

Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Rail Passengers' Association

Saturday 12th November 2022, 11:30

Shrewsbury Railway Station, (Chester Suite).

Present: Martin Bemment^(r), Dennis Bates^(r), Tony Burton, Steve Boulding, Angus Eickhoff, Roger Goodhew, Sarah Harvey^(r), Gareth Marston, Bill Redfern, Jeff Smith, Thomas Wheeler^(r), Cllr Richard White, Roger Whitehouse, Cllr Michael Williams^(r).

^(r) – remote.

Apologies: Tony Harvey, Robert Knight, Ivor Morris, William Owen, Dave Taylor.

Minutes of Last Meeting (15th October):

The minutes of the October meeting were accepted noting clarification to Line News that Dave Taylor was reporting that it was rumoured that trains would run between Barmouth and Pwllheli during the bridge works.

Matters Arising from the Minutes:

Regarding Sarah's concern that when on a Cross-country journey from Leamington to Wolverhampton she was disturbed by an announcement that TfW tickets were not valid on the service. Bill reported that he had spoken to Linda at Machynlleth station about this and that she was taking this up. Gareth confirmed that it would only apply to restricted cheap day return tickets between Shrewsbury and Birmingham stating TfW only. Roger Whitehouse stated that he had be caught out by a TfW only Wolverhampton Birmingham ticket. Bill said that the problem is not with tickets purchased from TfW in general, which are valid on all services, but only those that explicitly state on them TfW ONLY. Gareth added that this is the problem with operator specific tickets. No one travelling from the Cambrian should encounter problems.

Tony Burton queried Cambrian to London Marylebone tickets that say Chiltern and TfW Only. These are not valid on West Midlands Trains services, so you cannot use the Smethwick Galton Bridge to Moor Street

link. Roger Whitehouse added there is an anomaly that if you ticket is for beyond Marylebone it will say via High Wickham so the link can be used. An example of the ridiculous anomalies that have crept into the ticketing system over the years and need to be sorted.

Gareth added that after the December timetable change our services will not be stopping at Galton Bridge anyway, calling at Sandwell and Dudley instead. A ridiculous change causing uproar.

Gareth said that the German state has declared that the use of hydrogen is too expensive with electrification/intermittent electrification a better option. Steve said that hydrogen is only a short term solution only sensible in limited cases, such as the Tees Valley, where there is abundant Green Hydrogen. Using Blue hydrogen does not give environmental benefit. Thomas said that Modern Railways magazine reports a conference on electrification in September, where someone from the GBR transition team said that the 2021 spending review made Network Rails carbon plan unachievable by 2050.

Gareth said that Scotland is going ahead with electrification. It's not yet clear for Wales, but there is a moratorium on spending on roads except for current projects. A 50mph limit has been hinted at. After 2025 this should give around £200M of road spend up for grabs, and we should ensure we lobby for a Cambrian slice of this.

SCRUA Report

Steve reported that Gobowen to Oswestry reopening has received a £50k restoring railways grant for outline business case. They got good consultants for the report which was submitted at the end of September with no formal response so far, but it is thought to have been well received. It does give us good cause for optimism that we can go forward to the next step. Highways are set against the existing level crossing across the A5, so a bridge is proposed. Trains to Oswestry is looking promising including some through services, Mersey rail having discovered the range of their batteries, are interested in running to Oswestry. Gobowen to the Orthopaedic Hospital could start anytime, they have 2 pacer train units available.

Baschurch Station. Baschurch, 10 miles south of Gobowen, has a growing population (12,500) with much support for reopening. Serious interest at Shropshire Council level. Some anti rail opposition but the reopening group is having a really structured and professional campaign that should get around any opposition, and move it forward. Future likely electrification would recover time loss from stopping.

Steve then had to leave but stated that there was a SCRUA meeting in Chester with TfW coming up. Angus expressed surprise has the Line Liaison committee had reported problems getting TfW to attend. Steve said that Nichole Sarra Stakeholder Manager Wales and Borders is very keen.

Discussion:

Thomas reported that Wolverhampton to Shrewsbury electrification was now unlikely before 2050. Roger added that Shrewsbury Wolverhampton electrification was a bit of two edged sword from the Cambrian perspective, with regard to through running.

Gareth raised the online Midland Connect Consultation due end of November. In summary with regard to Shrewsbury to West Midlands services Midland Connect are proposing by 2040 electrification of Oxley (Wolverhampton) to Shrewsbury, hourly Shrewsbury London Euston; 2 all station stopping services (all stations Wolverhampton to Birmingham New Street and all stations Wolverhampton to Shrewsbury; which Gareth isn't convinced that they won't get in the way of to other services even with electrification); and 1 path for TfW service as far as New Street, not International. SARPA is aware from experience that terminating at New Street doesn't work. Roger Goodhew reported that he was on the 9:30 from Shrewsbury on the 26th October that broke down completely between Wolverhampton and Tipton. It was there for a very long time before it reached Tipton where it was terminated and left in the siding. Everything behind was disrupted. Roger questioned if we are starting to see problems because of the age of the trains? Roger Whitehouse reported that he had noticed a significant number of cancellations due to 'more units than normal requiring repairs'. Gareth stated that the Chester

depot has been transferred to CAF, in preparation for the 197s, and this as resulted in a noticeable reduction in the reliability of the 175 fleet. Angus queried Machynlleth, and Gareth stated that this will also transfer to CAF. Angus said we need to keep an eye that they don't try to close Machynlleth, though there are no plans for that.

Officers Reports:

The Chairman reported that he had tried to give Gail a nudge about the impact on the TfW rolling stock strategy that was predicated on the, now withdrawn, West Midlands services reducing overcrowding. i.e. shouldn't they now be needing more units. Nothing has been received back from Gail so the Chairman asked if he should take it up a level to Senedd members. It was strongly agreed that he should. Gareth pointed out that there has been a problem with the strategy from the beginning in the extra West Midlands trains were only off peak. Garth considers that, post Covid, Saturday is the most affected day, with new travel patterns still emerging. Bill said, again, that though we don't like the 197s buying more of them would help, and we should push for that. Thomas stated that buying more is very bad from the decarbonisation perspective and they should at least have pantographs. If at all possible we should block the 197s coming to the Cambrian. It is very unfortunate that 197s cannot be converted for electrification. Should suggest centre cars with pantographs to make three car units. Bill said that the problem is that design changes would be the excuse for it being too expensive. TfW have been burnt very badly with conversions. Gareth said one reason we are getting the 197s is because of CAF setting up a factory at Newport, but there are now no new orders, so some face saving is required. Thomas suggested we send the 197s back for modification.

Angus is drafting an email for Senedd members re the concerns about TfW.

The Chairman has drafted a prospectus to encourage councils along the Coast Line to join Sarpa.

The Treasurer reported little movement in the accounts this month.

The Webmaster reported that the web site is up to date. He will look to had recent minutes. He notes again we seem to have more on Facebook than we have members.

The Newsletter Editor is between editions, the next issue being January, for which copy is welcome.

Carno Reopening:

Tony Burton reported that nothing is really happening with regard to Carno Station reopening. A year ago Lee Waters wrote to Grant Shapps to request a tiny pot of money to develop the case for the reopening of Carno station. Tony thinks it's time that more pressure was put on the Welsh Government, and would SARPA wish to join with that, e.g. with a joint letter to Lee Waters? Garth said that what we have seen before, with Bow Street, is that when the local authority becomes involved things become a lot easier. He wondered if the electoral changes at Powys County Council would help. Michael suggested writing directly to the leader of the council (James Gibson- Watt). Tony said that Carno failed in the New Stations Fund application because of the increase in cost from £2M to £7.7M in the consultants report. A large element of the cost was a huge car park with roundabout so that rail replacement buses could serve the station! The SARPA position is that we can support subject to no detriment on the timetable.

Line Liaison Committee:

Angus reported that he attended a Line Liaison Committee meeting on the 4th of November where there was a proposal to link the committee with the North Wales Coast on the basis that a larger body would have more leverage. The proposal was accepted at that meeting. A £10 annual fee from stakeholders is required. Jeff proposed that SAPA remains a member and pay the £10. Bill said he agreed that we should take part, but it's important that the differences between the organisations is recognised, and we are the only body open to all Cambrian rail users. Roger Whitehouse said he was also at the meeting and supported we join. A unanimous vote was taken that we pay the £10.

Cambrian Lines News:

Angus asked how many days has the Cambrian been out of action this year. Jeff said that we have asked the question before; may be good to ask in January and get the whole year. Bill said he thought that it had been the worse year ever generally due to lack of resource, crew or trains, however he'd seen some signs of improvement with new staff being recruited. Roger Whitehouse said that cancellations, lack of through services etc., put people off and we need to keep on trying to shame TfW into providing the service they are supposed to provide.

AOB:

Proposal for 2023 meetings to be emailed around the committee.

Councillor White asked about progress with disability access to Newtown station, particularly the provision of a lift. Nothing had been heard and the Chairman agreed to pursue TfW on the matter.

Bill said he was unable to make the next meeting at Aberystwyth, and Jeff said it was lucky that it was a venue with remote access facilities.