

SARPA Newsletter No.20

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Special points of interest:

- **AGM report**
- **Mark Haslam bids farewell to the Cambrian lines**
- **Wales and the Borders take over the franchise**

Editorial

This is the first new-look SARPA newsletter, the product of the Editor's increasing familiarity with the workings of computers and publishing systems. He hopes you will like it, however, he still has a long way to go.

We live in interesting times, as the Chinese proverb goes. Wales and Borders has succeeded Central Trains, and Railtrack's future is at the time of writing still uncertain (though it may well have been settled by the time you read this). Inside you will find a farewell letter from Mark Haslem of Central Trains. We wish him well in the future.

The sentence in the case of the Tre'rddol deaths has just been announced - a twelve month suspended sentence. In all the circumstances, and in the



Sweating over a hot computer!

light of the grief and pain undoubtedly caused to those convicted, this seems the best outcome. The national publicity given to the case will have made its mark on the general public, and a custodial sentence would not have achieved anything more than the present sentence.

Wales and Borders Trains take over the Cambrian

Wales and Borders has just become the franchisee for the Cambrian Lines, taking over in early October from Central Trains, who have had the franchise since privatization. Chris Gibb, writing in the new timeta-

ble, welcomes us to "timetable H - covering rail services on the Cambrian Coast Line".



Wales & Borders Trains

SHREWSBURY TO ABERYSTWYTH RAIL PASSENGERS' ASSOCIATION (SARPA): AGM 2001: *Royal Oak Hotel, Welshpool, Powys. Tuesday 4th September 2001.*

Chairman's Report

Monthly Meetings

Attendance was on the whole good with an average attendance of nine people per meeting, the Saturday meetings in Aberystwyth (January & July) proving very popular. Further thought should be given to location & date of meetings, especially as we haven't held one in Borth for a long time, and the time constraints encountered in going to Machynlleth on a weekday evening.

Meeting with National Assembly's Transport Directorate

I had a meeting in Cathays Park, Cardiff in November 2000 with two members of the Assembly's Transport Directorate (Neil Pike & Gareth Price). This followed a raft of correspondence earlier in the year mainly on the subject of connections at Shrewsbury and improving links to North & South Wales. As well as this issue I raised the usual range of issues like overcrowding, access to real time running information, station facilities etc. It was a good meeting with two pro-rail people, there was a lot of talk about the hopes and aspirations for the new Wales & Border Franchise.

Rail Users Consultative Committee- Network of Networks

An email network between the RUCC (Now RPC) and individual rail users & groups was set up in October 2000. Both myself and Denis Bates have registered, however its use has been limited. I suspect neither of us has really had the time to spend on the net to contribute effectively.

National Assembly Transport Framework Consultative Document

A document seeking responses and contribution from a wide range of interested parties on the subject of transport as a whole across Wales was launched in April 2001. The objective was to shape the future Transport policy of the National Assembly to the needs of its populace. A copy was obtained and a response from a SARPA point of view submitted by myself.

A further document picking up on the responses received and inviting further comment is due to be sent back by October 2001. I'm currently working on this.

Shrewsbury Rail Federation

Roger Goodhew has done sterling work attending these meetings on our behalf. These are the interface between us and the other user groups that represent the lines running into Shrewsbury. I'm currently working on an exhaustive analysis of all arrivals into Shrewsbury and the waiting times for connections in all directions. The results will be made available to the other groups as a tool to campaign effectively for improved connections, empirical evidence that the overall picture is poor will give back up to individual examples that are often raised.

SARPA Website

This is in its early stages and "under construction". The address will be www.shrewsbury-to-aberystwyth.org.

Secretary

Ken Whittaker resigned back in March citing too many other commitments. After a couple of months with the position being vacant a new member, Rachael Jones, came forward in June and volunteered her services. She has proved to be efficient and organised and as well writing up a good set of notes has helped out with news releases and other publicity, and has acted as a persistent memory aide to myself to get things done.

Summer 2001 Timetable Change Consultation

In February there were some rumours flying around about changes in the summer timetable, mainly effecting the second UP train of the day, the then 0707 ex Aberystwyth. It would be retimed later giving an arrival in Shrewsbury at 0916. The major point of concern was if the new timing effected commuters using the service. Mark Haslem (Central Trains) actually contacted me explaining the reasons for the change and asking for our views. The obvious concern of commuting traffic being lost was raised, and we were asked to help with a survey being conducted on this issue along with train crews and Newtown Station Travel.

By chance at this time I was attending a course in Shrewsbury and spent the best part of a week commuting on the 0813 from Newtown. My observations were that there were a number of people travelling to Welshpool (asking them it transpired that most worked for employers who operated flexi-time so the timetable change was not of critical importance to them) but hardly any going on to Shrewsbury or Telford (at least during the week I travelled). I could only report what I observed which tallied with what other sources were saying that few if any people were going to lose out. The train was retimed in May and there appears to be no effect on the numbers travelling on it.

I know this was a bone of contention with some members, however the train was perhaps running too late to attract commuter traffic into Shrewsbury or Telford anyway. The real minus was the loss of the connection with the 0913 to Waterloo, which provided a direct train to Bristol without having to go via Birmingham.

Mid Wales Manufacturing Group

The association of manufacturing companies in Mid Wales (claiming over 150 members) launched the results of a members survey in August: highlighted amongst concerns was a "lack of rail services". I have just contacted them to try and find out further details and what service business people would like. Also I suspect this may be useful in pointing out any misconceptions they may have about rail services in Mid Wales. The lack of contact between local businesses and SARPA needs addressing, and hopefully this will help.

London for the Day

I was contacted in August by a local businesswomen complaining that it was not possible to travel to London and back in a day. It is, you can get a full eight hours there. I had a letter published in local newspapers pointing this out.

Press Releases & other bits of SARPA in the newspapers

Subjects covered included:

Election of officers at the 2000 AGM. September 2000.
The train service being unaffected by last September's fuel crisis. September 2000.
Welcoming of the National Assembly's announcement of funding for the Dyfi loop project. January 2001.

MWVG proposal to boost the population of Newtown to 25,000 people and the implications for transport infrastructure. May 2001

West Midlands Multi Modal Wider Reference Group

Despite being signed up for this consultation exercise, our participation has been somewhat limited mainly as the groups meetings have not been attended.

Shropshire and Mid Wales First Group

Some contact between the group and myself was made earlier in the year. Since then their activities seem to have diminished and little has been heard of them recently.

Newsletter

Thank you again to Denis Bates and those that have contributed to it. We have had feedback that AM's and members of TOC Management do read it and it is considered one of the better ones about.

"Rail" Safety

I swapped correspondence with Mick Bates AM (Montgomeryshire) back in November/December as he had jumped aboard the post Hatfield bandwagon with a vengeance. Hopefully I pointed out a few facts amidst the hysteria being bandied about.

More recently we have been in contact with Powys County Council regarding road bridge safety following the Great Heck incident.

Gareth Marston
Newtown, September 20001.

**Wales and Borders have their website at
www.walesandborderstrains.co.uk**

THE NEW LOOK TIMETABLE

With the takeover of the Cambrian services by Wales and Borders Trains, the new timetable H, reflecting their house style, with a cover in blue and silver. Bilingual of course, it comes with an introduction by the Managing Director of Wales and Borders, Chris Gibb. The content, of course, is very comparable with that of the old Central Trains ones.

The timetable, of course, gives all times to Birmingham—all Wales and Borders trains terminating there. In addition, times to and from Cardiff and London are also given, but only in the weekday tables. It would have been useful to give other connection times, to places such as Crewe, Chester, Liverpool, Manchester at least. Other more imaginative



Cambrian Lines map from the new timetable

at Shrewsbury).

times could be those to airports such as Manchester, Birmingham, Heathrow and Gatwick. The timetable pages have plenty of room for such information.

Connecting bus times are given for the Traws Cambria and Haverforwest, St. Davids and Fishguard services. The latter is a curious addition, since they do not connect with Cambrian trains!

A nice touch is the inclusion of minimum connection times (e.g. 7 minutes

TIMETABLE IMPROVEMENTS IN WALES

Chris Green, the Chief Executive of Virgin Trains, recently met the Rail Passengers Committee Wales in Cardiff. He outlined a number of improvements to services to South and North Wales, to be introduced in the next couple of years.

The current Virgin Trains provision is one train from Swansea, Neath, Port Talbot, Bridgend, Cardiff and Newport to the North East of England. By the 2003 timetable, Virgin Trains will be running 7 services from South Wales to Bristol, Birmingham, Doncaster and Darlington. One of the new trains will be a morning service from Swansea.

The current Virgin Trains provision is three trains from North Wales to London Euston. By the 2003 timetable, Virgin Trains will be running 7 services from North Wales to London. In addition, the journey time will be reduced from 3 hours 50 minutes to 3 hours 10 minutes. The Super Voyager train has been tested in the Alps, and the first of the 68 units ordered will come into service in June 2002. Chris Green confirmed that 5-car units would definitely be serving North Wales, and not 4-car as originally planned. For some North Wales services, two 5-car units would be coupled as far as Chester.

The timetable for the North Wales services was likely to be introduced in May 2003, although the earliest possible start was September 2002. A two hourly service would defi-

nately be running by 2005, but Chris Green confirmed that Virgin wanted to introduce the two hourly services as soon as it could. He confirmed that they had bid for the required paths for September 2002. Although Virgin had the wherewithal to run the 2 hourly service next year, it was likely that there would be a more gradual introduction of extra services to Holyhead.

Chris Green promised that the company would invest heavily in providing a "first class" service in Wales. He said Virgin was determined that the InterCity network from Wales would extend to provincial centres outside of London. Virgin is investing £1bn in a new train fleet for a cross-country service across the UK, which is now starting to be delivered. This fleet will operate in South Wales and make up for the omissions of the past.

Chris Green said: "This is just the beginning. If we can make a success of this, we would like to extend the services. "We would like to go to Swansea every two hours if we can find the market, with a possible extension of the service to Edinburgh."

Chairman's Message

Two big changes within the rail industry have happened in October- firstly the establishment of a Wales & Border Train Operating Company and secondly (and more importantly) the demise of Railtrack in its current form. I for one am not shedding any tears over the demise of Railtrack- it's a company that should never have existed and has done untold harm to the rail industry and the nations transport future. I have often wondered what the rationale behind the Conservatives convoluted complex and nonsensical privatisation restructuring of British Rail was about. Improved and better rail services? Not in a million years! The reaction to Railtrack going into administration that was plastered all over the news said it all. There was none or hardly any debate on the future of the industry or the question marks raised over financing the major improvements needed - instead we had the weeping Shareholders road show.

Those happy enough to reap the dividends when the share price was high (created by letting the infrastructure deteriorate through cost cutting and causing Hatfield, Southall etc.) cried foul about losing the value of their shares, supported by the Conservatives. It was clear that to the shareholders, getting their money back was of more importance than the future of the nations railways. Rail privatisation and its zany structure exposed as a money making racket for all to see. The complex structure was designed to enable maximum profits to be made - whether or not the travelling public got a better or improved services was inconsequential to the shareholders dividends. I wait with baited breath to see what Mr. Byers comes up with as its replacement.

Not everything in the privatised railway is bad (and also for the record I don't lump all Railtrack shareholders together, such as employees who were encouraged to sink life savings into the com-

pany they worked for and those who bought shares to try and influence Railtrack in the right direction). Which brings me to Wales & Borders (which is temporarily in the hands of National Express run from Cardiff by the old Valley Lines and Wales & West people) who will have a tough time until the franchise is awarded. Firstly there won't be any new investment in new trains etc. until the franchise holder is sorted, and they will have to soldier on with the same limited pot of money, and secondly they have got two primarily Railtrack problems to sort out which they have inherited. Problem one is the punctuality disaster: I advocate an emergency timetable until Railtrack get it together; and problem two the future of the Dovey Junction loop. The money is there but Railtrack say they don't have the resources to do the work.

The first signs have been good. The reintroduction of local management at Shrewsbury and Machynlleth and the allocation of a dedicated fleet of trains to run our services plus the coastline and Birmingham to Chester services based at Machynlleth. Chris Gibb the Managing Director of Wales & Borders has already had a meeting in Aberystwyth with a selected audience including SARPA representatives, and has kindly agreed to attend our January meeting in Aberystwyth on Saturday 5th at the Cambrian Hotel at 1330. I'm sure you will join me in wishing him well and also in sending our best wishes to the departing Mark Haslem from Central Trains who has not been in the best of health recently.

Gareth Marston, Newtown October 2001.

ISSUES RAISED BY SARPA REGARDING RAIL SERVICES 2000/2001

(In brief and in no particular order)

Poor quality of Passenger Information System installed at stations along the line

The primary complaint is that when the button is pressed for information regarding train running, the system only states what the next scheduled service is from the station, and does not give any real time information out.

Overcrowding

5 out of the 8 trains each way on a Monday to Friday are still formed of two coach trains which inevitably are prone to overcrowding on a fairly regular basis. More complaints are being made from traveling on an Aberystwyth train between Birmingham and Shrewsbury where two coaches are hopelessly inadequate between these population centers.

Punctuality

There has been a serious decline in punctuality since the start of the summer timetable. It is now not uncommon for trains to be running thirty minutes late.

Fares

Complaints that on-board staff do not have the time nor access to the information to provide travellers with the best fare especially on long distance journeys.

Lack of an Apex fare to Cardiff from Newtown

Only standard return of £31.20 is available even if booked in advance.

Other matters

Non rail users hogging station car parking space at Welshpool & Newtown resulting in inconvenience for genuine rail users.

No sign of any work being done on improvements promised some time ago - Newtown station refurbishment & Hourly service.

Lack of dedicated car parking at Newtown station.

Lack of an earlier westbound service from Shrewsbury. Currently the first departure is not until 0935. Makes travel to Aberystwyth for University, National Library of Wales not possible till nearly lunchtime. Also effects day trips up coastline.

Connections between Coastline & Aberystwyth.

Connections between Coastline & Shrewsbury.

Uncoordinated nature of connections between services running into Shrewsbury.

General condition of Welshpool station.

The difficulty in obtaining information about train times and fares especially at unstaffed stations.

Toilets at Machynlleth station.

Retiming of morning services to Shrewsbury causing missed connections and also disadvantaging commuter traffic to Welshpool and Shrewsbury.



A 170 in Central Trains livery

Rolling Stock Mid Wales: from Clive Williams, Wales RPS

In Mid Wales with the transfer from Central Trains what we will get is 11 Class 158's for nine diagrams and the whole of the service from Birmingham to Chester, Birmingham to Aberystwyth and up to Pwllheli will all be run by 158's. Now whilst there's a loss of a few round trips by 170's, Chris Gibb thinks there's a considerable gain in getting 158's on every service because most of it is 156's at present. Once National Express have "worked their magic" with the 158's and improved them to the standard of the Wales & West 158's then he thinks that an entirely 158 railway in Mid Wales is quite a step forward. Obviously, medium term with a new franchise agreement, Chris Gibb said he would go further than that, but in the short term, he thinks a 158 fleet is good. He does not see the loss of a handful of 170's as being a big



problem. He reckons the 170's are dreadfully unreliable at the moment – the 158's are much more reliable than the 170's!

I reminded him that the question of retaining new rolling stock is one that some that were opposed to the concept of a Wales and Borders franchise used as part of their opposition. Chris Gibb responded that what Wales and Borders does not want is a tiny fleet of four or five 170's. He reckons that is just not workable. So there has to be an element of practicality about this and where National Express is going with an all-158 fleet in Mid Wales and a large 175 fleet in North Wales, he thinks is fine – he does not see a huge issue about that.

LETTER FROM MARK HASLEM, OF CENTRAL TRAINS, TO OUR CHAIRMAN

Thanks for your letter. Sorry for the delay in replying, but I am still outstanding some performance information to come from our performance section. When I get the detailed info (hopefully later today [Friday]) I will forward it to you - probably by e-mail.

Anyway, I agree that since the timetable change back in May 2001 there has been a disastrous dip in punctuality and performance on the Cambrian. I believe that it is a bit better than it was earlier in the summer, but it is still unsatisfactory. The primary cause of this poor performance has been the failure of Railtrack to undertake the linespeed improvements promised for May 2001 between Shrewsbury and Wolverhampton. You may already be aware of this situation. Before the new Summer Timetable came in I was very confident that we would actually see an IMPROVEMENT in performance of the service as trains would cease to work through to the East Midlands (bouncing back at New Street). Being self-contained always helps punctuality. However, only a few weeks before the new timetable was due in May 2001, RT revealed that the

necessary works to deliver the new timetable had not been done. Worse was the fact that they hadn't even started the work and it wasn't programmed. This wasn't very good news!

Although 'on paper' a saving of 3-4 minutes each way doesn't sound a lot, I am sure you will appreciate that this can have a major impact on the service - especially as we lose our slots between Wolverhampton and Birmingham New Street 'on the day'. Since May the service between Shrewsbury and Birmingham (and therefore Aber too) has been a disaster. RT are now getting on with the work, but the problem will persist until at least the summer of 2002. Further, at great expense we have put in a standby unit at Shrewsbury six days a week (fully cov-

The very good news is that patronage/revenue is up on the Main Line by 24% compared to this period last year.

ered with traincrew front and back end) to step in when the services go out-of-kilter. Late running Chesters and Abers have priority for this standby because of their relative infrequency. Further, we have agreed revised regulating arrangements at Wolverhampton to avoid punctual Wellington shuttles and other slow traffic being put out in front of delayed Cambrian-bound and Chester-bound services. I believe that these significant actions are easing the situa-



tion we have. However, the end analysis is that we have a railway which cannot structurally achieve the timetable. The delays are exacerbated due to the cumulative delay across the day; due to losing paths at Wolves and Birmingham New Street. We are not very happy, but RT are now on the case. I can only apologise for the problems.

Other causes of delay have been continued poor availability of units (the Class 170 Turbostars are still causing problems) and general congestion at New Street station - the latter has been a problem since the Hatfield accident. Congestion at New Street tends to be a pm problem as late running long distance trains (those most impacted by ESRs) hit New Street randomly. Further, Virgin fleet problems have meant a lot of ad-hoc locomotive changes in the New Street area further not helping. Add this to late inward Salop-originated services and you start to see the problem. I hope I will be able to quantify some of these points when I get the data to you.

Further, I hope you don't mind if I update you on the latest Cambrian news ahead of your meeting. I am very pleased that you have invited Lembit and Paul to your meetings. They are both supporters of the railway, and have been extremely helpful in the positive promotion of what we are trying to do for the line - especially with regard to the Cambrian Conference proposals (hourly service, Dovey loop etc.). Please give them my regards.

The very good news is that patronage/revenue is up on the Main Line by 24% compared to this period last year. That is excellent news. I am bound to say that our Cambrian leaflet had a major part to play (I de-

signed it this year!!), but I think we have paradoxically been helped by the F & M crisis - the seaside is a more viable dayout option, and I seem to recall the weather was more variable last season. However, growth of nearly a quarter bodes very well for where we want to go with this railway. You will appreciate that we hand over the reins to W & W come this October. I have already been working with them closely for the last couple of months - in particular making sure that the work being done to deliver the Cambrian Conference proposals continues at its present lightning pace. I have written an improved timetable for them that they have put a business case together for to go to RPP. This will parallel what is being done with the linespeed and Dovey loop work. I am hopeful (although not an allday hourly service) that it will offer significant and exciting improvements, including more connections at Machynlleth and better frequency on the Mainline. Watch this space - I haven't gone away yet. I have another Dovey Junction meeting (jointly with the councils [Powys are leading], W & W and Railtrack) next Tuesday in Newtown. IF I am in a position to further update you then I will.

On a personal note I shall be genuinely sad to lose the Cambrian. It has been an excellent railway to be involved in. It has taken a long time to get things moving, but I really do believe (even with the current uncertainty over refranchising) that it is now very much on the move. I would have loved to have been a part of it in the future - but at least I will be working hard to ensure a smooth handover. W & W are fully up to speed with what we are doing and have done, and I am 100% confident that it will be a seamless handover. However, CTL will not be creeping out via the backdoor - we hope to go out with shoulders held high!

Finally, I'd like to thank you and your group for your positive and realistic approach to being a Users' Group. You have avoided the pitfall of criticising in a negative fashion (something the press love to jump on when talking the railways down), but I can assure you have still not let me off the hook. I can honestly say the same for Paul and Lembit too. Thanks for your contribution, and I look forward to bumping into you on a future improved Cambrian railway.

Mark Haslem

SARPA MONTHLY MEETINGS. 2001/2002

The committee meets on a monthly basis at a public venue, which is open to all who wish to take part. It is intended to be an open forum for views and discussions on the rail service in Mid Wales as well as just a committee meeting. We would like to see more ordinary members (and new ones) come along: there is always a danger that the views of SARPA will be those of the regular attendees rather than of the membership as a whole.

The venues and times are as follows: we meet where access by rail is practical.

2001

Tuesday 6 th November	Bell Hotel,	Newtown	1900
Tuesday 4 th December	Wynnstay Hotel	Machynlleth	1915

2002

Saturday 5 th January	Cambrian Hotel	Aberystwyth	1330
Tuesday 2 nd February	Bell Hotel	Newtown	1900
Tuesday 5 th March	Royal Oak Hotel	Welshpool	1915
Tuesday 2 nd April	Wynnstay Hotel	Machynlleth	1915
Tuesday 7 th May	Bell Hotel	Newtown	1900
Saturday 1 st June	TBC	Borth	1315
Tuesday 2 nd July	Red Lion Hotel	Caersws	1845
Tuesday 6 th August	Bell Hotel	Newtown	1900
Saturday 7 th September	Cambrian Hotel	Aberystwyth	1330
Note also AGM.			
Tuesday 1 st October	Royal Oak Hotel	Welshpool	1915
Tuesday 5 th November	Bell Hotel	Newtown	1900
Saturday 7 th December	Wynnstay Hotel	Machynlleth	1300

Please note the times may change for meetings during the last six months of 2002 due to timetable changes. Any changes plus



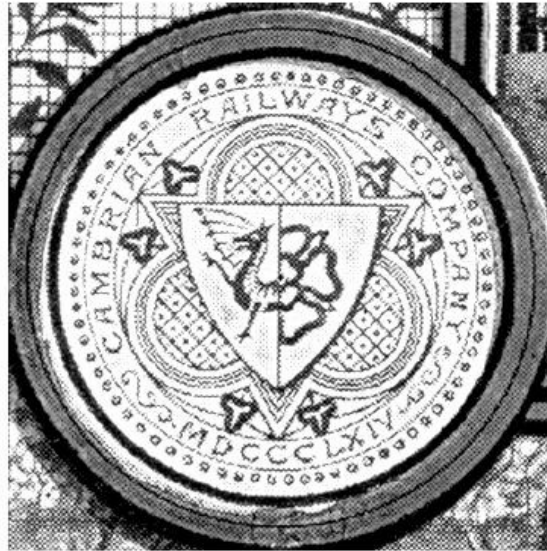
Not the current scene: Aberystwyth station: the press run of the 170 class, no longer being used on Cambrian lines.

SARPA

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Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Railway Passengers'
Association



We're on the web:
www.shrewsbury-to-aberystwyth.org

Officers of the Association

The current officers for the Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Rail Passenger Association (SARPA) are as follows:

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**Cambrian Railways
Partnership
Partneriaeth Rheilffyrdd
Y Cambrian**

**A new logo on the Wales and Borders
Trains Winter Fares pamphlet - compare
with the Cambrian Railways one above.**