

Issue 53 Autumn 2012

Rail Wales

*Newsletter of the Welsh branches of
Railfuture*



Wales' latest reopening: Fishguard & Goodwick station

Electrification and signalling developments to come

Wales is on the way to being able to rid itself of the dubious distinction of being the only European country except Albania to have no electrified railways! So the recent announcements that the GW main line is to be electrified through to Swansea (instead of stopping short at Cardiff as was promulgated earlier), and then that the entire Valley Lines network is also to be electrified, deserve a warm welcome. The two schemes are linked in that the former has helped the 'business case' for the latter; in particular it seems unlikely that the Maesteg and Vale of Glamorgan lines would have been included had the main line electrification ended at Cardiff. The need to replace the elderly roiling stock on the Valley Lines would also have been a factor in the decision to electrify these routes.

It has been suggested that this is the ideal time to further evaluate possible extensions to some of the Valley Lines, including for example Aberdare – Hirwaun and Ebbw Vale Parkway – Ebbw Vale town. Electrification could improve the 'business cases' for such extensions in several ways; these include cutting costs and increasing patronage (the well-known 'sparks effect'). The superior acceleration and braking of electric trains might also make it possible to operate extensions such as these without increasing the number of trains needed, and also, in the case of Aberdare – Hirwaun, may avoid the need for a new passing loop at Aberdare.

Meanwhile, the timetable for the Cardiff Area Signalling Renewal, a £220m project, has been announced. Work commences in January 2013 in the Vale of Glamorgan and proceeds in stages (to minimise disruption to passengers) over the next two years, ending with Cardiff Central and West of Cardiff in December 2014. These works will be consistent with subsequent electrification. The result will be a major renewal of signals and points throughout the network, with increases in capacity at some 'pinch points', including the bottleneck between Cardiff Central and Queen Street stations.

See also page 6.

Cambrian Lines news

European Train Control System and associated matters

The six-car trains promised by Arriva Trains Wales for the Cambrian main line this summer have not materialised. It had been intended to run certain services as four-car trains between Aberystwyth and Machynlleth, supplemented at the latter by a two-car section from the coast. More than one reason for the delay in introducing these strengthened formations has been offered. Apparently a section of fence erected at Caersws as part of the level crossing automation scheme has effectively shortened the platform length and as the Class 158s used on the line do not have selective door opening, six-car trains cannot be accommodated without locking some of doors out of use.

However, of more concern is the second reason given which is that the ERTMS hardware at Aberystwyth does not allow for the joining of trains in the platform, which would be the intention for the 09.30 departure. This reason is difficult to understand as the joining and splitting of trains at both Machynlleth and Shrewsbury is done as a matter of routine. Furthermore, locomotives of excursion trains are allowed to run around their trains at Aberystwyth, albeit with the coaching stock empty of passengers. It should be noted also that ERTMS supposedly has provision to allow permission to be given to drivers to proceed 'on sight' so it is difficult to see how the joining and splitting of trains should be a problem. Apparently the real answer may be that the Office of the Rail Regulator has to give approval for a change of working practices in Aberystwyth. If this is so it seems to be taking an awfully long time to agree to a practice that appears to be common elsewhere, regardless of the type of signalling provided.

ERTMS has also played a prominent part in the recently published report into the incident which occurred at Llanbadarn Crossing on 19th June 2011 when a Machynlleth bound train overran the crossing fortunately with no road vehicle or pedestrian involvement. The RAIB investigating officers conclude that the immediate cause was that the train driver failed to take note, in time, of the flashing red indicator light showing that the barriers had not lowered because they had 'timed out'. The report refers to drivers' workload when leaving Aberystwyth since the fitting and implementation of ERTMS, bearing in mind that they have to continually observe and react to messages transmitted via

the ERTMS screen, encouraging what is described as 'head down' driving. Additionally they have to carry out the requisite brake test. Furthermore, somewhat surprisingly, there is no interface between the ERTMS system and level crossings on the route. Obviously the report recommends that the problems highlighted as the result of the thorough investigation be addressed and are directed at Network Rail, Arriva Trains Wales and the Rail Safety and Standards Board as appropriate.

All of that said, punctuality on the line is still good, although there is no further news on the hourly service initially promised for 2011!

Refurbishment of the Class 158s

This programme of work is now drawing to a close and as previously noted the results have, in general, been much appreciated and the trains are well presented.

Aberystwyth Station

Work on the proposed improvements to Aberystwyth station still have not started but work continues on the reconfiguration of the bus station in Alexandra Road.

Tywyn

In the previous issue of *Rail Wales* I reported that a 'Harrington Hump' had been provided at Tywyn and that a further 20 sets were to be installed at stations in Wales with low platform heights. Our member J. R. Brooks from Tywyn contacted the compiler to say that no 'Harrington Hump' had been constructed at his local station and this still applied mid-August. I thank Mr. Brooks for the information and I am pleased to set the record straight.

West Coast Franchise

The announcement in mid-August that First Group has been awarded the West Coast franchise from December 2012 onwards for 13 years and 4 months (though this is subject to a legal challenge by Virgin) will undoubtedly have repercussions for mid-Wales train users. Over the years, those travelling on Virgin-operated trains have become used to the company's contribution to the general improvements in services on

the West Coast main line. Whilst Pendolinos may not be everyone's cup of tea, the thought of more seats being crammed into their coaches in First Great Western fashion does not auger well for comfort. First West Coast however has made several promises which are interesting, such as direct trains between Shrewsbury and London from 2016 and also certain reduced fares. One wonders whether the number of these direct trains, five per day having been mentioned, will affect the number of paths available for other train operators such as Arriva Trains Wales to run to Birmingham New Street and Birmingham International.

One thing is certain, passengers in general do not like changing trains and the benefit of the existing through trains between mid-Wales and Birmingham is that they allow a one-change journey to many parts of Britain by virtue of the criss-crossing of many routes at Birmingham New Street as well as providing access to Birmingham Airport at International. In all of this it must be remembered that not all passengers by a long way are London-bound. This is particularly true of students attending the University in Aberystwyth and it is to be hoped that the proposals included in the new franchise will not affect the number of through trains between mid-Wales and the Birmingham stations.

However it is not clear whether the new services proposed by First from 2016 will call at Birmingham New Street so whilst London-bound passengers may benefit from the introduction of these services, provided of course that connecting times are reasonable, others may not and a careful eye will have to be kept on developments. Much has been said for and against the awarding of the franchise to First but, as many railway commentators have already said, it will be many years before it can be shown whether or not the decision has been the correct one in many respects.

Glyn Jones

ATW's 'Club 55' fares scheme was re-introduced on 2nd September. Those over 55 years of age can travel anywhere on ATW's network for £17 return if booked on line, or £19 when bought at ticket offices. Senior railcard discount is reduced from £2 to £1, but these tickets still offer excellent value however booked. Add-ons are available to destinations on other TOCs' networks.

South-east Wales notes

The headline news is of course electrification. Unanswered questions remain, such as 'will the relief lines between Severn Tunnel Junction and Cardiff be wired?', especially in the light of proposals to site stations at Llanwern and Coedkernew on them. The freight operators and rolling stock providers have invested large sums in new and more efficient diesel locomotives, so are unlikely to want to put more money into buying electric locomotives, and then there is the cost of wiring terminals etc.

'Inside information' indicates that the relatively new signal gantries east of Newport will have to be altered or replaced. The specification at the time of wiring did not envisage clearance for electrification; presumably more recent work has done so. Work is currently in hand towards the resignalling of the Cardiff Valleys lines and the Vale of Glamorgan, though I have not yet seen a replacement date for Park Junction signal box at the Newport end of the Ebbw Vale line.

Usage of the Ebbw Vale line continues to increase; over 770,000 passengers were recorded in 2010-11, up 7.4%. Peak period trains are usually full to bursting. It is to be hoped that electrification will make more stock available for this service; currently only 2-car trains are run except on Saturdays. Around 700 passengers used the revised Rogerstone to Newport bus link in its first four months of operation. The danger is that the minimal usage will be used as an excuse not to provide trains to Newport, in spite of the fact that £2.5m was spent on a new crossover at Gaer Junction, west of Newport, and the signalling is now fit for passenger train use.

Questions continue to be asked about the extension from Ebbw Vale Parkway to Ebbw Vale Town; on the proposal to run trains to Abertillery; and on the provision of a new station at Pye Corner. The latter would provide a far better bus link to the centre of Newport, at no running cost to the Welsh Government. There is a minimum 10-minute interval bus service, with a running time of around 10 minutes, from bus stops around 200m from the proposed station site.

Ray Caston

Bridgend Area Rail Standard Day Returns (August 2012)

Here are the Standard Day Return (SDR) fares, one-way mileages, and pence per mile for the return journey, for stations in the Bridgend area. Some stations also have Cheap Day Returns.

* For these, road distances are considerably less, especially Maesteg to Port Talbot and Swansea.

Table 1: grouped by lines

First figure is SDR price; second figure is mileage; third figure is pence per mile.

<i>From Bridgend to:</i>		<i>From Wildmill to:</i>		<i>From Maesteg to:</i>	
Wildmill	1.90; 1; 95	Bridgend	1.90; 1; 95	Bridgend	3.40; 8¼; 21
Sarn	1.90; 2¼; 43	Sarn	2.00; 1¾; 80	Wildmill	2.70; 7¼; 19
Tondu	3.40; 3; 57	Tondu	2.70; 2; 67	Sarn	2.70; 6; 22
Maesteg	3.40; 8¼; 21	Maesteg	2.70; 7¼; 19	Tondu	2.70; 5¼; 27
	<i>Mean 37</i>		<i>Mean 40</i>		<i>Mean 21</i>
Pencoed	2.10; 4; 26	Pencoed	3.40; 5; 34	Pencoed*	3.40; 12¼; 14
Llanharan	3.40; 6 ½; 26	Llanharan	4.50; 7½; 30	Llanharan*	4.50; 14¼; 15
Pontyclun	3.40; 9¼; 18	Pontyclun	4.50; 10¼; 22	Pontyclun*	4.50; 17½; 13
Cardiff	6.20; 20¼; 15	Cardiff	8.00; 21¾; 18	Cardiff	8.00; 28½; 18
	<i>Mean 19</i>		<i>Mean 23</i>		<i>Mean 14</i>
Pyle	3.30; 6; 27	Pyle	4.30; 7; 31	Pyle*	6.30; 14¼; 22
Pt Talbot	4.10; 12¼; 17	Pt Talbot	4.30; 13¼; 16	Pt Talbot*	6.30; 20½; 15
Swansea*	7.10; 27¼; 13	Swansea*	7.10; 28¼; 12	Swansea*	10.10; 35½; 14
	<i>Mean 16</i>		<i>Mean 16</i>		<i>Mean 16</i>
Llantwit M.	2.10; 9¼; 11	Llantwit M.	3.40; 10¼; 17	Llantwit M.	3.40; 17½; 10
Rhose	3.40; 15¾; 11	Rhose	4.50; 16¾; 14	Rhose	4.50; 24; 9
Barry	4.50; 19; 12	Barry	6.00; 20; 15	Barry	6.00; 27¼; 11
	<i>Mean 11</i>		<i>Mean 15</i>		<i>Mean 10</i>

Table 2: ranked by distance

First figure is SDR price; second figure is mileage; third figure is pence per mile.

From Bridgend to:		From Wildmill to:		From Maesteg to:	
Wildmill	1.90, 1, 95	Bridgend	1.90, 1, 95	Tondu	2.70, 5¼, 27
Sarn	1.90, 2¼, 43	Sarn	2.00, 1¼, 80	Sarn	2.70, 6, 22
Tondu	3.40, 3, 57	Tondu	2.70, 2, 67	Wildmill	2.70, 7¼, 19
Pencoed	2.10, 4, 26	Pencoed	3.40, 5, 34	Bridgend	3.40, 8¼, 21
Pyle	3.30, 6, 27	Pyle	4.30, 7, 31	Pencoed*	3.40, 12¼, 14
Llanharan	3.40, 6½, 26	Llanharan	4.50, 7½, 30	Pyle*	6.30, 14¼, 22
Maesteg	3.40, 8¼, 21	Maesteg	2.70, 7¼, 19	Llanharan*	4.50, 14¾, 15
Pontyclun	3.40, 9¼, 18	Pontyclun	4.40, 10¼, 22	Pontyclun	4.50, 17½, 13
Llantwit M	2.10, 9¼, 11	Llantwit M.	3.40, 10¼, 17	Llantwit M.	3.40, 17½, 10
Rhose	3.40, 15¾, 11	Rhose	4.50, 16¾, 14	Rhose	4.50, 24, 9
Pt Talbot	4.10, 12¼, 17	Pt Talbot	4.30, 13¼, 16	Pt Talbot *	6.30, 20½, 15
Barry	4.50, 19, 12	Barry	6.00, 20, 15	Barry	6.00, 27¼, 11
Cardiff	6.20, 20¼, 15	Cardiff	8.00, 21¼, 18	Cardiff	8.00, 28½, 14
Swansea*	7.10, 27¼, 13	Swansea*	7.10, 28¼, 13	Swansea*	10.10, 35½, 14

Summary: Pence per mile

For the three or four stations in each group, the total fares are divided by the total mileage. Some stations are not included, viz. Maesteg Ewenny Road and those between Port Talbot and Swansea.

	From:	<u>Bridgend</u>	<u>Wildmill</u>	<u>Maesteg</u>
To Stations on:	Maesteg Line	37p	40p	21p
	Main Line East	19p	23p	14p
	Main Line West	16p	16p	16p
	Vale Line	11p	15p	10p

Passenger Numbers for the smaller stations

April 2010-March 2011, in thousands:

<u>Maesteg Line</u>		<u>Main Line East</u>		<u>Main Line West</u>	
<u>Vale Line</u>					
Sarn	41	Pontyclun	231	Pyle	77
Llantwit Major	197				
Tondu	36	Pencoed	215		
Rhose	155				
Wildmill	12	Llanharan	133		

The populations served by each station are comparable: mostly 6,000 – 12,000.

All have an hourly service, except Pyle (only every 2 hours, therefore attracting fewer people). The difference between usage of the Maesteg line's minor stations and the rest is obvious.

Conclusions

The tables above show many anomalies. For long distance fares, the Bridgend area extends from Briton Ferry (16 miles away) to Pontyclun (9¼ miles) and Rhoose (16¾ miles) – but not to Sarn, 2¼ miles! From West Wales, the 65½ miles from Briton Ferry to Rhoose and back are free, but the Bridgend to Sarn ride isn't.

Of course, in general the longer distances should cost less per mile than shorter ones; but many short distances are absurdly expensive, especially for stations on the Maesteg line (except Maesteg itself) which is very unfair since this area is one of the poorest in Wales. Bridgend to Wildmill is almost as much as to Llantwit Major, 9 times further. Bridgend to Tondy, 3 miles, is £3.40; to Llantwit it is £2.10 for over 3 times the distance.

These high fares mean that these in-between stations are used much less than you would expect. Wildmill is only a mile out from Bridgend, so most Wildmill people walk or use the bus to Bridgend station rather than pay so much for that extra mile. The craziest fare is to Sarn; from Bridgend it's high at £1.90; but on the way it passes through Wildmill – where the fare to Sarn is actually *more*, at £2!

Fares from Maesteg to Port Talbot and Swansea are not as reasonable as they look, as the mileages by rail are over double the road distance.

The best fares, by a wide margin, are on the Vale of Glamorgan line. It's a pity the other fares are not on such reasonable levels; particularly, the minor stations on the Maesteg line – especially Wildmill - would see far more users (probably about 3 to 5 times as many) if their fares were comparable to those in the rest of the district.

David Watts

Consultation responses

Responding to various consultation documents continues to be a significant part of *Railfuture's* work. Here we report on three recent examples.

1. ATW September 2012 timetable

The consultation document referred only to weekday services. Our response placed particular emphasis on service levels and connectional opportunities, including with other operators. (See the following article for the changes which actually occurred). ATW have since commented on some of our points, and where appropriate these are mentioned below.

North Wales: the objective of achieving better connections with ferry services at Holyhead is supported. But the changes to the Cardiff – Holyhead service do not result in improved connections to stations west of Cardiff. We considered also that a connection to Llandudno should be provided out of the 18.21 express service from Cardiff.

West Wales: The Fishguard Harbour service does not give the opportunity for inward day visits to north Pembrokeshire, with only a very early inward train and a late evening outward train available. There is no improvement in connections from west Wales into the Birmingham/Nottingham services from Cardiff.

ATW: the enhanced Fishguard Harbour service is a three-year trial specified by Welsh Government (WG) and a timetable change would need the authority of WG and consideration of degree of patronage with the existing timetable. Re Birmingham/Nottingham, we have looked at this a number of times and we still can find no resolution in the timings to afford these connections essentially because Cardiff Central is almost at capacity.

Heart of Wales line: We support the HoWLTA request for a fifth daily service in each direction and an extension of the service to Crewe possibly taking up some of the workings of the present 2 hourly Shrewsbury to Crewe shuttle.

ATW: as you know, we have been involved in discussing an option with WG and others in the past but this would inevitably be a decision for WG to take at some point.

Maesteg – Cheltenham: the 7.58 Maesteg – Cardiff service is too late for many workers starting at 9.00 and we suggested that it should start at 7.42 and take up the path of the 8.07 Bridgend – Ebbw Vale, though this would create a 1½-hour gap before the next service. The 15.17 from Maesteg is out of the standard pattern sequence and does not have the normal connection to Barry at Bridgend. We were pleased to note that the 22.35 Cardiff – Maesteg operated on the two Saturdays when events were held in Cardiff in July and therefore see no reason why it cannot run every Saturday.

ATW: pathing problems would prevent the suggestions mentioned for the morning Maesteg services being implemented.

We support the suggestion of a fixed hourly all-stations service between Cardiff and Cheltenham instead of the present two trains every three hours. The Sunday service provides excellent connections with services to and from stations west of Cardiff, a feature not present with the weekday service.

ATW: this would have to be a matter for WG to determine as ultimately these would not be commercially viable and it would require additional rolling stock, train crew and revenue support.

Cambrian: we are still concerned that up trains from Aberystwyth arrive at xx.26 and do not connect into Wrexham and Chester services departing xx.24 at Shrewsbury.

Capacity increases: The 17.40 Cardiff to Ebbw Vale is now loading to capacity and requires a three-coach train. We were pleased to note that this has been recognised most days by providing an extra coach, and hope that this is carried forward into the September timetable.

ATW: this has been formed to cater for the additional demand during the current school holidays and I regret to advise that it is unlikely to continue from September. We will still however try to strengthen during school half-terms and on weekends.

The 16.17 Cardiff-Maesteg has again left passengers behind when a class 143 unit was used. We were pleased to see that this also has been rectified by providing a three-coach train, and again we hope this will continue.

2. Arriva Cross Country's timetable

In our response to this, we welcomed the continuation of the additional stops at Chepstow and Lydney. We expressed concern about connections from the west of England into services at Cardiff and Bristol Parkway, and re-iterated the suggestion that the Swansea to north-east England and Scotland services should be re-instated.

3. Active Travel bill

This is a bill proposed by the Welsh Government. Our response to the proposals emphasised that we actively promote the use of, and improvements to, rail travel throughout Wales. We seek to move more people and freight from road and air to rail, by campaigning for cheap, convenient rail services for everyone, better links for buses, bikes and pedestrians and creation of urban Tram, Light Rail and Metro systems. The use of public transport has environmental, health and social inclusion benefits. This is enhanced by integrated transport and the opportunity to walk or cycle to railway and bus stations and to bus stops.

These points were expanded in our answers to the questions posed under the seven headings in the consultation document. We also emphasised that Railfuture has produced a Development Plan for the Railways of Wales (a new edition of which is due out shortly).

Rowland Pittard

ATW September timetable changes

The timings of the Saturdays excepted Holyhead to Cardiff locomotive-hauled service have been altered. The train will now leave Holyhead at 05.33 and be routed via Wrexham and not Crewe, but calling additionally at Colwyn Bay and Hereford to arrive Cardiff at 09.58. It will

leave Cardiff later at 18.21, calling at Hereford, again via Wrexham, and arrive Holyhead at 22.38. Unfortunately no connection is planned for Llandudno. The upgraded train will be worked by a class 67 locomotive, three refurbished mark 3 standard coaches (replacing the present mark 2 coaches), the mark 3 buffet/restaurant as at present and a driving trailer.

The Welsh Government has ceased funding the second Saturdays excepted express service from Holyhead at 07.51 to Cardiff. However ATW will provide a replacement service at 08.30 from Llandudno to Cardiff arriving at 12.08. This will be via Wrexham 09.42 non-stop from Shrewsbury to Newport. In the reverse direction there will be a 15.10 from Swansea (16.21 Cardiff) to Chester via Crewe arriving 19.04.

The 05.15 Holyhead to Birmingham International diverts via Crewe with a 07.47 portion from Wrexham added at Shrewsbury.

The 05.10 Cardiff to Holyhead diverts to Llandudno but the 07.50 and 08.50 from Manchester to Llandudno divert to Holyhead. The latter is fast from Chester, calling only at Llandudno Junction and Bangor and provides a connection into the Irish Ferries fast service to Dublin Port. There is an additional service at 10.02 from Chester to Llandudno.

The 06.50 from Manchester terminates at Llandudno Junction to form the 08.54 back, with a connection at 8.30 from Llandudno. The 10.50 from Manchester to Llandudno diverts to Bangor, and forms the 13.31 to Manchester which provides a connection out of the 12.32 boat train from Holyhead.

These changes have a significant effect on the service from Llandudno with the previous xx.08 and xx.44 pattern of departures not maintained. A 75-minute gap has been created between 8.30 and 9.45, with no connections for the 9.25 from the Junction to Cardiff, 09.40 to Euston and 9.44 to Bangor. In the afternoon there is no connection into the 13.31 from Bangor to Manchester (which replaces the 13.44 Llandudno to Manchester).

ATW added 465,000 extra seats to its services from May 2012 and these changes in September will add a further 125,000 seats. Additional capacity will be provided by using 3- instead of 2-car 175 units on the 05.46 Llandudno Junction and 07.12 Chester to Manchester services providing an extra 142 daily seats, 148 seats on

the busiest trains between Cardiff and Manchester, 74 extra seats on 17.39 Cardiff to Swansea (3-car 175) and 160 extra daily seats on morning Swanline services into Swansea. ATW provided an additional coach providing 74 additional seats on the 16.17 Cardiff to Maesteg and 17.25 Maesteg to Cheltenham, and on the 17.35 Cardiff – Ebbw Vale and 18.40 return during the school summer holidays.

David Mawdsley and Rowland Pittard

Cardiff disruption

On 9th August 2012 the 17.30 Manchester-Cardiff (175006) ran into debris when approaching Cardiff Central at 20.53. A section of the retaining wall adjacent to the up line between Cardiff Central and Cardiff Queen Street had collapsed and trains could not use either line between Central and Queen Street and the up and down relief lines east of Central.

All services between Central and Queen Street were cancelled and an emergency timetable was put in place. Cardiff-Taunton services started at Bristol and Cardiff-Portsmouth Harbour services at Newport until 14.00 on 10th August. This allowed the normal operation of main line services and was in time for spectators arriving in Cardiff for the Olympic football match to be held that evening. There was congestion at times on platform 4 at Central which was also being used for turning back valley lines services, as there is no westbound departure signal on platform 6.

However the Valley lines between Central and Queen Street remained closed until the commencement of services on 17th. The 18.45 Cwmbargoed-Aberthaw coal train was terminated at Heath Junction on 9th, and remained there until 09.50 on 10th when two locomotives topped and tailed the train from Queen Street via Radyr and the City line, the first loaded coal train with HTA wagons to run between Queen Street and Radyr. Until the freight train was cleared, Rhymney line services ran to and from Caerphilly with a bus connection to Taffs Well.

Revised services ran in the Cardiff Valleys during the period of closure and the service pattern on weekdays was as follows:

Rhymney/Bargoed and Treherbert services were diverted to Cardiff Bay, and the Cardiff Bay shuttle was withdrawn; a half-hourly shuttle ran between Coryton and Heath Low Level; Merthyr Tydfil trains ran alternately to/from Bridgend and Barry Island non-stop via the City line, reversing at Cardiff Central; the Aberdare service ran half-hourly to Barry Island, formed of two-coach trains calling at all City line stations; and the Radyr-Coryton service was withdrawn. There was a half-hourly shuttle between Cardiff and Penarth.

Rowland Pittard

Wales Freight Update (August 2012)

This update records freight developments in Wales during the first six months of 2012.

infrastructure changes

In **south-east Wales** the Newport area re-signalling has almost been completed and this has improved the flow of freight trains in the Newport area.

The former ballast tip sidings at Newport Alexandra Dock Junction were removed in March. Both East Usk Junction and Alexandra Junction yards remain in use at the Newport. East Usk yard has seen the closure of the DBS locomotive fuelling facilities but remains in use for trains from the east reversing to access the Uskmouth branch and for the storage of HTA wagon sets at weekends. Wagon repair operations have recommenced in the Liswerry section of East Usk yard in July. Pullman at Cardiff Canton has started to refurbish wagons on site from 9th January thus creating more work for the resident class 08.

The Maindee loop was singled from east to north and the connections to the freight branches at Caldicot Junction have been removed.

A new intermediate block signal has been provided north of Abergavenny, thus increasing the capacity of the Marches line for north-bound freight.

In **south-west Wales** the motive power depot and associated sidings at Margam were removed by March. The covered wagon repair facilities at Margam have not reopened and wagon repairs continued to take place adjacent to the Knuckle yard. The Baglan Bay branch at Briton Ferry has reopened and Briton Ferry sidings cleared of stored wagons.

There has been no rail traffic to Swansea Docks or on the Waterston and Trecwn branches in Pembrokeshire, which are intact. The Grovesend loop and the former connection to Brynlliw mine were removed in July 2012.

In **north Wales** traffic has ceased at Anglesey Aluminium and Mostyn docks, and the sidings at Llandudno Junction have been cleared of stored wagons. The line from Blaenau Ffestiniog to Trawsfynydd is out of use but there have been proposals for it to be used recreational purposes using rail cycles.

The two Welsh Government-assisted developments, one at Bird Port (a rail- to-road transshipment shed on the Uskmouth branch) and the other at Kronospan, Chirk (improved siding facilities) continue to be well used.

Aggregates

Moreton on Lugg railhead continues to dispatch gritstone from Tarmac's Dolyhir and Gore quarries near Presteigne. There are usually two trains each week to Hayes and occasional trains to Bury St Edmunds, Harlow Mill and Hothfield. DBS has also taken over the contract from Freightliner for a weekly train to Leeds Hunslet.

Machen continues to dispatch gritstone from the Hanson-Heidelberg Cement's owned quarry at Craig yr Hesg near Pontypridd in occasional trains to West Drayton and these depart as required on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. There have also been a few trains conveying limestone from Machen quarry to Ardingley and Whatley.

Cardiff Docks: the last Freightliner working to Elstow was on 7th February 2012.

Margam Grange siding: There continue to be occasional trains of crushed basic slag from Margam Grange siding to a variety of destinations including Acton yard, Brentford and Hothfield.

Neath Abbey Wharf continues to dispatch trains, Freightliner-worked, usually weekly, to Angerstein Wharf and Theale with stone from Bardon's Cwm Nant Lleci quarry in the Tawe valley. There has also been a train to Thorney Mill. In addition there have been a few trains worked by DBS to Leeds Hunslet and Washwood Heath with stone from Cemex-owned Bryncoch quarry near Neath.

Penmaenmawr Quarry was dispatching trains to Guide Bridge which have run up to thrice weekly with ballast for the extension of the Manchester Metrolink, but none has run recently.

Car Components and Chemicals

The daily wagon-load service between the Ford plants at Dagenham and Bridgend continues to run. There is also some traffic from Bridgend for Valencia in Spain. The Dow Corning plant at Barry receives silica sand from two locations in France (Amberieu and Notre Dame-de-Briancon) each fortnight by block train forward from Dolland's Moor.

Coal

There are five coal loading points for South Wales-produced coal, and imported coal is also loaded at Newport Docks.

Cwmbargoed disposal point is operated by Miller Argent which operates the adjacent Ffos-y-fran opencast site and dispatches up to three trains each day to Aberthaw power station. There is a weekly train on Wednesdays to Drax power station and from there have been trains on Mondays and Fridays to the cement works at Earles siding. There have also been trains to CPL at Immingham and TATA at Margam and Scunthorpe. The Saturday train to Barry Docks with household coal has now ceased.

Tower disposal point: opencast mining commenced this year at the site of Tower colliery and the first train was dispatched to Aberthaw on 2nd April 2012. Subsequently there has been a daily train to Aberthaw.

Cwmgwrach is used to load coal from the Unity mine adjacent to the loading point and from Aberpergwm. Coal from Aberpergwm ceased in July while development work takes place at the drift.

Onllwyn Washery, which is owned by Walters Mining Ltd (Celtic Energy), receives coal from opencast sites at Sarn Helen and Stella and also by rail from Gwaun-cae-Gurwen. Recently there have been two daily trains to Aberthaw power station and twice weekly trains to Immingham CPL. There have been occasional trains to TATA at Margam and Scunthorpe but the weekly train to Hunterston Low Level with coal for blending has ceased. There is still wagon load containerised coal for Mossend.

Gwaun-cae-Gurwen disposal point serving the Tir Gwaith opencast site, also owned by Walters Mining Ltd, despatches a daily train to Onllwyn washery. Three trains ran to Hunterston LL in June.

Newport Docks: coal trains to Aberthaw power station ceased after 10th February 2012 but ran from 26th March to 30th April. Newport Docks resumed supplying coal to Uskmouth power station on 12th June 2012 using Freightliner. A few trains DBS worked ran to Immingham CPL (February 2012) and Didcot power station (July/August 2012).

There are four coal unloading points in South Wales excluding Onllwyn washery. There are bottom door discharge facilities at Uskmouth and Aberthaw power stations and at TATA Grange siding. Penyffordd cement works near Wrexham continues to receive occasional trains of imported coal from Redcar.

Uskmouth: coal trains are worked by Freightliner from Portbury to Uskmouth power station (a daily service).

Aberthaw: DBS works coal trains from Avonmouth to Aberthaw power station, the number of trains varying according to the requirements of the power station. These are in addition to trains from the four South Wales loading points. There was a long-distance flow from New Cumnock to Aberthaw power station worked Freightliner.

Margam TATA: there have been inward movements of coal from Cwmbargoed and Maltby (February-April 2012) worked by DBS and from Killoch Washery by Freightliner. The last train from Killoch arrived on 30th March.

Coke

There was an intensive flow of coke from Redcar and Scunthorpe to Margam Grange siding until 6th July.

Container traffic

This has increased significantly in recent months. The daily Southampton to Wentloog liner now runs additionally on Saturdays and there is an as required service from Millbrook to Wentloog which usually runs at least once a week. The Saturday Garston Dock to Wentloog service continues to operate. The DBS and DRS services continue to run.

Nuclear traffic

Occasional train run from Valley which serves the two nuclear power stations at Wylfa, one of which has now ceased to operate

Petroleum

This continues unchanged. There is wagon load traffic from Fawley to Cardiff Canton via Didcot and the tanks are delivered and collected from ATW Cardiff Canton on Fridays. DBS works an occasional train of fuel oil from Lindsey to Aberthaw power station.

Scrap metal

The movement of scrap metal into South Wales by four different operators has added an additional dimension to railway operations in South Wales. Scrap metal is unloaded at Sims Newport Docks, CELSA Cardiff and TATA at Margam Grange siding.

Sims Newport Docks has recently received scrap from Handsworth Queens Head worked by GBF.

CELSA Cardiff: DBS has continued to work scrap metal trains from Exeter (on 27th August), Handsworth, Hitchin, Kingsbury, Lincoln, Rotherham, Shipley, St Blazey (wagonload), Stockton, Swindon and Tyne Dock.

New operator Devon and Cornwall Railways (BARS) commenced working trains from Shipley on 17th March and has subsequently worked trains from Stockton and Tyne Dock.

Freightliner Heavy Haul worked scrap trains from Dagenham Dock have continued and occasional trains from Hitchin and Tyne Dock have been added. The first trains ran from Stockton on 25th April and from Hitchin on 27th April.

GBRf has worked trains of scrap from Beeston and Handsworth Queens Head.

TATA Margam: there have been, in the past, infrequent movements of scrap steel to Margam Grange siding but from 29th March 2012 there has been weekly train from Trostre using 4-wheel SSA box wagons.

Steel

TATA steel works, Port Talbot continues to provide the main traffic flows in Wales. A recent renewal of contracts has resulted in DBS working all trains associated with works. The newer no. 5 furnace at the works was under maintenance in the spring leaving the older no. 4 furnace in production. The latter has now ceased production and is to be completely rebuilt, and no. 5 furnace is back in action. This has required an inward movement of steel slab to supplement that produced at Port Talbot. There have been regular movements of slab from Scunthorpe and imports, including from the Netherlands and the USA, via Bird Port (Newport), Newport Docks and Cardiff docks.

In the spring there was movement of imported coil from the Netherlands via Bird Port to Llanwern, Margam and Trostre. In May the return working of the Wednesday Margam-Rotterdam service also conveyed coil to Trostre. These have now ceased.

The closure of the hot rolling mill at Llanwern last November has seen the end of the transport of slab between Margam and Llanwern. There has been an increase in the movement of steel coil between Margam and Llanwern especially in covered wagons and there are at least four inter works trains each day.

There continues to be a substantial amount of inter-works traffic. There is a daily (sometime two) including Sundays train to Trostre tinsplate

works at Llanelli. There are two daily trains, using covered vans, to Dee Marsh coating plant at Shotton in north Wales. There are usually two daily to the pipe works at Corby and one to the pipe works at Hartlepool. These trains use open bogie wagons.

There are interesting flows to Europe using the Channel Tunnel. These include traffic to the TATA galvanising plant at Maugbeuge in north east France and the rolling mill at Beverwijk in the Netherlands. There have also been trains to Rotterdam Botlek in the Netherlands and Bonen in Germany. DBS has taken over these flows from Colas. The last Colas operated train ran on 20th March and the first DBS train on 17th April.

The finished products are distributed from the various plants by road and rail. There is a twice weekly service (Sundays and Wednesdays) Trostre to Tilbury conveying tinplate. There are up to three daily trains, using covered vans, from Margam picking up at Llanwern for TATA's distribution centre at Round Oak in the Midlands. There is wagon load traffic to Middlesbrough and Immingham using overnight trunk services. There is export coil traffic via Bird Port at Newport. A twice weekly train (Tuesdays and Thursdays) runs from Llanwern to Swindon stores with steel for the car industry.

Rowland Pittard

The Port Talbot Railway

During the 1890 s the *Port Talbot Dock Company* built three short lines into the Afan, Llynfi, Garw and Kenfig valleys, in an attempt to emulate the success of the *Barry Railway* which owned the huge new dock at Barry, and was developing into the largest coal exporting port in the world. At Cardiff, Swansea, and Newport, docks and railways were run by separate companies: a frequent source of friction, delay and extra cost.

Here are photographs of two attractive viaducts at *Pontrhydyfen*, birthplace of Richard Jenkins (better known to most as *Richard Burton*) in the Afan Valley behind Port Talbot. The top picture shows the elegant red brick PTR viaduct; the line closed about 1970, but the viaduct was saved, unlike so many others, and forms part of a network

of cycle ways. There was a similar structure at Llangynwyd, near Maesteg; I'm not sure if it has survived - I must go and see.

The lower scene is of a stone bridge almost 200 years old, originally carrying both an aqueduct and a horse-tramway to the Oakwood Ironworks (which for much of its life was run by the '*Governor and Company of Copper Mines in England*'). Here the bridge survives as it is the only road access from the west to the upper part of the village. This picture is taken from the middle of the brick viaduct.

The Port Talbot Railway had a short but profitable life (1898-1908) as an independent concern before being taken over by the GWR. It even ran a few passenger trains, continued by the GWR till the 1930s, to Maesteg and Blaengarw. As you go east by train from Port Talbot station you'll see a block of flats on the site of the old PTR passenger station, to the left of the derelict cinema.

The Afan Valley has no surviving railways now; but for its entire length had duplicated lines. Besides the PTR, there were earlier lines of the S. Wales Mineral Railway (one of Brunel's), the Rhondda & Swansea Bay (via S. Wales's longest tunnel), and the GWR itself by a tunnel from Maesteg. All were taken over by the GWR, who feared an attempt by either the Midland or the L&NW to extend their S. Wales lines, using the R&SB and PTR not only to access Rhondda coal, but also as part of a rival route between Swansea and Cardiff. (The R&SB line from Port Talbot to Swansea was both shorter and flatter than the GWR's). Also, the support by the Barry Railway for the proposed Neath, Pontardawe and Brynamman Railway in 1905 was not viewed favourably by the GWR! Both the Midland and L&NW had routes from mid Wales to Swansea. The LNW also had a line to Merthyr & Ebbw Vale, and used the Rhymney Railway to reach its half-mile (!) branch in Cardiff.

A lot of the old rail tracks in the Afan valley are now cycle ways and well worth a visit. There are cycles to hire if you don't take your own, or you can just take an easy walk on the gently rising pathway.

David 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 FEBRUARY for the Spring 2013 issue.

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