

## Wales

By Rowland Pittard rowland.pittard@railfuturewales.org.uk

### ■ ■ Farewell to Railfuture South Wales president

The president of Railfuture South Wales branch died in December. Ian Murray was a former branch chairman and member of national Railfuture committees. He was heavily involved in arranging the reopening conference that was held in Maesteg. Ian was an extremely active campaigner for improved rail and bus services especially those serving his home town of Porthcawl. He campaigned for the reopening of Pyle station and subsequently for bus links to the station. The number of trains calling at Pyle has been increased as a result of Ian's efforts. Ian was well known by staff at the transport consortia in South Wales, SWWITCH and SEWTA, who respected the way in which he diplomatically campaigned for public transport improvements. He was a regular participant at all Railfuture meetings in Wales and represented Railfuture at many conferences

### ■ ■ Success for campaign for North Wales to Cardiff trains

Deputy First Minister Ieuan Wyn Jones announced on 17 January that the express rail link between North Wales and Cardiff is to increase to two return services a day – Mondays to Fridays. There will be £3.5 million support per annum from the Welsh Assembly Government and Arriva Trains Wales is developing plans to lease additional rolling stock to operate the extra services from Holyhead to Cardiff. By paying to lease the trains for seven years, as opposed to on an annual basis, the Assembly Government will save the taxpayer £350,000. "The north-south express rail link plays a vital role in not only linking north and south Wales but also rural and urban communities," said Mr Jones. "This is part of our commitment to encourage sustainable transport and improve links between the north and south of the country."

There is still no fast morning link from south to north Wales and passengers to and from west of Cardiff have to endure waiting at Cardiff for 35 minutes for connections in both directions. The existing service does not call at Wrexham and does not have internet facilities.

### ■ ■ £1.6 million a year to subsidise Welsh air travel

The Welsh Assembly Government awarded a four-year contract for the operation of two flights daily from Valley near Holyhead to Cardiff with an operating subsidy of £1.2 million per annum and a subsidy of £400,000 per annum for providing terminal facilities at Valley airport. Both airports have rail connections.

### ■ ■ Campaign for more rail freight recording success

Freight traffic in Wales is now increasing. The movement of coke from Redcar to Margam has been transferred from sea to rail, as has petroleum from Immingham to Cardiff. Number 4 blast furnace at Tata Steel Margam is to be refurbished and there are heavy flows of steel between Margam and the rolling mill at Llanwern supplemented by imported steel via Cardiff Docks. Timber trains from Carlisle to Chirk have increased in length from 14 to 21 wagons thanks to freight grants from Welsh Assembly Government for the improvement of facilities at Chirk and from the Department for Transport for those at Carlisle.

### ■ ■ Rail staff praised for keeping services going in snow

Rail services in Wales were maintained throughout the adverse weather conditions in December, including some South Wales communities where bus services were withdrawn. Train operators and staff are to be congratulated on their efforts, including the use of 4x4 vehicles to get staff to work. Some problems were created by grit spreading on level crossings. Additional carriages were provided on trains to the ferry ports during the closure of airports because of weather conditions. Heavy rain in early January probably created more disruption with flooding in Chipping Sodbury tunnel causing extensive delays to services between London and South Wales for two days, the closure of the Conwy Valley line for five days and a number of partial closures.

[www.railfuturewales.org.uk](http://www.railfuturewales.org.uk)

# Super trucks threat

By George Boyle

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The European Union is proposing that all member states be forced to allow lorries weighing 60 tonnes and 25.25 metres long (82ft) on to the roads

This is being presented as a "green" option as larger lorries are supposed to mean fewer lorries. I have to say that it has never worked in the past, as every weight increase transferred more traffic from our railways and we ended up with more, as well as heavier, lorries.

In the case of the Peak District, the introduction of such lorries would immediately result in the transfer of the vast majority of existing stone traffic from rail to road, many millions of tonnes, resulting in thousands of lorry journeys.

Such lorries are already being used in Germany on a trial basis. However, the trials are as cynical as the Japanese whaling "scientific" catches.

All a German haulier has to do is call it a trial and he can do as many trips as he likes. As an example of the rolling programme of weight and size increase that the haulage industry has in mind, even before the German "trials" become an established fact, the industry is now demanding that the maximum length be increased another 1.25 metre to 26.5 metres.

Lorries are more than long and heavy enough at present and, paradoxically, a reduction in lorry weight would actually reduce the numbers, as traffic transferred back to rail.

I have written to my MP, Andrew Bingham, Conservative MP for the High Peak, and I urge all Railfuture members to contact their MPs and urge them to oppose the proposal for longer lorries.

The coalition government has alarmed rail campaigners by its decision to scrap capital rail freight grants which have been in place since 1974.

"This approach not only runs counter to its policies to reduce freight's emissions and improve road safety but risks ushering in mega trucks of 82 ft from Europe, to which the coalition has explicitly said it was opposed," said Philippa Edmunds, manager of

Freight on Rail. "Does the coalition government want to be blamed for mega trucks coming to the UK?"

"The London bendy bus is being phased out at considerable public expense due to road safety concerns so it seems a perverse decision to increase lorry lengths.

"Instead, the Government should be working with the industry to improve efficiency of existing HGVs and improve compliance with existing road regulations instead of undermining low-carbon, energy-efficient, safe rail, which reduces long distance road congestion.

"Previous increases in lorry lengths have led to more HGVs driving around with less cargo. Currently one in four lorries on our roads is empty, and many more only partially loaded.

"This is the reverse of what was claimed would happen by the proponents of longer HGVs, who are using the same old flawed arguments again. Will the road haulage industry ever stop asking for bigger and heavier lorries?"

The Freight Facilities grant scheme in England has significantly helped facilitate the transfer to rail with all the resulting economic, safety and environmental benefits to society.

Rail freight produces 70% less carbon dioxide emissions than the equivalent long distance road journey.

An average freight train can carry as much as 50 long-distance lorries and an aggregates train can remove 160 long-distance lorries from our roads.

Even existing lorries are over three times more likely to be involved in fatal accidents than cars on major roads due to a combination of size, lack of enforcement of driver hours, vehicle overloading and differing foreign operating standards.

Over 83% of HGVs exceed the 50 mph speed limit on dual carriageways and 75% exceed the 40 mph limit on single carriageway non-built-up roads.

Existing HGVs are up to 160,000 times more damaging to road surfaces than the average car. Some of the heaviest road repair costs are almost exclusively attributable to the heaviest vehicles.

## Railfuture directors elected unopposed

Railfuture returning officer Chris Precey reports that there is no need for an election to the board of the Railway Development Society Ltd this year. There were three candidates for the three vacancies who were thus elected unopposed: Philip Bisatt, Andrew MacFarlane and Jerry Alderson.