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Railway
Development
Society

RAILFUTURE'S 12th
NATIONAL
CONFERENCE
ON RAIL REOPENINGS

Saturday 2nd July 2005

(Memorial Hall Theatre, Barry, South Wales)

Conference Report

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1. THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN RAILWAY: A CONDENSED HISTORY

Construction of the Vale of Glamorgan Railway between Bridgend and Barry commenced on 20th August 1894 and was completed in the Autumn of 1897. The main purpose of the line was to convey coal from the Llynfi, Garw and Ogmere valleys to Barry Docks and a link line was constructed between Cowbridge Road Junction (east of Bridgend) and Corty Junction (north of Bridgend) with exchange sidings at Coity Junction.

The major construction work on the line included Porthkerry viaduct and tunnels together with cuttings in Liassic limestone (to the east) and Carboniferous limestone (to the west) and some intervening high embankments across the Tawe and Ewenny river valleys. The line had five stations: Rhoose, Aberthaw, Gileston, Llantwit Major and Southern down Road. The eastern terminus, Barry, was shared with the Barry Railway and the western end terminus, Bridgend, was shared with the Great Western Railway. Inspection of the new line was completed on 6th November 1897 and passenger services commenced on 1st December 1897. Porthkerry viaduct was closed from 10th January 1898 to 9th April 1900 for reconstruction after subsidence and a temporary diversionary route was laid to enable through services to continue.

The Vale of Glamorgan Railway was worked and managed by the Barry Railway but remained independent until grouping in 1922. Llandow Halt was opened on 1st May 1915, St. Athan Halt on 1st September 1939 and Llandow (Wick Road) Halt on 19th April 1943.

Local traffic on the line included traffic from the limestone quarries at the western end of the line and cement from Aberthaw and Rhoose (using local Liassic limestone) at the eastern end of the line. There was wartime traffic from Tremains and Brackla Hill at Bridgend and the RAF base at St. Athan. More recent developments were the opening of Aberthaw power station in February 1966 and the Ford engine plant at Bridgend in January 1980.

The Barry-Bridgend passenger service finished on 13th June 1964 by which time the train service had been greatly reduced. However, the line continued to be used by through passenger trains between Cardiff and Bridgend when the main line via Pontyclun was closed. This frequently happened at night and on Sundays and train operators ran empty coaching stock and empty mail trains via this route to retain train crew route knowledge.

At the present time, a daily train runs between Ford's plants at Dagenham and Bridgend and merry-go-round coal trains run between Onllwyn and Cwmgwrach (to the west), Tower Colliery, Newport Docks and Avonmouth (to the east), to Aberthaw power station averaging some 10 trains a day. Rhoose cement works has closed and the connection is retained to Aberthaw cement works where wagons are stored. Freight trains are similarly diverted via the Vale of Glamorgan line when the main line is closed.

Major Reference: *Vale of Glamorgan Railway* : C Chapman (Oakwood Press)

2. THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN LINE: REOPENING TO PASSENGER TRAINS

Railfuture produced its booklet "Rails to the Vale" in 1997 in which it was stated "... that the Railway Development Society believes that a new daily passenger service through the vale could cover its costs – and even generate profits given time." This publication was the catalyst to further local demands for the reopening of the Vale of Glamorgan line.

A study by SWIFT, the local transport consortium (now part of SEWTA) in 1999 also identified the potential for reopening the Vale of Glamorgan line. The scheme was promoted by the Vale of Glamorgan and Bridgend Borough Councils to the Welsh Assembly Government in August 1999. Eventually a funding package was produced using a Welsh Assembly Government Transport Grant and SRA support for the initial operational costs of the train service.

Track upgrading and signalling works commenced at an early stage in June 2004 with several sections of track being relaid with flat bottom rail on steel sleepers and concrete troughing for signalling cables. 3.5 miles of new track were laid and 6.5 miles of track upgraded. 15000 tonnes of ballast were used. 3 new section signals (2 on the up and 1 on the down) were installed together with 3 distant signals and one repeater signal required by the curved approach to Llantwit Major Station.

Final planning permission for the new stations and interchanges at Rhoose, Cardiff International Airport and Llantwit Major was granted in 2004 and from October 2004 the line was closed daily between Bridgend and Abethaw or Barry for the station construction. It remained open at night for the coal trains, the Ford trains and diversions. There were also a number of weekend closures. At Bridgend, the Barry bay was relaid and a new platform face built. The platforms were constructed to take four coach trains and 13 axle counters were installed (similar to those used on the West Coast Main Line).

Network Rail used three contractors: Mowlem for the permanent way, Carillion for signals and telephones, and Galliford Try for civil engineering, including the platforms while the Vale of Glamorgan Council was responsible for the construction of the interchanges at Rhoose, Cardiff International Airport and Llantwit Major. Network Rail spent £15m and the Vale of Glamorgan Council £2m making a grand total of £17m for the whole project. The daytime closures were shortened from April to enable crew training to commence.

158840/150280 worked the opening special at 1025 from Bridgend to Rhoose on Friday 10th June with an extended stop at Llantwit Major. There were fireworks as the banner was broken by the entry of the units into Bridgend Barry bay followed by a reopening ceremony at Bridgend. This was subsequently followed by reopening ceremonies at Llantwit Major, Rhoose and Cardiff International Airport (with a fly past by the Red Arrows).

The line officially reopened to fare paying passengers on Sunday 12th June with 143606/624 working 0840 Cardiff-Bridgend and 0945 return.

Initial passenger loadings have been above expectations with trains arriving/departing Bridgend with often 50 and in some cases 80 passengers, many taking advantage of the £1 day return fare from Llantwit Major to Bridgend. Llantwit Major sees 30-40 passengers getting on/off most daytime trains and there are strong calls for a booking office at the station. Rhoose has both local and airport traffic although some car owners still drive to

Barry which has a more frequent service. Often trains are full and standing after Rhoose and become even more crowded from Barry – again there are calls for the service to be non-stop Barry-Cardiff as the local stations have a 20 minute interval service. Almost inevitably, the conductor fails to collect all fares before Cardiff.

3. REPORT OF SPEAKERS' PRESENTATIONS

Councillor Michael Harvey

(Cabinet Member Regeneration, Tourism & Leisure, The Vale of Glamorgan Council)

The Conference was opened by Councillor Michael Harvey who welcomed attendees to Barry and the Vale of Glamorgan. He referred to all the hard work by the various partners that had enabled the reopening to take place. He continued by quoting excerpts from the local paper *'The Gem'* some of which welcomed the reopening and others which treated it with caution. Many of the Llantwit Major shopkeepers were concerned that the railway service would take business away from the town to Bridgend (Cheap Day Return £1), Barry and Cardiff and did not see its potential for bringing visitors into their historic town.

Robin Shaw

(Chief Executive, Transport Wales (National Assembly))

Robin Shaw, Chief Executive of Transport Wales – a section of Welsh Assembly Government – gave an overview of how the Railways Act 2005 and the Transport (Wales) Bill will give greater powers and additional duties to the Welsh Assembly Government. Details of these powers and duties are included the Appendix to this report which also explains the various components of the Welsh Public Transport organisation referred to in his presentation.

He explained Welsh Assembly Government's vision for the rail network in Wales:

- 1) A rail network which is a major element of a transport system linking urban centres from which complementary bus routes and other transport modes fork out.
- 2) A 15 year franchise which provides a more coherent set of routes with improvements in terms of investment and services. (Unfortunately, the franchise provided by the SRA did not include any enhancements to cater for traffic growth or new services).
- 3) Improvements in the quality of the rail network which will depend on Welsh Assembly Government investment. This process has already commenced.
- 4) Revenue support to ensure that services make the most of the investment.
- 5) Rolling stock investment to cater for passenger growth and new services, eg: 14 additional vehicles have been acquired equivalent to 7 x 2 car Class 150 units to provide extra capacity at a total cost of £50m.

He explained the changes in responsibilities and duties for Welsh Assembly Government following the Railways Act 2005 and the Transport (Wales) Bill. He produced graphs to show how rail passenger journeys to, from and within Wales had increased in recent years together with graphs showing the modes of transport used by commuters travelling into Cardiff. Both rail and bus transport had shown increases. He described recent investment in the Wales rail transport network including the lengthening of stations on the Aberdare branch to accommodate 4 car trains together with the aspirations for future developments. This will all depend on the availability of funding to Welsh Assembly Government.

Emma Harvey

(Operational Manager, Planning & Transportation Policy, The Vale of Glamorgan Council)

Emma Harvey described the Vale of Glamorgan Council's role in the reopening. The scheme was promoted by the Vale of Glamorgan Council and Bridgend County Borough Council to Welsh Assembly Government in August 1999. The objectives of the scheme were:

- 1) New rail access to the expanding communities of Llantwit Major and Rhose with links to the main destinations of Cardiff and Bridgend.
- 2) Improved service between Cardiff and Barry (4 trains per hour).
- 3) Improved access to Cardiff International Airport via dedicated bus link.
- 4) Reduce car travel in the region.
- 5) Improved public access to brownfield sites.
- 6) Encourage direct and indirect employment.

The level of demand anticipated was exceeded in the first two months of operation indicating the generation of new demand had been substantial. The environmental and economic advantages of the scheme included – reduction in noise and improvement in air quality following a reduction in road traffic, time savings for passengers, more frequent less crowded service between Barry and Cardiff, reduced road congestion, regeneration and increased tourism. The new service will give increased accessibility especially if good interchange with other rail services at Bridgend and Cardiff improved accessibility for disabled, improved social inclusion, increased employment potential (if trains reliable), more social activities. Transport Grant Funding (W.A.G.) had paid for all aspects of the transport interchanges at Rhose and Llantwit Major, totalling £2m. A Section 106 agreement resulted in land dedication at Rhose Point together with assistance from Coflon Ltd, the major developer of housing on the site of a former cement works and large limestone quarry. Emma described the initial design and planning stages that commenced in 2003 and then described the facilities provided at the Rhose and Llantwit Major exchanges, eg: car parking, bus stops, bicycle parking, seating, shelters, landscaping etc. She produced graphs of initial patronage monitoring and car park usage. Rhose was lower than anticipated – some residents were still driving to Barry where there was a more frequent train service. Emma concluded with an outline of future aspirations – half hourly service, services beyond Cardiff, CCTV in car parks, ticket office at Llantwit Major, live information links, station at St Athan/Gileston and greater use of off peak services.

David White (Project Manager, Network Rail)

Network Rail has transformed a low speed freight route into a passenger route with half hourly capacity and the construction of two new stations able to accommodate 4 coach sprinter trains. Contracts were awarded to Mowlem Rail (permanent way), Carillion Railprojects (signals and telecommunications) and Galliford Try Construction (station construction and new bay platform at Bridgend). Details included:

- Permanent Way: 3.5 miles of new track, 6.5 miles of upgraded track, 8200 new sleepers, 15000 tonnes of ballast.
- Signalling: 7 new signal installations, 70 miles of cable, 13 axle counters, 16000 metres of troughing.
- Civil Engineering: 5 new platforms with wheelchair access.

The work entailed major challenges, such as steep embankments and cuttings, limited access points, removal of solid rock for troughing and signalling equipment, difficult siting of signals (requiring a repeater signal at Llantwit Major), working on live platform at Bridgend and co-ordination of work by contractors including overlapping worksites.

Steve Hodgetts

(Head of Business Development, Cardiff International Airport)

Steve Hodgetts first outlined *Railfuture's* airport policy based on three key principles:

- 1) As much as possible of both domestic and short haul international traffic, both passenger and freight, should be conveyed by rail rather than air or road.
- 2) We do not as a body endorse or oppose any particular airport proposal.
- 3) All main existing airports must have adequate rail access and any new or expanded airport facilities must be rail connected from the outset.

It follows from these principles that *Railfuture* does not generally favour further airport developments and would support constraint in the South East. The emphasis should be on high quality rail alternatives first and regional hubs second and we (*Railfuture*) wish to see the range of direct rail services to existing airports expanded.

He then explained the Cardiff International Airport's operation. It is the 19th biggest in the United Kingdom, it is not dominated by one carrier and is growing less quickly than other UK airports. Domestic traffic is 14% (mostly to Scotland, with Edinburgh the most popular destination), over half the international air traffic to Spain, its catchment area extends to the West Midlands, Devon and the M4 corridor as well as South Wales with a maximum travelling time of 2 hours. Good rail links can result in an increase in the number of passengers using an airport which could result in increased numbers flying into and out of Wales.

Cardiff International Airport serves around 45% of air travel used by South Wales inhabitants – thus there is scope for growth. More inbound tourists and business is vital for Wales and these travellers require onward public transport. Steve emphasised Wales as being at the periphery of Europe and passengers are lost to other airports because of frequency of service and limited number of destinations. Rail links can ease the perception that Cardiff International Airport is difficult to get to.

Present access to Cardiff International Airport is 80% by car, (but only 35% of cars are left at airport), 2% by public transport, remainder by minibus or taxi. 95% of employee access is by car. This requires considerable car parking provision (but not multi-storey blocks).

Cardiff International Airport has always supported public transport with bus links to Cardiff (Cardiff Bus airbus), use of Transport Direct and employee travel plans and now the new rail-airlink with ticket inter-availability and add-ons.

Steve then outlined Cardiff International Airport's aspirations for the future:

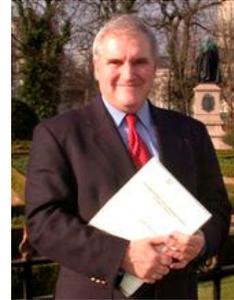
- A more frequent service on the Vale of Glamorgan
- Inter city and cross country direct services
- National Express and intra Wales coach links
- Park and Ride at Junction 34 on the M4
- Integrated travel and ticketing for all transport modes
- Direct link to terminal platforms at the Airport

- Miskin Parkway station on South Wales main line to link road and rail services

The ideal would be 5 trains per hour to the airport including Inter City from Swindon and Bristol and Cross Country services from Hereford, Gloucester, Bath, Taunton and West Wales, all of which would reduce road traffic to the airport.

Professor Stuart Cole
(Wales Transport Research Centre)

Professor Cole provided a vision for effective integrated transport for Wales "*Joining up Wales*". He described the varied nature of Wales with population concentrations in the North and South with large areas of mid-Wales with low population density. Rail routes were east-west with only one north-south route passing through England. Different solutions are needed for the major urban areas, inter city operations and rural services.



All traffic observations and predictions indicate growth and planners must move from "predict and provide" to "provide and promote". Elements of transport provision are:

- Road, rail and bus investment
- Public transport interchanges
- Pedestrian and cycling facilities
- Traffic management
- Public transport fares and service levels

The key activities are carried out by rail operators, Welsh Assembly Government, bus operators and County Councils with joint transport authorities (JTAs) becoming increasingly important.

The National Assembly for Wales has expenditure options – road investment, rail investment and public transport service funding with at present the largest amount committed to road investment. The development of an integrated transport system requires Information, Interchange, Investment and possibly Imagination. Professor Cole showed the range of information available at stations, bus stops, leaflets etc but there was a need for standardisation (some Councils do not issue public transport timetables). He also showed examples of interchanges (Cardiff, Caerphilly) and recent investment.

He drew comparisons of public transport funding in Wales and England with Europe. He estimated Wales required £1200m of funding to bring its rail system up to European standards whereas the SRA proposed £200m to provide a smartened up railway. He estimated that £800m would be required for rail renewals and maintenance and £1200m in subsidy for 2004-14 whereas the expected totals were £200m and £1050m with Welsh Assembly Government having to provide for any shortfall.

Professor Cole then provided details of his aspirations for the future – new Cardiff Millennium Station, new Severn Bridge for rail.

Malcolm Howitt

(Stakeholder Liaison Manager (South), Arriva Trains Wales)

Malcolm Howitt provided details of the service provided from 12th June 2005. 2 hourly on Sundays from 0845 to 2043 from Cardiff and hourly on weekdays from 0550 to 2247 from Cardiff. He explained the zonal fares system in operation. The £1 day return for journeys between adjacent stations would apply between Llantwit Major and Bridgend (the longest adjoining station journey on the Cardiff Valleys Network). He explained how Arriva Trains Wales was delivering the service with trains crossing at Rhoose to enable both services to connect with the bus link to the airport. He referred to service extensions into the Cardiff Valleys but none were planned to other destinations in the Arriva Trains Wales network.

He referred to Arriva's new standard pattern timetable to be introduced in December 2005 which would be passenger friendly, easy to understand, easy to remember, consistent linking of services, more regular even frequencies.

Malcolm provided copies of Arriva Trains Wales literature for the new service plus pens and key rings and a free return ticket for a journey over the line.

Jane Hutt

(National Assembly Member for the Vale of Glamorgan)

Jane Hutt said that she wanted to talk about the wider effects of the VoG reopening, and would use anecdotal evidence to show some of the benefits to the local population.



She opined that this reopening would not have happened had the National Assembly for Wales not been in existence (*this was greeted with applause*). The role of the Vale of Glamorgan Council was also stressed; transport is at the heart of their policies. The commuter flow from the Vale into Cardiff is one of the highest in the SEWTA area, but the line has many other users as well. 20% of the Vale's population is of retirement age. There are many school flows. There is a potential tourist impact. She has encountered children having their first-ever train ride, and has herself arranged a trip for a party of senior citizens. But there is much to do in the field of publicity and marketing, to tell people of the benefits of the railway and what it can do for them. Meanwhile, reliability of the train service is vitally important. She deplored the bureaucracy which apparently is preventing a signpost being erected to show the location of Rhoose station!

APPENDIX: TRANSPORT ADMINISTRATION IN WALES

The Government of Wales Act established the National Assembly for Wales and devolved certain powers and responsibilities from 1st July 1999.

An all Wales rail franchise “Wales and the Borders” was created by amalgamating parts of Wales and the West, Central Trains and North West Trains. This franchise was subsequently given to Arriva Trains Wales from 7th December 2003 to operate all local and regional train services in Wales and the Border Counties of England for the next 15 years. There was no rolling stock enhancement provided for in the new franchise. Great Western Trains continues to operate services from South Wales to London Paddington, Central Trains from Cardiff and Hereford to Birmingham and Virgin West Coast from Holyhead to London.

The Welsh Assembly Government has encouraged the establishment of four regional transport consortia in Wales although *Railfuture* urged the Assembly to consider an all Wales consortium or Passenger Transport Authority. Wales is divided into 22 unitary authorities and these are divided between the four consortia as follows:

- TAITH – Isle of Anglesey (Ynys Mon), Gwynedd (Caernarvonshire District), Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham (i.e. North Wales)
- TraCC – Ceridigion, Powys and Gwynedd (Merionedd District) (i.e. Mid Wales).
- SWWITCH – Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire, Swansea and Neath Port Talbot (i.e. South West Wales).
- SEWTA – Bridgend, The Vale of Glamorgan, Rhondda-Cynon-Taff, Merthyr Tydfil, Cardiff and Caerphilly (which previously formed SWIFT) and Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen, Newport and Monmouthshire (which previously formed TIGER) (i.e. South East Wales).

At present, transport is part of the portfolio of the Minister for Economic Development and Transport, Andrew Davies AM. His deputy minister, Tamsin Dunwoody-Kneafsey has special responsibility for transport. *Railfuture* has an annual meeting with the deputy minister when a wide range of transport issues are discussed.

The Assembly has formed a Welsh Transport Forum which has members from local authorities, transport operators, consumer, economic and environmental interests. Rail passenger interests were represented by the Rail Passengers Committee for Wales and subsequently by the London-based Rail Passengers Council and this has precluded *Railfuture's* participation in the Forum although we have received, subsequently, minutes and papers of the meetings.

SEWTA has constituted itself as a stand-alone organisation with a Board consisting of members from the constituent authorities and *Railfuture* regularly attends SEWTA Board meetings as an observer.

The Railways Act 2005 and the Transport (Wales) Act have devolved additional powers to Welsh Assembly Government but not as far as in Scotland to include the rail infrastructure. The Railways Act provides for the Assembly to be a co-signature with the Department for Transport for the Wales and Borders franchise. The Assembly will be able to specify services and fares but will be responsible for funding the services with a transfer of

resources from the Department for Transport (i.e. about 85% of the subsidy at present provided by the SRA).

The Transport (Wales) Bill places a duty on the Assembly to publish a Wales Transport Strategy to provide public passenger transport services, to establish Joint Transport Authorities (SEWTA already formed) and to create a Passenger Transport Users Committee for Wales.

The four transport consortia are at present developing transport strategies which will feed into the Wales Transport Strategy. *Railfuture* has provided copies of its Development Plan for passenger and freight services to each of the regional consortia and has held meetings with SWWITCH and SEWTA to discuss the plan.

It is important for *Railfuture* to recognise the consequences of devolution (also for Scotland) when producing information sheets responding to consultations and meeting other parties.

End of conference report.

RAILFUTURE's MISSION STATEMENT

To be the number one advocate for the railway and rail users.

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