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*Shrewsbury Aberystwyth Rail Passengers' Association*

# Newsletter No. 97

AUTUMN 2025

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Running as 6J39 0904 from Porthmadog to Coleham, 97303 is seen departing from Harlech with Colas Rail's DR73924. 10/9/25.

Photograph and caption courtesy of David Hopkins.

## NEGES GAN Y CADEIRYDD

Wrth ysgrifennu'r neges hwn, galla i adrodd llwyddiant mawr - mae Trafnidiaeth Cymru wedi cytuno i gadw'r trenau hwyr ar lein yr arfordir yn ystod y gaeaf. Roedd y toriadau'r llynedd yn ystod y gaeaf wedi cael effaith andwyol ar deithwyr, cymunedau a busnesau ar hyd y lein felly mae'n braf iawn gweld na fydd y fath toriadau yn digwydd eto y gaeaf hwn.

Nid SARPA yn unig sydd yn gyfrifol am y llwyddiant hwn, o bell ffordd, ond mae wedi bod yn hanfodol yn y frwydr. SARPA oedd rhai o'r cyntaf i godi llais, cyn i'r ymgyrch mawr torfol achub y gwasanaethau hyn. Bu SARPA yn ymgyrchu i godi ymwybyddiaeth yn ogystal â gwrthwynebu'r toriadau yn y cychwyn, gan ysgrifennu at gynghorau tref a chymuned ar hyd y lein, lobio gwleidyddion a thrio adeiladu perthnasau gyda mudiadau, gwleidyddion ac unigolion. Cyn hir, roedd ymgyrchwyr brwd ar hyd lein yr arfordir yn codi llais, gan arwain at gyfarfod cyhoeddus yn Nhywyn gyda dros 300 o bobl yno i drafod y toriadau i'r gwasanaethau rheilffordd.

Hoffwn i roi diolch i nifer o ymgyrchwyr lleol, gan gynnwys Barbara Fuller a Kate Day o Dywyn sydd wedi dod yn rhan pwysig o waith SARPA; i wleidyddion sydd wedi'n helpu, megis Mabon ap Gwynfor AS a Russell George AS; ac, wrth gwrs, pawb o fewn SARPA sydd wedi dod i gyfarfodydd, ysgrifennu llythyrau ac ebostion, a chyflawni nifer o bwyntiau gweithredu.

Mae gwaith arferol SARPA wrth gwrs yn parhau, gyda lobio ayyb, ond mae'n debyg mae gwyrddo'r toriadau yw'r brif stori ar hyn o bryd. Wrth fynd ymlaen, bydd rhaid i ni gefnogi ac annog mwyr o ddefnydd o'r gwasanaethau er mwyn sicrhau eu parhad i'r dyfodol.

Jeff Smith, Cadeirydd SARPA

## CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

At the time of writing, I can report a great success - Transport for Wales has agreed to retain the late trains on the coast line during the winter. Last winter's cuts had a detrimental effect on passengers, communities and businesses along the line so it is very pleasing to see that such cuts will not happen again this winter.

SARPA is not by any stretch solely responsible for these successes, but it has been an essential part of the struggle. SARPA were some of the first to speak out, planting seeds for the mass campaign to save these services. SARPA campaigned to raise awareness as well as opposing the cuts at the start, writing to town and community councils along the line, lobbying politicians and trying to build relationships with organisations, politicians and individuals. Before long, enthusiastic campaigners along the coast line were speaking out, culminating in a public meeting in Tywyn with over 300 people there to discuss the cuts to the rail services.

I would like to thank a number of campaigners, including Barbara Fuller and Kate Day from Tywyn, who have become an important part of SARPA's work; also politicians who have helped us, such as Mabon ap Gwynfor MS and Russell George MS; and, of course, everyone within SARPA who's come to meetings, written emails and letters, and carried out various action points.

SARPA's normal work of course continues, with lobbying etc., but the reversal of the cuts is the main story at the moment. Going forward, we will have to promote and encourage more use of the services in order to ensure their survival into the future.

Jeff Smith, Chair of SARPA

## **NEWS IN BRIEF**

### **Summer Strengthening on the coastline**

For most days from late July until early September the 1105 Machynlleth to Pwllheli and 1537 Pwllheli to Machynlleth services on Mondays to Saturdays ran as a four-car formation. Peak summer season additional carriages, if only on one train in each direction, have been a welcome step in the right direction, with positive publicity for the railway after the negativity surrounding last winter's coast timetable cuts. Also, on Sundays with no publicity in mid-August, earlier UP and DOWN departures were introduced on the coast line again till early-September providing 6 trains per day.

However, a lot more is needed to properly tap into the potential and latent demand on the coastline. With 2025 being a long dry summer in the UK, and the warmest on record, almost unbearable temperatures in the Mediterranean putting off visiting and squeezed incomes travel agents have been reporting customers have been opting for vacations nearer home and leaving booking until later, home vacation numbers are up. Several train operators in England noted a surge in journeys to coastal destinations on their trains in Q1 2025/2026. But are the railways up to the challenge? One SARPA member reports hearing a conversation between two visitors from different families on the seafront in Tywyn saying they would like to have gone on a train ride along the coast as they had heard it was an attraction in itself but were put off on seeing the trains were mainly only two coaches long, something we've heard only all too often over the years.

### **National Rail Use Quarter One and Quarter Two 2025/ 2026.**

Rail use has continued to grow, with several sources pointing to growth of just over 5% on the same quarters in the preceding year. National Rail usage in 2024/2025 was 98.5% of the highest level recorded since the end of World War 2 which was in 2018/2019. If this trend continues 2025/2026 will be the new peak year and the 2 billion trip usage mark is likely to be exceeded in 2027/2028. This means the average person in Great Britain will be making over 30 rail trips per annum, double the rate typically seen in the 1970's/1980's despite the decline of season ticket commuting. This of course asks some serious questions of the assumptions made by the powers that be and the continued need for investment. Back in Autumn 2020 people were trying to make out that rail use would be permanently down with people working from home following the pandemic. How wrong they were.

## Shrewsbury

Platform 3 of Shrewsbury railway station is to be extended to accommodate longer trains. This may still go ahead although platform 3 is currently used for through freight trains. The semaphore signalling may be a problem; this is not due to be replaced for another 5 years, meaning that the signal box will remain the largest manual signal box in the world. From BUS USERS SHROPSHIRE NEWSLETTER 65.

The station could see record usage this year. The many summer events in the centre of Shrewsbury, as well as its vibrant hospitality sector, national award winning market hall and many independent shops have brought extra travellers into the town. The prolonged road works outside the station have not appeared to have had any adverse effect on usage, despite access onto the station forecourt being awkward for road vehicles. The pigeon mess under the railway bridge over Castle Foregate has been cleaned up.

Amongst those setting their feet on its platforms have been travellers expecting through trains from the Cambrian to Birmingham International and vice versa. Over the summer the following normally through services to Birmingham International have been terminated at Shrewsbury: the 0518 from Aberystwyth and the 1137 from Pwllheli/1329 from Aberystwyth with passengers having to change to a connecting train to Birmingham International running at the same times as the through services. This has been to accommodate non ETCS fitted Class 197's working from the North Wales Coast through to Birmingham. In the reverse direction passengers from the 1408 and 1808 services from Birmingham International have had to change at Shrewsbury with connections for the Cambrian running at the same time as the through trains. We understand the services chosen for this have been to help get 4 car formations onto the North Wales Coast line in the peak summer period and this has changed for the autumn/winter.

In late September this changed to passengers on the 1208 BHI to AYW/PWL and 1126 AYW/0934 PWL to BHI services needing to change at Shrewsbury.

Cardiff to Manchester services suffered this summer due to two Driving Van Trailers for the MK4 coaching sets being involved in collisions and needing repairing, making the sets unavailable until late September. This has impacted on formation length on the Marches / Shrewsbury to Birmingham lines as other units have had to step up to cover the diagrams. However Cambrian services west of Shrewsbury have almost always run with the booked number of coaches over the summer.

Open Access Operator WSMR as expected have had their application to run services from Wrexham to London Euston via Shrewsbury rejected – there obviously being no extra capacity left on the southern section of the West Coast Mainline to accommodate them without compromising performance of existing services. We understand WSMR and the other open access operators wanted to run trains in pre-existing performance fire breaks in the timetable.

## December Timetable Change

Online industry planners are showing details of the December timetable change for the Cambrian. The timetable on the Cambrian mainline remains as now with one

service in each direction necessitating a unit swap in Shrewsbury – the services that arrive at Shrewsbury c1320.

### **Machynlleth**

The Class 158 units involved in last October's crash at Talerddig have continued to be stored half in/half out of the 1863 locomotive shed at the east end of the complex. The Rail Accident Investigation Board have not come to any publicly available conclusions as to the actual cause of the sanding system failure on the westbound train and no attempt has been made to repair and return to traffic either unit despite the capacity pressures on TfW's network. On Sunday 28th September one of them was removed by two low loaders and took a round about road route to leave Mid Wales due to height restrictions.

### **Yellow Class 97 locomotives days numbered**

At long long last ETCS (the digital signalling system in operation on the Cambrian since 2011 which was the pilot trial area for the UK) is starting to be installed in other parts of the UK and equipment installed in locomotives other than the Yellow Network Rail Class 97's, including Class 66 Diesels which can operate on the Cambrian.

After ETCS was installed on the Cambrian only trains fitted with ETCS equipment could be used in normal operating conditions. As well as fitting all 24 ATW Class 158 DMU's used to operate passenger services it was decided to fit the equipment into 4 locomotives as well. The thinking was to have available locomotives to haul engineering trains, rail head treatment trains, weedkiller trains and tow self-powered engineering machinery like ballast tampers into position who would not have ETCS equipment fitted. The occasional rail tour would also be possible and though not specifically planned for at the time commercial freight trains would be able to run.

Network Rail decided they would operate the trains themselves and because of the Cambrian's loading gauge west of Newtown being the lower Route Availability 5 they decided to fit the equipment into redundant Class 37 locomotives built in the early 1960's that were suitable and completely refurbish them. This was in 2009 and ETCS was expected to be rolled out nationally long before now. Though not captive to working on the Cambrian the Class 97's can often be seen parked at the depot at Coleham, Shrewsbury waiting to work on the Cambrian. Now there are only 3 locos left with the original donor locos being over 60 years old - perhaps not for much longer now.

### **Mid Wales has seen an increase in Road Traffic Accidents since the pandemic**

In recent months many people have commented on how often major A roads through Mid Wales and Shropshire have been closed due to road traffic collisions, with reports in the media every couple of days. Official figures for what are classed as Road Traffic Accidents in the county of Powys show they declined from 150 in 2015 to 107 in 2020 and have gone upward since then with 2024 seeing no fewer than 194 of them. Using that figure, the current population and life expectancy figures a Powys resident has a

1 in 8 chance of being involved in a RTA in their lifetime. 2025 figures will not be released until May 2026.

This is not to be confused with 20mph limit roads in Welsh towns and villages where accident rates have gone down by 25% as expected but the accidents people are commenting on are on the A roads between them with National Speed limits where the increased number of crashes seem to occur – this upward trend was happening before the 20mph limits were introduced.

Invariably this has impacted the railway in September with a lorry overturning after trying to go under the railway bridge over the A470 at Pontdolgoch, closing the line for several hours whilst it was moved and the bridge inspected, and also vehicles colliding at the A489/A470 junction next to Llanidloes Road level crossing near Caersws, with debris going on the track.

### **Powys CC rolls the bus dice ....badly**

A big shake up of Powys CC specified bus services ahead of TfW's snail's pace roll out of bus franchising was introduced on the 1st September 2025. Some long-standing routes have been split into different services, destinations changed, frequencies on some routes increased, Sunday buses introduced on some routes but not others and new timetables not put in bus stops and leading to much criticism. Topping this all Officials at County Hall managed to forget to re-tender the Llanfyllin to Oswestry bus service that Dr Beeching had promised was an adequate replacement for the Llanfyllin branch which closed in January 1965, leaving the residents of the small north Powys town without a direct public transport link to their nearest settlement of any note for several weeks whilst Powys re-tendered the route.

From a rail users' point of view residents and visitors hoping that the long standing frustrations regarding bus/rail integration or lack of it would be addressed were once again left scratching their heads that something that's commonplace on the continent and other parts of the UK can be so difficult in parts of Mid Wales.

Powys CC once more have designed their bus timetables around buses connecting with each other at bus stations at Newtown and Welshpool (and in Llangurig) for the north of the county, despite the noises coming out from Welsh Government/ Transport for Wales about modal integration. Meanwhile there is continued bellyaching in local authority land where they complain it is they who have expertise on how to organise buses and not TfW! As the turf war continues Powys CC have just scored an own goal in the Local Authority net!

### **Newtown**

Organisers of an anti-immigration march on September 13th in the town, despite protestations they were not part of any far-right movement and just concerned local people who just happen to be marching on the same day as a far right wing organised protest in London, shared misinformation from a far right source claiming that rail services all over the UK were being mysteriously cancelled due to "engineering works", -implying that authorities were trying to stop the protests by stopping people travelling.

The organisers of the supposedly “local” Newtown march were advising people to travel to Newtown by other means than by rail.

Come September 13th the trains ran as normal on the Cambrian Mainline and passengers were not bothered by any protestors.

## **Aberystwyth**

There has been a hiatus of log train movements over the summer – connected with the harvesting season for trees and customer demand at Kronospan Chirk. However a pile of logs waiting to be moved had appeared in the yard by early September.

## **Railtour controversy**

Previous occasions where TfW have consented to cancel service trains to allow rail tours to run have been met with a mixed response, with many people angry at the inconvenience and further impression TfW doesn't care about the Cambrian lines mainstream customers. Whilst the railtour trains always attract a lot of interest and photographers, how much they put into local economies given they offer refreshment on board and now due to timetable constraints often only stop over for an hour or two before returning is questionable. In the past passengers on these tours often got several hours at coastal locations after arriving on a train where the only refreshment was what you brought with you there would be a stampede for the local shops/cafes on arrival. Sometimes several of these trains turned up on the same day as the lines capacity was greater; today we typically see about 5 a year.

In August a new operator Britannic Railtours got for four successive Tuesdays the 1628 Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth service cancelled to allow it to do a trial run to Pwllheli, overnighing in Barmouth and returning the next day. The first date came and no sign of it, TfW put a bus on instead of the 1628. The second Tuesday the 1628 ran despite customers being informed it wouldn't in advance. Britannic Railtours has subsequently conducted two trial runs where they turned up and the shutters and buttons on smart phones and cameras were duly pressed but passengers wanting the 1628 have been inconvenienced. Upsetting some people is the fact the Brittanic is a luxury train with overnight cabins and they are selling berths on it for £6,500.00 per journey and providing a dining experience onboard...there's not much scope to spend on the coast of Mid Wales. The train ran again on the 17th September.

SARPA have formally complained about the repeated cancellation of the 1628 service.

## **Cambrian Railway Partnershp**

The Cambrian Railway Partnership has awarded almost £7,000 in grants to community organisations along the line. They include a sustainable train-themed garden in Caersws designed to honour the work and gardens that station masters used to create, and the production and screening of a film about Sir Pryce Pryce-Jones, the pioneering Newtown entrepreneur, to form part of a legacy exhibition.

A series of Welsh language guided walks along the Cambrian Coast, using the railway as a sustainable mode of transport to or from the destination, is also supported.

These projects showcase how communities along the Cambrian Line are bringing people together, embracing heritage and promoting the railway as a sustainable connection across Mid Wales and the coast.

[Form the *Cambrian News* 8th October 2025]

## **Workplace bullying allegation**

Former Cambrian Community Rail Officer Claire Davies, who now lives in France, has stated on social media that she was subjected to workplace bullying from a senior female colleague in TfW and her complaint to a more senior male Director was not taken seriously.

## **Caledonian Sleeper**

Caledonian Sleeper have announced that they will be adding a call in the west midlands on their Highland (Fort William, Inverness and Aberdeen portion) services from the 15th January 2026. The northbound service will pick up at Birmingham International @ 2242 and the southbound portion drop off @ 0620. The timings are not any advantage to changing at Shrewsbury and Crewe and picking up/leaving the service there; you will have to leave Mid Wales two hours earlier/get back two hours later to connect at International.

## **Liaison Group Meeting**

Some highlights from the recent meeting of the group:

71.9% 3-minute punctuality across the line (target 73.7%); 2.5% cancellations on the coast.

4-car trains ran on the coast on 14/42 occasions last year and 23/32 this year (improvement).

There will be some work on the depot at Machynlleth. Our Chairman asked if this could allow stabling of more trains / 3-car trains. James Nicholas, who was representing TfW, wasn't sure.

Shrewsbury lifts should be back working on 22 October.

197 driver training in the spring. Updates on splitting services etc in the new year.

I asked for assurance that platform 3 won't be part of the arrangement for changing between 158s and 197s at any point in the transition. James Nicholas wouldn't give that assurance, but said they'd try to avoid it.



## OUT AND ABOUT AND POSITIVE

Mine and the families rail trips this summer have all happened without any drama or major incident and have been a generally positive experience, as have the events, places, museums, shops, hospitality, holidays etc we have been using rail to access. This is in complete contrast to the narrative of the broken country that is constantly being rammed at us by social media, mainstream media, opposition politicians and foreign agitators. We've even been to London where it's supposedly "under Sharia Law" and were able to go to the pub and drink! We took our grandchildren to Barmouth where despite "underfunding from Westminster" it was busy and the shops, restaurants etc were all open doing a good trade full of people enjoying the weather. The real world is very different to the made up one, the trains we have used have been clean, on time (with one exception), not cancelled, busy, occasionally very busy and the rail staff pleasant and professional. The day I did encounter a very late running train resulted in me having another pint in the pub I was already in, before heading to the station as I was able to access information on my phone and make an informed decision, no big deal. OK not every aspect I would rate 10 out of 10 as there's always room for improvement but overall, it's been positive.

It can be a little too easy to always be critical and negative in Rail User Group land as it can be a forum for airing gripes and frustrations, and even more so if you look at the comments on our Facebook pages, especially from people who don't pay their subs! However, since the May timetable change up to early October, when I am writing this, Transport for Wales have strung together their most consistent period of operations on the Cambrian with trains running, trains running on time and with the booked number of carriages. That dirty barometer of how our rail service is doing – Welshpool Rail Users Facebook page – has been posting pictures of rail tours, photos of Welshpool station in the past and other related transport content, but very little about the state of the rail service through the town. The brave keyboard warriors knocking the railways on the site are noticeable by their absence in recent months,, I think we can take it as read that there hasn't been that much rail related matter to moan about in Welshpool recently. TfW of course have to deliver this year in year out – after all even much maligned Arriva Trains Wales delivered the published timetable with the booked number of carriages consistently for 15 years - let's not get too carried away just yet.

Perhaps because my family and I start and end our journeys from Newtown (Powys) we feel a bit more positive than some. Despite not being manned anymore, the station environment is probably in its best condition that I can remember, I've used it as a customer for 46 years, worked there, worked and drank across the street and probably know it better than most. Recently we've had the track in the passing loop re-laid, as well as cleaning out what was filthy ballast; the secret (until now) Brecon and Merthyr Railway chair holding the rail in place at one point has at last retired; a DDA compliant footbridge and lifts installed; new CCTV; new lighting; the platforms given attention; new signage ready for the Class 197 introduction and perhaps importantly a new tenant for the station buildings. Charity Platform One are there most days and their doors are open with refreshment available for purchase and they tend the planters on the platform. Back in 1979 when I first used Newtown, it had a manned booking office

with 2 shifts, a Red Star parcel office, signal box, semaphore signals and tokens, most of the goods sidings were still in situ and still nominally served by a daily pick-up freight train, though only domestic coal was being delivered by then. There was a daily train that carried mail in both directions. Summer Saturdays brought through locomotive hauled trains from London to the coast. If this sounds idyllic to some, remember everything was in BR corporate blue, toilet waste was dumped on the tracks. If trains were less than 30 minutes late on Summer Saturday afternoons it was a minor miracle: rail enthusiasts turned up to see how the breakdown of locomotives was operationally coped with hoping that light engines were sent to rescue failed ones! We had just 8 trains a day operated with first generation DMU's or Modernisation plan diesel locos with asbestos in them dating from the late 1950's with the first westbound train around 0500 being a connection from an overnight mail train from York at Shrewsbury, the next westbound train was not until after 0900. Timetables were not clockface and gaps between trains in the daytime could be close on 3 hours. In many ways it was like a living faded heritage railway without the glamour of the steam engines, colourful liveries, re-enactments and enamel signs. The only thing on the horizon was the Serpell Report which recommended the line's closure.

Today I can be in Shrewsbury and know I have a train back to Newtown every hour from 1530 onward till the last train, plus I've only paid 11p a mile for the fare @ £7.35 it's a really good value price – the taxi firms in Newtown charge £5.00 for a one-way ride around town of a mile or less! Next year we will have new trains on our line with working air conditioning; they might even run every hour in the summer. If I travel westward there's still the magnificent Mid Wales scenery, the coast and Snowdonia. Looking at my recently arrived 2026 copy of the Campaign for Real Ale Good Beer Guide no fewer than 5 entries are near stations on the coastline: a vast improvement on yesteryear. Back in the early 80's I can remember my grandfather saying he had to change 3 times (New St, Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury) to come and visit us from the suburb he lived in Birmingham. Today we have through trains to a major city centre and major rail hub in Birmingham (and also an international airport); this makes us just one change from a huge swathe of the UK and parts of mainland Europe. We have a regular freight flow running on our line after an absence of 40 years – timber from Aberystwyth to Chirk. Trains between Manchester and Cardiff on the Marches line are now mainly 5 carriages in length – I travelled for business up and down the Marches for 15 years in 2 and 3 coach DMU's – it might not be perfect everywhere but it's a better overall product.

There's a lot to be positive about: why look at all the hate and misinformation on social media and the so-called news from client journalists spinning a line and make yourselves miserable? Get out and about using the railway to visit places, it's far more interesting and positive than what they want you to believe. One of my best journeys along the coast line was a business trip to Pwllheli on a weekday in winter. It was high tide, sunny and snow was on the mountain peaks, I've had numerous trips to Aberystwyth over the years and the Dyfi estuary in winter can be at its most spectacular too. The Cambrian coast is not just for summer.

Of course, when I write my letter to Santa this year, more passing loops, electrification masts and Stadler FLIRTS on the Cambrian will be on my wish list – as they would be on any sensible person's. After all, it might be positive out there now

but it can be even more positive with a fraction of the political will/capital that other issues get. After all, I should be on the big man's good list as I've not been a miserable moaning Minny but a positive one having positive experiences!

**Gareth Marston**

**Newtown October 2025**



The large signalbox at Pwllheli still exists, its dignity somewhat diminished by its downgrading to a (ground?) Frame. Photograph Denis Bates

## **TIMETABLE CUTS**

The Cambrian News has reported that the cuts to the late evening services due to be re-imposed from December 2025 to May 2026 have been postponed by TfW. Industry planners confirm this with the current timetable of 8 trains a day Monday to Saturday continuing. There is as we go to press no official word from TfW and the early morning Barmouth to Machynlleth services remains cut.



It's hard to believe that this is the railway near Criccieth, and not an abandoned line (except that the rails are shiny). Photograph: Angus Eickhoff

## MEMBERSHIP

The membership fee for the forthcoming year (up to 31 December 2026) is £15.00 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](mailto:Bill_sarpa@outlook.com)

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## FROM THE SARPA ARCHIVE – THE YAWN OF INDIFFERENCE TO WASTE

Gareth Marston

Twenty-Two years ago (2003), on a sultry hot July day in central London a delegation from SARPA went to the Palace of Westminster to do some lobbying. One of the items on the agenda was a meeting with a government minister – Peter Hain, then the Welsh Secretary and Leader of the House. One of the issues we raised was that rail costs had gone up since privatisation/fragmentation and that Government money, instead of funding improvements, was increasingly being wasted paying for inefficiency. This was the exact opposite of what was promised at privatisation 10 years earlier and returning the rail industry to an integrated structure would be better for passengers, the economy and taxpayers. You might even be able to invest in rural railways and make them more relevant rather than whining about their supposed high cost which was fashionable in some quarters at the time. Hain mainly yawned profusely, which the SARPA delegation really didn't expect and it threw them off their gameplan – one of his officials sort of apologised in the corridor after the meeting and explained it was due to him being Welsh Secretary and Leader of the House at the same time and having too much work – this was sort of supposed to be OK..... Of course, nothing came of it – the Blair government's record on transport was of inaction unless forced into a corner (think Railtrack going into administration and fuel duty protests).

Roll forward to today (2025) and now it's officially acknowledged that the fragmentation of BR that accompanied rail privatisation is inefficient and wasteful and we're in the process of reintegrating the train operating companies with the infrastructure body! The Williams Report which instigated this calculated in 2018 prices there was £2 Billion per annum in efficiency savings by reuniting the track authority and train operators in one organisation. By the time the process is complete, roughly at the next general election, that will be nearer £3 Billion a year in 2029 prices. That will be c. £100 Billion plus lost in inefficiency since 1993 and many feel that's a conservative estimate as it's not a full reintegration of everything in the rail industry. Well, SARPA did tell Peter Hain and his officials back in 2003.....imagine if that money had instead been used for investment and improvements or to keep fares down, what sort of railway would we have now? Almost certainly a better one, that would produce better results and help the economy more for sure. Failure to invest in public transport is a big factor in the UK's underperforming regional economies and the dissatisfaction that many feel. It wasn't people on small boats, the European Court of Human Rights or the European Union that caused this but our own mainstream politicians over many decades who preferred to waste a £100 Billion plus on a failed ideological experiment.

There are other cases in the SARPA archives where we've been correct and ahead of the game on various issues and rail industry managers, politicians, civil servants have come round to our way of thinking: this was not a one off. Whilst heartening that we can be influential it is also frustrating due to the fact we get proved right time and time again albeit slowly. That SARPA, a voluntary group in rural Mid Wales, can be far more knowledgeable on matters regarding public transport than our leaders and decision makers is scary, especially given the wealth of evidence on what works and what doesn't that is out there – if only they bothered to look and not yawn!



This photograph was posted recently on a Facebook page by Terry Dorrity. It was taken at the Eisenbahnmuseum Bochum-Dahlhausen, a railway museum situated south of the city of Bochum in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany. Was this attached to the Aberystwyth engineering works of the Manchester and Milford Railway? They were presumably closed after the takeover by the Great Western Railway in 1906.



Narrow and broad: Vale of Rheidol diesel locomotive and wagons, and 158 Class and ballast wagons at Aberystwyth. 8th March 2014. Photograph: Denis Bates.

## 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](http://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](mailto: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](mailto:abergogledd@gmail.com)

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

[angus@anguseickhoff.co.uk](mailto:angus@anguseickhoff.co.uk)

**Treasurer and Membership Officer:** Bill Redfern, 8 Plas Edwards, Tywyn, LL36 0AS. Tel. 07769685117. Email: [bill\\_sarpa@outlook.com](mailto:bill_sarpa@outlook.com)

**Secretary:** position vacant.

**Newsletter Editor:** Denis Bates, 86 Maesceinion, Waun Fawr, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion, SY23 3QQ. Tel. 07952187021; 01970 617667. Email: [denisebbates@gmail.com](mailto:denisebbates@gmail.com)

### Committee Members

**Tony Harvey:** 23 High Street, Welshpool, Powys, SY21 7JP. Tel. 01938 559087. Email:

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**Thomas Wheeler.** Contact by Email: [sarpa@sarpa.info](mailto:sarpa@sarpa.info)

**Roger Whitehouse.** Contact by Email: [sarpa@sarpa@sarpa.info](mailto:sarpa@sarpa@sarpa.info)

## ASSOCIATION CONTACT POINT

**Email:** [sarpa@sarpa.info](mailto:sarpa@sarpa.info)

## WEBSITES

Our website <https://sarpa.info>

Webmaster Angus Eickhoff: [angus@anguseickhoff.co.uk](mailto: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:	<a href="http://www.traintimes.org.uk/">www.traintimes.org.uk/</a>
Transport for Wales	<a href="http://www.tfwrail.wales/">www.tfwrail.wales/</a>
National Rail Enquiries	<a href="http://www.nationalrail.co.uk/">www.nationalrail.co.uk/</a>
London Northwestern Railway	<a href="http://www.journeycheck.com/londonnorthwesternrailway/">www.journeycheck.com/londonnorthwesternrailway/</a>
West Midlands Railway	<a href="http://www.westmidlandsrailway.co.uk">www.westmidlandsrailway.co.uk</a>
Avanti West Coast	<a href="http://www.avantiwestcoast.co.uk">www.avantiwestcoast.co.uk</a>
Chiltern Railways	<a href="http://www.chilternrailways.co.uk/">www.chilternrailways.co.uk/</a>
Network Rail	<a href="http://www.networkrail.co.uk/">www.networkrail.co.uk/</a>
Railfuture/Railway Development Society	<a href="http://www.railfuture.org.uk/">www.railfuture.org.uk/</a>
Railwatch: the quarterly magazine of Railfuture	<a href="http://www.railwatch.org.uk">www.railwatch.org.uk</a>
The Association of Community Rail Partnerships (Acorp)	<a href="http://communityrail.org.uk">communityrail.org.uk</a>
North Wales Coast Railway	<a href="http://www.nwrrail.org.uk/">www.nwrrail.org.uk/</a>
Ffestiniog and Welsh Highland Railways	<a href="http://www.festrail.co.uk/">www.festrail.co.uk/</a>
Vale of Rheidol Railway	<a href="http://www.rheidolrailway.co.uk">www.rheidolrailway.co.uk</a>
Talylyn Railway	<a href="http://www.talylyn.co.uk/">www.talylyn.co.uk/</a>
Welshpool and Llanfair Railway	<a href="http://www.wlrr.org.uk/">www.wlrr.org.uk/</a>
Welsh Highland Heritage Railway	<a href="http://www.whr.co.uk/">www.whr.co.uk/</a>
Fairbourne Railway	<a href="http://www.fairbournerrailway.com/">www.fairbournerrailway.com/</a>
Borth Station Museum	<a href="http://www.borthstationmuseum.co.uk">www.borthstationmuseum.co.uk</a>
Real Time Trains	<a href="http://realtimetrains.co.uk">realtimetrains.co.uk</a>
Live Rail Record	<a href="https://live.rail-record.co.uk">https://live.rail-record.co.uk</a>

## MONTHLY MEETINGS

November	Saturday 15th	11:45	Town Council Offices, The Presbytery, Queens Road, Aberystwyth, SY23 2HS
December	Saturday 6th	11:30	The HIVE, 5 Belmont, Shrewsbury, SY1 1TE
January	Saturday 17th	11:15	Methodist Church, Welshpool
February	Saturday 14th	11:15	Wynnstay Hotel, Machynlleth
March	Saturday 21st	11:30	Monty Club, Newtown
April	Saturday 18th	12:30	Railway Inn, Borth
May	Saturday 9th	11:45	AGM Town Council Offices, The Presbytery, Aberystwyth
June	Saturday 20th	11:15	Methodist Church, Welshpool.
July	Saturday 11th	11:45	Talylyn Railway, Wharf Station, Tywyn.
August	Thursday 20th	19:00	Monty Club, Newtown.
September	Saturday 19th	11:15	Wynnstay Hotel, Machynlleth.
October	Saturday 17th	11:30	Vestry, Capel Y Traeth, Criccieth.
November	Saturday 14th	11:45	Town Council Offices, The Presbytery, Aberystwyth.
December	Saturday 5th	11:30	The HIVE, Shrewsbury.

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

Copy deadline for the next newsletter is 22nd February 2025