

Issue 60 Spring 2016

Rail Wales

Newsletter of Railfuture in Wales



A Milford Haven to Manchester service calls at the new platform on the recently doubled track through Gowerton in March. Will the service from west Wales to Manchester continue after the new Wales and Borders franchise starts in 2018? See page 2. Photo PK

railfuture
CYMRU | WALES

Welcome

There have been a number of important developments affecting Railfuture in Wales and the wider Welsh rail scene since the last issue of Rail Wales was published in September 2015.

Firstly, over 20 members travelled to Shrewsbury in October 2015 and voted to establish a single all Wales branch for Railfuture to replace the three existing branches. It was agreed that the members in the Cambrian lines area (Shrewsbury-Aberystwyth/Pwllheli) would continue to have an organisation under the Wales wide umbrella to be known as the Cambrian region.

The new committee includes representatives from all parts of Wales including the Cambrian region. John Rogers was elected as Chairman.

The first annual general meeting of the new Wales branch will take place in Shrewsbury on Saturday 23 April at 2pm. Everyone is welcome. Further details below.

Away from the structure of Railfuture in Wales, a debate has been raging about the nature of the Wales and Borders rail franchise which the Welsh Government will procure following the expiry of the Arriva Trains Wales contract in 2018. Railfuture Wales has played a prominent role in the discussion.

The matter kicked off when news emerged that the Department of Transport, which is responsible for English rail franchises, was considering removing some of the current cross border services such as Llandudno- Manchester from the new franchise leaving the Welsh Government only to look for bids to operate services entirely within Wales or which start and terminate in Wales (Cardiff-Holyhead).

You don't need to have won the Nobel Prize in economics to realise that many of the services which would be lost are those which generate a financial surplus or a modest deficit leaving the Welsh Government with a network requiring a larger subsidy or less frequent services. Officialdom denied any decision had been made on the content of the franchise to be inherited by the Welsh Government. However, this did not stop another proposal hitting the rumour mill a few weeks later those

services in Wales may need to terminate close to the border. Thus the Aberystwyth services would terminate at Shrewsbury and passengers to Birmingham would need to change there, a throwback to the latter days of British Rail, and a major deterioration in service for passengers travelling to and from mid Wales.

Railfuture has been very quick off the mark to raise its concerns about the potential break-up of the current Wales and Borders network. Chairman John Rogers was interviewed on the BBC1 Sunday Politics programme and has had letters published in the Western Mail.



The situation continues to evolve rapidly. The latest news will be provided at the AGM in Shrewsbury in April and there will be an opportunity to discuss what position Railfuture should take.

Peter Kingsbury

CYFARFOD CYFFREDINOL BLYNYDDOL 2016

SADWRN, EBRILL 23, 2016.

Gorsaf reilffordd Yr Amwythig.

1100-1300: cyfarfod pwyllgor y cangen ond croeso i bob aelod o Railfuture Cymru [yn unig].

1400-1600: y cyfarfod blynyddol... CROESO i bob aelod o Railfuture Cymru. Cofnodion y cyf. cyff. blynyddol diwethaf; adroddiadau [gyda cwestiynau] gan swyddogion; adroddiad gan Rhanbarth y Cambrian; sylwadau/adroddiad gan aelodau y gogledd; etholiadau i'r pwyllgor; fforwm agored i bob aelod, yn cynnwys adroddiad o'r `canol` gan Chris Bates, ein cyswllt gyda'r bwrdd canolog, Railfuture y Deyrnas Gyfunol.

Cofiwch dod â bwyd! A ddiolch i Ben Davies [TAC] am drefnu'r ystafell – yr un a gawsom ni y tro diwethaf.

John Rogers, cadeirydd: john.rogers@railfuturewales.org.uk 01656 840111.

EICH CYFLE I GAEL EICH DWEUD!

AGM RAILFUTURE CYMRU/WALES 2016

SATURDAY, APRIL 23, 2016 at Shrewsbury railway station (enter by door on far left side of building to left of ticket hall entrance)

1100-1300: normal branch committee meeting plus [on this occasion] a warm welcome to all members of Railfuture Cymru [only] as observers.

1400-1600: the AGM. A warm welcome to ALL our members

Minutes of the last AGM; reports from officers [with questions from the floor]; report from the Cambrian Area officers; comments/report on northern matters; election of committee officers & members]; a report on Railfuture UK by Chris Bates, our liaison with the UK board and then an open forum for all. YOUR CHANCE TO HAVE YOUR SAY!

Remember to bring food/refreshments! This meeting will take place in the same room we used last time – when the national branch was set up. Our sincere thanks to Ben Davies (ATW) for facilitating the use of this excellent venue.

John Rogers, chairman:

john.rogers@railfuturewales.org.uk 01656 840111

Could you help run Railfuture Wales/Cymru?

The AGM is the time of year when members of Railfuture in Wales decide who they wish to serve on the new committee. Although several new people have joined the committee in the past few months, there are still opportunities to get involved in helping shape Railfuture's policy towards improving the railways of Wales. The committee meets four times a year on Saturday daytime and Thursday evening and expenses associated with attending meetings and other activities can be paid.

The current Chairman John Rogers has indicated that he would prefer to stand down from that role for personal reasons as he does not have as much time available to commit as previously. Therefore the post of chairman will be available to be filled at the AGM. Apart from chairing the quarterly meetings, the post holder would ideally have a sense of

vision as to how Railfuture should best contribute to improving the Welsh rail system and lead the committee in implementing the vision. If you wish to speak to John about the role on an informal basis prior to the AGM he can be contacted on john.rogers@railfuturewales.org.uk .

The Station Community Hub

The following article is reproduced from the Heart of Wales Line Travellers' Association newsletter. Thanks to the newsletter editor Peter Berry for allowing it to be published in Rail Wales.

There was a time when the stations along what was then the Central Wales Railway were centres of activity to the communities they served. They were fully staffed, and the larger stations in particular attracted various local businesses. Today almost all are unstaffed, and many have even had their original buildings removed.

Efforts are now being made to reinvigorate some of these stations. Apart from the long-established and busy terminal stations to our line, some intermediate ones are becoming centres of more activity - Llandrindod Wells, Llandovery and, more recently, Llanwrtyd Wells.

But what about the others, particularly those which no longer have any of their original buildings? Rachel Francis, project officer for the Forum, outlines the idea of the Station Hub.

‘In seeking to bring unstaffed stations back to life, we came up with the idea of designing a transportable and sustainable enterprise hub for unmanned stations.

The site identified for installing the first hub was an old Network Rail storage yard next to Llandeilo Station. During September 2015 we consulted with local people about the hub. This consultation closed with a drop-in event and public meeting at Llandeilo Civic Hall on 5th October. Public response has been very positive.

The design and construction of the first Station Hub has been funded by Welsh Minister for Economy, Science & Transport, Edwina Hart.

The hub is made in Wales using Welsh grown wood. The hub design and construction was carried out by David Bamford and his team at Bamford Makers of Presteigne. David is also the designer of the highly insulated “New Welsh House” building panel system which seeks to add value to Welsh wood, whilst providing an ambitiously sustainable building system for affordable housing. The first station hub is now complete, apart from the steel roof and guttering, which will only be attached once the hub is in-situ. It is looking fantastic. The design is generating national interest, in particular amongst other community rail partnerships, and if this interest translates into orders for more hubs then it will potentially create new jobs for rural Wales.

We are hoping to install the hub in February, weather and legal agreements permitting*. We have a number of expressions of interest for use of the hub, including providing some space for a very exciting local produce scheme, working with a local social enterprise that provides desk and co-work space for freelance workers etc, and a sustainable tourism and travel initiative’

Follow news updates on the hub visit:

<https://llandeilostationhub.wordpress.com>

* STOP PRESS Carmarthenshire County Council has now granted planning permission.

Some links on the main Railfuture web-site

Here are some links to useful pages on the main Railfuture web-site:

www.railfuture.org.uk/conferences – Conferences (register online)

www.railfuture.org.uk/shop – Shop (books at discount, gifts etc.)

www.railfuture.org.uk/Railfuture+in+the+news – Media Attention

www.railfuture.org.uk/Press+releases – Press Releases

www.railfuture.org.uk/Rail+user+help – Advice on rail travel

Railfuture in Action

Railfuture supports new station campaign

A new station serving Magor and Undy has become a step closer thanks to help from Railfuture.

Local pressure group Magor Action Group On Rail (MAGOR) has been campaigning for the station on the South Wales main line for four years. “Magor and Undy Walkway” station will be designed to encourage access by foot, bicycle, bus and taxi. MAGOR hopes that if residents of Magor and Undy use these means of transport to reach the new station, parking space will be freed up at nearby Severn Tunnel Junction for those for whom a car is necessary to reach the railway. Therefore, there will only be limited disabled parking and a drop-off facility at the proposed station.

The locations of the original village stations aren't now suitable, so Magor and Undy Walkway would be built on the eastern side of Magor adjacent to the site of a proposed community centre. As such, it will also form part of a community hub for the villages, containing facilities for community activities. The idea is that it will be managed by the community, and commission from ticket sales will go back into the community.

These features make the proposed station unique, and MAGOR hopes it will make a substantial dent in the 11,000 or so vehicles using the main road through the villages every day. If the sixty daily buses that pass the proposed station connect with trains, local people will have enviable travel opportunities.

The scheme has widespread backing, including from village schools, various businesses, and politicians from community council to MP level. There is also support from ATW, GWR, the RMT and rail pressure groups, including Railfuture.

Now, Railfuture is offering a grant of between £5,000 and £10,000 to help match fund a “GRIP 3” study. This is stage three of Network Rail's process for developing major projects and will determine the best option for the proposed station from the possibilities that have come out of

earlier studies. Engineering and economic issues will be considered, along with MAGOR's local transport and community objectives.

Railfuture Wales strongly supports a station in the Magor / Undy area, which features in the Development Plan, and has helped with the grant awarded from Railfuture's Fighting Fund.

For more information about MAGOR and their campaign, see www.magorstation.co.uk

Julian Langston

Making the case for improved rail services to politicians, train operators and the public

The Railfuture Wales committee, led by secretary Rowland Pittard, has been busy responding to consultations from the Welsh Government and train operating companies over the past few months.

A detailed response was sent to the government consultation on the franchise it will let in 2018 following the expiry of the Arriva Trains Wales franchise. Apart from the formal response, a letter was sent to Economy, Science and Transport minister Edwina Hart following concern that the franchise devolved to the Welsh Government might exclude a number of routes within the current ATW network which run between Wales and England, or require the services to terminate close to the border, such as at Chester or Shrewsbury. The minister confirmed discussions on the matter with the Department for Transport are ongoing and that she does not wish to see any significant change to the current franchise map.

The issue was highlighted to the public at the end of 2015 when John Rogers gave interviews to the Western Mail, Radio Wales and the BBC1 Sunday Politics programme to explain concerns about the issue.

Evidence has also been provided to the Welsh Assembly's Enterprise and Business committee on service provision to, from and through Cardiff Central during last autumn's Rugby World Cup when significant delays were experienced on certain dates not only for spectators using rail to access games but to other passengers travelling along the South

Wales main line. Committee members also appeared at a separate evidence gathering session of the committee examining the future priorities for rail infrastructure in Wales.

On the rail operation front, meetings have been held with managers from Arriva Cross Country regarding the new two year direct award for that network, with Arriva Trains Wales regarding its December 2016 timetable, and correspondence undertaken with Great Western about the withdrawal of two Saturday services between Swansea and London which affect the ability of passengers to make an early start and late return to West Wales.

On Track for the 21st Century: Development Plan Summary sent to Welsh Assembly candidates

Railfuture Cymru/Wales has published a bilingual summary of its Wales Development Plan which has been sent to all candidates standing in the Welsh Assembly election in May. This will ensure that all 60 AMs forming the new Senedd to govern Wales for the next five years will have been informed of Railfuture's aspirations for and proposals to improve Welsh rail.

Visit the Railfuture Cymru Wales web-site



The independent campaign for a better passenger and freight rail network
yr ymgyrch annibynnol am well rhwydwaith ar gyfer teithwyr a mwyddau



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Welcome to Railfuture Wales - Croeso i Railfuture Cymru



- hafan
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- siop
- datganiadau i'r wasg
- cysylltiadau railfuture
- cofnodwch

Ymgyrchoedd

- Northern Powerhouse
- Wisbech
- cysylltiadau ar goll
- Improved Services
- gorsafoedd newydd
- trydaneiddio
- rheilffyrdd cyflymder uchel
- Southwest rail resilience

Wales Freight Update Winter 2015/16

Aggregates

After a long break there were three loaded trains from Machen, these were all for Allington and ran on 30th January and 3rd and 6th February. The branch from Park Junction remains open.

The movement of Welsh produced stone from Moreton on Lugg has continued with DBS serving Harlow Mill, Hayes, Hothfield, Elstow and Radlett. GBrF has ceased serving Moreton on Lugg and its last train was on 13th December which ran to Harlow Mill. Subsequently DBS has worked trains as required to Harlow Mill. GBrF still works stone traffic from Neath Abbey Wharf which usually consists of a weekly train to Angerstein Wharf or Colnbrook. The DBS worked flow of stone from Wenvoe quarry loaded at Cardiff Docks for Crawley has continued.

There are regular consignments, in containers, of limestone from Hardendale in the Lake District and dolomite from Thrislington in County Durham to TATA Port Talbot.

The wagon load traffic consisting of blast furnace slag from CELSA Cardiff to Rotherham and has subsequently grown to be a weekly block train.

Automotive

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

The twice/ thrice weekly train conveying cars from Portbury Dock to Doncaster and Mossend continues to run via the Marches line

Chemicals

The Dow Corning chemical plant at Barry receives inward raw materials including silica sand from France via the Channel Tunnel on alternate Fridays. The last train using polybulks ran on 18th December 2015 and subsequent trains have only consisted of containerised silica. As a consequence the line from Barry Container Terminal to Dow Corning's works has been out of use since the empty polybulks were removed on

30th December. Dow Corning's outward traffic in containers is mainly for export via Tilbury and Southampton with occasional traffic to Portbury .

Coal and Coke

The final movements of coke from Redcar took place on 10th, 13th, 15th and 22nd January to Port Talbot Grange siding to finally clear the stock pile at Redcar.

Coal traffic from New Cumnock (Scotland) to Penyffordd cement works continued until 27th January and then the source switched to Killoch Washery (Scotland) from 17th February 2016. Thirty six MEA box wagons are used for this flow.

A last one off train of coal ran from Newport Docks to Aberthaw power station on 26th November and now there is no coal stock pile at Newport Docks. There have been occasional trains from Avonmouth since 30th November and these increased to four a week in February. Welsh coal continues to be received from Cwmbargoed, Onllwyn and Tower Colliery usually up to four trains each day.

The movement of coal from Cwmbargoed to TATA Port Talbot has increased to five trains per week .The twice weekly services from Onllwyn to Immingham Coal Products Ltd and Cwmbargoed to Earl's cement works have continued to run but are frequently reduced to one per week. Containerised coal is still moved from Onllwyn to Mossend usually four containers each week. The loaded train from Gwaun Cae Gurwen to Onllwyn has reduced to weekly following production problems at West Pit.

The movement of coal to Uskmouth power station from Portbury recommenced once again on 12th November 2015 and at present trains are running three times per week.

The use of the Marches line for coal trains from Avonmouth and Portbury to Rugeley power stations has ceased.70004 worked the last train from Portbury on 4th January and from Avonmouth on 26th January . It has now been announced that Rugeley power station is to close later this year.

Intermodal

The workings from Daventry except Saturdays, from Southampton Millbrook on Saturdays and from Southampton Maritime except Saturdays and Sundays to Wentloog continue to run. The Saturday only train from Liverpool to Wentloog has not run recently.

Nuclear

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.

Petroleum

Trains continue to run from Robeston to Bedworth (Coventry), Theale and Westerleigh. The movement of petroleum and diesel for Green Energy at Cardiff Docks continued from Port Clarence and consists of a weekly train. There is an occasional train of fuel oil from Lindsey to Aberthaw power station.

Scrap metal

The weekly train of scrap from Trostre to TATA, Port Talbot resumed on 15th January 2016 but the weekly flow from Swindon has ceased after 27th July. There were weekly loaded scrap trains from Port Talbot to Aldwarke (Rotherham) from 10th August to 17th November reversing the direction of the previous flow.

CELSA continues to receive large quantities of scrap by rail from locations at Handsworth (Queens Head), Kingsbury, Lincoln, Rotherham, Saltley and Swindon. The 200 mile flow from Stockton worked by DCR ceased on 12th November but recommenced on 18th February 2016. The last train from Tyne Dock ran on 6th November. Scrap traffic recommenced after many years from Handsworth (EMR) on 15th December. There was a train from Attercliffe on 1st October. There have been no recent trains from Attercliffe (Sheffield), Beeston (Nottingham), Laisterdyke (Bradford) and Exeter .

Scrap has been moved during 2015 from Beeston, Exeter and Handsworth (Queens Head) to Sims at Newport Docks. To date the last train from Queens Head ran on 22nd December but a one off ran from Swindon on 4th January 2016. Sims received a number of DBS wagons for scrap on 6th January.

Steel and Steel Products

Llanwern's hot mill remains mothballed which produced coils for further processing remains mothballed. Further cutbacks announced in 2015 were the closure of one of the two pickle lines and the mothballing of the cold strip mill at Llanwern. This resulted in the termination of the steel slab flow from P-field siding Margam to Llanwern which consisted of three or four trains each day. The last slab train ran from Margam to Llanwern on 14th October 2015. The Zodiac galvanising line which produces steel for automotive and white goods manufacture continues in action.

The block trains from Margam to Hayange in Eastern France ran for the last time on 16th November 2015. The trains to Boenen and Rotterdam had ceased earlier.

Reduced 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 and Tilbury. The occasional steel train to Wolverhampton steel terminal has not run since 29th October 2015. The weekly train from Margam to Hull steel terminal only ran for a limited time. There are two or three weekly trains of tinplate from Trostre to Tilbury which often attach steel coil traffic at Margam. There was a one off train of tinplate from Trostre to Burton on 25th January.

In addition to the export of steel coil from Birdport (to European and Mediterranean countries) which is served by daily trains from Margam and Llanwern, there have been large movements of coil from Margam and Llanwern to Newport Docks when larger vessels are involved. These recommenced on 6th November and have continued into 2016 varying from one to three trains each day. There was a train of slabs from Margam to Cardiff Docks on 14th and 15th September. Between 4th

and 29th December one or two trains ran daily conveying hot rolled coil from Margam and/or Llanwern to Cardiff Docks for export to America.

Steel coil and bar is being moved by rail from CELSA Cardiff with terminals being served at Mossend (two terminals), Rotherham, and Tilbury. There is a weekly WO company train to Rotherham, and another ThO to Mossend. There has been no train recently to Burton on Trent. CELSA steel also moves as wagon load traffic to Mossend and Rotherham .

Timber

Timber continues to be moved from Baglan Bay (Neath) and Carlisle. There has been no recent movements from Exeter and Ribbleshead.

Wagon repairs

Engineering department wagons are being overhauled at the Colas Cardiff Canton facility and there have been occasional inward and outward trains.

Wagons are also moved in wagon load trains to and from the DBS repair facility at Stoke on Trent.

Rowland Pittard

Passenger services in North Wales: a personal view

Railfuture member Richard Wilcock, who lives in Prestatyn, offers an opinion on the quality of passenger services along the North Wales coast:

The North Wales railway for this piece comprises the line from Holyhead to Chester including the Llandudno and Blaenau Ffestiniog branches as well as the lines from Chester to Manchester, Crewe and Shrewsbury. I will not comment on the Wrexham to Bidston line as I rarely use this. Services are run by Arriva Train Wales (ATW), and Virgin West Coast. ATWs rolling stock is mainly 158, 175s and the odd 150 or 153. The Assembly members train is comprised of mark 3 carriages, driving van trailer and usually a class 67. Virgin use Voyagers, class 221. Freight traffic is very limited.

The worst aspect of the service is Sunday, when not only are services infrequent but there are few through services on the North Wales coast from Manchester. Virgin run many of the Sunday services which is a blessing as a 5 coach Voyager can take the large number of people wishing to travel. Bangor has a large student population which partly explains the high loadings. I frequently find that an ATW Sunday services are packed, rarely is an extra unit added.

The next aspect of the service which disappoints me is the failure to develop off peak usage particularly towards Chester. Neither ATW, local bodies or the Welsh Government have made a concerted effort to get more people to travel off peak. The result is not only do few people travel but stations become foreboding as there are few people around. This in turn discourages people to use the train.

If you wish to go to concert in Llandudno, forget it, as the last train is at 21.45, which for a major tourist and conference centre is pretty poor. The station has gone through a major renovation which needs to be capitalised on. The level crossing at Deganwy and its signal box is cited as the reason for the poor service. Lack of will is perhaps why nothing has been done.

North Wales is still a major holiday destination but I feel that ATW fails to grasp this sometimes. If Chester races are on then all trains are packed. ATW could try and organise a booked charter train on a Saturday, but as far as I know has never tried. They could make it essential to pre book and offer a Champagne/Prosecco service. That way they could assess demand and capitalise on the event. Needless to say longer trains are not run. At times people at Shotton and Flint cannot get on to a Chester bound train as it is packed. I went to the Victorian fair in Llandudno once, again no extra rolling stock or special trains but plenty of revenue collectors around which suggests ATW is happy to take the money but not offer any extra service.

The early evening week day service has an anomaly, using Rhyl as an example from the 15:36 train. Services are no longer roughly 30 minutes apart but run 15:36, 15:44, 16:34, 16:44, 17:33, 17:59 then an hour wait till 19:01, and then they go back to roughly half an hour apart. On a Saturday the trains remain roughly half an hour apart. It gets worse because in the holiday season, the extra holiday makers with their buggies, children and luggage take much longer to get on and off resulting in the trains being later and frequently running a few minutes apart. As at that time I travelled from Rhyl to Prestatyn, a five minute journey often required a 20 minute wait! I have complained to ATW numerous times. I suggested that they make station and train announcements for people with buggies to use the central doors to aid boarding and alighting. It has never been taken up. ATW just takes it as an inevitable yearly occurrence.

Virgin on the other hand offers a good service to London, under 4 hours from Holyhead, with a train an hour from Chester.

Talking to ATW staff I gain the impression that the Welsh Government is going to take over the franchise and ATW has lost interest.

So, what would I like to see in the next franchise? Simple:

1. Development of the off peak service, get more people on board will attract more people. This needs special fares and a long running promotional campaign.
2. A much better Sunday Service, certainly in the afternoons
3. New rolling stock.

As for electrification I am not sure if it would be the best investment, with trains two an hour most times of the day I feel that other parts of the country with more frequent services have a better call on the investment. However if my proposals above take off then who knows?

Richard Wilcock

Do you have any comments on Richard's suggestions? Please send me your thoughts and ideas. My contact details are on page 19. Peter K

News Lines

South East Wales Metro a step nearer

The completion of a City Deal for the Cardiff Capital Region was announced by the UK and Welsh government on the eve of the budget in mid-March. This means that funding of £1.2 billion has been agreed to spend on projects to improve the economic competitiveness of the area in SE Wales extending from Bridgend to the English border and north to the Heads of the Valleys. This region takes in ten local authority areas.

Previous discussions indicate the majority of this funding will be used to design and construct an integrated public transport network to make it easier to travel throughout this area. This network is being marketed as a SE Wales 'Metro'.

The Metro would provide a transport network covered by a single ticketing system and will cover both rail and bus services. Most of the rail services will be electrified with both heavy and light rail in the mix. A Welsh government exhibition showing initial ideas for the Metro visited several venues in February and March. Visitors were asked their thoughts on various issues such as ticketing (e.g. would a pre-payment card similar to the London Oyster be appropriate?)

Barmouth Bridge footpath gets temporary reprieve

Rail Wales 59 highlighted the threat to the footpath and cycle path that uses the rail bridge to cross the Mawddach estuary at Barmouth. Gwynedd council has recently agreed to pay Network Rail for the continued use of the bridge by walkers and cyclists for the next year whilst asking for options for reducing its future payments to be explored. The possibility of the local community raising funds to help offset the council's payment will be examined.

Station Improvements

The last few months have seen several station upgrades completed.

Port Talbot Parkway has benefitted from a £11.4 m scheme to provide improved access to the platforms via two lifts, and a new ticket office and waiting facilities in a new entrance building which provides a more direct link to the customer car park (see photo back page). The new facilities came into use in February 2016 after many months of passengers having to access the station's island platform via an uncovered ramp and steps.

Rhyl station improvements include refurbishment of the ticket office and toilets, a new information point, waiting shelter and platform fixtures. This £2.5million scheme is partly funded by the Welsh Government and was officially opened by Edwina Hart AM in February.

Chirk on the Chester to Shrewsbury line has had a new ramped footbridge installed which has improved access to the Chester bound platform for people with impaired mobility. The cost is given as c£2m.

Do you consider these station improvements worthwhile and represent the best use of the money spent? Please share your views with other readers by e mailing me –contact details on back page. Peter Kingsbury

Cambrian Lines News

There is no Cambrian lines feature in this issue for Rail Wales as Glyn T Jones has been unwell. I am sure all readers would like to join me in wishing him a speedy recovery. Peter Kingsbury

State of the Art

The Great Western Main Line electrification, currently creeping west towards South Wales, will be state of the art, according to Dr Dave Hewings of Network Rail. Some eighty people (including several members of Railfuture Wales) attended his lecture on the subject in Cardiff in February. Julian Langston provides some reflections.

Dr Hewings promised that many features of the new infrastructure would be advanced and in some cases world-leading. If you want to see polymeric bushings or the world's first flexibly operated substations, the Great Western is the place to come.

He went on to explain how passengers should benefit from this flexibility through a faster recovery from fault conditions. On older systems, power is automatically switched off across all lines when a fault occurs, meaning that electric trains are blocked until the fault is fixed or there is a manual intervention to re-open the undamaged line. This can take time, resulting in long delays.

All lines will similarly be shut down in the new system, but data taken moments before the fault will be analysed and the results used to automatically switch on unaffected lines, so the railway could be partially re-opened in a matter of seconds.

When electrification is complete, it will be capable of supporting trains running at 140mph; it's a pity that the track and signalling won't be up to that standard.

As an electrical engineer, Dr Hewings's talk was highly technical and full of pretty graphs and plots. He all but ignored the cost overruns and delays that have plagued the project, somewhat defensively arguing that the electrical part of the project was running to time. Indeed, when responding to a question about delays, he displayed a degree of equivocation that would leave many of our politicians speechless.



The imposing new station entrance building at Port Talbot Parkway photographed during its first week of use in February. This dwarfs the original ticket office which can be seen to the right. (photo PK).

Thanks are extended to all who contributed to this issue. In all cases, any opinions expressed are those of the contributors, and do not necessarily represent *Railfuture* policy. Material for the next issue – articles, letters, photos or comments – should be sent to the editor, Peter Kingsbury at peter.kingsbury@railfuturewales.org.uk or by post to 22 Winchester Avenue, Penylan, Cardiff CF23 9BT, by **15th August** for the autumn 2016 issue. The editor may edit letters for publication.

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