

Shrewsbury  
Aberystwyth  
Rail  
Passengers'  
Association



# Newsletter No. 49

February 2010



Newtown on Jan 13th. 158841 leading the 1009 ex Birmingham International. Photograph Gareth Marston.

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This is the quarterly newsletter of the Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Rail Passenger Association. Contributions are welcomed from members and non-members about the mid Wales rail scene.

Views expressed in it are those of contributors and not necessarily representative of the Association as a whole. Information provided is published in good faith, but the Association cannot accept responsibility for any loss or damage arising therefrom.

The Editor reserves the right to abridge or amend copy.

## **Subscription renewal**

As the membership year runs from January to December, subscriptions are now due. The membership fee is currently (for membership up to 31 December 2010) £7.00 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 lines future.
- Meet in public once a month.
- All members will receive our quarterly Newsletter free of charge.
- Members with access to e-mail can be included in our electronic network if they

so desire.

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

Please send cheques, payable to SARPA, to:

**SARPA Membership c/o Gareth Marston, 64 Churchill Drive, Barnfields, Newtown, Powys SY16 2LH.**

Make sure to include full name, address and telephone number and also e-mail address if you wish to become part of our electronic network.

## **Secretary and Treasurer**

These positions are currently vacant. If you wish to volunteer for either position, please contact the Chairman.

Do you have copies of the following issues of the Newsletter: 1, 3, 4, 5, all as CRUG newsletters? If so, we would like to copy them, to go into the Association archives. Please contact the Editor.

## Chairman's Message

Why should Rail User Groups like SARPA be listened too? Far from being a collection of mere rail enthusiasts wanting to create a vision that's inappropriate for a gently declining Victorian mode of transport we're actually the people that have got the big issues right over the last 20 years. Not just a boast - there's a growing mountain of evidence that shows this. We were the ones that said rail had a future as an expanding mode and that rail was relevant to the 21st Century. We were the ones that got expanding usage correct. We were the ones that said the "no growth" Wales and Borders franchise agreement had got it all wrong. Rail usage has continued to grow through the recession – much to the disappointment of some no doubt as predicted by us. We were saying fragmented ownership with no clear responsibilities was to the detriment of our stations long before the "station champions" official recognition of this. All the major political parties appear to be willing to fight the 2010 general election on a High Speed Rail network (in various forms) ticket that will massively boost UK's rail capacity if built. There's even an electrification programme taking shape, a so far unfulfilled promise of extra carriages and a Transport Secretary who in his earlier days was active in a RUG! A change from the days when I was given a "look here old chap" chat in a corner of a hotel bar by an official from the Strategic Rail Authority who made out that he was giving me an off the record heads up on the future. I didn't listen to him. Apparently their model showed rail use was to go into decline about 2003! We can't all live in a world where we pretend something won't happen as we don't want to face up to the decisions and choices that have to be made to accommodate it. The right decisions have to be made. The railways have a bright future as part of an economically and environmentally sustainable agenda.

Whilst there are now some plans for expansion/improvement about they seem small beer and far off compared to what's actually needed. For example specifying station standards in franchise agreements when they're let sounds great until you realise it will be December 2018 before the Wales and Border franchise is re let – that's nearly a decade off. The detail (and the carriages) of the extra carriages promised by Westminster Government are still to emerge and don't appear to include Wales. Any rolling stock cascades caused by electrification are still 6/7 years off. In the meantime a whole host of issues just won't go away. Have you noticed how clean and refreshed the Northern Rail trains are that Michael Portillo is travelling around on in his recent TV series following George Bradshaw? Compare this with Arriva's offerings - both franchises let on similar terms back in 2003.

Workington North, where a temporary station to help residents as road bridges were washed away in floods, has shown what can be done when the will is there. Positive thought and action, none of the no can do mentality, no talk of business cases, GRIP models, assessments, studies and the like. Funnily it hasn't cost £5 million either that's only if it's at Carno.....and electrification doesn't cost £8 million a mile either - well not since Lord Adonis got involved ,so why are Network Rail still quoting silly money to WAG for the Bidston line? Meryseyrail reckon they can do it for just over £2 million a mile. Already there's rumours that WAG are baulking at what NR are quoting to put the double track between Wrexham and Chester. There are no prizes for guessing what's going to happen in these post credit crunch budget constrained times to massively inflated cost schemes. Network Rail must quote realistically achievable costs not the cost of perfectly over engineering something.

Investment and improvements by their very nature can be medium to long term. How about here and now? Many of our members can see that so-called competition on the rails is clearly leading to a worse overall service than otherwise could be provided using the same assets. No more so than across North and Mid Wales and through Shropshire to Birmingham and on to London. For instance if Wrexham and Shropshire are handed the running of the current Birmingham International to Chester service many ATW units would be freed up to do other things. Clearly this involves some change for the better for the travelling public. The vested interests will no doubt scream and there will be a succession of insurmountable obstacles dreamt up to justify preserving the status quo. The railways should be about the future where cheap oil can no longer be guaranteed and economically and environmentally sustainable travel solutions are needed, not the narrow interests of here today gone tomorrow shareholders and owning groups.

RUG's like SARPA don't only have a better crystal ball, we have the can do mentality as well. Bureaucratic inertia may define other organisations but not us. If you genuinely want solutions, outcomes and planning for the future your local RUG has them. Why not give us a try?

Gareth Marston

Newtown, Montgomeryshire January 2010

## **News in Brief**

### **Class 97 activities**

On the night of 4th December 2009, 97304 "John Tiley" undertook ERTMS brake tests with 33025 "Glen Falloch" as a dead weight from Shrewsbury to Newtown and return, in order to measure the brake performance for any forthcoming railtour work the 97/3s may have to perform. Class 97 hauled test trains were run on the 23rd and 25th January reaching as far as Harlech overnight.

### **Aberdyfi/Aberdovey**

**The new** easier access ramp, or hump, was launched by Deputy First Minister, Minister for the Economy and Transport Ieuan Wyn Jones AM, in early December.

The initiative at Aberdovey is the latest in an on-going programme of improvements to infrastructure and services on the Cambrian railway network that have been delivered in partnership between the Welsh Assembly Government, Network Rail and Arriva Trains Wales. Aberdovey Railway Station has also recently benefited from a new shelter and a new travel information poster that provides localised information for onward travel from the station. Other stations on the Cambrian that have recently had new shelters include Tywyn and Welshpool and there are more earmarked. Twelve other stations on the Cambrian will also be provided with similar travel information posters as part of an initiative delivered by the Cambrian Railways Partnership.

### **Line Speed Improvements: Shrewsbury to Wolverhampton**

There is now a viable business case to support line speed increase on this stretch of line, and a funding contribution is available through the Regional Funding Allocation. Consequently, the design phase should proceed shortly, with a proposed implementation

timescale of late 2010/early2011. It is proposed to integrate delivery of the enhancement works with a programme of track renewals, to minimise disruption to train operators. The enhancement will raise the line speed from 70mph to 90mph between Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury over approximately 20 miles in the down direction (to Shrewsbury) and 23 miles in the up direction. This is because the speed increase will be applied where most benefit is to be gained (there are some sections where trains would not be able to reach 90mph anyway). [From Network Rail London North Western]

### **Refurbishment of units**

According to a report in *RAIL* magazine, "Wabtec Rail, Doncaster has refurbished Class 158's, 158 822 and 158 823. They are operated by Arriva Trains Wales". The report is misleading as it transpires this refers to their external repaint into Arriva colours and mechanical overhaul done in July 2009.

### **Marylebone**

Arriva Trains Wales formally submitted their application to run to Marylebone in October to a storm of protest from other operators, stakeholders and Members of Parliament. The Office of the Rail Regulator stepped up to the mark and has at the time of writing (mid January) sat on the application and made no public decision.

Wrexham and Shropshire have started to integrate their timetable more with Chilterns following their takeover. Four trains a day through to Wrexham have been restored and formations have been seen running with an extra carriage. An official launch of their new refurbished rolling stock took place. However connections to the Cambrian remain extremely poor.

### **Birmingham New St**

Visible progress of the upgrade work is now on show with demolition work on redundant buildings started.

The Department for Transport has confirmed that it is in discussion with Arriva Trains Wales about expanding capacity between Shrewsbury and Birmingham.

### **Shrewsbury**

An ATW poster on the station dated February 2009 proclaims that the station improvements works will take 48 wks to complete. As February 2010 approaches a lot remains to be completed.

### **Scruffy Stations.**

At last the penny has dropped that stations have had a raw deal out of privatisation with all the fragmented players copping out of looking after them as they'e not specified to do so. Government still believes franchising can be "made to work" and recommendations that TOC's are specified to maintain stations when franchises are let have been made.

### **Newtown**

Another Café called Fiero's Café has sprung up on the station this time at the Caersws end of the UP platform which was occupied by an IT firm. It can sell refreshments to passengers.

The Somerfield opposite the station entrance has been converted into the town's now only Co-Op and seen an upturn in usage. Newtown is of course the hometown of the founder of the co-operative movement Robert Owen.

Under a WAG initiative to promote sustainable tourism the middle section of the station is being considered as a cycle hire centre to an accompaniment of upgraded cycle routes in the area.

## **Aberystwyth**

According to new classification the terminus is a "Medium Staffed Station". Whether this will allow things like an increase in booking office hours, allow enough staff to provide revenue protection/platform customer service, prominently sign post the nearby bus station, or provide new information screens remains to be seen.

Bus wars have broken out to Penhryncoch. After Ceredigion CC awarded the subsidised contract to Mid Wales Motorways, the previous incumbent Arriva Cymru have responded by running twice as many services than before giving the village three buses per hour.

## **Ice and Snow**

As the County Councils struggled to keep roads and pathways clear the railways ran as normal bar one day when there were signalling problems at Birmingham New St. The thaw came just as the council's screamed blue murder about salt running out. In early 1963 St Harmon Community Council begged for the then un lifted Mid Wales line to be reopened as the village was cut off by road and the train had always got through for the preceding 100 years. Another week of sub zero temperatures in 2010 would have been interesting!

A Class 25 locomotive sent to clear snow in the big freeze of January 1982 allegedly went through a 20 foot deep snow drift near Talerddig.

## **Wrexham and Shropshire rolling stock**

Wrexham and Shropshire has completed the upgrade of its passenger stock. Their original stock of blue and grey liveried Mark 3 stock was hired from Cargo-D. They have gradually been replaced by their own Mark 3 vehicles, which have been completely refurbished, and carry a W & S livery. The final set was launched at Marylebone on 21st January. The company announced an 88% growth in passenger numbers.

[From *Railway Herald* No.209]

## **Llangollen Railway**

The extension of the railway from Carrog to Corwen has moved a step nearer, with the submission of a Transport and Works Order application. Five objections were received; however, all except two have been withdrawn. These are from Welsh Water and the Countryside Council for Wales. It is hoped that these will be settled in the near future.

## **Railfreight returning to Holyhead?**

A new freight terminal is proposed for Holyhead, as part of a 'land bridge' linking the continent with Ireland. Consultants are now preparing a business case for the project, to be completed in March this year.

## Cambrian steam for 2010

West Coast has announced that its Cambrian steam operation will again run in 2010, on Mondays to Fridays from 26th July to the 3rd September.

Monday, Wednesday and Friday trains will run to Pwllheli, while on Tuesdays and Thursdays they will run to Porthmadog. Pick-up stations will be Machynlleth, Tywyn and Barmouth. Again the train will be based at Machynlleth. It is hope the ERTMS issue will be resolved (indeed it may not be operational by then).

The booking line for all the trains is already open at 0845-1284681.



New signs have recently been erected at Machynlleth Station, proclaiming it as the **'Gateway to the Cambrian Coast Line and Snowdonia National Park'**.

Standing by one of the new signs (left to right) are: Ben Davies (Arriva Trains Wales), Gerwyn Jones (Cambrian Railways Partnership) John Ablitt (Snowdonia National Park) and David Crunhorn (Arriva Trains Wales).

## STOP PRESS- 25th January 2010

The Assembly Enterprise and Learning Committee report on Future Railway Infrastructure in Wales concluded that Wales was being short changed and lagged behind other areas of the UK and significant investment was needed. A list of 21 recommendations were put forward by its cross party membership. Sources have costed this at £5 Billion. Significantly it states that the Wales and Border franchise "Is not fit for purpose" to cater for growing passenger numbers and future demand.

**SARPA comment-** we told you so and years ago. The AM's report is a vindication of SARPA's work for the past decade and it's good that mainstream political views are now recognising what was blindingly obvious to us. Whether WAG acts on this is another matter of course.

The twentyone recommendations of the Committee are listed on page 8.

## **Future Railway Infrastructure in Wales**

Recommendations of the National Assembly for Wales Enterprise and Learning Committee January 2010.

### **Recommendation 1**

We recommend that the Welsh Government should make the preparation of Transport Assessments a statutory requirement as part of the planning process for new development.

### **Recommendation 2**

We recommend that the Welsh Government should continue to lobby for the electrification of the railway network serving Wales. As well as the Great Western Mainline as far as Swansea, the first priorities should be the diversionary lines between South Wales and London, the Cardiff area network - including the Valleys Lines - and the North Wales Mainline. We also recommend that Network Rail ensure that sufficient gauge clearance is provided on any electrified track to take freight as well as passenger traffic, and that the best technology be used to minimise disruption to rail services while electrification work is being carried out.

### **Recommendation 3**

We recommend that the Welsh Government work with First Great Western to achieve speed improvements on targeted services between South Wales and London by omitting station stops such as Swindon, Didcot and Reading.

### **Recommendation 4**

We recommend that to ensure that Wales will not be left on the slow train but will benefit from high speed rail links to the rest of England, Scotland and on to Europe, the Welsh Government should develop a strong case and lobby jointly with other interested partners for a new High Speed Line from London to South Wales, and for the North Wales Mainline to be directly connected to the proposed High Speed 2 Line from London to North West and Scotland. We further recommend that any high speed rail provision should not detract from existing services along classic lines.

### **Recommendation 5**

We recommend that the Severn Tunnel should be adapted for electrification. We also recommend that Network Rail should be commissioned to consider options for renewing the Tunnel in the longer term, linked to the business case for a new High Speed Line from London to South Wales.

### **Recommendation 6**

We recommend that the Welsh Government, Network Rail and the regional transport consortia work together on options to improve the existing North-South Wales rail line and services, including a programme of line speed improvements, additional faster services and a limited stop service on alternate hours during peak periods.

### **Recommendation 7**

We recommend that the Welsh Government, in consultation with Network Rail, should respond individually to the list of recommended rail speed and capacity improvements



listed in Appendix 2 of this report, and update its 2008 Rail Forward Programme accordingly.

### **Recommendation 8**

The planning of railway infrastructure needs to be better integrated with the provision of more appropriate rolling stock. We recommend that the Welsh Government should agree with the Department for Transport and Arriva Trains Wales how exactly it will deliver its commitment to provide more rolling stock, including longer trains on the Valleys Lines, and that it should publish this in a rolling stock plan for Wales, as we previously recommended. We also recommend that rolling stock provision and replacement should be integrated with plans for electrification of lines in order to achieve synergies and savings.

### **Recommendation 9**

We recommend that the Welsh Government and Network Rail take account of the socio-economic as well as the business case for new or re-opened stations. We also recommend that the Welsh Government, in consultation with Network Rail, should respond individually to the list of recommended schemes for new or re-opened stations and lines listed in Appendix 3 of this report, and update its 2008 Rail Forward Programme accordingly.

### **Recommendation 10**

We recommend that the Welsh Government carry out a cost-benefit analysis of providing new or enhanced Traws Cambria services both to complement existing rail services and to fill in gaps in the rail network, such as between Carmarthen-Aberystwyth, Moat Lane junction-Merthyr, Caernarfon-North Wales Main Line and North Wales Main Line-Ruthin-Corwen, linked to the Heart of Wales Line.

### **Recommendation 11**

We recommend that the Welsh Government should agree to fund the proposal, supported by the regional transport consortium SWWITCH and petitioners to the National Assembly, for providing additional trains to Fishguard.

### **Recommendation 12**

We recommend that the Welsh Government continue to work with partners to invest in improvements to rail stations in Wales, both for passenger comfort and safety - especially passengers with disabilities - and also for better connecting rail stations with other modes of transport such as buses, taxis and safe cycling and walking routes. We further recommend that these improvements be integrated in strategic transport plans at national and regional levels.

### **Recommendation 13**

We recommend that the Welsh Government should encourage the regional transport consortia, through their Regional Transport Plans, to develop more Park and Ride facilities to encourage more people to travel by train, and that the assessment of need include consideration of a growth in use to ensure sufficient numbers of parking spaces can be provided.

**Recommendation 14**

We recommend that the Welsh Government respond to the Department for Transport's consultation on "Better Rail Stations" and support the recommendation that Cardiff become a Category A station.

**Recommendation 15**

The Deputy First Minister told us that he would welcome innovative transport solutions, including light rail. We therefore recommend that the Welsh Government work with relevant partners to commission feasibility studies for developing light rail networks in the main urban areas of Cardiff, Swansea and Newport, which should include consideration of how to integrate such systems with existing heavy rail infrastructure.

**Recommendation 16**

Given the forecasted growth in both rail freight and passenger traffic, we repeat our 2007 recommendation that the Welsh Government should give higher priority and more resources to encouraging a modal shift of freight from road to rail, including signalling, loading gauge and axle-weight capacity enhancements. This needs to be managed carefully in partnership with Network Rail and the Train Operating Companies to avoid conflict with rail passenger traffic. We further recommend that as part of a study to understand better the pattern of movement of freight the Welsh Government and its partners consider how to plan for the strategic location of terminals to increase the amount of freight that can be transferred to rail transport.

**Recommendation 17**

We recommend that the Welsh Government and Network Rail prepare an action plan to identify and connect appropriate ports in Wales to adequate rail infrastructure in order for rail to compete with road and to fit operationally and financially with industries' logistics and distribution networks. We further recommend that the Welsh Government should ensure the Department for Transport's current consultation on a national policy statement for ports in England and Wales reflects Welsh priorities.

**Recommendation 18**

We recommend that once the National and Regional Transport Plans are finalised, a formal concordat with Network Rail should be drawn up and agreed by the Welsh Government and the regional transport consortia. This would help achieve greater transparency in rail planning from the national to the regional level and closer communication and cooperation to ensure aspirations for the future rail infrastructure in Wales are coordinated and delivered.

**Recommendation 19**

We recommend that the Welsh Government should seek equivalent powers to the Scottish Government, together with the associated funding, whether by amendments to the Railways Act 2005 or other appropriate legislative means. We also recommend that the Welsh Government should continue to make a strong case for continued investment in Wales through the planning group for the next High Level Output Specification period (2014-19).

**Recommendation 20**

We recommend that the Welsh Government use the opportunity of the next five-year performance review assessment of the Wales and Borders (Arriva Trains Wales) franchise to seek improvements for rail passengers and better value for public money. We further recommend that the Government establish a round-table partnership with the regional transport consortia to explore how the franchise could be improved.

**Recommendation 21**

We recommend that the Welsh Government work with the regional transport consortia on developing integrated policies for pricing structures such as smartcard systems that allow people to travel on different modes of transport – rail, light rail, buses – as well as encouraging alternatives to using the car.

## **Rail Rambles on the Cambrian Lines**

**Condensed from Arriva Trains Wales website at:**

[http://www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk/rail\\_rambles.aspx](http://www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk/rail_rambles.aspx)

Rail rambles are walks from railway stations in Wales and the border counties of England. The walks themselves are free to join (but of course you have to pay your rail fare!). Each walk is planned to be accessible by a day return rail journey from a number of main line and connecting stations. Rail fares are very reasonable and good value with many discounts available. You do not have to be a member of any organisation to join a walk. All you have to do is appear at the station from which the walk departs and make yourself known to one of the leaders.

At least two walks are arranged to take place every Saturday throughout the year and there is also a monthly Wednesday walk. Clicking on the "Programme" button on the website produces a six-monthly listing from January and July each year but which is not changed after initial publication. Changes to planned walks are very rare and leaders are always present at the planned starting point. A similar programme on a web log that can be updated by leaders at any time before the walk is available from the button above.

Outward and return times from the walks destination stations are indicated in the programme details for each walk. Where appropriate, outbound departure times from main line connecting stations are also included. For details of departure times from other locations and connecting services, please telephone the enquiry number 08457 48 49 50 or visit [www.nationalrail.co.uk](http://www.nationalrail.co.uk) or [www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk](http://www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk). Time details may be subject to minor change. Walkers are strongly advised to check times of trains before travelling.

Rail rambles were first organised in 1989 by Alan Howard and have only continued because of the support of Arriva Trains Wales and Ramblers Cymru. Extracts from a magazine article describing the early days of rail rambles is available via the website.

For more information please contact: Chris Jenkins on 01691 654066 (Mid-Wales region) or click on the "Contacts" button on the website.

In addition to the Cambrian line rambles listed there, the website also details walks on other Arriva lines, including the Heart of Wales Line and the Borders Line.

## **Adrian Bailey compares usage then and now**

UK's railways are currently enjoying a boom in usage with official press releases claiming a higher number of passengers than anytime since World War Two. This booming usage is often used as a sign that all is well with Government rail policy, privatisation and the TOC's. We've never had it so good! A lot of people would contradict this arguing that usage growth is down to external factors and has grown despite off not because of Government policy and the needs of private shareholders.

So how does usage on our line compare with yesteryear? There a very few publicly available sources to draw on. Recently on the internet I came across two sources quoting the figures for Llanidloes in 1962, one quoted that the station was selling over a hundred tickets a day and another that it saw over hundred passengers a day. Though slightly contradictory both figures explode the myth that no one used the Moat Lane to Brecon line. In their book Newtown to Shrewsbury (Middleton Press) Mitchell and Smith quote ticket sales figures for all then 16 stations for 1923 & 1933. However the Office of The Rail Regulator produces figures for the modern day in "footfall" for the 5 remaining stations so it's not comparing apples with apples.

The problem with ticket sales alone means that the true significance of what we shall call destination stations is not represented. A seaside town could have seemingly meagre ticket sales but in fact have five times that number arrive and depart from other places. This is one of the big criticisms of the Beeching era, as stations with especially seasonal visitor flows were discriminated against. Footfall addresses this by counting "entries" and "exits". Entries being tickets bought at the station and those passengers that are returning to their original starting stations, exits being those passengers that arrive from elsewhere and those that are returning having left the station to travel elsewhere. A passenger buying a return ticket will be counted 4 times, twice at the station they started from and twice at the destination. It's not entirely perfect as a passenger on a rover ticket will only count as one entry at the station where the ticket was bought, and is not picked up at any of the stations they alight at – which still discriminates against rural scenic lines.

So how does footfall compare with ticket sales? The answer is dependent on the station and its user profile. In an equal world it could be that ticket sales represent a quarter of the total as those travelling from a station are balanced by those that travel to it. On our line Aberystwyth can be described as a destination station as it attracts passengers to it. Therefore its footfall could be significantly greater than its ticket sales, maybe as much as 4 to 1 especially in years gone by. Maybe Borth could be classed such as well. The small village stations that closed in the 1960's probably had few people wanting to travel to them and their ticket sales formed a higher proportion of footfall maybe 40% and can be called feeders. We've assumed all things are equal for Machynlleth and Newtown.

So here's a comparison with yesteryear - if any readers have more accurate data I'm sure the editor would love to hear from you.

	Ticket Sales	Estimated Footfall	Ticket Sales	Estimated Footfall	Footfall	Estimated Ticket Sales
Station	1923		1933		2007/2008	
Aberystwyth	175,936	875,000	96,580	500,000	259,069	65,000
Bow St	23,034	55,000	4,808	12,000	0	0
Llande	19,574	50,000	4,495	11,000	0	0
Borth	20,310	100,000	9,904	50,000	52,735	13,000
Ynyslas	6,073	15,000	1,586	4,000	0	0
Glandyfi	7,775	20,000	3,154	8,000	0	0
Dovey Junction	2,410	6,000	1,789	4,000	1,978	800
Machynlleth	37,535	150,000	27,079	110,000	103,617	26,000
Cemmes Road	12,062	30,000	9,443	23,000	0	0
Llanbrynmair	9,031	22,500	7,104	17,500	0	0
Talerddig	1,822	4,000	2,206	5,500	0	0
Carno	7,880	19,000	4,551	11,500	0	0
Pontridogoch	5,560	14,000	3,373	8,500	0	0
Caersws	14,816	37,000	9,436	23,500	34,159	14,000
Moat Lane Jnc	10,471	26,000	4,797	12,000	0	0
Scafell	819	2,000	506	1,200	0	0
Newtown	58,536	234,000	26,712	110,000	105,260	25,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>413,644</b>	<b>1,659,500</b>	<b>217,523</b>	<b>911,700</b>	<b>566,818</b>	<b>137,800</b>

What does this tell us?

Aside from the assumptions about the estimates it's pretty clear that more people used the railway in the past with roughly three times the number of passengers. The Great Western Railway didn't rebuild Aberystwyth station in 1926 with no fewer than 5 operational platforms on a whim, and of course the figures for Aberystwyth would include those heading south via Carmarthen.

The huge drop between 1923 and 1933 is very noticeable though perhaps not unsurprising as the population of rural Wales was in decline from the 1880's until the 1980s, 1933 was of course in the middle of the great depression and road competition was established. Noticeable is that the small stations between Machynlleth and Aberystwyth declined much more than elsewhere. Can we speculate that bus services for short distance trips into Aberystwyth replaced the train? To this day bus services in Montgomeryshire are much poorer than elsewhere and the decline at Llanbrynmair etc. was less marked. That the booking clerk at Moat Lane Junction was issuing an average of 30 tickets a day in 1923 is surprising, the nearest villages Caersws and Llandinam on the Mid Wales line both had their own stations. The service in those days though included expresses that included Moat Lane as a stop and not the smaller stations.

The now closed stations were contributing c. 20% of the total usage. With the exception of Aberystwyth the other stations' usage in 1933 and 2007/2008 are broadly comparable. Of course the remaining stations now cater for passengers from villages with closed stations, notably Caersws, and Newtown's population is significantly larger than in years gone by following its expansion in the 1970's.

Can anything meaningful be drawn from these statistics? Clearly the claims that record the number of passengers are now using the railways are not applicable to all lines. The South East of England retained its rail network and its services remained more relevant to its population. If WAG delivers on its commitment of an hourly service from Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth maybe the claim of record numbers of passengers could be justified.

## **The View from Milepost 62 with Brigadier John Faviell**

On my travels it never ceases to amaze me how inconsistent and patchy is public transport provision and integration throughout our green and pleasant land. An early start saw me travel to Abergele taking advantage of ATW's recent change of heart about trains actually connecting at Shrewsbury – only once a day for North Wales from the first train of the day though! Still the ticket I purchased turned out to be great value even if my eyes were bleary. A North Wales All Zone Day Ranger valid all day long for £22.00 (full price). All of North & Mid Wales's railways connected by the Shrewsbury to Chester line plus most bus operators too! Shrewsbury station was none too pleasant a place to wait on a cold morning. However we got to Rhyl OK where I opted to get out and use a bus as the Cardiff to Holyhead trains don't stop at Abergele and Pensarn station. Full marks for having the bus station right outside the rail station! Rhyl station though clean was somewhat desolate and two revenue protection staff at the barriers more like grumpy security guards than customer service professionals. I soon spotted my bus the No. 12 Rhyl to Llandudno operated by Arriva buses. It operates at a 12 minute frequency. Through Kinmel Bay and Towyn which have no rail links and a stop outside Abergele and Pensarn station in the village of Pensarn and then a mile inland to Abergele itself. I met an old friend of mine and went to have breakfast at the towns Tesco store.

He warned me that though Arriva buses accepted the All Zone not all operators did and the unwary were caught out. We decided to go to Llandudno. The No. 12 bus did its stuff along the A548 again through the eastern suburbs of Colwyn Bay and into the town – no bus/rail integration here as we missed the station by a quarter of a mile. Still we went through Rhos on Sea and past the local FE college at Llandrillo into Penrhyn and then alongside the bay into the town of Llandudno itself. We were deposited some way from the station but closer to the pier and seafront. The bus takes over an hour between Rhyl and Llandudno - the train much quicker - but it does serve communities without rail stations well. Compare this with the poor offerings in Mid Wales. It can be done.

A pleasant few hours were had reminiscing about defeating insurgents back in the 60's and our thoughts turned to how modern public transport could be made better. The public house we were in had Sky TV - I don't care for it much this media over explosion. "Just think how many more journalists we'd shoot these days" my friend joked. I recall the looks of absolute horror on an American TV crew's faces as they walked into our fire zone in Aden just as Lance Bombardier McPartlin let loose with the general purpose machine gun. Then I was distracted – a rail story was on!

Lord Adonis was on announcing that in future franchises will be longer length potentially up to 22 years with winners awarded on investment packages combining profit sharing, with strict performance targets, regular reviews and severe penalties for those that give up. Investment targets have been outlined for the re-letting of the East Coast main line franchise. There has been much lobbying for longer franchises from within the industry as it's said that this is the best way to get improved performance and private sector investment. Chiltern Railways is always trotted out ad nauseam as the model to emulate.

Alas there are longer franchises and longer franchises as regular readers know the Wales and Border franchise is 15 years in length. Let's just say that the agreement doesn't feature Investment plans, stringent targets or penalties for poor performance and the operator clearly feels it's not incentivised to shower wads of private sector cash about.

So if you believe that long stringently specified franchises with incentives to invest are the best way to go forward there's a problem. Until December 2018 and the end of the current franchise we will have the worst of all worlds with no stick, no carrot and no investment unless a post credit crunch cash strapped WAG stumps up. However there is a way out - we always hear from ATW how good they are. They should have no qualms about prematurely ending their current franchise themselves and then bidding for a new super franchise. After all they can point to their record performance as reigning franchise holder, growing passenger numbers and use their inside knowledge of WAG and other stakeholder aspirations to put together a winning package safe in the knowledge that under the new franchise regime it just won't be handed to the lowest bidder. Arriva should be a shoe in with a brilliant investment package showing what the private sector can do!

Then it was back to reality- Llandudno station – how this wasn't on the list of the ten worst stations in the UK is beyond me. As we pulled away down the Conwy estuary my friend pointed to an article stating that Arriva Group's profits were holding up in the recession and better performing divisions cross subsidising others with ATW's profit propping up Cross Country so Lord Adonis's rage is diverted. Groan - another decade of shabby stations and the like beckons.

Three Cocks Cottage, January 2010

## **Cambrian Railways Partnership over the year**

As part of its work in developing links with the local community the Cambrian Railways Partnership (CRP) has presented a set of new polo shirts to Machynlleth Rugby Club. David Crunkhorn, Station Manager Cambrian Arriva Trains Wales, commented "Gerwyn from the CRP and I share an office and are both ex front row rugby players ourselves. As keen rugby fans it's great that the railway can help support a local team in this way". During the year the CRP has also provided, or is committed to providing, support for a range of events, clubs and activities including:

- The Gregynog Festival, Newtown
- Carnifal Cambria at Barmouth, Harlech and Criccieth
- Tywyn Tigers Cheerleaders
- Llanbedr Beer Festival
- Machynlleth Hurricanes Junior Football Team
- Machynlleth Snooker Club

Through the sale of posters featuring rail related artwork the CRP has also generated hundreds of pounds in support of good causes including the Wales Air Ambulance, Save Machynlleth Clock Appeal and the British Red Cross.

## **Aberdyfi Station gets its hump**

The new 'hump' at Aberdyfi station was officially opened on the 9th December by Ieuan Wyn Jones AM, Deputy First Minister, Minister for the Economy and Transport. In addition a new local travel information panel has been installed at the station.

## NEW YEAR WISHES

A Happy New Year to you everyone from SARPA (Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Rail Passenger Association). We wish you all well. We take a brief look back at 2009 and have some wishes for the New Year which we would like to share with you:

Unsurprisingly the recession didn't make a number of issues go away in 2009, and if anything the year confirmed that these issues should have been addressed some time previously. It also saw some anniversaries. In addition to it being 2 years since central Government promised 1300 extra carriages we had the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of being promised an hourly service between Shrewsbury and Aberystwyth in December.

The Class 158's on our line remained unrefurbished. Do we have the scruffiest rolling stock on the UK network? Wish **Number One: is that at long last ATW have a Class 158 refurbishment programme.** No more talk just get on with it everyone else seems to have managed it....

Expecting increasing passenger numbers to be accommodated in an inadequate number of DMU's has always been dumb and though no official figures for our line are publicly out for 2009, industry sources tell us that Cambrian usage continued to grow at around 4-5%. So much for the no-growth franchise and the recession dampening demand – though at the risk of saying so yet again SARPA has consistently got this issue right. 2009 saw plenty of occasions when even 4 car formations proved inadequate; the 2 car departures from Aberystwyth on Fridays at 1530 & 1730 are consistently overcrowded.

**Number Two: the need for more rolling stock has not gone away and needs to be properly addressed.**

Once upon a time a bidder for a rail franchise won its bid on the promise of an interconnecting timetable: in fact it was just about the only discernible improvement on offer at the time. Six years on a casual look at the December 2009 timetable at the hub of Shrewsbury soon indicates this has not been achieved. On the odd hours a train from Cardiff to Holyhead arrives at 15 minutes past the hour and waits 9 minutes departing at 24 minutes past, in the other direction a train heading for Cardiff arrives at 17 minutes past and departs at 21 minutes past. A train from Aberystwyth then arrives at 25 minutes past..... Interconnecting this is not. We could also mention the 26 minute wait for a Manchester bound train and the 49 minute wait traveling from Manchester to the Cambrian. So wish **Number Three: is that ATW deliver on their franchise winning promise of an interconnecting timetable.** Helpfully we've found an area that may help them; it's all the padding in their timetables.

Whilst the end to Wolverhampton turnarounds is welcomed and a confidence in the timetable is returning, ATW's "record punctuality" is of course helped by slowed down schedules, lengthy waits at stations and good old charter minutes. Following line speed improvements in 1994 BR offered 105 minute schedules from Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth; in 2009 we have 119 minutes including the 5 extra minutes allowed between Borth and Aberystwyth. In the UP direction trains have in total 26 station dwell minutes including 9 at New St followed by a leisurely non stop 14 minutes to get to Birmingham International - 4 minutes slower than Arriva Cross Country. That PPM figures in the Mid 90's are achieved is perhaps not surprising with 30 minutes out of the 200 minute schedule in the UP direction station dwell or charter minutes. But is an officially very



punctual service one that all users recognise especially those that don't travel end to end?

**Wish Number Four: is that a proper punctuality target regime not open to manipulation by the TOC's is introduced.** Of course some will point out that the much admired Swiss Railways pad out their timetables too. However they get their trains to connect at key interchanges... We know its not just ATW, but lets abolish charter minutes, set journey time limits, only allow extended station dwell for making connections and measure punctuality through key stations not just end destination. Honesty is the best policy!

This of course leads us to fares. Is it fair that passengers should pay for 75% of an inflated cost base? Then there's the complexity. Two passengers board the 0514 train at Aberystwyth: one doing a day trip to Birmingham, the other going to London via New St and staying overnight returning at 1645 the next day. The cheapest valid walk on fares are the "Anytime" (£22.70) for New St and the "Off Peak" (£61.80) for Euston. However will the Birmingham traveller know this or will they be offered the twice as expensive "Off Peak" (£41.30) fare and will the Euston traveller stand their ground as most TOC staff both Virgin and ATW expect some type of draconian time restriction on travel in and out of London and can't believe that the "Off Peak" is valid and try and get them to buy a £212.00 "Anytime"?

**Number Five: that the fares farce both cost and complexity is brought to an end.**

It's a good job confusion over fares distracts passengers from the much maligned stations they have to use. The passenger champions found that because franchise agreements hadn't specified station standards no one has done anything with them - as the jagged platform cobblestones at the far end of Aberystwyth and the about to fall down canopy at Borth testify. And who will take responsibility and resurface the footbridge leading to Welshpool station before the elf and safety brigade close it? Relying on specifying stations when the franchise is re-let will be no good as December 2018 for the Wales and Borders franchise is a long way off still. **Number Six: some heads really need banging together about stations on the route.**

Part of head banging process will have to be with Network Rail. They need to discover who the customers really are. There should be plenty of attention on the Cambrian as were the test bed for their shiny new signalling system - ERTMS. **Number Seven is that Network Rail remembers the Cambrian is used by passengers (c 1.5 million journeys per annum) and don't treat it as a play toy for signalling engineers.**

As you can see the Cambrian has many more issues than just the much talked about for ten years now hourly service. It was good to see WAG committing to the hourly service "by 2011" in its Draft Transport Plan. **Number Eight is that we hope that that commitment is followed through.**

One of the more ironic happenings of 2009 was the vehement opposition to ATW's plan to run trains from Aberystwyth to London Marylebone by Conservative MP's in Shropshire. ATW clearly don't come up to the mark according to the shire's MP's and shouldn't be allowed to run there. But isn't it the Conservative party's official policy on the railways that the answer to all problems is awarding longer length franchises as the private sector will then be allowed a free role to prosper? The fact that ATW have a long 15 year

franchise already is glossed over or ignored. **Number Nine; is that running a successful railway that delivers consistently high standards involves a lot more than franchise length; this needs to be recognised.**

The rows that have engulfed Virgin's and ATW's proposals to run to London in competition with Wrexham and Shropshire from Shrewsbury have highlighted how franchise specification and arcane regulation rules have worked against restoring proper direct services to London from North East Wales, Mid Wales and Shropshire . This not only affects passengers but also the economic connectivity of these areas. **Number Ten: is that a resolution to providing quality through services to London from North East, Mid Wales and Shropshire is found.** One of our members has suggested handing over the current franchised two hourly ATW service from Birmingham International to Chester to Chiltern Trains (Wrexham and Shropshire ) with provision for portions to run to Aberystwyth. This may cause consternation at Penarth House but has the potential to build a proper service through the area. After all surely the purpose of a franchise is not to provide a particular TOC with public subsidy for ever more but surely to get the best value for money?

## Line closures February

Barmouth / Harlech to Pwllheli: from 2215 Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> to Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> February (inclusive), trains between Machynlleth and Pwllheli will be replaced with road transport between Barmouth and Pwllheli (Saturday & Sunday) and then between Harlech and Pwllheli (Monday to Wednesday) which will serve all stations via Porthmadog in both directions.

Shrewsbury to Wellington (Salop): Saturdays 20<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> & Sundays 21<sup>st</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> February, trains between Aberystwyth / Chester and Birmingham International will be replaced with road transport between Shrewsbury and Wellington (Salop) in both directions.

## Provisional SARPA Meeting dates and venues 2010

Please note that venues and dates may be subject to change. Engineering possessions disrupted travel to our 2009 programme quite badly. Any alterations will appear in subsequent Newsletters and our website.

March	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Tuesday 1830	Newtown	Bell Inn
April	17 <sup>th</sup>	Saturday 1115	Machynlleth	White Lion
May	4 <sup>th</sup>	Tuesday 1800	Aberystwyth	RAFA Club
June	5 <sup>th</sup>	Saturday SARPA	Summer trip depart	Aberystwyth
			on 0514 train.	
July	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Saturday 1200	Borth	Sea Horse Inn
August	NO MEETING			
September	4 <sup>th</sup>	Saturday 1200	Tywyn	Talylyn Railway
October	9 <sup>th</sup>	Saturday 1145	Aberystwyth	RAFA Club
			Annual General Meeting	
November	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Tuesday 1840	Caersws	Unicorn Hotel
December	7 <sup>th</sup>	Tuesday 1900	Welshpool	Pinewood Tavern

## Websites

**Our website** <http://sarpa.info>

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

### Other sites of interest:

Arriva Trains Wales

[www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk/](http://www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk/)

National Rail Enquiries

[www.nationalrail.co.uk/](http://www.nationalrail.co.uk/)

Train and Bus Information Midlands

[www.centro.org.uk/wwwroot/HomePage.asp](http://www.centro.org.uk/wwwroot/HomePage.asp)

LondonMidland

[www.londonmidland.com/index.html](http://www.londonmidland.com/index.html)

Virgin Trains

[www.virgintrains.co.uk/default.aspx](http://www.virgintrains.co.uk/default.aspx)

Chiltern Railways

[www.chilternrailways.co.uk/](http://www.chilternrailways.co.uk/)

Network Rail

[www.networkrail.co.uk/](http://www.networkrail.co.uk/)

Railfuture/Railway Development Society

[www.railfuture.org.uk/](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/)

Cambrian Rail Partnership

[www.thecambrianline.co.uk/](http://www.thecambrianline.co.uk/)

The Association of Community Rail Partnerships (Acorp)

[www.acorp.uk.com](http://www.acorp.uk.com)

Wrexham and Shropshire company

[www.wrexhamandshropshire.co.uk/index.html](http://www.wrexhamandshropshire.co.uk/index.html)

North Wales Coast Railway

[www.nwrail.org.uk/](http://www.nwrail.org.uk/)

Circular tour of North Wales by rail

[www.penmorfa.com/Cambrian/](http://www.penmorfa.com/Cambrian/)

Ffestiniog Railway timetable

[www.ffestiniograilway.co.uk/timetable.htm](http://www.ffestiniograilway.co.uk/timetable.htm)

Vale of Rheidol Railway timetable

[www.rheidolrailway.co.uk/timetable.htm](http://www.rheidolrailway.co.uk/timetable.htm)

Talylyn Railway timetable

[www.talylyn.co.uk/timetable/2009](http://www.talylyn.co.uk/timetable/2009)

Welshpool and Llanfair Railway timetable

[www.wlfr.org.uk/timetable.htm](http://www.wlfr.org.uk/timetable.htm)

Welsh Highland Heritage Railway

[www.whr.co.uk/index.php?pid=51](http://www.whr.co.uk/index.php?pid=51)

Fairbourne Railway

[www.fairbournerailway.com/index.htm](http://www.fairbournerailway.com/index.htm)

Rail Photographs by Richard Jones including many of the modern Cambrian scene

[railphotos.demeseo.com/](http://railphotos.demeseo.com/)

## 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](mailto:customer.services@arrivatrainswales.co.uk)

### Network Rail:

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

### Newtown Station Travel

The Railway Station, Old Kerry Road, Newtown, Powys SY16 1BP. Tel. 01686 621966  
E-mail [newtownstation@btclick.com](mailto:newtownstation@btclick.com)

### The Association of Train Operating Companies:

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

**Wrexham and Shropshire:** Great Central House, Marylebone Station, Melcombe Place, London NW1 1JJ. Tel. 0845 260 5233

### London Midland

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

### Association of Community Rail Partnerships

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

### Virgin Trains

Virgin Trains, Customer Relations, PO Box 713, Birmingham, B5 4HH. Tel. 0870 789 1234

### Traveline Cymru for all public transport information

[www.traveline-cymru.org.uk](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

### 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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