

Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Rail Passengers' Association

Saturday 13th August 2022, 11:15

White Lion, Machynlleth

Present: Dennis Bates, Martin Bemment^(r), Angus Eickhoff^(r), Roger Goodhew, Sarah Harvey, Robert Knight, Bill Redfern, Thomas Wheeler^(r), Roger Whitehouse, Cllr Michael Williams.

^(r) – remote.

Apologies: Tony Harvey, Gareth Marston. Ivor Morris, Jeff Smith.

Minutes of Last Meeting (9th July):

The minutes of the last meeting were accepted.

Matters Arising from the Minutes:

Roger Whitehouse stated that there is still no date for the Line Liaison Committee to meet.

Officers Reports:

The Chairman provided the following written report:

I received the following response to my email regarding how far north services would go during the Barmouth Bridge closure:

'Apologies for the delayed response. I have been waiting on and was hoping to have had more details to share with you in respect of the upcoming Barmouth Viaduct possession by Network Rail, but unfortunately, I still do not have anything that I can share at this moment.

As soon as I have any details from Network Rail in respect of the possession, I will come back to you.

I have forwarded the points in your email to the relevant depts for consideration.'

I received the following regarding the poor level of service and punctuality:

'With reference to your email below, and apologies for the delay in responding, I write to advise that I have forwarded all the points and issues raised by your members to the relevant people/departments within Tfw. Further information on our performance can be found here

<https://tfw.wales/about-us/transparency/performance>

however if this is not suitable, please do not hesitate to come back to me.'

The link given declares 71.1% punctuality across the Wales & Borders sector this year, compared to 76.8% last year. Cancellations are up from 2.51% to 4.19%. Short formations apparently down from 10.5% to 7.86%. The link doesn't provide specific figures for the Cambrian, let me know if you would like me to ask for these.

The meeting agreed that we should ask for specific Cambrian figures. Robert added that footfall figures would also be interesting, particularly with regard to Bow Street.

I've received nothing regarding the reduction in semi-fast services between Shrewsbury and Birmingham by West Midlands Trains and why this means that more TFW units need to be fitted with ERTMS. Obviously some Tfw officers will be on holiday at the moment but I suggest that if we haven't had anything by the September meeting we contact Members of the Senedd and other politicians regarding this.

The Newsletter editor reported that he was relieved that the date for the next Newsletter was September as he was short of material, particularly pictures. He would like photographs of the timber train and the new 197s on test runs. Robert noted that the 197 has run during the day. Angus said he had sent some of the timber trains, noting that 3 have run, and one used a 97 + 37 (which is ok because the 197 with ETCS was always marshalled to lead). Dennis asked if we knew when the timber train would run again, he might be able to take photograph of the siding. It had been noted that a 97 had gone the full length of the line but the siding is currently blocked by a pile of timber sleepers. Robert stated that the oil

distribution siding had been cleared of undergrowth and the pipes have gone, presumably in readiness for timber traffic.

Angus reported that he had spoken on the telephone with Trevor Roberts, re the Line Liaison Committee. A meeting may take place mid October, subject to the new terms of reference. Roger Whitehouse cautioned that we shouldn't get too critical because it might involve extra costs.

General Discussion:

There was consensus that the reliability of Cambrian services have been very poor with a lot of cancellation and short formations.

Roger Goodhew noted that today trains were only going to Wolverhampton, and there was road transport to Barmouth. Roger Whitehouse reported seeing road replacement buses at Machynlleth station. Birmingham New Street was closed because of the ASLEF strike.

Roger Whitehouse summed up that there are all sorts of cancellations and short formations. TfW staff on the ground doing their best to provide a service. Cancellations are unpredictable with no day on day pattern. He added that we should ask for more details on 'lack of resource' frequently given as the reason for cancellations. Sarah Harvey stated that her neighbours went to Barmouth (from Newtown) on Wednesday but, because they found the train to be 'full and standing' they went by car. Robert stated that he had heard from conductors that Fairbourne to Talybont is the summer pinch point. Roger Whitehouse stated that the 1725 Tywyn to Pwllheli is a frequent cancellation, and this train is very important to caravan users. Michael added that it is the same on the main line.

Robert stated that promoting the Coast Line for extra passengers is nonsense at the moment.

Cambrian Lines News:

Robert Knight stated that TfW have locked the rear entrance to Aberystwyth station with revenue protection checking all tickets in and out. It is needed with quite a few caught without tickets. Is this a prelude to ticket barriers, which would be heavy on staffing needs. Roger Whitehouse stated that the obvious location for the barriers would need special access arrangements for access to the ticket office. Michael stated that SARPA have asked that every effort is made to collect fares. Roger Whitehouse stated that it was good when it's done, with the conductors being pretty thorough. Robert added that it was probably more thorough on the Coast Line, Borth was particularly weak. Angus referenced item 14 on our web site advocating full collection of fares. Could we have extra ticket inspectors particularly for the Machynlleth to Aberystwyth and Welshpool to Shrewsbury sections; though noting that the barriers at Shrewsbury should be helping at that end.

Sarah Harvey asked if there are ticket machines at Newtown station, and it was confirmed that there are.

Regarding the hot weather Roger Goodhew had noted a lot of open windows on the 158s, whereas the air conditioning on 175s seems to be pretty good. Thomas added that, from a Modern Railways article the air conditioning performance of 158s was poor but the addition of remote condition monitoring (RCM) was improving matters. Sarah said that she had seen on Facebook that guards had been handing out water.

Dennis said that the picture he had seen of a 197 at Machynlleth station platform seemed to show a folding step very high above the platform. Roger Whitehouse said that it might actually be easier like that especially for ramps used for trolleys and wheel chairs.

AOB:

Roger Goodhew stated that he had seen a list of 18 Coast Committee attendees, but it didn't quite add up. Roger Whitehouse said that it would be because of a mix of some council members plus invitees.

The Chairman had received Network Rail's decarbonisation report for Wales and Western released by an FOI from someone.

He provided the following summary:

The headline from our viewpoint is the map below (See Figure1):

As you can see, we are in Alternative Technology Tranche 2, which is the last set of lines to receive "alternative technology" (not electrification) to replace diesels.

Looking at the set of lines in Tranche 2, we don't seem to be very similar to them in terms of service frequency (See Figure 2):

More than that, I think that the electrification benefits for the Cambrian are seen as artificially low because the methodology does not consider the rough cost of electrifying the different lines. We would come out rather better than some other lines on this due to very little double track and very few obstructions (bridges etc) on the main line (coast tunnels would be another story but discontinuous electrification would probably solve the 4 problem areas on the long route.

This can be discussed in Saturday's meeting (for which I shall send my apologies in a separate email), but I think we need to lobby Network Rail Wales & Western to add some extra factors to their methodology.

Incidentally, you'll notice that the Western route haven't yet decided which tranches will be electrified and which might be alternative technologies. This appears to be why branches such as Gunnislake appear to be getting electrification whilst we get...ermmm.... no one knows.

Would it be worth asking them for details of what the alternative technologies are?

Here's what they have to say about the 197s:

TfW is in the process of procuring diesel CAF Civity 197s for this route and the new trains will be installed with compatible software. There will be an opportunity for mid-life refurbishment of these vehicles to provide bi-mode battery – diesel capability but the design of them may make it challenging to upgrade the trains to provide OLE capability and any replacement in the future will also need compatible software installed.

Looking at the methodology, if TfW hadn't ordered the 197s for the Cambrian, we would have scored much higher due to the need to replace elderly rolling stock. Maybe we would even have been electrified!

They also have this to say, in a windmill-filled landscape:

If electrification was progressed as the traction choice for decarbonisation, it is worth noting that there is not currently a sufficient level of redundant power supply for electrification here and further supply would need to be requested from the National Grid.

And finally this gem, which reduces the power of our arguments, sadly:

It is also worth noting for the cross-boundary flows that decarbonisation of the route between Shrewsbury and Wolverhampton has been identified as a candidate for electrification and is deemed as a low priority in work carried out by North West and Central.

Please let me know if you decide that I should send an email and if so what questions/comments it should include.

Gareth Marston provided his response in an email:

Thoughts

Nothing we haven't seen before

Don't think you can argue with the sequence of the tranches.

Need to get on with Tranche 1 not just have plan, FUNDING rolling programme needed. Side benefit will be cascaded 197's to strengthen our services.

No knee jerk reaction about Cambrian and other Tranche 3 areas, by 2035 we will have a really clear picture on costs/ benefits/ problems with

Hydrogen trains and if we get a rolling programme of electrification on costs of wiring coming down.

Absolute red line , no garden engineering of class 197's to other energy sources there not designed for it see vivarail and Class 769's

If it becomes clear that it will be hydrogen then let's get new hydrogen trains that's what continent are doing.

If we think the rolling programme of electrification is going to deliver cheaper costs and better benefits then we can join end of queue for it to be done in 2040's we have rolling stock in place with lifespan to 2050.

Hybrid Electric/ hydrogen trains already being built on continent best to retain through trains to West Midlands. Need to wire Newtown to Machynlleth and Barmouth to Porthmadog. Big climbs have direct juice and Aber Dyfi tunnels and Barmouth bridge don't need wiring.

Elephant in room remains freight and engineering trains.

The meeting agreed with Gareth's analysis, so no need for the chairman to send an email at this time. Angus said that there clearly wasn't enough creative thinking with regard to environmentally friendly sources providing the electricity supply for the supply for electrification. Thomas suggested that we should point out that there is an error in the report with regard to links to electrified lines, Cambrian services do run under the wires between Wolverhampton and Birmingham International.

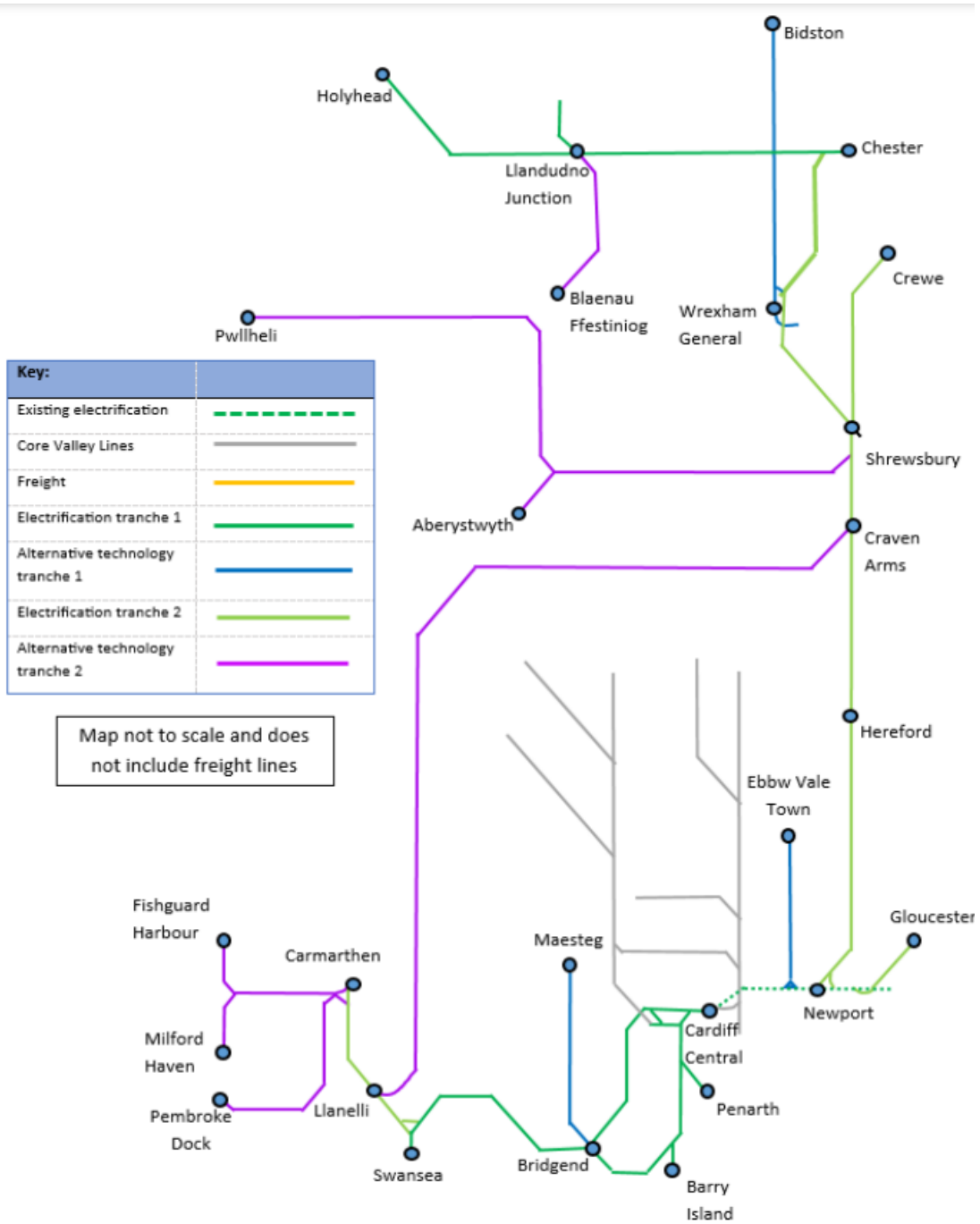


Figure 1

1.Route information

| Route | Route Miles | Gauge | Max line speed (mph) | Passenger trains per day | Links to electrified line |
|---------------------------------|-------------|------------|----------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Heart of Wales | 89 | W6, W8 | 60 | 5 | No |
| Cambrian | 135 | W6 | 80 | 14 | No |
| Pembroke Branch | 27 | W6, W7, W8 | 50 | 8 | No |
| Carmarthen to Milford Haven | 40 | W6, W7, W8 | 75 | 9 | No |
| Fishguard Branch | 15 | W6, W7, W8 | 55 | 3 | No |
| Llandudno to Blaenau Ffestinioa | 28 | W6 | 45 | 4 | No |

Figure 2