

Issue 48 Spring 2010

Rail Wales

*Newsletter of the Welsh branches
of
Railfuture*

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Rail freight to Holyhead?

News of a possible rail freight express service linking northern Europe and Ireland via Holyhead is to be welcomed, and indeed is long overdue. It is scandalous that so many lorries travel across north Wales between Ireland and England while none of the Irish cargo can go by rail. Foreign lorries on the Irish run have caused serious accidents on the A55 road and are a major worry for police, who have uncovered horror stories of overworked drivers falling asleep at the wheel etc. It's unacceptable that north Wales residents should be exposed to such risks, especially when there's capacity on the railway to take goods in much greater safety.

It is envisaged that trains would run via the rail freight terminal at Daventry in the west midlands before proceeding to Holyhead for the ferry to Ireland, and this would require the building of a modern rail freight terminal and storage facilities in Holyhead. The recent closure of Anglesey Aluminium could perhaps open up a new area for a rail freight terminal. The previous one, operational until the 1980s, was squeezed out of the main port to accommodate expanded ro-ro facilities.

European, UK and Irish operators are said to be interested in creating the fast-track 'land-bridge' from France to Ireland as pressure grows for greener and cheaper freight travel.

The terminal could cost between £40m and £70m, depending on the land chosen. Our view is that this cost should be met not from Welsh budgets but with EU and Irish money. We're already doing our bit by paying shadow tolls for the A55 on Anglesey and maintaining the rest of the A55 (one lorry is said to cause the same damage as 100,000 cars).

Transport consortium Taith has placed the proposal top of its priority list for the Rail Transport Plan and held discussions with the Welsh Assembly Government. International consultants AECOM have identified demand from British and continental freight firms and are also investigating the creation of a 'load consolidation centre' at Shotton for industrial operators in Deeside to switch transport from road to rail. They are now preparing business cases for the two projects, which are expected to be completed by March 2010.

We await further developments with interest.

CROESO i'r

CYFARFOD CYFFREDINOL BLYNYDDOL

o Gangen y De

o RAILFUTURE CYMRU.

SADWRN, EBRILL 17, 2010, yng Nghanolfan y Gyfeillion,
Caerdydd (wrth ochr Marks & Spencer).

Cyfarfod arferol y gangen rhwng 1030 a 1230; y cyfarfod blynyddol am 1315. Croeso cynnes i'n holl aelodau i'r 2 cyfarfod, a hefyd croeso cynnes i unrhyw aelod o Railfuture Cymru - ble bynnag ti'n byw! (Ond dim hawl i bleidleisio ar aelodau y pwyllgor nesaf os wyt ti'n aelod o gangen arall). Beth am ddod i weld sut mae'r cangen mwyaf (yng Nghymru) yn gweithredu?!

Yn y pnawn, rydym yn bwriadu lansio ein Cynllun Newydd am ail-drefnu reilffyrdd yng Nghymru, ail drefnu yn llwyr! Anfonir copi o'r cynllun i bob Aelod y Cynulliad ac i bobl pwysig yn y diwydiant. Mae'r Cynllun yn adlewyrchu barn y 3 changen o Railfuture Cymru - felly dewch i wrando ac i drafod!

Am gopi o'r Cynllun 2 neu 3 diwrnod cyn y cyfarfod, anfonwch e-bost at Cadeirydd y Cangen, John Rogers: john.rogers@railfuturewales.org.uk

WELCOME to the

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

of the SOUTH BRANCH

of RAILFUTURE WALES.

SATURDAY, APRIL 17, 2010, in the Quaker Meeting House, 43
Charles St, Cardiff (at the side of Marks & Spencer's).

Ordinary BRANCH MEETING between 1030 and 1230; the AGM at 1315.

A WARM WELCOME to all our members to both meetings - and a warm welcome to any member of Railfuture Wales who lives outside our branch area (though you will have no voting rights when we are electing committee members).

In the afternoon, apart from electing a new committee, we shall be launching our new Plan for Railways in Wales - this is separate from our Development Plan (which is being revised) and puts forward a radical plan to re-organise completely rail transport in Wales. A copy of the proposals, which reflects the views of all three Welsh branches, is being sent to every AM and to various key people in the industry. At the very least, it should provoke thought and discussion! Come along to listen and discuss.

To receive an e-mail copy of the 13-page plan a day or two before the meeting, send your details to the chairman, John Rogers: john.rogers@railfuturewales.org.uk

Next steps for Ebbw Vale line – and other possible re-openings

We welcome news of some further developments, all which are advocated in our own Development Plan, *On Track for the 21st Century*.

In November the Welsh Assembly government announced that it would be proceeding to the next stage of plans to extend the **Ebbw Vale** line from its existing terminus at Ebbw Vale Parkway for one mile to a station nearer to the town, on the site of the former steelworks site, now known as 'The Works'. £6.5m is promulgated as the cost of that part of the plan.

The other part of the plan provides for hourly services from Ebbw Vale to Newport. As well as sorting out the missing crossover at Gaer Junction (Newport), such a train service, which would be additional to the hourly trains to/from Cardiff, would need an additional passing loop, or more likely a 'dynamic loop', to be constructed on the single line section in the valley. This is likely to cost £22m. As we have said many times before (e.g. in *Rail Wales 45*), this would have been cheaper to do at the outset, but that was not to be.

So while this announcement is of course very welcome, there is no certainty at this stage that the scheme will actually go ahead, or that funding will be available. Consequently no date for completion has been announced. But when it does happen, there will still be one more phase of the original scheme to be completed: the rebuilding of one mile of track from Aberbeeg to Abertillery.

Other reopening candidates – good and bad news

Meanwhile, the WAG has announced feasibility studies for two possible reopenings, viz. extending the Cynon Valley passenger service from Aberdare (the present terminus) to **Hirwaun**, and reopening the Amlwch branch on Anglesey as far as **Llangefni**, the county town. That would require a new service between Bangor and Llangefni. The possibility of eventually running to Amlwch is not discounted.

Less welcome news is that Gwynedd County Council is continuing to sell land adjacent to the former railway (mostly now a cycle track) between Bangor and **Caernarfon** (also a county town), despite Taith's Regional Transport Plan earmarking Bangor-Caernarfon as a route for eventual reopening. Gwynedd CC are reported to have said *“establishing a rail link which connects Caernarfon with the North Wales coast railway line has been identified as a long-term aspiration set out in the RTP for North Wales. With the number of rail passengers increasing nationwide, this is certainly a possible option for the future which the council would be willing to consider with the aim of reducing the amount of traffic on our roads. If and when a viable scheme presents itself, it would be considered in accordance with the council's usual procedures. No potential schemes have been submitted, and, as a result, this parcel of land has been identified as an asset which can be disposed of on the open market.”*

This approach contrasts strongly with that adopted to achieve the Ebbw Vale line reopening, where the councils concerned were the principal movers in getting the scheme underway. Waiting for someone else to do it sounds more like a counsel of despair! It seems that lessons learned in one part of Wales are being ignored in another. It also begs the question of what is the purpose of the RTPs if even securing the trackbed for such an aspiration cannot be achieved?

A welcome service extension

A service enhancement introduced at the timetable change last December is the extension of some north Wales – Manchester trains to/from **Manchester Airport**. Unfortunately to start with there is only a single train each way between the airport and Llandudno, with two more services operating only to/from Chester. It is hoped that the service can become hourly in due course.

Fares round-up

The 'headline' fare for Arriva Trains Wales is that from Pontyclun to Prestatyn and it is the same fare for all stations to the west of these places such as Fishguard Harbour to Holyhead. The fare this year is £72.30 return (a reduction of 30p) and there is now a first class fare available at £193.60 which includes breakfast and

evening meal on *The Welshman*. It is confusing that these fares are referred to as 'off-peak' fares whereas they are valid throughout the day, and are in fact 'anytime' fares.

The Freedom of Wales Flexipass fares have risen. The 4-in-8 day all-Wales pass has risen from £74.00 to £78.00 thus keeping it ahead of the 'headline' fare. The cost of the South and North Wales 4-in-8 day passes has risen from £50.00 to £53.00.

Most journeys to London have become more expensive. From Holyhead the standard class 'anytime' fare is £250.00 and the 'off peak' fare £76.00, with the first class 'anytime' at £388.00. From Aberystwyth the standard class fares are 'anytime' £225.00/£269.00 and 'off peak' £61.00/66.00. Finally from Milford Haven the standard class 'anytime' fare is £234.00, 'off peak' £88.00 and 'super off peak' £72.70, while the first class 'anytime' fare is £349.00 and 'off peak' £219.00. There are cheaper fares from South Wales to London Waterloo via Salisbury with an additional journey time of at least one hour in each direction but no time restrictions. For an even longer journey Chiltern fares from Shrewsbury and Hereford also provide a cheaper option than some FGW and Virgin fares.

The foregoing indicates how First Great Western is even more complicated with a three-tier fare structure which was introduced in May 2009, with extensive time restrictions. The 'off peak' ticket was increased by 20% and the 'super off peak' ticket became the regulated fare but available on considerably fewer trains. The 'off peak' tickets however do have some easements for stations west of Swansea. The 'super off peak' ticket is however available all day on Saturdays and Sundays. In an attempt to provide partial compensation for the massive increases, especially in the 'off peak' fares, FGW decided in 2009 to make single fares for those tickets exactly half of the cost of a return ticket enabling mixing and matching of the two off-peak fares to take place. The mixing and matching could also take place with advance purchase tickets thus enabling a person to book in advance for an outward journey and have a walk on fare for the return journey. This apparently was so popular that FGW has now increased the cost of the single tickets from January 2010 by 16% to become 58% of the return ticket so once again abstracting more money from passengers.

The 'over 55' fares, with one month's validity, which companies such as FGW and Scot Rail marketed in 2008 for limited periods continued to be provided in 2009. These are available for purchase on the day of travel with some time restrictions usually similar to those for off peak tickets. They have been popular and well received, giving flexibility of travel for many who have no time restrictions and can travel on impulse or for last minute family demands. Railfuture, nationally, congratulated the companies concerned in providing this more flexible travel opportunity for the over 55s.

Arriva Trains Wales joined the 'over 55' club in 2009 with a fare of £15 available from 6th September to 12th December, and with £2 discount for senior railcard holders. In an innovative development Arriva Trains Wales provided add-on fares in cooperation with adjoining train operating companies. These included a one-off £5.00 for First Great Western to Worcester, Kemble, Warminster and Taunton which is not available in 2010, and £10.00 with Cross Country from Cheltenham to Birmingham, £5.00 with London Midland from Crewe to Liverpool, £1.00 with Northern for the Manchester suburban network including Blackrod, Littleborough and New Mills Central, and £1.00 for the Merseyrail network. Arriva Trains Wales and the associated companies are to be congratulated on this initiative which has proved to be very successful and Railfuture Cymru/Wales hopes that it will become a regular feature. ATW have announced that the tickets will be available from 10th January to 19th March 2010, but FGW have not re-introduced their 'over 55' fares in 2010.

However FGW's offering in 2009 had a more restricted autumn duration to avoid the 'over 55' tickets being used during the Christmas holiday period. In 2009 the tickets were on sale from 1st February to 7th April and from 6th September to 13th November and cost £25.00, with a discount of £5.00 for senior railcard holders. It is great to see co-operation taking place between train operators and for an extra £5 the FGW ticket could be extended to be used on all Arriva Trains Wales services to Llandeilo and Ludlow and all stations to the south including Milford Haven and Gloucester.

The range of 'Plus bus' fares has increased and these are usually good value. They are a recommended purchase for Welsh residents using senior railcards when travelling in England where

their bus passes are not accepted. Perhaps Railfuture should support a campaign for bus passes to have all-British validity.

Rowland Pittard

Never had it so good...

In commenting on current and planned passenger timetables, Railfuture is rightly concerned to argue for improvements wherever possible, whether to enhance service frequency, improve journey times, or simply to secure better connections. In so campaigning, there is however some danger that we may be seen as unappreciative of what we already have, of forgetting to recognise that today's timetables are in most cases already better than they have ever been before. Nowhere is this more evident than in the transformation of what we still tend to refer to as "the Valley Lines" into a genuine interurban commuter network.

We have to remember of course that, although these lines offered passenger services from the start, they were built primarily to carry heavy freight, in particular the products of the coal and iron industries. For most of their history, freight was the big revenue earner for the railways, and passenger trains relatively few. In an era when most people lived, worked, shopped and took their recreation within their own locality, there was in any case no great demand for frequent services to and from the "big city". Until 1953 there was no attempt at any form of regular interval service, and real growth came only with the introduction of diesel trains from 1958. This however was soon to be stifled by the negativity of the Beeching era, with wholesale line and station closures, until stemmed by the introduction of revenue subsidies allowing the remaining network to be stabilised in the 1970s.

Even then, the prevailing mood in railway management remained negative, with services steadily eroding. Service levels declined to a low in the Summer timetable of 16 May to 30 September 1983, but perhaps the catalyst for change was the brave decision of the then South Glamorgan County Council to fund a new station at Cathays, which opened in October of that year and was an immediate success, attracting significant new levels of usage to the Valleys trains. From that point on, service levels have improved in leaps and bounds, and as a means of quantifying this,

the table below speaks volumes. What it shows is the number of passenger trains timetabled over each section of line on Mondays to Fridays nowadays, as compared to that bleak timetable of 1983:

| <i>Section between</i> | <i>No. of SX trains ATW today</i> | | <i>No. of SX trains BR summer 1983</i> | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----|--|----|
| | Down | Up | Down | Up |
| Treherbert/Pontypridd | 31 | 30 | 18 | 18 |
| Aberdare/Abercynon | 29 | 29 | 0 | 0 |
| Merthyr Tydfil/Abercynon | 30 | 31 | 15 | 15 |
| Abercynon/Pontypridd | 61 | 60 | 17 | 17 |
| Pontypridd/Taffs Well | 92 | 92 | 33 | 32 |
| Taffs Well/Radyr | 93 | 92 | 34 | 33 |
| Radyr/Central via City Line | 30 | 29 | 0 | 0 |
| Radyr/Llandaff | 91 | 90 | 34 | 33 |
| Llandaff/Queen Street | 91 | 90 | 36 | 35 |
| | | | | |
| Rhymney/Bargoed | 18 | 18 | 13 | 13 |
| Bargoed/Ystrad Mynach | 51 | 51 | 16 | 16 |
| Ystrad Mynach/Aber | 51 | 53 | 21 | 22 |
| Aber/Caerphilly | 51 | 53 | 24 | 25 |
| Caerphilly/Queen Street | 55 | 58 | 24 | 25 |
| Coryton/Queen Street | 29 | 29 | 12 | 12 |
| | | | | |
| Queen Street/Central | 175 | 177 | 66 | 63 |
| Queen St/Cardiff Bay | 87 | 87 | 13 | 12 |
| | | | | |
| Central/Grangetown | 120 | 119 | 47 | 48 |
| Grangetown/Penarth | 57 | 57 | 22 | 23 |
| Grangetown/Barry | 63 | 62 | 25 | 25 |
| Barry/Barry Island | 45 | 44 | 21 | 22 |
| Barry/Bridgend | 18 | 18 | 0 | 0 |

It should be noted particularly that, back in 1983, there were no services at all on the Aberdare line, the City Line or the Vale of Glamorgan line, whilst the branches to Cardiff Bay (then called

Cardiff Bute Road) and Coryton were limited to just a small number of peak-time services. Across the Valleys network, service levels today are generally at least double, in some cases triple what they were. The exceptions are the topmost end of the Rhymney Valley, which remains poorly served with its one train per hour, and the Treherbert line, where the service is as good as it can get given the constraint of the long single track section above Porth, with only a single passing loop where all trains must cross.

For the time being, any further significant enhancement of service levels is unlikely, given that the line between Queen Street North Junction and Cardiff Central is for most of the day working at its maximum theoretical capacity, with a train in each direction every five minutes. The signalling requires a minimum of three minutes headway between trains, and with a 90-second platform dwell time, each train has only a half a minute to spare if punctuality is to be maintained. It is to the great credit of both ATW and Network Rail people that such an ambitious timetable is successfully operated, day in and day out, and we should applaud their efforts – and, remembering that the trains themselves are nearly 25 years old, we should give credit to the skills of Canton depot too.

Paul Jeffries

Cambrian Lines news

Through services to and from London

As far as we are aware the outcome of Arriva Trains Wales' application to run services from the Cambrian Lines to London Marylebone is still not known. What is known however is that there have been strong objections from other train operating companies to the proposals. As hinted in the previous issue of Rail Wales one of the strongest objections has come from the Wrexham Shropshire and Marylebone Railway, which received the support of the Welsh Assembly Government to set up its own operation. Whilst there is a great deal of praise for the quality of their services, it is a great pity that they object to through London

services by another company and from another part of Wales when the demand for such a service is clearly there. We can but hope that Arriva's application will be approved and that there will be co-operation, where possible, between the train operating companies. This example simply shows that whatever the advantages of privatisation might be there are still many problems to be ironed out in order to give the best service to passengers.

Service punctuality

There have been a few delays here and there which inevitably receive a great deal of publicity owing to the tremendous inconvenience that can be caused to those affected. Other than that services have run reasonably well.

Refurbishment of stock

The railway press has, in recent months, carried reports of refurbishment of Arriva Trains Wales Class 158's. There is some evidence of work having been carried out and in general trains are reasonably well presented, especially ex-depot. However this work falls far short of the complete refurbishment which trains of this age and mileage really need.

ERTMS

Work continues on the installation of the European Rail Train Management System, special trains appearing from time to time for testing purposes. The latest forecast for commissioning of the first section between Harlech and Pwllheli is March 2010, the date having been put back from the half term week in February. We look forward to the full implementation of this system and other improvements such as additional passing loops and the small amount of line doubling and hope that they bring with them the promised benefits including the long-promised hourly service.

Summer Steam

Comments have previously been made about the possible effects of ERTMS on the summer steam services. One source indicates that the service will run again this year, over a slightly extended season, from Monday 26th July to Friday 3rd September. At the time of writing (late January) however, West Coast Railways advertises the proposed services on its web site with the proviso that the timetable and route are still to be confirmed. But other sources suggest that a steam locomotive is to be fitted with ERTMS equipment.

Publicity

The line's Rail Development Officer Gerwyn Jones continues to find new ways of giving publicity to the railway's role in this part of Wales and thereby encourage people to use it.

Glyn Jones

Information malaise

The gradual equipping of nearly all stations with visual train running information systems is commendable in theory, but in practice the performance of these systems sometimes leaves much to be desired. In fact, they work at their optimum when trains are running on time. It is when delays occur that the information systems can let passengers down – just at the times they need it most!

Many members will have experienced the phenomenon of a train which is late (whether described as such or not) just disappearing off the screen at the time it was predicted to arrive. Not only that, but the screen then shows the 'next departure' from that platform. This of course is at best confusing, and at worst could result in passengers boarding the wrong train, or even deciding not to travel if the service frequency is low, e.g. next train not expected until an hour hence.

It might be argued that in some ways the wrong information is worse than none at all, but this is not a plea to scrap the systems; rather to get to the bottom of the problem and put matters right – hardly a ‘big ask’ in the IT world in which we live!

Stations modernisation in prospect

In February it was announced that £85m will be made available to upgrade stations in Wales between now and 2014. Reference was made in *Rail Wales* 47 to work at Newport having commenced, and it will be Swansea’s turn next. Users of the station at Wales’s second city will utter a heartfelt ‘about time too!’ but will be rewarded, eventually, with a station including refurbished platform canopies, a renovated station frontage and larger concourse. The latter will provide space for more shops and a bigger café, and easier access to other facilities including toilets, booking office and taxi rank. There will be glass walls to let in plenty of light. Cctv systems will be upgraded to improve passenger security.

All good stuff, and to be welcomed, but it's a pity that when Swansea’s bus station rebuilding was being planned it was not decided to relocate it to the railway station to provide a proper public transport interchange.

Consultation documents continue apace....

....and here are some recent ones to which *Railfuture* has responded. The four Welsh regional transport consortia submitted their first five-year **Regional Transport Plans** to Welsh Assembly Government on 30th September 2009, following extensive consultation. Each RTP was accompanied by an Environmental Assessment which was usually larger than the RTP itself. The Welsh Assembly Government will assess the plans and when they are finally approved will lay them before the Assembly for statutory adoption. The transport plans will form the basis for the allocation of funding for transport schemes. In December WAG informed the consortia of their indicative capital funding allocation range for 2010-11 and asked them for detailed costed programmes.

Railfuture was represented at the consortia's public launches of each of the regional transport plans.

Our '**Plan for the Progressive Electrification of the Railways of Wales**' was issued in 2009 as a response to the Network Rail's consultation for the Electrification Route Utilisation Strategy. We welcomed the subsequent adoption by SEWTA of the suggestion for the electrification of the complete Cardiff Valleys network. Subsequently it was announced that the next major electrification scheme will be the electrification of the Great Western main line for London to Swansea. This was warmly welcomed by *Railfuture*.

We responded to the consultation on Network Rail's **Great Western Route Utilisation Strategy** which closed in the autumn. The branches suggested that there should be a restoration of services from Wales to the West of England and the South Coast.

We made written and oral submissions to the WAG **Enterprise and Learning Committee** inquiry in to Rail Infrastructure in Wales. That committee issued its report in January. It is a far-reaching document, culminating in 20 recommendations, many of which represent developments which *Railfuture* has advocated, both in our Development Plan and in our submissions to this committee. They include electrification, plus of course new trains, for the Valley Lines network, and light rail networks for Cardiff, Swansea and Newport. Some reopening/rebuilding of closed lines would be investigated, and in other cases an enhanced Traws Cambria bus service would fill in gaps in the rail network. Several recommendations relate to improving existing services. Plugging in Wales to any new High Speed lines in England is advocated. Greater devolution of powers (equivalent to those of the Scottish government) is considered desirable so that Wales can set its own priorities for the rail network.

Undoubtedly this is an ambitious plan which would take several decades to implement. At this stage it is a committee report, not actual WAG policy; many of its proposals have been put forward before (and one might say some of them are well overdue for implementation); and it is issued at a time when political parties are trying to out-do each other on financial cutbacks. It is to be warmly welcomed however as a long-term vision for rail

development – provided of course that it leads to implementation of a significant part of that vision.

Rowland Pittard and Peter Clark

Remodelling of Severn Tunnel Junction completed

A major closure of the lines at Severn Tunnel Junction from 22.30 on 24th December 2009 to 03.30 on 4th January 2010 saw the relocation of the junction at the east end of the station between the Severn Tunnel and Gloucester lines to the west end of the station. A new up Tunnel line and platform (number 4) was brought into use at the station and the up relief line from Newport was extended to connect with this line. New signalling between Patchway and Newport East Usk was also brought into use on 4th January and control of this section of the line was transferred from Newport Panel box to the new South Wales Control Centre at Cardiff West. The siding with the containers housing the tunnel rescue vehicles was relocated together with two new cripple sidings near the M4 overbridge. The connection between these sidings and the up relief line was brought into use on 4th January. Thirty two engineers' trains were provided during the closure period.

In addition the lines between Severn Tunnel Junction and Bristol Parkway were closed completely on Saturdays and Sundays from 21st November to 20th December for preparatory work including the realignment and relaying of the up main and up loop at Severn Tunnel Junction and the down main and down loop which was shortened at Pilning. Trains were diverted via Gloucester. The lines between Severn Tunnel and Gloucester were closed on Saturdays and Sundays from 9th to 31st January to complete the removal of the junctions at the west end of Severn Tunnel Junction, and the Severn tunnel was closed on Saturday nights until noon on Sundays during the same period for further signalling work.

Services provided during the blockade

During the period of closure no passenger or freight services ran between Newport and Bristol/Gloucester. Arriva Cross Country services from Nottingham to Cardiff terminated at Gloucester.

Maesteg/Cardiff to Cheltenham services terminated at Newport with no Sunday services but with hourly services on weekdays. Paddington to Swansea services terminated at Bristol Temple Meads after calling at Bristol Parkway. Portsmouth Harbour/Taunton to Cardiff trains terminated at Bristol Parkway

The train services were amended over the period with interesting diversions by FGW via Hereford with probably the first booked HST services between Newport and Abergavenny/Hereford.

Eight HSTs stabled at Swansea to provide the revised service from 27th December to 3rd January. Four HSTs were used for an hourly shuttle between Swansea and Newport and two were used daily for services beyond Newport, leaving two spare each day. On 27th December the 08.30 Swansea-Newport ran empty to Hereford and there was a 16.08 Swansea-Paddington via Hereford. In the return direction there was a 14.42 Paddington-Swansea and empty stock from Hereford formed the 23.28 Newport-Swansea. From 28th to 31st there were through trains at 03.31 and 03.58 from Swansea to Paddington via Hereford and in the reverse direction empty stock from Hereford formed the 23.10 and 00.35 Newport-Swansea.

On 1st January the 06.28 Swansea-Newport continued empty to Great Malvern and the 10.28 Swansea-Newport to Hereford. In the reverse direction, sets off the 08.22 and 18.21 Paddington-Hereford formed the 13.25 and 23.10 Newport-Swansea. On 2nd there was an 04.20 empty stock working to Hereford and 17.28 Swansea-Paddington. In the reverse direction there was empty stock from Hereford at 20.20 and 22.00, the latter forming the 23.36 Newport-Swansea. The workings were more complex on 3rd when the 07.28 Swansea-Newport worked forward empty to Hereford, the 09.30 Paddington-Carmarthen, 14.42 Paddington-Swansea and 16.08 Swansea-Paddington ran via Hereford.

The first train to call at the new platform 4 was the 06.30 Cardiff to Portsmouth Harbour, and the first train to use the new up main line was 03.38 HST from Swansea to London Paddington.

Station improvements

The station facilities at Severn Tunnel Junction have been considerably improved. For many years it has presented a forlorn appearance with things just being 'patched up', notwithstanding large increases in passenger numbers. In addition to the re-instated platform 4, there are now new passenger information systems on each platform (including aural announcements), new waiting shelters on each platform (overcoming previous flooding problems), some new signage and a flat screen giving up-to-date train running information. It is hoped that the latter will also include the local no. 62 bus. There was some confusion to begin with however, as the previous notice about which trains serve which platforms was still on display at the entrance to the footbridge steps. This was rectified a few days later. A useful meeting was held with the ATW station manager at which the need for good clear signage at what is mostly an unstaffed station was emphasised.

Development of Severn Tunnel Junction as a 'park and ride' site is favoured by Monmouthshire County Council and could lead to better public transport generally in south Monmouthshire, with more trains and better integration with bus, cycle and walking routes. But much more car parking space would be needed than that currently available.

Bus replacement services

The pattern of replacement bus services generally followed the train timetable but with, of course, extended journey times. Thus buses ran hourly to Bristol Parkway, hourly to Newport and two buses per 3 hours to Chepstow and Gloucester, for forward connections to the rail network. All buses used the Rogiet Pool stop on the B4245 road. That this was the stop for rail replacement buses was not altogether clear to begin with but, commendably, staff were deployed to give information and help to passengers throughout the blockade period, and staff were also present at Longfellow Road, Caldicot, for Caldicot passengers. In due course large posters appeared at Rogiet Pool bus shelter confirming it as the stop for rail replacement buses. Also making an appearance on the station were posters with maps showing the bus services, so all-in-all the operation was well co-ordinated, and in our experience worked well, despite poor weather conditions at times. But there

was some overcrowding at popular times, e.g. when there are normal two scheduled trains westwards from Severn Tunnel Junction in close succession. This point was to be raised with other matters at a FGW meeting in February where the blockade bus provision will be reviewed. This is important as there will be more blockades in coming years as further modernisation, electrification and Gloucester line re-signalling take place, plus of course the routine maintenance of the Severn tunnel.

Freight service arrangements

A reduced freight train service operated during the period of closure and trains were diverted via Hereford and Shrewsbury Abbey Foregate curve, with a few returning petroleum trains via Ledbury. The diverted oil trains from Robeston to Westerleigh were the longest trains to be diverted. Two London-bound services were diverted via Shrewsbury and Bescot, the 18.10 Newport-Wembley enterprise service on 29th (and its return on 30th) and the 12.28 Margam-Dollands Moor steel coil train for France on 3rd January. There were no diversions on 27th December, the first on 28th being the 16.51 Margam-Hartlepool. The 29th was the busiest day with, in addition to those already mentioned, the following engineers' trains: 07.45 and 10.45 Severn Tunnel Jct.-Bescot, and 04.23 and 08.51 Bescot-Severn Tunnel Jct. The regular services to Warrington and the engineers' train from Newport to Crewe and back ran during this period but there were no steel trains to Dee Marsh.

Rowland Pittard and Colin James

Footnote: *a personal reflection from Colin James:*

“On a nice sunny morning in August 1961 myself and family were on platform 4 at Severn Tunnel Junction (en route to Brixham) waiting for the 8.42 a.m. train to Kingswear. Along came the 10-coach packed train with a grimy Cardiff Canton ‘9F’ 2-10-0 at its head. Now, almost 50 years later, platform 4 is open again! Decline has gone and now we have to manage expansion. As ever, we have to be wary of the ‘hawks’; there is going to be a need to justify major capital outlay when we compete with other spending departments. Electrification is not far away! Perhaps new rolling stock for regional services? Electrification of the valleys network? More freight on rail? Exciting days ahead!”

Whatever happened to Labour's 10-year transport plan?

Remember when Tony Blair was elected in 1997? What euphoria – I remember being elated! – at last the transport lobby would have some backing from the government. This was only tinged with disappointment that the new administration hadn't formed a commission to make recommendations over which closed railway lines should be reopened.

It seemed that we had indeed reached a turning point and John Prescott, Deputy PM and Transport Minister produced an exciting White Paper: *Labour's Ten Year Transport Plan – Changing the Way We Live*. Had it worked it would have changed everything but, alas, it didn't.

The new realism adopted in the white paper recognised that the previous policy of building more and more roads was no good – they just filled up, and the completion of the M25 in 1986 confirmed this. Transport economists were at last becoming aware that increasing road capacity just increases demand. Prescott achieved agreement on radical changes. These included holding back on roads while the situation could be assessed, defining integration, introducing road charging and increasing spending on public transport. Furthermore he managed to get the treasury to agree that the congestion tax could be ring-fenced for public transport spending. The paper produced in 1998 included the plans for congestion charging and urban centre parking charges. Biking and walking would be backed, making it less attractive for people to drive. Prescott even produced a bus 'summit': sexing up the bus, 'club class' buses, a contest for new bus design, bus stops and integration centres run by private companies.

The detail of the paper which was finalised in 2000 was something of a disappointment: a 50% reduction in road spending, 8 cities to introduce congestion charge, 12 cities to develop parking charges, 8-12 light rail schemes and more commuter trains. The fuel protest really did for these proposals; here in west Wales we remember the boys backed up in front of Elf Gates here at the Milford Haven refinery. Also the government had singularly failed to get any local authorities on board, a situation that was clarified by the failure at

the Manchester referendum in 2008 and the lack of finance to extend or provide new light rail, which was to have been paid for by the congestion charges. Prescott himself left transport in 2001 and his replacements were short-tenure appointments without the fire and conviction to see the proposals through. 7 million new cars came on the roads during the period between 2000-2010 and from the foresight which had been outlined by Prescott we were left with turning the breakdown lanes on motorways into extra width as transport policy.

Truly an opportunity missed and squandered. Whether it could be electorally acceptable remains to be seen – paying for the bankers may be an opportunity!!

Guy Hardy

Welsh rail freight update (*January 2010*)

Infrastructure

DBS train crew moved from Margam Depot to Margam Yard from 22nd November. The wagon repair shops at Margam have remained open but with a reduced staff .A small shed is being erected at Margam Yard for repairs. The Network Rail locomotive maintenance depot at Shrewsbury Coleham was brought into use on 9th November.

A new track layout at Severn Tunnel Junction was brought into use at 03.30 on 4th January 2010 (*see previous article*).

Aggregates

A new service operated by DBS commenced from Neath Abbey Wharf with stone from the RMC quarry at Gilfach, Neath to Leeds Stourton. The first train ran on 11th December followed by a second on 18th. Freightliner-worked trains for Bardon from Neath Abbey Wharf decreased with no trains running in December. The last trains were 23rd November for Theale and 25th November for

Angerstein Wharf. The once or twice weekly trains continue to run from Margam Grange siding to Lea Bridge. The twice-weekly trains from Machen to West Drayton continue to run as do the trains from Moreton-on-Lugg to Hayes. Freightliner continues to work stone trains from Penmaenmawr. Lime continues to be moved by Enterprise services from Hardendale and Thrislington to Margam.

Aluminium

The weekly train from Anglesey Aluminium ran for the last time on 31st October 2009.

Coal

Coal trains recommenced from Newport Docks to Aberthaw on 4th January 2010 but there have been no trains of coal to Uskmouth power station since 6th November. Aberthaw power station continues to receive Welsh coal from Onllwyn and Cwmbargoed and a weekly train, usually on Saturdays, from Tower with coal from Aberpergwm. Aberthaw continued to receive imported coal from Avonmouth and Portbury until 24th December with trains from Portbury recommencing on 23rd November.

Trains with coal for a local coal merchant at Barry ran from Cwmbargoed to Barry Docks on 2nd and 30th November. Containerised coal from Onllwyn continues to Mossend in Scotland. Freightliner coal trains from Avonmouth West Wharf and Portbury to Fiddlers Ferry and Rugeley continue to use the Marches line. The new Freightliner class 70 locomotives were first used on 1st December when 70002 worked a coal train to Rugeley via Abergavenny.

Car Components

There is a daily service using Enterprise trains from Bridgend Fords siding to Dagenham and Valencia (Spain)

Chemical traffic

The only remaining traffic in Wales is to and from Barry Dock for Dow Corning and includes some international traffic. There is a thrice weekly service from Newport to Barry Docks.

Container traffic

A daily train runs between Southampton and the Wentloog terminal at Cardiff worked by Freightliner. There is also a thrice weekly service from Didcot. However the container traffic from Tilbury worked by DBS on Enterprise services to Wentloog has ceased, but it still continues to Barry Docks

Petroleum

Trains continue to run from Robeston to Bedworth (1 train a week), Theale (3 trains a week) and Westerleigh (5/6 trains a week). There have been no trains recently to Kingsbury. Occasional trains with fuel oil run from Lindsey to Aberthaw power station.

Military traffic

A number of trains ran in the autumn conveying vehicles used for training purposes at Castlemartin.

Nuclear Waste

Trains continue to run as required between Valley and Cumbria.

Scrap Metal

This still forms a significant part of rail traffic in South Wales. Rail company Advenza ceased operating on 30th September and Direct Rail Services took over its scrap metal services from 14th October. DRS has worked trains from Shipley, Stockton and Tyne Dock to Cardiff for CELSA. The first train from Tyne Dock ran on 26th November.

DBS continues to work scrap traffic to Cardiff for CELSA from Attercliffe, Beeston, Brierley Hill, Handsworth, Handsworth Queens Head, Kingsbury, Lincoln, Newport Docks, Rotherham, Saltney, Swindon and St Blazey, usually weekly but more frequently from Rotherham. There have been no trains from Swindon since the spring and from Beeston since 5th December. The only recent trains from Newport Docks ran on 13th and 20th November

Trains of scrap metal from Handsworth to Margam Grange siding for Corus, recommenced on 11th November with one or two trains

each week. Two trains of scrap metal have run from Handsworth Queen Head to Sims Newport Dock on 10th and 18th December. There has been a one off train of scrap from Brierley Hill to Barry Docks Dunn Bros. which ran on 24th December

Steel

The No 4 Margam blast furnace was brought back into use in November. The P-field siding at Margam was brought back into use for loading slab for Llanwern on 1st November and up to five trains are now running each day to Llanwern Trains of slab from Lackenby to South Wales have ceased. The last train ran to Margam on 10th October and the last train to Llanwern on 26th November.

An interesting new development has been the movement of steel coil which has been moved by rail from Margam (via Llanwern) and Llanwern to Cardiff Docks for export. The first train ran from Llanwern on 16th December. Also during December steel bar and billets were moved from CELSA by rail to Cardiff Docks for export to Australia. After no trains since 6th August, the movement of steel coil recommenced to Newport Docks on 28th November. Block trains conveying steel coil from Margam and Llanwern run to Corby 1/2, Hartlepool 1, Mauberge (3 trains a week). Round Oak (3 daily), Swindon (2 trains a week), Shotton 1/2, Trostre 1/2 and Worcester (1 a week). Steel coil is also moved on Enterprise trains to Immingham, Tees for Middlesbrough and Warrington for Liverpool Docks.

The thrice weekly trains of reinforcing steel and bar from CELSA Cardiff Tidal sidings to Rotherham ceased on 10th October and the traffic is now moved by Enterprise services

Timber

Scottish timber is conveyed by rail daily to Chirk.

Rowland Pittard

Compiler's notes

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

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

Material for the next issue - be it a letter, a comment or article – should be sent the compiler at 84 North Street, Abergavenny NP7 7ED; email: peter.clark@railfuturewales.org.uk, to arrive by 31st JULY for the Autumn 2010 issue.

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

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