

Shrewsbury Aberystwyth Rail Passengers' Association

Newsletter No. 73

AUGUST 2017

ARE FINES AND /OR PENALTY FARES COMING TO THE CAMBRIAN LINES?

National Conditions of Travel and Railway Byelaws 2005.

Amodau Teithio'r Rheilffyrdd Cenedlaethol ac Is-ddeddfau'r Rheilffyrdd 2005.

Buy before you board

When ticket buying facilities are in operation at this station, you must buy a ticket before you board the train.

mTickets must also be activated before you board the train.

Travelling without a valid ticket could result in prosecution and a fine of up to £1000.

For more information:
www.arrivatrains.wales/bbyb

Prynu tocyn cyn mynd ar drên

Pan mae cyfleusterau prynu tocynnau ar waith yn yr orsaf hon, mae'n rhaid ichi brynu tocyn cyn ichi fynd ar y trêr.

Rhaid i ddogynnau ar ffonau symudol (mTickets) gael eu gwneud yn weithredol hefyd cyn ichi fynd ar y trêr.

Gallai teithio heb docyn diliys arwain at erlyniad a dirwy o hyd at £1000.

I gael mwy o wybodaeth:
www.trenauarriva.cymru/prynwch-tocyn

These notices are appearing at stations on the Cambrian Lines. No one can complain about Arriva Trains Wales trying to ensure that all passengers pay appropriately for their travel, but it will do them no favours to take a heavy hand on the Cambrian Lines. The poster offers little information and is hardly without threats. And based on the evidence to date of their communication strategy for the change leaves much to be desired.

A Welshpool resident has complained about the situation to the local MP and AM as well as Arriva Trains Wales. The reply received from Lewis Brencher (Head of Communications at Arriva Trains Wales) seemed to show, at the very least, a lack of knowledge of the Cambrian Lines. The letter sets out that "many stations already have a means to purchase a ticket" and goes on with a bit of self praise stating "[we] have installed 136 ticket vending machines on our network over recent years".

Well yes, some stations on the Cambrian lines do have ticket machines and Newtown, Aberystwyth, and Machynlleth have manned ticket offices for at least some part of the day. Remote from their stations the Welshpool Tourist Information Centre is open on Sundays as well as weekdays, and Barmouth TIC sells tickets during the summer. So far as machines are concerned there isn't one at Machynlleth, Newtown, Borth or Dovey Junction or anywhere up the coast line from there to Pwllheli (25 stations or request stops in all). Aberystwyth, Shrewsbury, Caersws and Welshpool do have ticket machines but only at the first two stations are cash **and** cards accepted. It is to be hoped that revenue protection staff will know which stations have ticket offices/machines and which ones don't. And for the former when they are actually open. Also and more importantly which machines take cash and cards or just cards and are actually working.

Further none of these machines offer "permission to travel" or certain types of tickets which may well be needed, for example when a passenger has a particularly difficult or complex booking. Of course what will

not be accepted will be when someone just doesn't have time to get a ticket from a machine. This is a very likely scenario when there are fifty plus people trying to catch a train at a station such as Welshpool. Are passengers expected to turn up half an hour before the train departs at this station with completely inadequate cover in inclement weather? Or what of the passenger who is genuinely concerned that if something happens to their card and it cannot be retrieved, when there are no nearby facilities from which to get help?

In fairness to the train operator their letter referred to above does state "Passengers who board at stations without ticket facilities (including where machines are not working) will be able to buy the full range of tickets on the train. Where passengers chose not to use functioning ticket falsities [sic] before boarding, if they then seek to purchase on the train then the full range of discounted/value tickets will no longer be available to them. Instead they will be charged the full fare...The exception to this is for disabled holders of a Disabled Persons Railcard in circumstances where passengers may not be able to use ticket vending machines". No mention of cash payments here or does Arriva want to do away with this inconvenient way of paying?

The letter also notes "we are currently investing a significant effort in communicating these obligations to passengers". This does not seem to be the case so far. The notice itself is threatening. The information being given to passengers seems unduly harsh and possibly inaccurate. For example on Saturday, July 15, a passenger travelling with three others from Welshpool to Shrewsbury who tried to pay in cash (having no credit/debit card) was taken to task by the conductor for not buying tickets at the station and forcibly told "**there is a big campaign going on and next time you will be fined for not having a ticket**". On Friday this same party going from Welshpool to Barmouth had no problems using a credit card and no information was given to them regarding the changes.

An e-mail to the Director of Customer Services asking for clarification sent on July 18 remains unanswered as of July 31.

Arriva Trains Wales lost an ideal opportunity to put their case and explain what was happening at their annual meeting of Station Adopters on the Cambrian Lines held on July 14 where about sixty people were present. Indeed much was (rightly) made of not putting barriers up to passengers and making their journey seamless. Perhaps this was because Arriva was extremely keen to keep the meeting "positive". And also perhaps because the trigger for this offensive lies with the poorly performing on-board ticket machines which certainly can take a long time to deliver tickets when paid for by credit/debit cards and have resulted in a considerable loss of revenue if local observations are to be believed.

The Cambrian Lines are generally considered to provide a friendly and welcoming on board environment and the Machynlleth staff is to be particularly singled out for praise. A clumsy implementation of this new ruling by the Revenue Protection Staff will rent this asunder. Therefore Revenue Protection Staff and Conductors (especially those without local knowledge) must be fully briefed on the ticketing facilities which are available on the lines (and their times of operation) and the rules regarding the use of cash as opposed to credit/debit cards. There is the potential for considerable problems unless the Revenue Protection Staff follow the recommendations of a Partner Update notice to the Shrewsbury Aberystwyth Railway Liaison Committee, dated July 2012, which states that the application of the rules needs consistency, discretion, fairness, accountability and transparency.

A smooth transition depends on good communication and unfortunately there isn't a lot of confidence in this happening. However, Mr Brencher, in a covering e-mail to his enquirer notes "I would be keen to arrange to meet [...] SARPA to discuss [this matter] in more detail. I would be grateful if you could share the dates of any forthcoming meetings so that [...] I can attend". Rest assured members we appreciate his offer and intend to take him up on it.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING APPROVED FOR THE NEW BOW STREET STATION

Under the headline "New station boost for passengers thanks to £16 million government investment", the Westminster Government has approved the spending of £3.945 million towards a total project cost of £6.76 million for the rebuilding of **Bow Street** station.

This is part of a total package of £16 million towards the building of five stations. The others are:

Horden Peterlee in County Durham which will receive £4.4 million of DfT funding towards a scheme worth £10.55 million [two platforms]

Warrington West in Cheshire, which will receive £4.23 million towards a total project cost of £17.2 million [two platforms]

Reading Green Park which will receive £2.3 million towards a total project cost of £16.5 million [two platforms]

Portway Parkway, Bristol which will receive £1.672 million towards a total project cost of £2.23 million

The press release says that "the station will act as a park and ride site for Aberystwyth and Borth stations and will help traffic congestion in Aberystwyth."

Rail Minister Paul Maynard said:

"We are committed to improving journeys for passengers right across the country. This means delivering more trains, quicker journeys and making more seats available.

The new stations fund is a great example of how our record investment in the railways and work with local authorities and industry is delivering better journeys for passengers and boosting local economies."

SARPA Statement

As a result of a decision taken at their meeting in August SARPA has written to the Ken Skates Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure regarding the likely effect of the opening on performance on not only the Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth line but the Cambrian Coast line from Machynlleth to Pwllheli and the line from Shrewsbury to Birmingham International with potential knock on effects on other operators.

It points out that it is "generally assumed that a station stop will add 2-3 minutes running time on average. The Bow St station site has uphill 1 in 75 inclines either side of it for a mile and a half in both directions. Trains stopping going down hill will take more time than on the flat and a train starting on an incline will take longer to get back to line speed than one that does it on the flat, thereby consuming more minutes than the average station stop. Its abundantly clear the extra minutes taken up to stop at Bow St will consume what little recovery margin there currently is at Aberystwyth, and UP trains will present themselves at the next passing loop at Dovey Junction late on a regular basis with knock on effects. This is also the view of local railwaymen and women in Mid Wales whom we talk to".

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

As your acting Chairman until our AGM in October 2017 at Machynlleth it is my pleasure to introduce a slightly new style *Newsletter*. The aim is to give our readers more information on current and proposed events which affect the Cambrian lines especially at this time of franchise renewal.

This doesn't mean that we are going to desert the historical. What we are going to do is try to include shorter pieces of direct relevance which let you know what happens at the SARPA monthly meetings and news from other rail associations, government, etc. However, our stalwart editor, Denis Bates, can only include information if he receives it. So please communicate with him. His details are at the end of the *Newsletter* under Officers of the Association.

Meanwhile to more immediate matters. The sooner we can get all of our 24 2-car 158 units back to Machynlleth the better. Loadings on the line from Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth are already heavy on many trains especially during the holiday seasons and at peak times. The Coast Line is the same during the summer time. A case of six car trains at least from Shrewsbury to Machynlleth with enhancement from the current two cars up the coast at peak times? We must also do all that we can to ensure, at the very least, a full hourly service when the new franchise commences.

Following the previous two Chairmen with all their knowledge of railways historical and current has been a somewhat daunting task and I thank all the Committee Members who have given me a great deal of help and guidance during the last months. We want SARPA to reflect the concerns of our members, so please try to come to the monthly meetings, contribute to the *Newsletter* or indicate your willingness to stand for the Committee when the AGM comes around. And remember from October of this year SARPA needs a new Chairman.

Ivor Morris, Acting Chairman

SARPA MEETINGS

Since the last *Newsletter* the Association has met in Newtown, Aberystwyth, Tywyn, Machynlleth and Welshpool. Some of the key issues debated and not included elsewhere in this *Newsletter* included:

- The possible re-opening of Bow Street caused concern over the likely effect on the timetable. A letter has been sent to Ken Skates, Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure. Reported in this *Newsletter*.
- Reports on the activities of the Shrewsbury to Chester Rail Users Association (including the possibility of new services from Liverpool to Wrexham/Gobowen; the Solihull and Leamington Rail Users Association (reference to a new body West Midland Rail which was hopefully going to modelled on the Merseyrail principle and had considerable ambitions; a master plan for the Stour Valley and the cessation of catering on all Chiltern Trains; and the Cotswold Line Passenger Group (developments on services from Worcester and Kidderminster).
- The need to include in the *Newsletter* a directory of all those rail organisations with relevance to the Cambrian Lines.
- The lack of easy to understand time table information for Coast Line to Aberystwyth connections. This has been remedied by Denis Bates and is reproduced in this *Newsletter*.
- The lack of effective air-conditioning on the trains and the filthy windows
- Two bidders remained for the new franchise: Abellio and Arriva Trains Wales.
- DfT had vetoed the sub-leasing (funded by Arriva Trains Wales) of 158 units from Northern. It was intended that these units would plug gaps whilst the others were upgraded to comply with disability legislation.
- The AGM on October 7 would now commence at 2.00pm
- The next Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Line Liaison Committee is now scheduled for October 6, 2017.

CAMBRIAN COAST EXPRESS TO RUN IN OCTOBER

Pathfinder has announced a tour to Pwllheli, under the title of **The Cambrian Coast Express**, on the 10th October. This will commemorate the opening of the Barmouth Bridge exactly a hundred years ago to the day.

The train will originate from Bristol Temple Meads behind a Class 67 locomotive, and will be hauled from Shrewsbury by a pair of Network Rail Class 97/3 locomotives, equipped with ERTMS in-cab signalling.

NEWS

ARRIVA TRAINS WALES

REAMS OF PAPER

Passengers purchasing their tickets on Cambrian Lines trains will be well aware of the reams of paper they receive as a ticket. Added to the waste of paper the length of time in producing the documents is certainly causing problems. One SARPA member reports that it took half of the journey time from Welshpool to Newtown to produce tickets for four people. This must lead to a loss of revenue and figures as high as 60% have been quoted for some parts of the journeys. Arriva Trains Wales say that they are unaware of such a dip in their receipts.

Apart from difficulties of production and the inconvenience of strips of paper the system will still not produce tickets which will allow passengers to cross London with ease. All this is difficult to understand as Scotrail, Virgin and London Midland all have the same on-train ticketing operating systems but print out the old style tickets without problems.

ANNUAL STATION ADOPTERS MEETING

The 14th Annual meeting was held in the tranquil setting that is the Plas Dolguog Hotel, Machynlleth, on Friday, July 14, 2017. Arriva staff present included Geraint Morgan (Community Relations Manager), Lynn Milligan (Customer Services Director), David Crunkhorn (Station Manager Cambrian Lines) and Phil Caldwell. The appreciation of Arriva staff for all the hard work done by volunteers was very genuinely and sincerely expressed. They stressed that the railway really benefits from truly local input.

Attention was drawn to the fact that Wi-Fi will be available on all trains by September and that the top fifty footfall stations in Wales will be similarly equipped through WAG funding; the website now shows the delay compensation key very prominently on the home page; the orange wallet scheme had their strong support; the importance of security especially the "See it/Say it/Sorted" advice to passengers; the impressive range of programmes run on the Conwy Valley Line and in North Wales to help those passengers with access and engagement problems (including the Vlog Central safety project orchestrated by a school in Blaenau Ffestiniog). All these projects have gained national media coverage and will be attempting to win various awards especially at ACORD.

Four pupils from Ysgol Arddudwy (Harlech) spoke of their aims in adopting Harlech station. They took on the task in 2016 for a number of reasons: 75% of the pupils use the train everyday; to reduce tension between the youngsters and older people in the town; to give something back to the local community and give it a boost. Their not inconsiderable efforts and innovative ideas had almost eliminated vandalism at the station, something which had previously been a serious concern. The *Tales on Rails* scheme was also highlighted. This being the year of legends schools in Harlech and Barmouth took part in story-telling on the trains and in the local library.

An excellent presentation was given on Borth Station Museum. This is the only station in which adopters also run a museum. Since opening in July 2011 it has hosted 36,000 visitors. (See *Up and Down the Line* for further information).

The range of activities and programmes undertaken by Arriva Trains Wales is certainly to be welcomed and admired. It was also interesting to hear of their problems not least with Network Rail. For example, a question was raised about the "dumpy bags" of material at Caersws. Of course their removal and/or use is dependant on Network Rail and has nothing to do with Arriva Trains Wales. Similarly with the Royal Welsh Show due they are making an attempt to ensure that relevant stations are up to scratch especially regarding the grass and weeds growing in the track. In spite of their remonstrations nothing has yet happened. As the spokesperson said they get blamed for the "mess" but are unable to do anything about it.

The programmed part of the meeting was over-whelmingly positive. However, this fell apart a little in question time where the old problem of communication reared its head. Poor quality information on trains

and at stations was the theme. That morning those travelling from Welshpool had a blank screen at the station and an on-train indicator throughout the journey stating the "next station is Birmingham New Street". Surely if the on-train indicators are not working the conductor should turn them off? As if to emphasise the problems those catching the 14.56 to Pwllheli after the meeting heard the announcement at Machynlleth that the front two coaches were for the Coast Line and the rear two for Aberystwyth. Needless to record the matter of reams of paper for a ticket was raised and is reported elsewhere.

The meeting certainly served to record Arriva's thanks to their adopters and it did highlight some of the problems that they encounter. It also served to show the diversity of people and their many needs which the train company has to deal with every day. Often in terms of customer awareness the real problem is a complete lack of common sense in the travelling public, although Arriva Trains Wales were careful not to express it in this way. But one is left wondering, as in so many other cases, that it is the "big" project which scores against the small because seemingly it ticks the boxes of high-visibility publicity and the chance for awards. However, often a range of small projects would bring greater over-all benefits----a case of the sum of the parts being greater than the whole. The failure to have an integrated railway system was also very notable. Finally it is interesting to learn that there is no contact between the Arriva bid team for the new franchise and those currently operating the railway.

There is no doubt that to keep up with all that is happening it is very necessary to follow social media including Facebook, Instagram and Twitter where ATW has 50,000 followers.

CAMBRIAN RAILWAYS PARTNERSHIP

With Rhidian Mason (Rail Development Officer) having moved on to Network Rail his post is to be taken by Claire Williams. She hopes to take up her post in September and will be based at Aberystwyth.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR WALES

Our last *Newsletter* contained a list of the issues raised at a Meeting of the Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Rail Liaison Committee regarding requirements from the new franchise. In June 2017 by the National Assembly for Wales, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee issued a sixty-nine page document entitled ***On the right track? The Rail Franchise and South Wales Metro*** bringing together the results of all the consultations and its recommendations.

In the Chair's Foreword to this important contribution to the franchise debate Russell George notes "Awarding a rail franchise is not simple. In fact it's pretty tricky". He goes on to note that the current franchise based, as it is on a "no growth" assumption, is an example of where a franchise letting "hasn't been particularly well done". He notes the extra challenges which pertain in this case:

- The long-promoted devolution of powers from the UK Department of Transport to the Welsh Government, which would allow them to award the franchise, has been delayed
 - Our inquiry has revealed new uncertainty over the terms of the UK government's £125m funding commitment to the Valley Lines electrification
 - There is uncertainty over EU funding too
 - The Welsh Government's plan for a vertically integrated Core Valleys Lines network is innovative
 - The promised electrification of the Great Western mainline from Cardiff to Swansea still has no confirmed start date
 - Current rolling stock on the franchise is around 30 years old, and only keeps running thanks to a demanding maintenance schedule and miracle-working engineers. And it doesn't meet the minimum legal standards that will be required by 2020 to ensure access for all passengers
 - The Welsh Government's own legislation promoting sustainable development means that polluting diesel trains may need to be replaced with cleaner alternatives
 - Passengers in England are concerned that a railway run from Wales will marginalise their needs
- George records the setting up of Transport for Wales and summarises that this report "examines the various challenges facing the Welsh Government and others...It highlights concerns in a number of areas,

and sets out how the growing mass of organisations involved in rail services in Wales and the Borders need to work together if the people of Wales are to receive the 21st Century rail services they demand”.

The report highlights ten key priorities for the new franchise:

- Effective monitoring: Performance measures should include: passenger satisfaction (as measured by the National Rail Passenger Survey)---punctuality, reliability, passenger growth, the condition and maintenance of rolling stock
- Greener railway
- Integrated network: clock-face timetabling where possible in a franchise which prioritises integration including smart ticketing and effective connections with the bus network and other train services
- Adaptable services: a willingness to explore new routes and services and service frequencies which meet passenger needs
- Affordable fares with clear, simple, ticketing options
- New trains: sufficient high quality rolling stock which meets demand now and in the future, which is accessible and with adequate space for wheelchair users and service dogs, space for luggage, cycle storage and prams. It should have Wi-Fi connectivity, USB/plug sockets, air conditioning/ functioning heating, improved cleanliness and adequate toilet facilities including baby-changing facilities, catering and refreshment services that are appropriate for long journeys: and a contactable member of staff on board.
- Better communication: improved on-board information and communication on connections and delays
- Modern stations: stations that meet or exceed the minimum expectations of passengers, a commitment to and funding for community rail projects
- Fair fares
- Reduced disruption: improved management of delays and disruption

As back ground to the report various public meetings were held and there were face-to-face surveys as well as ones on-line and in paper-based formats. At one SARPA Meeting some members complained that the public meeting in Aberystwyth had not been well advertised. In answer to the question “Which parts of the network do you use to travel by rail?” only 3.5% of responses were received from those who use the Cambrian Lines and Shrewsbury to Birmingham. Meetings were also held with Stakeholder groups and SARPA attended the one on March 9, 2017.

The main report, the ten key priorities and the notes of the stakeholder event in March are all readily available on the web. It is strongly recommended that SARPA members take a look at these and let us know their reactions.

One member has already made the following comments whilst noting the formal submissions that SARPA has made to the franchise process. Attention is drawn to two particular paragraphs:

179. Includes the following: “Free passage between carriages and a move away from dividing units”
- 182, “Both the Cabinet Secretary and [Transport for Wales (TfW)] described themselves as “agnostic” on [Driver Only Operation (DOO)]”.

If implemented on the Cambrian Lines 179 would be bad for Coast service users whilst SARPA have always opposed Driver Only Operation. In general the franchise renewal is to be welcomed and the move to more local (Cardiff) control should help accountability. It seems that there will be little more information and debate for the rest of the year. We can then hope for news and be ready to respond as needed.

To summarise and using a headline from the on-line journal *Rail Technology Magazine* the priorities are ‘heroically ambitious’. Let us hope that they are achieved to the benefit of the users of our railways. The short-list of bidders for the franchise is: Abellio Rail Cymru, Arriva Rail Wales/Rheilffyrdd Arriva Cymru Limited. However, at the August meeting of SARPA it was understood that only Abellio and Arriva Trains Wales are now in contention for the franchise. It would now seem that this has been reduced to two: Abellio and Arriva Trains Wales.

NATIONAL RAIL FIGURES 2016/2017

Rail use in the Regional and Long Distance sectors increased by 4% from the previous year, however the effect of the long running dispute on Southern has seen London and South East usage increase by only 0.8%. The Estimates of Station Usage for 2016/2017 – where we can publicly access usage figures for Cambrian line stations, is not due to be released until December 2017.

39% of tickets sold were season tickets, just under 4% being Advance Purchase with the vast bulk of tickets being sold being Anytime, Off Peak, Off Peak Day and Super Off Peak tickets that can be bought on the day of travel and don't need to be pre-purchased.

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

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

TRANSPORT FOCUS

Despondent rail passengers call for better services in Wales

The following is reproduced with the permission of Transport Focus from their on-line publication *Transport User Voice*: (<https://www.transportfocus.org.uk/news-events-media/transport-user-voice-newsletter/>). It is presented in English and Welsh but only the former is reprinted here. The report entitled *The Future of the Wales and Borders Rail Service: What Passengers Want* (dated June 29, 2017) is referenced. This is also available on-line together with the *Wales and Borders Rail Service Passenger Research-Agency Report* and the *Wales and Borders Consultation Response* (May 2017)

Passengers travelling on Wales and Borders services are calling for an overhaul of tired and over-crowded train services when a new contract is awarded in 2018.

In our latest research, Arriva Trains Wales passengers told us what they wanted to see as part of their future service.

Passengers' top priorities for the next operator include more seats and more space to deal with overcrowding, a more punctual and reliable service and new trains. Passengers say they find current facilities and stations outdated and in need of investment.

Passengers do however rate their local staff highly and see them as generally friendly, helpful and approachable. We're now calling on the next operator to build on this good relationship local staff have with passengers to develop a more positive image of the new service and operator.

Passengers would like to see Transport for Wales, the Welsh Government, Network Rail and the next operator of the Wales and Borders rail service put forward a clear plan to address these issues. The current Arriva Trains Wales franchise was contracted on a 'zero growth' basis without the investment needed to cope with the surge in the number of passengers. Passengers must see a commitment to investment from the new service to meet growing demand and expectations for improved quality across the network.

What passengers say

The following quotes from passengers in our focus groups outline some of the key areas for improvement for the next rail service:

"Arriva trains seem quite grubby and old and they are just rundown." Frequent Swansea leisure passenger

"The conductors are always helpful if you want to know where to change trains, what platform you want or if you want directions...They do go the extra mile." Frequent Machynlleth leisure passenger

"I'm just fed up and dejected. It's like everyday there's something that happens and there's nothing we can do about it. I need to get to work but I have to put up with just constant delays and disruptions." Frequent Llandudno commuter

"The man at the ticket office at the station is great. He gives me advice on all sorts like what ticket I can buy and how much those cost." Leisure passenger

Reacting to the findings of the report our Chief Executive Anthony Smith said:

"Many passengers in Wales are currently travelling on trains well past their sell-by date. Older trains, carrying more passengers than the number of seats available, makes for an uncomfortable journey. Passengers deserve better.

"Persistent delays to services on parts of the current Arriva Trains Wales network have diminished the expectations of passengers. It's important that the next operator and Network Rail get the basics right to rebuild trust with passengers.

"The competition for the next Wales and Borders operator provides a great opportunity to get a good deal for passengers. Transport for Wales, the Welsh Government and the next Wales and Borders operator need to listen to passengers and take action to improve future services."

What next?

Transport Focus will now work with Transport for Wales, the Welsh Government and the Department for Transport and to ensure future services reflect passengers' needs and help prospective bidders propose ambitious and high-quality proposals.

UP AND DOWN THE LINE

BARMOUTH

Recently, we have been hearing that Arriva crews and others have been spreading the word that there is going to be a two-year complete closure of Barmouth Bridge. However, conversations with insiders at Network Rail suggest that there is no such plan. What is definitely happening is that work on the River Artro timber bridge at Pensarn between 27 October and 6 November will require bus replacement north of Barmouth, and during both weekends in this period the block will be extended for work on the longitudinal timber work of Barmouth Viaduct.

It is true that there is further maintenance work planned on the viaduct (if funds are allocated) in the next five-year 'control period' from 2019 to 2024, including grit-blasting and painting of the metal spans, but we are assured that there will be no 'huge blockades.'

From Charlie Hulme's North Wales Coast Railway website 17th July.

Ticket buying facilities at Barmouth in the old Tourist Information Centre are to restart this summer under private ownership.

BORTH

There is an exhibition in the museum on Borth Station on Layers in the Landscape. It centres on the science and mythology surrounding the drowned landscape buried beneath the sands on the shore - the "Fossil Forest". Its centrepiece is the fine set of antlers discovered last year. It runs until 30thSeptember. Opening hours: Tuesday/Thursday/Saturday/Sunday 11am-4pm and Bank Holidays 12-4pm.

CARNO (proposed reopening)

The Station Action Group will no doubt be disappointed in the Welsh Government's announcement that its progressing plans to reopen 12 stations of which Carno is not included. The Secretary of the Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Line Liaison Committee had at their recent Meeting confirmed that he has formally written to

the Minister to ascertain whether the proposal is to be considered or not. This follows the proposal not being included in the recently published short list of possible future station re-openings in Wales.

MACHYNLLETH

Work has started on the new toilet block and the up platform shelter. There is no decision on the development of the car park and this is likely to await the new train operating company.

PWLLHELI

The station is currently devoid of any departure screen or indicator.

NEWTOWN

Work on the towns bypass can clearly be seen at the Welshpool end of the town with the route it will take over the line easily seen. Whilst the earthworks are not impacting the line it is unknown yet whether the installation of the bridge over the line will. Completion is not due till late 2018. In the meantime there's moaning a plenty from the town grandees about traffic delays over the recent bank holidays caused by additional traffic lights associated withthat's right the bypass's construction which of course the town grandees lobbied hard for.....

The condition of the surface of the footbridge has deteriorated seriously.

People from Abellio & MTR were observed taking photographs of the station in early June: the only outward sign that anything is happening with franchise renewal for some time.

SHREWSBURY

There has been piecemeal renovation of parts of the canopy over the last few months. A small raised bit of platform has appeared at the north end of platform 4 in line with passenger train stop markers. In the meantime, the bridge work has at long last finished and Platform 3 and the Freight avoiding line have been reconnected. The former Platform 2 and the South end of Platform 3 have been demolished with Platform 3 cut back in length. The platform here was a repair after the original platform was destroyed by a derailed freight train in the 1970's.

A toilet refurbishment scheme was due to start in June with temporary toilets being located at the North end of Platform 4.

The virtually cessation of coal fired electricity generation and the closure of Ironbridge Power Station has seen freight movements through Shrewsbury drop considerably.

TALERDDIG

Work goes on apace on the £7.5 million scheme to close five unmanned level crossings and three footpaths over the Cambrian Line by two new bridges at Talerddig. The drop-in session at Carno Community Centre on 5th July between 16.00 and 18.00 was attended by one of our members who reports the scheme is on course to finish in November, 2017. Officers were present from Network Rail and Powys County Council. It is intended that there will be an official opening involving the local community.

The scheme is being delivered by Network Rail Wales as part of its Railway Upgrade Plan and in partnership with Welsh Government who have provided £3m of the funding, and Powys County Council. The project will include two kilometres of new highways works and two new road-over-rail bridges at Ystrad Fawr and Rallt. The scheme will improve rail safety and assist local farmers in moving livestock across the railway. **The level crossings to be closed are:** Ystrad Fawr, Ystrad Fawr (Footpath), Clawdd Coed, Rallt, Rallt (Footpath), Tyddyn-y-pwll, Pikins and Pikins (Footpath). (Additional information is on the Network Rail web site)

SHELTERS

For many months we have been promised new/additional shelters for Welshpool, Dovey Junction and Llanaber. Rumour has it that these have been acquired but there are no funds for them to be erected. In answer to a direct question at a recent Arriva Trains Wales event participants were told that they had been acquired but there were now problems regarding their lease, maintenance and repair. So passengers shouldn't hold their breath.

GOBOWEN STATION

The Gobowen Area Improvement Group (GAIP) have announced they have completed the purchase of the buildings on both the up and down platforms at Gobowen Station. The station buildings had been in private ownership for many years and were destined to be sold at auction, however intervention by Selattny and Gobowen Parish Council with a Community Right to Bid application opened a path for the buildings to be secured for the community.

From Charlie Hulme's North Wales Coast Railway website 10th July.

SHROPSHIRE SHOWS THE WAY AHEAD

Chris Austin chris.austin@railfuture.org.uk

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Station staffing works! Gobowen station on the Chester-Shrewsbury line is already a success story and a classic example of community rail in action.

The station serves a Shropshire village with a population of 3,270 but the station pulls above its weight, with 213,900 passenger journeys recorded for 2015/16. This is four times the usage of the next station, Chirk, and two and a half times that of the other local station on the line at Ruabon. It is a striking example of the benefits of a staffed station, properly promoted and embedded in the community it serves.

Tickets are available from local agent Severn-Dee Travel in a comfortable room on the up platform, which also serves as a popular local cafe. Refreshments are provided by the local Derwen College, which works with young people with learning difficulties as part of one of their courses. The station has won a number of awards for its enterprise and initiative.

The original two-storey station building of Italianate design dating from 1846 stands on the down side and is grade II listed. Now empty, it needs repairs estimated to cost around £200,000. The CRP, together with the local authorities and the community have launched "SOS Gobowen" to raise funding to restore the station for community use.

The perils of fragmentation

Illustrating the practical problems caused by the fragmentation of land ownership following privatisation, the station buildings on both sides of the line are not owned by the railway, but by the John Lewis Partnership Pension Trust. The platforms are owned by Network Rail and form part of the station lease to Arriva Trains Wales with a frequent service to Arriva Trains Wales.

On the down side, the tracks connecting to the former line to Oswestry belonged to BRB (Residuary) and have recently been transferred to Cambrian Heritage Railways. A confusing patchwork indeed.

Connecting communities

The heritage railway is an active partner in the development of the station and the restoration of the line to their base at Oswestry with 30,000 people living within the catchment area. The initial plan is to reopen the first half mile with a frequent service to the Robert Jones & Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital, with an estimated 5,000 staff, visitors and patients arriving each day.

Patients are referred from all over the country and many have to make long journeys, best made by rail. The heritage railway has taken ownership of the line from Network Rail and applied for a Transport & Works Act order.

The railway would undertake the refurbishment of the line and construct the station at a lower cost than could be delivered by Network Rail, and the heritage railway will operate the service with a class 139 Parry People Mover vehicle or something similar. It was not surprising then that we* chose this package of interlinked projects to be one of our top ten “small” schemes to send to transport minister Paul Maynard MP following our meeting with him. A rail link to a major hospital, a restored station linked with a successful ticket agency and cafe, all with the support of the community, adding value and providing employment as well as a better experience for passengers, and a reduction in car use. It sounds like a winner to me!

***Railfuture**, the Campaigning name of the Railway Development Society Limited.



A Parry People Mover on the Stourbridge Branch.
Photo from Parry People Movers.

ALL CHANGE AT DOVEY JUNCTION

Denis Bates

Dovey Junction (Cyffordd Dyfi in Welsh) is the only junction west of Shrewsbury on the Cambrian lines to Pwllheli: the survivor of a maximum of nine junctions in Cambrian Railways times.* It opened on 14th August 1867 when the Aberdovey deviation was completed. Over the years there have been different station buildings: from 1867 to 1880 early ones; from 1880 to the mid 1950s wooden buildings which included a refreshment room; from then until a few years ago a modern waiting room; succeeded by the present “bus shelter”. The track layout has similarly been altered, being at its simplest between 1988 and a few years ago, before being remodelled to its present layout.

Over the years the Junction has served as a changing point for passengers travelling to or from Aberystwyth to the Coast Line, and the timetables show these connections. It was presumably for these that the refreshment rooms were provided. However, in recent years these have been poor, with up to hourly waits there (or at Machynlleth).

With the introduction of the partially hourly service in 2015, some very quick connections are now possible. In the coast direction, there are three of under ten minutes; in the Aberystwyth direction there are four - two of them quite early in the morning.

These certainly make a day out in either direction much more enjoyable. One delightful variation is to use the ferry at Barmouth and Fairbourne Railway in one or both directions as an alternative to the railway.

It is unfortunate that the current timetable booklet (Arriva 1) does not give connections to and from the Coast Line. This was the case in the Cambrian era (the “Coast Section” of the October 1908 timetable, though not in the 1904 edition); in GWR times (the June 1940 edition of Bradshaw); and into BR times (the September 1958 Western Region time table). It is not easy to work out connections from the current booklet, which has of course combined the main line and Coast line timetables in one.

The table opposite gives the current connections.

*Cruck Meole, Buttington, Kerry Branch, Moat Lane, Van Branch, Mawddwy, Dovey, Barmouth, Afonwen.

| AYW dep | Change | arr. | dep. | Wait | arr. BRM | Journey |
|----------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------|----------------|
| 0530 | MCN | 0600 | 0643 | 43 | 0745 | 2.15 |
| 0830 | DVY | 0852 | 0858 | 6 | 0959 | 1.29 |
| 0930 | MCN | 1000 | 1055 | 55 | 1159 | 2.59 |
| 1230 | DVY | 1252 | 1257 | 5 | 1355 | 1.55 |
| 1330 | MCN | 1400 | 1456 | 56 | 1556 | 2.26 |
| 1530 | MCN | 1600 | 1655 | 55 | 1758 | 2.28 |
| 1832 | DVY | 1903 | 1910 | 7 | 2003 | 1.31 |
| 2030 | MCN | 2104 | 2143 | 39 | 2246 | 2.15 |
| | | | | | | |
| BRM dep | Change | arr. | dep. | Wait | arr. ABY | |
| 0645 | DVY | 0735 | 0756 | 21 | 0820 | 1.37 |
| 0746 | DVY | 0835 | 0855 | 20 | 0922 | 1.36 |
| 0852 | MCN | 0954 | 1056 | 62 | 1120 | 2.28 |
| 1059 | DVY | 1157 | 1154 | 7 | 1220 | 1.17 |
| 1255 | MCN | 1352 | 1456 | 64 | 1520 | 2.23 |
| 1455 | MCN | 1554 | 1650 | 56 | 1720 | 2.25 |
| 1656 | MCN | 1755 | 1801 | 6 | 1827 | 1.31 |
| 1857 | MCN | 2004 | 2049 | 45 | 2120 | 2.23 |
| 2146 | MCN | 2245 | 2307 | 22 | 2337 | 1.51 |

AYW: Aberystwyth

DVY: Dovey Junction

MCN: Machynlleth

BRM: Barmouth

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

Newsletter 72 is a good read and I would like to make a few comments.

SARPA is right to say that you cannot put in extra stops at either Carno or Bow Street because the schedule just does not allow it. But solutions could be:

a) New faster trains with better acceleration.

b) Westward extension of the Welshpool dynamic loop.

c) Trains to stop at either Caersws OR Carno and Borth OR Bow Street but not both in each case.

I think (c) is the only likely possibility for the foreseeable future, but it does depend on the implementation of the full hourly service to give a 2-hourly stop at all of Caersws, Carno, Borth and Bow Street. Certainly it won't work simply to take time out of the layover at Shrewsbury, as some have suggested, as that is beyond the sections in which these extra stops are placed.

I often travel these days on the Machynlleth fleet of 158s on the North Wales Coast Line (NWCL) to/from Holyhead (for Ireland) and I find the state of the toilets often diabolical. My wife tells me that ladies are not likely to use them but the 175s on the Holyhead/Cardiff service are OK. GWR, SWT and Scotrail seem to keep their 158/159s in good order but ATW don't.

Of course a train from Aberystwyth to Birmingham International returns to Holyhead and vv, and as you rightly say the ERTMS fitted trains spend a great deal of their daily time away from the Cambrian. This may account not only for a lack of stock on the Cambrian but also for the lack of servicing of the toilets.

Reinstating the Westbury loop could provide paths in addition to an hourly service as far as Machynlleth (and the Coast line) but NOT to Aberystwyth. A charter or engineering train for example could pass the regular hourly trains at Westbury, Newtown and Machynlleth, and then pass the 2-hourly service at Barmouth and, with a bit of a wait, at Portmadog. You would need an additional loop at around Bow Street if more paths were required to Aberystwyth.

However additional loops are expensive and especially so if the signalling system has not been future proofed to allow for the possibility.

I believe there could be solutions to get enough ERTMS trains for the Cambrian and at the same time make some improvements to the NWCL and hopefully the toilets (!):

a) Terminate the Birmingham-Holyhead trains at Chester. This would release 2 ERTMS fitted 158s for a full hourly service on the Cambrian.

b) Replace the 2-hourly services between Chester and Holyhead thus lost by extending Virgin Voyager trains to Bangor or Holyhead. This would also restore a regular all day connection between Crewe and the NWCL which has not been the case for some time (except on Sundays). It would be easier to do once the NWCL has been resignalled and speeds upgraded, which I understand is planned for the next few years anyway. It would enable the extended Voyagers to return from Holyhead/Bangor to Chester an hour sooner by running faster and reducing the existing layovers of about an hour to around 15-20 minutes. This may facilitate the Voyager extensions, at least 2-hourly, without the need for more units.

c) Tweak the times of the ferry services by Stena Line and Irish Ferries to Dublin to better connect with trains at Holyhead - but that's another story!

Ken Rushen
SARPA Member
Dublin

COMMON SENSE AND COMMUNICATION - Two concepts which form the basis of a successful business.

Sadly, on July 5 Arriva Trains Wales showed neither attribute. The 09.30 from Shrewsbury was on time as it approached Newtown. Then came the announcement "this train will terminate at Newtown and there will be buses to take passengers forward". So a fairly heavily loaded train decamped on to Platform 2 at Newtown and trudged over the bridge. After a few minutes wait passengers were told the train was going on to its destinations after all. All trudged back over the footbridge. Onward the train went until the next announcement. All four coaches were to go up the coast, and those passengers for Borth and Aberystwyth should alight at Machynlleth. They did, to board a coach that had clearly been standing in the sun all morning. After some delay those for Pwllheli were then informed that only the front two coaches would be going forward, so another move for a lot of people.

No company can help failures, and clearly all this was caused by a signalling malfunction, but what they can do is mitigate the problems and communicate. So why didn't the train go into Platform 1 at Newtown thereby avoiding the bridge climb, twice. And it should be noted there were a lot of elderly travellers, many of whom were severely challenged in terms of climbing and descending steps, whilst many of the young had very heavy luggage. The conductor did his very best, something far removed from the Lloyds coach driver later who offered no assistance whatsoever. Additionally, why was not some time taken to assess the situation and leave people on the train before the final decision was made; this has certainly happened in the past.

To add insult to injury (for the travelling public) on that same day the 18.32 from Aberystwyth to Shrewsbury was announced as "on-time" until about a minute before it was due out. At the same time came the announcement that the train was running sixteen minutes late. The train finally left at 18.38 with the indicator board still saying it was on time. There is no excuse for this, because it must be known to the train operator exactly what is happening, as the stock for this train has been wending its way down the coastline since 15.37. It must surely therefore be easy to determine what is going to happen to it in relation to the 18.32. Unfortunately the very late announcement of a delay or even cancellation to this train is not unusual.

Tony Harvey

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

Newtown Station Travel

The Railway Station, Old Kerry Road, Newtown, Powys SY16 1BP. Fax. 01686 621966

E-mail newtownstation@btclick.com

The Association of Train Operating Companies:

ATOC, 2nd Floor, 200, Aldersgate Street,, London. EC14 4HD

London Midland

London Midland, PO Box 4323, Birmingham B2 4JB. Tel. 0121 6342040

Association of Community Rail Partnerships

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

Virgin Trains

Virgin Trains, Customer Relations, PO Box 713, Birmingham, B5 4HH. Tel. 0870 789 1234

Traveline Cymru for all public transport information

www.traveline-cymru.org.uk Tel.0870-6082608

Rail Franchise Performance Manager Rail and New Roads Division, Transport Wales, Welsh Assembly Government, Cathays Park, Cardiff, CF10 3NQ. Direct Line (029) 2082 6849

Public Transport Users' Committee for Wales Secretariat

Welsh Government, Cathays Park, Cardiff CF10 3NQ. E-mail ptucwales@wales.gsi.gov.uk

For Train Times and Fares Call:

08457 48 49 50 (24hrs) 0845 60 40 500 (Welsh Language Service)

0845 60 50 600 (Textphone)

For ticket reservations please call: 0870 9000 773

This is the quarterly newsletter of the Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Rail Passenger Association. Contributions are welcomed from members and non-members about the mid Wales rail scene. Views expressed in it are those of contributors and not necessarily representative of the Association and its Officers as a whole. Information provided is published in good faith, but the Association cannot accept responsibility for any loss or damage arising therefrom. The Editor reserves the right to abridge or amend copy.

Officers of the Association

Acting Chairman: Ifor Morris: 2 Dingle Rd, Welshpool, Powys.SY21 7QB. 01938-554463. E-mail ifor.morris@yahoo.co.uk

Meetings Secretary: Jeff Smith, 17 Marine Terrace, Aberystwyth, SY23 2AZ. 07964179799. jes7@aber.ac.uk

Treasurer and Membership Secretary: Tony Harvey: 23 High Street, Welshpool, Powys, SY21 7JP. Tel./fax. 01938 559087. E-mail Tony@Montgomeryshire.EU

Newsletter Editor: Denis Bates, 86 Maesceinion, Waun Fawr, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion SY23 3QQ. Tel. 01970-617667. E-mail denisebbates@gmail.com

Liaison Officer: Roger Goodhew: 12 Granville St, Shrewsbury, Shropshire. SY3 8NE. Tel. 01743 343173..

Committee Member: Robert Knight, Tresco, 8 Tanrallt St, Machynlleth, SY20 8BE

Association address: c/o Newtown Station Travel, as above. E-mail: [arpa@sarpa.info](mailto:sarpa@sarpa.info)

Webmaster: Angus Eickhoff. E-mail angus@anguseickhoff.co.uk

Copy deadline for the next newsletter is 22nd October

Want to Join SARPA?

The membership fee is currently (for membership up to 31 December 2017) £8.00 per annum for individuals and for organisations. Please make any cheques payable to SARPA. Donations are of course welcome.

- SARPA will lobby for better rail services.
- Act as a watchdog to safeguard the lines future.
- Meet in public once a month.
- All members will receive our quarterly Newsletter free of charge.
- Members with access to e-mail can be included in our electronic network if they so desire.

The majority of our expenditure goes towards the cost of publishing and distributing our newsletters. We occasionally pay for room hire. Any surplus is held as an emergency fund for the future.

None of the officers gains financially in any way from SARPA.

Please send cheques, payable to SARPA, to:

SARPA Membership Secretary: 23 High Street, Welshpool, Powys, SY21 7JP. Make sure to include full name, address and telephone number and also e-mail address if you wish to become part of our electronic network.

SARPA Meetings

| | | | |
|-----------|--------------|-------|--|
| September | Saturday 9th | 11.45 | Railway Hotel, Borth |
| October | Saturday 7th | 15.00 | AGM. Machynlleth, White Lion. |
| November | Tuesday 7th | 18.55 | The Sportsman, Severn Street, Newtown |
| December | Saturday 9th | 11.45 | Royal Naval Club, Market Street, Aberystwyth |

Websites

Our website <http://sarpa.info>

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

Other sites of interest:

A useful alternative to the National Rail Enquiries site:

Arriva Trains Wales

National Rail Enquiries

Train and Bus Information Midlands

London Midland

Virgin Trains

Chiltern Railways

Network Rail

Railfuture/Railway Development Society

Cambrian Rail Partnership

The Association of Community Rail Partnerships (Acorp)

Passenger Focus

North Wales Coast Railway

Circular tour of North Wales by rail

Ffestiniog Railway timetable

Vale of Rheidol Railway timetable

Talylllyn Railway

Welshpool and Llanfair Railway timetable

Welsh Highland Heritage Railway

Fairbourne Railway

Borth Station Museum

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

traintimes.org.uk/

www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk/

www.nationalrail.co.uk/

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

www.londonmidland.com/index.html

www.virgintrains.co.uk/default.aspx

www.chilternrailways.co.uk/

www.networkrail.co.uk/

www.railfuture.org.uk/

www.thecambrianline.co.uk/

www.acorp.uk.com

www.passengerfocus.org.uk/

www.nwrail.org.uk/

www.penmorfa.com/Cambrian/

www.ffestiniograilway.co.uk/timetable.htm

www.rheidolrailway.co.uk/timetable.htm

www.talylllyn.co.uk/

www.wllr.org.uk/timetable.htm

www.whr.co.uk/index.php?pid=51

www.fairbournerailway.com/index.htm

www.borthstationmuseum.co.uk

www.mylordz.com