

Report to:	Montgomeryshire on Wednesday, 8 th November 2017.
Author:	County Councillor J. Michael Williams, Montgomeryshire Rail Representative.
Subject:	Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Rail Passengers' Association (SARPA).

1. Introduction.

By way of introduction, given the number of new Members (councillors) who were successful at the local government elections in May last past, I thought it would be best to give a little background into SARPA – a, now, well-established rail users' group.

1.1 CRUG to SARPA: 1992-2017.

SARPA was originally formed in June 1992, and was then known as the Cambrian Rail Users' Group (CRUG). The first meeting was held in the Library in Newtown. Concerned members of the community, including sympathetic British Rail Managers, were active in getting the community organised to protect the line's future.

1.2 Membership/Meetings.

The membership fee is currently (for membership up to the end of the calendar year) £8.00 per annum for individuals and organisations. Currently, the group has about 70 individual memberships and ten organisations, including town/community councils.

The group meets monthly at various locations along the line at Shrewsbury, Welshpool, Newtown, Caersws, Machynlleth, Tywyn, Borth and Aberystwyth. All members are welcome and entitled to attend. The group is committed to:

- Lobby for better rail services.
- Act as a watchdog to safeguard the line's future.
- Meet in public once a month.
- All members will receive SARPA's quarterly Newsletter free of charge.

SARPA always welcomes new members; for further details, please contact: the Treasurer/Membership Secretary, Tony Harvey, 23, High Street, Welshpool, Powys, SY21 7JP. Tel. 01938-559087. E-mail: Tony@Montgomeryshire.EU

1.3 SARPA's Aims and Objectives as at 22nd May, 2015.

- That the railway is run in the most cost-effective manner: SARPA firmly believes that multiple contractual interfaces between numerous fragmented operators is not the best way to achieve this.
- That seating capacity on all trains is sufficient for existing demand and to cater for growth, which has been sustained over a very long period of time.
- That up-to-date real time information is available at all stations.
- That a minimum standard of station of station facilities in terms of specification for waiting shelters; provision of information; usable car parking facilities; cleanliness (both platform and whole station environment) and lighting are both set and adhered to.
- That there are sufficient platform and on-board staff to cater properly for passenger needs.
- That there is proper integration with bus services both physically and by ticketing. In a rural area running both bus and train services as one entity has great advantages and may help to facilitate bullet point five.
- That track capacity is sufficient to maintain efficiently the punctuality of the service and accommodate an hourly passenger service as well as being able to support freight and charter train movements.

- That the timetable designed around transport needs relating to wider policy objectives this includes:
 - a) A morning commuter train into Shrewsbury (and return).
 - b) Proper connections with the coast line (Machynlleth-Pwllheli) at Dyfi Junction/Machynlleth.
 - c) Sufficient recovery time built into schedules to allow for holding of late running connections.
 - d) A morning commuter train into Aberystwyth (and return).
 - e) Connections of less than 25 minutes wait at Shrewsbury in all directions.
 - f) Robust cross platform connections to London preferably at Shrewsbury.
- The reopening of stations at Bow Street (Ceredigion), Carno (Powys) and Hanwood (Shropshire).
- That journey times are not in excess of two hours between Aberystwyth and Shrewsbury.
- That rolling stock is appropriate for larger distance passengers that make up most of the users of the line and that trolley facilities are available on the majority of services.
- That internal deco and maintenance of rolling stock are of a high acceptable standard.
- That an easy to understand transport fare system is put in place that encourages travel including:
 - a) Adult group travel discounts.
 - b) The easing of restrictions of cheap day returns in winter.
 - c) Consistency with fare levels in other parts of the country.
 - d) A zonal system for travel.
 - e) Proper integration with local and Traws Cambria bus services.
- That full usage of the line is properly recorded by the full collection of fares.

2. Matters More Lately Considered.

2.1 Funding Approved for the New Bow Street Station.

The Westminster Government has approved the spending of £3.945 million towards a total project cost of (6.76 million for the rebuilding of Bow Street Station. The station will act as a park and ride site for Aberystwyth and Borth stations and will help traffic congestion in Aberystwyth.

SARPA has written to Ken Skates Welsh Government Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure to seek clarification on the likely effect on performance on not only the Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth line but also the Cambrian Coast line from Machynlleth to Pwllheli and the line from Shrewsbury to Birmingham International with potential knock on effects on other operators.

2.2 Cambrian Coast Express.

Pathfinder ran a tour to Pwllheli, under the title of The Cambrian Coast Express, on the 10th October. The tour commemorated the opening of the Barmouth Bridge exactly 150 years ago to the day.

The train originated from Bristol temple Meads behind a Class 67 locomotive, and was hauled from Shrewsbury by a pair of Network rail Class 97/3 locomotives equipped with ERTMS: European Rail Transport Management System in-cab signalling.

2.3 National Rail Figures 2016/17.

Rail use in the Regional and Long Distance sectors increased by 4% from the previous year, however the effect of the long running dispute on Southern has seen London and South East usage increase by 0.8%. The estimates of Station Usage for 2016/17 – where we can

publically access usage for Cambrian line stations, is not due to be released until December 2017.

The percentage increases for 2015/16 were: Shrewsbury 3.56%, Welshpool 17.87%, Newtown 13.53%, Caersws 17.65%, Machynlleth 10.29%, Borth 14.55% and Aberystwyth 5.93%. For the Cambrian lines as a whole, the increase was 14.52%.

The fare-box income across mainland UK was £9.5 billion for 2016/17, equivalent of every person spending £150.00 a year on rail fares. According to the Office of national Statistics “Transport” was the largest spending category per household in 2016, accounting for 14% of all household expenditure at £3,754 per annum.

2.4 Borth Station.

There is an exhibition in the museum on Borth station on Layers in the Landscape. It centres on the science and mythology surrounding the drowned landscape buried beneath the sands on the shore – the “Fossil Forest”. Its centrepiece is the fine set of antlers discovered last year.

2.5 Proposed Reopening of Carno Station.

The Station Action Group were disappointed in the Welsh Government’s announcement that its progressing plans to reopen 12 stations of which Carno is not included. It is understood that an 800-signature petition has already been gathered from the immediate area. SARPA and the Shrewsbury-Aberystwyth Rail Liaison Committee fully support the Carno Station Action Group.

2.6 Machynlleth Station.

Following the installation of the new footbridge, including two lifts, the impressive new toilet block has been completed. There has been no decision on the development of much needed car parking.

The Arriva Trains Wales Depot, which is open every day except Christmas, at the station celebrated its tenth year recently. The engineering work includes maintenance, repairs, fitting Wi-Fi and the first in the UK ERTMS signalling system.

The £3 million upgrade in 2007 saw the workforce treble in size to 33 and has gone from strength to strength. In the last two years, the number of annual journeys on the route have increased by 4,000 so that for 2016/17 there were 27,869 booked services on the line, which is the greatest number of services in a single year since before the Beeching axe in the 1960s.

The depot’s workforce, alongside Network Rail and train crews, has enabled performance to be consistent with an 87.3% Public Performance Measure in 2016/17 (the number of trains arriving to their destination within five minutes of their schedule).

A fleet of 24 trains serving the 33 Cambrian line stations in mid-Wales and Shropshire are now looked after at the depot (rather than at the Canton Depot in Cardiff) with eight trains attending the depot each night for maintenance, while the team are also able to respond if trains are caught by flooding and landslides along the route.

2.7 Shrewsbury Station.

Piecemeal renovation of parts of the canopy has taken place over the last few months, together with some work at the north end of platform 4 in line with passenger train stop markers. The bridge work has finished, and platform 3 and the freight avoiding line have the first in the UK been reconnected. The former platform 2 and the south end of platform 3 have been demolished with platform 3 cut back in length.

A toilet refurbishment scheme is ongoing.

2.8 Talerddig Crossings.

Work continues apace on the £7.5 million scheme to close five unmanned level crossings and three footpaths over the railway line by two new bridges at Talerddig. It is understood that the scheme is on course for completion in November of this year. The scheme is a partnership of Network Rail, Welsh Government and Powys County Council, who held a drop-in session at Carno Community Centre in July last past.

The level crossings to be closed are: Ystrad Fawr, Ystrad Fawr (footpath), Clawdd Coed, Rallt, Rallt (footpath), Tyddyn-y-Pwll, Pikins and Pikins (footpath).

2.9 New Shelters.

It is understood that new and/or additional shelters have been acquired for Welshpool, Machynlleth, Dyfi Junction and Llanaber but, as yet no date for their erection.

2.10 Replacement Wales and Border Franchise 2018.

Through what has clearly been the case since the current franchise was awarded in 2003, Franchise 2018 must take account of the tremendous growth in rail travel rather than the no growth franchise of 2003.

Experiences, the current situation and planning for growth to 2028 suggest that the franchise needs to aim to have:

- A minimum of 6 car/coach formations in operation between Shrewsbury and Birmingham International.
- Enough rolling stock to run an hourly service between Aberystwyth and Shrewsbury whilst fitting in the above requirement. 2-car formations will be inadequate at peak times.
- Monday to Friday Peak Hour additional stock on the Shrewsbury to Birmingham International Corridor should be used for extra capacity on the Cambrian on Saturdays and school holiday times.
- Manchester to Cardiff services need to be 5 cars/coach formations in the peaks and no fewer than 4 at other times.

We would suggest as a minimum at the start of the franchise that the entire 24-unit current ERTMS fitted Class 158 fleet is allocated to the ex Regional Railways Central lines in the franchise. I.e. Chester/Birmingham/Aberystwyth/Pwllheli.

Under the chairmanship of Montgomeryshire AM Russell George, in June of this year the National Assembly for Wales' Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee issued a 69-page document entitled ***On the right track? The Rail Franchise and South Wales Metro*** bringing together the results of all the consultations and its recommendations.

The report highlights ten key priorities for the new franchise:

- Effective monitoring: performance measures should include: passenger satisfaction (as measured by the National Rail Passenger Survey)- punctuality, reliability, passenger growth, the condition and maintenance of rolling stock.
- Greener railway.
- Integrated network: clock-face timetabling where possible in a franchise which prioritises integration including smart ticketing and effective connections with the bus network and other train services.
- Adaptable services: a willingness to explore new routes and services and service frequencies which meet passenger needs.
- Affordable fares with clear, simple, ticketing options.
- New trains: sufficient high quality rolling stock which meets demand now and in the future, which is accessible with adequate space for wheelchair users and service dogs, space for luggage, cycle storage and prams. It should have Wi-Fi connectivity, USB/plug

sockets, air conditioning/functioning heating, improved cleanliness and adequate toilet facilities including baby-changing facilities, catering and refreshment services that are appropriate for long journeys: and a contactable member of staff on board.

- Better communication: improved on-board information and communication on connections and delays.
- Modern stations: stations that meet or exceed the minimum expectations of passengers, a commitment and funding for community rail projects.
- Fair fares.
- Reduced disruption: improved management of delays and disruption.

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