
Shrewsbury Aberystwyth Rail Passengers' Association

Newsletter No. 75

MARCH 2018

ABELLIO NOW DROPS OUT OF BIDDING FOR THE WALES FRANCHISE

Abellio has now dropped out of the bidding for the Wales and Borders rail franchise, leaving only MTR and KeolisAmey remaining in the field.

Abellio took its decision after much of Carillion's rail assets were bought by rival Amey, which is involved in one of the rival bids, and left it unable to continue.

In a statement, Economy Secretary Ken Skates said the Dutch-owned company "has taken the regrettable decision to withdraw its bid having been unable to overcome the impact of Carillion's liquidation".

He added: "We have two strong bidders remaining in the process and remain on target to award this exciting contract in May 2018 and to transform rail services in Wales and borders from October 2018."

An Abellio spokesman said: "Following the liquidation of Carillion PLC on Monday 15 January, Abellio Rail Cymru has taken the decision to withdraw from the Contract Letting Process for the Wales and Borders Rail Service and South Wales Metro competition."

FRANCHISE TO BE AWARDED IN MAY 2018 AND BE OPERATIONAL IN OCTOBER 2018

The following is a transcript of a recent debate in the Senedd between Leanne Wood AM, the leader of Plaid Cymru and Ken Skates AM., Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Transport.

LW: Will the Cabinet Secretary provide an update on the award of the next rail franchise?

KS: Yes, of course. Transport for Wales are currently assessing the three bidders for the next Wales and Borders rail services and the South Wales Metro, and the contract will be awarded in May 2018 and it will be operational from October of this year.

LW: It's baffling why you are conducting the franchise tendering process [with] such a thick veil of secrecy. Unlike the UK Government's Department for Transport and Transport Scotland you are refusing to publish the invitation to tender documents that have been issued to bidders. If you did publish those documents, people in Wales, the people who are herded onto these train services every day, would have the opportunity to analyse the

criteria and offer ideas as to ways in which they could be improved. The mistakes of the last rail franchise for Wales can be laid at the door of an arms-length Westminster body. As a frequent traveller on the Valleys Lines coming down from the Rhondda it's no surprise to me to see customer satisfaction with rail services in Wales has dropped. The conditions are often appalling, if things don't improve this time there'll be no hiding place for you and your Welsh Labour Cabinet colleagues. Why not publish the franchise documents, get the people involved, open yourself up to greater scrutiny to deliver a better rail franchise that works for everyone? What are you afraid of?

KS: We're afraid of nothing. The member should recognise, though, first of all, that this [is] a world first in terms of the process that we're following. It's not been done anywhere else in the world, it is truly innovative and it's designed to ensure that we challenge experts in the field to bring forward the best possible solutions for Welsh travellers. There is no doubt whatsoever that we have to see a step change in terms of service delivery, in terms of punctuality and in terms of satisfaction, and each of the bidders has been challenged to bring forward within an envelope all of the best solutions based on new and emerging technology and based on the drive for greater satisfaction amongst passengers. Now, I can accept criticism for not publishing the full tender document at this stage, but the reason we can't publish detailed information with the invitation to submit final tenders is because we could jeopardise the entire competitive process which as I say is a world first. That's why the Scottish have taken a different approach and that's why the UK Government have taken a different approach. Releasing commercially sensitive information relating to the bidders' business plans could lead, potentially, to a prejudicing of the commercial interests of those companies. However, once a service provider has been appointed we will make further documentation, including the full tender document public and I will be more than happy to face full scrutiny for the future franchise that will be operating on Wales and Borders networks. I can say this. Welsh Government is not the cause of the problems on the Welsh network at the moment, but Welsh Government will be the cure.

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

Er gwaethaf y diffyg gwbydoeth parhaol am y masnachfrait newydd, mae SARPA dal i fod yn dylanwadol ac yn barod i godi llais. Enghraifft diweddar o hyn oedd yn y Cambrian News yn Mis Ionawr, pan gyhoeddwyd erthygl am ein gwrthwynebiad i'r cynydd ym mhrisiau tocynnau. Ers nifer o flynyddoedd mae prisiau tocynnau wedi bod yn codi yn gyflym fel bod llywodraeth San Steffan yn talu cyfran llai mewn swbsidi, tra eu bod yn parhau i fuddsoddi'n frwd mewn ffyrdd.

Yng Nghymru, mae Llywodraeth Cymru dal yn ymddangos yn awyddus i fuddsoddi mewn dargyfeiriad drud i'r M4 o gwmpas Casnewydd, gydag amcangyfrifon newydd o £1.4Bn. Gellid ail-agor y rheilffordd rhwng Aberystwyth a Chaerfyrddin dwywaith am y fath bris! Mae fe hefyd yn wir mae gan Gymru 5% o boblogaeth y DU, 6% o'r rheilffyrdd, ond mae hi ond wedi derbyn 1% o'r buddsoddiad mewn seilwaith rheilffyrdd yn ddiweddar. Yn sicr, mae angen buddsoddi mewn seilwaith rheilffyrdd yng Nghymru.

Ar hyn o bryd, rydym dal i ddioddef gorlenwi difrifol ar drenau ar y Cambrian oherwydd diffyg cerbydau. Mae 24 uned sy'n gallu gweithio ar y lein (hynny yw, 48 cerbyd), ond mae rhai o'r rhain yn cael eu defnyddio mewn ardaloedd eraill yn lle. Ar raddfa ehangach, does gan Drenau Arriva Cymru ddim llawer mwy o gerbydau nag oedd ganddynt ar ddechrau eu masnachfaint yn 2003, ond mae nifer y teithwyr wedi cynyddu'n drawiadol. Bydd angen mynd i'r afael â hyn a mynnu fod y 24 uned sydd ar gael yn cael eu trosglwyddo i'r Cambrian er mwyn ymdopi â phoblogrwydd y rheilffordd, trwy gael cerbydau ychwanegol i weddill y rhwydwaith.

Bydd siawns i ni trafod hyn, a materion eraill, gydag uwch-reolwyr Arriva yn ein cyfarfod yn Amwythig ym mis Mawrth. Yn ogystal, byddem ni'n parhau i osod ein gofynion ar gyfer y masnachfaint newydd.

Jeff Smith, Aberystwyth, Chwefror 2018

Despite the continued lack of information about the new franchise, SARPA continues to be influential and vocal. A recent example of this was in the *Cambrian News* in January, when an article was published about our opposition to the ticket price rises. For a number of years ticket prices have been rapidly rising so that the Westminster government pays a lower proportion in subsidies, whilst they are still enthusiastically investing in roads.

In Wales, the Welsh Government still appears keen to invest in diverting the M4 around Newport, with a new estimate of £1.4bn. The railway between Aberystwyth and Carmarthen could be re-opened twice for that price!

It is also true that Wales has 5% of the UK population, 6% of the railways, but has only received 1% of the investment in railway infrastructure in recent years. Certainly, more investment needs to be made in Wales' railway infrastructure.

Currently, we are still suffering serious overcrowding on Cambrian trains due to lack of carriages. There are 24 units which can work on the line (that is, 48 carriages), but some of them are used in other areas instead. On a larger scale, Arriva Trains Wales has barely any more carriages than it did at the start of the franchise in 2003, but passenger numbers have risen spectacularly. It will be necessary to take the bull by the horns and demand that the 24 available units will be transferred to the Cambrian in order to cope with the popularity of the railway, by obtaining additional carriages for the rest of the network.

There will be a chance to discuss this, and other matters, with Arriva senior management in our meeting in Shrewsbury in March. Additionally, we will continue to set forth our demands for the new franchise.

Jeff Smith, Aberystwyth, February 2018

SARPA NEWS

The monthly meetings have continued with concern being expressed at the likely impact on the service by the proposed re-opening of Bow Street. The Association was also asked to write to Ken Skates AM to point out the importance to the local economy of the depot at Machynlleth remaining open under the new franchise agreement.

The Chairman had his letter regarding the increase in rail fares published in the *Cambrian News* of January 11, 2018 noting "The recent price rises, which clearly outstrip most pay increases, are yet another sign that the Westminster government cares little for the railway. At the same time, the Wales and Borders rail route, which serves six per cent of the UK population, receives one per cent of the infrastructure investment. If some rail responsibilities are devolved to Cardiff, it will be vital for the Welsh Government to make serious improvements on the Cambrian Line. SARPA want to see major infrastructure improvements, a full hourly service and more carriages at a price that passengers can afford."

At the AGM in October the matter of the Association's Constitution was raised and various comments and observations received. As a result of circulating it to members further comments have now been received. Any members who still wish to receive a copy or make comments should contact the Membership Secretary. It is hoped to bring the revised document to the AGM this year.

The web-site has been refreshed and is now fully bi-lingual.

The Association does need more helpers. There is a need for a Secretary who can organise the Meetings, and in conjunction with the Chairman provide agendas for and minutes of those Meetings. Any one interested should contact the Chairman. Also at the next AGM in October, 2018 there will be a vacancy for a Treasurer and Membership Secretary as Tony Harvey is stepping down.



The osprey nest near Dovey Junction, viewed from the Dyfi Osprey Project's observation building. The parent birds should arrive from Africa during April; however the trains will not be visible as the year progresses, once the trees come into leaf.

UP AND DOWN THE LINE

ABERYSTWYTH

Yr Hen Orsaf (Wetherspoons) adjacent to the station will be closed from March 2018 for complete refitting and extension

BISHOP'S CASTLE RAILWAY (closed in 1935)

The provisional enquiry to the Heritage Lottery Fund regarding the weighbridge (see Newsletter no. 74) gave useful feedback. The objective of the project is to restore the 1865 building in sympathy with the original structure (though not necessarily with the same layout) ensuring the building's future and, by so doing, enable the heritage of the building to be understood by people locally. Following restoration, it is proposed that the building could be used as a meeting room for local organisations, as an exhibition venue and as an interpretation space for understanding the role of the Bishop's Castle Railway in the development of the town.

PENHELIG

The halt, which is thought to be the last original halt on the line, will be closed for several weeks from January to March 2018. Arriva Trains Wales's poster shows a timetable for a linking bus service (in reality a taxi) between the halt and Aberdyfi station. It appears to link with all trains except on Sundays. The rebuilding of the halt goes on apace. On January 11 the entire wooden and asphalt surfacing had been removed leaving the wooden stumps and struts exposed. The building remains untouched.

WELSHPOOL

For some time Welshpool Town Council has had in its forward plan the enhancement of Welshpool railway station. Full plans have now been drawn up and were recently discussed in public session by the Town Council. The proposals have now gone to the Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Rail Liaison Committee and full details can be viewed on their website and from which the following is taken. The aim is to improve facilities at Welshpool Main Line Station and takes into account the following factors:

- a) The site layout and boundary confines.
- b) The ongoing maintenance of any facilities provided.

And includes the following elements:

Access: Access for disabled is very poor with a long winding ramp being the only way to the platforms. The proposal includes for lifts at both the car park entrance and down to the platform.

Car Parking: The on site car parking is limited but there is little room to improve this situation without extensive land acquisition. Approx. 6-8 cars extra could be gained by minor alterations to the main car park area.

Station building: At present there is only one single shelter with a ticket machine housed within. You can get approx. 10-12 persons inside the shelter at a push. Many trains have at least 30 passengers to board the Shrewsbury bound train and another 10 or so for the Aberystwyth bound train. Both trains arrive around the same time. The proposal is to move

the shelter down the platform and to provide a building above the tracks accessed from the existing bridge. The design would allow for a walkway to the platform even when the buildings are locked. The new building would provide seating, ticket machines, vending machine, two toilets (one disabled) and indicator boards to show when trains are getting near.

A CCTV camera will need to be installed within the building for security.

Services: Electrical services are on site. Water and sewage services will need to be installed to allow for the toilet accommodation.

Cleaning and maintenance: The Town Council is willing to provide toilet cleaning and emptying of bins along with general tidying up of the new building. Repairing liability would remain with the railway companies. An arrangement could be agreed to cover what is needed by agreement.

Illustrations indicative of what is being proposed:



Information board and proposed seating type



Possible look of station from the Shrewsbury Platform end showing the location of the building above the station platform.



Ticket machine and lift

NEWS

FARES

An article on the North Wales Coast Railway news site has compared local return fares on North Wales Coast (Holyhead to Chester) stations with other areas of Wales, including the Cambrian, and found them to be more expensive on a per mile travelled basis. It pointed out that a day return from Llandudno Junction to Chester costs 25.4 pence per mile compared to a day return from Aberystwyth to Shrewsbury at 12.8 pence per mile. This is entirely true and a legacy of "market pricing" policies pursued by BR being frozen in aspic by rail privatization, and then 25 years of above inflation price increases. Newtown Station Travel's thoughts on how to reform our broken fare system appear in a main article. See: www.nwrail.org.uk/nw1801d.htm

ARRIVA TRAINS WALES

The Cambrian Card now costs £10 (for one year) up from £5 a price it has been since its introduction in 2006. It is still a bargain for frequent travellers on the line. The Cambrian Lines Railcard offers at least one third off most individual Standard Class rail fares on the Cambrian Lines. Holders of the Cambrian Lines Railcard are entitled to purchase most Standard Class rail fares for journeys Pwllheli - Aberystwyth- Machynlleth - Newtown - Shrewsbury (including from/to all intermediate stations) at a discount. The Cambrian Railcard leaflet is currently being updated for 2018. Please visit Aberystwyth, Barmouth, Machynlleth, Newtown or Shrewsbury stations for further information and how to apply for the card.

Arriva Club 55 is a promotional ticket which was available until 3 March 2018 and cost from £27. There's no limit on the number of Arriva Club 55 tickets you can buy. This is still a good buy but very sad to see how each year brings an increasing number of restrictions. A

Senior or Disabled Persons Railcard earns a further £1 discount. Tickets may be bought online, at your local staffed rail station ticket office or on-board the train from the Conductor.

NETWORK RAIL

The Welsh Government, Network Rail, Arriva Trains Wales and Transport Focus have joined forces with Welsh Government and passenger representatives to create a new board bringing track and train closer together and ensuring there is one voice to represent customers in Wales and the borders. The board will work together to drive improvements and hold the rail industry to account.

The Wales Route Supervisory Board builds on the work that has already taken place between Network Rail and Arriva Trains Wales to improve services for passengers in Wales and the borders.

The board will be independently chaired by Margaret Llewellyn OBE, who has a broad range of experience in tourism, the rail industry and shipping and is a non-executive director at Cardiff Airport. She is a past winner of the Welsh 'woman of the year' award for management achievement, and was awarded an OBE in 2004 for services to the economic development of Wales.

Work continues the Cambrian line with replacement bus services for the last train from Shrewsbury scheduled for the following periods: February 26 – March 1; March 5-8 and March 12-15. There will be a replacement bus between Newtown and Aberystwyth. There are also other closures. Over-running work has caused a number of problems especially in the week of February 5.

But Network Rail also have their problems because the works train returning to Shrewsbury on the night of January 17/18 encountered three trees across the line and two chicken sheds.

Network Rail has published its five year plan for the railway network, covering the 2019 to 2024 period, known as Control Period 6 (CP6). The renewal of the Grade II listed Barmouth Viaduct is one of the projects listed.

Wi-Fi THROUGHOUT WALES

Free-to-use Wi-Fi is now available on all Arriva Trains Wales fleets, with its fitment to Pacer and 153 trains. It has been fitted already in the class 158 fleet.

RAILFUTURE WALES/RAILFUTURE CYMRU

The 2018 AGM will be held in Shrewsbury on 14 April 2018 at 14:00 in Arriva Trains Wales offices at Shrewsbury station. It will be held in the ground floor meeting room.

WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN

There are many adverse comments about how Arriva Trains Wales have managed their franchise and although it might now seem a little late, it is worth taking a look at the following website, which has been supplied by one of our members:

<http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/how-arriva-wanted-develop-wales-13855134>

This highlights Arriva's original plans usually with the comment "rejected". The introductory text to the article is revealing. "Arriva's initial proposals for the existing franchise back in 2002 reveal that the root of many of today's problems is a decision by the Labour Government, under Tony Blair, not to increase the franchise's subsidy. Arriva expected passenger numbers to continue growing and recommended deploying new trains alongside the old ones, resulting in 31% more seats on the Valley Lines. Instead Arriva and the other bidders were told to work out how they would make ends meet if subsidy remained unchanged or was reduced by 10% or 20%."

Let us all hope that the same mistakes are not made again.

These are the highlights of Arriva's original plans taken from the website quoted above:

Proposed: At least 22 new Turbostar trains, to enter service in 2004 and 2005. **Outcome:** Rejected.

Proposed: Standard Pattern Timetable to make better use of existing train fleet and make timetables easier to remember. **Outcome:** Delivered in 2005.

Proposed: 31% increase in Valley Lines seating capacity. **Outcome:** Some increase delivered with Standard Pattern Timetable. No increased capacity from new trains.

Proposed: Hourly Aberystwyth-Shrewsbury trains. **Outcome:** Rejected by UK Government but introduced at peak commuting times in 2015 with Welsh Government funding.

Proposed: Hourly trains between Llandudno, Betws-y-coed and Blaenau Ffestiniog. **Outcome:** Rejected.

Proposed: Bus services as integral elements of the franchise for Aberystwyth-Carmarthen, Bangor-Porthmadog, and Port Talbot to Heads of the Valleys stations and Abergavenny. **Outcome:** Rejected.

Proposed: Trains between Wales and Manchester Airport, although Arriva did not see "any realistic prospect of through services for many years, if ever". **Outcome:** ATW launched regular services between north Wales and Manchester Airport in 2015 after overcoming opposition from the UK Government and other train operators.

WALES AND BORDERS FRANCHISE PROCUREMENT PROGRESS

In November 2017 the Department of Transport held a Wales & Borders Procurement Stakeholder Event at Shrewsbury. The purpose of the meeting was to: explain the agreement reached between the two governments; explain the principles behind the specification in the context of the procurement process; outline the plans for how the franchise will be managed

in life; discuss with the audience and other groups how stakeholder engagement is best arranged in future, replacing the existing Cross Border Forum. From reading this it is very clear to see why there may be difficulties between the Welsh Government and the Secretary of State. The latter still appears to be wanting compliance with their specific requirements both during the bid phase and in operation with the devolved powers only being finally executed when the new franchise starts. It also notes that Transport for Wales is not specifying any service enhancements across the border beyond the current operated base but the Welsh Government has identified routes where bidders are encouraged to develop capacity/frequency enhancements. Let us hope this does include a full hourly service on the Aberystwyth to Shrewsbury line and enhancements on the Coast line.

A key document (dated September 28, 2017) which underpinned the discussions was the formal one to propose a “Transfer of Functions Order under section 58(1) of GOWA (“TFO”) [...] to transfer certain Secretary of State franchising functions under the Railways Act 1993 (as amended) and the Railways Act 2005 (the Railways Acts) to the Welsh Ministers in order for the Welsh Ministers to be the franchising authority in respect of the Welsh Component of the Welsh Services.” It notes that in advance of the TFO coming in to force “Welsh Ministers are acting with the consent and, as legally necessary, as agent for the Secretary of State, as principals, to commence and conduct a procurement process under the Railways Act 1993) to procure a new Franchisee for the Replacement Franchise Agreement. Following the TFO coming into force, the Welsh Ministers will continue to act as agent of the Secretary of State in respect of the English Services to the extent that they are specified in the Replacement Franchise Agreement.” The document sets out undertakings and obligations. Schedule 4 details English Services and below the proposals supported and conditions as they particularly affect the Cambrian Lines are given below:

Newport	Shrewsbury	Up to 3tph
Shrewsbury	Birmingham International	Up to 1tph—all services (including on Sundays) to call at Smethwick Galton Bridge
Shrewsbury	Crewe	Up to 2tph*
Shrewsbury	Chester	No restrictions required by the Secretary for State
Wrexham	Bidston (for Liverpool)	Up to 2tph

*Bidders/the Franchisee are encouraged to minimise dwell times at Crewe to assist with station platforming in the long term.

Other routes covered are: Newport—Bristol Temple Meads; Newport—Cheltenham; Crewe—Manchester; Chester—Crewe; Chester—Manchester via Warrington Bank Quay; Chester—Liverpool via Halton Curve.

SHREWSBURY TO ABERYSTWYTH RAILWAY LIAISON COMMITTEE

The Committee met in Machynlleth in November, and in Welshpool on February 16. Minutes of both meetings are published on their website. A report on the initial proposals (see below) for Welshpool Station (see p.5) was on the agenda for the November meeting. The Meetings for 2018-2019 were agreed as May 11, October 5 and February 8, 2019 with July 13, 2018 as the joint meeting with the Cambrian Coast Railway Liaison Committee. [Note: the public are not admitted to these meetings.]

At the joint Meeting with the Cambrian Coast Line Committee in November 2017 a report was received from Claire Williams, the Rail Development Officer, Cambrian Railways Partnership. This included compliments on the survey conducted by the Committee (see following); the Bow Street re-opening; and a piece on Dementia Friendly Communities and Stations which is reproduced below:

“As the new Cambrian Railways Partnership Development Officer, one of my key objectives is Community engagement, developing plans to expand the reach of the CRP to a wider range of groups including those socially disadvantaged. Under this remit, I am currently working with strategic and funding partners at making The Cambrian Railway Line a Dementia Friendly Community in its own entity. This is a huge task and will take approximately 3 years to fulfil. However, I am looking to break this down and do it station by station, started with those manned stations, these initially will be, Machynlleth, Barmouth, Pwelli and Shrewsbury. [Is not Newtown a staffed station?] This would make the Cambrian Railway Line the first Dementia Friendly Railway Line in the UK. There are currently a very small number of DF stations in Wales but I strongly believe this goal is achievable. As we are in the design element of Bow Street, I have requested that whilst doing an Equality Impact Assessment for the re-opening of Bow Street I have asked if we could work with the Alzheimer’s Society and make it a Dementia Friendly Station”.

The Liaison Committee website includes a very full report on the survey work conducted on the Cambrian Lines in 2017. Entitled *Report no. 6* and running to thirty-nine pages there is also a summary issued as *Report No. 6A* from which the following is extracted:

“The main points with regards to the customer service survey are as follows:

- i) A slight decrease overall in satisfaction with the business traveller satisfaction rising (mainly to the free Wi-Fi provision now on most trains).
- ii) The main issues from a passenger perspective is the overcrowding of many trains.

The main points from Report no 6 with regards to the passenger survey are as follows:

- i) Journeys: 17% are local (under 30 mins), 20% medium (31-60 mins) and 63% longer journeys.
- ii) Tickets 30% are purchased on the train, 27% at a station, 35% online and the remaining 8% from other locations.
- iii) Those regularly travelling by train has risen from 37% in 2013 to 68% today.
- iv) The younger traveller section has increased in train usage from 28% in 2013 to 36% today.

Other relevant information is noted below:

- i) **Trains terminating at Shrewsbury:** There is an issue with a number of trains terminating at Shrewsbury (from both Birmingham and the West) with passengers having to change between trains which then return back to where they have just come from rather than completing their journey.
- ii) **Trains:** The capacity of trains is often less than demand and trains need to be strengthened.
- iii) **Busy days:** There are days (often a weekend) when the trains are busy where the trains are reduced in size to accommodate other activity elsewhere (e.g. rugby internationals in Cardiff) leaving the stock available to the Cambrian Lines reduced.
- iv) **The Business Traveller:** There is now Wi-Fi on most trains which is well received. There is however a need for more working power points to support the use of computers, iPads and mobile/smart phones.

From the survey result it is clear that on the main Shrewsbury Aberystwyth Line there is a need for an hourly train service through the day with a strengthening of passenger seating provision. There are two main trains which are missing from the current timetable which are:

- a) 08.30 ex Shrewsbury toward Aberystwyth
- b) 16.30 ex Shrewsbury toward Aberystwyth (to ease the 17.30 by giving an earlier train for shoppers)

From the survey results it is clear that on the Coast Line many trains in the out of season months are adequate; however the trains are extensively overcrowded during main tourist season. Hence the suggested train patterns set out in the following recommendations:

- i) There is a need for a full hourly train service on the main Shrewsbury Aberystwyth Line.
- ii) There is a need for a better Sunday service provision along the Coast.
- iii) There is a need to have the ability to strengthen trains to meet increased demand.
- iv) There is a need for infrastructure improvements at:
 - a. Welshpool – better all-round facilities (particularly for the disabled passenger)
 - b. Caersws – improved car parking
 - c. Machynlleth – improved car parking
 - d. Dovey Junction – better waiting room provision
 - e. Aberystwyth – longer canopy for the station area

The following alternative train configurations are suggested to meet the demands on the both the main and coastal Cambrian Lines:

Option 1

- 1 a) A 2 hourly 4 car unit train service through to Aberystwyth.
- b) A 2 hourly 4 car unit train to Barmouth where two cars remain which are picked up by the 2 car unit returning from the north.
- c) A 4 car unit stabled at Machynlleth to provide a service to Aberystwyth linking with the Barmouth train.

Option 2

- 2 a) A 2 hourly 4 car unit train service through to Aberystwyth.
- b) A 2 hourly 2 car unit train service along the Coast.
- c) A 2 hourly 2 car unit train service from Machynlleth linking with the Aberystwyth service.

The minutes of the February meeting are now available, from which these points are taken: ATW said that WiFi was now available on all their trains and would soon be available in stations. They now have a new MD, Tom Joyner. Pacers would be obsolete by 2020, and new 769 units (ex-Thameslink/Bed-Pan) for South Wales will release other trains for cascading, including 158s. Over-running engineering works have caused some difficulty. NR is reducing the number of hours per shift in order to get hand over to operator done more promptly and effectively.

At Machynlleth a Shelter upgrade planned for March. A new shelter on Platform 1 will be provided and the old waiting room re-opened.

Consultation for May timetable would begin in March.

Bus integration with Txx bus services at strategic interchange points is promised by WG.

NATIONAL RAIL FIGURES 2016/2017

Rail use in the Regional and Long Distance sectors increased by 4% from the previous year. However the effect of the long running dispute on Southern has seen London and South East usage increase by only 0.8%. 39% of tickets sold were season tickets, just under 4% being Advance Purchase with the vast bulk of tickets being sold being Anytime, Off Peak, Off Peak Day and Super Off Peak tickets that can be bought on the day of travel and don't need to be pre purchased.

The farebox income across mainland UK was £9.5 Billion for 2016/2017, equivalent to every person spending £150.00 a year on rail fares, or £355.80 per household. According to the Office of National Statistics "Transport" was the largest spending category per household in 2016, accounting for 14% of all household expenditure @ £3754.00 per annum. Given this does Government give Transport the priority it deserves?

Official statistics show that there are large variances by age group and region in how we travel. However, overall whilst only 3% of all trips are made by mainline rail, this represents 10% of all distance travelled, whilst the bus accounts for 7% of all trips but only 4% of distance travelled. Whilst 66% of all trips made are under 5 miles in length, rail is negligible in this market meaning that rail accounts for around 10% of trips over 5 miles in length and over 20% of distance travelled in journeys over 5 miles in length. Mainline rail has a 10% market share of total commuting, but into London and into other major cities this % is a lot higher meaning rail is a significant player in its markets. For instance 30% of peak hour journeys to/from central Birmingham are by rail.



The Cambrian Coast Express in steam days, arriving at Shrewsbury behind a King Class locomotive..



The end of the line at Aberystwyth, with the ticket machine on the left. This view, with passengers queuing to use the machine, accompanied a *Guardian* article a few months ago on the roll-out of digital Railcards for 16-25 year olds..

ALL TICKETS PLEASE WITH NEWTOWN STATION TRAVEL

Rail fares are widely discredited so what is the solution?

The point was reached quite some time ago whereby whatever the Rail Delivery Group or the current Government says or do, the public widely believe that rail fares are poor value for money. The recent 16-30 rail card is seen by many as little more than a stunt to try and pretend that Government cares about what people pay for rail fares. Whining on about paying for investment that the majority have not seen also rings hollow. However, the truth about rail fares is less than clear cut, due to the huge variation and complexity in fares found around the UK. Neither the black and white narratives of the Government/RDG, or that of the left, stack up when you look at the situation in any detail. In the real world Just 3% of all fares sold are the great value advance purchase tickets the RDG bang on about; season ticket holders are not debited money from their bank accounts straight to foreign Governments, and most local fares in the regions are actually good value for money. There is of course a myriad of layers in the over complicated system and it's full of unfairness, discrepancies and there are of course many overpriced tickets as well.

So, what is primarily wrong and unfair? Here's our Top 5.

A postcode lottery whose rationale is decades out of date

Back in 1968 Labour's Barbara Castle abolished national ticketing on a fixed price per mile travelled. British Rail was instructed to raise as much revenue as possible, so market based pricing was born or "see what we can get away with"; fares were jacked up at certain places and lowered at others. Hence the huge postcode lottery in fare levels was born. The problem is that back in that day the variance was not huge and no one really noticed; plus local Managers had the power to tweak things if something was out of kilter. If a flow had been overpriced, choked off demand and reduced revenue it could be adjusted down and vice-versa. However, since privatisation we've had regulated fares. These are increased on an annual basis, and no one engages their brain and looks at things: they just slap annual increases on top of what BR was doing in the early 90's which have become frozen in aspic. No one even knows if these fares are the best way to maximise revenue, or whether they're choking off demand. The disparity between fares from different places has widened over 25 years and is much more noticeable, especially now in the internet age. The reasons why a certain line or station has higher fares than another nearby have been lost in the mists of time, and the justification has long since disappeared. For example, one of the reasons used to justify the higher fares found on the Marches line was because BR introduced brand new trains on the route in the early 1990's. However, these new trains were replaced in 2005 by trains that were second hand, but the fares were not changed!

The overpriced peak

As we all know the magic efficiencies and innovations that Conservative Ministers believed rail privatisation would bring in the early 1990's have been absent: if anything the opposite happened. Unit costs in the industry have gone up and the passenger has been squeezed by successive Governments to pay a higher percentage of the railway bill than the Government. Part of this has been through increased usage and revenue, part by the constant annual

increases in regulated fares and partly by the TOC's turning to price gouging on peak fares which are unregulated. The cost of going to London at peak times with a walk on fare - one bought that day - can now be eye-watering. Different TOC's have different policies, and different definitions of peak, adding to the postcode lottery. If I book 12 weeks or so ahead I can buy an £9.00 Advance Purchase ticket on a peak train from Birmingham New St to London Euston with Virgin Trains and £9.00 back on an evening peak train. If I book on the day or when the Advance Purchase tickets are sold out, it's £176.00! I've been told that a company in Birmingham who send people to London for meetings on a regular basis at least once a week at short notice, now just book a ticket each way for every day in advance, and throw away £72.00 of tickets every week as it saves them £104.00 a week! Furthermore, we know that many Virgin West Coast Peak services are far from full up.

Whilst BR had introduced peak pricing as a capacity managing tool, primarily to avoid investment, some TOC's are undoubtedly using it to extract revenue from captive markets. Government policy failure of course underpins this, as more revenue is required as the increased costs caused by privatisation have not been addressed. Latest passenger usage figures show that increasingly there are fewer people travelling in the peak into London; one suspects after years of growth we may have found the point of price elasticity for the London peak rail travel market. Slapping the fares up again every January will do nothing to address this. There is also the changing nature of commuting that the industry is behind the curve on addressing, the traditional commuter that works 5 days a week every week and needs to travel in the morning and evening peak to the same place is becoming less common. People now maybe only need to do it 3 or 4 times a week or less, or they travel at different times and sometimes to different places. The Anytime season ticket is now on the decline. Of course season ticket holders get a hefty discount on buying every day, but the postcode lottery on fares sees anomalies. Commuting from Reading to London more than 9 times a month is cheaper by buying a monthly season ticket, but someone doing it from Telford to Birmingham would need to be doing it more than 14 times a month for the season ticket to be saving them any money. You can also find seemingly pointless Anytime Day Returns barely any more expensive than Off Peak Day Returns in the regions between non-metropolitan centres just adding to the complexity and confusion.

The pretend peak

Travel from Shrewsbury to London Euston and you'll come across Virgin Trains West Coast's peak time definition. Depart before 0930 on a weekday heading to London which you don't arrive at till gone 1200(!), and leave Euston between 1500 & 1900 then they want to charge peak pricing. Head for London Marylebone using Chiltern or even Euston with London Midland, and different less draconian peak definitions apply! Cross Country Trains pre 0930 rule is also one designed to maximise revenue rather than anything to do with peak demand. Board a train at 0920 in deep rural areas hours away from any major conurbation and you're in the peak on a half empty train.

Complexity for complexity's sake: what does it achieve?

Here are the different prices you can pay to travel from Newtown to Birmingham New St one way. Advance tickets are tiered at £9.50, £10.00, £12.50, £13.00, £13.50 & £14.00. The

Anytime Single is £20.60, the Anytime Day Return is £20.70 (=£10.35 one way) and the Off-Peak Return at £27.10 (=£13.55 one way). We analysed our sales to New St for one month in 2016 and divided the revenue by the number of single leg journeys: the result was interesting. The average one way fare was £11.15. We had not sold many of the lower tier AP tickets that month, strongly indicating that the average of all fares sold could well be lower. So if you charge say £11.00 each way as a walk on fare and get the same revenue, do you really need 9 separate levels of fare, searching on the internet for the cheapest train, booking in advance etc. etc.?

Walk on single prices are of course widely considered to be the poorest of value fares going. The justification for a single being 10p less than a return is frankly non-existent, and forces people to look for Advance Purchase fares making rail travel less convenient.

Railcard discrimination

Click on the drop down menu of any decent internet ticket seller and let your mind boggle at the number of different railcards you can have. Local ones, senior ones, two different types of under 30 ones, friends and family, all of which have different terms and conditions. Yet if you're aged 30 to 60 and travel regularly across the UK there's no product for you unless you commute to the same place very frequently!

The RDG and the Government of course know all about this already, but are too frightened of admitting past mistakes and would rather defend the status quo. Government is also frightened that there might be some drop in fare revenue, rather than recognising that if things were fairer more people would travel by rail and boost revenue.

Fare Reform: some simple steps

Service Quality Weighted Regional Fares

Returning to a national mileage based rate per distance travelled is a non-starter due to the huge spatial variation in earnings across the UK that exist now. It would also cause a lot of mass upheaval with many winners and many losers. However, we can use the regional Gross Added Value (GVA) figures as a basis: this is the average income per adult in the regions. Clearly this means that as a base line the affluent South-East pays more than the depressed North-East. Service Quality can also be a determining factor, with weightings for things like train frequency, journey time/speed, age of rolling stock, electric or diesel propulsion and Punctuality/Reliability figures being factored in. Newly electrified Reading to London with very high frequency services including quick InterCity ones with brand new stock in the affluent South-East will clearly be entitled to charge a lot more than a rural line in Wales with a less than hourly frequency service using 30 year old DMU's that crawl along at average speeds of less than 30 mph.

- Inter Region fares should be determined by the lower destination/start point.
- Passenger Transport Executives, Transport for London and other Devolved Government can all have say as well on fare levels within their boundaries.

- Where competition between different types of service exist, price differentials are allowed, i.e. InterCity and Regional Express trains between destinations like Birmingham and London.

A fair and consistent national peak policy

We must recognise that peak trains into major centres can be very busy but also cost to provide. Most of the UK Rail's operational and maintenance cost base is in providing peak hour trains into/out of London, despite attempts over the years to persuade the public that it all pours down the drain as regional subsidy. The price differential between Off Peak and Peak fares must be reasonable and not extortionate: say plus 33% in the regions and plus 70% for London. Restrictions should be as follows:

Into London from the major Metropolitan areas* (except Newcastle & Scotland) applies to all weekday arrivals into central London between 0730 & 0944 and departures from Central London between 1615 & 1844.

Into London from non-Metropolitan areas – applies to weekday arrivals into central London between 0730 & 0944 and departures from Central London between 1615 & 1844.

- On InterCity/ Regional Express services less than 135 minutes travel time.
- On Regional/Metro services less than 90 minutes travel time.

Into major Metropolitan Areas* from elsewhere - applies to weekday arrivals into central areas between 0730 & 0929 and departures from Central Areas between 1630 & 1829.

- On all services less than 90 minutes travel time.

*Major Metropolitan areas outside London: Glasgow, Edinburgh, Cardiff. Newcastle, Leeds, Sheffield, Manchester, Liverpool, Nottingham/Derby, Birmingham, Bristol & South Hampshire (Portsmouth/Southampton).

- Restrictions apply to the service in question, so even if you're alighting short of the major conurbation they apply as you're using peak capacity.
- Note that the restrictions apply into in the morning peak and out of in the evening peak for major conurbations only. There are no contra flow restrictions.
- There are no peak restrictions outside of commuting times into/out of major conurbations.
- The limit is set by journey time, the 135 minutes for InterCity trains matches the current journey times from the major conurbations excluding Newcastle/Scotland to London. Places with slow services to London i.e. Shrewsbury & Hereford are not harshly penalised. 90 minutes is the beyond the break point for commuters, so people having to travel long distance for non-commuting purposes are not penalised.

Single Leg Pricing

Singles should be half the price of a return. If you travel at a peak time one way and off peak another you're not penalised. Nor are you penalised for staying overnight even if you travel at off peak times. There will be three types of fares only, the Peak Single and Off-Peak Single for journeys involving peak fare zones and an Anytime Single for those that don't.

A National Rail Card for all

Simply put there should be two types of Railcard a Standard one and a Peak Zone one. The Standard one should be similarly priced to today's national railcards and give discount on non-peak travel in Peak Zones and at all times elsewhere for everyone over 16. The Peak Zone card should be premium priced and give people like part time workers who are non-season ticket holders and regular peak InterCity travellers like business travellers who are regular customers that travel in peak zones a discount.

There should also be "Plus" versions for an additional fee. This will allow discount for up to 2 Adults and up to 4 Children travelling after 0930 on weekdays/all day weekends. You do not need to have children travelling with you.

So how would that affect things on the Cambrian?

Fares would be lower than elsewhere in the UK due to Wales' poor GVA figures. Fares would still be lower again on the Coast line using our quality weighting system, which automatically discounts rural area fares due to low frequency, speed, age of rolling stock etc. So the current lower Cambrian fares would continue. Having a choice of fares to London would continue with InterCity services to Euston being more highly priced than Regional Express trains into Marylebone.

Welshpool is 62 miles from Birmingham New St, and currently just over 90 minutes travel time, so peak pricing wouldn't apply anywhere on the Cambrian. Nonsense fares for travelling long distance starting before 0930, despite being hours away from any major conurbation, would no longer apply. People will pay single leg on Anytime Singles.

The biggest change will be with railcards. Effectively the current Young Person's restriction pre 1000 on weekdays is lifted. This makes little difference as regular commuters have Cambrian cards anyway at the moment. The Cambrian is not in a major commuting area anyway.

The current Senior sees no change, though the holder can purchase the Plus version and take a friend with them.

The current Two Together is replaced by a higher priced "Plus" Railcard. However, this is offset by there being no restriction on who the second person is and it can be used individually.

The current Family & Friends is replaced by the higher priced "Plus" Railcard which is not as generous (2 adults instead of 4). However, this is offset by the fact it can be used individually, and it can be used by two adults without needing accompanying children.

Holders of the current Cambrian Railcard are perhaps the ones who lose out, especially those who just do 3 or 4 journeys a year on it. However, the higher purchase price of a National Railcard means holders can get discount on longer distance fares, and the holder does have the option of purchasing the "Plus" version. However the fares will be low on the Cambrian and free of any peak restrictions.

With Shropshire the peak zone pricing does kick in. However, with it being based on journey time you are not penalised for slow journey times/poor connections. Shrewsbury is out of any peak pricing for journeys to London due to how relatively slow it is, because of having to go via the West Midlands conurbation or change at Crewe. In contrast Chester

with its hourly service and journey time of just over 2 hours to London would have peak pricing. Telford would have peak pricing for direct trains but not connecting ones. Shrewsbury would have peak pricing to Manchester and Birmingham, but not Liverpool, though a similar distance away, due to lack of through trains/connection times at Crewe. Of course all the above does put the passenger on a more even footing instead of fares being for the operator or to pay for Government policy failure.

FROM THE NEWSLETTER ARCHIVES

SARPA, initially as CRUG (Cambrian Railways Users' Group) has been going for 25 years.

This is an extract from the very first Newsletter, dated Autumn 1992.

Some concerns are still with us!

SHREWSBURY TO ABERYSTWYTH DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

The £1.3m project to upgrade the line and infrastructure between Shrewsbury and Aberystwyth. Whilst there is much to be applauded in this scheme there are aspects of it that are causing us concern, particularly the objective of introducing a two hourly 'clock-face' timetable. (Trains will leave Shrewsbury and Aberystwyth at the same number of minutes after alternate hours). Whilst there are undoubted marketing and operational advantages in this we are concerned that it will impose too rigid a framework on the line to allow recovery of lost time and future development of services. We have been taking up some of these issues with Regional Railways and the sponsoring bodies.

UNLIT STATIONS ON THE COAST LINE

Regional Railways have been informed by the Railway Inspectorate that they consider it unsafe for trains to stop after dark at any of the eleven unlit stations on the Coast Line. These stations have a significant proportion of 'social need' use; shopping trips to nearby towns etc. This kind of use will be severely jeopardised in winter timetables. We have been assured that the problem is actively under consideration by RR and local authorities. We were particularly encouraged by Gwynedd County Council's positive response to our representations.

ROLLING STOCK SHORTAGES

Services continue to be seriously affected by BRs national shortage of rolling stock. This has led to intolerable overcrowding on some trains, the 1400 Birmingham to Aberystwyth in particular. The problem has also led to the loss of one of the most heavily used services on the Coast Line from the Autumn timetable. The origin of this problem lies with government policy rather than with decisions taken by BR. We must campaign for adequate rolling stock to be provided to allow our railways to meet existing demand and to allow new services to be developed. We believe that there is potential for considerable development of passenger, and maybe also freight, services on the Cambrian Railways.

ONE CHANGE AWAY A WHOLE NEW WORLD OF PLACES TO VISIT

Roger Goodhew

Cambrian Line rail passengers are well used to catching the train to destinations along the line; some also to the furthest points of the route such as Aberystwyth, Pwllheli or Birmingham International. But how many of our readers realise that a much wider choice of destinations awaits those who are prepared to change trains?

By getting off the Cambrian train at a number of intermediate stations and catching another train from the same station (not necessarily from the same platform), you can travel directly to places which are not normally regarded as 'a train journey away' from your starting point.

For example, whereas many people already may change train onto another ATW service at somewhere like Machynlleth or Shrewsbury to get to places like Chester, Holyhead, Crewe, Manchester, Ludlow or Cardiff; it is less well known the places that can be reached by changing just once onto another train at, say, Birmingham International or at Smethwick Galton Bridge.

(a) At Birmingham International

A whole generation of travellers have tried to change trains in the middle of Birmingham between the three stations of New Street, Snow Hill and Moor Street. There is still no pedestrian-friendly route available. Each of these stations has been improved in its own right, but a prize must await the first proper integrated interchange. At Birmingham International, however, which is away from the city centre hassle, a much smaller station is to be found with escalators, a proper seated waiting area for passengers changing trains and a much simpler platform layout. From here, a wide range of destinations is available which includes:-

By Cross Country Trains: Leamington, Banbury, Oxford, Reading, Basingstoke, Winchester, Southampton, Bournemouth, Derby, Sheffield, Doncaster, Leeds, York, Newcastle

By Virgin Trains: frequent trains to Coventry, Rugby, London

By London Midland Trains: Milton Keynes, Northampton, Watford, London

(b) At Smethwick Galton Bridge

The Cambrian trains normally stop at this station (Low Level) between Wolverhampton and Birmingham New Street. The platforms are narrow, some trains pass at speed so you need to keep alert and behind the yellow line on the platform: Platform 4 if you have alighted from Shrewsbury or platform 3 from Birmingham New Street. If, however, you are prepared to find the other platforms up the stairs or lift according to your needs, another pair of lines with its own two platforms (High Level) is revealed which cross the Stour Valley line at right angles: this is the Jewellery [or Horseshoe] line. This is also part of Smethwick Galton Bridge station - which has four platforms in all.

Trains from Platforms 1 and 2 run to places such as:

By London Midland Trains: Warwick, Dorridge, Whitlocks End, Stratford on Avon, Stourbridge, Kidderminster, Worcester, Great Malvern

By Chiltern Railways: Solihull, Leamington, Banbury, High Wycombe, London ; Stourbridge, Kidderminster [rush hours]

The London Midland trains are class 172 diesels which have all been delivered new to this line within the last six years. The Chiltern trains also stop at Birmingham Snow Hill and Birmingham Moor Street where more services to London start.

The station at Kidderminster is adjacent to the Severn Valley Railway terminus for trains (some steam hauled) to Bridgnorth.

(c) And Another Thought

People travelling towards London may benefit by *grasshopper changes* whereby, if you are prepared to make multiple changes, this increases the number of services available. The reason for this is that at commuter times trains often run fast for great distances on their way to a London destination. For example, some Chiltern trains run fast from Leamington Spa to London Marylebone. This has the effect of reducing train frequency from say Birmingham to High Wycombe at such times.

One way round this is to grasshop to Birmingham Moor Street, then Leamington, then Banbury. Here are the reasons:-

- (i) Birmingham Moor Street all trains from Birmingham Snow Hill stop
all trains from Smethwick Galton Bridge HL stop. London trains start from the terminus platform
- (ii) Leamington Spa two lines converge before this station so that trains via Birmingham International/Coventry and via Solihull all stop here
- iii) Banbury all trains from Leamington Spa (except fast Chilterns) stop
Chiltern trains from Stratford-on-Avon to London Marylebone via High Wycombe stop

This article has been prepared for passengers who use the Cambrian Main Line between Aberystwyth/ Machynlleth and Shrewsbury. Readers who start their journey from the Cambrian Coast Line (i.e.anywhere from Dyfi Junction to Pwllheli) may or may not already, technically, have made their first change at Machynlleth.

Notes on Terminology

The Cambrian Main Line runs from Shrewsbury westwards to Aberystwyth and includes a total of eight stations. SARPA meets monthly close to these stations each year.

A further 25 stations are to be found to the west and north of Machynlleth/Dyfi Junction stations on the Cambrian Coast Line which runs onto the Llyn Peninsula to terminate at Pwllheli. SARPA meets once per annum on this line at Tywyn Wharf.

The old historic centre of operations of the Cambrian Railway was at Oswestry where the station forms part of heritage rail efforts to reconnect local lines to the mainline national network at Gobowen railway station.

Many heritage railway lines can be reached from the stations on the Cambrian lines. Volunteer groups exist for most of these heritage initiatives.

Other lines mentioned in this article also are supported by volunteer campaigning groups like SARPA. In 1998 a national list of these groups was produced to help the Public to understand the complexities of the newly-privatised railway network. An update of this publication is long overdue.

In a subsequent article, some of the activities of these sister groups to SARPA will be mentioned in an attempt to portray the essentially complementary dependence of our railway services not only on local campaigners such as SARPA, but also on the similar effort which is invested by our neighbours on other lines which can also benefit us.



A busy Borth station, on the 5th August 2014.

JOURNEY TIMES ON THE CAMBRIAN MAINLINE

Gareth Marston

Up until 1988 the primary constraint on journey times on the Cambrian mainline was the mechanical signalling needed to operate a predominantly single-track railway. The Electric Token Block system was used, whereby a physical token was needed by train crew to give them permission to enter a section of single track. The token for the preceding section would have to be surrendered to a signaller and a new token obtained by the train crew to continue; only one token per section could be issued at any time by the interlocking between the signal boxes controlling the section. If the train was due to stop at the station the signal box was located at, this procedure would be done whilst the train was stationary; if the train was not scheduled to stop or the signal box was located away from a station then dropping off and picking up apparatus was installed at the side of the track and the token was placed in a large metal hoop that could be dropped off and collected.

When I did my work experience fortnight from High School at Caersws Signal box in June 1986 this method of working was still in place. For DMU's on passenger trains the token was swapped with the driver by hand whilst the train was in the platform; for freight trains (yes, we had them back then) and the Cambrian Coast Express or anything else loco hauled the hoop was used. The rule book stated that a nonstop train had to slow to 15 mph to exchange via the apparatus, but I soon found out there were other unofficial methods of swapping tokens whilst the train was on the move at speeds above 15mph not involving the apparatus...

By 1986 there were only 7 signal boxes left west of Sutton Bridge Junction in Shrewsbury on the 81 miles to Aberystwyth. However up until 1960 there were 22 signal boxes that controlled single line token apparatus plus another 3 controlling sections of double track! There were also 25 intermediate stations to consider. Regardless of their performance capabilities steam hauled trains, even nonstop or express ones, were timetabled to slow down to 15mph every few miles even if they had a clear path and other trains were already in passing loops. Every village had a station and every village had a signal box and passing loop, so that pick up freight trains could be recessed there and use the goods yard, but it was not conducive to quick journey times. A stopping passenger service on single track typically averaged around 25 mph, the pick-up freight trains managed 15mph. Working Timetables show that even up into the 1960's around half a dozen freight train movements a day in each direction had to be accommodated as well as half a dozen all stops passenger trains. Converting these trains to DMU or Diesel would make little difference on journey times due to the stop start/ slow down nature of the method of operation. Express trains were that in name only, as they had to thread their way through many other trains heading in the opposite direction all timed to slow to 15 mph every few miles. This was particularly so on Summer Saturdays when space had to be found for extra holidaymaker trains.

The Welshpool Frontier

Historically the Cambrian Railways ran from Whitchurch in Shropshire to Aberystwyth via Oswestry and Welshpool, and went nowhere near Shrewsbury. Passengers wishing to travel to Shrewsbury or beyond generally had to change at Welshpool onto services run by the LNWR or GWR prior to 1922. While there were through carriages on a number of Express services

these had to be shunted at Welshpool, and all this of course added extra time. After the GWR took over in 1922 there were gradually more through services to Shrewsbury, including the Cambrian Coast Express. However with the Operating Division Headquarters and the locomotive works in Oswestry, there were operational reasons why through trains to Oswestry had to continue. For instance the first train in the morning from Newtown was a service from Llanidloes to Oswestry and the last at night a service from Oswestry to Llanidloes so that locomotives could cycle back to Oswestry for more heavy maintenance. This practice continued right up until the Mid Wales line closure in 1962. By the 1950's most stopping trains split/joined up at Welshpool with Oswestry/Shrewsbury portions. Welshpool historically saw more of this type of operation than Machynlleth did.

Dramatic Change and First Generation Diesels

Change came about in the 1960's. Firstly in 1960 the 5 intermediate stations between Welshpool and Shrewsbury closed: this led to the rationalisation of signalling with just two intermediate signal boxes and with no stations between Shrewsbury and Welshpool journey times improved. The closure of the line between Welshpool and Whitchurch in January 1965 led to all trains heading to Shrewsbury with no time-consuming shunting or changing of trains at Welshpool. The smaller village stations between Welshpool and Aberystwyth closed in June 1965, and the track and signalling rationalisations that followed were all complete by the end of steam in March 1967.

Instead of having to stop at 25 intermediate stations and undertake 22 changes of token, a train departing Shrewsbury would now just face 6 intermediate stations with initially 10 changes of token; by the early 1970's the number of intermediate signal boxes was down to 8. Longer distances between station stops and token changes were the primary reasons that journey times tumbled. A typical steam stopper from Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth took close on 3 hours; now it was being done for around 2 hours and 15 minutes with 1st generation DMU's and Diesel hauled stock.

Official line speed had been limited to 55 mph for the entire mainline in steam days. However trains rarely had the chance to get up to that speed for long because of the need to continually slow down for passing loops and change tokens. Longer stretches between passing loops also meant that sustained higher speed running could be achieved and gradually sections were granted increased speed limits. Some sections also got continuously welded rail instead of wooden sleepers and short lengths, and speed limits were raised in parts, especially east of Welshpool.

RETB and 2nd Generation DMU's

In 1986 the first second generation DMU's, the Class 150, were introduced on the Cambrian. These were known at first as Sprinters. Whilst they had the same top speed as the first generation DMU's their acceleration was a lot better. In 1988 a brand new signalling system was introduced: Radio Electric Token Block. Instead of individual manual signal boxes controlling sections, the whole line was signalled from Machynlleth using radio control to the cabs of trains. This in itself did not lead to any decrease in journey times; it was primarily a cost saving system, and very efficient at that. Points were controlled by air bags and speed over them was limited to 15mph. It was the acceleration characteristics of new DMU's introduced by BR in the late 80's and early 90's that improved things.

Cambrian Line Speed Improvements

A number of things combined in the early 1990's to move things forward again. Sectorisation and the withdrawal of InterCity services to first Aberystwyth and then Shrewsbury meant that services were now being run by Regional Railways Central through to Birmingham and beyond, and a number of diagrams were now in the hands of new Class 158 DMU's that had been designed to run Regional Express services with a top speed of 90mph. There was also pressure to reduce operating costs. Someone in BR came up with the idea that the Cambrian Mainline would only need to have 2 units to run the service west of Shrewsbury, if they ran at approximately two hourly intervals and crossed at just one passing loop, Talerddig. However, to realise this line speeds needed to be raised east of Shrewsbury, and where would the £s be found? Step forward the Development Board for Rural Wales and European Grant funding. The board, headed by then Chairman and now Montgomeryshire MP Glyn Davies, thought it was buying a quicker train service, not realising it was locking in a two hourly service. Westbury passing loop had to be removed to make it work and various sections of track were realigned for higher speed running, and line speed east of Talerddig was raised to 80mph. Best ever times of 1 hour and 45 minutes from Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth were initially seen in timetables.

Post Privatisation

There has been no focus on any further reduction in journey times since rail privatisation, either by the train operators or the bodies that have specified franchises. The ETCS system installed in 2011 saw motorised points installed making higher entry/exit speeds from passing loops possible. This potential gain has to be balanced against running more trains on the line and accommodating more trains crossing, and also the number of trains that split/join at Machynlleth which adds time. Journey times will be extended when the station at Bow St opens.



How it used to be done. Inside Talerddig Signal Box in 1986.



Then and Now This 1986 scene shows an HST excursion from Bristol entering Aberystwyth. The signalbox is still in place (without its nameplate), and oil traffic is in the far siding. The photographers are perilously close to the track! All had gone by 2015, when 97303 was photographed.



CAMBRIAN STATION USAGE 2016/2017

The annual station footfall estimate figures were released by the Office of Rail and Road in December 2017 for Financial Year 2016/2017. Once more they show growth for Cambrian stations, but in a mixed bag of results.

Source <http://orr.gov.uk/statistics/published-stats/station-usage-estimates>

Shrewsbury recorded its first set of figures showing a footfall over 2 million, with 2,087,200 entries and exits, an increase of 5.5% on the previous year. The stations along the Cambrian Mainline grew by 5.11% from the previous year. However, as noted for last year's figures, there is a clear split between the figures for the Upper Severn Valley stations and those stations west of Talerddig summit. Whilst there was 9.21% growth for Caersws/Newtown/Welshpool, further west just 2.25% was recorded.

The news on the coast was a disappointing 4% drop in recorded footfall. As ever when looking at figures you have to understand what is going on. The 4% drop was near universal across the whole of the coast line. Season ticket footfall on the coast line actually increased by 4.38% meaning non-season usage was down 6%. Excluding the schools traffic or journeys originating off the line, people overwhelmingly buy their tickets on board from the Conductors, especially for the short on-line journeys that predominate on the coast line. In 2016 the Conductors were issued with new machines which are notorious for being slower to print tickets and to process card transactions than their predecessors. It's well known that the speed of ticket issue on board has slowed down considerably, and the practical consequence of this is that there are many reports of conductors not being able to issue tickets to people before they get off, especially in the summer months when loadings are higher. Though officially denied by ATW Management, most people agree that the new machines have led to a fall in recorded usage and revenue collection. ATW's "Buy Before You Board" campaign has been partly in response to this revenue own-goal.

Recorded footfall on the mainline (928,912) is now higher than the Coast line (870,646) for the first time. As mentioned above this is being driven by continued strong growth in the Upper Severn Valley. Season Ticket Sales on the mainline were up a staggering 69% on the year before, albeit from a low base, with increases of 89% at Caersws and 85% at Newtown confirming the presence of many commuting to Shrewsbury for educational purposes. We understand that not all students buy the Educational season tickets but purchase on the day using Cambrian railcards. Ticket buying facilities are much better on the Mainline, so Conductors are not faced with anything like the same numbers of people boarding without tickets as on the coast, though the replacement machines may be a factor at Borth, which does not have ticket buying facilities. Shrewsbury has of course barriers, and passengers alighting there without a ticket are usually captured.

Cambrian Top 10 Stations

Changes since the previous year to note are that Welshpool has gained a lot of ground on Barmouth. Pwllheli and Porthmadog have swapped places with Pwllheli bucking the coast trend and seeing growth, and Caersws comes into the Top 10 replacing Borth.

There is now a clear trend backed by a couple of years official figures about the impact of the extra services introduced in May 2015, which raise some serious questions to stakeholders in Ceredigion and to a lesser extent Gwynedd about their perceived impact of

the extra trains versus what's happened. Of course, the extra trains were not the doubling in frequency that other lines have got, so the impact was never going to be the same, but it does seem to have simulated growth predominantly east of Talerddig, and perhaps justifies prioritising future investment in the Upper Severn Valley?

Next year will see 3 years' worth of data to analyse, and we will look further into trends.

Station	16/17 Entries & Exits	15/16 Entries & Exits	15/16 to 16/17 % change
1 Aberystwyth	327334	321758	1.73%
2 Barmouth	185586	191802	-3.24%
3 Welshpool	170648	157646	8.25%
4 Newtown	161722	147938	9.32%
5 Machynlleth	135990	133228	2.07%
6 Harlech	113562	120766	-5.97%
7 Tywyn	104238	107446	-2.99%
8 Pwllheli	79502	77890	2.07%
9 Porthmadog	72120	79194	-8.93%
10 Caersws	64636	57942	11.55%

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

The *Cambrian News* of December 14, 2017 reports on Cllr Alun Williams telling Aberystwyth Town Council how successful the hourly service had been. I would like to remind all that it is not yet an hourly service much to the annoyance and inconvenience of many. Under the new franchise this is the very least we should all expect.

Tony Harvey,
Welshpool

Dear Editor,

Jeremy Barnes of Carno Station Action Group attended the SARPA November Meeting in Newtown and responding to a member who is a regular user of Caersws station denied that CSAG were suggesting reducing services at Caersws to accommodate stops at a reopened Carno. Yet at the same time he pens a letter published in SARPA's November Newsletter suggesting just that. This is very disappointing to say the least. Whilst I can understand Jeremy and the Group's frustration at getting nowhere and seeing Bow St so to speak gazumping them, suggesting that cutting services at a well used station is a way of getting trains to stop at Carno is not a policy I think SARPA should support. Jeremy wants SARPA to support their campaign, but I doubt Rail users in the Caersws/Trefeglwys/Llanidloes areas will be keen.

Gareth Marston

Newtown Station Travel, The Railway Station, NEWTOWN, SY16 1BP

Dear Editor,

Thank you for making the Newsletter easier to read, and for starting to include letters. May I take the opportunity to make a few miscellaneous points?

First, we're very lucky to have such committed staff (both ATW and Network Rail) working for us locally on our line. Despite the shortage of rolling stock (which too often results in congested carriages and cancellations) and despite sometimes terrible weather, they do a fine job and deserve our utmost thanks.

Second, I'm sorry to say that, rightly or wrongly, I see SARPA at present as being too inward-looking. Its officers suggest improvements to the line on our behalf, but its criticisms too often seem rather more negative than constructive. And SARPA's membership is far too small. Before moving to Wales my local group, the Cotswold Line Promotion Group, had about 2000 members. (Note the word 'promotion'.) With so few, SARPA will never have much clout, however valid its ideas. So the DfT goes on and on getting away with its apparently empty spin about the 'digital railway', and with its contradictions over electrification and so on.

Adrian Thornton, Machynlleth

SARPA MEETINGS 2018

March	Tuesday 6th	5.45pm	Shrewsbury (The Railway Station)
April	Saturday 7th	11.45am	Aberystwyth (Royal Naval Club) (TBC)
May	Saturday 12th	12.15pm	Borth (The Railway Hotel) (TBC)
June	Saturday 2nd	2.15pm	Machynlleth (The White Lion)
July	Tuesday 3rd	7.00pm	Newtown (The Sportsman)
August	Tuesday 7th	7.15pm	Welshpool (The Royal Oak)
September	Saturday 8th	11.45am	Tywyn (Talylyn Railway)
October	Saturday 6th	2.15pm	Machynlleth (The White Lion) AGM
November	Tuesday 6th	7.00pm	Newtown (The Sportsman)
December	Saturday 1st	11.45am	Aberystwyth (Royal Naval Club) (TBC)

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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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

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Association address: c/o Newtown Station Travel, Newtown Station, Old Kerry Road, Newtown, SY16 1BP. E-mail: sarpa@sarpa.info

WANT TO JOIN SARPA?

The membership fee is currently (for membership up to 31 December 2018) £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.

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:

Arriva Trains Wales

National Rail Enquiries

London Northwestern Railway

West Midlands Railway

Virgin Trains

Chiltern Railways

Network Rail

Railfuture/Railway Development Society

Cambrian Rail Partnership

The Association of Community Rail Partnerships (Acorp)

Passenger Focus

North Wales Coast Railway

Circular tour of North Wales by rail

Ffestiniog Railway

Vale of Rheidol Railway

Talyllyn Railway

Welshpool and Llanfair Railway

Welsh Highland Heritage Railway

Fairbourne Railway

Borth Station Museum

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

traintimes.org.uk/

www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk/

www.nationalrail.co.uk/

www.journeycheck.com/londonnorthwesternrailway/

www.westmidlandsrailway.co.uk

www.virgintrains.co.uk

www.chilternrailways.co.uk/

www.networkrail.co.uk/

www.railfuture.org.uk/

www.walesonrails.com

www.acorp.uk.com

www.passengerfocus.org.uk/

www.nwrail.org.uk/

www.penmorfa.com/Cambrian/

www.ffestiniograilway.co.uk/

www.rheidolrailway.co.uk

www.talyllyn.co.uk/

www.wllr.org.uk/

www.whr.co.uk/

www.fairbournerrailway.com/

www.borthstationmuseum.co.uk

www.mylordz.com

Copy deadline for the next newsletter is 22nd April 2018