

## Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Rail Passengers' Association

Tuesday 20th August 2024

Monty Club, Newtown.

**Present:** Dennis Bates<sup>(r)</sup>, Philip Ellison, Roger Goodhew, Sarah Harvey<sup>(r)</sup>, Gareth Marston, Chris Parker (SCRUA), Bill Redfern, Cllr Jeff Smith<sup>(r)</sup>, David Taylor<sup>(r)</sup>, Thomas Wheeler<sup>(r)</sup>, Peter White.

**Apologies:** Tony Harvey, Robert Knight.

The Chair, Jeff Smith, welcomed everyone to the meeting.

The loss of Councillor Michael Williams who had passed away was noted. Michael was a strong supporter of SARPA and a regular attendee at meetings.

Jeff Smith proposed, seconded by Gareth Marston, that since we had a sufficient quorum ( 10 ) that we ratify the AGM decisions and minutes (previously circulated, with copies available). Agreed unanimously.

### Minutes:

The minutes of the July meeting were accepted with clarification that 'pocket timetables' referred to TfW policy to move away from printing and distributing paper timetables, however these will be available to Cambrian users because the poor mobile signal coverage is recognised and the 16 day blockade will be closure of the line for re-railing at Talerddig and Machynlleth.

### Chair's report:

The Chair reported that a couple of matters had been raised with TfW (Gail Jones). Regarding the trend for swapping of portions on route to Machynlleth at short notice raised by Roger Whitehouse, Gail has requested more information on the instances of this occurring.

Our request for clarification of timetable periods Gail stated additional summer services would be mid May to late September; and loss of Winter services would be mid December to the end of March. Note this is worse than we had previously been led to believe. There are no plans for staff reductions and it is intended that the Winter period be used for training etc.

Jeff has travelled on one of the new 197 trains, outward journey toilet floor was flooded and no water available at the sink. Return journey toilet was not flushing and in a poor state. Ride quality not too bad.

### **Officer's Reports:**

The Treasurer reported that it has been an expensive month with publication of the July Newsletter(93), however postage costs were kept down by the pre-purchase of stamps. An error at Welshpool printers resulted in Robert receiving only 150 Newsletters when 175 had been requested. We have received a credit note for the difference. We also incurred web hosting costs reduced by a donation by Angus. The Line Liaison Committee subscription (£10) is due. The income for the month was a very generous anonymous donation.

The current account stands at £700.60, though we would not expect much further income for the rest of the year till next years subscriptions start coming in.

The Newsletter editor said that he is looking for material for the next newsletter, to be published November. It should include an obituary for Michael Williams. Gareth said that there are two big announcements expected late October: one is the new Welsh cabinet, the second is the Westminster budget. Agreed these should be included and Dennis thought that there would be time and wouldn't hold to the deadline.

### **Future Timetables:**

Jeff said that it seems to have gone quiet on this. Gareth said that the cuts have now been loaded into the timetable and can be seen on Real Time

Trains. Bill asked if we still intended to issue a strong Press Release at the right moment? Gareth said that the moment is now since they have found £20 million for Cardiff Airport (effectively money going out of the country)! Bill said that they don't seem to understand the importance of first and last services for long journeys including airports. They seem to think of the Coastline in isolation, not for longer journeys. Last week there were 3 days when the 06:45 Barmouth didn't run. Prior to that there was a week when it was replaced by a bus running at rail times and therefore missing the connections. It's ironic that with the Barmouth Bridge and other works Network Rail (Westminster) is looking after the line better than TfW(Cardiff). Bill said that he considers the cuts to be very damaging, with impacts worse than people realise, so that the Coast Line becomes a second rate public service, not first choice, and start of decline.

Thomas has had freedom of information from TfW on Operator of Last Resort Agreement and Passenger Service Requirements Specification. Unfortunately they don't seem to have settled specification for current period. What there is (2023) requires early arrival at Machynlleth by 07:45. Do we know any good contract lawyers?

Gareth said that we should consider how to make best use of the proposed changes to the Senedd when we will have more Assembly members.

Thomas pointed out that Eluned Morgan represents Mid and West Wales, could she be invited to one of our meetings or we attend surgery?

Jeff said we've tried previously but doesn't think we've had any replies. It was agreed that he should write to her. It was thought that this would probably best as a constituent.

### **AOB:**

Chris Parker from Shrewsbury Chester Rail User Association (SCRUA), said that they will be having a meeting Mersey D Consortium with TfW with regard to timetable change effects in their area. Particularly in the mornings there are a number of through services to Cardiff but for 5 or 6 hours no through service to Birmingham. This is attributed to extra

demand from Aberystwyth and an extra through service from Aberystwyth to Birmingham. They are not sure if this is actually true and not happy about it. Various issues have been raised with TfW but no replies. Stake holder meeting arranged for Chester but not till 27<sup>th</sup> November so sounds like a fait accompli. They seem to be trying to blame changes on the Cambrian! Jeff said that he had heard that TfW see interworking of Cambrian and Chester services results in inadequate 2car trains to Chester and that people would prefer to change. Chris said that they carried out a survey that found that demand from south of Shrewsbury was predominantly to Birmingham and this seemed to surprise TfW. Gareth said the explanation for this is civil servants who used to travel to Cardiff are now working from home.

It was agreed that SARPA would have no objection to them changing their acronym to SCARP (Shrewsbury Chester Association for Rail Passengers).

Roger Goodhew said regarding Newsletter 93 page 13 'Usage Figures' he found extremely interesting but request that Shrewsbury be included, maybe in an addendum and in future (and noted Minfordd was repeated). Gareth said 23/24 figures were due in December.

Gareth said that it seems that the ex TfW 175 train fleet will be going to Great Western.