

Shrewsbury Aberystwyth Rail Passengers' Association

Newsletter No. 94

NOVEMBER 2024



158 827 on the 1408 Birmingham International to Aberystwyth arrives in Platform 5 at Shrewsbury on Wednesday 18th September 2024.

THE CRASH AT TALERDDIG

The second head-on collision on the Cambrian lines, occurred at Talerddig 103 years after the first: the Abermule disaster of the 26th January 1921.

What is known, so far, is described in the Rail Accident Investigation Branch publication of the 5th November (see page 3).

RAIL CRASH AT TALERDDIG ON 21ST OCTOBER 2024

SARPA will not speculate on the causes of the crash beyond stating that it's abundantly clear from the evidence available that this was primarily caused by a wheel slip incident, The exact nature of which will no doubt be forensically laid out once the Rail Accident Investigation Board conclude their investigation.

Meanwhile, our thoughts are with the family and friends of Mr David Tudor Evans of Capel Dewi who sadly passed away, and the train crew and passengers who were injured.

Rail crashes involving a passenger fatality are very rare on the UK rail network in the 21st Century, which is why they become national and international news. It would appear the last crash where a passenger lost their life on the Cambrian network was way back in January 1921 - the Abermule crash where 17 people lost their lives. The fact we had to delve back into the history books over a century ago to find the previous occasion a passenger died in a crash on the Cambrian tells us much about how safe rail travel is.

The line between Machynlleth and Shrewsbury was closed for the entire week afterwards, with bus replacements running initially travelling via Mallwyd and Llanfair Caereinion due to the A470 road being closed as well for several days. The two units collided about 30 metres on the Machynlleth side of Milepost 62, right next to a small layby where the A470 runs alongside the railway line in a narrow steep sided valley a few hundred metres short of the summit of the line at Talerddig and about 800 metres from the passing loop where the DOWN service the 1J25 1831 Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth failed to stop. Around 40 passengers were on that service and just 4 on the UP train, the 1S71 1909 Machynlleth to Shrewsbury. The incident happened at 1930.

TfW Rail are now short of two Class 158 units, at least in the short term, and perhaps even permanently given their age and impending withdrawal next year. Given TfW Rail's struggles in getting their new fleets of trains to run with the same level of availability as the much maligned ATW did, the consequences of this incident appear to be another snake in the permanent game of service level snakes and ladders that passengers have endured since TfW Rail took over in October 2018. Saturday 2nd November saw services cancelled and trains that should be 4-car run with only 2.

COLLISION BETWEEN PASSENGER TRAINS NEAR TALERDDIG

Investigation into a collision between passenger trains near Talerddig, Powys, on 21 October 2024.

Published by the Rail Accident Investigation Branch on 5 November 2024



View of the accident site - train 1S71 is shown on the left of picture and train 1J25 on the right.

At around 19:26 on Monday 21 October 2024, train 1J25, the 18:31 Transport for Wales passenger service from Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth, collided with train 1S71, the 19:09 Machynlleth to Shrewsbury passenger service, also operated by Transport for Wales.

The collision took place on Network Rail's Cambrian line, approximately 900 metres west of the passing loop located at Talerddig, Powys. One passenger died and four other people were seriously injured. Eleven more people sustained injuries which required hospital treatment. Neither train derailed in the collision, although significant damage was caused to the leading vehicles of both trains.

RAIB was notified at 19:45 on the night of the accident and immediately dispatched a team of inspectors to the scene. Over the next few days, RAIB worked in conjunction with the British Transport Police, the Office of Rail and Road and the railway companies involved to secure the necessary evidence to support our independent safety investigation.

RAIB released the site of the accident to Network Rail on the evening of Wednesday 23 October 2024, to allow for inspection and repair of the track, and recovery of the trains. Both trains were moved off site on Friday 25 October 2024. RAIB inspectors



Aerial view of the accident site – train 1S71 is shown on the left of picture and train 1J25 on the right.

and support staff continued to secure evidence at the site of the accident, and at nearby locations, until Saturday 26 October 2024.

Both trains involved in the accident were 2-car class 158 diesel multiple units. These units are fitted with wheel slide protection systems, similar in function to anti-lock braking systems on road vehicles, and an automatic sanding system, which discharges sand automatically via sanding hoses when wheel slide is detected during braking. This is intended to increase the available friction at the wheel/rail interface.

The Cambrian line is equipped with the European Rail Traffic Management System, a form of railway signalling. This system removes the need for lineside signals by transmitting signalling and control data directly to the train. The limits of each section of track controlled by the system are signified by reflective lineside signs known as block markers.

The railway approaching Talerddig from each direction consists of a single track. To allow trains to pass each other there, a loop is provided. This has points at each end which allow trains to enter a short length of track adjacent to the single line. Westbound trains climb an ascending gradient to enter the loop and, on exiting, rejoin the single track as it descends towards Llanbrynmair and Machynlleth.

RAIB's preliminary examination has found that westbound train 1J25 had been due to stop in the loop at Talerddig to allow eastbound train 1S71 to pass. Initial analysis of data from the on-train data recorder (OTDR) fitted to train 1J25 shows that the driver applied service braking to slow the train as it neared the loop at Talerddig. Around 40 seconds after the first service brake application, the OTDR records an emergency brake demand being made. This emergency brake demand remained in place until the collision. OTDR data shows that wheel slide started during service braking and was constant during emergency braking.

Train 1J25 then entered the loop at Talerddig. Although the train slowed while passing through the loop, it did not stop before passing the block marker positioned near the exit. The train subsequently exited the loop, rejoined the single line, and continued to travel for around 900 metres on the descending gradient, before colliding with train 1S71.

There is conflicting evidence relating to the speed of the trains at the point of collision. Initial analysis indicates that train 1J25 was travelling at between 24 km/h (15 mph) and 39 km/h (24 mph), while train 1S71 was travelling at around 10 km/h (6 mph) in the opposite direction. RAIB is continuing to analyse evidence relating to the collision speed, which remains an area of ongoing investigation.

Following the accident, RAIB undertook measurements of wheel/rail adhesion levels at various locations from the approach to Talerddig loop to the point of collision. These found levels of wheel/rail adhesion that were low.

An inspection of the automatic sanding system fitted to train 1J25 after the accident showed that the sanding hoses on the leading vehicle of this train (which would have been active at the time of the accident) were blocked and apparently unable to discharge sand.

Our investigation will seek to identify the sequence of events which led to the accident. It will also consider:

- the actions of those involved and any factors that may have influenced them
 - the level of wheel/rail adhesion present from the approach to Talerddig loop to the point of collision
 - the status and performance of the braking, wheel slide protection and sanding systems on train 1J25
 - the behaviour of both trains during and following the collision
 - Transport for Wales' policies relating to low wheel/rail adhesion and how it managed the risk of low adhesion on the Cambrian line
 - Network Rail's policies relating to low wheel/rail adhesion and how it managed the risk of low adhesion on the Cambrian line
 - the processes used to assess and control the risk of overrun on the Cambrian line
- any relevant underlying factors, including any actions taken in response to previous relevant safety recommendations.

Our investigation is independent of any investigation by the railway industry, the British Transport Police or by the industry's regulator, the Office of Rail and Road.

We will publish our findings, including any recommendations to improve safety, at the conclusion of our investigation. This report will be available on our website:

:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/rail-accident-investigation-branch>

FROM TfW TO STAKEHOLDERS

Dear stakeholder,

We'd like to update you on our current fleet situation on the Cambrian line and a temporary plan we are putting into place from Saturday, 16 November.

Owing to a shortfall of trains with a number of our Class 158 fleet undergoing C6 heavy maintenance exams and autumn related repairs, we're having to amend services on the Cambrian line.

Because the Cambrian line uses a unique in-cab signalling system ERTMS (European Rail Traffic Management System), we are restricted to only being able to use the Class 158 fleet on it, so are not in a position to use any of our other fleets on the line to make up the shortfall.

As such we're putting a temporary plan in place to deliver services with more consistency and clarity for customers.

From Saturday, 16 November all services between Shrewsbury and Birmingham International will be terminating and turning back at Wolverhampton. This will allow us to run a consistent service for customers while we work through some of the fleet issues and get back to a stronger position. This also protects some of the vital services in rural mid and north Wales.

We are also looking at a plan to bring the new Class 197s into service between Shrewsbury and Birmingham earlier than was originally planned and we hope to share a further update on this soon.

Ticket acceptance is in place for customers travelling towards Birmingham New Street and Birmingham International on Avanti and West Midlands Railways.

The plan will be in place until at least Friday, 22 November.

We would like to apologise for any inconvenience caused and to assure you we are working hard to minimise disruption to customers.





TRANSHIPMENT OF SLATES RECREATED AT TYWYN

On Friday 8th November 2024 a standard gauge LMS 5-Plank wagon, dressed up in the livery of the local Cambrian Railways, was lifted into place atop a short track panel adjacent to the Cambrian Coast Line alongside Tywyn Wharf edge.

The project originally started some years back as part of enhancing how the Talylyn Railway conveys its slate history story to visitors, spurred on by becoming a component part of the UNESCO Slate Landscape of Northwest Wales World Heritage Site in 2021.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Aberystwyth

The log trains have not run over the summer, we understand this is to do with the harvesting season west of the Cambrian Mountains with no logging activity taking place to generate traffic. The path(s) for the service are still booked for the foreseeable future on a "runs as required" basis. However, logs are being stockpiled for a resumption of trains.

The £43 million redevelopment project undertaken on the Grade I listed Old College building on the seafront, owned by the University, is expected to generate 200,000 visitors and boost the local economy by £14.5 million per annum once complete. Work has been going on since autumn 2023 on the historic building. Originally constructed as a hotel for visitors brought to the town by rail, it was never finished as a hotel and was taken over by the University of Wales when they were looking for a suitable building to use when they were first established. The building is being totally renovated and will be a 4-star hotel with restaurants, cafés, a conference centre and business incubation units. It should generate traffic for the railway once opened in 2025.

Ceredigion County Council are introducing a slew of changes to parking along the promenade/seafront areas, severely reducing the number of parking spaces, increasing charges and other restrictions on the remaining spaces. The aim is to make the seafront more pedestrian friendly and attractive to visitors, rather than being a car park with motorists going back and forth distracted by trying to find a space to park mixing with pedestrians, and cut down on vehicles driving through the narrow town centre streets to get to and from the seafront. The seafront is of course an easy 5-10-minute walk from the station for rail users.

Class 197 Testing

Fault free mileage testing commenced in July of Class 197 units running in daylight on the Cambrian Mainline, sometimes a single unit and on other occasions two units have run. Units have worked through from Crewe to Dyfi Junction returning to Shrewsbury and then done a run to Newtown and back or they just come down to Newtown and back. Whilst this testing is likely to go on for many months, it will not be every day. Folk wanting to see the new trains can consult the real time trains website which shows what has been activated and is running <https://www.realtimetrains.co.uk/>. The ETCS-earmarked units have also been seen on the North Wales Coast Mainline on mileage accumulation runs.

The first day was marred by a technical fault on the ETCS equipment which caused delays to other trains. We understand the fault is one that also effects the ETCS equipment on the Class 158's rather than a problem with the Class 197's.

Information in Modern Railways July edition indicates that purchasing the last Diesel Multiple Units built in the world has cost TfW £ One Million more per vehicle than comparable Electric Multiple Unit platforms ordered elsewhere in the UK at the same time.

Newtown

The station has remained a building site over the summer with work on the access for all footbridge continuing and new lampposts being installed and the old ones taken out. The electricity consumption on the old ones was understood to be horrendous: the expense of the new lighting should be recouped in lower bills in future.

The Charity wanting to take over the station building is still in negotiations with Arch Co over the terms of the lease / rental amount.

The nearby Railway Tavern has returned as an entry in the 2025 Campaign for Real Ale Good Beer Guide under new manager Paul "Potter" Morris. Paul has collected some railway memorabilia and has installed a duplicate Passenger Information System which shows live departures from Newtown station.

The proposed Health and Well Being Campus situated just off Park St near the town centre is not progressing at any pace due funding constraints at Powys Teaching Health Board. It's a rare example of a new development that's taken into consideration all members of the community, not just car users. The Campus which would see Newtown Hospital moved there as well as concentrating other health facilities in the town is centrally placed and would be a sub ten minute walk from the station as well as being near bus routes and within a 20 minute walk of a greater percentage of the town's population than the current hospital, which is located on a hillside above the town heading toward Tregynon, with a steep walk uphill to access it. In contrast Powys County Council Local Development Plan wants to build housing estates around the towns bypass and away from facilities.

Welshpool

Welshpool has seen regular visits from revenue protection squads in recent months. Newtown to Welshpool has been identified as an area where fare dodging occurs on a regular basis, often associated with commuters working in the factories on the Severn Farm Industrial estate that offer seasonal minimum wage employment.

Shrewsbury

Transport for Wales have confirmed in their timetable consultation response that there will be a permanent all year-round departure from Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth at approximately 1630 Monday to Saturday from May 2025, subject to a pathing conflict (the UP-log train on a Friday afternoon) being resolved. The welcome move recognises overcrowding issues on the 1530 and 1730 departures, but there's also a strong nod to the educational commuter market that's opened between the Upper Severn Valley and Shrewsbury Sixth Form College since May 2015 and the introduction of extra services. Despite getting caught up in TfW's poor performance issues in 21/22/23 a sizable number of Sixth form students, mainly from Newtown, are still prepared to commute some distance daily. These educational commuters were providing approximately 8% of the footfall from the Upper Severn Valley stations in 2022/2023.

Shrewsbury Sixth Form has been rated in the Top 20 in the UK for such establishments and has a good record on A-level results and for students getting into

red brick and Oxbridge universities. It has two campuses both a c.10 minute walk from Shrewsbury station near the Welsh Bridge and English Bridge. The English bridge campus or Wakeman building is right next to the line at English Bridge Junction as you arrive at Shrewsbury on the left as the line is carried over the Abbey Foregate Road.

Shrewsbury's new more pro public transport MP has been contacted about opening up the path that leads off the end of Platform 3 and comes down at the back of the housing built on the site of Shrewsbury FC's old Gay Meadow ground which is accessed down the side of the Wakeman building. This would make the station more accessible by active travel from a wide area.

Marches Line

Services are now entirely booked for Mk4 coaches and locomotive or Class 197's. Despite the plan having 7 loco hauled services each way in operation each day (every two hours) between Cardiff and Manchester, TfW at the time of compilation (September 24) were managing just 5 services. Now at 5 carriage length as promised the issue has been more with the locomotives which are not proving particularly reliable. The Class 67 locomotives have been grossly underutilised throughout their existence. Originally purchased to haul mail trains on mainlines regular use has been few and far between for the full fleet since 2004, when those services stopped. It's understood that TfW have purchased two further locomotive of the class and will use one as a source of spares.

The Class 197's turn up as the 3 coach versions with odd on the day exceptions, the original plan to run them as 5 coach between Cardiff and Manchester will not happen until the South Wales Metro is completed, allowing the 2 car 197's that currently work Masesteg/Ebbw Vale/Cheltenham diagrams from Cardiff to be released. In mid-August TfW were still awaiting to accept into service three of the twenty six 3 car units and the twenty one ETCS fitted 2 car units. The thirty 2 car non ETCS units have all been accepted into traffic.

Birmingham New St

Cross Country trains have acquired a number of ex Avanti West Coast Class 221 Voyagers, displaced by new trains. They have been able to increase a number of services to 8/9 coach formations predominantly on the South West to North East axis services this summer. It is hoped that the railway, now with "grownups in charge" at Westminster, will be able to organise a nationwide cascade of rolling stock in the next couple of years with the East Midlands Railways fleet of Class 222 DMU's being displaced by new rolling stock, combined with the ex-Trans Pennine Express MK5 coach sets providing a near 200 strong fleet of coaches that can boost capacity on long distance services if the political will is there.

2024 General Election

In 2019 Westminster election constituencies along the Cambrian line returned 2 Plaid Cymru and 2 Conservative Members of Parliament. In 2024 this has swapped to 2 Plaid Cymru and 2 Labour. Boundary changes saw part of another constituency in NE Wales added to Montgomeryshire. The new Montgomeryshire and Glyndwr constituency includes Ruabon and Chirk stations on the Shrewsbury to Chester line, as well as the 5 in Montgomeryshire. The average number of stations in a UK parliamentary constituency is 4. It's hoped the new Labour MP Steve Witherden has rail services more on his radar than the disgraced former Conservative MP Craig Williams, who told ex SARPA Chairman Gareth Marston that rail investment was being cancelled as "tax cuts were more important" - it is not known if he had a bet on this. Gareth also reports that Steve Witherden knocked on his door canvassing and he was able to raise rail matters with him and confirms he was at least already aware there was a rail depot at Machynlleth in his constituency providing significant employment for the area - a step up from a certain previous MP and ex Chairman of the Development Board for Rural Wales who had to be told!

The Welsh Conservatives centre piece of campaigning was opposition to the road 20 mph speed limits which they said had been imposed against the will of the people. They failed to win a single seat as did the other party promising to roll back the policy: Reform.

Cardiff Bay

The direction of the Welsh Government toward transport has been left in limbo with the new Labour unity candidate Eluned Morgan's (an ex-MEP for Mid and West Wales) views unclear. Finding any publicly made views from her on transport matters are hard; indeed she seems to be a career politician who's risen without much trace of achieving or knowing anything. The Drakeford administration, with Minister Lee Waters to the fore, had made big strides in using evidence rather than ideology or fear of motorists' votes on road matters and had halted major road building as being bad for the environment, and had implemented the 20mph speed limits to save lives and cut down on the cost of road traffic accidents to the nation. Short lived First Minister Vaughan Gething, when not taking donations from dodgy companies, had brought back former transport minister Ken Skates, who had overseen the creation of the soporific Transport for Wales under the Carwyn Jones administration and is known to be inclined to believe road improvements are linked to economic development and be sympathetic to motorists. He has been kept on in the new unity cabinet and apparently by all accounts has been surprised that the 20 mph limits have done what they were supposed to: to reduce road traffic accidents and the costs to the police, NHS and individuals of them. This was the overwhelming evidence from other nations that had already implemented reduced speed limits in built up areas: the fact he was apparently ignorant of this does not bode well.

20 mph in Powys

A consultation on what changes to the 20 mph limits in Powys the public would like to see, ordered by new Welsh Government Minister Ken Skates, saw just 150 responses received at county hall and 93 of these were from people asking that there were no changes! This contrasts with last year's consultation about closing railway ticket offices which got 750,000 responses all saying no, a response rate per head of population nearly ten times as great!

Beyond an angry echo chamber on social media actual opposition to the policy seems thin with organised protest convoys attracting few vehicles, and a supposed 460K petition calling for its reversal alleged to have mainly been made in a bot farm in North East England.

Fare Britannia

Rail research /pressure group Greengauge 21 have completed a report on rail fare reform, commissioned by Greenpeace. They have concluded that implementing a nationwide rail discount card excluding travel into London and long-distance InterCity services modelled on the German Deutschland ticket would cost only £45 million to implement but would significantly increase usage by 30% in the provinces and the spin off benefits from modal shift in reduced congestion and pollution would more than offset this cost.



How it used to be done: staff exchange at Talerddig in the 1980s. The train is headed for Wolverhampton High Level.

NEAR DERAILMENT AT CAERHOWEL EXPOSES NETWORK RAIL'S VEGETATION FAILURES

On Wednesday 11th September the 1407 service from Birmingham International to Aberystwyth and Pwllheli hit a fallen tree at approximately 80mph, having just gone past the old Montgomery station building, which is located on an embankment above the hamlet of Caerhowel at approximately 1600.

A SARPA member who was on board the rear of the 4-carriage train reports a noticeable jolt and rising upwards of the carriages and noise underneath. Fortunately, the units stayed on the rails and came to halt on the embankment just beyond the bridge over the B4385 Garthmyl to Montgomery road on the Abermule side. All services were suspended between Newtown and Shrewsbury for around 3 hours with bus replacements being organised. The tree had caused damage underneath and there was no air supply for the braking system on either unit causing the brakes to lock on automatically, which meant the units had to be repaired and couldn't just be pulled or pushed by another train. TfW Rail and Network Rail probably did the best job they could on the day in the circumstances, given how far from Machynlleth depot the incident happened. Fortunately the fitters were carrying the right spare parts in their van when they arrived. The train itself terminated at Newtown 188 minutes late with c.150 passengers transferring to waiting Lloyd's coaches or left at Newtown, with some making a dash for the Railway Tavern for refreshment, there being no trolley on-board.

The real problem is of course the proliferation of vegetation within the railway's boundary which historically did not exist. The accompanying photographs clearly show a mature tree that's has been allowed to grow within the railway's boundary on the slope of the embankment. Up until the late 1960's railway land next to tracks would have been entirely clear of vegetation so as not to present a fire hazard to sparks from steam locomotives. As a no longer needed cost saving measure, BR stopped/ cut back on most proactive vegetation management; the pesticides used for weed killing back in the day were so toxic that nothing dared grow close to the tracks anyway. Local BR gangs over the years cut back stuff that was encroaching anyway, recognising the problem of autumn leaf fall. However, over time pesticides became less potent and then after 1994 Railtrack totally neglected lineside vegetation management (and many other things). and the green tunnels that shroud the views from trains started to take hold. Network Rail has the occasional blitz, especially near track known to have autumn adhesion issues, but on many rural lines marketed as scenic the scenery is now more often than not very close by trees. What were saplings in the early 2000's are now mature trees and are often in places like embankments where their roots are susceptible to heavy rain, drying out and high wind increasing the risk of falling. Given the effects of climate change things will only get worse.

The Salisbury rail collision in October 2021 was a result of poor rail adhesion caused by excessive vegetation on embankments. Fortunately there were no deaths, but people were injured. thankfully neither scenario happened at Caerhowel but how much longer will the rail industry get lucky? Lineside vegetation is not only a safety issue, but also a reliability and punctuality one (this costs £s) and is revenue related, as people need to be attracted to many rural lines by being able to see scenery. High time for action and something else to put on Great British Railways to do list.

Editor: this was of course written before the Talerddig collision of the 21st October.

Photo Credit - Paul Williams H18 PDW Photography, who having seen a social media post sent his drone from Newtown to investigate. The offending tree. Ironically the train came to a halt in the middle of a green vegetation tunnel.



GARETH MARSTON ARGUES THAT LEAVING COMMUNITIES AND INDIVIDUALS BEHIND MUST STOP

“Everyone goes home, no one’s left behind”: you’ve heard the phrase in the movies and even in real life. A few years back in Afghanistan, Royal Marines rode on the stub ordnance wings of Apache Helicopter gunships to recover their fallen comrades’ bodies, so they didn’t fall into the hands of the Taliban. In the world of transport SBB the Swiss national railway implemented this as national policy when they launched their nationwide *Taktfahrplan* in 1982. Everywhere was given a minimum of one service per hour running at the same time past each hour from 0600 to midnight six days a week with a later start on Sundays, with guaranteed connections at junctions and connecting buses from stations running out to every small village over 300 people without a station. A real plan with real integration, no faffing about with individual business cases or wasting years with consultations and studies or concentrating investment in big cities, nor pork barrel politics: it was for everyone and everywhere a truly national policy where no community was left behind. Whilst the designers recognised that the cost of running rural services would go up compared to previous intermittent services, they correctly assessed that the boost to **ridership/revenue nationwide** of having an easy understandable consistent system for all would more than offset the cost.

Here in Wales the legacy of the Beeching era, decades of underinvestment, the decline in bus services, the inability to integrate and planning policies seemingly more for the benefit of Texan Oil Billionaires than the people of Wales has resulted in public transport provision more like a Swiss cheese that’s been attacked with acid with many many holes and lots of people and communities left behind. We’ve had lots of cooing and soothing noises from the Welsh Government and Transport for Wales saying they’re doing something about it, but they now tell us that once more the awfully bad other boy – the Westminster Government – hadn’t given them enough money and there would have to be cuts to save money. And lo and behold they singled out lines and communities that were in many ways already being left behind to take another hit. The cuts in services on the Heart of Wales and Cambrian Coast, where services are less frequent than hourly to start with, are barely defensible; but when it was learnt that the supposedly cash strapped Welsh Government had found £20 million a year over five years to further subsidise Cardiff airport a distinctly sour taste in the mouth has been left. A quick look at the online departure board for Cardiff Airport shows over three quarters of the flights are to holiday destinations around the Mediterranean. Which means they’re not bringing tourists to Wales or being used by business travellers/ air freight or to visit family abroad, but facilitating the UK’s massive tourism deficit (UK tourists spent a staggering £33 billion more abroad than foreign tourists did in the UK in 2019) which far outweighs the economic benefit of the commercial aviation industry (which contributes c.£25 billion to UK GDP each year). Tourist £s in Barmouth or Llandeilo are far more beneficial to the Welsh economy, yet the Welsh Government has chosen to subsidise frequent flyers from the upper fifth of the income spectrum, who make up 75% of all UK flight goers, having yet another holiday in Marbella or wherever instead, and have left communities in rural Wales with further left behind levels of public transport.

Over the Irish Sea the Dublin and Belfast governments have just released a joint 25-year rail investment plan – the All-Island Strategic Rail Review, I won't go into it, you can look it up yourself, but it is a strategic countrywide strategy that takes into account decarbonisation and modal shift. On the continent, Germany and Austria also have long term rail plans with impressive targets. Here in Wales, beyond mumbling the word Metro and throwing out some crayon maps and promises of public sector specified buses, the Welsh Government transport investment cupboard is bare; with nothing after the long overdue delayed investments from the 2018 Keolis/Amey franchise some of whom are not even being delivered – notably the hourly service between Shrewsbury and Aberystwyth. Can you imagine the Swiss having a service that has random gaps in it from September to May each year? Let's be honest, the ATW replacement TfW services were not formulated as part of any coherent strategic plan that considered the realities of the 3rd decade of the 21st Century, let alone left behind communities and individuals.

It's not actually that hard to have a system that does, however. People like to tell themselves comforting myths to justify inaction, such as the myth that everybody has a car or access to one even in rural areas. The facts are different: a quarter of all Welsh households have no vehicle even in rural towns like Newtown, and with just over half of all Welsh households only having one vehicle many family members have to make other arrangements as the vehicle is often used by the major breadwinner to get to and from work, where it sits for 8 hours, and the chance of a convenient lift are constrained by both time and geography. Intermittent or no access to a vehicle is the reality for over half the population combined with the patchy provision of alternatives and a planning system that has favoured development for housing, retail, employment and services at locations best suited for access by vehicle you have a system where we have polarised into transport haves and have nots. There's also a significant cost to being a transport have as well, the cost of running an average motor vehicle is now more than 10% of average household income, and if you have housing costs (rent or mortgage) – which 70% of all households do – then most households have a huge squeeze on their incomes to participate as a have, unless they're at the upper end of the income spectrum, or are older and have paid a mortgage off. In 2019 40% of UK driving licences were held by people born before 1960 even though they accounted for just 30% of those who could hold them. The number of younger people with driving licences has been declining for around 25 years now, and this trend is now working its way up the age groups with driving licence holding in all age groups under 60 expected to decline further by the end of this decade. Younger adults in the UK have tended to cluster into major urban areas, partly because they have a better chance of being able to function using active travel and public transport, but this has had consequences for labour markets and economies in areas with poor alternatives to the motor vehicle.

The UK is noted for its poor productivity compared to many of our competitors. Has anyone stopped for two seconds to think about the consequences of leaving so many people and communities behind? It's like having a rowing boat and less than half the people are pulling the oars. The new Westminster government says its priority is economic growth as this will provide the tax revenue to fund the NHS and improved public services. Ensuring that the entire population is connected to opportunity whether that be health care, employment or retail should be part of this priority: it boosts

productivity. If you continue to leave communities and individuals behind, you won't achieve it no matter how shiny the reception at the air industry event is, or how much you kid yourself with wishful thinking about everybody driving.

The Welsh Government has already done the politically hard bit and found out that breaking the transport status quo over road building and speed limits has not had consequences in the ballot box at the general election, mirroring the experience in London despite the selfish screams of the noisy minority. The next stage – a Welsh public transport *Taktfahrplan* that includes all communities – should be much easier to implement whilst on its own it's not a universal panacea, it's a big piece of the jigsaw toward a better functioning economy and country.

Newtown, September 2024

COUNCILLOR MICHAEL WILLIAMS



It was with great sadness that SARPA received the news that Cllr Michael Williams of Powys County Council had passed away in July.

He was the official representative at our organisation of both the Powys authority and Machynlleth Town Council. Michael had been a great supporter of our aims for many years and was a regular attender at meetings. He was also the Vice Chair of the Shrewsbury Aberystwyth Line Liaison Committee, the local stakeholder group which seeks to improve the rail service in Mid Wales.

Born in 1941, he was a native of Machynlleth. In his role as a football referee

during the 1960s he was able to foster his interest in the railway whilst travelling to matches the length and breadth of the UK.

He was wise and kind and had a vision for the future, but he also had a special respect for different points of view. He had been in public life and local politics since the 1970s. As an independent he had represented Machynlleth on Powys County Council since 1981 as well as being a respected figure on the Town Council. His knowledge of local government was encyclopaedic.

In addition Michael really was always busy, quietly and modestly attending hundreds if not thousands of meetings, relentlessly supporting the town and countless organisations, teams, societies and local people. All the while he lived quietly on Bryn y Gog council estate in Machynlleth.

His funeral was held at Aberystwyth Crematorium on 14th August. He will be much missed but never forgotten.

BUDGET 2024

The impact of transport of the new Westminster Labour Government's first budget on the 30th October 2024 has not been overly well received by transport campaigners. The pre-budget announcement of the UK Government's raising of the previous single journey bus fare cap in England from £2.00 to £3.00 drew a lot of criticism. However, it never applied in Wales and the reality is most regular users in urban areas have weekly passes that are cheaper than buying separate singles anyway. Though widely touted to be reintroduced after 14 years of being frozen and with a temporary 5p cut introduced by the last Government reversed the Chancellor Rachel Reeves in fact did not reinstate the fuel duty escalator despite it costing the Treasury over £100 Billion in lost revenue since 2010.

At the same time the Chancellor was at the dispatch box making cooing noises at motorists the Treasury confirmed that regulated rail fares in England would go up by 4.6% next year and the £30 Railcards by £5.00 except for the disabled card. The Welsh Government tends to quietly mirror what Westminster does on regulated fares. As of the beginning of November there is no indication what if any of their additional £1.7 Billion in funding for 2025 would be allocated to transport.

Better news on the infrastructure front was the announcement that the HS2 tunnels between Old Oak Common and Euston would be built, Trans Pennine Route Upgrade would be completed and East –West Rail would go all the way to Cambridge with electrification back on the table. Tram schemes in the West Midlands and Yorkshire also received funding. The transport announcements were limited to schemes that needed decisions made due to things like powers lapsing or planning needing approving. It was noticeable that public transport schemes went ahead but several road schemes were culled. The new Infrastructure Commission is due to release its recommendations and a 10-year infrastructure investment plan in the spring we will have to wait until then to find out more.

It was also confirmed pre budget that the sale of land for HS2 Phase 2a ordered by the previous Government will not go ahead. There has been strong lobbying to get the 60 KM from near Lichfield to Crewe reinstated in some form and it is hoped this will be announced in due course possibly with private sector involvement along with the building of Euston stations HS2 terminus. The Staffordshire/Cheshire stretch of HS2 has no stations on it nor tunnels and only one short viaduct and is in open countryside and will be a lot cheaper per mile to build than Phase 1. Bypassing the Stafford bottleneck on the WCML is seen as top priority to run more and more reliable services between Britain's major cities. It of course provides most benefit to the Cambrian as this releases capacity at Birmingham New St station and along the Stour valley line to Wolverhampton plus allows for Crewe station remodelling.

USEFUL ADDRESSES

Transport for Wales: Customer Relations, Transport for Wales Rail Services, St. Mary's House, 7 Penarth Road, Cardiff . CF10 5DJ Tel. 0333 3211 202

Network Rail:

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

Association of Community Rail Partnerships

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

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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Website host is Hostinger: <https://www.hostinger.co.uk/>

Find us on Facebook - Shrewsbury Aberystwyth Rail Passengers' Association:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1506868396111739>

Other sites of interest:

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
Avanti West Coast	www.avantiwestcoast.co.uk
Chiltern Railways	www.chilternrailways.co.uk/
Network Rail	www.networkrail.co.uk/
Railfuture/Railway Development Society	www.railfuture.org.uk/
Railwatch: the quarterly magazine of Railfuture	www.railwatch.org.uk
The Association of Community Rail Partnerships (Acorp)	communityrail.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
Talylyn Railway	www.talylyn.co.uk/
Welshpool and Llanfair Railway	www.wlfr.org.uk/
Welsh Highland Heritage Railway	www.whr.co.uk/
Fairbourne Railway	www.fairbournerailway.com/
Borth Station Museum	www.borthstationmuseum.co.uk
Real Time Trains	realtimetrains.co.uk
Live Rail Record	https://live.rail-record.co.uk

MONTHLY MEETINGS

December	Saturday 7th	11.45	Town Council Offices, Baker St, Aberystwyth
January	Saturday 18th	11.15	Royal Oak, Welshpool
February	Saturday 15th	11.15	White Lion, Machynlleth
March	Saturday 15th	11.30	The Montgomery Club, Newtown

Articles in the Newsletter contain the views of the contributors, not those of the Association.

Copy deadline for the next newsletter is 22nd February 2025