

CAMBRIAN COAST RAILWAY LIAISON CONFERENCE

31 March 2023

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 Elfed Wyn ap Elwyn (Cyngor Gwynedd)
Cllr Gwilym Jones (Cyngor Gwynedd)
Cllr Louise Hughes (Cyngor Gwynedd)

Cllr Dafydd Meurig (Cabinet Member – Environment – Cyngor Gwynedd)

Liz Saville Roberts (MP Dwyfor Meirionnydd),
Shane Brennan (Office of MP Dwyfor Meirionnydd),
Cllr Meryl Roberts, (Eryri National Park Authority Representative)
Lorraine Simkiss (Tal-y-llyn Railway)
Cllr J M Williams (Powys County Council)

Sara Crombie (Network Rail)
Ben Travis (Network Rail)
Gareth Yates (Network Rail)
Gail Jones (Transport for Wales) – GJ

Rhian Williams (Integrated Transport and Road Safety Manager – Cyngor Gwynedd)
Lowri Haf Evans (Democracy Services Officer, Cyngor Gwynedd)

1. APOLOGIES:

Apologies were received from Mabon ap Gwynfor (Dwyfor Meirionnydd MS, Llio Hughes (Plaid Cymru Office Manager – Senedd Cymru), Ann Elias (Ceredigion County Council), Cllr Trevor Roberts (Aberystwyth/Shrewsbury Railway), Clare Williams (Cambrian Railway Partnership) and David Thorp (Ysgol Uwchradd Tywyn)

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 signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee, held on 18 November 2022, as a true record.

5. UPDATE FROM THE SERVICES

NETWORK RAIL

Ben Perkins (Project Manager), Gareth Yates (Project Manager) 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 undertaken on the viaduct and it was noted that the timber work had now been completed and the steel work was about to commence. It was noted that there would be no change to the design of the original bridge – new steel structures would be constructed by a company from Doncaster and these sections would be transported individually to Barmouth at the beginning of the summer. The bridge would close between 01-09-23 and 25-11-23 to complete the work (taking advantage while it was closed to complete additional repair work on the railway).

Update on Aberdyfi viaduct

It was reported that the structure of the Aberdyfi viaduct, like Barmouth viaduct, needed to be fully renovated and the work would be completed in two sections to avoid environmental disruption. The bridge would close between 01-09-23 and 31-10-23.

The officers were thanked for the update and the investment was appreciated locally.

In response to a question regarding enabling access to the Aberdyfi viaduct, it was noted that an access plan to the site had been approved. There would be access from the Ceredigion side of the estuary and discussions had already been held with landowners. In response to a further observation about re-directing the Coastal Path to go over the bridge rather than the mountains, it was noted that this was not possible as the bridge was too narrow.

In response to the disappointment that the bridge would close at the start of September which in turn would impact locally organised events during this period, it was noted, although accepting the impact on the holiday season and local events, a balance had to be struck between ecological access and the need for a period of 12 weeks to undertake the work (strict conditions on Dyfi viaduct due to protected geese).

In response to a comment regarding the bus provision during closure, it was noted that discussions were being held with Transport for Wales. Once the

arrangements had been confirmed it would be possible to share the information. In response, it was noted that there was a need to ensure a sufficient bus service for local events e.g., Harlech Beer Festival.

There was a need to organise a meeting with Transport for Wales to discuss a sufficient bus provision.

In response to a question regarding the timeframe, accepting that the work is challenging, and weather conditions had an impact, it was noted that the weather had been factored into the timeframe and the construction of the steel work was proceeding well. It was added that the bridge would be transported in sections on the back of a lorry to the Morfa Madog site at the end of May with an exercise of bridge construction undertaken prior to this in Doncaster. It was confirmed that they were not looking at closing the bridge after November. It was suggested that a site visit should be conducted so that Members could see the work.

In response to a supplementary question regarding the implications of transporting the steel work during the holiday season, it was noted that transportation would mean issuing a transport notice and the transport company would make every effort to avoid busy times, causing as little congestion as possible and as cost-effective as possible.

A request was made to Network Rail to share information and keep in close contact with the Harbour Master and Local Members to reduce the impact on the public.

TRANSPORT FOR WALES

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

- Transport for Wales had temporarily withdrawn many Class 175 trains from service to undertake checks and maintenance following recent mechanical difficulties. It was highlighted that the checks had found that some trains needed to be repaired before they were returned into service. As a result, it was likely that the disruption to passenger services would continue until the beginning of April. This would affect morning trains to Barmouth – a bus service had been organised.
- The work of installing lifesaving defibrillators in railway stations had been completed and a comprehensive programme of training and awareness had been organised with schools. Anyone with further interest should contact GJ
- It was announced that Jo Edwards had been appointed as a Schools Liaison Officer – JE will be responsible for ensuring that pupils who attend Ysgol Tywyn and Ysgol Arduwy do so safely, that pupils behave appropriately on the trains, and will visit schools to discuss railway safety.
- Introduction of class 197 trains – 2 carriage trains. Although the seating capacity of these carriages was less than the existing carriages, the 197 carriages allowed access to different users – more space for

wheelchairs, mobility scooters, bicycles, and prams. It was added that Transport for Wales cannot currently run trains with more than two carriages on the Cambrian Coast Railway due to existing infrastructure limitations (short platforms and level crossings near stations) – investment in infrastructure had not been devolved – it is the UK Government that is responsible for this.

- Good work was being undertaken between Community Railways and Ramblers Cymru with organised family walks.

They were thanked for the update.

In response to a question regarding encouraging train use to travel to the National Eisteddfod in summer 2023 and to consequently ensure that additional provision was available for visitors, it was noted that on the Cambrian Coast Railway and the North Wales Coast Railway, Transport for Wales was looking into the possibility of introducing additional carriages to support the journeys/peak times – (usually during the summer months). It was noted that a pilot scheme had been successfully trialled, e.g., during concerts and rugby matches in Cardiff. Should this be introduced on the Cambrian Coast Railway and the North Wales Coast Railway, cooperation would be required with the County to gather essential feedback to ensure the structure and its success. It was added that Lowri Joyce Lowri.Joyce@tfw.wales was working on the details of designated trips to the National Eisteddfod.

In response to an observation regarding introducing 197 vehicles and that the size of the platform limited the use of more than one carriage, it was noted that it was possible to challenge the safety element of the doors on the train and introduce four carriages during busy periods.

In response to a question regarding whether the number of passengers had returned to the number before covid, it was noted that an increase had been seen, however, it had not reached the pre-covid levels. With further investment in facilities on the trains, the hope was that there would be an increase in passenger numbers.

Observations and other matters raised during the discussion:

- Representatives welcomed the Transport for Wales investment in the area
- Request to install a camera in the Penrhyndeudraeth shelter

BRITISH TRANSPORT POLICE

No representative from the British Transport Police was present to submit a report and no response had been received from Inspector Karl Anderson to the meeting request. It was suggested that different sections of the Police were responsible for Cambrian Railway safety with the British Transport Police responsible for the line up to Harlech, and North Wales Police (Bangor) responsible for the line from Harlech to Pwllheli.

A request was made for more information to confirm this arrangement.

Officers were thanked for the updates.

Members wished to thank Philip Caldwell (Network Rail Crossing Manager) for his excellent work and his willingness to always respond to safety information requests.

6. RESPONSE TO FORMAL QUESTIONS

Llangelynnin Community Council

Llangelynnin Community Council would like to ask the question to both Network Rail and any other relevant party as to when work may commence on Friog Hill A493 relating to the boundary wall/crash barrier as this had been scheduled to commence in Quarter 1 of 2023 which we are nearly at the end of. Traffic control has been in place now for some considerable time without any works having been undertaken.

Councillor Louise Hughes (Local Member) added that the situation had been a matter of concern for the area for nearly 10 years and although discussions and assessments had been completed, the work had not commenced.

Reply: NR was still committed to undertake the repair work to the wall on Allt Friog. However, some developments over the last few weeks had changed elements of the work they intended to undertake. It was evident, when looking at old documents, that a letter dating back to 1976 stated that NR continued to maintain the boundary wall, however, the crash barrier on the A493 was owned by Cyngor Gwynedd and therefore the Council was responsible for its maintenance. It was added that the NR Property Team had contacted Steffan Jones, Head of Cyngor Gwynedd Highways to try and discuss the matter. Although this will not affect NR's plans to repair the wall, it will change the scope of the work and therefore they would only undertake maintenance work on the assets within their ownership.

In terms of the process, it was noted that NR was completing the designs and reviewing the costs. Once sufficient funding had been secured to undertake the project a time schedule would have to be set to complete the work. It was suggested that a Teams or Zoom call should be held with representatives of the Fairbourne area – Llangelynnin Community Council, Arthog Community Council and Members of the appropriate wards to discuss the matter in greater detail with the NR Assets Team.

Councillor Dafydd Meurig (Cabinet Member for the Environment) noted that he would contact the Head of Highways, Engineering and YGC for an update from the Council's side.

Cllr Louise Hughes noted that she would welcome an invitation to a Teams / Zoom meeting to further discuss the matter and of her wish to be included in any further correspondence. She was also eager to invite the Cabinet Member for the Environment and the Cabinet Member for Highways, Engineering and YGC to a site visit.

Llanbedr Community Council

Question: We would like to know if, and when Llanbedr Train Station will be renovated. We are grateful that the station has been recently painted.

Transport for Wales reply (TfW): There was no update in relation to improving the facilities at Llanbedr station. All the stations had been included in an Integrated Plan and it was proposed to visit to complete the re-branding work, signage, and improvements to station assets i.e., seats, shelters etc. However, no funding had currently been allocated to proceed with this.

In response, the Local Member noted, as the Welsh Government had refused a bypass for Llanbedr, there was a need to upgrade and improve facilities at Llanbedr station.

Question: We as a Council have also applied for a dog mess bin near the station – from Gwynedd Council. If we were successful with this, will there be a chance to get a litter bin on the station?

TfW reply: That the Station Manager, Mr Dave Crunkhorn had responded to the request. The situation would need to be reviewed when the dog faeces bin is in place.

The Cabinet Member added that he would draw the matter to the attention of the Head of the Highways Department noting that TfW were willing to reinstall the litter bin should the Council install a specific dog faeces bin nearby.

Question: Several Councillors who had adopted the Station in Llanbedr were keen to get answers back to the comments they send every two weeks. Is this likely to happen?

TfW reply: Question to the Community Railways Team – the Station Manager deals with the requests of the adopters.

Question: The old Station was known as Halt Talwrn Bach in the past. What is the possibility of getting the old name back?

TfW reply: Having questioned all the relevant officers from Transport for Wales it appeared that the answer was no. It was noted that changing the name of a station was much too complicated, and it was not a matter that Transport for Wales would approve.

Question: It appears that the wooden handrail has rotted.

Reply: Regarding this, Transport for Wales railway services had been spoken to. They visited the site on 29 March 2023 – the handrail had now been repaired.

NR Question: A complaint has also been received that the train timetable sign is too high for all to read.

Reply: Some clarity was required regarding which signs they were referring to? If these were the signs near the road, then not much could be done about these as they were established. However, it was noted that the information was reiterated in the station that was about 20 feet away.

Cricieth Town Council:

Question: Why is it necessary to pay an administration fee of £10 per ticket to get a refund even when there are trains cancelled by the service e.g., because of the weather?

TfW reply: TfW does not charge an administration fee or any fee on passengers that have claimed compensation for a cancelled or delayed train; in addition, TfW did not charge a fee when customers claim compensation.

Trainline (not TfW) charge a booking fee of £10.00 and not a claim fee as they do not offer compensation for journeys – they are only sellers.

TfW charge an administration fee if someone has a paper ticket and request a refund – this is not applicable if the ticket has been purchased on-line.

TfW does charge an administration fee if passengers want to change the details on their ticket e.g., advance ticket.

There is no administration fee or any fee to passengers that have claimed compensation for a cancelled or delayed train.

It is important to note that a refund and compensation are not the same.

Question: There is no fence between Cambrian Terrace and the railway – just a bit of wire.

NR Reply: Have been in contact with the Cricieth Railway Crossing Manager who has been to the site. It was noted that the existing fence, a post and wire fence, is fairly common around railway boundaries, however, the team has visited the site on 31 March 23 to discuss what may be possible. An update of the situation can be given following the site visit.

Question: The spiked iron fence near the level crossing is broken and seen as danger.

NR Reply: Have spoken with the Crossing Manager who has been to the site. The rotted white fence will be replaced with a new fence to ensure that the site is safe.

Question: There is litter between the rails near the station and makes the station look ugly.

NR Reply: Not sure where the litter is but if it was on the tracks, there will be a need to wait for a 'block line' and therefore the work had been recorded by the Maintenance Coordinator in the area. TfW had also been contacted who have a third party who attend regularly – need to check when their next visit is. It was added that it was very difficult to keep litter under control as it had often been blown there.

Shrewsbury – Aberystwyth Rail Passenger Association

Question: Is it possible for the committee to meet at its usual venue in Porthmadog on a date when train services are expected to be running normally in Wales and the Borders?

Reply: At a meeting of the Full Council on 2 December 2021 the Council decided on the principle to continue to hold formal committee meetings virtually wherever possible and hold hybrid meetings when 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 completely virtual with exceptions such as e.g., Employment Appeals Committee (dependent on the individual's request), the Chief Officers Appointment Committee – consideration when interviews are held – virtual otherwise. Committees and Sub-committees where quasi-judicial hearings take place.

The report has been adopted as a result of the requirements of Part 3 Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 that notes the need to allow remote access to Councillors to committees. In other words, holding only formal face-to-face meetings is not possible.

Gratitude was expressed for the questions.

Network Rail and Transport for Wales were thanked for their support and for responding to the matters raised at the Committee. They were encouraged to ensure that there was clear communication with the public regarding any events / updates.

Rhian Williams (Integrated Transport and Road Safety Manager, Cyngor Gwynedd) asked Transport for Wales to contact schools directly if the railway closes for any reason e.g., flooding.

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

CHAIR