

Rail network expands



OFFICIAL OPENING: A train breaks through the opening banner at Bridgend station

Picture: Bettina Skovbro

Rail campaigners were delighted in June when a passenger rail service came back to the Vale of Glamorgan for the first time in 41 years.

From 12 June, regular services now run between Bridgend and Barry and then along existing track into Cardiff from 12 June 2005.

The final work was completed in the summer to allow 18 miles of the Vale of Glamorgan line to reopen to passenger trains.

Arriva Trains Wales will serve two reopened stations – Rhoose, for Cardiff International Airport, and Llantwit Major.

The Welsh Assembly has supported the £17million project and the line was officially opened by Transport Minister Andrew Davies.

A shuttle bus runs to the terminal, seven minutes away from Rhoose Cardiff International Airport station.

Freight trains continued to travel to Aberthaw power station and Ford's motor plant near Bridgend after regular passenger services were withdrawn in 1964.

The line has also been used for diversions when there was work on the Great Western main line, west of Cardiff.

The recent work has included some new track and extra signalling to increase capacity.

Extra safety measures have been implemented at the pedestrian crossings, and at Bridgend a bay platform has been reinstated.

"The Ford train operates at night so most of the work was done during the day," said Network Rail manager Dave White.

Welsh Conservatives say the trains should run more frequently than once an hour. At the reopening, Mr Davies said it was "a historic day

for transport in Wales. The restoration of passenger services to the Vale of Glamorgan after 40 years represents a major milestone in the delivery of an efficient and integrated transport infrastructure for Wales."

He added that the airport terminal was on the wrong side of the airport for the railway station.

"To change that would be huge expense but obviously we will be working with the airport to improve services," he said.

Clive Williams, the director of the Rail Passengers Committee Wales, said he was delighted at the service. "The committee has always been an advocate for integrated transport, and the provision of a bus link between Rhoose station and the airport terminal is a major step towards achieving that integration," he said.

Graeme Bunker, managing director of Arriva Trains Wales, said the line was great news for the local community and for people travelling to the airport.

Councillor Tom Williams, chair of the South East Wales Transport Alliance (Sewta), said it was "a good start" on improvements which could offer practical alternatives to the car.

To mark the reopening, Railfuture staged its rail reopenings conference in Barry on Saturday 2 July 2005.

The Rail Reopenings Conference was sponsored by Angel Trains, Arriva Trains Wales, First Group and Cardiff International Airport.

In Scotland work is under way to reopen the Larkhall-Milngavie line. For the first time in 25 years construction work is under way on restoring a complete branch line in

Scotland. The Scottish Executive has also embarked on an impressive and major expansion of the Scottish rail network.

Preparations are well under way for reopening Stirling-Alloa-Kinross, the Borders railway, Airdrie-Bathgate, and links to Glasgow and Edinburgh Airport.

The £35million Larkhall-Milngavie link will help 1.5million passengers a year, said Transport Minister Nicol Stephen. Trains should be running by the end of the year.

The Scottish Executive stepped in to rescue the scheme with £16million after Railtrack dropped it.

Strathclyde Passenger Transport and South Lanarkshire Council are also providing grants.

Four new stations will be added to the network at Larkhall, Merryton, Chatelherault and Dawsholm, near Maryhill.

Mr Stephen said: "Scotland can blaze a trail for the rest of the UK in new rail developments."

In Ireland, the government is making financial provision to reopen the Sligo to Limerick line as part of a 10-year plan for rail.

West on Track campaigners were delighted by the good news for the 145-mile route, 114 miles of which are currently disused. Parts of it were closed 30 years ago.

If a similar healthy attitude prevailed in England, we would be looking at the reopening of Cambridge-Oxford, Northampton-Peterborough, the mid Norfolk line from Wymondham to the north Norfolk coast, the former Midland & Great Northern in Norfolk, the Somerset and Dorset line, Bristol-Bournemouth and Carlisle's former rail link to Stranraer in Scotland.



Better use rail

Rail union ASLEF says the Government's "pay as you go" road pricing proposals will do little to solve the real problems of the environment and road congestion.

"Encouraging freight on rail would cut road congestion, cut fatal accidents and improve the environment," said the union's acting general secretary Keith Norman. "The average freight train can remove 50 lorry journeys from our roads."

ASLEF was planning to lobby MPs on 13 July to launch its Who Cares? campaign to move more freight on to rail. The union will also be producing information packs for schools. More info: www.aslef.org.uk

Breathing polluted air, mainly from traffic fumes, kills 32,000 Britons a year and shortens average life expectancy by six months, a European Commission report reveals.

Friends of the Earth's Tony Bosworth said: "The sooner people start leaving their cars at home and use public transport the better."