

Shrewsbury
Aberystwyth
Rail
Passengers'
Association



Newsletter
No. 38

February 2007



The other line to the coast. No.7821 *Ditcheat Manor* at Penmaenpool on a down train, shortly before the closure of the line. The signal box remains, and is now a bird centre of the RSPB.

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CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

If I only had £10 for every time someone's complained about Arriva to me! Suffice to say that everyone is fed up to the back teeth of the level of service on offer from them, and their excuses are dismissed out of hand as just that. It will take a lot more than a slap of turquoise paint and a deep clean on the Class 158 units of which some have appeared recently to win passengers around. OK the ex CT green 158's have now gone and Machynlleth depot will be upgraded by the start of the summer timetable, but of course that's still six months off and the green 158's were deliberately run into the ground by ATW anyway. Only one person had anything positive to say about Arriva to me and that was they make a fairly good job given the constraints they operate under – the obvious implication was that the system specified by Government delivers what we get. Though largely a truism in that we have what government has specified, there is still scope for variance amongst operators within this framework and Arriva rate as they always have done since franchising started as poor. Still the UP trains sit at Talerddig for 20 minutes and trains turn short at Wolverhampton all too frequently, though the dirty allegations do not ring true with me a regular commuter as something I've experienced.

However it's no wonder the *Cambrian News* got excited about the prospect of Open Access operator Wrexham and Shropshire hinting that they may look at running trains on the Cambrian. W & S did stipulate that this would only be after the proposed infrastructure upgrades were done. We're fortunate on two fronts: firstly that devolution has given us a shield to a certain extent from the madness of DfT Rail Group, and secondly Network Rail has a vested interest in making the ERTMS trial work. Our punctuality is so poor that it threatens the success of the trial as it will be open to criticism that ERTMS cannot make the trains run on time - you can imagine the embarrassment of a load of dignitaries coming to visit the pilot trial and getting stuck at New St after a Wolverhampton turnaround! So whilst publicly NR may be hoping that the Assembly stumps up the money for the infrastructure needed for the hourly service, privately they will have a plan "B" which they will fund themselves to make Arriva run on time - anyone for a loop at Caersws?

"Will it/ won't it?" is the big question with the Assembly and the hourly service. At least we're having "will it/won't it", for if we were wholly within England and in a part of the country that had just had a new franchise, undoubtedly we would have had cuts on our line courtesy of DfT Rail Group. Thank god we're not in the West Country or Bristol. Talking of cuts this brings us neatly back to Arriva. Remember how they crowed that the cessation of the Walsall to Wellington hourly service last June would make punctuality improve for Aberystwyth bound trains? Which of course it didn't – now they're screaming about Wrexham and Shropshire's proposed 5 trains a day making punctuality between Shrewsbury and Wolverhampton worse. This just about sums up this company, the line between Shrewsbury and Wolverhampton is twin track and can easily accommodate 3 trains an hour on 5 hours of the day – and more. It seems that Arriva are more interested in finger pointing and excuses rather than sorting their own house out.

To paraphrase ex President Clinton: It's the lack of passing loops and decent turnaround times stupid!

Gareth Marston, Newtown January 2007

Proposals for the introduction of concessionary travel on the railway

Andrew Davies, Minister for Enterprise, Innovation and Networks announced on Friday 24th November the proposed introduction of concessionary rail travel in Wales.

The Assembly Government's statutory bus pass scheme has been hugely successful with over 530,000 bus passes issued to those over the age of 60 or eligible on grounds of disability since it was introduced. These passes have enabled free travel on local bus services throughout Wales and the immediate vicinity. Studies have illustrated that in some rural areas, the railway represents a more viable and effective means of local travel than commercial bus services.

Plans have therefore been unveiled today to pilot proposals for community rail designation on the rural stretches of the Heart of Wales Line and the Conwy Valley Line.

Designation on these two lines could take place from early 2007. "If these pilots are successful the Assembly Government would look to extend them next to the Cambrian Coast, Borderlands (Wrexham-Bidston) and Shrewsbury-Chester lines," said Andrew Davies.

This announcement comes following discussions with the Department for Transport's Community Rail Team, the Consortia, Network Rail, Arriva Trains Wales and local community rail partnerships - initially, the Heart of Wales Line Forum and the Conwy Valley Rail Partnership.

Councillor Trevor Roberts, Gwynedd Council, Chair of TAITH - the north Wales consortium of local authorities said, "This is really exciting news for the people in our rural areas, for many of whom rail travel is a better option than local bus services. The TAITH consortium has been at the forefront of the discussions leading to this announcement and on their behalf I would like to pay tribute to Andrew Davies and the Welsh Assembly Government for this imaginative scheme. Thanks to the hard work of all the partners involved, those with a bus pass in the rural areas served by the railway will benefit greatly, particularly along the Conwy Valley line between Blaenau Ffestiniog and the coast which I am delighted to say will be one of the first in Wales to benefit."

"AcoRP has argued that concessionary travel should be available to pensioners and the disabled using not only buses but also community rail services which can often be the sole public transport facility in an area. We are delighted that the Welsh Assembly Government are proposing to support concessionary fares on both road and selected community rail lines. We hope that this will set a precedent for the rest of the UK," added Neil Buxton, General Manager, Association of Community Rail Partnerships.

One of the main benefits from Community Rail service designation is the relaxation of the strict regulatory and franchise requirements that can apply to main line services. This can allow the introduction of more responsive timetables; flexible fares and simpler contractual requirements, it aims to improve net revenue by increasing patronage and/or ticket income. It can also deliver lower costs and increase community participation.

Community Rail designation is an initiative across England and Wales, led by the Department for Transport's Community Rail Team. Community railway schemes were established in England in 2004 and there is potential for similar schemes to deliver significant benefits to people in rural Wales.

News of the Line

Aberystwyth

The Aberystwyth Master plan is due for publication in January and at the time of going to press nothing has come through, therefore the fate of the halfwit scheme to build a multi story car park in place of the station is unknown.

Machynlleth

Work continues on the depot upgrade at a seemingly slow pace with little sign of real progress since before Christmas.

With the new broom at Arriva retreating from anything deemed non core activity i.e sending money to Leeds, rumours abound that West Coast Railway (who provided the coaches for the steam specials) will take over the operation and running of the steam specials this summer.

Newtown

Bridge bashes have disrupted services a couple of times into the New Year. The Dolfor Road bridge (over the A483) bears many a scar of an encounter with a stupid lorry driver.

Café Loco has reopened (again).

The new celebrity girlfriend of Lembit Opik MP, Rumanian pop princess Gabriela of the Cheeky Girls has been seen arriving and departing by train on more than one occasion.

Porthmadog

Network Rail attended a conference on the 24th November and outlined its plans to provide infrastructure to implement the proposed hourly service. Many people got the impression that Network Rail viewed this as an opportunity to make punctuality robust on existing services rather than going for growth.

The Assembly also used the occasion to announce a trial of free rail travel for over 60's on the Conwy Valley and Heart of Wales lines. The day was marked by the 0633 from New St running late but being prioritised instead of the 0727 from Aberystwyth which was held at Talerddig for the "dignitaries " aboard to make the 0908 connection from Machynlleth up the coast. Arriva obviously hadn't read the script for a smooth trouble free day to impress people with dignitaries returning from Porthmadog being turned out at Tywyn onto a mini bus replacement and reaching Machynlleth in time for a very late 1727 from Aberystwyth which was only 2 car and left Machynlleth grossly overcrowded with students et al.

Carno

The campaign to reopen the village station (closed in June 1965) reached TV (Wales Tonight on ITV) on the 14th January with Mick Bates AM doing a supporting piece to camera in front of the station building.

Fares

Amidst the national teeth gnashing as the governments contradictory and contrary transport policies were exposed as rail prices went up across the UK on the 2nd January, Arriva lifted the restriction on the use of Cambrian Rail Cards before 0900. Discounted local fares now being available on the 0633 ex New St, 0645 ex Machynlleth, 0810 ex Machynlleth, 0517 ex Aberystwyth, and 0727 ex Aberystwyth trains.

Beating a Wolverhampton turnaround *

***What is a Wolverhampton turnaround?**

It is the practice of terminating a late running Arriva Trains Wales service from Aberystwyth to Birmingham New St at Wolverhampton. As the rolling stock that forms arrivals from Aberystwyth are used to form the next service from Birmingham New St to Aberystwyth, that service then starts from Wolverhampton, not Birmingham New St.

Why is it done?

Basically to reset the timetable between Aberystwyth and Birmingham. Once late, services cannot make up time, but if they start from Wolverhampton rather than Birmingham New St the correct departure time can be achieved. Arriva Trains Wales claim that the pain caused for the users of the affected services is outweighed by the fact that users further west for the rest of the day get a reliable service, as a turnaround service from Wolverhampton usually departs from there "on time" whereas it would be late if it had gone into and back from Birmingham. It also helps massage Arriva's punctuality figures.

Who is affected?

As well as all travellers that use the Cambrian west of Shrewsbury, English users from Shrewsbury, Wellington and Telford Central and those that change at Shrewsbury from other services are. Travellers heading into Birmingham, as well as being late, have to change trains at Wolverhampton and miss connections when they arrive at Birmingham New St. Travellers heading away from Birmingham are often notified too late and on reaching Wolverhampton on other operators services find the Arriva Trains Wales service has already left there. For travellers west of Shrewsbury this can result in a two hour delay.

Why does it happen so often?

Several factors have combined to undermine performance on the Aberystwyth to Birmingham route: some historic and some relatively new. Not all are attributable to Arriva Trains Wales. It's the combination of these factors that's resulted in this practice occurring more frequently.

Whats being done about it?

Despite being common for some time, Arriva Trains Wales have been constantly "working with industry partners" to little effect. Measures attempted have not really addressed the primary causes which are insufficient turnaround times at Birmingham and Aberystwyth stations, poor maintenance of trains and lack of passing loops between Shrewsbury and Aberystwyth.

How can passengers avoid being caught up in it?

This practice appears confined to Arriva Trains Wales services from/to Aberystwyth. If at all possible users from other stations/routes should use other services between Shrewsbury and Birmingham New St.

Travelling to Birmingham New St and beyond

There's really not a lot you can do apart from having a contingency plan if it happens. The service between Wolverhampton and Birmingham New St is fortunately frequent, so if your train is terminated then getting forward to Birmingham New St is a relatively simple if inconvenient affair. Services on most routes beyond Birmingham have high frequencies so catching a later train will usually be an option after a short wait. A connections help desk is located at Birmingham New St near the main stairs to platforms 8/9.

Travelling from Birmingham New St and beyond

If at all possible plan to use Wolverhampton as your change point onto Aberystwyth services, not Birmingham New St. Aberystwyth services depart at xx50 past the even hours from there. You run the risk of struggling to get a seat if the service is operating as it should, but if a turnaround is being done you will be at Wolverhampton anyway and not have to fight your way through from Birmingham New St.

If joining at New St is unavoidable the best advice is turn up early. Aberystwyth trains go at xx33 past the even hours; being at the station half an hour before should give you plenty of time to assess the situation, and get to Wolverhampton in time if a turnaround happens.

Remember to look at the Arrivals screens not the Departure screens. The screens on platform only have room for so many entries: the larger screens by the station exit to the new Bull Ring are larger and contain more information. Look for the incoming service from Aberystwyth, generally due at xx18 past the even hours. If on time all is well but if it shows as being delayed by more than 10 minutes then there's a good chance that it could be terminated at Wolverhampton. Don't wait around for the announcements to be made which are notorious for being slow to filter through. Get the next service to Wolverhampton, the following will all get you to Wolverhampton in time:

xx13 Virgin Trains to Wolverhampton
xx18 Virgin Trains to Manchester
xx21 Central Trains to Liverpool

There is no problem using these services, providing your ticket is valid of course.

In conclusion.

Remember it is not doomed to happen! If you have access to the internet you can check on the progress of Arriva Trains Wales services via their website at www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk

And be forearmed with information.

The advice is based on experience of SARPA members who regularly travel through Birmingham New St. It is given in good faith in order to try and help fellow passengers. It is not sanctioned by any railway company. SARPA will not accept any responsibility if something happens to a passenger whilst following this advice, which is valid for the period of January to early June 2007.

Subscriptions

**Subscriptions are now due for 2006-7
These remain at £5**

**Please send your subscription to
Ivor Morris
2 Dingle Rd,
Welshpool,
Powys.SY21 7QB**

Central Trains fare increases January 2007

Most fares set by CT will go up by an average of 4.3%, whilst some types of fares may rise by 6.8% or more.

Standard Day Tickets (single / return), Saver Tickets (single / return), Season Tickets, Cheap Day Tickets (single / return), Ranger and Rover Tickets, First Class fares will increase by an average of 4.3%. Standard Open Tickets (single / return) will increase by an average of 6.8%

ERTMS for the Cambrian

As reported elsewhere in this issue, Ansaldo have been appointed contractors for work on the new European Rail Traffic Management System (ERTMS). Design work should be finished by the summer of 2007. Ansaldo has completed similar work in Italy, Spain and France.

The cab-based ERTMS signalling and train control system also offers full Automatic Train Protection (ATP). On the Cambrian line Network Rail and industry partners plan to implement Level 2 of the ERTMS system. All trackside railway signals will be removed and new axle-counters, interlocking and balises will be fitted along the route, together with the digital radio link and a new control centre to manage the system to be built in Machynlleth. Using data from these systems, the onboard computer on each train will allow it to reach its maximum permitted speed while maintaining a safe braking distance. The ERTMS system is based on one of three levels which either work with the current block sections and existing signalling or replaces both with a moving block system, allowing more services to operate within more flexible parameters.

It is likely to be switched on in December 2008.

For more information on how ERTMS works and the background to the technology visit the World of ERTMS website (<http://www.ertms.com/>) which is operated by UNIFE (Union of European Railway Industries). The above website also includes a graphic video showing how ERTMS Level 2 will operate.

Elin Jones AM samples bus and train

Plaid Cymru's AM for Ceredigion, Elin Jones, sampled train and bus services between Aberystwyth and Cardiff, and reported her experiences to the *Cambrian News* of 30th November 2006:

Her campaign has gained considerable national coverage, and the Plaid Cymru AM will be raising the problems with the Assembly Transport Minister and with the train and bus operators.

Elin Jones commented: "An effective and integrated public transport system is desperately needed if we are to encourage people out of their cars. This is essential to fight climate change. However, from the many complaints that I have recently received, our public transport system is extremely defective."

Elin's Train Journey: Thursday 23 November

Today, I returned from my week in the Assembly in Cardiff to Aberystwyth by train. As I had no formal Committees this Thursday I was able to catch a mid-day train and thus avoid more crowded trains later on in the afternoon.

This is an account of my journey:

- 11.00 Arrive at Cardiff Central Station, by Bus from Cardiff Bay. I purchased a single ticket to Aberystwyth that cost £37.70. I am sure that cheaper train tickets are available if booked in advance.
- 11.20 The Holyhead train leaves Cardiff Station. The train is reasonably empty and I have a full four-seater table to myself, until the next stop at Newport when a number of people get on. However, only one more person joins my table and I'm able to carry on doing my work. The train itself is very spacious and comfortable not too hot or cold and I've already investigated that there is a toilet- it's a large disabled toilet and very clean.
- 12.25 By now we've reached England and in Hereford. We've wound our way up the Gwent valleys and left Wales. The irony of my return Journey to Aberystwyth is that I have to go into England to reach the west Wales coast from Cardiff. Thank you very much Mr Beeching!!
- 13.22 We're on time in Shrewsbury and this is where I change for Aberystwyth. According to the timetable I have four minutes to change trains. However, it turns out that I have 14 minutes as the train from Birmingham is around 10 minutes late. The train I've just come off leaves the station and I've been examining the timetable. That train will be in Llandudno Junction at the same time as I will arrive in Aberystwyth. The train from Cardiff to Llandudno will take four hours and five minutes, with no changes. The train from Cardiff to Aberystwyth takes four hours and three minutes, with one change. This is despite the fact that Llandudno is over twice as far from Cardiff as Aberystwyth.
- 13.45 The train has now left Shrewsbury and I'm making my way back to Wales. This is a much inferior train to the one I've just left. It's much older and slower, and in fact quite a bit dirtier.

- 15.23 This is the time we were meant to reach Aberystwyth and we're only a few minutes away. It's been a pleasant enough journey and I've managed to do quite a bit of work, but as the train draws into Aberystwyth I'm reminded of the fact that my earlier train is now in Llandudno.

Commenting on her return train journey, Elin Jones said: "Over the years in the Assembly I've heard complaints over and over again from AMs from the north over their train service. The reality is however that our train service connection to Cardiff is much worse. Cardiff to Llandudno is a four hour train journey over 226 miles [Editor: 195.75], and is 20 minutes shorter than a car journey. Cardiff to Aberystwyth is also a four hour journey over only 111 miles [Editor: 187 miles by rail via Shrewsbury] and 1 hour 20 minutes longer than a car journey. Much of this can be blamed on Beeching cutting the more direct rail route from Aberystwyth to Cardiff via Carmarthen. But it can also be blamed on the poor rail connection and slow trains from Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth."

Elin's Trawscambria Journey: Monday 20 November

Today, I travelled from Aberystwyth to Cardiff on the TrawsCambria bus. I have received a number of complaints from constituents, especially the elderly, who believe that the bus is uncomfortable and inadequate as a long-distance bus. People have complained that there is no toilet and that seats are hard and offer little support for a long journey. Although I have used this service previously, I decided to try it again and see for myself.

- 6.30 Bus departs Aberystwyth Bus Station. I paid £12.60 for a single adult ticket. I am calling this a bus, as it is most definitely not a coach. I have always thought that buses such as this one are perfectly fine for local journeys, but not for a journey as long as four hours duration. There are around 10 of us on the bus from Aberystwyth my fellow passengers are mostly young, probably students.
- 7.04 The bus reaches Aberaeron - a few people have already left the bus and others joined. The bus has been very hot for the last half hour.
- 7.30 Now in Lampeter. It is now daylight as morning broke somewhere between Felinfach and Creuddyn Bridge. More young people join the bus. I'm joined by a grandmother from Lampeter on her way down to Llanelli to visit her grandson. She is a seasoned TrawsCambria traveller - from Lampeter down to Carmarthen and she finds the bus perfectly adequate for her purposes.
- 8.30 By now the bus has been on some pretty windy roads and one passenger has had to reach for a sickbag.
- 9.00 We're attempting to reach Swansea Bus Station in the middle of the Swansea rush-hour. This doesn't seem to be very sensible timetabling as we're at standstill for a long time.
- 10.28 We've arrived at Cardiff Bus Station. I thank the driver on the way out as he made a good job of driving such a bus all the way to Cardiff. I understand now precisely why people have written to me to complain about this bus journey.

Steam on the Cambrian Coast: 2007

Reproduced with permission from *Railway Herald* No.66

Although the news from Cardiff is bleak as Arriva Trains Wales (ATW) has said it will not be sponsoring Cambrian Coast steam operations in 2007, the news from Carnforth is good as the West Coast Railway Company (WCRC) will be stepping into the breach.

ATW has not been specific as to why the company has decided not to proceed with the 'Cambrian Coast Express', but reports of 2006 operations did indicate that loadings were not good. Also, changes in the management at ATW earlier this year signalled a change of emphasis within the business. The fine detail of WCRC's Cambrian operations remains to be fully revealed, but trains will operate between Machynlleth and Porthmadog, with the possibility of extending services through to Pwllheli, subject to the completion of track work. This would be a positive step forward as the railway north of Porthmadog offers some impressive coastal views and Pwllheli itself is an attractive alternative destination.

The outline service plan is to operate on mid-week days during August, and full details will be available in the New Year. Ian Riley's 'Pocket Rocket' No. 76079 is again the chosen motive power. This latest development has to be a good move. As an operator, West Coast is in the ideal situation to be able to provide coaching stock and back-up diesel locomotives (both the company's Class 33s and 37s are passed for Cambrian Coast operations) for the service. Perhaps more importantly, the company also has the operating and marketing expertise that has been gained over the years of running and promoting 'The Jacobite' trains out of Fort William.

Station Footfalls 2003-04

Station	Totals 02-03	Totals 03-04	% change
Aberystwyth	218498	241351	+10.5
Barmouth	174204	132219	-24.1
Harlech	133912	112652	-15.9
Tywyn	104242	105083	+0.9
Machynlleth	81219	89537	+10.3
Newtown	80768	91883	+13.8
Welshpool	60538	70833	+17.0
Pwllheli	56311	57886	+2.8
Porthmadog	41585	44630	+7.3
Borth	37040	39527	+6.7
Caersws	23600	24901	+5.5
Aberdovey	21302	23299	+9.4
Dovey Junct.	804	1093	+36.0

Longer trains to hit Cambrian mainline

Andrew Davies, Minister for Enterprise, Innovation and Networks announced on Wed. 20th December additional funding to continue running four car trains on the Cambrian Mainline following the successful pilot scheme carried out over the summer and autumn periods this year.

Andrew Davies said: "The success over the past few months of these strengthened train services has relieved overcrowding and enhanced performance along these routes. I am pleased to be able to commit further funding to continue the strengthening along this important cross border route.

"The additional units will continue to ensure there is available capacity on the busy Mid Wales and English Border commuter and tourist routes as well as assisting in the drive to increase performance on the line. This investment along with my recent announcements on extra rolling stock in South and North Wales, including modern comfortable Class 175 trains on the longer distance routes, is further evidence of my commitment to improving rail services across all parts of Wales."

The continuation of funding for extra rolling stock from the Welsh Assembly Government means that operator Arriva Trains Wales can provide 4 coach trains between Machynlleth and Birmingham on nearly all services relieving overcrowding and providing much needed extra capacity.

The Welsh Assembly Government recognises the importance of the Cambrian lines and as well as this latest investment in rolling stock, continues to work with local stakeholders on making improvements to the route.

Andrew Davies added: "I announced in my Written Cabinet Statement on the 1st December that Network Rail have undertaken an initial feasibility study on improving the Aberystwyth to Shrewsbury Cambrian mainline train service from two-hourly to hourly and there are a number of viable options.

"The viable options include improved passing loops and a workable regular hourly pattern timetable on the mainline between Aberystwyth and Shrewsbury which would benefit current performance levels and also improve journey times between the south and north sections of the Cambrian Coast railway through improved connections. Journey opportunities east of Shrewsbury would also be considerably improved.

"The infrastructure improvements, which would facilitate the hourly service, would also be of considerable benefit to performance under the current two hourly service, if there were to be an interim period between their provision and the eventual introduction of an hourly service."

Councillor Mansel Williams of Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council, Chairman of the Shrewsbury – Aberystwyth Railway Liaison Committee, said "The decision by the Minister to continue to fund the 4 car-trains into next year is very good news indeed for all users of the Cambrian Lines - be they shoppers, commuters, business people or students. The recognition by Andrew Davies of the importance in economic and social terms of the Cambrian Railway to Mid and North Wales is very significant. I would also say that the knock-on effects of developing the links from Mid-Wales into the West Midlands are also highly positive. On behalf of the Shrewsbury – Aberystwyth Railway Liaison Committee I wish to express our full support of this further positive action by the Assembly Government."

The View from Mile Post 62

With Brigadier John Faviell

The Assembly have continued to deliver us the extra units that make (in theory until ATW's maintenance woes let us down) nearly every train between Machynlleth and Birmingham 4 cars. ATW on their own would not have delivered this - there is no doubt of that. I'm reliably informed from sources within local authorities who deal with Arriva's bus arm that the company has an ethos of "well do bugger all unless someone else pays for it" - an accusation that certainly rings true of their rail division. So what's happened to the supposed brilliance of the private sector? Arriva are hardly entrepreneurial are they? Does anyone know of new initiatives by Arriva designed to increase rail use and bring in extra revenue? Their marketing department appears to be AWOL, and as to professional standards.....

Lets be clear: Arriva are a lowest common dominator company because they can be. They exist in order to take advantage of UK government's obsession with placing public transport provision into the private sector at any cost. Service provision and quality are paid lip service to, provided there is profit going back to HQ. The only argument why government supported services can be in the private sector making profits when most of their funding is from the state, is that there is significant added value provided by the private operator that the state can't provide. This is amply not the case with Arriva, they provide absolutely nothing "extra": in fact most people would argue the opposite, that punctuality, rolling stock reliability and promotion of travel were better under BR. All of Arriva's "big achievements" have been underpinned by money from outside or robbing Peter to pay Paul i.e. North to South trains at the expense of the natural flow of travel in North Wales and the Vale of Glamorgan reopening.

Value for Money is a big theme within government at the moment. Those in Transport Wales Rail Unit must be wondering what exactly the taxpayer is getting for their £141 million subsidy per annum given the volume of continual complaints about Arriva's woeful service provision. The editor of the *Cambrian News* is inundated with complaints about them as our are local AM's and MP's. Arriva are just not up to the task of providing the level of quality public transport that the people of Mid Wales deserve and need. A break point in the franchise is scheduled for December 2008 - a long way off yet but an ideal opportunity to take the franchise back "in house" and away from Arriva. Hopefully the coalition government in Cardiff Bay will have the guts to do the right thing. A real chance for the junior partner to make their mark on transport and end the national embarrassment of New Labour's contradictory and psychotic transport policies.

In the Cambrian News

19 Oct

A positive item about Arriva was the report of a hamper being given to passenger Richard Denyer by the company. He had been knocked down when getting off at Aberystwyth by a passenger trying to board the train in a hurry (thinking that the train was about to leave). Mr Denyer wrote to Arriva Trains, suggesting that an announcement could be made that the train was terminating, and wouldn't leave straight away. He added that "people complain about dirty trains, but there is no way a cleaner can get on the train with passengers pushing to get straight on the train."

Montgomery AM Mick Bourne also featured in an item on the Cambrian services, asking the Welsh Assembly to put pressure on the company to solve the problems of the service, particularly caused by the pollen during the summer.

2 Nov

Under the headline "Aber bus station 'one of the worst in Wales'", Aberystwyth town Cllr Eric Griffiths suggested that there should be an office at Aberystwyth railway station, with a room for enquiries and information on both trains and buses.

In the same issue, the train service was slammed, after a group of Japanese dignitaries, being met by the Mayor, arrived 40 minutes late. They also found that the station toilets were locked. MP Mark Williams criticised Arriva Trains for this poor service.

9 Nov

A full page article on the recent makeover of Borth station (see SARPA newsletter No.37) featured the adopters George Romary and John Toler, pupils and staff of Llanegryn School, Tony Donovan of Arriva, and artist Catrin Webster. The murals of Borth, displayed on the platform side of the building, illustrate earth, wind, fire and water around Borth, and include a fiery autumn sunset, and the spring on a sunny spring day. In addition, the posters of the "Travel Project" scheme were displayed. These will go on display at the Aberystwyth Arts Centre in the spring. A video of this project has already been displayed in the House of Commons.

A letter from the SARPA Chairman, on the suggested moving of the Aberystwyth railway station, also appeared.

16 Nov

Commenting on the Transport Select Committee's 14th report on rail franchising, MP Mark Williams said the "This report confirms what we all knew – delays on Wales' trains have got worse. 1 in 10 Arriva Trains Wales failed to reach their destination on time – an 80% increase since 1997. The Government should consider lengthening rail franchises, with stringent regular assessments, as short term franchises lead to a short term attitude.

23 Nov

Ceredigion's MP Mark Williams drew attention, in the House of Commons, to the number of occasions when he was stranded at Shrewsbury, or herded onto a bus. "Aberystwyth's train users need and deserve a reliable, regular train service."

7 Dec

Lembit Opik highlighted the problems caused by late running trains, raising the issue with the Secretary of State for Wales in the House of Commons. "The most regular aspect of the local timetable is the lateness!"

Two correspondents also wrote letters on the railway in the same issue. Gwenan O'Connor reported that on six occasions she was two hours late getting to Aberystwyth, because of the train being turned round at Wolverhampton; she also commented on dirty trains, and the state of the toilets. RC Marshall drew attention to the loss of revenue, particularly in the evenings: "it is almost unheard of to see a conductor after about 6pm, meaning passengers from Machynlleth and Borth travelling to and from Aberystwyth for free. One night last week around 25 people joined the early evening train at Machynlleth and none was sold a ticket. At £4.60 each that's over £100 thrown away on one train alone."

All the things you didn't know about

WHAT ARRIVA WILL DO IF THINGS GO WRONG

And Other Interesting Things From their passengers charter

(Reproduced with thanks from Pembrokeshire Travellers Rail Association No.68)

If delays occur after your train journey has started we will endeavour to:

1. provide as much information as possible on the train
2. pass messages on to people who may be meeting you or be worried about you
3. get you to the destination on your ticket
4. get you to your bus destination where your journey includes train/bus through ticketing
5. arrange alternative transport in certain circumstances
6. arrange overnight accommodation or transport home in certain circumstances
7. get you back to an appropriate station if your journey is not possible
8. issue complementary non alcoholic drinks where refreshment facilities are provided and subject to stocks being available if your journey is delayed by more than 1 hour.

COMPENSATION

We will as a minimum provide compensation for you to the value of 20% for holders of single tickets and 10% if you hold a return ticket if your journey on Arriva Trains Wales is delayed by a period of 30 MINUTES TO 1 HOUR. You will receive compensation of 100% for holders of single tickets and 50% in the case of a return ticket if your journey on Arriva Trains Wales is delayed by more than one hour. If you are delayed by more than 2 hours we will consider increasing the level of compensation.

Seat reservations are available on our longer distance services. If for any reason we cannot honour your seat reservation we will try to find you another seat on the train. If this is not possible and you have to stand for more than 15 minutes of the journey we will give you vouchers to the value of 5% or more of your journey ticket.

If we are in a position to do so we will give you an immediate full refund if the train you intend to use is cancelled, delayed or your reservation will not be honoured and you decide not to travel. Simply return your unused ticket to the booking office.

We will clean the outside of our trains EVERY TWO DAYS

We will clean the inside at least once a day

A team of mobile technical staff will be deployed to rectify faults that occur on trains in service wherever such repairs are possible [except the air conditioning? - ed]

We will employ sufficient staff in ticket offices so that you do not have to wait for more than 5 minutes at peak times and 3 minutes at other times.

On Connections – you should advise the conductor on your train if you are trying to make a connection and services are subject to delay.

On car parking – the number of car parking spaces at each station are at ATW's website.

Websites

Our website <http://sarpa.info> **Webmaster Angus Eichoff**
Website host is object4.net

Other sites of interest:

Arriva Trains Wales	www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk/
National Rail Enquiries	www.nationalrail.co.uk/
Train and Bus Information Midlands	www.centro.org.uk/wwwroot/HomePage.asp
Central Trains	www.centraltrains.co.uk/
Virgin Trains	www.virgintrains.co.uk/default.aspx
Chiltern Railways	www.chilternrailways.co.uk/
Network Rail	www.networkrail.co.uk/
Railfuture/Railway Development Society	www.railfuture.org.uk/
Cambrian Rail Partnership	www.thecambrianline.co.uk/
The Association of Community Rail Partnerships (Acorp)	www.acorp.uk.com
Website of the new Wrexham to London company	www.wrexhamandshropshire.co.uk/index.html

SARPA Meeting dates and venues 2006-07

February	Tues 6th 1845	Caersws Red Lion
March	Tues 6th 1900	Newtown Café Loco
March	Sat 31st 1100	Machynlleth Railway Station
May	Tues 1st 1915	Welshpool Pinewood Tavern
June	Tues 5th 1930	Shrewsbury Railway Station
July	Sat 7th 1130	Borth Victoria Inn
August	Tues 7th 1900	Newtown Café Loco
September	Tues 4th 1845	Machynlleth Railway Station
October	Sat 6th 1145	RAFA Club Aberystwyth
November	Tues 6th 1915	Welshpool Pinewood Tavern
December	Tues 4th 1900	Newtown Café Loco

Useful addresses

Arriva Trains Wales:

St Mary's House, 47 Penarth Road, Cardiff CF10 5DJ. Tel 0845 6061 660
Email: customer.services@arrivatrainswales.co.uk

Network Rail:

Community Relations, Railtrack House, Euston Square, London NW1 2EE

Newtown Station Travel

The Railway Station, Old Kerry Road, Newtown, Powys SY16 1BP. Tel. 01686 621966
E-mail info@newtownstation.co.uk

The Association of Train Operating Companies:

ATOC, 3rd Floor, 40 Bernard Street, London WC1N 1BY

Central Trains Limited

Central Trains Limited, PO Box 4323, Birmingham B2 4JB . Tel. 0121 654 1200

Association of Community Rail Partnerships

Rail & River Centre, Canal Side, Civic Hall, Slaithwaite, Huddersfield HD7 5AB

Virgin Trains

Virgin Trains, Customer Relations, PO Box 713, Birmingham, B5 4HH. Tel. 0870 789 1234

Traveline Cymru for all public transport information

www.traveline-cymru.org.uk Tel.0870-6082608

Ceri Davies, Rail Franchise Performance Manager

Rail and New Roads Division, Transport Wales, Welsh Assembly Government, Cathays Park, Cardiff, CF10 3NQ. Direct Line (029) 2082 6561

For Train Times and Fares Call:

08457 48 49 50 (24hrs)
0845 60 40 500 (Welsh Language Service)
0845 60 50 600 (Textphone)

For ticket reservations please call: 0870 9000 773

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