

Issue 58 Spring 2015

Rail Wales

Newsletter of the Welsh branches of Railfuture



ON 17th February 2015 work is progressing to prepare the track bed at the new Platform 8 at Cardiff Central. On the left of the picture, the new southern entrance to the station is under construction; this is expected to open this summer. (photo : Julian Langston)

Welcome

The period since the last issue of Rail Wales has seen significant announcements made regarding the future of the railways of Wales. In November 2014 news emerged that the UK government had decided to devolve the primary responsibility for managing the passenger franchise for Wales and the Borders to the Welsh Government. This is of particular significance as the current franchise awarded to Arriva Trains Wales expires in 2018. Although three years away, this is in the near future in terms of preparatory action required prior to the making of decisions relating to the new opportunity this presents to Wales. Work has already begun to consider how to make best use of the additional powers in the corridors of Cathays Park.

On the same day it was announced that agreement has been reached between the UK and Welsh governments on paying for the electrification of the Valleys rail network. This news is welcomed by Railfuture Cymru which looks forward to the significant improvement to passenger services serving many communities in South Wales which will result.

However, it is the decision to transfer the power re awarding the franchise for passenger services throughout Wales to the Welsh Government which is of significance to the entire country. Although falling short of the call by Railfuture Cymru in its Wales Development Plan for a not for dividend vertically integrated rail company, the decision to devolve this responsibility to Wales is a significant step in the right direction. It also raises a number of interesting questions as to how the Welsh government will utilise the opportunity provided. These matters are explored by John Rogers and others in this issue.

I hope you find there is something to interest and inform you in the magazine. If you have news or a comment that you wish to share with other Railfuture members, please send your contributions for the next issue to me by the 31st July 2015.

Peter Kingsbury

Railfuture Member News

Member get Member: You will find enclosed with this magazine a leaflet encouraging people to join Railfuture. Please think if there is anyone you know who might be persuaded to become a member and hand them a leaflet. The more members Railfuture has, the greater influence it will carry in its campaigning for a better rail network.

Tech Savvy? Are you keen on social media and knowledgeable about website design? Railfuture Cymru is looking for one or more people to look after its website and launch a Facebook and/or Twitter account for members to exchange views online. If you think you may be able to assist or would like further information on what this might involve, please contact Peter Kingsbury (peter.kingsbury@talktalk.net).

Railfuture Cymru Membership: a message from John Rogers

At our last committee meeting, the South Branch learned it had lost two members, one having died, the other moved away. However, on the whole, membership throughout Wales is holding up and we can be pleased by our progress, not least with the influential Development Plan and our meetings with decision-makers.

We are, nevertheless, re-evaluating how we organise the membership throughout Wales and, for the moment, northern members [i.e. those not in either the south branch or Cambrian branch areas] should contact either the chairman of the Cambrian branch [Glyn Jones, glyn.jones@railfuturewales.org.uk] or myself as chairman of the south branch [john.rogers@railfuturewales.org.uk] if you have any queries about membership or activities. In the meantime, please continue to campaign individually also, writing to the papers, contacting your AM or putting pressure on the local authority to promote rail.

All being well, the next RAIL WALES will confirm and expand details of a national meeting for all Welsh members on Saturday, October 17, probably in Shrewsbury. The main items for discussion will be the latest on what is to happen after the expiry of the ATW franchise – plus whatever urgent matters members would like to raise.

Rwy'n edrych ymlaen at weld llawer ohonoch chi yn yr Amwythig i drafod nid yn unig ein canghennau ond y sefyllfa ddiweddaraf ynglŷn â rheilffyrdd yng Nghymru.

**CYFARFOD CYFFREDINOL
BLYNYDDOL CANGEN Y DE
SADWRN, EBRILL 25, 2015.**

Canolfan y Crynwyr, Stryd Charles,
Caerdydd. [Yn agos at M & S].

1030-1230: cyfarfod arferol y pwyllgor
ond croeso cynnes hefyd i aelodau eraill.
1315-1515: y cyfarfod blynyddol— croeso
i bob aelod. D. S. Croesewir aelodau i
wnued gais i ymuno â'r pwyllgor.
Wedi i ni ethol aelodau'r pwyllgor, bydd
fforwm agored i drafod pynciau llosg y
sîn rheilffordd yng Nghymru.
D.S. I dderbyn gofnodion y cyfarfod
blynyddol diwethaf [26/4/2014], naill ai
rhowch wybod i mi trwy e-bost neu
anfonwch amlen addas gyda stamp.

**A.G.M. of the
SOUTH BRANCH
SAT, APRIL 25, 2015.**

The Quakers' Meeting House,
Charles Street, Cardiff [Near M & S].

1030-1230: branch committee
All members are most welcome.
1315-1515: the AGM - everyone
is welcome. N.B. Members may
apply to join the committee.
After the AGM, there will be an
Open Forum about the rail scene
in Wales (franchising, new trains etc)
N.B. To obtain the minutes of the
previous AGM [26/4/2014], please
let me know by e mail or send me
a stamped addressed envelope.

john.rogers@railfuturewales.org.uk

John D. Rogers, 2 Llewellyn St, Nantymoel, Penybont ar Ogwr CF32 7RF
01656 840111

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

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

Cambrian Line News

Hourly Services

Draft timetables for the hourly service to be introduced between Aberystwyth and Shrewsbury and enhanced services on the coast section are circulating in some quarters but the final version was not available at the time of writing but should apparently be published by 23rd February. Therefore no comment can really be made except that a hoped for 16.30 (or thereabouts) departure from Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth does not seem to have been included in the drafts that have been seen. It is not known either whether the additional trains will provide through services to and from Birmingham International as had been hoped nor the number of coaches proposed for each train. An on train survey will be undertaken during October of this year arranged by the Shrewsbury Aberystwyth Rail Liaison Committee so that the situation

may be monitored and comparisons of loadings 'before and after' made. There is no doubt however that the additional trains will provide a much improved service.

European Rail Train Management System

News regarding development of a system suitable for fitting to steam locomotives is not good. Apparently this is not thought feasible at present and there seems very little hope of further progress on this until the system becomes universal throughout the UK. Whilst the additional safety and other features brought about by ERTMS are undoubtedly advantageous one still has to question the shift of responsibility onto the train owners and Train Operating Companies in terms of the vast amount of ERTMS associated equipment fitted to the trains themselves and indeed all vehicles using our rail system such as track maintenance machines. Of course with further development equipment may become smaller and more portable as is the case with most computer based items. Also, looking into the future, it will be easier to fit equipment to new trains during the building process than the somewhat difficult and expensive task of modifying existing stock such as the Class 158's and Class 97's. Meanwhile discussions continue in the appropriate places regarding the aspiration to provide 'tourist trains' albeit non steam operated. It is a great pity that progress in one sphere of operations has prejudiced the continuation of main line steam services which had become very popular as indeed they are in Scotland and on the Settle to Carlisle line and other places where they make a big contribution to the local economy.

There is no further news at present either regarding the fitting by West Coast Railways of ERTMS equipment to two of their Class 37 locomotives. As stated in the previous issue of Rail Wales the availability of such locomotives for use on the Cambrian would 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.

Possible developments at Llanbedr

The airfield at Llanbedr south of Harlech on the coast section has been shortlisted by the UK Government along with seven other locations (six in Scotland and one in Cornwall) as a possible site for a Spaceport. If chosen this could bring a tremendous increase in traffic on the line both

in terms of passengers and freight. A decision is expected soon on the chosen site.

Station Improvements

Work is currently in progress on the improvements at Aberystwyth Station. It is expected that the proposed new footbridge and lifts will be installed at Machynlleth Station by year. Part of the old station building believed to have been at one time the Stationmaster's House has already been demolished presumably in preparation for the above work. On the coast section it is understood that Harrington Humps are being installed at Penrhyndeudraeth and that such provision is also to be made at four other locations. These works are much appreciated. The temporary closure of the through line at Shrewsbury has caused some problems as far as platform availability is concerned but we are assured that this is temporary and that the through line will be reinstated as soon as the work to the bridge which required the line's temporary removal is completed.

Cambrian Rail Development Officer

It's good to be able to report that Rhydian Mason formerly Regional Transport Plan Co-ordinator for TRACC has been appointed Line Development Manager, Cambrian Railways Partnership. Rhydian has long been associated with the Cambrian Lines in various posts and has always been prepared to attend our meetings and share with us relevant information and take back campaigning issues for further discussions elsewhere. We look forward to further mutual co-operation with him and wish him well in his new post which will involve, in part, making sure that the public are fully aware of the soon to be introduced improved services.

Carmarthen to Aberystwyth Railway Campaign

The campaign for the re-opening of this section of line is certainly gathering pace with a great deal of support being offered by politicians, County and Local Councils as well as many other groups representing communities far and wide. Meetings have been held at various locations along the route most recently at Aberystwyth when a very well attended gathering lent its full support for the campaign. Meetings have taken place with representatives of the Welsh Assembly Government and the possibility of them financing a feasibility study is understood to be under consideration. As previously reported the group will also be

campaigning for the reinstatement of the Afonwen - Caernarfon - Bangor line as part of a bigger strategic framework.

Cambrian Lines Branch AGM

Our Annual General Meeting will this year be held on 21st March 2015 at the Owain Glyndŵr Centre in Machynlleth at 11.00 hrs.

Glyn Jones

Ted Evans : a tribute

Ted Evans, a longstanding Railfuture member in North Wales, passed away in 2014. Rowland Pittard pays tribute:

‘Ted Evans was involved in Railfuture activities in North Wales for as long as I can remember and must have been one of the longest serving members of Railfuture in Wales. He was the cornerstone of the North Wales branch and kept it intact throughout his period of service as a branch committee member. He was treasurer of the branch and also served in other positions. Ted was a local councillor and in this capacity drove the transport agenda forward in North Wales. He organised public and Railfuture meetings in North Wales which were often based in his local town of Flint. He was a very effective campaigner and will be missed by all that came in contact with his transport activities.’

2018, electrification and all that....

RAILFUTURE meets the Welsh government`s rail civil servants again

I don't know how many of you saw Huw Edwards` BBC1 interview of Edwina Hart on the evening of February 5th – but I remember wanting to send her a bottle of champers afterwards! Half an hour or so on what should happen after the ATW franchise expires in 2018 – and she plugged our masterplan right, left and centre... though, with Edwina, I guess I ought to say `left of centre`. Obviously the word *RAILFUTURE* did not cross her lips.... But what she advocated was what we outlined in our plan [see the detail in our Development Plan, on the website].

She even stated that Network Rail (NR) would be an integral [and vital] component in such a transformation – as, at the moment, the Welsh government can only suggest improvements – or cough up the money [from the global cake supplied by Westminster] and pay NR to do the job.

However, there is obviously a note of caution. At the time of writing, February 6, I get the impression that the transport devolution state of play is still fairly fluid and I think the Minister is pressing Westminster to complete the handover so that she has a free hand. While it is unlikely there will be a bonfire of the franchise rules, regs and laws on the steps of the Senedd in 2018, even by the time you read this edition of `RW`, things might well have evolved or changed....

What *is* crystal clear is that Edwina Hart wants the kind of transformation that we have been advocating for some years, recognising not only the potential improvements this would bring for rail passengers but also the role an expanding network could have in nation-building [her words]. For example, she is thinking hard about Caerfyrddin/Carmarthen – Aberystwyth.

So, as I see it right now.... the good news is that, after 2018, it is likely we shall have an interim set-up, much better than what we have now and one which can hopefully lead eventually to the vision as set out by Railfuture Cymru. It was encouraging to hear in the TV programme that Edwina thinks that she and her team have a good working relationship with the Dept. for Transport in London – and, contrary to what you might envisage, her feeling is that their mood is not set totally against Wales going it alone eventually and having its own arm`s-length, not-for-dividend rail company – without interference from Whitehall. In other words, a rail company which would run the services currently operated by ATW – Wales & the Borders. [Yes, in the meantime, there is a May Westminster general election...and it is to be hoped that the constructive mood between both sides continues].

More good news from the Cardiff meeting with the civil servants: electrification of the valley lines should NOT lead to higher fares. My intention in writing this article was to report on the meeting with the rail civil servants – but I went back to my draft in the light of the Minister`s words in that frank TV interview.

On January 21, 2015, a troika from the south branch committee met with the three top government civil servants from the Welsh Govt.

transport department: James Price, Director-general of the dept., Gareth Morgan [Deputy Director, Delivery] and Nathan Barnhouse [Rail Programme Director].

Meeting in the Parc Cathays offices, we spent over an hour getting to grips with both the nitty-gritty of Edwina Hart's previous announcement [December 5] that she favoured a not-for-profit, government-owned rail company and also the complicated financial machinations of electrification, specifically for the valley lines.

Representing Railfuture Cymru were John Rogers [chairman, south branch], Mike Watson [vice-chairman] and Phil Inskip. To some extent, this was a follow-up to our September 2014 meeting with James Price – and we made clear our appreciation of the invitation to such a meeting and the openness with which the government team discussed matters with us. Let me add, however, that it was not all one way: the Railfuture three passed on the odd snippet of information that was news to the other side of the table, as well as pushing for aspects of our policies as set out in the new Development Plan.

While the Minister, Edwina Hart, favours what is more or less our Plan for a government-owned rail company and an end to franchising in Wales, she is being realistic enough to accept that a halfway house may be the best we can set up until all the negotiations with Westminster are complete. According to the civil servants, the concession model seems the favoured way forward as it could be introduced by Cardiff Bay whenever they are ready - and it is clear that their analogy is LOROL – London Overground Rail Operations Ltd. – although on television, Edwina suggested Mersey Rail was the one she admired, admitting, nevertheless, that it was a much smaller operation that we in Wales would have. A private company [following a model similar to that used for the Docklands Light Railway], LOROL is the train operating company responsible for running the London Overground network under a Concession Agreement with Transport for London [TfL], the latter answering to the Mayor of London. LOROL is a link-up between the MTR Corp. of Hong Kong and our old friends, Deutsche Bahn AG of Germany, DB's interest being managed by Arriva.

Back in January 2004, the Dept for Transport announced a review of the rail industry in GB and as part of this, proposals were put forward by TfL for a "London Regional Rail Authority" to give TfL regulatory powers over rail services in and around Greater London. Then in February of 2006,

the Dept for Tr. announced that TfL would take over management of services then provided by Silverlink Metro. Tenders were invited to operate the service under the provisional name of the North London Railway. Unlike the `national` rail operators under the franchise control of the Dept for Tr., TfL would set fares, procure rolling stock and decide service levels. The operator would take an element of revenue risk: TfL takes 90% of the revenue and 10% is retained by the operator, responsible for revenue collection.

Initially there was a 7-year contract with a possible two-year extension. And in October of last year, THE ECONOMIST reported that LOROL consistently achieves high ratings for punctuality and passenger satisfaction while more than tripling passenger numbers.

The crucial point about LOROL is that, as the Dept for Transport itself admitted, the “services operated by TfL and badged as London Overground, formerly part of the Silverlink Metro franchise, were legally removed from the franchised railway when they were transferred to TfL. This means that the Sec. of State no longer awards a franchise for the operation of these services.”

The above added: “The physical assets [excluding rolling stock] associated with London Overground, inc. track, signalling and stations, remain the property of Network Rail... London Overground is party to the Ticketing Settlement Agreement, including through ticket inter-availability.”

The feeling of the Railfuture troika was that the above system would certainly be a major step forward for those Wales & border services currently ATW-run. And if the change is not ready to be introduced for the first day after the expiry of the current franchise in 2018, then we can live with a two or three-year extension while the preparations are finalised.

This does not give us the rail regime as outlined in the plan featured in the Development Plan [for one thing, NR remains outside government control although as it already is operating as a Wales region, and is to some extent nationalised – albeit under Westminster – it means that eventual transfer to Welsh government control is easier than it might have been some years ago.

And as Cardiff Bay now has further devolution of transport powers, there should be a strong element of Welsh input into any franchise changes

involving FGW, Cross-country and Virgin. One day, we hope, such companies would simply be paying track access charges to the Welsh government-owned, vertically integrated rail company.

To summarise, at least the Concession/LOROL model will mean that Wales controls who has the concession; the service levels; the standards of operation at all levels; the fares... and we should see the beginning of the process whereby there will be an end to massive sums of money disappearing out of the industry, not least as dividends. The WG team were also of the opinion that the model could be tweaked to suit Wales and, importantly compared with now, it would be easy to adapt, change and add services as circumstances dictate.

And as Edwina pointed out to Huw Edwards, in a concession model we could end up with ATW putting forward the favoured bid – and there would be continuity of expertise, albeit with Cardiff Bay writing the song sheet.

In this connection, and as regards the work needed for electrification, I think the Welsh government concedes that, while NR has the expertise in signalling work, the government has considerable experience in delivering civil engineering projects – and, therefore, improvements to the network under the concession model should allow the government to ensure it negotiates a fair price for NR carrying out work on, for example, stations and car parks. An example is the Pye Corner project where the Welsh government managed delivery.

Ironically.... having said all the above, was not Network Rail, set up on March 22, 2002, specifically created as a company limited by guarantee, to be run on commercial lines but without shareholders and investing any profits in the railway? And then on September 1, 2014, the company became an arm's-length body of the Dept for Transport – and is classified as a central government body in the public sector. [Note, so far, all the phrases that echo the crucial ones in our own master plan!] I am tempted to say, if NR can be such a body, why cannot the Welsh government create what we advocate? But I guess that the crucial factor is that NR does not run passenger services... even though it is a crucial component in the rail industry.

Note, by the way, that NR retains the commercial and operational freedoms it had prior to September 2014; its Board being responsible to its Members, the Government and other stakeholders. The Secretary of State is classified as `the Special Member`, appointing the Chair as well

as having the right to approve the Boards choice of Chief Executive; he/she can also dismiss the Chair. There are between 30 and 50 public Members who hold the Board to account.

I don't think that I can here go into much detail on the electrification discussion except that, as we were told, it should really be entitled `Valleys modernisation & electrification` in view of the work that will be carried out on, e.g. station facilities, car parks and so on, all being financed from the same overall pot of money as that for erecting the wires.

The rail team pointed out to us, and as you may already know, the UK government is funding Cardiff to Bridgend electrification which was in the original Valley lines package. In addition, they are funding £125m towards the electrification and modernisation of the Valley lines themselves. The rest would be the responsibility of the Welsh government. The mechanism assumed in the outline business case is that the work could be funded through the regulatory asset base (NR's borrowing facility), with an infrastructure access charge to recover NR's costs.

With the cheaper operation of electric traction compared with diesel and the additional patronage and revenue that should ensue, [together with cheaper maintenance costs] this would pay back the total investment over 30 years – making it `cost neutral` by the end of the period. And based on the long-term recoupment of the investment, there are at present no plans to introduce specific `infrastructure improvement` fare increases to cover the `infrastructure access charges`.

The government and Railfuture are as one in rejecting any cascade of old electric rolling stock – if this can be avoided. Railfuture made it clear that the 313s from Thameslink would be a disaster, as happened when they were cascaded to the Brighton area to replace the existing newer stock with lavatories. The problem of rolling stock for the non-electrified lines will hopefully be solved by new stock – assuming the Westminster government's total ban on new-build diesel can be overturned. The rail team said that to get the process going could be difficult and might entail a cost penalty due to the stop-start element.

Railfuture members, we live in exciting times! Let's keep up the pressure.

John Rogers

News Lines

Cardiff Central: Cardiff Council has announced that the new bus station will be located immediately to the east of the current site replacing the Marland House offices and multi storey car park behind it. The current bus station will make way for the new BBC Wales/Cymru HQ. Railfuture was concerned that the current good train/bus connectivity enjoyed by passengers passing through Cardiff Central would be lost as other sites were suggested for the bus station further from the rail station. The current bus station will close in June 2015 with temporary arrangements operating until the new facilities open in 2018.

Marches Line User Group : a new rail user group has been established to represent passengers using services between Hereford and Shrewsbury. The group is entitled the Marches Rail Users Alliance (MRUA) and has announced four objectives to improve passenger services: an hourly service serving all intermediate stations between Hereford and Shrewsbury in addition to other faster services, a minimum of three carriages per train, better connections at Hereford and Shrewsbury and better integration at stations for onward local travel. Further information on MRUA is available from its secretary Ian Slater e mail : mrua@slateri17.freemove.co.uk .

Magor Walkway Station campaign: an innovative way of fundraising is being used by a local campaign group to raise the £20,000 required to commission a study into the feasibility of opening a new station at Magor between Newport and Severn Tunnel Junction. The Magor Action Group on Rail is using the 'crowd funder' website as part of its initiative to publicise the campaign and raise the required sum. The term 'walkway' has been chosen to emphasise that the new station would primarily serve local communities and is not aimed at passengers who wish to 'park and ride', who will continue to be served by Severn Tunnel Junction.

Infrastructure changes

Cambrian Coast

The section of line between Harlech and Pwllheli was reopened on 31st August 2014 following the construction of a new bridge at Pont Briwet. The railway line has been realigned and a new station platform

constructed at Llandecwyn. This was the last station in Wales to receive a digital information screen.

Saltney Junction to Rosett

A new double track junction has been installed at Saltney Junction and the doubling of the section from Saltney Junction to Rosett is nearing completion.

Swansea

An additional HST stabling siding has been installed at Landore adjacent to the main line to Neath. This is on the site of the former two fuel sidings. The depot can now stable six HST sets at night.

The newly laid three new eastern sidings of the new Hatachi IEP at Swansea, which cover the former High Street Yard and Maliphant sidings, were brought into use on 29th November 2014 and the remaining old sidings in High Street yard and their connection to the carriage washer line were taken out of use the same day. The road crossing between High Street and Maliphant sidings has been taken out of use and replaced by a long ramped footbridge.

Pye Corner

The new station opened on 14th December and the 08.26 Cardiff to Ebbw Vale Parkway worked by 150255/281 was the first official train to call. However a train failure on 12th December saw passengers transferred from the train to taxis at the unopened station.

Cardiff Central

The up east end siding was taken out of use on 19th October. This was formerly used to stable locomotives including those taking over trains from west of Cardiff.

The construction of new platform 8 continues and the new South side entrance is still to be completed. Apparently the platform will not be commissioned until Christmas 2016.

Cardiff Queen Street

The new ticket office was opened on 30th November 2014.

The signalling for the new bay platform 1 and new through platform line 5 was commissioned on 30th November. The first empty coaches to pass through platform 5 was 143607/609 on 05.14 Cardiff Canton to Aberdare on 1st December and the first to use bay platform 1 was 153320 on 00.08 Cardiff Bay to Cardiff Queen Street on 2nd December which then had to make two reversals to reach Cardiff Canton. Platform 5 continued to be used by the two early morning empty stock trains to Aberdare and Pontypridd. DBS empty coal trains from Aberthaw to Cwmbargoed and Tower (diverted from normal route via the City line) also commenced using platform 5 with 66161 on 06.15 Aberthaw to Cwmbargoed noted on 8th. The first passenger train to use platform 5 on 14th December was 150255/281 working 08.26 Cardiff to Merthyr and platform 1 153367 on 09.06 Cardiff Bay to Cardiff Queen Street.

Pontypridd

The new bay platform at Pontypridd was gauge tested by 142069 and 150299 on 30th November 2014. The signalling was commissioned on 14th December 2015 and tested by 142077/143604 which worked empty to and from Treherbert in the evening. The first trains to use the new platform were 09.26 Barry Island to Pontypridd and 10.39 return on 15th December which were worked by 142069 and 143625. The trains did not reach the end of the bay which is at present out of use while a new lift is being built. It is anticipated that the bay will also be used by 05.18 Pontypridd to Barry Island and 22.44 Barry Island to Pontypridd. The platforms at Pontypridd were renumbered from 15th December with the new bay platform as number 1, the platform for through trains to Cardiff platform 2 and the northbound trains using platform three. The full length of the new bay platform was not brought into use on 15th December. The section near the stop block is closed to allow the construction of a new lift.

Port Talbot

The road crossing adjacent to the station has been reduced to a temporary footpath which will be closed when the new station footbridge opens. The station footbridge has been removed and a temporary footbridge provided further west. A new footbridge with three lifts is being constructed.

Ystrad Mynach

A new footbridge together with and a new booking office and toilets on the down platform were brought into use in Autumn 2014. The footbridge lifts were subsequently brought into use in 2015.

Rhymney

An extension to the existing car park opened in November 2015 providing an additional 29 car parking spaces to the existing eleven places.

Cardiff East

Work has continued on the uncompleted Cardiff East track renewal and revised layout. The connection between the up relief and down main was installed at Christmas but the down relief to down main connection at Long Dyke remains unconnected

Baglan Bay

The new distributor road bridge connecting Sandfields with the Neath Port Talbot council offices and Briton Ferry crosses the sidings used for timber loading and was nearing completion in February.

Ebbw Vale

The branch line is being extended as a single line from Ebbw Vale Parkway to Ebbw Vale Town. The new station will be adjacent to The Works which is now the home of the Gwent County Archive and was formerly the old steel works general offices. The station is expected to open in May. An inclined lift has been installed between the new college, which is about five minutes walk from the site of the new station, and the town centre which is at a higher level.

Cardiff Windsor Road bridge

This was closed on 12th January for at least a year for reconstruction in preparation for electrification of the South Wales main line. Two road over bridges west of Newport have already been rebuilt and a former railway bridge at Maindee Bank in Newport was demolished at Christmas .

Access for all

‘Access for All’ programme is to create step and obstacle-free routes to platforms and station entrances through new footbridges, lifts and ramps. Those at Bridgend (bridge with two lifts), Prestatyn (ramped footbridge) and Wrexham General (bridge with lifts) have been completed. Provision has been made at Neath using the council owned bridge (with lifts) linking the town with the car park.

A number of schemes are in progress. Those at Chirk (ramped footbridge) and at Ystrad Mynach (new bridge and two lifts) are nearing completion and work is well advanced at Pontypridd (bridge with two lifts). Work has commenced at Machynlleth (bridge with two lifts), Port Talbot (bridge with three lifts), Llandaf (bridge with two lifts) and Radyr (bridge with three lifts).

No work has taken place at Abergavenny and Severn Tunnel Junction although the original schemes should have been completed in 2014. Schemes have been recently announced for Barry and Trefforest stations.

Rowland Pittard

Wales Freight Update Winter 2014-15

There has been no stone from Machen this year and the branch from Park Junction remains open but out of use.

The Margam to Tondur line was used for Sunday freight diversions in January and February the first time for two years.

The movement of coke from Redcar to Margam restarted in the Autumn.

The experimental movement of coal tar from TATA Port Talbot to Middlesbrough did not result in new traffic.

The increased movement of Welsh produced stone from Moreton on Lugg has continued with DBS serving Hayes, Hothfield, Elstow and Radlett and GBRF serving Harlow Mill and Bury St Edmunds. GBRF has also taken over from Freightliner stone traffic from Neath Abbey Wharf which usually consists of a weekly train to Angerstein Wharf in South

East London. A new flow of stone from Wenvoe quarry loaded at Cardiff Docks for Crawley commenced in the Autumn.

Coal traffic from New Cumnock to Penyffordd cement works continues with trains running on a regular weekly basis. However the thrice weekly flow from New Cumnock to Aberthaw power station has become more intermittent.

Aberthaw power station continues to receive imported coal from Avonmouth, up to 8 trains daily with occasional trains from Portbury and Newport docks. Welsh coal is received from Cwmbargoed, two trains daily, Onllwyn one/two trains daily and Tower two trains daily. The maximum number of trains that can be unloaded in a day at Aberthaw is twenty but the maximum number of arrivals so far has been fourteen. Sunday coal trains commenced in January consisting of three/four trains arriving from Avonmouth.

The weekly movement of coal from Onllwyn to Scunthorpe and from Cwmbargoed to TATA Port Talbot and twice weekly from Onllwyn to Immingham have continued to run.

Coal traffic has not restarted from Cwmgwrach and the line from Neath remains open but out of use.

Considerable quantities of steel continue to be moved from Margam and Llanwern to the rolling mills at Corby, Hartlepool, Shotton (Dee Marsh) and Trostre and also steel and tinplate to terminals at Immingham, Middlesbrough, Round Oak, Tilbury and Wolverhampton. Steel is also exported using the Channel Tunnel to a rolling mill in France and a steel terminal at Rotterdam in the Netherlands.

In addition to the export of steel coil from Birdport, which is served by daily trains from Margam and Llanwern, there have been movements of coil and slab through Newport Docks when larger vessels have been involved. Cardiff Docks was used for the export of a large quantity of steel slab from Margam to the United States in the autumn. The dock at Birdport has been covered to protect steel when it is being loaded from the warehouse onto the boat.

TATA, Port Talbot, continues to receive weekly trains of scrap from Trostre and Swindon and regular consignments of limestone from Hardendale in the Lake District and Dolomite from Thrislington in County Durham.

CELSA continues to receive large quantities of scrap by rail from locations at Attercliffe(Sheffield),Beeston, Exeter, Handsworth, Kingsbury, Lincoln, Rotherham and Swindon. The 200 mile flow from Stockton recommenced in January.

Steel coil and bar is being moved by rail from CELSA Cardiff with terminals being served at Mossend (two terminals), Rotherham, Scunthorpe and Tilbury. There is a weekly company train to Rotherham.

Timber continues to be moved from Baglan Bay (Neath), Carlisle, Exeter, Ribbleshead and Teigngrace to Chirk

The Dow Corning chemical plant at Barry receives inward raw materials including silica sand from France via the Channel Tunnel and its outward traffic in containers is mainly for export via Portbury, Tilbury and Southampton.

The Ford engine plant at Bridgend is served daily from Dagenham and there is outward traffic to Dagenham and Valencia (Spain).

The movement of petroleum from Robeston has been secured although the refinery has ceased production and is now only being used as a storage facility. The movement of petroleum and diesel for Green Energy at Cardiff Docks switched from Immingham to Lindsey in January and consists of one or two trains weekly. There is the occasional train of fuel oil from Lindsey to Aberthaw power station.

Scrap has been moved from Beeston and Exeter to Sims at Newport Docks. Two further consignments of class 66/7 locomotives were imported from the USA via Newport Docks for GB Railfreight.

The only freight traffic on the North Wales main line is occasional nuclear traffic to and from Valley on Anglesey for Wylfa nuclear power station.

Rowland Pittard

Campaigning News

Railfuture Cymru committee members have been busy on several fronts over recent months in arguing the case for more investment in and a greater role for rail in Wales. The important meeting with Welsh Government officials is described in detail by John Rodgers above (page 8).

Prior to that, in November two senior managers from First Great Western met the South Wales branch committee for a question and answer session. With FGW currently operating a short term extension to its historic franchise and work underway to prepare a bid for the award of a new franchise, it was understandably difficult to obtain much in the way of firm information regarding the company's aspirations and intentions for service improvements. The key role played by Network Rail in allocating train paths was also highlighted.

Railfuture Cymru has also contributed to the consultation on the Wales National Transport Plan. RF is a member of Sustainable Transport Cymru and provided an important contribution to that body's comments on the draft document, which makes minimal reference to the future role of rail in meeting the country's future transport needs.

Things Sometimes Go Wrong!

Railfuture Cymru member David Watts had the misfortune to wish to travel from Paddington to Pembrokeshire on the 27th December. As readers may recall, Christmas holiday engineering works outside Paddington overran. This is David's account of his experience. Obviously both trains operators and station staff have a lot to learn about managing the unexpected.

'I was returning from one of my regular visits to family in St Albans. I arrived at Paddington at 11am, in good time for the 11.45 to Swansea. No trains!

Arrangements for helping and advising passengers were inadequate. We were advised to go to Waterloo, and take the slow train [90 minutes instead of 23] to Reading.

The contents of our train [locals plus divertees] hit Reading at 13.15 like a Tsunami.

At Reading, there seemed to be *no arrangements* to help and advise passengers. Only 3 platforms [13 to 15] were in use for westbound trains. At these, the digital train & destination displays were often feeding out *inaccurate* information.

Trains were said to be on another platform to what was the actual case. Trains on each platform were not those claimed. Trains stated to be 'on time', 10 minutes after they should have left, did not appear at all.

Due to all this false information, people missed available trains, and some probably went on wrong trains. I spoke with a train manager, who had no idea when [or if] his train would appear, nor on which platform.

Eventually, at 13.50, with no S. Wales train in prospect [but one may have gone from a different, unannounced, platform], I took a train to Bristol Temple Meads, from where there are 2 trains per hour to Cardiff. The Bristol train was packed solid till Swindon, after which I had a seat.

Leaving Temple Meads at 15.21, & arriving Cardiff 16.21, it was too late for the 15.40 for Milford. I was now looking at leaving Cardiff 18.04, arriving in Milford at 20.56 instead of the planned 16.49: over 4 hours late! However, at Newport I was delighted to see the 12.30 from Manchester to Milford, running 40 minutes late, arriving at another platform. [No use trying to catch it at Newport: it takes so long to change platforms since the £23 million *misguided* revamping of that station that I would have missed it]. At Cardiff, I *just* managed to catch the train, and so arrived Milford at 19.20, only 2½ hours late! [On a previous occasion, with the train from Paddington running 21 minutes late, the Milford train left on time, and I missed it by one minute!]

If First Gt Western had any contingency plan to deal with the possibility of an engineering works overrun, there was little evidence of it at Paddington, and none at all at Reading. Indeed, the situation at Reading was a disgrace.'

David Watts

FORUM : Your views

Heart of Wales Improvements

Mr Evered of Llandrindod Wells looks forward to the improvements to this line which are due to be introduced with the May 2015 timetable and comments on other possible reopenings.

‘We look forward to a fifth train on the Heart Of Wales line, sensibly planned to start towards each end of the route, Llandrindod to Shrewsbury and Llandovery to Swansea. The other four services will be along the whole length. The new timings we assume will shake up the timetable dramatically from May 2015 will be of great interest.

How nice it would be if the Llangollen Railway could rebuild back to Ruabon but this is unlikely as parts of the trackbed have disappeared. However, the extension toward Corwen makes one wonder if it could ever continue westwards towards Bala to link with the narrow gauge line at Bala Lake’.

Valleys opportunities

Bill Riggs who lives near Pontypridd writes:

‘It is good to see the new bay platform at Pontypridd is now open. I wonder if the Cardiff City line services which terminate at Radyr could be extended to Pontypridd as the bay is not being used for most of the day.

I'd like to see Treforrest Estate station shifted north to the Power Station Hill area and provided with P+R facilities there, just off the Church Village bypass. It came up locally, a while ago, and a 'flier' from one of the parties (it may have been Lab, Lib or PC) dismissed it in a sentence saying that it could be done because the track was too curved. Really? A quick look at the map shows a rather straight line down to the present location of Estate station. I think the one sentence politician's response merely demonstrates lack of interest.

A local campaign has started to reopen the long tunnel at the top of the Rhondda valley as a cycle way. This connected the Rhondda with the

Afan and Maesteg valleys and was a relatively late Beeching closure (1970?) with a service running from Treherbert to Bridgend. Part of this route as far as Maesteg reopened some years ago. Should Railfuture campaign for restoration of rail services from Treherbert to Maesteg through the tunnel?’

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 August** for the autumn 2015 issue.

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The new bay platform at Pontypridd opened on 14th December 2014 for trains to Cardiff starting at Pontypridd. The original platform (for many years the only platform at Pontypridd), visible on the left, is used for down trains from Treherbert, Aberdare and Merthyr Tydfil to Cardiff and beyond. The current timetable only requires use of the new bay for several services a day. (Photo : Julian Langston)

