

**Issue 56 Spring 2014**

# Rail Wales

*Newsletter of the Welsh branches of Railfuture*



*New southbound platform and passing loop at Tirphil in the upper Rhymney Valley (photo: Julian Langston)*

## Bangor – Caernarfon reopening possible?

Re-opening the 7 miles of railway from Bangor to Caernarfon has long been a Railfuture aspiration. A report on the subject was produced by RDS Wales (as it then was) in the 1990s, but a problem always was the lack of support from Gwynedd County Council, who then, as now, preferred to build new roads rather than develop or restore rail links.

The latest proposal for this reopening has come from a different source, namely those who successfully rebuilt the Welsh Highland Railway. They observe that there is now a rail-less 7-mile gap in an otherwise 90-mile circular rail route around and through Snowdonia.

Our 1990s report on why the line to Caernarfon should be reopened pre-dated the WHR rebuilding, and the WHR's successful conclusion does indeed provide greater justification.

Subsequent developments since the line was closed in 1970 have not left the entire trackbed intact, but it is considered that there would be no insurmountable problems in constructing the proposed line. A standard gauge line is preferred, leaving the Bangor – Holyhead line at Menai Bridge, just as it did previously. Some works in Caernarfon itself would also be needed, and these could include extending the narrow gauge WHR track through the tunnel to meet the reopened standard gauge line where part of a car park could be used to make an interchange station (the equivalent of that at Blaenau Ffestiniog!).

TAITH (the north Wales transport consortium) sees the reopening as 'a long term aspiration' in its regional transport plan. Dafydd Elis Thomas AM, Plaid Cymru's transport spokesperson, has spoken in favour of it.

But there is much to do, not least securing funding; and then there is the question of who would operate such a service.

An urgent first step would be to commission comparative studies of the rail project and the proposed Bontnewydd bypass road, which would also bypass Caernarfon. The cost of the bypass has been estimated at £85m, the rail reopening at under £40m. Were the rail reopening to be progressed first, the impact on road traffic could be such that the bypass is not needed (if it's needed in any event). This would save public money and reduce carbon emissions, accidents etc.

## **YFARFOD CYFFREDINOL BLYNYDDOL CANGEN Y DE**

**SADWRN, EBRILL 26, 2014,** Canolfan y Crynwyr, 43 Stryd Charles,  
Caerdydd (yn agos M&S).

1030 – 12.30: cyfarfod arferol y pwylgor ond croeso cynnes hefyd aelodau eraill.

13.15 – 15.15: y cyfarfod blynnyddol – croeso I bob aelod. D.S.: croesewir aelodau I wneud gais ymuno â'r pwylgor. Wedi i ni ethol aelodau'r pwylgor, bydd fforwm agored i drafod pynciau llosg y sîn rheilffordd yng Nghymru, yn cynnwys cyfle I drafod ein CYNLLUN DATBLYGU RHEILLYRDD CYMRU.

D.S. I dderbyn gofnodion y cyfarfod blynnyddol diwethaf (20-4-2013) naill ai rhowch wybod i mi trwy e-bost neu anfonwch amlen addas gyda stamp.

*Cefnogwch ni trwy fod yn bresennol! Cewch chi siopa cyn neu ar ôl y cyfarfod!*

## **SOUTH BRANCH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

**SATURDAY APRIL 26, 2014,** The Quaker Meeting House, 43 Charles Street, Cardiff (very near M&S).

1030 – 12.30: branch committee meeting, but other members are most welcome.

13.15 – 15.15: the AGM – all members welcome. N.B.: we invite members to apply to join the committee. After the election of the new committee, there will be an open forum to discuss aspects of the rail scene in Wales, including a chance to discuss or buy our latest DEVELOPMENT PLAN PLAN FOR WELSH RAILWAYS.

N.B.: to obtain the minutes of the previous AGM (20-4-2013), please either let me know by email or send me a suitable stamped addressed envelope.

*Support us by coming along! You can go shopping before or after the meeting!*

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## **South-east Wales notes**

The detailed planning for the new station at Pye Corner has been passed by Newport City Council planning committee. Objections from residents living below the level of the station are to be met by screening. The single-platform station will have parking space for about 70 cars and will be about 300m north of the former Bassaleg Junction station, closed in 1962. It should benefit residents of the lower Rhymney Valley, as well as those of lower Rogerstone, where over a thousand houses are planned for the former Alcan site.

Some weeks ago, trains actually ran from Newport direct to Ebbw Vale during an engineering blockade on the main Newport to Cardiff line. Tickets were endorsed 'not via Cardiff'. No hint has been given as to whether the line from Gaer Junction to Park Junction (used by these trains, and by regular empty stock workings to retain drivers' route knowledge) is to be electrified; neither has any time-scale been promulgated for the abolition of Park Junction signal box, which controls the Western Valley line.

Meanwhile, residents of Abertillery have started a petition to show their annoyance at the delay in providing a rail link to their town, with reportedly over 1000 residents having signed it. The promoters consider themselves disadvantaged in job opportunities by having to travel by bus to the nearest station at Newbridge. To provide more services of any kind would necessitate the current loop being extended northwards from Cross Keys. It has been reported that this would have cost around £1m if it had been done when the line was initially upgraded. Not only would it now cost much more, but train services would have to be suspended whilst the work was done.

*Ray Caston*

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## **Cambrian Lines news**

### **Storm Damage and other infrastructure matters**

In this area, as elsewhere, the main topic at the time of writing is the storm damage and its effects in one way or another on almost everyone. Whilst the railways (or should we now be saying 'train lines' and 'train stations' as preferred by the media!!) have suffered badly, our thoughts also go out to those whose homes and premises have been affected.

Of the Cambrian Lines, the section between Dyfi Junction and Pwllheli appears to have come off worst with wash-outs and other damage over long sections. The Cambrian main line also suffered from cancellations and

delays as a result of the storms. The Dyfi Junction to Barmouth section was re-opened to traffic on 10th February having been out of use for a number of weeks. In the meantime the two Class 158 sets trapped in the affected section were conveyed, by road, to Chester so that they could be more usefully employed elsewhere. It is assumed that the section between Barmouth and Harlech will next be given priority, leaving the section between there and Pwllheli to be re-opened only after the rail section of the new bridge at Llandecwyn has been completed. Several dates for this have circulated but it appears that May of this year is probably the earliest.

The work on the Llandecwyn Bridge has been beset with problems and much has been reported in the media on the problems encountered and the steps which have had to be taken to amend methods of working and consequently schedules. The additional costs to Network Rail are reported to be very high with large sums being paid to Arriva Trains Wales by way of compensation as well as very high prices to bus operators for providing a rail replacement service. There has been criticism of the fact that no rail service has been provided to the north of the bridge site, as well as that to Harlech some distance to the south, although of course as it has transpired all of this has been affected by the recent storms. Gwynedd County Council, as well as Network Rail, is of course very much involved in the bridge replacement scheme and its completion will, if anything, bring more benefits to road users than to the railway although the latter will benefit from the capacity for greater weights and higher speeds.

The very high winds in mid-February caused further damage to structures (including cuts in electricity supplies affecting Dyfi Junction) and buildings necessitating even more work, and it is appreciated that this is only one relatively small section of our railway system that has suffered from the unusual weather events of this winter and it can only be hoped that the disruption caused will serve to highlight the value of the railways to the public.

## **European Rail Train Management System**

The system continues to work well and publicity in respect of ERTMS has now switched to other places, such as the Hertford Loop, where experiments and trials are now taking place. However one piece of recent good news relating to the Cambrian system is that West Coast Railways have decided to re-introduce two of their Class 37 locomotives (Nos. 37 668 and 37 669) to which will be fitted Hitachi ERTMS equipment for use on the Cambrian. Readers will recall that various availability and staffing problems relating to the four so-called 'dedicated' Network Rail and DB-operated Class 97 (former Class 37) locomotives resulted in cancellation of excursion trains on the Cambrian system in late 2013. It seems that West Coast Railways have taken the initiative and decided to convert their own locomotives for this kind of work as there is clearly a call for such excursion trains. In addition it is

reported that they are continuing to explore the development of ERTMS equipment suitable for steam traction and it is very much hoped that they will succeed in this also.

## **Hourly Services**

Much publicity has been given to this matter in the last few months with the Welsh Government Minister responsible for transport asking the Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Railway Liaison Committee to conduct a survey to establish the need for such a service enhancement. Apparently WAG would have regarded 500 responses as being good but in fact over 6,570 were received emphasising the need for such a service. WAG's response was to set up another group called the Cambrian Rail Implementation Group to analyse the results of the survey and the report prepared by the Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Railway Liaison Committee. The group comprised committee members and representatives of other bodies including Network Rail, Arriva Trains Wales and Aberystwyth University. As far as is known no other user groups were invited to be part of these discussions. The group has now prepared the business case which includes a timetable, costings and an implementation plan for the enhanced service and this has been submitted to the Minister who will now consider the recommendations before providing a further update to assembly members. It is expected that the group will discuss the report with the Minister in March. The outcome of all of this is now awaited.

One other piece of news which will improve safety and possibly timings is that five level crossings between Carno and Talerddig are to be closed, although the timetable for this work is not yet known.

## **'Bread and Butter' services**

Apart from the rather too frequent disruptions caused by weather conditions which inevitably bring about delays and cancellations, services generally are running well and timekeeping is still good.

## **Carmarthen to Aberystwyth Railway Campaign**

For some time now people in the Lampeter area and wider afield have been campaigning for the re-opening of the above line and have asked the Cambrian Lines Branch of Railfuture for support Our Secretary Dylan Lewis has been kept fully in the picture and reports that the group is very well organised and has engendered a great deal of support. A further public meeting was held on 20th February under the title **TRAWS LINK CYMRU – Transition Llambled Carmarthen to Aberystwyth Railway Campaign**. The meeting adopted the name 'Traws Link Cymru' for the campaign and a 'core group' has been appointed to take the campaign forward; Dylan Lewis is a member of this group. A visual presentation on the current state of the trackbed was made by former Aberystwyth geography student Geraint

Blayney who emphasised that the majority of the route of the line is still intact and not built upon with obvious exceptions such as the approach to Aberystwyth. It is intended to make contact with members of other rail-reopening campaign groups in order to share and learn from their experiences.

From the start the campaign has been supported by local and national politicians and it is very much hoped that progress will be made. It is understood that the group will also be campaigning for the reinstatement of the Afonwen - Caernarfon - Bangor line as part of a bigger strategic framework.

*Glyn Jones*

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## **Welsh Government Policy Statement - 28<sup>th</sup> January 2014**

The Minister, Edwina Hart A.M., confirmed that a new National Transport Plan is to be developed, reflecting regional priorities. The city region boards will advise on priorities and develop their co-ordinating role. The Metro is a key focus for the S.E Wales city region board; £2bn has already been spent on this complex project. A Metro implementation Group has been appointed to make detailed recommendations on implementation this summer.

The Cambrian Railways Implementation Group's work is being informed by a report produced by the Aberystwyth to Shrewsbury Railway Liaison Committee, while the Heart of Wales Line Forum has been asked to submit further advice on a review of the costs and benefits of the additional services timetable and proposals for resources to progress community rail development and longer-term service and management aspirations.

Electrification of the GW main line and the valley lines is progressing. The ministerial task force on north Wales transport, chaired by Lesley Griffiths A.M., Minister for Local Government, is making good progress. In its first two meetings it has focussed on building the case for north Wales rail electrification, and identifying broader transport priorities for the region. Ms Hart has written to the Secretary of State asking him to ensure the north Wales main line should form an intrinsic part of any further assessment of the case for electrification.

*Note: the ministerial statement also indicates the end of the four democratically appointed Passenger Transport Consortia and their replacement by city region boards and task force groups. Following a review, the contacts for members of the Passenger Transport Users Committee for Wales have not been renewed and their final report is awaited.*

## **Before and after OCTOBER 2018: A personal view....**

# Map ardal Masnachfaint Cymru a'r Gororau



(Ffynhonnell: gwefan Trenau Arriva Cymru)

The above map shows the Arriva Trains Wales franchise area of operation – and what we need to focus on is: what happens when the franchise ends in October 2018? As you may remember, in the last issue of this magazine, I was a little nervous about appearing before the Business & Enterprise Committee at the Senedd. However, I think it went off reasonably well and while I concentrated on promoting and explaining our plan for a government-owned, not-for-profit and vertically integrated Rail Wales (or whatever name), David Mawdsley, representing the north branch, spoke ably and persuasively about other matters, not least those which were important to northern passengers. There may well still be a video and transcript record of these October 3<sup>rd</sup> proceedings on the relevant website.

## **Meeting at Hereford**

Having duly pondered all the oral and written submissions, the committee published its report on December 11<sup>th</sup> – launching it in the unusual surroundings of the waiting-room at Hereford Station, the committee members having proceeded to Cardiff Central by minibus and then travelled up on the Cardiff-Holyhead 175 (surely ATW's star rolling stock?).

Why Hereford? Well, as the report underlines, of necessity, some of the Welsh routes run through England – and some of these sections are even profitable. The committee wanted to make the point that Wales valued the input of people living in England but served by ATW. After all, if we improve the services, everyone benefits. Phil Inskip and I travelled with the committee and represented Railfuture Cymru – much appreciating the complimentary hot coffee and bacon butties provided on arrival.

### **Some key points**

On the whole, I was impressed with the 100-page bilingual report. Its title reminds us all of the momentous challenge facing us: `The Future of the Wales and Borders Rail Franchise'. (An electronic copy of this is available for members; contact me at [john.rogers@railfuturewales.org.uk](mailto:john.rogers@railfuturewales.org.uk) ). If I choose some of the key parts of the report (in my opinion), they would include:

(a) A recognition of the fact that, as the ATOC representative told the committee, the unambitious franchise was awarded when budgets were limited or, as paragraph 23 states: "*The fact that the current franchise was accepted on the basis of no planned improvements was described by Railfuture as 'astonishing'.*" Sewta made the important point that the Welsh government was not involved in "*the procurement of the current franchise, little consideration being given to its transport, spatial planning and environmental priorities.*"

(b) There is no doubt now that the seeds we in Railfuture sowed those 4 years ago are now bearing fruit – in that the idea of an arm's length, government-owned Welsh rail company is now the subject of discussion in many rail circles and, interestingly, there are several possible variations on the theme. Paragraph 102 makes clear that the committee has been considering the options:

- A standard `NET COST` franchise model, where operators accept commercial risk and receive revenues, with either a subsidy paid by the authority (the Welsh government) or a premium returned by the franchisee.
- A concession `GROSS COST` model, where operators are paid a fee to provide services specified by the franchising authority. Revenues are received by the authority which also carries

commercial risk. Examples include Merseyrail.

- A NOT-FOR-DIVIDEND model, which might include various permutations such as a not-for-dividend franchise; a state-owned not-for-dividend company operating at arms length; and a co-operative franchise.

Paragraph 103 adds the comment: “*While many respondents thought not-for-dividend rail was at least worthy of further consideration and a number supported it strongly, there was a lack of clarity about what it might involve.*”

Prof. Stuart Cole predicted that “*the not-for-dividend company, based on the Network Rail and Glas Cymru model, was probably the most popular option*”. He believed that if the Welsh government were intent on managing the railway through an arm’s length company, it was essential that it work with partners such as Merseyrail and ScotRail to bring in expertise in franchise procurement and acquisition of rolling stock. (Para. 108).

However, at least Westminster knows that our government is considering a not-for-dividend company and it is significant that the DfT states that they “*do not think that we have a prohibition on a not-for-dividend company trying to pre-qualify and entering into the tendering competition process*” (Para. 115). Nevertheless, it is “*wary of letting a major contract become a guinea pig*” (*ibid*). And driving another nail into the current franchise system’s coffin?

(c) TIME is a vital issue in discussing, deciding and planning for 2018, as any change to the status quo entails much preparation. June 2018 is currently pencilled in for ‘contract awarded’ and October for ‘start of the franchise’ or, as we hope, something rather better. One cautionary note in this respect appears in paragraph 32: “*The Welsh Government will be a party to the next franchise but its precise role in developing the new franchise is not yet clear.*” Discussions between Cardiff Bay and London have already begun and, as “*both governments have identified the need for further devolution in relation to rail franchising....*” (Para. 33), we in Railfuture are cheered by the sentiment that “*We (i.e. the Business & Enterprise Committee) therefore wholeheartedly agree with the Minister for Economy, Science and Transport’s comment that ‘we want to take control of our own destiny’ on the next franchise*” (Para. 35).

I think it would be fair to comment, having my ear to the ground as they say, that for ‘franchise’ read ‘after the end of the current franchise period’. And as is made clear above (at the end of (b)), if a not-for-dividend company has to tender for the post-franchise rail rights, it needs to be in existence well in advance of the tendering date – meaning the Cardiff Bay government needs to get its skates on if that’s the path it is going down.

Finally in this section, para. 50 states: “*Railfuture suggested that the current franchise could perhaps be extended for a short, specified length of time to*

facilitate a move to not-for-dividend rail."

(d) EXPERTISE in Wales: para. 42 warns: "*Several consultation respondents raised concerns about the current level of expertise and resources within the Welsh Government to develop the franchise specification and procure the contract.*" In other words, the rail civil service team needs expanding as a priority. "*Transport Scotland told us,*" states the committee (para. 46), "*that it had 65 people who deal with rail issues, almost all of whom were engaged in some aspect of the consultation exercise*" (see para. 29). "*14 people were involved in taking forward the detailed specification. Its commercial team, which takes forward the 'franchising of the specification' has 12 people. It also supplements its staff with financial advisers, technical advisers and legal advisers, all of whom are contracted out from parties that have bid for the work and who have good experience in franchising within the UK.*"

Whether we end up having to accept a new franchise, or achieve the kind of re-organisation we are striving for, the fact remains that Wales needs its own expanded team of experts to advise the politicians and engage in the necessary detailed planning.

(e) ANALOGIES: the report makes it clear that the committee has looked at the Scottish situation of rail transport and spoken to many of those involved in its organisation. I won't go into detail except to say that I always thought it odd that Railfuture Scotland was not pursuing in parallel with us the aim of escaping from the financial and organisational craziness of the franchise system. While I had e-mailed them our own plan, there was no response to this. However, I have since been told that the Scottish government attempted to persuade Westminster to allow it decide for itself what would happen when the franchise expired – but that Westminster dug its heels in and simply refused to consider any non-franchise possibility.

DOR?? Directly Operated Rail, currently running quite successfully, as far as I know, the English east coast mainline following the franchise fiasco. If this government-owned outfit, a mini BR if you like, can do a darn good job, is there not a lesson here? Perhaps underlined by Westminster's refusal to allow the DOR company to bid for the new east coast franchise!

But what about Ireland? Why did not our committee either talk to – or at least draw attention to – those running the small northern Ireland network, one which is **both vertically integrated and still nationalised?** When drawing up our own plan, I remember 'phoning the Irish Rail HQ and being pleasantly surprised at how easy it was to get in contact with key management. My interlocutor (a word I learnt from 'Yes Minister') confirmed that they still ran a nationalised organisation but which had separate accounting for train operations on the one hand, and track & infrastructure on

the other – so keeping happy those in Brussels. (A subsequent chat revealed that the ‘international’ passenger trains between Belfast & Dublin had locomotives serviced one side of the border and the coaches on the other. Timetabling etc. was resolved in amicable discussion between north and south...) So if Ireland can do it.....

## A social-cultural perspective

Apart from the above five points that stuck in my mind, I was particularly pleased to read that the CRESC report I forwarded to the committee made enough impact to be highlighted in paragraphs 113 & 114. (This report, published 4/9/2013, is also available for e-mailing to anyone interested.)<sup>1</sup>. The Centre for Research on Socio-Cultural Change (CRESC) - drawn up by distinguished experts - draws attention to a number of key issues, an appreciation of which will undermine some of the pro-franchise propaganda peddled by ATOC et al.

For example, The report argued that “*there is an imbalance between direct subsidies to train operators and an indirect subsidy through low track access charges, which undervalues the cost of operating and developing infrastructure and so contributes to significant debt held by Network Rail.*” As RAIL magazine stated in a recent edition, its net current debt is £30.611 **billion** - guaranteed by the Westminster government.

CRESC also identified a correlation between passenger growth and Gross Domestic Product (GDP), suggesting that this and other factors such as petrol prices account for passenger growth as opposed to the action of franchise operators themselves. (Para. 114). To expand this slightly, the CRESC report stated that motoring costs in general had been rising; that passenger growth was evident even before franchising began; and that the rapid increase in rail commuting in south-east England was a significant factor.

I am not saying that some of the TOCs have not made notable efforts and improvements to improve passenger transport – but when they begin bragging about their ‘investment’, the warning lights should flash in our brains. After all, what does a TOC actually own? The TOCs also make a point of how low and ‘reasonable’ their profits are. While the CRESC report accepts that TOC dividend extractions are ‘modest’, i.e., £160 million paid out in 2010-11, 2.1% of turnover, the CRESC report states: “*The standard*

*measure of return is usually return on capital employed (ROCE) because that is the basis on which any portfolio or direct investor would compare investment opportunities. The KPMG report avoids ROCE calculations, and opportunistically claims that supermarkets earn margins of around 5% on turnover... But that glosses over a fundamental difference between TOCs and supermarkets. The supermarkets have large amounts of capital tied up in their businesses, whereas the TOCs are what we called ‘fee for service’ companies. This is because the investments they make are negligible. They don’t have capital invested in the tracks that their trains run on. And they don’t have capital invested in those trains either. They lease their rolling stock from ROSCOs”.....*

You get the drift! It goes on: “*Compare this (supermarket profits etc.) with the 22 TOCs which in the same year (2011-12) had a negligible £219 million invested in the rail business. This meant that their 2.8% on sales translated into a starry 121.6% return on capital, a figure well above the expectations of return in a heavily levered private equity fund. As private equity knows, the only way to get operating ROCE above 25% is by persuading someone else to supply most of the capital so that fund returns are levered. ... from a rail system point of view, NR is supplying the capital so that the TOCs can earn profits”.....*

Not exactly light reading – but I recommend struggling with the report as it is a real eye-opener.

## **What happens next?**

The Senedd committee report ends with a ‘Charter for the Next Wales & Borders Franchise’ (followed by the Inquiry terms of reference and a summary of points made). The Charter consists of 10 points, although number 10 has 14 sub-points under the heading of ‘Ensure that the franchise clearly addresses the following other issues’. Picking just two of the main points, no. 1 declares: “*Continue to lobby the UK government for the necessary powers and requisite funding to be devolved so that the Welsh government is responsible for specifying and procuring the next Wales & Borders Franchise.”*

A key one in view of our aim is no. 6: “*Take an early decision on the management model to be adopted, demonstrating how the chosen model will improve passenger satisfaction and service quality as well as value for money. The approach to managing and mitigating risk must also be clear.”*

No. 8 is a sound principle, although I wonder how successful Welsh efforts would be: “*Work with the UK Dept. for Transport to ensure Welsh interests are reflected in the procurement of new franchises more widely, not least the Great Western and West Coast franchises.”*

## An overall impression

Overall the committee's report marks a major step forward, not least in that there is confirmation of the Welsh government's move to find a viable alternative to the current franchise system and also that they and Westminster are already engaged in discussions. What is needed now is an explicit announcement by either Edwina Hart or Carwyn Jones that it is happy with the report and its recommendations and that our government will redouble its efforts to obtain full powers from London to manage the future of rail transport.

It is also clear that the Senedd is fully aware of the shortcomings of the current franchise and that, even if we are landed with another dose of the same, the franchise company will be expected to do a lot more to expand and improve the Welsh rail scene. However, how successful any attempts will be at influencing FGW, Cross-country and Virgin (or their successors) remains to be seen. And finally, the committee has fully endorsed ATW's opinion that its current network be maintained and not whittled away, whatever the post-2018 situation.

**Members of the Enterprise & Business Committee:** Nick Ramsay (chair), Welsh Conservatives, Monmouth; Byron Davies, ibid, south-Wales west; Rhun ap Iorwerth, Plaid Cymru, Ynys Môn; Alun Ffred Jones, Plaid Cymru, Arfon; David Rees, Welsh Labour, Aberafan; Mick Antoniw, Welsh Labour, Pontypridd; Keith Davies, Welsh Labour, Llanelli; Julie James, Welsh Labour, Swansea West; Eluned Parrott, Welsh Lib Dems, south Wales central; Joyce Watson, Welsh Labour, Mid and West Wales.

*John Rogers, chairman, south branch of Railfuture Cymru*

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## Wales Freight update (February 2014)

**Aggregates:** Trains with grit-stone have run from Moreton on Lugg to Hayes and Hothfield, worked by DBS, and Harlow and West Drayton worked by GBRF. Machen Quarry has dispatched trains to West Drayton. Basic slag has been loaded at Grange siding for a variety of destinations. Limestone is dispatched from Neath Abbey Wharf to Angerstein Wharf in London and Theale. Limestone from Hardendale in the Lake District and dolomite from Threlkeld in brought in containers to Port Talbot steel works.

**Automotive:** a daily service links Fords at Bridgend and Dagenham, and a thrice weekly service from Portbury to Mossend conveying imported vehicles.

**Biomass:** The first biomass train to run in Wales was the diverted 22.15 Portbury Dock to Ironbridge power station on 19th December.

**Chemicals:** Trains run from Barry Docks with traffic for Southampton Docks and Tilbury. A twice monthly service delivers silica sand from France.

**Coal:** The last train of coal left Cwmgwrach on 18th August for Aberthaw, since when the line from Neath N & B Junction to Cwmgwrach has been out of use. Trains with coal for blending have been running twice weekly from Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen to Onllwyn. The weekly train of coal from Onllwyn to Scunthorpe last ran on 25th January but the twice weekly trains to Immingham continue to run.

Cwmbargoed dispatches a weekly train to TATA at Port Talbot and twice weekly trains to the cement works at Earl's Siding at Hope. The coal trains to Uskmouth power station were worked by Freightliner until 31st August and DBS took over the workings from 2nd September. The last inward train of coal from Newport Docks to Uskmouth power station was on 4th December and no more coal trains have run from Newport Docks. The last Avonmouth to Uskmouth Power station coal train was on 5th February 2014.

Aberthaw power station continues to receive coal from Avonmouth, Cwmbargoed, Onllwyn and Tower and a thrice weekly train from New Cumnock in Scotland. The cement works at Penyffordd receives a twice monthly train of coal from New Cumnock. Coal trains worked by Freightliner from Avonmouth and Portbury Docks use the Marches line en route to Fiddlers Ferry and Rugeley power stations.

**Coke:** Colas commenced hauling a weekly coke train from Redcar to Margam Grange on 26th October. DBS commenced hauling coke from Redcar to Margam on 20th November and this subsequently increased to four trains per week.

A new coke loading point has been established on the east side of the Grange branch between the junction for P-field and the junction for the high and low level lines at Grange siding. The coke is of finer grain than that coming from Redcar and is being sent to Scunthorpe. The first train was loaded on Friday 31st January.

**Containers:** Daily trains run from Southampton worked by Freightliner, and Daventry worked by DRS, with an occasional Saturday train from Garston worked by Freightliner.

**Nuclear:** Trains run as required between Valley and Sellafield.

**Petroleum:** DBS-worked petroleum trains from Robeston to Theale have increased from 3 to 5 per week, and most weeks there have been two to Bedworth. The daily train to Westerleigh continues to run. DBS also works an occasional train from Lindsey to Aberthaw power station. GBRF works a weekly train from Lindsey to Cardiff Docks for Green energy.

**Scrap:** Trains with steel scrap ran from Beeston and Handsworth Queens Head to Sims **Newport Docks** in January and February.

DCR worked trains with scrap from Stockton to **Cardiff Tidal sidings** in September, with the last train running on 3rd October. GBRF worked trains with scrap from Beeston and Handsworth Queens Head until 28th June when they were taken over by DBS. Freightliner has continued to work thrice weekly trains with scrap from Dagenham Dock. DBS has worked trains of scrap from Attercliffe, Beeston, Exeter, Handsworth Queens Head, Kingsbury, Rotherham(thrice weekly) and Swindon. Weekly scrap trains from Lincoln to Cardiff for CELSA recommenced on 24th January after a break of a year.

There has been a weekly train from Swindon to **Port Talbot Grange siding** in addition to the weekly train from Trostre.

**TATA steel:** DBS has been working daily trains of steel coil from Margam and Llanwern to Birdport Newport (two trains), Corby, Dee Marsh (two trains), Hartlepool, Round Oak (three trains) and Trostre. There have been thrice weekly trains to Middlesbrough and twice weekly to Swindon and Wolverhampton. Up to five daily trains of slab run from Margam to Llanwern. DBS has continued to work twice weekly to both France and the Netherlands via Dollands Moor. Trains conveying steel coil for export ran in September from Llanwern to Newport Docks, and in December conveying steel slab from Scunthorpe to Llanwern.

A new service has commenced from Margam to Tilbury with steel coil for export to Belgium. At first this traffic was sent as wagon-load using the Trostre to Tilbury tinplate service and the Newport to Didcot and Didcot to Tilbury enterprise services. From 6th December Colas has worked a Friday weekly block train from Margam and a second weekly train commenced on Tuesdays from 11th February. DBS also worked a block train from Llanwern to Tilbury in December.

Colas worked steel coil trains from Llanwern to Dolland's Moor for export on 1st and 8th September. and from Llanwern to Washwood Heath Birmingham on 3rd and 10th February.

**CELSA steel:** Celsa recommenced sending reinforcement bar to Rotherham on 17th September and steel bar to Mossend on 22nd October. There has also been a number of consignments of billets to Scunthorpe.

**Timber:** Chirk has received timber from Baglan Bay, Carlisle, Ribblehead and Teigngrace.

*Rowland Pittard*

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## But what chance for rail freight?

VOSA (the Vehicle and Operational Services Agency) has reported that, in the year ending December 2013, 35% of heavy goods vehicles inspected when using the A55 road in north Wales were served with prohibition notices for defects, including defective brakes and overloading. There were also instances of drivers in breach of driving hours rules.

VOSA remarked that the 'vast majority of operators on the A55 are responsible', but this view is hardly supported by a 35% failure rate! Their intended action is to set up a second inspection unit, in Flintshire, to complement the existing unit in Gwynedd.

Users of the A55 (the main east – west road from the English border to Holyhead) can testify from their own experience that few HGVs comply with speed limits such as that of 50 mph through Colwyn Bay. With so much corner-cutting, it's not surprising that road haulage continues to undermine rail freight. In north Wales, the safety problems on the A55 should justify a more *concerted* effort to reintroduce revenue-earning rail freight, especially for the major movement of freight through Holyhead ferry port.



*New bay platform at Caerphilly (photo:Julian Langston)*

## Bridgend Area Rail Standard Day Returns (February 2014)

This is a follow-up to the article I wrote in ‘Rail Wales’ in 2012 (*issue 53*) about the ‘Unfair Fares’ at the three stations just north of Bridgend. Serving one of Wales’s poorest areas, they had the highest fares. This is because, in spite of being the stations *closest* to Bridgend, they were *not* counted as being in the Bridgend Fares Zone, while stations as far away as Rhoose, Pontyclun and Briton Ferry were!

Since then (perhaps partly as a result of my article), some fares at those stations have been reduced, although they are still high compared with other places. Here are the Standard Day Return Fares, one-way mileages, and pence per mile for the return journey, for stations in the Bridgend area.. A few stations also have Cheap Day Returns. A Single fare is only slightly less than a Day Return.

**Table 1: 2012 & 2014 Fares for Bridgend and Wildmill (Listed by distance)**

Headings: Day Return Fares in **2014** & **2012**; Increase or decrease; Miles; p/mile.

L: Lines: M: Maesteg Line; E: Main Line East: W: Main Line West; Vale of Glam. Line

Bridgend:							Wildmill:						
L	To / from	2014	2012	+ / -	M	P/m	L	To / from	2014	2012	+ / -	M	P/m
M	Wildmill	<b>2.10</b>	1.90	+20	1	105	M	Bridgend	<b>2.10</b>	1.90	+20	1	105
M	Sarn	<b>2.10</b>	1.90	+20	2½	93	M	Sarn	<b>2.10</b>	2.00	+10	1¾	57
M	Tondu	<b>3.00</b>	3.40	-40	3	50	M	Tondu	<b>2.90</b>	2.70	+20	2	72
E	Pencoed	<b>2.30</b>	2.10	+20	4	26	E	Pencoed	<b>3.00</b>	3.40	-40	5	30
W	Pyle	<b>3.60</b>	3.30	+30	6	30	W	Pyle	<b>4.80</b>	4.30	+50	7	34
E	Llanhara n	<b>3.60</b>	3.40	+20	6½	28	E	Llanharan	<b>3.60</b>	4.50	-90	7½	24
M	Maesteg	<b>3.00</b>	3.40	-40	8¼	18	M	Maesteg	<b>2.90</b>	2.70	+20	7¼	20
V	Llantwit	<b>2.20</b>	2.10	+10	9¼	12	V	Llantwit	<b>3.00</b>	3.40	+40	10 1/4	15
E	Pontyclun	<b>3.60</b>	3.40	+20	9¼	19	E	Pontyclun	<b>3.60</b>	4.50	-90	10 1/4	18
W	Pt Talbot	<b>4.60</b>	4.10	+50	12 1/4	19	W	Pt Talbot	<b>4.80</b>	4.30	+50	13 1/4	17
V	Rhoose	<b>3.60</b>	3.40	+20	15 ¾	11	V	Rhoose	<b>4.90</b>	4.50	+40	16 ¾	15
V	Barry	<b>4.90</b>	4.50	+40	19	13	V	Barry	<b>4.90</b>	6.00	-110	20	12
E	**Cardiff	<b>6.80</b>	6.20	+60	20 1/4	17	E	Cardiff	<b>7.70</b>	8.00	-30	21 1/4	18
W	*Swansea	<b>8.00</b>	7.10	+90	27 1/4	15	W	*Swansea	<b>8.00</b>	7.10	+90	28 1/4	14

\*\* Cheap Day Return £5.80; Bridgend only. \* Cheap Day Return £6.80 available Bridgend & Wildmill...

**Table 2: Stations listed by Fares**

**L: Line:** M= Maesteg; E & W = Main Line East & West; V = Vale of Glamorgan  
**D: Distance in miles** (one way) **P: Day Return Fare in Pence**

<u>Tondu</u>				<u>Bridgend</u>				<u>Wildmill</u>				<u>Sarn</u>			
L	To/from	D	P	L	To/from	D	P	L	To/from	D	P	L	To/from	D	P
M	Wildmill	1	210	M	Bridgend	1	210	M	Tondu	¾	210	M	Sarn	¾	210
M	Sarn	2 ¼	210	M	Sarn	1 ¼	210	M	Wildmill	1 ¼	210	M	Wildmill	2	290
V	Llantwit	9 ¼	220	M	Tondu	2	290	M	Bridgend	2 ¼	210	M	Maesteg	5 ¼	290
E	Pencoed	4	230	M	Maesteg	7 ¼	290	M	Maesteg	6	290	M	Bridgend	3	300
M	Tondu	3	300	E	Pencoed	5	300	E	Pencoed	6 ¼	300	E	Pencoed	7	300
M	Maesteg	8 ¼	300	E	Ll'hara	7 ½	300	V	Llantwit	11 ½	300	V	Llantwit	12 ¼	300
W	Pyle	6	360	V	Llantwit	10 ¼	300	E	P'tyclun	11 ½	360	E	P'tyclun	12 ¼	360
E	Ll'hara	6 ½	360	E	P'tyclun	10 ¼	360	W	P.Talbot	14 ½	480	W	P.Talbot	15 ¼	480
E	P'tyclun	9 ¼	360	W	Pyle	7	480	E	Ll'hara	8 ¾	490	W	Pyle	9	490
V	Rhoose	15 ¾	360	W	P.Talbot	13 ¼	480	V	Rhoose	18	490	E	Ll'hara	9 ½	490
W	P.Talbot	12 ¼	460	V	Rhoose	16 ¾	490	V	Barry	21 ¼	490	V	Rhoose	18 ¾	490
V	Barry	19	490	V	Barry	20	490	W	Pyle	8 ¼	580	V	Barry	22	490
E	Cardiff	20 ¼	680	E	Cardiff	21 ¼	770	E	Cardiff	22 ½	770	E	Cardiff	23 ¼	770
W	Swansea	27 ¼	800	W	Swansea	28 ¼	800	W	Swansea	29 ½	1140	W	Swansea	30 ¼	1140

**Table 3: Fare Price Bands**

**D: Distance in miles.** **P: Pence per mile**  
Bridgend      Wildmill      Sarn      Tondu

£2.10- 2.30	D	P	£2.10-2.30	D	P	£2.10- 2.30	D	P	£2.10- £2.30	D	
Wildmill	1	105	Bridgend	1	105	Tondu	¾	140	Sarn	¾	140
Sarn	2 ¼	47	Sarn	1 ¼	84	Wildmill	1 ¼	84			
Pencoed	4	29				Bridgend	2 ¼	47			
Llantwit	9 ¼	12									
£2.90- 3.00			£2.90-3.00			£2.90- 3.00			£2.90-3.00		
Tondu	3	50	Tondu	2	72	Maesteg	6	24	Wildmill	2	72
Maesteg	8 ¼	18	Pencoed	5	30	Pencoed	6 ¼	24	Bridgend	3	50
			Maesteg	7 ¼	20	Llantwit	11 ½	13	Maesteg	5 ¼	28
			Llanharan	7 ½	24				Pencoed	7	22

			Llantwit	10 1/4	15					Llantwit	12 1/4	12
<b>£3.60</b>			<b>£3.60</b>			<b>£3.60</b>			<b>£3.60</b>			
Pyle	6	30	None			Pontyclu n	11 1/2	16	Pontyclun	12 1/4	15	
Llanharan	6½	28										
Pontyclun	9¼	19										
Rhoose	15 ¾	11										
<b>£4.60- 4.90</b>			<b>£4.60-4.90</b>			<b>£4.60- 4.90</b>			<b>£4.60-4.90</b>			
Pt Talbot	12 ¼	19	Pyle	7	34	Pt Talbot	14 ½	17	Pt Talbot	15 ¼	16	
Barry	19	13	Pt Talbot	13 ¼	18	Llanhara n	8¾	28	Pyle	9	27	
			Rhoose	16 ¾	15	Rhoose	18	14	Llanharan	9½	26	
			Barry	20	13	Barry	21 ¼	12	Rhoose	18 ¾	13	
									Barry	22	11	
<b>£6.80</b>						<b>£5.80</b>						
Cardiff	20 ¼	17				Pyle	8¼	35				
<b>£7.70- 8.00</b>			<b>£7.70-8.00</b>			<b>£7.70- 8.00</b>			<b>£7.70-8.00</b>			
Swansea	27 ¼	15	Cardiff	21 ¼	18	Cardiff	22 ½	17	Cardiff	23 ¼	17	
			Swansea	28 ¼	14							
						<b>£11.40</b>			<b>£11.40</b>			
						Swansea	29 ½	19	Swansea	30 ¼	19	

The figures show the haphazard way in which fares are drawn up, before having arbitrary increases added (or sometimes reductions made!) each year. The result is a wholly irrational fares structure, with an extra mile costing anything from nothing to £1.84 (and in a few cases actually giving a reduction!). Some glaring anomalies: one mile from Bridgend to Wildmill costs almost the same as 9¼ miles from Llantwit. To Swansea from Sarn, the 1¼ miles to Wildmill costs £3.40; but going to Cardiff, it costs nothing. From Sarn to Pyle costs 90p *more* than for someone passing through from Tondu. You can find plenty of similar absurdities in the tables.

The best fares, by far, are on the VoG line. It's a pity the other fares are not so reasonable. The minor stations on the Maesteg line – especially Wildmill - would see far more users (perhaps 3 to 6 times as many) if their fares were comparable to those in the rest of the district, and on the other Valley lines.

*David Watts*

## Weather Disruption Winter 2013-14

Strong winds and fallen trees, heavy rain and flooding, high water tables and landslip, high tides and coastal surges and damaged signalling equipment have all contributed to rail service disruption in Wales this winter. The major disruptive incidents are described below but the list is not exhaustive.

The most destructive incident occurred on 4th November 2013 when it was found that Pont Briwet over the River Dwyryd between Llandecwyn and Penrhyndeudraeth had moved. Work on a new £19.5m rail and road crossing had destabilised the existing bridge, forcing Network Rail to close a 22-mile stretch of line from Harlech to Pwllheli. There was no ATW unit north of Harlech when the closure took place. The adjacent road crossing which is between Llandecwyn and Penrhyndeudraeth was also shut. Completion of the new rail bridge is expected in May 2014.

The **Cardiff Valley** services have escaped major disruption this winter with only short periods of line closure between Fernhill and Aberdare. The flooding that used to occur at Llandow on the Vale of Glamorgan line appears to have been solved by improved drainage. The most disruptive day for the Cardiff valley services was on 2nd November 2013 when heavy rain and strong winds in the afternoon resulted in fallen trees and flooding affected many services for a few hours.

Storms hit the **Cambrian Coast line** on the 3rd January causing damage to the surrounding area. The sea wall was washed away at Llanaber, resulting in 300 tonnes of rail ballast lost to the sea and approximately 800 tonnes of debris across the line. The tidal surge also caused damage the embankment and sea wall at Barmouth and the Sandilands area of Tywyn, leaving the railway unsafe for operations. Two class 158 units were stranded at Barmouth. 158831/36 were removed from Barmouth to Chester by road on and worked empty from Chester to Cardiff Canton. They re-entered service the following day. 158840 worked the 08.07 Machynlleth to Aberystwyth but it was unable to return to Machynlleth and remained at Aberystwyth until the line reopened at 18.00 on 6th January. The line from Barmouth to Machynlleth reopened on 10th February with 158824 working the first service. The line from Barmouth to Machynlleth reopened on 10th February with 158824 working the first service. There have been intermittent closures between Welshpool and Newtown and Newtown and Machynlleth but remedial work carried out last year appears to have been effective.

There has been limited disruption between **Rhyl and Llandudno Junction**. The **Blaenau Ffestiniog branch** was closed from 3rd to 7th Jan because of storm damage and reopened on 8th. The branch was further affected by

fallen trees on 12th February.

Storms in the South East of England caused considerable disruption to the **Paddington to Swansea service** on 23rd December .The 20.28 Swansea to Paddington departed at 23.38 but did not reach Paddington until 07.24 the following day The 21.50 from Paddington to Swansea started from Paddington at 22.08 and reached Swansea at 03.29. The previous 19.15 and 20.15 Paddington to Swansea were cancelled and the additional 22.45 diverted to Bristol. The following morning the 03.30 empty HST ran to Cheltenham but there were no FGW services out of Swansea until the 08.29 to Paddington. Rail services between south Wales and London Paddington have been affected by flooding.

Paddington to South Wales services were again disrupted and some trains cancelled when flooding at Maidenhead affected signalling equipment from 11<sup>th</sup> February. An hourly service was provided from Paddington to Swansea and vice versa with most trains taking 30 minutes longer to reach South Wales. The Cardiff to Paddington weekday service was cancelled as were the morning trains out of Swansea at 05.58, 06.58 and 07.58 and balancing return workings at 16.15, 17.15 and 18.15 from Paddington. These cancellations affected many local journeys in South Wales especially for morning commuters and for passengers travelling to North East England whose journeys were extended by an hour. Services were to return to normal from 17th February but in practice it was 20th before all services were restored.

The **Marches route** experienced intermittent problems in the Newport to Hereford section, especially in the Cwmbran and Pandy areas. Flooding affected the route on 23rd and 30th December. The 05.33 premier service from Holyhead to Cardiff was held at Hereford until flood waters had cleared on 30th. There was further disruption on 3<sup>rd</sup> January, 9<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup> February.

Services between Cardiff and Newport were curtailed on 3<sup>rd</sup> January after multiple signal failures and flooding affected lines west of Newport. For a while a shuttle service operated between Cardiff and Newport.

The southern end of the **Central Wales line** was closed by flooding on 3<sup>rd</sup> January and trains from Shrewsbury terminated at Pantyffynnon where a unit stabled each night. The line re-opened on 7th. A land slip at Knighton resulted in services being cancelled on 4th and 5th February. Six trains were cancelled on 4th February. There was a further closure on 12th.

Storms on 3rd January 2014 caused damage to sea walls and the main line at **Pwll, west of Llanelli and near Ferryside**. The last up train was the 05.03 Robeston-Westerleigh freight, which was subsequently diverted via Cockett because of flooding at Llangennech. 175116 working the 06.02

Milford Haven-Manchester terminated at Pembrey & Burry Port and returned to Carmarthen. The stock for the 07.30 Carmarthen-Paddington was passed through the possession at 17.00 and no further trains ran. ATW units 150284/5, 175007 and 175113/6 were trapped at Carmarthen and maintained services west of there during the blockage. The line re-opened on 13th when 150284 ran empty from Carmarthen to Llanelli to work the 16.30 to Manchester and 150258 off the 11.30 Manchester-Llanelli ran empty to Carmarthen. Empty HST 43018/43158 ran as 20.43 Swansea-Carmarthen and 21.48 return. The first passenger train was 150260 on the 21.04 Cardiff-Milford Haven. This was followed by 175103 on the 18.30 and 175110 on the 19.30 from Manchester but the first up train was 150260 on the 01.50 Fishguard Harbour-Swansea the following day. The first discharged oil trains ran west on 15th and the first loaded train was the 22.47 Robeston-Theale hauled by 60062.

The line between **Lydney and Gloucester** was closed because of flooding from 09.10 on 14th to 16.00 on 17th February. The Nottingham to Cardiff passenger service terminated at Gloucester and the Cardiff to Cheltenham service at Lydney. 150241 working 08.45 Cheltenham to Maesteg on 14th was stranded at Gloucester and returned empty to Cardiff Canton at 18.30 on 17<sup>th</sup>. The through service from **Cardiff to Taunton** was cut back to Bridgwater when flooding of the Somerset levels closed the line between Bridgwater and Taunton on 7th February and has yet to reopen.

*Rowland Pittard*

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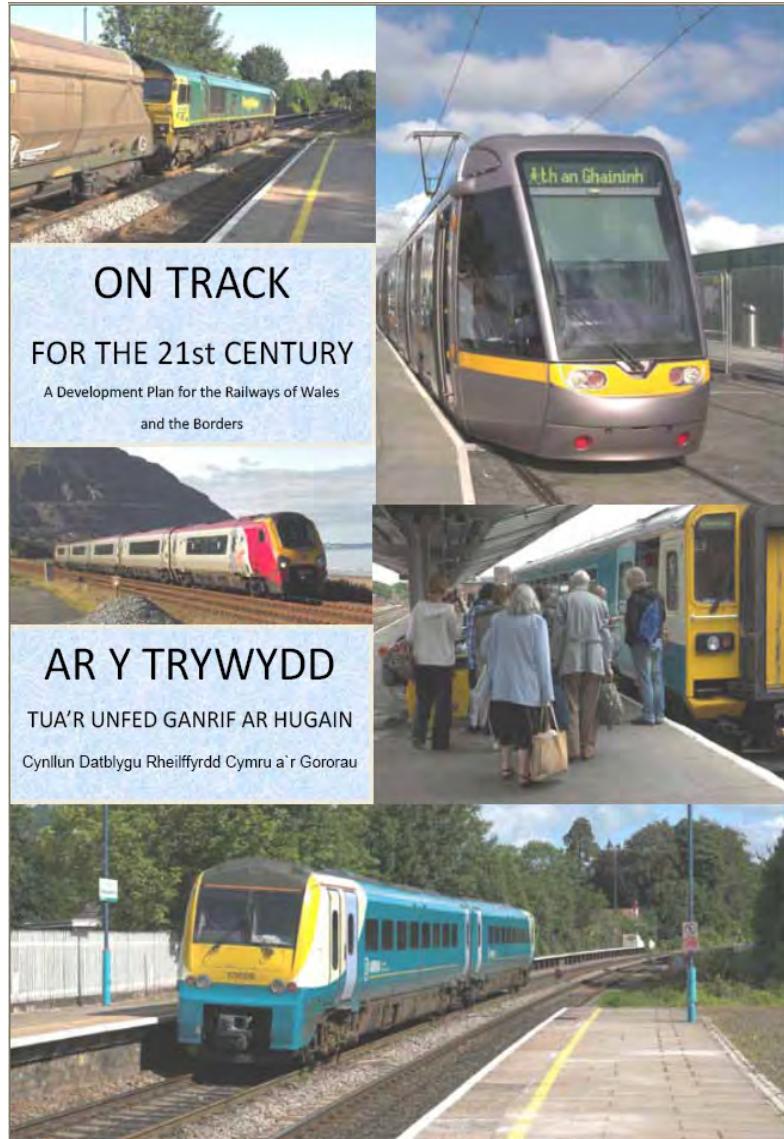
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