

PEMBROKESHIRE RAIL TRAVELLERS ASSOCIATION.

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NEWSLETTER 79.

Sept-2008.

THIS ISSUE CALLS ON REQUEST AT:

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EDITORIAL

Several articles in this issue examine the reality of buying fares culminating in advice that buying a ticket is an art form! For some time we have been making jokes that one needs to pass NVQ in Rail Ticket Purchase to actually find your way through the jungle but it seems now that the situation is getting more adverse for potential travellers. Adding in the government's planned over inflation increases there is a considerable danger that car orientated occasional riders will just not be prepared to undergo the hassle that getting a ticket has become. Just imagine telling someone that if the price from a to b is a lot one should spend time examining fares from and to intermediate stations along the way to endeavour to find a better deal. In the days of Supersavers we used to say that petrol doesn't cost more on Fridays but this is a bag of crisps compared with the hoop jumping needed to get a successful result now. It will be interesting to see whether ATOC's claim that nobody will pay more is reality when we get to examine the "easy to understand simplified fares tickets that are being introduced in September.

DON'T BE THAT WAY!

News that the New Zealand Government had renationalised the railways in that country is a timely reminder that we really don't have to have our present chaotic mess of pseudo state owned Network Rail + myriads of private operators - many with near monopoly areas when the provision of bus and rail is taken together. The railways and ferry services in New Zealand had been asset stripped by their private owners and the finance minister, Michael Cullen when launching Kiwi Rail said "Privatisation had been a painful lesson for New Zealand". The prime minister, Helen Clark claimed that the takeover of rail is exactly what is needed to build a modern, environmentally sustainable transport network. Commenting on our railway, Seumas Milne in the Guardian Newspaper said "Fleeced by the private train companies and

rolling stock contractors [some of them trousering 30% rates of return], it is now the most expensive, opaque and inefficient rail system in Europe. As the Campaign for Better Transport reported yesterday walk on fares are on average 5 times those booked in advance and all ticket prices are set to spiral in the next few years. Meanwhile renationalisation is strongly supported by the public and is in fact official Labour Party policy." It is estimated that £800 million a year is being abstracted from the railways by the private sector. One would have thought that the government might be having a look at the modus operandi but not a bit of it – Tom Harris, Transport Minister insisted that if the Tories hadn't privatised the railways, New Labour would have sold them off- Curioser and curioser!

SIMPLIFIED RAIL FARES - THE REALITY

The introduction of so-called improvements to the rail fare system, and the need to book a journey to Preston, prompted me to take a good look at the current fare structure and the options provided when booking through the National Rail Enquiries website.

To keep things simple, I decided the only feasible departure to ensure timely arrival at my destination was the 0917 Manchester train from Johnston (Arriva).

The first step was to request details for a single ticket (lowest fare option) from Johnston to Preston. This offered a service with a Virgin connection from Crewe arriving at Preston at 1537.

Johnston (0917) - Crewe (1424/1456) - Preston (1537) = £77.00 (open)

The next step was to price up the journey on two tickets - same trains and times.

Johnston (0917) - Crewe (1424) [ATW] = £24.00 (advance)

Crewe (1456) - Preston (1537) [Virgin] = £16.50 (open)

....which totalled £40.50 giving a significant saving of £36.50 (47%).

I then looked at the implications of travelling to Stockport and catching a Northern Trains service to Preston. Using the 0917 Johnston departure as before, the alternative route added 47 minutes to the journey, but saved another £9.50.

Johnston (0917) - Stockport (1453/1519) - Preston (1624) = £31.00 (advance)

....and using two tickets:

Johnston (0917) - Stockport (1513) [ATW] = £24.00 (advance)

Stockport (1519) - Preston (1624) [Northern] = £11.10 (saver)

...so no benefit here from split-ticketing.

Clearly, split-ticketing should be considered as an option - and can offer significant savings. Alternative routes should also be considered - but as in the case above - unless you know there is an alternative connection - the rail websites won't offer it.

The big question has to be: Why are the benefits of Arriva's advance fares incorporated into some long distance journeys (for example involving Northern Rail) but not into similar journeys (involving Virgin services)? After all, the majority of the journey is on the ATW route.

It is scandalous that the train companies are allowed to hide many of the better value fares that are essential if we are to encourage more people to leave their cars at home and "let the train take the strain"

The ATW website gave the same results, and option to look for cheaper, slower routes still came up with a £77 cheapest fare! Eventually I found a link to an "advanced options" section which allowed me to specify a route "via" Stockport. However, it would

be far better if the "via" option was part of the initial enquiry page as on the National Rail Enquiries web site.

I subsequently purchased the tickets using the ATW website (via Trainline). This worked very well - clear, easy to use, and this time the "via" option was offered on the first page. The tickets arrived by first class post within two days.

David Harries

TRAIN VERSUS CAR – MY RECENT EXPERIENCES!

When we moved to Pembrokeshire a few years ago we decided that where at all possible we would use the train – usually from Haverfordwest.

We have travelled to London many times (often every 3 or 4 weeks), and to Harrogate, Birmingham, Toulouse (via Paris and Bordeaux), Charite Sur Loire (via Paris), Oban, Wakefield, Crediton, Lymstone and Ulverston together with local journeys between home and Cardiff.

The London journeys generally involve travelling to Paddington or Reading and then on to South London via Waterloo or Charing Cross.

By changing at Reading it is possible to get to Waterloo using South West Trains and then through Waterloo East to my destination in South London, avoiding the need to travel on the over crowded and over heated London Underground.

It is not straight forward to book this particular part of the journey on line as a through ticket as the computer always wants to route the ticket via Paddington! Recently a very helpful Arriva Trains Wales (ATW) conductor very kindly sold me a single from Reading to Blackheath even though he had no idea of that part of the network!

Using the Rail Easy website I am now able to book my regular London tickets as two singles AND specify train time, carriage (quiet), seat position (window, aisle, table) and facing or back. This breaks down a bit with the train reversing at Carmarthen and Swansea! If I book early enough, together with my half price

Senior Rail Card (courtesy of Pembrokeshire CC), I get the option of a First Class upgrade for part of the journey (free coffee, cakes and papers) for about the same fare that I was paying in 2007. It really does pay to book early and check on all fare options.

In general most of the delays on these regular journeys over the past five years have been due to engineering, track or signalling problems or broken down freight trains ahead. Generally the FGW trains have been clean and the staff very helpful sometime phoning ahead to check on connections. We occasionally go "the pretty way" via Chippenham and Bath adding an hour to the journey.

The re fitted coaches and very good and comfortable especially the leather seats in First Class BUT Standard coaches have seats that are not necessarily by windows/tables and have backs that are so high you cannot see down the coach and they have taken out the toilet in Standard Coach A (my favourite Quiet Coach) and the equivalent First Class Coach at the other end of the train to provide storage for the buffet trolley).

When the train is busy getting to the loo can be quite a challenge!

Why do people in the South of England have problems with the concept of a phone free carriage?

The ATW service to Manchester is very useful but some of the rolling stock looks and feels second hand and scruffy and some units have very unreliable disabled toilets. The trains are much cleaner of late and friendly cleaners now rush through the train at various points on the journey.

On my journey to Oban in May the ATW train from Haverfordwest failed at Cardiff (no reason given) and we were unceremoniously herded off onto a replacement already waiting at the platform ahead of us which then appeared to hit something on the track side on two occasions in the Hereford area and was brought to a long stand at Shrewsbury. We were then put onto another train for our next stage to Crewe which had just arrived from Crewe. Its passengers were put on our train and we got on theirs - and off we went again!

The Virgin train to Glasgow from Crewe was crowded but clean and fast, my walk across Glasgow to Queen Street was pleasant

enough and the Scotrail service to Oban was old but clean and the journey was spectacular arriving 14 hours after my departure from Haverfordwest. My return journey a week later was quite uneventful by contrast and generally on time throughout. Sadly the ATW staff member I asked for assistance was unhelpful.

To summarise my recent experience. ATW appear to have some of the most ancient of rolling stock (although some Northern Trains take some beating) which is now kept cleaner but still manages to look scruffy and unkempt but are often overcrowded and very noisy.. The train staff are invariably friendly and helpful but seem to tolerate very high noise levels from radios and other audio equipment without comment (see railway bye-laws on this) making long journeys wearing.

The station staff at Swansea, Cardiff and Newport seem to resort to shouting out changes of trains and platforms when stressed which is difficult for older passengers, visitors from overseas and me! Not everyone can gather up their belongings, leave the train and get on an already crowded alternative in a few minutes. The occasional lack of liaison between FGW and ATW make through journeys challenging at times. Connections (at Swansea/Carmarthen are sometimes hit and miss and involve long waits or free bus/taxi rides to Haverfordwest. I frequently need to phone home to ask to be picked up from Narbeth as I would have an hour to wait on the least passenger friendly station in the area (Swansea).

Despite all this I remain committed to using our local trains for most of my journeys, but ATW could make the whole thing much more pleasant with a bit more effort, station staff training and some new rolling stock!

Andrew Burns July 2008

HEART OF WALES NEWS.

Members who have been chary of riding the Heart of Wales because of the humongous number of people riding FOC can examine the situation afresh. The FOC scheme was discontinued

from May 18 until October 5th – for those railcardless a 33% discount can still be obtained by purchasing a Heart of Wales Line Railcard – Carmarthenshire residents still get 50% off. After October 5th free travel will resume until May 2nd 2009.

FARES TO LINCOLN

An example of how fares are moving is provided by the editor's occasional visits to Lincoln. Last time I went two advance purchase returns with senior railcard discount were around £46 total. Endeavouring to obtain tickets for a trip mid August about 3 ½ weeks up front revealed fares quoted by ATW's website as follows – no advance tickets available –

Last Time £about46 – 2 advance; senior railcard

NOW - ALL FARES ARE FOR 2 WITH R/C DISCOUNT

| | | |
|------------------|---------------|------------------|
| Not London | Saver | £131 |
| Any permitted | Saver | £147-80 |
| Not London | Standard | £174-90 |
| Any permitted | Saver | £413-20 |
| Any permitted | Standard Open | £467-30 |
| Any permitted | First Open | £664-00 |
| Any permitted | First Open | £686-40 |
| Cheaper singles! | | £129-60 each way |
| National Express | 60+ | £97-50 |

Changes on rail were between 2 and 4 – the National Express journey involved 3 hour waits when changing coaches in both directions. Currently with petrol at £4-95/ gallon the cheapest rail fare gives just under 26 ½ gallons of petrol or 1058 miles at 40/gallon. Lincoln is about 325 miles from Milford Haven.

A CORE TENET OF PUFFERERS TURNS OUT TO BE TRUE!

In 1946, Paul Kiefer, Chief Mechanical Engineer of the New York Central Railroad set his latest steam locomotive, the potent, coal burning, 6700 horsepower Niagara class 4-8-4 against General Motors brand new diesel electrics. The Niagara could generate more power than three of the latest diesel electrics coupled together. It could run the wheels off them while accelerating

passenger trains as long as 30 modern British Inter City carriages with the alacrity of an electric.

The detailed report that followed revealed total annual running costs of US\$350095 for Kiefer's finest and US\$359478 for a twin set of 4000Horsepower General Motors diesels capable of maintaining existing New York Central schedules. As the construction costs of the diesels was 50% higher than that of a Niagara, you might have thought that steam would continue to rule the railroad roost.

Not a chance, even though the trials were conducted with oil as cheap as chips in today's terms. If, in fact, the New York Central management had been forced to buy oil at the equivalent of today's prices, the Niagara would have won the day effortlessly. Or would it? I don't think so no matter how you looked at, or cooked, the figures. The problem facing inspired steam engineers like Kiefer and his contemporary Andre Chapelon of France's SNCF – whose latest locomotive, 242 A1 was outperforming existing electric locomotives was as much as anything else, one of image. Steam seemed old fashioned, dirty and labour intensive. It didn't have to be, but that was the perception encouraged by General Motors, the oil lobby, and a new generation of fervently modernising railway managers.

- Jonathan Glancey, the Guardian's architecture critic writing in the paper on July 16 when Tornado the brand new British steam engine was presented to the media.

As he says at the end – New fuel and power technologies need to be pursued and developed, and yet steam technology, as old as Hero of Alexandria's first century turbine, may yet be back on the agenda, road, rails and record books.

THE ELUSIVE WATER BUS.

The new water bus service on the Haven seemed such a good idea that your editor offers full apologies that this article is appearing in this September PRTA Newsletter when the last services ran at the end of August. The introduction of the service seemed to be in the best British Rail tradition – that is - pretty secret. Examination of the Pembs County Council website and the Milford Haven Town Council info on the net yielded absolutely no mention – Greenways

was the access to full details and at Milford a small notice was fixed to a lamp post with the timetable on etc.



The 11-30 departure waits at Mackerel Quay, Milford Haven with a ridership of 7 on 23rd August. –GH

As can be seen from the pik the service is operated by a smallish open boat – this year's timetable left Burton at 09-00 calling Neyland, Hobbs Point, Hazelbeach then Milford Haven {mackerel Quay is hard by the sea loch facing inland up the Haven} – if tide conditions are favourable the bus goes to Angle and Dale returning Milford at 15-00 then calling as in the outward journey arriving Burton 17-30 - but when they are not [about 50% of timetable] the bus returns to Hobbs Point then Milford again followed by journey back to Burton with the same calls as in the morning. As the boat is fairly small advance bookings were stated to be essential but casual passengers are carried if there's room. Fares are reasonable: Return £5 adults, £3 children – seniors travel at the children's rate – singles are half the return fare.

It is to be hoped that Pembroke / Pembroke Dock might be included in next year's timetable thereby opening up possibilities of rail/boat round robin journeys etc, in any event the results of this year's operations will be hard to assess fairly in view of the lack of publicity.

The boat's captain was hopeful that after this year's trial the water bus would appear again in 2009 – finance had been tight for this year. If it does your association hopefully will take a trip!

EDITOR'S NOTES

The West Wales community rail partnership seems to have been completely dead since Mr. Youngman's departure – ACORP's Train Times Newsletter No 51 for Summer 2008 didn't even include the west Wales CRP as a member.

Have you been on the nine ten from Milford lately? Using it three times in a week in Late July gave standing up every day – one day from Whitland! The rostering dept at ATW always seem to get a 2 car on this service when a 3 car is vital. Ridership generally seems on the up and trains on the advertised.

We have heard that ATW may be planning to do something to eliminate the awful waste of men and rolling stock that is the Pembroke Dock timetable – elimination of the regular interval timetable is surely better than the present arrangements.

The future of coal burning power stations has been highlighted by the actions of campaign groups: Plane Stupid, Climate Camp, Rising Tide and Leave it in the Ground among others who have been taking action to flag up the damage done by burning coal. In some cases trains have been high jacked and coal thrown out on the tracks.



Guardian

Those members who aren't too keen on Clarkson may be interested to learn that he's been experimenting with a new technique to save petrol – hypermiling – the aim is to drive really steady and achieve mpg better than the manufacturer's claim.

Tom Harris, Transport Minister, in a parliamentary answer said that 69822 trains had been cancelled in the 12 months to the end of March – 192/ day – ATW cancelled nearly 4 a day and 1st Great Western 22.

Rhodri Clark, the effective, very ace, rail campaigner has been appointed as a Vice President of the Railway Development Society.

The Fishguard enhancements are included in SWWITCH's consultative plan published in July.

Further to last Newsletter – Milford Haven Docks co have erected a plaque detailing the stay of the Great Eastern in the Haven and its length – visitors can pace it out and imagine what a whopper this ship was.

SAFETY IS NO ACCIDENT!

A SAFE TRIP IS A GREAT TRIP!

- # Arrive at your station early to avoid rushing for your train*
- # Think about parking logistics before setting out*
- # Watch your step when boarding and leaving the train*
- # Use handholds/handrails when boarding and moving through the train*
- # Walk don't run on stations and in trains*
- # Read safety info on board.*

SITUATION – NORMAL!

When the consultants examining the reopening of the Ebbw Vale line were asked to provide their estimate of ridership they came up with a figure of 22000 a month rising to 33000 in 2012. Actual ridership on the line, which opened on February 6th after some safety concerns over the state of the track, is 44000. The local MP Trish Law said " It is evident that passenger forecasts have been woefully underestimated".

This is another example of cheeseparing over infrastructure costs in the build period which only yield much higher ones later when alterations have to be made to a working railway. Ebbw Vale was virtually closed down when the initial work for passenger re-opening went ahead. As it is riders are faced with overcrowding and the goal of trains to Newport seems to be strictly manyana – failure to lay enough double track now means that the service cannot be enhanced. Lets hope the WAG learn from this.

DIRTY TRAIN – IT COULD BE WORSE!



Moving the masses: Interior of "Hard Class" car on train No. 48 to Kunming.

If any member has been on Chinese railways recently it would be interesting to learn whether the authorities have effected cleaner travel than is shown in this picture, taken some years ago.

O P I N I O N S
 E X P R E S S
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A CAUTION FOR EUROPEAN TRAVEL

Members using the train to go to Europe should be aware of some research carried out recently by a UK national newspaper. What it found was that SNCF's Rail Europe website will not necessarily provide the most economical ticket because of the way it is programmed whereas phoning up and paying the £6 booking fee that this method incurs can yield substantial savings.

Researchers found that a return journey from London St

Pancras to Cologne in Germany cost £269 booking directly on the net but through a phone operator only £186 + £6 fee. London St Pancras to Mentone in the South of France yielded a massive saving of £233 on the web price of £472. The man at seat 61 [www.seat61.com] told the paper " Sometimes you need to prompt or coerce the agent to rummage about a bit to find the best fare. There are all sorts of quirks when you book tickets for European rail travel. Getting the best deal is an art not a science".

Best tips were

1. *Get Thos Cooks European timetable and Rail Map of Europe*
2. *Look at timetable – German or Swiss Railway websites*
3. *Check out seat61 website for tips*
4. *Use both web and phone*
5. *Try looking at different legs of the journey rather than one through fare splitting it where you have to change trains.*
6. *Make it clear to phone operators you are looking for the cheapest ticket you can get – if the one you're talking to isn't convincing hang up and try another agent.*

CAR PARK NEWS.

Your committee recently highlighted planning opportunities for land adjacent to Manorbier and Saundersfoot stations to provide better access and more car parking facilities. Pembrokeshire County Council have reacted favourably to our suggestions and although these may take some time – it is unlikely that any other use for these sites will be permitted.

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Advertisement. – The Taberna is in the Good Beer Guide for 2007

AIMS of PEMBROKESHIRE RAIL TRAVELLERS ASSOCIATION:

1. *To Press for improvements to rail and associated bus services in
The area West of Carmarthen.*
2. *To encourage greater use of the current services*
3. *To assist in the improvement of the railway environment in particular at stations*
4. *To liase with other pro – rail organizations.*

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 Milford Travel. Charles Street, Milford Haven 01646 692268
 Milford Station Office [open mornings] 01646 693460
 Traintracker – for current running info 0871 2004950
 Transport for London 02072221234
 Great Western Ticket Line 0845 7000125
 Great Western On Line Ticket Sales www.firstgreatwestern.co.uk
 Great Western group travel 0845 7413777
 Great Western Plus Bus www.plusbus.org.uk check add -on fares
 Virgin Trains www.virgintrains.co.uk
 National Rail Information www.nationalrail.co.uk
www.transport-direct.org.uk public transport info
 Europacar – UK car rental 01133882429
 Pembrokeshire County Council – for bus timetable info 01437
 764551
 National Express 0870 5808080
 Richards Bros 01239 613756 www.gobybus.net
www.richardsbros.co.uk
 Silcox Buses 01646 683143 www.silcoxcoaches.co.uk
 North Pembrokeshire transport Forum hatti@woakes.demon.co.uk
 First Cymru buses 0870 6082608 www.firstgroup.com

Pembrokeshire County Council Greenways 01437 776313
greenways@pembrokeshire.gov.uk
 Friends of the Earth www.foepenfro.org.uk
 Festiniog/ Welsh highland Railways www.festrail.co.uk 01286
 677018
 Beacons Bus 01873 853254 www.visitbreconbeacons.com
 Carmarthenshire County Council – transportation
publictransport@carmarthenshire.gov.uk
 Freedom of Wales Flexipass 0870 9000777
www.walesflexipass.com
 Great Western Customer Relations
customer.relations@gwt.firstgroup.com
 Pembrokeshire Rail Travellers Association www.prta.org.uk
 Bus users UK www.bususers.org
 Acorn Travel 01348 74728 www.acorntravel.com
 Trans Wales Bus – www.trawscambria.info
 South West Wales Integrated Transport Consortium: SWWITCH
www.swwitch.org.uk
www.Seat61.com – a useful site for overseas rail travel
 Llandrindod Wells Booking Office – Kelsham Hannah 01597822053
 Ludlow Station Travel – Railway Station, Ludlow 01584877090
 Arriva Cross country [www. Crosscountrytrains.co.uk](http://www.Crosscountrytrains.co.uk) [Cardiff –
 Nottingham
 East Midlands Trains www.eastmidlandstrains.co.uk 08457125678
 Swiss Timetable: www.ch.co

CALL TO ACTION

Seen any vandalism lately? – seen any graffiti
 operators? – people behaving suspiciously around the
 railway?

DIAL 0800 405040 –

**HELP THE RAILWAY TO TAKE CARE OF
ITSELF**

###This is especially important now: the price of scrap metal has reached enormous heights and cable and other thefts are plaguing the track maintainers daily.

JOIN US

Fees are: £4 electronic [all communication electronically] £7 standard[MAIL]/Corporate and Group: £5 electronic[all communication electronically] £10 standard [mail] [50% AFTER July 1st] No joining fee.

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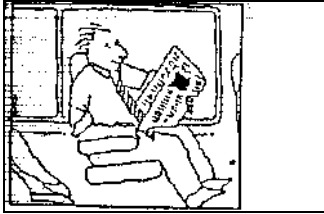
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ASSOCIATION*

SEND PRTA INFO to my friend.....

.....

.....

Cut or Xerox this and send to the membership sec[above] with the appropriate fee.



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