

Issue 59 Autumn 2015

Rail Wales

Newsletter of Railfuture in Wales



The new station at Ebbw Vale Town opened in May. This view shows the single terminus platform in the July sunshine with the car park beyond. Photo PK

railfuture

CYMRU | WALES

Welcome

Recent months have seen a number of important announcements affecting the future of rail in Wales. The decision to not delay ('pause' in official language) the electrification of the South Wales main line to Swansea is perhaps the most significant but news has also emerged of First Great Western obtaining a continuation of its franchise until 2019. This should see the company providing services between South Wales, Bristol and London until shortly after the completion of the electrification works in 2019 providing there is no further slippage.

Rail Wales readers will have breathed a collective sigh of relief with the announcement that the FGW electrification was not to be curtailed although there has been some speculation that the overhead wires might terminate at Cardiff. However, the recent construction of a new depot for the electric trains with associated overhead wiring outside of Swansea station (see back page) should soothe concerns that the new service will not extend west of Cardiff.

On top of the above news, which results from decisions made by the UK Government, the politicians and civil servants in Cardiff Bay have been starting to get to grips with the announcement that responsibility for awarding the Wales and Borders franchise in 2018, when the existing Arriva Trains Wales franchise expires, has been devolved. Welsh Transport minister Edwina Hart has set up an advisory group to consider options for operating the new franchise. It is known that the minister wishes to see a 'not for dividend' organisation operating in Wales. This is the option supported by Railfuture Cymru as outlined in its Development Plan but how this might be structured to comply with UK law which requires new franchises to be awarded by competitive tendering provides major challenges which need to be overcome.

An additional element of uncertainty thrown into the mix is the announcement from Mrs Hart that she will not be standing in the May 2016 Welsh Assembly election. Whether her successor will have a similar vision for the future of the railways in Wales remains to be seen.

Add in progress in planning for the Metro integrated transport network for South East Wales (see pages 12-13) and there is plenty of interest for Railfuture members in Wales to discuss at the national meeting in Shrewsbury on October 17th (details below). I hope to meet many of you there.

Peter Kingsbury

NATIONAL MEETING FOR RAILFUTURE CYMRU: MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD

An important meeting to which all Railfuture members based in Wales are invited takes place at Shrewsbury station on Saturday 17th October. The meeting venue will be the station offices accessed via a door on the left hand site of the main entrance as viewed from the car park.

The purpose of the meeting will be to decide on the future structure of Railfuture Cymru/Wales. As a result of the north branch ceasing to function, and the need for Railfuture to have one point of contact within Wales for train operators and the Welsh Government, it is suggested that Railfuture reorganises to have a single branch covering all of Wales. This new branch would replace the former north, Cambrian and south branches, and will put Wales on a similar footing to Scotland which has a single branch. The Cambrian lines would continue to be represented by a region of the new branch.

The new structure can only be introduced with the approval of the Railfuture members in Wales. Hence the calling of the Shrewsbury meeting which will also provide members with the opportunity to hear the latest news on and discuss the proposed franchise which will replace Arriva Trains Wales in 2018. Exciting changes in the way passenger services are provided in Wales are in the pipeline following responsibility for the franchise award being transferred from the Department for Transport to the Welsh Government in 2014. A question and answer session will provide the chance for your thoughts on the changes to be aired and to provide an input into the formulation of future Railfuture policy.

The secretary to the Board of Railfuture Chris Bates will attend the meeting. Chris is currently also acting as temporary national chairman following Chris Brown's decision to stand down for health reasons. Chris Bates will be able to provide a UK-wide perspective on the changes Wales is seeing in passenger service provision.

If a decision is made to move to a single Wales branch, it will be necessary to decide who will manage the new Wales branch. Members will have the task of electing a committee. Nominations are required for the following posts: Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary, Minutes secretary, Membership secretary, Treasurer, Editor of Rail Wales and representatives from the north area and Cambrian region.

The numbers of representatives will be decided at the meeting. If you wish to find out more what the roles involve, please contact John Rogers, e-mail john.rogers@railfuturewales.org.uk in advance. Nominations should be made on the day. However, if anyone is unable to attend and wishes to stand for election, their nomination should be sent to John Rogers no later than midday on the 16th October. Nominees will need to be Railfuture members and have a proposed and seconder. The initial meetings of the new committee are likely to be in Bridgend but the committee will be able to change the venue if desired after it has been formed. Please also contact John if you wish to see a draft paper prepared by the South branch committee to facilitate discussion at the meeting.

The meeting on the 17th October will commence at 11.00 hours and is expected to be completed by 14.00 hours. No refreshments will be provided so please bring a snack if you wish to have lunch before 2 pm.

Peter Kingsbury

Opportunities to help Railfuture Cymru

Apart from joining the new Wales branch committee, there are two opportunities to get involved with and help Railfuture in Wales.

1. Providing news of developments in the rail scene and local campaigns in North Wales. A North Wales news section will improve Rail Wales and provide a service to the members based in this area. You need not have previous experience of writing for publication. Simply someone who has knowledge of what is happening in the northern rail scene and who can jot down some notes will be a great asset to Railfuture Cymru.

2. Railfuture Cymru is seeking a volunteer to manage its website and introduce social media (e.g. Facebook / Twitter) to its on-line presence. Do you enjoy communicating online? Could you help consolidate Railfuture Cymru's digital activities?

If you might be interested in either opportunity, please speak to Peter Kingsbury at the meeting in Shrewsbury on the 17th October or e mail Peter beforehand peter.kingsbury@railfuture.org.uk .

The Busiest Stations in Wales

The Welsh Government publishes statistics on all sorts of topics. One subject of interest is station usage in Wales. The table below provides details of the busiest stations over the period 2011 to 2014

Station	2011-12 Entries & Exits	2012-13 Entries & Exits	Year on year change (%)	2013-14 Entries & Exits	Year on year change (%)
Cardiff Central	11,507,598	11,637,744	1.1	11,739,630	0.9
Cardiff Queen Street	2,488,920	2,495,238	0.3	2,462,700	-1.3
Newport	2,275,362	2,250,258	-1.1	2,291,044	1.8
Swansea	2,148,352	2,162,128	0.6	2,116,490	-2.1
Bridgend	1,578,766	1,547,098	-2.0	1,669,880	7.9
Cardiff Bay	793,382	869,126	9.5	1,019,348	17.3
Pontypridd	873,630	878,656	0.6	861,092	-2.0
Treforest	911,766	834,386	-8.5	824,964	-1.1
Neath	810,020	806,264	-0.5	820,188	1.7
Cathays	755,408	772,586	2.3	806,646	4.4
Caerphilly	678,380	691,516	1.9	698,318	1.0
Bangor	676,858	680,102	0.5	662,970	-2.5
Barry Island	617,212	592,354	-4.0	621,224	4.9
Penarth	589,340	611,822	3.8	599,648	-2.0
Rhyl	633,700	612,004	-3.4	591,130	-3.4
Wrexham General	622,466	615,306	-1.2	590,968	-4.0
Barry	506,272	526,808	4.1	559,104	6.1
Aberdare	537,542	552,436	2.8	557,992	1.0
Merthyr Tydfil	452,706	481,696	6.4	547,026	13.6
Treherbert	512,582	529,676	3.3	541,720	2.3
Other Welsh stations	17,162,000	17,486,680	1.9	18,051,904	3.2
All Welsh stations	47,132,262	47,633,884	1.1	48,633,986	2.1

Source ORR

Some interesting patterns and questions emerge:

1. The dominance of Cardiff Central, which has as many passengers entering and leaving the station as the total number using the next seven busiest stations combined. It is even busier as these figures do not count passengers changing trains

2. The dominance of South Wales in passenger numbers. The busiest station not in the south is Bangor (12th position) followed by Rhyl and Wrexham.

3. The significant flows in the Valleys network including the contributions of three stations that have been opened/reopened in the past 30 years (Aberdare, Cardiff Bay and Cathays).

4. Is Cardiff Bay the busiest unstaffed station (halt) in the UK?

Infrastructure changes

Saltney Junction to Rossett

The £44million scheme to double the line between Rossett and Saltney Junction, Chester should be completed in the autumn and ready for the winter timetable in December.

Ebbw Vale Town

The one and half mile extension from Ebbw Vale Parkway to Ebbw Vale Town opened on 17th May 2015. The new station is located within 'The Works' site - the regenerated area of the former steelworks in Ebbw Vale. It is also home to the Blaenau Gwent Learning Zone and an inclined lift railway, which takes passengers up to the town centre.

The £11.5m Welsh Government funded project provides access to Ebbw Vale town centre and is served by the existing hourly service from Cardiff. The project was delivered by principal contractor The Buckingham Group and delivered in 14 weeks. Key stakeholders included Welsh Government, Arriva Trains Wales, Network Rail, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council and the Buckingham Group.

The station features a brand new building, car park, CCTV, information screens, waiting shelter, help point, ticket vending machine and bicycle storage. The 150m long platform is also capable of taking trains up to 6 carriages in length.

Newbridge to Aberbeeg

The Ebbw Vale frequency enhancement scheme will see improvements to Llanhilleth and Newbridge stations as well as work to double the track between Crosskeys Junction and Aberbeeg Junction. A new track is being laid alongside the existing track to enable the provision of a more frequent service on the Ebbw Vale line. Work to lay the extra track is

expected to be finished this winter. Following this, work will begin to construct the new platforms at Llanhilleth and Newbridge stations. The line will then be re-signalled to allow for a more frequent service in the future. The Ebbw Vale frequency enhancement scheme is a £40m project, funded by Welsh Government.

Swansea IEP Depot

This is almost complete and overhead wires are being installed (see back page). It is used at present for stabling HST trains

Electrification

A storage facility has been set up at Liswerry yard Newport. Consultation is taking place on the replacement of bridges between Severn Tunnel Junction and Marshfield. Lineside vegetation clearance has taken place east of Newport. A few mast bases have been installed between Bristol Parkway and Severn Tunnel.

Cardiff Area resignalling

The new double track section of the Treforest Curve between Cardiff Central and Ninian Park was brought into use on 11th May 2015 when 143605 on 06.45 Coryton to Radyr was the first train over the new section of line.

The Cardiff East resignalling between Cardiff Central and Newport Ebbw Junction was commissioned on 29th June 2015. This included the installation of four high speed crossings. Only two at present are used by passenger trains. All the other crossings between the main and relief lines have been closed with the exception of those at Pengam East which can only be used at 25 mph. A down main to up main high speed crossover would have given more flexibility.

Station Footbridges

New footbridges with lifts have been completed at Pontypridd and Ystrad Mynach. Work is underway for new footbridges with lifts at Machynlleth, Port Talbot, Pontypridd and Llandaf. The ramped footbridge at Chirk has been completed. Preparations are being made at Severn Tunnel Junction.

Harrington Humps

Several stations have had a section of platform raised, with ramps on either side, to provide easier access to trains. These include stations on the Heart of Wales line, Cambrian Coast line, Anglesey and west of Llanelli.

Cardiff Central

The new south entrance building with ticket hall opened at the end of August but the new platform 8 has not yet been completed. A completion date of late 2016 has been stated. The station toilets were also upgraded during August.

Rowland Pittard

Cambrian Lines News

Hourly Services

The introduction of the new Cambrian timetable at the end of May saw the promised increase in the number of services - the so called hourly service although as is now well known this is not a full hourly service but it is nevertheless a vast improvement and much welcomed. Most of the new services are advertised to run between Aberystwyth and Shrewsbury only but it is believed some of the services offer extensions to the service by virtue of the diagramming.

The following examples are reported by our Treasurer David Taylor:-
The 1230 off Aberystwyth couples up to another unit at Shrewsbury to form the 1433 to Birmingham International. Both the 1831 and the 2030 from Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth are actually formed of the rear two coaches of the four car 1709 and 1904 respectively from Birmingham International to Llandudno and Chester both being split in Platform 3 at Shrewsbury. Additionally the 1830 from Aberystwyth to Shrewsbury seems to form the 2032 from Shrewsbury to Crewe. The 0830 from Aberystwyth to Shrewsbury forms the 1027 back from Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth.

Whilst all of this may seem a little complicated it does indicate very good use of resources by Arriva with the prospect of these through trains appearing in the timetable once the robustness of the arrangements have been proven. Credit to Arriva Trains also for making other small

adjustments after it was drawn to their attention that the set forming the 1755 arrival in Machynlleth from Pwllheli formed an empty stock train to Aberystwyth in order to form the 1830 departure from there to Shrewsbury. Passengers are now conveyed on the Machynlleth to Aberystwyth section of this set's journey giving a very useful Pwllheli to Aberystwyth service. As generally expected those trains which had in the past year or so been strengthened by the addition of a two-car set have now reverted to the previous general arrangement for Birmingham bound trains of two-car sets from Aberystwyth and Pwllheli respectively combining at Machynlleth to go forward as four-car trains. In general the same happens in the opposite direction with trains splitting at Machynlleth.

The additional trains between Aberystwyth and Shrewsbury are usually formed of two cars.

Comments have been made in many quarters that the new timetable does not show connections forward from Shrewsbury to Birmingham and London for all the new services and it is hoped that this will be corrected when the next timetable is printed and that the services mentioned in the previous paragraph will be included. The current diagramming of the sets really has to be applauded as making good use of corridor connected multiple unit trains. In general the new service has started quite well and timekeeping is satisfactory. As expected there are now calls for certain gaps to be filled particularly at times of the day when loadings are known to be heavy and it can only be hoped that this will happen in due course. The general shortage of d.m.u. stock is well known and strengthening of trains and provision of additional ones is obviously difficult.

Excursion Trains

Whilst the introduction of the new timetable leaves fewer paths for excursion trains it's good to report that one such train has run this summer when Statesman Rail ran an Aberystwyth - Scarborough excursion on 21st June. The train had one WCRC Class 57 at each end and was piloted in each direction over the Cambrian by the obligatory Class 97 to provide compatibility with the ETCS signalling system.

European Train Control System (frequently referred to as European Rail Train Management System)

Further to the item on this matter in the previous issue of Rail Wales it seems that the designing of an ETCS system suitable for fitting to steam engines is still exercising minds in some quarters. At a recent ORR instigated 'Heritage Operator's Summit' the matter was aired particularly bearing in mind proposed introduction dates for the implementation of the system on the Great Western Main Line out of Paddington and the East Coast Main Line. The matter will be given consideration by the RSSB Group which is to look at how to maintain the sustainability of steam and this will include investigating how ETCS can be fitted to steam locomotives and a separate group has been formed to evaluate ETCS options. So steam may return to the Cambrian once more at some date in the future.

It's strange how infrequently the Cambrian is mentioned these days in any feature on ETCS / ERTMS in the railway press. The spotlight has moved to places where the system is to be introduced in the future. In the meantime the system appears to have settled down well on the Cambrian and has, along with other work carried out, played its part in speeding up journey times to facilitate the running of trains at a greater frequency.

Aberystwyth to Carmarthen Railway Campaign

The campaign for the re-opening of this section of line continues to gather pace and in a letter dated 22nd June this year to the Assembly Member for Ceredigion Elin Jones, Edwina Hart, Minister for Economy and Science in the Welsh Assembly Government, announced that a grant of up to £30,000 would be made available for an initial scoping study to be undertaken in order to develop the scope, cost and work required to develop a business case for the optimum line of route between Aberystwyth and Carmarthen. It is hoped that the findings can be reported this coming autumn. In the meantime well attended meetings continue to be held in towns and villages along the line and support is on the increase. As previously reported our Secretary Dylan Lewis is on the campaign committee.

Barmouth Bridge

There is a possibility that the footpath which is part of Barmouth Bridge and situated on the eastern side of the structure will be closed as part of cost cutting by Gwynedd County Council which apparently contributes £30,000 per annum to Network Rail for the right of way for pedestrians to use the bridge as part of the Barmouth and Mawddach Trail. Any such closure would be a big blow to local residents and visitors alike as the footpath over the bridge has been a big attraction over the years and would mean an 18-mile detour. The Mawddach Trail runs over the bed of the long closed Barmouth to Ruabon line which made a junction with the Cambrian Coast line at Morfa Mawddach (originally known as Barmouth Junction) and the footpath over the bridge is part of the 870 mile Wales coastal path. There are fears that closure of this section of path would adversely affect the local economy. Gwynedd Council is to consult the public with regard to the plan which apparently is part of a £10 million per year cost cutting exercise by the Authority.

Editor's Note: It was reported in the Western Mail in late August that an on-line petition has been started to oppose the withdrawal of funding by Gwynedd Council. This had attracted 20,000 signatures in its first week. Pedestrians used to pay a toll of 90p to cross the bridge but this has not been collected in recent years.

Glyn T. Jones

South East Wales Metro edges closer

Edwina Hart, the Welsh Government minister for Economy and Transport, confirmed on the 30th June that £600 million has been identified as the target for the funding required to deliver the second more substantial phase of the proposed local rail upgrade for south east Wales. The government states that it is now committed to deliver phase 2 of the Metro, the main focus of which will be the electrification of the local rail network. More frequent, faster services are the prize. Phase 1 is currently being implemented and includes the extension of services to Ebbw Vale Town which opened in May 2015.

£125 million of this required funding has been confirmed as comprising the UK government contribution towards the cost of electrification of the Valley lines. European Union funding may provide £150 m of the outstanding sum of £475m required to complete phase 2.

The term 'Metro' has been given to the proposed integrated transport network for South East Wales. Despite the name, no routes running in tunnels under the centre of the major towns in the area are proposed. An indicative route map is shown on the next page of Rail Wales. Some of the routes would be operated by express bus services.

The minister confirmed a contract for delivering the metro is expected to be signed in 2017. The aim is to link this with the new franchise to replace the current Arriva Trains Wales franchise which expires the following year.

One of the key issues currently being examined by civil servants is whether to use traditional 'heavy' rail vehicles on the electrified routes or to provide a light rail network, i.e. trams. Many commentators are arguing that light rail is more suitable given the distribution of population to be served. Light rail would also have the advantage of the potential for street running in town centres.

Peter Kingsbury

Wales Freight Update Summer 2015

Aggregates

There have been two trains with grit stone from Machen the first on 2nd June to Leeds and the second on 5th June to Theale. The branch from Park Junction remains open.

The increased movement of Welsh produced stone from Moreton on Lugg has continued with DBS serving Hayes, Hothfield, Elstow and Radlett and GBRf serving Harlow Mill and occasionally Bury St Edmunds. GBRf works stone traffic from Neath Abbey Wharf which usually consists of a weekly train to Angerstein Wharf in South East London. There was a one off and first load of stone from Neath Abbey Wharf to Colnbrook on 9th June. The DBS worked flow of stone from Wenvoe quarry loaded at Cardiff Docks for Crawley has continued.

There are regular consignments, in containers, of limestone from Hardendale in the Lake District and dolomite from Thrislington in County Durham to TATA Port Talbot.

Wagon load traffic consisting of blast furnace slag recommenced from CELSA Cardiff to Rotherham on 12th June.

Automotive

The Ford engine plant at Bridgend is served daily from Dagenham and there is outward traffic to Dagenham and Valencia (Spain).

Chemicals

The Dow Corning chemical plant at Barry receives inward raw materials including silica sand from France via the Channel Tunnel and its outward traffic in containers is mainly for export via Portbury, Tilbury and Southampton.

Coal and Coke

The movement of coke from Redcar to Margam ceased after 13th February.

The experimental movement of coal tar from TATA Port Talbot to Middlesbrough has continued but not on a regular basis.

Coal traffic from New Cumnock (Scotland) to Penyffordd cement works continues with trains running on a regular weekly basis. However the thrice weekly flow from New Cumnock to Aberthaw power station has ceased.

Aberthaw power station ceased to receive coal from Avonmouth (occasionally Portbury) after 31st March. Welsh coal continues to be received from Cwmbargoed, Onllwyn and Tower Colliery with an occasional train from Newport Docks, usually up to six trains each day.

The weekly movement of coal from Cwmbargoed to TATA Port Talbot and twice weekly services from Onllwyn to Immingham Coal Products Ltd and Cwmbargoed to Earl's cement works have continued to run. The movement of coal from Onllwyn to Scunthorpe ceased after 2nd May. Containerised coal is still moved from Onllwyn to Mossend usually four containers each week. The daily loaded train from Gwaun Cae Gurwen to Onllwyn reduced to twice weekly in June. There was a one off trial coal train from Tower to Immingham on 13th June.

The movement of coal to Uskmouth power station recommenced on 9th March with a train from Newport Docks but the source switched to Portbury from 11th March. However these workings ceased from 31st March.

Coal traffic has not restarted from Cwmgwrach and the two potential sources, Aberpergwm drift and Unity mine, have been mothballed and the line from Neath (Neath and Brecon Junction) remains open but out of use.

Intermodal

There is a daily train worked by DRS except Saturdays from Daventry to Wentloog (Cardiff) with containers for Tesco. A daily train worked by Freightliner, except Sundays, runs from Southampton to Wentloog with imported containers. This train starts at the Maritime Terminal on weekdays and Millbrook on Saturdays. There is also a train on Saturdays again worked by Freightliner with containers from Liverpool to Wentloog that usually carries bulk aluminium and /or wine. Although containers are loaded inbound there are some products which form outward loads from Wentloog including Welsh water and supermarket trolleys.

Nuclear

The only freight traffic on the North Wales main line is occasional nuclear traffic to and from Valley on Anglesey for Wylfa nuclear power station.

Petroleum

The movement of petroleum from Robeston has been secured although the refinery has ceased production and is now only being used as a storage facility. Puma Energy, a subsidiary of commodity trading giant Trafigura Beheer, has taken over the storage facility and Murco's wholesale and distribution business in the UK. Trains continue to run to Bedworth (Coventry), Theale and Westerleigh.

The movement of petroleum and diesel for Green Energy at Cardiff Docks switched from Lindsey to Port Clarence from 8th January and consists of one or two trains weekly. There is the occasional train of fuel oil from Lindsey to Aberthaw power station. The movement of fuel oil from Fawley to Cardiff Canton for Arriva Trains Wales ceased after 27th February

Scrap metal

The weekly train of scrap from Trostre to TATA, Port Talbot ceased after 13th March when the wagons were diverted to move scrap between Aldwarke (Rotherham) and Port Talbot. TATA continues to receive a weekly train of scrap from Swindon and also received a weekly train from Laisterdyke (Bradford) between 16th April and 2nd July. There were one off trains of scrap from Attercliffe on 23rd June and Newport Docks Sims on 24th June. There have been occasional trains of scrap rails from Westbury and from 4th June from Whitemoor.

CELSA continues to receive large quantities of scrap by rail from locations at Attercliffe (Sheffield), Beeston (Nottingham), Exeter, Handsworth, Kingsbury, Lincoln, Rotherham, Saltley (from 21st April), and Swindon. The 200 mile flow from Stockton worked by DCR has continued and there have been occasional trains from Tyne Dock from 20th May.

Scrap has been moved from Beeston, Exeter and Handsworth to Sims at Newport Docks.

Steel and Steel Products

Considerable quantities of steel continue to be moved from Margam and Llanwern to the rolling mills at Corby, Hartlepool, Shotton (Dee Marsh) and Trostre and also steel and tinplate to terminals at Immingham, Middlesbrough, Round Oak, Tilbury and Wolverhampton. A weekly train commenced from Margam to Hull steel terminal on 22nd July. Steel coil is also exported using the Channel Tunnel to a rolling mill in France and a steel terminal at Rotterdam in the Netherlands. There are three weekly trains of tinplate from Trostre to Tilbury

The movement of steel slab recommenced on 23rd February from Scunthorpe to TATA Margam and continued until 3rd April.

In addition to the export of steel coil from Birdport, which is served by daily trains from Margam and Llanwern, there have been movements of coil and slab through Newport Docks when larger vessels are involved. The only movement of steel to Cardiff Docks was on 24th March.

Steel coil and bar is being moved by rail from CELSA Cardiff with terminals being served at Burton on Trent, Mossend (two terminals), Rotherham, and Tilbury. There is a weekly WO company train to Rotherham, and another ThO to Mossend commenced on 16th July.

Timber

Timber continues to be moved from Baglan Bay (Neath), Carlisle, Exeter and Ribbleshead to Chirk. The movement of timber from Teigngrace to Chirk ceased after 1st April.

Wagon repairs

Engineering department wagons are being overhauled at the Colas Cardiff Canton facility and there have been occasional inward and outward trains.

Wagons are also moved in wagon load trains to and from the DBS repair facility at Stoke on Trent.

Rowland Pittard

New First Great Western Franchise

First Great Western has obtained a new franchise for its network which includes services along the South Wales main line.

The new franchise commenced on the 20 September and runs until April 2019 with the possibility of a one year extension. The length of the award is influenced by the forecast timetable for completion of the electrification of the Swansea to London route.

The major change to services between South Wales and London is due in three years' time with the December 2018 timetable. The franchise provides a preview of the quality of service to be provided with the new Super Express trains being built for this route by Hitachi even though the end of 2018 date must be in significant doubt as a result of slippage in the electrification timetable to date.

A best time of 2 hours and 38 minutes for Swansea to London is proposed with a 'typical' time of six minutes slower. The Cardiff to London best is 1 hour 45 minutes and 1 hour 53 minutes 'typical' journey. Some readers will be aware that these times differ little from that achieved in the late 1970's when the HST 125's were first introduced. This was possible as services ran non-stop from Newport to London whereas most services under the wires will call at three or four stops in England before reaching Paddington.

In addition to faster journeys, South Wales will also benefit from a third hourly service at peak times running to Swansea. Off peak, no frequency change is intended, i.e. one/ hour from Swansea, two/hour from Cardiff.

However, one of the less direct benefits of electrification will be felt earlier than the end of 2018 as in May 2017 higher capacity trains should start to operate on the Cardiff - Portsmouth route. These are the diesel turbo trains being displaced from the Paddington suburban services. Sufficient rolling stock should be available to provide some five carriage trains. At present the three carriage class 158 trains that run between Cardiff and Bristol Temple Meads are frequently over-crowded. No change to journey times has been promised, however.

For the privilege of operating services for a further 3.5 years, FGW is paying the UK government £68 million, a modest contribution to the billion pounds plus cost of the electrification of some of its routes.

Peter Kingsbury

FORUM : Your letters

Cambrian line timetable

Sam Braithwaite comments

'I warmly welcome the commencement of the new hourly Aberystwyth to Shrewsbury services on the Cambrian Line which were introduced on the 17th of May, but I would have liked to have seen the new additional services extended past Shrewsbury to locations other than Birmingham such as to Cardiff to provide new direct services between Cardiff and Cambrian Line destinations of which there are none at present.

The extension of the new services on the northern end of the Heart of Wales Line to Crewe seems sensible to improve onward connectivity so I would've thought similar logic should apply to the Cambrian Line. I understand that the issue is due to severe limitations in availability of rolling stock, but I think the point still stands that the absence of any direct services between Cambrian Line destinations and Cardiff is a significant missing link in Welsh long-distance services, and given the Welsh Government's excellent work on the direct Cardiff to Holyhead services, it seems like the Cambrian Line should benefit from similar provision.'

Chester-Rossett redoubling

David Woodward writes

'Although it is fair to mention that all the work is being done at night, this small project to redouble about seven miles of track between Chester and Rossett is taking an age to complete. However, at last there are signs that the ballast has been cleared and it *looks* ready for use. The sad thing is, of course, that the track will not be redoubled all the way to Wrexham as we were originally led to believe it would be a couple of years ago. Wrexham to Chester was originally constructed as part of the route for the GWR expresses from Paddington to Birkenhead: then in 1967, BR cancelled these trains following completion of that part of the West Coast route electrification, putting all its eggs in one basket. Since then the Wrexham-Chester section was singled, at least partly to make space for the A483 to be converted to dual carriageway. This crosses the railway near Wrexham on a high bridge whose pillars were set too closely together to allow space for redoubling of the railway track!'

Feedback on Rail Wales 58 from Jeremy Evered

‘It is nice to see the picture of a more utilised Pontypridd station but sad to see it only partially used. This is a gem amongst the ‘bus stop’ constructions of the other Valley Lines stations which are largely unstaffed. I recall a few years ago a passenger from an English city alighted at Knighton and on seeing the existing Victorian building searched in vain for a member of staff and a taxi rank.

The dualling of the Wrexham to Chester line means that the possibility of direct Wrexham to Bangor/Holyhead trains (avoiding Chester) is now a non-starter. Could the Welshpool to Gobowen line via Oswestry ever be reinstated? Station reopenings could include at the old Forden site to serve Montgomery –a possible Parkway? ‘

British Transport Police in Wales

An unpleasant recent rail journey experienced by two relatives of mine prompted me to contact BTP in Wales to ask some pertinent questions. Here are the questions and the verbatim answers.

1. Your website states that BTP has 2,931 officers; South Wales Police [according to publicity posters on the backs of buses] has lost a huge number of officers because of recent cutbacks: has BTP also suffered cutbacks? If so, to what extent?

BTP is fortunate to be experiencing growth at a time when our Home Office colleagues are managing budget cuts.

2. ‘Passenger reassurance: Cardiff Central station.’ This appears as one of your priorities [on the BTP website]. Two ladies recently told me of a nightmare journey involving drunken young men on the last FGW train from Cardiff Central to Bridgend on a recent Saturday night. Not only did the guard/train manager not put in an appearance, but there was no sign of any BTP police at any stage of the journey. I have taken up the business of the guard’s responsibilities with FGW - but why could not the BTP ensure either a presence on such a train or, better still, is there not a policy of preventing obviously seriously inebriated passengers from joining at mainline stations?

BTP is working hard with its rail industry partners and other agencies to tackle alcohol-fuelled anti-social behaviour. Cardiff is a vibrant city with a growing night time economy and, as that grows, so does the demand on policing. There are dedicated patrols at Cardiff Central to provide reassurance and visibility to all passengers and rail staff, and to quickly deal with any anti-social behaviour or public order situations. The railway environment present its own dangers to people who are under the influence of intoxicants, and BTP, working with train operating companies, will make a decision on whether to refuse travel on an individual basis.

3. An employee of FGW recently told me that, in his experience, faced with drunken passengers [rugby?] at say Cardiff Central, the police are more interested in getting them on the train than preventing them from travelling. This seems hardly fair to other passengers.

During event days, crowd management - including loading of trains - is the responsibility of the train operating companies. First Great Western has representatives who work at Cardiff Central on these days. BTP has a significant presence at the station to ensure an efficient and appropriate policing response to incidents that require police intervention. BTP will prevent access to the station to any passengers who are too intoxicated or are involved in other offences such as aggression towards staff or anti-social behaviour.

4. Which Welsh railway stations have a BTP office? Continuously manned? Staffed part-time?

Our main office (and sub divisional headquarters) are at Callaghan Square in Cardiff, adjacent to Cardiff Central station. This is the only 24/7 station in Wales. Our other offices are at Swansea, Newport, Pontypridd, Shrewsbury, Rhyl and Bangor, while we have two satellite stations at Machynlleth and Rhyl. A full list of opening hours and contact details can be found here:

http://www.btp.police.uk/contact_us/btp_stations/wales.aspx

My thanks to Huw Waghorn, media manager [Wales] of BTP for sending me this information. The first three answers were supplied by Chief Inspector Sandra England. If any reader wishes to relate a similar experience or to respond in any way, I am sure our editor will be pleased to hear from you.

John D. Rogers

News Lines

Campaigning: Railfuture Cymru committee members have been busy presenting information and comments to the organisations responsible for providing rail services within Wales.

Comprehensive responses have been sent to Network Rail on its Welsh Route Study and to Arriva Train Wales on its December 2015 timetable. If you wish to receive details of these submissions, please contact Peter Kingsbury (contact details on page 23).

South Wales committee members had a further meeting with Mark Youngman First Great Western's Development Manager-Wales in July following the announcement of the new franchise award. The meeting provided a useful opportunity to ask Mark about details of services to be provided during the franchise before they had been made public.

Free seminar : Railfuture members are invited to attend an event to review progress with the electrification of the railways in South Wales to be held at Cardiff University on 9th February 2016. The seminar is arranged by the Institution of Engineering and Technology and is free. The guest speaker will be Dave Hemmings from Network Rail. Further details can be obtained from <http://www.theiet.org/events/local/224581.cfm> .

Cardiff Central: the bus station outside of the rail station closed on 1st August and the site is currently closed off. Cardiff Council has stated that the replacement bus station on an adjacent site will be completed by early 2018. All the displaced bus services operate from stops within 500 metres of the former bus station apart from National Express coaches which have moved to Sophia Gardens on the north western edge of the city centre. Foster + Partners, the well known practice founded by Norman Foster, has been appointed as architects for the new transport interchange which will include the bus station.

Heart of Wales line : working with the Welsh Government, the Heart of Wales Line Enterprise Network has secured agreement for the construction of a new station building at Llandeilo. The intention is to let this to a business whose location at the station will encourage traffic on the railway. The route has benefitted from additional services since May 2015. Further details of the premises are available from Railfuture South Wales Vice Chairman Mike Watson: mike.watson@railfuture.org.uk .

Thanks are extended to all who contributed to this issue. In all cases, any opinions expressed are those of the contributors, and do not necessarily represent *Railfuture* policy. Material for the next issue – articles, letters, photos or comments – should be sent to the editor, Peter Kingsbury at peter.kingsbury@railfuture.org.uk or by post to 22 Winchester Avenue, Penylan, Cardiff CF23 9BT, by **15th February** for the spring 2016 issue. The editor may edit letters for publication.

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Electrification reaches Wales! The view outside of Swansea station on the 9th September with the masts and booms in place above the tracks leading to the new Hitachi depot for the Super Express trains. In the background an Inter City125, which will be replaced by the new trains, is setting out on its 190 mile journey to London. (photo: PK)

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