

SHREWSBURY ABERYSTWYTH RAIL PASSENGERS' ASSOCIATION (SARPA)

An Examination of Strategic Issues Affecting the Railway

1):- Freight

- 1.1** Is it possible to achieve a modal shift from road to rail with freight?
- 1.2** In order to succeed, the railway must demonstrate ways to assist the logistics sector to improve productivity and achieve better margins. For future growth, the railway must run co-operatively with the road haulage sector, rather than in competition.
- 1.3** What technical innovations would be necessary to bring this about?
- 1.4** What investment needs to be made to bring about the required technical advances?
- 1.5** Given the estimated reduction in coal and steel traffic in the near future, how can Wales take a lead in this? There will still be plenty of merchandise of other types requiring to be moved and which could provide an opportunity for Welsh ingenuity and innovation.
- 1.6** Does Network Rail have a proper understanding of the needs of both railfreight and passenger operators? Previous versions of the Welsh Route Study have indicated NR does not estimate growth in the quantity of freight trains over the next 20 years or so. Already, we have received reports of operational conflicts between passenger and freight trains along the Marches. Moreover, there have been proposals to remove the dedicated goods line through the middle of Shrewsbury Station. This in a rail centre which is getting steadily busier. Both passenger and freight operators will be seeking to grow their businesses.

2) Climate Change and Coastal Inundation

- 2.1** We have already seen the Cambrian Coast line experience serious problems when it was washed away by exceptional winter weather in 2014. What steps are being considered to protect the railway from further such events?
- 2.2** In the event of the section between Dovey Junction and Borth becoming permanently inundated, what scheme is there for building a replacement railway to Aberystwyth further inland?

/continued

2.3 In the event of coastal inundation, would there be any scheme to replace the railway along the Cambrian Coast or would the route and even the towns themselves be abandoned?

3) Ticketing

3.1 The population of Wales is less than the Greater London area, which itself has the well know "Oyster" travelcard scheme. This is valid on all trains and buses. What steps are being taken to introduce all-Wales ticketing for all land based public transport?

3.2 Consideration should be given regarding the comments in 3.1 as to how all Wales ticketing could assist integration and intermodal transfer.

3.3 Arriva Trains Wales have recently introduced a new type of paper rail ticket across the network which is much more bulky than the card one it replaces. As far as we understand It is not valid for use via the London Underground as it does not have a magnetic strip on the back but relies on a QR code for encryption of journey information. Moreover, difficulty is experienced at large frontier stations (Shrewsbury/Birmingham for instance) as the barriers are not sufficiently equipped with QR code readers. As busy times, queues of passengers build up in consequence.

3.4 Deutsche Bahn group appear to have introduced this ticket across their other UK passenger rail interests as well, though we understand that not all train operators will accept them at the present time.

4) Railway Land:- Network Rail

4.1 Recently the Westminster Government decided to examine Network Rail's portfolio of land to ascertain whether any of this might be sold off to help with the national debt. Once again a Government is seeking to asset strip the railway, a process which has been going on relentlessly since the days of Dr Beeching in the early 1960s.

4.2 The danger with this is that once land is lost to the railway, it is difficult to re-acquire it again. The railway becomes hemmed in by other developments, which causes difficulty if the railway needed to expand its facilities. As examples, we would offer Newtown (Powys) and Chester. At Newtown, development has encroached on the railway so much that for any new facilities to be provided, they would have to be built on a greenfield site out of town. At Chester and London Marylebone, a similar situation prevails where freight yards have been sold off for expensive housing and the land is no longer available for rail use.

/continued

4.3 This poses a sovereignty problem for Wales. The land is a national asset to be used for the economic development of the nation and not sold off, often at a knock down price. Where whole sections of route are disposed of, it becomes difficult to re-instate the railway.

4.4 Wales suffered very badly under the Beeching programme, with the result that there are very few lines left within the central part of the country. The possibility of replacing these would give an opportunity for economic development which would be lost if the sell off goes ahead throughout Wales.

4.5 The situation in the U.K. is radically different from that in France, where we understand there has been a 50 year moratorium on disposing of closed railway land and routes. If carried out in this country, it would mean that lines removed in the 1960's as uneconomic could be replaced more easily if the situation demanded. We would, for instance not have to worry about HS2 controversy as a viable route would already have been available between London and Manchester. (The former Great Central line.)

Angus Eickhoff
SARPA Chairman

<http://sarpa.info>

January 2017