

Shrewsbury
Aberystwyth
Rail
Passengers'
Association



Newsletter
No. 72
March 2017



Carno Station action group at the Crossing at the station. See the article on the reopening campaign in this issue.

| | |
|---|----|
| Chairman's Message..... | 2 |
| News in Brief..... | 4 |
| The Carno Station reopening campaign..... | 5 |
| A letter to the Western Mail..... | 13 |
| A Flight of Fancy..... | 13 |
| Rail use figures on the Cambrian..... | 14 |
| The view from Milepost 62 with the Brigadier..... | 16 |
| Class 442 trains for Wales..... | 20 |
| All tickets please with Newtown Station Travel..... | 21 |
| SARPA Meetings..... | 22 |
| Websites..... | 23 |
| Useful addresses..... | 24 |
| Officers of the Association..... | 24 |

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.

Want to Join SARPA?

The membership fee is currently (for membership up to 31 December 2017) £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's debatable whether any of the UK regional governments actually get it. It is questionable as to their understanding of the matter – just how much of an economic driver a frequent and affordable rail service can be.

If you don't believe me, just look at the economy of the South East of England. Ask yourself, what would it be like without that network of lines radiating from London? It would certainly not be where it is at the present, given that the commuter culture was developed and encouraged around 90 years ago by such as Sir Herbert Walker, the General Manager of the Southern Railway (the railway company) from its inception in 1923 until he retired in 1937. He was a big advocate of electrification, and indeed he is responsible for the Third Rail system still in use in the south today. He also was keen to promote housing developments near to the railway, where people would use the trains to get to work.

So the railway had a head start over road commuting. Its continued importance can be noted with regard to the recent dispute between the Department for Transport and Southern Railway (the similarly named train operator we have now) on one hand and the RMT Union on the other. If the railway was insignificant, the disruption so caused would be minuscule in comparison.

Nevertheless, UK administrations bury their heads in the sand and continue to put most of their transport eggs in the roads basket, thinking that the private car is the panacea for all transport issues.

In truth this is an outdated line of thought, and a throwback to the early 1960s where the railway was viewed as out of date and no longer of much use. That was a fallacious way of thinking even then, if the truth be known, brought about as it was by a transport minister who had formerly been the managing director of a roads building company. Ahem! Thereafter followed the disaster of Beeching and Yes, it was a disaster, having saved only an estimated £7m in 1963 money, or around £132m today. This is pretty small beer and hardly going to achieve the shibboleth of making the railways pay..... just think what might happen if the closure of all uneconomic roads were threatened!

Back in the 1960s, there were lines with timetables which had not changed for ages, and which had received little investment since before the First World War, so it's not surprising that they were not serving the public properly any more. People expressed their displeasure at poor service by voting with their feet. Here, the Cambrian was thought of as a basket case and was several times threatened with complete closure.

Contrast this with today, where the service to Aberystwyth has been enhanced at key points of the day and we have seen growth in usage of up to 40% in some areas, but governments are still not getting the message. There is no great vision to provide the extra rolling stock we need to cater for more passengers. They would rather spend extra money on roads. There is a huge amount of money being thrown at the Newtown Bypass at the present time, for instance – probably enough to take the railway back as far as Llanidloes, whilst the average “growth” in road traffic along the Upper Severn Valley over the 9 year period to 2014 works out at a rather interesting -9%.....Yes, that's MINUS NINE PER CENT! (Source, Campaign for Better Transport Maps).

Now, we accept that there are more trips by car than journeys by train, but the method of calculating is not strictly fair. I can buy a rail ticket from Welshpool to Birmingham and get off in Shrewsbury and see a friend, continue to Telford and do business and then even go shopping in Birmingham, but that still only counts as one journey. If I do the same by car it counts as three and statistically, most car journeys are less than 5 miles, which is not an area in which the railway is competitive anyway.

Do roads offer the best value for money as solutions to transport problems? The huge sums being lavished on the Newtown Bypass are a clear indication of this lack of analysis. Similar amounts would probably manage to replace the railway from Newtown to Llanidloes. The amount which has been thrown at the A465 “Heads of the Valleys’ Road” would possibly have paid for the Aberystwyth-Carmarthen railway link to be revived..

The net effect of this scattering of large sums of cash like confetti on road schemes to enhance links which already exist is that Wales is unlikely to get the communications it needs in order to flourish, and rail has the edge here. It would be possible to provide a link from Newtown to Newport with a target journey time of 90 minutes, inclusive of stops. Just think of the money needed to provide to reduce the road journey time from 2 hrs 10 minutes for the 83 miles. Dual carriageway would be necessary for most of the way. (The fastest present rail time - going via England - is 2 hr 25 minutes by the way.)

Wales is not unique either. In Scotland, the government is spending untold billions on the A96Aberdeen-Inverness road and the A9 between Perth and Inverness. Do these schemes offer the best value, and what other connectivity could be provided by putting rail schemes first? Time for governments to wake up to the benefits of the railway, instead of grudgingly providing a less than first rate service.

Angus Eickhoff
Meifod, Powys March 2017

Sadly, this is my last Chairman's message owing to my moving on to pastures new, as I indicated at the last AGM held at Machynlleth in October 2016. I would like to thank the group for their input and assistance over the period during which I have held the office and together we have achieved much. I would also like to say how much I miss the countenance of various members who are no longer with us and whose judgement and comment at a senior level during my time with SARPA was always highly valued. Charles Williams, Cllr. Mansell Williams, Peter Gatward and Glyn Davies. In the meantime will be continuing in the role of Webmaster and wish the group every success for the future.

Angus Eickhoff

News in brief

Transport for Wales meetings on the forthcoming franchise

Fe fyddwn yn lansio ymgynghoriad cyhoeddus ar Wasanaeth Trên Cymru â'r Gororau cyn hir. Fel rhan o'r broses ymgynghori, fe fyddwn yn cynnal nifer o weithdai HANNER-DYDD, BORE i hêl eich barn ar y Wasanaeth newydd. Mae'r dyddiadau isod, i chi nodi yn eich dyddiadur. Bydd mwy o wybodaeth a manylion ar sut i gofrestru yn dilyn unwaith mae'r ymgynghoriad wedi'i lansio.

We will soon be launching a public consultation on the Wales and Borders Rail Service including the South Wales Metro. As part of the consultation process we'll be hosting a series of HALF-DAY, MORNING workshops to gather views on the new Service. The dates of the events are below, please mark them in your diaries. More details of the events and joining instructions will be sent out once the consultation has been launched.

DATES AND VENUES

20 Mawrth / March Canolfan Gateway Centre, Amwythig / Shrewsbury

21 Mawrth / March Venue Cymru, Llandudno

28 Mawrth March Coleg y Cymoedd, Nantgarw

29 Mawrth / March Gwesty'r Ivy Bush Hotel, Caerfyrddin / Carmarthen

3 Ebrill / April Gwesty'r Marine Hotel, Aberystwyth

ELEN KING

Rheolwr Cyfathrebu ac Ymgysylltu / Communications and Engagement Manager

Trafnidiaeth Cymru - Transport for Wales

Tŷ Southgate, Stryd Wood, Caerdydd, CF10 1EW

SARPA EGM @ Shrewsbury March 10th

After 5 years at the helm SARPA Chairman Angus Eickhoff has had to stand down as Chairman due to relocating. Vice Chairman Ifor Morris has agreed to be temporary Chairman until the association AGM in Machynlleth in October. The postal address for SARPA is now c/o Newtown Station Travel, The Railway Station, Old Kerry Rd, Newtown Powys SY16 1BP. The e mail contact is the same sarpa@sarpa.info.

In the meantime SARPA has been busy as usual, with submissions being sent to the various consultations on the replacement Wales and Borders franchise and members attending the consultation events in Shrewsbury and Aberystwyth. The SARPA Meeting in Newtown on Tuesday April 4th will be attended by a representative of Arriva UK who are bidding for the franchise.



Arriva Trains Wales at
Telford Central,
September 6th, 2009.
Photograph Denis Bates

THE CARNO STATION RE-OPENING CAMPAIGN

The first seeds of the campaign to re-open Carno station were sown in 1995, when the Carno Community Council wrote to Railtrack in support of re-opening. Next year, following representations by local councillor Evan Davies, Powys County Council Highways Committee considered the issue and resolved to fund half of a (£10k) feasibility study if the rail industry would match this amount. However, the Train Operating Company (TOC), then Central Trains, was in the run up to privatisation and unable to make any financial commitment. Railtrack provided a detailed response to enquiries in 1997, advising that the cost (which they could not meet themselves) for a single platform scheme would be "around £500k".

Formation of Carno Station Action Group

There was then a lull in activities until 2002, when the Carno Station Action Group was formed. The Group's inaugural meeting was held in the Community Centre with guest speaker Gareth Marston, the then SARPA chairman. In the early years the group concentrated on building contact with Powys County Council and the new Wales TOC, Arriva Trains Wales, but little concrete could be achieved in the absence of funding for the feasibility study.

The campaign for Carno station re-opening has long been conducted against the backdrop of the much wider campaign for an hourly service on the Cambrian line, which dates back many years. Proposals for an hourly service were first articulated by the Welsh Assembly in its 'Vision for Rail' map within "The Transport Framework for Wales" (Nov.2001), but it was not until 2006 that the Welsh Government initiated the first move to bring it about, when it commissioned a study from Network Rail of options for the necessary infrastructure enhancements.

Mike Gallop of Network Rail gave a progress report on the study at a meeting in Machynlleth on August 4th and gave details of six different combinations of locations at which trains would pass that were under consideration. This led SARPA to write to the Welsh Government urging that passing locations selected should only be at existing stations or at promising sites for new stations, such as Carno.

A new passing loop at Carno?

Network Rail presented the results of the Cambrian Hourly Service 'GRIP 3' Option Selection Study to a meeting of stakeholders in Porthmadog on November 24th 2006. Two options were selected to go forward to GRIP 4, with trains passing at either a new loop at Dyfi Junction, Talerddig and a new 4.2 km Dynamic Loop W of Welshpool (Option 1 (i)) or at Dyfi Junction, a new loop at Carno and a shorter 2.3 km Dynamic Loop at Welshpool (Option 1 (ii)).

The group recognised that the possibility of relocating Talerddig loop to Carno would be a very promising development, as station stops at Carno would be possible without causing trains extra delay. However there was a major setback on March 12th 2007, when Ian Baxter of Network Rail advised the group that the GRIP 4 study, which the Welsh Government had instructed Network Rail to commence, would only be taking forward Option 1 (i), with trains crossing at Talerddig. Carno Community Council Clerk Alan Humphreys was shocked and responded with the question "What on earth is the point of stopping trains in the middle of a field 28 times a day, when those same trains could stop to pass at Carno and pick up passengers at the same time?" The group was galvanised into action and representations were made to the Welsh Government, TraCC [Trafnidiaeth Canolbarth Cymru, the Regional Transport Consortium], Powys County Council and Arriva Trains Wales that Network Rail should develop the Carno loop option instead.

Events then started moving quickly. A public meeting was held on April 4th in the community centre with guest speakers Cllr Gwilym Evans, Chairman of TraCC, and Mick Bates AM. Cllr Evans said he had been impressed by the strength of the Case for Re-opening submitted by the action group, and confirmed that TraCC would press for Carno's case to be considered by the Welsh Assembly Government. He added that TraCC backed the repositioning of the existing Talerddig passing loop at

Carno. Mick Bates AM started by looking at sustainability in relation to transport but went on to point out that the next few months were crucial in the campaign, because the Welsh Assembly Government would take a decision on the infrastructure for the hourly service in July or August. He recommended the action group act without delay to send a large petition to the Minister and set up a website.

Petition to National Assembly

Although the website took two months to set up, the group took up the petition suggestion with alacrity, with members going out collecting signatures throughout the village and in Llanbrynmair (the next village to the West, which would also benefit from a station at Carno) until nearly 800 had been collected! The petition read "We call upon the Welsh Assembly Government to re-open Carno Station and end the wasteful practice of stopping trains outside Talerddig with no passenger benefit".

Separately well over a hundred residents posed as prospective passengers for a photograph in front of Carno station on the morning of April 15th to witness to the growing support for the station re-opening campaign.

Mick Bates arranged for a formal handover of the petition to the Presiding Office of the National Assembly, Lord Dafydd Elis Thomas on June 12th and a small contingent travelled down to Cardiff Bay to take part.



The timing was perfect, because the National Assembly had only just set up a petitions system for Wales and the newly formed Petitions Committee considered the petition at its first meeting on July 4th. The committee gave a favourable reception to the Carno petition, with Mike German and other committee members complimenting the action group on presenting a well-argued case. In her opening remarks, Chairman Val Lloyd alluded to a last minute submission - a photograph of the Talerddig loop and the glorious surrounding countryside - sent to illustrate Talerddig's remoteness! After discussion, the committee decided to refer the petition to the Enterprise and Learning Committee, whose remit included transport, for detailed consideration.

The Enterprise and Learning Committee considered the petition at their next meeting on July 11th. In the meantime, Carno Station Action Group had submitted further written evidence to the committee, including a Cost-Benefit Analysis, and committee members commented favourably on the quality of the case that had been put before them. After discussion, the committee decided to travel to Carno to see the station site for themselves and to hold a hearing in the village on the re-opening proposal. The date for the Committee hearing in Carno was set for September 4th.

Minister announces retention of Talerddig loop

In view of the anticipated imminent Ministerial announcement on the infrastructure enhancements for the hourly service, local AM Mick Bates, Mid and West Wales AM Alun Davies and Petitions

Committee member Mike German AM all wrote to the Minister asking him to defer a decision on precise passing loop locations until after the Committee hearing. Nevertheless on August 8th the Minister, Ieuan Wyn Jones, officially announced that the infrastructure enhancements were to go ahead with retention of the Talerddig loop. Naturally the group were incensed that this decision on the passing loop location would pre-empt the Committee's deliberations on the station petition and wrote to the Minister pointing out the resulting damage to the petitions process.

Enterprise and Learning Committee hearing in Carno

Four members of the Enterprise and Learning Committee took part in the hearing in Carno on September 4th – Jeff Cuthbert (Caerphilly), Alun Davies, Gareth Jones (Aberconwy; Chair) and Mick Bates (Montgomeryshire) – and heard evidence from Mike Bagshaw (Commercial Director, Arriva Trains Wales), Ian Baxter (Senior Commercial Scheme Sponsor, Network Rail), Tony Burton (Principal Petitioner, Petitioners for the reopening of Carno railway station), Mike Gallop (Route Enhancement Manager, Network Rail), Philip Jackson (Transport and Development Control Manager, Powys County Council) and Tim James (Head of Rail Unit, Welsh Assembly Government).

Network Rail gave their evidence in the context of their recent decision against relocating the Talerddig loop at Carno as part of infrastructure improvements needed for an hourly service. They argued that the primary reason for the decision was one of cost – citing a £0.6 m higher cost for constructing a new loop at Carno as against enhancing the Talerddig loop.

In relation to the opening of a station at a new Carno loop, it was pointed out that the intention at both Talerddig and Carno was that one train should stop in the loop and the other pass through without stopping and so “insertion of an additional station call at Carno instead of passing through the loop at linespeed would compromise all the output benefits realised by the Infrastructure Enhancement project”. This assertion failed to recognise the fact that CSAG was (and is) campaigning for a 2 hourly service rather than an hourly one.

Network Rail stated that demand at Carno could not generate a positive business case in relation to an expenditure of £5 m – the sum they estimated would be required for a two platform station with a footbridge – and dismissed the possibility of constructing very short platforms as at Beaulieu in Scotland as unacceptable. Again they failed to acknowledge that only one platform would be needed for a 2 hourly service.

The four committee members posed many pertinent questions to the witnesses during cross-questioning and the whole transcript repays a careful reading. In particular, they asked why the decision on loop locations could not have been delayed until after the Committee hearing. Network Rail responded that the infrastructure enhancements had to be integrated with ERTMS implementation, so the decision had to be made by the end of July. The hearing lasted three and a quarter hours in total.

The Enterprise and Learning Committee published their Report on the hearing on September 20th. They concluded that it would be difficult to justify the case for a new station at Carno on the estimated number of new passengers alone, but that “there may be a case linked to the wider objectives of supporting a rural community and encouraging the regeneration of an area that has suffered from the closure of the Laura Ashley factory and a resulting loss of local employment. A formal business case needs to be developed.” Among the recommendations was one that asked the Minister's officials to “provide support to the Carno Station Action Group in developing and submitting a formal business case for such a station.”

The Minister, Ieuan Wyn Jones, responded to the Committee's recommendations on November 9th. The responses were generally non-committal but pointed out that it was the role of the Regional Transport Consortia, WAG, ATW and Network Rail to develop formal business cases and recommended CSAG to engage with TraCC.

Scrutiny of the Minister

The Enterprise & Learning Committee were due to question the Minister on his responses at a Scrutiny Meeting on 14th November, 2007, so CSAG hired a minibus to transport fifteen supporters

to Cardiff to watch the proceedings. During the meeting, the Minister was questioned about the impact retention of the Talerddig loop would have on the feasibility of re-opening Carno station and responded "I want to give that reassurance again that the work that is currently being done, and the way that it is being done, does not compromise the provision of a station in Carno at some future point."

In relation to the business case, Mr Tim James, Head of Rail, who accompanied the Minister at the session, stated that the Welsh Government "had told TraCC that it should lead the process" of developing the business case, and "that the people of Carno should provide evidence for that business case". He also said of the TraCC Regional Transport plan then being prepared that WAG "would look to see Carno as a priority within such a plan".

At the conclusion of the meeting, the Committee Chair, Gareth Jones said "As a mark of respect to the action group in Carno, I believe that it is to be warmly congratulated on the way in which it has presented this case to us, and to the Assembly. Its objectives in relation to the community and what it expects in terms of development in this part of mid Wales are in line with our objectives and aspirations as the Welsh Assembly Government. I am sure that I speak on behalf of all members of this committee when I say that we will be declaring our support for what they wish to see, namely the reopening of the station in Carno."

The Carno Transport Appraisal

Encouraged by the invitation to provide evidence for the business case, CSAG immediately set about the preparation of its own draft business case in line with Welsh Transport Appraisal Guidance (WelTAG) for submission to TraCC. Based on a station capital cost of £1 million for a single, 4 carriage long platform, a benefit cost ratio of over 1.6 was obtained. The 62 page report, entitled the Carno Transport Appraisal was presented to the TraCC chairman, Cllr Gwilym Evans, at County Hall, Llandrindod Wells on July 1st, 2008.

There followed a period of over a year in which TraCC neither took ownership of the Carno Transport Appraisal, nor carried out any work to refine it. CSAG found it extremely frustrating that the commitments made at the scrutiny session on November 14th, 2007 were not being carried out. It was apparent that TraCC had not received any dedicated funding for the appraisal of Carno Station and were unwilling to use their own funds for the work. Moreover, the TraCC Provisional Regional Transport Plan, which appeared in December 2008, failed to include the re-opening of Carno station as a priority and merely suggested that it should be considered in a future "all-line" rail study.

Cardiff delegation

Eventually the group decided that there was no option but to re-engage with the National Assembly, so a delegation travelled to Cardiff on June 24th, 2009, and met with the chair of the Enterprise & Learning Committee and other interested AMs to complain about TraCC's failure to initiate a formal station appraisal. The AMs were sympathetic and agreed to approach the Minister on CSAG's behalf. The opportunity was also taken to meet with Mr Tim James, now Head of Integrated Public Transport at WAG, who undertook to arrange a meeting between TraCC, WAG and CSAG to try to get things moving again.

"All-line" rail study

The TraCC/WAG/CSAG meeting was held in Newtown on August 6th, 2009. CSAG were informed that TraCC had now secured WAG funding for its "all-line" rail study, which would include Stage 1 WelTAG appraisals of possible infrastructure improvements, including the re-opening of Carno station. WAG also gave a commitment that, on completion of this study, they would fund a Stage 2 WelTAG appraisal of Carno station which would enable them to take the decision as to whether the scheme should go ahead or not.

Alternative station site

The “All-line” rail study was carried out by Capita Symonds over the period November 2009 – April 2010. Capita Symonds visited Carno in November to view the site and meet representatives of CSAG. This led to the identification of an alternative site for the station at the East end of the village, about one kilometre from the former site at the West end adjacent to the level crossing on the Cwm LLwyd road. In view of the costs of modifying the operation of the automatic level crossing barriers to cater for trains stopping at the station, Capita Symonds based their indicative costings on the Eastern site. The WelTAG Stage 1 appraisal concluded that the financial Benefit Cost Ratio of re-opening Carno station would be 0.75, which TraCC considered was high enough to justify more detailed evaluation.

Stage 1+2 WelTAG appraisal

A further TraCC/WAG/CSAG meeting was held in Newtown on April 27th, 2010, at which Tim James accepted TraCC's recommendation to proceed to a Stage 2 appraisal of both Carno and Bow Street stations straightaway. Accordingly TraCC commissioned Capita Symonds to carry out a WelTAG Stage 1+2 appraisal of the re-opening of the two stations.

Work began on the WelTAG Stage 2 appraisal in June 2010, with completion predicted in autumn 2010. However, the work was considerably delayed – largely through difficulties in setting up a meeting with Network Rail - and the final version of the report was not completed until May 24th, 2011.

Capita Symonds held three stakeholder meetings in Carno to report the progress of their work on July 14th & September 9th, 2010 and March 24th, 2011. Scrutiny of the benefit and cost tables presented at the meetings led to the identification of several errors, but although these were eventually rectified, Capita Symonds showed reluctance to engage in dialogue with CSAG on the details of their Benefit Cost analysis.

At a late stage in the appraisal process (March 2011), account was taken of the effect of possible lost through journeys on overall economic benefits for the first time, at the request of the WAG transport economist. This reduced the Benefit Cost Ratio of Carno Station from 1.15 to 0.46, but the validity of the estimate that 3800 through passengers would be lost per year, used in the Benefit Cost Ratio calculation, is very much in doubt. In view of this, the final version of the report presented both values.

TraCC was hoping to have an opportunity to present the WelTAG appraisal to the Minister, but was unable to arrange a suitable meeting.

A joint delegation of Carno and Bow Street station campaigners travelled to Cardiff on November 8th and met with local and regional AMs to brief them before they, in turn, met the Minister, Carl Sargeant the following day.

Responsibility for new stations

In the afternoon the delegation met Tim James, to try to establish where the responsibility for implementing plans for new stations lay. He advised that the place for Carno and Bow Street stations was in the Regional Transport Plan (RTP), not the NTP. He was therefore asked how a consortium like TraCC, which only had a budget of about £3 m per annum for implementation of its RTP, could contemplate including stations costing £1.5 m each in its RTP without pushing all the usual schemes out. He replied that, if the Welsh Government was to support these and subject to affordability and other RTP priorities, any extra funding would come from the Welsh Government to enable such projects to be accommodated within the Consortium budget through a bidding process. In other words, if it is larger expenditure, the WG can and do provide additional funding.

TraCC presentation in Carno

At CSAG's request, TraCC gave a presentation of the WelTAG appraisal at a public meeting in Carno on November 14th, 2011. There was a very large turnout, with over 170 people attending. TraCC chairman, Councillor Trevor Roberts, told the audience that TraCC were fully behind the opening of Carno station and that, subject to resolution of funding with the Welsh Government, he could see no reason why the station could not open within three years. However, AM Russell George told the meeting that the Minister, Carl Sergeant, had told him that TraCC should progress the station rather than WG, despite TraCC's understanding that rail schemes – whether of national or regional significance – were the responsibility of the Welsh Government. It was clear that the funding conundrum was now the chief obstacle.

Refinement of the Business Case

In view of this, improvement of the business case was clearly a worthwhile objective. Research by CSAG identified three areas where costs had been exaggerated in the WelTAG appraisal:

- The station capital cost contained a substantial element to raise the station car park to reduce flood risk, but the Environment Agency Wales subsequently advised against raising the station car park above the flood level as had been recommended by Capita Symonds, resulting in a 14% saving on the original £1.7m capital cost.
- The cost of the station could be reduced by a further 6% if the car park was constructed by Powys County Council rather than by Network Rail.
- Information obtained from Arriva Trains Wales from the Ebbw Vale line indicated that annual station running costs were likely to be £21k, rather than the £35k assumed by Capita Symonds.

Following the appointment of Edwina Hart as Transport Minister in March 2013, CSAG requested a meeting to discuss flaws in the WelTAG and to flag up opportunities presented by the re-development of the old Laura Ashley site. This meeting, which took place in October, resulted in an offer of collaborative working between CSAG and the WG transport economist to refine the WelTAG business case. The outcome of this collaboration was the completion in June 2014 of an agreed revised Business Case demonstrating a Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR) of 1.65. This was based on a reappraisal of the predicted number of lost through journeys, the new data on station operating costs, identification of errors in the original BCR calculation and reduction of the car park capital cost.

Meeting with Edwina Hart in Carno

CSAG were optimistic that the improved BCR would lead to the inclusion of Carno station in the 2015-2020 National Transport Plan, but when the draft appeared in December, no new stations were included at all. However, Edwina Hart agreed to travel to Carno to meet the group on February 12th 2015 to discuss prospects for the station and indicated at the meeting that the door was not closed.

On February 14th, a Saturday drop-in session was held at Carno Community Centre at which residents were invited to write to the Minister urging station re-opening or sign one of three different letters that had been drafted beforehand. There was an impressive turn out, but the Minister did not attempt to respond to all her correspondents.

Station siting

Another outcome of the dialogue with the Minister was reconsideration of the preferred station site, in the light of proposals for redevelopment of the Laura Ashley site and the possible establishment of a Laura Ashley museum in the former station building. She was clearly open to the possibility of closing the Cwm Llwyd level crossing – either by building a road diversion to meet the A470 to the West of the existing A470 bridge over the railway or by constructing a new bridge – and asked CSAG to undertake a comprehensive survey of Carno and Llanbrynmair residents to determine their preference. There was a very high level of response to the survey, which took place in March 2014, and people favoured the former station site as opposed to the new one at the East of the village by a large margin.

Since the survey took place, the Laura Ashley site has been bought by West Yorkshire Fellmongers Ltd. The old schoolhouse has been refurbished and it is understood that parts of the site adjacent to the station are to be redeveloped for housing. It is hoped that the station building may become available for the proposed museum.

Accommodation of Carno stops within enhanced train service

Given the eagerly anticipated introduction of the enhanced Cambrian Line train service in May 2015, CSAG were aware of the importance of demonstrating that stops at Carno could be incorporated into the new timetable. To this end the group proposed an amended version of the new timetable with Carno stops inserted and submitted it to WG officials for consideration by Arriva Trains Wales. Unfortunately ATW concluded that the schedule as at May 2015 was too tight to allow an additional stop at Carno. This came as a surprise, as the CSAG draft timetable, in which not all trains would stop at Carno, was based on existing sectional running times, with the three minute delay due to the Carno stop coming from a reduction in the lengthy 10 to 15 minute layover of trains at Shrewsbury.

In order to resolve the question, Edwina Hart commissioned independent technical advice from PRA Operations Planning Limited. They devised a modified timetable which accommodated 5 Eastbound and 8 Westbound stops at Carno, but recommended against the opening of Carno station on a widespread basis without infrastructure enhancements.

Next steps

In a separate development, CSAG has invited all the bidders for the new Welsh Franchise to meet with the group for a briefing, in the expectation that they will wish to include the opening of the station in their bids.

Clearly the thrust of the campaign from now on must focus on the accommodation of Carno stops within the timetable. Accordingly it is continuing its dialogue with the Welsh Government on this issue with a view to engagement with industry timetable planners on the detail.

Conclusion

As the reader who has got this far will appreciate, the Carno station re-opening campaign has followed a long and tortuous road, with many obstacles in its path. Chief among these has been the skill of the Welsh Government and the Regional Transport Consortium, TraCC, in deflecting responsibility for progressing the station to the other arm of government. Nevertheless we have succeeded in demonstrating an excellent business case, which has been agreed with the Welsh Government economist. This shows a Benefit Cost Ratio of 1.65, excluding wider economic benefits, which exceeds the corresponding figure of 1.4 for Phase 1 of HS2 (The Economic Case for HS2, Department for Transport, October 2013).

A postscript on the controversial decision to retain Talerddig loop from Ian Baxter of Network Rail: "While the Talerddig loop decision did not help the Carno station cause, it did not hinder it either" reported from the Cambrian Line Liaison Committee Meeting - Friday July 27th 2007.

Tony Burton February 27th, 2017

ADDENDUM –TALERDDIG VS CARNO LOOP COSTS

There remain questions surrounding the decision to retain the crossing loop at Talerddig rather than relocate it at Carno. Network Rail made it clear that the main reason was cost - the total of the GRIP 4 Capital and Risk Costs for the Carno Option 1(ii) being £0.8 m greater than for the Talerddig Option 1(i) - see Table below. However, Network Rail appear to have ignored entirely the extra maintenance costs of the longer Welshpool dynamic loop required in conjunction with Talerddig loop retention. On the assumption that the maintenance cost per mile of track on the Cambrian line is half the UK

average, the extra annual maintenance cost for the 2 km longer dynamic loop is £41 k, which results in an extra discounted whole-life maintenance cost of £1.1 m over 60 yrs.

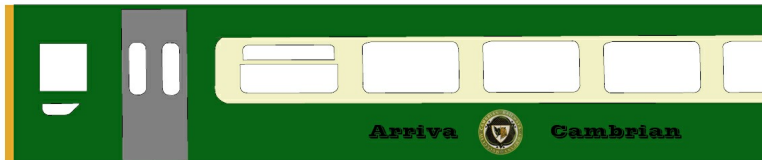
| Passing loop pattern | Total Capital Cost £m | Risk Costs £m | Total of Capital and Risk Costs £m | Extra whole-life maintenance cost £m | Capital + Risk + extra maintenance cost £m |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|---------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| Option 1(i) Talerddig | 11.6 | 3.2 | 14.8 | 1.1 | 15.9 |
| Option 1(ii) Carno | 12.6 | 3.1 | 15.6 | 0 | 15.6 |

Comparison of Option 1(i) and Option 1(ii) Hourly Service Infrastructure Costs

COMMENTS FROM SARPA

Carno Station Action Group have submitted this piece to us outlining their struggles over the years - the dodging of responsibility is all too familiar a theme. You'll note the severe contrast with what's happened with the Bow St scheme, which has been fast tracked as it's in the Local Government sausage machine with Ceredigion CC supporting it, in contrast to the lacklustre Powys CC.

SARPA has taken the line that the infrastructure on the line in terms of passing loops/double track sections is not robust enough at the moment to support additional stations at Carno, Bow St or wherever else without adversely impacting performance on the line. We made this clear to Network Rail in response to the formal application from the Welsh Government for funding for the Bow St scheme from the New Station Fund. We would like to see a future plan for the whole line, including the Coast, encompassing all infrastructure requirements - looking at things holistically and not just individual schemes.



Letter to the Western Mail

The state of Welsh Railways is now headline news with everyone queuing up to blame the terms of the franchise agreement in 2003 rather than admit any fault of their own. Were told that the growth was unexpected and no one could have predicted it however organizations like Sarpa were predicting that growth back in 2003 and earlier and campaigning for it to be accommodated – it wasn't a surprise to us! We've been proved right by events.

The Welsh Government is currently blaming the Department of Transport in London for the problems glossing over the fact that Labour were in power in Westminster at the time with the Minister of State at the DfT with responsibility for rail between June 2003 and September 2004 when the Wales and Border franchise agreement started the Member of Parliament for Pontypridd, a certain Dr Kim Howells.

Welsh Labour seem all too keen to devote time and effort glossing over its role in the debacle rather than sorting out the mess, we note that from the First Minister down they cannot provide even the most basic details on what the new franchise will contain despite having had 14 years to prepare whilst they've been in power in Cardiff Bay.

The four bidders for the franchise are currently meeting with stakeholders however they are not allowed to divulge any detail on what they might propose so the bizarre spectacle of note taking with no feedback is being seen around Wales. The Welsh Government has not publicly released any specifications for the new franchise - the whole thing appears to be conducted in vacuum. What should be a process that delivers a major chunk of Welsh Government expenditure for the 2020's potentially modernizing our public transport system is being done behind closed doors with a complete lack of transparency. There is a growing feeling of little confidence in the process across Wales and the Borders.

Albert Hall

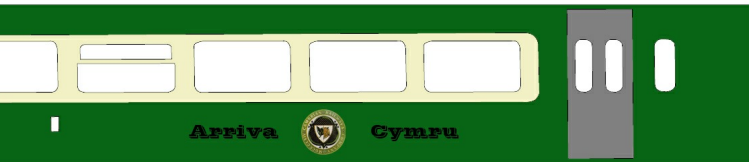
Secretary Sarpa – Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Rail Passenger Association, Welshpool

A Flight of Fancy

Over the Christmas period, your Editor had a day dream. Why not apply a new livery to the ERTMS-fitted 158 units? They are dedicated to the main lines of the former Cambrian Railways, with running of course extended to the Welshpool - Shrewsbury - Birmingham International route in England, and this livery would give a corporate image to the route.

So here is a mocked-up livery. The base colours are an attempt at the Cambrian Railways Bronze Green and Cream of their coaching stock. The crest is that of the Cambrian Railways, which combines the Welsh Dragon and the English Rose. It of course reads "CAMBRIAN RAILWAYS COMPANY MDCCCXLIV": this probably should be altered to something more appropriate (I have no idea whether it is subject to the laws of heraldry).

The lettering that I've put on my not be in the best style: this was one picked out of my font list on the computer. The present Welsh Government logo and text can also be placed at the ends of the coach.. Note that there's a filler cap(?) centrally placed on the side, which interferes with the placing of a single central crest.



Rail Use Figures on the Cambrian

The Office of Rail and Road released the station usage estimates for 2015/2016 in early December, allowing us the first look at official figures since the introduction of the extra services in May 2015. We had done research that showed for several English rural lines that had their service frequency doubled there was on average a rise in usage of 59% in the first 3 years – what the result of adding a 50% increase in services was is an unknown. The ORR figures are for the whole financial year – the extra services started in the middle of May, some 7 weeks into the year, so we don't have a full year's data. However the results are encouraging, but do show some variation depending on which part of the Cambrian system you're on when compared with the 2014/2015 figures.

The Headline was that usage on the Cambrian system as a whole grew by 14.5% from the year before, at first glance with the Coast line growing by 17.8% and the Mainline by 11.3% it seems odd. However break it down and:

- Penhelig to Morfa Mawddach grew by 3.2%.
- Barmouth to Pwllheli grew by 24.5%

The growth Barmouth and north was undoubtedly down to the reopening of the line north of Harlech at Pont Briwet: the line having been heavily hit by its closure, and passenger numbers recovering to former levels. With the only change here being one very early morning northbound train replaced by an evening one, little growth was expected.

Total usage on the coast was 906,446 with 200,000 season ticket users. 20,000 users interchanged between the Aberystwyth/Borth and the Coast. The previous year's figures were 21,000, which seems odd given the vast improvements in connection opportunities at Dovey Junction.

On the Mainline there was a skew in figures too:

- The Upper Severn Valley stations Caersws, Newtown and Welshpool grew by 16.0%.
- Stations further west grew by 8.25%. Aberystwyth only registering a 5.9% growth.

Total usage on the mainline was 883,720 with 20,000 season ticket users, the 11.3% increase being equivalent to 13% over a 12 month period. The growth on the mainline was equivalent of 2,000 extra journeys per week the extra services ran.

Whilst passengers transferring between the coast line and England via the Cambrian Mainline are not recorded, it's probably safe to assume that one million journeys per annum plus are now being made on the Cambrian Mainline, or around 20,000 per week on average.

With regular commuters able to purchase their fares more cheaply on the day by using Cambrian railcards, it's hard to pick out commuting trends from the figures as season tickets are usually not cost effective. However the 200,000 coast season tickets are almost certainly the schools traffic into Harlech and Tywyn. On the Mainline the 20,000 season ticket figure was up from 12,000 the year before – notably at Caersws, Newtown and Welshpool. With some students going to Shrewsbury Sixth Form College on Educational Seasonal tickets in the September, we can perhaps see the start of this market growing, albeit with less than two terms attendance in the 2015/2016 figures.

Trends to watch for Next Year 2016/2017

We expect the entire coast line to go back to normal background growth, as the Pont Briwet reopening boost is over and there has been no other improvements. However the coast trade is notoriously dependent on the tourist season and weather so anything could happen!

With no other benchmark to look at the trend with the English examples mentioned earlier saw 2nd year growth at around half that of 1st year, meaning there might be another 6%-7% for the Mainline. If this pans out, footfall for the Cambrian Mainline stations and Coast Line might be a similar figure at c.920-940K per annum. The Season Ticket Sales in the Upper Severn Valley might be significantly up as we know a larger number of students started in Shrewsbury Sixth Form college in September 2016 than previously, plus we will get a full year's figures.

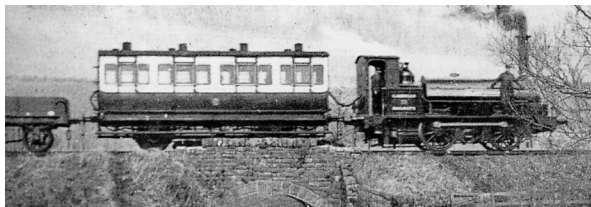
Conclusions

The Cambrian is a vibrant rural rail system closing in on 2 million journeys a year. This needs to be stressed when rural lines in Wales are discussed, given the poor loadings on the Heart of Wales, Conwy Valley and Pembrokeshire branches – the Cambrian must not be labelled with them.

Demand for the extra services is higher East of Talerddig than west of it. This raises interesting questions as to where future investment/improvements should be targeted. Whilst there's been strong support from Ceredigion CC for improved services, the anticipated influx of commuters and other travellers into Aberystwyth has failed to materialise. The 0624 Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth does not carry commuters from the upper Severn valley into Aberystwyth as expected by stakeholders, but instead carries the mainly Eastern European nightshift from Sidoli's factory in Welshpool back to Newtown, with double figures being observed disembarking at Newtown most mornings @ 0703.

| | Station Name | 1516 Entries & Exits | 1415 Entries & Exits | Increase |
|----|---------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| | Cambrian | 1790166 | 1563198 | 14.52% |
| | Shrewsbury* | 1979248 | 1911258 | 3.56% |
| 1 | Aberystwyth | 321758 | 303738 | 5.93% |
| 2 | Barmouth | 191802 | 173272 | 10.69% |
| 3 | Welshpool | 157646 | 133744 | 17.87% |
| 4 | Newtown | 147938 | 130306 | 13.53% |
| 5 | Machynlleth | 133228 | 120802 | 10.29% |
| 6 | Harlech | 120766 | 105524 | 14.44% |
| 7 | Tywyn | 107446 | 105364 | 1.98% |
| 8 | Porthmadog | 79194 | 55892 | 41.69% |
| 9 | Pwllheli | 77890 | 54332 | 43.36% |
| 10 | Borth | 61468 | 53662 | 14.55% |
| 11 | Caersws | 57942 | 49250 | 17.65% |
| 12 | Penrhyndeudraeth | 51872 | 39962 | 29.80% |

*In addition, there were some 250,000 interchange passengers @ Shrewsbury.



The Kerry Branch train in Cambrian Railways times. Presumably the coach was in the Cambrian Railways cream and bronze green livery (see page 9).

The View from Milepost 62 with the Brigadier

Franchise Replacement update special

They're now queuing up to say how inappropriate the 2003 franchise agreement was, including those from the parties who happily agreed to it at the time. Johnny come latelies from across the business, and the political spectrum who can't wait to tell us about the flaws with the current franchise agreement; though of course if you look at the SARPA Newsletter archive on our website, today's tears were all predicted by SARPA back in 2003. Arriva Trains Wales management are busy blaming it all on the nasty franchise agreement terms (they're blameless of course) and the Welsh Labour Government seems to have forgotten its welcoming press release telling us how it was the best thing since sliced bread, and the fact that the Minister of State for Railways in charge at the DfT at the time was the Labour Member for Pontypridd!

With the future of potentially so much public money (for Wales) being set in stone for the entire 2020's, you would think things would be open and transparent, so that the cock up of 2003 would not be at risk of being repeated. Then think again. The Welsh Government has decided it's secret squirrel time! Despite being berated for over a decade on the shortcomings of the current franchise, and what's needed for a modern Welsh public transport system, the brains in Cardiff have not made public any detail on what they're wanting. Fluffy generic policy statements have been floated, and there is talk of a South Wales Metro, but the all crucial detail is missing. They have however created an arm's length body called Transport for Wales to oversee the process, and the new Minister with the shiny teeth has done the rounds, committing to nothing and making the usual excuses about needing more funding and powers from Westminster. As we found out when Abeillo came to see us before Christmas, the bidders are not allowed to reveal any details of their bid, but are expected to interact with Stakeholders. However under the terms of the competition they cannot confirm or deny anything, so a bizarre session of note taking ensued with no feedback from the bidders! Dusty has spoken with the Town Hall cat from Welshpool - Marmaduke - as back in early January all four bidders turned up over two days to silently make notes with the Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Line Liaison Committee there.

All four bidders are of course subsidiaries of foreign state owned railways! Despite the public sector in the UK being deigned "deeply inefficient" and barred by law from competing for franchises, deeply inefficient state owned operations from overseas can, or is it that socialist Governments abroad are far more efficient than free market companies in the UK who haven't bothered to bid? That question was above the tabby Marmaduke's pay grade however, he reports that he heard no Dutch, German, French or Chinese being spoken but did spy some ex-MP's and AM's in the bid teams, who presumably have been hired to try and use their contacts to find out what the hell the Welsh Government expects, so they can steal a march on their competitors. Though the glazed look on one of them did not inspire any confidence. Marmaduke says it was Groundhog Day and he gave up halfway through the third bidder and went to sleep next to his favourite radiator. Essentially the Committee fired their agreed bullet points on what they wanted at the bidders who made notes! The sequence was the same each time and feedback was – well – non-existent. Committee Secretary Robinson's tried to assert that trains would remain through to Birmingham International, but none of them would comment!

The bidders will then formulate their bid based on these and other meetings just like them, and then come up with a bid, presumably not knowing how much money the Welsh Government has to contribute, or what their basic specification is! The whole process sounds very much like the board game Battleships, as bidders will try and aim, fire and hit the magic square!

I've reproduced below the notes Mr Robinson's prepared on the issues that were raised so we can all see what was said. The SARPA Committee say that they generally were on common ground with the Committee on 90% plus of things. His notes are not as fully developed as the SARPA document that was published in the last Newsletter.

SHREWSBURY ABERYSTWYTH RAIL LIAISON COMMITTEE NOTES OF MEETINGS WITH FRANCHISE BIDDING COMPANIES

6th and 9th January 2017 in Welshpool Town Hall

INTRODUCTION

1 NETWORK

- The understanding (***bidders did not confirm or deny this – SARPA italics***) is that all current services including cross border will remain as they are now for the next franchise.
- Request that minimum level of service is that being delivered now.

2 DISABLED ACCESS

- Examples of poor service to disabled was given
- Some improvements at Machynlleth
- Some improvements planned for Welshpool
- Orange and Blue Badge schemes noted
- Information systems need to meet all disabilities
- Seats in trains for disabled not policed
- Toilets and access to them an issue.
- Meeting noted 30% of the populations of most communities along the line are over 60.

3 WELSH LANGUAGE

- The information should be fully bilingual.
- Always needs to be both Welsh & English
- Welsh first and English second when translated.
- The announcements should be bilingual
- 'Accent' was considered important
- Staff speaking Welsh important
- Bilingual signs not present at Mach Lifts

4 AIRPORT ACCESS

- Access by train to main airports essential
- Marketing of the lines to airport to be improved

5 EVENTS AND TRAIN RESPONSES TO CHANGE

- A requirement to meet changes in demand
- Trains taken from Cambrian to service Cardiff events unacceptable.

6 OVERCROWDING

- Most trains are overcrowded. Integrated buses with trains needs improvement.
- Since the new services 41% main line increase
- Greater increase along the coast since May 15
- Some trains were identified as worse than others
- Sunday service on Coast line must be improved.
- West Midlands and the North West through to Mid Wales as important as Cardiff links.
- All trains should be 4 car units on the main line.

- Main trains which are overcrowded worse than others are:
- 7.33 ex Shrewsbury to Birmingham
- 8.33 ex Shrewsbury to Birmingham
- 9.30 ex Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth
- 17.30 ex Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth
- 16.09 ex Birmingham International
- 18.09 ex Birmingham International

7 HOURLY TRAIN SERVICE

- A full hourly service is required for the main line
- A 7 day service including the coast is needed
- Trains need to run later into the evening
- Issue of limited number of 158 units (i.e. 24 fitted)
- Issue of 158's being used on other services where that type of train is not needed.
- A need for more rolling stock
- Westbury loop may help give more paths

8 TIMETABLING

- Connection times need review
- Just missing connecting trains an issue

9 CROSS BORDER SERVICES

- Services to Birmingham Int. very important
- From a timetable as well as access point of view.
- Services to Manchester very important
- Better services to Liverpool Airport desirable

10 TRAINS

- State of trains an issue.
- Poor toilet provision (particularly for disabled)
- New Trains needed sooner rather than later.

11 STATIONS

- Improvements to stations identified:
- Machynlleth car park extension.
- Welshpool Station disabled lifts.
- Caersws car park essential.

12 CYCLISTS

- Better provision for cycles on trains needed.

- Possible removal of one seat in each carriage to gain more space for cycles and storage.

13 INFORMATION

- Better information on stations needed
- Train information needs review (carriage info)

14 CONNECTIONS AND INTEGRATED TRANSPORT

- Co-ordinated timetabled between trains and buses

15 CATERING ON BOARD

- Catering on board all main line and coast trains should be provided.
- This is important due to long journeys on rural lines.
- Access to trolley when trains full an issue.

16 KEY POINTS

- The companies attending were given a copy of the Shrewsbury Aberystwyth Rail Liaison Committee 'Future Plan' recently adopted.

17 COMMUNITY RAIL

- A request for cross border Community Rail
- Meetings

18 WHEN IT GOES WRONG

- There is often no staff around to advise when things go wrong.

19 GUARDS ON TRAINS

- Essential to have a guard on every train.

20 FUNDING

- The funding is the same but to be used differently

.It was noted that the companies would be limited in what they could say due to the 'Transport for Wales' rules. The SARLC is conducting 2 surveys in April and August for the Welsh Government via Welshpool Town Council.

R A Robinson 6th January 2017

In the meantime Westminster Transport Secretary "Failing Grayling" was in town recently – well a small city many miles from Mid Wales called Cardiff anyway, and told journalists it was all going to be the choice of the Welsh Government what happens about the replacement franchise; they have a budget and can make choices about what to spend it on (that's called Devolution). Grayling touted the complete fleet renewal in East Anglia, seemingly saying to Cardiff Bay if some country bumpkins from Norfolk can get new trains in our franchise rounds let's see what you can do! For years, it's always been the other boys fault down at Cardiff Bay to excuse failure, but Grayling has thrown the ball at the Welsh Government. Will they drop it? So, I'm afraid there is little concrete to report as to what will or won't happen post October 2018 which gets ever closer....

Three Cocks Cottage January 2017

Class 442 trains for Wales?

A recent press report originating from Welsh Government circles suggests that some of the Class 442 electric trains, originally built for the London - Weymouth line in the late 1980s and later used on Gatwick Express services but now redundant, could be used in modified form on Arriva Trains Wales (ATW) long-distance services, freeing up some diesel units for South Wales Valleys service.

These trains are five-coach sets, for third-rail electrified lines, powered by electric motors (recycled from the 4-REP units they replaced) driving all four axles of one of the non-driving coaches. The idea seems to be that this coach would be removed leaving a four-coach set which could be worked in push-pull mode by a Class 67 or maybe a 68. They are based on Mk3 coaches, but unlike those built for HST and loco-hauled use at the time, and the Mk3s presently in use by ATW, they have powered doors.

Wiring modifications would be needed to work with locos, but the idea does seem feasible; we hear that some test have already been made with one of the 442 sets stored at Ely. It has been suggested in the past for the Trans-Pennine lines, but brand new loco-hauled sets are now on order for that company.

Will this happen? Who knows, but the leasing company that owns them is keen to find another use.

From Charlie Hulme's North Wales Coast Railway website, 5th December 2017



A Newport to mid Wales train at Torpantau - the summit of the Brecon and Merthyr Railway, in 1959.

Photograph: Denis Bates

All Tickets Please with Newtown Station Travel

London fares

Despite all the adverse publicity regarding rail fares, travelling to/from London from the Cambrian is still relatively good value for money, and free from the draconian evening peak hour restrictions that most of the country must endure. You can rock up at Euston or Aberystwyth and buy on the day a standard class return between the two places for £78.00 via Birmingham without a railcard. The only restriction on use is that you can't arrive in Euston before 1005 (which is impossible anyway) or leave Euston before 0930 on weekdays. Aberystwyth is some 280 miles from London so this fare works out at a reasonable 14p per mile travelled! (The average cost of running a motor vehicle is around 50p a mile). The reason there is no evening peak restriction is because the latest connection that will get you back to the Cambrian is officially 1843. Virgin Trains definition of peak hours is 1500 to 1900 (this is not about managing peak demand but extracting as much fare revenue as possible); however they can't reasonably ask you to wait till the peak is over and then travel! Many travellers just take this for granted, not realising the huge cost barriers that travellers from say Shrewsbury have to put up with if they want to arrive early in London or leave in the evening peak. We are very fortunate in this respect and this is a long standing grandfather right. Occasionally we hear calls for a later train back from Shrewsbury: the practical consequence of this would be peak hour restrictions on leaving Euston, making travel between London and Mid Wales more expensive, as a later departure from Shrewsbury would mean you could leave Euston after 1900 and get back the same day! It was rumoured that Virgin tried to persuade ATW to do this a few years ago so they could do just that. Another bonus of the lack of evening peak restrictions is that the Virgin Trains departing Euston on weekdays between 1500 & 1900 are never full.

The London market is mainly leisure based from Newtown and usually involves multiple passengers: often infrequent travellers. The £68.00 fare is perceived as expensive by many, and many want to look for Advance Purchase deals. There is a common misconception among many irregular passengers who believe that if they book in advance then the fare will always be cheaper - this is not the case. Infrequent travellers from Mid Wales also aren't always aware of the consequences of travelling at peak times. The Advance Purchase system works by offering a limited number of cheaper tickets to those who will commit to travel at set time; once the cheapest quota sells out a more expensive set is released and so on. The industry standard is that they are put on sale 12 weeks in advance, though Virgin had broken ranks and put weekdays on sale up to six months ahead in October 2016. These tickets can and do sell out especially at peak times. As a general rule of thumb, coming out of Euston on Sunday PM and normal weekday evening peaks sell out first, as do the connecting trains on normal weekdays between Birmingham and London from the first UP Cambrian train. Nearly everyday we see people looking to go on the first train on a weekday and come back out in the evening peak who are surprised by being told there's no "cheap deals". The reality is you have to be booking weeks ahead to travel cheap at peak times most people come a week or two before hand after the cheapest tickets have been on sale for 10 weeks - only to find they've sold out. However, if you can plan your journey around travelling at non-peak times even a few days beforehand then there is often something possible. Weekends and school holidays are unsurprisingly busy with leisure travellers, though August and Christmas can see Business travel drop off and space free up. The through AP tickets from the Cambrian to London disappear quickly as a rule but you can get round this by splitting booking at Birmingham.

Of course we have an alternative to Virgin: by using Chiltern Railways between Birmingham Moor St and London Marylebone. This does mean changing stations in Birmingham, which is a mental block to many, though in some ways the 5 minute walk is easier than changing ends of the station at New St by going out and then back through the barriers in the crowds! Chiltern offer a Super Off-Peak Return from Newtown @ £39.50 (c 9p per mile) and Aberystwyth @ £59.50. There are limitations on its use: you can't get the first train down from Mid Wales on a weekday, and if you're returning on a weekday you must leave between 1000 and 1600 and of course the journey does take a bit longer than to Euston. There are no restrictions at the weekend. We find on leisure journeys with overnight

stays the Marylebone price beats AP to Euston 8 out of 10 times. However it can be horses for courses, as Euston can be more convenient to where your end destination in London is rather than Marylebone i.e. catching Eurostar from St Pancras; others prefer the quicker Virgin trains whilst others will only go Chiltern. At least there's choice!

There is also the option of travelling down the Trent Valley to Euston as well, although this route is more expensive at £80.50 for Any Permitted route Off Peak Return from Newtown compared to £68.00 via Birmingham. Many online journey planners offer via Trent Valley one way and via Birmingham the other as technically the journey is slightly quicker. However this often involves tight connections at Wolverhampton, Stafford or Crewe. The potential return of saving a few minutes for the extra £'s is not worth it, especially as connections can be missed. At New St you do get 20 minutes. It's usually online purchasers who get suckered into it, not realising there are easier and cheaper alternatives. A late running train at Newtown often brings people into the office clutching their Any Permitted routes tickets bought elsewhere worried about connections. London Midland offer fares on their slower services via Northampton to Euston as well.

Is the £68.00 fare from Euston to Newtown a rip off? No - our answer to complainers is try driving to central London! Not only will you drive 460 miles but when you get to London where to do you park? And when you've found somewhere how much will it be? Then there's the congestion charge to worry about and that's if you're comfortable with long distance motorway and urban driving, which many aren't. London isn't five minutes down the road, and the alternative to the train is expensive and not palatable to many. The fares from other UK towns a comparable distance to London are often a lot more expensive than from the Cambrian, there's no draconian peak restrictions to worry about, good Advance Purchase availability and an alternative cheaper operator's fares. Rail travel to/from London from Mid Wales is a good deal.

Gareth Marston

SARPA Meetings

| | | | |
|-----------|---------------|-------|--|
| April | Tuesday 4th | 18.55 | The Sportsman, Severn St, Newtown |
| May | Saturday 13th | 11.45 | Royal Naval Club, Market Street, Aberystwyth |
| June | Saturday 10th | 11.45 | Wharf Station, Talylyn Railway, Tywyn |
| July | Saturday 8th | 15.00 | White Lion, Machynlleth |
| August | Tuesday 1st | 19.00 | Royal Oak Hotel, Welshpool |
| September | Saturday 9th | 11.45 | Railway Hotel, Borth |
| October | Saturday 7th | 15.00 | AGM. Machynlleth, White Lion. |
| November | Tuesday 7th | 18.55 | The Sportsman, Severn Street, Newtown |
| December | Saturday 9th | 11.45 | Royal Naval Club, Market Street, 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

Talylyn Railway
www.talylyn.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
www.mylordz.com

Useful addresses

Arriva Trains Wales:

St Mary's House, 47 Penarth Road, Cardiff CF10 5DJ. Tel 0845 6061 660

Email: customer.services@arrivatrainswales.co.uk

Network Rail:

Community Relations, Kings Place, 99, York Way, London. N1 9AG

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, 2nd Floor, 200, Aldersgate Street,, London. EC14 4HD

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

Officers of the Association

Acting Chairman: Ifor Morris: 2 Dingle Rd, Welshpool, Powys.SY21 7QB. 01938-554463. E-mail ifor.morris@yahoo.co.uk

Secretary: Albert Hall. Contact at sarpa@sarpa.info

Treasurer and Membership Secretary: Tony Harvey: 23 High Street, Welshpool, Powys, SY21 7JP. Tel./fax. 01938 559087. E-mail Tony@Montgomeryshire.EU

Newsletter Editor: Denis Bates, 86 Maescseinion, Waun Fawr, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion SY23 3QQ. Tel. 01970-617667. E-mail denisebbates@gmail.com

Liaison Officer: Roger Goodhew: 12 Granville St, Shrewsbury, Shropshire. SY3 8NE. Tel. 01743 343173..

Committee Member: Robert Knight, Tresco, 8 Tanrallt St, Machynlleth, SY20 8BE

Association address: c/o Newtown Station Travel, as above. E-mail: sarpa@sarpa.info

Webmaster: Angus Eickhoff, Lliidiart Wood, Moel y Garth, Welshpool, Powys, SY21 9JF. Tel. 01938-553572. E-mail angus@anguseickhoff.co.uk