
Shrewsbury Aberystwyth Rail Passengers' Association

Newsletter No. 96

JULY 2025



NEW AT NEWTOWN

Above: Tornado at Newown during the [ETCS](#) (European Train Control System) testing. Photograph: Angus Eichkoff.

Below: The New Newtown station footbridge and lifts. Photograph: Network Rail.



NEGES GAN Y CADEIRYDD

Mae SARPA wedi bod yn brysur iawn dros y misoedd diweddar yn dadlau'r achos dros wella gwasanaethau ar y Cambrian a sbardun twf pellach yn y niferoedd o deithwyr.

Yn ddiweddar, rydym ni wedi cael Russell George AS, Aelod o'r Senedd dros sir Drefaldwyn, a Steve Witherden AS, Aelod Seneddol Maldwyn Glyndŵr, yn bresennol yn ein cyfarfodydd. Roedd y ddau yn ymddangos yn awyddus i helpu ni gyda'n hymgyrchu ac roeddynt wedi gweld y cyfarfodydd yn fuddiol iawn o ran dysgu mwy am sefyllfa'r rheilffordd.

Wrth i mi ysgrifennu'r neges hon, mae tîm bach ohonom newydd cwrdd â James Price, prif weithredwr Trafnidiaeth Cymru, a nifer o uwch-swyddogion. Rhaid i ni ddiolch i Russell George AS am sicrhau'r cyfarfod hwn. Cafwyd trafodaethau adeiladol iawn a allai, gobeithio, arwain at welliannau sylweddol yn y dyfodol.

Wrth fynd ymlaen, bydd SARPA yn parhau i ddadlau'r achos dros wasanaeth rheilffordd amlach, mwy dibynadwy gyda mwy o gerbydau ar gael i wasanaethu ar y lein. Mae'r rheilffordd yn bwysig dros ben i'n cymunedau ac fel rydym ni wedi gweld o'r blaen, daw buddion lu o unrhyw welliannau pellach i'r gwasanaethau.

Jeff Smith, Cadeirydd SARPA

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

SARPA has been very busy over recent months arguing the case for improved services on the Cambrian and attempting to obtain further growth in passenger numbers.

Recently, we have had Russell George MS, Member of the Senedd for Montgomeryshire, and Steve Witherden MP, Member of Parliament for Montgomery Glyndŵr, present at our meetings. They both seemed keen to help us with our campaign and they had found the meetings very beneficial in terms of learning more about the railway situation.

As I write this message, a small team of us have just met with James Price, chief executive of Transport for Wales, and a number of senior officers. We must thank Russell George MP for ensuring this meeting. There were very constructive discussions which could hopefully lead to significant improvements in the future.

Going forward, SARPA will continue to argue the case for a more frequent, more reliable rail service with more carriages available to service the line. The railway is extremely important to our communities and as we have seen before, huge benefits will result from any further improvements to the services.

Jeff Smith, SARPA Chair



ROGER GOODHEW

Bill Redfern & Sarah Harvey

Roger Charles Goodhew: 8th October 1943 - 22nd January 2025.

We heard in late January the sad news that Roger Goodhew had passed away after a short battle with cancer. Roger became a member of SARPA way before me, the oldest record for him that I have to hand being 2001.

Roger was a SARPA committee member and was our Liaison Officer. He would provide our meetings with detailed reports of his meetings with other user groups and organisations, often bringing relevant extracts from Newsletters, magazines and newspapers.

Roger's family have collected reminiscences of Roger, reproduced below that for me creates a vivid picture, but of all aspects of Roger it was his friendliness that came over most strongly. A personal recollection was travelling on a train with Roger to a SARPA meeting during a period of flooding, and Roger using his great knowledge of hydrology to explain that much of the problem was down to the removal of trees from higher ground.

Even in December, when he was ill, Roger was keen to ensure that SARPA continued to operate smoothly by handing on arrangements for the meeting room in Shrewsbury, one of his tasks.

Collected Reminiscences of Roger:

Devoted husband • Loving father • Technophile/technophobe • Acclaimed hydrologist • Failed plumber • Train spotter • Hat wearer • Map collector • Obsessive meteorologist • Ship lover • Note taker • River watcher • Choir singer • Chocolate scoffer • Reluctant chef • Jazz aficionado • Detail lover • Piano player • Fact checker • Clock winder • Story teller • Sky gazer • Proud citizen • History buff • Leaflet picker • Family historian • Record hoarder • Paper stacker • Decision dodger • Ardent traditionalist • Meeting attendee • Quirky dresser • Football follower • Sunday swimmer • Book buyer

Sarah Harvey has this personal memory. I first met Roger when, a newbie to SARPA, there was a meeting at the White Lion in Machynlleth and the SARPA regulars were lunching inside. It was a bright, sunny day so I went in the garden at the back. Roger kindly came out to talk to me; he thought I had been left out which I had.

I was always impressed by Roger's commitment to SARPA. For most of the

meetings he had to travel further than other members of the Committee but rarely missed one. When I visited him, not long before he died, I told his wife, Carol, that my original enthusiasm for SARPA meetings was based on the fact that I enjoyed visiting the places where they were held. Carol said Roger was the same and treated meetings as a day out.

He and Carol had lived near the Emscote Road in Warwick. I have often stayed with a friend on the Emscote Road as my mother lived in Warwick and I went to school there so we had something in common.

I know Roger was musical; he spoke of going to concerts. His son was sometimes playing and that would, on rare occasions, cause Roger to even miss a SARPA meeting to attend.

Before Covid Roger sent me a Christmas card. It was a postcard of the phases of the moon for the following year which I referred to frequently. After Covid Roger had difficulty getting the cards and he wrote the whole thing out for me.

My favourite image of Roger was after a meeting at The Railway Inn in Borth. He had a napkin tucked into his collar and was tucking into his lunch with great gusto. This is how I shall remember him.



A named train on the Cambrian: Tornado on arrival at Newtown.
Photograph: angus Eickhoff.

NEWS IN BRIEF

NATIONAL RAIL USE

The Office of Rail and Road have released usage statistics for UK's mainline rail journeys for 2024/2025 that show 1730 million journeys were made in the year just passed. This is 99% of the highest record figure of 1752 million journeys in 2018/2019. TfW saw journeys increase by 19% to 31 million journeys just 1.8% of the UK total.

COMPREHENSIVE SPENDING REVIEW

The Department for Transport took on overall cut of 5% but additional funds were found for infrastructure projects. Notable by their absence were mentions of road schemes and airports in the list of schemes that were distributed around the UK and outside of London. Wales received £445 million in funding outside of the block grant and Barnett. The £445 million will pay for level crossing upgrades on the North Wales Coast Mainline to allow extra services to run; to upgrade Padeswood cement terminal sidings so freight trains don't block the Wrexham to Bidston running lines allowing more trains to run; in the south Cardiff West Junction a bottleneck will be upgraded and the Burns commission proposed stations on the South Wales Mainline will be funded. There will also be money for preparatory work for future schemes.

SHROPSHIRE

Chirbury's Councillor Heather Kidd, who's known to use Welshpool station, is the new Shropshire County Council Leader following the May 2025 County Council elections. The incumbent Conservatives as their main campaign message were once more urging people to vote for them to get the Shrewsbury North West Relief Road built which they claimed the "silent majority" wanted. However, the Liberal Democrats romped home, taking control of the council, on a ticket that included cancelling the road. This follows a similar pattern in recent years with Shrewsbury's town council and member of parliament, the message from the electorate has been clear people don't want the road built. It will be interesting to see how the council now approaches public transport in the county hopefully with a greater priority.

POWYS

The County Council have announced plans to concentrate English language Sixth Form education facilities in the north of the county in Newtown. This has prompted many comments that Powys youngsters will look to go over the county border for post 16 education opportunities as they would have to travel from Welshpool, Machynlleth etc anyway. This has missed the fact that Powys youngsters, particularly from Newtown, have for the last 10 years already been going to Shrewsbury Sixth Form College by rail. The numbers are currently down from a peak in 2017/2018 with TfW's poor operational performance a big factor. However, the trend is established and with an attractive time for returning educational commuters - a 1628 service from Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth

being introduced from this May's timetable change - the numbers could be going up, boosting our lines ridership and relevance.

There are trains every hour from 06xx to 10xx from Upper Severn Valley stations into Shrewsbury and returning from 15xx till 21xx from May 18th.

CEREDIGION

Former TraCC (remember them) and Mid Wales Transport Lead Ann Elias has retired (she was employed by Ceredigion CC). She says she now plans to make use of having more free time by making more trips by rail.

BIRMINGHAM MOOR ST TO LONDON MARYLEBONE

Chiltern Railways are set to take on the MK5 coaches and Class 68 locomotives that DfT forced Trans Pennine Express to give up a couple of years ago and will use them on their West Midlands to London Marylebone services. The Super Off-Peak ticket to London Marylebone valid on TfW and Chiltern Railways services from Cambrian stations is still available, though it has never been promoted by TfW and their ticket machines do not list them as an option for travel to London from Mid Wales. You might have to tell online journey planners to set a route via High Wycombe to find them. They are easily found if you ask the booking office clerk or conductor for them!

The Super Off-Peak ticket is restricted on Mondays to Fridays; you can't arrive in London Marylebone before 1130 – so not valid on the first train of the day, but it is on all other UP services – returning you cannot leave London Marylebone before 0830 or between 1600 and 1900, no restrictions on weekends. If you don't mind a short walk across the centre of Birmingham between New St and Moor St station and have a non-time critical journey, you can buy a significantly cheaper walk on fare from Aberystwyth for £80.20 and from Newtown £53.70 than going to Euston. If you have a valid railcard then a return journey to London for £35.75 is possible from Newtown! These cheaper Super Off Peak Fares travelling via Marylebone are also available to destinations across London and the South East and Essex that you have to travel to via central London.

SHREWSBURY

Dedicated Passenger Assistance staff wearing pale turquoise hi-viz vests have been seen working at the station.

The sidings opposite the Severn Bridge Signal Box on the Wellington line have been upgraded at a cost £3 million paid for by WMR and TfW as more units are now be kept overnight at Shrewsbury. West Midlands Railways have recruited 3 FTE maintenance staff.

TfW services between Manchester and Cardiff had settled down going into Quarter 1 of 2025/2026 and were now at long last almost always run by 5 car formations with services alternating between loco hauled MK4 Coach sets every 2 hours and Class 197 DMU's every 2 hours. However two MK4 sets were damaged in collisions in late May and were out of service when the article was written in early June, resulting in some shorter formations.

TfW services between Shrewsbury and Birmingham International remained erratic into Quarter 1 until the introduction of the summer timetable on May 18th with daily occurrences of 2 car Class 158's instead of 4 car ones operating observed. The Summer timetable has seen a number of diagrams worked with Class 197's, with 2 car formations east of Shrewsbury now a lot rarer. However, this has necessitated unit swaps at Shrewsbury for through passengers from/to the Cambrian. The first couple of weeks in June was seeing the 0514 from Aberystwyth and 1809 from Birmingham International having units swapped at Shrewsbury.

Network Rail have refused to back nearly all the current stampede of Open Access applications to run services, in particular the ones wanting to access the West Coast Mainline including the latest proposal from Wrexham and Shrewsbury, for the obvious reason that the line is already operating at above optimum capacity and performance for all operators will deteriorate even more if more services are added.

Prior to Rishi Sunak's cancellation of the Phase 2 leg of HS2 to Crewe and Manchester in October 2023, the industry had spent years waiting on and planning for services once HS2 was open and capacity was released on existing lines. Shrewsbury was earmarked to have an hourly service to London Euston down the old WCML: an hourly semi fast service from Wales to Birmingham New St, plus two stopping services to Birmingham New St per hour eastward. Government has been unable to articulate what the consequences of the cancellation of Phase 2 were and with long distance services from Birmingham to Manchester and Scotland that were supposed to run over HS2 remaining on the Stour Valley line and no released capacity the plans to improve services from the West Midlands into Shropshire have been put in limbo. The current Westminster Government has yet to announce the result of its review into the line.

NEWTOWN

The lifts at Newtown Station are now open to the public, which is a fantastic step forward in making travel easier for everyone.

For the first time, the station in Powys is fully step-free which will help make journeys more convenient, accessible and smoother for passengers.

Rail enthusiasts braved the early hours on several occasions to observe A1 Steam Locomotive 60163 Tornado, and a support coach run overnight ETCS tests from Coleham Depot Shrewsbury in April before Easter. The loco ran round its coach and returned to Shrewsbury here. The loco is Route Availability 9; beyond Newtown is only Route Availability 5 and under due to the wooden viaduct over the River Severn at Caersws, so the loco was too heavy to go any further.

Charity Platform 1 have installed new plant holders paid for by TfW at the station and their Café opened in Mid June.

BOW STREET

The initial station business case from 2014 was based on usage figures for neighbouring Aberystwyth and Borth stations in 2011/2012 and stated that an expected footfall of 37,100 was predicted. This puts in context the actual 28,582 seen in 2023/2024, four years after opening. Despite claims of success, it would appear to be in fact underperforming.

This contrasts with the recently reopened Northumberland line where usage has exceeded expectations instantly on opening and there are calls for longer trains. The stations were assessed using the same industry standard methodology. Rail campaigners must be careful of just shouting “build it and they will come” as the actual picture is clearly more complex and needs to be better understood.

Editor: the car park appears to be very well used. In the afternoon of Tuesday 10th June it was full: I was unable to find a parking space.

ABERYSTWYTH

Two pairs of seagulls have decided in their wisdom to build nests, one right next to the tracks by the platform in the station, the other alongside the platform which is now Craft.. One of them flies off when a train approaches whilst the other moves into a recess under the platform.

The Vale of Rheidol Railway have opened a new café at the Aberystwyth end of the 1930's Great Western Railway engine shed – Caffi Cledrau. The outdoor seating area is a good place to observe the log train being loaded – runs started again on Friday 6th June after a hiatus.

CLASS 197'S

These remain the object of informed and uninformed criticism on social media. In early June TfW had accepted into service all the non ETCS fitted units (26 x 3 car and 30 x 2 car sets) plus 9 of the 21 ETCS fitted 2 car sets. The ETCS fitted 2 car sets not in use can be found parked up at Holyhead station sidings.

Further overnight tests down the Cambrian from Shrewsbury happened in Mid-May and again in early June, with much focus over heights between low platforms and the units. Stakeholders have been told their introduction on the Cambrian will be in the New Year in early 2026, presumably after work on platform heights has been undertaken.

BARMOUTH

The T3 Trawscymru buses that run from Barmouth to Wrexham, mirroring the closed GWR route from Ruabon to Barmouth, will all call at Wrexham Maelor Hospital from May onwards.

OPPOSITION POLITICIANS DEMAND NON-EXISTENT PEAK FARES ARE ABOLISHED IN WALES

Following the Scottish Government announcement that they would permanently abolish peak fares on ScotRail this May, some Welsh opposition politicians have demanded similar here in Wales. The only problem is they don't exist, having already been quietly done away with! South Wales Metro stations with newly installed PAYG facilities have in fact had substantial price reductions in recent weeks.

Once more some politicians have demonstrated a woeful ignorance about rail matters.

MAY TIMETABLE CHANGES

Most welcome was the introduction of a 1628 service from Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth and the reintroduction of the 1029 Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth and return 1230 Aberystwyth to Shrewsbury which had been suspended over the winter months due to rolling stock shortages. The 1628 has been observed several times as loading well.

There are now 16 departures on Mondays to Saturdays from Aberystwyth – the last 3 at night just to Machynlleth. They are nearly hourly all day starting at 05xx till 23xx with just three gaps now at 10xx, 14xx and 16xx.

From Shrewsbury there are 12 departures from 07xx till 21xx; the gaps are at 08xx, 12xx and 14xx. There's also the early morning westbound service that starts from Welshpool that fills the 06xx slot from Shrewsbury.

STATION FOOTFALL/DESTINATION ANALYSIS A RESPONSE FROM GARETH MARSTON

The article in March's newsletter on station footfall and analysis of destination/origin points has drawn comment from a regular long distance traveller on the coast line, who says the reported low number of long distance travellers on the coast (c.10% as opposed to a national average of 1 in 6) and its very high percentage of journeys only taking place on the line itself (7 out of 8) are misleading, due to split ticketing and especially so in the winter months when bus pass holders can travel for free on the coast, but have to pay from Machynlleth/Dyfi Junction onward.

Whilst he's right to identify this as a factor, the extent of it is not sufficient to change the dial on the general conclusion that the coastline is predominantly self-contained in terms of usage, with a lower number of long-distance travellers than the national average. Having spoken with a few conductors they agree that a large percentage of the ticket sales from Dyfi Junction are down to split ticketing. However, with a footfall of just 14,610 and the coastline from Aberdyfi to Pwllheli having a total footfall of 845,500 the total number of journeys that could be affected amount to just 1.7% of the overall total. Even allowing for some from Machynlleth's 112,636 footfall shall we say 20,000-25,000 in total between the two stations, you are still looking at long distance travellers being around 1 in 8 of journeys as opposed to 1 in 6 nationally and 8 in 9 journeys are still just between Pwllheli and Machynlleth. If you want to argue more people, do it, bear in mind the implication of this would be that the actual usage of Machynlleth station by passengers starting and finishing their journeys there is substantially less than official figure.

There's nothing "wrong" with this usage pattern on the coast as it's how it is, patterns vary from line to line all over the UK. There is a tendency to see things through our own lenses and not take into account other users on the line. After all, how many of the schoolchildren on the coast are SARPA members? Yet they account for 25% of coast journeys.

POLITICIANS OF ALL COLOURS AND OFFICIALS MUST DO BETTER

On October 14th this year it will be a full 7 years since Transport for Wales took over services on the Cambrian from Arriva Trains Wales. At the time no one would have thought we would be looking back, (almost) pining for the steady state railway that at least ran its full published timetable day in day out, week in week out, year in year out fairly reliably, even if there were other issues mainly centring around peak capacity and lack of investment. The Transport for Wales experience has so far not been a happy one.

On the SARPA website there are archived newsletters at

<https://sarpa.info/archive.html>

- take a read of the articles in the period 2016-2018 about the new franchise and how Welsh Government/Transport for Wales were spouting forth how things were going to be marvellously better and improved under their watch and then contrast it with what's actually happened. As the analysis of the official station footfall figures published in the SARPA March newsletter shows, usage peaked on the Cambrian Mainline in 2017/2018 - ATW's last full year and then fell for the two years before the 2020 pandemic - passengers driven away because of TfW's inability to run the same service they inherited from ATW - nothing to do with unavoidable worldwide external events. We have had numerous short periods where the service has got back to "ATW levels", but invariably it's been yet another false dawn and things have slipped back. There's been little consistency of product with cancellations and short forming knocking the public's confidence in using rail services in Mid Wales. Despite this, the number of people travelling by rail on the Cambrian has recovered to 2019/2020 levels: a lot better than in many other parts of Wales and the Borders demonstrating the underlying demand. On the coastline usage is equal to that in 2019/2020 destroying TfW's excuse to cut services that travelling patterns have changed since the pandemic... The newsletters also report the franchise announcement in June 2018 where we were promised that new DMU's would be introduced on our line in 2022 and the full hourly service implemented on the December 2022 timetable change, both of which we are still waiting for. It's now a quarter of a century since then Welsh Government Finance Minister Sue Essex said on a visit to Aberystwyth that Welsh Government would deliver an hourly service on the Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth line!

In May this year there have been more promises - the North Wales Metro was launched with the sort of fanfare that Government can bring - true it was fairly good for vision and ambition but it was soon apparent that there was no medium and long term funding attached to the plan and the short term gains with £s attached were all re-hashed 2018 franchise commitments that hadn't been delivered! We've been here before - quite a few times. Delivery is what people want and need, not more flannel.

There is a lot of dissatisfaction generally with Welsh Government and Welsh Labour's long tenure in Cardiff Bay amongst the public, which, civil servants and politicians please note, is not just noise from political opponents. Transport for Wales with their poor operational performance, laboured and slow delivery of investment/improvements are undoubtedly part of that mix. In the past it's been all too easy for Welsh Government officials and Welsh Labour politicians to dismiss legitimate criticism as political noise from the opposition, safe in the knowledge their positions were secure with ballot box dominance. In May 2026 there are Senedd elections and

Welsh Labour is widely expected to have its worst showing since devolution, and rightly so: poor performance should not be rewarded.

Yet the Welsh Government can get things done and get things right - ironically what is probably the most effective and successful of all policies since devolution has seen, instead of praise being heaped on Welsh Government has resulted in a lot of foot stamping and irrational anger with the Minister who championed the policy hounded from office including by many in his own party. The 20mph road speed limit has done what international experience said it would – it has led to a significant drop in road traffic accidents and casualties, saving lives, injury and distress, NHS and Police time and money, car insurance premiums have come down and the streets are more pleasant for pedestrians and cyclists all because people are not charging around like Mr Toad in his car in built up areas. This type of policy is being repeated across many countries worldwide due to its undisputed evidence-based success. The soon to be completed South Wales Metro also mirrors worldwide best practice; frustratingly it's not as though we can't get things right in Wales.

But what of the alternatives from the political opposition? The main transport policy of two of the opposition parties in Wales is to reverse the 20mph policy; a policy that works and benefits us all! Whilst we rightly criticise Welsh Labour for poor delivery and unkept promises how can anyone in their right mind take seriously parties who pander to macho selfish entitlement that ignores evidence and will kill and maim their own citizens as a policy choice? A third opposition party who claim to be big on vision for Wales managed to launch an economic policy that failed to mention transport's role..... transport is interlinked with the economy.... that's basic entry level understanding stuff. They then misrepresented how the Barnett funding formula for devolved governments work: are they credible? Whilst Welsh Labour's record may not be great, but several opposition parties understanding of transport is poor, and they seem to prefer using it to create false narrative wedge issues rather than to offer a sensible evidence-based alternative.

Our competitors in Europe in the better economically performing countries and city regions all have extensive functioning public transport networks. If you care to look the evidence is clear. A recent study of 60 European city regions with a population of over a million saw all but two of the 8 UK's regional cities included in the bottom third ranked by economic performance. Another recent study showed that only 1 in 5 UK cities had any sort of metro (underground/light rail mass transit) systems, way behind levels found with our competitors – there's a rather obvious link between the two studies! No wonder the centre for the study of cities concludes that the underdeveloped public transport networks around our regional cities are a primary factor in why they struggle to produce agglomeration effects. 25 years ago, the UK had a sliding doors moment when Tony Blair rejected John Prescott's Integrated Transport White Paper and deprived the UK's regions of the funding and tools to bring their public transport networks up to standard and help their economies expand. Underpinning the divisions and dissatisfaction that many in the UK feel is our historical failure to invest in public transport. Early June's announcement of £15 Billion for UK City Regions from the Westminster Government has at long last recognised this with money for light rail, buses and suburban rail services on a scale not seen previously. However, we're playing catch up after decades of neglect. Transformation will not be overnight, but this should be

just a start and needs to be seriously ramped up over a long period of time if we are to genuinely move the dial.

Down in Valleys the road project which has consumed a large percentage of the Welsh Government's infrastructure spending since devolution has finally been completed - the A465 Heads of the Valleys Road dualling. This was allowed to be completed despite the road building moratorium. We have a made in Wales solution to move things forward in the ex-road building budget being repurposed. It's a gift horse staring Politicians and officials in the face; ok it will only go so far but Welsh Government has spent the equivalent of £200 to £250 million a year at today's prices on ineffectual road construction that the evidence shows neither solved congestion nor stimulated the economy. Getting this money doing something better should be a priority.

Gareth Marston
Newtown June 2025.

TRAVELLER'S TALES

Roger Whitehouse

A ticketing problem

Shortly after press date for Newsletter 95 I made a return journey to the south of England, using the Chiltern route. The conductor couldn't collect my fare, as London doesn't accept paper tickets, so I would have to leave the train (and my seat) to pay at Machynlleth. Ought not our conductors' tickets be to a nationally accepted standard? In the event, the through coast portion was cancelled: at least the station staff replatformed the trains at Machynlleth to avoid the trek over the footbridge.

My return journey was delayed after Wellington by a faulty engine and waiting for crew. Eventually the driver was able to restart the offending engine in the coast unit (of course!), which was replaced at Machynlleth.

Portions at Shrewsbury

En route on a Saturday to the East Midlands, the 0704 Machynlleth-Shrewsbury arrived at Platform 4: "all change please!". The unit sat in the platform with through passengers waiting alongside until another from Crewe coupled on, whereupon we got back in the same unit to continue our journeys. (I noted that through passengers from the Chester line had to change trains.)

Our return 1722 from New St, described as 2 Llandudno and 2 Shrewsbury, left full and standing despite having the promised 4 cars. Was the rear unit for Aberystwyth or not? There was no check of tickets or destinations, and the only PA announcement was drowned by wheel squeal on the curve between Abbey Foregate and Shrewsbury platform 3. We recognised a trolley operator on the platform who confirmed that our unit was for Aberystwyth, and then had to direct a worried looking couple sitting opposite us, who wanted Gobowen, to get off quickly.

Why are trains which divide at Shrewsbury apparently never described properly with both destinations served?

Experiences vary

Our next trip to Birmingham was incident free, and we were properly informed by the conductor about the Aberystwyth portion of the 1922.

A trip to Newtown for SARPA's March meeting was delivered as advertised, including correctly described portion order of the return train.

A return journey to Birmingham was affected by the planned Newtown-Machynlleth engineering closure. We intended to 'park-and-ride' via Welshpool, but the front car park was closed off, and the overspill on the other side full, so we drove on to Telford. The return 1822 from New Street was screened (in the wrong order) as front 2 Newtown, rear 2 Shrewsbury: on the train, DORIS declared "this train is for Chester". I wonder how many passengers, possibly relatively new to rail, are made anxious or confused by such things, or finish up in the wrong carriage, and decide "Never Again!"

We now sometimes start a return from Birmingham on West Midland's 1852 fast departure, thus avoiding the possibility of a Platform 3-to-Platform 6 change at Shrewsbury off the 1922. This has more than once turned out to be a wise move. Users of Telford Central, Wellington and Shrewsbury seem to be taking a while to register the extra West Midland trains which (with TFW's) provide a half-hourly fast service.

Another to the South of England

We had purchased our tickets in advance during a visit to Machynlleth. Our earliest start (0817 from Tywyn) is now an hour later than before the cuts, and potentially requires changes (annoying with heavy luggage) at Machynlleth and Shrewsbury. It was pleasing to be told after leaving Welshpool that the train was through to Birmingham. On returning some days later, New St displayed the portions in the right order, and the 1222 from New St ran to time. May such things happen more often!

More through portions

Through portions from the coast are on platform screens as trains to Birmingham International, but on the train DORIS initially says "This train is for Machynlleth", requiring a reset. En route to SARPA's Welshpool meeting, the conductor earned a 'brownie point' by doing this immediately after Penhelig. Alas, this time the return train's portions were in the wrong order on Welshpool's screen.

Taking the 0817 again, just before press day, more 'brownie points' when shortly after leaving Machynlleth, DORIS declared "This train is for Birmingham International". There was, however, a 'black mark' at Shrewsbury when the coupling up movement led to "we are now at Wellington". Some of these incidents point to deficiencies in 158 software. A retired professional's comment: software can only be as good as the specification obtained from the customer.

The train following ours was delayed by a 'bridge strike' in the Caersws area, and the rest of the day was not one of the Cambrian's best. It turned out that the 1930 Shrewsbury-Aberystwyth was cancelled (the 1822 from New Street was described there as 4 cars for Chester), leaving many passengers for the 2032 instead. This left

from platform 7, formed of 2 cars shunted from platform 6 and apparently taken off a train to Birmingham International, in front of 2 cars from Holyhead booked to terminate. Announcements insisted, twice, that the front unit was for Aberystwyth and the rear for the coast, which would be the wrong order at Machynlleth for this service. The conductor informed us, when checking tickets, that the coast train would, as usual, be standing in front at Machynlleth on the same platform. The unit from Holyhead only went as far as Machynlleth.

I'd be delighted, one day, to have nothing interesting to write about under this title. Perhaps SARPA's efforts will eventually lead to that desirable end.



Spring 2025 was officially the sunniest and one of the driest on record. Saturday May 17th was no exception - this is the view at Machynlleth station at 1900 with the clear blue sky and high UV that had been present on the coast since sunrise evident. Passengers are awaiting the 1909 service to Shrewsbury. The unit behind was the one that worked the 1537 Pwllheli to Birmingham International and had been terminated at Machynlleth around about an hour late as disruption had hit the coast earlier in the day, the Aberystwyth portion had worked forward on time on its own. I stood from Tywyn to Aberdyfi and again from Machynlleth to Newtown.

Gareth Marston

Letter to the Editor**Reopening Afon Wen**

How practical would it be to extend the Welsh Highland Railway northwards from Carnarfon to Bangor? We would then have a rail link between Bangor and Porthmadog. If a tram is on the agenda, why not a narrow gauge steam train? Make it an all-year-round service and allow locals a discount card for 'normal' ticket prices. Tourists would also appreciate the longer Bangor to Portmadog steam train.

Laurence Main Dinas Mawddwy

SARPA FINANCES AT 30TH APRIL 2025

Opening balance (30th April 2024): **£802.19**

Income:	Subscriptions and donations	£831.00	
	Interest	£4.18	
		£835.18	<i>(533.36)</i>

Expenditure:	Newsletter printing	£440.00	{August, November, March}
	Newsletter postage ^{#1}	£177.50	
	Meeting room hire ^{#2}	£95.00	{Criccieth, Shrewsbury}
	Web hosting	£40.00	
	Liaison committee sub	£10.00	
		£762.50	<i>(908.15)</i>

Closing balance: **£874.87** {Surplus £72.68}

Membership (paid up) 43

Notes:

#1 Postage was reduced by advance purchase of stamps.

#2 Room hire includes £20 donation to Talylyn Railway.

TORNADO ON THE CAMBRIAN Network Rail

[Network Rail](#) has begun testing at speed for an operational steam locomotive fitted with [ETCS](#) (European Train Control System) technology. LNER 'A1' No. 60163 'Tornado' is the world's first steam engine with digital signalling technology installed. Tornado is a modern steam locomotive and was built in 2008.

The loco is the first to be included in the charter and heritage pathfinder project for the [East Coast Digital Programme](#) (ECDP), which combines steam power with digital signalling.

As the modern railway celebrates its bicentenary this year, Network Rail sees this project as blending nineteenth century innovation with twenty-first century technology. Network Rail explains that the pathfinder project aims to "enable all parts of the railway to share in a digital transformation". Digital signalling, which is being installed on the [East Coast Main Line](#), will improve safety and reliability on the railway, and will reduce harmful emissions.

The heritage pathfinder aims to enable main line running of steam and heritage diesel for the future. Heritage rail contributes over £600m per year to the UK's tourist economy. Fitting the signalling technology involved contributions from four organisations. Hitachi Rail was responsible for onboard equipment, AtkinsRealis for fitment design, and Network Rail for integration. The locomotive's owner, the A1 Steam Locomotive Trust, was also involved.

The work met what Network Rail calls "significant challenges" concerning supply of electricity, management of braking, and running in both directions. It also had to overcome the difficulties involved in enabling people to work in a noisy, dusty, and sometimes rainy, environment, with vibrations.

These tests followed [earlier testing between Carnforth and Hellifield in March](#), which cleared the locomotive for mainline operation and allowed it to progress to the next stage of testing. Tornado undertook overnight test runs on the Cambrian line between Shrewsbury and Newtown in Mid [Wales](#).

West Coast Railway operated the test trains. Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) provided test train officers for each trip. Network Rail completed this phase of testing on Thursday, 17 April.

Later this year, [BR Class 55 No. D9000 'Royal Scots Grey'](#), a heritage diesel pathfinder loco, is scheduled to undergo dynamic testing. This will also take place on the Cambrian line. It will then need to undertake more refining and assurance processes before it can run in mainline heritage operation in ETCS Level Two.



The visits by Tornado to the Cambrian were ground breaking. It was the first Pacific locomotive to have run on the Cambrian, and the first three cylinder locomotive. The engine was being driven by Machynlleth based railwayman John Cushty Rogers (seen pictured in the cab).

The engine is pictured below ready for departure back to Shrewsbury. Photograph: Angus Eickhoff.





Personnel involved in the testing of Tornado.

Above: Tom Goulding (Engineering Degree Apprentice, Hitachi and retired steam driver Ray Poole Credit: Network Rail.

Below: LtoR Ben Mason, Amy Clouston, Raymond Sturton, Rob Morland // Credit: Network Rail



USEFUL ADDRESSES

Transport for Wales: Customer Relations, Transport for Wales Rail Services, St. Mary's House, 7 Penarth Road, Cardiff . CF10 5DJ Tel. 0333 3211 202

Network Rail:

Community Relations, Kings Place, 99, York Way, London. N1 9AG

Association of Community Rail Partnerships

The Old Water Tower, Huddersfield Railway Station, St George's Square, Huddersfield HD1 1JF

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

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Our website <https://sarpa.info>

Webmaster Angus Eickhoff: angus@anguseickhoff.co.uk

Website host is Hostinger: <https://www.hostinger.co.uk/>

Find us on Facebook - Shrewsbury Aberystwyth Rail Passengers' Association:

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

Other sites of interest:

A useful alternative to the National Rail Enquiries site:	www.traintimes.org.uk/
Transport for Wales	www.tfwrail.wales/
National Rail Enquiries	www.nationalrail.co.uk/
London Northwestern Railway	www.journeycheck.com/londonnorthwesternrailway/
West Midlands Railway	www.westmidlandsrailway.co.uk
Avanti West Coast	www.avantiwestcoast.co.uk
Chiltern Railways	www.chilternrailways.co.uk/
Network Rail	www.networkrail.co.uk/
Railfuture/Railway Development Society	www.railfuture.org.uk/
Railwatch: the quarterly magazine of Railfuture	www.railwatch.org.uk
The Association of Community Rail Partnerships (Acorp)	communityrail.org.uk
North Wales Coast Railway	www.nwrail.org.uk/
Ffestiniog and Welsh Highland Railways	www.festrail.co.uk/
Vale of Rheidol Railway	www.rheidolrailway.co.uk
Talylyn Railway	www.talyllyn.co.uk/
Welshpool and Llanfair Railway	www.wllr.org.uk/
Welsh Highland Heritage Railway	www.whr.co.uk/
Fairbourne Railway	www.fairbournerrailway.com/
Borth Station Museum	www.borthstationmuseum.co.uk
Real Time Trains	realtimetrains.co.uk
Live Rail Record	https://live.rail-record.co.uk

MONTHLY MEETINGS

August	Thursday 21st 19:00	Monty Club, 11 Broad Street, Newtown, SY16 2LU.
September	Saturday 20th 11:15	Wynnstay Hotel, Machynlleth.
October	Saturday 18th 11:30	The Vestry, Capel Y Traeth, Criccieth.
November	Saturday 15th 11:45	Town Council Offices, The Presbytery, Queens Road, Aberystwyth, SY23 2HS.
December	Saturday 6th 11:30	The HIVE, 5 Belmont, Shrewsbury, SY1 1TE.

Articles in the Newsletter contain the views of the contributors, not those of the Association.

Copy deadline for the next newsletter is 22nd October 2025