

Issue 73 Autumn 2022

# Rail Wales

*Newsletter of Railfuture in Wales*



*Class 197 trains are seen at Chester in September 2022 prior to entering service later this year. The new trains will operate most services in north and mid Wales as well as Manchester to SW Wales. They were assembled at the new CAF factory at Newport. Photo: Richard Wilcock*

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## WELCOME

Welcome to the latest issue of Rail Wales, the magazine for members of Railfuture Wales. This issue aims to bring you news and thought-provoking comment on the ever-evolving rail scene in Wales as well as Railfuture's activities to achieve its core goal of bigger and better rail services.

2022 is proving to be a challenging year for all those who believe rail has the potential to make a significant contribution to Britain's transport needs. The UK economic situation has led to industrial action affecting passenger services over the summer and autumn which shows no resolution at the time of writing. Whilst Wales has to a certain extent been isolated from this as the principal trade union involved (RMT) has not, at the time of writing, called on its members working for Transport for Wales (TfW) rail to strike, the dispute with Network Rail (NR) has resulted in most TfW services being halted as the signals in Wales are operated by NR which is not devolved to the Welsh Government. The only exception to this has been services on the lines north of Cardiff Queen Street (the Core valley lines) where responsibility for the rail infrastructure is devolved to the Welsh government and a basic service has run.

Railfuture has been directly affected as its national conference to be held in Leeds in September had to be postponed until next March as a result of a strike on the conference date. The Railfuture board has issued a statement calling for all parties to negotiate. This can be read at <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/article1892-Everyone-loses>.

In Wales, delivery of the range of improvements promised in the 2018 franchise award is continuing to be rolled out, although at a slower timetable than originally envisaged. The new class 197 trains to operate most services in north and mid Wales are starting to be seen in trial service and work continues to progress the electrification of the Core valley routes. The rolling stock ordered from Stadler for these routes has attracted positive comment from a number of sources.

The Wales branch AGM was held at Shrewsbury station in April and we were given an interesting talk by Mike Dalton (pictured) who at that time was a stakeholder manager for the Borders routes. He outlined the changes that can be expected to be delivered across the TfW Rail network over the next few years, and highlighted that the December



2022 timetable change will see nearly all of the service reductions introduced as a result of Covid removed.

Details of the talk and other AGM matters can be read on the website at: <https://www.railfuturewales.org.uk/docs/Railfuture-Cymru-Wales-AGM-2022-03-23-Minutes.pdf>

Following the visit to the new train mock ups in April 2022, attempts have been made to arrange visits to rail operational facilities such as signal boxes. However, regrettably this has not been possible to date but please keep a watch on the Railfuture Wales website for news about new activities which can sometimes be arranged at short notice.

The committee has been busy in responding to consultations from the Welsh Government and Transport for Wales and commenting on changes to rail services affecting Wales where it is considered Welsh passenger interests could be harmed. Details of this are provided on page 5.

I hope you find something of interest in this edition of Rail Wales. The next issue is due to be published in March 2023 and contributions including opinion pieces on any topic relevant to the present-day rail scene are welcome.

Peter Kingsbury

## **FISHGUARD FOR IRELAND?**

A desire to start to travel beyond the shores of Britain combined with the relative ease of post Covid entry into Republic of Ireland led me to decide on a trip to the Emerald Isle at Easter. Living in Cardiff my first choice of route to reach Dublin was to go via the Fishguard-Rosslare ferry.

This route and the harbour at Fishguard were created by the Great Western railway in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when it had its eyes on capturing some of the lucrative transatlantic trade. The latter ambition was not fulfilled but the short ferry crossing from West Wales to SE Ireland became an established route for people to cross the Irish Sea.

The ferry was operated by publicly owned Sealink in the British Rail era with the trains connecting with the twice a day ferry travelling from Paddington. In Ireland, a harbour station at Rosslare helped the seamless transfer from ship to train where departures left for the east coast route to Dublin and westward towards Waterford. I had last travelled this way for

a visit to Waterford city in the late 1980's when, as now, there were two ferries each way per day.

Forward to 2022 and I was surprised when the two-coach train from Swansea (the connecting service to the afternoon ferry does not even start in Cardiff) reached the harbourside and the dozen or so passengers were asked to board a minibus to reach the ship looming above us. The ramps for passengers to walk from the train to the upper decks of the ship were still in place but not used. We were deposited in the bowels of the vessel amongst the car drivers and had to make our way upstairs to the lounges and café.

The same applied at Rosslare where a small bus took six or so people a few hundred metres to the single platform basic station. The four-coach train to Dublin had less than 10 people on board although after calling at Wexford station about 10 miles up the line, it was fairly full. The Waterford route is closed.

This experience, repeated a few days later on Easter Monday leaving Dublin at lunchtime for the evening sailing, made me realise that the rail-sea link to Ireland is hanging on by a thread, and the ferries exist first and foremost for the benefit of car passengers and freight. I assume the vast majority of people travelling between Wales and Ireland who are not using a car now fly. (I would be interested to know the situation re use of the rail-sea links at Holyhead).

As for the prospects for the Fishguard branch, this received a boost in 2012 when a station was opened to serve the towns of Fishguard and Goodwick (see photo on page 12). This is a mile from the where the ship docks. Additional services were introduced to supplement the twice a day train to the ferry taking the number of trains to six per day. These services were amongst the last to be restored after the Covid cutbacks and I hope that numbers of passengers using the 'town' station' has recovered to close to pre pandemic numbers.

Several years ago, a proposal to redevelop the harbourside adjacent to the ferry dock which involved the closure of the harbour station with rail passengers being bussed from Fishguard and Goodwick town was opposed by Railfuture Wales. It was felt that the need to use a bus to reach the ship would deter rail passengers. The scheme was not pursued but in light of my experience earlier this year, I do not think if this proposal was resurrected, there would be any grounds to resist it.

Peter Kingsbury

## **RAILFUTURE WALES IN ACTION**

Railfuture Wales has been busy this year responding to consultations.

The following documents have been considered and comments submitted:

A. Welsh Government: 'National Transport Delivery Plan 2022-27':

The response included the following comments:

*The National Transport Delivery Plan sets out a comprehensive set of proposals for achieving modal shift, including many improvements to rail.*

*Railfuture Wales considers that an important aspect of persuading more people to use public transport, including rail, is the quality of service that customers experience.*

*At the current time, quality, particularly communication with users, is often poor when problems arise. Therefore, in addition to the capital projects listed, a mention should be made of the need to invest in staff training in communications with passengers in response to operational problems.*

*It is probable that leisure journeys will form a larger share of total travel demand post Covid and therefore the Delivery Plan should ensure this aspect of demand receives high priority.*

B. Welsh Government white paper on bus regulation: 'One network, one timetable, one ticket: planning buses as a public service for Wales'. The following is a summary of the Railfuture Wales response

*Railfuture Wales supports the proposals for One Network, One Timetable, One Ticket as a positive way of providing a fully integrated public transport network. We have questions on how existing bus and rail fares are to be aligned where in many cases bus is currently much cheaper than rail other than for short local journeys. Alignment should be through reducing fares on the more expensive mode but there might be a case for a 'daily cap' for bus only journeys as in London to reflect the significant time penalty for long bus journeys.*

Railfuture Wales has also joined the Senedd's Cross Party Group on Public Transport which meets every month or so and is chaired by Carolyn Thomas MS. At the most recent meeting, Lee Waters the deputy Climate Change minister with responsibility for transport, answered questions about the bus regulation proposals outlined above. Railfuture Wales secretary, Bob Saxby, was able to use his experience as the former public transport co-ordinator for Gwynedd, to make a number of suggestions for the operation of the new system of regulation which Lee Waters stated he would be interested to receive further details of.

**STOP PRESS:** At its late October meeting, the Railfuture Wales committee decided to issue a call for free rail travel to be available between the Isle of Anglesey and Bangor for the duration of the Menai road bridge closure. The bridge, one of two road crossings to the island, is shut for emergency repairs expected to take several months. The existing rush hour traffic congestion has become worse since the closure in late October.

## **CARDIFF BAY BRANCH TO BE TRANSFORMED**

Permission has been granted by Cardiff Council for two new stations on the one-mile branch that runs from Cardiff Queen Street to Cardiff Bay.

The branch will be served by tram trains under the SE Wales Metro project. The existing single track will be replaced by two tracks as part of the Core Valleys upgrade.

Halfway along the branch a new station called Butetown will be built to serve the historic residential area to the west of the line (the original Tiger Bay before redevelopment in the 1960's) and the newer communities to the east across Lloyd George Avenue. Access will be provided to track level by steps and ramps with pedestrians crossing the lines at rail level to reach the two platforms. Passengers will have covered waiting areas.

At the branch terminus, the existing single platform Cardiff Bay station will be replaced by an island platform with new accesses from both sides. Shelters and a new staff accommodation building will be provided on the platform. At the end of the station a new square will be created providing onwards access to the various destinations in Cardiff Bay.

The approved plans show the potential provision of a third track on the east side of the platform which would allow the continuation of a double track tramway towards the waterfront. The original 2018 franchise award indicated the tramway would be extended by on street running 400 metres to the Plaza outside the Wales Millennium Centre and subsequent proposals take this extension towards the residential areas east of Cardiff Bay such as Splott. However, these proposals do not form part of the current scheme. A further on street line might also be built from the branch north of the new Butetown station to the rear entrance of Cardiff Central but this proposal which would also bring the tram trains onto the street is not yet programmed.

It is believed that the new stations and doubling of the branch are to be completed in time for the start of tram train operations, currently scheduled for 2024.



*Illustration of the Bute Street entrance to the new Cardiff Bay station. The original Taff Vale Railway station building, which is listed, sits to the right.*

*Source: Transport for Wales*

## **NEWSLINES**

### **Magor Walkway progress**

The group seeking to open a station at Magor, between Severn Tunnel Junction and Newport, won two awards in the annual Railfuture Rail User Group awards announced at the national AGM in July. The Magor Action Group on Rail received a commendation for both their campaign and website. The group has previously received a grant from Railfuture's Fighting Fund.

Meanwhile progress is being made in developing the station design. Three options are currently being evaluated with the aim of deciding on the preferred design in January 2023. This will be followed by further detailed design work with the final approval required to be granted by Network Rail. No indicative date has been given as to the possible opening of the station which would potentially form part of the wider upgrade of local services between the Severn Tunnel and Cardiff which are part of the package of

measures proposed by the Welsh government as an alternative to construction a M4 relief road around Newport.

## **Free Rail Travel!**

Transport for Wales has continued to provide free travel for holders of a Welsh concessionary travel pass (bus pass) between 1<sup>st</sup> October and 31<sup>st</sup> March on the following routes:

Heart of Wales line (Swansea to Shrewsbury) including journeys in Shropshire which start or finish in Wales.

Cambrian Coast line (Machynlleth- Pwllheli)

Blaenau Ffestiniog branch

Wrexham to Hawarden Bridge section of the Wrexham-Bidston route

Free travel is now available on the Blaenau Ffestiniog branch and between Wrexham and Hawarden Bridge all year round.

Please note that tickets are required before boarding trains — issued from offices free of charge or, if no office, from conductors on board.

## **Grand Union Trains tries again**

Passengers travelling between South Wales and London may have a choice of operator in a few years' time if a new application from Grand Union Trains to the Office of Rail and Road is approved.

Grand Union Trains has resubmitted an application to operate services between Carmarthen and Paddington. It is proposed to start in December 2024. The service would run non-stop from Bristol Parkway to London. In South Wales it would be routed via the Swansea District Line calling at a new station at Felindre on the northern edge of Swansea adjacent to the M4 instead of the city centre station which requires reversal.

Railfuture Wales has long campaigned for passenger services to be introduced on the Swansea District line which has been retained for regular freight services. The proposal was discussed at the branch committee meeting in late October which, despite some reservations about possible impact on existing services from S Wales to London, decided to support the Grand Union Trains submission in principle.



## **FREIGHT NEWS**

There have been two new freight developments recently in North Wales, one of which sees slate waste brought by road from Penrhyn Quarry to the loading point at Llandudno Junction, which involved reactivating the sidings there. Trains are expected to run weekly on a Wednesday to Luton. With the amount of such waste available, hopefully this flow will be a long term one. The other recent flow is of quarry traffic from Penmaenmawr on the North Wales coast, which also operates weekly, and both services are welcome additions to freight traffic.

Moving to Mid Wales, another new flow is of timber from a loading point near Aberystwyth station, brought from Cambrian forests by road, for onward shipment to Kronospan's plant at Chirk. Trains will operate on a weekly basis, following a trial back in the spring.

In the South, oil trains continue to operate from Robeston to both Westerleigh and Theale, normally twice a day most days of the week. Steel coil movements continue from Margam to Trostre, normally twice a day, including weekends, and also flows from Trostre to Tilbury, I believe once or twice a week. Timber traffic continues from Baglan sidings to Kronospan, operated by Colas usually using Class 56s. However, whereas these have been five days a week in the past, there now seem to be an average of three a week. Steel traffic from Margam operates to Llanwern, Round Oak and Dee Marsh, with both open coil and covered wagons, and the return empties, mainly weekdays, but some movements weekends too. Sadly, one loss to report is the lunchtime Freightliner train to Southampton from Wentloog, which had operated for many years. During the HGV driver crisis these trains were full most days, but seemed to lose traffic. However, I have been informed that a new flow may be starting up, possibly to London Gateway. The Tesco Daventry to Wentloog trains continue, as do other container flows. The Barry container train normally operates Monday to Thursday, calling at Wentloog to pick up other traffic.

Machen quarry trains are operating up to twice a week with stone for HS2 works, which is a welcome return of freight to the branch, after a long period out of use. Lastly, coal trains from Cwmbargoed to Hope Cement works continue I believe twice a week, and coal also flows to Tata steel Margam, where coal is still required in the steel making process. Cwmbargoed may cease production in the near future, and coal flows by rail from the Cardiff Valleys will be history!

Rhodri Evans

## **TICKETS AND FARES: REFORM REQUIRED**

One of the claimed advantages of the reform of railways in Britain is to have one organisation (Great British Railways/GBR) responsible for fares and ticketing.

The cost of rail travel, particularly for longer journeys, is no doubt a major deterrent to more people choosing rail rather than car or flying. Railfuture now regards attracting people out of cars (modal shift) to travel by rail as one of the main opportunities to grow rail use. However, if serious progress is to be made in this area for longer distance travel, the current anomaly of split ticketing needs to be addressed by GBR.

This issue was highlighted to me in August when I decided to make a return trip to Scotland by train. The return journey was from Aberdeen to Cardiff. With a railcard I was quoted a fare of £178 for a single journey midweek by Scotrail and Transport for Wales rail. Using one of the split ticket websites, I obtained the same journey departing at the same time for £116, a saving of around one third. This figure includes a fee of £11 to the company selling the ticket. However, I could have saved this fee if I was willing to make the effort of booking the individual legs of the journey with the various train operators as the website gave a breakdown of the various fares I would be purchasing.

There were no fewer than seven different single tickets issued by the machine when I collected my paper tickets prior to the journey, ranging in distance from an off-peak day single from Edinburgh to Preston to an anytime day single from Cwmbran to Cardiff Central for the final part of my journey. The journey from Crewe to Cardiff was covered by three single tickets, with ticket changes at Church Stretton and Cwmbran, all valid on the same train.

With the seat reservations and my receipt, 15 tickets were issued by the machine which took a minute or so to print. Just as well for the people standing behind me, I was not collecting tickets for a family!

The issue I have is that the significant fare saving available by split ticketing on longer and medium distance travel is only available to those 'in the know' and potential new users of rail would not have ready access to this. To overcome the 'fare deterrent' issue, rail fares need to be simplified and the cost of long-distance fares lowered for direct sales by GBR.

Peter Kingsbury

## NEWS FROM RAILFUTURE BOARD

### Potential ticket office closures

Many rail users are rightly concerned about de-staffing of stations. Although that has not been specifically stated, the possibility of ticket office closures (at least in England) have been widely reported by the media. Of course, that does not necessarily mean that stations would become de-staffed as operators are looking to use station staff more productively. Railfuture director Neil Middleton, who leads national campaigns on fares and ticketing, has recently had private talks with one train operator to understand what is likely to happen. He is currently working on Railfuture's views of how to mitigate the effects of potential ticket office closures – even if that does not affect people in Wales, it might if they travel to England. Railfuture's view is that other improvements (such as ticket vending machines selling all ticket types to all destinations) are required prior to withdrawing opportunities to purchase tickets in person. The Railfuture website ([www.railfuture.org.uk](http://www.railfuture.org.uk) – click on the 'News' option on the menu bar at the top) will have details.

### Please give us your email address

Railfuture has an email address for the majority of its members. If we do not have yours, please email [renewals@railfuture.org.uk](mailto:renewals@railfuture.org.uk) so that we can record it.

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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](mailto:peter.kingsbury@railfuturewales.org.uk) or by post to 22 Winchester Avenue, Penylan, Cardiff CF23 9BT, by 28<sup>th</sup> February 2023 for the spring 2023 issue. The editor may edit letters for publication.

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*Fishguard and Goodwick station with a harbour bound train calling in 2012 shortly after the station reopened as part of an initiative to provide a service on the Fishguard branch that would serve the local population. The station is one mile from the harbour station alongside which ferries dock. The additional trains introduced at that time were amongst the last to be restored as rail services resumed after Covid. Photo: North Pembrokeshire Transport Forum*

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