

Issue 70 Spring 2021

Rail Wales

Newsletter of Railfuture in Wales



All change in the Valleys. A class 769 Flex ex Thameslink electric train passes a class 150 Sprinter at Heath High Level in the early spring sunshine. The 769s cover the gap left by Pacer withdrawal and will operate on the Rhymney Valley line until the arrival of new Stadler built tri-modes in a few years' time Photo: Peter Kingsbury

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CYMRU | WALES

WELCOME

Welcome to the latest issue of Rail Wales. To say recent times are unprecedented is somewhat of a cliché, but as every week that passes with everyday life and the economy remaining far from 'normal', this seems a correct summary of the situation we find ourselves in.

As readers will be aware the COVID-19 pandemic has not resulted in the rail industry and associated decision-making hibernating. Railfuture Wales has continued to monitor the ongoing flow of news and react where something has come to light which it considers not to be in the interest of the rail system and its users.

Of the torrent of news since the last issue of Rail Wales rolled off the press in October 2020, the decision of the Welsh Government to use the 'operator of last resort' powers to take over day to day responsibility for passenger services in the Wales and Borders franchise must be the most significant item. The transfer of ownership took place on 7th February 2021 and Transport for Wales Rail Ltd was born. The irony is that Railfuture Wales has long argued for Welsh rail to be operated as a publicly owned railway with day-to-day running handed to an arm's length operating organisation. However, nobody could have forecast that this change would come about as a result of a global pandemic. Sensibly, the global expertise and experience of former operator Keolis/Amey has not been entirely lost as those companies are retained to provide advice in several areas including the introduction of new rolling stock and integrated ticketing and to deliver electrification of the core Cardiff Valley routes.

One aspect of the current structure of the rail system which Railfuture Wales regards as unsatisfactory, as does the Welsh Government, is that, with the exception of the core Valley routes, rail infrastructure remains the responsibility of a separate organisation, Network Rail. Network Rail is accountable to and in part funded by the UK government.

Railfuture Wales has long called for responsibility for rail infrastructure to be devolved to the Welsh Government. Following the transfer of powers over passenger services from London to Cardiff in 2018, it seems illogical that issues such as funding for track and signalling improvements, which affect the speed and capacity of passenger services, are managed at the most strategic level from outside of Wales.

The House of Commons Welsh Affairs select committee is currently examining this issue and Railfuture Wales has submitted evidence which points towards rail infrastructure powers, including funding, following

those for passenger services in moving from Westminster to Cardiff Bay (or should that be Pontypridd, the location of the new Transport for Wales HQ?). Funding is a critical dimension of this issue as at present the amount spent on capital projects to improve rail infrastructure in Wales is far lower than a comparison of the populations of Wales and England suggests Wales should receive.

The Spring issue of Rail Wales normally carries details of the AGM. This year, for obvious reasons, we are unable to gather in Shrewsbury, and the event will take place via Zoom. Details are provided below. It is hoped that taking the event online will enable some people to attend who might otherwise not be able or willing to travel to Shrewsbury.

Peter Kingsbury

RAILFUTURE WALES AGM 2021

The Wales branch AGM will be held as a ‘computer link up’ on Saturday 24th April 2021. Everyone will be welcome. Apart from the usual business that is required to be carried out, the meeting will feature a short presentation from Ian Brown CBE, a Railfuture director and vice president.

Ian has enjoyed an extensive career in the rail industry and is the board’s policy director. He has worked for British Rail starting as a graduate trainee and for Transport for London, where he served as the managing director for London Rail. Ian has been the board’s representative on the Wales branch committee since last year.

The AGM will start at 10am. This year it will take place virtually (online). The formal business will be undertaken first followed by Ian Brown’s contribution. The meeting will therefore provide everyone with an opportunity to ask questions about Railfuture’s activities and future direction at both a Welsh and GB level. It is anticipated the event will conclude by 11.30am.

The meeting will use Zoom. The link to join is

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83136654968?pwd=VEZpZXVYNFNXUU8raitwSDVLRXAzUT09>

The passcode is: AGM21 (no space). Meeting ID : 831 3665 4968

RAILFUTURE WALES IN ACTION

Railfuture Wales has been busy over the winter responding to several government consultations, speaking up for Welsh rail users and arguing the case for better train services.

The January committee meeting discussed our response to the House of Commons Welsh Affairs committee rail infrastructure inquiry (see 'Welcome' above). Also considered in January was the Welsh Government's new transport strategy 'Llwybr Newydd' (New Paths). The committee decided to broadly support the strategy. Detailed comments were provided on the rail 'mini plan' within the strategy, including a need to be cautious about replacing diesel trains with hydrogen. The mode is less desirable than electricity or batteries as it is only about 33% efficient and is only decarbonising if the hydrogen is produced in a carbon-neutral way. The importance of providing better connectivity between rail and other modes of public transport was emphasised.

At its November meeting the committee discussing its input to the UK Government's Union Connectivity Review. Priorities for improving rail connections between Wales and England were agreed. The electrification of the North Wales mainline through to Crewe was given top priority with the importance of through running of services from HS2 highlighted. The committee's conclusions were incorporated in the Railfuture GB response to the review.

The same committee also discussed the proposals from Traws Link Cymru to reopen the Aberystwyth- Carmarthen route and the associated Bangor-Afon Wen line in North Wales. A report on this by Julian Langston can be read on page 8.

You will read that Railfuture Wales has plenty of interesting topics to get to grips with. This will continue with the role out of the new rolling stock and improved services forming part of the 2018 franchise award. There are many and varied opportunities to contribute to the work of the organisation. The AGM will decide on the committee to run Railfuture Wales in 2021-22, and new members who have ideas and enthusiasm which could refresh it are very welcome. Nominations will be accepted at the AGM but if you wish to find out more about this opportunity in advance, please contact Peter Kingsbury for an informal discussion- contact details at end of this magazine.

FREIGHT MOUNTS PANDEMIC FIGHTBACK

Rowland Pittard provided comprehensive news on the Welsh freight scene for Rail Wales for many years. Rhodri Evans has kindly agreed to continue this strand and provide reports on freight for the magazine. Here is Rhodri's first update preceded by an introduction to the current freight scene, which provides positive news from a recent online event.

Julian Worth, chair of the Chartered Institute of Logistics & Transport Rail Freight Forum, presented an upbeat picture of the prospects for rail freight in Wales and the West of England at a Modern Railways 4th Friday talk in January.

Julian explained that freight volumes across GB had recovered to 95% to 98% of pre-Covid levels, a figure that passenger operators could only dream of. He also stated that if coal traffic, so long the mainstay of rail freight, was discounted, freight traffic had grown by 68% in the 25 years since rail privatisation.

Growth has occurred in most sectors, with transport of aggregates for the construction industry particularly strong. In S Wales, Newport sees about 70 freight trains a day pass through with steel, oil and intermodal trains particularly featuring. Tata make a makes a significant contribution to steel, the Milford Haven waterway refineries to oil and intermodal traffic travels to the Wentloog terminal in east Cardiff where Tesco now sends one train a day.

Julian suggested that Llanwern, the area of east Newport undergoing substantial change, would make a good location for a new regional freight distribution centre for South Wales and the west of England. The previous disincentive of Severn bridge tolls for lorries had disappeared.

2020-21 Freight News

To begin this report, the Swansea District line has been closed for a considerable amount of time since the serious derailment last August at Llangennech, but I am glad to report that it reopened in early March for the Robeston oil trains to Westerleigh and Theale, and the normally twice daily open coil trains from TATA Margam to Trostre and the return empties, normally one in the morning and the second in the afternoon, including weekends. Prior to the derailment, some occasional coal flows had begun to operate from Gwaun Cae Gurwen via Ammanford, but as the junction where the Heart of Wales joins the District line was damaged in the derailment, I assume that these had to be suspended.

The log trains from Baglan restarted last autumn from the former BP sidings, I believe loaded ones leaving on Thursdays and returning empty on a Friday. The other path, loaded Tuesday and returning Wednesday, may also have restarted, but due to lockdown restrictions I have not been able to leave Swansea to check.

Sadly, the Aberthaw cement trains to Moorswater, Cornwall which operated once or twice a week, ceased to run from late December, and with the loss of the Ford flows from Bridgend, there is no booked freight over the Vale of Glamorgan line west of Barry anymore, except diversions, when the S Wales main line is blocked. The Tesco Daventry to Wentloog train continues daily, and I believe there is a possibility of these increasing. Freightliner flows from Wentloog also continue.

TATA steel flows from Margam to Dee Marsh, normally one each way daily, and the Round Oaks both ways daily, plus shorter flows from Margam to Llanwern. There are also flows to Hartlepool, and from Trostre to Tilbury Docks weekly. However, many steel trains run on an as required basis, and due to COVID-19 affecting business, and the economy generally, do not always actually run. GBRf continues to operate aggregate flows from the Neath area, normally weekly also. The Machen branch has no current traffic.

The Cwmbargoed coal trains continue to run, although less frequently than a few years ago. There is an empty train up in the morning and return in the afternoon, which runs to TATA at Port Talbot steelworks normally weekdays. There used to be an earlier working up and back during the morning, but again I have been unable to verify this due to lockdown. Also there are container trains Monday to Thursday from Barry Docks, worked by Freightliner. These used to operate on Fridays but this finished some time ago.

Rhodri Evans

THE 20 BUSIEST STATIONS IN WALES

The spring issue of Rail Wales traditionally includes the latest station usage figures for the previous year. This report would cover the 12 months up to the 31st March 2020. Readers with memories of that month will realise that the first national lockdown began on 23rd March at which point rail passenger numbers collapsed overnight, and numbers had greatly reduced over the previous week with the first stay at home advice. Therefore, an April to March comparison between 2018/19 and 2019/20 would be of little value.

Fortunately, the Office of Rail and Road (ORR), which compiles the statistics, has published data for 1st March 2019 to 29th February 2020 to enable a more valid examination in station usage trends to be made. It is these figures I have used to compile the table below.

Station	2018/19	2019/20	Change (%)
Cardiff Central	12,934,000	13,141,000	1.6
Cardiff Queen St	2,919,000	2,784,000	-4.8
Newport	2,745,000	2,814,000	2.5
Swansea	2,156,000	2,134,000	-1.0
Bridgend	1,559,000	1,557,000	-0.1
Cardiff Bay	1,531,000	1,522,000	-0.6
Cathays	978,000	1,002,000	2.4
Pontypridd	884,000	841,000	-5.1
Neath	826,000	832,000	0.7
Barry Island	832,000	787,000	-5.7
Caerphilly	760,000	739,000	-2.8
Trefforest	719,000	679,000	-5.8
Bangor	659,000	652,000	-1.1
Penarth	655,000	643,000	-1.9
Radyr	585,000	579,000	-1.1
Port Talbot Parkway	536,000	561,000	4.7
Barry	524,000	537,000	2.5
Aberdare	556,000	528,000	-5.3
Wrexham General	512,000	521,000	1.8
Rhyl	517,000	519,000	0.4

It will be seen that for the first time in several years the number of stations recording a fall in usage exceeds the number of gains. This reflects a pre-Covid levelling off of the growth in passengers seen in recent years.

The largest declines were in the Cardiff Valleys network, which had previously seen some of the strongest growth. This part of the network is one which saw the highest levels of rail use for commuting and Saturday shopping trips. The extent to which the dramatic loss of much of this traffic over the past year is reversed when life returns to 'normal' is very much clairvoyant territory but it is hoped that the significant investment to create to SE Wales Metro will have been seen to help encourage people to continue to use rail and attract new customers when my successor looks back on the 2020s in ten years' time.

WEST WALES REOPENING HOPE

A continuous rail route linking North and South Wales, and wholly in Wales, could become a reality if two disused lines are re-opened.

Railfuture Cymru Wales has carefully studied proposals from Traws Link Cymru (TLC), which is campaigning to reinstate the lines. TLC is focussing on re-opening the 90km line linking Carmarthen with Aberystwyth, but the group would also like to see the line between Bangor and Afon Wen (between Porthmadog and Pwllheli) rebuilt (see map below).

We have long advocated re-opening Bangor to Caernarfon; after examining the proposals and talking to members of TLC who attended the December committee meeting, the branch decided to support re-opening both lines in full. This would enable a through service from Bangor to Carmarthen and beyond via Caernarfon, Porthmadog and Aberystwyth. While local journeys, such as Aberystwyth to Carmarthen, are likely to dominate, the committee believes it is essential to open the whole line to create the connectivity required.

In September 2018, the Welsh Government paid consultancy firm Mott MacDonald to examine the feasibility and assess outline costs of re-opening between Carmarthen and Aberystwyth. The report, at <https://gov.wales/aberystwyth-carmarthen-rail-reinstatement-feasibility-study>, concluded that rebuilding the line would be feasible, pending further studies. Five intermediate stations are proposed: Pencader, Llanybydder, Lampeter, Tregaron and Llanilar. An hourly service is possible if passing loops at or near Pencader and Tregaron stations are provided. End-to-end journey times of about 80 minutes could be achieved with class 185 trains (timings for the class 197 trains currently being built by CAF, which would probably operate the route, are unknown).

The project is not without its challenges. Many roads and a cycle path would need to be diverted, private land acquired, flood threats mitigated. In Aberystwyth, use of the original alignment would entail excessive demolition of private housing and would be untenable. Instead, a route further inland is proposed, including construction of a 1km tunnel under Pen-y-Banc.

The Gwili Railway occupies over 7km of the former track bed north of Carmarthen. Sharing track is unlikely to be feasible, nor is there sufficient room in this narrow valley to accommodate an additional track for the re-

opened railway. A 3km bypass tunnel for the Carmarthen–Aberystwyth line was considered, but this is likely to be disproportionately expensive. The only remaining option is to relocate the heritage railway. TLC has suggested it could use the former Carmarthen–Llandeilo railway, but the Gwili Railway is understood not to be in favour of this.

The biggest problem is simply one of cost. Mott MacDonald estimates the capital cost of the re-opening to be in the region of £775 million. However, likely income from operating the line would give a maximum Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR) of 0.43. This means that for every £1 spent on opening the line, 43p would be recovered through the farebox and wider economic benefits. To gain government support, projects generally have to show a BCR of at least 1.

In September 2020, TLC published its own report into the complete link north to Bangor: see <http://trawslinkcymru.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/TLC-Strategic-Case.-09.09.20.pdf> . This argues that some of the assumptions made by Mott MacDonald are unduly negative and the Carmarthen-Aberystwyth line could be built for substantially less than £775 million, possibly raising the BCR to about 1. It also states that the report does not take into account the *Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (section 2.3)*. TLC points out that the line would link remote rural parts of Wales with Aberystwyth, Carmarthen and beyond.

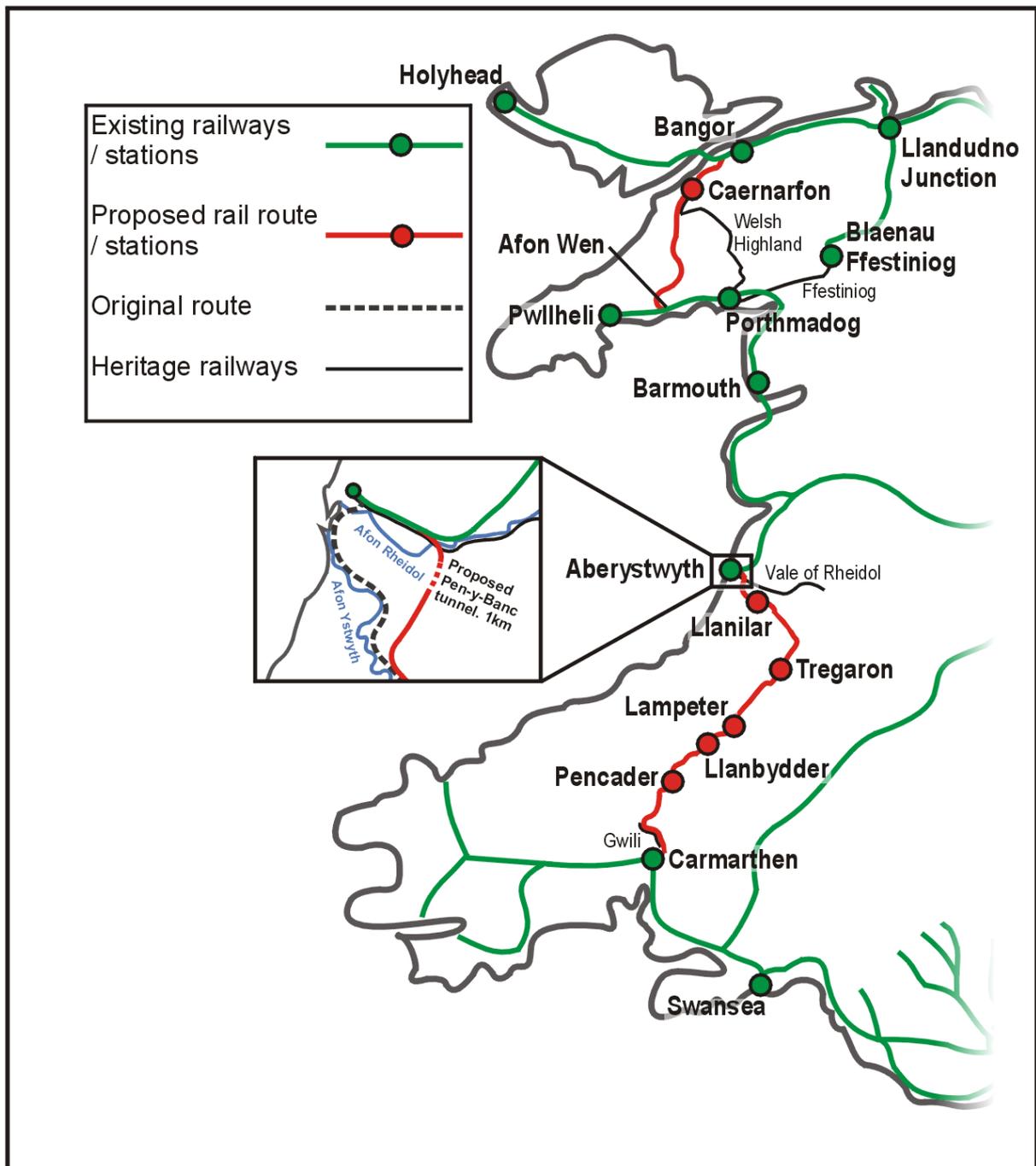
There are problems, too, with re-opening from Bangor to Afon Wen, particularly around Caernarfon where part of the original station is now the site of a Morrisons supermarket. Nearby, a tunnel has been taken over by a road, and south of the town, several kilometres of the track bed is used by the Welsh Highland Railway and a cycle path. However, it is believed none of these obstacles are insurmountable, and TLC has submitted a bid to the DfT's Restoring Your Railway Fund, through Liz Saville Roberts, MP for Dwyfor Meirionnydd, for a scoping study to investigate possible solutions. The Welsh Government has itself advocated re-opening Bangor – Afon Wen. See website at:

<https://gov.wales/north-wales-main-line-rail-network-map>.

Despite the difficulties re-opening both lines would entail, it is encouraging to see that the Welsh Government is interested in a scheme that would help promote modal shift away from the car, bringing about environmental benefits. Re-opening the railway would also improve social mobility in remote parts of Wales that are poorly served by public transport. All these

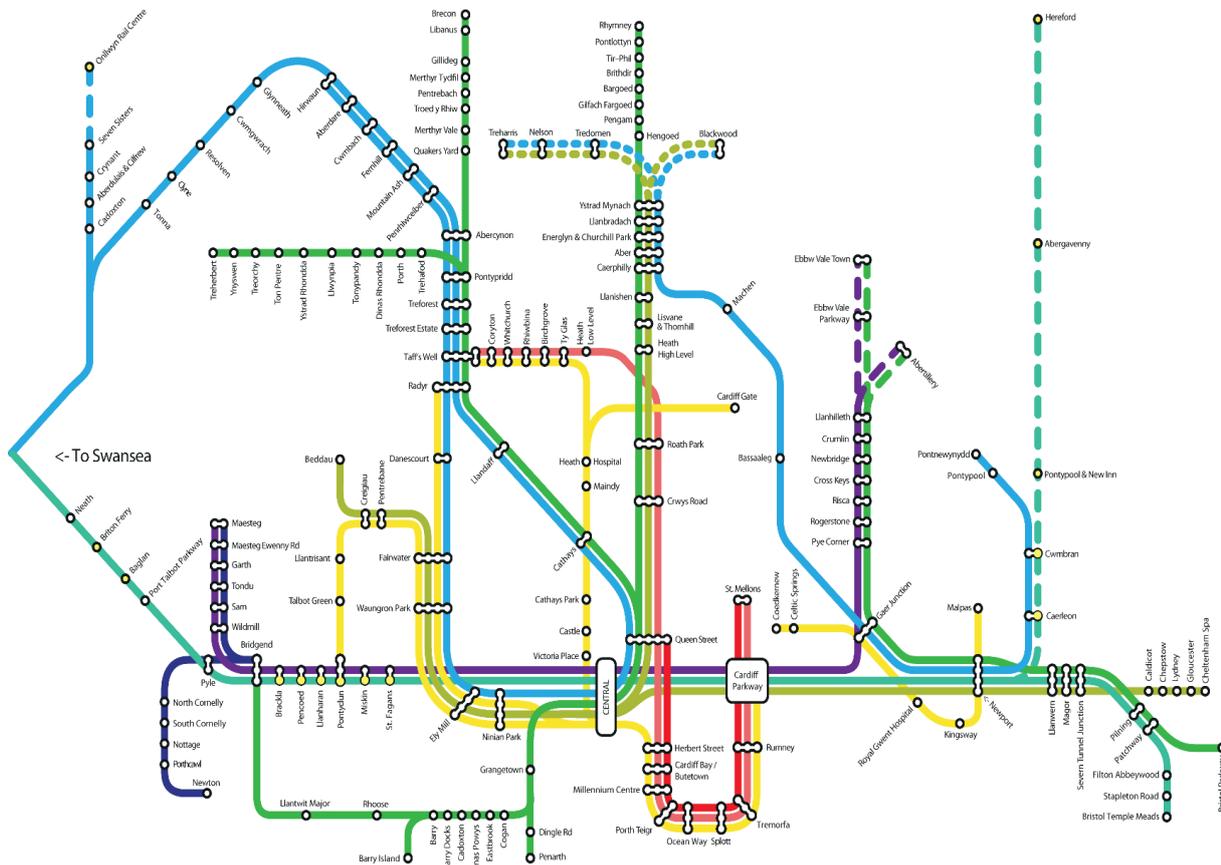
are policies of the Welsh Government, and so, with this political support, we are hopeful that, for the first time in decades, it will once again be possible to travel from North to South Wales without leaving the principality.

Julian Langston



LETTER

I have a number of comments to make in response to Jim Maggs' letter in the Autumn 2020 'Rail Wales' on the new class 197 and Cardiff metro tram-trains.



Possible Metro Network suggested by Thomas Wheeler -see next page

TfW say that they do ask passengers for feedback. I was told in December 2018 that they would consult regarding the choice of seats. In September 2019 TfW said that their "exciting opportunity for customers to provide feedback" would "now take place during 2020". The TfW board agreed to fund the 'upgrade' to Sophia seats in October 2019. As far as I know the feedback event never took place but it appears the significant decisions had already been made. A class 197 mock-up exists; it featured in Andrew Gainsbury's presentation to Modern Railways' 'Rail in Wales and the West' online conference. However, to address the cutting of toilets it would probably have needed to appear in 2018, before the bodyshell design was fixed.

In January 2021, Alexia Course of TfW reminded attendees at a Transport Focus event that potential franchisees talked to user groups in 2017-2018 while constructing their bids. She also claimed that passenger panels had looked at things like seats and location of bins. Who was on these panels and did they have any real say? As for the pre-bid discussions, how were the user groups expected to comment on new trains nobody knew about at the time?

Even if all new fleets had the same level of toilet provision I agree with Jim; that wouldn't make it right. In fact Crossrail stock has no toilets at all and the IEP fleets average at least one toilet per carriage. TPE's 'Nova' fleets meet the Rail Delivery Groups' 85 seats per toilet best practice. None of the class 197 variants do.

SE Wales Metro

Moving on to the tram-trains, I completely agree that they should be kept to shorter routes. If the service to Cardiff Bay was run as a standalone shuttle (as at present), it would only need 1 or 2 trams in service plus a spare or two. I doubt anyone could make a business case to build a depot to service such a small micro fleet and no other on-street running is currently funded.

Fortunately, the decision was made to electrify at 25kV, hopefully to the same spec as that on the Rhymney line. If so, normal trains can return if more routes are built to utilise the tram-trains. Railfuture should campaign for the class 398 tram-trains to be used for new routes rather than building more trams. The result could look like the attached map, incorporating ideas from various sources including Railfuture Wales' development plan. Dashed lines (and stations with a pale yellow fill) represent an hourly service, solid lines every half hour or better. I suggest that the 36 class 398 tram-trains should be redeployed to the following routes. All other routes on my map should be operated using heavy-rail stock with toilets.

- Maesteg to Newton (Porthcawl) via reversal at Bridgend
- Pontyclun to Cardiff Parkway via Fairwater
- Radyr to Cardiff Parkway via Fairwater
- Taff's Well to Cardiff Parkway via Coryton and Cardiff Castle
- Cardiff Gate to Cardiff Parkway via Cardiff Castle
- Taff's Well to St. Mellons via Coryton, and Cardiff Queen Street
- Cardiff Queen Street to St. Mellons
- Coedkernew to Malpas via Royal Gwent Hospital and Newport

Kind regards,
Thomas J. Wheeler

MANCHESTER: CASTLEFIELD CORRIDOR CHALLENGE

This is one of the most congested rail routes in Britain. So much so that the 'Manchester Recovery Task Force' (See Modern Railways March 2021) has been set up by the Dept for Transport (DfT) to look at options to reduce services to relieve pressure on this line by adopting a standardised train patterns and times. Three options have been proposed of which one, option B, retains the North Wales - Manchester Airport service. Clearly North Wales does not want to lose this service neither do other parts of the country want to lose theirs.

The background of this goes back to the early days of the railway when many routes are funnelled into the corridor. If you have a railway atlas or Google earth it is worth looking at the rail routes in central Manchester. Piccadilly not just links North Wales and the North West, but also Scotland, Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, North East, East and West Midlands. It is a route of national importance. Numerous proposals have been put forward to improve the infrastructure over the years. Network Rail proposed the Ordsall Chord, Oxford Road four platforming - at present not all four platforms are used - and an extra two through platforms at Manchester Piccadilly. The Ordsall Chord went forward making the congestion worse and the rest put on hold presumably because of the cost. The DfT then expanded Northern and Trans Pennine service, hence the delays and congestion on this route. The DfT integrated rail plan for the North/ Midlands is due soon which may suggest a solution.

There is no simple solution to this problem; in my view a number of options need to be implemented.

Railfuture has suggested that creating a new freight terminal at an old refinery at Carrington, in western Manchester which would divert freight from Castlefield corridor to run south of the city centre. Railfuture has made two submissions to the Manchester Recovery Task Force', one for Wales which suggested running the N Wales to Airport service via Crewe as the Chester - Manchester service via Newton le Willows can be run by Northern. Running the North Wales to Manchester Victoria/ Stalybridge service on to Manchester Airport via Guide Bridge could be an option but take much longer. Running fast via the Mid-Cheshire line is another option. How fast depends on stopping patterns. After we submitted our response that from Railfuture NW England and Yorkshire went in which did not prioritise option B.

In my view Railfuture should keep pressure on the DfT to create an infrastructure solution, possibly by setting up a task force working with interested parties. There are many options, here are a few:

Northern Power House Rail. A tunnel from HS2 at Manchester Piccadilly to Leeds via Bradford.

Oxford Road operational four platforming;

Manchester Piccadilly four through platforms;

Reopen the eastern link from near Miles Platting to Manchester Piccadilly;

Grade separation at Ordsall Lane Junction so Liverpool/North Wales service do not cross Salford Crescent Oxford Road services;

Manchester Airport Western access - North Wales services would run on the Mid-Cheshire route via the airport to Piccadilly;

Transfer freight to Trafford Park south to a new freight terminal to Carrington (new terminal) and on to Trafford Park if not replaced.

I am sure there are many more options. Whatever happens, this is a crucial piece of national infrastructure which has been neglected due to cost and a lack of vision.

Richard Wilcock

NEWSLINES

Class 769 trains debut- Pacers exit

The past few months have seen significant changes to the rolling stock serving the Rhymney Valley branch of the Cardiff Valleys network. The reduced service operated during the Covid-19 pandemic has allowed the withdrawal of many of the Pacer units a few months ahead of schedule. The gap left by their departure has been filled by the transfer of the class 769 former electric trains from the Thameslink network in the London area. The units have had a diesel powered generator fitted to drive the electric motors. Although the trains are almost the same age as the Pacers, both dating from the British Rail era, as they have electric traction, early reports suggest a quieter, more comfortable ride. The 769s are also all four car units which will provide additional capacity if needed in the post pandemic era.

Cardiff Parkway

Planning permission has been sought for this proposed new station located midway between Cardiff Central and Newport on the South Wales main line. The application can be viewed on Cardiff Council's website: <https://planningonline.cardiff.gov.uk/online-applications/>. The application reference to enter is 21/00076/MJR .

As this is an 'outline' application, there is no station design to be viewed, but the proposal is for a four-platform station (i.e. a platform on all tracks) with a bus interchange outside the station entrance, and a car park providing up to 650 spaces adjacent. The proposal is an integral part of the proposed construction of a large business park on adjacent land.

The supporting documents state there is an aspiration for eight trains per hour to call. It is hoped that 13.4% of journeys to employment in the business park will be made by rail in peak hours with a further 8.6% by bus. If achieved, these figures would be a major shift away from car use to travel to work compared to other edge of city employment sites.

The decision on which rail services will stop will not be made for some time and will depend on the decisions of the train operators and Network Rail. Railfuture Wales has supported the proposed station in principle in comments submitted to Cardiff Council, recommending a legal clause to ensure the station is provided when a specified amount of commercial space is completed.

Welcome to Bow Street

The first new station to open in Wales since Ebbw Vale Town and Pye Corner in 2015, saw its first train call in early February -see photo back page. The single platform station is located on the outskirts of Aberystwyth. It has a car park and aims to attract passengers from the town and surrounding area who wish to use rail but do not find use of the current town centre terminus station convenient.

Abergavenny: all change for art

Historic Abergavenny station will soon be displaying more than train timetables as a result of a refurbishment to use part of the buildings for an art gallery and studios. The new facilities will complement the thriving family-run café in the main station building and a physiotherapist who also runs a business from the station.

Peak Cymru, an arts organisation based in the Black Mountains, will manage the facilities. Working creatively with professional artists and communities it's over-arching goal is to increase opportunities for children and young people to engage with the various strands of their artistic programme.

TRANSPORT COMMISSION GIVES LARGE BOOST TO RAIL

Prospects for rail to play a greater role in transport in the Newport and Cardiff area received a large boost when the final report of the SE Wales Transport Commission was published in November. The commission had been set up following the decision by Welsh Government in 2019 to cancel the M4 relief motorway around Newport. It was tasked with identifying alternative ways of dealing with the congestion (pre-Covid) on the existing M4 road in the vicinity of the city.

Railfuture Wales attended one of the commission's evidence gathering sessions and made recommendations to improve local heavy and light rail services in and around both Newport and Cardiff based on the proposals in our Wales Development Plan (2013).

The published final report picks up several of these ideas as part of a package of measures to reduce car use. In particular the proposal for a local rail service serving six new stations on the main line from Severn Tunnel Junction to Cardiff features. One is located at Magor, a proposal subject to a long-standing campaign by the local group Magor Action Group on Rail who are Railfuture Members. A 15-minute frequency service is suggested as serving the new stations.

Away from the main line, new stations are recommended at Caerleon on the Hereford line and Maesglas on the Ebbw Vale line in west Newport, close to a large employment area.

Whilst welcome, there are two apparent challenges in delivering the commission's vision. Firstly, an operating challenge: the suggested rerouting of fast services on the main line to the southern pair of tracks which at present are used for freight and relief purposes. This is to make space for the new local service and will potentially create a conflict with freight operations. Secondly, money. Whilst the decision not to proceed with the M4 relief road will potentially save the Welsh Government over £1 billion, most of the cost of providing the improved public transport offer will be infrastructure works. Rail infrastructure spending is not

controlled by the Welsh government (see Welcome column page 2) and as the UK government supports the building of the relief motorway, it may not be willing to make the funds available to Network Rail and Welsh Government for the ambitious programme of rail improvements.

Peter Kingsbury

MEMBER NEWS

Members' meeting: The use of the internet for committee meetings in the past year and with a virtual AGM in April 2021 has led to the suggestion that a meeting be held for Railfuture Wales members using the same means. This will allow everyone in the Wales branch to take part regardless of distance from centres such as Cardiff or Shrewsbury (subject, of course, to having a suitable broadband connection).

Therefore, a virtual meeting will take place at 10am on Saturday 11th September. Please keep an eye on the Railfuture Wales website and Rail Watch and Rail User Express (sign up on the website) for further details. The focus for the meeting will be the revival of the Welsh rail system post-Covid and include a look at the SE Wales metro.

Members' Handbook

Have you ever been baffled by how Railfuture operates or what it offers its members? If so Railfuture GB has recently prepared a handbook for members which may be of interest and help you find your way around the organisation. There is a brief history of the organisation and explanation of the how to make the most of your membership.

The handbook can be read here:

<https://www.railfuture.org.uk/display2552>

Member visits

In recent years, special visits have been arranged to two of the most interesting rail operation facilities in Wales and the borders: the Severn Bridge Junction signal box at Shrewsbury and the driver training simulator in Cardiff. Such visits are greatly appreciated and once Covid restrictions lift Railfuture Wales hopes to arrange visits to two more sites: the CAF assembly works in Newport where the class 197 trains are being built, and the Cardiff Rail Operating Centre.

Help Publicise Railfuture Wales

Are you involved with a transport and other type of visitor attraction? Do you have a local attraction with which you are on good terms? If so, as places such as heritage railways and museums reopen during the spring and early summer as lockdown restrictions are gradually lifted, please consider if the attraction may be willing to display the Railfuture Wales bilingual membership leaflet. This A5 sized booklet was produced at the end of 2019 but has not been widely distributed as a result of the Covid challenges in 2020. The leaflet outlines the work of Railfuture Wales and encourages people to join.

If you can find a home for a few leaflets, please contact Peter Kingsbury, peter.kingsbury@railfuturewales.org.uk, who will send you a supply.

DELIVERY OF RAIL WALES

In order to reduce the cost of producing branch newsletters, the Railfuture Board is encouraging members to receive their branch publications by e mail. This is not mandatory as members who wish to receive a postal copy can continue to do so. However, if you are willing to change to email receipt, please log onto the Railfuture website www.railfuture.org.uk/member/ and update your preferences using the 'Selfcare' area. You will require your Railfuture membership number which is printed on the rear of the paper address sheet used to send Railwatch and PIN (see sheet for details on obtaining this). Email copies of Rail Wales will be sent at the same time as postal copies.

POSTSCRIPT: What lies ahead for the railways?

This issue of Rail Wales is the third one to be published since the arrival of the Covid-19 virus in Wales. There can be little doubt that this presents the greatest threat to the future of rail travel in Wales and across the UK since the line and station closures half a century ago.

The pandemic has vividly illustrated that the much of the physical movement of people from place to place to conduct our everyday lives is no longer an absolute necessity. This has become apparent in both our business life and during leisure time. Whether it is office workers producing most of their 'output' from home, supplies being required for day-to-day life being delivered to the home, or leisure such as watching a newly released film; many activities which required us to travel away from our homes can now be accomplished without leaving the front door.

The irony of this in relation to Railfuture is shown by the improved financial position of the organisation as less has been spent on meeting venue hire and travel expenses to face to face events yet the organisation has still continued to function, arguably as effectively as before. However, the missed train trips to meetings and conferences have resulted in less ticket income to operators.

Of course, as the threat of illness reduces people will wish to move around more again but will the use of rail return to the historically high levels (in the post-Beeching era) of recent years?

Many commentators predict that whilst leisure trips may eventually recover to close to previous levels, the use of public transport for journeys to work including business travel, will be permanently lower. If so, within Wales it will be the local services bringing people into Cardiff that will lose the greatest income. Of course, this is where there is a huge capital investment programme underway to transform the network, under the 'Metro' tag. To date, this is continuing and electrification will assist the Welsh and UK governments move towards their zero carbon targets. However, the pandemic has put the role of rail under an intensified focus to which Railfuture will need to creatively respond.

Peter Kingsbury

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@railfuturewales.org.uk or by post to 22 Winchester Avenue, Penylan, Cardiff CF23 9BT, by 30th Sept for the autumn 2021 issue. The editor may edit letters for publication.

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The first train to call at Bow Street for 56 years is seen on the morning of 14th February 2021 nearing the end of its journey to Aberystwyth. Opening celebrations were muted as a result of the Covid-19 restrictions. The station has a 69 space car park, covered cycle parking and a bus interchange, and was built at a cost of around £8m.

Photo: Dylan Wilson-Lewis

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