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Aberystwyth
Rail
Passengers'
Association

CAMBRIAN RAILWAYS
GIVING ACCESS TO THE FINEST PARTS OF WALES

**Newsletter
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Birmingham New Street atrium - an artist's impression. Photograph courtesy of Network Rail.

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Chairman's Message

In 1964, an architect called Christopher Alexander published a book entitled "Notes on the Synthesis of Form". He began:- ***"These notes are about the process of design; the process of inventing physical things which display a new physical order, organisation, form, in response to function.***

Today, functional problems are becoming less simple all the time. But designers rarely confess their ability to solve them. Instead, when a designer does not understand a problem clearly enough to find the order it really calls for, he falls back on some arbitrarily chosen formal order. The problem, because of its complexity remains unsolved."

How prescient for our own age! We live in an increasingly complex society, something which Alexander had commented upon when he first wrote his book. He said that over long periods of time, ethnic cultures had evolved design solutions which were well suited to function. Buildings and artefacts were made in a certain way which became a tradition. Because of our quickly changing society, we do not have the luxury of this slow method of evolution. He pointed out that rather than approaching design in an intuitive manner, a more rational approach was necessary.

He outlined the case for what he called "Hierarchical Decomposition of Systems"; a close examination of design problems which involved extensive use of mathematics. Essentially, what he was investigating was a digital approach to design. He wrote a computer program to look at the relationships between design parameters which ran on an IBM 7090, an extremely impressive machine for its time, with a computing power of around 3mb/sec and a total memory of around 1mb. However, you needed a Very Large Room in which to put it and a pocket filled with 2.8 million American Dollars to buy. Remember that when you plug in your laptop on one of Arriva's Class 158s.

Alexander's words resonated with your chairman as a callow youth. At the time, I was spending quite a bit of time working on steam locomotives and understood quickly that there must have been a better way to design these things. For instance, why put all the valve gear in the middle of the framing where nobody could get to it? And dead loss lubrication systems? They were just........well, a dead loss. A persistent failure to deal with the problems had led to a machine which could have been a much more effective tool being outclassed by other technology.

Today's railway is very much a complex structure. The way it has wound up is essentially based on the idea that the government directs and the private sector provides the service, whilst the taxpayer picks up the tab. This was probably not how the brave new privatised railway was envisaged by its Tory protagonists in the wake of the 1992 UK general election, but that is what we have. We can more or less say with certainty that they did not work through their ideas and consider all the implications of what they were about to do, and we have to live with the consequences.

I could be forgiven if I believed that the way since 1960 that the various governments of the United Kingdom have approached the management of the railway, has been to train a ferret to hold a dartboard, pin ideas to it, then blindfold someone and ask them to throw. (There is actually such a game - without the ferret - called "Audio Darts"!) As evidence that this mindset is presently alive and well I offer the fiasco of the West Coast Franchise, the IEP replacement for the HST and just now, HS2 which - Heigh Ho! - fails completely to serve important places it passes. Leicester has been completely left out, whilst Nottingham, Derby and Sheffield all have stations in the middle of nowhere. Seems that some of the lessons from Wales have not been learned...... Llanbister Road, Builth Road, Cemmaes Road.......... "Nottingham and Derby Road"? "Sheffield Road"? Meanwhile, the opportunity to re-link the East Midlands with the North West has not been taken at all.

"When a designer does not understand a problem clearly enough to find the order it really calls for , he falls back on some arbitrarily chosen formal order." Here in Wales we have the situation where the Welsh Government has decided to spend another £500m on the A 465 Heads of the Valleys Road, despite a poor cost benefit analysis (CBA). The total spend of approximately £800m on this road represents enough money to have replaced the railway between Mid and South Wales, via Llanidloes, Builth and Brecon; this would have taken towns not at present on the network back onto the railway and contributed to growth in the Welsh economy.

A well planned railway is difficult to achieve but has benefits for the community which reach far beyond the station forecourt, enabling connectivity without the expense of owning a road vehicle. This is especially true for Wales, where connections are so astonishingly bad for a modern European nation. In reality, beyond the forecourt is where the real consequences of the railway (or the lack of one) make themselves felt, which is where Christopher Alexander comes in. He took the view that one must not only look at all the parameters regarding the thing itself which was being designed ("the form") but also the way that item interacted with the rest of the world ("the context").

In this respect, local and urban administrations have intuitively picked up the message rather better than central government. This is probably more from self interest than anything else, as local transport planners themselves are more likely to use and benefit from service enhancements! Municipal enlightenment has provided the impetus for investment in local rail, which has brought benefit to those communities courageous enough to build and reopen. Consider if you will, those brave souls who planned and instigated the Tyne & Wear Metro. A very controversial project it was in gestation and building, but the region would not be without it now. Moreover, since it opened every other big conurbation now wants a surface tram style metro! Remember also those folk who planned and executed the Cross City Link in Birmingham from Longbridge to Lichfield, later extended to Redditch,, now a central transport linchpin in the West Midlands .

In contrast, over the past 50 years or so (and even beyond), intervention by central governments have been somewhat lacklustre at best and have not worked in the interests of the railway; neither have the objectives of the protagonists been achieved. In the wake of the Beeching closures, it's almost as though central government lost its way and has no clear vision as to what the railway is actually for. Better, more enlightened thinking is clearly needed for governments to succeed in their chosen role as "designer of the railway". On the 50th anniversary of the infamous Doctor's "Reshaping" report, surely its time to wake up and start reopening railway lines. Doesn't fresh coffee smell great?

Angus Eickhoff
Moel y Garth
Welshpool

March 2013

News in brief

Aberystwyth Station upgrade

Aberystwyth station is included in a £40 million National Station Improvement Scheme, announced by the Welsh Transport Minister Carl Sargeant on the 7th November. In will include a new forecourt, an improved taxi rank system, a new accessibility ramp for disabled people, new electronic ticket machines, new automated screens, a new CCTV system and better lighting.

Borth

The first AGM of Borth Station Museum's volunteers took place on 24 September last year. Since opening in 2011 there have been more than 10,000 visitors. The museum's collection is still growing, with the support of local people and former railway staff.. Exhibitions included Borth as a seaside resort, sea defence and Uppingham by the Sea (Uppingham School was temporarily moved to Borth in 1876, after a outbreak of typhoid).
2013 sees the 150th anniversary of the opening of the station, and celebrations will take place on the weekend of 6 July.
    Friends of Borth Museum, an informal support group, has been launched. The museum's website, which has been receiving about 80 hits a month, is www.borthstationmuseum.co.uk
    If you feel you want to contribute to this exciting heritage project, have anything to donate or loan to the collection or wish to join the Friends of the Museum, or think you can help in any other way, please contact George Romary on 01970871850.

Bow St

The station reopening proposal apparently has a better cost benefit ratio than the Welsh Government's favourite pet project, the dualling of the A465 Head of the Valleys road.

Newtown

UP trains (i.e. towards Shrewsbury) are reported as arriving as much as 6 minutes early, but do await correct time before departing. The section times since the introduction of ERTMS and associated infrastructure work have shaved minutes of the old schedules, yet there is still no sign of any timetable change to reflect this. Many are making the obvious link and are wondering whether an earlier arrival time in Shrewsbury will facilitate connections with the Wrexham line.
    The track in the old Brecon bay was lifted in February and the engineers siding shortened and realigned. It is now doubtful whether a failed DMU could be shunted out the way.
    A hairdresser is the latest tenant at the Caersws end of the building.

Fifty Years on

March sees the fiftieth anniversary of that report. For Mid Wales it recommended closure of all stations between Aberystwyth and Shrewsbury except Borth, Dovey Junction, Machynlleth, Newtown and Welshpool. The coast line from Dovey Junction to Pwllheli as was left open as was, but it recommended closure for the lines from Afon Wen to Bangor, Barmouth Junction to Ruabon, Aberystwyth to Carmarthen, Welshpool to Whitchurch, Llanfyllin to Llanymynech, Oswestry to Gobowen, Craven Arms to Swansea, and it confirmed the closure from Moat Lane Junction to Brecon that took place in December 1962, though the track had not been lifted.

Westminster

Ceredigion MP Mark Williams made a demand for direct services to be restored to London from Aberystwyth, though his reasoning and knowledge where somewhat shaky when he declared that Aberystwyth was one of few towns of its size without a direct service to the capital. The member for

Ceredigion was clearly oblivious to the fact that with a population of just under 16,000 at the last census there are plenty of larger towns than Aber in the UK that don't even have a railway station - such as the 32,000 souls in Coalville, Leics, the 68,000 in Gosport, Hants, or the 19,000 in Gorseinion, nr Swansea. 46,000 live in Cwmbran but they don't have a direct train to London either. In fact nearly 20 conurbations in Wales alone larger than Aberystwyth don't.

Montgomeryshire MP Glyn Davies in the same debate on cross border links made the usual calls for bypasses around Pant/Llanymynech and Wollaston to Buttington. Where the £150 million to build them would come from, and why these schemes should be national priorities Mr Davies couldn't say.

The Welsh Affairs Select Committee has recommended the introduction of the hourly service, as "a matter of urgency", in its report into Cross Border Transport issues. This has been welcomed by Mark Williams. [*Cambrian News*, 28th March 2013]

Shrewsbury

The prison next to the station closed down in February as part of a Ministry for Justice modernisation/cost cutting exercise. The old goal dates back to the 1790's, and there has been a suggestion it could be turned into a hotel. Its history as a place of execution has been highlighted with the last hanging taking place in 1961. It's understood that the bodies of most of the executed prisoners still lie within the grounds. Executions were carried out in public until 1868 with considerable crowds attracted to watch the spectacle, and were a source of considerable excursion traffic for the early railways.

The Passenger Information Screens have now been labelled with which platform they are referring to.

Virgin Trains proposal to run a face saving token service from Shrewsbury to London Euston following the West Coast franchise debacle has been welcomed with open arms by Shropshire Conservative MP's. The official application has not gone into the rail regulator yet, but leaked details indicate that 2 trains a day will be on offer, leaving Shrewsbury at 0706 & 1506 and travelling via Telford , Stafford and Rugby giving a journey time of approximately 2 and a quarter hours, with returns planned for the late morning (1133) and toward the end of the evening rush hour (1833). Outside the issue of connections the first train will arrive in Euston in the morning peak period. The anytime standard fare on the 0735 from Chester which arrives in Euston at 0940 is all of £251.00. No wonder many people prefer changing stations in Birmingham and using Chiltern Railways.

Advice on connections toward Wrexham/Chester

Apart from the first train in the morning, all arrivals from the Cambrian are scheduled to come in on Platform 4a. Often arrival is a good couple of minutes before the official time of xx26 and the Holyhead train – due to depart xx25 - is still in Platform 4b with doors open. Platform staff and conductors have been observed looking out for anyone trying to make the unofficial connection. Our advice would be if anyone intends trying this then to position themselves right at the front of the train on arrival at Shrewsbury and get out the door first – often the units are only 10 yards part; from observation there seems a high probability that you'll make it.

Customer Satisfaction

The ATOC teddy bear came out the pram again when Which? published a rail passenger satisfaction survey with considerably lower marks than the official Government funded ones from Passenger Focus's National passenger Survey. ATOC of course prefers the higher marks from the NPS!

For the record ATW's NPS overall rating was 88%, but only 48% from Which?

Caersws

Caersws Community Council, who adopted the station after the Network Rail crossing keepers left, have won a Keep Britain tidy award for the efforts - well done.

Network Rail plans for Control Period 5 2014-2019

Network Rail published their plans for the next 5 year control period recently. On the Cambrian itself the only major infrastructure work of note is a planned renewal of the metal spans on Barmouth Bridge and timber replacement on this and other bridges. The Marches line south of Shrewsbury to Newport is to be re signalled, with what is reputedly the oldest signal box on the Network - Moreton on Lugg to be replaced (allegedly the structure dates from 1853). Network Rail aim to migrate all signalling control to one centre in Cardiff for their entire Wales zone by 2025.

Silk Commission

Further radical devolution of powers form Westminster to Cardiff Bay have been rejected, but some areas such as full control over the Wales and Border franchise could be devolved to the Welsh Government. However this sits very uncomfortably with many in the Borders, who feel their rail services will be pushed further down the pecking order than they are now. Ominously a recent Welsh Government document refers to aspirations for an hourly Holyhead to Cardiff service - is this really what folk in Hereford and Gobowen want of their rail service?

Change of Ministers

Carl Sargeant, member for Alyn and Deeside has been replaced as Rail Minister in the Welsh Government by Edwina Hart, member for Gower, who is now Minister for Economy, Science and Transport.

Birmingham New Street

Passengers using Birmingham New Street will soon see the first major changes to the station in over 40 years when the huge project to redevelop the station reaches the half-way point this April. The station will 'switch over' when the existing concourse and entrances which have been in use since the 1960s will close and passengers start to use the first half of the brand new concourse. The entrance/exits will change to Stephenson Street only for the next phase. Work is due to be complete in 2015.

A series of public exhibitions are taking place at the station. Passengers will be able to ask questions and pick up information to find out how the changes will affect them.

Chris Montgomery, Network Rail project director said: "We've committed to keeping New Street open to passengers throughout the redevelopment and to date, we've been able to do most of our work behind the scenes. The switchover in April will be the first time passengers see real changes in how they use, and access New Street station. By switching off the old station and opening the first half of the new concourse next door, we can keep passengers moving through New Street while we continue rebuilding the existing half of the station and shopping centre above."

We understand that there are also proposals for a moving "travelator" which will operate between New St and Moor St stations.

You can find out more about the project by visiting
www.newstreetnewstart.co.uk

An up goods train - oil and coal wagons - near Bow Street in 1975. Photograph Denis Bates.

Caersws in 1983

Saturday 26th August 1983. Whilst the normal motive power for the Summer Saturday trains to Aberystwyth was a pair of Class 25 Diesels hauling rakes of Mk1 coaches the locomotives were rather unreliable. Due to the decline in freight traffic, greatly accelerated by the recession in the early 1980's, BR had decided to phase out the class and consequently were not spending any money on maintaining them. Delays of over an hour were commonplace. One Saturday in late August word got round that a Class 40 locomotive had appeared on one of the diagrams. John's intention was to photograph it on its return leg that evening. However a bigger surprise awaited when on arrival at the station a Class 47 locomotive No.47326 running light was stabled in the loop. Apparently both the Class 25's on one train had failed at Dyfi Junction and it had been sent to rescue the train and locos which had been dragged back to Machynlleth. 40135 can be seen at the head of the return passenger train beside the box in Caersws, with the driver looking back at 47326. Neither class were regular performers in BR days on the line, and catching the two together was indeed a very rare occurrence. The lighting conditions were not great but its probably a unique shot.

Photographs: the late John W Marston of Caersws.

A 2007 rail tour to Aberystwyth advertised itself as the first time a Class 47 locomotive had worked west of Newtown - a claim repeated recently in RAIL Magazine which as you can see is not true!

Evidence based decision making?
By Adrian Bailey

Cynicism is widespread amongst many experienced rail campaigners as to the motives behind many of the decisions that have affected our railway over the last half century. The powers that be like to dress up their decisions as ones from those in the know with all the facts to hand; however, more often than not these facts are not in the public domain. Sometimes evidence appears many years later that sheds light on the decision making in the past. It is of course the fiftieth anniversary of the Reshaping Britain's Railways report. The report repeatedly told us that car was replacing rail journeys, and this loss of traffic was behind the system's deficit. The report's authors implied that there were not enough people using the rail system in the early 1960's to make large chunks of it viable anymore, or keep seasonal rolling stock reserves. So when the Department for Transport published its rail statistics for 2011 and included a section on official rail use back to the 1920's, we would of course see the severe drop off in rail traffic in the years leading up to the report wouldn't we? The curve plotted on a graph would look something like Stuka dive bombers dive wouldn't it? Here's what **actually** happened between nationalisation and the end of 1962 just before the reports publication and presumably available to its authors to make an informed decision.

Passenger Kilometres travelled is the measure used in the Government's website which gives a better indication of overall use than ticket sales alone.

Graph 1 – UK Passenger Rail Usage 1948-1962
Source: *https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/.../**rai0101**.xls*
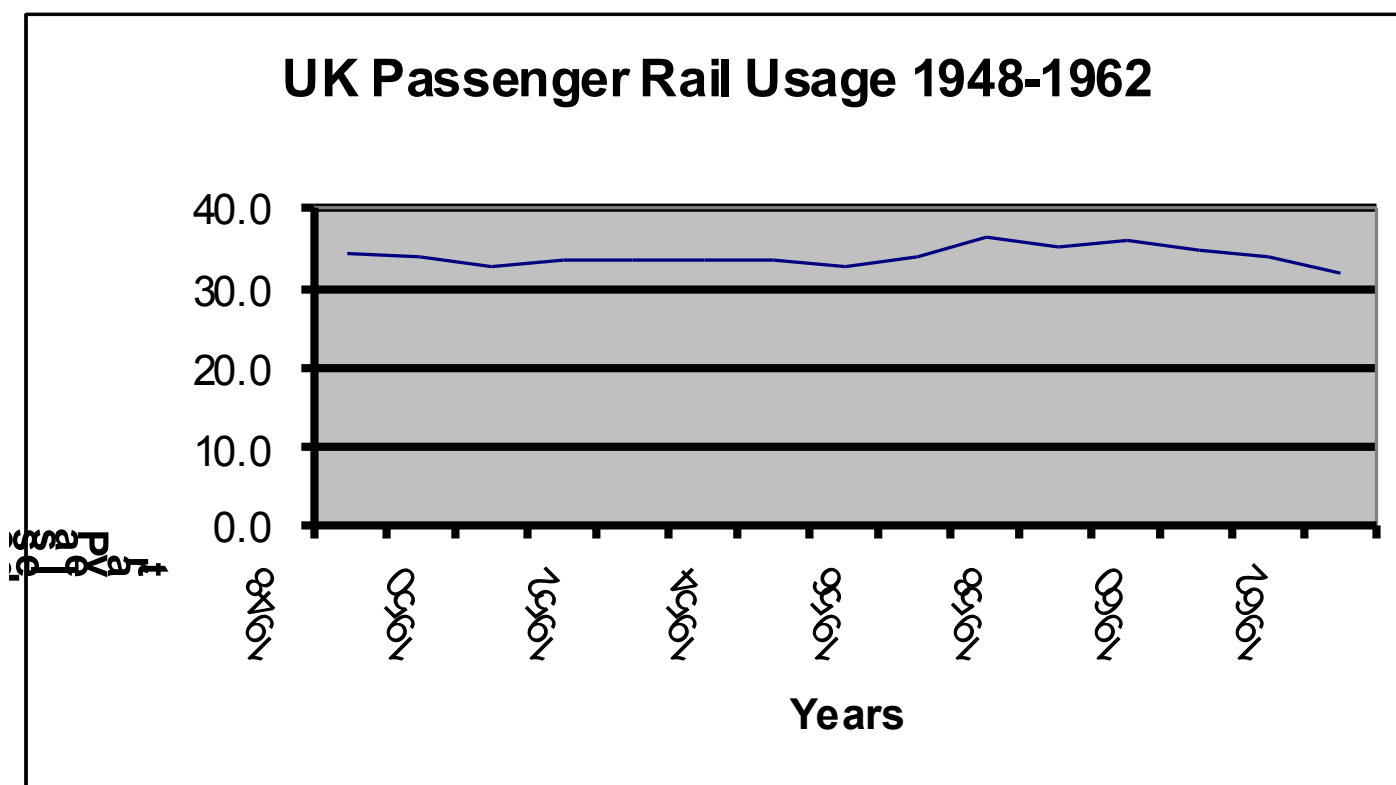
As you can see the actual number of passenger KM's travelled in the period up to the report showed some fluctuation but the amount of KMs travelled by passengers in 1962 at 31.8 Billion was similar to 1950's 32.5 Billion. Variation from the mean in the period was plus or minus 6%, there simply isn't a definitive trend to identify, though there was some slight decline since the peak of 1957 but nothing major. If the report's vehement assertions were right then surely the line on the graph would have dipped continually and noticeably from 1948 onward? As mentioned in another SARPA newsletter article this information was not made public at the time as it doesn't back the reports assertions.

The view prevalent in Government circles for the next thirty five years and beyond was that rail was a declining Victorian mode of transport not worth bothering with investment in. Let's see what actually happened from 1962 until rail privatisation.

Graph 2 – UK Passenger Rail Usage 1962-1997
Source: *https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/.../rai0101.xls*

UK Passenger Rail Usage 1962 -1997
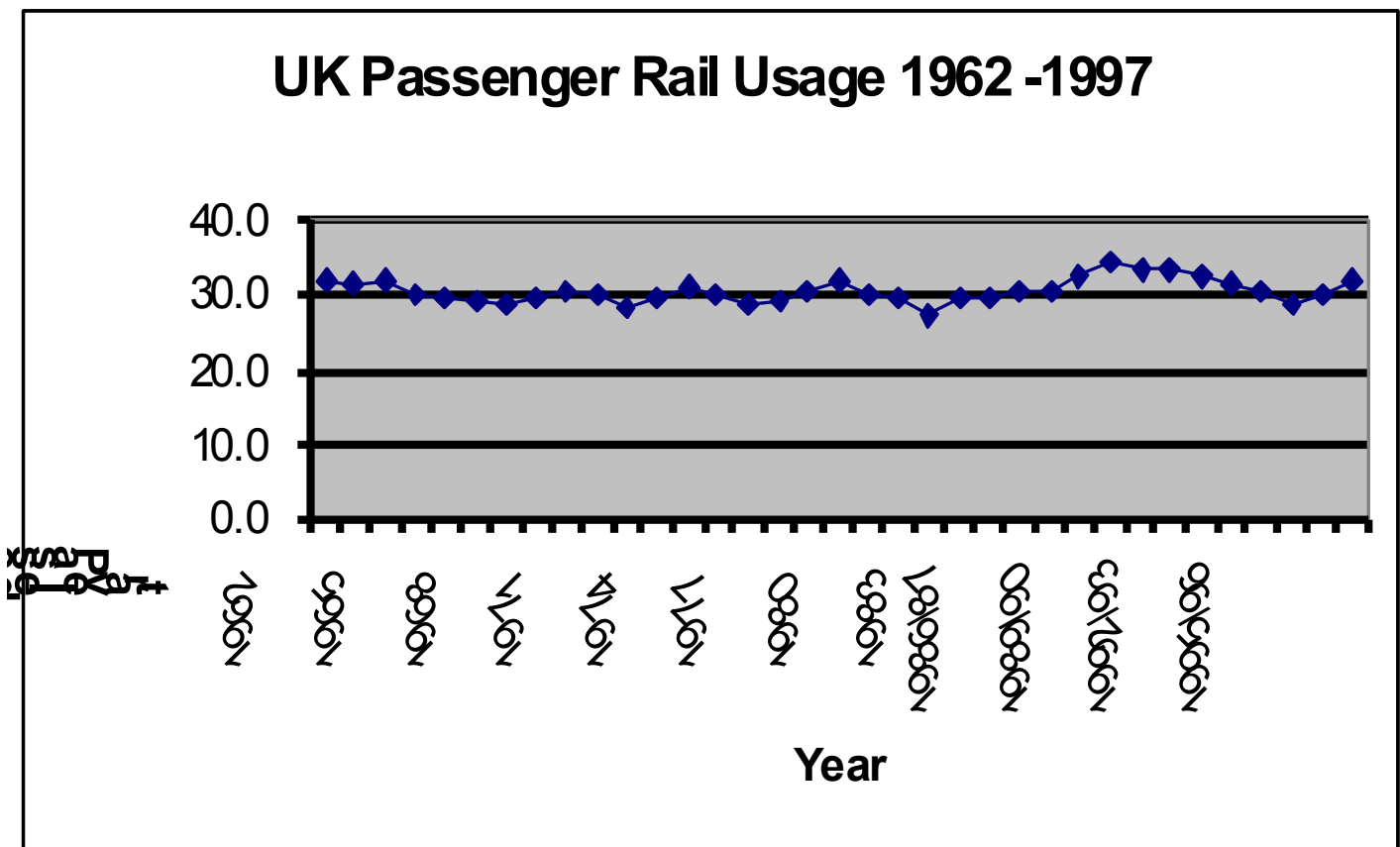
As you can see the theme was to repeatedly cross the 30 Billion KM's travelled mark, swaying over and under but not straying far following the cycles of the economy. Not a flat line but hardly proof of "gentle decline" is it? The last full year of BR (1996-1997) saw 32.1 Billion Passenger KM's travelled. Compare this to the first full year (1949) 34.0 Billion Passenger KM's travelled. 95% of the usage on a network two thirds the size supposedly with the car having taken it all way.

Back in 2003 the Strategic Rail Authority let the Wales and Border franchise on the basis of "no growth", so what trends were there for the SRA to come to that conclusion which were so readily accepted by the Labour administrations in Westminster and Cardiff Bay? The Office of the Rail Regulator has recently published footfall data back to 1997/1998. Previously data was only available to 2002/2003, the last full year before the Wales and Border franchise, SARPA newsletters have often compared the "unexpected" growth since then, but we can now see what was hidden from the public at the time.

Table 1 Cambrian Mainline Station Footfall 1997/1998 to 2002/2003
Source: http://www.rail-reg.gov.uk/server/show/nav.1529

Station	1997/1998	2002/2003	% difference
Aberystwyth	186,024	218,998	+ 17.7
Borth	32,455	37,040	+ 14.1
Dovey Junction	1,504	804	- 46.5
Machynlleth	63,775	81,219	+ 27.4
Caersws	20,733	23,648	+ 14.1
Newtown	65,571	80,540	+ 22.8
Welshpool	49,726	60,538	+ 21.7
Total	**419,778**	**502,787**	**+ 19.8**

So with growth averaging 4% per annum in the 5 year period up to letting the franchise, just how did the SRA come to the conclusion that there would no growth for the next 15 years? This trend was also apparent in other stations /areas across the franchise area, not just ours.

The evidence of official actual rail usage shows that the reasons given for decisions on closure and disinvestment are not supported by the facts. If this evidence was in the public domain at the time would the cuts, investment starvation and no growth franchises happened in the way they have? It is said the primary role of the state is that of a nation's defence, for a RUG it should be to question and challenge.

Vale of Rheidol services

Sunday 21st October 2012: Vale of Rheidol No.8 near Glanyrafon, on a photo charter to Devil's Bridge. Photograph: Alistair Grieve.

Saturday 16th February 2013: the afternoon train to Devil's Bridge. Half term services ran for the first time, with the brake van providing heating for the train (as it did for the Santa Specials in December). Photograph: Denis Bates.

The View from Milepost 62 with the Brigadier

Terrible news - I witnessed an international incident the other Friday night on the 1727 departure from Shrewsbury. Despite the train being fairly rammed full the conductor in her wisdom decided to announce before departure from Shrewsbury that the front two coaches were for Aberystwyth and the back two for Barmouth. Queue instant confusion as we hadn't reversed yet; she then announced again as we departed and came through to do a full ticket check telling people to move. Queue more panic amongst some unfamiliar travellers; a column of Chinese students decided to get themselves and all their baggage out of the Aberystwyth portion into the coast one whilst all the other folk were worrying themselves from the coast portion toward the Aberystwyth one! Dusty meowed and gesticulated desperately to no avail; impasse amid train: a full hour plus before the train would divide. One Chinese with rucksack wedged and nowhere to go against the flow going the other way said hopefully "Awer is with?" The passenger information screens said "Welcome aboard this Arriva Trains Wales service" but that was all, and the PA system announced "This is a security announcement". "This carriage is labelled A for Aberystwyth" insisted one woman - though it was the coast portion - presumably she thought carriage B was for Barmouth! But with an A and B going to Aberystwyth and another A and B going up the coast, only confusion won. Why oh why cannot ATW get something so simple right! Regular travellers all know there's no need to move portion until after Newtown when the load thins out and you can move around more freely, and what's wrong with actually having something aboard telling you where the carriage you're in is going? There's some signs - in between Platforms 5 and 4a at Shrewsbury now - but if you're already aboard there no use.

As a child I remember the Southern Railway had destination boards on the outside of the carriages. I never saw anyone in the wrong portion of the Atlantic Coast Express leaving Waterloo. Despite being met with a sea of BR standard livery coaches at Euston, you could always find an InterCity paper sticker listing end destination and calling points on the door windows. It seems in 2013 we've regressed, or is ATW implementing some strange security directive to confuse foreign terrorists – will I find a member of Al Qaida crying on my next trip because he's got on a train he wasn't planning on blowing himself up on? I'm told that the internal passenger information systems installed on our Class 158's have cunningly been given different versions of software so if you get two units coupled up with different versions they don't work. Of course improved customer service is an area we're told is one of the benefits of privatisation.

I was rather amused the other day, whilst visiting that young man Peter at the excellent Newtown Station Travel, at the new passenger information screens –they handily tell you the next 3 trains. So at 0900 in the morning the UP platform screen was confidently saying that the 1446 to Birmingham International was on time whilst the indicator on the DOWN platform was equally adamant that 1404 to Aberystwyth and Pwllheli was on time. Of course neither of these trains had left their starting points which were hours away, so how could anyone possibly know? The information was no better than looking at the printed timetables. Perhaps it's dark psychological conditioning for us to say everything's all right, when Passenger Focus do their next survey telling us how wonderful the TOC's are. Has anyone ever taken part in these national satisfaction surveys, who do they ask?

Perhaps the reason information is not what it should be is due to the franchise agreement not telling ATW to make it so - like so many other things "it isn't in the franchise agreement", or is it that a business case had not been made? Maybe it would relieve stress if we all ran around like headless chickens making jazz hands and chanting "there's no business case". On second thoughts that would be so depressing, maybe we'd throw ourselves under a train instead, but that would mean finding out if the passenger information screens actually gave out useful information in the event of delays…

However in Welsh Government land it doesn't matter if your business case doesn't stack up; it transpires that the cost benefit ratio of their favourite near entire budget swallowing pet project, the completion of the dualling of the heads of the valleys road – a Welsh Office legacy project – has a poor ratio, and even that's based on growing traffic levels rather than actual declining ones. When challenged why rail projects with better BCR figures had been shelved the Welsh Government told us that the cost benefit analysis was only part of the equation, and the road would be the catalyst to economically regenerate the area! Really? Our Politicians and Officials have been on the funny cigarettes if they believe this. Up in Ynys Mon there's panic amongst local politicians about the islands

faltering economy and job prospects: the area already has the lowest incomes per capita in the UK. However back in the 1990's when the area had the lowest incomes per capita in the UK, a magic solution was put forward, and provided a scheme that would be the catalyst to economically regenerate the area. Can you guess what that was? The A55 North Wales Expressway across the island was completed in the early 2000's. Now if you're the poorest part of the country and you then build a dual carriageway and you're still the poorest part of the country by a long shot ten years later, surely that's telling us something about how useful in regenerating the economy the road has been? In fact Wales is a grand case study of how road construction schemes have not had the magic economic effects claimed of them. Wales is actually very well connected by purpose built roads by international standards, with a high percentage of its population living within 5KM of a dual carriageways/motorway junction, yet the bulk of the country remains an economically depressed region. Has it escaped the notice of our politicians that they built a dual carriageway up the Taff valley to Merthyr Tydfil in the 1980's – big roads didn't work twenty five years ago, why should they now?

It's not that our politicians are spending disproportionately huge sums of transport budget money in South Wales I object to, mostly it's the fact the they're actually conning the people of South Wales as to the effect it will have. If roads really did have the regenerative effect claimed then there would be hard empirical evidence to back this hypothesis up. There would be studies recording business start up rates and failures, levels of employment, income per capita etc. before and after roads had been provided, and the evidence would be there for all to see. So where are they? Recently 32 Professors wrote to the Chancellor pointing out that the economic benefit of new road construction beyond the construction industry jobs created were unproven. The other excuse made by the Welsh Government is that rail infrastructure spend is not devolved. However there's stacks of precedence of WG money being used on it; our unused passing loops for a start and nowhere on the devolution settlement did it say anything about funding air services and buying airports, yet that's is what WG is doing with what little money the A465 cuckoo in the nest is not swallowing up.

The rail network has been held back and under funded on the basis of roads being given priority on the back of the false hypothesis of economic growth for decades. It's time to grow up and recognise this just think of how much third party funding ATW could get to help them label their carriages properly.

Three Cocks Cottage
February 2013

Cambrian Steam News

As many good folk will know, the steam service which operated on the Cambrian during the summer was felled by the introduction of ERTMS in 2011. No steam locomotive in this country has yet been fitted with the necessary on-board equipment to operate with this signalling system. As we understand it, Network Rail believe that the problem is just too expensive. We have heard of seven figure sums being bandied around.

In some circles, steam traction is seen as a nuisance, though we would counter this by saying that whenever a steam locomotive has come to the Cambrian, it has pulled trains and made money and therefore deserves more support. Indeed, the provision of steam traction on some selected services seems quite a good way to persuade people to pay a premium to travel by train!

We have discovered that in Switzerland, the engineering company DLM have fitted a steam engine with a version of ERTMS which is used there. The locomotive concerned is No. 52.8055, a rebuilt German "Kriegslok" and which is now oil fired. The equipment comprises Balise readers and computers housed in the tender. A driver's display is mounted in the cab. The cost of fitting was around £45,000 GBP equivalent.

One of our members has advised us that the Swiss system is not full ERTMS and that their network will be migrated to this by the end of the decade. At that point, 52 8055 will have to be upgraded, though we note that there is a long way between £45,000 and a seven figure sum!

In the meantime, we have been in touch with an organisation called 5AT (http://www.5at.co.uk) who have indicated that they would be willing to project manage the design and build of a brand new machine, primarily for operation on the Cambrian. Enhanced technology would provide greater reliability and range, with reduced maintenance and running costs. ERTMS would be fitted from new.
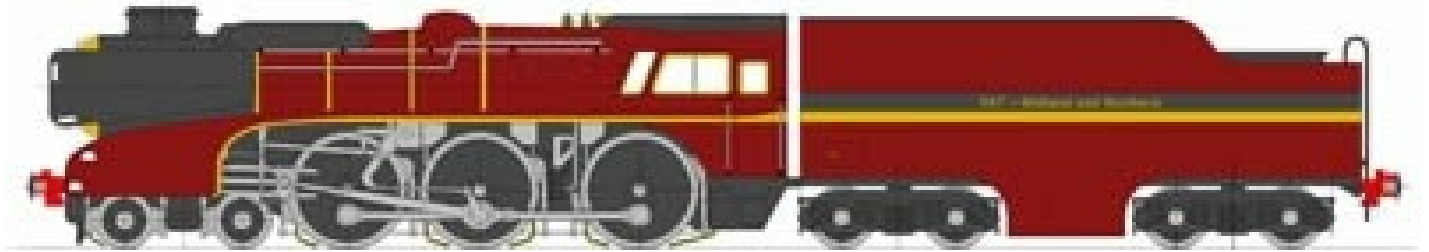
An impression of the loco, reproduced with permission from the 5AT website (www.5AT.co.uk). This loco has not been designed for the Coast Line, but the design could be modified for the line, including provision for tender first running, with better sight lines.

52 8055, the loco that has been fitted with an ERTMS system.

The computer interface in the cab.

Cardiff Central 18/03/13 158828 on a West Wales service, the 1239 to Carmarthen.

Following years of heel dragging any units that might have been allocated to run additional services on the Cambrian have inevitably ended up being used to run trains /provide extra capacity on other parts of ATW's "no growth" franchise area that haveseen growth rates similar too and in some cases better than on our own line. Currently 3 Class 158 units are diagrammed to run services across South Wales on a daily basis including including the Ebbw Vale and Maesteg branches.

This corker has appeared between Platforms 5 and 4a at Shrewsbury station. No wonder people still get in the wrong portion it appears the coast portion first goes via Borth and Aberystwyth before heading up the coast. Passengers for Pwllheli on the 1727 departure Mondays to Thursdays will be disappointed on reaching Machynlleth as they'll have to wait 2 hours.
    No wonder the next sign has been put in place.

Network Rail announcements on developments

Eryl Crump
Daily Post Reporter
From Charlie Hulme's website 21 Jan
http://www.nwrail.org.uk/nw1301c.htm

I spoke with Mark Langman of Network Rail on 8 January about their recent announcements. Faster train services between North and South Wales should be running by 2018 thanks to a major £34m upgrade. Network Rail (NR) says the schemes in North Wales will be the biggest investment in the Welsh railway network since the 1870s. The news has been welcomed by senior politicians but calls have been made for greater investment in North Wales.

The first stage of the 10-year route modernisation plan will involve re-signalling the line between Flint and Llandudno. Aligned with a similar scheme to re-signal the Marches route between Newport and Shrewsbury, both projects will allow more frequent and faster trains between North and South Wales. Engineers believe the re-signalling could take 15 minutes off journey times to Cardiff. The line west of Llandudno Junction will be re-signalled by 2020.

Other projects include major refurbishment of the four metal spans of the historic Barmouth Bridge (budgeted at £3m) plus c.£0.5m per annum (2014-2019) on a rolling programme of timber repairs and maintenance the viaduct, a total spending on the viaduct of c.£5.5m by end of 2019. Also planned is a complete makeover for Holyhead station (£1.5m) to be complete during 2016 although the final programme is yet to be confirmed.

In a separate development, Minister with responsibility for Transport, Carl Sargeant, has announced that the Welsh Government, working in collaboration with the regional transport consortium, Taith, is to develop a business case for the electrification of the North Wales line. The Minister has confirmed that a robust business case will be developed that will capture the full social, economic and environmental benefits for north Wales.

The business plan for modernisation will build on previous work done to date, including the important North East Wales Area Based Transport Study. Mr Sargeant told the press: 'I want to see North Wales properly connected to the UK electric infrastructure, with effective cross-border links ... Modernising the North Wales rail line is a key element of this ambition and has the potential of greatly improving the rail services and unlocking economic growth for the region, which will in turn help tackle poverty.'

In addition to the North Wales Coast Main Line (from Holyhead to Crewe), consideration will be given to the rail network in north-east Wales (including the Wrexham to Bidston line, the line from Wrexham to Chester, and the line from Chester to Warrington Bank Quay) in order to maximise the social, economic and environmental benefits to the region resulting from modernisation. Work now begins on establishing the strategic case for investment, which will define the scope, objectives, benefits and long-list of options for the project. This in turn will lead on to a robust case for change, which we are told will be complete this summer.

SARPA - Welsh Government on the hourly service

On 21 December 2012 Angus Eickhoff wrote from SARPA to the Welsh Goverrnment

Dear Mr Sargeant,

I note with interest your answer to a question from Mr Russell George regarding the Cambrian railway line on Wednesday 5th December last.

It is true that Mid Wales is unlikely ever to elect a Labour member to the Welsh assembly. Conservative representation may be a blessing or otherwise but whatever may prevail, there are a great many electors here for whom the Labour party could be described as representing their interests. Indeed, if we were to apply the definition of "working class" as outlined by Mr Tony Benn, that potential constituency could prove very substantial indeed, if only they could be persuaded!

It is dismaying that there is to be no consideration for enhanced services on the Cambrian between Shrewsbury and Aberystwyth before 2015. We would accept that in these difficult economic times, it may be difficult to find the finance the full blown hourly train service before then but given the capability of the railway to offer enhanced economic opportunities to ordinary people, could not some consideration be given to an improved service on an incremental basis before that time? As a priority, we would put forward that commuter trains into and out of Shrewsbury and Aberystwyth at the appropriate times of day would be a good place to start. This would help to alleviate poverty and economic hardship by enabling working people to access jobs away from their immediate locality, without having the use of a car.

We note that in South Wales, the improved services to Fishguard were achieved by better utilisation of trains and crews. We would countenance that similar improvements may indeed be possible by applying the same principles to the workings on the Cambrian Main Line. We would ask you to consult with Arriva Trains Wales to see if any additional services might be possible within the limited resources available.

We understand from your reply to Mr George that the ERTMS signalling system continues to be part of the problem, though you did not go into detail. Arriva managers have been quoted in the railway press as saying that the system has settled down well,is now very reliable and that the punctuality of the service has now returned to the levels previously achieved. Indeed, this has now been the case for some time, so we are at something of a loss to understand what lies behind your statement. Electors deserve a more informed response and we invite you to explain further.

We have tried in the past to ascertain the nature of the proposed Cambrian line service enhancements through a Freedom of Information Request. However, this endeavour was engulfed by the fog of "Commercial Confidentiality". We would point out that we are not alone in this. We have had sight of a paper written by Powys County Council, which indicates frustration at the lack of available details of the problems delaying service commencement. We also understand that TraCC have expressed disappointment that there is still no firm date for implementation.

This dearth of proper information is most unhelpful to stakeholders as it does not enable them to make a proper contribution to discussion and debate. The result is that for the present, the prospect of an enhanced service on the Cambrian Main Line appears moribund.

In the meantime, we would hope you will agree that the structure of the rail industry as reconfigured for privatisation under Mr Major's government has not lived up to expectations. Whilst it has enriched those corporations which lease the trains, it has served neither the taxpayer nor the passenger particularly well and has left the railway unable to respond quickly to changing needs and developments. The continued delay for the start of enhanced services here is a case in point. We hope that you will be examining closely the prospect of providing a better framework for Welsh railways when the franchise comes up for renewal in 2018.

Yours sincerely,
Angus Eickhoff

Reply from Welsh Government

Tue, 22 Jan 2013
From: Ardern, James (LGC - Transport) <James.Ardern@Wales.GSI.Gov.UK>

Dear Mr Eickhoff,

Thank you for your email dated 21 December to the Minister for Local Government and Communities relating to services on the Cambrian Line. I have been asked to reply.

I can advise that Welsh Government officials are in discussion with Arriva Trains Wales and Network Rail regarding the timetabling of an enhanced service on the Cambrian Line.

With regards to the further work that is required for the introduction of the enhanced service, this relates to the infrastructure enhancements that were completed in parallel with the introduction of ERTMS. These were modelled to sustain an improved timetable. Since ERTMS has become operational, trains running under it are not achieving the anticipated sectional running times. Network Rail is therefore mobilising further infrastructure works, at their own cost, to rectify these issues.

The current infrastructure issues prevent the introduction of a robust hourly timetable. Once Network Rail completes the works it will be possible to consider the implementation of an enhanced service, subject to a positive business case. At a time when public finances are under significant pressure it is important that the Welsh Government maximises the benefits of investment. We would welcome the views of SARPA and other interested groups on how this can best be achieved.

In relation to your comments on the structure of the rail industry, the Minister for Local Government and Communities launched the Welsh Government's call for evidence in October into the options for the future Wales and Borders Franchise from 2018. There will be a full public consultation on the options for re-franchising later this year.

Yours sincerely,

James Ardern
Contracts Manager, Rail & Air Commercial Operations, Transport, Local Government & Communities, Welsh Government

Do you think your fare is fair or good value for money? A comparison of selected fares from Welshpool reveals a dichotomy

Lets take a look at some fares from our line and see if you think they're value for money or fair. We've taken 10 fares from Welshpool: 5 long distance city breaks over a weekend, and 5 Saturday day trips more locally. We've assumed leaving and returning on the same trains: the 1501 on a Friday, returning 1749 Sunday for the weekend breaks, and the 0901 Saturday morning returning 1749 for the day trips. We've looked at distance travelled, cost per mile and average speed of journey. We've used National Rail Enquiries, and assumed the cheapest walk on flexible ticket with no railcard discounts, to get the fares and journey times. We've taken mileages from an old BR all line timetable to calculate cost per mile and average speed.

Destination	Fare	Cost per Mile	Average Speed
Weekend away			
Birmingham New St	£22.30	17.9p	45mph
Cardiff Central	£46.00	18.3p	45mph
Liverpool	£39.60	22.4p	31mph
London Euston	£59.90	17.0p	55mph
Manchester Piccadilly	£26.30	15.8p	39mph
Day trip			
Aberystwyth	£13.70	11.1p	40mph
Birmingham New St	£16.60	13.3p	45mph
Newtown	£5.10	18.9p	54mph
Telford Central	£12.50	18.3p	40mph
Shrewsbury	£5.80	14.7p	52mph

There's certainly variation, as a grouping the day returns (11.1p- 18.9p) are cheaper than the period returns (15.8p – 22.4p) it's hard to see why as the person travelling is a passenger on the same train going out and back regardless. The same fares are applicable if we had chosen the same day of outbound travel and trains: the fact we choose different days actually makes no difference to the price.

Our day trips out are all on the same Aberystwyth to Birmingham International trains, but there's no consistency, you could argue the cost per mile to Newtown is reflected in the higher speed but it's only 2mph faster than to Shrewsbury whose cost per mile is over 20% lower! The cost per mile to

Telford certainly couldn't be justified on the speed, Aberystwyth is 40% cheaper per mile at the same speed. There does seem a degree of "pricing off" applicable to the fares to Newtown and Telford, but why? The fare may discourage someone using the train to Telford, but at the same time the Birmingham fare encourages seats to be occupied all the way into the West Midlands.

For the city breaks Liverpool sticks out like a sore thumb, with the highest cost per mile (22.4p) and the slowest journey speed (31mph) with 2 changes thrown in as well. Can anyone justify it? Contrast this with Manchester: o.k. 39mph average speed is not great (mainly due to connection time at Shrewsbury), but 30% cheaper per mile (15.8p). London is comparatively good value, but the average speed is not as great as one would think. The connections and therefore average speed to Cardiff are good but at a premium. Given the disinterest many people in Mid Wales feel towards Cardiff the train fare is hardly encouraging visits, is it? The distance by car from Welshpool to Liverpool and Birmingham is almost identical but rail seems to provide a barrier to travel to Merseyside in its fare structure.

We can hear the spokesman from ATOC shouting about the great advance purchase deals available, so let's look at our City breaks and try and shed light. We happened to check on the evening of the 28th January, assuming outbound travel on February 8th returning on the 10th February. For Birmingham New St we could find an AP single for £17.00 outbound and £22.00 return giving a total of £39.00 – an incredible £16.30 more expensive than the walk on fare! For Manchester Piccadilly there was an AP single available for £24.00 on the train we selected but nothing on the return. For Cardiff outbound at £24.00 and return at £14.00 was on offer, giving a total of £38.00 - a saving of a £8.00. For Liverpool we found an outbound fare of £23.60 via Wolverhampton with a return of £21.00 giving a total of £44.60, £5.00 more expensive. London Euston was more bizarre: an outbound AP of £74.00 was on offer with a £27.50 return, a grand total of £101.50 - a staggering £41.60 more expensive than walk on! Overall (taking out Manchester) Advanced Purchase turned out to be 33% more expensive than walk on fares! No wonder ATOC are so keen on promoting them K-ching!

The truth of the matter with advanced purchase is that the great deals only exist on very early morning trains or late evening ones. We found an £11.00 single from London Euston to Welshpool: the trouble was you had to kill 5 hours in Birmingham in the middle of the night waiting for the first train to Mid Wales. Advance Purchase despite the whinging from ATOC about great value only accounted for 4% of all tickets sold in the UK in 2011, as they are of limited use to the vast bulk of travellers. Season tickets accounted for 45% the bulk of tickets sold; 51% were actually walk on fares, though over half of these or 28% of the overall total were discounted i.e. using railcards.

Up until 1968 fares were set at fixed rates per mile travelled, by Government legislation dating back to Victorian days. In 1951 the Third class return fare to London Paddington from Welshpool was 47 shillings and 2 pence or £2.36. According to the National Archives websites historical currency converter this was worth £53.72 or 15.3p per mile in 2010 prices. Just 3 of our 10 selected fares above were cheaper per mile than they would have been 60 years ago. The rates in 1951 were 2.4 old pence per mile travelled for return third class fares (valid for 3 months) and 3.2 old pence per mile for single journeys. At least it was consistent, unlike today.

SARPA Meetings in 2013

Saturday 13th April	1100	Aberystwyth	The RAFA Club, 46 Bridge St.
Note change of venue from that already posted.			
Tuesday 7th May	17.45	Shrewsbury	Railway Station
Tuesday 4th June	18.30	Newtown	Sportsman
Saturday 13th July	1145	Tywyn	Wharf Station, Talyllyn Rly.
Saturday 10th August	1145	Borth	Railway Hotel
Tuesday 3rd September	1845	Caersws	
Saturday 12th October	1100	Machynlleth	White Lion **AGM**
Tuesday 5th November	1745	Aberystwyth	Cambria, Pier St.
Tuesday 3rd December	1830	Newtown	Sportsman

Websites

Our website http://sarpa.info
Webmaster Angus Eickhoff. Website host is mid-wales.net

Other sites of interest:

A useful alternative to the National Rail Enquiries site
        traintimes.org.uk/

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
LondonMidland
        www.londonmidland.com/index.html
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
North Wales Coast Railway
        www.nwrail.org.uk/
Circular tour of North Wales by rail
        www.penmorfa.com/Cambrian/
Ffestiniog Railway timetable
        www.ffestiniograilway.co.uk/timetable.htm
Vale of Rheidol Railway timetable
        www.rheidolrailway.co.uk/timetable.htm
Talyllyn Railway
        www.talyllyn.co.uk/
Welshpool and Llanfair Railway timetable
        www.wllr.org.uk/timetable.htm
Welsh Highland Heritage Railway
        www.whr.co.uk/index.php?pid=51
Fairbourne Railway
        www.fairbournerailway.com/index.htm
Borth Station Museum
        www.borthstationmuseum.co.uk
Rail Photographs by Richard Jones including many of the modern Cambrian scene
        http://railphotos.fourecord.com/index.php

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

Newtown Station Travel
The Railway Station, Old Kerry Road, Newtown, Powys SY16 1BP. Fax. 01686 621966
E-mail newtownstation@btclick.com

The Association of Train Operating Companies:
ATOC, 3rd Floor, 40 Bernard Street, London WC1N 1BY

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 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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