
Shrewsbury Aberystwyth Rail Passengers' Association

Newsletter No. 90

JUNE 2023



NEWTOWN RELAYING MAKES TRACKS

The complete relaying of the track at Newtown, including the siding, took place during a complete shutdown of the line between Sutton Bridge Junction and Machynlleth in May. The line was then under Engineering Possession, which allowed the use of any locomotives, including those without ERTMS.

The picture above shows the 1530 from Aberystwyth with 158837 on the 24th May departing Newtown station on the newly relaid tracks. Compare this with the old track shown on p.9.

Photograph: Gareth Marston.

NEGES GAN Y CADEIRYDD/CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

Newid moddol: yn y cyfeiriad anghywir

Mae argyfwng hinsawdd arnom. Consensws gwyddonwyr a'r rhan fwyaf o wleidyddion a gwneuthwyr polisi yw bod angen newidiadau mawr er mwyn osgoi trychinebau all ladd niferoedd mawr o bobl. Yma yng Nghymru mae Llywodraeth Cymru a sawl corff arall wedi datgan argyfwng hinsawdd. Cydnabyddir yn eang hefyd fod angen gweithredu yn gynt yn hytrach nac yn hwyrach er mwyn cael y siawns gorau o osgoi effeithiau gwaethaf newid hinsawdd. Wrth ymateb i'r argyfwng, mae gan y rheilffyrdd, a thrafnidiaeth gyhoeddus yn gyffredinol, ran fawr i chwarae. Mae trafndiaeth gyhoeddus yn llawer mwy effeithlon o ran defnydd tanwydd na'r defnydd o geir preifat, yn ogystal â darparu trafndiaeth i bobl sydd ddim yn berchen ar gar. Yn ôl dadansoddiad diweddar gan y TUC, bydd angen lleihau'r kilometrau mae ceir yn mynd yng Nghymru gan tua 20% erbyn 2030 a chynyddu'r kilometrau mae teithwyr yn gwneud ar y rheilffordd gan 133% (a bws gan 124%). Amcangyfrifir yn yr adroddiad bod angen buddsoddi £700m ychwanegol o gymorth ariannol bob blwyddyn a £14bn o wariant cyfalaf i gyflawni hyn (ar y rheilffordd).

Mae llawer o synnau calonogol wedi bod o du Llywodraeth Cymru ynglŷn â'r hyn a elwir yn "newid moddol" (*modal shift*) lle mae pobl yn cael eu hannog i ddefnyddio trafndiaeth gyhoeddus yn hytrach na cheir preifat. Mae rhannau o'r rhaglen adeiladu ffyrdd newydd wedi'i atal, er mwyn buddsoddi mwy o arian mewn trafndiaeth gyhoeddus ar ôl 2025, fydd yn rhywbeth i'w groesawu – ond mae eisiau buddsoddiad ar y system trafndiaeth gyhoeddus nawr!

Yn 2021, cyhoeddodd Llywodraeth Cymru Llwybr Newydd, cynllun sydd ar bapur yn ddogfen uchelgeisiol i leihau allyriadau carbon o drafndiaeth a lleihau anghyfartaleddau trafndiaeth yn ein cymdeithas. Un o'r prif flaenoriaethau yw sicrhau newid moddol, un arall yw lleoli gwasanaethau yn agosach at bobl er mwyn lleihau eu hanghenion teithio. Fodd bynnag, dydy gweithredoedd Llywodraeth Cymru a'r sefyllfa ar lawr gwlad ddim yn cyd-fynd â'r uchelgais na'r rethreg.

Er mae Llywodraeth Cymru sy'n rhedeg y gwasanaethau trenau (hyd fraich), mae'r nifer o drenau sy'n cael eu canslo wedi bod yn cynyddu, tra bod eraill yn hwyr neu'n orlawn. Mae hyn wedi bod yn gorfodi pobl oddi ar y rheilffordd. Yn ardaloedd fel y Drenewydd a'r Trallwng mae pobl yn adrodd colli swyddi oherwydd annibynadwyedd y rheilffyrdd ac mae rhai yn gyrru yn lle cymryd y trê. Adroddwyd ar y sefyllfa droeon yn ein cychlythron yn ddiweddar ond mae'n werth ailadrodd er mwyn cymharu addewidion Llywodraeth Cymru â'r sefyllfa lawr gwlad.

Mae'r sefyllfa'r bysiau yn waeth os unrhyw beth. Mewn siroedd fel Ceredigion, mae sawl llwybr bws wedi mynd o un bws yr awr i un bws bob dwy awr ac mae niferoedd y teithwyr wedi bod yn llawer is nag oeddynt cyn dyfodiad covid. Dydy'r bysiau ddim yn rhedeg mor hwyr ag oeddynt ac mae rhai llwybrau ddim yn cynnig taith yn ôl adre wedi i bobl gweithio yn Aberystwyth. A gyda Llywodraeth Cymru yn benderfynol o ddirwyn cymorth bysiau i ben, gallwn ddisgwyl mwy o doriadau a cholli llwybrau. Rwyf wedi sylwi yn ddiweddar ar faint mwy o bobl ganol oed ac hyn sy'n dysgu gyrru o gwmpas Aberystwyth – mae'n debyg mae toriadau i'r bysiau sy'n bennaf gyfrifol am y ffenomenon. Wrth gwrs, grŵp rheilffordd yw SARPA ond mae'r rhwydwaith

bysiau yn bwydo mewn i'r rhwydwaith rheilffordd ac maen nhw'n rhan hanfodol o'r rhwydwaith trafnidiaeth gyhoeddus.

O ran symud gwasanaethau yn agosach at bobl, ni welir llawer o welliant fan hyn ychwaith. Os unrhyw beth, mae adnoddau cymunedol yn parhau i gau – siopau, ysgolion, llyfrgelloedd ayyb – a gofal iechyd yn mynd yn gynyddol bellach oddi wrth y cleifion. Enghraifft berffaith yw'r syniad o ysbyty newydd rhwng Sanclêr a Hendy Gwyn i gymryd lle ysbytai Glangwili a Llwynhelyg. Er mwyn cydbwysedd daearyddol, bydd tua'r un mor bell o Gaerfyrddin a Hwlfordd – yng nghanol nunlle. Mae'n bosib bydd hyn yn agos at y rheilffordd ond does fawr ddim sôn am orsaf. Yn sicr o safbwynt gogledd sir Caerfyrddin a Cheredigion fydd y bysiau uniongyrchol ddim yn mynd yno a bydd teithiau'n hirach. Eto, bydd mwy o bobl yn gyrru yn hytrach na defnyddio trafnidiaeth gyhoeddus.

O'r uchod, gwelir bod llawer o fwllch rhwng polisïau Llywodraeth Cymru a gweithredoedd Llywodraeth Cymru ar lawr gwlad. A ydy Llywodraeth Cymru yn annog newid moddol? Ydyn, ond yn y cyfeiriad anghywir: mae eu gweithredoedd a phenderfyniadau yn annog pobl i ddefnyddio ceir yn hytrach na thrafnidiaeth gyhoeddus. Mae angen i weithredoedd Llywodraeth Cymru gyd-fynd a'u dyheadau cyn ei bod yn rhy hwyr.

Jeff Smith

Modal Shift: in the wrong direction

We face a climate emergency. The consensus among scientists and most politicians and policy-makers is that major changes are required in order to avoid disasters which could kill large numbers of people. It is widely acknowledged that action must be taken sooner rather than later, in order to secure the best chance of avoiding the worst effects of climate change. In reacting to the problem the railway, and public transport in general, has a large part to play. Public transport is much more energy efficient than private car use, as well as providing transport to people who don't own a car. According to recent analysis by the TUC, the kilometres travelled by car in Wales must to reduce by around 20% by 2030 and the kilometres that passengers travel by train must increase by 133% (124% for the buses). The report estimates the required investment to achieve this would be £700m per year of additional subsidy and £14bn of capital spending (on the railway).

Many positive sounds have come from the Welsh Government's direction regarding modal shift, where people are encouraged to use public transport rather than private cars. Parts of the new road building programme have been stopped, in order to invest more money into public transport after 2025, which will be something to welcome – but the public transport system needs investment now.

In 2021, Welsh Government published *Llwybr Newydd*, a plan which is on paper an ambitious document to reduce carbon emissions from transport and to reduce transport inequalities in our society. One of the main priorities is to ensure modal shift, another is to locate services closer to people in order to reduce their need to travel. However, the Welsh Government's actions and the situation on the ground do not match the ambition nor the rhetoric.

Although the Welsh Government run Transport for Wales (at arm's length), the number of cancelled trains has been increasing, whilst others are late or overcrowded. This has been driving people away from the railway. In areas such as Newtown and Welshpool people report losing jobs due to the unreliability of the railway and some drive instead of taking the train. The situation has been done to death in our recent newsletters, but it's worth repeating in order to compare the Welsh Government's promises with the situation on the ground.

The situation with buses is worse if anything. In counties such as Ceredigion, several bus routes have gone from one bus an hour to one bus every 2 hours and passenger numbers have been much lower than before covid. The buses don't run as late as they used to and some routes don't provide a route home for those working in Aberystwyth. I have recently noticed how many more middle aged and older people are learning to drive around Aberystwyth – it is likely that cuts to bus services are mainly responsible for this phenomenon. Of course, SARPA is a rail group but the bus network feeds the rail network and they are an essential part of the public transport network.

In terms of moving services closer to people, little improvement can be seen here either. If anything, community amenities are continuing to close – shops, schools, libraries etc – and healthcare is moving further away from the patients. A perfect example is the idea of a new hospital between St Clears and Whitland to replace Glangwili and Withybush hospitals. In the interests of geographical equality, it will be approximately the same distance from Carmarthen and Haverfordwest – in the middle of nowhere. It is possible that this will be near the railway but there isn't much talk of a station. Certainly from the viewpoint of northern Carmarthenshire and Ceredigion the direct buses will not go there and journeys will be longer. Again, more people will drive rather than using public transport.

From the above, it can be seen that there is a large gap between the Welsh Government's policies and the Welsh Government's actions on the ground. Is the Welsh Government encouraging modal shift? Yes, but in the wrong direction: their actions and decisions are encouraging people to use cars rather than public transport. The Welsh Government's actions need to match their aspirations before it is too late.

Jeff Smith
Cadeirydd SARPA/SARPA Chair

NEWS IN BRIEF

Aberystwyth

Log trains resumed on the 17th March 2023 and are now showing in railway planning systems as running on an "as required" basis every Friday until at least the beginning of October. Fridays are still the day they are scheduled and are using the same paths as before, running overnight from Chirk down to Aberystwyth arriving at 0505 and departing at 1550. Colas have used a non etcs fitted Class 37 alongside one of the Network Rail Class 97 locomotives; this apparently has a more powerful engine than the Class 97's allowing a heavier load to be hauled. The wagons used also carry loads from other destinations to Chirk Kronospan, these being Baglan Bay near Neath, Exeter Riverside and Carlisle (via the Settle and Carlisle line).

Barmouth Bridge

Network Rail have confirmed the dates for the next phase of work on the bridge, specifically on the metal spans. The bridge will be closed from the 2nd September 2023 for 13 weeks until the end of November 2023. Details from TfW Rail on how they will operate Machynlleth to Pwllheli in that period have not been made public at the time of going to press.

“Ban” on longer trains than 2 coaches on coastline easily resolvable

Stakeholders have been confused by a TfW communication referring to an alleged ban by Network Rail of running trains longer than 2 coaches on the coast line. Many people have asked how excursion trains, which are much longer, can run such as the one on the 21st April. The answer and solution are relatively straightforward.

There are no fewer than 9 stations on the coast line where there is a level crossing in very close proximity to the platform (all being single platform stations), meaning depending on direction of travel a train that stops with its front end on the station's platform can see its rear carriage(s) if the formation is long enough stationary across the nearby level crossing. Two car units do not sit over the level crossings however as the next choice up is 4 cars: these do. This has been deemed a health and safety issue by the powers that be.

The stations are;

Northbound: Tonfanau, Fairbourne, Llanbedr, Pensarn and Llandanwg.

Southbound: Abererch, Talsaranau, Tygwyn, Dyffryn Ardudwy and Llwyngwiril.

As you can see from this list these are amongst the smaller stations, the occasional excursion trains on the line are not scheduled to stop at these small stations, hence there's no issue for them.

When the new Class 197 trains are introduced on the Cambrian, they have been fitted with a feature the current Class 158's do not have: something called SDO & ASDO which stands for Selective Door Opening i.e. the train crew can select which doors are unlocked rather than unlocking all of them, and Automatic Selective Door Opening where software is programmed to do it. This means that it would be relatively easy for say a four coach train in future to stop at a point beyond a platform so that the rear carriage(s) fitted on to the platform and just the doors on the rear carriage(s) were unlocked. All that's required are 9 metal poles saying 4 car stop to be put in the ground at the appropriate place. The issue becomes then do TfW have enough units? SARPA is pressing for this “common sense” approach to be used and for more units than the current 21 two car Class 197's to be fitted with etcs for use on the Cambrian.

Machynlleth

A Class 197 unit appeared again in March and undertook overnight testing on the line. The A487 road under the railway bridge flooded badly earlier in the winter. It has been discovered during the rebuilding of the adjacent garage that the petrol tanks were installed obliterating the Victorian drainage system from under the bridge. It is hoped that the new garage will rectify this problem, otherwise the new £50 million Dyfi Bridge will be useless if vehicles cannot reach it!

Caersws

Zero Carbon Llanidloes have called for the money saved by the scrapping of the proposed road schemes on the A470 road to be used instead so that buses can connect with the trains at Caersws. Something which they rightly point out is standard practice through most of Europe.

The bridge over the River Severn saw repairs, including timber replacements, in May during the Newtown closure

Newtown

The relaying of the track was carried out by Network Rail between the 6th and 21st of May, during which the line was closed between Machynlleth and Sutton Bridge Junction.

Locomotives used included several Class 56s, and Class 66. Both classes are not fitted with ERTMS, and so could only visit the line during the engineering passession.

Also starting will be work on the DDA compliant footbridge/elevator. This will appear at roughly the same location as the temporary footbridge was installed in 2020.

Welshpool

The long awaited second waiting shelter has appeared on the platform.

The powers that be got themselves all confused over whose responsibility it was to grit the footbridge this winter and it missed being done on a number of occasions.

Shrewsbury

The last train on a Saturday night (the 2008 from Birmingham International, 2143 from Shrewsbury) has attracted criticism due to the behaviour of some of its customers once more. TfW laid on a coach in addition to the train on the 1st April as the 2032 to Aberystwyth had been cancelled, but the coach suffered from vandalism. The previous weekend there was confusion as the train was running very late; some intended passengers believed they had been told to get a replacement bus, but these turned out to be bus replacements heading to Wolverhampton because of engineering work. A couple of people then decided themselves to get into taxis and paid and have taken to social media wanting to know how TfW will reimburse them. The train itself departed Shrewsbury at 2230. Unfortunately, excessive consumption of alcohol would appear to be a major factor on both occasions.

Germany

Hydrogen trains (Alstoms I-lint's) have failed to operate in the cold weather this winter. The regional government in Hesse were less than happy and had to bring in stored old DMU's to run non electrified services around Frankfurt. Temperatures of minus 10 are still commonplace in central and eastern Europe in the winter months, the issues with the cold weather appear to be around refuelling. The regional government in Baden-Wurtemberg must have felt quite smug as they had last autumn rejected the use of hydrogen trains and instead have opted for more electrification with bi-mode electric/battery trains their preferred option for non wired lines.

Whilst the Cambrian is supposedly scheduled to have Hydrogen trains the real concern with this development will be in Scotland, where winter temperatures of minus 10 are also common on the West Highland and Far North lines.

The long term successor to previous year's discounted tickets to help with the cost of living and to tackle climate change will go live this May. The Deutschlanderticket will cover all buses/trams/U-Bahn/S-Bahn networks and Regio/ Rego Express Trains but not long distance InterCity services. They cost just 49 Euros per month (c £43.00) for unlimited travel on all local and regional networks.

The Deutschlanderticket is also being implemented. This is essentially a fully integrated timetable with everywhere on regular interconnecting clockface frequencies and speeded up services to make connections work as pioneered by the Swiss. DB is expecting to double the 155 million long distance and 2.8 Billion local and regional journeys made in 2019 by 2030.

Spain

In a lesson in accepting responsibility and doing the right thing, the Transport Minister and the head of train operator RENFE have resigned after it was discovered new rolling stock ordered for a metre gauge line was too big and wouldn't be able to operate on the line. Users of the lines effected have been offered free travel until 2026 when the next batch of hopefully correct size trains will be delivered. Perhaps given the numerous multiple cumulative problems since taking over from Arriva some people in Welsh Government and Transport for Wales might want to consider this type of action?

Which bring us to...

Quarter 4 2022/2023's Totally Avoidable Cock Up on TfW's watch

Ordered brand new by long defunct First North Western in 1998 were a fleet of 27 two and three car Diesel Multiple Units by Alstom, designated Class 175, initially bought for long distance regional services between Manchester and the North Wales and Cumbrian coasts, the Strategic Rail Authority transferred the whole fleet to ATW in 2005. The depot in Chester was operated by Alstom and the whole fleet has been based there operating North Wales Coast and Manchester-Cardiff- West Wales services for 18 years, with the units having a fairly good reputation with passengers and operator alike, apart from the usual complaints about the two car sets being too small.

A problem arose with small amounts of oil from the engine exhausts being trapped, accumulating and occasionally catching fire. This has been known about for over 20 years, and prevented by regular cleaning and checking of the known problem area. Then toward the end of last year Alstom handed over the depot in Chester to CAF, (manufacturer of the new Class 197 trains). In February no fewer than 3 of these units suffered "thermal incidents" in the space of a week, and the panic button was hit with virtually the whole fleet taken out of service for "safety checks". It would seem that the regular checking and cleaning of the known problem was not carried on with after Alstom's departure. This has resulted in Cambrian trains being once more pinched to cover shortfalls elsewhere in the TfW area with train cancellations, short, formed services and services not going through all the way to Birmingham International.

The situation has slowly eased, and TfW Rail expect things back to normal by the end of April. A finger pointing exercise has occurred between CAF, Alstom, TfW Rail and Transport for Wales as once more the Welsh Government and TfW, under hapless James Price, have discovered there's a lot more to running a successful railway than not being Arriva Trains Wales.



20th March at Aberystwyth with a Class 97 (97302) that had come on a tamper drag parked up right in the station and 158821 which had just arrived with 0624 from Birmingham New Street. Photo: Gareth Marston

Above right: A newcomer to the Cambrian. Two Class 56 locomotives, 56049 and 56105 have been on the line at Newtown Station during the relaying works. We are grateful to H18-Pdw Photography/Paul Williams for permission to use this photograph, and the one on page 10.

There is also a Youtube video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9IPlcQiMncA>

Below right: The tracks through Newtown Station as they used to be, laid with bullhead rail in chairs. The last full relaying was in the 1940s, perhaps from before nationalisation. The train in the picture was a private train to observe the work on the Barmouth Bridge. It consisted of a Class 97, a Class 37 (for carriage heating?) and an ex-LMS saloon coach (in LMS livery). Photograph: Paul Williams/H18-PDW Photography.



SARPA STAND AT NEWTOWN'S SPRING FAIR

Thanks to an invitation from Cllr Chris Jones of Newtown Town Council, SARPA had a stand at Newtown's Spring Fair on 30th April. We spent much time talking to members of the public about our campaigning work and the overall impression we had in feedback was that Transport for Wales could do better. We gave out copies of our newsletter and printouts of briefing papers



written by SARPA members. We also had some supporting material from Railfuture Wales and our thanks are due to Peter Kingsbury of Railfuture for his assistance in arranging this. Thanks also to Stephen Hughes, Janet Farahar and our Chairman, Jeff Smith for running the stand throughout the day.



A busy scene during the relaying of the track at Newtown. At least 20 people are present. Photo by H18-Pdw Photography/Paul Williams.

TRANSPORT FOR WALES

Briefing Paper sent to stakeholders from SARPA regarding TfW Issues Quarter 4 2022/2023

1) Transport for Wales

1.1) TfW was set up as an arms-length body to run public transport in Wales. In many ways this is commendable as the former British Railways Board was a similar concept.

1.2) Where this differs – and falls down – is that the BR version employed people who were career railway personnel with a wide range of experience. This is not so in TfW, where new management has been brought in from sectors outside the railway.

1.3) In consequence, those of us who have had dealings with Transport for Wales have been less than impressed with the quality of the people encountered, who whilst well-meaning and educated, seem confused by anything that involves having some knowledge of how railways actually work. This has coincided with increased problems on the TfW Rail network of increased overcrowding, cancelled or curtailed services and inconvenience for travellers. The situation is considered to be worse than even in the Arriva Trains Wales years.

1.4) We note that there appears to be an increasing reluctance to engage with stakeholders. Before the change of franchise in 2018, Arriva Trains personnel and management would regularly attend meetings with various groups. Such is no longer the case, and TfW have indicated that they are unwilling to attend out of office hours. They have also been conspicuous by their absence at joint stakeholder meetings recently.

1.5) Much time and effort was expended by various committees of Senedd and stakeholder groups in discussing the requirements for future rail provision after the end of the Arriva Trains Wales franchise in 2018. A “World Class” transport network was promised, but after four years the reality has sadly failed to meet expectations. Civil servants and Senedd Members will have been in receipt of their salaries for their efforts during the consultation period, but many stakeholders (including ourselves) gave their time voluntarily. The disappointing manifestations thus far provide some justification for stakeholders to feel indignant that their efforts have been a total waste.

1.6) Meanwhile, the Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee of Senedd have called for cheaper public transport throughout the country. This is not going to be practical unless matters improve on the delivery of services – and thus far there has been no discussion on reviving the Welsh Rail Network which was so badly decimated under the Beeching plan of the 1960s. However, it is worth noting that Plaid Cymru passed a resolution on this at their 2021 Conference..

1.7) Aims of the Senedd Committee outlined above are within the remit of WG, as the setting of rail fares has been devolved for some time. Nevertheless, WG have thus far tended to raise ticket prices in line with those outlined by Westminster.

2) New Trains:- The Class 197 Diesel Multiple Unit (DMU)

2.1) Despite much informed and justified criticism, TfW have ploughed ahead with their plan for the replacement Wales and Borders franchise of ordering trains more suited for city region journeys than the long distance and rural ones on which they will be used. Testing has commenced on the CAF Civity Class 197 DMU's in North Wales/Cheshire/Merseyside. Prior to the pandemic we were given to understand that there was to be a proper consultation about these new units, but the lockdown restrictions unmasked this illusion and nothing was forthcoming. Instead, stakeholders have been presented with a fait accompli.

2.2) TfW have tacitly admitted that the CAF's are a mistake, by changing the Keolis Amey rolling stock plan, and have acquired a quantity of ex-East Coast Mainline Mk4 coaches, (and very nice they are too). Now the intention is to run, in their words, a "quality service" between Swansea and Manchester rather than a service solely made up of Class 197's. Apparently the Scottish InterCity services with refurbished HST's have shown what you can do; alas with not enough sets ordered to run the hourly services between Swansea and Manchester passengers will face rolling stock roulette with some services of a proper InterCity quality and others formed with Class 197's. Sadly, the Cambrian lines will not benefit at all from the quality of comfort provided by the Mk4 locomotive hauled sets.

2.3) Insufficient quantity of toilets in a 197 for the number of passengers carried. This has been advised to us as a level of one per 2 car train (120 pax). This is a reduction from the two at present on board a Class 158, and is significantly less than provision on BR Mk1 and Mk2 stock which was at a level of 2 per vehicle of 64 seats. The Cambrian Line trains operate on quite lengthy sectors and so adequate and reliable provision is of the utmost importance.

2.4) To put this in perspective, the journey from Birmingham International to Pwllheli is a leg which takes over 5 hours – a slightly longer time than it takes to go from Euston to Glasgow. The Cambrian user demographic (weighted to both the old and young families) increases the requirement for toilets. Also, with few station facilities now available, what would be the plan if the single high-tech toilet becomes unavailable mid route? In the circumstances outlined in this paragraph, just a single toilet for a 2 car train carrying over 100 people is totally unacceptable.

2.5) Concern that the number of table bays is being reduced from the present quantity on the Class 158. Whilst we would accept that some people do in fact like the "aviation" style seating arrangements, the possibility of increasing the number of table bays should not be discounted. The seating plan for the units currently in use by Chiltern trains makes a good example. Seat comfort is not being left unquestioned either, and would hope this could be improved. This is likewise of the utmost importance and our comments at **2.3 & 2.4** above regarding length of journeys apply equally. Meanwhile, there are a number of seats which do not match up with a window view, something which is rather an oversight on a scenic route such as the Cambrian.

2.6) We were astonished to learn of the lack of ability for the new trains to couple with anything else. This is rather a retrograde step and something which goes back to the

dawn of railways, when commonality of coupling was discovered to be essential for smooth and trouble-free operation. Moreover, the lack of ability to couple with other units rather limits their effectiveness and would prevent them being used as part of a "mixed" formation for the conveyance of merchandise.

2.7) Commonality of coupling is essentially a fundamental principle for the railway. Ability of the Class 197 to couple to other types of rolling stock would provide versatility. It would allow the addition of a freight unit to run as part of the same train. On the Cambrian, a goods vehicle carrying palletised loads could work down to Aberystwyth as part of a passenger train and detach. It could be unloaded in the interim and work back towards Shrewsbury as part of a following passenger train. This could save train paths on the single line and increase crew productivity as there would not be any need for additional train staff – or track infrastructure. We need imaginative solutions if we are to have any chance of fighting climate change. Welsh Government makes all the correct noises about dealing with the problem but is somewhat light on the radical changes necessary.

2.8) TfW have also ordered what are widely regarded as the "best in class" regional train in Europe from Swiss manufacturer Stadler: a version of their hugely successful FLIRT platform. FLIRT" stands for "Flexible Lightweight InterCity Regional Train", yet TfW have decided to trundle them across Cardiff from Penarth to Coryton – less than the distance from Newtown to Welshpool – and this with 12 stops. It should be noted that the Greater Anglia franchise have bought these trains but use them for InterCity and Regional services in East Anglia and have acquired bespoke commuter trains for services closer to London. In many respects TfW have ordered their rolling stock "back to front" with regional trains doing commuter runs and commuter trains performing regional work.

2.9) The Class 158 unit as used on the Cambrian at present was designed and built by British Rail Engineering Ltd. In concept it was a determined effort to bring Inter-City standards of comfort and ambience to longer distance services on secondary routes. We see no such endeavour being brought to bear with the new Class 197 trains.

3) Beyond 2025

The completion of the South Wales Metro and introduction of new rolling stock

3.1) Beyond some vague references and crayon diagrams for a "North Wales Metro and a Swansea Bay Wales Metro" there are no firm plans for Welsh railways beyond 2025 once the current investment cycle ends. What are TfW's plans? There is a vacuum as far as Stakeholders are concerned. TfW need to share their plans: their Five Year Strategy states "We need fewer people travelling by car and more taking public transport...." but there is no mention of a revived internal rail network, or indeed freight. Surely, transport is transport and not just the parts they would like to provide?

3.2) A brief burst of investment that is inevitably patchy in its coverage; after decades of neglect is not going to solve current problems, let alone provide a network fit for purpose in the changed world where we must address climate change. Nor, given their track record are TfW Officials going to come up with the correct solutions if left

to their own devices. A genuine partnership approach with the people of Wales is needed. Unfortunately TfW took on too many of the bad habits from Welsh Government, foremost being its culture of pretending it knows best. As previously stated this does not survive contact with the real world to the detriment of the people of Wales and the Borders. This has to end.

3.3) When you compare spend on mainline European rail networks expressed as a percentage of GDP rather than in monetary terms our research demonstrates a clear pattern. The countries whose networks are rated the best in Europe - France, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, for instance - all spend the equivalent of 1.5% of their GDP or more. The UK is spending 1.1% this year **including** HS2 construction costs and Westminster wants to reduce that. We calculate that Wales's baseline spend has been around the 0.9% of Welsh GDP mark with the current work on the South Wales Metro and new rolling stock temporarily increasing our spend to 1.25% for a couple of years.

3.4) If we're serious about actually having a top tier in Europe rail network rather than just throwing around the phrases "metro" and "world class" the inference is clear: we have to spend a lot more and consistently. The Welsh Government's road review looks like it will provide a source of extra funding later this decade once the legacy projects already started have been completed.

3.5) To attain the objectives set out in the TfW 5 year strategy, attitudes need to change. There is too much hand wringing regarding the rail industry and reasons given why things can't be done; so proposals and projects become moribund. We need to think how things could be achieved, rather than finding excuses why they cannot. We need to move away from the glacial pace of progress which has characterised improvements to rail transport within the UK for over 50 years.

3.6) We see public transport as being of increasing importance as time goes on – the age profile of people with driving licences would serve as an indicator that younger people of working age would need to rely on it more. Good physical connectivity is also crucial to the sustainability of communities if they are not to become moribund or decay. If one started a business in say, Lampeter, and it grew successfully, what current incentives are there to keep it in that location generating local prosperity, rather than move it to say, Cardiff or Bristol?

Angus Eickhoff

Gareth Marston

Shrewsbury Aberystwyth Rail Passengers' Association (SARPA)

TRAVELLER'S TALES

Roger Whitehouse

To Newtown, for a SARPA meeting. Tywyn's indicator displayed Birmingham International, DORIS on the train gave the destination as Machynlleth. Immediately after Dovey Jn, DORIS was switched off, and reappeared listing stations to International. Well done!

On returning, the platform indicator displayed the portions in the correct order: the announcement included the usual partly contradictory instructions "For Caersws, ... Dovey Jn ... Aberystwyth travel in the front 2 carriages, for Caersws, ... Dovey Jn, ... Pwllheli travel in the rear 2 carriages." We know what it means, but that isn't what it says.

My journey finished on time in both directions.

But it isn't always like that, is it? What follows describes occurrences which may confuse or annoy passengers, to the point of discouraging them from making further rail journeys.

Connections

Last September: the 1925 from Birmingham New St was delayed at Wolverhampton by a need to send for the British Transport Police. We informed the conductor that we needed to catch the 2032 Shrewsbury–Aberystwyth, for the last train to the coast line that evening. The answer from higher authority was to the effect that "they couldn't promise, but would try their best". Hence it was only as the train rounded the curve into Platform 4 (16 minutes late) that the sight of a 158 with headlights on in Platform 5 made it likely that the connection would be made. It was.

We left 9 minutes late. The 1930 from Aberystwyth was delayed at Welshpool – by 2 minutes!

On principle I travel to SARPA meetings by train whenever possible, so why did I drive to the latest Borth meeting? On Mondays to Fridays a service leaves Tywyn at 1130, changing at Dovey Jn 1150/1154 arriving Borth 1203. But the meeting was on a Saturday, when the connection arrives 1306 via Machynlleth: depart 0930 instead to arrive in time for the meeting. The "non-connecting" train times are 1152/1155. Travellers from Machynlleth reported that the connection was made on the day, but dare you take the risk? One of the many examples over the years of differing times on Saturdays, for no apparent reason.

Such connections should be a standard feature of the timetable. One 'missed' is 2129 SX Aberystwyth to Dovey Jn 2155/2153 to Pwllheli: these trains always connect in practice when I use the coast train. The official Aberystwyth departure is 2029, but this was cancelled during the unit shortage (see below), forcing my wife to leave a meeting early to catch the 1929.

Cancellations

At the beginning of March, TfW withdrew all 175s for safety reasons, reducing

services to match the available units. Checking TfW's Journey Planner before a journey to Birmingham, the 1325 from Tywyn was shown as cancelled. My car was temporarily off the road, so what now? Two other journey planners confirmed this, but their useful Alternative Trains links revealed the reason as termination of the train at Wolverhampton, and added a connection to New St.

Where was that information to be found on TfW's website, whose Journey Planner has no such link? Absence of 1137 Pwllheli to Machynlleth from the Journey Check listings suggested that it was running, and termination of 1329 Aberystwyth at Wolverhampton was listed. But how would an average intending passenger know what to look for and where on TfW's website, and how to interpret the results? You need to choose Service status – Live route status – Journey Check, then look in Train Cancellations and Other Train Service Updates. Searching is made harder by the last two being in time order for the whole network rather than classified by route.

At the time I left Tywyn no cancellations were shown for my return next day. I guessed (correctly) that I needed to start earlier than the booked 0822. Checking again on the evening before SARPA's Newtown meeting, no cancellations were listed at 1930, but these had appeared by 2200. That is much too late for many prospective travellers. As I write, on the afternoon before another trip to Birmingham, the information on the web is vague or conflicting about how far our train from Machynlleth will go tomorrow morning.

From Machynlleth? Yes: the 0645 from Barmouth is a bus, not connecting with the 0805 from Machynlleth, which left passengers cooling their heels until 1008 when the 0906 to Shrewsbury was also cancelled. That length of wait is not a replacement service, and recently it has happened far too often during bus replacements.

Right & Wrong

Why is it apparently **so difficult** to deliver the right information at the right time to passengers?

Which platform is it?

We had to exchange trains at Shrewsbury: the conductor consulted his mobile, and advised "platform 5 to platform 4". Wrong! Actually 5 to 6. Another change was from 3 to 5 instead of 3 to 6.

How many carriages?

A Sunday 1722 'Chester & Shrewsbury' service from New St was described as 4 carriages, front 4 for Chester and rear (no number stated) for Shrewsbury. One unit arrived at a crowded platform: I opted for the 1822. This was repeated on a later Sunday. In between, midweek trains from Wellington to Birmingham and Birmingham to Shrewsbury were advertised as 4 carriages and arrived with only 2.

Those types of error seem to occur, at Wolverhampton as well as Shrewsbury, when the screens' database is not updated to reflect changes from timetabled working. But how does one explain a Machynlleth station announcement "front 2 for

Aberystwyth only, rear 2 for [stations to] Aberystwyth"? It was 2 Aberystwyth and 2 Coast as usual. And Wellington, displaying a train (starting from Wolverhampton) as both Arrived and cancelled!

Where does this carriage go?

Approaching Shrewsbury, the conductor had announced an onward journey to Birmingham International. I ought to have been suspicious on seeing the train from Birmingham standing at signals and formed 158 + 150. Just after we stopped, the conductor appeared announcing the need to change, apologising that he had only just been informed. The presence of a 150 in the other train would probably have been known when it left Shrewsbury nearly 3 hours earlier

Display of portions of trains to the Cambrian lines in the wrong order has been a running sore for years. Moreover, Shrewsbury's standard automated announcements of Front and Rear are unhelpful, if you don't already know the answer. To be fair, my wife did hear recently one human announcer at Shrewsbury explaining clearly which end of a train was Front and which Rear. Hence it is common to see after leaving Shrewsbury a steady forward flow of passengers from the rear unit, arising from the conductor's usual careful ticket check including destinations.

A Sunday 1822 was on New St screens as front 2 Aberystwyth, rear 2 Machynlleth. I caught fleeting glimpses at Welshpool and Caersws (where you sit affects what you can see) but got up to confirm that Newtown displayed front 2 Machynlleth and rear 2 Aberystwyth. Thus both legs of the journey were displayed in the wrong order!!

PS On my latest return from Birmingham, when through services had mostly been restored, the 1622 from New St was described as 2 coaches, front 2 Aberystwyth, rear 2 Pwllheli. 2 coaches departed full and standing. I'll leave you to guess what was displayed at Newtown: answer on page 18.



A tamper in the newly relaid siding at Newtown, on 24 May. Photograph: Gareth Marston.

MONTHLY MEETINGS

July	Saturday 8th		No meeting
August	Saturday 12th	11:30	Monty Club, 11 Broad St, Newtown, SY16 2LU.
September	Saturday 9th	11:15	Royal Oak Hotel, Welshpool
October	Saturday 14th	11:15	White Lion, Machynlleth
November	Saturday 11th	11:30	Chester Suite, Railway Station, Shrewsbury
December	Saturday 9th	11.45	Town Council Offices, Baker St, Aberystwyth

Answer from Page 17.

2 coaches, front 2 Pwllheli, rear 2 Aberystwyth. Did you guess correctly? Fortunately for passengers, the conductor did, as usual, get it right, advising coast line passengers to change and wait on the same platform at Machynlleth.

WANT TO JOIN SARPA?

The membership fee is currently (for membership up to 31 December 2023) £10.00 per annum for individuals and for organisations. Please make any cheques payable to SARPA. Donations are of course welcome.

- SARPA will lobby for better rail services.
- Act as a watchdog to safeguard the line's 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.

To join please send your details, making sure to include full name, address and telephone number (and also email address if you wish to become part of our electronic network) to:

Bill Redfern, SARPA Membership Secretary, 8 Plas Edwards, Tywyn, Gwynedd, LL36 0AS, along with cheque for the membership fee, or, and preferably, you can pay directly into our bank account: Shrewsbury-Aberystwyth Rail Passengers Association: Barclays Bank: sort code 20-61-08: account 20148148, and send your details to

Bill_sarpa@outlook.com

USEFUL ADDRESSES

Transport for Wales: Customer Relations, Transport for Wales Rail Services, St. Mary's House, 7 Penarth Road, Cardiff . CF10 5DJ Tel. 0333 3211 202

Network Rail:

Community Relations, Kings Place, 99, York Way, London. N1 9AG

Association of Community Rail Partnerships

The Old Water Tower, Huddersfield Railway Station, St George's Square, Huddersfield HD1 1JF

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

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

OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS OF THE ASSOCIATION

Chairman: Jeff Smith, 17 Marine Terrace, Aberystwyth, SY23 2AZ. Tel. 07964 179 799. Email abergogledd@gmail.com

Vice Chairman and Webmaster: Angus Eickhoff. Contact by email:

angus@anguseickhoff.co.uk

Treasurer and Membership Officer: Bill Redfern, 8 Plas Edwards, Tywyn, LL36 0AS. Tel. 07769685117. Email: bill_sarpa@outlook.com

Secretary: position vacant.

Newsletter Editor: Denis Bates, 86 Maesceinion, Waun Fawr, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion, SY23 3QQ. Tel. 01970 617667. Email: denisebbates@gmail.com

Distribution Officer: Robert Knight, 8 Tanrallt Street, Machynlleth, Powys, SY20 8BE.

Committee Members

Roger Goodhew: 12 Granville St., Shrewsbury, SY3 8NE.

Tony Harvey: 23 High Street, Welshpool, Powys, SY21 7JP. Tel. 01938 559087. Email: tony@montgomeryshire.eu

Ivor Morris: 2 Dingle Road, Welshpool, SY21 7QB. Tel. 01938 554463.

Thomas Wheeler. Contact by Email: sarpa@sarpa.info

Roger Whitehouse. Contact by Email: sarpa@sarpa@sarpa.info

ASSOCIATION CONTACT POINT

Email: sarpa@sarpa.info

WEBSITES

Our website <https://sarpa.info>

Webmaster Angus Eickhoff: angus@anguseickhoff.co.uk

Website host is Hostinger: <https://www.hostinger.co.uk/>

Find us on Facebook - Shrewsbury Aberystwyth Rail Passengers' Association:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1506868396111739>

Other sites of interest:

A useful alternative to the National Rail Enquiries site:

www.traintimes.org.uk/

Transport for Wales

www.tfwrail.wales/

National Rail Enquiries

www.nationalrail.co.uk/

London Northwestern Railway

www.journeycheck.com/londonnorthwesternrailway/

West Midlands Railway

www.westmidlandsrailway.co.uk

Avanti West Coast

www.avantiwestcoast.co.uk

Chiltern Railways

www.chilternrailways.co.uk/

Network Rail

www.networkrail.co.uk/

Railfuture/Railway Development Society

www.railfuture.org.uk/

Railwatch: the quarterly magazine of Railfuture

www.railwatch.org.uk

The Association of Community Rail Partnerships (Acorp)

communityrail.org.uk

North Wales Coast Railway

www.nwrail.org.uk/

Ffestiniog and Welsh Highland Railways

www.festrail.co.uk/

Vale of Rheidol Railway

www.rheidolrailway.co.uk

Talylyn Railway

www.talylyn.co.uk/

Welshpool and Llanfair Railway

www.wlrr.org.uk/

Welsh Highland Heritage Railway

www.whr.co.uk/

Fairbourne Railway

www.fairbournerrailway.com/

Borth Station Museum

www.borthstationmuseum.co.uk

Real Time Trains

realtimetrains.co.uk

[Live Rail Record](https://live.rail-record.co.uk)

<https://live.rail-record.co.uk>

MEETINGS OF THE ASSOCIATION

All meetings will be available online, for those who cannot attend in person.

Articles in the Newsletter contain the views of the contributors, not those of the Association.

Copy deadline for the next newsletter is 22nd August 2023