

Issue 52 Spring 2012

Rail Wales

*Newsletter of the Welsh branches of
Railfuture*



Cardiff Bay: fares fair? (see page 4)

In Memory of

MERVYN MATTHEWS, rail campaigner

This is a belated tribute to a great railway campaigner who died not long ago, aged 95. `Belated` because somehow I was not informed in time to attend his funeral. However, for his passing not to be marked by some sort of tribute would be an injustice.

Mervyn and I first got together in the early 70s when he, Dr George Penn of Whitland, Jim Rowlands of Pendine, myself and others founded the Welsh Railways Action Group – as a spin-off from the Cambrian group fighting for Machynlleth-Pwllheli.

We made quite an impact, not least because of Mervyn's expertise as an ex-BR manager. For example, we presented his detailed plan for a re-opening of the line to Amlwch to a joint meeting of the local and county councils in Amlwch. Although this was well thought out, would not have entailed much expense and was applauded by all concerned, unfortunately the times were not conducive to such creative thinking in Whitehall.

In recent years, Mervyn kept alive the WRAG by writing as chairman to the *Western Mail* on rail matters. By then he and Sally were living in a delightful cottage a few yards from their daughter's home in Capel Dewi.

Merfyn Cwmtwrch, to use his Gorsedd of Bards name, was totally committed to campaigning for rail travel – from those dark times when the only fate of Welsh lines seemed to be closure right up to his death, by which time a good part of his visionary aims had been realised.

Unflappable, optimistic, tireless, humorous and a good friend.... Just a few of the words that fit. Diolch Mervyn am yr holl blynyddoedd o gyfeillgarwch ac y cofion o`r ymgyrchoedd. RIP.

John D. Rogers
South Branch of *Railfuture Cymru*

CYFARFOD CYFFREDINOL BLYNYDDOL

SADWRN, 28 EBRILL 2012, am 1315 yng NGHANOLFAN Y CYFEILLION, 43 Stryd Charles, CAERDYDD.

Yn cynnwys fforwm agored l orffen.

Gwnewch bob ymdrech i fod yn bresennol, os gwelwch yn dda! (Croeso i bob aelod yng Nghymru).

HEFYD... CYFARFOD ARFEROL pwyllgor y gangen am 1015 yn yr un lle. CROESO i bob aelod o *Railfuture* Cymru i'r cyfarfod hon.

Unrhyw cwestiynau ynglŷn â'r cyfarfodydd, cysylltwch â John Rogers, y cadeirydd: rogers98@btinternet.com neu 01656 840111

SOUTH BRANCH AGM

The South Wales branch ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING will be held on SATURDAY, 28th APRIL 2012, at 1315 in the FRIENDS` MEETING HOUSER (the Quakers), 43 Charles Street, Cardiff. (The street at the side of M&S and the cathedral).

Please make every effort to attend – all *Railfuture* Cymru members are welcome, wherever you live. The final item on the agenda will be a members' forum on any current topical matters.

IN THE MORNING:

Normal BRANCH COMMITTEE MEETING at 1015; we warmly invite ALL *Railfuture* Cymru members to be present at this meeting (same venue).

Any questions about either meeting, contact John Rogers, chairman: rogers98@btinternet.com or 01656 840111.

At the time this magazine was being printed, we had just heard that one of our northern stalwart members, TED EVANS of Flint, was in Glan Clwyd Hospital after a heart attack. Ted and fellow member David Mawdsley have tried to keep the flag flying for us in the north and we owe him a lot. We hope he is soon well enough to come home and send our best wishes to his wife, Doreen, at this difficult time.

Cardiff Bay: fares fair?

With the RPI+1% fare increases in January, the local media for some reason became quite fascinated for several days with the single fare between Cardiff Bay and Cardiff Queen Street, which they reported as £1.90 for the journey of just over a mile. The source of their information was not disclosed, and was in any case incorrect as the published single fare is actually only the current minimum rate of £1.50 single but, as they say in the trade, “never let the facts get in the way of a good story”. The real worry though is that this sort of news item is clearly designed to give rail travel a bad name and is an attempt, for whatever motives, to deter passengers from taking the train. Interestingly, at no point did the media make the comparison with the flat fare charged for the same journey by the municipally-owned Cardiff Bus, which would actually be even dearer at £1.70 single. This is a flat fare within the city and applies even if the journey is just from one bus stop to the next!

In any case, one wonders how many people would ever buy a Cardiff Bay / Cardiff Queen Street single ticket? Even those making just that short journey would more likely buy the return ticket at £2.10, representing even better value against the comparable bus fare of £3.00 return. But in practice the majority of users of the Cardiff Bay branch line do so as part of a longer journey, making use of the convenient interchange with other Cardiff Valleys routes at Queen Street. For £1.90 single (£2.80 return) Cardiff Bay journeys can extend to and from Cathays, Grangetown or Ninian Park; a £2.40 single (£3.40 return) allows travel between the Bay and Radyr, Coryton, Llanishen, Penarth or Eastbrook, whilst a £3.00 single (£4.50 return) extends the range further still, out to Lisvane & Thornhill, Taffs Well or Barry Island.

Fares policy in the Valleys has undergone significant changes over the years, most recently in the withdrawal of discounted “off peak” rates in favour of a simple “anytime” standard single or return fare. But as with all rail fares, things are in practice still rather more complicated than that; regular travellers can save money by purchasing season tickets, and there are of course discounts available too for the various categories of railcard holders. It should also be noted that all fares are nowadays rounded to the nearest 10p, and this will always create anomalies when a percentage increase needs to be averaged out across the network, but this does give a clear benefit in avoiding handling of too much small change on a network where most ticket issuing is undertaken by on-board Conductors.

Paul Jeffries

More reports on possible re-openings

The Welsh Government has commissioned a series of reports from Network Rail. One of these refers to the 4½-mile line from Gaerwen Junction to **Llangefni** (the county town of Anglesey), on the former Amlwch branch. An hourly service to/from Llandudno Junction is envisaged, calling at all stations on the main line (and so allowing long-distance trains to omit some of these stops – see below). The estimated cost of £25m includes renewing the existing track on the branch (to allow 45 mph line speed) and making a new Junction at Gaerwen, together with associated signalling. Llangefni would be the only new station.

This could be both good and bad news for Llanfair PG, Llanfairfechan, Penmaenmawr and Conwy. These stations would have an hourly service which would be an improvement on the present 2-hourly calls which apply for much of the day. But they would lose their through trains to/from Chester and further afield, which would be detrimental to Llanfair PG and Conwy which depend heavily on tourism.

One might also question whether Llandudno Junction is an appropriate turnaround point for the service. For most passengers it is rarely a destination in its own right, the major ‘centre’ in the area being Llandudno, and having to change at the Junction might be a ‘turn-off’ for many people. This is why south Wales reopenings have always involved running into Cardiff, not turning short at Bridgend, Pontypridd etc.

Also reported on is the long-proposed extension of the Cynon Valley line from Aberdare to **Hirwaun**, plus a possible later extension to the Tower Colliery site (5 miles from Aberdare). This would necessitate a passing loop being provided in the vicinity of Aberdare. The new Hirwaun station would be on the site of the old station there, and phase 2 would provide a station just south of the Tower Colliery loading pad. A half-hourly service (extension of the existing Cardiff – Aberdare trains) is proposed, with running speed on the reopened section to be 40 mph. At least one other new station might be included, and various other options result in a cost estimate of £16m to £19m depending on choice of options, plus another £10m for the extension to Tower.

News on possible funding, and hence development of these proposals, is awaited.

But does it have to end there? When/if the extension to Tower is opened, there will then be a rail-less gap of about 5 miles between there and Cwmgwrach near the head of the Neath valley. Re-laying this section of the former Vale of Neath railway would allow Glyn-neath etc to have a passenger service to Cardiff. With a new connection around Neath it

could provide a diversionary route when Bridgend-Neath is blocked and allow a new Swansea-Aberdare-Cardiff service to run. Aberdare, Hirwaun and Glyn-neath would be more attractive places for businesses, or as dormitory towns, if there were trains to Swansea as well as Cardiff.

Visionary? Or pie-in-the-sky? Readers can decide for themselves, but remember that there is nothing here which hasn't been done elsewhere. Think of the 'Robin Hood' line in Nottinghamshire, where a tunnel and its approach cutting had to be dug out before the railway could be rebuilt. Think too of Airdrie – Bathgate in Scotland, where the rails have been re-laid over a (longer) gap between two 'stubs' to offer a through service once again. Communities on that rebuilt (and electrified!) section now enjoy two trains per hour!

Train Crash at Llanboidy, 19th December 2011 – A Personal Experience

The morning of Friday 19th December dawned pleasantly and I enjoyed the walk across the marina to Milford Haven station via Tesco, to acquire a little sustenance for the journey to Cardiff. I was due to meet a group of friends for a long leisurely pre Christmas lunch, a tradition that we had established some thirty years ago at a wine bar in London, adjacent to Paddington Station.

I boarded the two-carriage 175 class train and selected my usual seat in the first car on the left hand side with my back to the direction of travel. I have adopted this seating arrangement so that when the train reverses on leaving Carmarthen I am then facing forward on the right side of the carriage and am able to take in the superb views as the train follows the coast line along the estuary towards Llanelli and Swansea.

The train left on time and all seemed normal as some 35 passengers boarded at Haverfordwest. We all settled down for the journey and after passing through Clarboston Road and Clynderwen we were approaching Whitland when the normality of the day was abruptly disrupted. On rounding a bend I was suddenly aware of the train's brakes being really strongly applied, something that I had not experienced before in spite of having travelled by train frequently and regularly for well over 50 years. On looking out of the window I noticed that we passed a signal and the strong braking was continuing so I realised that something serious was afoot. Sure enough as we were slowing there was an almighty bang as we hit a lorry that was astride the track on the Llanboidy level crossing. It immediately became obvious what the lorry was carrying, as loose hay and bales were flying around like giant confetti. There were a few expletives uttered but that apart there was no panic amongst the passengers although a few who were facing forward were thrown out of their seats. (The preliminary inquiry reported that the train had slowed from 68 mph to 41 mph by the time it collided with the lorry.) My initial

concern related to the loose hay, as the train engines were still running and I was concerned that the hay might catch fire if it was in proximity to the engines' exhaust pipes. In the event no such fire occurred.

The conductor soon came through the carriages, reassuring passengers and enquiring from everyone as to their wellbeing or otherwise. A few passengers had what appeared to be minor injuries mostly caused by being thrown out of their seats. Personally I was grateful for being in a seat with my back to the direction of travel so that when the train hit the lorry all that happened to me was that I was pressed back in to my seat which fully supported my body and head thus not having any injuries, albeit I felt somewhat shaken and it was noticeable that my hands were shaking for the next couple of hours.

The train had hit the lorry square on and pushed it some 80 metres or so along the track, scattering hay all over the track and surroundings. Fortunately the train did not derail. We were assured that the emergency services were on their way and the first to arrive was a helicopter, closely followed by ambulances, fire engines and police.

Eventually after the minor injuries were treated and those passengers taken off the train, the rest of us disembarked from the back of the second carriage where some of the hay bales were put to good use, forming steps down from the train! We were then given the option of either being bussed to Carmarthen to continue our journeys, or to return by bus to our originating stations. Personally I continued to Cardiff, caught up with my friends some three hours late and joined in the festivities. My first beer hardly touched the sides!

One never anticipates being in such a situation and having such an experience, but given that it happened, I was surprised at how most passengers took it very much in their stride and did not seem unduly perturbed by the experience. The conversations were quite rational, and responses to the emergency personnel were balanced and objective. The professionalism of all the emergency staff was exemplary, as one would expect. The train itself came through the incident seemingly quite intact apart from the driver's cab which, needless to say was crushed, but the driver was physically unhurt.

In case you are worried about the risks of such a level crossing accident, it is worth noting that in the last five years, only one rail passenger has died as the result of such an incident.

Colin Hitchings, Pembrokeshire Rail Travellers' Association

Cambrian Lines News

European Train Control System and associated matters

ERTMS, or more correctly ETCS, continues to receive adverse publicity in many quarters including several railway journals. There has been criticism of the early deployment scheme on Cambrian Lines and also future schemes. I too have to admit to having a personal preference for route or infrastructure based signalling systems utilising the minimum of expensive train-borne equipment and allowing use by locomotives and trains that do not have to be specially modified and which consequently become captive to a specific route. However the rail industry believes otherwise and sees ETCS as being better, more flexible and less expensive in the long run.

The early deployment scheme has now been in use on Cambrian Lines for about a year (more on the northerly section of the coast route). After a shaky start it settled down reasonably quickly and reliability improved apart from some glitches – the problem being that when it goes down it fails in a big way. However for a long time now travel experience and local perception is that punctuality has been restored to pre-ETCS levels. This is confirmed in a report in ‘Rail’ magazine in November 2011.

Whenever there are delays however there is a tendency to blame ETCS rightly or wrongly. In the January 2012 issue of ‘Modern Railways’ the system is blamed for the poor overall performance of Arriva Trains Wales Class 158’s during 2011 and that may well be so. ‘Modern Railways’ quotes Peter Leppard, ATW’s Operations and Safety Director as saying of the Class 158’s, at an Institution of Railway Signal Engineers Seminar in November, 2011 that this was *‘the first time they had been ripped apart. Really there was no part of the train that was untouched by the process; it is all round the vehicle, not just in one place. The reliability issues have arisen partly by disturbing things that would have been better left undisturbed. These have been very considerable, and as a result colleagues of mine at ATOC (the Association of Train Operating Companies) are now looking hard at how we minimise this problem’*.

That may be so and it is difficult to argue with those facts. However there have been some delays as the result of difficulty in joining and coupling trains at Machynlleth and a recent report of passengers having to change trains because of shortage of fuel. Are we to deduce that the fitting of ETCS equipment has affected the working of even couplings and fuel gauges?

It is understood also that there is more work to do on the infrastructure side of things and the Welsh Assembly Government has

said that Network Rail must prove the robustness of the scheme before timings are carried out as part of the considerations into introducing a more frequent service on the Cambrian main line. So much then for the hourly service promised for 2011.

A special train was however run on Cambrian metals on 4th and 5th February comprising an ETCS-fitted Class 97 locomotive and 7 ex-Virgin Trains coaches for timing purposes for future excursion trains and thereby gather essential data for the ETCS computer.

One matter relating to ETCS seems however to be a long way from being resolved and that is the designing of equipment which can be used with steam operation. Consequently steam hauled services will not run again this year. Latest rumours are that the operator of the steam service has been asked to lead the project. This certainly highlights one of the disadvantages of the system, utilising, as it does, so much train-borne equipment requiring an adequate supply of electricity.

Excursion Trains

On a brighter note, two excursions are proposed from Aberystwyth during 2012 and these are currently being advertised in the local newspaper and in other places. On April 14th there will be a train from Aberystwyth to Carlisle travelling one way via Shap and returning via the Settle and Carlisle route. Salisbury will be the destination on October 20th, the train travelling via Bath. This builds on the success of the excursion run in 2011 to Newcastle and Durham.

Aberystwyth Station

Improvements to Aberystwyth Station are proposed and consultations are being conducted with appropriate organisations and bodies. In the meantime the work on Alexandra Road in the vicinity of the station frontage has commenced. This is intended to improve train / bus interchange.

Tywyn

A 'Harrington Hump' has been provided at Tywyn in order to make train access and egress easier for passengers. It is understood that this is similar to the one provided some time ago at Aberdyfi and that a further 20 sets are to be installed at stations in Wales with low platform heights.

Vale of Rheidol Railway – Narrow Gauge

It may interest readers to know that the Vale of Rheidol Railway's locomotive number 8 is being converted from oil to coal firing in preparation for the 2012 season. This follows a general trend amongst

narrow gauge railways, many of which had converted to oil firing over 30 years ago when oil prices were competitive with coal. Fuel prices now very much favour coal.

Glyn Jones

Newport – Abergavenny line proposals

A report commissioned by SEWTA lists various proposals to improve facilities and services on this section of the Marches Line. They include general improvements to stations, possible opening of new stations and increasing service frequency.

These ideas are grouped into Basic, Medium and Enhanced options which are then evaluated using BCR (benefit: cost ratio) and WelTAG (Welsh Transport Planning & Appraisal Guidance) methodology. All three options include improved interchange and parking at Abergavenny and Cwmbran stations, and at Pontypool & New Inn in the medium and enhanced options. Attention is also given to station facilities, such as lighting, passenger information, cctv etc.

All except the basic option include increased service frequency, to be achieved either by filling in the gap in the hours when the 2-hourly Holyhead service does not run (medium option), or by instituting additional hourly Cardiff – Abergavenny trains (enhanced option). Sites for possible new stations are Llantarnam, Sebastopol and Caerleon, but only the last-named finds its way into any of the options (the enhanced one).

It is concluded that the ‘basic’ option (improvements to existing stations) gives the best BCR but the medium option came out better under WelTAG because the benefits are less localised. Caerleon station is not included, but the report notes that on its own Caerleon comes out well under both appraisal methods, so it is suggested that other opportunities be explored to open a station there, served by various services (including the proposed ‘infill’ service), but this may have to await the new Wales franchise. Meanwhile the medium option is expected to result in 168,000 new rail trips p.a. Caerleon station would add another 93,000.

While there is much to welcome in these proposals, those of us who have been involved in rail campaigning for a long time have heard many of them before! Caerleon station was first officially proposed by Newport Borough Council in June 2000 (see *Rail Wales* 30), and the lack of bus facilities and inadequate amount of parking at Abergavenny have been talked about for a very long time. The report’s answer to these two

shortcomings is 'provide a bus turning area' and 'pursue potential for additional car parking'. Is it really that simple?

But the report speaks of 'relatively quick wins by making better use of existing infrastructure' so we must hope that this turns out to be the case. Perhaps the relatively quick (imminent) re-opening of Fishguard and Goodwick station (not, of course, in SEWTA's area) will be a portent for the future? Sadly, not so for Caerleon!

FOOTNOTE: *Caerleon is by no means alone in having to wait a long time for its station! A consultation is currently taking place re Energlyn (Caerphilly) station for which funding was allocated in 2001. Brackla (Bridgend) station was also announced in 2001, but isn't even on the radar!*

South East Wales report

Recently several documents have come into the public domain concerned with the future of passenger services in south-east Wales. 'The **Chepstow Rail Corridor**', produced by Capita Symonds for the South-East Wales Transport Alliance (SEWTA) proposes improved train service frequencies, additional stations, improvements in passenger facilities etc. along the Cardiff – Cheltenham route. Local groups 'Better Trains for Chepstow' (BTFC) and Severn Tunnel Action Group (STAG) have campaigned for these improvements, with some success. The decision by Cross Country Trains (XC) to stop some services at Chepstow is a result of 8 years hard slog by BTFC. Continued pressure must be put on Arriva Trains Wales (ATW) via SEWTA, local councils, pressure groups etc. to get the 2-hour gaps filled in the Cardiff – Cheltenham local service. This seems some way off at the moment with an anticipated cost of nearly £2½ million (incredible!).

A major concern along the route is lack of car-parking spaces. Reports do highlight possible solutions but there are land issues, and of course the ultimate cost: who pays? Improvements at Chepstow envisage making it an interchange station, such as for a bus link to Tintern and the Wye valley. But our present XC service is experimental so it is most important to retain these trains. In fact our policy is to have all trains stopping at Chepstow, and an hourly local service (see above).

The **Severn Tunnel Junction Interchange Study** again emphasises the need to enlarge car parking facilities. It looks at a few options including better access roads to the station. At present, it is difficult for 'off peak' passengers to get a parking spot (and off-peak travel is something we are

trying to promote). Cars park in places which often inconvenience local residents in Rogiet village.

Fortunately, the urgency to have some 'stop gap' measures has been recognised by the new **Lower Wye & Severnside Area Committee/Joint Rail Transport Working Group**. Set up a few months ago, it comprises county councillors, Monmouthshire CC officers and representatives from STAG and BTFC. Specifically looking at rail matters in the south-east, it is a very sensible step in the right direction. It keeps rail issues at the top of the political agenda. At the last meeting, a quick decision was made to look at the car parking issue as a matter of urgency, e.g. the use of council land at the old Rogiet school?

At **Severn Tunnel Junction station**, work is due to start in the summer in the new DDA station upgrade, which includes a new footbridge, ticket hall facilities, toilets etc. Planned to take a year, it will certainly improve things for passengers. However there will be some disruption to the car park while construction takes place.

The **December 2011 timetable** saw few changes to our services, but one improvement is the running of the 17.23 Portsmouth Harbour to Cardiff on Mondays to Fridays, rather than Fridays only; it calls at Severn Tunnel Junction at 20.13. We are still trying hard to have the 13.23 ex Portsmouth Harbour to call at 16.13, to fill a one-hour gap from Bristol between 15.21 and 16.21 – not very convenient for those finishing work, and students finishing college, just before the peak. Indeed it has always been our aim to have ALL the Cardiff – Portsmouth trains to call at Severn Tunnel Junction, as these would provide the best connections with the ATW services to Caldicot and Chepstow.

Network Rail's **Modernising the Great Western (2011)** booklet shows that demand for rail travel in the Bristol area has increased by 90% in the last 10 years. With around 75% of Severn Tunnel Junction's passengers heading towards Bristol on FGW trains it has been important to develop a dialogue with organisations in Bristol. A few weeks ago we met James White (Transport Policy team leader of the West of England Partnership) and Alistair Cox (service manager, city transport, Bristol City Council). In our presentation we emphasised the need to maintain and improve cross-Severn links. We know that Network Rail is developing plans for reinstatement of tracks between Filton Abbey Wood and Dr Days Junction. This will help the south Wales route in terms of extra capacity and improving reliability of the service.

Often overlooked is the increasing importance of **Rail freight**. A planned development will be the introduction of direct Daventry – Wentloog intermodal train for Tesco. We understand that Wentloog will be used

initially until a direct link is made to the large warehouse just east of Tata Steel at Llanwern. Despite the economic gloom, rail seems to be holding up well, with increasing passenger numbers (especially on Severn Tunnel services) and the developments in the freight sector. There seems to be a greater awareness now with local politicians that rail can play an increasingly important role in developing transport solutions in south-east Wales.

Colin James, Severn Tunnel Action Group

Committee meetings: pain or pleasure?

A personal view of how South Wales ones strike their chairman...

No doubt you have heard someone complain that a piece of writing is so obscure it must have been written by a committee. And while the very word *committee* is synonymous with grinding boredom or frustration to many (and don't we in Wales like forming committees?), how else can an organisation like ours function?

As the majority of our South branch members are not invited to committee meetings, I thought it might be worth writing a few words to let them know, first, that we do hold them (every two or three months), and, second, that out of them come decisions that further the work of *Railfuture Cymru*.

For several years we have been lucky in our choice of venue: a very reasonably priced, cosy little room which is next to a Bridgend church – only about a hundred paces from the exit to the railway station. This is also useful in that it is fairly central for those travelling both from the south-east and the far west. Your chairman and secretary are lucky enough to live quite near. And I am sure members will join me in thanking those who give up their evening time (we begin at 1815), travelling from, for example, Milford and Swansea and, from the other side, Portskewett and Severn Tunnel Jct.

The agenda is usually the same: apologies for absence; confirm the previous minutes, matters arising; secretary's report of his activities; chairman's report (very short!); the treasurer, membership secretary and *Rail Wales* editor usually report by e-mail for the good reason that attendance is difficult; then there are reports from those representing HoWLTA (the line through Llandrindod), Better Trains for Chepstow and STAG (Severn Tunnel Action Group) and the Pembrokeshire organisations; any other business; and date of next meeting. (Usually followed by a key member looking guilty as he has again forgotten his diary...) Usually, too, somewhere in the agenda speakers are able to report back on their attendance at the relevant regional transport

consortia (SEWTA etc). At our last meeting, Julian, the treasurer, was able to attend because of changed work patterns, and gave us useful input into Cardiff's public transport, leading to our making urgent representations to various city people to safeguard land in the centre for future light rail.

Sometimes there are reports from sub-committees, for example, the current revision of our influential Development Plan is being carried out by Rowland Pittard (our secretary), Mike Watson of Swansea (and HoWLTA) and Phil Inskip (Caldicot) – though, I stress, the final document will reflect the views of many members of the committees of all three branches. (Yes, I know the north has problems – hang on, guys!).

The meetings themselves? Well, as chairman, I am torn between acting like a strict teacher, telling the class to concentrate, stop wasting time chatting... and trying to allow the fascinating tangential, sometimes wandering discussions, anecdotes and informative remarks... to carry on for a while before being steered back to the agenda item we have reached! Such is the seemingly bottomless pit of knowledge, the almost omniscient grasp of railways in Wales, GB and Europe, of those round the table.... I sit there and often forget myself what we are supposed to be deciding. AND I have landed myself with keeping the minutes.... a difficult task when I am trying to signal in a friendly way to one voluble speaker that time is ticking and we need to get on...!

However, believe me... we DO make progress and out of such meetings have come a host of actions (often landing on the secretary's shoulders) – and once, a highly focused debate with a knife-edge vote on my idea for a people's, government-owned, not-for-dividend Wales Rail (or whatever) when the ATW franchise expires.

I haven't the space here to go into detail, but each member of the committee is not only totally dedicated to Railfuture and rail transport, but also has his own area of specialist knowledge, whether one route or an aspect of the rail industry itself, in some cases from having worked for BR (and even subsequently as a consultant). This means that, no matter what line, or station, or train service is mentioned, someone round the table has intimate knowledge of it, passenger and freight, train service or infrastructure. As chairman, I often feel I'm a member of the remedial class in comparison with these A* people... as my relevant background has been on the political/peoples` power campaigning side rather than acquiring such PhD-level knowledge.

So... believe me, our two-hour meetings whiz along with never a dull moment or silence – and, on behalf of all our members, I pay a heartfelt tribute to those who have helped make *Railfuture* a power to be

consulted and listened to in the Cardiff Bay (and Parc Cathays) corridors of power. Diolch yn fawr i chi gyd. Safwn yn y bwlch!

John D. Rogers, Chairman, south branch of Railfuture Cymru

Reprioritisation of the National Transport Plan

Railfuture responded to the Welsh Government's consultation on this topic, concentrating mainly on rail matters. Main points are summarised below:

Cross-Border Issues: The reprioritisation does not address cross-border issues. We have several concerns, e.g. Shrewsbury to Birmingham and Cardiff to Bristol capacity problems; Cardiff to Cheltenham service frequency; and the poor connections between services at such interchanges as Bristol Parkway, Severn Tunnel Junction, Hereford and Shrewsbury. Cross-Border bus services frequently do not meet the needs of local residents.

There are also cross border service issues within Wales with regard to bus services which cross the border from one local authority to another and where one authority will not subsidise a service for part of its route. Of even greater concern is the withdrawal some of the Rail Link bus services.

Railfuture is concerned that there has been no consultation within Wales with regard to the replacement of the Great Western franchise which could have a significant effect on the quality of rail services in South Wales and the delivery of the National Transport Plan.

No cost or minimal cost enhancements: None is proposed in the reprioritisation. We gave the examples of the additional rail services that have been provided at Severn Tunnel Junction and Chepstow where there is still the opportunity for further enhancements. Opportunities exist for improved connections between rail and rail services and between bus and rail services. We previously suggested the extension of rail services further into England such as Gloucester to Cheltenham, Manchester Piccadilly to Manchester Airport and Birmingham New Street to Birmingham International and these have been partially or fully been introduced.

Sunday services should be introduced where they are not at present provided, i.e. to Maesteg, Coryton and Llandudno, and on the Conwy

Valley line in winter. No additional infrastructure costs would be incurred in providing these services.

Expenditure: *Railfuture* welcomed the announcement in 2010 that Wales was spending less than 50% of its transport funding on road schemes, the remainder being spent on public transport, rail transport and walking and cycling. No costs are shown in the Reprioritisation and there are no indications that this trend is continuing. We would have welcomed a statement in relation to the percentages of expenditure anticipated. We consider that the key issues affecting transport in Wales are:

- The lack of progress in providing an integrated transport system within Wales - in fact disintegration is taking place in some cases.
- The uncertainty of the amount of the Welsh rail network that will be electrified.
- The uncertainty with regard to the type of rolling stock to be provided for the Welsh rail network in terms of suitability, quantity and sustainability. There are hints of cascaded older rolling stock from the London area which will be more expensive to operate in Wales and therefore less sustainable.
- The lack of Sunday rail and bus services in some areas.
- The decrease in rural bus services and also services in some urban areas together with a decrease in funding for community transport.
- The decline in ferry services to Ireland and a decrease in commercial flights from Cardiff Wales airport.
- A large number of consultant's reports over a number of years on the implementation of new rail schemes that have not yet been delivered.

Reducing greenhouse gas emissions: This will be achieved only by providing an alternative integrated affordable transport system for car users. A policy of progressive rail electrification, as advocated previously by *Railfuture*, will achieve this reduction

Integrating local transport: The reprioritised plan gives no indication of improvements needed. The valleys rail network should be integrated with the local bus network with suitable interchanges at hub stations. Examples of good and poor practice abound (and were listed in our response). The bus timetable for Carmarthen to Aberystwyth has not been brought into line the improved rail services and at Newtown the service to Brecon does

not call at the rail station. These trends do not confirm the statement 'continue to plan (not construct) additional strategic modal interchanges'. We do not see how investment in Sustainable Travel Centres is integrating transport in fact it is concentrating investment on areas which already have better transport facilities than other parts of Wales. The inter-availability of bus and train tickets between Newtown and Shrewsbury has been discontinued.

Enhancing international connectivity: Again we see no real evidence of this in the Reprioritised plan. Ferry services to Ireland have been reduced and the Swansea to Cork ferry withdrawn. Stena at Holyhead is now using a berth even further from the railway station than the previous two it has used at the port. Links to Cardiff Airport are limited but the hourly bus service from Rhose station is welcomed. There is no direct link to Heathrow Airport and the other airports in the south east of England and proposals for an international airport in the Thames estuary will be of little use to Wales.

There are no proposals for through rail services via the Channel Tunnel and even on domestic routes there is no mention of reintroducing the two-hourly International rail service from Cardiff to Edinburgh.

Priorities: The priorities are not laid out in order of importance and we consider that an affordable integrated sustainable transport system is the most important objective. We also consider that there should be more expenditure on public transport (rail and bus) than on roads and motorways. Rural rail services need to be enhanced for example on the Heart of Wales line. There is a need for national and international priorities as well as local priorities. There must be greater control of the expenditure of Network Rail in Wales and schemes delivered without excessive expenditure. There have been some good examples such as the station platform lengthening programme

Sustainability and equality: Investment in public transport must be sustainable but, to serve the communities of Wales, transport both road and rail must be subsidised from public funds. *Railfuture* would like to see a greater shift of funding from road to rail schemes together with improved transport integration. Transport poverty should not be created for residents in Wales who live outside the main conurbations.

Rowland Pittard

Fares update

The maximum ATW standard fare is from Pontyclun to Prestatyn and from January 2012 has been £84.70. The same fare applies from Pontyclun to all stations between Prestatyn and Holyhead and from Prestatyn to all stations between Pontyclun and west Wales.

The ATW 'club 55' ticket is available from 8th January to 28th March, price £19, with add-ons of £21 for Chiltern from Birmingham to London Marylebone, £1.50 for Northern Rail in the Manchester area, £1 for Mersey Rail and £5 for London Midland for Hereford to Worcester and Crewe to Liverpool.

The Cardiff Valleys zonal fares are gradually becoming more fragmented with numerous variations occurring. The maximum day fare is from stations between Maesteg and Wildmill and is £9 while from Ebbw Vale Parkway (at the same distance from Cardiff as Maesteg) the fare is only £8. Rhymney, Merthyr, Aberdare and Treherbert also have a maximum day fare of £8 to Cardiff and west to Bridgend. The minimum return fare between any two stations is now between £1.90 and £2.10 with the longest distance between Bridgend and Llantwit Major.

The Pembrokeshire Rail Travellers' Association has produced an excellent 4-page leaflet with an immense amount of detail of fares available from Pembrokeshire. Day return fares from Whitland to Pembroke Dock, Milford Haven and Fishguard Harbour are identical and the return ticket can be used from any of the three termini. The same applies to fares from east of Swansea to Whitland and stations further west.

Railfuture had a meeting at Holyhead in December with the local Stena Line route manager to discuss ferry services between Wales and Ireland following the withdrawal of the fast ferry summer service between Fishguard and Rosslare and the Winter HSS service between Holyhead and Dun Laoghaire. This has resulted in improved publicity of Sail–Rail by Stena and ATW which now has a dedicated web page providing details of ferry services and enabling bookings to be made. The Summer Fishguard to Rosslare high speed service will not be replaced and the facility for day trips from Pembrokeshire to Ireland is withdrawn. The HSS ferry will be reinstated for the summer from Holyhead and facilities at Holyhead will be improved.

Rowland Pittard

Wales rail freight update_(February 2012)

Infrastructure: The fuelling of locomotives at Newport East Usk ceased from 16th October. Margam Traction Maintenance Depot was demolished in December. The running line and loop at Tower was relayed during February. Briton Ferry yard was cleared of stored wagons on 2nd December.

Aggregates: *Moreton on Lugg* continues to dispatch trains to Harlow Mill and Hayes worked by DBS, and to Elstow and Leeds Hunslet worked by Freightliner.

Machen: There was a one-off working to Ardingley on 3rd October but occasional trains continue to run to West Drayton. These increased in February.

Cardiff Docks: The trains to Crawley ceased on 23rd August but a new weekly flow to Elstow with stone from Hafod Quarry, Abercarn commenced on 3rd October which continued to be worked by DBS until 29th November. Since the Elstow trains recommenced on 11th January they have been worked by Freightliner.

Margam Grange siding: There have been a few one-off workings of basic slag. The most recent was on 29th November to Day's at Brentford.

Neath Abbey Wharf continued to dispatch trains to Angerstein Wharf and Theale, Freightliner worked.

Penmaenmawr: Trains have run up to thrice weekly with ballast for the extension of the Manchester Metro.

Aluminium: There was a one-off train at Anglesey Aluminium on 12th October.

Cement: The Drax to Aberthaw Cement fly ash train ceased after 22nd December.

Coal: Cwmbargoed has since 3rd October forwarded a weekly train to CPL Immingham; however these ceased between 18th December and 25th February. There were also five trains from Cwmbargoed to Earls Siding for the cement works between 5th September and 5th October. The weekly trains to Drax and Margam continue to run with an occasional Saturday train to Hargreaves at Barry Docks.

Two coal trains ran from Barry Docks to CPL Immingham. The first ran on 24th September and the second on 22nd October. These consisted of duff produced when screening lump coal from Cwmbargoed.

Newport Docks resumed supplying coal to Aberthaw from 26th September but ceased again after 10th February. There were two trains to Immingham CPL, the first on 11th and second on 14th February.

The weekly train from Tower to Aberthaw ceased after 29th October but American-owned Walter Energy at Aberpergwm commenced forwarding their coal from the Unity Mine loading point at Cwmgwrach on 24th November. A new washery has been commissioned at Aberpergwm. Recently Aberpergwm and Cwmgwrach coal has been blended for use at Aberthaw. The number of trains from the Cwmgwrach railhead has increased to three weekly to Aberthaw.

In addition to those from Cwmbargoed and Killoch trains conveying coal from Maltby colliery ran to Tata Margam on 7th and 21st February.

A weekly train continues to run from Onllwyn to Hunterston Low Level but there have been no further trains from Gwaun-Cae- Gurwen. Trains from Gwaun-Cae – Gurwen ran on 21st and 23rd September in addition to the initial train on 5th September.

Coal trains to Aberthaw recommenced from Portbury Docks on 17th October but ceased after 26th January.

The last recorded coal train to Penyffordd cement works was on 1st December.

Coke: The loaded coke trains from Redcar to Grange siding Port Talbot were replaced by ones from Scunthorpe from 30th January to 13th February. Trial loads of coke from Scunthorpe to Grange had run previously on January 17th and 24th. The trains reverted to Redcar on 14th February and a second ran on 15th since when there have been no further coke trains to Port Talbot.

Container traffic: A new service worked by DRS from Daventry to Wentloog for Tesco commenced on 28th February.

DBS also works a weekly wagonload container traffic conveying flour from Tilbury to Wentloog.

Nuclear traffic: There were no trains to Valley during the summer whilst the crane used for transferring the casks was overhauled. They restarted on 22nd September.

Petroleum: A new service from Lindsey refinery to Inver Green Energy at Cardiff Docks worked by GB Railfreight commenced on 15th December and has subsequently arrived on Tuesdays. This is in addition to the DBS worked trains from Immingham to HCB which has an adjoining terminal to Green Energy at Cardiff Docks.

Robeston continues to serve Bedworth, Theale and Westerleigh distribution depots.

Scrap metal: GB Railfreight worked trains of scrap from Exeter to Sims Newport Docks on 11th 15th and 22nd November. There have been no further trains to Newport Docks

The Barry Docks' yard formerly owned by Dunns has been sold to Sims and no trains have run since January last year.

CELSA Cardiff continues to receive the bulk of the inward scrap to South Wales. GB Railfreight has worked trains from Beeston, Exeter and Handsworth Queens Head. However it worked its last train from Exeter on 24th November (this yard has subsequently closed) and from Handsworth Queens Head on 1st February (trains now worked by DBS).

DBS has continued to work scrap metal trains to CELSA Cardiff from Handsworth, Hitchin, Kingsbury, Lincoln, Rotherham, Shipley, St Blazey (wagonload), Stockton, Swindon and Tyne Dock in addition to the recent additional trains from Handsworth Queens Head. DBS also worked a one off last train from Exeter on 4th January before the yard finally closed. The flow from Stockton restarted on 27th August and that from Tyne Dock on 19th February. The most regular flows have been from Kingsbury and Rotherham. There have been no recent services from Brierley Hill

The Freightliner Heavy Haul worked scrap trains from Dagenham Dock to CELSA have continued and preparations are being made for BARS Devon and Cornwall Railway (DCR) to commence working trains of scrap to Cardiff.

There have been no inward trains of scrap for TATA Port Talbot during the period under review except for a trial loading from Trostre on 24th November.

Steel: A weekly service on Sundays from Trostre to Tilbury conveying tinplate which commenced on 24th April was increased to two a week with the introduction of additional train on Wednesdays from 31st August. The Sunday train last ran on 22nd January.

Trains conveying steel coil for export from Newport Docks ceased after the 1st October.

A weekly train conveying steel billets from CELSA Cardiff to Scunthorpe commenced on 6th October.

The movement of steel slab from Margam to Llanwern ceased in early November following the mothballing of the Hot Rolling Mill at Llanwern.

A weekly train loaded at Grange Siding Port Talbot conveying pig iron to Aldwarke, Rotherham commenced on 28th November.

DBS worked a short term flow consisting of four trains from Margam to Rotterdam Botlek as far as Dollands Moor which started on 22nd November and ceased on 13th December.

Colas recommenced working trains of steel coil from Margam to Dollands Moor for Mauberg in France on 3rd January having previously worked these trains from Llanwern. There have been occasional trains worked by

Colas from Llanwern for Boenen in Germany- the most recent on 16th January.

There have been occasional movements of steel slab from Cardiff Docks and Birdport to Margam during the period under review but a more intensive programme commenced on 1st from Cardiff Docks and on 9th from Birdport. A new movement of steel slab from Scunthorpe to Margam commenced on 13th February.

Timber: A new weekly service (Colas worked) conveying timber from Teigngrace on the Heathfield branch near Newton Abbot to Chirk commenced on 7th December. The last train of timber from Ribblehead to Chirk ran on 15th December.

The Welsh Marches Line: Coal trains worked by Freightliner Heavy Haul from Portbury to Rugeley recommenced on 15th November and to Fiddlers Ferry on 22nd December. These trains increased to four daily trains to Rugeley and one to Fiddlers Ferry by February.

The newly introduced coal train from Onllwyn to Hunterston Low Level, the timber train from Teigngrace to Chirk (Colas operated) and the empty container train from Wentloog to Daventry (DRS operated) has resulted in four freight companies operating train over this line. All the trains listed previously continue to run and in addition there is the weekly Saturday Freightliner working from Garston, Liverpool to Wentloog.

Wagons: Except for four, all of the remaining four-wheel merry-go-round coal wagons stored in South Wales were removed in November and early December by road for scrapping at Rotherham. They were removed from yards throughout South Wales including East Usk Newport Alexandra Dock Junction, Newport Docks, Aberthaw, Margam, Briton Ferry, Swansea Burrows and Llandeilo Junction (Llanelli). Three remain loaded with coal at Newport and one at Onllwyn washery. The last working for these wagons in South Wales was from Parc Slip to Westbury Cement works.

Pullman at Cardiff Canton has started to refurbish wagons on site from 9th January but the wagon works at Margam has not been brought back into use.

Rowland Pittard

Book Review

Railway's Strangest Journeys: 'Extraordinary but True Stories from over 150 Years of rail travel'. *Tom Quinn, 2nd Edition. Published by Portico; £6.99.*

This is not the worst book ever published on railways; that honour is probably held by the book's first edition. The author obviously knows little about railways, and has relied on tall tales spun to him by his friends. Many of the most outrageous "true stories" have been eliminated in this 2nd edition, but enough remain to chuckle over.

Most stories omit details of the company concerned and the actual location (usually just 'England'). The tone is set on page 1, "When virtually every inch of Durham and Northumberland was given over to coal mining" which tells of an engine exploding in 1819, killing 13; but no location or actual date is quoted. Many dates are often obviously wrong, and no references are given; not surprising, as few of the stories are true *as written*. Many have been garbled, exaggerated, or otherwise mangled, and some are just unbelievable.

The account of the opening of the Stockton & Darlington railway (pp.2 &3) has the train starting and finishing at *Doncaster*. The Liverpool & Manchester line (p.4) is moved back from 1830 to 1825. Two accounts are given of the end of the Broad Gauge: both wrong! It's 1871 on p.143, starting at *Hereford*; on p.147, it's 1872, entitled "Stephenson's Gauge". We are told it was the gauge favoured by *Stephenson* himself, and that the *very last train* left New Milford (in "England") on 11 May 1872. (Actually, Brunel's Broad Gauge survived till 1892 on the Paddington to Cornwall line). Page 154 has a "Southern Region" railway in 1873, and it's also on p.195 in 1892. On p.205 cable haulage in the first few years on the London & Blackwall line is still operating in 1899.

Stories about USA lines are often 20 years or so before they were built: thus p59: the Portland Oregon line 1847; p65: the Kansas Pacific 1848. On p8, a woman has a Civil War (1861-65) widow's pension in 1854. A story about a line out of Boston is given as 1817, though the heading gives a more likely 1888. Page 193 has Western USA being "first opened up at the end of the 19th Century".

The strangest thing about "Railway's Strangest Journeys" is how it was published – twice.

D G Watts

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 AUGUST for the Autumn 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 .

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Web site: www.railfuturewales.org.uk

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