

Issue 49 Autumn 2010

Rail Wales

*Newsletter of the Welsh branches
of
Railfuture*



Class 158 units to be refurbished (*page 6*)

William Madron Price

1945 – 2010

We are sorry to report that our member Bill Price died on 23rd April.

Bill grew up at St. Athan in the Vale of Glamorgan. A schoolteacher by profession, he married Marion in 1970 and they made their home in Llantwit Major. Thus when Bill joined RDS (as it was known then) in 1996, he became interested and heavily involved in our campaign to get passenger trains restored to the Vale of Glamorgan line. He wrote a large part of our book *Rails to the Vale* (now out-of-print), and found several local sales outlets for it. He produced and distributed campaign newsletters and attended many local events with our display board to publicise our aims. He was able to make use of many contacts with decision-makers, including elected representatives, in his local area

By 2000, the local authority and the Welsh Assembly came out in support of reopening, but matters then proceeded extremely slowly. Bill maintained a watching brief during this period. Eventually re-opening happened and Bill, naturally, travelled on the line on the first day of services in June 2005. He kept a close eye on passenger numbers in the following days and weeks, and it soon became clear that the initial heavy loadings were not merely attributable to novelty value, but were being sustained.

Bill's writings in *Rail Wales* amount to a history of the campaign and its successful conclusion; see issues 29, 33, 37, 39 and 41. Reading these articles underlines the debt of gratitude which *Railfuture* owes to Bill – whose own reward was to see and use trains on his local line, something for which he had strived for so long. But as well as campaigning, he was committee minutes secretary for several years, and more recently had been undertaking the distribution of *Rail Wales*, right up to the last issue.

The funeral service was held in the 13th century parish church of St. Illtud, where Bill had been a bell ringer for many years. *Railfuture* was represented by John Rogers (South Wales branch chairman) and Peter Clark. We offer our sincere condolences to Bill's wife Marion, his sons and his grandchildren.

Rail to the rescue!

The eruption of Eyafjakkajokull volcano in Iceland and the associated ash clouds disrupted UK airline activity with a prolonged period of suspension between 15th and 20th April. An increased number of foot passengers used the ferries between Ireland and Wales and Arriva Trains Wales and Virgin West Coast responded by providing extra carriages, in some cases as many as eight, on trains to and from Holyhead and Fishguard Harbour. Arriva Trains Wales also provided an additional daily train from Holyhead.

The train companies received details of the number of foot passengers traveling from the ferry companies, thus ensuring that sufficient accommodation was provided on the connecting trains. In most cases the train companies provided refreshments on the trains. ATW also provided an additional conductor on the trains from Fishguard Harbour, to assist with ticket sales and train connection information.

The two daily boat trains from Fishguard Harbour were increased from 2 to 6 coaches from 17th to 24th April. The 01.50 from Fishguard Harbour continued to work to Swansea, and the 13.30 to Cardiff except on Sundays when it terminated at Swansea. This involved working additional stock from Cardiff to Swansea for the night trains. Two 'Pacers' (142085/143610) worked 13.27 Fishguard Harbour to Cardiff on 17th May when flights again were cancelled between Ireland and Great Britain. This is the first time this combination has been recorded at Fishguard.

To provide for additional ferry foot passengers at Holyhead, ATW strengthened most trains between Holyhead and at least Chester, and in some cases to Birmingham, Cardiff and Crewe, to at least 4 coaches between 16th and 25th April. In addition an extra train with up to 6 coaches was run daily at 03.00 to Crewe on weekdays. Virgin West Coast provided 2 Voyager sets daily on its 13.58 departure from Holyhead to Euston.

First Great Western did not provide any additional connectional services in South Wales, which led to some overcrowding especially on Sunday afternoons from Swansea. Unfortunately Stena ceased selling rail sail tickets during the period of disruption

although accommodation was available on most sailings for foot passengers.

Railfuture Wales congratulated ATW and Virgin West Coast on their swift response to cater for the extra passengers, and issued a press release alerting the media, including railway magazines, of the effort made by the two companies.

Rowland Pittard

Footnote: *after several years of making ferry/rail interchange at Rosslare less convenient or even impossible, Irish Rail did make some effort during the period of ash disruption, including retarding the departure time of the evening Dublin-bound train from 17.55 to 18.40 to connect with the afternoon ferry from Fishguard which arrives at 18.00. This apparently had little effect; perhaps unsurprisingly since no rail connection is available normally. No additional services were run to cater for passengers to/from Waterford, Limerick and Cork. Yet, ironically, it was the vestigial Waterford – Rosslare service, due for imminent withdrawal, which did carry significant numbers of ferry passenger numbers (50+ on some occasions)!*

Cambrian Lines news

Service Performance

Punctuality continues at a good level on Cambrian Lines with Arriva Trains Wales showing an overall year-on-year improvement of 1.7%.

Through services to and from London

According to reports Arriva will not be appealing against the decision of the ORR to refuse permission for the running of through trains between Aberystwyth and London Marylebone. Since then of course both Arriva and WSMR, who were one of the main objectors, have become part of the same group under the wings of their parent company, DB Shenker, and it may well be that the way forward now will be through co-operation.

Hourly service on Cambrian mainline

It is still hoped that the proposed hourly service will be introduced as intended. This of course is tied up with the line improvements

being carried out at the same time as the ERTMS conversion work. The infrastructure work required for the hourly service is said to be complete apart from certain installations, which can only be undertaken during ERTMS commissioning.

European Rail Train Management System

Although it has been subject to several delays, the date of introduction having been put back on more than one occasion, work continues and Network Rail say that over 92% of the work has now been carried out. The latest delay has been caused by the Driver-Machine Interface 'washing out' in bright sunlight. The reason for this is said to be the small driving cab size of the Class 158 trains presumably restricting the choices of locations for the equipment. This and other problems, which have occurred, highlight the difficulties of retrofitting a large amount of equipment to existing trains. Evidence of the conversion to ERTMS can be seen almost everywhere on the line: balises and axle counters on the track, new signs covered over until introduction, new points or switches, new passing loops, upgrading of level crossings and of course equipment on the trains themselves. All of this and more, including the installation and commissioning of the Fixed Telecom Network which links, via fibre optic cable, lineside equipment to the new signalling centre built at Machynlleth. In addition, training simulators for drivers and signallers have been manufactured and supplied together with detailed work not evident to the observer. This is indeed a large amount of work and expenditure and it can only be hoped that its introduction and use will not be beset by teething troubles and delays to the services. Although it is good to see such an investment in the line it must be remembered that this is seen as a UK trial and the results and success or otherwise of the scheme will have an impact on the decision on whether to extend its introduction to other parts of the UK rail network.

Summer Steam

The delay in the introduction of ERTMS presumably means that it has not been necessary to fit the equipment to the locomotive (Black Five No. 44871 for the start of the service at least) and/or train to be used although assurances had been given that such equipment could be produced. This of course augurs well as far as other special trains are concerned as equipment may become available for such use following development of the system for the steam specials.

Permanent way work

Work on the permanent way and that associated with ERTMS continues to bring interesting workings to the line. In addition to the ERTMS-fitted Class 97's, representatives from Classes 31 and 66 are seen from time to time hauling test trains and ballast wagons. Of course heavier locomotives than hitherto have been allowed on the Cambrian main line for some time now.

Barmouth Bridge

One of the most severe restrictions on the weight of locomotive using the Pwllheli line over the years has been Barmouth bridge. It is good to learn therefore that significant works are planned for next year. Whether this will permit the raising of weight restrictions is not known but it's interesting to note that double-headed Class 37's and 97's have been seen using the bridge in fairly recent times whereas the practice for some time has been to restrict hauled trains to one locomotive. The work proposed is to be welcomed and we can only hope that it can be interpreted as a further safeguard to the future of the line.

Refurbishment of Class 158s *

Very recently it has been announced that the entire fleet of Arriva Class 158's is to be refurbished. The work will be extensive and will include the fitting of additional luggage and wheelchair spaces, new seats, CCTV and passenger information systems. The toilets will also be refurbished. The units have received mechanical overhauls in recent times and the work now announced is said to be basically everything above the solebar. Arriva say that this work will result in units that will be 'as new'. This is good news as the refurbishment of Class 158's has been the subject of campaigning in the past. The work will be contracted through Angel Trains who own the units and will be partially funded by ATW through increased leasing charges and, according to reports, the Welsh Assembly Government will also be providing £7.5 million.

Shrewsbury

Improvements have been carried out to the signalling system at Shrewsbury to enable use of Platform 3 for the Cambrian and Hereford routes. This will offer greater capacity and flexibility for train movements. One disadvantage is that it is accessed via stairs situated to the side of the main station entrance and outside the ticket barriers. This involves more walking and obviously more

time for those making a change to or from trains using the island platforms.

Publicity

The line's Rail Development Officer, Gerwyn Jones, continues to keep Cambrian Lines in the eyes of the public by introducing new initiatives and publicity items as well as using tried and tested means. Arriva Trains Wales was presented with the community prize at the Arts and Business Cymru Awards for 2010 at the Millennium Centre in Cardiff on 29th April as the result of a project undertaken in collaboration with Theatr Harlech, which brought together young people from the community and experts in the performing arts to create carnival parades in towns along the Cambrian Coast.

Glyn Jones

**Compiler's note: the ATW class 153s will also be refurbished under this programme, and ATW has undertaken to 'refresh' the class 175 trains.*

South-east news

During July the *South Wales Argus* re-opened its 'Trains to Newport' campaign. The Welsh Assembly minister for Transport, Ieuan Wyn Jones AM, was quoted as saying that it was not desirable to divert some of the Ebbw Vale trains to Newport, given the success of the service to Cardiff. Regarding introducing a half-hourly service, which would need an extension of the present passing loop, he is quoted as saying that a two-platform station would be necessary at Ebbw Vale Town, with possibly double track between there and the existing Ebbw Vale Parkway station, and also 'more signalling works' near Newport. It is difficult to understand why two platforms at Ebbw Vale Town and double track from there would be needed, given that all the current Valley Lines termini manage with just one.

An unwelcome development is the decision by Caerphilly Council to introduce a daily car parking charge of £1.50 at stations under its control. Whilst it is understood that councils are hard-pressed for funds, it is surely not the way that council thinking should be going.

On a brighter note, work is proceeding apace on the 'new' station at Newport. While sceptics are doubtful whether it will be completed in time for the Ryder Cup tournament (early October), the main bridge structure has had its capping of ethylene tetra-fluoroethylene and fitting out is proceeding. However, inconvenience has been caused by the closure of the short-stay car park, presumably for refurbishment, precipitating the taxi rank into the eastbound bus lane, and reducing other facilities to a 'drop off' point. It is unclear how many of the older facilities at Newport station will continue in use; some work on replacing glazing in platform canopies appears to be taking place, but the main building still awaits a tenant for its upper floors. (See *also 'late news', p. 23*).

The next phase of the Newport area resignalling is thought to have been deferred until 2011. Whether this is due to technical problems or to the current financial squeeze is unclear. Nevertheless, signals with 'out of use' crosses continue to appear, including one at the exit from the Western Valley line at Gaer Junction, complete with 'feather' for the yet-to-be installed crossover (for 'up' direction travel along the 'down' main).

A welcome announcement of cash being available for station refurbishment rather curiously mentions Ebbw Vale Parkway, still relatively new, and Ebbw Vale Town which is yet to be built!

Ray Caston

A dismal effort

One of the achievements of rail campaigners in the run-up to privatisation in the 1990s was to secure continued production of a single national railway timetable book, reissued with each major timetable change date. The last edition of the "British Rail Passenger Timetable" was that for Winter 1993/94, the title then changing to the more politically acceptable "Great Britain Passenger Rail Timetable" from summer 1994 through to Winter 1998/99, before adopting the more succinct style of "National Rail Timetable". Whilst this was clearly never going to top the best-seller list, it was nevertheless a shock and disappointment to

regular rail travellers when Network Rail announced that the issue dated May 2007 was to be the last.

The thought of having to collect a multitude of timetable booklets from all the different TOCs in order to assemble a comprehensive picture of our train services was daunting indeed, hence it was a very pleasant surprise and relief when The Stationery Office announced that it was to take over publication of a national timetable book. Their first issue, dated December 2007, was called the “UK Rail Timetable”, but after protests that it did not in fact cover Northern Ireland, this quickly changed to “GB Rail Timetable”, and it continues to be published by TSO in this guise. The style and format throughout all this period has remained very consistent, and very true to the familiar and easy-to-use pre-1994 British Rail version, which fits readily into the brief case or suitcase.

The latest issue is dated 23 May to 11 December 2010, and at £16 it does not come cheap. But, oh dear, what a disappointment. Suddenly, the print size has been halved so as to reduce the number of pages, but without a magnifier it is now very difficult to read, even under bright lighting conditions. The mileage columns have been discarded, but those admittedly were never of more than passing interest. Far worse is that the timetables themselves are so inaccurate, with numerous trains omitted altogether. Look at the Coryton branch on Table 130, for instance – this suggests there is just one train a day, leaving Coryton at 18.45, whereas in reality the line has a half-hourly service!

Also missing are virtually all the usual column headnotes that should indicate where through trains run off one table and can be picked up on another. One of the most exciting developments this summer has been the new Grand Central service between Kings Cross and Bradford. But can you find them? The Kings Cross to Doncaster leg is on Table 26, Doncaster to Wakefield on Table 31 (but nowhere indicating that this is via an intermediate stop at Pontefract), the Wakefield to Brighouse section is missing altogether, and Brighouse to Bradford is on Table 41. Without headnotes, there is nothing at all to link these bits together and give the reader any clue that you can board a train at Kings Cross and go all the way to Bradford.

Compounding all this is the matter of Timetable Supplements. Until the demise of the Network Rail publication, late changes and

corrections were notified via a printed Supplement inserted into the book, and latterly there was also a facility to download any further alterations from the Network Rail website. Since TSO took over, the printed Supplement has not appeared, and the website has been the only source of updates. But, for the latest edition, with all its evident errors, there is not even an on-line supplement. So, those who've paid their £16 in good faith have been sold a work of fiction, with no means of correcting it.

In this age of high-tech publishing, there can be no excuse. This is not good enough. It is to be hoped that *Railfuture*, Passenger Focus and other user representatives will make strong representations to establish what caused such a failure, and to ensure that steps are taken to ensure it cannot happen again. Whatever happened to the concept of "proof reading"?

Paul Jeffries

Monitoring the National Transport Plan

Railfuture Wales responded to consultation regarding the monitoring of the Welsh National Transport Plan as part of the Transport Statistics for Wales. The following points were made in the *Railfuture* response:-

We consider that the indicators, which are adopted, should also be able to be used for monitoring the Regional Transport Plans.

The Secretary of State for Transport has recently reaffirmed that transport statistics should be in miles, not kilometres. We support this view especially as most railway measurements are in miles and road transport also uses miles.

Railfuture Wales has collated the annual Station Usage data provided by the Rail Regulator for each Unitary Authority and each Transport Consortium in Wales together with the percentage increase or decrease in usage year on year. We recommend that similar data is included in the monitoring.

Passenger Focus publishes a bi-annual National Passenger Survey that is shortly to be upgraded as a formal dataset within

National Statistics. This data is published for each passenger train operating company and therefore will include some cross border details, and should form part of the monitoring.

We recommend the monitoring of the provision for disabled travellers and we strongly recommend that at least the following should be considered for inclusion:

- The number of trains operating in Wales having disabled access and disabled toilet provision.
- The number of trains operating in Wales having provision of audible and visual customer information.
- The number of railway stations in Wales and the number of railway stations which are staffed.
- The number of railway stations which have platforms enabling disabled access into trains.
- The number of railway stations that have audible and visual customer information.

This will enable the progress of providing these facilities to be monitored.

The Welsh Assembly Government is committed to Integrated Transport, but we see no evidence in the questions of intention monitor the provision of integrated transport. The following questions are suggested:

- The number of trains and buses able to convey bicycles.
- The number of stations with car parks and the number of car parking places available.
- The number of stations with cycle storage facilities and the number of spaces provided.
- The number of stations with a bus stop adjacent to a railway station and the number with an adjacent bus station

We consider that statistics should be produced showing the number of services and facilities provided at ferry ports, including those for foot passengers This should include details of passenger

numbers using each ferry port and their mode of travel. This will be an indication of International conductivity.

We strongly advise that a statistic is included showing the amount of money spent by Network Rail in Wales on station and track.

Railfuture also commented on the sections related to Social, Economic and Environmental Outcomes.

Rowland Pittard

Rail Wales Plan: the latest

Rather as we hoped, the plan to re-organise rail transport in Wales caused quite a stir - both in Wales and within the *Railfuture* Board.

The *Western Mail* gave us a good spread, with a picture of an FGW 125 and the headline, *Passenger group calls for nationalised Welsh Rail*. The reporter, Rhodri Clark, also included a comparison table headed *Welsh Rail vs. Irish Rail*.

Professor Stuart Cole said: "The great thing about groups like *Railfuture* is they come up with ideas which are off-the-wall but make people think in a different direction." Quite.

The document was hard-copied or e-mailed to all AMs, the 3 rail unions' headquarters, *Railfuture*'s Board chairman and the editor of *Railwatch*, and to any Welsh member who ordered it (after an invitation in this magazine). And thanks to *Railwatch* for its coverage - which was accurate and fair.

Several AMs took up the invitation to tell us they found it interesting, two asked us to keep in touch with any further developments - and none said they disagreed with it. (One example, Mike German (LibDem): "... *It raises many questions concerning the way railways are operated currently in Wales and the rest of the UK and will, I am sure, provoke some very interesting and valuable discussion.*") I was disappointed, however, that none of the unions gave us any response.

At the southern branch AGM on April 17, the day the Plan was released to the media, Jill Evans MEP (who lives in the Rhondda) was due to speak to us on the European implications of such a plan - but was stuck on the Continent because of that volcano - so we appreciated the presence of her husband, Syd Morgan, who stepped in and knowledgeably briefed us on some interesting aspects of EU transport policy.

Two key aspects of his talk stuck in my mind: first, Eire (Rep. of Ireland) went all-out to take advantage of every possible EU grant for improving its rail infrastructure - and did well out of the legitimate financial aid available. (In comparison, the UK stood on the side-lines and sniffed snootily... missing out). And second, Syd says that the corridors of EC power are remarkably transparent in that officials and ministers are easily available for consultation or lobbying - and if we wished to probe their minds on what Wales could do, say but the word.

I must say that my own limited research shows that our Plan would NOT fall foul of any current EU legislation.

While one Board member of *Railfuture* telephoned me to say how pleased he was with the Plan, the Board chairman expressed grave doubts because the organisation had not given its support to re-nationalisation, not a word I used in the Plan (deliberately). He wanted us to stress the fact that it was a discussion document, rather than policy...

I sympathise with his position - but pointed out that we did say forcefully that we wanted to provoke discussion, that my feeling was that growing numbers of people throughout Britain want a return to some sort of re-vamped BR with ADEQUATE political backing and finance, and now that Wales and Scotland have their own parliaments, perhaps we should be allowed to see things differently and plan for our own circumstances. And wasn't it interesting that, tagged on to the *'Western Mail'* article, was a readers' survey question on whether people wanted the railways to be re-nationalised (*sic*). A good 59% backed re-nationalisation.

At the moment, I am hoping to get back to some AMs who expressed interest and, before they get bogged down in next year's election, try to get them to give us more formal backing - or organise some sort of forum in the Senedd building...

So while we carry on with the arduous but necessary up-dating and re-writing of the Railfuture Wales Development Plan for our railways, I would like to keep the pot boiling on the idea of our parliament thinking radically for the future.... We have to accept the present as it is, of course, which is why we are updating our Development Plan - but more and more, I feel we are having to tinker with a flawed design and it seems a wonderful opportunity for our Cardiff Bay parliament to think Big and think Different (excuse the grammar).

I remember many years ago when I lived in the north, as a prospective parliamentary candidate I persuaded the First Secretary of the Swiss Embassy to come up to Mold and talk to our constituency party about his country. In thanking him, I joked that sometimes I thought Wales should declare war on Switzerland, make some belligerent noises and then, after a few days, surrender and allow the Swiss to occupy us - until after a few years, once we have a first-class railway network, we shall thank them and they can leave...

But there's nothing to stop our Senedd inviting in advisers from Switzerland (or Ireland).

If anyone out there still wants a copy of the Plan, either e-mail me (john.rogers@railfuturewales.org.uk) or send an A4 stamped & addressed envelope (2 Llewellyn St, Nantymoel, Penybont ar Ogwr CF32 7RF).

John Rogers (chairman, South Branch)

A Public Transport Users' Committee for Wales

Railfuture Wales responded in November 2007 to the consultation for the formation of a Public Transport Users' Committee for Wales. The order for the formation of the committee was made on 16th November 2009. On 15th July 2010 Welsh Assembly Government finally advertised for the appointment of a Chairperson and eight committee members.

The Public Transport Users' Committee for Wales will provide

advice to Welsh Ministers on public transport services and facilities in Wales from a passenger's perspective.

The role of the Committee will involve giving advice and making recommendations to Welsh Ministers about areas for improvement of public transport services in Wales.

Applicants were asked to demonstrate experience and knowledge of public transport services in Wales, good communication skills, confidence in expressing their views, advocacy skills and the ability to develop creative and innovative option based solutions from a passenger perspective to:

- increase the appeal of public transport;
- promote public transport services that can be used by everyone;
- improve accessibility, safety and mobility of public transport services;
- encourage sustainable travel;
- support integrated transport and
- encourage a shift from using the private car to using public transport.

The Public Transport Users' Committee for Wales will represent all public transport users across Wales. The Chairperson and all Committee members will need to demonstrate they meet two or more of the following criteria:

- A frequent user of more than one mode (for example, bus, train, community transport) of public transport in Wales, or with regular experience of travelling by public transport in Wales.
- Significant knowledge of public transport issues in Wales.
- An understanding of the public transport network and knowledge of the day-to-day issues that affect public transport users from all backgrounds as well as understanding passenger needs and aspirations for further development.
- Ideas of how public transport services in Wales could be improved.
- A track record of seeking the views of public transport users (e.g. young people, older people and people with disabilities,

and awareness of equality issues), and ability to represent their needs.

- Personal experience of the barriers to mobility and accessibility when using public and community transport and consider themselves disabled persons under the terms of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA).
- Experience of working to influence Government policy at a Wales or UK level.

Rowland Pittard

Whither franchising?

In July, the DfT issued a consultation document on the future of rail franchising. Here, two Railfuture members give their personal views on it.

Consulting, or Not! - About What's Required – or Not!

“The coalition has pledged to put rail at the heart of its transport strategy”, it says, and goes on to say...“The government believes that the existing system of rail franchising has become too prescriptive at the point of bidding and lacks flexibility once operational....” My experience as a member of the late Rail Passengers Council for Wales, and of the New Labour administration under Tony Blair seemed to indicate that consultations were things offered out to the world at large and to the movers and shakers of the rail lobby after the boffins had indeed decided what policy would be pursued. Stay tuned to see if the world has changed!

This action by the new coalition embraces the railway run for profit, with its encouragement of freedom of action for operators to enhance or withdraw services reflecting ridership and to embrace passenger-friendly action, which may contribute to their bottom line. Out in the sticks however where no wheel turns without subsidy it is harder to see how the brave new world of operator freedom can be beneficial as the taxpayer will still need to know in detail what is being done with the cash provided.

In RPC Wales days I remember that we had felt that the First Great Western service to Fishguard Harbour had taken a hit from changing travel patterns on the Southern Irish Corridor and needed a boost (at this time the overnight Swansea –Fishguard Harbour and Fishguard Harbour – Paddington services were HSTs run commercially and augmented by additional daytime services in summer). Our efforts in the FGW Stakeholders' Forum to persuade FGW to promote the service with aggressive marketing resulted in a sudden complete withdrawal of the HSTs with FGW exiting Fishguard Harbour completely, so obviously it had not passed muster in the accounting department!

Many of us enthusiastically embraced privatisation but it is hard now to see any benefits from it; the railway is much more expensive to operate, has priced many people off trains and faces an annual extraction of millions of pounds for the shareholders of the private companies now involved. On the subsidised side the private company involvement negates all the benefits that might have been available in a real market; on the profitable side there may be some advantages but in any event the poor old passenger is liable to be crushed by the machinations of the finance departments of the train operators as they endeavour to maximise the returns for their shareholders. The interests of the latter will not automatically coincide with actions needed for first class public transport, and if the recent past is anything to go by, trying to regulate these kinds of benefits into a franchise agreement is likely to result in failure.

In a situation diametrically the opposite of "If it Ain't Broke Don't Fix It" the consultation reveals a reluctance to really examine the fundamentals of where the railway is today and apparently will be content with tinkering with the existing system whereas what is required is a no holds barred, out-of-the-box approach.

It is difficult to see any great benefits from this consultation. There might be a new high-speed line from London to the Midlands and North but great advances in public transport in Wales will probably depend on sky-high petrol prices when the new situation will dictate that sensible, innovative solutions are employed. All we need to do is wait 'till the world economy gets going again!

Guy Hardy

'The document founders before the foreword is complete'

As some of you will know, I am so fed up with this ludicrous, chaotic system underpinning (?) our railways, I have devised a Plan for an arms-length Welsh Rail to be run by the Welsh government (see pp 12 - 14). However, I steeled myself to begin looking through this document - and could stomach no more than the Foreword....

[1] *"...we believe significant private investment could be released by granting longer franchises...."*

Investment that will require a return - i.e., profit that will stay with the investing company and its shareholders, rather than (in the case of a state-owned railway) be available for further investment.

[2] *"We want this investment to help us deliver the important enhancements to the railway..."*

Who will decide on the enhancements? The private company? In which case, who is to say that such an enhancement is the best way of utilising the capital? Is the railway to be improved and developed only at the whim of some private company, perhaps here today and gone tomorrow? How could such an enhancement fit into any strategic overview of the network as a whole?

If the enhancement is not decided by the company but by the government, why should a private company risk financing a government-inspired decision, one which could (ought to be?) sometimes derived from the principles of public service rather than profit-making? Why, for example, should a private company 'invest' in "station improvements"? Will not the passengers still turn up and the trains run without such expenditure? The document is foundering before the foreword is complete...

[3] *"Longer franchises could also make it easier to establish the successful long-term working relationships between train operators and NR which are so vital..."*

But they will do nothing to alter the basic principles underlying franchising, not least a train operating company that could well own not one asset in its operations. Furthermore, in the last, say, one third of a franchising period, will not the TOC have little

incentive to plan fundamental improvements (new stock?) or investments, and merely wring every penny of possible profit from operations as its operating period approaches closure? Even if the TOC wanted to renew the franchise, how could it be sure of a successful bid, and, therefore, aim to invest for its next franchise period?

[4] *"We also need to move away from...."* (and the rest of the paragraph).

To move to the end first, yes, it has not been in the interest of passengers to be served by a company that paid a ridiculously high bid just to ensure franchise victory and/or was eventually to be savagely pummeled by nonsensical and increasing premium payments in its final years, possibly further crippling the company...

"...giving more flexibility to the professionals..." So, only a light government touch on the tiller? Similar to the light touch by the banking & finance regulator when dealing with Canary Wharf-land and its myriad financial shenanigans? Or, more seriously, once again, who will be responsible for the overall strategic vision? What if these free-roaming professionals embark on an initiative that doesn't go down well in Whitehall? A Government heavy fist? Where, then, is the `flexibility`?

There is - still - a basic paradox: how can free industry, serving its shareholders, have the freedom to plan and invest and reap a financial harvest... while at the same time implementing a government agenda (vision?) for the British railway network?

[5] *"The consultation paper elaborates on the Government's aspirations.... delivers the best possible value for money for the taxpayer...."*

Is the tax-payer best served by a system that involves huge government expenses in running the franchise system - and in a system whereby vast sums of money are siphoned off to keep shareholders happy.... and in a once-integrated railway, now shattered into fragments of bureaucratic, white-collar heavy companies?

John Rogers

Welsh rail freight update (*July 2010*)

INFRASTRUCTURE

Bird Port is a dock on the left bank of the River Usk which exports steel products to Europe and North Africa. Previously it had a rail connection and was used by Bell Lines as a container port for Irish traffic. Last year in May and June, steel billet was unloaded from rail at Bird Port using cranes. A new covered transfer facility has been built over and adjacent to the Uskmouth branch at Bird Port to transfer steel coil from rail to road for the short haul to the warehouse. The first test train with steel coil ran from Llanwern to Bird Port on 19th May, with a second on 4th June. Regular services commenced running from 7th June.

Grange siding branch is approx. 1 mile long, of single track with a high-level run-round loop, and runs from the western end of Margam Knuckle Yard towards Grange coke ovens. The bottom door discharge plant on the high level loop is being reinstated and the branch has seen an upsurge in traffic. Facilities have been provided for loading crushed slag and unloading scrap metal. A radiation detection unit was installed in 2009 at the Knuckle Yard end of the branch to ensure that the correct quality of scrap is received.

Twice-weekly trains conveying basic slag to Lea Interchange in London continued to run. Scrap trains recommenced from Handsworth, and wagonload scrap from Lackenby, in late May. The first of occasional Sunday coal trains from Cwmbargoed, and twice-weekly wagon load coke from Redcar, commenced in May, both using box wagons; this traffic is expected to transfer to bogie bottom-door discharge wagons when the discharge plant is reinstated. Margam is also receiving coal by road from Onllwyn and this will also transfer to rail.

On the **Heart of Wales line** new electrically operated points were installed at Llandeilo on 8th May, bringing the crossing loop back into use. The crossing loops at Llandovery and Llanwrtyd Wells were converted on 20th June and 1st August, leaving those at Llandrindod to be dealt with later in the year.

OPERATIONS

A major revision of DBS Enterprise including wagonload services commenced on 1st March. The Newport to London Wembley

Enterprise was combined with the Wentloog to Didcot MOD train and terminated at Didcot. A replacement service was introduced from Didcot to Dagenham via Ripple Lane. North to West services were revised soon after; the Newport – Warrenton service has been extended to run from Margam to Carlisle on three days per week, and the Mossend to Portbury car train has been diverted via Newport to pick up traffic formerly conveyed on the Newport – Warrington train.

Aggregates: after a boom period in February and March, supplying gritstone for road repairs, traffic returned to more normal levels in April.

Moreton-on-Lugg: the present pattern is two weekly trains to Hayes, with occasional trains to Elstow and Hothfield.

Cardiff Docks: Freightliner worked two trains conveying stone from Hafod Quarry, near Abercarn, to Theale. in May.

Machen: the present pattern remains at twice weekly trains to West Drayton.

Neath Abbey Wharf: Freightliner continues to operate trains for Aggregate Industries to Angerstein Wharf and Theale, and occasionally Thorney Mill. A train to Crawley ran on 13th July. DBS operates occasional trains to Stourton for Cemex.

Penmaenmawr: Freightliner operates occasional trains to Ashton-in-Makerfield and Chesterton Junction.

Cement: a temporary flow to Aberthaw cement works commenced on 17th May when fly ash arrived from Drax in PCA wagons. Trains are expected to run weekly until normal supplies become available from the adjoining Aberthaw power station.

Coal: destinations for coal from Cwmbargoed have diversified. In addition to two daily trains to Aberthaw, and occasional ones to Barry using box wagons, there have been train to Drax and Coal Products Ltd. at Immingham using bogie hopper wagons, to Hargreaves at Newport Docks, and to Corus at Grange siding.

Aberthaw power station received 10 trains of coal from Killoch washery in July, worked by Freightliner; the empty wagons were worked to Portbury for loading to Rugeley, thus reducing the length of unproductive mileage. Aberthaw ceased receiving imported coal

from Portbury after mid April and from Avonmouth after late May. Uskmouth received no coal in 2010 until a thrice-weekly train recommenced from Newport Docks in mid-May. A one-off test train of coal ran from Newport Docks to Fiddlers Ferry in May. Penyffordd cement works continues to receive coal from New Cumnock and imported coal from Redcar,

Container traffic: a daily container train is worked by Freightliner from Southampton to Wentloog, and a new Saturday-only service from Garston Docks, Liverpool, to Wentloog started in March. There is occasional MOD traffic worked by DBS to Wentloog.

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

Petroleum: The present pattern from Robeston is 5 or 6 trains weekly to Westerleigh, 3 trains weekly to Theale and 1 train weekly to Bedworth. Trains (one or two weekly) recommenced to Kingsbury on 12th June.

Scrap metal traffic: There continues to be a diversified pattern of workings usually using bogie MBA box wagons although some older 4 wheel SSA box wagons have been brought back into use. These wagons are frequently used complex diagrams such as Cardiff Tidal to Swindon, Swindon to Liverpool Alexandra Dock, Alexandra Dock to Handsworth and Handsworth to Cardiff Tidal. Other diagrams have involved Thames Steel at Sheerness. The only remaining wagonload traffic is from St Blazey to CELSA Cardiff (see also Margam Grange siding).

Sims, Newport Docks: Sims has been receiving scrap from Exeter using a new weekly service, which commenced on 21st January. This train was diverted to CELSA from 29th April. There are occasional movements from Newport to CELSA for example on 8th, 11th and 14th May.

EMR, Cardiff Docks: there has been no inward traffic this year except for a few wagons rejected by CELSA.

CELSA: Major flows of scrap are required to supply the works and so far this year scrap has been sourced from Attercliffe, Barry Dunns, Beeston, Brierley Hill, Exeter, Handsworth Queenshead, Handsworth, Hitchin, Kingsbury, Lincoln, Mossend EMR, Newport Docks, Rotherham, Shipley and Tyne Dock and wagonload from St Blazey all worked by DBS. In addition there have been trains

from Stockton and Tyne Dock worked by DRS which has taken over the former Advenza workings. After a break, trains from Beeston trains recommenced on 15th May and those from Handsworth Queenshead on 17th May. The first train from Hitchin this year was on 18th and the first DBS train from Tyne Dock was 22nd April followed by a second on 24th May. The thrice weekly train conveying rods and bars recommenced running to Rotherham on 28th March. Previously the traffic had been conveyed on wagonload enterprise services.

Dunn Bros, Barry Dock: There has been no recent inwards traffic but loaded trains have been dispatched to CELSA on 24th April, 1st and 13th May.

Corus, Margam: Scrap train arrivals have been intermittent. They are unloaded at the far end of the Grange siding branch. There was one from Laisterdyke on 23rd January, the only train from this scrap yard to South Wales so far in 2010. Subsequent trains have arrived from Handsworth, Queenshead, Kingsbury and Mossend with a one-off train from Middlesbrough Dawsons.

Steel: There have continued occasional movements of slab and coil from Margam to Cardiff Docks and coil from Llanwern. Imported slab from the Netherlands was moved to Llanwern and Margam in July. Thrice weekly trains conveying slab commenced running from Margam to Scunthorpe on 2nd May with the final train running on 20th May. Coil imported through Newport Docks is being sent to Swindon and Dawsons at Middlesbrough.

Timber: Trains continue to run from Scotland to Chirk usually consisting of 13 wagons. For a period in March two daily trains ran.

Rowland Pittard

LATE NEWS: Newport station (see p. 8)

As this issue closed for press, it was announced that the remodelled station at Newport will be opened on 13th September, and that the existing main entrance will be closed from that date.

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 JANUARY for the Spring 2011 issue.

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