

Shrewsbury
Aberystwyth
Rail
Passengers'
Association



Newsletter
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The western gateway to the Cambrian: the new entrance to the refurbished station buildings in Aberystwyth. The carpark is now reached from the taxi rank, and cars can exit at the far end, back via the taxi rank. 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 and its Officers 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.

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The membership fee is currently (for membership up to 31 December 2015) £8.00 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 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 Secretary: 23 High Street, Welshpool, Powys, SY21 7JP. 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.

Chairman's Message

"It cannot be said that the Cambrian any longer fulfils the purpose for which it was built. It still offers speed, reliability and reasonable comfort; but most of its customers have deserted it..... As some indication, passenger bookings at Aberystwyth for the Cambrian Line declined from 46,000 in 1963 to 31,000 in 1967..... The days of standard gauge rail transport in Mid Wales seem, therefore, to be ending, much as we must regret to see them go."

So wrote the rail author, John Snell in 1969. What a long way we have come since then and thankfully, the Cambrian lines from Shrewsbury are still with us and thriving. It would have probably been beyond the most optimistic commentator's imagination back then to think we might ever have a service which is hourly in frequency at least for parts of the day.

In the 1960s, the presumption was that the car would provide the answer to all passenger transport problems. It was thought that the passenger railway would fade away as vehicle ownership increased, whilst rail freight would increase - this at a time when road deaths were running at around 7,000 per year. That's about nineteen people every day being wiped out; just going about their business.

In the early seventies, the Cambrian service was fairly sparse, with a mere six trains each way and no Sunday service at all in winter. The first departure left Shrewsbury at 0415 - an overnight mail train from York - but if you tried to travel on the day from London Euston the first departure from Shrewsbury was 1130. There were massive service gaps in the middle of the day. From 1130 until 1417 and then until 1824, there were no Cambrian departures ex-Salop. The last departure for Shrewsbury from Aberystwyth was at 1828, the York mail. Through passenger trains even as far as Wolverhampton were the exception, with only one working each way.

By the late 1980s, the service had improved somewhat with the re-introduction of the "Cambrian Coast Express" as a through service to Euston, Mondays to Fridays; threats of closure had abated. The 0415 ex-Salop had disappeared but the total number of trains each way had increased to seven. There was still a fairly large service gap in the Up direction in the afternoon, with no through departures

from Aberystwyth between 1330 and 1712. The exception was on Saturdays when there was a 1500 service, which if I recall correctly was something of an indifferent timekeeper.

From the mid-1980s, BR had introduced a Sunday service of sorts by providing a bus which called at stations on the Cambrian Main Line. By 1988, service provision had risen to two trips each way.

So now, we can look forward to an increased train service from 18th May. The total footfall figure today at Aberystwyth is 320,000; the 160,000 entrance footfall consists of tickets bought locally, return tickets from other originating points and a guesstimate of rail rover usage. It's not a direct comparison with 1967's ticket sales as the methodology has changed over the years, though in all probability we've seen a multiplication of users in that time of around threefold. Increased train frequency will make the Cambrian railway even more attractive for travellers. This is the culmination of a campaign which is older than SARPA itself, going back to the days of the old "Cambrian Rail Users' Group" and it really is fantastic news. We extend our thanks to all in the Welsh Government and the Local Councils who have worked so hard to make this possible, as well as all those in the railway industry over the years.

We have been asked by some people where SARPA is going next? Well we still have plenty of work to do. Monitoring the new service will be of the utmost importance as the rolling stock provided should be adequate for the number of passengers using the trains. We are not entirely convinced that the various authorities have quite grasped this, which may yet prove embarrassing for the railway if it becomes a victim of its own success. The replacement Wales and Border franchise is of utmost importance and the many mistakes of 2003 cannot be allowed to be repeated. We also hope that adequate effort will be made to publicise the new service, which starts in less than two months' time.

Angus Eickhoff
Llidiart Wood
Welshpool

March 2015

News in Brief

Welshpool

Buttington-Trewern School have teamed up with Arriva Trains Wales to provide floral decoration at the station. Arriva have provided two tubs for the project and children from the school planted bulbs in December.

Concern has been expressed at the lack of additional parking space for rail passengers arriving by car, which could become acute when the service frequency is enhanced next year. Additional space could be made available on the east side of the station, although where the funding to convert it into car park space will come from is not clear. A plan is being progressed to make extra car parking space on the industrial estate side of the station

Enhanced Service Update

The new timetable has been made available for booking tickets from 24th February. You can take a look at it by going on line. The webmaster favours the Accessible UK Train Times site as being easier to use than that of National Rail Enquiries.

We have also pieced it together from the Open Train Times website, which gives reporting numbers. The results, showing departures from Shrewsbury and Aberystwyth can be seen in the tables below (Mondays to Fridays times). Platform numbers are still subject to alteration and indeed real time trains is showing slight variation to those shown in the article today. The 1830 and 2030 departures from Shrewsbury are very likely to be portions off Holyhead trains from BHM INTL, though the split is not yet showing. The arrival from INTL is in Platform 3 a few minutes before the Aberystwyth train departs and there's no ecs working.

Turnaround times @ Aberystwyth approx 14 min. Dovey Junc - Dovey Junc times approx 54 min.

In our view, the absence of 0830 and 1630 departures from Shrewsbury are unfortunate. We hope that there are plans to strengthen the 1727 ex-Salop to cope with what undoubtedly will be heavy demand. Also, a 2030 departure from Aberystwyth in the summer months would probably be popular,

though the present arrangements east of Shrewsbury would only allow the passenger to travel as far as Wolverhampton at that time of day.

Departures from Salop.					
Reporting No	Arr	From	Platform	To	Dep
1J00		Salop	5	Aberystwyth	0625
1J03	0719½	Birmingham New Street	6	Aberystwyth	0727
1J07	0918	Birmingham International	5	Aberystwyth	0930
1J09		Salop	5	Aberystwyth	1029
1J11	1119	Birmingham International	5	Aberystwyth	1129
1J15	1319	Birmingham International	5	Aberystwyth	1329
1J19	1519	Birmingham International	5	Aberystwyth	1530
1J23	1719	Birmingham International	5	Aberystwyth	1727
1J26		Salop	3	Aberystwyth	1831
1J27	1920	Birmingham International	3	Aberystwyth	1930
1J28		Salop	3	Aberystwyth	2030
1J31	2119	Birmingham International	3	Aberystwyth	2142

Departures from Aberystwyth		
Reporting No	To	Dep
1G07	Birmingham International	0530
1J10	Salop	0630
1G15	Birmingham International	0730
1J20	Salop	0830
1G25	Birmingham International	0930
1G35	Birmingham International	1126
1J40	Salop	1230
1G45	Birmingham International	1330
1G55	Birmingham international	1530
1G65	Birmingham International	1729
1J71	Salop	1829
1G75	Birmingham New Street	1928

Traws Link Cymru

Ceredigion MP Mark Williams met recently with the Secretary of State for Wales Stephen Crabb and representatives of Traws Link Cymru to discuss their campaign to reopen the Aberystwyth-Carmarthen line. Mr Williams said that there is now a huge amount of interest and growing momentum for the campaign: so that it was very important to promote a dialogue with the UK Government. The representatives put a strong case to the Secretary, who seemed genuinely interested in the issue.

Harrington Humps

Following the installation of Harrington Humps at Aberdyfi and Talsarnau, one is now being installed at Penrhyndeudraeth.

Machynlleth

Following the installation of the new footbridge with lifts, the existing one is going to the Welshpool and Llanfair Railway.

The station is something of a construction site mess at the moment with the old house demolished and being used as a base for the contractors building the access for all footbridge and lift. Wire fencing

has been placed haphazardly behind the UP platform. The flat roof of the ERTMS signalling centre has already developed leaks and has been covered in scaffolding for repair.

In addition we understand that there has been a slippage behind the Up Platform, in which part of the structure itself has moved. This has led to trains using the Down side, irrespective of direction of travel. Whether this applies to all services is not clear.

Cambrian Crossings

The Welsh Government has allocated £3 million to Network Rail towards a scheme to close eight Cambrian railway level crossings around Talerddig, between Newtown and Machynlleth. The total estimated cost of the scheme is £7.5 million and Network Rail's £4.5 million contribution is a significant allocation of the ring-fenced funding for crossing closures across England and Wales.

Powys County Council is Network Rail's delivery agent and the majority of the works are on the highway. The project comprises two kilometres of new highways works, two road-over-rail bridges and one new river bridge. The intention is improve safety and train performance and punctuality, make the performance of the May 2015 improved timetable more robust and more able to recover from delays. The closure of the crossings will, it is said, provide an improvement in local safety and will also assist local farmers in moving livestock across the railway.

[From Charlie Hulme's North Wales Railway website]

The agricultural contractor that was being prosecuted for causing the collision between a tractor and a train at Buttington Hall in 2013 has had the case against him dropped by the CPS on the grounds of his ill health: the gentleman is 74 years of age.

Capel Seion crossing at Borth, which is close to the station at the Aberystwyth end, is to be closed to vehicles, though not to pedestrians. A road diversion is to be put in place, so that vehicles can cross at the existing one closer to Aberystwyth, which is to be equipped with barriers.

Members of the local agricultural community have become concerned about the prospect of an hourly service, claiming that they need half an hour at a time to get cattle across User Worked Crossings (UWC), and they will no longer have the time with more trains running. Their claims have been met with some scepticism from within railway sources, who point to other areas of the UK with double track and even more frequent services that seemingly have no issues with live stock crossing. It has been suggested that the farmers are primarily looking for compensation and it has pointed out that north of Welshpool to Buttington Junction up until 1965 there were close on 50 train movements a day on summer Saturdays. As far as we are aware, there is no record of any livestock crossing problems.

Shrewsbury

The station café is to be rebranded as a Starbucks franchise.

Network Rail's Wales Route Strategy suggests extra platforms will be needed in the long term to accommodate expected increases in passenger traffic. However, the identified solution of ripping up the line that serves Platform 3 and building a new platform to serve the UP main line and building a platform to serve the DOWN Main line seems half cut. Both these lines are the freight avoiding lines through the station, so Network Rail thinks they're not needed? If there's been a lesson on the railways from the last few years ripping up infrastructure because you've persuaded yourself you have a crystal ball that says their stuff is not needed in the future is a fool's choice with more money being spent reinstating infrastructure than was ever saved by taking it out up and down the country. The document also bizarrely conducted a cost benefit analysis on adding extra carriages to already overcrowded Manchester to Cardiff services.

Newtown

Newtown Station Travel will be opening slightly earlier than the current 0745 to accommodate travellers for the 0738 to Shrewsbury once the new timetable arrives.

Dovey Junction

The new timetable will see trains cross 10 times a day on weekdays and Saturdays making it the busiest crossing point on the line. UP trains i.e. from Aberystwyth are scheduled to arrive first and run into the platform stopping at the Machynlleth end whilst DOWN services towards Aberystwyth will use the loop and access the platform at the Aberystwyth end. Most of the crossings will take place pre 0900 and after 1800.

Mindless thieves and vandals stole a limited quantity of cash whilst causing lots of damage in the Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust hide/visitor centre in March. The resident ospreys, Monty and Glesni, have now returned from their winter sojourn in Africa: look out on the north side of the train as it leaves the station for a glimpse of them on the nest platform.

Aberystwyth

The greatest thing since sliced bread said the Welsh Government press release. Welcome, but maybe not quite in that category is the completion of the station refurbishment with new toilets, waiting areas and booking office. See the pictures. Whilst undoubtedly an improvement, a snap poll of passengers in early April by SARPA found that extra carriages, more services, direct London trains and the restoration of the line to Carmarthen were of more concern for users at the station.

Long serving Trolley Man and SARPA member Dave Taylor has retired after 25 years plus service. We wish him a long and healthy retirement.

Wetherspoon's have installed a large TV screen in their main bar area, giving up-to-date train departure information.

Ticketing

We understand from reports in the media that Arriva Trains are in favour of scrapping nationwide ticketing. The suggestion is that ATW would be only selling tickets for journeys on their network and direct 'cross boundary' services from its stations.

As we understand it, the purpose is to enable the company to introduce new smart ticketing systems without the obligation and expense of continuing to offer nationwide BR-era magnetic stripe tickets in parallel. In the event of this happening, presumably Arriva would then wish to vary prices to reflect the cost of selling different types of tickets and also, to encourage customers to use new smart ticketing systems. This could mean higher charges for magnetic stripe tickets bought through ticket offices, as opposed to barcode or smartcard tickets bought online.

We have written to ATW asking for clarification but they have not at this stage responded.

See:

<http://tinyurl.com/lbqyk8w>

Birmingham New Street rebuilding

In February, the new Birmingham New Street station and Grand Central shopping destination moved a step closer to completion after demolition work to create the stunning new atrium came to an end. More than 6,000 tonnes of concrete have been removed from under the new atrium allowing natural light to flood the new concourse for the first time. The impressive space was created using a bespoke JCB machine - fondly known as the Mega Muncher - which was used by local demolition firm Coleman & Company to remove two floors of concrete from the old station structure.

The rebuilt Birmingham New Street station along with the new premium shopping destination, Grand Central are scheduled for completion in September of this year.

Network Rail has a website dedicated to the project:-

<http://www.newstreetnewstart.co.uk>

Completion is still due for September 2015 with the new development incorporating many new shops/restaurants and largest John Lewis store outside London. This will surely attract more users to New St but there been no corresponding increase in train capacity planned.

Pacers on the Cambrian

The end of the abominable Pacer trains reminds us that BR brought the prototype Leyland Railbus on a proving trip to the Cambrian in 1981. The Pacer concept was originally designed as a supposed low cost solution for lightly loaded rural branch lines, though the Thatcher Government forced BR to build these trains for use on Suburban routes away from London. Having arrived on the Cambrian and run up to Pwllheli and back down to Machynlleth it was to overnight there before running into Aberystwyth and returning to Shrewsbury the next day. Local legend has it that staff, utterly appalled at the prospect of the contraption being used on the Cambrian, hatched a sabotage plot in the Red Lion in Machynlleth that night. Suffice to say it apparently struggled to climb the bank out of Aberystwyth and came to halt on Talerddig bank a number of times: even apparently rolling back to a less steep section to get a run up. BR top brass hushed up the incident but the Pacer derivatives were never to be seen on the Cambrian again. Surely 89C's greatest day!



The new booking office and waiting room at Aberystwyth - a great improvement on the old booking office. Note the incorporation in the pitched ceiling of an original Cambrian Railways beam.
Photograph: Gareth Marston.

Weed Room

We came across a totally bonkers proposal recently, from the right wing think-tank, The Institute of Economic Affairs. Two authors connected with this organisation have cobbled together a briefing paper entitled "Paving Over the Tracks; a better use for Britain's railways?"

Essentially they propose ripping up railway lines and replacing them with dedicated bus routes. They think that there would be no difference in capacity and that overcrowding would be consigned to history. Speed between stopping places would be unaffected. Oh. Really?

Well this one has been tried before, being proposed as long ago as the 1950s by an outfit which called itself the "Railway Conversion League". They published figures which purported to show that the number of passengers who could be transported on coaches along such a road was the same, if not more, than could have travelled by train on the railway; however, without hard shoulders or verges, a single breakdown or slower vehicle would have drastically reduced the capacity of the road. Nevertheless, the idea found some favour for some time, even to the extent where there was a serious plan to replace the former Great Central (GCR) lines into Marylebone as a pilot. In the early 1980s, even Peter Parker, the Chairman of British Rail was mesmerised and commissioned a report into converting a railway in the London area.

A number of routes were examined. In the end the only one deemed suitable was the short section of the GCR from Marylebone to Northolt Junction. If the road was constructed as a busway, it was estimated that it would need to carry 1,000 vehicles per day, and passengers would have to be charged a 25p-45p supplement to bring a return on investment of around 10-15%. Even this had its problems, owing to the restriction offered by the Marylebone Tunnels. The plan was to have it brought into service by 1987. It was eventually defeated by public opposition, although not before serious chunks of the Marylebone site were sold off for development and which constrain the operation of the railway today.

Recently, our Chairman was round at Three Cocks Cottage for a spot of luncheon with our esteemed contributor, the Brigadier, and this very matter was discussed. Dusty was purring loudly, as the old soldier went to his extensive bookshelves and took down his late cousin's well used copy of "Home Guard Manual, 1941". This is a most useful volume if you need to repel invaders and on page 202 in the transport section, the Brigadier pointed out a graph showing road capacities, with one salient feature. The greater the volume of traffic in terms of "Vehicles to the Mile" (vtm), the slower the speed.

Now, the military are certainly no fools when it comes to moving loads of stuff. They have quite a long and successful track record and they've been doing it all over the World. Thus, the "Home Guard Manual" points out that the most efficient speed/capacity combination is 44 vtm at 25mph. At 50 mph, you only manage 19 vtm. Now, the required number of road vehicles to replace a modern 12 coach suburban train, seat for seat would be around 16. If we consider that on long distance buses everyone must be seated and belted in, we wind up requiring at least 20 buses. We then have a situation where a train about 900 feet long would be replaced by road coaches taking up over a mile, or nearly 6000 feet, travelling at under 50 mph. "Concerns about journey times can be dismissed." say the Institute of Economic Affairs.

The notion that travel speeds would not be adversely affected is, of course a complete nonsense. The Cambridge Guided Busway, which has been foisted upon the trackbed of the Huntingdon-Cambridge railway line, is limited to 55 mph, which compares poorly with the railway. This is for a *GUIDED* busway, where the driver does not have responsibility for steering the bus. Probably, an "open road" busway would need a tighter speed restriction for safety reasons.

The eventual cost of the Cambridge experiment was quite staggering, at around £150m against an original estimate of £116m. In comparison, around the time of privatisation, a scheme to reopen the route as a proper railway was costed at just £20m.

The authors maintain that providing dedicated bus roads has been fantastically successful all over the World. "From Istanbul to Mexico City, these busways carry vast numbers of commuters while offering cheap and affordable fares." Well the Chairman has some experience of Mexico City and can only cite their transport planning as a disaster, which has meant that a beautiful city is utterly despoiled by gridlock and the most odious pollution. The Mexicans have meanwhile closed down their entire passenger rail network, selling the freight side off to American operators. Traffic tribulations in the

capital have occasioned some repentance recently with the building of a new suburban railway.....complete with ERTMS signalling!

We are right to worry that the railway still has its misguided opponents and we should not discount what they say. They have had the ear of government before in the early 1960s and nationwide, public transport is still reeling from their stupidity.

The whole of the current proposal has its genesis in market greed; that the state should not support the rail industry and which the authors think gives poor value for money anyway. Their report does not go into too much detail but mentions that, to save wages, the bus drivers could do another day job as well when they are not driving commuters! They believe that excess capacity could be sold off to other users who might be prepared to pay to use a toll road. Heady stuff for those who think the market is such a beautiful thing.

In conclusion, this is so poorly conceived, one could be forgiven for thinking that the authors have been spending time smoking the same heady stuff as Bill Clinton admitted to – only it looks like they inhaled.

Thornton Luper

Shrewsbury: rail hub for Mid Wales and the Marches

Roger Goodhew

The turn of the year is a busy time, with the winter timetable starting in mid-December, all lines closed on Christmas & Boxing Days, major engineering renewals under way in diverse places, and new fares starting in early January.

Shrewsbury is a 'crossroads' with lines from the NW (Holyhead, Chester & Wrexham) and the North (Manchester, Stockport & Crewe) converging at Shrewsbury station; crossing lines from the West (Aberystwyth, Pwllheli & Machynlleth) and the East (London, Birmingham & Wolverhampton) and meeting lines from the South {Cardiff, Newport & Hereford} and the SW (Swansea, Llandrindod Wells and Craven Arms).

The railway station sits astride the river Severn with four signal boxes controlling rail traffic in and out of the station and through the myriad of points (or 'switches') and crossovers that make up the permanent way. The junctions rely on several types of control and signalling equipment, with the prospect of an updating scheme providing a major challenge for the 2020s.

Winter Timetable

The winter timetable came into force on Sunday 14th December 2014 and lasts until Saturday 16th May 2015. During this 22 week period, a direct service between Shrewsbury (SY) and London Euston (LE) is being provided by Virgin Trains. This is the third time since the Railways Act of 1993 became law that a direct service of this type has been tried. The first was also to Euston by Virgin, the second by the Wrexham & Shropshire Railway to London Marylebone.

The new service provides two trains per day Monday to Saturday in each direction with one each way on Sunday:-

M-F	SY	0639	1524	Sa	SY	0818	1524	Su	SY	1524
	LE	0915	1756		LE	1056	1756		LE	1757
M-F	LE	1023	1823	Sa	LE	1123	1823	Su	LE	1900
	SY	1258	2055		SY	1354	2055		SY	2135

Stopping pattern - southbound

All trains stop at Wellington, Telford Central, Wolverhampton, Birmingham New Street, Birmingham International and Coventry; thereafter, the only stop is at either Rugby (only the 0639 exSalop) or Watford Junction. To get to Kew, change at Watford Jn and Willesden Jn using London Overground.

Stopping pattern - northbound

The first stop is at Watford Junction, except for Sundays when the first stop is at Rugby; thereafter, all trains stop at the same stations as in the above list between Coventry and Wellington; the evening train stops additionally, daily, at Sandwell & Dudley,

Sunday 14th December 2014

The inaugural service from Shrewsbury to London Euston. The photographs show the pattern of train movements at Shrewsbury station before, during and after the departure of the first Virgin Trains service.

Timeline [P=platform]

15:12 arr P6 ex Swansea 11:08 via Heart of Wales line
 15:19 arr P4 ex Birmingham International 14:07 via Stour Valley line [photo 13]
 15:21 arr P3 ex Cardiff Central 13:22 via Marches line
 15:22 dep P3 for Holyhead due 18:37 via Chester line
 15:23 arr P6 ex Aberystwyth 13:30 via Cambrian line (sch 15:26) [photo 16]
 15:24 dep P5 for London Euston due 17:57 via Stour valley line [photos 17-19]
 15:26 see 15:23 above
 15:27 dep P4 for Aberystwyth due 17:25 via Cambrian line [photo 20]
 15:33 dep P6 for Birmingham International due 16:56 [photo 20 awaiting dep]
 15:38 arr P4 ex Cardiff Central 13:40 via Marches line
 15:40 dep P4 for Manchester Piccadilly due 17:14 via Crewe line
 15:44 arr P7 ex Manchester Piccadilly 14:30 via Crewe line
 15:47 dep P7 for Milford Haven due 21:20 via Marches line
 16:18 dep P6 for Cardiff Central due 21:37 via Heart of Wales line

Apart from the diversity of signalling arrangements, also of note in photos 16 and 17 is the class 170 unit of London Midland which is stabled in the nearby sidings. This train will have formed the 23:08 from Birmingham New Street on Saturday evening arriving in Shrewsbury at 00:11 on Sunday morning. This unit is available to form the early morning service on Monday morning departing Salop at 05:25 for Rugeley Trent Valley due 07:38 via all stations through Birmingham New Street and Walsall.

Engineering Works

Repairs, renewals, experiments and enhancements all impact on train services. The Cambrian line had more than its fair share of repairs to weather-related damage from early 2014 onwards. These are substantially complete. Renewals includes provision of replacement bridges and also of trackwork, signalling and overhead wires. The West Coast Mainline is receiving a major investment in the Watford Junction area which may affect weekend timetables to London Euston until April 2015.

The signalling exercise on the Cambrian system seems to have bedded in leaving just level crossing replacement works to be done. On the Chester line a partial re-doubling of the track is well under way although further works to speed up trains on the Marches line are likely.

Comment

Bridge repairs in Shrewsbury will need to be completed if a continuation of 'strengthening' of Cambrian services to Birmingham to 6 car lengths is to be sustainable.

It remains to be seen whether further signalling work - including the bringing back into service of platforms 1 and/or 2 at Shrewsbury station - will be needed. If the Virgin service is to use platform 5 on any regular basis, then it seems unlikely that platform 6 will be able to accommodate at one and the same time (as it did on 14/ 12/ 14) the Heart of Wales train (particularly if it is formed of a 150 unit) and a 6 car Cambrian train.

Finally, it is to be hoped that anyone who uses the weekend Virgin Super Voyager service to London Euston during the currency of the Watford Junction Engineering Works will bear in mind that the renewal work will eventually provide improved speeds and reliability between Rugby and Euston. This has been badly needed for years.

In the interim, it is assumed that the extra 1 hr 25 mins time which Virgin publicity expects will be needed to reach Euston [by diesel powered, diverted trains] during the currency of these major works will be accompanied by a most interesting alternative route which will probably, from Coventry, take the traveller via Leamington Spa, Oxford, Reading, Acton MainLine, Acton Wells Junction, Willesden Junction and Euston. Unless, of course, you know better!



The first service to London: preparing to depart from Platform 5, and rounding the curve. The signal showing "off" is for a train departing in the Hereford direction. Photographs: Roger Goodhew.





The new Birmingham New Street station. Network Rail have kindly allowed us to use the pictures above, which give an artist's impression of the rebuilt station. The Chairman rather feels that the striking atrium feature would be further enhanced by some large plant life. An opportunity for Birmingham Botanical Gardens perhaps?

Back to Banff?

Well, it's a bit off our patch and probably none of our business. Nevertheless, we could not help noticing that Scotland has been much in the news in recent months so we may as well take the opportunity to pass comment on the Scottish Government's road policy for a change. They want to put dual carriageway on the A9. Yes, on most of it. More astonishingly, they want to perform the same trick with a rebuild of the A96, which runs between Elgin and Inverness! The cost of this truly gargantuan quantity of tarmacadam is projected at a hefty £6bn for both routes, though the government's website is noticeably coy when it comes to nailing a price for the A96 and despite the section between Elgin and Forres apparently showing a massive 28% drop in traffic from 2005. We have to confess a small interest here, as we hope such deeds will not encourage the Welsh Government, given over as they are to expensive road schemes, to consider dualling the A470 when they have finished throwing money at the A465. In truth the A96 carries around the same level of traffic as our own single carriageway A483 between Welshpool and Newtown, whereas the A470 is well down the scale. Moreover, the Chairman points out he is not called 'Angus' without good reason.

We came across the Scottish highway scheme via the Far North Line website and to be entirely fair to the Scottish Government, there are also substantial works planned for the Aberdeen - Inverness Railway too. These involve route and signalling upgrades and improvements to line speed to give an end to end time of 2 hours on an hourly service, with talk of extra trains between Inverness and Elgin as well. Projected cost at £170m is a mere snip compared to the road!

This is welcome news for the route, which in the '60s was scheduled for closure under the Beeching Plan, along with everything else north of Aberdeen. The scheme actually managed to get as far as chopping up most of the former Great North of Scotland Railway (GNoS) network, including the iconic Speyside line and also the Buchan section, where recently there have been tentative mutterings about reopening.

All the same, it is worthwhile taking time out to consider what else might be achieved if the £6bn worth of road money were to be spent in different ways. Given that the Borders Railway has delivered 30 miles of rebuilt route for around £300m, does the road scheme along the North East Coast actually offer reasonable value for money? The upgraded road will no doubt be a fantastic place to put the Beamer through its paces when the cops aren't looking, but what for the rest of us, who cannot afford the latest BMW offering?

SARPA members have on many occasions made the point that road travel is all very well but you still have to find the money to buy a car, tax it, insure it and pay the maintenance, in addition to the fuel costs. For young people, this is an increasing burden – indeed the cost of car insurance for the under 25s is now quite prohibitive. Additionally, unless you can afford a chauffeur to drive the Beamer for you, working whilst on the move is totally out of the question. Given the opportunities for this offered by modern computing and communication devices, road transport is at a distinct disadvantage when it comes to business travel.

We would surmise that problems with the road might be addressed relatively cheaply, with selected upgrades to remove serious pinch points. This would leave substantial sums for improvements to public transport infrastructure.

An intelligent scheme would be to take the railway back to Banff, which would do much to bolster the economy of the region. This could be achieved using much of the old GNoS alignment and with a probable price tag of less than £400m. We understand that Park Signalling in Manchester have devised a wizard scheme for signalling secondary lines, which if fully developed could significantly reduce the cost. Also, to save meandering across the countryside from the erstwhile Lossie Junction, it would make sense to branch off from the existing railway near Lhanbryde and link up with the old route between there and Garmouth.

There is the problem of a humongous hole which has been dug for mineral extraction to the West of Portgordon, but this is not insurmountable, and the former junction at Tillynaught would need to be re-aligned as the line from Banff went North-South, rather than East-West. Also, a new route near Cullen would be advisable to avoid that horrible curved platform, which is now replaced by housing anyway.

There would be stations at Buckie, Cullen, Portsoy and Banff. For an hourly service, trains would need to cross on a dynamic loop east of Lhanbryde and at Portsoy, with loops at all stations to allow for flexibility.

Projected timings from Elgin, which are based on those already being achieved on the Cambrian are a wake-up call and in reality vital for the success of the reopened railway. Buckie could be reached in 17 minutes; Cullen 26 minutes; Portsoy 35 minutes and Banff 47 minutes with schedules from Inverness taking less than 90 minutes over the whole route. The key to this is the fantastic bridge over the Spey at Garmouth, which has lain idle since the line closed.

Angus Eickhoff



The Spey Bridge at Garmouth. Photo:- Ronnie Leask/Wikimedia Commons

Of Time and the Railway

Of time and the railway is a film by artist Robert Davies, about the Cambrian journey recorded from the drivers cab of the train. Filmed between October 2013 and February 2015 on 86 different days it has been edited into a single trip that takes in more than a year. It captures the changing human geography adjacent to the track, but also a landscape that is sustained and twisted by the weather and the coming and going of the seasons.

It starts in industrial Birmingham, passing through the Black Country and Wolverhampton before heading into the shires to Shrewsbury and through the Welsh marches to Welshpool and Newtown. Into the mountains at Caersws to a high point at Talerddig. The train then drops down into the Dyfi valley towards Machynlleth, the Dyfi estuary and Borth before arriving at journey's end in Aberystwyth.

The film is being screened in various venues during the Spring and Summer, including Caersws, Machynlleth, Welshpool, Borth, Wolverhampton and Birmingham— see our website for details. The film is also featured on

<http://oftimeandtherailway.com/>

Vale of Rheidol Happenings

The railway ran twice daily services during the February schools half term, and has been running at weekends since.

Two long serving employees of the Vale of Rheidol - Bill Lewis and Pete Smith - were recently presented with long service medals by the company. The medals were based on one presented by the railway to Sir James Szlumper to mark his contribution to the building of the line in 1902.

The railway has recently been successful in obtaining funding from the Coastal Communities Fund. This has enabled it to equip its new workshop with additional machinery and specialist tools, to develop a sustainable training school and an engineering business, and to commence the overhaul of No.7. The project will employ two new engineers and four additional apprentices. Some of the new tools have already arrived.

The first project to enter the new workshops is the Kerr Stuart "Sirdar" class 0-4-0T *Diana*, ex Kerry Tramway, Oakeley and Pen-yr-orsedd quarries. It will be followed by a Hunslet quarry class locomotives.

These two locomotives should be outshopped in time to appear at the railway's autumn event. This is a Steam Festival, and will take place in September. There may be other locomotives present.....

The overhaul of No.7 has already commenced, with initial work being on the boiler.

March saw the running of a mixed goods train, with two coaches, seven of the original goods wagons, and the four wheel brake van, as a photographic charter.

The Enhanced Service from May 17th – what does it mean for passengers?

Cambrian Coast

There is one extra service in the evening: the current Fridays only Machynlleth to Barmouth service becomes an all week 1900 Machynlleth to Pwllheli train plugging the large gap in northbound trains on the coast in the evening. This is a through train from Birmingham International so better for people returning from away or tourists coming to the area. It will also be beneficial to generating more traffic from in situ holidaymakers. However it does come at a cost, its arrival at Pwllheli at 2102 means there's no return run south and the unit forming it overnights there, making two units stabled overnight at Pwllheli. This means that the very early morning 0507 Machynlleth to Pwllheli service which used to form the stock for the second train of the day from Pwllheli southwards is withdrawn. On balance the new train is probably a better use of resources and will benefit more people.

As intimated above through trains to the West Midlands from the coast are retained; the second to fifth departures from Pwllheli still join up with Aberystwyth trains at Machynlleth and go forward, as does the early morning starter from Barmouth. However the last through train is the 1338 from Pwllheli. In the opposite direction the last six departures from Machynlleth are all split from trains arriving from Birmingham.

Connections to/from Aberystwyth at Dyfi Junction are vastly improved but only at certain times:

Southbound coast trains
with connections to Aberystwyth

Departures from Aberystwyth with
connections to the Coast

0629 ex Pwllheli
0646 ex Barmouth
0934 ex Pwllheli
1746 ex Pwllheli

0830
1230
1830
2030 * more than 30 minutes

This will make commuting from Aberdyfi and Tywyn to Aberystwyth viable and provide options for tourists and shopping trips.

Cambrian Mainline

There are four extra services over the whole length of the line between Aberystwyth and Shrewsbury: two are in the morning departing at 0630 & 0830, one in the middle of the day at 1230 and an evening departure at 1830. In addition there are two extra departures as far as Machynlleth at 2030 & 2230 giving 16 trains a day between the two towns.

Westbound there are also four extra services over the whole length from Shrewsbury; the first is at 0625, second at 1029 and finally two in the evening at 1831 and 2030. There's one extra train just between Machynlleth and Aberystwyth at 0647.

Please remember that it's not a full blown hourly service all day: long parts of the day are hourly in both directions but it's not continuous - please refer to timetables. There are still some two hour gaps so beware!

Overall Journey times are reduced on now and the slack in the timetable such as the 5 minute wait at Newtown eliminated to give earlier arrival times into Shrewsbury. The above combine to give an hourly service into Aberystwyth from Machynlleth in the morning peak and back in the evening. There's an hourly service to Shrewsbury in the morning and returning in the evening. The 0625 from Shrewsbury replaces the current 0810 Machynlleth to Aberystwyth and runs around half an hour earlier: this will allow people to get into Aberystwyth from east of Machynlleth pre 0900. How much demand there is for this remains to be seen. What will undoubtedly be more popular will be the 0630 from Aberystwyth with an arrival time in Shrewsbury of 0814, which will allow the communities in the Upper Severn Valley proper commuting opportunities into Shrewsbury and on to Telford. The lack of a 1630 shoulder peak departure at either end may limit the numbers though.

There's an overall increase of around 30% in the number of seats per day over the line. However the 1730 departure from Aberystwyth is after a two hour gap and this train will be two car only all the way to Shrewsbury, as the stock from the connecting 1538 from Pwllheli will no longer be able to join up in Machynlleth in the summer months, but instead will be used to form the stock for the 1830 departure from Aberystwyth. Whilst some people may opt to leave Aber later, with passengers joining off the coast in the summer months this 2 car train could well be under pressure at busy times. Likewise the corresponding departure from Shrewsbury at 1727, although 4 car in length is again the first after a two hour gap when the morning timetable has encouraged commuting and other journeys into England and will also convey a coast portion all week. Another train that may be under pressure is the 0630 from Aberystwyth. This may abstract some long distance travellers off the current 0514 and 0730 departures from Aberystwyth and will also form a high peak commuter train into Shrewsbury arriving 0814.

Beyond Shrewsbury

Connections at Shrewsbury towards the Chester line are vastly improved with all Cambrian arrivals now making a sub 10 minute connection, greatly improving journey opportunities to Wrexham and other North Wales destinations plus Chester and on to Liverpool. However the slightly earlier arrivals into Shrewsbury mean a lengthier wait for Manchester services. There are also improved connections onto the Heart of Wales line which sees its service enhanced from 4 to 5 trains a day. The 1330 ex Aberystwyth and 1138 ex Pwllheli will now connect into the 1524 Virgin Train's service to London Euston arriving in the capital at 1756. The morning departure still leaves before the first Cambrian arrival. In the return direction VT's departures are now at 1023 arriving 1254 for a 31 minute connection to Aberystwyth (arr 1517) and Pwllheli (arr 1717). The 1823 from Euston connects poorly with the last train to arrive Aberystwyth at 2335 after leaving Shrewsbury at a slightly later 2150, with the London train arriving an hour before. Connections southwards down the Marches are much the same as now.

Overall there are a number of improvements that have been campaigned for many years, but there are still some gaps in provision that need addressing. However with 3 years to show increased usage and demand, getting these on the table for the new Wales and Border franchise come 2018 may be easier to achieve.

The View from Milepost 62 with the Brigadier

This year's general election campaign has been preceded by an unprecedented number of "good news" announcements about the railways. Dusty and I have been amazed at how the current Coalition Government in London has come out with some new snippet almost week by week during February and March. Of course when you look at the detail it's not all jam today but at some point in the future. For those of you that don't follow the Government's press releases we've had the announcement of free Wifi on trains, the end of Pacers up north, High Speed 3, Northern Powerhouse, new trains and cascades for the South West etc., etc. One can of course be cynical, but the fact that they feel they need to pump good news stories out about the railways shows how much more important they feel the railways are in the minds of the general public. This is good news. However, in contrast to announcements about electrification, new line studies, extra carriages the main opposition party – Labour – has come up with no more than some ideological mutterings about structure and even rumblings about paring back the High Speed 2 line which causes poor Dusty to growl (which no doubt many Labour leaders in the North of England do in private every time Ed Balls opens his mouth).

Down in my old part of the world, Exeter in the South-West, the extension of the Great Western franchise and electrification of the main line out of London has meant that by 2017, the Barnstaple line will be operated by cascaded Class 158 trains instead of Pacers & Class 150's, and the Paignton to Exmouth South Devon metro will have an all day long half hourly service operated by 4 car Class 150 formations instead of a hotch-potch of irregular trains operated by 2 car Pacers and 150's. Ok it's not nirvana but there's a tangible implementation date when improvements will happen. In contrast we have a promise of a review of franchising and allowing the public sector to compete for franchises from Labour. I'm no fan of the franchise system but how does this deliver improvements for the passenger? What's the plan? How many new or extra carriages will it deliver? Which areas will be upgraded first? Timescale? How about all those stations and lines that have a strong reopening campaign? Sadly the detail is 100% absent: you can hear the tumbleweed rolling down the corridor at Labour HQ, crucially investment in rail is non-existent, there's no plan only playing to the gallery naughty Train Operating Companies and anti HS2 rhetoric. There is no magic fairy based on ideology that will automatically deliver improvements, only proper planning ahead, investment and hard work. Labour's record in power at Westminster on rail is woeful, with the all too brief reign of Lord Adonis, who's not on-board this time. Remember Transport Secretary Darling do nothing, no growth franchises, modally agnostic choices, bottling out of genuinely reforming the 1993 Railways Act following Railtrack's collapse and the 1300 extra carriages that never appeared last time Labour were in power? I fear a Milliband Government will just want to sweep the railways under the carpet like the Blair one.

Will it be any better here in devolved Wales? Will the Welsh Government continue to scream "London must pay" with Labour in Whitehall. I doubt it! Where will electrifying the North Wales coast line be without tying it in to the HS2 hub at Crewe? The Welsh Government seemed more interested in playing party politics with Valleys line electrification than delivering a modern transport system for its people. The big idea from Welsh Labour is not an investment plan but a not for profit franchise. Their establishing a holding company owned by the Welsh Government to run it, no doubt with selected sympathisers on the board who will probably know diddly squat about transport, yet again there is no detail on what the investment plan is. It will magically be better because the profit making Arriva won't be running it, says the theory. I'm afraid Dusty says she can see what will happen with Valleys electrification. The business case was based on cascaded EMU's from Essex. However, South Wales politicians believing their own rhetoric will want to obtain a fleet of brand new EMU's using the "excess" profits. Of course the reality with the price differential between Pacers and leasing new EMU's is that the profits and then some will be eaten up buying shiny new trains for the Valleys, and crumbs from the table will be left for the rest of Wales and the Borders. This is not acceptable. Can anyone from Labour provide a narrative that includes detail and come clean about their real rail plans?

Mansel Williams

Mansel is the Chair of the Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Line Liaison Committee and a long standing rail campaigner as well as being a County Councillor in Shrewsbury. Unfortunately this March he was diagnosed with a brain tumour and has had an operation to remove it in Stoke hospital. We understand the prognosis is favourable and he should be returning home shortly. SARPA wishes Mansel a speedy recovery and hope he is on Shrewsbury station to wave off the first extra train on May 18th.

Talented Apprentices wanted in Wales

Network Rail is seeking to recruit young people in Wales and the borders for its award-winning apprenticeship scheme, as it continues the largest investment into the railway since Victorian times. The scheme offers anyone over the age of 17 a fantastic opportunity to earn while they learn, gain valuable qualifications and skills and build a career in engineering. More than 2,000 people have joined the scheme since it was launched 10 years ago in 2005. These include school and college leavers as well as those that were unhappy with their jobs, and chose to go back into training to secure a more stable, long-term career.

The first year of the three-year scheme is spent at Europe's largest engineering training facility at the Royal Navy's HMS Sultan in Hampshire. There apprentices train in one of five core specialist areas: track, signalling, telecoms, electrification and plant and overhead lines. During their second and third years they experience work on the rail network's front line, gaining vital skills as they train to become maintenance technicians. This on-the-job training is completed by further off-railway learning at training centres.

The Network Rail Advanced Apprenticeship scheme is open to anyone who is 17 by 31st August 2015. Further details on the scheme, including case studies of current and former apprentices talking about their own experiences, can be found on Network Rail's website:

<http://www.networkrail.co.uk/apprentices>

For further information please contact:- Hannah McCarthy 07710 940248

Email:- Hannah.McCarthy@networkrail.co.uk

[From Network Rail's website]

A moot for ley-line hunters

Our member Laurence Main has arranged a moot of ley-line hunters between Sunday 28th June and Friday 3rd July, consisting of a meeting in Dinas Mawddwy on Saturday 27th, and walks to various sights in quite a large area of Merioneth, Montgomeryshire and Ceredigion. He is using public transport where possible - including of course the railway - and hired bus where not (connecting with trains at Machynlleth station). Full details from Laurence at 9 Mawddwy Cottages, Minllyn, Dinas Mawddwy, Machynlleth SY20 9LW. Tel. 01650-531354.

SARPA Meetings in 2015

May	Tuesday 5th	18.45	The Sportsman, Severn Street, Newtown
June	Tuesday 2nd	17.45	Railway Station, Shrewsbury
July	Saturday 11th	11.45	Tywyn. Wharf Station, Talyllyn Railway
August	Tuesday 4th	18.55	The White Lion, Machynlleth
September	Tuesday 1st	19.20	Royal Oak Hotel, Welshpool
October	Saturday 10th	11.00	AGM. Machynlleth, White Lion
November	Tuesday 3rd	18.45	The Sportsman, Severn Street, Newtown
December	Saturday 12th	11.45	Cambrian Hotel, Aberystwyth

Websites

Our website <http://sarpa.info>

Webmaster Angus Eickhoff. Website host is <http://www.redboxinternet.com/>

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

Passenger Focus
<http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/>

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.fairbournerrailway.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

The Old Water Tower, Huddersfield Railway Station, St George's Square, Huddersfield HD1 1JF

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

Public Transport Users' Committee for Wales Secretariat

Welsh Government, Cathays Park, Cardiff CF10 3NQ. E-mail ptucwales@wales.gsi.gov.uk

For Train Times and Fares Call:

08457 48 49 50 (24hrs) 0845 60 40 500 (Welsh Language Service)
0845 60 50 600 (Textphone)

For ticket reservations please call: 0870 9000 773

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