

MINUTES OF SARPA MEETING. FEBRUARY 4TH 2020.
UNICORN HOTEL, CAERSWS.

Apologies:- Apologies were received from Bill Redfern, Sarah Harvey, Trevor Roberts, Simon Pilkington, Thomas Wheeler, Ray King, Tony Harvey, Ivor Morris.

Present:- Roger Whitehouse (RW) Robert Knight (RK), Peter White (PW), Phillip Ellison (PE), Roger Goodhew (RG), Gareth Marston (GM), Michael Williams (MW), James Davies (JD), Jeff Smith, Angus Eickhoff (AE)

As the secretary was absent, AE agreed to take minutes.

1) Minutes of previous held @ Royal Oak, Welshpool. GM informed the meeting that Newtown Station toilets are now permanently locked out of use owing to anti-social behaviour and non-rail passengers using the facility.

AE pointed out that the “concessionary passes” mentioned in the minutes are the new bus passes. RK pointed out that as well as being valid on Cambrian Coast and Heart of Wales trains, they are able to be used on the Wrexham-Bidston line as far as the English Border (Harwarden?)

RG raised the subject of the next Cambrian Coast Line Conference meeting, which will be held in March. He then spoke about the new trains, which will be known as Class 197. AE asked if they were to be 2 or 3 car units. GM thought 2 and that there would be 21 trains.

RW spoke about the automated announcements at stations. He said the new version was much better than the ATW version. There had been a trial @ Porthmadog.

2) Officer Reports. There was not much to say that wasn't being discussed elsewhere. Bill Redfern had sent apologies so there was no treasurer's report.

3) Cambrian Performance. GM said that Robert Robinson was wanting to give TfW a hard time over Cambrian performance in the autumn. In reality, matters had improved since October. In December, 96% of trains ran. 81.2% ran to time, an improvement from only 77% in the autumn. In January, 99.7% of scheduled trains ran, with 92% running right time overall. There are still problems due to voluntary rest day working. Class 170s from Anglia Railways are now working, as are some extra Class 153s. This has made a big difference, though the crunch time will be at the timetable change in May. In July, the derogation on the continued use of Pacer trains will end, thus bringing increased pressure as TfW may borrow Cambrian line units to work in South Wales. He thought that performance would continue to improve. There had been problems recently with the ETCS and axle counter failures. RW concurred that performance appeared to be improving and he cited various instances. However, he said that problems with train describers and on-train destination displays indicating incorrect information still persist. The group asked JS to write to TfW thanking them for the improvement in Cambrian Line performance in recent weeks.

GM said there has been a spike in Welshpool - Euston returns being sold because of the lack of restrictions for Off Peak travel on the Cambrian section and which apply elsewhere. RG said West Midlands Trains have been experiencing serious problems with performance and that the Mayor of Birmingham has threatened to withdraw the franchise

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from the operator. GM pointed out that extra trains and other “goodies” in franchise bids tended to increase the likelihood of a successful outcome but then the company may not have the resources or ability to deliver their promises.

4) Publicity & Logo Design Competition. AE said he had taken no further action. He had emailed Lowri Joyce and asked if TFW might put up some money and had received an encouraging reply, though without commitment. He had hoped to raise the subject with her at a meeting with Machynlleth Climate Action Group in January but she had cancelled. He said he will probably go with what funds are available. He said GM has allowed for an exhibition of entries in the ticket office @ Newtown.

5) Design of New Trains.

The group were informed that the new trains will be known as Class 195. AE asked about 3 car units as passenger growth would require these soon. GM thought the whole franchise needed to be re-specified. JS said there is a whole variety of reasons why additional rolling stock needs to be built. RW told the group that there is a possibility that the new Class 195s will not be fitted with compatible couplings and will not be able to couple up to anything else on the railway. JS is to write to Lowri Joyce asking for clarification.

6) Correspondence.

None had been received. GM told the meeting that the postal correspondence address for SARPA remains with Newtown Station Travel and he is quite happy to continue with this arrangement, although no actual correspondence has been received for some time.

7) AOB

PW spoke about car parking problems, particularly at Aberystwyth where there was not really adequate space. He thought Bow St would not help matters when it opens. JD said that there are similar problems at Borth. GM pointed out that there is no easy answer when so much railway land has been sold off.

The impact of electric cars on the railway was discussed. JD suggested that poorer people may not be able to afford electric vehicles owing to their high cost. He pointed out that the batteries will become life expired after around 6 years, requiring very expensive replacement.

AE asked GM to outline the case for HS2. They had discussed the matter on the SARPA Facebook page. AE said he didn't understand why it might be thought necessary. GM pointed out that another WCML upgrade would produce massive disruption as most of the diversionary routes had been closed down in the period since Beeching (1963). Any serious proposal to increase capacity requires the building of a new railway – moving trains to it will increase capacity on other lines. Osborne/Cameron thought of it as a Keynesian Economics type scheme. The opposition from the Right Wing is because it doesn't fit in with neo-liberal thinking and there is no understanding that the money saved would be spent on the rest of the network anyway.

The meeting concluded at approx 21.00