

Issue 51 Autumn 2011

Rail Wales

*Newsletter of the Welsh branches of
Railfuture*



A SUCCESSFUL REOPENING – see page 14

A Cardiff – Ebbw Vale train leaves Risca and Pontymister station

National Eisteddfod travel disappointment

In some years the annual National Eisteddfod of Wales (which attracts about 160,000 visitors) has been held at rural locations where public transport provision can be sparse, but when it is at a major centre, such as Wrexham this year, the opportunity surely exists to promote use of rail by visitors.

Wrexham is served by trains hourly from Holyhead and points east; two-hourly from Cardiff and points north and from Birmingham; and hourly from Merseyside/Deeside. A shuttle bus ran every 10 mins. between Wrexham General station and the Maes, from 8 am to 6 pm, then (less frequently) until nearly midnight. Passengers without free bus passes could ask for a Wrexham PlusBus ticket, which costs £1.50, when buying their rail ticket to Wrexham, or could pay the £1 single fare on the bus.

So far, so good! But who knew about this, and how could they find out? The National Eisteddfod's website suggested car sharing, described a route to the Maes for cyclists, briefly mentioned the shuttle bus and referred people to ATW's website for information about trains. But the only information about the Eisteddfod on ATW's website was a statement warning of disruption due to engineering works on the track south of Wrexham on Sunday 31 July – although the work was cancelled because Network Rail finished it a week early.

There was also no mention of the Eisteddfod on the website page which ATW devoted to summer events in 2011. The events listed by ATW recur in the same place every year, but the Eisteddfod is unusual in that regular visitors have to make new travel arrangements each year. Going by car may be the preferred option of many when the Eisteddfod is remote from the rail network, and they will default to the car in the absence of suitable information and publicity when the Eisteddfod can be easily reached by train.

This was a disappointing situation, especially when the Eisteddfod was in the main operating area of ATW's sister company, Arriva Buses Wales, which operated the Eisteddfod shuttle buses jointly with a local company. The message to both the Eisteddfod organisers and ATW has to be 'must do better'!

A testing time to come

September 12th sees the introduction of additional services on the line between Fishguard Harbour and Clarbeston Road in Pembrokeshire.

Local groups North Pembrokeshire Transport Forum and Pembrokeshire Rail Travellers Association campaigned effectively over the inadequate service – hitherto just two trains a day – until Pembrokeshire County Council/SWWITCH decided to appoint consultants to examine the case for more trains. As the track was in place and already up to passenger-carrying standards the result of the consultants' deliberations was that the numbers they came up with compared very favourably with those of other passenger reinstatements. The campaign then intensified with an interesting petition being presented to the Welsh Government by two sixth formers at Fishguard High School.

Earlier this year the Welsh Government announced that they would be funding 5 additional trains a day starting in September for a period of three years and that those three years would be a trial period after which, if the additional service was not judged a success, the trains could be taken off without the cessation of service being encumbered with the statutory closure process at present in force.

Presently the trains serve the Harbour station in Fishguard (much improved by Stena Line when they took over from Sealink) which is accessed by a long bleak road of about ½ a mile. There is adequate car parking for intending passengers but at a cost of £7 per day. Nearby in Goodwick is the former station of Fishguard and Goodwick, closed in the 1960s; the platform is still in situ and probably not up to today's standards, but no station building as PCC have recently demolished it. Attempts to get it listed were unsuccessful.

The timing of the introduction of the additional trains seems rather inopportune with regard to F&G station which is on the intensive Fishguard Town bus service route and has the facilities to provide a large parking area for car-borne passengers. Although plans are hurriedly in process to examine its re-opening it will not be on stream for September 12th and trains will be met at the harbour by

connecting buses. The disconnect here between station facilities and the new trains is to be regretted but we are where we are.

The new service was put out to consultation before it was finalised and the finished article is to be commended as a workmanlike attempt to cater for the market for train travel in West Wales. After the boat train which leaves the Harbour at 01.50, the day opens with the new services when the 05.50 from Carmarthen arrives at the Harbour at 06.44; this turns around leaving at 06.53 for Clarboston Road, arriving 07.16 with a twelve minute wait for a connection onto the Manchester Piccadilly train from Milford Haven. Turning around again the train leaves Clarboston Rd at 7.34 arriving back in the harbour at 07.58; unfortunately there is no incoming connection. Leaving almost immediately at 8.04 this train becomes a through service to Manchester Piccadilly. The next arrival at the Harbour is the 09.46 which is from Cardiff and leaves again at 09.56 for Carmarthen where there is a connection to Cardiff and the east of 13 minutes. The existing service to meet the ferry arrives and leaves at 13.25 and 13.30 respectively. There is then a 5 hour gap until the next train which is from Cardiff and arrives at 18.34. This again shuttles to Clarboston Road and back with slick connections – 10 minutes eastbound and 5 minutes westbound - before leaving at 20.50 with destination Carmarthen, where there is an onward connection but unfortunately entailing a 48-minute wait.

Fishguard has been somewhat disconnected from the rest of Wales in terms of public transport, largely relying on stage carriage bus services, so the new train services provide an excellent opportunity for the town and hinterland. Commuting to Carmarthen and Swansea is possible on the timings as well as excellent days out in Cardiff and, indeed, anywhere along the south coast corridor.

It is hoped that the Community Rail Partnership and Arriva will put considerable energy into promoting the new services and it seems to the writer that the two groups in the voluntary sector will be able to hold a second launch when F&G station finally joins the list of Pembrokeshire railway stations open for business. Ride these trains if you can – the old ‘sixties maxim applies over the next three years – “Use ‘em or lose ‘em!”

Guy Hardy

Some Sunday services are still inadequate



The illustration shows a train leaving Deganwy for Llandudno, on the 3-mile, double track branch from Llandudno Junction. Llandudno, as well as being north Wales's largest holiday resort, is also a significant commercial and conference centre. Serving it adequately by long-distance transport is hampered by its location off the main line; there is an hourly through service to/from Chester and Manchester, but for other destinations a change at the Junction is needed, and good connections there are essential.

This was partly achieved by ATW two years ago when Manchester trains were timed to operate a shuttle from Llandudno to the Junction and back, before setting off again for Manchester. These shuttles give good connections *from* Llandudno into the main line trains to Birmingham and Cardiff. Unfortunately, when going *to* Llandudno there is a long gap in the afternoon when this does not apply, and waits of half an hour or more at the Junction have to be endured.

Even worse is the lack of any Sunday services in 'winter' (i.e. two thirds of the year!). (In summer, Sunday trains operate from mid-morning to early evening). Yet Arriva has recently doubled the

Sunday frequency on its Llandudno – Bangor – Caernarfon bus route, showing increased demand for travel on Sundays.

A welcome recent announcement that funding is now in place for a £5.4m revamp of Llandudno station notes that it is used by about 270,000 passengers per year, with Network Rail commenting that "it has seen a steady increase in passenger demand over the years and the proposed improvements will cater for this growth and encourage sustainable travel, whilst improving the environment and socio-economics of the town." All the more reason then to ensure the train service is adequate 7 days per week!

Another line without a Sunday service (at any time of year) is that to Maesteg. Yet Sunday is a busy day on the rail network nowadays. ATW has improved main line Sunday services in recent years, but services on some of the branches have not kept up!

Wales Passenger update (September 2011)

New services

An additional, Saturdays excepted, north Wales to Cardiff passenger service was introduced on 22nd May, departing Holyhead at 07.51 and returning from Cardiff at 18.18. This uses a two-car class 175 unit, is routed via Wrexham and has resulted in a popular service to Birmingham being diverted via Crewe. There are no immediate connections to and from this service to west of Cardiff. Welsh Government has invested £620,000 in this service to December 2011.

Five additional, Sundays excepted, services were introduced to Fishguard Harbour from 12th September. These services do not conform to a standard pattern timetable as elsewhere in Wales and are timed to suit the local community; unfortunately there is no suitable inbound service for day visitors to north Pembrokeshire and south Ceredigion. Welsh Government has not published the cost of these additional services. (*See also pp. 3 & 4*).

Engineering disruption

On Saturdays 3rd and 10th September the line was closed between Hereford and Shrewsbury and Broome and Craven Arms. On Sundays 4th and 11th the blockade was extended to Newport and

this coincided, on both Sundays, with a blockade from Severn Tunnel Junction to Gloucester. There was thus no route open between north and south Wales except via Bristol Parkway and Birmingham. There was an hourly bus service between Newport and Shrewsbury which took 3½ hours compared with a rail journey time of 1 hour 40 minutes. Previously only sections of the line have been closed; this is the first time that there has been a complete closure and is an unwelcome trend for rail passengers.

Ebbw Vale Parkway via Newport

On 27th August the 21.35 and 23.05 Cardiff to Ebbw Vale Parkway and 21.40 and 22.40 Ebbw Vale Parkway to Cardiff services were routed via Newport. The empty stock from Cardiff Canton to Ebbw Vale in the morning and from Ebbw Vale to Cardiff Canton in the evening always runs via Newport for staff route knowledge.

Fares

The headline **ATW** maximum fare is from Pontyclun to Prestatyn and at present is £78.80 (railcard £52.00). This is the same as the fare from Fishguard Harbour to Holyhead.

FGW increased some of its fares from 4th September and now charges the same fare as from Swansea to Paddington for stations as far as Bridgend; these fares (standard class) are now £229.00 anytime, £86.00 off peak and £69.00 super off peak with considerable restrictions as to the time of travel. The off peak fare was increased from £83 (3.6%) to £86 to make it 25% higher than the Super off-peak fare. There will be further substantial fare increases in January following the retail price index plus 3%.

Virgin West Coast has an anytime fare of £271.00 and an off peak fare of £81.30 for the longer journey from Holyhead to Euston with fewer restrictions. Virgin also allows railcard holders to use the off peak fare without restriction, a concession not offered by FGW. Again there will be further substantial fare increases in January following the retail price index plus 3%.

ATW has discontinued most Cardiff area off peak zonal fares and made adjustments to other fares. Welsh Government has not yet decided on fare increases for January 2012. Scottish Government and Northern Ireland Government as well as Merseyrail have

decided upon retail index plus 1% increases and not plus 3% as in England. It has reintroduced its popular Club 55 fares from 4th September to 14th December, this time at the increased price of £18 (railcard £16), again with useful add-ons. A new feature is an add-on of £20.50 for Chiltern Railways thus providing a through fare to London from Wales for £38.50. This is considerably less than the Cardiff to Waterloo via Salisbury off peak fare of £48.10.

First Group companies have Zonal Club 55 fares from 19th September to 20th November at £20 per zone (senior railcard discount 20%). It is two zones from South Wales to London and there is an all routes ATW add-on priced at £15. The Swansea to Paddington fare would be £49 (railcard £32).

Holyhead – Dublin ferry services

Stena Line

The Stena HSS service between Holyhead and Dun Laoghaire departing Holyhead at 10.00 and Dun Laoghaire at 13.15 was withdrawn from 14th September. Unlike last winter, when it was replaced by the high speed ship used during summer between Fishguard Harbour and Rosslare, there will be no replacement ship. The use of the high speed vessel proved to be unreliable when there were adverse weather conditions resulting in the cancellation of sailings. The inner terminal at Holyhead and the complete terminal at Dun Laoghaire will now be closed at least for the winter. There will now be no walk-on ferries for foot passengers at Holyhead and in Dublin. All foot passengers will now require a bus transfer from the rail terminal to the ferry at Holyhead and by bus from Dublin to Dublin Port. The remaining services for foot passengers are at 08.20 and 21.15 from Dublin and 02.30 and 13.50 from Holyhead. There is no onward rail connection from Holyhead for the 21.15 sailing. Stena do not allow foot passengers on the convenient 02.15 and 16.00 sailings from Dublin Port and 08.20 and 21.30 from Holyhead. Rail-sail tickets are still available but there will now be no opportunity for day trips.

Irish Ferries

The Irish Ferries services are unchanged with sailings from Holyhead at 02.40, 12.00s, 14.10 and 17.15s, all requiring a bus transfer at Holyhead; and 08.05, 08.45s, 14.30s and 20.55 from

Dublin Port, a bus ride from the city centre. The four sailings ('s' above) by the Swift ferry can be cancelled in inclement weather. Irish Ferries also have rail-sail tickets.

Passenger Focus

The Passenger Focus organisation has been downsized and the Link Passenger Manager positions have been abolished. Simon Pickering was the last Passenger Manager in Wales who provided a valuable link between ATW, WG, the four transport consortia and voluntary rail action groups. He was helpful to and supportive of *Railfuture* in Wales and this link will be missed. *Railfuture* Wales regrets the reduction of activity of Passenger Focus which will now focus on the role of completing rail passenger satisfaction surveys.

Passenger Focus had also taken over bus representation in England but this continues to be covered by Bus Users UK in Wales. **Bus Users UK Cymru** receives funding from the Welsh Government to gather the views of bus passengers, to act as a contact point for user complaints and to provide advice. Their role includes strengthening the voice of bus users in the discussion of public transport issues; increasing the influence of bus passengers on local and national decisions affecting bus services; developing good communication between bus companies and their passengers.

Passenger Transport Users Committee

The following were appointed to the committee: Dan Butler, Christine Court, Andrea Gordon, Elly Foster, Steve Hale, Greg Pycroft, Graham Walter, Chris Yewlett and Ted Sangster.

The committee held its first meeting in Swansea on 24th March and second meeting in Llandudno Junction on 20th-21st July. The committee has decided to concentrate on investigating the provision of public transport in Wales and has received presentations from various organisations in Wales including ATW, Traveline Cymru and Taith. The committee also consulted using a questionnaire to which *Railfuture* Wales responded.

It appears that the committee will have no campaigning brief and no direct relationship with public transport user groups other than those in which its members participate. Its role will be to advise

government although it does not include any members directly involved in the provision of public transport. It will not be a replacement for Passenger Focus and user groups will still have to campaign directly to the Minister responsible for transport.

Consultations

Railfuture has responded to the following consultations:

Office of the Rail Regulator - Periodic review 2013

ATW 2011-12 Timetable

Sewta - Rail Strategy review and Roll Forward.

Tracc - Passenger Transport Strategy

Railfuture met members of the Welsh Government's rail team on 12th March at which the *Railfuture* Development Plan for Wales and other current topics were discussed. The rail team provided an update on rail developments in Wales.

Railfuture attended a Sustainable Transport Cymru meeting on 7th September with the Climate Change Commissioner for Wales at which various suggestions were made to improve public transport provision and mitigate climate change.

Rowland Pittard

South East report - 1

Service enhancements

Rail Wales 50 anticipated various timetable changes which were to be introduced in May, so we can now, three months later, try to assess how useful and effective these are proving to be.

The call at Severn Tunnel Junction by the **First Great Western** (FGW) 9.30 Cardiff – Portsmouth Harbour train fills a gap and gives the station a half-hourly service to Bristol in the morning 'peak'. Our spot checks reveal an encouraging uptake (9 to 15 passengers most mornings), with a few transfers from the Chepstow direction. This interchanging is something which we and 'Better Trains for Chepstow' (BTfCh) wasn't to develop further.

The additional calls at Chepstow and Lydney by **Arriva Cross Country** (XC) took many by surprise! As mentioned previously, it is

for a trial period of one year and results from meetings with stakeholders and discussions with the Welsh Government and Passenger Focus. Initial reports indicate the numbers using the new trains are increasing, and this is confirmed by our own surveys. Talking to passengers at Chepstow, the feeling was that they were very pleased with the increase in frequency, the faster running to Cardiff and to the north, and the better quality of the trains themselves. Fears that timekeeping might be impaired by these additional stops have proved groundless; all our observations have shown that there is ample time in the present scheduling, with punctuality of the XC trains being very good. Even the 15.30 from Birmingham, which calls at *both* Lydney and Chepstow, is often waiting time at Newport. (For members unfamiliar with this route, there is a severe speed restriction though Chepstow station even for non-stopping trains, on account of the curvature of the line).

But there has been no publicity from XC for these service enhancements. To help in the promotion, Chepstow Marketing has prepared a leaflet *Chepstow and the lower Wye Valley by public transport*. We helped in its production and our intention is to distribute in areas covered by the Nottingham/Birmingham – Cardiff XC services. The Midlands area will be ‘key’, with leaflet drops at main stations and visits to tourist Information centres, plus leaving leaflets at major hotels etc. We hope to meet the promotions manager at XC very soon.

However, our main push will be to get an hourly frequency throughout the day on the local Cardiff - Cheltenham **Arriva Trains Wales** service. Among the two-hour gaps in the present timetable is one from 7.49 to 9.48 in arrivals at Chepstow from Cardiff etc. – no use for commuting!

Station issues

All our local stations have **inadequate car parking spaces**, a fact confirmed by a recent report produced for Monmouthshire County Council (MCC). Many potential passengers just cannot find a parking space and end up driving to destination. There are no easy solutions, with land ownership issues to be discussed, and determining who will pay!

At Severn Tunnel Junction our **commuter buses** from Magor are being withdrawn from September because of low patronage. This is

disappointing; good effort has been made to encourage more people to use the bus links and there have been a few constructive meetings with MCC transport officials. MCC's 'grass routes' bus scheme (a 'book ahead' facility) will be tried, and we continue to have some stops in the local Caldicot – Magor service.

At Chepstow, one of the **town bus services** will have a station stop inserted into the schedule. With a heavy interest in developing tourism, the Wye Valley bus might pass the station in the near future (ideal for visiting Tintern Abbey).

Other issues

- FGW are considering strengthening some trains which serve Severn Tunnel Junction, including the popular and very overcrowded 7.55 (7.30 from Cardiff);
- A new footbridge at Severn Tunnel Junction will be in place in 2012;
- Chepstow line resignalling is due in 2012;
- The UK government is creating 'enterprise zones', including one around Bristol Temple Meads station – further pressure on rail?
- Possible patterns of train services post-electrification. Electric trains could operate Cardiff- Bristol – Bath – Swindon and such a service may help the case for westward electrification from Cardiff to Swansea.

And finally.....

The date: Tuesday 26th July 2011

The happening: lorry on fire in Brynglas tunnel on the M4 motorway.

Again, the road system around Newport and the wider area was paralysed! In the comments in the media afterwards there was hardly a mention of rail as providing a reliable alternative for both passengers and freight!

We have a long way to go.....

Colin James (Severn Tunnel Action Group)

South East report – 2

Newport developments

Phase 1B (East Usk to Marshfield) of the **Newport Area Signalling Renewal** was brought into use on 16th May. The new signalling is 4-aspect LED with theatre-type route indicators and axle counter train detection as far westwards as milepost 161. Thereafter the previous 4-aspect signalling is utilised to the overlap with Cardiff Panel Box.

Pleasingly, the flexibility of the layout around Newport station has been retained. From the crossovers on the River Usk viaduct to those at Gaer Junction, all the running lines are reversibly signalled, except the down relief line through the station itself; this allows access to platform 1 from both directions. The up Hereford line is also reversible as far as the facing crossover on that line.

The lines though the station have been re-designated, and from the main entrance they are now up/down platform (no. 1), down relief, up relief, down main (no. 2), up/down platform (no. 3), up main (no. 4). It is noticeable that trains now stop at the west end of the platforms, mainly on nos. 2 and 3 for ease of interchange, platform 4 seeing relatively little use, with occasional down trains still using platform 1.

This has led to the litany of complaints increasing to include the long walk to the refreshment facilities and, more importantly, the large gaps between platform and carriage when HSTs stop at the curved end of platform 3. Amazingly, the 'high-tech' roof is still leaking, though the present writer did not notice any leaks on a very wet day some months ago! On the positive side, monitors indicating the complete forthcoming train service have been installed on the platforms, and a new help point opened on the island platform.

Looking to the future, Newport Panel signal box now controls only Caldicot - Newnham. This is due to migrate to the South Wales Control Centre (SWCC) in 2013. As the boxes between Crewe and Shrewsbury are planned to be taken over by SWCC, this implies that eventually it will control all of the Marches line. This will of course be dependent on funding and resources, and Network Rail assumes that a majority of the present signallers will have secure jobs for some years yet.

Ebbw Vale – Newport still in limbo

Meanwhile, the saga of the link from the Ebbw Vale line to Newport meanders on. The much-heralded facing crossover at Gaer Junction has been installed, together with associated signalling. The politicians have finally come clean and admitted that the present Ebbw Vale to Cardiff service has been so successful that they do not wish to divert some trains to or via Newport. Establishment of a separate service depends on the lengthening of the present loop in the valley to Llanhilleth, or establishing a loop there, with an extra platform, at an estimated cost of around £17m. Where the extra trains would come from is another matter. Yet another ‘business case appraisal’ is underway, itself costing some £280,000.

SEWTA proposals

SEWTA is pressing for stations to be opened at **Magor** and **Llanwern**, amongst others. Around the latter in particular a large development of housing and commercial property is planned (and has already started) on the former steel-making plant area and also to the north of the railway. This area, running eastwards from Newport, has attracted many people who commute to Bristol, because of generally lower house prices. This means that Llanwern station, at least, will become a necessity rather than a luxury. It has been suggested that these stations should be sited on the relief lines, to avoid delays to the frequent through passenger trains using the main lines, though Network Rail has reservations about this, because of the still-buoyant freight traffic.

One possibility to mitigate this is to use the main steelworks running lines for freight, in the same way as the steelworks spine road is set to be brought into public use as part of plans to alleviate congestion on the parallel M4 motorway. This would provide ‘dynamic loops’ some 3 miles long between Magor and Llanwern. There must now be over-capacity on the steelworks lines, as they were designed originally to cope not only with the coal, ore and limestone etc. for steel making, but the possibility of a complete new steelworks to the south of the present site.

SEWTA has tabled for the future the reopening of the rail link between **Caerphilly** and **Machen** (and hence to Newport using the existing freight line from Machen quarry). This is surely a non-starter; the track bed has been built over both north and south of Machen station, apart from needing an expensive bridge over the

River Rhymney. As much as I support railway development, this really seems a pipe-dream, with the half-hourly bus service generally able to cope with the traffic on offer!

Ray Caston

Cambrian Lines news

Class 158 Refurbishment

The long-awaited and welcome refurbishment of the Class 158 trains used on Cambrian Lines continues and several sets have now been completed. A very good compromise has been found as far as design is concerned, bearing in mind the limitations imposed by the position of existing equipment which could not easily be moved. The first of the refurbished trains, 158 840, was introduced and launched on the 09.30 Aberystwyth to Birmingham International on 15th April when invited representatives of local authorities and rail user groups including *Railfuture* were invited to join Arriva senior management on board the train. The general view was that a very good job has been done. Some people have commented that it's a pity that mechanical improvements were not carried out at the same time. Internally however there is a great improvement and a more pleasant ambience.

European Rail Traffic Management System

After a planned suspension of services for a week or so, full ERTMS operation commenced on 8th March. Initially there were problems with radio reception, axle counters and balises but the overall impression is that the system settled down fairly quickly. Staff also appear to have quickly adapted themselves to the new signalling system. There have however been a number of days when long delays and disruption to services have occurred and whilst it's so easy to blame the new system there is reason to believe that in some instances at least the delays were caused by other problems. The national railway press have been quick to pick up on the contents of a report, prepared by Arriva Trains Wales, which is critical of ERTMS. It is not clear however whether the problems

referred to in this report occurred during the initial stages of operation or more recently.

Hourly service on Cambrian mainline

No date has yet been given for the introduction of the proposed hourly service on the Cambrian main line. Whilst the necessary infrastructure is all now in place it seems that the Welsh Government is not convinced that the ERTMS system is yet reliable enough, and looks to Network Rail to provide more reliable operation. As previously mentioned the report prepared by Arriva is also critical of the new signalling system. Whilst it is indeed sensible that the reliability of ERTMS be proven before imposing a more frequent service on the system, let us hope that no one is looking for excuses for not going ahead at an early date with the introduction of the hourly service.

Summer Steam

Most matters relating to the Cambrian lines at this time appear to hinge on the success or otherwise of the ERTMS signalling system, and so it is as far as the summer steam hauled trains are concerned, it not having being possible to run the services after all this year owing to the fact that no solution has yet been found to the fitting of the necessary equipment to steam locomotives. According to reports design and other work is still ongoing in the hope of finding a solution in time for the summer of 2012. These problems highlight the downside of a signalling system which relies so heavily on train mounted and based equipment rather than on rail and route based systems as of old.

Special Trains

Two special trains have been successfully run to Aberystwyth since the introduction of ERTMS. The first one on 28th May was run from Hull and arrived in Aberystwyth with four locomotives, three on the front and one on the rear. The obligatory Class 97's which are fitted with ERTMS were necessary of course between Shrewsbury and Aberystwyth but one Class 57 and one Class 47 were also included

in the consist having worked the train between Hull and Shrewsbury. Another excursion, from London, ran on 16th July but this was hauled between Shrewsbury and Aberystwyth in each direction by two Class 97's. On 18th August a locomotive-hauled excursion from Aberystwyth to York and Durham was programmed, the first time for many years that an excursion starting in Aberystwyth will have run.

Glyn Jones

Value for money?

According to a recent survey, more people in Wales are choosing to use public transport than were doing so a year ago. This finding appears to continue a trend of lower car use which has been going on for the past four or five years.

Yet the National Transport Plan, published last year by the Welsh Government (WG), contains a long list of road schemes, involving high capital expenditure. We seem to be still in the era of 'predict and provide' for road building, an attitude which has prevailed for most of the last half-century at least. We acknowledge of course that, but for the Welsh Government we would not have had rail reopenings such as Vale of Glamorgan and Ebbw Vale, but there does now seem to be a need to rebalance the relative expenditure on road and rail schemes, in line with the trends in usage alluded to above.

A lorry fire in Brynglas tunnel on the M4 motorway in July led to the usual and predictable clamouring for the grandiose project to construct an M4 relief road to be resurrected. The WG so far has held firm and pointed out other measures being adopted to improve resilience of the motorway. But this could, and should, include greater use of rail. Opening new stations between Severn Tunnel Junction and Cardiff would also contribute to this, if Network Rail's objections to stations on the relief lines can be overcome (*see also p. 14*).

Wales Freight Update (*September 2011*)

Infrastructure

Margam wagon shops are expected to reopen shortly and be used by Axiom Rail, a subsidiary of DB Shenker.

Aggregates

Moreton on Lugg: the regular twice-weekly DBS working to Hayes continues with additional trains to Harlow Mill and Hothfield. Freightliner commenced working weekly trains to Leeds Hunslet from 17th March with very occasional workings to Elstow.

Machen: trains run very infrequently to West Drayton which is now served regularly from Avonmouth Docks.

Cardiff Docks: stone has been hauled by into Cardiff Docks from Taffs Well Quarry for loading to Crawley. At first from 28th March Freightliner worked the trains until 1st July, and DBS took over from 5th July. There have also been a few trains to Kennet, near Bury St Edmunds.

Margam Grange siding: the intermittent flow of slag commenced to Bow Olympic usually on Tuesdays continued until 11th February when it ceased.

Neath Abbey Wharf: regular trains continue to run weekly operated by Freightliner to Angerstein Wharf and Theale. There have also been one offs to Thorney Mill.

Penmaenmawr: trains have run to Guide Bridge, Manchester with stone for Network Rail.

Car Components and Chemicals

A daily flow of component traffic continues between Fords Dagenham and Bridgend. There is regular traffic between Barry Dow Corning and Southampton and Tilbury. Occasional direct trains have run on Fridays from Dollands Moor to Barry with imported silica sand from France.

Cement

The Freightliner trains conveying fly ash from Drax to Aberthaw cement works recommenced on 11th April and have run twice weekly.

Coal

Cwmbargoed continues to serve Aberthaw Power station with up to five two daily trains of coal. It also dispatches weekly trains to Drax Power station and Tata at Margam Grange siding .Three trains were loaded for Ayr Harbour on 15th ,16th and 20th July and two for Earl's Siding Hope Cement works on 31st August and 5th September. An occasional train runs on Saturdays to Barry Docks with domestic coal using MEA wagons.

There is usually a daily train from Onllwyn to Aberthaw Power station and twice weekly trains to Immingham CPL. There was a daily train of inward coal from Gwaun Cae Gurwen with coal for blending this has been reduced recently because of production problems at the opencast site. A new weekly service commenced on 20th July to Hunterston Low Level in Scotland with coal for blending. There is regular containerised wagon load traffic from Onllwyn to Mossend. Onllwyn also sends coal by road to Tata at Margam. A first train of coal for blending ran from Gwaun Cae Gurwen to Hunterston Low Level on 5th September.

A weekly train usually runs from Tower colliery to Aberthaw power station with coal from Aberpergwm but this is expected to transfer later in the year to a new loading facility at Cwmgwrach. The Unity mine at Cwmgwrach has commenced producing coal and trains to Aberthaw commenced on 12th May.

Uskmouth power station has received coal from Portbury on an as required basis with trains being hauled by Freightliner.

Aberthaw power station in addition to receiving Welsh coal from Cwmbargoed, Cwmgwrach, Onllwyn and Tower continues to receive imported coal. This has been sourced as required from Avonmouth West Wharf. The last trains ran from Portbury on 18th April and Newport Docks on 22nd April.

Tata Steel at Margam continues to coal by rail from Cwmbargoed and road from Onllwyn. A new flow started on 12th January from Maltby colliery and continued until 14th February with two more on 4th and 11th July. Freightliner worked three trains from Killoch in Scotland on 4th, 11th and 18th August which were unloaded the following day.

Penyffordd cement works has received occasional, usually weekly, trains of coal in MEA wagons from Malby colliery, North Blyth, Hunterston Low Level and New Cumnock.

Coke

There has been a reduction to 10 services per week with 31 HTA wagons from Redcar which are discharged at Margam Grange siding.

Container traffic

There is a daily including Saturdays, container train worked by Freightliner from Southampton to Wentloog. An additional twice weekly service from Southampton was introduced from 3rd August. The Saturday only service from Garston Docks Liverpool to Wentloog continues to run.

Also at Wentloog there is occasional MOD traffic and also container traffic to Tilbury both worked by DBS.

Nuclear traffic

Trains worked by DRS run regularly with spent fuel from Valley to Cumbria.

Petroleum

The present pattern from Robeston is 5 or 6 trains weekly to Westerleigh, 3 trains weekly to Theale and 1 train weekly to Bedworth. Trains occasional operate to Kingsbury.

The fuel train from Lindsey to Aberthaw power station continues to run as required.

A service, worked by DBS, continues to run once or twice weekly from Immingham to Cardiff Docks HCB.

Scrap metal

There continues to be a diversified pattern of workings by DBS usually using bogie MBA box wagons although some older 4 wheel SSA box wagons are in use.

The only remaining wagon load traffic is from St Blazey to CELSA Cardiff (see also Margam Grange siding)

Sims Newport Docks: Sims receives the occasional train of scrap from Exeter.

EMR Cardiff Docks: there was one inward loaded train from Swindon on 21st March.

CELSA Cardiff: GBf Railfreight took over the shunting and inter-works traffic for CELSA from DBS on 29th January. They also commenced working scrap from Handsworth Queen's Head from 14th February and Beeston 21st February flows which had been previously worked by DBS. Gbf Railfreight also took over the Exeter flow from 6th September.

Major flows of scrap are required to supply the works and recently scrap has been sourced from Brierley Hill, Exeter, Handsworth, Hitchin, Kingsbury, Rotherham and Shipley and wagonload from St Blazey all worked by DBS. There was a flow from Seaton on Tees between 6th January and 13th March. DBS commenced working weekly trains from Stockton on 28th July.

The trains from Stockton and Tyne Dock worked by DRS ceased on 6th May from Tyne Dock and 5th August from Stockton.

BARS Devon and Cornwall Railway worked a trail train of scrap from Grimsby Docks arriving on 11th July and this was the new company's first venture in hauling freight traffic.

Freightliner commenced hauling scrap from Dagenham docks on 21st July.

Barry Dock Dunns: the last inward loaded train was from Brierley Hill on 26th March and no trains have run since. The company has been taken over by Sims and the yard emptied of scrap.

Margam Tata Steel: scrap traffic is unloaded at the far end of the Grange siding branch. Block trains from Lackenby ceased after 4th January but commenced weekly from Scunthorpe on 19th March. Wagon load traffic continued to arrive infrequently from Dalzell in Scotland and Lackenby.

Steel

Tata Steel, Margam and Llanwern: daily block trains operate from South Wales to Corby 1 or 2 per day, Dee Marsh (Shotton) 1 or 2 per day, Hartlepool 1 per day, Round Oak 3 per day, Swindon 2 per week and Trostre 1 or 2 per day with occasional trains to Wolverhampton. Wagonload traffic is conveyed to Immingham, Middlesbrough and Swindon. A second service usually twice weekly commenced to Hartlepool on 15th August.

Colas continues to work block train loads of steel coil from Llanwern to Dollands Moor for Mauberge Tata Steel/Sous le Bois Myriad SA in North East France. These were formerly worked by DBS. From 10th April Colas commenced working an occasional train of steel coil from Margam to Dollands Moor for Rotterdam Botlek and from 18th April another from Llanwern for Boenen in the German Ruhr.

A fire in the TATA rolling mill at Ijmuiden in the Netherlands saw the commencement of new temporary flows of steel between Ijmuiden and Trostre, Trostre and Llanwern and Llanwern to Dollands Moor for Ijmuiden using French curtain sided wagons. These trains ran thrice weekly operated by DBS until the last train from Ijmuiden and Trostre ran on 27th August and from Llanwern to Ijmuiden on 1st September.

Cardiff Docks: there were occasional movements of coil from Margam and Llanwern to Cardiff Docks for export but these were last operated on 6th January. The import of slab from the Netherlands recommenced from 13th January and continues to run as required.

Birdport Uskmouth branch: Traffic from Llanwern has recently increased with a daily train including Saturdays sometimes supplemented by a second train in the afternoon.

CELSA Cardiff: the thrice-weekly train conveying rods and bars continues to Rotherham and there is wagonload traffic to Mossend.

Tata Steel Trostre: wagon load traffic is conveyed by rail to Birdport, Round Oak and Worcester. There was a temporary flow of steel from Ijmuiden (see above). A Sundays only block train commenced running from Trostre to Tilbury on 24th April.

Newport Docks: small quantities of imported coil through Newport Docks are being sent to Middlesbrough, (Dawsons), Swindon and Wolverhampton.

Timber

Facilities at Chirk have been improved. Trains continue to be operated by Colas from Carlisle to Chirk and these have increased in size from 14 to 21 wagons. In addition loaded timber trains of 10 wagons have run thrice weekly from Ribbleshead.

The Welsh Marches Line

This line is used for through traffic to and from South West England and the Midlands and Northern England. There are more northbound flows than southbound flows and this is to avoid the steep gradients on the Cheltenham to Birmingham route. One of the heaviest flows has been coal from Portbury and Avonmouth to power stations at Fiddler's Ferry (Liverpool), Ironbridge and Rugeley. However there has been no coal from the Bristol ports since 1st July (Portbury to Fiddler's) and 11th August (Portbury to Rugeley). There is a weekly train of china clay from Cornwall to Stoke-on-Trent and a twice-weekly empty cement train from Westbury (sometimes Cornwall) to Earle's Siding, Hope Cement works. There is also a twice-weekly car train between Portbury and Warrington and Mossend in Scotland. This train is routed via Newport to collect any wagon load traffic bound for Scotland.

Rowland Pittard

Compiler's notes

Your compiler extends his thanks to those members who contributed material for this issue. In all cases, any opinions expressed are those of the contributors and do not necessarily represent *Railfuture* policy

Our aim is to cover *Railfuture's* actions and views on developments throughout Wales and the Borders. This can be done *only* if members contribute, so please share your experiences and views with other members.

Material for the next issue - be it a letter, a comment or article – should be sent the compiler at 84 North Street, Abergavenny NP7 7ED; email: peter.clark@railfuturewales.org.uk , to arrive by 15th FEBRUARY for the Spring 2012 issue.

BRANCH SECRETARIES

Cambrian Lines: Dylan Lewis, 1 Maesmaelor, Penparcau, Aberystwyth SY23 1SZ; Tel. 01970 624582; email dylan.lewis@railfuturewales.org.uk ;

North Wales: (acting secretary) David Mawdsley, 11 Banc y Chwarel, Bodfari, Denbigh LL16 4DJ; tel. 01745 710464; email david.mawdsley@railfuturewales.org.uk ;

South Wales: Rowland Pittard, 61 Chantal Avenue, Penyfai, Bridgend CF31 4NW; Tel. 01656 721109; email rowland.pittard@railfuturewales.org.uk .

Railfuture is the campaigning name of the Railway Development Society, a UK-wide voluntary body for rail users. It receives no funding from political parties or rail companies. Annual subscription is £21 (£14 for students and unwaged). Enquiries should be addressed to Peter Clark (address above).

Web site: www.railfuturewales.org.uk

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Registered in England & Wales no. 5011634
Registered office: 24 Chedworth Place, Tattingstone, Suffolk IP9 2ND