

Issue 57 Autumn 2014

Rail Wales

Newsletter of the Welsh branches of Railfuture



A Holyhead to Birmingham International train arriving at Llanfair PG

A new editor for *Rail Wales*

Peter Kingsbury will be replacing Peter Clark as the compiler/editor of Rail Wales from the Spring 2015 issue. Peter K has written a few words to introduce himself:

'I am a relatively new member of the *Railfuture* South Wales committee but have had a lifelong interest in public transport and belief in the role it can play in improving the quality of people's lives. I have lived and worked in Cardiff for most of my adult life although some may consider me to be an immigrant as I grew up in the suburbs of London where my passion for rail travel was first kindled by journeys on the London Underground. I had travelled on every part of the system by the age of 13 including several routes which have since closed.

'I moved to Cardiff in the 1980's just in time to see the opening of Cathays station. This was, I believe, the first stop on a 25 year journey of substantial improvements to the Valleys network which has seen a growth in network mileage, station openings and train frequency the scale of which is probably unequalled outside London. What happens next in terms of electrification and possible use of trams is currently subject to intense debate. Although living in metropolitan South Wales, I have an interest in the role of rail services in all parts of the country and aim to ensure that *Rail Wales* carries news and comment covering the north, mid and west of Wales.

'However, not being based in those areas I am dependent on you to send me material or links to stories which highlight what is happening north of Merthyr and west of Swansea. Readers have contributed much of interest to Peter Clark over the past 10 years and I hope this will continue. My contact details for submitting articles, letters, photos and comments are given at the end of this magazine (*page 24*).

'Finally, on behalf of all the readers of *Rail Wales*, I would like to thank Peter Clark for the job he has carried out for the past 10 or so years. Given that he stepped in as compiler only temporarily, to ensure its continued publication whilst a new editor was found, he has done an excellent job for which all members in Wales should be very grateful.'

Peter Kingsbury

North Wales update

Branch structure and viability

North Wales Branch Committee has been considering for some time whether existence as a separate branch is viable and, following consultation with the national organisation and branch members, has decided to approach South Wales with a view to amalgamation. The arrangements are ongoing and updates will be provided in due course.

In the meantime, branch committee members met in March with members of the North West England Branch committee, with whom we have much shared interest. The meeting was instructive in underlining the differences in the two branches and leading to re-thinking of the North Wales Branch's viability. It is very much the case that the link between North Wales as a division of Wales Branch and North West Branch will continue.

Connectivity, Greengauge 21

North Wales local authorities are jointly employing a connectivity project manager (John Rooney) to manage what they have called their Connectivity Project. There are three elements to it: (1) fast broadband & digital development across north Wales; (2) collation of land investment opportunities across north Wales; and (3) rail modernisation across north Wales with specific reference to quantifying the economic and social benefits. Rail modernisation will be the biggest element in the work and the one to be undertaken first.

Greengauge 21 are consultants engaged on the rail modernisation project. They are tackling their work in phases. Phase one is already complete, looking to identify enhancements or 'conditional outputs' that would justify investment. Phase 2 an econometric study of the conditional outputs intended to form part of the business case for the suggested improvements. Mr Rooney is establishing contact with various stakeholders, including *Railfuture*, as part of his research.

The North Wales branch has responded to this contact with various constructive comments which, it is hoped, will influence the process. There follows a summary of the response given which serves to act as a full list of concerns for the region. It includes commentary on the

issues they had already identified and suggestions of additional items of concern to our members, which it is felt they should consider.

Commentary on Conditional Outputs

North Wales Coast:

- One train an hour from the north Wales coast should serve Manchester Piccadilly (for onward connections to numerous destinations) and Manchester Airport. If there are to be two trains an hour, then there would be no problem if one of those trains were to serve Manchester Victoria. We are concerned, however, at rumours circulating that all trains from north Wales are to be diverted to Manchester Victoria. Given the importance of Manchester Airport to North Wales, it is essential that the present hourly service to Manchester Piccadilly (which has been timetabled to allow sufficient time for trains to run to and from the Airport) should be extended to the Airport every hour throughout the day.
- There should be an hourly service to Liverpool South Parkway (for Liverpool John Lennon Airport) and Liverpool Lime Street via an upgraded Halton Curve. As an alternative to a service from the north Wales coast, consideration should be given to a through service from Wrexham to Liverpool, with appropriate cross platform interchange at Chester with the North Wales to Manchester Airport service.
- There should be an hourly through service from the north Wales Coast to London Euston. The need to avoid a change of trains at Chester or Crewe cannot be over-emphasised.
- The existing hourly service from Holyhead to Shrewsbury via Wrexham, with alternate trains going forward to Birmingham International or Cardiff should continue, but it is essential that cross-platform interchange with other services is retained at Shrewsbury, so as to provide an hourly service from North Wales to each of Birmingham International and Cardiff.
- Connections to and from Llandudno should be provided for all trains calling at Llandudno Junction.

- In order to provide effective, through services from north Wales to Euston, Manchester and Liverpool, it is essential that the route from Chester to Holyhead is electrified at the same time as the other routes in north west England - in particular Crewe to Chester, Warrington Bank Quay to Chester, and Runcorn to Frodsham (the Halton curve). There would otherwise be a continuation of the current undesirable situation where diesel trains are used on services which run "under the wires" for a substantial part of their journey. The availability of European funding for electrification should be investigated, given that the route is part of the TEN-T EU-designated corridor.

Other routes:

- The current Wrexham to Bidston service should be increased to at least half-hourly and extended to Liverpool Central. Given that diesel trains are not permitted in the tunnel section between Birkenhead Park and Liverpool Central, this will require electrification of the route from Wrexham. While third rail electrification is not ideal, it should not be ruled out in this case, as the Merseyrail Electrics network (to which the Wrexham to Bidston route would be appended) is largely a "stand alone" network with few points of interface with other routes.
- While a through service between Wrexham and Euston via Crewe would be highly desirable, we question the need for this to operate via Birmingham New Street, given the existing service from Wrexham to Birmingham via Shrewsbury. A service to Birmingham via Crewe is unlikely to be significantly quicker than one via Shrewsbury, but would add unnecessarily to the journey time between Wrexham and Euston.
- In order to provide a reliable and frequent service between Wrexham and Chester (wherever the ultimate destination of such services may be), it is essential that double track is restored over the whole of this section, with the possible exception of the short bridge over the A483 road.
- Services on the Conwy Valley branch should be increased to hourly between Llandudno and Betws-y-Coed (at least in the tourist season), and to two-hourly between Betws-y-Coed and

Blaenau Ffestiniog.

Stations:

- We support the aspiration to ensure that very high levels of passenger interchange are available at Crewe and Chester. Provision should also be made for easy passenger interchange between the High and Low Level stations at Shotton.
- While a new station at Broughton is desirable, there are numerous other locations on existing routes within Wales where the possibility of new stations should be investigated, including: –
 - a) on the North Wales coast: Queensferry, Connah's Quay, Bagillt and Greenfield;
 - b) on the Shrewsbury to Chester line: Cefn, Johnstown, Rossett and Chester Business Park;
 - c) on the Wrexham to Bidston line: Deeside Industrial Park.

Freight:

- We support the proposal to return containerised rail freight to Holyhead (after appropriate gauge enhancement along the North Wales coast). As the site of the former container berths at Holyhead is now occupied by the passenger terminal and fast ferry berth, we would suggest that the existing tracks alongside platform 1 at Holyhead should be extended to the site of the current freight berths at Salt Island.
- Other options for rail freight should be investigated, including terminals at locations such as Deeside Industrial Park, Llandudno Junction, Bangor and Holyhead.
- The possibility of removing slate waste from Blaenau Ffestiniog by rail should be further examined.

Additional Suggestions

Restoration of several former railway lines merits examination as possible means of improving connectivity across North Wales. We set out the most obvious examples below, but there may well be others:

Bangor – Caernarfon – Afon Wen

The feasibility of restoring the former railway between Bangor and Caernarfon should be urgently examined. The castle at Caernarfon is

amongst the most visited tourist attractions in Wales, yet is difficult to access by public transport. Further, the section between Bangor and Caernarfon is the only “missing link” in the rail network (comprising the lines of Network Rail, the Ffestiniog and Welsh Highland Railways) which encircles Snowdonia. With interchange facilities between Network Rail and the Welsh Highland Railway at the site of the latter’s station alongside the entrance to Caernarfon Castle, public transport in the area would be immeasurably improved. (*See also footnote at end*).

Any new interchange facility at Caernarfon should be designed in such a way as to permit the restoration of the remainder of the former railway between Caernarfon and Afon Wen, so as to provide a comprehensive rail network in North Wales. The present network can be likened to three and three quarter sides of a rectangle, with the missing section being Bangor to Afon Wen – a distance of some 27 miles. To make that journey by rail at the present time involves a distance of some 215 miles via Chester, Shrewsbury and Machynlleth.

Bangor – Llangefni

The feasibility of introducing a service between Bangor and Llangefni, using the first section of the mothballed Amlwch branch, should also be examined. As the administrative and commercial centre of Ynys Môn, Llangefni should be connected to the rail network. Further, the congestion on the existing road crossings created by the considerable commuter traffic between the island and Bangor could be alleviated by the provision of a rail service operating at least half-hourly. The costs involved are likely to be substantially less than the cost of building a third road crossing which has been suggested.

Mold – Chester

The feasibility of restoring a rail service linking Mold to Chester should be examined. Since the former railway was closed, the town of Mold has expanded enormously, while the hinterland of the town has become a dormitory for workers commuting to Chester, Liverpool, Manchester and further afield. Although there is a frequent bus service between Mold and Chester, the journey time of almost an hour for a distance of a mere 13 miles renders the bus unable to compete with the private car. The options for restoring a rail service between Mold and Chester should be examined – either using the original route, or

possibly by means of connection to the Wrexham – Bidston line at the former Buckley Junction.

Light rapid transport (LRT) network around Wrexham

Wrexham is an area suffering from road congestion. The possibility of creating a light rapid transport network linking Wrexham to its surrounding towns and villages should be examined. There are numerous disused rail corridors around the town which could be used as the basis for such an LRT network. The document *On Track for the 21st Century* published in 2013 was well received throughout Wales. It was noted that a number of LRT schemes were included for Cardiff, Swansea, Bridgend and Newport. Members have drawn up a similar diagram (*opposite*) for the Wrexham conurbation based upon the once existent rail routes and would like to see this brought forward in any future proposals in part or in whole.

Membership

With only 27 members, many of whom are not active members, it can perhaps be seen why North Wales as a branch lacks viability. This is certainly not for the want of issues to put forward and it is hoped that with the support available from being part of a larger branch that resources can be brought to bear to attract more members and encourage their active participation. We would hope for example to publicise our existence better in the region through leafleting and press releases in future, supported by the Wales branch. As can be seen there are many concerns and we need to ensure voices are heard.

John Hanahoe

Footnote: support for Bangor – Caernarfon reopening was expressed recently by former Conwy Council Transport Officer Bob Saxby, who quotes £100m as the cost of the proposed bypass road, which would be much more expensive than the rail scheme, and makes some interesting observations on the nature and value of reinstated train services. He opines that the journey time for trains between Bangor and Caernarfon would be 13 minutes, whereas most buses take more than twice that. But he doesn't foresee significant abstraction from the buses because they serve many parts of Bangor remote from the rail station. Rather, the main benefit would be in attracting visitors to Caernarfon from further afield, which would represent a large benefit to the town.

To achieve this, Mr Saxby believes there would be a good business case for an hourly train service to/from Chester and beyond, and goes further by advocating the extension to Caernarfon of the Virgin trains which currently terminate at Bangor; this would make possible a Caernarfon – London Euston journey time of just 3 hrs 27 mins!

The various authorities in north Wales continue to say that reopening the railway to Caernarfon is a 'long term aspiration'. Let's hope it is not too long a term, but meanwhile the enthusiasm of a respected former transport professional is indeed very encouraging.

Peter Clark

Wales freight 'task and finish' group

This group was appointed by the Minister of Transport Edwina Hart in July 2013, replacing the larger Freight Advisory Group of which *Railfuture* was a member. The group reported in March 2014 and made 24 recommendations relating to transport by air, road, rail and sea. Those relating to rail and sea are listed below with my comments in italics; many had already been incorporated in *Railfuture's* Development Plan for the Railways of Wales 'On Track for the 21st Century'.

N. The Welsh Government continues to work with all partners on maximising the potential for rail freight under Network Rail's Route Modernisation Plans in the Long Term Planning Process;

O. The Welsh Government works with all partners to encourage the retention of existing rail infrastructure, especially near ports, where there is potential for rail freight in the future - for example the sidings near the port of Swansea. (*These sidings in Swansea Docks are at present disused, as are those at Mostyn Dock*);

P. The Welsh Government works with all partners to ensure that the opportunities presented by the electrification of the South Wales Main Line and Valley Lines, take account of the potential to grow rail freight, and especially containers, through gauge clearance and inclusion of relief lines in the scheme. (*There will also be the need to electrify parts of the existing marshalling yards at Newport, Cardiff and Margam and private sidings at Wentloog and Ford Bridgend to ensure the use of electric traction throughout*);

Q. The Welsh Government explores with Network Rail, as part of the latter's Long Term Planning Process, the potential for an appropriately gauged diversionary rail route for freight into South Wales via Gloucester. (*Provision should be made for routes from Felixstowe, Harwich, Thames Gateway and Southampton*);

R. The Welsh Government explores with partners the opportunities for enhancing freight connectivity on the North Wales line via both Crewe and Warrington once capacity on the West Coast Main Line is released through the construction of HS2;

S. The Welsh Government works with all partners to ensure that the development of the case for North Wales rail electrification takes account of the potential to grow rail freight, and especially containers, through gauge clearance;

T. The Welsh Government explores further the role of public grant in supporting modal shifts from road to rail in Wales and the environmental and social benefits for Wales specifically;

U. The Welsh Government liaises with business, especially the retail sector and the supermarkets, to review the potential for increasing the flow of goods on rail via Wentloog in South Wales. (*There is also road/rail container transfer at Barry Docks for Dow Corning, at Margam for TATA steel and at Valley for Wylfa Power station*);

V. The Welsh Government explores with Network Rail, as part of the latter's Long Term Planning Process, the potential for enhancements to the line west of Swansea;

W. The Welsh Government supports marketing by ports in Wales which reflects their competitiveness for short sea shipping routes, including it as an integral part of the offer to relevant inward investment to Wales;

X. The Welsh Government supports a re-introduction of Load on - Load off (Lo-Lo) container freight via Holyhead port if opportunities were to arise in the future and they were in line with the Welsh Government's priorities for economic growth and jobs.

Wales Freight Update

The only losses of traffic have been the movement of coal to Uskmouth power station, which ceased generating in April, and the movement of coke from Redcar to Margam which ceased in July.

There has been an experimental movement of Coal Tar from TATA Port Talbot to Middlesbrough.

There have been only three trains of stone dispatched from Machen this year.

There has been an increase in the movement of Welsh-produced stone from Moreton on Lugg with an increased range of destinations including Elstow and Radlett.

There has been a substantial increase in coal traffic from New Cumnock to Penyffordd cement works with trains running weekly.

The weekly movement of coal from Onllwyn to Scunthorpe, after a short break, has continued to run.

The drift coal mine at Aberpergym has recommenced production and coal traffic is expected to restart from Cwmgwrach . The branch from Neath was reopened in preparation for this traffic.

The amount of steel being moved by rail from CELSA Cardiff has increased with destinations being served including Mossend (two terminals), Rotherham, Scunthorpe and Tilbury.

There has been an increase in the movement of steel and tinplate from South Wales to Tilbury with four trains running each week.

In addition to the export of steel coil from Birdport, Newport, there have been movements of coil and slab through Newport and Cardiff Docks when larger vessels have been involved.

The movement of petroleum from Robeston has been secured by the sale of the refinery in August.

Outward traffic from Barry Docks has recently included Portbury and Thames Gateway as well as Southampton and Tilbury. The former

scrap yard on the north side of no. 2 dock has also been used for unloading and storing containers as well as the new container terminal.

A consignment of five class 66/7 locomotives were imported from the USA via Newport Docks on 10th July for GB Railfreight .

Rowland Pittard (both articles)

All change outside Cardiff Central

Proposals have been announced over the summer which, if realised, will result in a transformation of the areas on both sides of Cardiff Central station.

First off, the BBC has stated it will relocate its Wales headquarters from its premises in the Llandaf area of the city to the site to the north of the station currently occupied by the bus station. The new HQ will be part of a larger commercial development being undertaken by Rightacres, a Cardiff based property company. Prestigious architects Norman Foster and Partners will be designing the BBC complex.

The BBC aims to move into its new home in 2018 which will require work to start in preparing the site in 2015 when the current bus station will close. Cardiff is fortunate to have its bus and coach station located adjacent to its principal rail hub and concern has been raised about the impact of the above on integrated transport connections in Cardiff.

In response, Cardiff Council has stated it intends to retain a bus interchange close to Cardiff Central and two sites are being evaluated. The first is on the eastern side of the existing bus station where Marland House and a multi storey car park stand and which will require demolition. The council, which owns Marland House, has recently bought the car park from NCP. The alternative is to develop a new bus interchange on the site of the surface car park to the south of the railway where work is currently underway constructing a new station entrance.

Consultations on the replacement bus station commenced in mid August and close on the 3rd October and will also cover the options for the interim period of several years starting in 2015 when no single

central bus facility will exist. The Council has stated that increased capacity for bus boarding in the city centre streets has already been put in place with stops in a number of locations which currently are not used such as Custom House Street and Callaghan Square. To take part in the consultation, visit <http://www.surveys.cardiff.gov.uk/busstation2014> .

Peter Kingsbury

Cambrian Lines News

Storm Damage and other infrastructure matters

The main news is that services resumed north of Harlech on 1st September following completion of storm damage repairs and of course the rail element of Pont Briwet. Problems have been encountered during the replacement of this structure which caused the closure of the old bridge to rail and road vehicles. The intention had been to maintain services whilst the new rail structure was being built with only a short break in services for the necessary connections to be made. Following that the road section of the bridge was to be completed with road traffic using a temporary structure during that time. However movement within the structure of the old rail bridge during the work followed by problems found with the deck of the road bridge resulted in the temporary cessation of rail services in November 2013 and a long diversion for road traffic. It was announced on August 26th that this latter diversion is expected to remain in place for another seven months as a result of further problems with the construction of the road bridge. At the end of this period it is hoped that both elements of the combined rail/road structure will be available for use. There have been complaints from many quarters that the delay in completing the work has greatly affected the local economy.

As far as the rail bridge is concerned, a test train comprising locomotive 97 303 ran over the new bridge on August 19th and after that empty stock Class 158 dmu's were run for crew refresher courses and training. This, not surprisingly, resulted in trains being seen at stations whilst passengers were still having to use the road coaches providing the rail replacement services!

Hourly Services

Readers will undoubtedly be aware by now of the announcement made by the Welsh Assembly Minister for Transport, Edwina Hart, that finance will be made available for hourly services to be introduced on the Cambrian main line during morning and evening peaks from May 2015 for a trial period of three years. This is indeed good news and will provide a great improvement in service provision. There will also be improvements to services on the coast section of the Cambrian and on the Heart of Wales line. North Wales will also benefit as a further locomotive-powered train is to be made available to enhance capacity to and from the north Wales coast. Whether this is partly in order to release additional Class 158's for the hourly services on the Cambrian Lines is not known but there is speculation that this has something to do with it. These announcements are to be very much welcomed and it's so good to see improved services promised for all these lines.

European Rail Train Management System

The ERTMS system has now been part of everyday life on the line for some time. It continues to work well and no doubt facilitates speedier crossing of trains, particularly at Talerddig.

With regard to the news that West Coast Railways are to fit ERTMS equipment supplied by Hitachi to two of their own Class 37's, this appears to still be the case and one at least of the locomotives involved has been photographed on the main line following its return to service although presumably not yet fitted with the above signalling system. Their availability for use on the Cambrian should greatly facilitate the organising of excursions as the Network Rail Class 97's modified and fitted with ERTMS equipment for use on the Cambrian Lines continue to be used far and wide on test and infrastructure trains. One excursion did run from Bristol to Aberystwyth on July 26th headed by two Network Rail Class 97's. One of these was failed at Aberystwyth with what was understood to be a fairly minor problem but it did mean the train returning with one locomotive which, it has to be said, was reported to have coped very well with the load.

As previously mentioned, most of the ERTMS publicity has now transferred to the Hertford loop where further trials are now being

conducted. It is rumoured however that the system being trialled there is slightly different from the one on the Cambrian and will mean that if the system now being trialled on the Hertford loop is adopted and used nationwide, some software adjustments will have to be made to the system used on the Cambrian in order to make the systems compatible. If true, this seems rather strange as the system introduced on the Cambrian is understood to have been installed in full compliance with that used in other parts of Europe.

Glyn Jones

Infrastructure developments 2014

Resignalling and track alterations

Cardiff Valleys: the new bay platform at Caerphilly has been completed and was brought into use on with the first train using the platform on 14th October 2013. A new bay platform has been completed at Pontypridd on the town side of the station and facing Cardiff. There were two engineering trains on 1st June which delivered materials for the construction of a reinstated bay platform. The Taff lines were also closed north of Taff Wells on 8th and 15th June to enable the installation of point and track work at Pontypridd and bridge work at Penrhiwceiber which had previously included slewing the track to the adjacent disused bridge. The bay platform has not yet been commissioned.

Work has continued at Cardiff Queen Street to provide a new bay platform, no. 1, for the Cardiff Bay trains and a new up platform, no. 5. Sections of track have been laid but none of the work has been commissioned yet.

Work has been progressing for the construction of a new platform 8 at Cardiff Central but no new track has been laid. Sections of the south entrance to the station have been demolished and replaced by temporary buildings.

Cardiff West: the Cardiff West stage 3 resignalling was preceded by a series of line closures between Cardiff and Penarth/ Barry Island and Bridgend and implemented on 30th June. The resignalling covered the area from Cardiff to Penarth, Barry Island and Barry West, the City line

and Leckwith Loop .Barry signal box closed together with a section of Cardiff Panel signal box. A revised layout was introduced at Barry town with a new bidirectional platform, no. 3, for trains travelling to and from Barry Island. Access is still possible to platform 1 from Barry Island .The redoubling of the line from Cardiff Central to Ninian Park (Penarth Curve East to North Junctions) has been postponed. The Cogan up and down and Barry down loops have been converted from goods to passenger loops.

Cardiff East: a major project was planned between 1st and 18th May 2014 east of Cardiff affecting the main and relief lines between Cardiff and Pengam Junction. The train service was reduced between Shrewsbury and Cardiff during the period of the work with complete blockades on two Sundays which completely closed the lines between Cardiff and Newport. The plan was to install high speed crossovers between the relief and main lines to provided direct access and exit to and from platforms 1 and 2 to the east and also upgrade the relief lines. Two new junctions were to be created, Moorland Road Junction and Long Dyke Junction, both with ladder crossings. These were intended to reduce the need for trains to reverse at Cardiff West and give more flexibility to the use of the platforms at Cardiff Central. An extensive programme of engineering trains was planned with a temporary virtual quarry established at Cardiff Marshalling sidings. The programme of work quickly fell behind schedule and the work for first week which involved the relief lines overran into the second week and the high speed crossovers to the main lines were not installed. An investigation has been ordered into the reasons for the delay in completing this project and the work to complete the project will have to be arranged for a future date. The next stage was to be a further block in October to complete the Cardiff east resignalling and the closure of Cardiff Panel signal box. This has now been postponed until later.

Chester to Wrexham: the single line between Saltney Junction west of Chester and Wrexham is to be redoubled only as far as Rossett and not throughout. There were weekend closures of the line between Chester and Wrexham on to install the new track layout at Saltney Junction by 24th March. This was followed by a nine day closure between Chester and Wrexham from 2nd to 10th August to enable further preparations for the redoubling of the section from Saltney Junction to Rossett including track slewing, level crossing alterations

and the delivery of materials. Commissioning of the new section of track is expected in February 2015.

Cambrian Coast: the line north of Harlech closed abruptly on 4th November 2013 with the collapse of the bridge at Pont Briwet. Subsequently the section from Tywyn to Harlech was closed from 3rd January 2014 following storm damage. The Barmouth to Harlech section reopened on 1st May and Harlech to Pwllheli on 1st September.

Stations: a major improvement scheme has been completed at **Llandudno**. The west side of the station where there were formerly platforms four and five and latterly carriage sidings has been converted to a car park. The former open entrance has been converted into a waiting area with an adjacent new ticket office with large glass panels on both sides but this unfortunately is closed when staff are not on duty and the station has to be accessed by a side gate. The station has been repainted in LMS dark red and cream colours and looks very attractive. The scheme was funded from a £3.5m Welsh Government investment including European Regional Development Fund structural funding, £1.5m from the Department for Transport's National Stations Improvement Programme and a further £150,000 from the Railway Heritage Trust.

Station improvements have been completed at **Neath** and a more substantial £7m scheme is in progress at **Port Talbot Parkway** where a new bridge and lifts are to be provided. Future station improvements involve **Chirk, Llandaf, Machynlleth, Radyr** and **Ystrad Mynach** stations, which will receive the money as part of the Access for All programme to create step and obstacle-free routes to platforms and station entrances, through new footbridges, lifts and ramps. Work has started on the improvements starting with Ystrad Mynach and the others started in the Spring and are expected to be completed by end of year or early 2015. The programme is funded by £7m from the Welsh Government and £5m from the Department for Transport. Network Rail will be carrying out the works.

New Stations: work on the £3.5m new station project at **Pye Corner** commenced in the Spring and the Ebbw Vale branch was closed to passenger trains on 31st May, 1st, 7th and 8th June to enable the track to be slewed, at a cost of £1.2m, at the site of the new station at Pye

Corner between Park Junction and Rogerstone. This will enable the track to be doubled and a second platform built if required in the future. The work included the first visit of class 70/8 locomotives to the branch. On 8th the new section of track was connected up on 8th and trains ran over the new section of track the following day. The station is expected to open on December 14th.

Closures: The line between Birdport and Uskmouth power station has been out of use since 5th February when the last inward coal train ran and closure of the coal fired power station followed on 31st March.

There has been track rationalisation at Llandudno where the station improvements have been completed.

The branch from Long Dyke Junction to the CELSA Rod Mill (Castle works) was closed on 28th April 2014. Liswerry sidings 1 to 4, east of Newport, were lifted during May. Sidings 5 to 7 remain for wagon repairs.

Minor Railways: The **Ffestiniog Railway** has redeveloped its Porthmadog station with the provision of an improved layout and a new platform for Welsh Highland Railway trains. The new platform was opened on 27th May. The **Brecon Mountain Railway** opened its extension to Torpantau on 1st April 2014.

The **Teifi Valley Railway** ceased operating after 8th June and a section of the track has been lifted. The **Llangollen Railway** is expected to extend to Corwen during the year and the **Gwili Railway** could well open a section of its extension to Carmarthen before Christmas.

The **Vale of Rheidol Railway** has upgraded a number of its stations, and the **Snowdon Mountain Railway** has acquired new coaches with assistance from Welsh Government.

Rowland Pittard

READER'S LETTER

Changes at Pontypridd

'It is good to see 'Progress at Ponty', as the new bay platform is installed at Pontypridd. It had been a concern of mine that the new

platform would only be taken as far into the station as the old south bay platform (former platform 7, I believe). Although listed, the station is largely unused and fossilised. It is good that such a minimalist solution has not been adopted. Rather, the line has been taken right into the heart of station, for the full length of the middle platform face on the east side of the 'island' (former platform 6). Let's hope it helps bring the station 'back to life', possibly creating commercial opportunities on the concourse.

I feel it would be great if the new line could be continued and taken out of the north end of the station as a through line, allowing the rather poor 1990s platform on the freight line to be closed, and the station to be re-unified on its historic site. Some platform trimming may be needed at the north end, as has happened at the south end. A bridge may even be needed over the new distributor road. But, as I understand, a tunnel is going to be built to reach the 'freight line' platform (present platform 2). I thus ask: might we be interested in promoting this as an alternative to the tunnel and continued use of the 1990s platform, which is out on a limb and was not part of the original station?

Regarding platform trimming, due to the loss of land to road widening, the southern end of old platform 6 has been re-profiled. Viewing the works over a few weeks, it initially looked as if platforms 6 & 7 might have been merged into a single long smooth curve. In fact, about half the width of old platform 7 has been used up at its buffers, and the platforms have not been so merged. The track is near but not adjacent old platform 7. I suppose platform 7 could be set back further and reopened if another bay were ever needed, e.g. if the new line were taken out the north end of the station as a through line.

The great pity of Pontypridd is the loss of the Edwardian façade, which reflected the style of the red brick and terracotta buildings on the concourse. It apparently happened in the late 1970s; I was in S. Wales at the time, but never saw it. It is incomprehensible why this happened, or why the station was only listed as an Edwardian station after the destruction of its façade. It was replaced by a featureless slab red brick wall in stretcher bond. This was taken down about ten or fifteen years ago and replaced by the present fenestrated blue brick wall. The butchered Edwardian façade was visible for a

while. Perhaps restoration was considered. I don't know. Perhaps there's an opportunity there for a specialist brick company, apprenticeships, regeneration...?

Bill Riggs

Note: the editor will be pleased to receive readers' letters on topical issues concerning the railways in Wales and the borders.

South Branch AGM, April 26, 2014

We had a good turnout for the AGM, 13 of our 58 members being present at the Quaker Centre in Cardiff; there was one apology for absence. As always, as chairman, I gave a sincere and massive thank-you on behalf of all members to the committee for their hard work – the highlight being, at last, the publication of the DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR WELSH RAIL, an impressive document both for its visionary content and visual appeal, the latter being the result of the corporate formatting which such things now must have. The recipients include all AMs and MPs for Welsh constituencies. (Our thanks to the *Railfuture* Board for financing the printing costs).

As chairman, I also thanked the *Railfuture* board chairman, Dr David Berman, for his expert care of the *Railfuture* Cymru website... and anyone in Wales who can take this over will be most welcome. The magazine *Rail Wales* received justifiable praise, as always, and our thanks go to Peter Clark as Compiler - and organiser of envelope-filling and the dispatch. Peter, who was present at the AGM, was at last happy to see a full-blown Editor appointed: Peter Kingsbury will initially be shadowing Peter's work over the current 12-month period.

The 2014-2015 COMMITTEE is as follows:

CADEIRYDD/Chairman: John D. Rogers (Nantymoel).

IS-GADEIRYDD/Vice-chairman: Mike Watson (Abertawe/Swansea).

YSGRIFENNYDD/Secretary: Rowland Pittard (Penyfai, Penybont/Bridgend).

TRYSORYDD/Treasurer: Julian Langston (Caerdydd/Cardiff).

Ysg. AELODAETH/Membership Sec. a *Rail Wales* Compiler: Peter Clark (Y Fenni/ Abergavenny); Shadow Editor: Peter Kingsbury

(Caerdydd/Cardiff);

Ysg. COFNODION/Minutes sec: John Rogers

Aelodau eraill y pwyllgor/Other members: Phil Inskip (Portskewett); Colin James (Portskewett); Glyn Cross (Caerdydd/Cardiff); David G. Watts (Aberdaugleddau/Milford Haven); Lindon Stone (Abertawe/Swansea); Rhobat Bryn Jones (Caerdydd) - at his request to be reviewed after 12 months.

Any Railfuture member (of any branch) who wishes to receive a copy of the minutes of the above meeting, please either e-mail me at or send me a suitable, stamped & addressed envelope to 2 Llewellyn St, Nantymoel, Penybont ar Ogwr CF32 7RF.

Er gwaetha pawb a phopeth... cerddwn ymlaen!

John D. Rogers

Seat reservations

The following letter appeared in the August issue of *Modern Railways*:

I'm not sure Cross Country's Advance Purchase on the Day (APOD) initiative deserves an Innovation Award (June Modern Railways p55). The ability to book a seat ten minutes before boarding a train means that no passenger without a reservation can be sure that the seat they take, while unreserved at the time, will stay so for the duration of their journey. It is surely far more important that passengers on the train, having legitimately found a vacant seat can keep it, than somebody arriving at the station ten or more minutes before that train departs can guarantee a reserved seat. Anecdotal evidence points to altercations, both passenger-passenger and passenger-train staff when a passenger is expected to move from what they thought was a free seat. The situation is worse when the seated passenger is elderly or disabled.

It is theoretically possible for the on-train passenger to request the train manager to reserve the seat they are in for the duration of their journey. However, attempts to do this have resulted in blank expressions from the train manager. Even if possible, it is not necessarily practical for the passenger, if alone, to wander the train in search of the train manager. If, alternatively the passenger waits for the

train manager to pass by the passenger's seat, it may be too late to reserve it. In any case, the train manager is often too busy to deal with this additional workload.

Is it not also somewhat iniquitous that passengers paying the least for tickets will have seat reservations, whereas those willing to pay a lot more for the flexibility of a turn-up-and-go ticket run the risk of being turfed out of their seat, perhaps several times during a long journey?

We understand that this, bizarrely is a franchise requirement. If it was experimental, it should be regarded as a failure and ideally ended as soon as possible. Please don't extend it to other operators.

Julian Langston, Railfuture South Wales

Cross Country wrote a lengthy rebuttal, which appeared alongside the letter. Among other things, it stated that one coach of the train will not be subject to reservations, although this is not generally understood by the travelling public. It also stated that train managers can reserve seats on the train, though the evidence is that they can't or won't.

The September issue of *Modern Railways* carried four further letters; three strongly supporting the branch position and the other making a suggestion which can be regarded as neutral.

Caption to photograph on page 24:

The new platform 3 at Barry, on 18th July. Trains for Barry Island now use this platform; Bridgend trains use platform 2 and Cardiff trains platform 1. There is now no connection from platform 2 to Barry Island but there is a short stub to allow for Bridgend trains to overrun the end of the platform safely without compromising the safety of any up trains from Barry Island. The new platform will make possible a shuttle to Barry Island to connect with trains to Bridgend, thus allowing the frequency of trains to Bridgend to be increased without reducing that to the Island.

Julian Langston



Thanks are extended to all who contributed to this issue. In all cases, any opinions expressed are those of the contributors, and do not necessarily represent *Railfuture* policy. Material for the next issue – articles, letters, photos or comments – should be sent to the editor, Peter Kingsbury at peter.kingsbury@talktalk.net or by post to 22 Winchester Avenue, Penylan, Cardiff CF23 9BT, by **15th February** for the Spring 2015 issue.

Railfuture is the campaigning name of the Railway Development Society, a UK-wide voluntary body for rail users. It receives no funding from political parties or rail companies. Annual subscription is £21 (£14 for students and unwaged). Enquiries should be addressed to Peter Clark at peter.clark@railfuturewales.org.uk or 84 North Street, Abergavenny NP7 7ED. Web site: www.railfuturewales.org.uk

The Railway Development Society Ltd A 'not for profit' company limited by guarantee
Registered in England & Wales no. 5011634
Registered office: 24 Chedworth Place, Tattingstone, Suffolk IP9 2ND