

**Issue 79   Autumn 2025**

# **Rail Wales**



## *Newsletter of Railfuture in Wales*

*Avanti West Coast class 805 Evero bi-mode train on the 08.53 Holyhead to Euston travels along the North Wales coast at Penmaenmawr in April 2025. This is currently the only 10-car train operating in North Wales.*

*Photo: skimpler@flickr*

## WELCOME

As I sit down to prepare this new issue of Rail Wales, the media keeps reminding me that the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the world's first steam hauled scheduled rail passenger service occurs in late September. Although this event took place in Northeast England, many readers will be aware that Wales had led the way with the operation of both the world's first passenger service on rail, the horse drawn Mumbles tram, and the first steam locomotive hauling freight on the Penydarren tramway from Merthyr, some 20 years previously.

Since that time the fortunes of the steel wheels on steel rail means of transport have experienced many ups and downs, with recent years seeing a marked reversal of the decline which rail was subject to through much of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, rail has the potential to play a much greater role still in moving both people and goods around Wales, and Railfuture exists to remind people of this and campaign for bigger and better railways.

Whilst more people are using rail than 50 years ago and there have marked improvements in the quality of the service, Britain lags markedly behind many of the world's advanced economies in the quality of the national rail network. This unfavourable comparison is not just made with Europe but with other parts of the world traditionally regarded as economically 'behind' the western world.

The 2026 Wales Senedd election provides an opportunity for Railfuture Wales to spread the message of how rail has the potential to improve the quality of people's everyday lives and tackle what is arguably the biggest threat to society in the long term, climate change. With the Welsh Government now responsible for passenger services in Wales the administration elected in May 2026 will have a key role in determining how the Welsh rail system evolves in the second quarter of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, its role in Great British Railways, which will manage track/infrastructure, remains unclear,

The Railfuture Wales committee is arranging to meet the members of the main political parties contesting the Senedd election with the aim of informing them of our priorities and seeking their views on matters such as electrification of the North Wales mainline. The first meeting with Plaid Cymru took place in July and a meeting with Welsh Conservative transport spokesperson, Sam Rowlands happened at the end of September. The Chair's Column below provides further details.

On a separate note, there will be an opportunity for Railfuture Wales members in South Wales to meet for a chat and get to know each other in Cardiff in early November. Julian Langston, Wales Railwatch columnist and I will be in the Great Western pub on the evening of Tuesday 11 November for a social get together. This venue is only a one-minute walk from the main exit of Cardiff Central station. All are welcome to attend and discuss the rail issues of the day. The event will run from 6.30pm to 9pm and you are welcome to call/drop in at any time. Look for the table with Railwatch and Rail Wales on display. Further detail will be posted on the Railfuture Wales WhatsApp group so if you have not joined this, please consider doing so.

*Peter Kingsbury*

## **CHAIR'S COLUMN**

As chair I want the group to have contacted all the political parties before the Welsh Government elections in May. This is a means of exchanging ideas and finding out each party's policy. We also need to have a statement of our wants ready for the election and for a press release. So far we have spoken to Plaid Cymru, our next meeting is with the Welsh Conservatives took place in late September. After that it is the turn of the Liberal Democrats and Reform. Welsh Labour as the party in power, have already published their policies, although we also wish to speak to them before campaigning gets underway.

In the committee's view TfW Rail is getting better. In my opinion it has a long way to go. I welcome the bus policy and can see some long-distance coach services acting as 'virtual' train services with all that entails; through ticketing, good connections etc. We also discussed how Great British Railways will work in Wales. This is an interesting one. Will TfW be an agent for infrastructure in Wales and the Borders, or what?

I welcome more investment in Wales but we also need to bear in mind many services connect to England, so Northern Powerhouse Rail could deliver better connections to Manchester Airport from North Wales. I wrote to my MP in a personal capacity, raising this point. North Wales electrification, Cardiff to Swansea route upgrade with electrification, Filton Bank electrification are all things which would benefit the rail users.

I attended the chairs of regions meeting in Derby. The main thrust of the meeting was getting new members. Most people felt that Railfuture needs a better social media presence even if it has to be paid for with someone

having expertise in this area in charge. Some regions do e-mail members particularly when membership is up for renewal. In Wales, Jessika Venn is doing a great job in promoting the group by taking our stall to suitable events. I encourage more members to join our WhatsApp group so we can all engage in a debate. The meeting also discussed rail investment; given the state of the economy this seems unlikely unless some urban development pays for it. I was part of a group looking at the passenger experience, which along with ticketing needs improvement.

In my patch I attended a presentation on Network Rail's plans to close several foot crossings on the North Wales main line to pedestrians. I am for the idea, but the scheme seems over-elaborate when it proposes building a pedestrian bridge next to an existing road bridge with a footpath, plus it is quite a diversion for pedestrians. I did ask if the bridge could be further west if Network Rail owns the wood to the north.

*Richard Wilcock*

## **WHAT DOES THE COMPREHENSIVE SPENDING REVIEW MEAN FOR WALES?**

The results of Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rachel Reeves's, comprehensive spending review in June 2025 were mixed for rail in Wales. £445 million over ten years was promised for rail infrastructure, excluding those parts of Cardiff's Core Valleys Lines which are devolved to Transport for Wales.

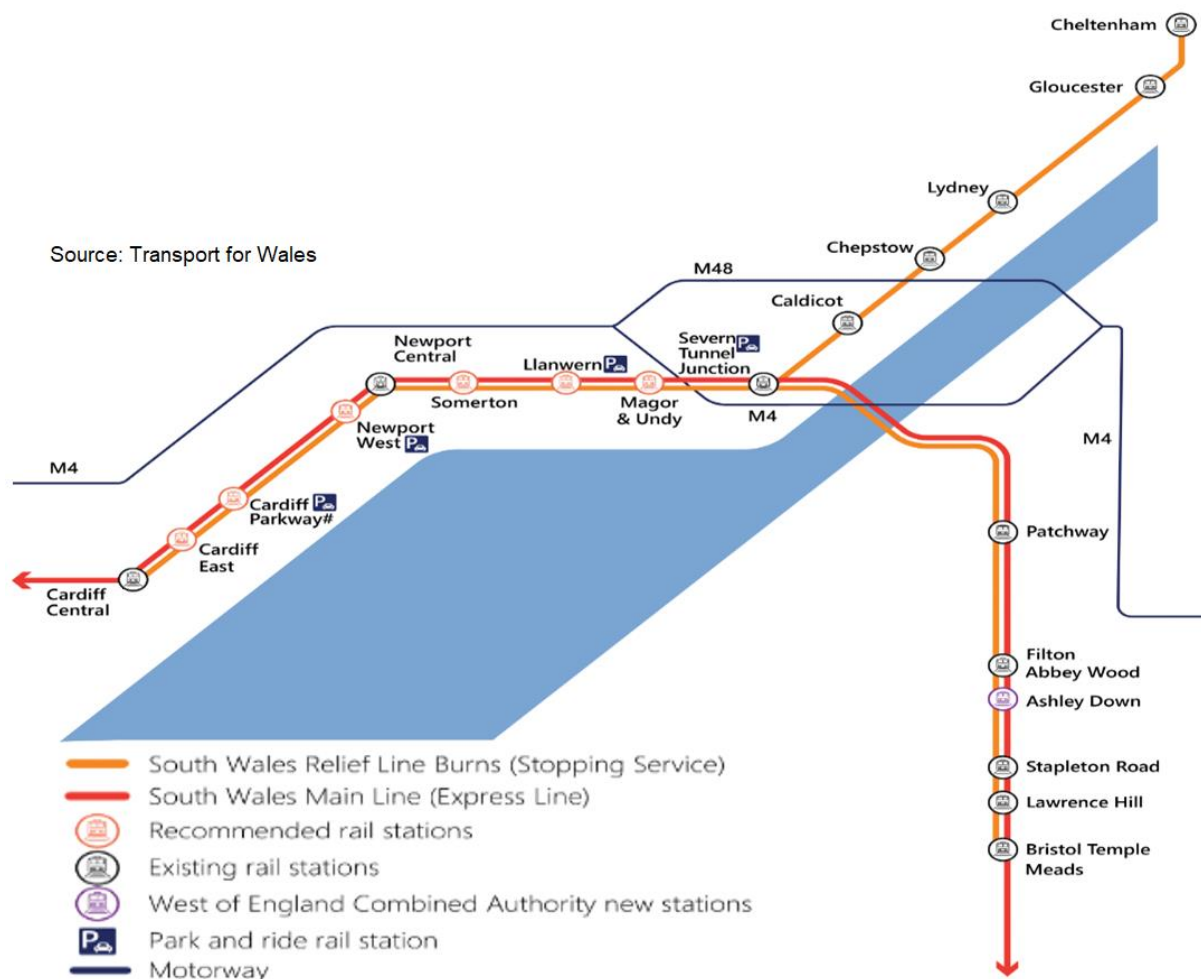
£385 million is for five new stations between Cardiff Central and Severn Tunnel Junction and improved trackwork. Cardiff East, Newport West, Somerton, Llanwern, and Magor & Undy were suggested in the 2020 Burns review – which was set up to propose public transport alternatives to building a duplicate M4 motorway around Newport. They are intended to help support enhanced local services of up to two additional trains an hour between Cardiff Central and both Bristol Temple Meads and Cheltenham.

The proposed Cardiff Parkway station (see map) is to be largely financed from the new development which will surround it; it is not clear if the funding announced will help make up the difference.

The stations are to be on the relief lines, so the new services will share these with existing freight trains. Four of the five stations will employ island

platforms, so the southern-most track and its associated electrification equipment will be slewed further south to make space for them. Additionally, the speed limits on these lines will need to be brought up to 90 mph or thereabouts from the current 60mph (40mph east of Newport). We are not convinced that the funding allocated will be adequate for the new stations and associated trackwork. Also, it appears that the cost of new trains to operate the services has not been included- the cost of trains is usually borne by Welsh Government.

Work on the new stations is expected to start in 2027, with the new service starting in 2030.



Railfuture Wales is particularly pleased that the review provides for Cardiff West junction to be upgraded, which will be needed for future phases of Cardiff Crossrail. The layout of this junction, just to the west of Cardiff Central, hasn't changed for decades (save for minor works to connect platform 8) and dates back to a time when what became known as the City line was just a freight line running through the west of the city. (The



only passenger trains using it were occasional football specials to Ninian Park.) Most trains didn't go into Cardiff Central but took the Penarth Curve towards freight destinations in the Vale of Glamorgan. Some years ago, a stretch of the City line, which now supports four stations, was doubled to the west of Cardiff West junction, but even so, there is a short single-track section before Cardiff Central is reached. Moreover, access to Canton depot from the mainline part of the station necessitates trains crossing onto the City line before crossing back into the depot. Plans to modernise the junction as part of the Cardiff Area Signalling Renewal project, completed in 2017, were "value engineered" so the junction layout changed little. Result: it only supports two trains per hour in each direction on the City line.

We wrote to senior politicians, including the Secretary of State for Transport (then Louise Haigh) as well as Welsh government and Cardiff Council representatives at the beginning of 2025, calling for "tactical interventions" costing up to £30 million, first proposed by Professor Mark Barry (seen by many as the father of the South Wales Metro). Our lobbying does indeed help to bring results.

Following the upgrade, at least four trains per hour will be able to use the City line which, as well as accommodating Crossrail, will add resilience to the increasing traffic flowing through the Cardiff valleys lines.

In North Wales, single pedestrian overbridges will replace two foot crossings at Pensarn and two at Prestatyn, which will help to enable 50% more trains to run on the North Wales main line. The enhanced service could start as early as next year, but the permanent bridges won't be in place before 2027. Temporary bridges will allow the service enhancements to start before the permanent bridges are ready.

We are concerned that a redesign at Pensarn means the bridge will be lower, to reduce visual impact. We hope this won't endanger future electrification under this bridge.

The connection to the Padeswood cement works sidings on the Wrexham-Bidston line, the subject of many refused grant applications over the years, is also to be upgraded. The current tortuous and time-consuming shunting of freight trains, necessary for them to access Padeswood, will be eliminated. It is the only freight project across the UK featured in the comprehensive spending review, but we think it is only there so that current gaps in the passenger service, necessary to allow freight trains to access Padeswood, can be filled.

All these investments are welcome, but they amount to less than £50 million per year, which many commentators have observed is a pittance for Wales.

*Julian Langston*

## **FREIGHT REPORT**

Beginning in North Wales, the aggregate flows from Penmaenmawr continue to operate, as does the crushed slate from Llandudno Junction to Hope, Derbyshire. In mid Wales, the timber traffic from Aberystwyth to Chirk operates using Class 97s along the Cambrian main line having to find slots between the passenger traffic on this single-track route.

In West Wales, the petroleum trains operate from Milford Haven several times a week to either Westerleigh (near Bristol) or Theale (Berks). Sometimes the eastbound loaded traffic is so great to require two locomotives.

Open coil trains continue to Trostre, Llanelli, normally twice a day, but only some are from Margam works (which continues to process steel made overseas), with others coils imported via Cardiff Tidal Sidings in that city's docks. These coil flows travel to Newport Alexandra Dock Junction to reverse, with most imported coils bound for Margam.

Trostre generates a few flows of long covered steel wagons a week for Newport Docks, whilst Margam to Round Oak (Dudley) and Dee Marsh (Shotton) covered steel flows operate several times a week, and open coil to Hartlepool. Slab is being imported through Newport and Portbury Docks daily, with most being from Newport, and usually one a day from Portbury. Celsa at Cardiff also generate freight traffic, and there are scrap trains into Cardiff Docks.

The Machen branch has been quite busy recently, with one and sometimes two aggregate trains a day, including Saturdays. The Tesco container flows to and from Wentloog operate twice a day, 7 days a week, and Freightliner operates container trains from Wentloog to London Gateway and Southampton, with the latter especially well loaded lately.

*Rhodri Evans*



*The scene at the new tram train depot at Taffs Well in early September 2025 where over a dozen new class 398 units sat in the sunshine waiting for the date they will enter service. TfW Rail is still to confirm this.*

*Photo: Peter Kingsbury*

## **NEWSLINES**

### **TfW News**

Railfuture Wales attended the TfW Liaison group in July 2025 when the following news was reported:

- The availability of the class 197 units, the mainstay of the long-distance services in Wales, has improved. At that time only six trains remained to be delivered. It was intended to start operating the trains on the Cambrian lines following the arrival of units equipped with ETCS. Machynlleth depot will be transferred to CAF, the builder of the 197s.



- In the Cardiff valleys, no date was provided for the introduction of the class 398 tram trains into service but it was suggested they would start to enter service in mid-2026. This would allow all the Tri-mode 756 units to move to the Rhymney to Penarth/ Barry route, where electrification works north of Cardiff are due for completion by the end of 2025. It was reported that a programme of installation of WC pods at stations on the Aberdare/ Merthyr/ Treherbert lines had begun with Treorchy being the first location. This is welcomed by Railfuture Wales as we were one of many groups to criticise the introduction of rolling stock (tram trains) without toilets on routes where many journey times exceed 30 minutes.
- On the Heart of Wales line, five class 153 units converted for Active Travel were scheduled for introduction over the late summer and an additional Sunday service was operated during the peak tourist season.
- The December 2025 timetable will see the service between Wrexham and Chester increased to two trains per hour and a fifth through train introduced on the Heart of Wales route, reversing a cut made in 2023. In Cardiff the Coryton branch will see a Sunday service operated for the first time since the 1980s.
- Looking further ahead, in May 2026, North Wales services will receive a boost (subject to Network Rail approval) with the introduction of through Liverpool to Llandudno and Holyhead to Manchester Airport services. This will provide two to three trains per hour on the main line east of Llandudno Junction and a direct service to Merseyside from the North Wales coast. In September 2026 the Milford Haven to Cardiff trains will continue on to Bristol Temple Meads, providing a through service from West Wales to Bristol city centre, something Railfuture Wales has long sought.
- The scheme for increasing the capacity and improving facilities at Cardiff Central, the busiest station in Wales, was approved by Cardiff Council in June 2025. A new multi-storey car park on the south side (rear) of the station is nearing completion. This was approved prior to the above works to the station and will significantly increase the number of parking spaces provided for customers.

## LATVIAN RAILWAYS: AN IMPRESSION

In September 2025 Richard Wilcock visited Latvia (show in red in this map from Wikimedia Commons). Here is his impression of the country's railways:

I spent an enjoyable four days in Latvia, some of it by train. The first day was spent visiting the rather small railway museum which consisted mainly of Russian era rolling stock in a yard. My first trip out from the capital Riga was to the seaside at Jurmala on a new Skoda 16 Ev EMU, rather similar to a continental Flirt. These trains have not been without their problems, resulting in Skoda facing penalties. Ticketing was mainly on the train and based on fare zones, for me 2.5 euros one way. Cheap. Interestingly, all platforms had been raised. Many of the support columns for the overhead were being replaced. I did wonder with the basic shelters, what would it be like waiting for a train in winter? Riga Central station is a labyrinth as it is linked to a shopping centre. At platform level, it was basic, certainly for Riga's main station.



The second day was spent going north to Sigulda on a LTG link service for which I had to pay a one-euro supplement. The train, a 730M by PESA was fine but really slow. No wonder this connecting service to Tallin, Estonia took so long. I am sure the coach would be quicker. The return was on an old Soviet era Latvian ER2T DMU with the engine inboard so the trailing cars were quiet. Being a Soviet gauge train the carriages are wider, making them very comfortable.

There were some signs of work on Rail Baltica particularly at Riga Airport. In Riga the work seemed to have stopped. A Google search suggests funding has been a major issue as the project is running over budget; shades of HS2 perhaps?

Overall, Latvia is a great country to visit. People are very friendly and helpful. Trains are cheap, electric trains are new with good services, but some journeys are very slow and infrequent. Not much for the UK to learn.

The visit demonstrated the obvious point that rail needs long-term continuous investment to work. The threat from Russia will hopefully result in the work on Rail Baltica speeding up.



*Not the latest train for the Cardiff Valleys! A suburban EMU service from Riga to Tukums operated by Skoda 16EV-0224 calls at Dzintari in September 2025.*

*Photo: Richard Wilcock*

## **RAILFUTURE WALES IN ACTION**

### **Preparing for the Senedd election**

As explained above, Railfuture Wales is planning to meet representatives of the main political parties prior to the election to be held in May 2026. The following notes summarise the meeting with Sam Rowlands MS, the Conservative transport spokesperson (pictured, right).





Mr Rowlands appeared to have limited knowledge of Railfuture but explained that he was a regular user of Welsh rail travelling between North Wales, where his constituency is based, and Cardiff.

Mr Rowlands stated that it was important that the rail industry needed to improve its ability to accurately forecast the cost of major infrastructure works such as electrification. He was informed of the Railfuture policy of the need for a rolling programme of electrification to all teams to be kept, learn from experience and thereby reduce cost.

On the location of investment, Sam Rowlands agreed with the point that the current Treasury policy of primarily assessing returns based on existing passenger numbers tended to work against decisions to invest in lines with lower passenger volumes. An amendment to give more weight to potential future passenger volumes in the assessment could benefit areas with lower populations such as Wales.

Other topics Mr Rowlands raised as meriting consideration included tickets: an initiative to encourage more young people to use rail by making the Young Persons railcard available at a lower cost or even free. This would complement the current offer of lower bus fares available throughout Wales for people under 21.

Finally, in a wide-ranging discussion, Sam Rowlands referred to the challenge of achieving better integration between rail and bus (this is one aim of recent Welsh Government legislation to regulate all bus services), and the need to make performance data on rail more easily accessible, an objective Railfuture Wales supports.

## **Visits to public events**

In recognition of the need to attract new members, Railfuture Wales has embarked on a programme of visits with a stall to events where the people present may consider joining us.

So far, the stall has been set up at the Mumbles Railway celebration in March, Penarth Model Railway show in July and the Swansea Model Rail Exhibition in September (see photo on the next page). It is intended to also be present at the Swansea Green Fair on 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> November.





*Railfuture Wales committee member Jessika Venn meets the public at the Swansea Model Rail Exhibition Photo: Julian Langston*

## **RAIL PERFORMANCE: HOW TO ASSESS TOC QUALITY**

Much of the debate about how better rail services could be provided centres around how well the train operators (TOCs) are performing in terms of their current services.

Any assessment of service quality must include a look at data about recent performance. However, the format of current publication of statistics on this topic can appear daunting for rail users who are not familiar with what is out there and where to find it.

The following is a brief guide to available information, including details of how TfW Rail has performed in the most recent period.


There are two sources of data on rail performance: that published by the rail regulator, the Office for Rail and Road (ORR); and that gathered by Transport Focus, the official government watchdog for transport users, which covers bus services and other road users as well as rail.


The ORR issues quarterly reports covering punctuality and cancellations based on information supplied to it by Network Rail. The latest period covered is April to June 2025. This showed that during this time Transport for Wales achieved station arrivals for its trains within three minutes of the advertised time of 83.7%. This compared with an average 86.3% on this measure for all British train operators, placing TfW in 12th position in the table of 24 British TOCs, a mid-table score.

One positive note for TfW Rail, compared with the same period in 2024, is that TfW Rail was the TOC which had seen the greatest improvement in its punctuality. Its previous 'within three minutes' figure was 82.2% and it was one of only five TOCs which had improved. Readers in North Wales will perhaps not be surprised to learn that Avanti West Coast was the worst TOC for punctuality in April to June 2025, recording a disappointing 58.5% of within three-minute arrivals.

Turning to cancellations, between April and June 2025, 4.2% of TfW Rail's services did not run. This compares with a national figure of 3.2% and places the Welsh operator at a low 22nd position in the table of 24 TOCs. Avanti West Coast fared better with a cancellation rate of 3.8%, a significant improvement on the year before when it cancelled 7.8% of its services.

The above figures provide a factual assessment of two measures that many passengers consider important when rating the attractiveness of rail travel.





## Passenger rail performance

### April to June 2025

11 September 2025

Passenger rail performance in the latest quarter (1 April to 30 June 2025) was mixed. There have been improvements in reliability, but punctuality has worsened compared with the same quarter in the previous year.

**Table 1 Punctuality worsened this quarter but reliability has improved**

Measure	April to June 2025	Compared with April to June 2024 (one year ago)
<b>Time to 3</b>	86.3%	down 0.6 pp ↓
<b>Cancellations</b>	3.2%	down 0.3 pp ↓

**Background:**  
This quarterly statistical release contains information on passenger rail performance measures of punctuality and reliability for Great Britain. It also contains more detailed information by train operator. Numbers presented in this release are rounded. Source: Network Rail. Latest quarter: 1 April to 30 June 2025. Contents: Context – p2. Train punctuality – p4. Train reliability – p7. Annexes – p10. Responsible statisticians: J. Wilkes. Author: L. Al Ajlani. Public enquiries: rail.stats@orr.gov.uk. Media enquiries: 07850 279006. Next publication: 11 December 2025.

For **Time to 3**, the percentage of station stops arrived at within three minutes was 86.3%. This was 0.6 percentage points lower (i.e. worse) than the same quarter in the previous year and represents the lowest April to June quarterly figure since 2018.

For the **Cancellations** measure of reliability, 3.2% of services were cancelled in the latest quarter. This was 0.3 percentage points lower (i.e. better) than the same quarter in the previous year. In terms of severe disruption, there were six **Severely disrupted days** in the latest quarter.

We have **made changes to this statistical release**. We have placed more focus on Time to 3 performance and less on other punctuality measures such as On Time and PPM. Further information on these changes and how it will impact users can be found on page 2. Please direct any feedback or questions to [rail.stats@orr.gov.uk](mailto:rail.stats@orr.gov.uk).

All data tables, a quality and methodology report and an interactive dashboard associated with this release are published on the [Passenger rail performance page](#) of the ORR data portal.

Transport Focus data takes a different approach and aims to assess how passengers view their overall experience with the various operators. It surveys the views of passengers by conducting interviews with a sample of travellers every four weeks. People are asked about their overall satisfaction with individual operators covering topics such as (over)crowding, value for money and stations, as well as their experience of punctuality and cancellations.



In the most recent survey period in late spring 2025, TfW Rail recorded an overall journey score of 84. The best journey score of 93 was achieved by Merseyrail and the worst of 75 was by Cross Country. TfW Rail was in joint 16<sup>th</sup> place in the table sharing this with GWR (out of 23 TOCs). Perhaps it is not surprising that Merseyrail is the leading TOC in this regard given the small size of its network.

If you wish to investigate this matter further and see how TfW Rail's performance evolves over time, visit the following on the web:  
<https://dataportal.orr.gov.uk/statistics/performance/passenger-rail-performance/>

<https://www.transportfocus.org.uk/publication/rail-user-survey-edition-40/>

*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](mailto:peter.kingsbury@railfuturewales.org.uk) or by post to 22 Winchester Avenue, Penylan, Cardiff CF23 9BT, by 28 February 2026 for the spring 2026 issue. The editor may edit letters for publication.

*Railfuture* is a voluntary body that campaigns across Great Britain for rail users. It receives no funding from political parties or rail companies. Annual subscription is £20 (£14 for under 26) and there is now a 'paperless' membership for just £10 per year.

Website: [www.railfuturewales.org.uk](http://www.railfuturewales.org.uk). X/Twitter: [@RailfutureWales](https://twitter.com/RailfutureWales)

Rail Wales is printed by Power Print, Llandrindod Wells <http://www.power-print.co.uk>

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Registered in England & Wales no. 05011634

Registered office: Edinburgh House, 1-5 Bellevue Road, Clevedon, N Somerset, BS21 7NP (for legal correspondence only)





*An unusual sight on the Barmouth bridge this summer was the newly fitted out luxury train 'The Britannic Explorer'. The train was travelling from Llandrindod Wells to Porthmadog on 19<sup>th</sup> August as part of a round Britain tour. The train is headed by Network Rail class 97 diesels 97303 'Dave Berry' and 97304 'Talylllyn', a rare visit by diesel locomotives to the Cambrian Coast.*

*Photo : skimpler@flickr*

Website: [www.railfuturewales.org.uk](http://www.railfuturewales.org.uk)

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