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Elections

Railfuture is the campaigning name of Railway Development Society Ltd, 18a Grantham Road, Bracebridge Heath, Lincoln LN4 2LD

The board is elected annually and nomination forms can be obtained in January.

Wales takes the lead on rail reopening

By Rowland Pittard

It is not easy to get together a team of professionals on a summer Saturday to speak at a conference.

But Robin Shaw – chief executive of Transport Wales, a division of the Welsh Assembly Government – gave the Railfuture reopenings conference an up-to-date report on the Assembly's transport policy and funding.

He explained the Assembly's vision for rail services in Wales and the effects of the Railways Act 2005 and the Transport (Wales) Bill.

He showed graphs illustrating travel-to-work modes and trends and there were also details of the Assembly's £50million initiative to relieve overcrowding on train services into Cardiff.

Railfuture had asked Welsh Assembly member Dr Brian Gibbons to be the speaker at the reopenings conference in Barry on 2 July.

Railfuture Wales has appreciated the assistance it has received in recent years from Dr Gibbons – as deputy minister for economic development and transport – and has had regular meetings with him.

Earlier this year Dr Gibbons was promoted to minister for health and was unable to attend the conference. His successor at transport, Tamzin Dunwoody Kneafsey, was also unable to attend. But as the lead body in reopening the Vale of

Railfuture Rail Reopenings conference at Barry, 2 July 2005
Sponsored by Angel Trains, Arriva Trains Wales, First Group and Cardiff International Airport

Glamorgan line it was important that the Welsh Assembly Government was represented at our conference.

Several of our conference speakers knew each other from their work for the Wales Transport Forum and the South East Wales Transport Alliance (SEWTA).

Vale of Glamorgan and Bridgend County Borough councils originally promoted the Vale reopening to the Assembly Government in 1999 and it became part of SEWTA's strategy. The main partners were Valley Lines (now Arriva Trains Wales) and Railtrack (now Network Rail).

What would be ideal for the future?

- Direct inter-city trains via the Vale of Glamorgan
- Long-distance services from Hereford, Gloucester and West Wales
- A direct link to terminal platforms at the airport
- Five trains per hour to the airport

Steve Hodgetts,
head of business development,
Cardiff International Airport

Both are members of SEWTA which has developed an admirable team spirit in securing transport improvements.

The conference speakers explained how each of their organisations had played its part in delivering the successful new Vale of Glamorgan rail service. The project cost £17million, including £2million for the interchanges.

The social and environmental benefits were explained by Emma Harvey, operational manager for the Vale of Glamorgan's planning and transportation team.

Funding of £2million was available to provide interchanges at Rhoose Cardiff International Airport and Llantwit Major. Ms Harvey described the detailed work of planning and constructing the interchanges.

The infrastructure upgrade work was detailed by David White, project manager for Network Rail.

NR achieved substantial cost savings by managing the work while sub-contracting permanent way work to Mowlem, signals and telephones to Carillion Rail Projects and civil engineering to Galliford

Try Construction. The work called for 6.5 miles of track upgrading, 1,200 new steel sleepers and 15,000 tonnes of ballast.

A bay platform and track were reinstated at Bridgend and two platforms built at Rhoose and Llantwit Major.

It was not an easy project as the line is either on steep embankments or in limestone cuttings, making it difficult to instal the troughing and lineside equipment.

There are few access points to the line and they were often along narrow lanes.

All footpath crossings were upgraded and considerable lineside vegetation clearance was carried out.

But there was a great deal of enthusiasm for the project.

It is interesting to note that the major international destination from Cardiff is Edinburgh which begs the question: What happened to Virgin's plans for a two-hour rail service between the two capitals? Training staff to operate the new

Vision for rail services in Wales

The rail network is one key element of our transport system. We expect it to act like a spine across the country linking urban centres, from which complementary bus routes and other transport modes fan out.

Robin Shaw, chief executive,
Transport Wales
Welsh Assembly Government

line was the job of Arriva Trains Wales, said stakeholder liaison manager Malcolm Howitt.

ATW also had to manage timetable changes, station operation, interchanges, fares, information and publicity.

The new service required two additional units to provide an hourly service which is integrated into the Cardiff Valleys network.

With the successful Vale of Glamorgan scheme working, future transport requirements for Wales were highlighted in a stimulating presentation by Professor Stuart Cole from the Wales Transport Research Centre at the University of Glamorgan.

He outlined the Welsh Assembly Government's integrated transport policy and the Wales and Borders franchise (no growth).

He promoted the policy with five Is – information, interchange, investment, integration and imagination.

He said transport policy should be based on "provide and promote" not "predict and provide".

This is why the Welsh Assembly Government is providing funding to improve the rail infrastructure



Crowds watch the Royal Air Force's Red Arrows aerobatic team fly over Rhoose station to mark the reopening of the Vale of Glamorgan rail service

Picture: Betina Skovbro

– new stations, additional cross loops and improved capacity.

This pro-rail investment has not yet been matched in England by regional funds. The English regions depend on central funding which does not seem to be forthcoming from Whitehall.

Councillor Michael Harvey welcomed people to the conference and gave his insight into the perceived effect of the line on the business community in Llantwit Major which warned that trade would be removed to Bridgend or Barry but had not itself made people in other areas aware of the attractions of its own historic town which has a good range of public houses and restaurants.

Welsh Assembly Member Jane Hutt concluded the conference by explaining how the reopening

had provided new opportunities. She described how the communities welcomed the reopening and how they were using the trains.

She said it had removed social barriers and given more freedom to disabled people and mothers with young children.

Traffic flows on the line have been encouraging to the extent that the smaller class 142-3 units have already been replaced by larger class 150s on some services.

The attractive £1 inter-station fare between Llantwit Major and Bridgend has stimulated local use with up to 50 people arriving at Bridgend on many daytime services.

Morning and evening commuter services load to capacity with people standing from Cardiff as far as Rhoose. Some passengers between

Air-rail boost

Rail development was seen as useful in attracting more people to use Cardiff International Airport.

The airport's head of business development Steve Hodgetts also recognised its value in reducing road transport and giving airport workers an alternative mode of transport.

A coach link is provided between Rhoose Cardiff International Airport (surely a candidate for longest station name on Network Rail) and the airport terminal.

There is integrated ticketing with the bus service between Cardiff and the airport and an attractive half-price promotional offer for using rail.

Mr Hodgett referred to Railfuture's policy on airports and posed several questions at the end of his speech which stimulated discussion. He stressed he was pro-rail for ground transport.



The Welsh passenger rail network. Large areas of the country remain a long way from a railhead but at least the South Wales area is now better served than it was, thanks to rail campaigners