

Shrewsbury Aberystwyth Rail Passengers' Association

Newsletter No. 83

JANUARY 2021

BRIDGES AND STATIONS

In spite of the Covid-19 outbreak, work proceeds on infrastructure projects on the Cambrian.



Above: Work on the renewal of the Barmouth Bridge commenced in September. During the October half term the line was closed, to enable work to proceed using engineering possession of the line. Here two rail-mounted cranes are in action. Photograph courtesy of Network Rail.

Right: The new Bow Street Station is nearing completion, with the erection of signage. Photograph: Denis Bates



NEGES GAN Y CADEIRYDD

Blwyddyn newydd dda, neu blwyddyn newydd well fel mae rhai yn dweud ar hyn o bryd. Mae'n amhosibl ysgrifennu neges fel hyn heb gyfeirio at y sefyllfa covid, ac yn sicr mae hyn wedi effeithio ar bob un ohonom dros y rhan fwyaf o 2020. Cydymdeimladau dwys i'r rhai ohonoch sydd wedi colli rhywun. Dydy SARPA ddim yn eithriad i'r argyfwng ac felly bydd rhaid i ni barhau i gynnal cyfarfodydd arlein nes ei bod yn ddiogel i ni gwrdd wyneb yn wyneb unwaith eto. Rwy'n deall nad yw'n bosibl i bawb ymuno â'r cyfarfodydd ond does gennym ni ddim dewis ar hyn o bryd.

Mae gobaith ar y gorwel gyda brechiadau'n cael eu dyrrannu; fodd bynnag bydd heriau o safbwynt y rheilffyrdd hefyd. Gostyngodd lefelau traffig yn aruthrol yn ystod y pandemig ac mae eisoes sôn am drysorlys llywodraeth y DU yn gostwng lefelau gwasanaeth ar y rheilffyrdd. Wrth gwrs bydd angen i ni ddylanwadu felly ar Lywodraeth Cymru i beidio ag gwneud yr un peth ond hefyd mae eisiau gweld lefelau traffig ar y rheilffordd yn atgyfodi pan fydd hynny'n ddiogel. Yn ffodus, mae'n bosibl bydd y Cambrian yn dioddef llai na rheilffyrdd eraill am fod gymaint o deithio hamdden ar hyd y lein: yn sicr mae gen i restr hirfaith o lefydd hoffwn i fynd unwaith dwi'n cael crwydro eto. Fodd bynnag bydd angen sicrhau gwasanaeth rheilffordd aml a dibynadwy, gan gadw Trafnidiaeth Cymru at eu haddewid i gyflwyno gwasanaeth bob awr llawn a chadw pwysau am newidiadau i agweddau o'r trenau newydd.

Er gwaethaf pob cwmwl mae rhai enillion. Fel y gwelwch nes ymlaen yn y newyddlen, mae Network Rail am wneud gwaith ar nifer o bontydd ar rwydwaith y Cambrian, gan gynnwys Pont Glantwymyn (Black Bridge), un o'r manau gwanaf ar y lein. Bydd hyn yn gwella dibynadwyedd a helpu sicrhau dyfodol tymor hir rheilffyrdd y Cambrian.

Jeff Smith, Cadeirydd SARPA

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

Happy new year, or better new year as some people have been saying recently. It's impossible to write a message like this without mentioning the covid situation, and this has certainly affected each and every one of us through most of 2020. My sincere condolences to those of you who have lost someone. SARPA is no exception to the emergency and therefore we must continue to hold our meetings online until it is safe for us to meet face to face once again. I understand that it's not possible for everyone to join the meetings but we don't have a choice at the moment.

There is hope on the horizon with vaccines being dispensed; however there will also be challenges for the railways. Traffic levels decreased markedly during the pandemic and there are already suggestions that the UK government treasury will reduce rail service levels. Of course we will need to influence Welsh Government not to follow the same path but we also need to see rail traffic levels returning to normal when this is safe. Fortunately, it is possible that the Cambrian will suffer less than other railways due to so much leisure travel happening along the line: I certainly have a long list of

places I would like to go to once I am free to roam once again. Besides, we will need to ensure a frequent and reliable rail service, holding Transport for Wales to their promise of introducing a full hourly service and keeping pressure up for changes to aspects of the new trains.

Despite every cloud, there have been some gains. As you will see later in the newsletter, Network Rail propose to carry out work on a number of bridges on the Cambrian Network, including Black Bridge (Pont Glantwymyn), one of the weakest links on the line. This will improve reliability and help to ensure a long term future for the Cambrian Lines.

Jeff Smith, SARPA Chair

Bow Street proceeds apace

As of the 5th January, Bow Street station appeared virtually ready for opening. The station sign has gone up, the light poles and lights are all in place, and the car park and roadways are tarmaced and have road markings.

The car park is already in use - for site workers. A bilingual sign greets people arriving at the station, noting that it is for use by railway users only. It will be interesting to see what use will be made of the station in the current pandemic. Photographs: Denis Bates



BID BONT: UWCHRADDIO PONTYDD Y CAMBRIAN

“Mae'n ddrwg gennym ond mae'r gwasanaeth.... i Birmingham International bellach yn fws rhwng Machynlleth ac Amwythig....”

Mae'r sefyllfa uchod yn mor gyfarwydd i ni. Mae nifer o broblemau gwahanol yn gorfodi Trafnidiaeth Cymru i ganslo gwasanaethau ond un o'r prif broblemau sy'n cau prif lein y Cambrian yw lefelau uchel o ddŵr o dan Bont Glantwymyn (Black Bridge). Pan mae hyn yn digwydd, weithiau mae rhaid i Network Rail anfon deifwyr i blymio'r dyfroedd ac archwilio strwythur y bont! Gyda newid hinsawdd mae tywydd eithafol wedi taro'n amlach ac mae llifogydd wedi effeithio ar reilffyrdd y Cambrian yn aml (er yn llawer llai nag ar Reilffordd Dyffryn Conwy!).

Mae SARPA wedi lobio ar nifer o achlysuron am ddiogelu rheilffyrdd y Cambrian at y dyfodol, er enghraifft trwy wella'r pontydd. Fel byddai rhywun yn disgwyl mewn gwlad mor wlyb â Chymru, mae rheilffyrdd y Cambrian yn defnyddio llawer o bontydd. Mewn gwirionedd, mae gan y Cambrian dros hanner y pontydd pren sy'n dal i fod ar reilffyrdd Prydain. Er bod y rhain yn brydferth, mae angen cynnal a chadw arnynt yn aml. Fodd bynnag, gyda llifogydd yn digwydd yn amlach, bydd digwyddiadau o'r fath yn tarddu'n fwyfwy ar y gwasanaeth, weithiau am sawl diwrnod, ac mae adfer y lein yn ddrud o safbwynt Network Rail. Felly o ran ddyfodol hir-dymor y Cambrian, mae cynnaladwyedd ariannol y Cambrian a lefelau'r gwasanaeth, mae wir angen diogelu'r lein i'r dyfodol trwy wella'r pontydd.

Yn ffodus, mae Network Rail wedi cyhoeddi mwy o waith ar bontydd ar draws reilffyrdd y Cambrian. Yn ogystal â'r adnewyddu mawr ar Bont y Bermo, bydd ymyrraethau eraill sydd yn llai amlwg ond yr un mor bwysig. Caiff Pont Glantwymyn ei chodi i wella dibynadwyedd ar y lein – rhywbeth rydym wedi galw amdano ers sbel. Bydd pont newydd wrth Bant Eidal (rhwng Penhelig a Chyffordd Dyfi) yn lle'r strwythur presennol a bydd gwaith adnewyddu mawr ar Bont Traeth Mawr (rhwng Minffordd a Phorthmadog) lle adnewyddir llawer o'r gwaith pren. Hoffwn feddwl ein bod wedi chwarae rhan yn annog y gwaith hwn.

Bydd angen cau lein yr arfordir wrth Draeth Mawr rhwng 13 a 21 Chwefror, tra bod lefelau defnydd dal yn isel. Cwblheir y gwaith wrth Bant Eidal tra bod lein yr arfordir ar gau ar gyfer y gwaith adnewyddu ar Bont y Bermo, o 12 Medi i 12 Rhagfyr. Bydd prif lein y Cambrian yn cau wrth Lantwymyn o 10 Ebrill i 9 Mai.

BID BONT: UPGRADING THE CAMBRIAN BRIDGES

“We are sorry to inform passengers that the ... service to Birmingham International will be replaced by road transport between Machynlleth and Shrewsbury...”

We're all too familiar with this situation. Many different issues cause unplanned cancellations on the Cambrian main line, but one of the most frequent single events that causes temporary closures of the line is high water levels under the Black Bridge (Pont Glantwymyn). When this occurs, Network Rail sometimes have to send divers into the water to examine the structural integrity of the bridge! With climate change extreme weather events have become more frequent and flooding has affected the Cambrian on many occasions (though nowhere near as badly as the Conwy Valley Line!).

SARPA has lobbied on many occasions for future proofing of the Cambrian lines. As befits a rain-soaked country such as Wales, the Cambrian lines use many bridges: in fact the Cambrian is home to over half the wooden bridges still remaining on the British rail network. Although these are picturesque, they need frequent maintenance. However with flooding becoming more frequent, disruption ensues, sometimes for a number of days, and the restoration of the line to service is usually rather expensive from Network Rail's point of view. Therefore regarding the long-term future of the Cambrian, the financial sustainability of the Cambrian and the levels of service future-proofing of the line is much needed.

Fortunately, Network Rail have recently announced more work on bridges across the Cambrian Lines. In addition to the major renovations of the iconic Barmouth Viaduct, there will also be other interventions which are less obvious but just as important. The Black Bridge will be raised to improve reliability on the line – something we've called for for some time – whilst the bridge at Pant Eidal (between Penhelig and Dyfi Junction) will be replaced and there will be a major refurbishment of Traeth Mawr bridge between Minffordd and Porthmadog, with many of the timbers being replaced. I'd like to think we played some part in this welcome news.

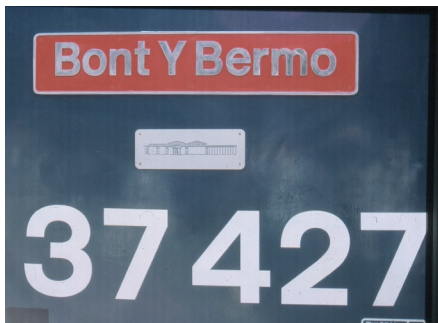
The work at Traeth Mawr will involve a closure on the coast line between 13 and 21 February, whilst traffic levels are still low. The Pant Eidal renewal will take place whilst the coast line is closed for the Barmouth Bridge works, from 12 September to 12 December. The closure on the main line at Glantwymyn will occur from 10 April to 9 May.



A view through the window. Aberdyfi seen from a mainline train just east of the former Ynyslas station. Photograph: Denis Bates



This aerial view looking south shows some of the preliminary work being carried out, with access at low tide for caterpillar-tracked machinery. The tidal currents here are strong, as is shown by the megaripples present on both sides of the bridge. Photograph courtesy of Network Rail.



In 1986, after the last work on the Bridge, Class 37 was named after the bridge. It was subsequently renamed Highland Enterprise; and became an English Welsh and Scottish Railway loco, and was withdrawn in 2015.



The work on the bridge has necessitated the erection of a large compound on the south side of the estuary. Photograph: David Taylor.



Seen at a model railway exhibition some years ago, this is part of a magnificent 0 Gauge model of the bridge and approaches. It is shown here with a GWR train approaching Barmouth. Photograph: Denis Bates

The view from inside a world class institution

We've all seen or heard the doomsayers about the future of rail if passengers fail to return to rail after the pandemic ends. The usual narrative is along the lines that everybody will now work from home in the future, collapsing the demand for rail, and "tough choices" will have to be made – implying cuts and even closures. These crystal ball glazers of course failed to spot the pandemic coming and don't realise that commuters are only one part of the usage mix of UK railways – freight trains will not be working from home will they? We should take these glum predictions with a huge pinch of salt. Rail's role in the adjustments we need to make to realise net zero carbon mean a bright future is ahead.

Once upon a time, well nearly 30 years ago, the official view of transport was simple and clear: building roads would solve congestion and deliver economic development, there were some concerns about vehicle exhaust pollution but it was all Ok as tech solutions had been promised. Flying for foreign holidays was all the rage with airport expansion galore as every small city seemed to want its international airport. The railways were a gently declining Victorian mode of transport that was inefficiently run by state owned British Rail. The private sector was earmarked to make a profit out of it whilst it continued to decline, and perhaps a few years afterwards those nasty subsidy-consuming branch lines could be closed once it had been demonstrated they were beyond redemption and the uproar at the proposals was vented at the private sector not the Government. And we all lived happily ever after?

As we know things didn't pan out as expected I won't go into a blow by blow account, but let's just say that there was one consistent theme running through the last near three decades from Governments of all colours – ***the political capital and vast sums of public money put into maintaining private sector involvement in the railways***. As we all know, after privatization costs in the rail sector went in the opposite direction to what was expected, and the private sector would have walked away long ago were it not for the vast sums of increased public sector money put into the rail network. Rather than address the causes of why costs have gone up and more subsidy is required despite years and years of above inflation fare increases and double the number of passengers, it's been expedient to prop up the system. Why? Simply put it was feared doing something about it would have been seen as tantamount to admitting that the private sector is not always best, striking at the heart of certain political ideologies. The majority of the public has always found rail privatisation deeply unpopular, and polls have consistently shown percentages of the population opposed to it that are greater than that which show support or opposition for any other policy choice. Yet Governments have invested much capital in maintaining the narrative of the successful private sector.

Covid has turned the world sort of upside down. However, around the corner there is a vaccine and the promise of a return to near normal, transport decarbonisation, the end of millions of personal fossil fuel vehicles, a vastly altered freight cost/logistics network and fewer overseas holidays. In time rail will pick a large amount of new trade from these trends, dwarfing the loss of a chunk of the current central London commuter market from home working. ***What is needed is for Government to show a fraction of the political and financial capital it was prepared to shell out on rail***

privatisation in the next couple of years, in keeping and expanding the network until these changes kick in growing demand. So far the signs have been encouraging, with rail infrastructure projects continuing in the pandemic and Government prepared to underwrite lightly loaded trains. November's budget statement was not one of cuts for the railway in 2021/2022. However, with Brexit's inevitable negative consequences that are just around the corner there is no room for complacency and we must be prepared to argue rail's case for the future even more strongly.

CAMBRIAN LINE INVESTMENT

From Network Rail Wales and Borders

2021 is an exciting year for investment in the Cambrian Line. We will shortly begin refurbishing **Traeth Mawr Viaduct**, also known as Traeth River Viaduct, which connects Porthmadog and Minffordd over the Afon Glaslyn. Our £1.85m project to replace timbers on the viaduct will allow us to continue providing a safe, reliable and resilient railway for many years to come.

Our contractors Amco will be setting up our site from 15 January 2021. We will be closing the railway from Saturday 13 February to Sunday 21 February so that we can carry out our main work safely. Our colleagues at Transport for Wales will be providing rail replacement services between Porthmadog and Harlech during the work. We are expecting to return to carry further work on Traeth Mawr Viaduct, which is likely to take place in 2022 or 2023.

We are also planning to carry out resilience work at **Black Bridge***, also known as Glyntwymyn, in Powys. We will be lifting the bridge higher to help to prevent long closures due to flooding in the future. The railway is expected to be closed from 10 April to 9 May so that we can carry out this work, with rail replacement services in operation.

We will be continuing our £25m restoration of **Barmouth Viaduct** from 12 September to 12 December. To make the most of the closure, we are also planning to renew **Pant Eidal**, in Gwynedd, when the railway is closed. This work will allow us to continue to run a safe and reliable railway.

I hope this information is useful and the work isn't too disruptive. Work will help to prevent future periods of planned and unplanned closures, minimising disruption for passengers and reducing maintenance costs to the taxpayer. Please plan ahead and allow additional time for travelling.

Thank you for your continued support and please do get in touch if you have any questions.

Yours sincerely

Sam Hadley

Network Rail Wales and Borders

*Editor: The bridge is about one mile east of Machynlleth station, over the Afon Dulas near the Dolguog Hall Hotel.



The other bridge at Barmouth. Originally a timber structure, it was rebuilt in the 1930s by the Great Western Railway in concrete. 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.

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

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Other bridge work was taking place on the Leri Bridge in October.
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.tallyllyn.co.uk/
Welshpool and Llanfair Railway	www.wlfr.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 March 2021