

CAMBRIAN COAST RAILWAY LIAISON CONFERENCE

22 March 2024

Attendance:

Present:

Cllr Dewi Owen (Cyngor Gwynedd)
Cllr Gwynfor Owen (Cyngor Gwynedd)
Cllr Anne Lloyd Jones (Cyngor Gwynedd)
Cllr Eryl Jones-Williams (Cyngor Gwynedd)
Cllr Gwilym Jones (Cyngor Gwynedd)
Cllr Louise Hughes (Cyngor Gwynedd)
Cllr Richard Glyn Roberts (Cyngor Gwynedd)
Cllr Elfed Wyn ap Elwyn (Cyngor Gwynedd)

Cllr Dafydd Meurig (Cabinet Member for the Environment, Cyngor Gwynedd)

Cllr J M Williams (Powys County Council)
Cllr Trevor Roberts (Shrewsbury/Aberystwyth Railway Committee)
Cllr Meryl Roberts (Eryri National Park Authority)
Bill Redfern (Shrewsbury – Aberystwyth Rail Passengers' Association)

Charlotte Harries (Network Rail)
Gail Jones (Transport for Wales)

Lowri Haf Evans (LHE) (Democracy Services Officer, Cyngor Gwynedd)

1. APOLOGIES:

Apologies were received from Liz Saville Roberts (MP for Dwyfor Meirionnydd), Mabon ap Gwynfor (MS for Dwyfor Meirionnydd), Cllr Elin Hywel (Gwynedd), Clare Britton (Ffestiniog Railway), David Crunkhorn (Arriva Trains Wales), Lorraine Simkiss (Tal-y-llyn Railway) and Clare Williams (Cambrian Railway Partnership).

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

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

3. URGENT ITEMS

None to note.

4. MINUTES

The Chair accepted the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee, held on 1 December 2023, as a true record.

5. NORTH AND MID WALES ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS – Minutes of the meeting held on 17 November 2023

Submitted for information – the minutes of the meeting held on 17 November 2023. Councillor Trevor Roberts (Shrewsbury/Aberystwyth Railway Committee Representative) stated that a survey of services had been completed, where local staff serving the journey between Pwllheli and Machynlleth had been praised – specific reference was made to examples of local decisions being made by local people rather than having to wait for a decision from Cardiff. He added that lessons had been learned here.

It was noted yet again that there was not enough room on the trains.

In response to a question about participating in the survey, it was noted that the survey was conducted by volunteers, and they planned to conduct another one soon. **Cllr Trevor Roberts to share the date with LHE.**

6. UPDATE FROM THE SERVICES

Highways, Engineering and YGC (Cyngor Gwynedd) An update about the cliff road on the A493 by Y Friog.

Apologies had come in from Mr Steffan Jones (Head of Highways, Engineering and YGC) that he was unable to attend the meeting because the Zoom link had not worked for him, therefore he could not provide a verbal update to the Committee members. He added in an e-mail to the Chair that he would share a report on the situation with the Members.

Members expressed disappointment that Steffan Jones was unable to attend the meeting, and that there was lack of progress with the situation. It was noted:

- That the situation must be resolved
- That the matter of the asset's ownership must be resolved, and work together to move forward
- The road was a class A road – a busy, connecting road
- Part of the wall had collapsed – need to repair the barrier
- There were plenty of promises but nothing had changed
- Network Rail were reporting that they had not received a response to letters they had sent to the Council

NETWORK RAIL

Charlotte Harries (Network Rail Communications Manager) was welcomed to the meeting. She expressed that the service was continuing to work to improve experiences for passengers. There were no specific updates on work between Machynlleth and Pwllheli, but she referred to improvements to Newtown Station.

The officer was thanked for the update. The committee also gave thanks for the work that Network Rail does to ensure that the railway link is effective for passengers.

TRANSPORT FOR WALES

Gail Jones (Stakeholder Manager – North and Mid Wales) was welcomed to the meeting. She stated that the findings of the survey had been presented to Transport for Wales and that work was being done to respond to those findings. She added that the survey provided valuable information about passengers' experiences, and as requested by the members, she agreed to share information about passenger numbers that use the Cambrian Coast Railway. **GJ to share the information with LHE to be distributed at the next meeting.** (A comment was made, in the context of interpreting the information, that we would need to consider that the railway had been shut for some months over the past three years whilst work was being carried out on the viaduct in Barmouth).

The members were notified that a Transport Liaison Group Meeting would be held in April and that there would be more information to follow.

Matters arising from the ensuing discussion.

- Confirmation was needed regarding the use of four-carriage trains on the Cambrian in future – at present it appeared that these trains would run twice a day and only during the summer holidays – this did not respond to the need.
- A request for four-carriage trains had been made several years ago, but nothing was happening. Despite the promise of new trains, this did not mean more trains. Although they had sought information / an update on the situation, officers changed regularly – there was a need to secure one point of contact.
- Too many passengers had to travel standing, which subsequently prevented the ticket collector from collecting money. This meant a financial loss to the service.

In response to the comments, the Transport for Wales officer noted that there were no spare trains available, and every effort was being made to ensure that there were enough carriages available to respond to the need. She noted that the new trains had not been introduced as quickly as expected, but options were being considered to resolve the situation.

An incident on 16 February 2024 was highlighted, where a passenger had been waiting for the last train from Pwllheli (20:30). Although the train was in the station, passengers were not allowed to board the train despite the weather being atrocious. Once the doors to the carriages opened, the train appeared untidy and dirty. This was not a pleasant experience – it sent the wrong message to passengers. At the time, a message and a photograph had been shared on *Twitter*.

In response to the incident, the Transport for Wales officer noted that there were strict rules in relation to opening the doors when a train was waiting in the station, but she accepted that there were inconsistencies with this. She asked for a copy of the photographs and suggested, in future, that any bad experiences should be referred directly to her.

As a contact point for enquiries / comments / information about Transport for Wales, members could contact GJ through e-mail.

BRITISH TRANSPORT POLICE

No representative in attendance.

7. RESPONSE TO FORMAL QUESTIONS

Criccieth Town Council

Question: Is it possible to paint Criccieth station? Criccieth in Bloom is working hard on improvements and maintenance of the lands there, and it would be a great boost to have a lick of paint to the station to improve the appearance and welcome users there. Thank you very much for your consideration. Thank you very much for agreeing to remove the graffiti on the bridges – and for the excellent work in Criccieth station and for cutting the tree growth near Cae Crwn allotments.

Answer: That Transport for Wales and Network Rail can work together as one industry to carry out the improvements.

Llanbedr Community Council

Question: There has been mention in the Council recently of proposed upgrading before the end of March on the shelter at Talwrn Bach Llanbedr Station. I would like to have confirmation of whether this is true?

Answer: Work is underway to find a source of funding to carry out the work. It was noted that the structure of the platform was not suitable for building a new shelter, but that work was being done to restore and paint the existing shelter.

Question: Are there any potential developments for installing barriers at the crossing here?

Answer: Network Rail to ask their Railway Crossing Team for information regarding the situation.

Question: Regarding a litter bin. Could we press for this? As Cyngor Gwynedd have not provided a dog mess bin by the site. Is there a way of reaching an agreement with Cyngor Gwynedd to collect litter from the station?

Answer: The litter bin / dog mess bin was a matter for the Council. Transport for Wales refused to install a litter bin in Llanbedr because the train officials would be expected to collect the rubbish (which contained dog fouling) – this was not an ideal situation as it created a bad odour on the train. They were therefore requesting the Council to provide a bin for dog mess in Llanbedr Station. **LHE to contact the relevant department in Cyngor Gwynedd.**

Question: Also, press to have the old name TALWRN BACH in writing on the sign (i.e., below the word Llanbedr).

Answer: Accept the suggestion – will seek more information regarding the possibility of adding the name to the sign.

A request was made to ensure consistency in responses, and that any matters of significance should be communicated directly to the Community Council Clerk and the Local Members – Cllr Gwynfor Owen and Cllr Anwen Hughes.

Mr Roger Goodhew (Shrewsbury – Aberystwyth Rail Passengers' Association)

Question: When will the Machynlleth depot have enough units to enable the 06:45 Barmouth to Machynlleth to operate a) without cancelling regularly, b) as a through route to Birmingham International Airport?

Answer: Improvements had been carried out recently and although there were no spare trains available, every effort was being made to ensure that there were enough carriages available to respond to the need.

In response, although accepting that the service had improved recently, we must insist that the first and last trains operate – this was essential for schools, colleges and work. Available trains could be used more regularly.

The Transport for Wales Officer added that an update on the railway, stations and timetables would be discussed at the Transport Liaison Group Meeting (11-04-24)

Question: When will the committee resume face to face meetings?

Answer: As noted in the Committee meeting in March 2023:

At a meeting of the Full Council on 2 December 2021 the Council decided on the principle of continuing to hold formal committee meetings virtually wherever possible and to hold hybrid meetings where there is a high level of interest from the public. The report states that only the meetings of the Full Council, the Cabinet, scrutiny committees and the Planning committee will be multi-location meetings (hybrid). All other committees will be entirely virtual with exceptions such as e.g., Employment Appeals Committee (dependent on the individual's request). Chief Officers Appointment Committee – consideration when interviews are held – virtual otherwise. Committees and Sub-committees where quasi-judicial hearings take place.

The report was adopted because of the requirements of Part 3 Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 which states the need to allow remote access to Councillors to committees. In other words, holding only formal face-to-face meetings was not possible.

Cllr Meryl Roberts (Eryri National Park Representative)

Question: Who owns Station House, Penrhyndeudraeth? There was dirty land near the station and it needed tidying up. Need a litter bin in the station.

Answer: Network Rail and Transport for Wales to make further enquiries.

Question: Who are invited to meetings of the Shrewsbury – Aberystwyth Rail Passengers' Association (SARPA)?

Answer: Invitations are shared with Town Councils. **Bill Redfern to make further enquiries.**

Everyone was thanked for their questions.

The next meeting to be held in November 2024 – LHE to arrange.

The meeting commenced at 10:30 and concluded at 11:30.

CHAIR