

Rail Wales

Newsletter of the Welsh branches of Railfuture



The new platform 8 under construction at Cardiff Central Station on 8th August with the 13.25 to Barry ready to depart. (See also pp. 19 & 20)

Arriva Trains Wales and First Great Western provide additional accommodation for summer services

ATW brought into use two additional class 150 units at the beginning of the summer service, replacing two class 153s. They replaced one diagram on the Heart of Wales line and one on the Pembroke Dock branch. In addition, the remaining two class 153 diagrams on the Pembroke Dock branch were replaced by two Pacer diagrams, the units coming from two Coryton to Radyr diagrams which were replaced in turn by two class 153 diagrams. The other two class 153 units were used to replace the heritage unit, which has now been withdrawn, on the Cardiff Bay service, and to strengthen peak hour services on the Ebbw Vale branch.

Passenger numbers for the afternoon ferry service from Fishguard Harbour to Rosslare Harbour increased this summer as a connecting rail service was provided, after many years' absence, to and from Dublin. To provide for this demand ATW replaced one of the two class 153s being used on the Coryton to Radyr service with an additional Pacer diagram and used the 153 to provide additional capacity on the Fishguard service. This in turn provided further additional capacity in the morning peak on the Ebbw Vale branch. On Saturdays an additional Pacer and on Sundays a class 153 was added to the Fishguard Harbour service.

The 9.30 from Aberystwyth to Birmingham International is now two class 158 units with a third added at Machynlleth. This followed signalling alterations at Aberystwyth.

ATW also used its locomotive-hauled stock to provide an additional service on Saturdays from Holyhead to Crewe and back to connect with ferry services to and from Ireland during the summer holidays.

ATW is to be congratulated in providing the additional stock for this additional capacity.

In addition, to cope with heavy traffic to and from Weston-super-Mare, FGW provided an HST set for its 09.00 Cardiff to Taunton and 14.00 return services on Saturdays.

Rowland Pittard

South Matters

It struck me last year that, as only a minority of our southern members attend the AGM, only a minority will know who is at the helm, or indeed, on the bridge and in the engine room. And as the membership fee is rather more than a pittance, it seems only fair to summarise who makes the branch tick – especially as we are responsible for ensuring that all Welsh members are, as far as possible, happy with the final draft of the Development Plan.

This year's AGM was quite well attended, in the context of past years. 12 members turned up at Cardiff Quaker Meeting House on 20th April, with two apologies. There were the usual reports from committee members and then the election of the new committee, broadly unchanged:

Chairman (and minutes secretary): John Rogers of Nantymoel;

Vice Chairman (at long last!): Mike Watson of Swansea;

Secretary: Rowland Pittard of Bridgend;

Treasurer: Julian Langston of Cardiff;

Membership secretary & Rail Wales complier: Peter Clark of Abergavenny.

The rest of the committee was elected *en bloc*, and with the addition of a very welcome new member, Peter Kingsbury of Cardiff.

One vital strength of the committee is that several members are active in their own user groups, providing a useful two-way flow of information and influence. Mike is active in HoWLTA; Rowland wears the hats of several organisations and always champions the Maesteg line, his local one; Phil Inskip and Colin James are active in STAG and Better Trains for Chepstow; and David Gwyn Watts is a tower of strength in the Pembrokeshire Rail Travellers' Association. Apologies if I have omitted anyone. Perhaps the above explains why Bridgend is the normal venue for meetings – and just a few yards from the station.

Peter Clark acts as membership secretary (including handling the distribution of *Rail Wales*) and ensures we have a much-praised *Rail Wales* filled with interesting articles out on time twice a year. But he is 'compiler' and would welcome someone else taking over the reins as a full-blown editor.....any takers? We are still looking for someone to manage our website, currently in the caretaker hands of Dr David Berman, *Railfuture* chairman – and our thanks to him for continuing to do this vital job.

I hope Phil and Colin won't mind my passing on something I learned in one of Phil's recent e-mails, something which will gladden the hearts and minds of all rail campaigners trying to improve their local services. STAG has, to date,

won back 19 of the services originally cut as part of the franchise. And Better Trains for Chepstow has campaigned successfully for 14 additional stops by Cross Country trains at Chepstow, trains which used to wizz through without stopping.

Pembrokeshire, of course, has achieved the re-opening of Fishguard and Goodwick station, and HoWLTA battles on, especially via its Forum, for improvements on the Heart of Wales line.

Peter Clark reported that Wales has 104 members, 58 of whom are in the South branch, while Julian indicated via his circulated financial reports that all was well with the bank accounts. Certainly we need to increase membership, although we recognise that the current fee might appear daunting to some, even though it includes the magazines `Railwatch` and `Rail Wales`. (Do you remember seeing the Gwili Railway plea outside their terminus shop: `New members required – especially Welsh speakers and females`)?!

Meanwhile, at the time of writing, we are still putting the finishing touches to the maps of our revised DEVELOPMENT PLAN – and a big thank you to Colin James for the drafts and to Julian for the computer work in turning these into print versions. While all members have had some input into the Plan, the main burden has fallen on Mike Watson, Rowland, Colin and Phil.....*a diolch bob un ohonynt.*

We had hoped to see the Plan out and available by now, but the maps have been a problem and the whole thing is undergoing editing for 'corporate font, layout' etc., courtesy of Ray King, editor of *Railwatch*. Certainly we hope it will be out by the time Assembly Members return to Cardiff Bay on September 23.

Finally, for a while I was worried by the lack of 'visible' progress towards realising what I had thought was clearly government policy – the setting up of a not-for-dividend Rail Wales (or whatever) after ATW's franchise expires in 2018. Since we took the initiative (or so it seems) in circulating such a plan a few years ago, the idea has generated more and more interest and fairly wide-ranging support. In fact, when I represented us at the government's national rail conference last October, the only explicit disagreement came from an English firm of accountants, and the Minister, Carl Sergeant then, spoke very favourably of the principle and gave me the impression that he was at the stage of investigating 'how', rather than 'whether to'.....

When Edwina Hart took over as Minister, I wrote to let her know of our expectations and, given that things move at snail-pace in the rail world, asked if she could confirm government intentions in this direction and let us know where they were in terms of preparing for such a massive change – not least

in talking to Westminster. However, her letters to me suggested a worrying lack of urgency, and I began to wonder how to gee things up.

Luckily there then arrived an invitation from the government's Enterprise and Business Committee to both individuals and organisations to respond to a consultation exercise about the future of rail after the 2018 franchise expiry. It has been agreed that I shall represent the south branch, David Mawdsley the north and Dylan Lewis the Cambrian/midlands. While I shall focus almost exclusively on the not-for-dividend Plan (on behalf of all members), David and Dylan will be free to raise whatever rail improvements they wish to see – within the framework of the soon-to-be-published Development Plan. (I cannot yet be specific because we have only just received the invitations to respond). We would be foolish to assume that the current franchise *is* going to be the final one in Wales – even if we fervently hope it will.

Anyway, what pleased me in the consultation document was one particular sentence. In the committee's list of questions to which they invite answers, such as how any future franchise could bring about better rail transport in Wales, there is this point we are invited to respond to: "The management model to be adopted, including the **Welsh government's proposal for a not-for-dividend franchise.**" (My use of bold). Quite a welcome surprise!

So I need to respond in writing by September 13 and attend at the Senedd on Thursday, October 3, to answer any questions from the Committee members. This could be a key meeting and I admit to being both excited and nervous.

Felly, ar y cyfan, llawer o newyddion da ac ar ran ein holl aelodau, DIOLCH yn fawr pwyllgor am holl ymdrechion a gwaith called.. Cerddwn ymlaen....!

John D. Rogers

Wrexham - Chester redoubling in doubt

The National Transport Plan published by the Welsh Government in 2010 included two projects to re-double main lines which had been singled, viz. Gowerton – Llanelli (recently completed – see last issue), and Wrexham – Chester. There is now considerable doubt that the latter will actually happen, it being one of several transport projects put on hold following a change of Minister. It is to be subject to 'a review of the processes and decision-making behind the rail infrastructure project to reduce north – south journey times and re-double the railway between Wrexham and Saltney'. No date has been mentioned for completion of said review.

The presence of this stretch of nearly 10 miles of single track on the north-south route imposes timetable limitations and causes significant delays when perturbations occur, which can 'export' delays to far away parts of the network (or, result in trains being terminated short of destination). The line is served mainly by hourly long-distance services at present. We consider there is potential for additional local services to serve some reopened stations, but it is unlikely that these could be accommodated north of Wrexham unless there is double track on most of that section.

There is considerable pressure from Assembly members to reinstate this project and press on with it at an early opportunity. We await further news.

Cambrian Lines news

European Rail Train Management System

As previously reported, this system is now working well and at least two of the popular railway magazines have recently carried articles explaining the workings of the system and in general praising the benefits it brings and will continue to bring when it is introduced more widely. The experts still feel that it will bring about financial savings. It is extremely ironic therefore that some of the recent problems affecting the line have, indirectly, been brought about as the result of the introduction of the system.

I mentioned in the previous issue of *Rail Wales* my concern about the widespread use of the 'dedicated' Class 97 locomotives elsewhere on the Network Rail system. They seem to be very much 'common user', even having supposedly been fitted with ERTMS predominantly so that they could be available for use on the Cambrian lines when required. Three locomotives had been fitted with Ansaldo equipment for the introduction of the system and more recently one more has been fitted, this time with Hitachi equipment, which according to reports worked well when tried out on the Cambrian and was proved to be compatible. It beggars belief therefore that a short while ago a well-advertised and apparently well-planned excursion train from Sheffield to Aberystwyth was cancelled within 24 hours of the due date and time, causing losses of revenue to businesses in Aberystwyth including the Vale of Rheidol Railway on which a special train had been booked for some of those travelling on the main line excursion. It has been said also that the coaches to be used on the excursion had been stocked with food and provisions in readiness for the following day.

Various explanations have been offered and they all centre on the Class 97 locomotives. Some say that no suitable locomotives were available; others

that suitably trained drivers were not available. It has also been said that the operators of the excursion made practical and realistic suggestions as to how the problems could be resolved but that all of these were rejected. Added to all of this, it has just been reported that an excursion from Aberystwyth planned for the autumn has had to be cancelled already because all the Class 97's are required for rail treatment trains, and this when four of them are now fitted with ERTMS. It is known that West Coast Railways are interested in getting their drivers trained in the use of the locomotives and signalling system but it seems that Network Rail will not allow this. Furthermore it is widely reported that West Coast Railways would be interested in fitting the necessary equipment to some of their locomotives. Therefore whilst the will appears to be there in certain quarters to run excursions on the Cambrian, there do seem to be stumbling blocks put in the way of this. The fact appears to be that, whilst the system works well, advantage does not seem to be taken of opportunities of proving this and extolling the advantages talked about by the experts.

'Bread and Butter' services

Normal services generally are running well and timekeeping is good with trains frequently 'waiting time' at certain locations, primarily, it is thought, as the result of the crossing of trains at Talerddig taking less time under the new signalling and control system. 'Waiting time' however is something that Pwllheli line passengers, unfortunately, have had to put up with for some time owing to the way the timetable is arranged and attention has been brought to this on several occasions.

One other problem, which persists, however (in common, it is accepted, with many other routes) is the one of lack of capacity exacerbated on one or two occasions by short formation trains. An instance has been cited of 'up' and 'down' passengers having to swap trains at Shrewsbury in order, presumably, to provide a four car formation for the Cambrian section to allow for separate Aberystwyth and Pwllheli portions from Machynlleth onwards. There are undoubtedly sufficient Class 158 units fitted with ERTMS to provide adequate capacity, but as mentioned previously these are being diagrammed over almost all parts of the franchise area and not just on the Cambrian and Holyhead routes which are, it has to be said, integrated to good effect as far as diagramming of stock is concerned. Now it has to be accepted that efficient stock diagramming is important but it's a great pity that it is necessary for stock expensively fitted for use on the ERTMS system of the Cambrian lines to be used so widely on conventionally signalled routes, in addition that is to the Shrewsbury to Birmingham International section and the aforementioned Holyhead route, both of which are an important part of a diagramming pattern that has been proven to be working well.

At the time of writing the unit damaged in an accident with a tractor and trailer at Buttington Farm Crossing on 16th July is still under repair at Barton Hill Depot, Bristol and the loss of the unit at this busy time of year is undoubtedly being felt. Fortunately there were no injuries to the three train staff members but two passengers sustained minor injuries. The tractor driver and two agricultural workers who were standing close to the accident site were slightly injured by flying debris.

Shrewsbury - London services

It seems for the moment that the proposals by Virgin Trains to run direct services between the above locations have been rejected by Network Rail and ORR. It is understood however that Virgin will continue to press for permission to run such services and also direct services between London and Blackpool.

Hourly Service

The hourly service promised for a 2011 start has still not materialised but in a statement issued on 18th July this year the Welsh Assembly Government's Minister for Economy, Science and Transport Edwina Hart said: -

'I am committed to improving transport services in Mid Wales. In terms of the Cambrian Main Line hourly service, the way is clear for an operator to introduce additional services though it is important to be mindful of the tough financial settlement we are facing. I have asked the Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Railway Liaison Committee to co-ordinate work with the other rail interest groups to investigate the demand for rail services. I will also consider the strategic role of the Marches line between Newport and Shrewsbury/Wrexham. I have been clear that this should complement the work of the Local Growth Zones and be consistent with the tourism strategy.

Accordingly, initially for the Cambrian Line and the Heart of Wales Line, my tourism sector panel will provide a view on the feasibility of proposals for summer tourist trains on a trial basis. I will make an announcement for summer 2014 in due course'.

The Liaison Committee was due to hold a meeting on 6th September to discuss the matter. One cannot but comment that, if the need was there at the time the promise was made of an hourly service commencing in 2011, it is certainly there now considering the percentage increase in passenger numbers throughout the network. The reference to 'summer tourist trains on a trial basis' is an interesting one particularly in the context of such trains on Cambrian Lines having to be cancelled recently for the reasons outlined above!

Now that the infrastructure and the signalling system have been in place and working well for some time, we look forward to a favourable decision to introduce an hourly service at an early date on the Cambrian main line as previously promised.

Glyn Jones

MAGOR is launched

2013 being the 50th anniversary of the Beeching Report, many column inches have been devoted to the whys and wherefores of what was done to 'make the railways pay' (though the replacement roads were never required to do this!). Whatever one's views on the closures, there is no doubt that most of the many subsequent re-openings of closed lines and stations have proved successful in terms of usage; lifestyles and land use patterns are very different now from what they were in the 1960s, and the effects are seen in the rapid growth in rail passenger journeys in recent times.

Thus in Wales, restoring services on the Vale of Glamorgan line in 2005, with reopening of Rhoose and Llantwit Major stations which had closed in 1964, has been a huge success. (So too has the Ebbw Vale line but that was a pre-Beeching closure!).

So what other 'Beeching' closures might lend themselves to reversal? In March a new campaign group MAGOR (*Magor with Undy Action Group on Rail*) was launched to press for the re-opening of the station at Magor (which lies between Newport and Severn Tunnel Junction). Magor was opened in 1850, and the GWR opened a halt at nearby Undy in the 1930s; both were closed in 1964.

The group observes that in the last decade rail passengers have increased by 40% generally, while at Severn Tunnel Junction the increase has been 100%, largely due to the efforts of the Severn Tunnel Action Group which was formed to combat a series of cuts to train services which were being planned for late 2006. Improvements to station facilities were secured, and train services were improved. The station attracts many commuters, who enjoy faster journeys to Cardiff, Newport and Bristol than by road.

A significant number of these commuters originate from Magor and Undy, having moved there in recent years. Driving to Severn Tunnel Junction may make sense for those working in Bristol, but is less attractive for those heading for Newport or Cardiff, who have to start their journey in the wrong direction and double-back (and the reverse on the homeward journey!). The main B4245 road is heavily congested at times and future planned house

building at Undy and Portskewett will exacerbate this. For these reasons, MAGOR feels the time is ripe to press for a station at Magor, to open the national rail network to the increasing population. They do not see such a station being in direct competition with Severn Tunnel Junction, which attracts users from a wide area and needs much car parking space; Magor and Undy's 9000 population could access the centre within 15 mins. on foot or by bicycle, so avoiding the need for extensive parking space, as distinct from 'drop-off' facilities.

The impending electrification of the main line through Magor is seen as the opportunity to press for the new station, so that provision can be made when wiring starts. The aim is for a 2018 opening, to coincide with the commencement of the new GW franchise. The Group is under no illusions about the magnitude of its task, but support at the launch meeting demonstrated that the community is behind the proposal.

Compiled from information supplied by Laurence Hando of MAGOR.

South-east Wales notes

Welcome news is that funding streams for the new stations at Ebbw Vale Town and Pye Corner seem to have been agreed. The latter will become significant as large-scale housing developments in the area come to fruition.

SEWTA has issued its new rail strategy for consultation. Its proposals include new stations at Caerleon, Coedkernew, Llanwern and Crumlin; the re-opening of the line from Aberbeeg to Abertillery; services to Newport from Ebbw Vale, and more frequent services on other lines. On the Ebbw Valley line, this would of course be dependent on extension of the dynamic loop to Llanhilleth. A few weeks ago, trains were indeed running from Newport to Ebbw Vale, during a Sunday engineering blockade of the main line to Cardiff. Tickets were endorsed 'not via Cardiff'!

Owing to torrential rain on the afternoon of 5th August, the up Marches line was blocked in the Caerleon area by water cascading onto the track. The M4 motorway was also affected. This demonstrates the vulnerability of the railway at a time when Network Rail is being nationally criticised for lack of front-line staff for maintenance, yet I am told that NR is adding another level of supervision to its Cardiff-based operation.

Ray Caston

News from User Groups

The **Severn Tunnel Action Group** (STAG) participated in a passenger survey at Severn Tunnel Junction on 9th April last. It was found that, despite the severe restrictions caused by lack of car parking, the numbers travelling continue to grow at a rate that appears faster than any of the Cardiff commuting areas from the Valleys, Vale or Bridgend/Maesteg lines. For the first time, over one hundred commuters were recorded joining one of the morning services to Bristol.

But as usual, success can bring its own problems! Several services have been strengthened to 3, 4, or even 5 cars but even these are only just coping with present day demands, while the remaining 2-car Taunton – Cardiff train in the evening peak is severely over-loaded; even if it were increased to 3 cars there would still be passengers standing!

Also noted were increases in patronage of late-evening trains, and in the no. of bicycles being taken on trains.

This indicates a need for forward planning so that, when electric services between Cardiff and Bristol are introduced in a few years' time, all peak time services should be planned around 6-car sets, with forward provision for 9 cars on the most heavily loaded services to meet the growing demand.

Meanwhile, some problems remain on the station itself. Signage is still inadequate, and there is a lack of clear information, especially for those arriving by rail to change trains (almost 10% of all users), as there is little or no clear information within the station itself as to which platform to transfer to. There are no notice boards within the station, though these were promised to be considered by a previous station manager; all boards are outside in the car park and hidden from view from arriving passengers. The only electronic information telling passengers which platform trains are scheduled to depart from is located a minute or two's walk away down at the far end of the car park. Each platform has an electronic 'next train' board but this defaults to advice to ring National Enquiries with every two-hour gap in the service, as it appears to be unable to deal with trains more than ninety minutes apart. Lack of

information is also a problem when bus replacement services operate.

The **Heart of Wales Line Travellers' Association** (HoWLTA) continues its long-running campaign for improved services on the line. The HoWL Forum met the Minister, Edwina Hart AM, together with AMs representing the communities along the route, and felt that a positive response was obtained. The Minister observed that as well as capital budgets being increasingly constrained, revenue budgets are also under considerable pressure, and therefore she must be realistic about the ability to provide funding for new or additional services. She has undertaken, however, to consider whether there are more cost-effective opportunities to work with local community groups to deliver such enhancements. This could involve different management arrangements and a better alignment of services with the needs of people and communities. The possibility of summer tourist trains is also being considered, and an announcement for summer 2014 will be made in due course.

The group also took part in the annual 'Community Rail in the City' event by a presence at Paddington station, along with tourist associations from Carmarthen and Swansea. This was to promote tourism by public transport, and it was felt that many useful contacts had been made, whilst advertising Wales as an easily accessible destination.

HoWLTA has an impressive list of volunteers acting as station adopters, and their efforts, especially with station gardens, continue to receive plaudits.

Pembrokeshire Rail Travellers' Association (PRTA) notes that 7th September marked the 150th anniversary of the opening of the railway to Milford Haven.

- *See next article for more on west Wales.*

Summer HST services to Pembroke Dock

On Saturdays from 25th May to 7th September 2013 FGW High Speed Trains worked the following services:

07.24 Swansea to Pembroke Dock (09.44), calling at Llanelli, Burry Port, Carmarthen then all stations;

10.01 Pembroke Dock to Paddington (15.33), *The Pembroke Coast Express*, calling at Pembroke, Manorbier, Tenby, Saundersfoot, Whitland, Carmarthen, Burry Port and Llanelli;

08.45 Paddington to Pembroke Dock (14.14), *The Pembroke Coast Express*, calling at Whitland, Saundersfoot, Tenby, Manorbier and Pembroke;

14.55 Pembroke Dock to Paddington (20.32), calling at all stations to Swansea except Gowerton.

This has been the normal method of working for many years but is now under threat with the future introduction of 5-coach bi-mode IEP trains, which are going to be timetabled only as far west as Carmarthen. It is anticipated that the new Great Western franchise will not specify trains west of Carmarthen.

I travelled on the 11.09 Bridgend to Pembroke Dock (08.45 from Paddington) and the 14.55 Pembroke Dock to Bridgend on 3rd August. Departure from Bridgend was late and the train was preceded by the Fishguard Harbour boat train, but I imagine that the connections with the boat train had been made at Cardiff. The lateness was reduced at Swansea by a swift turn-round and departure was on time from Carmarthen, but a few minutes were lost at Tenby en route to Pembroke Dock. The return journey was on time. The train was well loaded and it is unlikely that the number of passengers and their luggage could be accommodated on a 5-coach IEP in the future, especially out of London as the 08.45 serves both the Fishguard and south Pembrokeshire passengers. The train was well used throughout with more passengers joining at Carmarthen than leaving. There was no time to clean the train at Swansea but a cleaner joined the train there and removed rubbish and reservation labels en route to Carmarthen. The train was further cleaned between Carmarthen and Pembroke Dock and was clean and labelled ready for departure from Pembroke Dock.

The train had two train managers, one of whom continually walked through the train checking and selling tickets, as some of the station calls do not have booking offices. On the Pembroke Dock branch there is selective door opening and announcements were made in plenty of time for passengers to move to the correct section of the train. In fact in some cases they were at the door well ahead of the stops thus avoiding station overtime. The second train manager made clear, concise announcements as to the next station stop and which coaches would have their doors released for opening well ahead of each station stop. He operated the selective door opening from the appropriate coach.

The main restriction with the use of selective door opening is that the mechanism is fitted to alternate coaches and on alternate sides, thus usually allowing only blocks of two or four coaches to have their doors released. FGW policy is normally to load cycles in the front power car from Paddington. The second train manager also checked the destination of cycles in that car. At Tenby the front of the train is over the west end of the platform and the manager arranged for cycles destined for Tenby to be transferred to the rear power car at Carmarthen, where the whole train was accommodated on the platform.

The time loss at Tenby was attributable to the time it takes the driver to walk back and change tokens; perhaps a little more time should be allowed at this station. I did not see any luggage handlers on the trains. Passengers appreciate the through trains and they appear to be well used, both by long distance travellers and day-trippers to the coastal resorts, especially Tenby. Their operation is complex for both the driver and the train managers, especially when the trains call at all stations. The buffet was open throughout with no closure before end of journey and was well stocked. The attendant served passengers in a competent manner.

Passenger demand on the Pembroke Dock branch has increased in recent years and from May 2013 ATW replaced the single car 153 sets working the branch with 2-car Pacers and class 150 units.

Rowland Pittard

ATW December 2013 timetable

Our response to the consultation on this topic is summarised below, together with ATW's comments where appropriate.

Table 79: Aberystwyth/Pwllheli to Birmingham International

These services should connect at Shrewsbury with the services to Wrexham and Chester.

ATW: connections at Shrewsbury are raised frequently and we will keep this on the radar for when certain infrastructure improvements on the route have been introduced.

Table 81: Manchester/Crewe to Holyhead

We still wish to see an extension of the service to Manchester Airport and this should be part of the Northern Hub proposals. A change of trains at the busy central Manchester stations is unacceptable.

ATW: unfortunately we have been prevented from running any more services to Manchester Airport by Network Rail and there is the future consideration of the Northern Hub to take account of in the fullness of time.

Table 101: Wrexham to Bidston

We welcomed the provision of an hourly service on August Bank Holiday Monday and trust you will be able to provide an hourly service on Bank Holidays in the future.

ATW: we operated a normal Monday service for the last bank holiday mostly because of the festival in Liverpool but we will consider for next Easter.

Table 128: Cardiff to West Wales

There should be an improved service on the Pembroke Dock branch on Sundays, with a departure from Pembroke Dock at 13.30 to connect into the 14.55 FGW service from Carmarthen.

ATW: we note the aspiration for enhanced Sunday services in West

Wales but the 14.55 CMN-PAD service is likely to change many times because of engineering work.

Table 129: Swansea to Shrewsbury

We wish to see all services stopping at Gowerton. The new morning service from Cardiff to Swansea is welcomed but there is also a need for a connection from all stations between Cardiff and Swansea into the 09.15 Swansea to Shrewsbury service.

ATW: we're working on this suggestion as we speak.

Table 130: Cardiff Valleys

The 15-minute interval service from Cardiff to Abercynon, Bargoed and Barry should be the standard, where appropriate, for other parts of Wales including Cardiff to Swansea. Consideration should be given to a half-hourly service between Barry and Bridgend with connections at Barry for Barry Island.⁴

ATW: these timetables are being discussed within the context of CASR, mainline and VL electrification projects.

Table 131: Manchester to Cardiff

Improvements to the poor connections from west of Cardiff into the Cardiff to Holyhead service, especially the 07.21, should be considered; services from south to north Wales, especially in the morning, should be similar to those from Holyhead to Cardiff. The starting back of the 18.21 from Llanelli is an interesting development and makes improved use of the unit allocated.

We welcome the earlier departure of the premium express from Cardiff to Holyhead to 17.16, but you do not indicate the arrangements on a Bank Holiday. We would like to see a connection for Llandudno out of this train; a wait at Llandudno Junction for a train from Blaenau Ffestiniog is not acceptable.

The starting of the 05.13 Chester to Maesteg at Shrewsbury at 06.33 will hopefully improve the time keeping of this train. We trust it remains a class 158 service, and that the 05.13 Chester to Birmingham provides a connection from Chester into the Maesteg train.

We consider that there should be a Crewe to Shrewsbury local service in the evening as it is not acceptable to have an extended journey from Manchester to Cardiff at this time, especially on the 17.30, 18.30 and 19.30 services from Manchester.

We welcome the extension to Carmarthen of the 19.30 service from Manchester.

ATW: We have looked at the Llandudno connection you highlight with the 17.16 from Cardiff and unfortunately are unable to make any difference to the long connection time. We do not anticipate the 17.16 running on bank holidays. The 06.33 to Maesteg is planned to be a 158. For Crewe to Shrewsbury local enhancements, I am afraid we do not have sufficient rolling stock at this time.

Table 132: Maesteg to Cheltenham

We still await the long-promised half-hourly service from Cardiff to Maesteg and also that from Cardiff to Chepstow. The Bridgend to Maesteg service has more passengers but fewer trains on fewer days than the section from Bargoed to Rhymney, which is being upgraded, for a half-hourly service. It is still one of two lines in Wales that does not have a Sunday service. The Cardiff to Cheltenham service still has two-hour and sometimes longer gaps in service, and an hourly clock-face service should be provided.

The 07.59 from Maesteg now fails to provide a reliable connection at Bridgend for Swansea, with only 3 minutes into a FGW service, followed by a wait of 35 minutes for the next westbound train. The forward connection consequently from Swansea to the Heart of Wales line has also been lost

The 09.16, 10.16 and 15.17 should depart Maesteg at xx15 to ensure connections with the Bridgend to Vale of Glamorgan services. We suggest that the xx42 departures from Bridgend could now be restored to xx45 as these trains consistently arrive at Barry 4 minutes before their departure time towards Cardiff.

The 12.15 from Maesteg should be extended from Gloucester to Cheltenham and the return service start not from Gloucester at 14.45 but from Cheltenham at 14.45 for Maesteg, thus restoring the

connections previously provided at Cheltenham and a better interval service for stations between Gloucester and Cardiff. This will also resolve the difficulties at present experienced in platforming the 16.17 departure from Cardiff to Maesteg. This train is loaded to capacity most evenings and perhaps consideration should be given to running it non-stop to Llanharan as there is now an all stations three-coach train to Bridgend at 16.37. The 16.04 to Fishguard Harbour can be worked by 13.29 from Fishguard Harbour.

However we welcome the return of the 15.17 Maesteg to Cheltenham to a standard clock-face departure time.

We appreciate the continued extension of the Maesteg to Gloucester service to Cheltenham beyond what was specified in the Franchise. The connections at Cheltenham provide a very valuable improvement in rail-to-rail connectivity.

A downside continues to be the lack of late evening services on Saturdays from Cardiff to Maesteg and Cheltenham. Maesteg continues to have the earliest last service at 21.10 on a Saturday of any South East Wales destination. On two occasions this year a later Saturday service has been provided to Maesteg and this should be the norm. There appear to be no engineering constraints now that track on the branch will have been completely renewed by October 2013. Similarly the last train to Gloucester line stations is at 21.12.

ATW: The half-hourly service for Maesteg remains a Welsh Government consideration and depends upon where the additional trains will come from. As we have mentioned in the past, we are running may more trains than the contract requires and we do quite a lot more on event days for Maesteg. Again, I feel this would be for others to agree particularly for the electrified future and CASR progress. In the meantime, we will continue to improve connections as best we can.

Rowland Pittard

Capacity enhancements at Cardiff

The following notes refer to the photographs on the next page.

Upper: another view of the new platform 8 under construction at Cardiff Central station on 8th August. This will provide greater capacity for Valley Lines trains bound for Penarth, Barry, Bridgend and the City Line to Radyr and beyond. Unlike at Cardiff Queen Street, the platforms at Cardiff Central are not being renumbered, partly as the tiled platform numbers in the subway are listed. Steelwork for temporary buildings is also visible to the left of the new platform.

Lower: the new northbound platform under construction at Cardiff Queen Street station on 8th August, with the 11.55 to Coryton just leaving. This is one of two platforms to be built; when complete there will be two northbound and two southbound platforms to provide greater resilience at this station. There will also be a bay platform for the Cardiff Bay shuttle. The existing platforms have been renumbered – the new northbound platform is expected to be number 5. Track-laying has started here.

Photographs and text by Julian Langston

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. Material for the next issue - be it a letter, a comment or article - should be sent the compiler at 84 North Street, Abergavenny NP7 7ED; email: peter.clark@railfuturewales.org.uk, to arrive by 15th FEBRUARY for the Spring 2014 issue.

Railfuture is the campaigning name of the Railway Development Society, a UK-wide voluntary body for rail users. Annual subscription is £21 (£14 for students and unwaged). Enquiries should be addressed to Peter Clark, as above.

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