

Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Rail Passengers' Association

11:15 Saturday 14th January 2023

Royal Oak Hotel, Welshpool

Present: Angus Eickhoff, Roger Goodhew, Sarah Harvey^(r), Stephen Hughes, Tony Harvey, Dr Peter Jones^(r), Ivor Morris, Dennis Omious, Bill Redfern, Jeff Smith, Dave Taylor^(r), Thomas Wheeler^(r), Roger Whitehouse, Cllr Michael Williams^(r).

^(r) – remote.

Apologies: Dennis Bates, Gareth Marston, Robert Knight.

The Chairman announced that Criccieth and Penrhyndeudraeth councils have now joined SARPA.

The meeting was pleased to welcome Dr Peter Harlech Jones who is a representative from Criccieth Town Council. Peter queered the scope of the association, which is the Cambrian Lines (Main and Coast), however we do touch on issues outside this area when it impacts Cambrian users.

Officers Reports:

The Chairman has contacted TfW regarding a couple of issues that he had been asked to raise.

The rail replacement buses during the Barmouth Bridge works were not connecting properly at Machynlleth and Harlech, and our concerns about the high step on the new 197 trains with regard to whether Harrington Humps (raised platform areas like Aberdovey) will still be effective and the length of ramps to achieve a safe gradient. No response has been received back yet.

The Chairman attended a virtual stake holder liaison meeting organised by TfW.

Our response to the proposed December 2023 timetable has been sent in. Of note is the 18:30 arrival Aberystwyth which is shown as non-stopping at Dovey Junction and Borth; wrongly copied from the current timetable.

Dave Taylor said that regarding the last connection from Cardiff, in the present timetable it's 1941 with a connection for Aberystwyth leaving Shrewsbury 2050 but in the proposed timetable the last departure for Aberystwyth from Shrewsbury will be 20:30 meaning that you would have to leave Cardiff 50 minutes earlier. Jeff said that he would check the proposed timetable for the Marches Line .

Treasurers Report:

The Treasurer reported that 2 new councils (Criccieth and Penrhyndeudraeth) and 3 new members (have joined us David McKeever, Jim Honeybill and Rev David C. Capron).

As usual the information from Barclays is a little out of date but gives us £711 in the current account and £272-72 in the deposit account. Yesterday the Treasurer received the bill for printing the January Newsletter giving us expenditure of £115 and there will be Robert's distribution costs., so the Newsletter is clearly on its way and I intend to print the labels this weekend.

Following a question from Angus, the Treasurer said that we haven't received a request for the Line Liaison membership subscription (£10). Roger Whitehouse stated that the Talyllyn Railway hadn't received an invoice and Dave Taylor said that RailFuture hadn't.

Webmasters Report:

Angus said that there was nothing to report regarding electronic media other than to note that it's interesting that it appears that the Welshpool Facebook group can't turnout for a meeting in Welshpool! Angus requested an up-to-date email list has be is getting some 'bounces'. The Membership officer said that he would send Angus an updated list.

Is producing a briefing paper for the Senedd members based on notes from Gareth Marston.

He will be seeking permission from Robert Robinson to include the minutes from the North and Mid Wales Line Liaison meeting.

Report from the Line Liaison Committee meeting:

Copies of the Line Liaison Committee minutes were made available for inspection at the meeting. They contain a lot of concern about the new 197 trains. It includes an understanding that 'TFW had confirmed that the trains were not what they would order today and accepted their shortfalls', however the source of the statement is not attributed.

Tony Harvey noted that the Cambrian and North Wales liaison groups had merged. Jeff said that the theory is that the joint meetings will get TfW and Network Rail to attend. The lack of attendance at Line Liaison meetings was noticed and concern that the SARPA representative (Angus) did not receive an invite.

Cambrian Lines News:

Bus substitution today (and all January weekends) between Newtown – Aberystwyth – Tywyn.

Roger Whitehouse stated that a one and a half hour waiting time at Machynlleth was not a proper service. Jeff agreed to take this up with TfW, and stated that Arriva were much better.

Angus asked if there was any news about the Machynlleth Interchange. Roger Whitehouse said that increased car parking spaces would be good. It was noted that the garage will be closed for 6 months while it is rebuilt. Cllr Williams said that it was still with the County Council Designers. He suggested that SARPA ask the question of Powys or TfW.

Roger Whitehouse noted the 1:30 arrival at Shrewsbury from Aberystwyth coupled with a unit to proceed with 6 carriages to Birmingham.

Roger Goodhew noted that he had seen at Shrewsbury the use of 2x150 units to Holyhead, but at least these do have toilets.

Roger Whitehouse again repeated the concern that the new 197 units have only a single toilet.

Jeff pointed out that Cambrian services now stop at Sandwell and Dudley but do not call at Smethwick Galton Bridge, a change that reduces the connectivity possibilities for Cambrian passengers with Sandwell and Dudley being pretty useless. It was noted that Avanti services stop at Sandwell and Dudley. West Midlands Trains wanted Smethwick Galton Bridge to improve connectivity of their services, which is fine but they shouldn't 'of nicked' our slots. Roger Whitehouse said that it likely that it's in the franchise contract..

Stephen Hughes said that he was in favour of services being run by public bodied. Angus said that the East Coast is a good example..

It was noted that a Facebook group about the new 197 trains is already showing up many problems with the trains. We still have many concerns about the new 197 trains that have not been answered. It was agreed that we should maintain pressure on this and the Chair agreed to draft an item for the press and railway magazines. He noted that we had been promised that nobody would have to stand for more than twenty minutes and an increase in capacity across Wales and Borders. Tony asked exactly what information have we had regarding promises for our line. They could hide behind only promising overall improvement, not specific lines.

Bill said they they definitely promised that things would improve, and with the new trains we suspect that won't be the case. Our leverage should be that the Senedd said that by them taking control things would improve.

The difference between the Welsh Parliament and the Government was noted. Roger Whitehouse said that is way we need to inform any Senedd members who are willing to listen, and the can ask questions of TfW.

Roger Whitehouse asked Thomas Wheeler if the new 197s were fitted for selective door operation. Thomas said he wasn't sure but would expect so. This is very important, especially for the Coast Line where there are many short platforms. He had heard a rumour, ut only a rumour, that they don't have SDO. Bill explained that SDO capability is different to the ability to locally open a single door. Roger Whitehouse stated what we wanted was

similar to what he had seen at Bilbrook with 4-car 170 where the guard announced that doors in the front 3 carriages only would open.

Ken Law asked what would be the implications of us pushing for 3-car units. Angus answered that it would be more expensive, but if its done now while they are still in production we would expect it that would be much cheaper than in five years. Dave Taylor said he would be reluctant to push for 3-cars as it was likely that TfW wouldn't join these with 2 cars impacting through journeys to the Coast. Ken Law said that he had been to see the mock up at Taffs Wells and asked about the single toilet and was told that normally it would be 4 rather than 2 cars running. Roger Whitehouse said that this wouldn't be true for the Coast Line. Bill said that he thought that we are at a point where shouting loudly to the press might achieve something, but no guarantees. We do however need to word things carefully, say around the train experience, as we are pleased with there timetable proposals. Tony suggested something like 'we are really looking forward to the new timetable but they're not going to be able to deliver it'. Jeff agreed to distribute a draft.

AOB:

The White Lion Machynlleth will now be charging £10 per hour for use of the function room (i.e. £30 per meeting). It was agreed that we would pay this for the May 13th AGM but consider moving the later meeting.

Tony Harvey noted that the User Group for the Marches Line could fold due to the lack of volunteers.

Ken said he was concerned about a subject that has come up before, the clearing of ice from the up ramp at Welshpool station. He asked Powys County Council who said that it was nothing to do with them. Land registry map shows that most of it is Welsh Government. A letter has been written to Lee Waters. Ken said that there are other improvements needed at Welshpool and even though we wont get a nice new station it would be nice to have another shelter and extra call point and CCTV.

Ken Law also stated that people are driving to Shrewsbury because there are no car parking spaces left at Welshpool Station. The spaces are being filled by non-rail users because they are free.

Angus reported that the Welshpool Station adopters may be reforming.

Peter stated that in the last few days a number of people from Criccieth have had their trains cancelled because of flooding between Machynlleth and Shrewsbury and they were told that there was a £10 fee to cancel their tickets. Peter uses Avanti from Bangor to London and Birmingham, and though they provide a dreadful service there refunds come through quickly. Do we know why TfW charge an admin fee? It was considered that there shouldn't be a charge for a no fault/railways fault cancellation and the Chairman agreed to raise this with TfW. Roger Whitehouse said that there was a related problem with delay repay where each claim has to be made separately.

Tony said he had heard that there were problems with refunds/changes to tickets bought from agencies such as Welshpool TIC. Angus suggested checking the position with Gobowen Severn Dee Travel.

It was suggested that we hold a meeting in Criccieth, and Peter said they would be pleased to host us. It was suggested that we visit Criccieth rather than Machynlleth on the 14th October. Peter will check the availability of the Memorial Hall Green Room. Time of meeting to suit train times. We will also need to check Barmouth Bridge works at that time. Peter was therefore asked to also check the 8th of July.

Peter reported that Criccieth Station is adopted by Criccieth in Bloom, and have just received a grant from Tidy Wales, very pleasing.