

Wales

By Rowland Pittard

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■ ■ Steel works revamp

Railfuture Wales welcomed developments at Corus Margam steel works at Port Talbot which will boost rail freight. The number 4 blast furnace is being rebuilt at a cost of £185 million. The bottom-door discharge hopper and associated conveyer belts have been reinstated at Margam Grange siding and the first load of coke – in bogie hopper wagons – from Redcar was discharged in August. Two trains daily are expected. Corus is also investigating the possibility of mining an estimated 35 million tonnes of anthracite on site at Port Talbot.

■ ■ Heart of Wales line boosted

Network Rail has fitted new equipment to enhance the reliability of the train service on the Heart of Wales line by bringing some passing loops back into use and upgrading equipment at other loops. The loops at Llandeilo, Llandovery and Knighton had been out of use awaiting replacement of equipment. The former hydro-pneumatic points at each end of the loops were converted to power operation. The work entailed Sunday closures of sections of the line to install the new equipment at Llandeilo on 8 May, Llandovery on 20 June, Llanwrtydd Wells on 1 August, Llandrindod Wells on 22 August and Knighton on 12 September.

■ ■ Welsh and Irish rail campaigners join forces

Railfuture Wales has given its support and advice to the Waterford-Rosslare action group which is fighting for the retention of passenger services between Rosslare Europort and Waterford which at present connect into and out of ferry services from Fishguard Harbour. See page 15.

■ ■ Trains upgraded

The eight class 153 and 24 four class 158 units leased by Arriva Trains Wales are to be upgraded thanks to Welsh Assembly Government and train operator funding. The Assembly Government is providing £7.5 million for the improvement programme which will take place over the next 18 months, with the units undergoing a complete upgrade. This will include new seating, a new passenger information system and improved luggage storage facilities, additional space for wheelchairs, as well as a full refurbishment of toilets. Work has already started on the class 153 units at Cardiff Canton and will continue on the 158 units from December. Arriva Trains Wales, in conjunction with Angel Trains and Alstom, is upgrading its 27-strong class 175 fleet, which serves routes between north and south Wales and Manchester. The first refurbished unit is already in service and the fleet will be completed by May 2011 with new carpets, seat covers and vestibule area improvements.

■ ■ Pontypridd station given a multi-million pound upgrade

A £4.2 million scheme will create new amenities and improve existing facilities at Pontypridd station over the next year. The upgrade includes replacing the roof canopy over platform one, refurbishment of the original main entrance, with a new lift, shops on the platform and at the entrance, improved waiting facilities and revamped platforms. There will also be a new covered bridge joining platforms one and two and bike parking. A previously closed platform will be reopened and there will be improved access from the Graig entrance.

■ ■ Rail-to-ship depot opens for Llanwrn steel trains



A new rail-to-ship facility was brought into action near Newport in May. Two test trains conveying steel coil from Llanwrn along the Usk mouth branch to Bird Port, pictured left, were followed by regular traffic in June. The trans-shipment facility was funded by the Welsh Assembly Government.

Lyon leads the way

By John Stanford

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A score of Railfuture members and relatives gathered at St Pancras International in May for our trip to Lyon.

After acquaintances had been renewed and final information sheets distributed, there was only a short wait between check-in and boarding our Eurostar to Lille Europe.

At this functional if uninteresting station we changed for the TGV service to Lyon, remembering to validate our tickets for the first time on the trip.

Some of the group took the opportunity of travelling on the upper deck as the TGV Duplex swept through northern France, the hills of Burgundy and the Saone valley. We arrived early evening at Lyon Part Dieu station, which was built 30 years ago as the centre of a major redevelopment when the high-speed service between Paris and Lyon began. As our hotel was near the old main station, Lyon Perrache, we used a tram for the final leg of our journey.

There were a few fixed points in the programme.

One morning the administrative and financial background to public transport in the area was outlined, coupled with a visit to the depot where the driverless trains used on one of the Metro lines are maintained. A programme to provide more passenger standing spaces sounded familiar. Hard hats were not required even when we went below a train being serviced.

That evening we met members of local organisations working for improved rail transport in the region. This focused on a presentation on the strategic nature of Lyon as a hub for rail traffic, both passenger and freight, and the measures required to prevent it becoming a bottleneck.

A visit to St Etienne and its enthusiastically curated Tram Museum had also been organised. The town pioneered tramways in France and continued its service when tram lines had been closed in other cities in France. The metre-gauge system,

the only one remaining in France, has recently been extended and new trams bought from Switzerland. The French sense of style was offended by the original boxy ends of the Swiss trams, so they built their own and fitted them on to the Swiss bodies.

This still left plenty of time for group members to visit towns including Annecy, Geneva, Marseille, Vichy, Vienne and the medieval village of Perrouges, benefiting from Lyon's status as a rail hub by using TGVs, inter-regional and local trains.

Just to show that SNCF does not get everything right, some stopped off at Chambéry and Aix-les-Bains because of faults on their train to Annecy.

Within greater Lyon there are four Metro lines, two funiculars,



DOWN UNDER: Railfuture members at Lyon Metro line A depot Picture: BERNARD MARRIOTT

trams, trolleybuses and buses, all on a common ticketing system, as well as local trains and bicycles. These all seemed to be well used and well integrated with a number of new interchanges around the city. The network is continuing to develop with the extension of an express tram line to the airport expected to open later this

year, the introduction of tram-trains on a network of lines west of the city and plans for expansion of the Metro and tram lines.

It was not all transport. Some people visited Roman sites, attended football matches, looked at modern architecture, went to the opera and museums and experienced at least some of the variety of Lyon's noted cuisine.

What went wrong? The weather! It was grey when we left St Pancras and got darker, wetter and unseasonably colder during the week.

On a personal note, as a newbie in the party and someone who has not been on a group holiday since England won the World Cup at Wembley, I would like to thank Jim Walker and everyone for their friendliness and inclusivity.

I advise all readers of *Railwatch* to keep an eye open for information about next year's trip to Munich.