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*Shrewsbury Aberystwyth Rail Passengers' Association*

# Newsletter No. 78

March 2019

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## **NEW ROLLING STOCK – MORE QUESTIONS EMERGING THAN ANSWERS?**

Transport for Wales honeymoon period on taking over the franchise was very brief indeed: suffice to say the failure to address long standing and well-known issues that had been repeatedly flagged up by SARPA (and others) to the Welsh Government before the end of the ATW franchise underpinned the problems in late autumn. Having not addressed issues pre-October 2018 we then got a new franchise that wasn't addressing issues in October 2018, instead we have some wonderful plans for the future. It's Jam tomorrow says the Welsh Government. Let's look at one aspect of that: the new rolling stock being acquired for our line.

It all looked rather impressive. The new DMU's from the Civity range (see artists impression above) are to be built by Spanish Manufacturer CAF. There will be a mix of 51 x 2 car and 26 x 3 car units to run all long distance DMU services away from the South Wales Metro area. Initial comments and focus were on the door positions @ 1/3 and 2/3 instead of the ends of carriages, and on concerns over the internal layout. Would it be appropriate for long distance travelers, with plenty of luggage racks, views out of windows and plenty of tables? People were worried they would be getting an outer suburban train rather than an appropriate vehicle for the Cambrian. We flagged this up very early with contacts at TfW Rail Services, and had verbal reassurances that the internal layout would be appropriate for our line, and that the fleet of 77 DMU's would be go anywhere units - all fitted with ETCS, and services would be flexible and tailored to demand flows with 2,3,4,5,6 car formations appearing as appropriate.

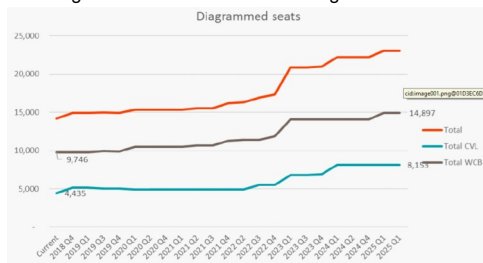
However, it emerged after Christmas in a railway magazine article quoting senior TfW Rail Service Managers, that only 21 x 2 car DMU's will be fitted with ETCS and

able to operate on our line! The existing pattern of our line being integrated with a two-hourly service to Chester and Holyhead from the West Midlands is to continue, and this, combined with the Cambrian mainline being fully hourly, meant eyebrows were raised as to whether 21 units would be enough to cover all diagrams, let alone provide the boost in capacity promised?

Head of Transport for Wales James Price told the Western Mail on the 4th January "...which will mean an average increase of 65% in capacity [passenger] across Wales in five years' time." See:

<https://www.walesonline.co.uk/business/business-news/transport-wales-chief-exec-says-15627348>

An earlier infographic (below), sent out at the time of the franchise changing claimed a 65% average increase in seating capacity was on the cards. Non Core Valley Lines will be increasing from 9746 to 14897 seats diagrammed.



So, what does 21 units actually get us? Apparently TfW expect to get much better availability from their new fleet of DMU's, with 90% as standard and 95% for short periods of time, so 19 units daily with 20 for short periods will be in traffic. When you analyze the unit diagrams, this means trains west of Shrewsbury, apart from those carrying Birmingham to Pwllheli portions, will normally be just 2 car in length. Trains between Shrewsbury and Birmingham international would be 4 car with the peak AM and PM trains being strengthened to 6 cars. This pattern needs 18 units, leaving one spare on weekdays with 19 available, there's scope to use the Birmingham peak strengthener elsewhere at the weekends, and temporary spells with another unit. In short there's maybe an extra 2 car unit to strengthen the odd train here and there spread over 300 route miles.

Further souring the taste were some tweets from TfW Rail services giving infographics comparing the new rolling stock with our existing Class 158 units (see below). As you can see a 2 car Class 158 has 140 seats and an official Total Capacity of 199 (59 standing) a 2 car CAF has 120 seats with an official Total Capacity of 202 (82 standing). Therefore, on a like for like basis you're losing seats and gaining more standing space.

Of course, with a full hourly service between Shrewsbury and Aberystwyth you can try and argue there's more capacity west of Shrewsbury than now. However, crunch the numbers above, with 20 seats per unit down on now, it's clear that the total number of seats with 5 x 4 car and 10 x 2 car CAF (2160 seats, 3636 Total) formations works

Unit Type	Image	In Use	Seating Capacity	Total Capacity	PRM Compliant	Toilets	Onboard Wi-Fi	Power Sockets	Bicycle Spaces	Electronic Passenger Information	Air Conditioning
Class 158		Until 2022	140	199	✓	✓	✓	✓	2	✓	✓*
DMU		From 2022	120 (2 car) 196 (3 car)	202 (2 car) 316 (2 car)	✓	✓	✓	✓	3	✓	✓

out much the same as now with 5 x 4 car and 7 x 2 car (2100 seats, 2985 Total) but with a 11% increase in total capacity - standing to you and me! Albeit the capacity is spread a bit differently over the day, but it's still nowhere near the 65% average increase promised, and exceedingly disappointing on the seat front, and things have gone backwards at a rate of knots in terms of seating capacity on the Coast line. 9 x 2 car CAF (1080 seats, 1818 Total) compared to 9 x 2 Car 158's (1260 seats, 1791 Total).

The franchise agreement stipulates that there should be no standing for more than 20 minutes at peak periods and none at all off peak. With Welshpool 21/22 minutes from Shrewsbury, no one should in theory be standing leaving or arriving at Shrewsbury on any Cambrian inbound or outbound train at any time, so what is the "total capacity" for on the Cambrian? A cursory glance at the time between stations shows that standing between Machynlleth and Caersws would also always not be acceptable, but Llwyngwril to Barmouth or Borth to Aberystwyth at peak times would be, but what about Fairbourne to Barmouth on market day and summer Saturdays which aren't "peak" times? Something is clearly not stacking up correctly here. With only an odd train or two able to be strengthened, there's no guarantee that you won't come across standing on a 2 car or even a 4 car train with 40 fewer seats than now.

On the other side of Shrewsbury Welsh Government helpfully told the bidders in the franchise specification that West Midlands Rail would be increasing its services from Shrewsbury to Birmingham from one an hour to two an hour (from this May), clearly implying that the bidders needn't worry too much about increasing capacity as the other TOC is. What the Welsh Government forgot to mention was that there are already peak hour extra services into Birmingham in the morning and out in the evening peak, meaning there's going to be no increase in the number of high peak trains run. Passengers on the 0733 from Shrewsbury will be scratching their heads as they stand, when they find they have 60 *fewer seats* when the CAF's are introduced, and no extra West Midlands Train to use... The most vociferous complainers about the current service are commuters from Telford, who at 33 minutes from Birmingham New St certainly should not be standing all the way, though you could argue that Wolverhampton, 18 minutes from New St technically is. It's ok to ask people to stand on peak trains as far as Wolverhampton in the evening peak, providing they then get a seat....

What is clear is that when you analyze the plans, the promised significant increases in capacity that were desperately hoped for and needed, seem to have slipped by the Cambrian and Shrewsbury to West Midlands routes. Contrast this with the plans to run 4 & 5 car trains down the Marches instead of 2 & 3 car trains, double the frequency

of services between Shrewsbury and Chester, and increase from 2 per hour to 3 per hour between Chester and Llandudno Junction.

Perhaps someone from Transport for Wales can explain how the Cambrian & Shropshire are to benefit from their exciting journey plans, apart from having a little bit better bespoke standing space? Ok 65% is an average and not everyone is going to get it and some of that figure is clearly accounted for by the extra Sunday trains promised but a bit of better standing area?

Are Transport for Wales a purveyor of broken promises?

## NEGES GAN Y CADEIRYDD CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

Mae'r misoedd diwethaf wedi dangos yn glir bod dal angen grŵp fel SARPA i wthio am welliannau i'r rheilffordd. Problem weledol iawn yw'r trafferthion parhaus o ran perfformiad ar y Cambrian, gyda nifer o drenau sydd yn rhy fer, rhai wedi'u canslo a theithwyr yn gorfod newid trenau ym Machynlleth ar sawl achlysur. Er gwaethaf ymdrechion a lobio SARPA, mae'r problemau'n parhau, er eu bod yn llai nag oedden nhw yn mis Tachwedd diwethaf.

Yr hyn sydd yn llai weledol ar hyn o bryd, ond fydd yn cael effaith mawr ar y gwasanaethau, yw'r cwestiynau am addewid Trafnidiaeth Cymru i osod offer ERTMS ar yr holl trenau DMU newydd. Yn lle, mae sôn am osod yr offer ar dim ond 21 uned 2-cerbyd (i'w rhannu gyda'r gwasanaeth Birmingham - Caerdybi), sydd ddim yn ddigon i ymdopi'n iawn â'r alw presennol, heb sôn am dyfiant. Mae niferoedd o deithwyr ar y Cambrian wedi cynyddu'n aruthrol yn y blynyddoedd diwethaf, yn arbennig ers gyflwyno'r gwasanaethau ychwanegol, ac mae disgwyl i hyn barhau. Gan hynny, mae angen mwy o gerbydau ar y lein yn ddirfawr. Mae Trafnidiaeth Cymru wedi addewid 65% mwy o seddi ar draws rhwydwaith reilffyrdd Cymru a'r Gororau, felly mae ond yn deg y dylai'r Cambrian cael 65% mwy o seddi ar y trenau. Am hynny, bydd angen llawer mwy na 21 o DMUau arnom!

Bydd SARPA'n parhau i lobio Trafnidiaeth Cymru, gwleidyddion ac eraill i sicrhau gwelliannau i'r gwasanaeth a threnau newydd fydd yn welliant go iawn i'r gwasanaeth ar y Cambrian.

Recent months have shown clearly that a group such as SARPA is still needed to push for improvements on the railway. A very visible problem is the continuing shortcomings in performance on the Cambrian, with a number of short-formed trains, some cancellations and passengers required to change trains in Machynlleth on a number of occasions. Despite the efforts and lobbying by SARPA, the problems persist, although they are less serious than they were last November.

What is less visible at the moment, but which will have a huge effect on services, is the question mark over Transport for Wales' promise to fit all the new DMUs with ERTMS. Instead, there are suggestions of only fitting the equipment to 21 2-car units (shared with Birmingham – Holyhead services), which will not be sufficient to deal properly with the present demand, let alone growth. Passenger numbers on the Cambrian have increased incredibly in recent years, especially since the introduction

of additional services, and this can be expected to continue. As a result, there is a pressing need for more carriages on the line. Transport for Wales has promised 65% more seats across the Wales and Borders network, therefore it is only fair that the Cambrian should receive 65% more seats. Given this, we will need a lot more than 21 DMUs!

SARPA will continue to lobby Transport for Wales, politicians and others to ensure improvements to services, and new trains that will be a genuine improvement to services on the Cambrian.

Jeff Smith, Mawrth/March 2019

## **THE DEMENTIA (AND EVERYTHING ELSE FOR THAT MATTER) FRIENDLY DIGITAL RAILWAY?**

Recently, one of our members came across the (not so) dementia friendly railway! Having to renew his Senior Railcard, he was offered a 3 year deal with a saving of £20 if he renewed on line. Very good! All went well as he went through the renewal process up the point where payment was demanded. Then, the screen flashed up a sub-page from "Verified By Visa", requesting - nay demanding inputs from various letters and numerals chosen at random from what he thought was his password. No luck! The other option was to reset the password, which required the input of the details as they appeared on the payment card. The electronic machinery would not accept the information, even though it was from the card actually in his hand and thereafter locked it, requiring a visit to the bank branch 40 miles away to reset it, the local branch having now closed! The member went to the local rail station and renewed his card, albeit without the discount and paid cash. All was accomplished in less than 10 minutes with no fuss. Newtown Station Travel have reported customers arriving to renew railcards, having experienced similar problems.

## **UP AND DOWN THE LINES**

### **ABERYSTWYTH**

The long await refurbishment of Yr Hen Orsaf (Wetherspoon's) at the station has begun and will be reopening (so the notice says) on March 27, 2019.

### **ABERYSTWYTH (VALE OF RHEIDOL)**

The new station opened on the 16th February with the 0930 departure for Devil's Bridge.

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

The weighbridge project continues apace on the pit and the mechanism. A permanent record is being made of the restoration project through drawings and photographs..

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

Work has commenced on building a new path between Bow Street and the Aberystwyth University IBERS Campus at Plas Gogerddan. This will be a dual cycle way and pedestrian path.

## **CARNO**

From the Shrewsbury Aberystwyth Rail Liaison Committee Minutes: “Carno re-opening. An update was given on progress with Welsh Government. It is hoped that some news will come forward from the Minister in February 2019.

From the SARPA Minutes of their Meeting in December: “It was reported that Ben Davies and Claire Williams had contacted the Group. They were negotiating with the landowner, who lives in the Far East. His plans were to build houses and turn the station into two flats. It was said to him that if the station building became a station and a Laura Ashley Museum then house prices would be increased.”

## **WELSHPOOL**

In February the Shrewsbury and Aberystwyth Rail Liaison Committee conducted a survey on a Welshpool Station Improvement Plan, the results of which would be used to inform a report to be submitted to the Welsh Government. The questions asked included: Do you use the train regularly?; Do you travel East inland or West (Coast)?; Do you live in Welshpool?; Do you live within 10 miles of Welshpool or do you live further afield?; Are you using the service for work or leisure?; does the existing station meet your needs? On a scale of 1-5 respondents were asked which of these facilities are most important to them: car parking; drop off/pick up point; bus integration; shelters; booking office; ticket machines; good access; good disabled access; lifts; good signage and information; toilets; café; vending machines; CCTV; help point (speak to a person); clean environment; seating on the platform; under cover areas on the platform.

## **BEN DAVIES RETIRES: STATEMENT FROM TfW RAIL SERVICES**

We would like to announce that Ben Davies, has decided to retire from his position at Stakeholder Manager, North Wales.

Ben has worked in the railway for 40 years and in that time has taken on a number of roles based in stations, notably Manager for Chester before going on to become Area Manager and more recently Stakeholder Manager.

Speaking about his career Ben commented “I have been lucky enough to work with some great people but retirement has called and I will now be spending time on my narrowboat with my friends and family. These are exciting time ahead and I truly believe that rail offers a fantastic future and career opportunities to our people”

So far there is no announcement as to his replacement – is North Wales and Mid & West Wales about to be amalgamated?

## **TRANSPORT FOR WALES**

Well, the uniforms have arrived and most staff are wearing them, and train running has greatly improved over that of the last months of 2018. It is not suggested that there is any connection between the two. There is no doubt that much of Wales suffered greatly from terrible services from the time of the new franchise until 2019. Although TfW did try very hard to make sure that their communication was effective, it didn't always work and not everyone has access to the internet and/or mobile phones.

On the net it certainly wasn't always easy to actually work out what was happening. For example, on December 4 five trains were listed as cancelled (0625 S-A; 0630 A-S;

1029 (S-A) and 1230 (A-S). It was announced that the 0830 A-BI would start from Shrewsbury. At the bottom of the listing there was the statement "Road transport will run in lieu of cancelled trains". The chances are everyone read this as all of them but certainly on that day there was no bus replacement for the 0830 (A-BI). Sadly, there were many examples of these sorts of problems over the weeks. There is more on the disruption in *All Tickets Please with Newtown Station Travel* below.

At a SARPA meeting concern was raised about the difficulties at Welshpool. On a number of occasions passengers were left stranded because there was no announcement on the platform indicators about bus replacements, thus even if travellers were there in time for a bus they didn't know that there was one. The reasons for the problems varied between stock problems, no staff and the weather. And still the infuriating problems occur. Just two examples from a number: On February 19 the 0955 from Welshpool terminated at Shrewsbury without any reasons being given, or apologies, and on March 1 the 1832 from Aberystwyth was twenty minutes late leaving Machynlleth because an engineering train had been let past Talerddig. On the latter occasion the conductor made every effort to help passengers with connections, and both conductor and driver did all they could to lessen the delay by the time the train arrived at Shrewsbury. And passengers do not take kindly, however well meaning TFW are, after all these problems to be greeted at Aberystwyth one morning and being handed two leaflets heralding "Transforming Transport" and "Be inspired" together with a small pot of "smarties". Even the sweets were not the genuine ones.

Still the other morning a sight was encountered that had never been seen before---the arrival of an Aberystwyth train at Welshpool with its rear lights shining as it entered the station. Perhaps TFW are going backwards to go forward; well surely it can't get any worse than it was in the last months of 2018.

## FACEBOOK GROUPS

We now have a Facebook Group, where members who are on Facebook (and anyone who signs up for that matter) may post information or comment about the Cambrian Main Line, or any rail related material which is relevant. The URL

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1506868396111739/>

or, for short: <https://tinyurl.com/y2hojszl>

will take you there. The group is moderated, the administrator being the SARPA webmaster.

Meanwhile, we learn of another Facebook Group which started up on February 19th, a few weeks after our own. This is the "Welshpool Rail Users" page, and their introductory statement states "This group is for Welshpool rail users to share both positive and negative experiences about the service level of trains to and from Welshpool and the station facilities." Their URL is

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/2302135053442679/>

or, for short: <https://tinyurl.com/y5hqaxcr>

Whilst we wish them well, we are all too aware of the plethora of groups which have sprung up from time to time on the Marches Line south of Shrewsbury, which has rather diluted campaigning strength and coherence, so we would encourage their members to come along and help us, and join SARPA.

## CAMBRIAN STATION USAGE 2014/2015 TO 2017/2018

The annual station footfall estimate figures were released by the Office of Rail and Road in December 2018 for the Financial Year 2017/2018. Source

<http://orr.gov.uk/statistics/published-stats/station-usage-estimates>

We now have 3 years' worth of data since the extra trains were introduced on the Cambrian Mainline in May 2015 (well nearly 3 years anyway!) and can now draw some very firm conclusions about the effectiveness of the "is it – isn't it?" hourly service that was introduced. As part of our lobbying process to get extra trains introduced, we had analysed data from several rural lines in England that had had their frequencies doubled. Three years from the introduction of doubled services, the lines looked at had seen on average an increase in usage of 58%. What would that translate into with increasing the service by 50%, some at quiet times? 25%? 30%?

Well the answer we can reveal is that there was a 23.5% in increase in footfall from the stations between Aberystwyth and Welshpool (inclusive) between 2014/2015 and 2017/2018. Which is roughly what you would expect given the evidence of other frequency enhancements. As had been pointed out in previous reviews of station footfall figures there was (and continued to be) a huge spatial variation in the impact on extra services between the stations in the upper Severn valley (Welshpool, Newtown, Caersws) and further west.

	14-15 Entries and Exits	17-18 Entries and Exits	Change 14-15 to 17-18	% Increase	Season Ticket E & E
<b>Aberystwyth</b>	303738	335426	31688	10.43	1640
<b>Borth</b>	53662	67168	13506	25.17	520
<b>Dovey Junction</b>	2366	4434	2068	87.40	0
<b>Machynlleth</b>	120802	137686	16884	13.98	760
<b>Caersws</b>	49250	69668	20418	41.46	7950
<b>Newtown</b>	130306	185064	54758	42.02	23210
<b>Welshpool</b>	133744	180486	46742	34.95	10152
<b>Shrewsbury</b>	1911050	2211090	300040	15.70	
<b>Mainline Total</b>	793868	979932	186064	23.44	

Excluding Dovey Junction, which started from such a low base, it's clear that the big impact percentage wise has been on the eastern end of the line, with both Caersws and Newtown recording 42% increases and Welshpool an equally impressive 35%. Percentage increases further west are less impressive.

In terms of numbers two thirds of the increases have been from upper Severn Valley stations, with 121,918 extra journeys. Newtown has generated an extra c1050 journeys a week, Welshpool c 900 and Caersws c400. Further west the average weekly increases at Aberystwyth were c610, Borth c260 and Machynlleth c325.

The final column gives a big clue to the source of much of the extra traffic. Prior to 2015, season ticket sales on the line were negligible, mainly because for commuters it's cheaper to buy daily using a Cambrian Railcard. The figures for the whole line looked much like those for Machynlleth to Aberystwyth above. However, there is a noticeable number of season ticket entries and exits in the Upper Severn Valley, confirming the



presence of post compulsory educational commuters to Shrewsbury (they get Educational Term time season tickets via Shrewsbury Sixth Form College): around a third of the increase in usage (c40,000) on the eastern end of the line would appear to be from students on season tickets.

Shrewsbury recorded a footfall of 2,211,090, up from 1,911,050 in 2014/2015, a 15% increase. A sizeable chunk of the c300,000 increase is down to increased arrivals/departures from the Cambrian.

Recorded footfall on the coast was fairly static, up to 872,290 from 870,646 in 2016/2017. Beyond traffic recovering to former levels on the northern end of the line after Pont Briwet reopened, there is little change to report in the last 3 years.

## Conclusions

The extra trains have clearly opened a post compulsory educational commuter market across the border from the upper Severn valley to Shrewsbury – which accounts for around a quarter of the total increased usage. However, it should be pointed out that a lot of other users have been attracted as well! Many more would have been attracted if we had the full hourly service introduced – but that's another story!

With Transport for Wales not planning to plug the gaps in the timetable and introduce a full hourly service with new rolling stock until December 2022, there appears to be little in the pipeline that will stimulate an increase in usage for the next 3 years or so, apart from a couple of extra Sunday services. A modest 2% per annum growth in usage would see the combined footfall for the entire Cambrian over the 2 million mark by 2022.

## SARPA NEWS

The Association have met monthly and minutes of the Meetings are on the Association web-site. Matters discussed included:

- Considerable concern expressed at the December and January meetings at the appalling deterioration in the service. It was noted that there are many problems at Welshpool. No information on the screens about replacement buses because without this buses could arrive in the car park and drive off without passengers being aware.
- New trains and concerns about numbers of units and their design.

## MONTHLY MEETINGS

### 2019

April	Saturday 6th	1145	Royal Naval Club, Market Street, Aberystwyth
May	Saturday 18th	1145	Wharf Station, Talylyn Railway, Tywyn
June	Saturday 8th	1415	White Lion, Machynlleth
July	Tuesday 2nd	1900	The Sportsman, Severn Street, Newtown
August	Tuesday 6th	1915	Royal Oak Hotel, Welshpool
September	Saturday 7th	1215	Railway Hotel, Borth
October	Saturday 5th	1415	White Lion, Machynlleth <b>AGM</b>
November	Tuesday 12th	1900	The Sportsman, Severn Street, Newtown
December	Saturday 7th	1145	Royal Naval Club, Market Street, Aberystwyth

## ALL TICKETS PLEASE WITH NEWTOWN STATION TRAVEL

One cannot let the disruption and cancellations that occurred in November/December 2018 go uncommented on. As you can imagine we were in the front line of people's frustrations and misunderstandings – though being local, and with most users being local people here at Newtown, we didn't suffer the grief some of our TfW colleagues received elsewhere. We had several people commenting on how awful it must be for us (and TfW staff), most people realising it was something beyond the control of local staff in Mid Wales.

The big thing that soon became apparent was that there was a widespread misunderstanding amongst the public as to what was happening. For the duration of the 4 weeks of disruption we had 3 trains a day cancelled in each direction through Newtown – the other 9 all ran as normal – 25% of trains being cancelled is an inconvenience (as well as many short-formed in the first couple of weeks) but liveable with if you plan around accurate information. However, we couldn't walk down the street, or go into a shop or a pub in town, without someone coming up to us with a version of the "all the trains are cancelled" story. Claire the Cambrian Community Rail Officer confirmed she was experiencing similar comments as well.

Why the mass misinformation? Several reasons were apparent. The primary culprit was "the internet", more on which later; however just before the start of the cancellations the last train back from Shrewsbury on a Saturday night had been cancelled due to not having a conductor to work it. A rumour had been going round Newtown, possibly fuelled by the bar manager of a Newtown hostelry trying to get people to stay in town rather than go out in Shrewsbury, that it had been permanently cancelled "due to drunken disorder" – we then got the media coverage of TfW's problems which seemed to some to validate the rumour of "train cancellations". The cancellation cat was out the bag so to speak. So, with a malicious rumour going around and media coverage of cancellations what official sources of information could you turn to? Well, going up the local station and asking us was an option, as well as e-mailing us, messaging us on Facebook, or calling. Many people of course instead went to that font of all knowledge "the internet" to check, and this is where the fun really started.

Like all operators Transport for Wales have a Journey Check section on their website:

<https://www.journeycheck.com/tfwrail/>

This is the correct place to go for information about any disruptions. They appear here at the same time that staff are informed about them internally. The services that were cancelled were all listed here and a timetable for the bus replacements was put up. So far so good – however there was one glaring problem: like all journey check websites it takes the approach of listing what was cancelled not what was running – we had people thinking there were only 3 replacement buses a day for the whole service having seen the bus replacement timetable. People were looking for the train they wanted to take and couldn't see it; in short, a lot of people couldn't understand that if a service **wasn't listed it was running**. Not everybody can subtract cancelled trains on one website from a timetable to see what was running. Journey Check was saying (correctly) that the 0630 from Aberystwyth to Shrewsbury was cancelled as was the 0625 from Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth, but people wanting to get a train at Caersws @ 0628 (the

0530 Aberystwyth to Birmingham International) were believing that was cancelled as well. The general public don't think in terms of the 0930 from Aberystwyth to Birmingham International or whatever but the time of the train at their station. Whilst what TfW were putting out was 100% correct, that was not the situation that the public understood, which was a confused one. We are aware of people driving to Shrewsbury and then catching trains that were going from/to Aberystwyth to go to Birmingham.

We posted on our Facebook page train running information (from Newtown) regularly updated it, and took a different approach. We started by saying what % of trains were running, then listed the trains that **were running** followed by bus times. The number of views became steadily more impressive than anything we had seen before, the post saying all services had gone back to normal reached over 7250 views (given that c11,500 people live in Newtown in total.....). People left messages saying it was clearer than anything else they had seen.

But the most confused and misled were those who chose to use third party websites as their source of information. National Rail Enquiries spent most of the first week saying everything was normal, then deleted the cancelled services and put a yellow warning of disruption sticker next to the ones that were running undisrupted. People turned up at Newtown with tickets bought off third party internet retailers like Trainline for trains that were cancelled. People jumped up and down on the platform waiving their arms and shouted because there was no train and they had asked Google, and Google ([www.google.co.uk](http://www.google.co.uk)) said there was a train! It became frustratingly repetitive to point out to people that they had not gone to the organisation that runs the trains to find out information, but to other sources. No amount of whipping their mobile phones out, staring at the screen and saying "but it said on the internet" was going to make the train that wasn't running appear. It appears that this problem of third-party misinformation is rampant – take our office hours. Several third parties on the world wide web show incorrect information as to our opening times.

It's not just the rail industry but the world wide web as whole. We went to the cinema in Newtown recently, and found a third-party website giving false information about times and what films were showing in the Regent Centre. Far from making everyone's lives easier, "the internet" appears to be full of sites spreading false information about other organisations that provide services and goods. The best advice we can give is to always go to the organisation that provides the service you want for information about it. The chances of errors, mistakes and lack of updates decreases dramatically.

The rail industry also needs to look at how it presents information at times of mass disruption. Simply listing columns of cancelled trains is not an appropriate vehicle. Something more reassuring and positive is needed, such as saying what is running, which is what people are looking for. Most people "get" that there are problems but want to know what is running.

## **Yet More Advance Purchase tickets – aaaaghh!**

Our position outlined in a previous article is that Advance Purchase tickets are part of the problem, not the solution to the UK rail ticketing system mess. Transport for Wales have now introduced them on all flows over 50 miles in length, regardless of whether

they get one over another TOC via the ORCATS system or not. You can now get AP fares from Newtown to Cambrian destinations from Fairbourne to Pwllheli and places in England that you never used to, like Chester, Crewe, Gobowen and Craven Arms! With four different tiers of fares it has created literally hundreds of new fares in the system from Newtown alone.

Fancy a day out in Barmouth this summer? Book in advance and save some money? With the lowest tier £7.50 one way between Newtown and Barmouth and an Anytime Day Return priced at 13.50.....you won't! In fact many (but not all) AP flows are similar in that there's often no/minimal savings or there even more expensive than Day Return tickets which you don't need to buy in advance. Its only usually on the cost of the period Saver Returns that you really get any price advantage and even then it's not universal as you would expect with the UK rail fare system its full of anomalies and inconsistency. Book a trip from Welshpool to Borth then the lowest tier AP is £6.50 with the Anytime Day Return £15.10 – and you will save! Miss out on the cheapest tier AP fares from Welshpool to Manchester and you could pay £28.00 each way, the Saver return is £42.10! Confused? We could go on and on....

Is the public told that Advance Purchase tickets may or may not save you any money depending on what type of journey you're taking, and even then there's no hard and fast rule, and it varies from station to station and destination? One thing is for certain: introducing more of them hasn't solved concerns over complexity/ best value for money. I'm sure offering more AP fares is wonderfully well intentioned and driven by Welsh Government "reacting to concerns raised in the franchise consultation", but it's a piece of window dressing: the reality behind the headline of "more cheap fares" reveals more layers of complexity and confusion.

## **Penalty Fares introduced between Shrewsbury and Birmingham**

Simply put if you're found on a West Midlands Trains or Transport for Wales service between Shrewsbury and Birmingham (NOT ANYWHERE ELSE ON TFW's NETWORK) without a ticket you're liable to be handed a Penalty Fare of £20.00 **and** have to pay for the ticket to the destination you're traveling to. Pay it off and learn your lesson or if you keep getting handed them or refuse to pay you could be prosecuted.

Shrewsbury to Birmingham has rightly been identified as a route where a lot of deliberate ticketless traveling has been occurring. The aim of the scheme is to penalise and deter these people, not to confront passengers who have made a genuine mistake or encountered some difficulties. Staff do have discretion on issuing the Penalty Fares.

Revenue Protection measures have been stepped up including longer hours when the barriers are in operation at Shrewsbury station. Barriers will soon be in operation at Wolverhampton station as part of its refurbishment.

Note that this does not apply to journeys on the Cambrian network itself, only to journeys that then traverse Shrewsbury to Birmingham. You are not going to be prosecuted for boarding a train at Dovey Junction without a ticket as one lady claimed!

So what will happen between Shrewsbury and Birmingham? Stories about the Conductor not coming through the train, the battery on your mobile phone is flat so you can't show them your e-ticket, you arrived late and there wasn't time to buy a ticket, there was a queue at the Booking Office, Aliens stole your ticket, the man on the platform

said it was OK etc will all result in – the Penalty Fare being issued. There is an appeals process if you think it's unfair. It's actually very black and white: either you have a ticket that you can produce for verification or you don't!

If you're travelling from the Cambrian beyond Shrewsbury you should make sure that you have a valid ticket before you depart Shrewsbury station. If you have not purchased a ticket before you board a train on the Cambrian we all know the Conductors on our line can and do sell tickets onboard, but occasionally for a variety of reasons they might not be able to walk through the whole train and issue tickets to all those that want them. Our advice is that if this happens you can try seeking the Conductor out, or given that our trains normally have a 15 minute wait at Shrewsbury before departing to Birmingham, go down to the ticket office at Shrewsbury. **DO NOT JUST SIT THERE: BE PROACTIVE!**

Transport for Wales are installing 75 new Ticket Vending Machines at Mainline (not South Wales Metro) stations across their network this year. The machines will replace existing ones at Welshpool, Caersws and Aberystwyth on our line, and perhaps will be installed at a couple of locations that currently don't have one (details still to be confirmed). There are manned ticket offices at Aberystwyth, Machynlleth, Newtown and Barmouth (summer months only) stations and the Tourist Information Centre in Welshpool sells tickets. You can also buy tickets on the internet if you so wish, but remember many websites claiming to sell cheap tickets actually sell full price ones with extra charges on top, and you will still need to physically collect your ticket – showing a booking reference is no good you will get a Penalty Fare. Mobile tickets or E-tickets downloaded to your SMART phone are another option, but remember you need to activate them and have enough battery left so they can be displayed.

## **Delay Repay after only 15 minutes Introduced (ONLY ON TRANSPORT FOR WALES SERVICES NOT ANYONE ELSE'S)**

Customers can now claim 'delay repay' on any journey that is late by more than 15 minutes on TfW Rail's services. This is part of the franchise agreement commitment, see

<https://tfwrail.wales/delay-repay-compensation>

The amount of compensation varies depending on how long the delay is. If your train is cancelled you can claim.

TfW inherited a timetable from ATW that is normally fairly robust between Aberystwyth and Birmingham International. Waits at Machynlleth, Shrewsbury, Birmingham New St and additional minutes in the schedule between New St and Birmingham International are all built in to help ensure punctuality. Which is what people really want, not compensation. On the day the scheme came into operation not a single train was more than a couple of minutes late arriving at Aberystwyth and all services ran.

You cannot claim compensation for overcrowding, no chocolate left on the catering trolley, the view out the window not being to your liking or the fellow passengers!

## LETTERS

Dear Editor

### Letter from Ireland

Good to still be receiving the SARPA Newsletter and I would like to congratulate Denis Bates on producing such a fine edition each time - always a good read. Pity it will be 2022 before the full hourly service between Shrewsbury and Aberystwyth will come to pass. That must be almost 20 years since SARPA started to campaign for it but patience and persistence brings success!

In addition to the main line I am pleased to see that there will be improvement the very meagre Sunday service on the Coast line. Of course what it really needs is a minimum 2-hourly service on the Coast line as per weekdays but perhaps with a later start up in the morning. Perhaps that is what is meant by 9 trains/day on Sundays from 2022/23.

As for me I'm still alive and kicking and now living in Ireland. I live at Shankill right at the southern tip of Co Dublin just a couple of miles from Co Wicklow. We have a DART station a few minutes walk down the road with a 10 minute service into centre Dublin but it's a bit slow - takes 40 minutes for the 11.5 miles with 15 stops. However intercity and long distance services in Ireland are not frequent. The trains themselves are relatively new and comfortable and most have trolley services but as yet only one route has an hourly frequency (Dublin-Cork). Even what should be the flagship route (Dublin-Belfast) has only 8 trains per day at approximately 2-hourly intervals. A lot of investment is needed for that cross border route (Brexit or not) to give a faster hourly service.

Some other IC routes have a 2-hourly service (or nearly so) but my local IC route (Dublin-Rosslare) has a pathetic 5 trains/day, 3 of which serve the commuting needs to/from Dublin, which are packed to the gunnels. So for the rest of the day only two trains turn up at 4 to 5 hourly intervals! The towns on the Rosslare route (Wicklow, Arklow, Gorey, Enniscorthy and Wexford) have a total population to match that of the Welshpool, Newtown, Machynlleth and Aberystwyth so the market should be there especially bearing in mind that there is a half hourly fast bus service between Wexford and Dublin.

The Rosslare route is single track south of Bray and there may need to be some infrastructure intervention to facilitate a clock face 2-hourly service (as was necessary on the Aber line for 2-hourly clock face in 1990 and the hourly service now). Sadly, though, there are currently no signs of any improvement to frequency on the line.

I congratulate SARPA for the promised achievement of its main goal of an hourly service. However, Ireland is not a rich country (and will be even poorer post Brexit) so please spare a thought for my adopted country and the limited resources she has for rail improvements.

Ken Rushen  
Dublin 18

## USEFUL ADDRESSES

### Transport for Wales:

#### 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

## OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS OF THE ASSOCIATION

**Chairman:** Jeff Smith, 17 Marine Terrace, Aberystwyth, SY23 2AZ. Telephone 07964 179 799.

Email abergogledd@gmail.com

**Vice-Chairman:** Ivor Morris, 2 Dingle Road, Welshpool, SY21 7QB. Telephone 01938 554463.

**Treasurer and Membership Officer:** Bill Redfern, 8 Plas Edwards, Tywyn, LL36 0AS. Tel.

077669696517. 111 Grange Drive, Blackley, Manchester, M9 7AJ. E-mail:

bill\_sarpa@outlook.com

**Secretary:** Sarah Harvey, Rose Villa, Varchoel Lane, Pool Quay, Welshpool, SY21 9LQ. E-mail:

sarahharvey52@yahoo.com

**Newsletter Editor:** Denis Bates, 86 Maescenion, Waun Fawr, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion, SY23

3QQ. Telephone: 01970 617667. Email: denisbates@uwclub.net

**Webmaster:** Angus Eickhoff. Contact by email angus@anguseickhoff.co.uk

**Distribution Officer:** Robert Knight, 8 Tanrallt Street, Machynlleth, Powys, SY20 8BE.

### Committee Members

#### Roger Goodhew

**Tony Harvey,** 23 High Street, Welshpool, Powys, SY21 7JP. Telephone: 01938 559087. Email:

tony@montgomeryshire.eu

### ASSOCIATION CONTACT POINTS

**Contact by post:** c/o Newtown Station Travel, The Railway Station, Old Kerry Road, Newtown, Powys, SY16 1BP. **Email:** sarpa@sarpa.info

## WANT TO JOIN SARPA?

The membership fee is currently (for membership up to 31 December 2019) £10.00 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:

Newtown Station Travel

<https://www.newtownstationtravel.co.uk/>

A useful alternative to the National Rail Enquiries site:

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

Transport for Wales

[www.tfwrail.wales/](http://www.tfwrail.wales/)

National Rail Enquiries

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

London Northwestern Railway

[www.journevcheck.com/londonnorthwesternrailway/](http://www.journevcheck.com/londonnorthwesternrailway/)

West Midlands Railway

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

Virgin Trains

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

Chiltern Railways

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

Network Rail

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

Railfuture/Railway Development Society

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

Cambrian Rail Partnership

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

The Association of Community Rail Partnerships (Acorp)

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

Passenger Focus

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

North Wales Coast Railway

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

Ffestiniog and Welsh Highland Railways

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

Vale of Rheidol Railway

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

Talyllyn Railway

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

Welshpool and Llanfair Railway

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

Welsh Highland Heritage Railway

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

Fairbourne Railway

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

Borth Station Museum

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

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

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

**Copy deadline for the next newsletter is 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2019**