

Shrewsbury
Aberystwyth
Rail
Passengers'
Association



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Arriva Trains Wales/Trenau Arriva Cymru
Steam Returns to the Cambrian
Trenau Stêm yn ôl ar y Cambrian
Summer 2006/Yr Haf 2006

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CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

The Cambrian main line is now the worst performing line in the whole of the UK, which makes me angry as there is no real need for it to be. The true level of poor performance is somewhat masked as the official performance figures for Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth are lumped in with all the services/routes that were transferred from Central Trains in October 2001. Observations I collated for the first 4 weeks of the summer timetable would indicate that out of the sample, which was statistically reasonable, Arriva only managed to run the service as advertised i.e. 8 trains each way Aberystwyth to Birmingham within 10 minutes of schedule on 5 days. A truly awful record. Monthly season ticket holders renewing at Newtown at the start of July got an extra 10 days free travel as compensation.

Travelling back from Cardiff on the 21st June I was approached by train crew shortly after leaving Shrewsbury and asked to speak to a passenger and see what I could do to help. I talked to a man from Borth, he had been caught up in the failure of the units to get up Talerddig in the hot weather: as a result he was 2 hours late into Birmingham International resulting in him missing his flight to Helsinki. As it was an important business trip he managed to book another flight, but from Heathrow at further expense including another train fare and overnight hotel. To rub salt in his wounds on his return he got charged an excess fare of £55 by a Virgin conductor on leaving Euston as his ticket bought at Birmingham International was not valid in the peak; his plea that he was actually travelling to Borth and would normally have the right type of ticket had he actually planned to travel via London fell on deaf ears. I pointed him in the right direction for ATW's Customer Service people and pledged SARPA's full support if he failed to get any joy. At the time I write this (15th July) I have not heard any further.

I hear on the jungle drums that ATW's senior management are in a bit of a blue funk about the Cambrian and its performance, and are in despair as technically they are in constant breach of the franchise agreement and are worried that they'll get a huge slap on the wrists from the Assembly, and, heaven forbid, may be fined - so there won't be so much candy to send the shareholders in Leeds. I'm afraid I have little sympathy: it's no secret within the rail industry that ATW maintenance regimes for its Class 158's are the poorest across the UK, and despite the "wrong type of pollen" excuse it's significant that the other six TOC's that use 158's had no problems with them in the hot weather. Arriva "outsource" their maintenance in an attempt to save cost, or should I say boost shareholder profit, yet another case of two fingers to the passenger whilst someone laughs on the way to the bank.

Perhaps an area where I have a slight amount of sympathy is the trying to run a two hourly timetable based on tight turnarounds at both ends and the constraints in the Stour valley and the missing loops. BR & Central Trains never relied on an Aberystwyth bound service being dependent on an on time arrival from Aberystwyth for its unit - they always came through from elsewhere or had robust turnaround times. Of course nobody at the top who created the Wales and Border franchise thought about this did they? Another explanation from ATW or WAG pointing this out is not what is wanted but a resolution. We live in hope?

I was somewhat surprised when working in Cardiff recently that I ended up in the same office block as the old Rail Passenger Committee Wales office which got the chop exactly a year ago. The signage on the stairs still proclaimed its existence, which reminded me about an SRA apparatchik that used to be sent to the RPC Wales public meetings and regularly turned bright red as she tried to defend the indefensible. Her

behind the scenes contributions which to be fair from some TOC members could be useful and productive consisted of moaning that there would never be a business case for anything. If anybody was wondering what happened to old SRA employees when it was washed away here's a cautionary tale the franchise manager for Wales and Borders at DfT Rail Group is the one and same person. Explains a lot doesn't it!

Gareth Marston
Newtown July 2006

NEWS IN BRIEF

Steam Specials

Steam specials this year will be running during most of August. The loco, BR 76079, and carriages, will be provided by the West Coast Railway Company. Trains will run between the 30th July and the 28th August, on Sundays departing Aberystwyth for Barmouth at 11.40, and on Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays departing Machynlleth for Porthmadog at 10.05. Brochures are available from stations and other outlets; tickets can be booked from Arriva Trains booking offices or by ringing 0870 428 4077. Through tickets from both Cambrian line stations, and Cardiff Central - Shrewsbury - Chester - Crewe - Birmingham New Street inclusive.

Diesel Special

On 31st March, West Coast Rail operated a Peterborough to Aberystwyth charter for Railtourer. The 11 coach train was hauled by 33 class locos 33029 and 33207.

Travel Art Project

Arriva Trains Wales has just won a top award: the Arts and Business Cymru Award 2006, for their sponsorship of a community art project led by Aberystwyth Arts Centre. On the project (see Newsletter 33 Children from Taliesin went on a train journey with a difference - in their very own moving art studio. Their trip was to Birmingham, there to meet with children from the Small Heath area to share their experiences of life and travel, and discuss the similarities and differences between rural and urban life. On the way, the children created art work reflecting the surroundings that they travelled through.

The project was organised by Catrin Webster, of Aberystwyth Arts Centre, and sponsored by Christine Hughes of Barclays Bank, Tony Donovan of Arriva Trains and Tia Jones of the Arts Centre.

The artwork is now to be exhibited on billboards at Arriva stations along the route, so look out for a splash of colour.

New Managing Director of Arriva Trains Wales (from the South Wales Echo)

Bob Holland has been appointed managing director of Arriva Trains Wales replacing Graeme Bunker with immediate effect. Mr Holland, 55, joined the company in 1999 with responsibility for overseeing and developing Arriva's mainland European operations. Before moving to Arriva, he was divisional director for First Group's South West and Wales bus operations.

The unexpected departure of Mr Bunker — he took up the post in April last year — prompted a spokesman from Arriva to comment: "Graeme Bunker has decided to leave the business with immediate effect. He leaves by mutual consent." The Arriva spokesman told the South Wales Echo: "The company is not in any financial difficulties. It will continue to deliver the services set out in the franchise agreement with the Welsh Assembly Government."

Cambrian Coast trains (from the Caernarfon Herald)

The Cambrian Coast railway line will have one extra train daily from July.

Delegates attending the half yearly Cambrian Coast Railway Liaison Conference at Porthmadog were told the good news at the weekend. Arriva Trains Wales official Ben Davies told delegates of his delight that the line, between Pwllheli and Machynlleth, will have a two hourly train service from July 24 onwards.

Mr Davies added: "We are very fortunate that all our services between Machynlleth and Pwllheli reach performance targets, and this is naturally good news for all those involved, and I only wish I could say that for the Aberystwyth to Shrewsbury service, which, unfortunately suffers delays, and causes disruption at times."

"Our new time table, effective from July 24, is quite positive, enabling us to look to the future with confidence. We are aiming for an hourly service from Aberystwyth to Birmingham, and I wish to get the message over to the travelling public that the Cambrian Line from Pwllheli and Aberystwyth to Shrewsbury and Birmingham is as important to us as any other line elsewhere in the UK. There is a tremendous amount of investment worth some £1.5m going into the depot in Machynlleth and we are also aiming to improve our stations along the Cambrian Coast, hope-fully persuading local groups to adopt stations."

Promoting the Line

ArrivaTrains Wales has appointed Communiqué 360 to create a campaign promoting train travel as a fun and value for money option. The train operating company, a division of Arriva, began the hunt for an agency for the project in December last year. The pitch was overseen by head of marketing Gillian Bell. She said: "We were very impressed not only by the creative element of Communiqué 360's tender but by its pre-and-post campaign evaluation processes, which will enable us to maintain a firm research-based, quantifiable approach to marketing spend."

Birmingham New St

Communication of Wolverhampton turnarounds continues to be patchy at best with many people reporting non existent announcements from the Network Rail managed station.

Wolverhampton

The Low Level station which some feel should be reopened to cope with rail congestion and ever increasing demand has at last succumbed to property developers as a retail/leisure complex. The GWR station closed to passengers in 1972 but was kept on as a parcels depot until the early 80's, there then followed an abortive attempt at creating a rail museum on the site and two decades of dereliction.

The Great Western Pub on Sun St opposite the gates to the old Low Level station remains one of the top Real Ale and food pubs in the UK according to the Campaign for Real Ale. – access by turning right out of the exit from Wolverhampton station and go underneath the railway by tunnel arriving outside the old low level station turn right and walk past approximately 5 minutes. Railway memorabilia accompany the Holden and Batham's ales and the house speciality is roast meat rolls. Useful if stuck or worth a visit in its own right. Hours 11 to 11 Monday to Saturday.

Cosford

Sunday 11th June 2006 will go down as the great Cosford air show disaster. In an apparent return to running a railway for the public good ATW had advertised that all Sunday trains and extra services would call at the Shropshire station to cater for the air show, hundreds of passengers turned up to find no trains and no information. ATW blamed "staff shortages" many people talked of basic competence issues instead.

Shrewsbury

A coffee/sandwich kiosk has appeared at the north end of platform 4. The ticket gates appear to be working well but are noticeably not manned in the evening.

Newtown

Café Loco Newtown has reopened under new management with a plan to open 8 to 11 everyday.

There has been some tweaking to the Traws Cambria 704 service times to Brecon. It still only connects to/from the Welshpool/Shrewsbury direction.

Mick Bates AM turned up on the morning of the 24th June to see the 1042 departure to Birmingham. The Montgomeryshire AM's correspondence had been clogged up with complainants about overcrowding on the 0932 ex Aberystwyth. Mick didn't get to see this as the 3rd Saturday of the summer timetable saw the service formed of 4 cars, however he rode to Welshpool meeting passengers accompanied by a small delegation from SARPA.

Caersws

The crossing keeper's casserole dish came to the rescue on more than one occasion during Arriva's hot weather problems in carrying water to top the coolant up on trains.

Machynlleth

A date of February 2007 has been given for the opening of the beefed up depot, this seems to fall in line with the date that Trans Pennine Express will have a complete fleet of Class 185 DMU's releasing its Class 175's to Arriva. However the release of the additional Class 175's will see no increase in ATW's overall fleet size as 11 Class 158's will be sent back off lease.

Borth

Local school children have become involved in the station adoption team with proposals to paint murals in the passageway between the platform and the entrance.

Aberystwyth

Folk on Alexandra road were forgiven for thinking that Arriva had introduced a new customer service compensation regime when a man shouted “who wants free money” and scattered an alleged £20,000.00 in £20 notes on the Zebra crossing on Alexandra Road just outside the station on June 20th. Police later arrested a man for motor traffic offences in Aberaeron and appealed for the money to be handed in. The man was later reported to be receiving “medical care”.

Cardiff Bay

The Assembly Committee on Improved Rail services duly delivered its report, which included a commitment to delivering an hourly service on our line as one of eight priorities across Wales. Whether this opposition dominated committee will force the intransigent minority Labour administration into action remains a big question mark.

Stop Press

A meeting in Shrewsbury on the 18th July will see the launch of the Welsh Assembly Governments study into the feasibility of introducing an hourly service between Shrews-

What does ATW really stand for?

The much missed Great Western Railway was sometimes referred to as “God’s Wonderful Railway”. However this was not always the case, up until it built its so called “cut off” routes to the West Midlands and the West Country approximately 100 years ago the initials GWR were understood by many to mean “Great Way Round”.

Now Arriva Trains Wales initials ATW have exercised a similar search for an alternative. Listed below are a number heard up and down the line: you may surmise that Arriva’s awful reputation in Mid Wales and Shropshire is the driving force behind them.

The top ten are:

Always Terminates Wolverhampton
 Another Tedious Wait
 Arrives Talerddig Wheezing
 Another Terrible Weekday
 Another Terrible Weekend
 Arrives Telford Whenever
 Aberystwyth’s Transport Wally
 Arduous Trail Waiting
 Altogether Terrible Waste
 Aberystwyth To Wolverhampton

Summer of rail problems ahead in Mid Wales and Shropshire

Press Release from SARPA 4th June

Mid Wales rail user group SARPA today (4th June 2006) warns of a summer of problems ahead on the rail network in Mid Wales and Shropshire following the introduction of the summer timetable on the 11th June 2006.

"The start of the summer timetable will see lengthened journey times to Aberystwyth, no Sunday service at all between Shrewsbury and Wolverhampton and increased overcrowding" said a SARPA spokesman."

- Arriva Trains Wales have opted to increase journey time between Newtown and Aberystwyth by 7 minutes in a desperate attempt to solve the punctuality problems that have bedeviled its running of the franchise on the Aberystwyth to Birmingham line.
- Network Rail have insisted on complete closure of the Shrewsbury to Wolverhampton section of the line for the duration of the summer timetable on Sundays in order to carry out signal upgrading work that is years overdue.
- Nothing has been done to address the chronic rolling stock shortage within the Wales and Border franchise and the situation is exacerbated by the overrunning of engineering work between Crewe and Stockport which means diverted Manchester to Cardiff services require more rolling stock to operate that timetable drawing resources from elsewhere.
- A combination of service cuts and a timetable recast for Central Trains between Shrewsbury and Birmingham prompted by the DfT mean that Shropshire rail users will be forced into using already crowded Arriva Trains Wales services as alternatives have been taken away.

"This situation is clearly unacceptable to all and action is needed to address various problems. It is totally ridiculous that the railway does not operate properly on Sundays which are one of the busiest day for the Cambrian lines, and many users travel from beyond Shrewsbury they will be hit particularly badly.

SARPA is calling for a proper solution to punctuality problems not extended journey times, an urgent rethink of the timetable between Shrewsbury and Birmingham and more rolling stock resources.

Arriva have talked a good railway over the last 30 months but experience on the rails proves otherwise we hope that their new Managing Director Mr. Holland heeds the lesson that action not words are needed".

SARPA to TraCC on Park and Ride scheme for Dyfi Junction

TraCC's submission to the Assembly's RIPS Committee mentioned that there is consideration of creating a "Park & Ride" facility at Dyfi Junction possibly in conjunction with the A487 Dyfi bends scheme.

This was discussed at our meeting in Aberystwyth today and the consensus was that there were grave concerns over the viability of such a scheme at this location and that efforts to improve and upgrade car parking facilities should be concentrated at Machynlleth.

The prime concern was that the area around Dyfi Junction is a well known flooding area, the high tide this last week has only served to confirm the thoughts of those that know the area. On Thursday the Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth line was blocked at Dyfi Junction as the high tide caused flooding. Again today the Dyfi was perilously close to flooding the line and there was water standing in between the track on the coast platform.

As you know the station at Dyfi Junction is some half a mile from the main road at the site of the old Glandovey station with no other access, a car park here would prove unattractive to all but a few as the long unprotected walk to the station would be a deterrent. Building an access road and car park at the station would be a costly affair especially one that was raised up so as to be (relatively) immune to the effects of flooding. The sum would be better spent on restoring passing loops to increase line capacity and improve punctuality.

We feel that car users haven't driven past Machynlleth would continue to drive all the way to Aberystwyth. For example a hypothetical journey from Llanbrynmair to Aberystwyth. The driver would perceive to be more than half way there and the psychological effect of "doubling back" to access Dyfi Junction may be a significant barrier.

Machynlleth would be a better choice to improve car parking facilities which are already overstretched.

- The parking in front of the station entrance from the station drive is already full most days. Lack of car parking is a strong barrier to growing rail use.
- Machynlleth would not be seen as being close to Aberystwyth so may be more attractive to stop and change modes at.
- Space could be found in the Dyfi Valley Eco park- whose units are not all occupied.
- A field exists on the other side of the A487 to the Eco Park which could prove suitable.
- Access to the UP platform and possibly alongside the A487 under the bridge would have to be upgraded.
- The scheme could be combined with making pull ins for the local and Traws Cambria bus services so as to improve integration.

Gareth Marston
Chairman, SARPA

Welsh Transport Statistics 2005 – Chapter 9: Rail Transport

- There were approximately 19.9 million rail passenger journeys which either started or ended in Wales in 2004-05, an increase of 2 per cent compared to the previous year. Around two-thirds (66 per cent) of these journeys were within Wales.
- During 2004-05, Cardiff was the destination of almost two-fifths (39 per cent) of rail passenger journeys within Wales. Rhondda, Cynon, Taff and The Vale of Glamorgan accounted for a further 14 per cent and 8 per cent respectively.
- There were 42 train incidents in 2005, similar to the number in the previous year (43). Half of these incidents (21) were due to fires.
- There were 10 potentially high risk train accidents in 2005. 7 of these were due to derailments.
- In 2005 there were 11 railway fatalities, all of whom were trespassers.
- There were over 1,900 notifiable offences reported on the railways in Wales in 2004-05, a decrease of 3 per cent compared to the previous year.
- In 2004-05 27 per cent of notifiable offences reported involved theft of passenger property. Criminal damage/ malicious mischief, violence against the person and motor vehicle/cycle offences accounted for 14 per cent, 12 per cent and 11 per cent respectively of notifiable offences reported.

The answer to the photo below.

It's the maker's plate on the buffer stops at Aberystwyth.



THE VIEW FROM MILEPOST 62

with Brigadier John Faviell

A sorry state of affairs have passed by especially in early/mid June. It's amazed me how some of those units restarted given the gradients where they failed. Which brings me on to this issue's rant - yes those blasted ROSCO's! What a waste of space they are!

Apparently chums in government – old government in London you know- have asked these ROSCO chaps to tone down their leasing charges especially for old BR stock like the Class 158's on our line. However the mercenary scum at the ROSCO's won't play ball – never trust a banker, a chum of mine told me, and how right he was! They're digging their heels in and spinning the line that not all the lease charges are that high: in fact a high proportion of them are for heavy maintenance. Apparently just over half the £250K for a Class 158 is actually for heavy maintenance.

Have you seen one of our 158's maintained, let alone heavily maintained! Who are you kidding Mr ROSCO! It's obvious to everyone and their blind aunt that the units on our line are in desperate need of a mid life refit. Some nearly ten years into privatisation the ROSCO's have allegedly had around a £ million per unit to spend on maintenance, so why haven't they:

Replaced the toilets which have been poor since built?
 Made the PA system audible?
 Deep cleaned the vestibule areas?
 Re-carpeted, and re-seated the passenger saloon on the ex CT units?
 Make the air conditioning work properly?
 Provide internal doors that don't jam or open slowly?

And so on and so forth. An answer from the ROSCO's by next issue? Apparently the ones who "own" our 158's are called Angel.

"They don't like it up 'em!", Corporal Jones used to say, and the same is true today. Having gained responsibility over rail in April the post bag and email inbox at Transport Wales and in Andrew Davies's office has not relented, especially about the Cambrian and they can no longer pass the buck. Which has resulted in them giving Arriva a bit of kick. The real solution of course is not having Arriva running the franchise on its current terms and conditions. How the current franchise sits with the high words and expectations of the Assembly's' Draft Consultation for its 25 year Transport plan is a bit of a mystery. Well lets face it, it doesn't!

The one big thing that comes out is Wales's overdependence on motor vehicles and we're not exactly the richest part of Europe either. 76% of our transport budget is spent on roads and we travel more than in other parts of the UK. Crises in the Middle East and knock on effects on oil prices are sure things to damage our fragile economy. A radical rethink and proper use of our rail network is desperately needed. A consultation that has a deadline in October for responses and god knows how long after that before it reports remains an anathema to what's needed and should have been done yesterday. Another New Labour fudge.

Seen at Salop...

We trust it's only invisible rubbish that's now deposited in the invisible bin.
A beautifully restored GWR waiting bench on Platform 3. What does the plaque say?

Two for the price of one. The replica Lartigue monorail at Listowel, Ireland.



Holland gives first interviews: Western Mail June 10th and 14th

June 10th

Rail passengers in Mid Wales may have to wait two or three years for a reliable service, the new boss of Arriva Trains Wales has warned.

In his first major media interview since becoming ATW's chief executive last month, Bob Holland admitted the Cambrian Line, linking Aberystwyth to Shrewsbury and Birmingham, was "a difficult route".

Trains delayed by railway congestion in the Birmingham area were disrupting timetables in Wales - where there is just one track for both directions. But Mr Holland said he was pleased with ATW's improving overall punctuality since it introduced a new standard pattern timetable in December, giving most routes an easy-to-remember pattern of services every hour, two hours or half-hour.

From tomorrow, seven or eight minutes will be added to journey times between Shrewsbury and Aberystwyth in an attempt to reduce delays.

Mr Holland said Aberystwyth trains were being delayed in Birmingham and Wolverhampton and later holding up eastbound trains on the single line, which has limited passing places, through Welshpool and Machynlleth. "It's a difficult route. The long-term solution is working with Network Rail over the next two to three years," he said. "In the meantime it's always going to be difficult to maintain the reliability that we want."

June 14th

The new managing director of Arriva Trains Wales says he wanted the job because of the challenge posed by rapidly growing passenger numbers. For the last few years local trains in Wales have struggled to cope with rising demand because their subsidy and resources are designed around much slower growth.

Many managers might be turned off by the constant uphill struggle of trying to meet the expectations of passengers, and of politicians who want the trains to relieve pressure on the roads. One option under consideration elsewhere in Britain is to raise peak commuting fares and reduce fares either side of the morning and evening peaks, to encourage more people to vary their working hours and commute when there are spare seats on the trains.

But Bob Holland, who previously managed Arriva's bus and rail operations in southern Europe, ruled out any attempts to stem the growth in demand for train travel in Wales. "The excitement, and the challenge, of coming in to do this job is that it's about moving forward and growing. I'm not really interested in being in a business that's in decline. It's a good business and it's going to get better."

He said Arriva's partnership with the Welsh Assembly Government was critical to the development of his company's 15-year franchise, which started in December 2003.

Proposals for new trains for the Valley Lines, to replace unsuitable and unreliable Pacer trains, would be taken to the WAG when Arriva had a clearer idea of the costs involved. Demand for local travel in South Wales has grown as a result of Cardiff's booming economy, but ATW is seeing growing passenger numbers in other areas of its network too. Six months ago it introduced a user-friendly timetable for all routes except the Cambrian lines in Mid Wales. Last month the Cambrian lines were the only ATW services where more than one in 10 trains was late.

The North Wales main line was the star performer, with 96% of trains arriving within five minutes of advertised times, while 92.1% of Valley Lines trains were also on time. Mr Holland said the new timetable was attracting more people to the trains.

"It's a much-improved timetable," said Mr Holland. "Our reliability has improved and the frequency of complaints has reduced as a direct result."

The new two-hourly service between Holyhead and Cardiff via Wrexham was generating unexpected new journeys between intermediate points, such as Rhosneigr to Hereford. "It's clear that we've got growth in passengers right across the network, particularly since the standard pattern timetable was introduced," said Mr Holland.

He has previously been involved with Arriva's rail franchises in Denmark and the Netherlands, where franchise contracts are structured differently from in Britain. But he said ATW was similar to those overseas franchises in that its development depended on productive partnerships with regional and local government.

Marches Evening Rover Ticket

A new Marches Evening Rover ticket is now available and on sale. Valid between Hereford and Shrewsbury and all intermediate stations. Price £6:50 adult, £3:25 child.

Ideal for an evening walk, a night out or a few beers here and there! (although perhaps not the child fares for the few beers!!!). Leave the car at home !!



No.7803 *Barcote Manor*, with the down Cambrian Coast Express at Welshpool.

HOT AND BOTHERED

The SAGA of the wrong sort of pollen and 158 asthma

June 12th From Gareth Marston to Ceri Davies

I write formally on behalf of my association in relation to the appalling level of service being experienced on the Cambrian lines west of Shrewsbury and on ATW services running from the Cambrian into the West Midlands on Aberystwyth to Birmingham New St diagrams.

In particular:

- Arriva Trains Wales new Managing Director Mr Holland has made comments quoted in the Western Mail on the 9th June that it would take 2 to 3 years to sort out the current punctuality problems on the Birmingham to Aberystwyth route. Services fail to run through the full length of the line many passengers are stranded because of this mainly due to terminating short at Wolverhampton instead of Birmingham to regain paths. The basic timetable on the Cambrian was not altered by ATW's new SPT in December 05 but carried on its previous format that is roughly the same as what Regional Railways , Central Trains and Wales & Border Trains operated before- without the level of ATW's problems.
- One service in particular has a dire level of performance - the 0633 Birmingham New St to Aberystwyth. Last week (w/c 2nd June) of the six days it should have ran, it was totally cancelled once, was terminated short at Machynlletth three times due to late running and only reached Aberystwyth twice.
- The recent hot weather has seen the units operated by ATW on the Cambrian - Class 158 DMU's failing to climb inclines as their engines overheat. There have been cases of services failing on Talerddig bank between Machynlletth and Caersws galore. Reliable sources tell our Association that the engine filters are not sufficiently maintained by ATW and that regular cleaning of them prevents this problem. This type of unit the Class 158 is operated by many other TOC's UK wide none of whom have experienced the problems suffered by ATW.

ATW have been described as the worst TOC in the UK and the Cambrian as its most neglected line. The words competence are often used in conjunction with ATW. ATW recently sang the praises of the reopened Vale of Glamorgan line pointing to 225K passenger journeys in its first year. The Cambrian sees 6 times that many.

In the Assembly's opinion why are we the poor relation?

Thursday, June 15, from Mike Bagshaw, Performance and Planning Director, Arriva Trains Wales

Firstly, my apologies for delay in replying. I received your email on return from my leave and it has taken me a while to catch up with a backlog of correspondence.

We have certainly had a difficult period on the Cambrian route over the last couple of weeks. As you are aware the 158 fleet is susceptible to problems when we have a combination of high temperatures, pollen and demanding gradients on routes such as the Cambrian.

To explain a little of the detail, the class 158 engine cooling system has a radiator that is specifically designed for hot conditions. This has been optimised over the years taking into account nationwide experience. However we experienced additional difficulties, when general dirt, coupled with vegetation that has expelled pollen over a short period of time, ends up being sucked into the radiators cooling fins by the fan drawing air across. This acts in a similar way to a vacuum cleaner collecting dust.

Unfortunately the pollen and dirt does not get pulled through the radiator but sticks to the cooling fins reducing the air flow and hence the efficiency. This results in the engine coolant temperature increasing which causes the engine to shut down to idling speed which maintains adequate coolant flow until the engine temperature reduces.

We completed a number of pre-summer radiator cleaning programs in readiness for the pollen season, following similar experience in previous years and we are therefore frustrated that the problem has again materialised and resulted in disruption to services. We also have an on-going program that is running 24/7 at our maintenance locations, to clear the radiators. We are also paying particular attention on the troublesome units and attempting to keep them away from the Cambrian route where possible.

Going forward, the focus is on getting through the remainder of this year's pollen season and ensuring appropriate actions are in place to limit the problem next year. In terms of having a dedicated 158 Cambrian fleet, this project is on track for February 2007 when the new depot is due to open at Machynlleth.

I am also pleased to say that Network Rail have assured us that the long awaited line speed improvements between Machynlleth and Sutton bridge are due for completion for the end of this month. This will make the timetable slightly more robust over the critical single line sections of the route.

Thanks for the feed back and please accept my apologies for our disappointing performance over recent weeks.

Sunday 18 June from Tony Burton

Yes, I was on the Birmingham train on Friday. The train had left Caersws 40 minutes late, after reportedly having had to stop more than once on the climb to Talerddig on what I thought was only a moderately hot day.

We arrived at Shrewsbury at 1615 and then the train just sat in the platform without a driver. At 1640 we were all turfed off into the Central Trains 1642 stopper, which was only 2 carriages and, of course, was extremely crowded. Standing room only all the way. A large crowd of passengers waiting to board at Telford. [I do not know what had happened to the ATW train from Chester departing Shrewsbury at 1624, which we ought to have been able to transfer to - I did not see it at Shrewsbury.] We arrived at Birmingham New St at about 6 pm, 1hr 45 mins late. My train on to Rugby was a stopper, and was itself late, whereas my intended train had been fast, so I arrived at Rugby 2 hrs late.

Sunday June 18th: from John Wildig

Adding my little bit on Friday's appalling day.

Wife and I were on the 0732 ex Aber to visit Gardeners World at NEC. At Aber, the driver told me that we were taking a big chance going at all with the 2 car unit on the service. Needless to say both engines overheated and cut out just before top of the bank . Eventually we restarted and crossed the 0630 whatever ex-Birmingham in the loop. Next problem was Welshpool where doors would not close and after a good kick we got off again . More delays in Salop whilst the fitter put the door out of use and we set off with a very full load for Birmingham . Eventually as we passed Cosford announcement made that service was terminating at Wolves where we arrived at the time the return working should have been leaving New Street. Of course all services into New Street were well and truly full !!!

Return was horrendous.

We always now take first train available for Wolves/ Salop or Chester; so we joined a 2 car CT 170 for Salop due off New Street at 1753. By 1745, conductor asking for Wolverhampton passengers to get off and join the following Virgin service----none did. We eventually set off close to 1800 with a grossly overloaded train and a couple with a baby in a pushchair had to get pushchair off at every station to Wellington such was the load. Conductor did mutter about Arriva Trains Wales cancellations being a reason for the overcrowding.

Arrival at Salop around 1910 saw the 1532 ex-Aber which forms the 1833 ex-New Street sitting in the bay 5!!!-----i.e. it had been an hour late into Salop and had terminated there. According to the driver the same had taken place with the 1332 ex-Aber. Train left Salop slightly late for Aber but was less than half full as the CT service we were on was the only arrival from Wolves and one has to assume that a hell of a lot of passengers were simply left stranded in both New Street and Wolves. Arrival at Talerddig saw us waiting yet again for the 1932 ex-Aber which was struggling up the bank.

Arriva drivers and Conductors are thoroughly cheesed off with the situation and see no end in sight of the problem ----one said their advice is to raise it with AMs and get political pressure on Arriva which will either see the Franchise removed from Arriva or some improvement

HAVING EXPERIENCED, FRIDAY YESTERDAY ---Saturday---MUST HAVE BEEN ABSOLUTELY AWFUL

SARPA and us as individuals need to continually highlight the lamentable failures of Arriva to deal with a problem which a couple of years ago did not exist when the Cambrian Fleet of dedicated 158's all had thermostats adjusted so that even when the train was standing with engines running the cooling system was running flat out.

Ordinary passengers and everyone of us as tax payers are being ripped off by Arriva incompetence. Gareth Marston and I will remember when as RPC members we went round Canton to see how their then chief fleet engineer intended to deal with poor 158 availability and reliability -----I presume he no longer works for Arriva !!!!
Temperatures, driver shortages, pollen , doors ----what next?????

Monday 19th June, from Ian Ball

Further to the various messages detailing problems of the past days I have shown the apologetic letter from Tony O' Donovan to various people in the industry and received the following comments (I am intentionally avoiding attribution of these comments as they are all from 'insiders' involved in the railway in some capacity).

The comments fit well with other comments made in recent emails

- Disappointing performance (quote from letter) actually it is diabolical.
- The units are not being serviced properly, and too many poor units were diagrammed for the line.
- Arriva elected not to have a dedicated fleet by moving the servicing from Tyseley to Cardiff, where it will remain even when Machynlleth is able to perform more work.
- The Cambrian line always appears to be bottom of Arriva's priorities.
- Management disappear around 16.00hrs on a Friday till Monday mornings & last weekend (10th/11th June) left no train plan in place, and a "control" who do not appear to fully understand the Cambrian. If it wasn't for the efforts of the local staff the system would fall apart completely.
- The new MD had to be goaded by adverse press reports to issue a weak apology, & appears not to have offered commiserations etc to the staff who had to endure the brunt of passenger's criticism and frustration.
- The Cambrian line needs a new operator who is openly committed to operating a service, not just a franchise holder.

July 3rd, from Gareth Marston to Ceri Davies

Subject: Re: ATW performance on the Cambrian lines

Without beating about the bush a lot of our members have seen the reply beneath and there's a general feeling that WAG is apparently unaware of the true nature of the problems on the Cambrian at the moment. Your reply contains several passages that with all due respect appear to have originated from ATW themselves given the wording and content which look familiar from replies seen from ATW elsewhere.

We know all about the "background issues" and have done so for donkeys years- it's getting something done about is what were after. Today sees another disaster day on the Cambrian from ATW. The 1522 arrival into Aberystwyth is shown as running 45 minutes late on their website and the next service after that as cancelled, with the corresponding return workings to Birmingham similarly effected as a result. Both return workings (1532 & 1732 ex-Aberystwyth) could have been my train home from work - if I had worked from the office today.

Many feared this as soon as the temperatures rose again where ATW have been unable to provide rolling stock that can climb the gradients on the Cambrian in hot temperatures. The official excuse is pollen and high temperatures causing the engine filters to clog. However this has never happened before on the Cambrian under Wales

and Borders Trains, Central Trains and BR ownership using the same class of unit - the Class 158.

Enquiries to other TOC's using the same type of unit reveal that none of the other TOC's using the Class 158/159 units First ScotRail, Northern Rail, Trans Pennine Express, Central Trains, First Great Western, South West Trains have experienced ATW's problem of getting units uphill in high temperatures with pollen present. Indeed one telling comment from a TOC Fleet Manager who will remain anonymous is "its no surprise given ATW's (lack of) maintenance".

The staff on the Cambrian will all too readily tell you that ATW in Cardiff do not maintain their rolling stock adequately. Given that ATW pay Angel leasing fees of £250,000 per annum which the ROSCO's are at great pains to claim that 50% of which is maintenance, it may be a pertinent question to ask what exactly you get for £250K given the numerous other faults and problems seen on ATW's Class 158 fleet.

I look forward to your comments.

Monday, July 17, from Ceri Davies

Subject: FW: ATW performance on the Cambrian lines

Dear Mr Marston,

The problems the Cambrian line faces are indeed well documented and understood by the Welsh Assembly Government. We have continued dialogue with Arriva Trains Wales on the performance of this route.

The Welsh Assembly Government are of course keen to work with all partners to improve services and are aware of the problems encountered very recently with journeys made on the Cambrian route. However, whilst we are happy to be made aware of journey experiences you must raise your specific issues in the first instance directly with ATW and should you feel the response is unsatisfactory, with Passenger Focus.

In order to seek options for addressing the longer term issues you will be aware that the Assembly Government are sponsoring a Cambrian line study which I understand that you are also invited to provide views to. The Assembly has established the group to look at this route and the options available and we look forward to stakeholder input.

I am also pleased to advise that the Assembly Government are funding extra capacity on the Cambrian Coast services during the summer together with a hot spare based at Shrewsbury to assist with service operation.

I will also be attending the Passenger Focus event next Tuesday should you wish to have an informal discussion on any further issues.

Yours faithfully
Ceri Davies

Websites

We now have a new website, hosted by Angus Eickhoff:

<http://sarpa.info>

Other sites of interest:

Arriva Trains Wales

www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk/

National Rail Enquiries

www.nationalrail.co.uk/

Train and Bus Information Midlands

www.centro.org.uk/wwwroot/HomePage.asp

Central Trains

www.centraltrains.co.uk/

Virgin Trains

www.virgintrains.co.uk/default.aspx

Chiltern Railways

www.chilternrailways.co.uk/

Network Rail

www.networkrail.co.uk/

Railfuture/Railway Development Society

www.railfuture.org.uk/

Cambrian Rail Partnership

www.thecambrianline.co.uk/

The Association of Community Rail Partnerships (Acorp)

www.acorp.uk.com

It is the 200th Anniversary of Isambard Kingdom Brunel. His works in Wales are on these websites

www.ice.org.uk

www.swie.org.uk

Events are listed on the HERIAN website at

www/herian.org

and the Brunel website at

www.brunel200.com

SARPA Meeting dates and venues 2006

August	1 st	Tuesday 1845	Caersws	Red Lion
September	5 th	Tuesday 1900	Newtown	Bell Hotel
October	7 th	Saturday 1130	Welshpool	Raven Inn
AGM till 1400 followed by trip on Welshpool & Llanfair Railway.				
November	7 th	Tuesday 1900	Machynlleth	Railway Station
December	5 th	Tuesday 1900	Newtown	Bell Hotel

Useful addresses

Arriva Trains Wales:

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

Network Rail:

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

The Association of Train Operating Companies:

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

Central Trains Limited

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

Tel. 0121 654 1200

Association of Community Rail Partnerships

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

Virgin Trains

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

Tel. 0870 789 1234

Traveline Cymru for all public transport information

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

Ceri Davies, Rail Franchise Performance Manager

Rail and New Roads Division, Transport Wales, Welsh Assembly Government, Cathays Park, Cardiff.

Direct Line (029) 2082 6561

For Train Times and Fares Call:

08457 48 49 50 (24hrs)

0845 60 40 500 (Welsh Language Service)

0845 60 50 600 (Textphone)

For ticket reservations please call: 0870 9000 773

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