



Open access: Direct trains started running in April from Wrexham to London for the first time in more than 40 years

Another new train service for Wales

Business is booming on Britain's railways as people throughout the world wake up to the fact that reliance on cars and lorries is a dead end.

Car sales went down by 6% in Japan last year and in Germany by 9%. Even in car-crazy America car use declined by nearly 5% in March 2008.

With its fuel-efficiency and environment-friendly credentials, rail is the answer to keeping an advanced society mobile.

As more people switch to rail, new services are being introduced.

The latest is the Wrexham to London Marylebone passenger service which was introduced in April.

Direct scheduled train services have been restored after a gap of more than 40 years.

Also benefiting from direct trains to London are Shrewsbury, Telford and Tame Bridge Parkway, near Walsall.

The operator is the Wrexham, Shropshire & Marylebone Railway

which began running five trains a day in each direction.

Since 1967, passengers for London have had to change trains en route. WSMR is jointly owned by Hull Trains partner Renaissance Trains and Laing Rail, which is now part of German state rail operator Deutsche Bahn.

DB also owns EWS, the largest rail freight operator in Britain.

Andy Hamilton, the operator's managing director said: "We've had tremendous support for our new rail service."

Fares start at £22 and passengers can take advantage of a "tckts2txt" buying option - which means tickets bought via www.wrexhamandshropshire.co.uk can be sent direct to a mobile phone by SMS text message.

The trains are hauled by Class 67 diesel locomotives, with Mk 3 carriages.

Even though the Wrexham direct trains serve only two Welsh stations, it has received Welsh

Assembly Government support because it has created 60 new jobs at Wrexham.

A month earlier First Minister Rhodri Morgan officially opened Llanharan station on the South Wales main line.

Residents of Llanharan now have passenger rail services from their town for the first time in over 40 years.

Mr Morgan travelled by train from Cardiff to Llanharan to see for himself the modern new facility, which offers half-hourly services to Cardiff and Bridgend.

Mr Morgan said: "The South East Wales commuter rail network is one of the most important mass transit systems in the UK with 70 stations on it.

"Recent investments have seen new lines being opened, such as the Ebbw Valley Railway and the Vale of Glamorgan line as well as new stations being opened on existing lines, such as Llanharan. All these developments encourage commut-

ers, shoppers and leisure travellers to switch from private to public transport in line with our green agenda. It is part of our drive to maximise Wales's contribution to combating climate change."

Mr Morgan paid tribute to Eynon Hawkins, the son of a Llanharan miner, who campaigned for the reopening.

Mr Hawkins, who was awarded the George Cross in 1943 for his bravery at sea during the Second World War, sadly died in 1981 before the station reopened.

Keith Griffiths, chief executive of Rhondda Cynon Taf Council, said: "The station has already proved a huge success and we know people have been using it since services began in December."

Network Rail's newly published draft Route Utilisation Study for Wales envisages a 25% rise in passenger numbers by 2018.

It was presented to the Welsh Assembly Government in early June.