

CAMBRIAN COAST RAILWAY LIAISON CONFERENCE

18-11-2022

Present:

Cllr Dewi Owen (Cyngor Gwynedd)
Cllr Gwynfor Owen (Cyngor Gwynedd)
Cllr Anne Lloyd Jones (Cyngor Gwynedd)
Cllr Eryl Jones-Williams (Cyngor Gwynedd)
Cllr Elfed Wyn ap Elwyn (Cyngor Gwynedd)
Cllr Richard Glyn Roberts (Cyngor Gwynedd)
Cllr Gwilym Owen (Cyngor Gwynedd)
Cllr Meryl Roberts (Representative from the Eryri National Park Authority)
Llio Hughes (Plaid Cymru Office Manager - Senedd Cymru)
Ann Elias (Ceredigion County Council)
Cllr Trevor Roberts (Aberystwyth/Shrewsbury Railway)

Sara Crombie (Network Rail)
Richard Griffiths (Network Rail)
Gail Jones (Transport for Wales) - GJ

Lowri Haf Evans (Democracy Services Officer, Cyngor Gwynedd)

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

RESOLVED TO ELECT COUNCILLOR ERYL JONES-WILLIAMS AS CHAIR FOR 2022/23

2. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

RESOLVED TO ELECT COUNCILLOR DEWI OWEN AS VICE-CHAIR FOR 2022/23

3. APOLOGIES:

Apologies were received from Cllr Louise Hughes (Cyngor Gwynedd), Cllr Elin Hywel (Cyngor Gwynedd), Cllr Dafydd Meurig (Cabinet Member for the Environment - Cyngor Gwynedd), Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd MP), Mabon ap Gwynfor (Dwyfor Meirionnydd AM), Claire Williams (Cambrian Railway Partnership Officer), Stuart Williams (Tal-y-llyn Railway), Chris Wilson (Ceredigion County Council) and David Thorp (Ysgol Uwchradd Tywyn).

The Chair noted that Councillor Louise Hughes had recently received surgery, and she was wished a full and speedy recovery.

4. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received from any members present.

5. URGENT ITEMS

None to note

6. MINUTES

The Chair accepted the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee, held on 11 February 2022, as a true record.

7. UPDATE FROM THE SERVICES

NETWORK RAIL

Richard Griffiths (Head of Communications, Network Rail for Wales and the West) and Sara Crombie (Network Rail Communications Manager) were welcomed to the meeting.

Update on upgrading Barmouth viaduct

Key images and facts were presented on the work completed on the viaduct thus far. It was noted that the work had been challenging and physically difficult for the workers as the working conditions were dependent on the weather and the bridge was also in much worse condition than was initially considered. It was reported that the original proposal was to close the viaduct for one period between September and December 2022, however, to reduce the impact on rail services, the community and the local economy it had been resolved to close the line for two shorter periods so that it would be possible to re-open the railway for school half-term and the Christmas period.

The railway between Machynlleth and Pwllheli was closed for five weeks from Sunday evening, 11 September until Saturday, 15 October, re-opening for four weeks to include half-term. The second closure period was from Sunday evening, 13 November with a proposed re-opening on Saturday, 10 December for the Christmas period. It was added that the working days on the viaduct in 2023 had not been confirmed.

Update on Aberdyfi viaduct, Y Bwthyn and the Leri

As well as the work in Barmouth, it was reported that repair work was also being undertaken to the Viaducts of the Dyfi, Leri and Bwthyn. It was reported that the Aberdyfi viaduct was in a poor condition - there was a need to fully renovate the structure. Images were presented to show the condition of the timber and the steelwork.

It was added that work to renovate the track was being completed in Tywyn, and Network Rail would take every possible opportunity to undertake maintenance work whilst the railway was closed. It was noted that the work for 2023 would be organised jointly with Transport for Wales and the Freight Service.

They were thanked for the update. The Chair noted that the Committee appreciated the investment.

Observations and other matters raised during the discussion:

- That the work of renovating tracks in Tywyn was proceeding well.
- The issues with transportation for schools during the closure period had been resolved.
- Because of good collaboration between agencies, it was possible to install a new bridge over the railway in Aberdyfi.
- It was good to see money being invested and work being completed along the railway.
- Thanks was given to local officers for their work raising awareness about railway safety.

In response to a question regarding the Harlech railway crossing and had there been any reduction in trespassing since the campaign held earlier in the year, it was noted that risk assessments had not been undertaken on specific crossings but a campaign to raise awareness had been undertaken with the public and in schools. It was noted that it would be possible to refer information about the safety of the Harlech Crossing directly to Councillor Owen.

TRANSPORT FOR WALES

Gail Jones, Transport for Wales, was welcomed to the meeting to present an update on the activities of Transport for Wales.

It was highlighted that the work of installing lifesaving defibrillators in Transport for Wales railway stations had been completed and a comprehensive programme of training and awareness had been organised with schools.

Observations and other matters raised during the discussion:

- As the railway was closed, the buses transporting children to college in Pwllheli were arriving late.
- It was disappointing that letters/e-mails were not acknowledged by Transport for Wales' officers - this made the work of responding to complaints / electors' comments difficult.
- Complaints that drivers of buses that had replaced trains were discourteous with passengers.

- Complaints that buses passed passengers and did not stop.
- The times of the T2 bus had been modified and now they did not correspond to the train times. The T2 bus no longer stops at the Railway Station in Porthmadog.
- In response to a question regarding seeing the response of Network Rail and Transport for Wales to Natural Resources Wales' consultation on Flooding and Climate Change (giving consideration specifically to the Pwllheli area as parts of the coast were vulnerable and had long-term concerns), the officers noted that they would ask their organisations and respond directly to Councillor Richard Glyn Roberts.

BRITISH TRANSPORT POLICE

No representative from the British Transport Police was present to submit a report. It was highlighted that no response had been received from Inspector Karl Anderson and although another officer had been appointed, he had left after 4 weeks. They were now in the process of training another officer. Disappointment was highlighted that no representative from the Police was present.

Officers were thanked for the updates.

8. FUTURE OF THE CAMBRIAN COAST RAILWAY CONFERENCE

A proposal was received from the Shrewsbury Aberystwyth Railway Liaison Committee (SARLC) to recommend an arrangement that the Cambrian Coast Railway Liaison Committee joined the SARLC to establish one group under the umbrella of the North and Mid Wales Local Councils Association. In the minutes of the SARLC Committee held on 04/11/22, it was noted that the matter had been discussed in detail with a report including the reasoning and full recommendation - the recommendation had been proposed by Cllr Trevor Roberts and seconded by Angus Eikhoff - the vote was unanimous in favour of the proposal.

Observations and other matters raised during the discussion:

- There was a purpose to join with them in order to avoid losing out on the discussions.
- It was accepted that they should continue separately, however, there was concern regarding calling officers to two meetings.
- The Cambrian Committee discussed local matters - this would be lost in a larger forum.
- The Cambrian Committee worked well - it met twice a year and Network Rail and Transport for Wales officers attended every time.
- Representation from the Cambrian in SARLC meetings - appropriate information had been received.
- Transport for Wales had not declared their support for both committees to merge.

It was proposed and seconded to adhere to the existing arrangements and ensure a close link with SARLC.

9. RESPONSE TO FORMAL QUESTIONS

Barmouth Town Council

Question:

The new trains will reduce capacity and the number of toilets. TfW initially told us that we would be getting 3 carriage trains which would increase capacity. Now it appears that new trains will only be 2 carriages which will reduce capacity on a line that is already very busy and crowded in the main season. Can TfW confirm that the new trains will be 3 carriages?

Answer:

Transport for Wales will use the 3 carriages as required. GJ noted that she had not been informed about anything different, but she had sent an e-mail to check this.

Question:

The access doors from the ticket office and waiting area to the platform no longer open automatically. This was reported 3 years ago and has been reported many times in the intervening years and nothing has been done to fix them. This makes access to the platform difficult as in the winter it is not possible to leave the doors open. It makes waiting in the covered area impossible - many older rail users prefer to sit indoors whilst waiting for the train to arrive. If the doors are permanently open then the waiting area and ticket office are very cold, and on windy days all the information in the waiting area blows around. Can you let us know when the doors will be fixed?

Answer:

An application had been made for a maintenance inspection to repair the door and if it could not be repaired a new door would be required.

Are the litter bins on the platform (Northbound) going to be replaced? The bins on the Southbound platform are small and the one by the main entrance has been removed. Is it possible to look at more bins?

Comment accepted

Llanbedr Community Council

Question:

I understand that Talwrn Bach Station will be upgraded in the spring, what exactly will these improvements be?

Request for details / ideas of what is required in relation to upgrading the station.

Question:

When will the new trains be in operation?

Answer:

The new trains be in operation in 2023.

Question:

Is there any feedback about the work of the volunteers who have adopted the Station here in Llanbedr? Several inspections have been carried out so far.

Answer:

An update was received from Community Railways

That the station adopters were aware that finance was available to install artwork instructions in the station. There was currently finance to print any design and if the artwork together with the details of the supplier could be provided, then the invoice could be paid. It was added that the station manager had agreed to revamp the existing shelter in the spring with the support of his team.

A conference for the Cambrian railway volunteers would take place in February 2023 (date and location to be confirmed).

Contact: Sian.jones@tfw.rail available to assist with any enquiries regarding station adoption.

Councillor Trevor Roberts (Town Council)

Question:

Why weren't the Rail Replacement Coach Service timetables posted on the stations during the Barmouth Viaduct closure and will this be rectified when the viaduct is closed again in one week's time?

Answer:

It was reported that the posters were up during the last closure period. Having discussed this with the line manager, Dave Crunkhorn, he had stated that the posters currently up in the stations would be changed on 19 November to reflect the changes and the new train times.

Question:

Can Network Rail inform the meeting when the new type of miniature warning lights will be installed on Wayne's Footpath crossing north of Barmouth. Crossing lights have been installed on 2 crossings 1 mile further north, but Wayne's crossing carries more pedestrians than both the other crossings being the only footpath crossing from the main housing estate (Heol y Llan area) to

the town centre and the surgery. Older residents living in sheltered accommodation on the east side of the crossing need to use the crossing to and from the promenade and beach.

Answer:

The previous risk assessment had taken place in May 2021 and was based on the current risk score, the next one would take place in August 2023. It was noted that every crossing was a risk, however it was reiterated that concern could be referred to the relevant officers to try and conduct a risk assessment before August 2023 and to invite Councillor Trevor Roberts to the site visit.

Question:

Residents are concerned at the state of the rail embankment north of the Barmouth railway tunnel where trees and bushes seem to be growing in a wild state on both sides of the track. Do Network Rail carry out regular maintenance in this area?

Answer:

As the railway was currently closed, it would be possible to visit the site in the next few weeks.

Gratitude was expressed for the questions.

Attention was drawn to the West Midlands Railway Consultation in England. Although many positive proposed investments were proposed in the consultation, it appeared that there was an intention, from 2040, to not allow Transport for Wales services to go beyond Birmingham New Street (central railway station in Birmingham). This was not an acceptable consideration as currently Mid Wales and North Wales had a service to Birmingham International where the National Exhibition Centre and the Airport were located and a link with London (the HS2). These connections were important for tourism and businesses, and any changes to the existing service would not be supported. Members were encouraged to respond to the consultation.

<https://wmre.org.uk/our-strategies/west-midlands-rail-investment-strategy/consultation-on-the-west-midlands-rail-investment-strategy/>

The meeting commenced at 10:30 and concluded at 12:00

CHAIR