

Shrewsbury
Aberystwyth
Rail
Passengers'
Association



Newsletter
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The Clettwr Bridge has been subject to speed restrictions recently, with work in progress on it. An evening train moves gingerly over it. Photograph: Glyn Jones.

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This is the quarterly newsletter of the Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Rail Passenger Association. Contributions are welcomed from members and non-members about the mid Wales rail scene. Views expressed in it are those of contributors and not necessarily representative of the Association and its Officers as a whole. Information provided is published in good faith, but the Association cannot accept responsibility for any loss or damage arising therefrom. The Editor reserves the right to abridge or amend copy.

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- SARPA will lobby for better rail services.
- Act as a watchdog to safeguard the lines future.
- Meet in public once a month.
- All members will receive our quarterly Newsletter free of charge.
- Members with access to e-mail can be included in our electronic network if they so desire.

The majority of our expenditure goes towards the cost of publishing and distributing our newsletters. We occasionally pay for room hire. Any surplus is held as an emergency fund for the future. None of the officers gains financially in any way from SARPA.

Please send cheques, payable to SARPA, to:

SARPA Membership Secretary: 23 High Street, Welshpool, Powys, SY21 7JP. Make sure to include full name, address and telephone number and also e-mail address if you wish to become part of our electronic network.

Newsletter Errata:

Some errors crept into the article on p.7 of the last issue, during transfer of the text to the publisher file. A corrected version is available on our website.

Chairman's Message

To begin with, on behalf of our group, I would like to say how delighted I am at the recent announcement by the Minister, Edwina Hart that there will be an enhanced train service between Shrewsbury and Aberystwyth, starting in May of next year. I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to the multitude of good people who have worked so hard for so long to bring this about. We look forward to the first train of the service.

To continue, I am going to take a look at the Buttington Hall Crossing collision, where a westbound train hit a farm trailer and which occurred on 16th July last year.

Seventy five years ago, in the April 1939 issue of "Railway Magazine" the "Pertinent Paragraphs" section contained a photograph of a heavily loaded hay wain, drawn by two horses, crossing a double track main line railway. *"From the safety point of view, the 'occupation crossing'.....is increasingly a menace in these days of ever increasing speeds"*, commented the writer, who went on to describe the rather elementary method for crossing the line employed by the hay carters in the picture. *"In these days of elaborate signalling precautions, such a procedure as this seems to be lacking in the first elements of safety, though admittedly the problem is a difficult one"*, he concluded.

How true: not only for 1939 but for our own time also, where various types of level crossing continue to pose an ever increasing risk to the railway. It is almost as if successive rail managements, having been unable to get to grips with what is a nasty and vexing problem, hope it will just go away. Well, it won't. In the intervening period, train speeds have continued to rise, and due to modern signalling, services can now run at greater frequency. People and vehicles crossing the line for whatever reason therefore pose an ever greater risk, not only for themselves but for rail users too.

Reading the official report of the Buttington Hall Crossing collision, the most salient factor which comes to light is that the voice communication between the signaller and the crossing users was open to different interpretations (Para. 27). The railway does not appear to have adopted a standard

phraseology for use in such situations, leaving speech communication open to different meaning. Indeed, historically, rail authorities have been reluctant to rely on verbal authority for actually controlling trains, precisely for that reason. Ambiguous speech exchanges were a major factor in the Norwich Thorpe disaster as long ago as 1874. To this day it remains the worst single line collision on the British network, claiming the lives of 25 people. Conversely, the block telegraph with its rigid system of bell codes was simple and clear. For example, two beats on the bell means only one thing:- *“Train entering section”*.

Nevertheless, given the introduction of GSMR mobile telephones between trains and signallers, it seems astonishing that train crews are not party to voice communication between signalling authorities and crossing users. Indeed, the official RAIB report makes no recommendation at all in this direction. If anything, the recommendations outlined on page 24 are rather vague and unspecific.

Some years ago, I was privileged to be part of a group visit to the Tower at Manchester Airport, at the invitation of one of the controllers. The first thing that struck me is just how quiet it was up there. You could almost hear a pin drop, whilst outside aircraft screamed and roared as they taxied and sped down the runway. The secret, apparently, is some very, very good multiple layer glazing. Our host explained to us the basic principles of Air Traffic Control. I remarked that it seemed a bit like railway signalling except that you could not actually stop an airliner in mid-flight. His response was that you could effectively stop an aircraft by sending it somewhere to orbit and that yes, they had indeed borrowed many principles from the railway.

Voice communication forms a far greater part of the picture in aviation than is the case on the railway and the safety record is impressive. The more so when one considers that if a conflict were to occur, you might have as little as 5 seconds to do something about it! Oh and just to help, it's the one that remains stationary in your field of vision that is going to hit you.

The way the aviation industry has achieved this is in no small part due to the rigid standards set for verbal communications. Syntax and phraseology are tightly controlled. For instance, the phrase “Take off” is not uttered unless you are being told you can actually go and do it. Otherwise, the word “departure” is always used, even to issue instructions to be carried out after take-off! *“After departure climb straight ahead until passing altitude 2500 feet”*. Moreover, most of these instructions require to be read back to the controller by the pilot. All this information is contained in the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) publication “CAP 413, Radio Telephony”.

So, what relevance is this to the railway and crossing users? Well, nowadays it's not beyond the wit of man to enable a train driver to hear what is being said to a crossing user by the signaller, and this could provide useful advance warning information. Neither would it be that difficult to give each crossing an alphanumeric designator with a lineside board to aid identification. Drivers could then be advised of activity on the crossing and told to approach at reduced speed if necessary. Rigid control of syntax and phraseology as in the aviation industry would aid safety. Of course, it would be up to the authorities to decide what to do about contractors and users who do not wish to be co-operative, though the fact that train crews could be party to exchanges between signallers and crossing users would in itself be of enormous benefit.

Maybe it's time for some good folk from Network Rail's “Safety Central” to take the train to Gatwick and have an informal discussion with the CAA. The conversation could prove fruitful. Possibly I will bring down a heap of odium upon my head for having had the temerity to suggest such things. After all, suggesting that people think differently is often unpopular. Whatever, it is clear that the present state of affairs is unsatisfactory and needs to be addressed.

Spare a thought for the consequences if the tractor driver involved at Buttington had crossed the line just a second later. The train would have hit the tractor rather than the trailer, with much more serious consequences. A lot of people had to die before passenger trains were compelled to have continuous automatic brakes; the scourge of fire caused by gas lighting was removed; and automatic train control (aws) enabled trains to run safely in fog. Leaving this serious problem unsolved for 75 years is clearly unsatisfactory.

News in Brief

The Vale of Rheidol Railway

This winter has been a busy one on the Vale of Rheidol. As well as carrying out routine winter maintenance, various parts of the railway have been enhanced ready for the start of Daily Train operation in late March.

Winter maintenance at Devil's Bridge Station has seen it lovingly conserved and certain features restored to return it closer to its Edwardian appearance. The most novel feature to be restored is the station lighting, which appears to have been removed during the 1940s. As in the 1910s, today's station lamps are to be gas lit - this has required the development and installation of a bottle fed LPG system at Devil's Bridge. The lamp columns sourced to adorn Devil's Bridge platform are a remarkable find in themselves, bearing works-plates showing they were built by the Avonside Engine Co. Avonside, of Bristol, built a number of small, industrial narrow gauge railway engines used throughout Wales, making these lamps a particularly poignant addition to one of Wales' premier narrow gauge railways. The water tank at Devil's Bridge, a feature of many photos of locos running round at the throat of the station has also been sympathetically replaced. A new tank, a close replica of the original was transported up to Devil's Bridge by train and installed during early February.

Aberystwyth Booking Office and Gift Shop has been refurbished, providing twice as much shop space and two serving kiosks. The increased shop space will provide a much more visitor friendly experience, and complement a vastly increased range of products, which will also be available online. The additional serving kiosk will enable two booking clerks to be on duty at any one time, vastly reducing the time taken to serve a whole train load of passengers. As well as a comprehensive collection of railway books and DVDs, it is anticipated future products will include local souvenirs, model railway items and an increased range of refreshments, ready to complement Aberystwyth Station's new picnic area. Aberystwyth terminus has also been the site of continuing P-Way work. The rail connection to the New Workshop was recently completed, allowing No.10 & No.8 "Llywelyn" to visit for gauging tests and to put the new crane through its paces.

An exhibition of work by the renowned wildlife artists Terence Lambert and Dee Doody is to be shown in the historic Booking Hall at Devil's Bridge, during June. The exhibition will run from Monday, 16th June until Sunday, 22nd June and will be open, free of charge, to both railway passengers and passing members of the public. Terence Lambert is especially well known for his paintings of birds, having almost exclusively painted them for thirty years. His work on display will be complemented by a film specially produced by Dee Doody. Dee Doody has gained a reputation for producing emotive, high quality nature films. In his production for the Vale of Rheidol, he hopes to showcase the wildlife of the Rheidol Valley, Red Kites and Pine Martens included. The exhibition will also display plans of the Vale of Rheidol's ambitious new visitor centre based at Devil's Bridge, which will incorporate its own art gallery and cinema. Vale of Rheidol spokesman, Robert Gambrell said the exhibition "is a really exciting opportunity to do something a bit different, that'll appeal to non-railway enthusiasts and will show off the amazing wildlife to be found in the Rheidol Valley."

In partnership with Natural Resources Wales, eleven new viewing windows have been created along a two mile stretch of forested line between Rheidol Falls Halt and Devil's Bridge. The line runs along a ledge high above the Rheidol Valley floor following the contours of the mountain side, from which dramatic views can be afforded. Spectacular views of Rheidol Falls and the Cymystwyth Quarry that were lost to rampant forest growth have been reopened. The windows, which are 50-100m wide have required around 250 trees to be felled, fitting in with NRW's long term Age Structuring Plan. This tree felling will enable new, natural growth, including flowers and native Ash trees to grow. The work was completed over an intensive two week period by railway staff, external contractors Advanced Forestry & Garden Services and Natural Resources Wales. Adam Young, a member of the Vale of Rheidol's Lineside Conservation Team who has previously worked in the wildlife conservation sector, said creating the Viewing Windows was good news, the project having been fourteen years in the planning to work with NRW's Age Structuring Plan. He went on to say the new viewing windows will "dramatically enhance the visitor experience by reinstating the original Edwardian vistas."

Aberystwyth's New Workshop and associated trackwork is edging ever-closer to commissioning later this year. After completion of the New Workshop Yard trackwork locomotives No.10 & No.8

Llewellyn were moved to the Yard for gauging tests before No.8 was used as the test load for the new crane. The new overhead crane was supplied by AB Cranes of Sheffield. AB Cranes have built up a reputation for first class supply and installation of cranes and their work for the Vale of Rheidol was no exception. The New Workshop's latest visitor is Vale of Rheidol's diminutive Kerr Stuart Wren Class, No.3114, which has been turned using the crane. The line has also taken delivery of a hardwood smoke vent, manufactured by Dixon Balston Design. This is to be installed in the east gable end of the New Workshop, whilst the railway awaits delivery of the clock destined to adorn the west end. As the external contractors continue outfitting the shed it has started being used for rolling stock storage.

See the railway's website www.rheidolrailway.co.uk for full information.

[From the North Wales Coast Railway Website.]

Two Together Railcard

The new Two Together railcard was launched on 3rd March. With the railcard, two named people over 16 will be able to travel together and receive a discount of one-third off all fares, at all times except between 0430 and 0930 on Monday - Friday. You don't have to be related!

The card will cost £30, but a discount of £3 can be obtained online at

<http://twotogether-railcard.co.uk/leaflet>

by entering the code LEAFLET3. The card will also be available from station ticket offices. Each person must provide a passport photograph. The card can only be used when the two named people travel together so does not replace any existing railcards.

The Two Together railcard was trialled for a period of time last year in the West Midlands, and was obviously successful.

Railfuture (and SARPA) welcomes its introduction nationally - it fills the gap between Young Persons, Senior and Family railcards, is one step towards a National Rail Card and will make the cost of rail travel more competitive with the cost of two people travelling together by car.

£12m scheme improving access for passengers at five railway stations in Wales unveiled

Stations at Machynlleth in Powys, Chirk near Wrexham, Ystrad Mynach in Caerphilly county, and Llandaff and Radyr in Cardiff will all benefit. The cash will be used to create step and obstacle-free routes to platforms and station entrances through new footbridges, lifts and ramps. The funding has come from the Welsh and UK governments. Work will start at Ystrad Mynach later this month, with the other projects starting in May and June.

Transport Minister Edwina Hart said: "This scheme will greatly improve access to a number of stations and ensure more people can use the train. "Public transport is a vital way for many people, including some of the most vulnerable in our society, to access jobs and services. I want to make sure our rail stations are accessible to all and offer a comfortable experience for passengers."

The work is being funded by £7m from the Welsh government and £5m from the Department for Transport.

Mark Langman, route managing director of Network Rail Wales which will be carrying out the work, said: "These enhancements will help passengers get access to platforms and cross more easily between them through the installation of new footbridges with ramps or lifts. "Step-free access not only benefits disabled passengers or those with reduced mobility, but also people with children, heavy luggage or shopping. "In most cases, the improvements will open up the stations and the rail network to users who may not have been able to access them previously."

[From BBC website, 20th March 2014]

Shrewsbury

Work has still not finished on the undersides of the bridge over the river Severn with contractors equipment and screens still evident in mid April. The work has meant that the freight avoiding lines have not been used, and a large gouge has been created in Platform 3. Despite the completion of the new customer assistance/dispatch office and new waiting room area, the station environs still present

a scruffy unkempt appearance, with the state of the area between the tracks and the footbridge to the Dana of particular concern.

It's those London trains again – seemingly bowing to political pressure two paths have been found for Virgin Trains as extensions of existing Euston to Birmingham/Wolverhampton trains. Provisional departure times from Shrewsbury are given as 0639 and 1524 for commencement in December 2014, neither of which will connect with Cambrian trains.

Welshpool

Members of the local agricultural community have become concerned about the prospect of an hourly service claiming that they need half an hour at a time to get the cattle across User Worked Crossings (UWC), and they will no longer have the time with more trains running. Their claims have been met with some scepticism from within railway sources, who point to other areas of the UK with double track and even more frequent services that seemingly have no issues with live stock crossing. It has been suggested that the Farmers are primarily looking for compensation, and it has pointed out that north of Welshpool to Buttington Junction up until 1965 there were close on 50 train movements a day on summer Saturdays, and no record of any livestock crossing problems.

The embankment on the east side of the line just south of Cilcewydd Mill has needed stabilisation work, as the relaying of the DOWN line onto the abandoned side of the formation has proved problematical.

Newtown

Powys CC is pressing ahead with plans to apply to the Welsh Government for a grant to redevelop the bus station on its existing site. Where this leaves bus/rail integration remains unclear and also where the buses to serve it will come from. Having cut support to around half the bus routes in the county in 2013, a further package of cuts has been proposed on the bus support grant but without any detail on where the axe will fall. Public transport by bus in the county may soon become a trip into a market town for school/college time and a trip back when school/college finishes.

Caersws

Work has started on converting the station buildings into a small hotel/hostel for hikers and walkers. This welcome development is to be pitched at tourists arriving by rail, however despite clearing stating this Powys CC Highways Department objected to the planning proposal on the grounds that there weren't sufficient car parking spaces! One wonders whether the brains at County Hall read the application or realised there was sufficient space in the station car park opposite for any road access?

Buttington Crossing collision

The report on the accident has recently been released; it can be accessed online at http://www.raib.gov.uk/cms_resources.cfm?file=/140327_R062014_Buttington_Hall_V2.pdf
or
<http://tinyurl.com/lqixv8n>

Of course, in the past the Cambrian Line had the ability for far more frequent services as the block sections were closer together! The Cambrian Coast Express fireman changed the token twenty odd times between Salop and Aber, and there were double track sections too. Summer Saturday extras tail chased each other block to block and there were relief portions as well! There were no lineside telephones for occupation crossings either. How did the farmers of Montgomeryshire cope then?"

SARPA letter to Minister

Sunday 2 March 2014

Dear Edwina Hart,

Our group has been most interested in your support for the concept of tourist trains on the Cambrian section. We await further announcements with anticipation.

Nevertheless, we are not sure that today, tourist and special trains remain competitive unless they are run by the franchise operator as part of the regular, structured timetable. This opinion arises from examination of recent special train fares. As an example, in 2011 a special train from Aberystwyth to York was priced at £59 from Cambrian line stations. At the time it was possible to use ordinary service trains to make this journey for a similar amount, with a quicker journey time in both directions. Other excursions run by this operator suffered from a similar competitive disadvantage.

Contrast this with the situation in the early 1970s, where a "Merrymaker" excursion from St Pancras to Barmouth was offered for a mere £1.75p (1972). At the time the regular fare was given as £8.80 return from Euston and the cheapest possible regular fare would have been around £4.80 (Awayday Return), so the excursion fare was very competitive.

There is an exception to this situation which is when steam locomotives are employed. Using steam traction in selected circumstances is quite a good way to persuade people to pay a premium to travel by train.

No doubt you are aware of the steam service which operated until fairly recently on the Cambrian Coast route. Unfortunately, the trains ceased after the 2010 season owing to the introduction of the ERTMS signalling system the following year, as no British steam locomotive has yet been fitted with the necessary equipment. Nevertheless, there was considerable business development potential for these services, which were used by holidaymakers, many of whom had arrived in the area by car and would not normally use the railway at all. Moreover, the trains were independently operated and ran without public subsidy.

Our group is of the opinion that new-build steam traction would be a better option than fitting ERTMS technology to existing locomotives. Using better technology developed since the end of steam traction in the UK, improved efficiency and productivity would be possible.

- * Better thermal efficiency leading to reduced fuel consumption
- * Reduced maintenance costs
- * Improved service availability
- * Dedicated motive power for special trains on the Cambrian
- * ERTMS fitted from new

We have been in contact with an organisation who have indicated an interest in managing such a project. We believe that a scheme to build such a machine could form a useful part of a social regeneration and education package. This could help to train new engineers and help to offset a growing skills shortage within the engineering sector.

This is certainly not pie in the sky. The "Inter-City 125" trains which have served so well between London and South Wales since 1976 were designed and built by former steam engineers.

In these present constrained times it would not be appropriate to ask for direct assistance from the state for such a project. Nevertheless, we would be pleased to learn what manner of other support the Welsh Government might be able to offer.

On behalf of our membership, I look forward to your comments.

Reply from the Minister: 18 March

Dear Angus,

Thank you for your email of 12 March and the suggestions that you have made for a scenic train operation. Given the damage incurred during the winter storm and the need to re-open the coastal railway as soon as possible, I have decided to defer a potential trial for future consideration.

I appreciate your helpful observations with regards to potential use of steam locomotives for any scenic train scheme. I will take this into consideration should this scheme be re-visited.

Aberystwyth to Carmarthen?

Tim James responds to Rob Philips presentation on restoring the railway through Lampeter from last October reproduced in SARPA 62.

Rob is clearly affiliated to Plaid Cymru and we must take some of his views in the political context of that party's agenda. After all he's suggesting that the Welsh nation makes a very large capital investment in rural Plaid voting areas of the west and north! It's all very well moaning about the Heads of the Valleys road and Cardiff investment bias but is this proposal any more than mirror image politics - The Big project for my area? Where does this proposal fit in within the context of a genuine national transport plan that is fair to all areas of Wales, and has clear achievable funded aims and objectives? Rob doesn't say.

The Carmarthen to Aberystwyth line was the victim like so many other lines of the erroneous belief that railway losses in the early 1960's could be cured by closing the lightly used parts of it, and that investment in these lines to reduce costs was pointless as the private car and lorry would soon take all the traffic away. The line was never a money spinner, and was condemned as being very lightly used which from the evidence available was perhaps true in a passenger sense, but from the freight side it was carrying more tonnage than a lot of other rural lines. The southern end and parts of the branches survived into the early 1970's as a freight only line until the industry it was serving (milk) closed. Track was not lifted between Carmarthen and Lampeter until 1975; however this was before the reopening movements in the mid to late 1980's. The schemes in South Wales that Rob suggests are evidence of bias, were done because the lines there had survived for freight traffic through to more enlightened times, and were relatively easy and cheap to restore services on, unlike the ripped up and sold off track beds of 1960's and 1970's closures.

Costs – the upper estimates he quotes for restoration are probably more accurate. The Irish Western Rail Corridor and our own Ebbw Vale branch show that if the trackbed and structures had been left intact, restoration costs would be much lower than what we're seeing with the Borders route in Scotland. Unfortunately the Carmarthen line was not protected. However, he's right to say there are no major engineering challenges. £700 million is a lot but that's the price of stupidity in the 1960's and 1970's. Afon Wen to Bangor is maybe cheaper per mile as the local authority have managed to protect and own large sections of the trackbed, but it still has a number of major breaches in the formation to contend with. Combined with line speed improvements on the Cambrian Coast were probably talking about at least a £ One Billion price tag at today's costs.

This is the big problem with the project; the cost of it and perhaps more rightly the opportunity cost of it is a major stumbling block. With the South Wales Metro project estimated at £4 Billion and the M4 Relief Road over £1 Billion this also would be in the category of a very large scheme, and perhaps one that would take up the bulk of the present Transport Capital infrastructure budget for a substantial period - as we're seeing with the current Heads of the Valleys road. Simply put, this project if it went ahead would mean other projects across Wales not happening for some time. You could restore the railway into Mold, a town three times the size of Lampeter for around £30 million. What's so special about Lampeter that it must happen first? Not that I'm knocking west Wales just saying that there's plenty of scope for rail reopenings to larger places without the same cost.

Funding – The idea that somehow Wales is being hard done by, and that natural justice should see the UK government spend more money on capital investment in Wales, is all rather political posturing. The current UK-wide rail electrification plans sees over 20% of the spend in Wales, which has just 5% of the population. HS2 is clearly designed for through trains from Scotland and North, and Mid Wales will benefit from freedup capacity on the West Coast Mainline - it's a UK project so probably no Barnett formula consequential. Try telling a sob story about "only having 200 miles of electrification" in the wireless and cut off the South West peninsula!

Labour have already struck the deals for the next round of European funding, and as usual the money has been dissipated across all sectors meaning that the pot for capital investment is relatively small. European money has been squandered apart from some small exceptions on the Welsh Government's watch, and our economy has not been improved; we're unlikely to get so much funding in the future, and we have to move on. The magic funding fairy will not be delivering a one off present no matter how much we may like it to. In the UK spending on transport by the public sector accounts for £19 Billion per annum, Social Security excluding pensions consumes £113 Billion. The public sector

is always going to have a limited ability to do infrastructure schemes whilst the benefits bill is so high. Money to help the economy of an area or to fund the lifestyles of the guests on the Jeremy Kyle show is maybe a too simplistic line of thought, but some redistribution from paying benefits to keep people economically inactive to projects that benefit the economy is a long term solution.

Bus use Rationale? – the X40 bus may used to have carried 110,000 passengers between Aberystwyth and Carmarthen, but the T4 between Merthyr Tydfil and Newtown carries 160,000, and the X75 between Llanidloes and Shrewsbury 140,000. If bus use is a criterion for rail reinstatement then restoring the railway from Merthyr through Brecon and up to Moat Lane Junction and reopening the village stations between Newtown and Shrewsbury would have a better business case.

North to South Wales traffic rationale? – take one look at the sickly usage figures for the north to south air link and the 9 direct trains. The Welsh Government doesn't crow about them, as they show it's a very small niche market. If the more populous areas of North Wales already served by direct links to Cardiff are not spitting out huge numbers, then the traffic on offer will be even thinner from rural southern Gwynedd and Ceredigion.

Population rationale? – supporters of the Traws Cymru link are claiming that the population that could be served by rail between Aberystwyth and Carmarthen is greater than that by the Cambrian Mainline. However they seem to have underestimated the population of Montgomeryshire, and excluded Shrewsbury from the Cambrian mainline, whilst including Aberystwyth and Carmarthen in their calculations – using their own methodology the Cambrian mainline actually serves a population three times the size in west Wales.

Broom broom, honk, honk – civil servants in transport departments are still churning out predict and provide reports claiming that road usage will continue to grow and need lots of new road space built. This is despite road usage levelling off and going into slight decline, with traffic levels now back to 2003 levels. Politicians are still obsessed with road schemes as being some sort of economic miracle driver. Tucked away on the Welsh Government website there is a study done by a Transport Consultancy from Scotland about the impact of roads schemes in Wales in 2006; their conclusion was that whilst new roads influenced things like the choice of location for development of housing, retail and businesses, there was no evidence at sub regional level of any impact on improving GDP. This is one of the biggest stumbling blocks to reopening closed railway lines. Decision makers need to get their heads out of the sand and realise that road usage has peaked and road construction doesn't improve the economy anything like they perceive it to.

If our decision makers finally wake up to the changing transport demands of the second decade of the 21st Century, then we may get some traction on line reopenings. There's some movement in the support for rail electrification and the South Wales metro, but the reality is only so much can be done whilst we still plan for road schemes that are increasingly expensive and unaffordable. In Wales this is dressed up as addressing network resilience – in reality schemes for duplicate Motorways and dual carriageways along the South and North coasts. The arguments have to be made and won on why public transport and freight by rail are better long term alternatives to tarmac and benefit payments for the entire country. Tilting at individual projects like Rob does is not really helpful.

The hourly service

The proposed extra trains, according to a Plaid Cymru press release, will be departures from Aberystwyth to Birmingham at 6.30am, 8.30am, 12.30pm, and 6.29pm, with equivalent return services. Also, there will be extra evening shuttle services from Aberystwyth to Borth and Machynlleth at 8.30pm and 10.30pm.

This would appear to give this timetable:

Aberystwyth to Birmingham dep. 0514, **0630**, 0730, **0830**, 0930, 1130, **1230**, 1530, 1730, **1829**, 1930.

Aberystwyth to Machynlleth dep. 0514, **0630**, 0730, **0830**, 0930, 1130, **1230**, 1530, 1730, **1829**, 1930, **2030**, 2136, **2230**, 2350.

Birmingham to Aberystwyth arr. **0825(?)**, 0925, 1125, **1225**, 1325, 1525, 1725, **1824**, 1925, **2025**, 2125, **2225**, 2344.

Machynlleth to Aberystwyth arr. 0512, **0625(?)**, 0710, **0825(?)**, 0844, 0925, 1125, **1225**, 1325, 1525, 1725, **1824**, 1925, **2025**, 2125, **2225**, 2344.

The Working Timetable of Passenger and Freight trains Oswestry Division Western Region British Railways 15th June to 13th September inclusive 1959 – a window on the railway in Mid Wales just before the Beeching era

The Oswestry Division of British Railways Western Region was the administrative area that covered the bulk of the Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth line from nationalisation up until late 1962, and was centred around the former Cambrian Railways lines with some add on's such as Aberystwyth to Pencader, Talylyn Junction to Pontsticill Junction and Oswestry to Gobowen, amounting to 320 miles of railway with 90 signalboxes, 141 stations and halts, employing nearly 1000 men and women including the carriage and locomotive works at Oswestry itself. There were just over 100 steam locomotives stationed at 12 different engine sheds in the district in 1947. East of Buttington Junction to Shrewsbury was in the Chester Division, as was the line from Barmouth Junction to Ruabon. Each section of line had what was called a "working timetable" that showed a list of all planned train movements including passenger, freight and light engine movements; the travelling public only saw the published passenger train timetable. The working timetable amounted to a bible and was a point of reference for all railway employees, including detail on where signal boxes were, the maximum load certain types of engine could be loaded to over sections of the line, gradients, speed restrictions etc. The summer 1959 edition we use as source here amounted to 91 pages – just for the Oswestry Division.

The railway in Mid Wales in 1959 was still steam operated, and the summer of 1959 was the penultimate summer of the use of the Dukedog 4-4-0's: essentially a 1930's rebuild of a Victorian design. The Moat Lane Junction to Brecon section was almost exclusively run by 46XXX series: modern 2-6-0's built in Swindon to an Ivatt LMS design, though some other BR Standard types were seen it was still a predominantly an ex-GWR fleet in operation. The passenger rolling stock was no older than from the mid 1930's, and quite often the premier trains used new BR Mk 1 stock. However the timetable and working practices were still similar to the past, with little thought about relevance to the modern world. The area was not selected for any of the trials of DMU's or diesel railbuses, and no early allocation of diesels or DMU's were seen at this point, apart from one daily working from Bangor to Pwllheli. The mid and late 50's were in fact a time of growing passenger numbers on the railway, and paid holidays taken in the UK were a big factor in this for seaside lines. Overcrowding was not unknown on Summer Saturdays, despite numerous long length trains. 1955 had seen the launch of the Modernisation Plan and the replacement of all steam engines promised by 1975; what wasn't so apparent was any plan or timescale on individual lines. This was left to the Region concerned, and future analysis showed there to be a gap in what the quantities of DMU's and diesels planned would cover. We know now that the British Transport Commission had been working on a secret plan of branch line closures since the late 1940's, though there was no overarching strategic objective apart from hunting down and eradicating hopelessly uneconomic parts; however with Modernisation underway there was the promise of reduced operating costs and attracting increased business. It was all rather woolly. However on the ground especially on Summer Saturdays the lines had never been busier...

Summer Saturday bonanza for 14 weeks – the icing on the cake

Think of yourself at that small Mediterranean airport that sees an influx of several large jets arrive once a week, unload and then load up again. The Oswestry Division was something like that, in parts anyway, except that the carriages stayed all week from Saturday PM to the following Saturday AM.

There were 19 additional departures to destinations off the Cambrian from the coastal stations. Talerddig slightly edged it as the preferred route, and the destinations were evenly split between the North West, London and the West Midlands, along with the solitary single extra train going south of Aberystwyth. The summer of 1959 was clearly the heyday of Butlin's at Penychain with no fewer than 11 of the additional trains serving it, 4 starting from there. The Butlin's camp was started before World War 2, but used as a Naval training base during hostilities; afterwards it opened in 1947 along with Penychain station with two long platforms, and the line between Afon Wen and Penychain was doubled

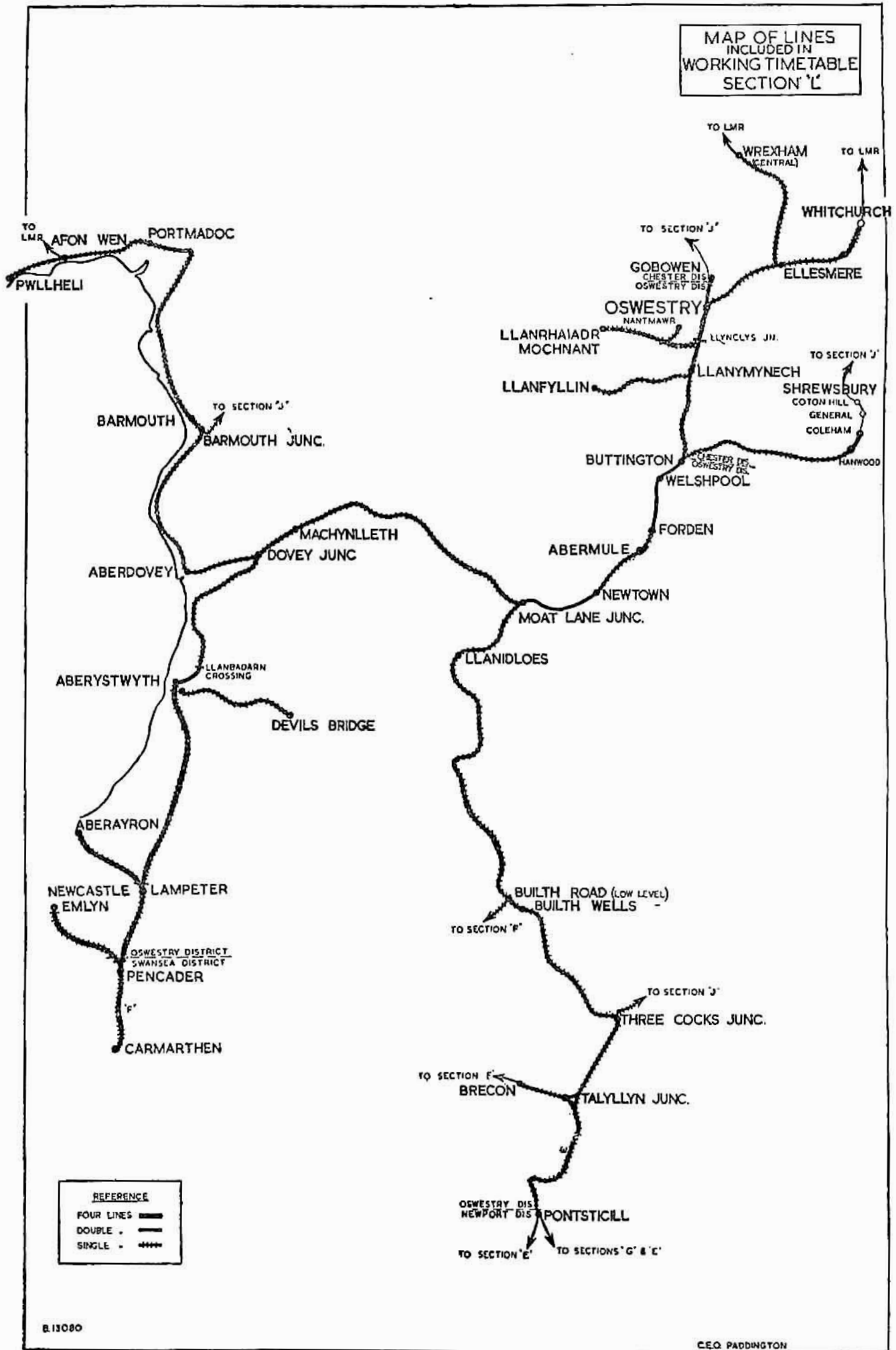


Table 1. Additional Summer Saturday Trains 1959 –Departures. Oswestry Division

Time	From	To	Route
0720	Pwllheli	London Paddington	Bala
0812	Barmouth	Birmingham Snow Hill	Talerddig
0835	Barmouth	London Paddington	Bala
0845	Penychain	Stoke on Trent	Caernarfon
0845	Pwllheli	Birkenhead	Bala
0910	Pwllheli	Manchester Exchange	Caernarfon
0920	Barmouth	Birmingham Snow Hill	Bala
0945	Aberystwyth	London Paddington	Talerddig
1000	Pwllheli	London Euston	Caernarfon
1008	Penychain	Carmarthen	Aberystwyth
1035	Barmouth	Manchester London Rd	Talerddig
1040	Penychain	Liverpool Lime St	Caernarfon
1045	Pwllheli	London Paddington	Talerddig
1100	Pwllheli	London Euston	Caernarfon
1100	Aberystwyth	Manchester London Rd	Talerddig
1110	Pwllheli	Birmingham Snow Hill	Bala
1125	Penychain	Warrington	Caernarfon
1230	Aberystwyth	Birmingham Snow Hill	Talerddig
1330	Barmouth	Birmingham Snow Hill	Talerddig

Table 2. Trains per route

Route	Number of Trains	To London	To the North West	To the West Midlands	To South Wales
via Caernarfon	6	2	3	1	0
via Bala	5	2	1	2	0
via Talerddig	7	2	2	3	0
via Lampeter	1	0	0	0	1
Total	19	6	6	6	1

to cope with the traffic. It was planned as a rail served facility. Barmouth was served by 10 extra trains, Tywyn by 5 and Aberystwyth by 4.

The arriving extra trains roughly mirrored the departing pattern and whereas the departures were predominately AM the arrivals would be PM. There is plenty of photographic evidence from the time, so we know that train lengths were fairly long and can deduce that the capacity provided by these extra trains would be 9000- 9500 seats each way a week, which equated to roughly a quarter of million seats in the season. One of the big criticisms of the traffic survey carried out barely 18 months after the summer 59 season ended, was that it failed to take into account seasonal variation, and that the infamous usage maps in the Reshaping report were an under-representation of many lines' true usage figures. It's highly unlikely that the railway would be providing 19 extra long length trains if they weren't used. Normal service trains also ran with extra carriages in the summer months and the North Western part of the Division saw additional weekday tourist trains – the Radio Land Cruises.

However, some parts of the Oswestry Division saw little or no extra summer Saturday traffic: only one train ran south of Aberystwyth, just one of the Manchester trains was routed north of Welshpool and via Oswestry and Whitchurch, and there was nothing at all along the Mid Wales line to Brecon.

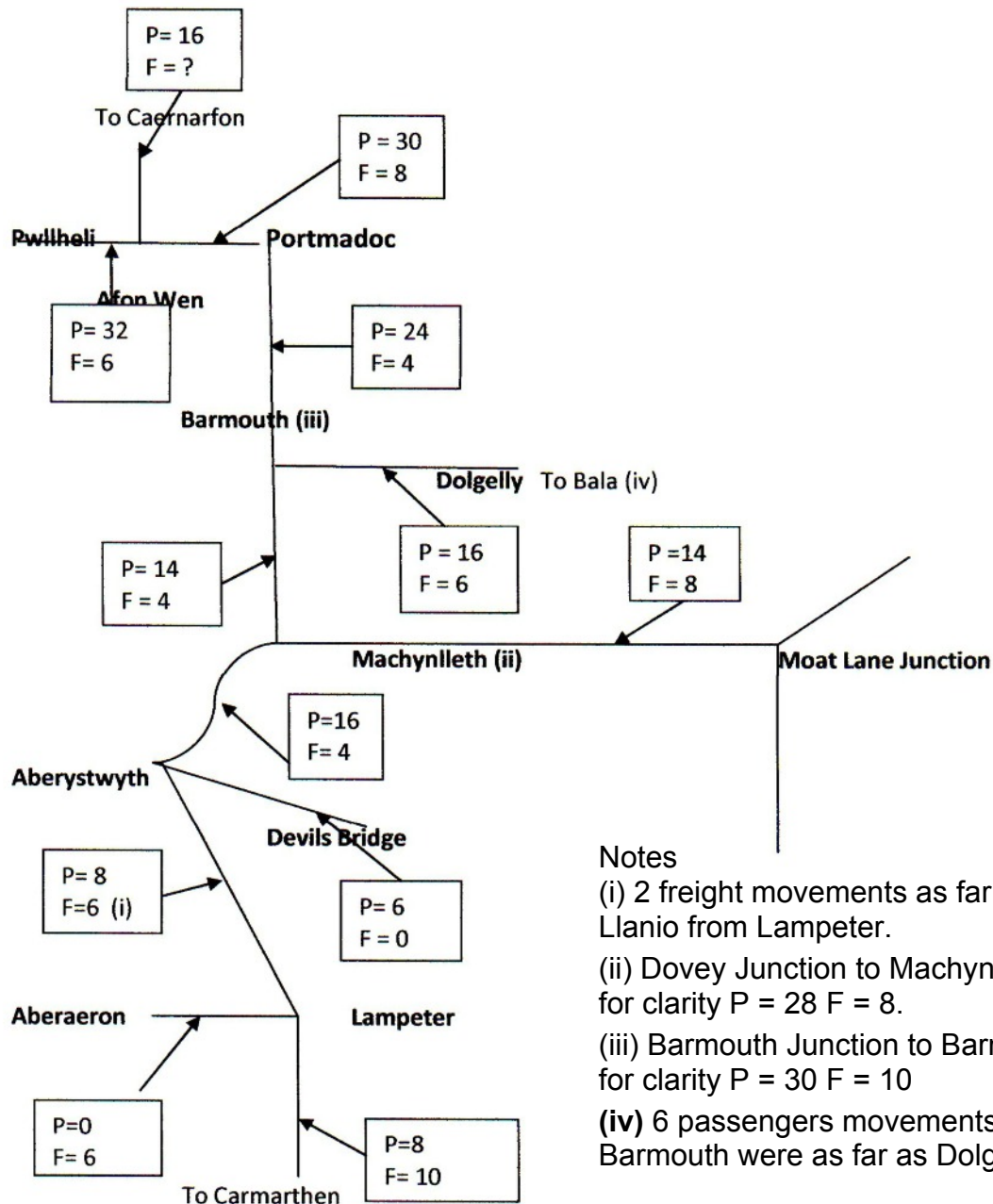
Service Density on Weekdays

Figures 1 and 2 show the normal weekday train movements (both directions combined) for freight and passenger trains for each section of the Division. It can be seen that there was much variation and

often having a connecting line with trains running from it over a further few miles produced a greater traffic density. The north west saw the greatest density of passenger traffic, as it benefitted from through trains from the London Midland Region to Pwllheli and Portmadoc, in addition to Western Region services and the Radio Land Cruises. Of course it had a swelled up population with the extra holidaymakers all arriving by train in situ to cater for. Freight traffic was at its densest around the Oswestry area; traffic in the south of the Division both West and East was noticeably much lighter. The two signal boxes at Oswestry were open 24 hours to cater for 108 train movements. In contrast the section from Llanidloes to Builth Wells saw just 10 movements. Oswestry was the HQ of the Division and very much a hub for local passenger services and freight. It is noticeable how the volume of freight trains gradually decreases from Gobowen as the Cambrian mainline is followed from Oswestry to Aberystwyth. In total Oswestry had 42 freight train movements a day versus 8 for Aberystwyth! In the far south freight movements equalled or bettered passenger train movements south of Lampeter, and from Tallylyn Junction to Pontsticill Junction. In the North the section between Buttington Junction and Llanymynech saw equal numbers.

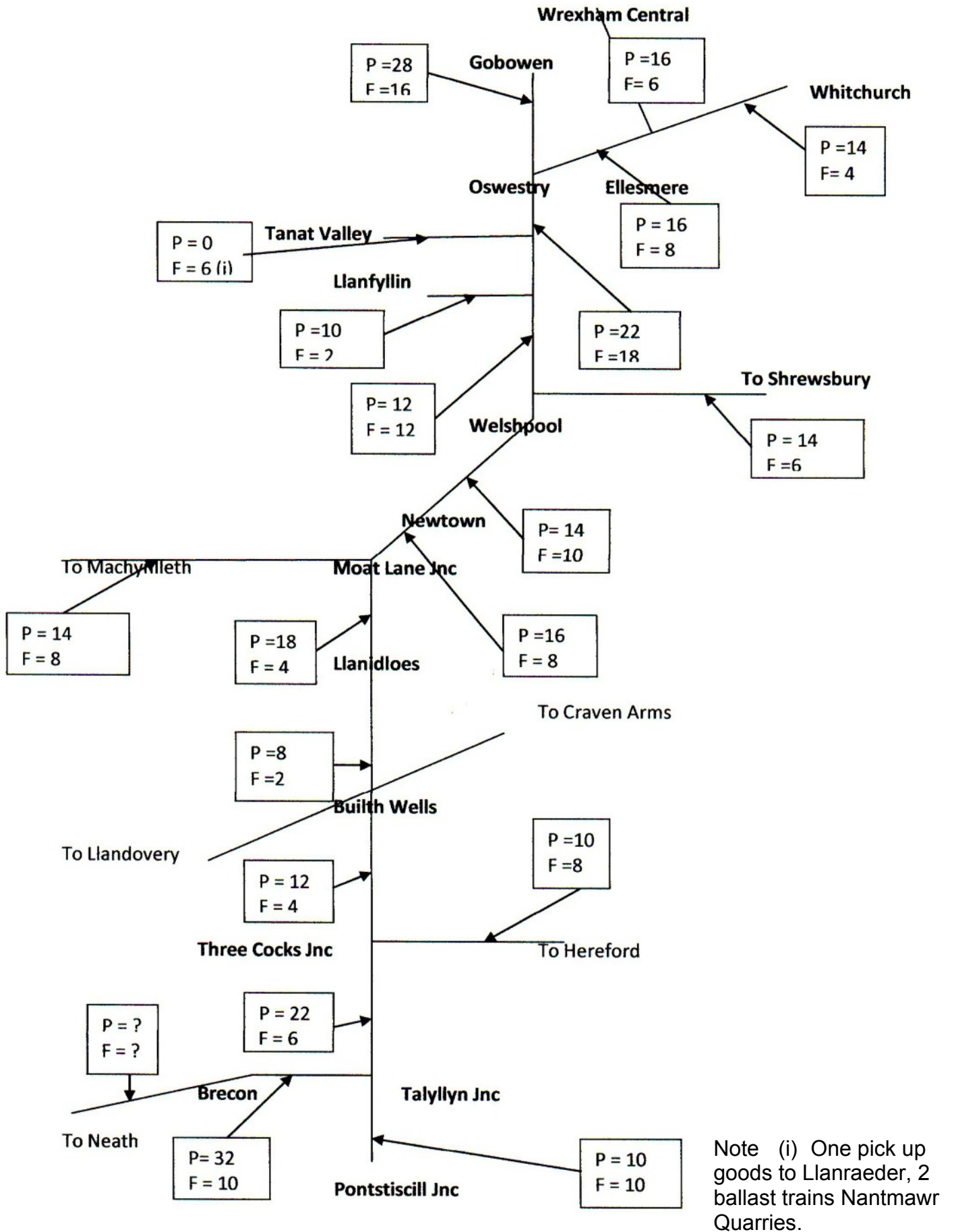
It should be noted that there was no mention of any freight arrivals or departures at Afon Wen from the Caernarfon line though terminating and starting LMR passenger trains are shown. Also no traces of any movements from the Neath and Brecon line are shown.

Figure 1 Weekday train movements Western Oswestry Division



- Notes
- (i) 2 freight movements as far as Pont Llanio from Lampeter.
 - (ii) Dovey Junction to Machynlleth omitted for clarity P = 28 F = 8.
 - (iii) Barmouth Junction to Barmouth omitted for clarity P = 30 F = 10
 - (iv) 6 passengers movements from Barmouth were as far as Dolgelly only.

Figure 2 Weekday train movements Eastern Oswestry Division Summer 1959



Bear in mind when comparing train numbers with today the lesser demand for travel and also the effect of running pick up goods trains on line capacity, for instance the 0515 pick up freight from Oswestry took until 1130 to reach Machynlleth and that's with running non stop to Welshpool!

Numbers only tell part of the story of movement of trainload freight was few and far between: two milk trains that came up from Carmarthen, one to Aberaeron and one to Pont Llanio and return, a daily Ammonia tank train from Hereford to Dowlais Central and back, a daily coal train direct from the Hafod colliery near Wrexham to Oswestry and the ballast trains to the Nantmawr Quarries. The bulk of freight was done by Class K unfitted pick up freight trains, some of which skipped stops along the mainline only serving towns. Many of the village stations were only served by one freight train a day in each direction.

Mail trains were a big feature of the timetable. The 0315 from Whitchurch to Aberystwyth was met at Welshpool by the 0348 from Shrewsbury and connected into the 0545 Moat Lane Junction to Builth Wells and 0640 Machynlleth to Pwllheli. In the reverse direction the 1800 Aberystwyth to Whitchurch was connected into by the 1605 from Pwllheli and the 1708 from Brecon; at Welshpool it connected with the 2055 to Shrewsbury. Mail also came in and out over the Lampeter, Bala and Caernarfon routes.

The only A Class passenger working on a weekday was of course the Cambrian Coast Express, the UP service departing Aberystwyth at 1145 on weekdays. It had through carriages added to it at Dovey Junction from the 0955 from Pwllheli. It reached Shrewsbury at 1442 but with no connection from the Mid Wales line or toward Oswestry at Welshpool. The DOWN service was the 1010 from Paddington departing Shrewsbury at 1326 arriving Aberystwyth 1605. Through carriages were detached at Machynlleth and added to the 1540 to Pwllheli. Again there was no connection from Oswestry but it did connect into the 1445 Moat Lane Junction to Brecon service.

Pre Grouping operating practices? The Brecon and Merthyr Railway was something a misnomer as it soon realised that it wouldn't have a monopoly on traffic from Brecon. It turned itself into a Valleys mineral line running across industrialised Dowlais and into the Rhymney Valley and on to Newport docks. Its passenger services were secondary considerations, the all stations Brecon to Newport service was chronically slow and didn't go where people wanted to (Cardiff), but just followed the B&M mainline: 36 years after the grouping and 4 years after Cardiff was made the capital of Wales. Trains from further north terminated at Brecon, as they did in Cambrian days. Trains from Carmarthen terminated at Aberystwyth, The LMR trains ran into Pwllheli but Western Region trains terminated there and ventured no further north. Perhaps having the division mirror the old Cambrian Railways boundaries encouraged the old ways to linger. Of the 7 northbound weekday trains from Newtown, 3 still went toward Oswestry at Welshpool, one without a Shrewsbury connection. Was it the Cambrian Railways mainline or Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth?

Having a manned signal box on average every 3.5 miles tells its own story as to operating costs: at least 180 signalmen plus reliefs would have been needed just to pull the levers every day. A train travelling from Moat Lane to Brecon despite the sparseness of traffic still passed by 15 signal boxes. There were 12 manned stations between Aberystwyth and Pencader alone. Having passing loops and points every couple of miles also effected journey times on single track lines. The UP Cambrian Coast Express managed Aberystwyth to Shrewsbury in just under 3 hours, with just 5 station stops but 20 token exchanges for single track sections. All stops passenger trains could take nearly three and half hours.

The bitter complaint that the timetable south of Llanidloes was all but useless is borne out by the difficulties a traveller from Newtown would face to get to South Wales. Catching the Aberystwyth mail train from Newtown at 0516 and alighting Moat Lane Junction at 0523 he made a connection into the 0545 to Builth Wells which arrived at 0710. There he would face a two hour wait until 0910 and the train to Three Cocks Junction, arriving there at 1004 in time to connect with the 0902 from Hereford to Brecon departing 1008 arriving Brecon 1044. The train to Newport was at 1215 and that didn't get to Pontsticill Junction till 1315! In contrast he could be in Aberystwyth for 0705 and connecting with the 0715 for Carmarthen which arrived there at 0923. Pwllheli was possible by 0940 using the 0640 from Machynlleth. Heading off in the other direction the 0653 departure (0640 ex Llanidloes) would see him in Whitchurch by 0900, Wrexham could be reached by 0925 via Ellesmere and Gobowen at 0824 via Oswestry, but he would have to wait until 0740 (0635 ex Machynlleth) for a through train to Shrewsbury arriving 0908.

All in all much more interesting than a passenger train every two hours?

The Dyfi Osprey Project

Once again this year the Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust are opening the Dyfi Osprey Project site, near Derwenlas on the A487 road between Machynlleth and Aberystwyth. However, a new three-story observation building was built during the winter, and it at Easter. It affords much closer views of the ospreys than the existing building, which is close to the road. Although close to the railway, only the down end of the Aberystwyth line platform is visible; conversely the building is hard to see from the train.

At the time of writing, last year's pair of ospreys, Monty and Glesni, are back in residence, and eggs may well appear before the end of April.



From the Facebook site of the Dyfi Osprey Project: "If you were watching the live streaming earlier you may have spotted the 'Big Yellow Train' go by. Monty got the best view!" The train (Aberystwyth to Bescot) is in the loop at Dovey Junction, while a 158 (probably the 1325 arrival in Aberystwyth) is at the Aberystwyth direction platform. 22nd April. Photograph: Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust.

Cambrian Lines train simulator

A train simulation package based on the Cambrian main line, using Dukedogs as motive power, has been developed by the american firm 3dtrainstuff.com. This can be accessed via their website at:

<http://www.3dtrainstuff.com/index.html>



The View from milepost 62 with the Brigadier

As a child Christmas was viewed with a mixture of expectation, excitement and anti climax. I really hoped that there would be toy soldiers or more stuff for my model railway, my big sisters Roberta and Phyllis wanted things for their doll collections. We had several Aunts and elderly great Aunts who were all very good at sending us things we didn't really want or need because we already had plenty of them, usually hats, gloves, scarves, yet more socks. Groan! "Now come on Children remember to write a thank you letter and wear the items the next time you see Aunt so so" said Mother. "But that's usually at the seaside in the summer and it will be too hot to wear a scarf" we cried! Today travelling by rail is somewhat like getting those Christmas presents: there's posters up everywhere and press releases telling us it's railway Christmas investment time and how many £ Millions are being spent and the improvements on the way – always in general terms. We're also told that the constant fare increases are to pay for improvements (not specified); expectation is built up: maybe more carriages to address overcrowding or the hourly service on our line. You know the things we really want and need?

Alas not. We recently went to Oxford on a weekday and were expecting great things from all the work done at Birmingham New St. We used the 0514 from Aberystwyth and the overcrowding was horrendous from Telford into Birmingham New St. It took an age for everyone to get off at New St. At last we headed out of our carriage and found exactly the same bloody station as before! The same dingy narrow platforms and narrow staircase up to the concourse were still there. Now when we had fought our way to the top there was a change though, and it's still only partially done; white partitions ushered us toward some new shops and fast food stalls selling overpriced food and drink. The Memsahib had picked up a leaflet with an impression of what it would be like when it's finished. "Look at all those nice shops and restaurants; there'll even be a John Lewis store". Little point I thought if you can't get the train here due to overcrowding, and get jammed on those stairs! It was time for our train to Oxford, an Arriva Cross Country Voyager. If anyone's in doubt as to whether the private operators had actually planned the growth in usage we seen in recent years, then the Voyager is Exhibit A in the case against. Whatever else Mr Branson's foray into train operation has achieved or was meant to, this contraption was not designed to grow passenger numbers: it struggled to cope just after the morning peak had finished. Now under the control of Cyril the Civil Servant in the last few years, additional carriages have been nowhere to be seen, and the trickle down cascades caused by electrification are still some years off.

The simplest and easiest investment on any line is of course just to put extra carriages on existing trains, and remember two thirds of the population of the UK do not live in London and the South East, where a handful of lines are at capacity saturation. Why can't we do the right thing? Dusty is convinced it's all a plot by the Treasury to stop modal shift and keep motoring tax revenue. The current structure of the industry undoubtedly plays a big part. The Government money that's needed to support the industry that wasn't in the Treasury Privatisation Units plan is sent straight to Network Rail so that the TOC's can appear to be "profitable" and keep the private sector even if its Foreign State owned involved. This unfortunately results in a heavy infrastructure focus, and investment is channelled into areas not involved with rolling stock– lots of construction of things without wheels and an obsession with shops, no doubt aided by lobbying from the private construction companies that Network Rail contract out the jobs to. The TOC's have proved hopeless at getting extra stock as they were designed for profits today not long term investment in the country's economy. Attempts by central Government have ended up becoming involved in the quagmire that is procurement. Long ago when I was posted to help the Ministry of Defence I soon learnt that procurement was a euphemism for delivering something that was not quite what you wanted, years late, massively over budget and in insufficient quantity i.e IEP!

It's all a sad indictment of the current way of running our railways. It's almost snatching defeat from the jaws of victory: the growth in passenger numbers and revenue would be even greater if we had spent a balanced amount on extra rolling stock instead of on Network Rail's overpriced construction projects. Our line is a microcosm of this: £ Millions on ETCS, £ Millions on additional passing loops and track relaying, and now we have a station refurbishment at Aberystwyth station and the mega DDA compliant footbridge at Machynlleth, which will no doubt be announced as the greatest things since sliced bread when they're completed. None of the this has of course delivered a single extra

seat or carriage, let alone a single extra service anywhere between Aberystwyth, Pwllheli and Shrewsbury. Back in 1965 when DMU's were first introduced on our line there were 12 two car sets, and the Cambrian Coast Express, Mail trains and Summer Saturdays extras were still steam hauled with rakes of coaches. Today just 9 two car DMU's are provided to run the entire service all year round west of Shrewsbury. Is it any wonder that the Passenger Focus and Which surveys constantly point to overcrowding being the biggest gripe which leads to a perception of poor value for money? Only when new extra carriages come on stream in sufficient quantity will the travelling public be convinced that it is in fact railway investment time. For heaven sakes invest in the right things!

Dusty tells me that a new DMU/EMU carriage costs c £1.25 - £1.5 million to buy. ATW could comfortably buy 10 a year with its profits, and the so called M4 Relief road could be traded in for 1000 new carriages – 4 times as many as ATW currently have! Network Rail is planning to spend on average £2.5 Billion a year for the next five years on what it calls enhancements i.e. not like for like spending that adds new features like electrification etc. Spending just 10% of that on extra carriages would make a huge difference. Do we as a nation have the gumption to get things right for a change or will it be Christmas Scarf time again when all grossly overcrowded journeys end like an American theme park with an exit in a overpriced shop?

However it's well done to Network Rail for repairing the coast line after the recent storm damage! Not that long ago the damage would have been used as the excuse by the fifth columnists in Whitehall to close the line; times have indeed changed.

Three Cocks Cottage March 2014



An assessment of the strength of the Clettwr Bridge in March resulted in the marooning of two ballast trains in the section west of the bridge. To enable the line to reopen they were propelled back into the loop in Aberystwyth. Most of the second train is out of sight in this photograph, which shows the 1330 leaving Aberystwyth on the 8th March.

SARPA Meetings in 2014

June	Saturday 14th	1145	Borth, Railway Hotel
July	Saturday 12th	1145	Tywyn Wharf, Talylyn Railway Station
August	Tuesday 5th	1845	The Sportsman Newtown
September	Saturday 13th	Time and location to be confirmed	
October	Saturday 11th	1100	AGM, White Lion, Machynlleth
November	Tuesday 4th	1845	Sportsman 18.30.Newtown
December	Saturday 13th	1100	White Lion, Machynlleth

Websites

Our website <http://sarpa.info>

Webmaster Angus Eickhoff. Website host is mid-wales.net

Other sites of interest:

A useful alternative to the National Rail Enquiries site
traintimes.org.uk/

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

LondonMidland
www.londonmidland.com/index.html

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

Passenger Focus
<http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/>

North Wales Coast Railway
www.nwrail.org.uk/

Circular tour of North Wales by rail
www.penmorfa.com/Cambrian/

Ffestiniog Railway timetable
www.ffestiniograilway.co.uk/timetable.htm

Vale of Rheidol Railway timetable
www.rheidolrailway.co.uk/timetable.htm

Talylyn Railway
www.talylyn.co.uk/

Welshpool and Llanfair Railway timetable
www.wllr.org.uk/timetable.htm

Welsh Highland Heritage Railway
www.whr.co.uk/index.php?pid=51

Fairbourne Railway
www.fairbournerrailway.com/index.htm

Borth Station Museum
www.borthstationmuseum.co.uk

Rail Photographs by Richard Jones including many of the modern Cambrian scene
<http://railphotos.fourecord.com/index.php>

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. Fax. 01686 621966
E-mail newtownstation@btclick.com

The Association of Train Operating Companies:

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

London Midland

London Midland, PO Box 4323, Birmingham B2 4JB. Tel. 0121 6342040

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

Rail Franchise Performance Manager Rail and New Roads Division, Transport Wales, Welsh Assembly Government, Cathays Park, Cardiff, CF10 3NQ. Direct Line (029) 2082 6849

Public Transport Users' Committee for Wales Secretariat

Welsh Government, Cathays Park, Cardiff CF10 3NQ. E-mail ptucwales@wales.gsi.gov.uk

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