

Sarpa Meeting 6th August Royal Oak Hotel Welshpool

Present: Julia Clarke, James Davies, Angus Eickoff, Philip Ellison, Russell George, Sarah Harvey, Roger Goodhew, Bob Kemble, Ken Law, Richard Newcombe, Bill Redfern, Richard White, Roger Whitehouse, Michael Williams

Apologies: Denis Bates, Tony Harvey, Robert Knight, Ivor Morris, Jeff Smith

The meeting started late as the result of a delay in the Aberystwyth-Birmingham train. In the absence of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman it was proposed that Angus chair the meeting. This was seconded. Angus welcomed newcomers and the guest Russell George, Assembly Member for Montgomeryshire.

Russell George said he is willing to attend any Sarpa meetings in Welshpool or others when he is available. He explained that he chairs the Economy, Skills and Transport Committee in the Welsh Assembly so can help in those spheres; this meets every week and its job is to hold the government to account.

Looking at the future of TfW the Committee will be looking at the amalgamation of transport: taxis, buses and trains. As there are 18 months left of the current Assembly it is likely that regulations will be scrutinised in the New Year. The Committee has looked at transport in other regions e.g. London and the North East.

Julia Clarke expressed her pleasure at using the T12 bus service which she uses a lot. Bob Kemble agreed. Julia remarked on the overcrowding at Birmingham station where people are jammed in. Angus thought Arriva had done better but things had gone “pear shaped”. Russell asked about maintenance. Angus referred to Gareth Marston at Newtown Travel Bureau who named the problem as the ETCS System. Roger Whitehouse introduced himself as the Tallylyn representative on the Shrewsbury - Aberystwyth Line Liaison

Committee. He said they had heard very praiseworthy publicity but we are in a transition stage. There are problems: passengers on a through service had to change twice; trains are short formed; the wrong units get into a train that should come onto the Cambrian; we are bothered about a report that only 21 units be fitted when new signalling comes into the system. Roger W said last Saturday passengers couldn't catch trains because they were so crowded. Councillor Michael Williams, also a member of the Line Liaison committee, said a number of issues had been taken up by the Chairman and Secretary of the Committee when they met in Cardiff. Julia mentioned poor air conditioning on trains; Angus said he would put this on the Facebook page.

Bill said that not all units fitted with ETCS are running on the Cambrian, Roger W that 3 of the units don't come near us. Roger W referred to holiday times and movement of students to Aberystwyth. 158s get bound for Cardiff but it doesn't work vice versa. Ken Law asked if changing signalling system would help; Bill and Angus said not. Ken reported 2 carriages only to Shrewsbury during holiday time. Richard Newcombe thought ETRMS had limit of only 8 coaches. Russell answered that the issue is shortage of rolling stock and carriages. He continued that the issue isn't money: the Welsh government will say the UK government is responsible for the Network. The UK will say it is the Welsh; the Welsh government have taken responsibility. Ken referred to the statement from TfW (July Minutes) that they will not send a representative to meetings if there is a politician present. Angus's explanation was that they are civil servants. Russell responded that they are using that as an excuse. Roger W said there are always politicians at S-A Line Liaison Meetings.

Bill thought there were questions to TfW for Russell G's group's scrutiny about trains being more reliable. Roger W gave the opinion that sending trains to Coventry would cause chaos. Roger Goodhew

commented on this saying a big rebuild of Birmingham International may stop a plan of anything happening. There was discussion about a slowed down timetable and turnaround with one train returning as the Holyhead train and one as the Cambrian. Roger G said the purpose is to segregate trains. It is early days he continued.

Philip Ellison said excuses were made re staff shortages, Angus that Arriva had relied on rest day working. Philip said Sundays and evenings were very bad. When extra Shrewsbury – Aberystwyth trains were put on there was no overtime for 3 years. Rest Day working was used instead of extra staff. Now there is the enhanced (part hourly) service there are cancellations day by day while staff withdraw rest day working. Russell said that had never been raised as a reason; he will raise it in committee. Sarah mentioned absence of refreshments on a Saturday on the 10.29 Shrewsbury – Aberystwyth train was explained as due to holiday time. Russell referred to a 4 hour journey between Cardiff and Manchester without refreshments saying it should be in the contract. He added that at least they apologised for disputes. He told the meeting that performance is recorded on the TfW website; Roger W said the figures measure the trains' arrival at their terminus; as he understands it a lot can be left out.

Russell read from the Response by the Welsh Government to the report of the Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee on the autumn Rail Disruption: Recommendation 3. He later gave Sarah a copy of the Response and the Response from TfW to the report.

Bob said more information should be available and Russell agreed. Bob asked about the gap between the 4.30 and 6.30 from Shrewsbury. Michael Williams said it should be called an enhanced service and Angus said it is. There was discussion about the Sunday service as the earliest train from Welshpool is 10.57. Roger W said a full hourly service is in the contract even if it doesn't start early. Ken said it isn't in the Timetable. TfW said they hadn't made a decision.

Angus thought maybe we should hold TfW and the Welsh government to account. Ken asked what the barriers are. Russell said he would ask what commitments were made, Roger W that he should ask what commitments were made in the franchise. After some discussion Russell said he will talk to Ken Skates. Ken Law read a response he'd had that no strategic decisions were to be made. Russell said the Committee had been looking at the future but don't know what the government want TfW to do. TfW say they are following government policy but it looks as if they are forming policy; they use high levels of consultation and appointments. It was difficult to find their organisational charter as they only showed Board members. Russell's Committee had asked for the whole thing. Julia asked why TfW cannot see what is needed. Russell asked whether there had been a general improvement. Angus and Roger W agreed that there had. Bob said users are going up year by year. Russell said connexions with buses are not always working but public pressure e.g. from Sarpa does work. Sarah thanked Russell for his intervention on behalf of disabled passengers who cannot access toilets and referred to the positive response he received from James Price, Chief Executive of TfW.

It was suggested that the subject of buses be referred to the Transport Committee. Roger W praised the fact that the Committee is moving towards an integrated transport system. He continued by saying the old bus service from Tywyn to Dolgellau is terrible and that there is now a town bus service at Welshpool station but at Newtown nothing except when there is a railway replacement. Bob thought it better to look at integration in Belgium than in England but Russell said TfW needs its own model. The places visited were able to tell whether their systems worked – or not. Bob repeated that T12 service is excellent. Roger W and Julia said go to Switzerland for an effective service! Angus when asked about the Westbury Loop explained it as a crossing between Shrewsbury and

Welshpool; he asked Russell if he were aware of the Bow St infrastructure and changes at Borth. Russell asked with whom does Sarpa take up issues and does it get good or bad replies. Angus replied that it gets both. Bill explained that infrastructure comes under Network Rail: staffing and operating is the responsibility of the train operators. He continued that the response from Network Rail re Bow St is that they are starting to look into the issues. The timetable at Aberystwyth is tight and Bow St would make it difficult. There would be a requirement for more platforms at Aberystwyth for more trains. Russell George said he will take these concerns back. He will take the matter up with James Price.

Ken asked about electronic seat reservations; Bill said he wasn't keen on seat reservations which can make finding a seat harder for those without reservations and they are not a panacea for trains without sufficient seats.

Russell G spoke about a cross border group then the Mid-Wales Growth Deal. He said that connectivity is most important. In mid-Wales everyone is working together. It's in its early stages. Roger Goodhew joked that it's not a no-deal.

The Shrewsbury bound travellers had to leave at this point. Bill gave out membership forms. Angus thanked Russell George for attending and the meeting concluded.