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**Shrewsbury Aberystwyth Rail Passengers' Association**

# Newsletter No. 74

NOVEMBER 2017

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## SHOCK WITHDRAWAL OF ARRIVA FROM THE FRANCHISE BIDDING

Arriva announced on 30<sup>th</sup> October that it was pulling out of the bidding for the next franchise. Arriva has said Arriva Trains Wales was "no longer participating in the Wales and Borders competition", adding it had "not been an easy decision". No further reasons were given.

## BUY BEFORE YOU BOARD

*Newsletter* no. 73 highlighted the Arriva Trains Wales campaign 'Buy before you Board' and raised a number of questions. The article states that an e-mail to the Director of Customer Services asking for clarification which had been sent on July 18 remained unanswered when the *Newsletter* was compiled. On August 9 a reply was received from Barry Lloyd, Head of Customer Experience at Arriva Trains Wales. Much of the letter reiterated what was reproduced in the last *Newsletter*.

In a further exchange the following two questions were restated:

- Will cash be accepted---assuming there is no staffed ticket office on the station? And without having any penalties imposed including the non-allowance of the various rail cards.
- Will credit/debit cards be accepted when there are no facilities available at the station or the machine is inoperative? And without having any penalties imposed including the non-allowance of the various rail cards.

Mr Lloyd's response of September 25 is as follows:

"In answer to your 2 queries:

Yes, cash or card will be able to be used on-board to purchase tickets, without having penalties imposed, if there are no pre purchase facilities available at the origin station. This includes if those pre purchase facilities are not in operation, for whatever reason.

I understand what facilities are available to customers on the Cambrian line, and we have made our by 'before you board' policy with such routes and stations in mind. If there are no facilities available, then the customer should seek the Conductor to purchase the correct ticket for their journey".

In the last *Newsletter* we reported that Mr L. Brencher, Head of Communications for Arriva Trains Wales was "keen" to come and meet with SARPA. Our Acting Chairman tried at least twice by e-mail to ask Mr Brencher to the AGM or any other meeting. To date no response has been forthcoming; so much for his "keenness".

## THE NEW FRANCHISE

In a written statement entitled Wales and Borders Rail Franchise Update, dated September 29, 2017 and available on the Welsh Government web site, Ken Skates, Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure wrote the following:

“I am writing to inform members that yesterday (Thursday September 28th), Abellio Rail Cymru, Arriva Rail Wales, KeolisAmey and MTR Corporation (Cymru) Ltd were invited by Welsh Government to submit final tenders for the next Wales and Borders Rail Service.

The new rail service will deliver a step-change in the quality of rail travel in Wales so rather than follow the traditional model for procuring a rail service, with the issue of a set specification that companies bid for, our approach has been to allow new ideas to be explored and collaborative working relationships to be developed.

Detailed discussions with all four of the shortlisted potential operators have only served to reinforce my optimism that the next service will see big improvements. The successful operator will be announced in early 2018.

Proposals for the South Wales Metro are being developed alongside the Wales and Borders service to aid development of an integrated transport system in the region. The deadline to submit final tender is 21st December.

Alongside this I will continue to press the UK Government on fair funding for services and rail infrastructure enhancements to ensure that Wales gets the investment it deserves to support our communities and economic growth.

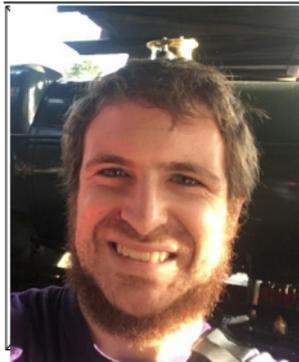
I intend to create a rail service that benefits the whole of the Wales and Borders network, one with passengers at its heart. Today’s announcement is another important step towards that.

More information can be found in the ‘Rail Services for the Future’ document published by Transport for Wales”.

The railway press (e.g. Rail issue 834) has reported extensively on the “row” between the Department for Transport and the Welsh Government. There are two issues involved. Firstly the allegation that the General Election delayed the work on the franchise process and for the Arriva Trains Wales rebate (c. £62 million per annum) currently paid to the UK government to go to the Welsh Government. The rebate goes back to the Department for Transport and is then given to Network Rail. Concern has been expressed that this delay will result in hastily made decisions which will jeopardize the whole franchise arrangements and may result in a delay of awarding a replacement for the current franchise holder.

The statement by the First Minister, Carwen Jones, that there will be a requirement for the franchise operator to ensure a second man on trains who performs a safety critical role has been widely welcomed.

## CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE



As your new chairman, it gives me great pleasure to write my maiden chairman's message. I'm passionate about the railways in general, and in particular the Cambrian, which I use on a regular basis.

I've taken the reins at a key time: confusion reigns supreme regarding the new franchise, the details thereof and even about which government will be awarding the franchise. On a more positive note, the railway scene is booming with major increases in passenger numbers, additional services, better connections to the Coast line at Dyfi Junction, the campaign to link Aberystwyth and Carmarthen by rail is at its strongest since the line closed, and plans for a new station at Bow Street are well advanced (which we emphasise will require significant line speed improvements and perhaps an extra passing loop if punctuality is to be maintained).

I'd like to be able to present positive news on the new franchise, but the opacity from the Welsh Government leaves us all in the dark, trying to glean conclusions from whispers and snippets. Suffice to say, SARPA have pushed strongly for major improvements: a full hourly service on the Cambrian mainline, additional carriages, infrastructure improvements, station improvements and so on. SARPA have pushed a strong agenda for improvements to the Cambrian services through our own consultation response, through representation to the Line Liaison Committee and through the individual responses of our members. It remains to be seen if our demands will be fulfilled, and the campaign certainly isn't over yet!

One encouraging news article from a couple of weeks ago was the Welsh Government announcement that all trains will have a guard in the new franchise. The spectre of Driver Only Operation (DOO) had been a bone of contention for unions, user groups and passengers alike, and it would have been entirely unsuitable for the Cambrian in particular. SARPA have called repeatedly for this and it's great to see that the safety of the travelling public will be maintained.

Perhaps the largest uncertainty surrounding the new franchise, however, is the question of which government will be responsible for awarding the franchise. Although devolution of the powers to do so to the Welsh Government had been expected to occur prior to the franchise award, the Westminster Transport Secretary Chris Grayling has muddied the waters somewhat with a plethora of diverse and sometimes contradictory announcements, apparently on a whim at times. This threatens to delay the franchise award significantly.

SARPA is home to a range of views about the devolution of rail services, and our primary concern is the service levels provided, investment in trains and infrastructure and so on. However, the political games currently taking place create perhaps the worst possible scenario: a delay in the franchise could see an extension of the current unfavourable zero-

growth model in the meantime and would most likely delay the work to make trains compliant with the 2019 Disability Discrimination Act regulations. These regulations require any service train running after 2019 to satisfy a variety of regulations, such as an accessible toilet; this requires current trains to be withdrawn for refurbishment for weeks at a time on a rolling programme. The longer the franchise award is delayed, the faster the refurbishment has to be undertaken, therefore a number of units could be out of action at the same time, leading to a shortage of units.

Certainly the 2003 franchise award was disastrous, and has led to acute overcrowding for passengers and extraordinarily high profits for Arriva. The recent cancellation of the Cardiff to Swansea electrification has also been a blow to the Welsh (and borders) railways. However, moving the franchise award powers from London to Cardiff does not in itself change the situation, it simply moves the decision closer to home. Improvements to the rail network come from groups like SARPA lobbying government. And here's where you, the members, come in.

The franchise process is still in progress. Assuming that the Welsh Government will, in the end, award the franchise, there's still time to lobby our AMs (for those of us in Wales). Under the Welsh system, all of us have 5 AMs and an MP. Our members in England each have an MP too (though no AMs). Let's seize the opportunity to continue lobbying in order to get the best possible deal for the line. A full hourly service, more carriages, infrastructure improvements, station improvements – all aboard!

## **SARPA MEETINGS**

Since the last *Newsletter* the Association has met in Borth and Machynlleth. The latter being the October meeting was the AGM at which the following officers and Committee were elected:

Chairman: Jeff Smith

Vice Chairman: Ivor Morris

Treasurer & membership Secretary: Tony Harvey

Web master: Angus Eickhoff

Committee Members: Robert Knight, Roger Goodhew, Bill Redfern

Contact details will be found at the end of this *Newsletter*.

## **SARPA CORRESPONDENCE**

Sarpa wrote to the Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure about the disappointment over the cancellation of the electrification programme to Swansea. The letter suggests that this would “be an opportunity for Wales to take the lead and show how it should be done” noting that “there is surely nothing to prevent the Welsh Government from taking over the scheme and running the project for an electrified railway from Cardiff

to Swansea.....The bi-mode trains which are proposed for the route on to Swansea are a poor substitute for the straight electrics they will replace. They will be heavier and cost more to maintain because of the extra complication. Moreover, performance on the non-electrified sections will not be as good. Opportunities for improved scheduling for both local and express services resulting from electrification will thus be lost. Faster electric trains will help the Welsh Government in its stated aim of achieving modal shift away from private cars.”

The reply we received is reproduced below:

“Thank you for your email of 6 August regarding Swansea Rail Electrification addressed to the Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure. I have been asked to reply.

Rail infrastructure is not devolved to the Welsh Government, it is the responsibility of the UK Government to ensure they invest in the network in Wales, or otherwise give Welsh Government the funding powers to do so.

We are very disappointed by the UK Government’s decision to cancel electrification between Cardiff and Swansea and are currently challenging the decision that has been made by the Secretary of State for Transport.

We are pressing the UK Government to make a commitment towards a fairer share of rail funding for Wales to redress the historical underfunding of our network.

Furthermore, we are continuing to make the case for further devolution of powers for the Welsh Government to be able to direct investment into Wales’ rail infrastructure.

To reinforce this, the Cabinet Secretary for the Economy and Infrastructure has issued the following statements:

<http://gov.wales/newsroom/transport/2017/170721infra/?lang=en>

<http://gov.wales/about/cabinet/cabinetstatements/2017/rail1/?lang=en>

Yours sincerely

Matt Edwards

Rail Programme Manager”

## NEWS

### NETWORK RAIL

Several newspapers (including *The Guardian* and *'I'*) reported that Network Rail have received a pledge from Government that by 2019 train toilets which empty their contents on to the track will no longer be allowed. None of our trains have holding tanks. The agreement which has been reached means that all franchise holders will have to operate trains with retention tanks by 2020.

### ARRIVA TRAINS WALES

#### CONCESSIONARY TRAVEL

The Welsh Government Concessionary Travel scheme will run as detailed below until March 2018. Holders of Concessionary Travel Passes (this includes bus passes) issued by Welsh local authorities are able to travel free on the following routes. The schemes in our area are:

- Wrexham-Hawarden bridge: only travel between the following stations is included Hawarden Bridge, Shotton, Hawarden, Buckley, Penyffordd, Hope, Caergwrie, Cefn-y-Bedd, Gwersyllt, Wrexham General and Wrexham Central. This part of the scheme is in operation on a 12 month rolling basis.
- Cambrian Coast (Machynlleth-Pwllheli): from October 1 until March 31, 2018. Travel between all stations from Machynlleth to Pwllheli is included. It should be noted that there will be some restriction on some trains during the school term:
  - 06.10 Pwllheli – Machynlleth between Barmouth and Tywyn
  - 07.34 Pwllheli – Machynlleth between Penrhyndeudraeth and Harlech
  - 12.56 Machynlleth – Pwllheli between Harlech and Penrhyndeudraeth
  - 14.56 Machynlleth – Pwllheli between Tywyn and Barmouth
- Conwy Valley Line: all stations including Llandudno and Llandudno Junction. This part of the scheme is in operation on a 12 month rolling basis.
- Heart of Wales: From October 1 to March 31, 2018 Special note: Concessionary Travel is not permitted solely between stations highlighted in red or solely between stations highlighted in purple. Travel is not permitted for journeys that take place entirely between Shrewsbury and Bucknell or between Llanelli and Swansea. Subject to these terms travel is permitted between the following stations:
  - Shrewsbury, Church Stretton, Craven Arms, Broome, Hopton Heath, Bucknell, Knighton, Knucklas, Llangynllo, Llanbister Road, Dolau, Pen-y-bont, Llandrindod, Builth Road, Cilmeri, Garth (Powys), Llangammarch, Llanwrtyd, Sugar Loaf, Cynghordy, Llandoverly, Llanwrda, Llangadog, Llandeilo, Fairfach, Llandybie, Ammanford, Pantyffynnon, Pontarddulais, Llangennech, Bynea, Llanelli, Gowerton and Swansea.

## **SHREWSBURY TO ABERYSTWYTH RAILWAY LIAISON COMMITTEE**

The Committee met on October 6, 2017 and a major part of meeting was taken up with a presentation on and discussion of a report to the Minister on the Cambrian Lines. A meeting with the Ken Skates, Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure has been arranged for November 17, 2017 and until the Welsh Government gives approval the contents of the *Report* remain confidential. Reports were also received from Arriva Trains Wales, the Cambrian Rail Partnership and Network Rail. An update on the proposed reopening of Carno Station was received. The Secretary is trying to hasten the provision of extra shelters at both Welshpool and Dovey Junction. The date of the Committee's next meeting is Friday, February 16, 2018 at 11.15am at Welshpool Town Hall. There will also be a joint meeting with the Cambrian Coast Railway Liaison Committee on November 24, 2017 at 11.15am in Machynlleth. The public are not admitted to these Meetings.

## **TRAWS LINK CYMRU/WEST WALES RAIL CAMPAIGN**

**The following is an edited version of what appears on the Traws Link Cymru web-site:**

“The Traws Link Cymru campaign is a grass roots campaign calling for the re-instatement of rail links in west Wales. We believe that rail links will provide an environmentally sustainable, cost-effective and socially inclusive transport system to boost the economy. It will provide opportunities for locals and tourists alike, and through linking the South Wales Main Line, Cambrian Lines and North Wales Coast Line will provide Wales with a figure of eight network.

The plan calls for the two phase development of rail links through west Wales. While the population of the region may be low, the benefits would be great and through linking the three east-west routes of the Welsh railway network would bring benefits to the whole of Wales. As well as local traffic, travel between south, west, mid and north west Wales would be significantly enhanced bringing wide economic and social benefits. The proposals will also create a north-south route wholly within Wales, connecting the nation and providing a useful diversionary route for both passenger and freight trains.

**Phase 1** calls for a new railway between Carmarthen and Aberystwyth. This would involve around 60 miles of new and re-built railway with stations serving major communities on route such as Pencader/Llandysul, Llanybydder, Lampeter, Tregaron and Llanilar – all with park and ride facilities. This would be coupled with work on the Swansea District Line and a new station at Morriston to support a fast, direct train service between Cardiff – Carmarthen – Lampeter – Aberystwyth. This would give competitive journey times of:

- Aberystwyth – Cardiff 3 hours
- Lampeter – Cardiff 2 hours 15 minutes
- Aberystwyth – Carmarthen 1 hour 30 minutes

The Carmarthen – Aberystwyth train could be combined with a Milford Haven or Fishguard service between Cardiff and Carmarthen, and could be extended to Machynlleth for connections up the Cambrian Coast Line. Services would be hourly.

Most of the original line is not built on and so could be re-used where appropriate, however where there has been development and where a new alignment would allow for faster speeds, a new course would need to be built.

**Phase 2** calls for 25 miles of new and re-built railway between Afon-Wen on the Cambrian Coast Line and Bangor, coupled with incremental improvements along the Cambrian Coast line to improve journey times. The current Machynlleth – Pwllheli service would be formed of 2 trains which would divide at Afon-Wen with portions for both Pwllheli and Bangor via Caernarfon. This would provide a train service every 2 hours to link mid and north west Wales, with a more frequent local service between Bangor and Porthmadog. While some of the Bangor to Afon-Wen line has been lost to road developments, significant stretches are still clear and the geography of the area allows for a new alignment to be built where needed.

The Cardiff – Bangor journey along the western route would not be quicker than the current service via Shrewsbury, but many intermediate journeys would be significantly speeded up. Journeys such as Aberystwyth – Swansea, Lampeter – Machynlleth and Pwllheli – Bangor become possible in a way which they are not at present”.

It has been announced that £300,000 has been granted by the Welsh Government for a feasibility study into the re-establishment of the line from Aberystwyth to Carmarthen. The study will be carried out by Mott Macdonald.

### **TRANSPORT FOCUS**

In order to create one voice for passengers in Wales and the Borders Transport Focus has joined with Network Rail, Arriva Trains Wales and the Welsh Government to create a Wales Route Supervisory Board. The independent chair of the Board, which first met in September, is Margaret Llewellyn OBE. Future meetings will be on a monthly basis. “Transport Focus will work to ensure the voice of the passenger in Wales and the Borders is at the heart of every action of the board. Passengers in Wales tell us their top priorities for improvement are more seats and more space to deal with overcrowding, a more punctual and reliable service and new trains. We will use our research to help Network Rail and train companies stay focused on delivering what rail passengers really want.” (from Transport user Voice, November 2017. [www.transportfocus.org.uk](http://www.transportfocus.org.uk))

## **UP AND DOWN THE LINE (and a little beyond)**

### **PROJECTED CLOSURES & ALTERATIONS TO SERVICES**

#### **ABERYSTWYTH-MACHYNLLETH**

Network Rail announce that trains will not operate between Aberystwyth and Machynlleth stations from Saturday 4 February until the first morning service on Wednesday 8 February, 2018. A rail replacement bus service will be in operation for the duration of the station’s closure, which will take passengers directly from Aberystwyth to Machynlleth, without stopping at Dovey Junction station. Services will still operate between Machynlleth and Pwllheli stations, but due to a minor rail diversion these services will not stop at Dovey Junction. This is to enable essential upgrade work to Afon Llyfnant rail bridge, on the approach to Dovey Junction railway station, to be delivered as part of Network Rail’s Railway Upgrade Plan. The bridge – which carries trains over the Llyfnant river – will undergo a full refurbishment during the closure.

#### **PENHELIG.**

The halt will be closed for several weeks from January to March 2018.

## **ABERYSTWYTH**

Yr Hen Orsaf (Wetherspools) adjacent to the station will be closing in the new year for complete refitting and extension

## **ABERYSTWYTH—CARMARTHEN**

See under News above at Traws Link Cymru/West Wales Rail Campaign

## **ABERYSTWYTH (Vale of Rheidol)**

The Railway has received £250,000 from the Coastal Communities Fund. The money will be used for a variety of purposes including providing wheelchair access to the carriages for the first time and the improvement of the first class accommodation. The long derelict Vista car and three others will be refurbished for this purpose. Importantly two new apprentice positions will also be established.

## **BARMOUTH**

On October 14 and 15 Barmouth celebrated the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Dwyfor-Meirionnydd Bridge, the longest wooden viaduct in the country, with a host of events. As part of a British Film Institute project, the Dragon Theatre showed the 1941 film 'The Ghost Train' which featured Barmouth Viaduct, along with other footage from the Britain on Film and the British Transport archive collections. There were art displays, photographic exhibitions and memorabilia displays in the Arts Room/Community Rooms. Barmouth Leisure Centre hosted an exhibition of model railway displays of various gauges. The centrepiece of the exhibition was an accurate, scale model of Barmouth Viaduct, built by the very talented Barry Kelsall of Shrewsbury. Network Rail and other agencies held pop-up information stands with plenty of information and help on hand. Local gift shop "Luv It! Bermo" hosted a train themed treasure hunt throughout the town in the week leading up to and including the weekend celebrations.

The proceedings were launched by Andy Thomas, Route Managing Director for Network Rail in Wales by cutting a cake with a picture of the Barmouth viaduct on it. He said: "Barmouth viaduct is one of the most iconic structures in the whole of Wales, connecting people for 150 years and boosting economic growth by bringing tourists to the area. We are working closely with Cadw and Gwynedd Council on our plans to refurbish the viaduct to secure its long-term future, so that it can continue to play a crucial role for the local economy for many years to come." Network Rail engineers are currently working on innovative plans to improve the Grade II\* listed structure. Development work is being undertaken now which would allow the multi-million pound project to begin in Network Rail's next control period, CP6, which runs from 2019 to 2024. On Saturday the festivities closed with a laser show and fireworks.

Pathfinder Tours celebrated this by organising a loco-hauled excursion with the traditional name 'The Cambrian Coast Express' from Bristol to Pwllheli and back on 10 October. 67 030 hauled the train to Shrewsbury where 97 304 *John Tiley* and 97 303 took over for the run

over the ERTMS-signalled Cambrian line. A picture gallery will be found at

<http://www.nwrail.org.uk/nwnews.htm>

The Network Rail 'Lines in the Landscape' award winner in the Landscape Photographer of the Year 2017 was a picture by Jon Martin of the 08.52 train from Barmouth crossing the bridge. See [www.take-a-view.co.uk](http://www.take-a-view.co.uk)

### **BISHOP'S CASTLE RAILWAY** (closed in 1935)

The Bishop's Castle Railway Society has discovered the last original building on the site of the old Bishop's Castle Railway Station. Hidden in a corner of an industrial site is the weighbridge, complete with machinery. At a meeting on August 15 some 60 people attended presentations by the project team about the renovation plans, possible uses for the building and how the town might be involved. The next step is to prepare a preliminary enquiry to the Heritage Lottery Fund, take further advice and, if all goes well, put a proposal to the Railway Society's committee for a full application for funding.

### **BOW STREET (re-opening)**

Ceredigion County Council announced that funding had been confirmed for a new station at Bow Street. The Council's press release stated "the scheme to develop a Passenger Transport Interchange at Bow Street, 3.5 miles to the north of Aberystwyth has been developed and promoted jointly by Ceredigion County Council and the Welsh Government.

The proposed scheme is a local and regional transport priority in the Mid Wales Joint Local Transport Plan 2015-2020 and will provide a public transport interchange with a new railway station, 100 places car park, a parking area for buses and coaches and cycle parking facilities to enable passengers to access both bus and rail services and to car share from this location. The scheme also seeks to address local road safety concerns by providing a A487/ A4159 junction improvement with active travel facilities. The scheme will support and deliver potential economic growth opportunities and improved access to services and facilities located in and around Aberystwyth and north Ceredigion.

The DfT has announced that the NSF2 Fund is providing £3.945 million towards a total project cost of £6.76 million with match-funding and savings achieved through an ongoing value engineering exercise to bridge any potential funding gap.

There is considerable support for the scheme amongst the local community and discussions have been taking place with local land-owners and business that may be affected by the proposed scheme.

Cabinet Member for Transport, Waste and Carbon Management for Ceredigion County Council, Councillor Alun Williams said: "We're delighted to receive this news after all the work the Council has put into making the case. It's quite unusual for new stations to be built so the case had to be extremely solid. The new station will be much more than another stop on the

rail line. It is intended to be a park and ride and general transport hub that will bring long-term economic, environmental and connectivity benefits to the whole area, including easing traffic congestion in Aberystwyth. I want to thank everyone who has been involved in developing the case, including local people who have been so supportive."

The scheme is due to open in 2019-2020. Clearly this is seen very much as a transport hub and as the Ceredigion AM Elin Jones said in a statement "it will also be a convenient hub to access the Aberystwyth-Shrewsbury train service". It is to be hoped that the provision of this transport interchange will not impact on performance on both the Shrewsbury-Aberystwyth line and also the Cambrian Coast line. SARPA's views were given in the last *Newsletter*.

### **CARNO** (proposed re-opening)

The latest position regarding the re-opening of Carno is summarised in a press release from the Carno Station Action Group.

"Following the delivery of a petition on the 4<sup>th</sup> October to the National Assembly for Wales, the Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure, Ken Skates, has sent a letter to Carno Station Action Group confirming that Carno is now on the list of stations to go forward to Stage Two of the New Stations Assessment Program. The petition contains 878 signatures and was presented to the Petitions Committee of the National Assembly for Wales to demonstrate that there is still a huge local demand for the station to be re-opened.

The background to the launching of the petition is as follows. In May this year, Ken Skates announced the New Stations Assessment Program, a new three stage process to assess stations in Wales for potential re-opening. There are 46 stations listed in the new program, of which 12 were initially chosen to go forward to Stage two of the process in May. In Mid-Wales only one station was on the list of 12, namely Bow Street near Aberystwyth. At the time Jeremy Barnes, Chairman of the Carno Station Action Group commented: "We are very disappointed and angry. Not only has this new assessment program been introduced without warning or consultation of any kind, but also that Carno has not been included in the list to go forward to Stage 2. We will be contacting Mr Skates urgently to discover the process which has been used to select these 12 stations."

On the 28<sup>th</sup> July 2017 it was announced that a new station has been approved for Bow Street with funding from the UK Government and the Welsh Government. Carno Station Action Group then began an intense campaign, writing to Welsh AMs and in particular to Ken Skates, arguing that as Bow Street was now going ahead, Carno station should replace it as the Mid-Wales candidate on the list of 12 station to go forward to Stage 2. Almost six months after the New Stations Assessment Program was announced, Ken Skates has now agreed that this will happen.

Carno Station Action Group Chairman Jeremy Barnes commented: "Although this is very welcome news, we are disappointed that it has taken so long for Carno to be included in the list announced in May. We are now trying to contact Mr Skates' department to see how far behind we are in the assessment process and whether that will put Carno at a disadvantage.

We have produced a huge amount of documentation over the years, much of which will be useful in moving forward with Stage 2 of the New Assessment Program. We look forward to working with Mr Skates and his department to ensure that Carno station will be re-opened as soon as possible.”

Despite two letters sent from the Action Group, it is now two weeks after the letter was received from Ken Skates and we are still waiting to be “engaged” by his department. Our obvious concern is that we have joined the process much later than the other 11 stations and will have to work fast and hard to catch up. We will continue to press Mr Skates to achieve our goal, one which the vast majority of Carno residents continue to support.”

See also a letter to SARPA from Jeremy Barnes, Chairman, Carno Station Action Group & Member of Carno Community Council at the end of this *Newsletter*.

### **DOVEY JUNCTION**

See above under *Projected closures and alterations to services*.

### **MACHYNLLETH**

In August the Machynlleth Train Care Facility celebrated ten years of operation. In 2007 a £3 million upgrade and the staff grew to 33. A fleet of 24 trains serving 33 Cambrian line stations in mid-Wales and Shropshire are now looked after at the depot with eight rolling in each night for maintenance.

At the time of writing the toilet block had still not opened.

### **PENHELIG**

The halt will be closed for several weeks from January to March 2018.

### **PWLLHELI-BANGOR**

See above under News for the plans being advanced by Traws Link Cymru/West Wales Rail Campaign.

### **WELSHPOOL**

Complaints from members of the public about the very poor facilities at the station continue to be voiced not least through letters to the *County Times*

### **THE OTHER SIDE OF THE BORDER**

The West Midlands franchise has been awarded to a consortium consisting of Abellio (70.1%), East Japan Railway Company and Mitsui & Co (50:50 of the remaining 29.9%). It commences in December 2017 and runs until March 2026. There is a promise to invest £1 billion in the network. The intention is to have new and extra trains between Shropshire and Birmingham with the doubling of the existing number of hourly trains. Sunday services will also be increased. The trains will offer digital screens, free wi-fi and extra seats. Passengers will be

offered 25% compensation when the train is more than 15 minutes late and there will be better access to stations for disabled people, 1000 more car parking places, 2500 more cycle parking places, a cycle hire scheme and refurbished waiting rooms.

The franchise will be operated in two parts. West Midlands area trains will be jointly managed by the DfT and West Midlands Rail (WMR). WMR is a consortium of 16 local councils. The other division still to be named will run the longer distance routes, e.g. to Liverpool and London. See below for comments on what these changes might mean for Cambrian passengers.

## **COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIPS AND RAIL USER GROUPS OF RELEVANCE TO THE CAMBRIAN LINES PART 1: ORGANISATIONS BASED IN MID AND WEST WALES**

At a recent SARPA meeting it became clear that some members did not know of the many organisations of relevance to those interested in the Cambrian Lines. Having now conducted a little research into these bodies their confusion is easy to understand. Unhelpfully many of the organisations seem use variations of their titles.

It is very necessary to draw a clear distinction between those organisations which are ad-hoc and those which are permanent. For example, the recent meetings organised by Transport for Wales (TfW) to provide public input to the franchise planning document fall into the *ad hoc* category and are not included here. Additionally, some of the permanent organisations allow the public into their meetings others do not.

The entries below have been constructed from a variety of sources and if possible verified by a responsible member of the organisation. It is therefore hoped that the entries do not include any wrong information. However, neither the compiler nor SARPA can be held responsible for any inaccuracies.

### **CAMBRIAN COAST RAILWAY LIAISON COMMITTEE**

**CONTACT DETAILS:** [glyndaobrien@gwynedd.llyw.cymru](mailto:glyndaobrien@gwynedd.llyw.cymru)

**OFFICERS:** A Chairman and Vice-Chairman will be elected at the meeting to be held on November 10, 2017.

**MEETINGS :** The Committee meets in the Spring and Autumn of each year. In July each year there is a joint meeting with the Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Railway Liaison Committee hosted in alternate years by the Cambrian Coast Railway Liaison Committee. The meetings are not open to the public. The agendas and minutes of the meetings are available at <https://democracy.cyngor.gwynedd.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?CId=163&Year=0>

**MEMBERSHIP:** 10 elected members of Gwynedd Council; 1 elected member from Powys County Council and Ceredigion Council; 1 representative from Ysgol Arduwy, Ysgol

Uwchradd Tywyn, Coleg meirion-Dwyfor, Tallylyn Railway, Festiniog Railway, Fairbourne Railway, Welsh Highland Light Railway (1964) Limited, Transport Users Consultative Committee, Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Railway Liaison Committee, Chamber of Trade/Commerce, North Wales Police Authority, National Park Authority, Merioneth Access Group and Dwyfor Access Group; The Assembly Member and the Member of Parliament for Dwyfor/Meirionnydd; Regional Assembly members for Mid and West Wales; 2 representatives from One Voice Wales (one from Dwyfor and one from the Meirionnydd). **OBJECTIVES:** to disseminate information regarding the Cambrian Coast Line between Machynlleth and Pwllheli; to obtain long-term financial security of the line; to seek improvements to the train service; to encourage greater use of the line; and to consider complaints regarding the line.

**PUBLICATIONS:** None

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:** The name of the organisation has sometimes been given as the Cambrian Coast Railway Liaison Conference as this title is given in the articles of the association. However, they have confirmed that the preferred name is that given at the head of this entry. The meetings are convened and minuted by Committee Officers within the Democratic Services of Gwynedd Council

## **CAMBRIAN RAILWAYS PARTNERSHIP**

**CONTACT DETAILS:** Claire Williams, Partnership Development Officer, c/o Ceredigion County Council, Technical Services, Canolfan Rheidol, Rhodfa Padarn, Llanbadarn Fawr, Aberystwyth, SY23 3UE. Tel: 01970 633432: Mobile 07792 319085. E-mail:

claire.williams@ceredigion.gov.uk

**WEBSITE:** [www.walesonrails.com](http://www.walesonrails.com)

**MEETINGS:** Quarterly operational/ management meetings between partners and the Partnership Development Officer. Not open to the public. Quarterly progress reports are provided to both the Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Railway Liaison Committee and Cambrian Coast Railway Liaison Committee.

**MEMBERSHIP:** Arriva Trains Wales, Gwynedd Council, Ceredigion County Council, Powys County Council and Shropshire Council, Mid Wales Tourism, Network Rail and representatives of heritage railways in Mid and North Wales (such as Vale of Rheidol, Welshpool and Llanfair Light Railway, Tal-y-Llyn and Welsh Highland Railway).

**OBJECTIVES:** To work together to promote rail travel to and within the area and to support community involvement in the railway lines.

**PUBLICATIONS:** Range of promotional material and offers promoting rail access to tourism destinations (including castles, beaches and the Wales Coast Path and other footpaths), use of the lines for commuter journeys, integration with buses and travel and information such as pocket timetables.

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:** This is one of the five Rail Partnerships in Wales others being The Chester to Shrewsbury Line Partnership; The Conwy Valley Initiative, The Borderlands Partnership and The Heart of Wales Line Forum (see <http://www.scenicwales.co.uk>). Collectively the officers are affectionately known as CROWS and FACEBOOK pages are

maintained. Ceredigion County Council acts as employer of the Partnership Development Officer and Gwynedd Council is the financial management authority and treasurer.

## **SHREWSBURY TO ABERSYTWYTH RAIL PASSENGERS' ASSOCIATION (SARPA)**

**CONTACT DETAILS:** c/o Newtown Station Travel, the Railway Station, Old Kerry Road, Newtown, Powys, SY16 1BP: [sarpa@sarpa.info](mailto:sarpa@sarpa.info)

**Website:** sarpa.info

**OFFICERS: Chairman:** Jeff Smith, 17 Marine Terrace, Aberystwyth, SY23 2AZ. Tel.: 07964179799. E-mail: [abergogledd@gmail.com](mailto:abergogledd@gmail.com)

**Treasurer and Membership Officer:** Tony Harvey, 23 High Street, Welshpool, Powys, SY21 7JP. Tel. 01938 559087. E-mail: [tony@montgomeryshire.eu](mailto:tony@montgomeryshire.eu)

**MEETINGS:** Meetings are held monthly moving between venues in Aberystwyth, Borth, Caersws, Machynlleth, Newtown, Shrewsbury, Tywyn and Welshpool. The meetings are open to the public but they are not allowed to vote on any motions.

**MEMBERSHIP :** c. 80 including individuals and local community and town councils. Annual subscription is £8. Membership Secretary: Tony Harvey, 23 High Street, Welshpool, Powys, SY21 7JP :Tel./fax 01938 559087: E-mail [tony@montgomeryshire.eu](mailto:tony@montgomeryshire.eu)

**OBJECTIVES:** The organisation has a Constitution where the objects are stated as follows:

- To seek the retention, improvement, development and marketing of the railway from Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth and Dovey Junction to Pwllheli and to liaise with any other organisations which are relevant to achieving this objective.
- To represent the Association's members, current and potential passengers and the general public both to stakeholders and those responsible for the maintenance and operation of the railway.
- To create a greater awareness throughout the rest of Wales and Britain as a whole of the value and potential of the Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth and Dovey Junction to Pwllheli railway lines and of rail transport in general and to liaise with organisations having similar objects.

**PUBLICATIONS:** *Newsletter* issued four times a year. Available in hard copy or electronic form. Also on the website.

**Editor:** Denis Bates, 86 Maesceinion Waun Fawr, Aberystwyth SY23 8NE. Tel. 01970 617667; E-mail [denisebbates@gmail.com](mailto:denisebbates@gmail.com)

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:** SARPA is a voluntary organisation funded solely by membership subscriptions. The website provides dates and Minutes of Meetings, the Constitution with extended aims and objectives, details for joining, *Newsletters*, consultations and submissions.

## **SHREWSBURY TO ABERYSTWYTH RAILWAY LIAISON COMMITTEE**

**CONTACT DETAILS:** Robert A. Robinson, Town Clerk, Welshpool Town Council, Triangle House, Union Street, Welshpool, SY21 0QY: tel. 01938 553142: E-mail [wtcouncil@btinternet.com](mailto:wtcouncil@btinternet.com)

**Website:** shrewsburyaberystwythrailway.org

**OFFICERS:** Chairman: Cllr Trevor Roberts; Vice-Chairman Cllr Michael Williams; Secretary: Robert Robinson

**MEETINGS:** March, July, September and November. Members of the Public are not admitted to the Meetings. Joint Meetings are also held with the Cambrian Coast Railway Liaison Committee.

**MEMBERSHIP :** membership is open to Ceredigion, Gwynedd, Powys and Shropshire Councils, Town and Community Councils who have a station along or are close to the line, Cambrian Rail Partnership, Aberystwyth University and Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Rail Passengers' Association (SARPA); additionally Welsh Government Officers, local MPs and AMs are also invited to the meetings.

**OBJECTIVES:** The Constitution lists the following objectives:

- Discussion on common issues between its membership regarding the main line between Shrewsbury and Aberystwyth
- To receive updates on matters affecting the main line from Arriva Trains Wales, Network Rail, Rail Partnership, Police and other relevant bodies
- To influence and aid enhancement to the main line services between Shrewsbury and Aberystwyth
- To liaise between Welsh Government and the various interest groups

**PUBLICATIONS:** *Travel Plan for 2016-2020* (October, 2016).

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:** The Constitution, agendas and minutes of Meetings, Reports from Network Rail, Arriva Trains Wales and Rail Partnership and publications are all available on the Committee's website.

## **TRAWS LINK CYMRU. WEST WALES RAIL CAMPAIGN**

*Please note that the details for this entry have been taken from the Traws Link Cymru website in October, 2017*

**CONTACT DETAILS:** Chairman: Adrian Kendon. Tel. 07981 436981.

**E-mail:** post@trawslinkcymru.org.uk

**Website:** trawslinkcymru.org.uk The website is bi-lingual Welsh and English

**OFFICERS:** Chairman—see above

**MEETINGS:** Fortnightly (sometimes less) usually on a Thursday at The Black Lion, Lampeter.

**MEMBERSHIP :** Nine individuals are core members but hundreds of people have signed the Campaign's petition for the reopening of the Aberystwyth to Carmarthen line. This Campaign has the support of over 30 AMs , 3 MPs and 47 town and community councils as well as Carmarthenshire and Ceredigion County Councils and many other public bodies.

**OBJECTIVES:** The Traws Link Cymru campaign is a grass routes campaign calling for the re-instatement of rail links in west and north west Wales. The two closed lines targeted for reopening are the Aberystwyth to Carmarthen line and the re-establishment of the link from Pwllheli to Bangor.

**PUBLICATIONS:** The scoping study for the re-opening of the Aberystwyth-Carmarthen line is on the website.

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:** The Campaign started in 2013 and is set up as a charity. It maintains a presence on Facebook. Donations to the cause, signing the petition, becoming a core member and volunteering can all be done through the website.

### **IMPROVEMENT ON SHREWSBURY TO BIRMINGHAM CORRIDOR IN WEST MIDLANDS: WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR CAMBEIAN PASSENGERS?**

The new West Midlands franchise will see two trains per hour operate all day along the Shrewsbury to Birmingham corridor in addition to the one train per hour operated by the Wales and Border franchise. Whilst at face value this looks a big improvement on today's one train per hour operated by London Midland and one by ATW it must be born in mind that peak hour extras already run to/from Shrewsbury. Regulars will tell you that's it's in the peak hours that the worst overcrowding experienced by long distance Cambrian passengers travelling through the West Midlands occurs. A regular commuter from Newtown says most days she stands to Telford on her return.

There are already 7 arrivals into Birmingham New St from Shrewsbury including a Virgin service between 0730 & 0930 on weekday mornings and 7 departures between 1600 & 1830. Realistically there will only be an increase of one service in the evening peak and that will be between 1630 & 1700 leaving Birmingham. Peak Wales and Border services on this corridor will still need extra resources to cope with current overcrowding and future growth.

Also of interest in terms of implication is yet another order for brand new rolling stock, this time the new franchise has ordered a fleet of CAF (the Spanish manufacturer) Civity DMU's (the same as Arriva North have ordered for their Northern Connect services). These new DMU's will be used for services to Shrewsbury, Worcester, Hereford and Stratford Upon Avon. These new units will displace the current Class 170 DMU's seen on London Midland services in Shrewsbury, meaning there is yet another fleet of relatively new (built 2000) trains coming off lease with no home to go to. This has come about as DfT policy on franchising changed a couple of years ago to include a weighted quality element in bids to encourage bidders to buy new/additional stock, This combined with historically cheap financing costs has led to new stock displacing stock with life left in it. Whilst passengers will be getting new rolling stock with some more capacity as part of the new franchise deals there's now a glut of off lease DMU's appearing which should be used to boost capacity but are not. The current count is that there are no fewer than 150 DMU carriages built since the Year 2000 with no home once new stock is delivered. A few years ago DfT shouted that no one made new DMU's anymore and that the shortage of stock would be solved by electrification; now new DMU's are being built to displace older ones to sit in sidings whilst overcrowding is not solved. As ever "trying to make franchising work" seems to lurch from one disaster to another.

Allegedly we will know the winner of the Wales and Border franchise in January and the East Midlands Trains one before that: can we expect more of the same - a few extra new carriages whilst the sidings fill up?

## HOW THE DIGITAL RAILWAY FAILED EVERYONE AT THE BARMOUTH BRIDGE 150<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY FIREWORKS EVENT

The Transport Secretary and DfT have been busy recently promising that the “Digital Railway” will be coming over the hill riding to the rescue, exactly what it is and how it will help address important passenger concerns like getting a seat has of course never been explained. Here on the Cambrian we have been the pioneers of the digital railway with the ETCS trial since 2011. Six years into the trial of the new wonder technology was the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Barmouth Bridge opening this October. The bridge was built by Victorians without the aid of machinery and predominantly with wood and trains of all lengths and capacity have been able to get over it ever since.

On the evening of Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> October a firework and laser show was arranged in celebration which turned out to be quite a draw for locals and visitors alike. Could we have the late evening services strengthened? asked local ATW staff. Leaving aside the shoe string nature of ATW’s rolling stock resources with the winter timetable on the coast and units arriving back into Machynlleth on a Saturday it might have been possible to defer maintenance on a unit or two till Sunday. No, was the answer from control in Cardiff as 4 car Class 158 trains are not permitted to Pwllheli due to *“ongoing Network Rail restrictions of the national Signaller-to-Driver radio system”*. After some digging about here’s the plain language translation – Movement Authority on ETCS fitted trains is transmitted through the GSM-R Mobile network and after about 50 metres away from the buffers at Pwllheli station there’s a mobile phone not spot! A driver in the front cab of a 4 car 158 will not be able to get a signal and permission to travel from the signalling centre. The special train that run earlier in the week was much longer in length and was “in signal” in case you’re wondering.

Back on the ground on the Saturday night there were reports of frayed tempers amongst passengers at Talsarnau who couldn’t get on and grossly overcrowded trains with road transport being laid on. Showcasing the benefits of the digital railway? Somehow we suspect the Barmouth Bridge will still be there long after the digital railway is consigned to the bin!

### BARCLAYS - the caring bank?

Car parking for rail passengers can be something of a hot potato with issues ranging from perceived excessive charges to park at places like Wolverhampton to lack of spaces. There was a long ongoing issue at Welshpool with non-rail users believing the railway car park was free for them, until the Town Council took over management of it. However, problems have surfaced at Newtown with workers from the town centre looking for free parking. A couple of years ago Powys CC increased their charges in their town centre car parks and motorists started parking on the periphery of the town centre looking for free car parking. Then around 18 months ago

the formerly free car parks near the station outside what is now Phoenix Furniture (ex Co-Op) and Pryce Jones Warehouse started charging for non-customers wanting to park there. They are private businesses and well within their rights to charge for car parking, and the move was designed primarily to stop non customers using their parking. Several people then started parking in the station car park pre 0900 often arriving the same time as passengers intending to use the 0839 service to Birmingham International. There were apparently a number of confrontations (we hasten to point out involving non SARPA members) with the town office workers who tended to run away red faced when challenged, some altered their behaviour but others continued. Employees of Barclays Bank were labelled the worst offenders mainly due to their wearing uniforms which made them easy to identify.

The problems at Newtown are compounded by the fact that the car park is not in the Train Operators lease, having been developed on land that was owned by Network Rail by Powys CC using a Welsh Government grant around 15 years ago. Like many well meaning third party funded schemes, the ongoing maintenance/responsibility lines are not clear and no one seems to take ownership. Ideally the car park should be pay and display, and people could get money off their train ticket.

SARPAwrote to Barclays Bank several months ago asking for their staff to play fair pointing out that users of Newtown station are not confined to town residents who can walk or get a lift in but are often from outlying villages, towns and farms who have to leave a vehicle overnight as they have no other choice. It's not as though there is any obvious alternative option of leaving a vehicle overnight near the station if you can't find a space. We also made the point that it was hardly enhancing the reputation of Barclays Bank to have their staff involved in confrontation with members of the public and being blamed for people missing trains. Alas this fell on death ears: Barclay's replied that as the station car park has no restrictions or charges on its use then their staff can park there if they want to. So much for the Bank's slogans about caring for the communities they supposedly serve. We have also contacted the Town Council and Russel George AM as it's an issue that effects residential streets and businesses in Newtown.

Underpinning this is of course is the inefficient nature of transport in the UK, having encouraged a mass car owning society and neglecting public transport for over 50 years the problems are stacking up. The consequence of having around 30 million non-commercial vehicles on the road in the UK that on average spend 95% of the time inactive is that you have to find somewhere to store them (park). The public highway is usually not an option and the space required stretches to many many square miles. We also have high land prices especially in urban areas and pressures on land use due to the high population in many parts of the country. Why should organisations provide free car parking for all and sundry when there are more commercial rates of return on land? Their own customers are a different story. Rural Mid Wales is not immune from these problems. Congestion and reduced/unreliable journey times are not the only disadvantages of mass car ownership.

**ALL TICKETS PLEASE with Newtown Station Travel  
Rip Off Rail Fares?**

In *Newsletter* no. 72 we talked about London fares and how they are relatively good value from/to Mid Wales. However let's look at the other side of the coin. Imagine were at Aberystwyth station at 0620 on a weekday morning. Professor Jones from the University is going to a conference in London that starts after lunch and lasts a couple of days. His department has paid £78.10 for an Off-Peak Return to Euston. He spots retired Professor Williams also going to London to visit relatives – he's got a senior railcard and has paid £39.25 for a Super Off Peak Return to Marylebone. They're joined on the platform by Professor Smith: he has a lunch appointment in Oxford and is coming back the same day – his Anytime Return ticket has cost £157.60! All three board the 0630 to Shrewsbury and travel together for the first 125 miles of their journeys to Birmingham New St, having paid wildly varying fares to destinations similar in distance to each other. At Welshpool a man gets on across the aisle from them; he asks the Conductor for three different tickets, an Anytime Day Return to Birmingham, a Birmingham to Banbury Off Peak Return and an Off Peak Day Return from Banbury to Oxford. "That's £44.00 please" says the Conductor. Professor Smith looks at his £157.60 ticket and is not amused "but I booked ahead and bought this on the internet ... thank God the University is paying" he says. Welcome to the whacky world of UK rail fares!

Professor Williams goes cheaper to London than Professor Jones by trading in journey time, having to change stations in Birmingham and staying off peak as well as having his senior discount.

Professor Smith's fare to Oxford is set by Cross Country Trains who say that any journey involving a fare "owned" by them that starts before 0930 on a weekday morning even if on another operator's train is peak and therefore you must pay more. He's also been suckered into believing he's getting discount by buying ahead on the internet – in fact the fare would have been the same buying on the morning.

The man who got on at Welshpool knows what he's doing and has asked for split tickets. Professor Smith could have paid £57.30 for his day trip to Oxford, saving over £100, if he had split his tickets. Why didn't the website offer the best deal to him? This issue is just part of the overall toxicity of UK rail fares. We often hear how fare dodging costs the industry an estimated £250 million a year. However we firmly believe that by not offering the best fares the industry easily gets £250 million and more extra a year out of the public! We're all for punishing genuine fare dodgers at Newtown Station Travel, but needlessly fleecing genuine passengers? It brings the railways into disrepute.

Unfortunately when it was realised that the privatised railways costs were out of control it became government policy to make the passenger pay a higher percentage of the bill than the taxpayer – but as we all know jack all was done about addressing the costs. Hence the passenger has been continually squeezed over the last 15 years by Government policy. Operators like Cross Country have promised to pay huge premiums to Government to pay for

Government policy failures, the travel before 0930 peak rule has nothing to do with managing peak loads into major cities, but is a desperate attempt to increase revenue mainly from business travellers. The recent DfT/RDG announcement of a pilot trial about allowing split tickets is viewed with great suspicion; many see this as a cynical attempt to increase revenue by abolishing or reducing the super expensive rarely purchased Anytime Returns like Professor Smith bought, and increasing the costs of the more common cheaper tickets covered by a smokescreen of officially allowing split ticketing on fare flows where this is happening unofficially anyway.

For instance the Anytime Return Any Permitted Route from Newtown to Penzance is £335.20 and has probably never ever been bought. It's a cheap headline to abolish it/reduce it but what happens underneath is key: most journeys to the far South West we sell involve Advance Purchase fares, Anytime Returns via Hereford or people asking for combinations of Advance's and other fares. Advance tickets are of course unregulated and easy to stealth increase. Back in the early 1990's the 1993 Railways Bill only got through parliament with a number of amendments, one of which was the creation of regulated fares. Is the Rail Delivery Group trying to use fare simplification as a vehicle to wriggle out of fare regulation?

In the meantime the talk of split ticketing is causing confusion and delay. If we had £10.00 for every time someone asked for their ticket to Birmingham to be split at Shrewsbury we would be very happy and richer! instead we have to explain that....an Anytime Day Return to Birmingham from Newtown is £20.00. If you split your ticket at Shrewsbury you pay £8.40 for an Anytime Day Return to Shrewsbury and then pay £14.60 for an Off Peak Day Return or £17.20 for an Anytime Day Return, you don't save – in fact you pay more! Split ticketing is not a universal magic panacea to high fares or perceived high fares. Genuine root and branch reform is needed and were not getting that. The Anytime Day Return at £20.00 with no restrictions is actually a very good bargain for the 152 mile round trip, but the overall mess and disrepute that is the UK rail fare system means people are suspicious of it as a con.

And now for the destination we get the most enquiries for from people who actually end up **not** buying – Cardiff. With the Off Peak Return at £63.10 (99 miles by road), an Off Peak Day Return at £54.70 and the lowest tier Advance Purchase tickets at £20.50 one way Cardiff is as expensive if not more expensive as going to London, but with it being less than half the distance away by road many leisure travellers especially when travelling in multiples opt to drive. The overwhelming feedback is it's too expensive – with the extra mileage via Shrewsbury added on by the Beeching cuts and the historic higher fares down the Marches, passengers face a double whammy to get to Cardiff from the Upper Severn Valley. A few business travellers do it and the odd student travels over to Craven Arms by car and catches the train from there, but it remains a thin market. We sell more tickets to Scotland! Having all the trains from the Cambrian connect well with trains to Cardiff may tick some boxes somewhere, but the price structure acts against people doing it. The Off Peak Return price to Manchester (97 miles by road) is £40.90 and Liverpool (80 miles by road) £44.40, and whilst not as steep as the fare to Cardiff they are still poorer value for money than going to

Birmingham (80 miles by road) £26.20 or on to London (230 miles by road) Euston £68.00/Marylebone £39.50.

On our line itself there is a poor value fare that need highlighting. Telford is a popular destination from the upper Severn valley stations, yet the Anytime Day Return from Newtown is £23.30 compared to Birmingham's £20.00 or £8.40 for Shrewsbury. The Off Peak Day Return is £21.40. Needless to say everyone splits their tickets at Shrewsbury and no one pays any more than £15.70, the official fares are probably only bought by those who buy on the internet naively believing that everything on the internet is cheaper. On a normal weekday this is not a problem as the numbers travelling are relatively few. However come Saturdays and school holidays being asked by everyone to split tickets when the queues are out of the door is not conducive to serving everyone quickly! Of course if the only fare option was the official one, people wouldn't travel and overall revenue would be down. Telford fares need to be in line with the stations before and after it.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

**Dear Editor,**

I am writing to you about my trip to Reading on August 2<sup>nd</sup> this year. As I approached the platform at Welshpool there was an announcement that any passengers travelling without a ticket would be fined or prosecuted. Incidentally there is a similar notice at Warwick where my mum lives – ticket office open between 6.30 and 9.30, plus a very well used machine at peak times too.

Was this the “blitz” on fares Tony Harvey had mailed me about yesterday that I hadn't read yet?

I boarded the 7.52 Birmingham train, as usual without a ticket, heading for Wolverhampton. When the conductor reached me I explained that I was nervous about using the machine as I have never done it before, am afraid of losing my debit card and might not know how to get the discount I am entitled to. The lady told me the conductor would check that part of it. I then asked for a period return to Reading with a senior rail card. “Via Newport?” she replied. “It is £96”. “No,” I returned emphatically. “Via London?”. I was quite amazed. “On the Internet,” I said, “It goes via Wolverhampton. I went to Reading last year, purchasing my own ticket and it was fifty something pounds. My journey to Oxford this June was only forty something”.

The ticket lady told me to “hang on a minute” and disappeared for some time. She eventually returned saying she had conferred with another member of the crew and the period return with discount would be £51!

My question is this: I do not always know in advance on which day or at what time I am going to travel. When my friend and I go to the beach at Aberdyfi we often decide to go at the last minute depending on the weather. My friend even does this and goes all the way to Pwllheli working as she travels. If I decide to buy my ticket from the machine is it going to give me the best possible deal like Newtown Station Travel would? A few years ago thanks to them I was able to travel to Par in Cornwall and back a few days later for £45.

I rest my case.

Sarah Harvey, Pool Quay, Welshpool

**Dear Editor,**

### **SARPA policy on Carno station re-opening**

Thank you for publishing Tony Burton's article on the Carno Station Re-opening Campaign in Newsletter 72. We were surprised and disappointed to read in the "Comments from SARPA" underneath the article the statement that SARPA has taken the line that the infrastructure on the line in terms of passing loops/double track sections is not robust enough at the moment to support an additional station at Carno without adversely impacting performance on the line.

We had previously understood that our group had SARPA's full support for the re-opening of Carno station. Indeed item 9 on SARPA's List of Aims and Objectives is "The reopening of stations at Bow Street (Ceredigion), Carno (Powys) and Hanwood (Shropshire)", without any caveats in relation to current infrastructure.

Carno Station Action Group are well aware of the importance of minimising adverse impacts on line performance resulting from the opening of the station, and to that end have devised modifications to the existing enhanced timetable in which the three minute delay arising from the Carno stop comes from a reduction in the lengthy 10 to 15 minute layover of trains at Shrewsbury. The modified timetable provides for 9 trains in each direction to stop at Carno, with an hourly frequency at peak times. At times of the day when trains are passing at both Fron and Talerddig, stops at Carno cannot be accommodated if the strict hourly pattern is maintained, so not all trains stop at Carno and the timetable is flexed at the beginning and end of the day to permit inclusion of some Carno stops then. The flexing results in slightly earlier departures from Aberystwyth in the early morning and slightly later arrivals there in the evening.

Clearly all line users are hoping that the full hourly service is introduced as soon as possible, so we have devised an hourly timetable with six Eastbound and seven Westbound trains stopping at Carno. This requires some flexing of the time table as described above and the omission of Caersws stops by the 4 additional trains in each direction. Such a timetable would not fully achieve our aspiration for a two-hourly train service, but would come close. The percentages of trains stopping at Caersws and Carno would be 75% and 41% respectively. It is considered that this would provide a reasonable balance between the two stations.

Although we recognise that the ideal solution would be Westwards extension of the passing loop at Welshpool, this would cost millions of pounds and destroy the station business case. This would be another instance of the best being the enemy of the good.

In the light of the above, we hope that SARPA will quickly reaffirm its support for the re-opening of Carno station.

Jeremy Barnes,  
Chairman, Carno Station Action Group & Member of Carno Community Council

**Dear Editor:**

The message about a through Coast to Aberystwyth train has got through, without any publicity or on train mention of it. For example on arrival at Machynlleth on October 10<sup>th</sup> the 15.37 ex-Pwllheli was very well loaded, near to full, yet only a dozen or so passengers got off leaving around half a train load to proceed, non-stop, to Aberystwyth.

From the first day of the concessionary (free) bus pass travel on the Coast Line, the computer system for Machynlleth booking office (and all other offices) together with the on-train portable machines had not been set up to deal with this. Passengers with bus passes were simply waved on, apparently without any check on numbers. The same situation prevailed on October 14<sup>th</sup>. The loss of revenue from WAG must be huge.

Robert Knight, Machynlleth

**Dear Editor**

I hope SARPA received my latest contribution entitled Reading Trip.  
Here is my initial response to the first few pages of Newsletter No 73 for what it is worth.  
From what I have read so far it is extremely informative and performs the vital and necessary functions i.e. to alert the reader to various situations and, where necessary, Protest!

As far as the visual aspect is concerned the I feel that previous issues in colour and with glossy pages are far more attractive, and though obviously more costly would, in the end, produce more revenue as they are far more appealing to prospective subscribers.

Welshpool Town Council and the Friends of the Canal produce this type of magazine.  
Secondly the compilers need to consider the needs of the reader more as older people struggle to read small print especially when it is as faint as this. I am a senior citizen with an eye disorder who finds such print difficult to read and there are hundreds more older than me with worse eye diseases than I have.

I am not being negative about the issue but suggesting ways to promote it and give it more appeal to potential members.

I am entirely in accord with the points made by passengers travelling in Wales and the Borders. I was appalled on first seeing the condition of the former station at Harlech and there are many other stations on the Cambrian line in a similar state. On the other hand the stations at Borth and Caersws are delightful to visit and illustrate the possible benefits when a team from the area are prepared to voluntarily give up their time to enhance the

attractiveness of their local! Welshpool, one of the busiest stations in Powys, has facilities which are, in my view, totally inadequate. This station should be a priority for development owing to its situation in Mid Wales close to one of the few remaining TICs.

With regard to refreshments I found the cafe at Pwllleli excellent; the only downside is that it closes early. Similarly the kiosk at Machylleth has a reasonable range of products but much of the time it seems to be closed. It is quite obvious when one visits old stations reopened and manned by volunteers such as the Talyllyn at Tywyn that the stations on the mainline leave a lot to be desired.

However I believe that the solution lies with the people living in the vicinity, whether involved in local government or interested in local history or train enthusiasts, as well as people who wish to improve the appearance of the locality by planting window boxes, sponsoring murals or providing local food as some stations have done. Once they are able to appreciate the benefit to the whole community whether indirectly by attracting visitors and revenue, or on a personal level by improving their experience of rail travel I am sure that local people will club together to raise the standard of their railway station.

Sarah Harvey, Pool Quay, Welshpool

Addendum: returning to the subject of ticket purchasing I have become quite frustrated by the fact that the Tourist Information Office only opens during office hours. On two occasions I have been in Welshpool but before it opened and last week I arrived at 5.32 two minutes after it closed.

Barmouth Bridge 150 "Cambrian Coast Express on the Bridge. Photo copyright Richard Jones.



## BRIDGE REPAIRS AT PENSARN

On the Cambrian Coast line, Network Rail is carrying out improvement work to the River Arto viaduct near Pensarn station. The innovative £1.4m project will 'jack the tracks', to carry out repairs to the timber viaduct underneath. This method will save time and minimise disruption to passengers. The technique will, it is said, also be used during the upcoming refurbishment of Barmouth viaduct although we are still being told that there won't be a long closure.

[From Charlie Hulme's website, 30 October 2017: <http://www.nwrail.org.uk>]

## SARPA MEETINGS

December	Saturday 9th	11.45 am	Aberystwyth (Royal Naval Club, Market Street)
<b>2018</b>			
January	Tuesday 9th	7.15pm	Welshpool (Jacobite Room, The Royal Oak)
February	Tuesday 6th	6.45pm	Caersws (The Red Lion)
March	Tuesday 6th	5.45pm	Shrewsbury (The Railway Station) (TBC)
April	Saturday 7th	11.45am	Aberystwyth (Royal Naval Club) (TBC)
May	Saturday 12th	12.15pm	Borth (The Railway Hotel) (TBC)
June	Saturday 2nd	2.15pm	Machynlleth (The White Lion)
July	Tuesday 3rd	7.00pm	Newtown (The Sportsman)
August	Tuesday 7th	7.15pm	Welshpool (Jacobite Room, The Royal Oak)
September	Saturday 8th	11.45am	Tywyn (Talylyn Railway)
October	Saturday 6th	2.15pm	Machynlleth (The White Lion) AGM
November	Tuesday 6th	7.00pm	Newtown (The Sportsman)
December	Saturday 1st	11.45am	Aberystwyth (Royal Naval Club) (TBC)

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.

## 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

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## 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.

## 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

LondonMidland

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

Talyllyn 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/](http://traintimes.org.uk/)

[www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk/](http://www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk/)

[www.nationalrail.co.uk/](http://www.nationalrail.co.uk/)

[www.centro.org.uk/wwwroot/HomePage.asp](http://www.centro.org.uk/wwwroot/HomePage.asp)

[www.londonmidland.com/index.html](http://www.londonmidland.com/index.html)

[www.virgintrains.co.uk/default.aspx](http://www.virgintrains.co.uk/default.aspx)

[www.chilternrailways.co.uk/](http://www.chilternrailways.co.uk/)

[www.networkrail.co.uk/](http://www.networkrail.co.uk/)

[www.railfuture.org.uk/](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/)

[www.thecambrianline.co.uk/](http://www.thecambrianline.co.uk/)

[www.acorp.uk.com](http://www.acorp.uk.com)

[www.passengerfocus.org.uk/](http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/)

[www.nwrail.org.uk/](http://www.nwrail.org.uk/)

[www.penmorfa.com/Cambrian/](http://www.penmorfa.com/Cambrian/)

[www.ffestiniograilway.co.uk/timetable.htm](http://www.ffestiniograilway.co.uk/timetable.htm)

[www.rheidolrailway.co.uk/timetable.htm](http://www.rheidolrailway.co.uk/timetable.htm)

[www.talyllyn.co.uk/](http://www.talyllyn.co.uk/)

[www.wllr.org.uk/timetable.htm](http://www.wllr.org.uk/timetable.htm)

[www.whr.co.uk/index.php?pid=51](http://www.whr.co.uk/index.php?pid=51)

[www.fairbournerailway.com/index.htm](http://www.fairbournerailway.com/index.htm)

[www.borthstationmuseum.co.uk](http://www.borthstationmuseum.co.uk)

[www.mylordz.com](http://www.mylordz.com)

**Copy deadline for the next newsletter is 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2018**