

Shrewsbury Aberystwyth Rail Passengers' Association

Newsletter No. 82

August 2020



During lockdown, on the 9th April the 1130 from Aberystwyth to Birmingham passes beneath the Plas Crug footbridge, and the Vale of Rheidol track is at a standstill. Photograph: Denis Bates.

FEWER TOILETS ON THE NEW TRAINS!

The Class 197 Civity trains are planned to have only one toilet, with disabled provision. In a two car set, that means one toilet per 140 seats, as against one per 70 on the Class 158 trains at present. There will have 10 bays of at-table seats, most seats being airline, as at present. Fainsa Sophia seats - better than the original spec., but less comfortable than the West Midlands trains being built for the same company - are being installed. Doors are situated at one third and two thirds along each carriage, with wider entrance bays, which will aid passengers entering and leaving. There will also be a catering bay, though it is not clear whether this will be for parking the catering trolley, or will house a mini bar. (See p.3)

NEGES GAN Y CADEIRYDD

Er gwaethaf trafferthion Covid-19, mae SARPA dal i fod yn weithredol. Rydym yn parhau i lobio ynglŷn â dyluniad y trenau newydd, ymateb i ymgynghoriadau ac yn y blaen. Mae hyn yn cynnwys nifer y tai bach ar y trenau, nifer o gerbydau a seddi arnynt a'u tanwydd. Mae'n destun tristwch gennyf fod y sefyllfa ynglŷn â hyn heb newid o gwbl ers cyhoeddi'r cylchlythyr diwethaf, ond rydym yn trio'n galed i newid y sefyllfa.

Rydym ni heb gynnal cyfarfod wyneb i wyneb ers mis Mawrth, fodd bynnag mae'r pwyllgor wedi bod yn cwrdd yn rhithiol dros y we yn fisol. Bydd ein holl gyfarfodydd yn y dyfodol agos, gan gynnwys y Cyfarfod Cyffredinol Blyneddol, yn digwydd arlein nes ei bod hi'n ddiogel i ni gwrdd yn ffisegol eto. Rydym yn ymwybodol bod hyn yn dieithrio rhai o'n haelodau sydd ddim yn meddu ar gysylltiad we neu'r meddalwedd priodol i ymuno yn y cyfarfodydd, ond does dim llawer o ddewis gennym! Felly ymddiheuriadau i'r rhai ohonoch na fydd yn medru mynychu'r CCB eleni.

Ychydig ddyddiau cyn i mi ysgrifennu fy neges, cyhoeddodd Llywodraeth Cymru a Thrafnidiaeth Cymru eu bod yn codi'r gwaharddiad ar deithiau trên nad sy'n hanfodol, sy'n debyg o gynyddu defnydd o'r lein ac sydd wedi derbyn croeso gan nifer o gyn-deithwyr ar hyd y lein. Fodd bynnag, mae hi bellach yn hanfodol i bawb gwisgo mwgwd ar y trenau, mae mesurau pellteru cymdeithasol dal ar waith ar y trenau a bydd rhaid prynu tocyn cyn teithio am na fydd modd prynu tocynnau ar y trên.

Cadwch yn saff, a chofiwch gwisgo mwgwd os ydych am deithio ar y trên.

Jeff Smith

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

Despite the issues caused by Covid-19, SARPA continues to function. We are continuing to lobby regarding the design of the new trains, answering consultations and so on. This includes the number of toilets on the trains, the number of carriages and seats on them and their fuel. I'm saddened that the situation has not changed at all since the publication of the last newsletter, but we are trying hard to change things.

We have not met face to face since March, however the committee has continued to meet virtually online on a monthly basis. All our meetings will be online for the near future, including our Annual General Meeting, until it is safe for us to physically meet again. We are aware that this disenfranchises some of our members who do not have an internet connection or do not have the appropriate software to join the meetings, but we don't have much choice! So apologies to those of you who will be unable to attend the AGM this year.

A few days before I wrote this message, the Welsh Government and Transport for Wales announced that they are lifting the ban on non-essential train journeys, which is likely to increase usage of the line and which has been welcomed by a number of

formerly-regular passengers along the line. Also, it is now mandatory to wear a face covering on the trains, social distancing measures are still in place on the trains and tickets have to be purchased before travel since there will be no onboard ticketing.

Stay safe, and remember to wear a mask if you're travelling by train.

Jeff Smith

TOILETS ON THE NEW TRAINS

With the appearance of criteria and outline carriage layouts for the new TfW trains, particular concern has been the provision of toilets, which is proposed to be one (disabled) toilet for each two car set. This has been set out in a letter from Lowri Joyce at TfW to Robert Robinson, Secretary to the Shrewsbury Aberystwyth Rail Liaison Committee. The relevant portion of the letter states:

We have ordered 77 Civity DMUs, which will enter service from 2022 and be assembled at CAF's new facility in Llanwern, as part of our commitment to ensure at least half of TfW's new fleet will be assembled in Wales. CAF has invested £30 million in the facility and 300 new jobs will be created.

The order includes 51 two-car units and 26 three-car units. 21 of the two-car units will be fitted with in-cab signalling equipment for use on the Cambrian Line to Aberystwyth and Pwllheli, while 14 three-car units will feature first class accommodation for use on services between Swansea and Manchester Piccadilly.

These trains will - as with all our new fleet - be fully compliant to Persons with Reduced Mobility (PRM) requirements making our network accessible for all our passengers, and in designing them we have worked tirelessly to find - what we believe to be - a balance between seating capacity and toilets, seating layout and bike space.

A key consideration was to source fleet that would improve reliability and punctuality. The current class 158 and 175 trains do not perform well against the scheduled dwell time at busy stations, and this is impacting our own and other operator's performance. With passenger numbers forecast to increase further, a change in philosophy for managing station dwells was necessary. This led to the specification of double-leaf doors at 1/3 and 2/3 on the bodyside, and unimpeded access between the external door and the saloon areas, which will facilitate much easier access between the platform and seats. Naturally, this configuration of doors displaces the toilets to the saloon area.

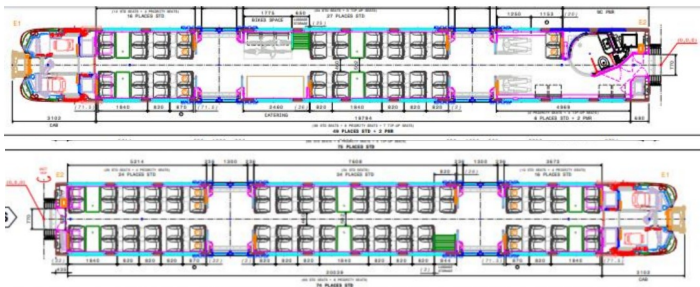
When choosing our fleet, we must consider the needs of all. That means all units have a 'Universal Access Toilet' (i.e. one that meets PRM requirements) which occupies the space of approximately 12 fixed seats, 6 more than a standard non-accessible toilet. This requirement does mean that in order get the right balance between capacity and toilet provision, the trains will have only one (PRM compliant) toilet per 2-car train; this is in line with the level of toilet provision on new fleets being delivered to other UK operators. The 2-car Class 197s will often run with a second unit on long-distance services, providing two toilets for a 4-car train and the 3-car units will have two toilets. Recognising the importance of ensuring toilets are always functioning, the toilets will be capable of two full days operation in terms of water and retention tank capacity. Routine servicing of the toilet tanks will be scheduled around the diagrams the units are operating to ensure this; key to reducing the likelihood of the toilets being out of

service. This balance to ensure capacity also dictates the seat pitch and the number of tables that can be accommodated. We are pleased to have been able to achieve a seat pitch of just 1cm less than the class 175 train and 4cm greater than the class 158 train. All the new trains which will be introduced to the network from 2022 onwards will include Multi-Use Areas which can be used for pushchairs, prams and bikes and will be separate from the dedicated accessible areas for passengers with disabilities. On the Class 197s, there will be one Multi-Use Area on the 2-car trains and two Multi-Use Areas on the 3-car trains. Carriages will be bright, airy with open window space. We have carefully chosen a layout to ensure that customers have a comfortable journey, and, where possible, this includes aligning seats with windows so that customers can enjoy a scenic journey while travelling with us. When considering seat design, we made the decision last year to fund an upgrade to the Fainsa Sophia seat – the highest option available for the CAF Civity without requiring redesign which would have considerably delayed the production programme. These ‘gold standard seats’ are used in a large number of UK long-distance fleets and are considered to offer good levels of comfort for long distance operations.

The lack of provision of adequate train toilets has been raised with Transport for Wales not only by SARPA, but also by Railfuture Wales and the Shrewsbury Aberystwyth Rail Liaison Committee. To date, there has been no change in the provision being made for toilets. This was set out on the 13th August, in a letter from Dewi Rowlands, Deputy Director Transport Strategy and Policy in the Welsh Government to Russell George MS:

When choosing the fleet, TfW must consider the needs of all. All units have a ‘Universal Access Toilet’ (i.e. one that meets PRM requirements) which occupies the space of approximately 12 fixed seats. This is 6 more than a standard non-accessible toilet. This requirement does mean that in order to get the right balance between capacity and toilet provision, the trains will have only one (PRM compliant) toilet per 2-car train. Such provision is in line with the level on new fleets being delivered to other UK operators. The toilets will be capable of two full days operation in terms of water and retention tank capacity.

So, there appears to be no willingness to amend the plans to place a second toilet in the the other carriage.



NEWS OF THE LINE

Machynlleth

Funding has been secured for works at Machynlleth Station to create a transport hub. This will include new shops, information display screens, new signage, improved toilet facilities and extra seating. £600,000 has been allocated for this purpose.

[*Cambrian News*, 28 May 2020]

Signalling

Published on the 21st August, the Department for Transport, The Office of the secretary of State for Wales, and The Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP released a statement on a multi-million boost from the UK government for Welsh railways to level up infrastructure and improve journeys for passengers.

Relevant to the Cambrian lines is the statement that:

The Transport Secretary has also announced £3 million to advance plans for upgraded signalling on the 241-kilometre Cambrian line from Shrewsbury Sutton Bridge Junction to Aberystwyth and Pwllheli. The planned state-of-the-art digital signalling system will modernise the network, improving the reliability of services, and support the introduction of a new fleet being rolled out across the network in December 2022.

https://www.gov.uk/government/news/multi-million-boost-from-uk-government-for-welsh-railways-to-level-up-infrastructure-and-improve-journeys-for-passengers?fbclid=IwAR1-YQ3FcULdux043C9fLvNC5SmQe_cHeEbM5ICxr82-2Qy5mY4uRwNxAP4

Bow Street Station

At present, work is focused on the car park; the platform is already in place. The station is expected to open early next year.

Newtown Station Travel

It is regretted that this has closed. Thanks are due to Gareth Marston for his work in recent years, following after Peter Compton.

Carno Station

The Welsh Transport Minister, Ken Skates, has strongly supported the case for funds for the reopening Carno Station. This is in a letter calling on Grant Shapps to invest in the Wales and Borders rail network through the UK Government's Restoring Your Railways fund, not only to improve rail connectivity, but to supercharge Wales' post coronavirus (COVID-19) recovery. Carno is listed together with Deeside Parkway, St Clears and Ely Mill as having equal importance.

He put forward suggestions for the New Ideas Fund, such as the restoration of passenger services on the line between Gaerwen and Amlwch on Anglesey and an expressed interest in using the Accelerating Existing Proposals fund to restore the line and services to Abertillery in South Wales. He also took the opportunity to reiterate the case strongly for plans which included the Aberystwyth to Carmarthen and Bangor to Caernarfon re-openings.

A SUBMISSION TO THE TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

I am a retired teacher living in Wales. In normal circumstances my friends and I are frequent users of the railway. For the past 8 years I have been travelling from Welshpool to Birmingham and from Birmingham to Warwick and back every few weeks. I have also made many journeys west to Aberystwyth for the purposes of study and on the Cambrian coastal line for holidays and days out.

I am responding to the Transport Select Committee's Inquiry Launch: Reforming public transport after the pandemic.

The last 4 months have been exceptional ones. Prior to the pandemic and subsequent lockdown, conditions on the railway were far from satisfactory. There was overcrowding on many trains travelling to and from Birmingham and Shrewsbury. There were short-formed trains of only two carriages exacerbating the overcrowding.

Trains between Birmingham and Aberystwyth run every two hours. This is by no means sufficient for customary usage. I do not drive and usually use a bus 2-3 times a week. There is no correspondence between the times of buses and no synchronicity between buses and trains. I must take a taxi into town in order to catch an early train or bus as the bus from my village arrives too late.

Improvement in public transport is long overdue and the pandemic should not become an excuse for ignoring this fact.

It is my view that central to any transport policy should be the need to greatly reduce the amount of traffic on the road. Any system which minimises the need for cars and heavy goods vehicles must be championed.

While it is true that some employers and some staff may choose the "working from home" model as the better and cheaper one there are others for whom this is not possible or desirable. I listened to a man describing how during lockdown his wife worked in the study while he had to manage on the kitchen table accompanied by a small boy.

While shopping online has increased during lockdown there are those who enjoy the experience of visiting shops particularly in a major city. It is evident that many rail passengers on Saturdays are having a day out in town. There is also the point that towns and cities have been in the doldrums for some time and effort is needed to reverse this trend by making shopping more accessible whether by train, bus or tram.

Cycling and walking may be encouraged but very often are not practicable. If a person lives some miles from their workplace or the nearest shops, is elderly or has a health problem these are not viable solutions. The congestion on roads as well as the noise and pollution from traffic do not make these alternative modes of transport attractive in urban areas.

The Inquiry launch refers to "plummeting passenger demand" leading to billions of pounds of government subsidies. This lack of demand was caused when the government announced that only key workers could use public transport. On 13th July the Welsh government updated its guidance on travelling safely indicating that public transport is for essential travel only.

The railway between Birmingham, Aberystwyth and the Cambrian coast is used for a variety of purposes. Workers commute to and from Birmingham, Wolverhampton and Telford. Holidaymakers travel east to Birmingham Airport and west to the coast. People living in the West Midlands can access the coast in under 3 hours. Passengers from

England and Wales enjoy days out on the train. University and college students rely on rail travel.

It is important to consider who benefits from our railway. In this part of Britain it is used by young people who may not have cars, by families on holiday or on outings and by older people travelling for pleasure. As we are told that Britain has an aging population this last group will increase.

There is no doubt that the pandemic has brought tragedy and misery to many. The way it has been presented by government and media has also created a climate of fear. I have spoken to people in their seventies who are afraid to leave their homes. A friend identified our problem with public transport. We do not know how much risk is involved. One can only assume that if the number of Covid 19 infections drops the risk will decrease. When, as is hoped, a vaccine is available the fear should be lessened.

Travel by car should be strongly discouraged in order to safeguard the future of the planet and the well-being of its inhabitants. Cycling and walking though suitable for some journeys and beneficial for health do not fulfil the needs of the majority of travellers. Public transport must be recognised to be safe both now and in the future.

It also needs to be affordable. Raising the price of fares should not be an option. Public transport is the only sustainable form of travel for the majority and must be given the highest priority by policy makers.

Sarah Harvey



Aberystwyth Station in the early 1960s, from the Rokeby Collection, now held in the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales/ Comisiwn Brenhinol Henebion Cymru, reproduced by their permission.

TRANSPORT DECARBONISATION BRIEFING FOR SARPA

Here's a statement from a Government Minister we perhaps thought we would never hear: certainly not from a right leaning/neo liberal one anyway. The Department for Transport released its consultation paper on Decarbonising Transport - Setting the Challenge on March 26th.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/878642/decarbonising-transport-setting-the-challenge.pdf

In the forward to the consultation Secretary of State for Transport Grant Shapps MP states ***"Public transport and active travel will be the natural first choice for our daily activities. We will use our cars less and be able to rely on a convenient , cost effective and coherent public transport network"***. These are the words of a UK Government Minister not an activist or a campaigner. The full transport decarbonisation plan was due to be announced at the annual UN Climate Change Conference COPS 26 in Glasgow this November (though we understand this has now be postponed to early 2021 due to the Covid 19 crisis).

This is big stuff, but beyond the transport community the general public at large (and many local politicians) seem to be unaware of it or its consequences. You may well ask what's brought about this change of heart given the road building programme promised by the Conservatives in the December 2019 general election? Dig inside the 80 page document and it becomes obvious since 2016 that the transport sector has become the biggest emitter of greenhouse gases in the UK (29% OF TOTAL) and road usage accounts for 96% of emissions within the transport sector! Levels produced have remained static since the early 1990's whilst every other sector of the UK has worked at reducing theirs. Whilst individual vehicles are emitting less than their forebears, the fact we have put an extra 11 million of them on the road in the last 30 years, plus the advent of internet shopping light van usage has risen exponentially and combined this has wiped out the small technological gains in vehicle emissions that have happened, and come nowhere near the big ones that were promised in the 1990's by the DfT as being the answer. Down in Whitehall the Department for Transport has seriously lost face with the other departments and had to bow to pressure to get its house in order. Though not mentioned in the document the DfT had wanted the energy sector to increase national grid output by 30% so that 35 million electric vehicles could continue to be charged and used as now. Quite where the power source for that was going to come from they didn't say, but they got a firm no. Whilst electric cars are viable and planned we do not have the power generating capacity to use them the same way as our 35 million fossil fuel road vehicles. This is a key point to realise, as not everyone will be able to retain and use their car on electric power as now, even if they want to. Overnight every road capacity expansion scheme is now officially obsolete as traffic levels will be falling in future delivering decongestion and reduced journey times no matter how much backwoods/shire Conservative MP's jump up and down using the phrase "vital" about their pet local road scheme! However, the document ducks out of commenting on this.

Car usage accounts for 61% of all trips – a fact often used to justify road investment. However, 55% of all car trips are less than 5 miles in length, meaning a third of all journeys are currently a short distance car trip that in many cases can

actually be replaced by active travel or a short distance public transport trip by bus/light rail/underground. Heavy rail is not really in the sub 5 mile market except in some of our bigger cities. However, with 2% of all trips made by heavy rail already this may not seem much, but in fact 10% of all distance travelled is by rail, meaning it's already a significant player for longer journeys. Usable or rather non usable public transport to complete journeys from the destination station are often cited as a reason why people choose to drive. Door to door integrated usable public transport is not mentioned but would seem to fit the bill for a convenient and coherent public transport network. There's plenty of best practice out there, like the Swiss model it's not rocket science to see how this could develop with rail the choice mode for longer distance trips connecting into local electric bus/light rail/active travel for "last mile" type journeys.

Even if the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic reduces demand for travel in the short term and changes commuting habits, even a relatively small modal shift from motor vehicles will see a doubling or more of numbers using rail in a decarbonised future.

As far as public transport is concerned there is mention in the document of modal shift, but it doesn't say how much the proportions should be in future or how we get there: this is open to debate. The document doesn't mention the nitty gritty of what a future public transport network looks like, so we assume this is open to debate also.

The rail network is specifically mentioned in terms of reducing GHG. Even today with only 42% of the UK rail network electrified carrying c.70% of existing passenger traffic and freight largely being hauled by diesel the rail sector emits just 1.4% of total transport emission on 10% of passenger (and freight) miles. There's a massive emissions gain to be had in simply switching to rail from road on the existing network. However, the aim is for rail to be decarbonised. There's a change of heart regarding rail electrification from the DfT, with acknowledgement that electric power is the only option for "busy lines". However there's no mention of a target or definition of a busy line; our friends battery and hydrogen trains are also mentioned but the magic is yet to be developed. "Bionic duckweed" seems to have been put aside.

There's a large degree of coherence about the thinking policy on future passenger movements. There's a framework to work to which is beneficial to SARPA's aims and objectives, with broad brush themes that could almost have been written by us. We are actually in a very good position to influence the debate being the local "experts" in mid Wales!

On freight there is less coherence. The rail side of it is straightforward enough. It acknowledges that battery/hydrogen technology cannot provide enough power for heavy goods trains: this must be electric and there's some musings on hybrid/bi mode options with no firm answers. However, when it comes to road freight there's a total fudge. They seem to want a carbon free Road Haulage sector but cannot come up with any answer as to how you can have a carbon free HGV. Bear in mind the same rules apply with current rail freight about battery and hydrogen limitations, which is not mentioned. There's a lot of grand words hinting that there's some technological solution to more efficient movements and demand management – perhaps this is the "Smart digital duckweed" option. There's also a lot of talk about "last mile" freight delivery's though not spelling it out the inference of a "hub and spoke" model is there

with long distance goods delivered between central points and then distributed locally by electric vans.

Let's not contemplate "electric planes". One suspects the DfT has returned to its default setting that the status quo can be maintained by unspecified future technology despite being continually proved wrong!

Implications for SARPA

There's a clear logical argument for promoting an hourly service on the Swiss Model from c.0600 to c.2359 on the Cambrian Mainline, with integrated manned transport hubs at Welshpool, Newtown, Machynlleth and Aberystwyth, with bus connections to smaller villages etc. This includes through ticketing/smart ticketing. The Cambrian Mainline underpins the longer distance travel requirements in the transport hierarchy.

The main concern is electrification: will it come to us or not? With the Midlands already wanting electrification to Shrewsbury after HS2 and 4 passenger trains an hour, will the West Midlands want "welsh diesels" running to Birmingham in the 2030's? Probably not. What are the implications?

A rolling programme of electrification will see Newport to Crewe and Shrewsbury to Chester done as they have at least 2 passenger train movements an hour already or planned and heavy freight already.

The key to this for us is freight. How will the freight model develop? A road-based hub and spoke model will see us just have one passenger train per hour and unlikely to be electrified, and given hydrogen powered trains. Will these be brand new or old units converted? Will they be able to maintain the current journey times between Shrewsbury and Aberystwyth? Will they be allowed to run through to Birmingham under the wires? The current passing places on our line are modelled around the performance characteristics of DMU's. Will HMU's need the physical infrastructure altering?

A rail-based hub and spoke model could change the game completely especially around infrastructure and manning. Purpose built freight depots where? Unloading/loading on existing platforms? Could there be enough freight on the Cambrian to help justify electrification or would Hydrogen powered Freight Multiple Units be the way forward?

Do we have a view?

Gareth Marston

RAILFREIGHT ON THE CAMBRIAN

Angus Eickhoff

In the UK, the railways were built to carry freight and throughout the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, that was their primary purpose. Since 1963, that role has been progressively eroded to such an extent that at the present time, the railway is primarily a carrier of passengers.



Freight on the Cambrian as it used to be. An down goods train, bound for the coast line, approaching Dovey Junction in the early 1960s. It has about 30 wagons, including eight gunpowder vans and one oil tanker. Photograph: Denis Bates.

Key reasons for the decline in merchandise being moved by rail go as far back as 1923, when the independent railway operators were all subjected to a forced merger by H.M. Government, which had taken over the companies for the duration of the First World War. At the cessation of hostilities, there was a considerable backlog in maintenance and renewal and a cash strapped administration sought to dodge its responsibility for making good. The resulting four companies, whilst large, were unable to meet the necessary demand for new investment in their core business – the carriage of freight. Legal constraints from being common carriers didn't help either.

Whilst the introduction of company block trains, container trains and "Merry Go Round" mineral workings was heralded as the new bright future, throughout the 1960s, railfreight continued to decline. After a period of relative stability under the Labour governments of the 1970s, the downturn took on a more serious direction under the Thatcher administration. During the period to 1990, the railway lost newspaper traffic and there were major infrastructure losses with the closure of the Woodhead line over the Pennines and other freight routes. In 1991 the railway exited from wagonload traffic with the closure of the "Speedlink" network.

In the period since privatisation, decline in the types of traffic has continued with the loss of almost all parcels and part load traffic. British Rail had a very effective parcels network, utilising large blue trolleys called "BRUTES", which could be loaded on trains en masse and sorted at stations as required. They also operated a very efficient same day parcels service known as "Red Star" which utilised spare capacity on passenger trains. Both these types of service ended in 1999.

Since privatisation, there has been a small but significant revival in the fortunes of railfreight, with increases in the transit of bulk traffic and intermodal. Sadly this has been offset by the steady decline in coal traffic for power generation which has taken place over the period, not to mention the almost total absence of parcels. Construction traffic increased by 7 per cent and



The last of the traffic flows to Aberystwyth: in the mid 1970s a Class 25 locomotive heads oil and coal empties past Bow Street. Photograph: Denis Bates.

consumer traffic by 6 per cent in 2016-17, increasing each quarter, compared to the previous year. The final quarter figures show 9 per cent consumer and 11 per cent construction traffic increases compared to the same quarter in the previous year.

On the Cambrian there is currently no freight. The last regular goods train was an oil tank working to Aberystwyth which ran until 1993. In 2005, there was a trial with moving timber to Kronospan in Chirk, which was generally regarded as very successful but sadly was taken no further. Along the route the railway has been hemmed in by development and land has been sold off, thus restricting opportunity for renewed freight development.

Nevertheless, it would be sensible and enterprising to look at ways in which freight traffic could return to the Cambrian and indeed other parts of the UK network. The constant rumble of HGVs and other commercial vehicles through small towns around Wales and the rest of the UK is a source of irritation to local inhabitants everywhere. This could be an appropriate moment for elected representatives willing to grasp the opportunity to push for a change in transport policy as it would resonate with the public at large.

Network Rail has set out its plans for the future of bulk freight and has at this stage no plans for any bulk flows along the Cambrian. There are no corporate

operations of sufficient size along the railway west of Shrewsbury to make this viable at the present time. Nevertheless, a strategic view should be taken with regard to land use adjacent to the railway to facilitate new freight infrastructure should it be required in the future. It would be particularly useful to preserve the former oil terminal site at Aberystwyth for future rail use.

In the area of palletised or trolley loads and parcels traffic, it is possible that some progress could be made on the Cambrian. Several concerns have been examining ways in which merchandise could be carried by passenger train again. In a small way this is already happening as the Caledonian Sleeper service currently conveys consignments of seafood from Inverness to London

Euston. The business model probably best suited for the railway would be in the role of contracting to third party logistics operators. This would obviate the need for the railway to provide collection and delivery beyond the railhead, a service from which British Rail exited in July 1981. It may be that vacant space on the more sparsely used services could be utilised for the carriage of goods, and recent experiments by GB Railfreight using Class 319 electric units have proved encouraging.

The possibility of using or acquiring dedicated vehicles for freight work should not be discounted. It would not be beyond the grounds of credibility to convert redundant Class 158 units to carry parcels and merchandise. After all, the Class 325 Postal EMU was based on a Class 319 bodyshell and the intention was that they could be converted for passenger use if no longer required for the carriage of mail. A "reverse conversion" of a Class 158 would seem perfectly feasible and would allow a freight movement to be marshalled into a passenger train without requiring an extra path. The use of the Class 158 as a donor vehicle would have the benefit of ETCS signalling equipment already fitted and thus make is especially useful for the Cambrian. There would, of course need to be commonality of coupling between the two types of train. This is something which could cause problems as the proposed new Class 197 units for the Cambrian reputedly will be unable to couple with anything else.

In the recent past, supermarkets have been suggested as possible railfreight customers and indeed Tesco and Stobart rail have a very successful partnership with GB Railfreight. However, this may not be appropriate for the Cambrian as with the exception of Tesco in Newtown, supermarket sites in the towns along the route are not really suited for rail deliveries without transshipment via road transport from the railhead. Nevertheless, supermarket traffic as it stands is very wasteful as 50% of all journeys are completely empty. This may be something that the railway may wish to address so that it could offer an improved product in the longer term. Meanwhile, at Newtown, the author understands the store has been partially repurposed as a distribution centre for "Home Deliveries. Its situation adjacent to the railway would make it a possible candidate for modal shift.

In conclusion, bulk freight is unlikely to return to the Cambrian as there is little call for it. The types and levels of economic activity in the region do not lend themselves to this type of rail transport, although consideration should be given for a modal shift to rail for any type of bulk load into the region. Meanwhile, every effort should be made to preserve former railway land for future rail use, in particular the former oil terminal at Aberystwyth.

Whilst it would be desirable to have a return to wagonload traffic, this is unlikely to occur without determined government investment and intervention. Over the distance from the English Midlands to Aberystwyth rail already has the potential to offer a competitive edge, something which also applies from other English conurbations. An EU study from 2015 points to threshold of 200-300km (124-186 miles) above which rail is particularly competitive and the potential for modal shift is higher. If road transport were persuaded to pay its full costs then the competitive edge for rail would increase.



Timber being loaded at Aberystwyth in the 2005 experiment. Photograph: Denis Bates.

WANT TO JOIN SARPA?

The membership fee is currently (for membership up to 31 December 2021) £10.00 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 line's 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.

To join please send your details, making sure to include full name, address and telephone number (and also email address if you wish to become part of our electronic network) to:

Bill redfern, SARPA Membership Secretary, 8 Plas Edwards, Tywyn, Gwynedd, LL36 0AS, along with cheque for the membership fee, or, and preferably, you can pay directly into our bank account: Shrewsbury-Aberystwyth Rail Passengers Association: Barclays Bank: sort code 20-61-08: account 201481148, and send your details to Bill_sarpa@outlook.com

MONTHLY MEETINGS

For the period of the Coronavirus lockdown, monthly meetings have been cancelled.

2020

October	Saturday 3rd	1115	White Lion, Machynlleth AGM
November	Tuesday 10th	1900	Newtown Council Chambers, The Cross, Broad St, Newtown
December	Saturday 5th	1145	Royal Naval Club, Market Street, Aberystwyth

USEFUL ADDRESSES

Transport for Wales: Customer Relations, Transport for Wales Rail Services, St. Mary's House , 47 Penarth Road, Cardiff . CF10 5DJ Tel. 0333 3211 202

Network Rail:

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

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 AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS OF THE ASSOCIATION

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ASSOCIATION CONTACT POINT

Email: sarpa@sarpa.info



The present day scene at Aberystwyth station, to compare with the 1960s view on p.7. Note that the viewpoint is not exactly the same as in the earlier, as the (now closed) Shilam restaurant is occupying part of the concourse. Photograph: Denis Bates

WEBSITES

Our website <http://sarpa.info>

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

Other sites of interest:

Newtown Station Travel	https://www.newtownstationtravel.co.uk/
A useful alternative to the National Rail Enquiries site:	www.traintimes.org.uk/
Transport for Wales	www.tfwrail.wales/
National Rail Enquiries	www.nationalrail.co.uk/
London Northwestern Railway	www.journeycheck.com/londonnorthwesternrailway/
West Midlands Railway	www.westmidlandsrailway.co.uk
Virgin Trains	www.virgintrains.co.uk
Chiltern Railways	www.chilternrailways.co.uk/
Network Rail	www.networkrail.co.uk/
Railfuture/Railway Development Society	www.railfuture.org.uk/
Cambrian Rail Partnership	www.walesonrails.com
The Association of Community Rail Partnerships (Acorp)	www.acorp.uk.com
Passenger Focus	www.passengerfocus.org.uk/
North Wales Coast Railway	www.nwrail.org.uk/
Ffestiniog and Welsh Highland Railways	www.festrail.co.uk/
Vale of Rheidol Railway	www.rheidolrailway.co.uk
Talyllyn Railway	www.talyllyn.co.uk/
Welshpool and Llanfair Railway	www.wllr.org.uk/
Welsh Highland Heritage Railway	www.whr.co.uk/
Fairbourne Railway	www.fairbournerrailway.com/
Borth Station Museum	www.borthstationmuseum.co.uk
Rail Photographs by Richard Jones including many of the modern Cambrian scene	www.mylordz.com

Copy deadline for the next newsletter is 22nd November 2020