

Shrewsbury
Aberystwyth
Rail
Passengers'
Association

Newsletter
No. 39

April 2007

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CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

Having a pint in the Weatherpoons at Aberystwyth station one day waiting to come home I was thinking nothing is ever as it seems is it? Take UK Transport Secretary's Alexander Douglas's "1000 new carriages" to relieve overcrowding. Well not until 2014 and the sidings are even fuller of "off lease" rolling stock in the meantime. A decade has been spent merrily acquiescing to the franchise con, yet something could have been done at any stage in the last decade about overcrowding. Imagine calling a plumber who says I'll get round to it in 17 years! Or here in Wales where the fine print was omitted about the extra WAG funding of units for the Cambrian, guaranteed for Monday to Friday only, at the operators discretion at the weekend, as some have found out on 2 coach Saturday trains.

An oft quoted "fact" is that 70% of all journeys are by car and only 7% by rail. It's often used as a put down against rail campaigners. However look at the detail - it's not as simplistic as that. For a start 70% of all car journeys (50% of all journeys) are less than 5 miles in length: a market that rail is just not in. The bus which accounts for 15% of all journeys is also for predominately short distance trips. Journeys over 15 miles in the UK account for 20% of all trips made, and rail market share here leaps to 28%. So far from being a minor player rail is a major player in its market. Of course some individual flows show even greater reliance on the train. When you realise that rail is such a major player in certain markets it's then not too great a leap of faith to realise it is therefore very important economically to the country - it's nothing to do with anoraks and locomotive numbers I'm afraid. Travel from Aberystwyth to Shrewsbury (82 miles) and rail has a more than healthy market share as Transport Wales officials admitted privately

a couple of years back. Network Rail acknowledge this in their 2007 Business plan. The railway is tied up with the economy whether some people like it or not.

Which makes the decisions after the next Assembly election in May all the more important. Do we continue with our unrealistic minor incremental approach to rail improvements, or go for something a little bit more realistic and in tune with the needs of the 21st century? We have more European money to spend in the old Objective One areas this time around, with c£350 million (including match funding) being available for transport. Priority 3 is developing the strategic infrastructure for a modern economy and its objective - to equip the region with the physical infrastructure necessary for the development of a modern competitive economy, and to promote agglomeration effects. Attempts to resurrect the road building agenda are foundering on the out of control costs in the road construction industry (the current estimate for the A483 Pant/Llanymynach bypass (£50 million plus) mean that its cost benefit ratio is hopeless). So £50 million on the roads pays for a 3 miles of single carriageway bypass around two small villages in between two small border market towns, so a relatively small number of HGV's can shave a minute or two off their journey times. Where's the economic benefit of that versus the cost of provision? One rail scheme in the current round of structural funds is the Ebbw Vale line reopening. Reconnecting an area of c100,000 people to the rail network, six new stations, access to employment, training and shopping in the boom city of Cardiff for an unemployment black spot and all without adding to road congestion. Cost £28 million.

Rail will give a much better bang for your European funding than any road scheme can hope to achieve. Do we have the courage to move forward and grasp the opportunity?

Gareth Marston

Newtown, April 2006.

News in brief

Aberystwyth

Sources within the Welsh Assembly Government have confirmed that the Aberystwyth Masterplan is unlikely to include provision for the proposed station relocation.

An automatic ticket machine has appeared on the platform selling a range of more popular fares, designed to be a queue buster. Its Achilles heel appears to be that it can't cope with the wide range of destinations the users of the station request fares to.

There has been some disappointment as none of the four coach formations are reaching the town, on occasion resulting in passengers having to move forward through the train when it joins the extra carriages at Machynlleth.

Machynlleth

Progress on the new depot has speeded up since the New Year, the most notable aspect being the construction of a new two road shed under the cliff face at the far western end of the complex where the livestock pens used to be. However it has emerged that it has been built to the wrong dimensions. Units used on the Cambrian are of course of the Class 158 variety, 23m in length the new shed can accommodate 20m Class 150's. Some have also questioned its location in the most obvious part of the

railway land to expand the car park which is desperately needed. It has been pointed out that plenty of land exists at the eastern end of the complex.

A depot for the ERTMS equipment as been built on the UP side alongside the old entrance to the good depot. Two Class 37 locomotives have been fitted with GSM-R equipment ready for trials: they are believed to be 37411 and 37425.

A pair of Class 158's received graffiti/ paint damage in early April whilst stored overnight on April 1st/2nd.

Cemmaes Road – a victory for the middle class incomers?

Some local residents were up in arms over the GSM-R technology masts that have appeared along the line. They allege a lack of consultation and were worried about radiation from the masts some of which are within 100m of housing. A protest campaign attracting wide support has persuaded Network Rail to relocate the mast away from the centre of the village. Two masts will now be erected either side of the village.

Carno

Despite being deemed a viable option by Network Rail, WAG have instructed the GRIP 4 stage of the Cambrian One train per Hour Study to look at enhancing Talerddig loop and not relocating it to Carno as was floated initially. Carno Station Action Group feels this was a deliberate move to scupper any reopening of the village station.

Weig lane

The installation of automatic barriers and the lifting of the speed restriction are understood to be part of Network Rail plans for the ERTMs trial.

Moat Lane Junction

The island platform at the old junction is rapidly becoming the eyesore of the line with a collection of old HGV's and heavy plant being stored there serving no apparent purpose.

Newtown

Café Loco has closed (again). The latest sub tenant apparently "did a runner" and left the towns football club in the lurch also. The lease is now up for sale: call Tim Clarke on 07789 918141 if interested.

Already erected is the GSM-R mast next to the car park. Hundreds of residents of the Treowen estate live close by over the tracks. A working class estate with some single parent households. Opposition? Not a murmur!

The flower bed on the DOWN platform has received new concrete edging.

Shrewsbury

A combination of WAG, DfT and Shropshire CC money will see the lift restored to operational use on Platform 3 and Network Rail will fund the restoration of the platform line to full operational use. How this pans out and whether Cambrian services will use it

remains to be seen but it will definitely enhance operational flexibility at the station which once boasted 7 platforms, currently only 4 are in full use.

Wrexham

Wrexham and Shropshire Rail Company have suffered a setback, and have had to resubmit their plans to the Office of Rail Regulator following objections, mainly from Virgin Trains. Arriva also objected claiming that the new service would get in the way of their trains and make them late – which is exactly the same argument made by Virgin and Central Trains when Arriva try and get their trains paths to Birmingham International!

Freight on the Cambrian returns.

OK maybe not what you would expect if you remember the Stanlow Oil tanks to Aberystwyth but if you have a resource why not use it! The 0633 from Birmingham New St has been observed carrying a new PC to Machynlleth station and even a fridge freezer for the catering trolley base at Aberystwyth.

Remember those green ex Central Trains Class 158's?

Yes the ones that Arriva ran into the ground and handed back to their ROSCO in December 2006. A deal has been brokered that will see them and other off lease Class 158's replace the dreaded Pacer train across the Northern Rail franchise. However joy at Todmorden and Bolton etc for commuters may be short lived, unless they receive a refurbishment first, as out of service toilets, engrained dirt, broken seats, air conditioning that doesn't work are all supplied by Arriva as standard. The narrow doors at either end of the carriages will do nothing for delay minutes at busy stations either.

Cardiff Canton

20 MK2 railway carriages for sale. Arriva have no use for them –“surplus to Arriva's business needs”- despite endemic overcrowding across the franchise. Contact Tom Clift on 07887 988928or tom.clift@arrivatw.co.uk if interested.

c10% of WAG's annual subsidy is creamed off as profit, no improvements unless someone else pays for them, happy for overcrowding to continue. Which begs the question, is Arriva surplus to the requirements of the Welsh nation?

Basic maths

ATW's leasing costs of its Pacer and Class 150 Sprinter fleet = c£8 million a year for just under 100 carriages. The cost of building a new fleet of commuter trains for S Wales of 120 carriages = approximately £120 million. Life span 30 years cost per annum c£4 million. Now we know that the ROSCO's claim leasing costs cover heavy maintenance as well as capital costs, but the reality is that our Class 158 fleet will not be refurbished unless some one else pays for it. So why lease 20 yr old stock when buying new is cheaper if you cut out the middle man?

89C rises again

Due to come on line this summer, the upgraded depot at Machynlleth should not only see more jobs and activity, but also a raising in maintenance standards on our Class 158 trains. With ATW Class 158's on Cambrian service group duties failing and causing delays on average once a day (source: from NFRIP data *Modern Railways* January 2007) something was needed to boost reliability. Whilst ATW endlessly carp on about the infrastructure on the Cambrian as being the primary cause of delay on our line, it should be borne in mind that if their units did not fail so often the underlying weaknesses in the infrastructure provision would not be exposed so often. The line of corporate denial taken by ATW has rather pulled the rug from under their £1 million good news for the Cambrian, as if they shout about how better maintained the units will be they leave themselves open to the question of how poor they were before.

A lot of the problems with the Class 158's are that ATW have been trying to operate them remotely from any supportive maintenance facility. Machynlleth, as it is, has a very limited ability to fix things and do preventative maintenance. Units have to be sent back to Cardiff Canton and in doing so a day is lost in transit in each direction. The ability to fix more problems locally, and provide better TLC, will make a large difference. Don't expect a miracle like South West Trains Salisbury depot though, as unfortunately the units are expected to soldier on to the end of the franchise (2018) without any refurbishment.

Under Cambrian Railways auspices it was simply known as Machynlleth; the Great Western Railway knew it as MCH. 89C was its British Railways shed code (it's best remembered as this) from December 1947 to September 1963 as part of Western Region. For its last couple of years till closure in December 1966, the Midland Region knew it as 6F. The remaining steam locomotives up to March 1967 were run down from Shrewsbury and back on the same day. BR called it MN and down graded it to a stabling/fuelling point for diesels: a role it has performed for the last 40 years.

The original shed is the existing two road shed, built by the Newtown and Machynlleth Railway for the lines opening in 1863, measuring approximately 45-ft by 100-ft. There was a later 1873 addition - a three road shed measuring approximately 50-ft by 100-ft. By the 1970's the roof had to be dismantled on this portion and just the retaining walls remained until the early 90's when the remains were pulled down.

Why build an engine shed at Machynlleth anyway? Firstly it was the western terminus of the Newtown and Machynlleth Railway, and banking locomotives were needed for Talerddig bank on nearly all services, so it was a logical choice even after the formation of the Cambrian Railways, as locomotives based there could cover the coast line to Pwllheli as well. It was not the Cambrian Railways largest depot: Oswestry had that honour, a trend which continued up to the end of January 1965 and Oswestry's closure. The Great Western operated the ex-Cambrian Railways territory as the Central Wales Division and British Railways as the Oswestry Division. In both Machynlleth was one of the primary depots.

In December 1947 24 locomotives were based at Machynlleth. Further locomotives were sub-sheded at Corris (narrow gauge - 2), Aberystwyth (16), Pwllheli (4), Porthmadoc (9), Aberaeron (1), Aberystwyth (narrow gauge-3). Aberystwyth was made a sub shed of Machynlleth in 1932 and even though a new modern engine shed was built at Aberystwyth in 1938 – still in use today by the Vale of Rheidol Railway, its subsidiary status to Machynlleth remained. Aberystwyth remained as an overnight stabling point until 1982.

Typical duties for Machynlleth based engines were local passenger and freight workings on the coast, local passenger workings on the main line, bankers for Talerddig, main line freight and engines for the Dinas Mawddwy branch. Winter storage for older locomotives which were used for summer haulage was a feature of the 1950's, often stored against the cliff face. The last Cambrian locomotives lasted until the early 1950's along with the older GWR types that were drafted in after grouping. It was only in the last decade of steam that a modern more homogeneous stud of the BR Standards and Collett designed GWR locomotives really took grip.

After steam up to 1986 Midland Region DMU's based at Chester were the predominant type of stock that would be seen at Machynlleth depot. Duties included the coast line with a mix of turns to Shrewsbury, Crewe, Chester, Wolverhampton and Birmingham which saw the units regularly cycle back to their home base. 1986 brought about the Class 150 Sprinter and Regional Railways Tyseley depot was the main base. This continued into privatisation up until October 2001 with all services running through Birmingham near to home. The creation of the Wales and Border franchise changed this, and as outlined earlier the lack of ability to cycle units back to a home base has been somewhat of a weak point for Cambrian operations in the last few years.

Details of exact nature of the new facilities have not been very forthcoming so far. However it is understood that 17 Class 158's will be able to call Machynlleth their home base. With some of the units diagrammed away from the Cambrian there could be an increase in empty stock workings or service trains hauling out of use units on the rear. With locomotives rumoured to be 4 or 6 Class 37's also involved in the ERTMS trial, one thing is for sure is that Machynlleth will certainly be a busier place than it is now, with its half a dozen or so units stabled overnight, and an occasional out of service Class 158 seen on shed in the day.

Meet the Manager

From Arriva Trains Wales, early March

On the following dates our management team will be out and about on the network to meet with you, our customers, to discuss any issues you would like to raise and answer your questions.

25/4 Shrewsbury
30/5 Aberystwyth
27/6 Carmarthen
25/7 Bangor
29/8 Swansea
26/9 Cardiff Central
31/10 Newport
28/11 Chester

We look forward to meeting you and hearing your views.

Passenger Focus and meetings with ATW

Passenger Focus convened a meeting in Shrewsbury on 18th July 2006 that examined a number of the performance issues on the Cambrian line. A follow-up meeting was held six months later, at which ATW provided information on the incremental changes that have been implemented, although the company acknowledged that more still needs to be done for performance on the line to meet passenger expectations.

Passenger Focus has not undertaken any studies to verify the impact of the changes outlined, and consequently would welcome any comments or feedback from regular service users about their perspective of the impact of these changes.

email: simon.pickering@passengerfocus.org.uk

web: www.passengerfocus.org.uk PO Box 114, Chepstow, NP16 6WR

The information has been provided by Mike Bagshaw, ATW's commercial director [These are the views of ATW's management and are not endorsed by SARPA's committee.]

Performance

A number of the initiatives that were outlined at the July meeting have contributed to a noticeable improvement in performance. However, some of the gains from these changes had since been eroded through a combination of the leaf fall season and subsequent Network Rail imposed speed restrictions.

Following the changes, reliability rose from an average of 59.1% in May to early July to 75.1% ppm from mid July to mid October, and was reaching up to 91% on some days. During the leaf fall period performance fell back to 62.7%, although this compares to the same period a year earlier when ppm in some cases was lower than 40%.

Since the end of leaf fall, performance was increasing again. For the period between 10 December 2006 – 06 January 2007 ppm was 70.3% and has been steadily improving since.

(n.b. Public performance measure (PPM) numbers refer to all trains in the Cambrian service group so includes Aberystwyth - Birmingham, Pwllheli - Machynlleth and Chester - Birmingham.)

Fleet issues

Every radiator on the Cambrian fleet has recently gone through an acid dip to take it back to "as new" condition. In addition, every hydrostatic hose on the Cambrian '158' fleet has been replaced to assist with engine cooling.

ATW is also trialling three finless radiators to determine what style of radiator gives a better performance during periods of significant airborne pollutants.

ATW took delivery of a further 13 '175s' in December 2006, resulting in a cascade of rolling stock that has seen an improvement to the overall quality of '158s' used on the Cambrian, both in terms of performance and interior comfort and condition. One such benefit is that since the cascade there is now only one type of air conditioning system in the fleet, simplifying maintenance. A Summer preparation plan is also being developed.

The Welsh Assembly Government has agreed to extend funding for the operation of strengthened trains on the Cambrian, trialled in Summer 2006, through to December 2007.

Exterior cleaning

Following the July meeting, ATW has implemented more rigorous processes and standards with regards to exterior cleaning.

Every unit now goes through one of the company's wash plants at least every two days, while additionally at least one unit is hand washed at Machynlleth every evening.

Every unit goes through a periodic heavy clean every 28 days.

All these cleaning standards are monitored.

Toilets

Since July 2006, ATW has reduced the number of defective toilets at start of service from 6 per day start to 2 per day start across the ATW network. ATW is now aiming to reduce this to zero.

There is now a daily toilet tracker across the network to monitor this issue.

Infrastructure

A joint working group of ATW and NR representatives meets each month to discuss infrastructure issues on the Cambrian. This is continuing to identify and investigate areas of speed restriction on the route that may be lifted.

For example, there is a 30 mph speed restriction at a particular location on the Cambrian Coast that is linked to the issue of high seas. It is currently a permanent restriction, but its status will be changed so that it is only imposed in times of high seas.

Similarly, a number of speed restrictions have been identified that are linked to railway crossings that have subsequently been closed.

Timetable changes

The timetable has been adjusted so that trains depart Aberystwyth and Shrewsbury a few minutes earlier, to aid on-time running and ensure trains get to the critical passing points more punctually.

Information provision at Birmingham New Street

ATW has been working with Network Rail and other train operators (Central and Virgin) to improve information provision to passengers in the event of services being turned short at Wolverhampton.

Staff at Birmingham New Street have been issued with pagers linked to ATW control, while protocols have been established with platform staff at BNS and Wolverhampton in relation to information provision and dissemination in relation to late running train.

Ticket checks/revenue protection

ATW is now monitoring ticket sales from individual conductors to help ensure they are undertaking ticket checks.

ATW is also piloting other revenue protection initiatives such as extending ticket gate operating hours at Shrewsbury.

The view from milepost 62

with Brigadier John Faviell

Network Rail are better than Railtrack, aren't they? Well we've seen plenty of them and their contractors relaying track, putting up radio masts of dubious value etc. etc. recently, and were to be a big play set for a new signalling toy, ERTMS. Of course our friends at Arriva blame the infrastructure for our line's problems. One thing Network Rail have been decidedly poor at is reinstating capacity to our nation's rail infrastructure: one simple little loop in Caersws would have pulled the service out the muck on many an occasion since we've had the Wales and Borders franchise. At long last Network Rail has now recognised the blindingly obvious, that the network is growing and continuing to grow - despite DfT apparatchiks producing reports claiming that it won't. We need to have the capacity to accommodate today's traffic and tomorrow's growth, not the decline of the 60's and 70's. The £2.4 Billion in enhancements announced in the 2007 business plan are for up to the end of 2009.

So we've got Platform 3 coming back on line at Shrewsbury, but what else? Network Rail, instead of pulling their finger out, appears to be waiting on the WAG funding the hourly service. Further east we know that the stretch of track between Wolverhampton and Birmingham is very busy and can cause delay on our line. A quick look at the timetable reveals 9 trains per hour in each direction, all trying to cram down this double line stretch, expresses, stoppers all mixed up - no wonder it's a disaster! Once upon a time there were two main lines through the West Midlands: trains from Shrewsbury ran via the Great Western Paddington to Birkenhead route through Wolverhampton Low Level and Birmingham Snow Hill. Low Level is now gone and the rest of the formation occupied by the Midland Metro, but closer in to Birmingham the line from Stourbridge runs into a reopened Snow Hill and over the top of this line runs the ex LNWR line from Bescot to Soho Junction. A simple connecting spur could see traffic from the Wolverhampton direction access Snow Hill and beyond and thereby relieve pressure on New St. Likewise a new west spur at Bordesley could see trains from the East Midlands and even diverted trains from Euston accessing the spare capacity at Moor St station.

This is not a grand high speed line nor a cheap easy option, but nonetheless it is a win win option, for there are grand plans to redevelop New St station - but the ability to divert existing services is desperately needed, not just for during the reconstruction but also to ease pressure on the network's primary bottleneck. Tying our service to New St has always imported problems to our line, but we have to get away from the mentality that one main line station for a city the size of Birmingham is workable. Beeching's greatest folly was not the branch line closures but the closing/downgrading of what he called "duplicate main lines", which have in fact turned out to be desperately needed in the early 21st Century.

Network Rail are in danger of being remembered as the organisation that engineered a perfect railway for the perceived needs of the early 1990's. This may have helped try and keep transport swept under the carpet for New Labour and the dunderheads at DfT Rail Group, but history will very soon judge otherwise - unless Network Rail truly embraces what is called "enhancement" or what we in the real world call repair after vandalism.

ARRIVA TRAINS WALES INVITES APPLICATIONS FOR ITS NEW PASSENGER PANELS

Rail travellers throughout Wales are being invited by Arriva Trains Wales to join their new Passenger Panels. The panels will represent South and West Wales, North Wales and Mid Wales.

Each panel will meet quarterly and will be expected to be users of Arriva Trains Wales services. At the meetings they will get the opportunity to question ATW management on service provision and improvement programmes.

A summary of each of the meetings outcomes will be posted on the ATW website.

Passenger Panel members will be expected to serve for a term of three years and to elect their own chair. They will be provided with free rail tickets to the meeting venue plus other reasonable travel expenses such as car parking.

“Arriva Trains Wales, customer services director Ian Bullock said. “This is a golden opportunity for rail travellers to quiz us at Arriva Trains Wales about the services that affect them. We welcome the chance this offers for us to discuss these issues. It will help us improve our service to customers.”

Anyone interested in becoming a panel member should submit a brief biography and contact details to Arriva Trains Wales, Customer Services Department, St Mary’s House, Penarth Road, Cardiff CF10 5QT or visit the website at www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk.

‘Catch the BIG TRAINS to meet the Great Little Trains of Wales’ Promotion Launched

The Cambrian Railways Partnership has teamed up with some of the Great Little Trains of Wales (GLTW) to offer a **20% discount** on standard day returns on the following railways:

- The Welshpool & Llanfair Light Railway
- Corris Railway & Museum
- Vale of Rheidol Railway
- Talyllyn Railway
- Fairbourne Railway
- Ffestiniog Railway
- Welsh Highland Railway Ltd (Porthmadog)

on display of a valid ATOC Cambrian Rail ticket.

As well as running train services many of the railways featured have additional facilities, amenities and attractions such as Museums, Shops, Cafés, Licensed Bars and provide access to wonderful countryside walks – adding up to a great day out.

The Cambrian Railway Lines directly connect Shrewsbury, Wolverhampton and Birmingham with the Cambrian Coast resorts including Aberystwyth, Tywyn, Barmouth and Porthmadog. The Cambrian Lines provide a stunning and contrasting coast and countryside rail journey through mid Wales that offer a convenient and environmentally friendly way of accessing the area and its attractions such as the narrow gauge railways.

Ray Reid from the Talylyn Railway, on behalf of the Great Little Trains of Wales participating in the promotion, stated *"In the past the little trains carried goods to the big railways to be sent all over Britain. Now the big trains bring people from all over Britain to enjoy a ride on the little trains. GLTW is pleased to be associated with this promotion."*

Gerwyn Jones on behalf of the Cambrian Railways Partnership commented *"We are blessed in mid Wales with a wide variety of unique and charming narrow gauge railways. These have played an important role in the development of the area since Victorian times and today provide great visitor attractions in their own right – what better way to access them than on their bigger cousins on the Cambrian railway lines and in doing so benefiting from this 20% discount offer?"*

To promote the offer a leaflet with further details has been produced and is being distributed across the mid Wales area, Shropshire and the West Midlands.

For further information on the Cambrian Railways Partnership visit:

www.thecambrianline.co.uk

For further information on the participating railways visit:

The Welshpool & Llanfair Light Railway

www.wlfr.org.uk

Corris Railway & Museum

www.corris.co.uk

Vale of Rheidol Railway

www.rheidolrailway.co.uk

Talylyn Railway

www.talylyn.co.uk

Fairbourne Railway

www.fairbournerrailway.com

Ffestiniog Railway

www.festrail.co.uk

Welsh Highland Railway LTD (Porthmadog)

www.whr.co.uk

SHREWSBURY STATION TO GAIN FROM £738,000 INVESTMENT PROGRAMME

Arriva Trains Wales: March 5th

Passengers using Shrewsbury Railway Station will benefit from a major refurbishment of Platform 3 thanks to investment from the Welsh Assembly Government, the Department for Transport and Shropshire County Council.

The refurbishment project represents an investment of £738,000 and will be completed by March 2008. The investment package consists of £438,000 from Assembly Government, £250,000 from the Department for Transport's Access For All fund, and £50,000 from Shropshire County Council.

The refurbishment work involves the installation of a lift from the ground floor to Platform 3, as well as improving the lighting system and station signage. Around 1.3 million passengers travel through Shrewsbury Railway Station each year and the refurbishment will improve the accessibility of Platform 3.

Network Rail is in the process of developing a parallel investment scheme to modify the track and signalling layout at Shrewsbury Station in order to optimise the use of Platform 3 which is currently only used by one service in one direction. A significant number of services would then be able to use it.

In addition, the Railway Stations at Wrexham, Pontypridd, Llandudno Junction and Chester will benefit from the installation of new technology which will enable the lifts to be remotely operated when the stations are unstaffed. This will be of benefit to disabled passengers as the lifts are locked out of use when there are no station staff on duty.

Arriva Trains Wales, commercial director, Mike Bagshaw said: "The works at Shrewsbury will considerably enhance the services provided by Arriva Trains Wales at a key station in our network. The projects to provide remote lift operation at other key stations will provide for access to the platforms whenever the stations are open."

Dave Koring, Rail Officer for Shropshire County Council, said: "This is an exciting project which will be of great benefit to users of Shrewsbury station, and is a good example of how co-operation between Wales and England can produce real benefits."

Andrew Davies, Minister for Enterprise, Innovation and Networks said: "I am pleased to be able to commit further funding for this important cross border station. This is a key passenger station for Welsh rail users and increased use of Platform 3 will help to increase performance of ATW's services, including the Cambrian service.

"I announced in my Written Cabinet Statement on the 1st December that Network Rail have undertaken an initial feasibility study on improving the Aberystwyth to Shrewsbury Cambrian mainline train service from two-hourly to hourly. There are a number of viable options including improved passing loops and a workable regular hourly pattern timetable on the mainline between Aberystwyth and Shrewsbury which would benefit current performance levels and also improve journey times between the south and north sections of the Cambrian Coast railway through improved connections. Journey opportunities east of Shrewsbury would also be considerably improved."

The latest news is that the study is at 'Grip 4 Stage' - with detailed costs for the preferred programme of works being done. The result is due to be announced in July 2007.

40th ANNIVERSARY EXHIBITION ‘OVER THE POINTS – 1967’: THE END OF STEAM IN SHREWSBURY

A major exhibition recalling the end of the steam era for rail services in Shropshire and the closure of the Shrewsbury engines sheds is to be staged in Shrewsbury this summer.

The Exhibition is being organised by the Shrewsbury Railway Heritage Trust and forms part of the Shrewsbury Summer Season. It will be held at **The English Bridge Workshop Gallery, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury (Tel 01743 243283)** with support from other groups involved with Shrewsbury's railway history.

The planned Summer 2007 Exhibition would underline Shrewsbury's importance as a key centre of the steam age, and its place in the national network. It is planned to exhibit paintings and photographs of Shrewsbury at the height of the steam age, along with other memorabilia, including old timetables and it is hoped that visitors will include a high percentage of Shrewsbury's existing and retired railway staff. There will also be a programme of films and Illustrated talks on evenings throughout the Exhibition.

If you have any relevant material to donate to the Trust e.g. interesting items of memorabilia relating to Shrewsbury's remarkable railway heritage, please contact Cllr Williams on (01743) 235103 or email him on - mansel.williams@shrewsbury.gov.uk The Shrewsbury Railway Heritage Trust will record and safely store for exhibition and display purposes, any items you wish to donate to the Trust.

Councillor Williams says "We know that there is a tremendous ongoing interest in railway issues in Shrewsbury, including our moves to restore the Old Abbey Station of the Shropshire and Montgomeryshire Railway in Abbey Foregate, where building work is planned to commence during 2007."

THE EXHIBITION WILL RUN FROM THURSDAY, JUNE 21 TO SATURDAY, JULY 7 2007, At the ENGLISH BRIDGE WORKSHOP GALLERY, ABBEY FOREGATE, SHREWSBURY SY2 6AD Tel 243283

Aeron Valley Railway Society

The Aeron Valley Railway Society has a programme of talks, film shows, outside visits, and an annual model railway exhibition.

Meetings on the third Wednesday of the month, 7.30pm, in the Victoria Inn, Aberaeron. Website <http://www.denisbates.uwclub.net/AVRS.htm>

SARPA to Rhodri Morgan AM, First Minister, National Assembly for Wales

Dear Mr Morgan,

Our organisation notes the recent announcement from DEIN that the Merthyr railway branch is to receive £19 million of investment to allow the frequency of passenger services to be increased to half hourly from its current hourly provision and the creation of additional car parking spaces at Abercynon. Whilst as a group supporting rail services across Wales we welcome this decision our members cannot but help compare and contrast the seemingly different standards adopted to rail investment in different parts of the country.

Figures from the Office of the Rail Regulator reveal that the Merthyr branch usage in 2004/2005 was c525,000 journeys, up in Mid Wales the Cambrian lines west of Shrewsbury saw c1,300,000 in the same period that's 250% more journeys. Yet we only have a train service once every two hours in Mid Wales. Sometimes there is precious little thin air on our trains they are so busy. The Assembly has funded extra carriages on our line but only up to the end of 2007, the equivalent of £500,000 this year which also benefits rail users in Shropshire and the West Midlands. In terms of investment beyond the scope of the franchise agreement with Arriva Trains Wales that equates to approximately £36.00 per existing journey on the Merthyr branch and about £0.38 per existing journey on the Cambrian lines.

There has been a long standing proposal to increase the frequency of services on the Cambrian main line between Aberystwyth and Shrewsbury to hourly but as of yet no firm commitment from the Assembly apart from a feasibility study with Network Rail.

Andrew Davies, the Minister for Enterprise, Innovation and Networks said of the Merthyr investment:

"This latest investment is another demonstration of our commitment to restoring and improving rail services across Wales – a top priority for the Welsh Assembly Government".

The people of Mid Wales would be interested to know when the long overdue announcement of improvements to our rail services will be made?

As you are no doubt aware rightly or wrongly there is a widely held perception in Mid Wales that the Assembly favours the areas around Cardiff over and above the rest of the country. Confirmation of investment in our rail services and the hourly service would go some way to dispel that perception.

Yours truly,

14th February 2007

A Civil Servant replied that the Merthyr scheme was more advanced than the 'Cambrian one train per hour project', and that WAG's current investment was £1.5 million (unsubstantiated).

Websites

Our website <http://sarpa.info> **Webmaster Angus Eichoff**

Website host is object4.net

Other sites of interest:

Arriva Trains Wales

www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk/

National Rail Enquiries

www.nationalrail.co.uk/

Train and Bus Information Midlands

www.centro.org.uk/wwwroot/HomePage.asp

Central Trains

www.centraltrains.co.uk/

Virgin Trains

www.virgintrains.co.uk/default.aspx

Chiltern Railways

www.chilternrailways.co.uk/

Network Rail

www.networkrail.co.uk/

Railfuture/Railway Development Society

www.railfuture.org.uk/

Cambrian Rail Partnership

www.thecambrianline.co.uk/

The Association of Community Rail Partnerships (Acorp)

www.acorp.uk.com

Website of the new Wrexham to London company

www.wrexhamandshropshire.co.uk/index.html

Transport 2000

www.transport2000.org.uk

SARPA Meeting dates and venues 2006-07

May	Tues 1st	1915	Welshpool Pinewood Tavern
June	Tues 5th	1930	Shrewsbury Railway Station
July	Sat 7th	1130	Borth Victoria Inn
August	Tues 7th	1900	Newtown Bell Hotel
September	Tues 4th	1845	Machynlleth Tabernacle
October	Sat 6th	1145	AGM: RAFA Club Aberystwyth
November	Tues 6th	1915	Welshpool Pinewood Tavern
December	Tues 4th	1900	Newtown Bell Hotel

Useful addresses

Arriva Trains Wales:

St Mary's House, 47 Penarth Road, Cardiff CF10 5DJ. Tel 0845 6061 660
Email: customer.services@arrivatrainswales.co.uk

Network Rail:

Community Relations, Railtrack House, Euston Square, London NW1 2EE

Newtown Station Travel

The Railway Station, Old Kerry Road, Newtown, Powys SY16 1BP. Tel. 01686 621966
E-mail info@newtownstation.co.uk

The Association of Train Operating Companies:

ATOC, 3rd Floor, 40 Bernard Street, London WC1N 1BY

Central Trains Limited

Central Trains Limited, PO Box 4323, Birmingham B2 4JB . Tel. 0121 654 1200

Association of Community Rail Partnerships

Rail & River Centre, Canal Side, Civic Hall, Slaithwaite, Huddersfield HD7 5AB

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

Ceri Davies, Rail Franchise Performance Manager

Rail and New Roads Division, Transport Wales, Welsh Assembly Government, Cathays Park, Cardiff, CF10 3NQ. Direct Line (029) 2082 6561. Ceri.davies@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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