

Rail Wales

Newsletter of Railfuture in Wales



The first IEP service from Paddington to Swansea arrives at Cardiff Central on the 16th October on its inaugural run replacing the scheduled HST 125 train.

Photo P Kingsbury

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WELCOME

Much news of interest to Railfuture members in Wales has occurred since the last issue of Rail Wales (number 62) was published in March 2017.

The magazine production was held back a few weeks to allow coverage of the start of the running of the new Hitachi IEP trains (class 800 series) on the South Wales main line. This occurred in mid-October and was greeted by a considerable fanfare at Swansea where the train was turned around in the usual 45 minutes before returning to Cardiff and London.

I travelled on the train and my initial impressions were positive. Of course, given the significant investment in the new trains and length of development period you may say well they ought to represent a step change in quality.

Nevertheless, I was pleased to note that some of the basics were correct such as table seats aligning with windows. In addition, the level of noise and vibration within the carriages was lower than experienced elsewhere for an under carriage powered diesel, and the acceleration away from station stops was markedly better than existing diesel units.

The comments on the ride experienced by passengers on the new trains when operating in diesel mode is more relevant than I was anticipating at the start of 2017 as the extremely disappointing news announced in July that the proposed Cardiff-Swansea electrification has been abandoned results in journeys along most of the South Wales main line begin diesel powered for the foreseeable future.

The Railfuture Wales branch committee has expressed its profound regret at the news and called for the decision to be reversed. Nationally, Railfuture has taken a somewhat different approach and called for the issues of large cost overruns and skill shortages that have led to delays in constructing the wires on the Great Western route to be addressed by Network Rail so that a rolling programme of electrification can be reinstated to cover the entire British rail network. This is an issue that not only affects South Wales as readers will recall that the plug was pulled on the East Midlands main line electrification on the same day as Cardiff-Swansea and, whilst not abandoned, no date has been given for the wires to reach Bath and Bristol.

If the above was not enough to contemplate, news emerged in late October that Arriva has withdrawn from the competition to operate the next Wales & Borders franchise. No reason for this decision was provided but it is not unreasonable to assume that in its discussions with

Transport for Wales, which is using an innovative 'competitive dialogue' process to decide on whom to award the franchise, Arriva has decided that the potential financial return it would make from a bid which might be successful, was too low. This, combined with the considerable cost of continuing to prepare a bid (final submissions are due in December 2017) meant that Arriva was willing to cut its link with Wales where it has operated the current franchise since 2003.

The future of Rail Wales

I have edited the magazine since 2014 following Peter Clark who described himself as the compiler, i.e. he largely relied on contributions sent in from members rather than write material himself. I am informed that Rail Wales is a higher quality of publication than is produced for members by other Railfuture branches, some of whom only receive the national magazine Railwatch.

The number of contributions for Rail Wales has declined in recent times. For example, Peter Clark received news reports from North Wales and the Cambrian lines. This has ceased. The lack of news from across Wales results in the magazine tending to concentrate on South Wales, and Cardiff/the Valleys in particular, which can be seen in the current issue. Only three contributions from others have been received for this issue.

We would really welcome a significant increase in contributions for future issues. The deadline for the next issue is 28th February 2018. Details of how to send me material are given on the back page. I welcome short or longer submissions including letters which can be news or opinion focussed (or both).

If you have any views on what you wish to see included in the magazine or on other options for serving Railfuture members in Wales, please let me know. With an increasing number of outlets providing instant news about Welsh railways, it is difficult to know how a magazine published at six monthly intervals can be topical and worth reading.

Last but not least, if you have journalistic ambitions and might wish to take over as editor and would like to discuss this, please get in touch for an informal chat.

Peter Kingsbury

WALES FREIGHT UPDATE

Major developments

DB Cargo revised some of its services in South Wales following the downgrading of Didcot Yard (following the loss of military traffic) from 2nd July 2017. The services are based at Newport Alexandra Dock Junction and involve the following services. The Dagenham to Newport ADJ and return service is now direct and does not call at Didcot. This conveys Ford component traffic daily between Dagenham and Bridgend and Dow Corning traffic twice weekly MWO between Barry Docks and Tilbury destinations. Sometimes tinplate is conveyed on this service. A new service runs twice weekly to convey Dow Corning traffic to Southampton Docks via Eastleigh TThO which previously went via Didcot. This service sometimes conveys automotive traffic and/or tank cars for maintenance at Eastleigh. Another new service operates between Newport and Doncaster TThO and return to convey automotive traffic which has been imported via Portbury and formerly was routed via Warrington. It is also used to transfer wagons between the North east and South Wales and also to Warrington for maintenance at Stoke on Trent. The TThO Warrington to Portbury and return to Mossend services continue to run but with reduced loadings mainly automotive traffic and wagons for maintenance at Stoke on Trent.

DB Cargo UK and CEMEX UK made history on Wednesday 20th September 2017 when the first jumbo train hauled by two class 66 locos and consisting of 34 wagons transported 2,300 tonnes of building materials to be used in the construction industry from ABP's Port of Cardiff to Southall in West London where it is split into two portions. The train operated by Britain's biggest rail freight operator DB Cargo UK, transported limestone from CEMEX's Wenvoe and Taff's Well quarries, on the outskirts of Cardiff for use in the production of asphalt and concrete in London and the South East. DBC were operating up to three smaller trains a week for CEMEX from Cardiff Docks to Crawley (two trains) and one to Acton. A new contract to supply aggregate to Days at Brentford stimulated the need for a weekly jumbo train with some of the conventional trains continuing to run. Each train will save the equivalent of 80 truckloads on Britain's congested roads.

Freightliner has ceased stabling wagons at Stoke Gifford Yard to facilitate changes associated with the building and commissioning of a fourth platform at Bristol Parkway. The move to East Usk Yard for stabling wagons took place on 9th August after four sidings had been re-laid.

Freightliner locomotives still use Stoke Gifford for fuelling and train crew purposes.

Freightliner has also been working steel trains between South Wales and Dee Marsh for Shotton steel works in North Wales since DBC closed its train crew depot at Hereford. In addition Freightliner has taken over the working of all coal trains from North Blyth and some from Cwmbargoed to Port Talbot steel works. It has also taken over from DBC a weekly coal working from Onllwyn to Scunthorpe.

A third freight company operating in South Wales, Colas, has taken over from DBC the working of CEMEX grit stone traffic from Gilfach Quarry near Neath from Neath Abbey Wharf. Initially this was occasional traffic to Stourton, Leeds and Washwood Heath, Birmingham but has now extended to Ely in East Anglia.

Aggregates

Neath Abbey Wharf serves Cemex Gilfach Quarry and Hanson Cwm Nant Lecki Quarry. The latter provides stone for the occasional trains worked by GBF to Angerstein Wharf in London and Colnbrook. Stone from CEMEX's Wenvoe and Taff Wells Quarries is loaded at Cardiff Docks and supplies Acton, Brentford and Crawley. There has been very little gritstone loaded at Machen recently. The busiest loading point is Moreton on Lugg north of Hereford which continues to load Welsh stone for Elstow, Hayes and Radlett on at least a weekly basis and occasional trains to Acton, Kennet and Hothfield.

There is a weekly Sunday train of blast furnace slag from CELSA at Cardiff to Rotherham for road surfacing and an occasional weekly train from TATA at Port Talbot to Hayes in west London. There have also been trains of blast furnace slag from Port Talbot to Bow in east London.

Thrice weekly trains convey lime in containers from Hardendale to TATA Port Talbot.

Cement

Colas operate twice weekly trains of powdered cement from Aberthaw Cement works to Westbury and a weekly train to Moorswater near Liskeard in Cornwall. The movement of bagged cement from Aberthaw is anticipated.

Coal

Colas commenced the movement of imported coal, up to two trains a day, from Avonmouth to Aberthaw on 1st August 2017 after DBC had ceased operating trains from Avonmouth earlier in the year.

East Pit at Gwaun Cae Gurwen is now the only source of coal for Onllwyn washery. There are up to two TThO 34 wagon trains of loaded coal a week from Gwaun Cae Gurwen to Onllwyn which are forwarded from Swansea Burrows sidings the following days in two portions. Onllwyn loads one or two trains a week for Coal Products Limited at Immingham and occasional wagon load container traffic for Mossend in Scotland all worked by DBC. Freightliner usually works a MO coal train from Onllwyn to Scunthorpe.

Cwmbargoed dispatches a weekly train worked by DBC to Earl's siding for the cement works at Hope. It sends a daily train of coal to TATA at Port Talbot worked by Freightliner and twice weekly trains worked by DB. There has been an occasional train to CPL Immingham.

Penyffordd cement works near Wrexham ceased receiving coal by rail after the arrival from Killoch on 17th May 2017.

One or two daily coal trains, which commenced running on 25th August 2017, from Portbury to Fiddlers Ferry, use the Marches line. A small quantity of coke was brought from stock piles at Redcar to TATA Port Talbot during September 2017.

Containerised or Intermodal traffic.

There are daily trains to Wentloog (Cardiff) from Daventry worked by DRS and Southampton worked by Freightliner. Dow Corning receives and dispatches containers containing chemicals at its container terminal in Barry Docks. There is also a train of silica sand in containers FO from France to Barry every other week.

Iron Ore

Iron ore continues to be brought occasionally from stock piles at Redcar to TATA Port Talbot. The movement of iron ore as pulverised rock commenced on 16th November 2017 and continues at present.

Nuclear Waste

The only freight train on the North Wales main line worked by DRS is the occasional freight train from Valley to Sellafield conveying nuclear waste from Wylfa power station.

Petroleum

Trains continue to run with petroleum from Robeston to Thele and Westerleigh. There are occasional trains of fuel oil from Lindsey to Aberthaw Power station.

Scrap

Scrap traffic continues to be buoyant to CELSA Cardiff with sources including Kingsbury, Lincoln, Rotherham, Saltley and Swindon and occasionally from Attercliffe and Sunderland.

There are two or three trains weekly from Beeston to Sims at Newport docks with scrap for export. The weekly train with scrap from Trostre to TATA Port Talbot continues to run.

Steel and Tinplate

Steel from the TATA steel works at Port Talbot continues to provide the main freight traffic in Wales. The main flow is steel for further processing at Llanwern while there are daily trains to other processing plants at Corby, Hartlepool, Trostre and Shotton. Both Port Talbot and Llanwern provide coil for distribution locations at Immingham, Middlesbrough, Round Oak and Swindon and for export from Birdport Newport and Newport Docks. Trostre sends tinplate to a variety of destinations including a twice weekly train to Tilbury. There has been some movement of steel slab to and from Port Talbot works via Newport Docks. Colas has worked some trains between Margam/Llanwern and Newport Docks.

New developments include a weekly train of steel coil from Margam to Tilbury and an occasional train to the new Thamesport at Grain. There is outward bar traffic from CELSA with company trains to Mossend and Rotherham. An occasional train runs from steel stockholders Dowd's at Newport Docks to the distribution centre at Wolverhampton.

Tar

The regular movement of tar from TATA Port Talbot to Dawson's Middlesbrough distribution centre continues .

Timber

The movement of timber to Chirk has increased this autumn following improvement work at the plant in Chirk. There are trains from Baglan Bay and Carlisle.

Rowland Pittard

NEW METRO FOR SWANSEA BAY?

A revolutionary idea for a metro linking Swansea with its surrounding towns has been unveiled by Professor Mark Barry of Cardiff University. New lines and stations will make new rail services possible, supported by buses feeding in at stations like Llanelli and Gowerton.

One core aspiration is to dramatically reduce the journey time between Swansea and Cardiff from 55 minutes to half an hour. Prof. Barry, author of the South Wales Metro plan, argues that current journeys are so slow because of the tortuous route through Neath and the curves between Cardiff and Bridgend. To overcome these difficulties, he proposes a new line exiting an enlarged Swansea station from the south using new through platforms. This would follow the route of Fabian Way, in part using disused railway land, before crossing the River Neath and rejoining the existing line before Port Talbot. Through platforms would allow trains from east to west to cross Swansea without needing to reverse, adding a further time saving for these journeys. Finally, the line between Cardiff and Bridgend should be upgraded for at least 100mph running to address the curves here.

Local stations on the new line could serve the new student campus on Fabian Way, the Liberty Stadium and a park and ride near the M4. Other new stations along the Swansea district line and on the existing main line could enable new commuter services from Swansea, including a circular or figure of eight route to Llanelli. This would require a new link between the main and district lines near Llansamlet. Reopening of the Neath Valley line to Aberdulais for passenger use is included and, if tram-train becomes a reality, on-street running between Swansea and Mumbles.

Prof. Barry argues that an ambitious rail-based metro complements the Swansea Bay city deal by making new homes, businesses, schools and hospitals fully accessible without requiring car use. He believes that developing the metro would substantially boost economic development and employment in the Swansea Bay City Region, an area with a population of 500,000.

He admits that with a price tag of at least £1Bn the plan is not cheap but points out that this sum will only buy fourteen miles of new motorway around Newport.

needing unaffordable new infrastructure. In any case, how will the good burgers of Neath react to their station being relegated to secondary status with London trains bypassing the town?

None-the-less, if the South Wales Metro can go from being seen as unrealistic to at least partial implementation in just six years, who knows what developments might be possible for Swansea's rail network. It certainly needs a fillip.

Julian Langston

RAILFUTURE WALES NEWS

The branch committee, led by secretary Rowland Pittard, has been busy to ensure that decisions makers are aware of Railfuture's views and expertise on a several issues of the day.

Evidence has recently been submitted to the UK Parliament's Welsh Affairs committee investigation into the cancellation of the electrification of the mainline between Cardiff and Swansea. The submission highlighted the impact of the decision on the potential hourly through services between Swansea and Bristol Temple Meads/Bath which Railfuture has been advocating for some time. Wiring of the Maesteg branch is now impossible.

Loss of higher line capacity and reduced operating costs are two benefits which will be lost. The opportunity for electric hauled freight services from Margam to SE England has disappeared. Electrification would have provided an economic stimulus to the Swansea region and would have delivered significant environmental benefits in terms of reduced carbon emissions including attracting passengers from the often congested M4.

Finally, the evidence calls for devolution of the Network Rail budget for Wales to the Welsh Government, pointing out that expenditure per head on rail infrastructure in Wales is much smaller than in England.

Other submissions over the past few months include to the Welsh Assembly's Economy, Infrastructure and Skills scrutiny committee inquiry into the letting of the Wales and Borders franchise, to Arriva Trains Wales on its 2017/18 timetable and on the future role and potential of Crewe as a hub following opening of HS2 to NW England.

Chair, Peter Kingsbury and secretary Rowland Pittard have provided comments to the Western Mail on the quality of the public consultation carried out by Transport for Wales as part of its process for letting the new

franchise, on the latest statistics which showed Arriva Trains Wales as being one of the best operators with regard to punctuality, on the increased profits of ATW and on the loss of through services from S Wales to London over an entire weekend in mid-October as a result of 'emergency' engineering work at Reading.

Welsh speaker sought

Could you assist Railfuture Wales with its campaigning by providing a response in Welsh to requests from the media for a Welsh speaker to comment on rail news? This happens relatively infrequently but at present there is no one the committee can ask to provide a comment, written or verbal, in Welsh. Guidance is provided by the national media officer. Support will be available from the two existing media reps (Peter and Rowland). Please contact Peter Kingsbury (details below) if you might be interested in providing this practical contribution to the work of Railfuture Wales.

AGM 2018

It may seem a long way in the future but as the next issue of Rail Wales is not due until March 2018, please make a note of the date and venue of the next Railfuture Wales AGM. It will be on Saturday 14th April 2018 in the ground floor meeting room at Shrewsbury station commencing at 14.00 hours.

Would you be interested in joining the committee and helping shape the policies and campaigning of Railfuture in Wales? The committee meets four times a year in Shrewsbury (Saturday daytime) and Cardiff (Thursday late afternoon) allowing a return home by rail to most Welsh destinations the same day. Please consider this opportunity.

Twitter

Thanks to the contribution of Paul Harding, Railfuture Wales now regularly tweets from its Twitter account.

For those readers who use this type of social media, Paul's comments (tweets) on topical news and links to the news from other Railfuture areas and beyond can be read by visiting @RailfutureWales.



The image shows a screenshot of the Railfuture Wales Twitter profile. The header includes the name 'Railfuture Wales' in bold, the handle '@RailfutureWales', and the bio 'Railfuture Cymru/Wales - Campaigning for a bigger and better railway'. Below the bio, it shows the location 'Great Britain', the website 'railfuturewales.org.uk', and the join date 'Joined July 2013'. At the bottom is a blue button that says 'Tweet to Railfuture Wales'.

NEWS LINES

New stations: the Welsh Government has announced that 12 station locations have been selected from a longlist of over 40 for further detailed study as to the feasibility of opening. These are:

- Cardiff : Ely Mill/Victoria Park (between Ninian Park and Waungron Park), Rover Way and St Mellons (both on mainline to Newport)
- Newport: Llanwern
- Swansea: Cockett and Landore
- St Clears
- Deeside Industrial Park/Northern Gateway
- North Wrexham, South Wrexham
- Llangefni (the only location not on a line with existing passenger services)
- Bow Street (between Aberystwyth and Borth)

The Railfuture Wales committee gave these a cautious welcome but advised of the need to ensure that the stopping of trains to serve the stations does not detrimentally impact on speed of current services which might cause some loss of existing passengers.

It is noted that two locations previously featured in Rail Wales, Magor and Carno, have not made the shortlist.

New trains: Arriva Trains Wales has announced that, with the support of Welsh Government, it has secured the use of additional rolling stock to improve capacity on the Cardiff Valley routes. The former Thameslink class 319 electric units have been converted to bi-modes and five 4-car units will start to operate in 2018. The new trains will also allow the phased temporary withdrawal of existing class 150 and 158 units to allow their adaption to comply with the disabled access regulations which come into effect in 2020.

Cardiff Central: further uncertainty is affecting the timetable for providing the new bus station outside of Cardiff Central. The land reserved for this is adjacent to the former bus station site and next to the new BBC Wales HQ currently under construction. However, the company responsible for the entire redevelopment of the area is advising that the previously agreed development to be built above the bus station does not provide sufficient financial return to allow the bus station to be provided. As a result, potential other 'over' bus station building options are currently being assessed. 2020 is now the earliest date for opening of a new bus station.

Heart of Wales line trail: this new waymarked route is the idea of the line's travellers' association as an initiative to boost passenger numbers on the route. The first phase from Craven Arms to Knighton opened in summer 2017 as a result of support from Shropshire County Council. Progress with other sections of the proposed route are dependent on fundraising. Further details on the trail and how to make a donation can be read at <http://www.heart-of-wales.co.uk/trail.htm>.

For more mature readers: The popular Club 55 ticket was again offered by Arriva Trains Wales from early September to the 31st October. However, if you missed this and are over 60 with a Welsh bus pass you are entitled to free travel on the Heart of Wales line (Swansea- Shrewsbury) and the Cambrian Coast from Machynlleth to Pwllheli until 31 March 2018.



Trams to be built in Wales: Not a headline that you will have read in most of our lifetimes but in July Spanish company CAF announced that it will commence assembly of trams at a new factory located in Newport, Gwent. 300 jobs will be created. CAF is a major world player in the supply of light rail vehicles. It has provided trams to the Birmingham (Midland Metro) and Edinburgh networks. The opportunity to be considered as the local supplier when and if new light rail vehicles are ordered for the revitalised Valleys network may have been a factor which helped CAF take a decision to open its first UK works in South Wales.

Cardiff Bay station: formerly known as Bute Road; the historic original station building has been vacant and falling into disrepair for many years. Now plans have been approved to convert it into offices and retail space with a new structure being built alongside. Images of the project can be seen at <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/plans-convert-listed-former-cardiff-13493500>

Railfuture Cymru/Wales is pleased to announce that it will be staging the Railfuture Ltd. AGM in Cardiff in 2019. More details in the next issue.

RAILWAYS IN JAPAN

Railfuture Wales member Richard Wilcock has recently travelled to Japan. In honour of the recent arrival of the first Japanese designed trains in Wales, Richard describes his impressions of the country's railways and culture:

'I have been planning to go to Japan for many years, this September I fulfilled that dream on a two weeks holiday. These are my own experiences of the railways of Japan, based on my trip. On my first full free day I made my way to 'The Railway Museum' in the north of Tokyo. My hotel printed out the train times and changes for me to get there. As the first train left in a few minutes from the station opposite I set off. To buy a day ticket you had to find your destination station marked as a box on a map; inside the box it gave the fare, from that it was an easy task of selecting English on the ticket machine menu and buying a ticket for that value. Simple! Well it is when trains run to time. All of mine did.

I managed to navigate my way using the train departure times on my sheet rather than working out the station name or the final station on the line being much simpler than waiting for the English names to scroll round on the station monitors. I was off and arrived at my penultimate stop, finding my next ride proved more difficult. It turned out to be on a new line at the opposite end of the station around a corner. Not a quick connection. The train was similar to a Paris Metro type trains, rubber wheeled.

'The Railway Museum' had a good collection of rolling stock and interestingly geared up for families with small children. The most interesting aspect was a midi railway which allowed children to drive their parents around a small layout with signals crossing laid out in a circuit. I found out that Japan had a battle of the gauges as most of the network is narrow gauge with the Shinkansen and some other lines being standard gauge.

Two days later we made a journey to the coast on a local service. I found the ride uncomfortable and the car, spartan, to say the least for a 40-minute ride this metro car with underground longitudinal seating arrangement inappropriate. It was when we left the train and used a level crossing it sunk in that this being a narrow-gauge train was the main cause of the poor ride.

The Shinkansen was another world in comparison; roomy, smooth riding with separate toilets, smoking room, urinals and wash room. However, the

view from the window rarely changes, you realise quickly how urbanised Japan is. Being mainly mountainous the population is squeezed on to the coastal belt. Walking the 12-carriage train end to end I noticed all the seats faced forward, which means on the return to Tokyo they all face backwards.

In Koyoto I picked up a leaflet about a romantic train ride. My guide said that you normally have to book in advance but checking on the internet I found the service for the next day was not fully booked, so I set off early and rode the line. It was a diesel train on a single track along a gorge. The local line had been electrified and took a direct line through the hills and across the gorge. Clearly popular with tourists I was glad I set off early as the platform at our destination was crammed full of passengers for the return leg. I took the local train back into the city centre.

The Koyoto Railway Museum has recently opened. In my view better than the Tokyo one as it has more interactive displays and show more aspects of railway operations than just display of rolling stock. Both museums have a viewing platform where you can watch local trains and Shinkansen come and go. There was also a steam train running back and forth.

Koyoto is a much older city, or largely survived the second world war undamaged. I found Tokyo very urban, on my train ride I hardly saw a tree. As we travelled westward the landscape became more rural.

From Hiroshima to Nagasaki we travelled on a Hitachi A train similar in look to the IEP/Class 800. It is the first train I have been on with parquet flooring! The ride was awful, not bad when sat down but when I went to the loo I nearly landed in someone's lap. Again, a narrow-gauge line.

I recommend Japan for a holiday, the people are so polite, the towns litter free. The urban landscape leaves a lot to be desired, years of no planning control may be to blame. The trip was expensive though eating out and drink was not.'

Richard Wilcock

Rail Wales is printed by Bridgend Festivals tel 01656 661338



The first class 800 IEP unit in public use at Swansea on the 16th October waiting to form the 15.29 departure to Cardiff and London Paddington : Photo P Kingsbury

Thanks are extended to all who contributed to this issue. In all cases, any opinions expressed are those of the contributors, and do not necessarily represent *Railfuture* policy. Material for the next issue – articles, letters, photos or comments – should be sent to the editor, Peter Kingsbury at peter.kingsbury@railfuturewales.org.uk or by post to 22 Winchester Avenue, Penylan, Cardiff CF23 9BT, by **28th February 2018** for the spring 2018 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 £18 (£14 for students and unwaged).

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Railway Development Society Ltd (until 31 December 2017) / Railfuture Ltd (from 1 January 2018)

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Registered in England & Wales no. 5011634

Registered office: 24 Chedworth Place, Tattingstone, Suffolk IP9 2ND