

SARPA Newsletter No.26

Inside this issue:

Chairman's Message	1
ERTMS radio signalling	2
Our press release on fares	3
News of the Line	4
Arriva have the franchise	6
A Bulgarian train ride	7
The Points at Aberystwyth	8
Twenty five summers ago	9
Useful addresses	11
Meetings, and Officers of the Association	12



The Pathfinder Tour of the 14th June at Machynlleth.
Photo: Richard Putley.

Chairman's Message

Writing these messages can sometimes be a frustrating experience, as you never know what will be the big issue by the time the newsletter is printed and distributed. Fortunately the SRA is good at providing material: the franchise winner announcement and the consultation document suggesting maintenance budgets are to be slashed brings more gloom and doom. Who is to blame? Well if my communication with many members over the last few months is right – it's the Government's and I tend to agree. Many of you have expressed feelings of anger, disappointment, betrayal and downright venom all directed at central government. The SRA is just an all too willing carthorse that does what Government tells it and increasingly looks like part of the problem rather than the solution.

Tony Blair declared that he will be judged on domestic policies and not the war in Iraq. Complete and utter failure on transport policy is a start isn't it? Long be-

fore any sexed up documents made their way on to the scene I think many rail users had lost trust in the government. The difference between what's been needed, the promises and what's actually happened is stark. The sorry saga of the Wales and Border franchise process just highlights how we're all being failed by government. Promises, delay and ultimate disappointment sums it all up. Labour are in the middle of their third substantive attempt at running the railways in the UK, the first two times around were characterised by broken promises, failure and a lack of vision and leadership. History is repeating itself.

It is pointed out that after nationalising the railway in 1947 Labour left the industry with no direction and weak leadership - leaving the railways rudderless and at the bottom of the queue when they desperately needed to be modernised and Victorian working practices abolished to compete as the age of mass car ownership arrived. This in turn accelerated the financial crisis of the early 1960's that led to the Beeching report. We all know about Labour's broken promise in 1964; what's not so commonly known is that they welshed on Beeching and failed to totally modernise the remaining network as per his recommendations. The Blair government has carried on in a similar vain: promises but no delivery.

At the heart of the problem is the fact that they refuse to deal with the structure of the industry caused by privatisation. Four times as much government money is being spent on the railway now as was given to BR, yet these hundred plus private operators can't run the network as a whole as well as BR. It's too much of a coincidence that this state of affairs has happened after the trauma of the 1993 Railways Act, yet government tries to kid us that there are other primary reasons. Today's railway crisis is directly attributable to mistakes made in the privatisation process, yet government is in denial. It believes that fragmentation and franchising can be made to work despite all the evidence to the contrary. The SRA's increasingly desperate thrashings around are a symptom of the problem that the real issues are not being addressed.

At a time when a revived mixed-traffic rural railway is needed more than ever as the failures of the over reliance on road become more apparent, our leaders fail us once more- regime change in Westminster is needed.

ERTMS radio signalling to be trialled on the Cambrian

ERTMS—the European Rail Traffic Management System - is to be tested in Britain with a pilot installation on the Cambrian Lines, as reported in the National Press in May (e.g. *The Times* of May 20th).

This system was recommended in the Cullen/Ulf report into the Ladbroke Grove disaster. It is designed to stop trains passing red signals, and will also allow more trains on the tracks. It uses digital beacons on the tracks, and GSM-R radio (the same technology as is used by mobile phones) to send control mes-

sages to trains, allowing drivers to use in-cab displays. When it is fully working, signals will no longer be necessary.

The beacons, or “balises”, will be positioned every one to two miles. As the train passes over one, an onboard antenna makes contact, identifying the train’s position. The onboard computer constantly monitors speed, braking capability and proximity to the train in front; a display in the cab gives exact instructions. At the control centre information on train movements is processed, and permission to move is relayed to the trains.

The total cost of installing the scheme nationally is currently put at £3.7 billion. It will be compatible with installations across the European Union.

Our Press release on Fares

SARPA CONDEMNS GOVERNMENT OVER PROPOSED INCREASES IN RAIL FARES.

This weeks announcement by Transport Secretary Alister Darling that rail fares will have to increase to pay for an improved network have been met with anger by Mid Wales rail users.

Local rail user group SARPA has condemned the announcement as yet another example of how out of touch with reality government is with the rail industry and the needs of the transport sector generally.

SARPA Chairman Gareth Marston said, “To penalise the ordinary user even further who have literally been waiting decades to see substantive improvements in services is an appalling affront. At a time when Labour has spent six years in power literally squandering billions of taxpayer’s money propping up the dysfunctional privatised rail network to little effect, price increases are not on. This money should have been spent on modernizing the network; instead it’s gone to waste due to the inefficient nature of the fragmented rail industry and Labour’s failure to grasp the true issues facing the industry”.

“The rail network desperately needs to be reorganised on a vertically integrated basis in order to reduce costs and make improvements happen quicker, increasing fares whilst persisting with the failed structure will make no difference”.

NEWS OF THE LINE

The recent Pathfinder Tour

Richard Putley writes: Having travelled on the Pathfinder Tour of the 14th June to Aberystwyth I think 37 haulage is the answer to the Cambrian's punctuality problems! The tour arrived 20 min early at Welshpool. We'd originally been booked to wait there for 20 min, but we were allowed to go on to Newtown where we crossed an eastbound train. We then motored on to Mach where we arrived 30 min early! For people intending to get off there, this was a bonus. Our departure for Aber was delayed by a late running train from Aber.

In view of your recent report about the run round point at Aber being plain lined made me wonder if the tour would be postponed again. But having 2 locos on the train (37114 "City of Worcester" and 37042) meant they were able to use one loco to propel the train out of the platform and into the siding, and then swop the locos round.

Weather was excellent too so a thoroughly great day out.

Aberystwyth

In mid July Network Rail was quoting October as a date for the points to be repaired at Aberystwyth. However this was pre the Rail Regulators review of their finances that suggested "non essential" maintenance work should be deferred. A run round facility at Aberystwyth does not effect normal day to day operations. As Richard Putley's piece on the pathfinder excursion points out a double headed train can run its locomotives around by a complicated shunting manoeuvre. Will the points become the new "lights at Welshpool" –lets hope not.

In the meantime a steam special scheduled for September 13th has been pencilled in to go to Barmouth instead. However at the time of going to press the organisers were still waiting clearance from Network Rail to go over Barmouth bridge.

Ynyslas

Early June saw a wreckage of a crashed plane- a vintage Hawker Hunter jet land in the field next to the line on the landside just to the Dovey Junction side of the level crossing. The pilot was picked up from the estuary by a search and rescue helicopter.

A shuddering thought- what if the plane had crashed on the line or even onto a train? About as likely as the current structure of the rail industry being made to work of course, but no doubt the health and safety fascists would have cooked up some impossible safety regulations to cover the eventuality happening again.

Newtown

A refurbished and relocated Newtown Station Travel, fresh paint, new access points, Project Inform, a station Jazz Café, a proper car park, integrated transport with a bus turnaround and stop, a disabilities charity occupying the last part of the main building. Things are on the up what could be wrong?

Yes Network Rail has forgot to weed the tracks in the station and clear litter up. They may be not for profit but like predecessor Railtrack they seem to be not for the passenger also.

Welshpool

Yes no issue can go by without mention of the failed lighting. Latest on the saga is, that at our own cost we have pursued with the Land Registry the question who owns the ramp - stand up the Transport Directorate of the National Assembly for Wales who presumably inherited it from the old Welsh Office. We are pursuing this line of attack!

Wales and Borders has decided that the National Eisteddfod being held at Meifod a few miles into the hills from Welshpool during the first week in August will not attract sufficient custom to justify extra carriages or services, and have pointed out that the infrastructure on our line is constrained (surprise, surprise). 170,000 visitors are expected, those arriving by train face an hour's wait for a connecting bus.

Project Inform

You may have noticed that the screens don't always give out correct information. Wales and Borders are said to be looking into minor teething problems since its introduction. However most machines are only as good as the information that's fed into them. Some management time is needed, sitting on the person whose job it should be to feed information into the system to make sure their doing their job properly all the time.

Shrewsbury

The Association of Community Rail Partnerships (ACORP) held its AGM in Shrewsbury on the 3rd and 4th July. Several SARPA members attended (but not all wearing their SARPA hat). Delegates from all over the UK were there, and some high profile guest speakers.

Things of most significance to SARPA were the information on the progress of Microfranchising and the speech by Chris Austin of the Strategic Rail Authority. It comes as no surprise that he stated that line closures have been looked into by the SRA. The good news is that these have been dismissed (at least by the SRA), on the grounds that the amount of hassle and political fall out that a closure attempt would generate would outweigh the relatively small savings that would be made. So next time we hear a government Minister bleating about subsidy per mile travelled we need to remind them that the railway finances black hole is not to be found on rural lines!

Westminster.

A delegation of Mid Wales rail users and MP's, including members of SARPA, met with Peter Hain MP. Secretary of State of Wales to discuss rail services on July 2nd in London. The delegation was cordially received and several issues of a more strategic nature were raised, including Microfranchising as a way forward for the railways in Mid Wales. Peter Hain promised to set up a meeting for the delegation with Richard Bowker, Chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority. This has not been finalised at the time of going to print.

Stop Press

Arriva to take over the Wales and Border franchise

August 1st at last saw the announcement of the winner for the Wales and Border franchise - Arriva Trains. The franchise will start in October. It has been confirmed that the franchise will run the same number of services as at present.

A Bulgarian Train Ride

Lewis Smith

In May this year (2003) I and a friend travelled - with bikes - by train in Bulgaria from Burgas on the coast nearly to the capital Sofia (actually to Ihtiman, one major stop short). This is just a 'comparative experience' narrative...

Finding out anything at Burgas station was problematic, since there is no visible or published information other than forthcoming departures and arrivals. We were lucky to find someone in the information office who spoke English - and she disappeared soon after. Pressing for information on available trains and where/when they stopped, yielded a proper national timetable book - but not for the public. We had to make hurried notes.

Even accepting that Bulgaria is very poor, the fare was a surprise: just 11 Lev to Sofia, about 250m/400Km, approx £4 (10 Lev to Ihtiman)! We were told that the bikes would be 9 Lev each, but were in fact eventually charged about 10 Lev for the two. We chose to travel overnight. An incoming train from Sofia due at 21.06 glided silently into the terminus exactly then. Ours left at 22.15, and was on-platform well before then. The composition was interesting, comprising roughly: 3 luggage vans; 5 2nd class cars, 1 1st class car, 1 2nd buffet/ordinary seating, 4 sleepers. Electric loco all the way. Our bikes were expected, and we were free to tie them where indicated in a largely empty car.

All the stock was, naturally, utilitarian; corridor cars, though - hooray! The seat headrests were rather too high; the journey was *not* comfortable. Luckily the night was warm, so effectiveness of heating was not an issue. The ride was slow, rather bouncy, but decently quiet.

Our compartment started with just us, but filled completely by the 2nd stop. There were no announcements on the train of where we were, nor those 'Ding dong, ding dong, ding dong, ici Avignon' etc that French stations broadcast and which punctuate overnight journeys there. Nor were station names often visible at stops - how's *your* Cyrillic, anyway? A refreshment trolley went past at intervals, dinging a little bell as it went.

We relied on being awake at the right time - luckily my friend was. But as we heaved our bikes out into the early dawn, the lady guard appeared: I think she

was aware of us, and would have roused us. Bulgarians are friendly people. Ihti-man station is barren, the waiting room cavernous. But at 0500 there was a little kiosk open in the entrance selling coffee and snacks at normal, not inflated, prices (coffee typically 15p).

We needed to hang around for a couple of hours, so saw a couple of early commuter trains go - about 0550 and 0650. A bus turned up for the first (the station being 'out of town'), and there were many passengers. More so for the second, fed by 2 buses. Integrated transport, no less.

...I have never been in any of 'our' stations very early in the morning, but wonder whether you find buses specifically feeding trains, an open waiting room, and refreshments at normal prices?

The Points at Aberystwyth

An email from Network Rail to the Chairman:

The points in question have not been fully surveyed on the ground. Carillion have been in correspondence with Corus but as the points are Bullhead Great Western ironwork they are neither standard to design or available off the shelf. Carillion need to carry out a full survey of the site and establish the best match to replace the damaged area. A further concern is that if a suitable match cannot be found then both ends may need replacement.

Currently the infrastructure is suitable for double headed engineering or charter traffic and just requires a different shunting operation to be carried out. I would anticipate that it will be back in order by October.

Gareth comments:

Do I dare suggest we start a sweepstake on what will be fixed first: the lights at Welshpool or Aber's points?

Twenty Five Summers Ago

By Gareth Marston

A browse through the Internet one day discovered a site that had amongst other things a copy of the working timetable for the summer of 1978 posted for both the Cambrian Main line and the Coast. A very interesting read it made too, and highlighted how much things have changed over the last quarter of a century. One might imagine if you didn't know any differently that today's basic passenger only railway was a product of the Beeching era cuts in the mid 1960's. However the process of decline was a gradual one from that time onward. 1978 still saw an extensive amount of traffic that was reminiscent of a previous era and there are few similarities to today, indeed the timetable is a good yardstick of how far we've advanced and also how far the service on our line has declined.

The loops at Westbury, Caersws, Cemmes Road and Dovey Junction were all still there and made use of, Aberystwyth had three operational platforms. Goods yards were still in use at Welshpool, Newtown, Machynlleth and Aberystwyth. There were nine DOWN passenger trains a day and eight in the UP direction. Journey times were longer Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth being typically two hours and ten minutes.

The whole thing strikes you as so radically different to today, 1978 had very different weekday and Saturday timetables. They were very distinctive and different to each other: today you have to play "spot the difference" between a weekday and a Saturday and often find a train leaves a minute or so later or earlier on a Saturday. In 1978 for instance there was a 0710 departure from Aberystwyth to Wolverhampton on a weekday, on Saturday the equivalent was a 0750 as far as Shrewsbury only. There were through trains to Crewe (2), Wolverhampton (1), Birmingham New St (1) and London Euston (1 SO) though most trains terminated at Shrewsbury.

The day started with the 0415 Mail train from Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth, DMU weekdays, locomotive hauled on a Saturday with a ten minute booked stop at Newtown between 0505 and 0515. Then there followed on weekdays only a freight from Coton Hill yard Shrewsbury at 0434 booked at Welshpool for 15 minutes between 0515 & 0530 and Newtown for 48 minutes between 0556 & 0644. This went to Aberystwyth on Mondays, Thursdays and Fridays only where it

spent an hour and three quarters. It then went up the coast line and returned heading for Bescot in the early evening. On Tuesdays and Wednesdays it went straight up the coast. A Diesel Parcel Unit left Shrewsbury at 1000 for Newtown arriving 1048 returning to Shrewsbury at 1055 on weekdays: was this was connected with the parcels traffic generated by Kay & Co?

1010 on a Saturday saw the departure from Aberystwyth of a through locomotive hauled train to London Euston. The working in the other direction saw a London departure at 1040 reaching Aberystwyth at 1524. Four and three quarter hours from London is hard to better in 2003.

In the UP direction there was a 0520 from Aberystwyth but only on Mondays and Saturdays, other days it started at Machynlleth at 0600. The 1750 reversed at Dovey Junction and went up the coast with the 1900 forming the UP mail working. Late evening arrivals were stabled in Aberystwyth overnight to form the morning services. The last departure from Shrewsbury was as early as 2035.

Connections from the coast to/from Shrewsbury were better than today (six UP & seven DOWN) and there were even a number of decent connections between Aberystwyth and the coast line and vice versa but not starting till mid morning. There was an arrival in Aberystwyth at 0846 from Machynlleth, much the same as today, but no commuter timed service into Shrewsbury, the nearest being an 0928 arrival. Connections at Shrewsbury is an unknown as the information is not available.

Some things have improved such as journey times; the first train of the day from Aberystwyth being run all week; and the last train from Shrewsbury being 2200 now. The last train from Aberystwyth to Shrewsbury is 35 minutes later and there are some workings from Aberystwyth to Machynlleth up to midnight now. However this has to be weighed against the poor state of connections to/from the coast line, the absence of any westbound early morning service, and slightly fewer trains running the full length of the line. There is of course no freight, parcel or mail traffic now.

I will leave the intricacies of the coast line for another occasion, those with access to the web can view the timetable in all its glory on www.2d53.co.uk

If any older readers could shed some light on any of the workings mentioned please do so.

Useful Addresses

Wales & Borders Trains:

WB4, Brunel House, 2 Fitzalan Road, Cardiff CF24 0SU

Tel 0845 6061 660

Email: customer.services@walesandborderstrains.co.uk

RPC Wales:

Secretary, St. David's House, Wood Street, Cardiff CF10 1ES

Networkrail:

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

The Association of Train Operating Companies:

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

Central Trains Limited

Central Trains Limited, PO Box 4323, Birmingham B2 4JB

Tel. 0121 654 1200

Virgin Trains

Virgin Trains, Customer Relations, PO Box 713, Birmingham, B5 4HH

Tel. 0870 789 1234

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



Machynlleth Station: the new indicator on the up platform.

SARPA: www.shrewsbury-to-Aberystwyth.org.uk

SARPA MONTHLY MEETINGS. 2003

We meet on a monthly basis in public and occasionally have guest speakers. We will be inviting the candidates for the forthcoming Assembly elections from all the parties to our March and April meetings.

All are welcome please come along and discuss your concerns with the committee and other members.

The venues and times are as follows: we meet where access by rail is practical.

September	Saturday 6 th Also AGM	Wynnstay Hotel (Lloyd George Function Room)	Machynlleth	1315
October	Tuesday 7 th	Pinewood Tavern (Upstairs Function Room)	Welshpool	1915
November	Tuesday 4 th	Bell Hotel (Downstairs Function Room)	Newtown	1900
December	Saturday 6 th	Cambrian Hotel (Upstairs Function Room)	Aberystwyth	1130

Contributions from people who can't attend are more than welcome.

OFFICERS OF THE ASSOCIATION

The current officers for the Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Rail Passenger Association (SARPA) are as follows:

Chairman: Gareth Marston: 64 Churchill Drive,
Barnfields, Newtown, Powys SY16 2LH. 01686-
625716. E-mail: gareth.marston@btopenworld.com

Treasurer: Ivor Morris: 2 Dingle Rd, Welshpool,
Powys.SY21 7QB. 01938-554463

Newsletter Editor: Denis Bates, 86 Maesceinion,
Waun Fawr, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion SY23 3QQ. Tel.
01970-617667. E-mail deb@aber.ac.uk

Shrewsbury Rail Users Federation Representative:
Roger Goodhew: 12 Granville St, Shrewsbury, Shrop-
shire. SY3 8NE. Tel. 01743 358873.

I / we would like to join SARPA/ renew our membership for 2003.
Please delete as appropriate.

Name(s):

Address:

Telephone:

Email address:

Please cut out and send to:

SARPA Membership c/o Ivor Morris: 2 Dingle Rd, Welshpool, Powys.SY21
7QB.