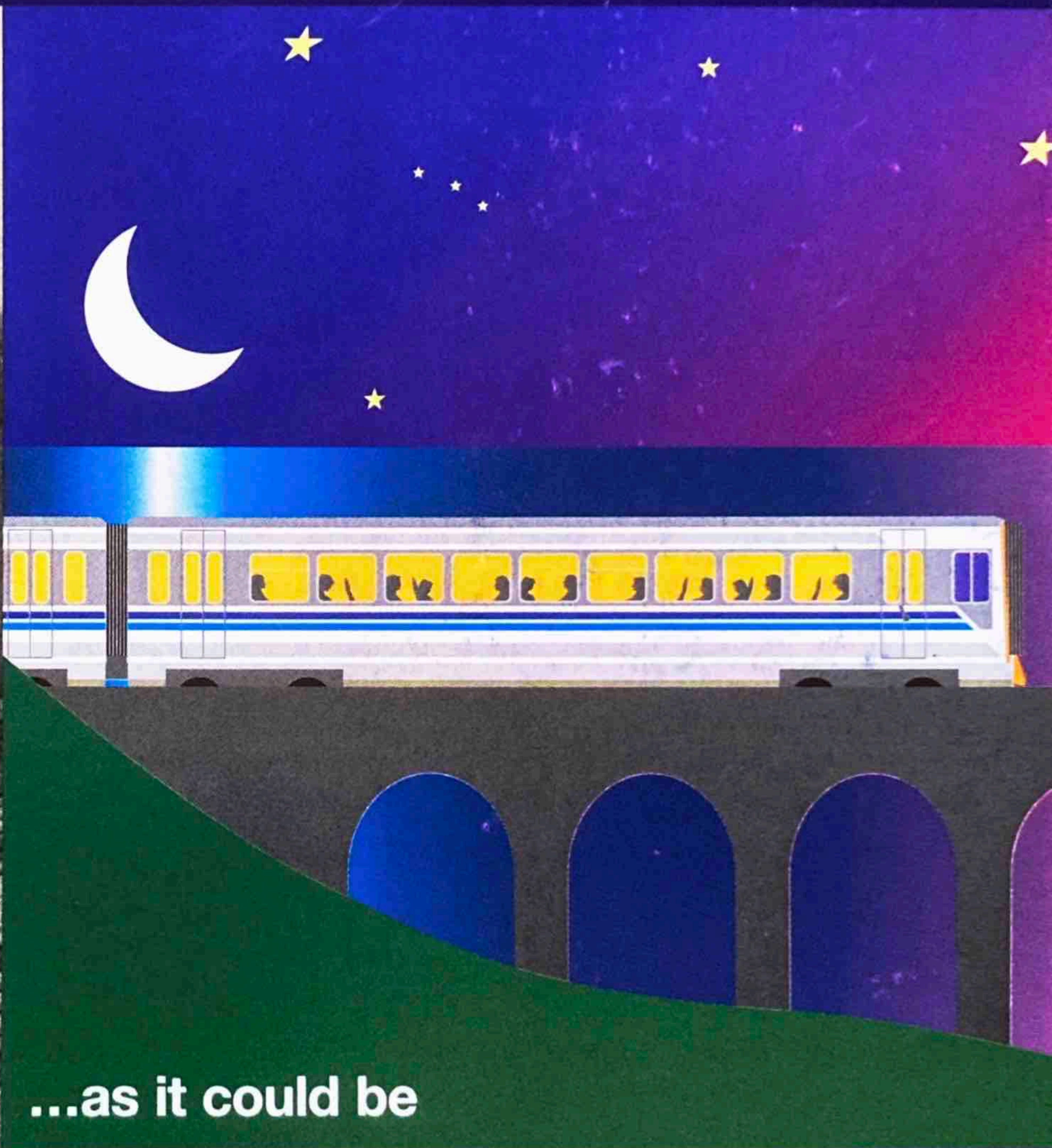


Rails to the Vale

The story of the
Vale of Glamorgan line



As it was...



...as it could be



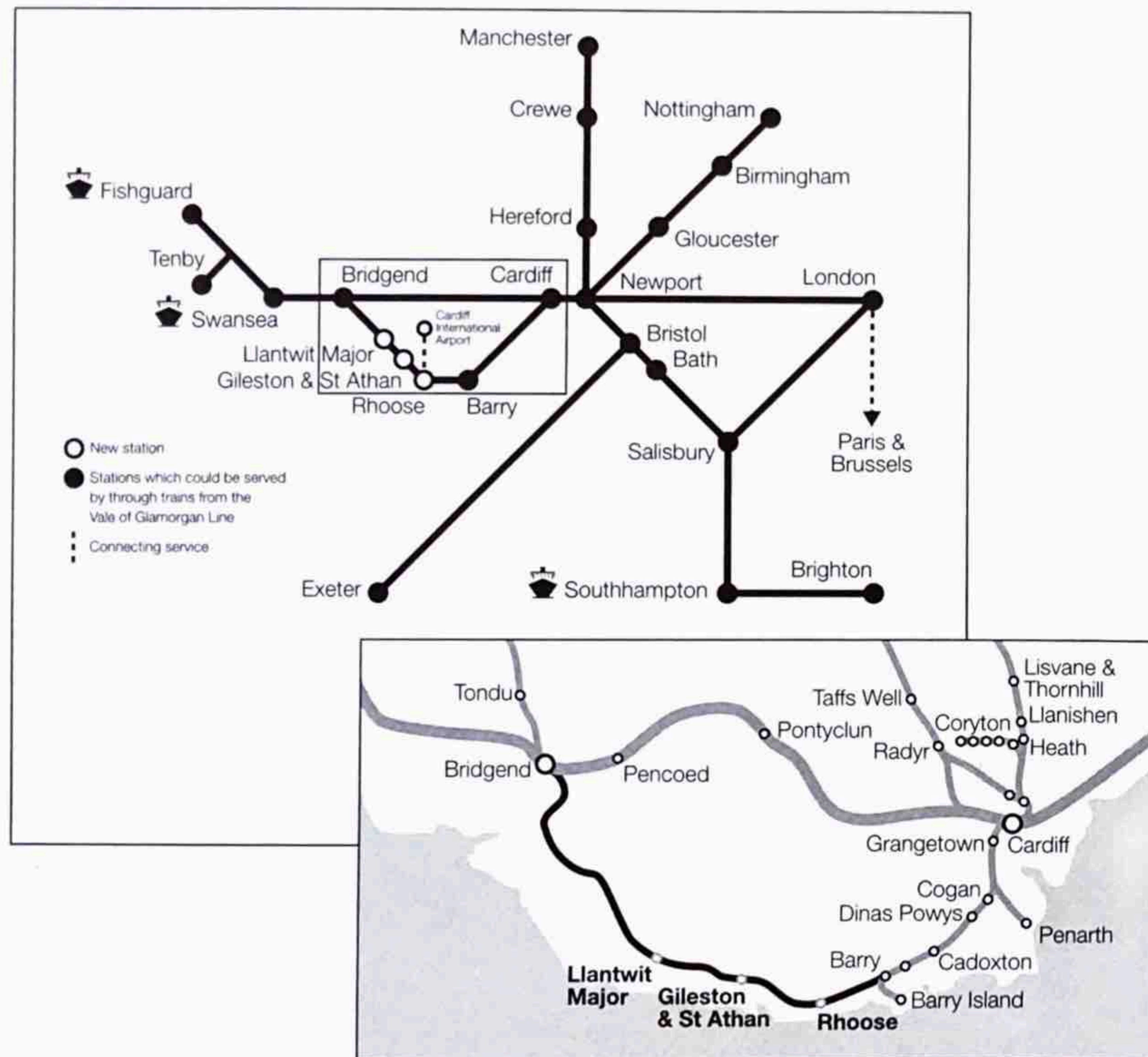
RAILWAY DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY WALES
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The Vale of Glamorgan area with its railways.

Graphic: Robert Neville

Front cover left: Number 82039 on the Vale of Glamorgan line. See page 9 for more information.

Photo: S. Rickard Collection © B.J. Miller

Front cover right: Artists' impression of Class 158 crossing Porthkerry Viaduct by night.

Graphic: Julian Langston and Nick Clark



Class 158 DMU meets Class 253 HST atop the Porthkerry Viaduct when Wales & West's 14.42 from Cardiff passed Great Western Trains' 14.31 service from Bridgend on 15th June 1997. The viaduct has stood for just over 100 years, carrying the railway 110 feet above Porthkerry Country Park on sixteen arched spans of up to 50 feet resting on eighteen piers. It was described by inspectors of the Vale of Glamorgan Railway as handsome work and a fine piece of engineering.

Photo: Bill Price

Foreword

by Rt. Hon John Smith, Member of Parliament for the Vale of Glamorgan

For many readers who are resident in the beautiful Vale of Glamorgan, this book will evoke memories. Memories of catching the train and travelling through cuttings and rolling fields, stopping to pick up the occasional passenger at the tiny halts then running down the long straight past RAF St. Athan. Memories of the sight of the sea at Font-y-gary, of the view from the viaduct at Porthkerry and of the tunnels into Barry. Memories of important stationmasters and guards in their uniforms waving the trains off, or memories of dusty old carriages with that peculiar odour and varnished wood work; and leather window straps. And, most evocative of all, memories of the steam engines, with the sound of whistles, with the smell of steam and hot oil, and the sight of their majestic spoked wheels at work.

In looking back at this old way of life, this book also draws attention to what we in the Vale of Glamorgan are missing today. The steam trains may have disappeared from the Vale, but the railway track from Barry, through Rhoose, Aberthaw, Gileston and Llantwit Major and on to Bridgend are still very much in place. While watching the passenger trains go past on Sundays, many of us have pondered the question; "how could we restore our passenger train service here in the Vale?"

If, like me, you believe a passenger service stopping at communities along the Vale line would be of considerable economic, social and environmental value, this book should also inspire hope. The Railway Development Society argues the case for a high-quality service quite unlike anything which has been considered in the past - yet it could be cheaper to run. Not only would it provide a modern transport link for Llantwit Major, Rhoose and other communities, but it could also aid the development of new facilities at Barry and extend the catchment area of Cardiff International Airport.

Our passenger train services may have gone, but they are far from forgotten.

Chapter I

Introduction

The desire to restore the local passenger train service in the Vale of Glamorgan goes back almost to the day in 1964 when the original service was withdrawn. As the population of Llantwit Major, Rhoose and other settlements grew, so too did the clamour for trains. The rise to prominence of Cardiff International Airport, near Rhoose, added extra weight to the calls for a train service.

Successive local authorities have examined the prospects for a return of passenger trains. Most recently, the new Vale of Glamorgan County Borough Council considered the project in 1996. Sufficient funds for the investments needed, such as building new stations, had been set aside from the proceeds of the sale of the airport. However, the scheme was shelved because the train operating company, Cardiff Railway, would need subsidy to make up the shortfall between income from fares and the cost of operating the service.

The Railway Development Society firmly believes that these figures did not add up because the scheme had been approached in the wrong way. The council was budgeting for a local shuttle service, using cheap bus-style trains, between Llantwit Major and Cardiff - in other words, treating the Vale of Glamorgan as a branch line with a dead-end at Llantwit Major.

The Vale of Glamorgan line is not a branch line. It links directly into the main Swansea to London line, at both Bridgend and Cardiff. Its usefulness as a through route is obvious on many Sundays each year when engineers are at work on the main line and passenger trains, including InterCity services, are diverted to run through the Vale of Glamorgan.

The Railway Development Society believes that a new daily passenger service through the Vale could cover its costs - and even generate profits, given time. The key to this is to treat the line as a through route, not a branch line. This would open the gates to services by high-quality air-conditioned trains on long-distance routes, greatly increasing the number of destinations which could be reached by through train from Barry and other stations in the Vale.

Once this principle is taken on board by the council and the rail businesses, the return of passenger train services to the Vale of Glamorgan cannot be far behind.

Chapter II

Top Station

The Vale of Glamorgan line, between Barry and Bridgend, was one of the last railways to be built in Wales. It was opened on 1st December 1897. Less than 70 years later, on 15th June 1964, the line's passenger services were withdrawn. Yet in its relatively short period as a railway conveying passengers and general goods, the railway had an enormous impact on the development of towns, villages and industries in the Vale of Glamorgan. The railway's importance to those communities during that era continues to fuel the clamour for reinstatement of passenger trains more than 30 years later, and the railway was so central to everyday life that many local residents still cherish memories and anecdotes about the line in its heyday.

So recent, in fact, was the construction of the line that Doris H. Lewis, who now lives in Barry, says her father, born in 1889, used to talk of the building of the new railway. The Llantrisant to Cowbridge railway had been opened in 1865 and extended to Aberthaw in 1892, and Mrs. Lewis recalls this line carrying parties of Sunday School children from the mining valleys into Aberthaw Low Level station. They were on their way to join a train at Aberthaw High Level so that they could proceed to Barry Island for a day out in the 1920s and 30s. She says that in her youth the train was the only means of transport from her home village of Aberthaw.

The railway was opened following pressure from mining companies in the Bridgend valleys who were dissatisfied with the Great Western Railway's monopoly of rail routes to Barry Docks. It took the extension of the Taff Vale Railway's Cowbridge branch to Aberthaw, and talk of its possible extension to Barry, to goad the Barry Railway into putting its money where its mouth was and throwing its weight behind the Vale of Glamorgan scheme.

The line had an inauspicious start. It included several significant engineering works, most notably Porthkerry viaduct which had given trouble even before opening. Only six weeks into the new service, movement of this structure necessitated complete closure of that part of the line. A temporary route was constructed to avoid the viaduct while it was rebuilt, this work being complete by April 1900.

Coal to Barry Docks was the main traffic for several decades but the railway also played a much wider role, carrying passengers and a variety of goods. Coal traffic reached its maximum in 1913 but declined inexorably in the 1930s. At

that time, passenger services also started to feel the pinch, as a result of competition from the burgeoning network of local bus services, though these were indeed local and hardly competed for passengers to and from Cardiff. There was always at least one through train between Llantwit Major and Cardiff, timed to suit working hours, though at other times a change of train at Barry was usually necessary. This was a bone of contention even in the line's earliest years, but is likely to be avoided once the restored passenger service begins (for reasons given later in this book).

The smart, twin-platform station at Llantwit Major, with its accompanying goods yard, was one place where the railway's importance was plain for all to see. Today those station platforms are derelict and infested with weeds, and it sometimes seems incredible that they could once have been the central pivot for an entire community.

Stan Smith, now living in Barry, recalls his days as a junior clerk at Llantwit Major station. He says: "You won't find a railway station in Llantwit Major today and you may even have difficulty in identifying its former site but in July 1937 this GWR station was serving passengers travelling mainly to Bridgend, Barry and Cardiff, dealing with cattle, sheep, milk, coal and the like, also passenger luggage and parcels traffic. It was a typical country railway station of the era, boasting a station master, two senior clerks, a junior clerk, two porters and a goods yard staff of about six men."

The passenger area of the railway complex at Llantwit Major was known as 'Top Station' and is remembered by Eric Thomas, a Llantwit Major resident for over 70 years. In keeping with all the stations along the line, Llantwit Major boasted a fine display of flower beds. Bedding plants to grace these areas of beauty were provided by the gardens department at St. Donats Castle.

'Top station' was often a hive of activity, according to Eric Thomas. The passenger trains were always well used out of Llantwit Major, despite running in competition with bus operators, Hill's and White's to Barry, and Vale Bus to Bridgend. The bulk of passengers comprised many workmen for the cement factories at Aberthaw and Rhose. Others used the train to go shopping and to visit places of entertainment at Barry and Bridgend.

There were distinguished passengers, too. Among them was William Abraham, a Lib/Lab MP for a South Wales valley constituency and a miners' union leader. When Abraham returned to his home, *Bryn Illtud*, following his victory at the General Election, a phaeton and horse were sent to convey the conquering hero from the station. However, to demonstrate their approval of the MP's success, the horse was removed from the shafts of the carriage and the phaeton was pulled around the streets of the town by a team of enthusiastic supporters.

Eric Thomas remembers that passengers of a lowlier standing had to show their tickets as they left the station but some residents remember a variation to this routine. Fred Lewis, a porter at Llantwit Major, should have been on duty at night when a late train came in but he was sometimes not to be found on the station premises. Passengers would alight but they would not be asked to

surrender their tickets until some way from the station building, where they would meet Fred hurrying from a local hostelry!

Many parties of Sunday School children were brought to the town for outings which included sports events on the Pound Field, adjacent to the station. Many other visitors used Llantwit Major station as a means of getting to the beach below the town. A local subscription raised enough money for a road to be built to the Colhugh Beach. The influx of visitors by railway was seen to be a vital source of income to the townsfolk. At one time a substantial settlement of holiday homes and facilities was sited in the valley of the Colhugh just inland from the beach.

On the Feast of St. Barnabas, June 22nd, it was Llantwit Fair Day. The station was again the cornerstone of the activity as hunting horses arrived by train together with hordes of excited, expectant visitors.

Lorna Hughes, now a Vale of Glamorgan County Councillor and past mayor of Llantwit Major remembers one journey on the line that was especially important to her. Towards the end of World War II she travelled by train from her parents' home in Pyle to take up a junior teaching post in the town. She recalls taking her luggage and trusty bicycle on the train. Subsequently, she rose through the ranks to become headteacher of Llanilltud Fawr Infant School.

Parcels and a wide variety of goods were also handled at the station and yard. Fish boxes packed with ice and churns full of milk were common sights at Llantwit Major and other stations on the Vale of Glamorgan line. Of special note was the annual passage of several prize Aberdeen Angus cattle en route to Smithfield Market from the farm of Morgan Board at Frampton. The animals were conveyed to the Llantwit Major Station by horse box and were accompanied by 'minders' in long white coats for their journey to London.



No. 6614 waits at the up platform of Llantwit Major with 'The Leek', a special run jointly by the Monmouthshire and West Glamorgan Railway Societies. This trip from Bridgend to Cardiff on 27th June 1964 was just two weeks after the Vale of Glamorgan line closed to passenger trains. *Photo: Peter Clark*

Eric Thomas' father, Rees Emlyn was employed at Llantwit Major station as Porter and Heavy Goods Driver. There was a large goods yard and goods shed at the station then, as there was till the end of goods traffic from the station in 1967. In Rees' day, goods were carried from the goods yard to homes in the town and to the outlying district by horse and cart. Two private hauliers, Sid Chatterton and Alf Simmonds, serviced the goods yard. Deliveries were made to Ham Manor in Llantwit Major, to St. Donats Castle and to the village of Wick and other settlements in the Llantwit Major catchment.

Eric saw many cattle pass through Llantwit Major station, especially during the 1920s and 1930s, as the town boasted no less than three cattle markets which opened each week on a rota basis. In the week of Christmas all three markets were open and Llantwit Major was akin to a Wild West town with loose cattle in the streets! Cattle were kept in pens outside the station at Llantwit Major and herded into trucks for shipment. The pens were reached by ramps so that the cattle were positioned at the level of the railway wagons ready for shipment. The vehicle used to carry cattle to the station from market was pulled by a stout horse named Jesse.

Rees's father was Bill Thomas 'Haycutter' who put hay in a railway wagon to be carried to breweries and collieries for use with their stables. A loading gauge was situated at Llantwit Major station to check the heights of loads.

Coal was taken from railway trucks stationed in the goods yard for delivery to homesteads in the town and each truck had to be emptied in a set time so that the trucks could be returned to the colliery. Loads of coal for the vicarage above Hillhead were taken by horse and cart to the west end of the church and another horse was hitched to the load so that it could be pulled up the hill past the Gatehouse. Alf Simmonds was responsible for this delivery. The same gentleman had a long wagon so that he could carry long logs for loading onto the railway bogie bolsters.

Roy Billington of St. Athan was another railway employee. He recalls: "My romance with the railways began at Llantwit Major in 1942. The station master was Mr. Berry and among the porters were Ernie and Donald Miles, all of the town. The signalmen were Dick Williams of Turkey Street with Dai Williams and George Johnson of Llandow.

"I joined the GWR as parcel porter, entering incoming and outgoing goods in a ledger. Other duties were cleaning, trimming and filling with paraffin the lamps needed for the signals and ground discs, and keeping the area free of litter. All went well until June 1943 when I was called up to war."

The railway industry in those days offered excellent career prospects, so Mr. Billington returned after the war, in July 1947, to become Porter-Signalman. In this capacity he took turns in the signalbox when one or the other of the regulars was off and no Relief Signalman was available.

"It was also part of my job to oil and look after the pump which supplied water for the locos from the large water tank at Llantwit Major Station," he says. (This pump, in its shed, was situated at the foot of the railway embankment alongside the railway bridge over the Eglwys Brewis Road). "I

also operated the St. Athan Halt signalbox when required, so that access was afforded to the RAF St. Athan spur."

Percy Smith, a signaller at Llantwit Major at around the time of World War II, later became County Alderman, a JP and MBE, leaving the position of Signaller Class 4 open. Roy was promoted, but the era of jobs for life on the railway was approaching twilight.

"In the early 1950s I moved to Rhoose signalbox upgrading to Signaller Class 3," says Roy. "From there I took two temporary summer posts in Barry and in 1960 I gained a permanent post at Barry. In 1961 I gained Barry Junction signalbox which is where I wanted to be and it had taken me twenty years to get there but the post did not last long. The Class 2 post became redundant in two years time with the closure of passenger services to the Vale of Glamorgan and I was forced to accept the post of Senior Railman at Aberthaw dealing with goods traffic for Aberthaw Power Station. There I remained for ten years when, again, the prospect of redundancy raised its ugly head. So, in March 1973 I left the Vale of Glamorgan railway, and British Rail, for a position as a mobile plant operator in Aberthaw Power Station."

In 1966, two years after the withdrawal of passenger services on the Vale of Glamorgan line, the station was reopened for a day or so to enable HM Queen Elizabeth and Prince Phillip to visit St. Donats Castle. It was also found necessary to decorate the platform and erect some kind of shelter for the royal visitors.

This action annoyed T. J. (Joe) Hughes, a headmaster in Llantwit Major, still living in the town. During the dark days of World War II, Joe organised a visit for his pupils to Ninian Park, home of Cardiff City AFC, to watch a wartime international between Wales and England. The Welsh team were soundly beaten but the trip by train was thoroughly enjoyed by the boys at a time of austerity. For some ten years before the closure of the line, Joe organised school excursions from Llantwit Major Station with the whole-hearted cooperation of British Railways. Joe can remember a representative of BR coming to his school to discuss 'travel plans' for the children in his care and their parents. Places such as Bath, Bristol Zoo, Cheddar Gorge and Wells Cathedral, Paignton and the River Dart, Southampton Docks and Windsor Castle were visited.

Rowena Bowen, now Lady Mayoress of Llantwit Major, remembers well, as a schoolgirl, the outings organised by Mr. Hughes. She also recalls turning out in Brownies uniform to greet Queen Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh in 1966.

Following the closure of the Vale of Glamorgan passenger service in 1964 Joe tried to keep alive the annual excursions from his school but all his efforts were in vain. The only exception to the rule of closure was applied to royalty!

Dr. Robin Sheppard of Broughton recalls using the train between 1957 and 1961 to travel from Llantwit Major to Bridgend, where he attended the Grammar/Technical School. On one journey, blasting at the Castle Upon Alun quarry was a little out of synchronisation and the blast caused the train to sway violently. During one journey home to Llantwit Major he noticed that a

pheasant had been 'clipped' by the diesel multiple unit train on which he was travelling about half a mile the Bridgend side of Llandow Wick Road Halt. On arrival home Dr. Sheppard got his brother to give him a lift back to Llandow station so that he could walk back along the line to collect the dead bird which was still warm - the bird made a delicious meal!

Via his brother, Dr. Sheppard was acquainted with one of the signallers at Llantwit Major box known locally as 'Dick Caution' because of his very safety-conscious nature. Many fascinating hours were spent in the signal box as a school boy in his early teens.

During the 1950s the Sheppard family rented a garden allotment adjacent to Llantwit Major Station at the water tank end of the platform so the garden was always well watered in summer. The family was mystified for a while by an increasing number of lumps of coal appearing amongst the garden crops. However, it turned out that these were merely ammunition being thrown by the engine crew trying to hit the rabbits that were eating the sprouts and other produce.

Dr. Sheppard believes the passenger service timetable became completely inappropriate to working and travelling patterns/requirements before the Vale of Glamorgan Line was closed. Through ticketing facilities had been withdrawn a few years prior to the closure so that passengers going beyond Cardiff had to queue there to buy tickets for their ultimate destination and so find their journey disrupted and lengthened in many cases. He can also recall a deliberate policy of reducing the passenger friendliness of all involved with the line, with the intention of justifying the impending closure of that and many other lines throughout the country network.



Standard Class 3 No. 82039 begins the eighteen mile run from Bridgend over the Vale of Glamorgan Railway with the 13.50 service to Barry on 4th July 1955.

Photo: S. Rickard Collection © B.J. Miller

Chapter III

Those magnificent men in their flying machines

The Vale of Glamorgan line played a significant part in the establishment and early operation of the RAF base at St. Athan.

Construction of the base caused an astronomical growth in freight traffic over the line. Extra staff were stationed at Llantwit Major to assist with handling construction materials. For long periods of time train loads of timber and sometimes bricks were to be seen in every available siding between Cardiff and Llantwit Major, all awaiting their turn for delivery to the scene of intense construction activity at St. Athan.

Bricks were a vital commodity at the beginning of World War II when millions of them came from factories, like the one at nearby Tondy, for buildings essential to the camps at RAF St. Athan. The huge loads of bricks had to be unloaded, two at a time, from railway wagons to road trucks by the goods staff. The principal vehicle for haulage was a Latil* tractor and trailer that was 'gas' powered carrying a coal fired boiler. Gloves made from old tyres and inner tubes were essential pieces of clothing for those goods staff as the bricks wore away the skin on the hands in no time at all.

George Scott, now 85 and still living in Barry, joined the railway at Barry Town Station in 1937 as a supernumerary porter working on a part-time basis. Following the commencement of building at RAF St. Athan in 1938 George was transferred to Llantwit Major as a part-time goods porter. He had to commute from Barry on the 07.20 train. His duties at Llantwit Major included the unloading of bricks and other building material for transport to the camps by Latil tractor and trailer. The materials were used for building hangars, airmen's quarters, the NAAFI etc. A garage and canteen were built at Llantwit Major station for the staff and a large maintenance depot was set up there for the use of RAF personnel.

George learnt to drive lorries and parcel vans at the goods depot in the company of Bill Clifford. George recalls a mobile crane being stationed at the

* Latil: An old established French vehicle builder which had considerable success in the UK in the 1930s with a four-wheel drive, heavy duty tractive unit, built under licence by Shelvoke and Drewry.

goods yard operated by a tall slim man named Wyndham Matthews. Whilst driving through the town centre one day George collided with the butcher's van. The police were called and he had to attend Cowbridge Court later but he was found blameless. On another occasion, George was driving his tractor and trailer through Beggars Pound near RAF St. Athan in the blackout when he found himself and his vehicle in a ditch. Several unwanted passengers who had jumped aboard the back of the truck found themselves catapulted off and ended in the ditch too.

George acted as a temporary ticket collector at Llantwit Major and while on late shift one day he needed help from a superior over some matter but his station master was in the pub and was not to be disturbed.

The spur line from St. Athan Halt to within the perimeter of the RAF camp at St. Athan was built while George was working at Llantwit Major. Parts of planes came in by train in long wagons and were held in sidings at Llantwit Major and Gileston.

At the outbreak of World War II, George joined The Home Guard. He enjoyed rifle shooting with his 'platoon' and qualified as a machine gunner. Part of his duties at the outbreak of hostilities was to walk the Porthkerry tunnels and viaduct. The Home Guard had its bases within one of the tunnels and at the foot of one of the viaduct arches.

Mrs. I. D. Davies of Llantwit Major remembers making regular visits to Haverfordwest by rail from the town. Her late husband was a civilian employee at RAF St. Athan and he would have to work till midday on the day of their departure for West Wales. The train left Llantwit at one o'clock so Mr. & Mrs. Davies would take their suitcase to the station the day before the journey and leave it in the luggage office at a cost of one shilling.

Ron Everist, who was himself in the RAF during World War II, served as station master at Llantwit Major for exactly ten years from June 1954 to the end of passenger services. He still lives at Llantwit and looks back fondly on the line as a quiet rural railway, but recalls another great influx of materials for the RAF 'Camp' during the summer of 1958, when part of the complex was designated as 'The Empire Village' for those competing in The Empire Games at Cardiff. Many spectators would have been carried to these events, taking place in the newly designated capital of Wales, along the Vale of Glamorgan railway.

Every September there was a great influx of passenger traffic on a particular Saturday known as 'Battle of Britain Day' when a number of extra trains brought visitors from the 'Valleys' and elsewhere to Gileston station. These visitors were then ferried up to RAF St. Athan by a shuttle service of buses although many hundreds chose to walk. Bill Price, now a Llantwit Major resident, can remember as a child watching the droves of people and continuous stream of vehicles passing through the village of St. Athan where he lived. Ron Everist recalls the extra trains being stationed at Llantwit Major in the several sidings ready for their return at the end of the day.

Stan Smith, who began working for the railway in 1937, recalls, "Within a year Llantwit Major station had grown dramatically and had become a very busy freight and parcels depot, receiving bricks, timber, pipes and other construction materials for the building of the major new RAF station. Thereafter, daily supplies of meat products and other foodstuffs for the RAF Station's NAAFI and Messes became a familiar part of the railway station's parcels business. The original small staff had grown within the year to include an additional station master, about six clerical staff, and a yard staff of approximately fifty!"

The RAF station quickly repaid any debt of gratitude to the railway for its assistance with the construction work. The base quickly became a major source of passenger traffic for the railway. Many forces personnel used the train from Gileston and St. Athan Halt to travel to Llantwit Major for dancing at the Town Hall. Similarly civilians who worked at 'The Camp' travelled by train there. Prior to World War II, during the hostilities and thereafter, many RAF servicemen were moved into and out of RAF St. Athan by train.

The train was also much appreciated by RAF staff as a means of getting them to and from home on leave. It seems certain that today's personnel, and their successors at St. Athan, will find their traveling made easier once the train service is restored.



This Class 153/158 DMU set was a Sunday diversion from Bridgend at 12.01 on 15th June 1997. Here it descends the gradient from Batsleys to pass the site of the 400 foot long up platform at Gileston, which served many homeward bound servicemen from St. Athan and villagers as well. Present servicemen would find a restored service equally useful.

Photo: Bill Price

Chapter IV

Indian summer

The period after World War II saw the line return to business as usual, but there were fundamental changes in the pipeline. The first of these was nationalisation of Britain's private rail companies, including the Great Western Railway, which occurred on January 1st 1948.

Among those to feel the effect of this change was Ron Everist who had served as station master at Abergwynfi, in the Upper Afan Valley, before moving on to the Vale of Glamorgan line. He recalls that as a result of railway nationalisation it was no longer necessary to apportion revenue for everything, from passengers to pigeons, to the various private railway companies which they might use in the course of their journeys. Instead, all revenue was simply attributed to British Railways. At that time travel throughout the railway network was charged at one old penny per mile. Readers may wish to reflect on the wheel having turned full circle; passenger fares on the Bridgend to Cardiff line must now be apportioned between two private companies! Now, though, the average rail fare is more than 12p per mile.

The GWR lettering on the locomotives was painted over and new British Railways emblems, showing a lion and wheel, were applied instead. Generally, though, nationalisation brought few visible changes to the Vale of Glamorgan line. Freight and passenger traffic continued much as before. During the early post-war period the trains were packed with passengers intent on enjoying the festivities in a Britain no longer at war. Local schoolchildren continued to travel by train to Barry County Grammar School from all stations along the line. School outings in post-war days were undertaken to Porthcawl, Barry Island and Bristol Zoo, all by train of course.

The stations on the line remained unchanged. Gileston, like many other stations on the line, had a rough wooden floor in its General Waiting Room, a gents toilet that reeked of Jeyes Fluid, and a bike shed with slatted compartment doors. Bill Price remembers standing on the footbridge across the track, taking in the view up and down the long, straight track between Aberthaw Curve and Batsleys with its not inconsiderable gradient of 1 in 81. This occasionally saw banking engines providing extra power behind diverted, Swansea-bound express trains on a Sunday.

Bill also says, "On the up platform was the waiting room without a door built into the rocks and a huge canopy over a large part of the platform built to

was the only link for his village with the outside world for several days and vital food supplies were brought in by that means. Ron Everist remembers the 08.00 commuter service to Cardiff vanishing in a snow drift one morning while passing through a small cutting, just after leaving St. Athan Halt. It proved impossible to get hold of a railway snowplough so the Officer Commanding at RAF St. Athan obligingly sent some three hundred airmen with shovels to dig the stranded train out!

Despite continuing to play such an important role in the life of the communities it served, the Vale of Glamorgan line's passenger service could not escape the dreaded Beeching axe. Richard Beeching was drafted in because the finances of British Railways were in such a poor state, despite the recent modernisation programme. His hurried report, produced on the strength of minimal statistics, was widely criticised for twisted accounting practices. Many people believed the usefulness of services like the one on the Vale of Glamorgan line was grossly underestimated because Beeching was considering only the number of tickets sold for travel on each individual route. In reality, many of the journeys on the Vale of Glamorgan line were to places much further afield than Bridgend, Barry or Cardiff.

Many of the former passengers quoted in this book recall using the service for journeys to West Wales or England. Bill Price says his family always used the train from Gileston station whenever they needed to travel beyond Llantwit and Barry, but strangely used the bus to travel to those towns.

"Christmas visits to Swansea with my father, mother and, later, my brother, were begun from Gileston station," he says. "We embarked there on summer journeys to Penzance to visit my grandfather (once a GWR diver and underwater welder), and Brighton, via the electrifying and petrifying Southern! Likewise, relatives used the Vale of Glamorgan to visit our home in St. Athan and it was always a great thrill for me to stand on the platform at Gileston waiting for the arrival of the train carrying visitors. On special occasions we might take the train to Bridgend or Cardiff to meet the visitors."

Mrs. Lorna Price travelled frequently from Swansea to Gileston in the 1950s and up until the end of passenger services in 1964. Such a trip required a change at Bridgend for the Vale of Glamorgan line. Mrs. Price says that the journey was most comfortable and her son Tudor was fascinated by the steam locos and always wanted to see the footplate. The children from Swansea always came armed with sweets, crayons and notebooks for the 'long' journey. Over the many years of travelling the Vale landscape became very familiar to the family with their urban homeland contrasting with the countryside and seascape of the Vale. Tudor can only remember the tedium of the wait at Bridgend for the Vale of Glamorgan train necessitating a visit to the shops in the town! However, he thrilled to see the signal box at the Duchy and Lancaster quarry with its sidings because he knew that he was on the Vale of Glamorgan line and he guessed that he would soon be at journeys end! He also recalls the display of colourful posters extolling the benefits of a holiday in Porthcawl, Gwbert, Aberystwyth, Cardigan and places further afield.

Despite the protestations, Beeching had his way. Other than introducing diesel trains, British Railways made no attempt to run the line in a more economical way than it had been run in the early years of the century. The Vale of Glamorgan services were never integrated fully into the regular-interval timetable introduced on the Cardiff Valley lines in 1953. There, passengers had the reassurance of a train every hour, at the same minutes past each hour throughout the day. By contrast, the Vale of Glamorgan timetable remained erratic, with some long gaps between trains. This was especially so in the final years at the west end of the line, where the sparse service was timed to suit schools traffic, making it of little practical use for other purposes.

On 15th June 1964 the passenger service went straight from being an operation with many stations, all of them fully staffed, into oblivion, and the line's regular users had to find alternative methods of transport. Among them were Bill Price and friends, who for some years had relied on the timetabled train services and football specials to get them to Ninian Park to watch Cardiff City, which for a while was in the First Division of the Football League.

"I remember many trains of maroon suburban coaching stock passing through Ninian Park Halt during those halcyon days of Welsh soccer when Ivor Allchurch and John Charles with his brother Mel played for the City and seemed to beat all comers," says Bill. "But it didn't last long. Cardiff City were relegated and the Vale of Glamorgan line was closed to passengers. I was reduced to travelling to Ninian Park for each home match in the back of a van belonging to a friend of my father!"



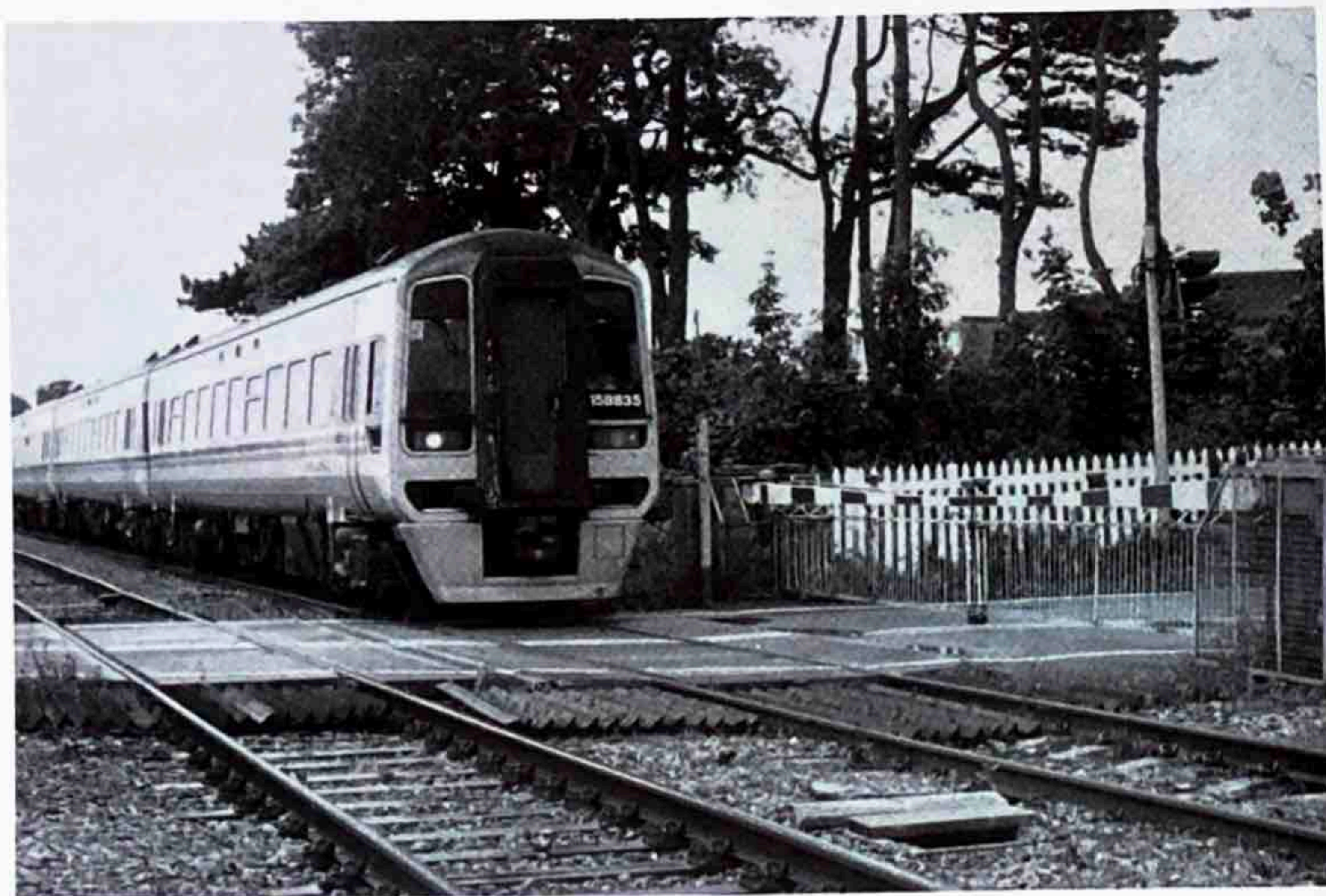
A 3 car DMU set (Class 116) emerges from number 1 tunnel bound for Barry with the 11.09 service from Bridgend on 25th July 1959. The tunnel is about 540 yards long.

Photo: S. Rickard Collection. © B.J. Miller

Chapter V

The Vale of Glamorgan Line Today

Although the Barry to Bridgend line lost its regular passenger service on 15th June 1964, the railway has remained intact. The main reason for retaining the tracks and signals has been to serve the coal-fired power station at Aberthaw. Trains loaded with Welsh coal approached the power station both from the Cardiff direction, from collieries in the Cardiff Valleys, and from the west, from collieries in the valleys north of Bridgend, Port Talbot and Neath. Today most of the coal is imported through Avonmouth docks, near Bristol, or carved from the hills at Cwm Bargoed opencast site. Some arrives from the west from the



A 4 car Class 158 DMU approaches the level crossing to the east of the site of the up platform at Rhooose with a diverted Sunday service from Bridgend at 13.49 on 15th June 1997.

Photo: Bill Price

washery at Onllwyn, north of Neath. The western end of the line is also used by freight trains supplying the Ford plant at Bridgend.

One only has to watch one of these coal trains pass by to appreciate how many heavy lorry journeys through towns and villages in the Vale of Glamorgan are being avoided by the use of the railway. Over the years, the line has also come into its own as an alternative route between Cardiff and Bridgend. Whenever the main line through Pontyclun is closed for planned engineering work or because of emergencies such as flooding, the passenger trains continue to run by switching to the Vale of Glamorgan line.

Residents in the Vale of Glamorgan find it bizarre to see 125 mph InterCity trains, complete with restaurant car and first class carriages, passing through Llantwit Major and other settlements when the local people are deprived of a basic local train service.

In recent years, British Rail has been divided for privatisation into numerous different businesses, several of which are involved with the Vale of Glamorgan line. Railtrack now owns the tracks, signals and signal boxes, as well as the stations on the Barry to Cardiff line. Trains are run by separate train operating companies. These companies pay a fee, known as an access charge, to Railtrack for each train that runs on Railtrack's infrastructure.

This fragmentation of the rail network has imposed extra costs and bureaucracy on the system, but privatisation could also bring opportunities. Cardiff Railway and Wales & West are having to cope with dramatically reducing subsidies by increasing their revenue. The Vale of Glamorgan line could offer them the prospect of extra passengers who can be carried with little extra operating cost.

Railtrack is under pressure from both sides. On the one hand it has shareholders who want higher profits and dividends. On the other is the Rail Regulator, who is keen to see Railtrack investing more in the rail network. For Railtrack, the Barry to Bridgend line must be a seriously under-utilised asset, and an asset which needs constant maintenance to the high standards required for operation of passenger trains. By playing a part in the restoration of passenger services, Railtrack should be able to please its shareholders and the regulator at the same time.

Chapter VI

New Ideas for a New Service

Numerous passenger services which were axed in the 1960s or 1970s have been restored in recent decades. Most of these services, including Bridgend to Maesteg and Pontypridd to Aberdare, are branch services. When the train reaches the end of the re-opened line it returns the way it came.

Previous plans for a service to the Vale of Glamorgan assumed the same would apply here. Llantwit Major would be the westernmost terminus, from which the trains would return to Barry and Cardiff, possibly continuing to destinations on the Valley Lines system radiating from Cardiff Queen Street station. This proposal has several shortcomings. Cardiff would be the only major destination on the route for residents of the Vale of Glamorgan. While Cardiff is undoubtedly a principal destination for those residents, they also need to travel elsewhere. This would be possible by changing to other rail services at Cardiff Central, but experience over the past ten years has shown that passengers are more likely to be attracted to a service that runs through to their ultimate destination. In short, a service to Cardiff only would meet the requirements of some travellers only, possibly a minority of them, and low patronage would result in the need for subsidy to meet the operating costs of the service.

Another flaw in the concept of the local shuttle service is that it would be operated by trains designed for short local journeys. If the new service is to attract people who are used to the comfort of their cars (and the Vale of Glamorgan has relatively high car ownership) a higher standard of comfort will have to be provided. This is also crucial if business travellers using Cardiff International Airport are to find the service acceptable.

Therefore, the Railway Development Society believes that the Vale of Glamorgan service should be provided by long-distance trains. Trains should travel through the Vale from Swansea and points further west to Cardiff and points east and north. Whereas the shuttle service would cater only for some journeys, long-distance regional services would cater for most journeys. They would also be formed of comfortable air-conditioned Class 158 trains.

Under normal circumstances, setting up such a service from scratch would be prohibitively expensive (according to current priorities for public expenditure). However, the Vale of Glamorgan line is unusual in that it runs parallel to a busy main line and has the twin tracks needed to accommodate a

frequent main line service. The basic service can therefore be provided simply by diverting some of the existing services to run through Barry instead of Pontyclun. Those existing services currently run direct to a variety of destinations in England, including Manchester, Hereford, Birmingham, Bristol, Portsmouth, Basingstoke and London. All these places could potentially be served direct from the Vale of Glamorgan.

This exciting possibility opens up journey opportunities for people to travel not only from the Vale - but to it as well. Cardiff International Airport would suddenly become easily accessible to people in Swansea and West Wales, as well as Newport, Bristol, Hereford and Gloucester. It could also bring extra visitors to the Vale, especially to Llantwit Major, Font-y-gary and Barry Island, and offer a new commuting facility to Barry from the Bridgend and Swansea areas.

The cost of providing a service this way is far lower than that of a dedicated shuttle service. This is because the long-distance trains are running already, so the only cost attributable to the Vale of Glamorgan line would be a result of the slightly greater distance involved. By contrast, the entire costs of a shuttle service - including wages for drivers and conductors, fuel, access charges to Railtrack - would be attributable to the Vale of Glamorgan.

A variant of the Railway Development Society's proposals has been put forward by the DSW Rail consultancy which is headed by John Davies, British Rail's former manager for Wales. The consultants have drawn up plans for a South Wales Metro service stretching from West Wales to Abergavenny and Bristol and providing frequent, comfortable and reliable services on several corridors. One corridor recommended by DSW Rail is Carmarthen to Bristol via Swansea, the Vale of Glamorgan and Cardiff. Common to this proposal and that of the Railway Development Society is the idea of a service right through the Vale to open up numerous new journey opportunities.



A 2 car Class 158 DMU sprints up the steepest and longest gradient on the Vale of Glamorgan line at 1 in 81 bound for Bridgend on a Sunday service diversion from Cardiff at 14.42 on 29th June 1997. Aberthaw Power Stations A and B can be seen in the background.

Photo: Steve Davies

Chapter VII

Putting Communities back on the Rail Map

The new Vale of Glamorgan rail service is likely to call at three new stations - Llantwit Major, Gileston & St. Athan, and Rhoose & Cardiff International Airport. Those areas are likely to derive significant economic, social and environmental benefits from the train service. Indeed, at least one estate agency is already telling prospective house buyers that a train service is likely to be provided soon - such is the importance attached to it.

Perhaps most importantly, the train service would open up new employment opportunities for Vale of Glamorgan residents. The service would be especially useful to the young, unemployed and anyone else who cannot afford to purchase a car, tax, maintain and insure it, and pay for fuel. The train would be a reliable, comfortable and relatively cheap method of reaching major employment areas such as Cardiff, Bridgend, Swansea and even Bristol. The Railway Development Society is campaigning for a new station at Celtic Lakes, near Newport, where the Korean electronics firm LG will eventually employ more than 6,000 people at its new factories. A Vale of Glamorgan train service of the kind proposed by the Railway Development Society would provide direct and rapid access to LG from Llantwit Major, Barry and other places.

The potential impact of the train service on local unemployment is illustrated by a previous new rail service in Scotland. In 1986 passenger trains began to link the town of Bathgate with Edinburgh. Within six months of the service's start, youth unemployment in the Bathgate area had fallen by 40%.

The unemployed are not the only people who do not have cars at their disposal. The more elderly members of society would find the train a great help for getting around, as would members of one-car households where the car is normally used to take one family member to work. Local train services also grant extra freedom and independence to young people, as is demonstrated by the Valley Lines network every Saturday and during school holidays. This freedom to travel could encourage young people to continue into further education or training. All new stations in the Vale of Glamorgan would have ramped access, so the train service would be accessible to the disabled and to travellers who are laden with shopping, pushchairs or luggage.

Royal Air Force personnel stationed at St. Athan would find the train service useful, especially for going on leave. The trains would also provide a commuting facility for staff at Cardiff Wales Airport and other business premises in the Vale.

One of the biggest benefits of the train service would not be visible on the trains or stations - i.e. the impact of trains on road traffic levels. The coal trains serving Aberthaw power station already demonstrate the value of the railway in keeping heavy lorries off the local road network. In similar fashion, passenger trains should reduce the number of car journeys on the roads, or at least put the brakes on the current growth in car journeys.

A train service of the kind proposed by the Railway Development Society would encourage motorists to leave their cars at home, or at the nearest station car park, and take the train. This is because the service would be as comfortable as the private car and quicker for some journeys. It would avoid road congestion in Cardiff and other urban areas, as well as the hassle of searching for parking space. The cost of the train ticket would compare favourably with parking fees and fuel costs. Good connections into InterCity services at Cardiff Central would make the local service an attractive alternative for people who currently drive to Cardiff Central whenever they wish to catch the train to London.

The benefits of reduced traffic volumes are numerous. Parents would feel happier about letting their children play outside and walk or cycle to school. The air would be less polluted, the roads would be safer for pedestrians. Even the people who still need to travel in cars, buses, vans and lorries would benefit from fewer traffic jams.

The question of noise pollution is a concern for some householders whose properties are close to the railway line. It must be stressed, however, that the passenger trains used for the local service would be far lighter than the freight trains which are now common on the line. The trains which would be used if the Railway Development Society's proposals came to fruition have aluminium bodywork and normally run in pairs of self-powered carriages which weigh 38 tonnes each. By comparison, locomotives used on the current freight trains weigh up to 125 tonnes each. The coal trains are much longer than passenger trains and the empty wagons sometimes create a hollow rattling noise which does not arise from passenger trains.

At the end of the day, it must be remembered that each two-carriage train can carry well over 150 passengers. The alternative to the passage of an occasional light-weight passenger train is a constant procession of cars along main roads which generally pass closer to houses than the railway line does.

Chapter VIII

Helping the Barry Boom

Barry is a town which, at the time of writing, is undergoing a huge facelift. The Welsh Development Agency and other organisations are remodelling most of the former docklands to provide a base for a wide range of employment, leisure and retail facilities. A train service running between west and east Wales via the Vale of Glamorgan could contribute enormously to the success of this ambitious redevelopment.

At the moment Barry has three stations plus one at Cadoxton. All are part of the Cardiff Railway Company's Valley Lines network. Trains run frequently to Cardiff and up into the Cardiff Valleys, giving useful access to the employment and retail area adjacent to Cardiff Central and Cardiff Queen Street stations, as well as to the University of Wales college and other institutions at Cathays. The University of Glamorgan at Treforest is also well served by trains from Barry. To go anywhere else of significance, however, passengers from Barry had to change trains until recently, and changing trains is known to be a major disincentive to rail travel for many potential passengers.

On 29th September 1997, Wales & West introduced a through, weekday service between Barry and Birmingham. This has been achieved by starting the first train of the day to Birmingham from Barry Island instead of Cardiff, and similarly extending the last train from Birmingham through to Barry Island.

This is just one train per day in each direction, but it is a start to putting Barry on the main-line rail map of Britain. The train service proposed by the Railway Development Society would expand on this by running more trains and extending them right through the Vale of Glamorgan. Passengers would be able to board a train at Barry and alight from the same train at Bristol, Hereford, Manchester, Birmingham or Portsmouth - and possibly even London Waterloo. Trains would also provide direct access to major employment sites, including the giant LG electronics inward investment near Newport and the Ministry of Defence headquarters at Filton Abbey Wood, near Bristol.

By catching a train running in the opposite direction, passengers who board at Barry would be able to travel - without changing trains - to Bridgend and the city of Swansea. Some trains might also continue to the beautiful countryside of Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire, possibly providing a direct link to the Irish Sea ferry services.

The number of journey purposes which the trains would fulfill - among them visiting friends and relatives, going on holiday, commuting, business trips, day outings, shopping, visiting the theatre or night-clubs - is boundless.

Of course, the service also works in reverse, making Barry more accessible to people who live outside the area. If the train is useful for a mother in Barry to visit her grown-up daughter in, say, Neath, then the same service will provide an easy route for the daughter to visit her mother in Barry.

Barry Island already attracts crowds of visitors by train, especially from the Valleys and Cardiff which are linked directly by rail. The new train service would open Barry Island to new markets - Cwmbran and Newport in the east and Bridgend and Maesteg in the west. Passengers would simply alight at Barry station and walk or catch one of the frequent Cardiff Railway services to Barry Island.

Barry's importance as a leisure zone will soon increase enormously as new attractions and shops are opened as part of the Barry Waterfront redevelopment. Barry will even have its own working steam railway! Many of these attractions will cater for large numbers of visitors - and indeed will depend on attracting large numbers for their commercial survival. The train service would not only provide a means of access for many people but also reduce pressure on the local roads from people visiting the new facilities. Barry Island's serious car parking problems could also be alleviated by greater usage of trains.



No. 374078 'Loch Rannoch' heads an enthusiasts' special named 'Scrimmager' passing through Barry on its way to Bridgend via the Vale of Glamorgan line at 11.42 am on Saturday 22nd April 1995. Photo: Steve Davies

Chapter IX

The only Rail-served Airport in South-West Britain

Cardiff International Airport's location alongside the Vale of Glamorgan line is fortuitous, from several points of view. For a start, a train service of the quality and frequency proposed by the Railway Development Society might not be viable without the addition of passengers who would use it to travel to and from the airport. Equally, the airport itself would not attract enough train passengers to justify the service without the addition of many passengers who would be making the types of journey described in the previous two chapters.

Passengers travelling to the airport would alight at Rhoose, where a road shuttle vehicle would be waiting to take them the short distance to the airport terminal building. This shuttle would function in a manner similar to the internal buses used at many major airports in Europe. During the summer holiday season there ought to be sufficient passengers alighting to justify a shuttle bus, with a wide entrance and plenty of space for luggage. During the winter a smaller vehicle could be used to provide the courtesy link such as a minibus, or even a large car or taxi.

Careful consideration will be needed in the design stage of Rhoose station to ensure that passengers do not encounter a sudden drop in standards after leaving the airport. A heated waiting room with clean toilets and comfortable seating is essential and the courtesy bus or car should draw up alongside the platform so that no steps or ramps have to be negotiated. Perhaps the simplest way to meet these objectives would be to create between the two railway tracks a single platform onto which the courtesy shuttle can drive. This design would entail construction of only one set of waiting facilities, and the courtesy vehicle would be able to serve passengers using trains in both directions from a single pick-up and drop-off point.

An information link between station and airport would also be desirable. Screens at the airport terminal should display real-time information about the train service, since passengers may prefer to linger at the terminal if they have a 40-minute wait for the train. Whenever a courtesy shuttle is about to leave the terminal, announcements and displays should inform passengers of the stations where the connecting train service will call. Although not essential, a display of flight information at the station would enhance the quality of service.

This would involve simply repeating the information shown on the airport's own monitor screens and would help to put passengers at ease as they transfer from train to courtesy shuttle.

The main appeal of this service would be to holiday-makers, who form the majority of the one-million-plus passengers using Cardiff International Airport every year. Using the rail link would be far cheaper than parking a car at the airport for a fortnight. It would also avoid imposing on friends or relatives to act as chauffeurs - a tedious duty if the return flight is delayed.

Business travellers could also use the train service - but for this a high-quality service is paramount. Bus-style Pacer trains, as used on the Valley Lines, simply do not have the ambience and comfort that business travellers would require. The air-conditioned, 90mph Class 158 trains (which would run the service proposed by the Railway Development Society) are a much more suitable product, offering tables for working and a mixture of airline-style seating for privacy and seating bays for groups to be together.

Careful timetabling would be needed to attract business travellers to the train service. Trains would be needed in the early morning, when most scheduled flights depart, and early evening, when most return. Business travellers would not be prepared to use a train service if it entailed a long wait on the way back. As it grows, Cardiff International Airport is employing increasing numbers of staff, who would find the new train service a boon for commuting. Some of these staff are already regular users of the rail-link bus between the airport and Cardiff Central station, via Culverhouse Cross.

Train tickets are valid on this bus but the service does not provide an accurate indicator of demand for a train service to the airport itself. With all due respect to the operator of the bus link, it has to be said that the bus is simply of too low a quality to attract business travellers. Also the interface between rail and bus at Cardiff Central is rather more slap-dash and shabby than one would expect of a purpose-built facility at Rhoose.

The bus is not ideally suited to holiday-makers either. It is not a low-floor bus offering level access from the pavement, so passengers have to carry their luggage up a series of steps as they board the vehicle.

It is said by many, including the airport's own management, that the quality of the road between Cardiff and Barry is a major disincentive to people who might otherwise use their local airport. Whatever these problems are perceived to be (and traffic congestion around Culverhouse Cross is a very real problem at certain times of the day) the rail-link bus to the airport cannot avoid them. Few people would be willing to leave their cars at home to travel on a bus which takes them into the same traffic jams as they could otherwise endure in the comfort of their own cars. The rail service, in complete contrast, would bypass all road congestion and take exactly the same time to reach the airport during the rush hour as in off-peak periods.

A rail link would also improve Cardiff International Airport's potential to attract incoming visitors. Such passengers do not normally have private transport to hand when they arrive at the airport so the availability of

convenient and suitable onward transport is highly influential when they book their flights. Train services are perhaps held in higher regard overseas than in Britain, and knowing that an airport is rail-served gives a guarantee of user-friendly and reliable transport to the prospective passenger. The rail link could therefore help to attract many more overseas tourists to Wales, a country in which tourism is the second largest economic sector.

Perhaps the most fruitful market to exploit would be the Dutch tourist market. KLM Royal Dutch Airlines flies several times a day between Amsterdam and Cardiff, and by happy coincidence the Dutch love the mountainous scenery of Wales. Using a combination of air and rail travel, Dutch holiday makers could be in Tenby or the Black Mountains near Abergavenny within a few hours of leaving Amsterdam. By virtue of the rail service to and from Rhoose, Cardiff International Airport would join an elite band of British airports which have a direct train service. Large sums have been invested at several airports - including Manchester, Heathrow, Stansted and Newcastle - to create new rail connections from pre-existing railway lines several miles away from the airports. Happily, Cardiff International Airport is far closer to a functioning railway line than any of those and the expense of setting up the rail link facility at Rhoose is, by comparison, minuscule.

Even more significantly, Cardiff International Airport is the only airport in the whole of South-west Britain to be so close to a railway line. This potentially gives the airport a huge competitive advantage over its rivals, notably Bristol. If the train service is of high enough quality, there is no reason why Cardiff International Airport should not be able to attract new passengers from the other side of the Severn, the Welsh Marches and Gloucestershire, as well as Swansea and West Wales - all of which would be linked by through train to the airport under the Railway Development Society's proposals.

A bigger catchment area would render viable a wider range of scheduled and charter flights so, in this way too, the train service could contribute to economic growth in South Wales.

Chapter X

The Likely Costs

A high-quality train service is normally expensive to provide but, paradoxically, for the Vale of Glamorgan line it would actually be cheaper than a train service of lower quality.

The capital costs of high- and low-quality services for the Vale are almost equal. The principal investment needed will be construction of three new stations, including car parking or setting-down areas, waiting shelters, lighting, information displays, footbridges and ramped access for the disabled. Some upgrading of track and signals will also be needed. The cost has already been estimated at between £2 - £3 million - a favourable sum compared with the £54 million estimate for the planned new road between Cardiff and Barry. The Vale of Glamorgan council set aside enough money for the work from the money it received from the sale of Cardiff International Airport.

The Railway Development Society recommends some extra expenditure to ensure that the service is of suitably high quality. Track and signals between Llantwit Major and Bridgend should be upgraded for higher train speeds. The design for an interchange at Rhoose described in the previous chapter will cost more than the work allowed for in the original estimate.

There is no reason why the bill, albeit a modest one, for this extra work should fall only on the Vale of Glamorgan council. The main beneficiaries of a high-quality airport rail link would be people living outside the area, the private owners of the airport, the Welsh tourism industry and the Welsh economy generally. Therefore it would not be unreasonable for relevant organisations - including the Welsh Office, Welsh Development Agency, Wales Tourist Board, TBI (the airport company), Cardiff County Council and other local authorities - to contribute to any costs associated with securing the necessary quality of service for airport passengers.

There is also a compelling reason for Railtrack, the private owner of the former British Rail infrastructure, to fund the required upgrading of track and signals. At present the main line between Cardiff and Bridgend (via Pontyclun) is extremely busy, carrying three or more passenger trains per hour as well as many freight trains. It is also likely to get busier in the near future.

As part of its bid for the InterCity franchise in South Wales, Great Western Trains promised to investigate the feasibility of doubling the frequency of its hourly London to Swansea trains to half-hourly. Bridgend County Council is

interested in doubling the frequency of the hourly Cardiff to Maesteg service, which also uses the main line through Pontyclun, and it is widely accepted that the Swanline local service between Swansea and Cardiff needs a higher frequency if it is to succeed. At the same time, the new private owner of the rail-freight business has a target - which on current trends it is likely to hit - of increasing the amount of freight carried by rail by 10% by the end of the century. As the industrial coastal corridor of South Wales is already one of rail-freight's most fertile grounds, it seems certain that the main line through Pontyclun will be carrying increasing quantities of freight in the coming years.

It is difficult to see how the main line - which has only two tracks - will be able to accommodate all this extra traffic, at least without services becoming less reliable. The Vale of Glamorgan line is surely the key. If a proportion of trains currently using the main line is diverted to run through the Vale, then the number of trains that have to be handled by the main line will fall immediately.

The operators of the passenger trains will not, however, be prepared to run a large number of services through the Vale if the journey is far slower than by the main line. The cost to Railtrack of improving the tracks for faster train services - between Barry and Cardiff as well as Barry and Bridgend - should be paid back quickly if it helps Railtrack to accommodate all the extra services planned for the next few years. Each extra service brings in extra income for Railtrack and each passenger train delayed by, for example, a slow-moving freight train triggers a penalty payment from Railtrack to the train operator affected. It is easy to see, therefore, how Railtrack could quickly benefit.

Even without a grasp of these complexities, any businessman could see that possessing an asset of the size of the Vale of Glamorgan line and using it for just a few coal trains each day just does not make commercial sense, especially when that line passes through large communities and alongside a thriving regional airport.

A more complex issue than the one-off capital cost arises from the on-going cost of providing the new train service. The shuttle train between Cardiff and Llantwit Major which was investigated by the council in 1996 would have left an annual shortfall of £200,000 between income from fares and operating costs. While the council was happy to pay for the infrastructure needed, it was not prepared to pay out revenue support every year for the foreseeable future.

The service proposed by the Railway Development Society solves this problem through both increased income from fares and lower operating costs. As this book has shown, a long-distance service through the Vale would cater for far more journeys than a shuttle between Cardiff and Llantwit Major. Not only would there be more fare-paying passengers but each passenger would, on average, be travelling further and therefore paying a higher fare.

The cost of the shuttle would be attributed entirely to the Vale of Glamorgan service since it would not be serving any other market. The costs attributable to a Vale service provided primarily by diverting trains that already run via Pontyclun would be far lower. The train operator is already paying the driver

and conductor and the Railtrack access fee (which would presumably be the same or lower for travel via the Vale for the reasons outlined above). The only increase in costs would arise from the slightly greater distance, hence slightly greater fuel consumption and wear and tear, involved in running via Llantwit Major instead of Pontyclun.

The train operator will naturally be concerned about the effect of this slightly longer journey on passengers travelling between Swansea and Cardiff. Provided the tracks in the Vale are upgraded, the difference in journey time between the two routes should be in the order of 10 or 15 minutes. The long-distance regional trains already pause 15 or 20 minutes at Cardiff Central for servicing and there is no evidence that this delay puts anyone off travelling on these trains.

Long-distance trains take 50 minutes to travel between Swansea and Cardiff, while the Swanline local trains take between 15 and 20 minutes longer to make the same journey. There is no evidence that the extra time taken deters passengers from using the Swanline services to travel between principal stations on the route, mainly Cardiff and Swansea. Therefore it seems unlikely that passengers will object to spending a few minutes longer in transit whenever their train is running via the Vale of Glamorgan (and the beautiful coastal views from the train between Porthkerry and Aberthaw should more than compensate during daylight hours!). Passengers simply want the next available train which is going direct to the destinations they want.

If by any chance some passengers are put off by the detour around the Vale of Glamorgan, this small loss will be easily counter-balanced by the huge new markets which the trains would tap, particularly through calling at Barry and Cardiff International Airport. In fact, those new markets are probably significant enough to merit extra trains being laid on in addition to the long-distance services which currently run between Swansea and Cardiff and onwards to Manchester, Birmingham or Portsmouth. Many services on these important corridors currently do not run west of Cardiff.

In its successful bids for both the South Wales and West Railway, and Cardiff Railway Company, the private company Prism Rail promised to introduce six through services each way daily between Pontypridd and Manchester / Portsmouth. This was to be achieved simply by extending trains which now terminate at Cardiff up the Valley Lines system to Pontypridd. However, the Class 158 trains used for these long-distance services are wider than normal Valley Lines trains and would collide with station platforms between Cardiff and Pontypridd. Instead, Wales & West (which was the South Wales and West Railway) have introduced a single daily return service between Barry and Birmingham, as there is no such problem on this line. Indeed the Vale of Glamorgan line is already used to divert main line trains. It is only a tiny step to expand on this one, daily return service, by running more trains and extending them the few miles to Rhoose for the local and airport trade. From there it should make commercial sense to continue at least to Bridgend, for the reasons outlined in this book.

Chapter XI

Conclusion

A high-quality train service through the Vale of Glamorgan as part of the long-distance rail network in Britain should satisfy the local population, travellers using Cardiff International Airport and the local authority - at the same time as meeting the strict commercial criteria applied to all developments by the private companies involved. It could even be argued that the organisations involved are being socially irresponsible in keeping such a valuable asset as the Barry to Bridgend line out of passenger use at a time of extreme concern about growing traffic levels and the environmental impact of yet more new roads.

A long-distance service through the Vale makes far more sense in financial terms than the local shuttle service considered hitherto. But even if the Railway Development Society's proposal is accepted, there is still a danger that the service could be started on a shoestring budget. That is precisely what happened when the Pontypridd to Aberdare and Bridgend to Maesteg lines were reopened, in 1988 and 1992 respectively. As a result, the local authorities concerned are now trying to figure out ways of providing extra trains on both lines. Overcrowding of certain trains has become a serious concern on the Aberdare line.

The risk from skimping on the Vale of Glamorgan railway budget is not one of overcrowding - just the opposite in fact. If the service is of poor quality then local residents will vote with their feet. If the interchange and courtesy shuttle at Cardiff International Airport is not fluent and reliable enough, or is undermined by poor information or inadequate waiting facilities, then passengers will not use the trains to reach the airport. If the track is not upgraded suitably, then the detour through the Vale will be unacceptably slow for passengers and *Wales & West*.

For this service to succeed, everyone involved will have to strive to provide the highest possible quality - not the bare minimum. For the sake of the regional economy and the local population, it is essential that the ship is not ruined for the want of a ha'p'orth of tar.

The Railway Development Society

The RDS is the only national pro-rail group independent of both railway management and trade unions. It is a national, voluntary organisation with branches throughout Great Britain (including three in Wales). It was formed in 1978, and acts as a campaign for a fairer share of transport investment for the railways, and as a consumer organisation representing rail users. It is not linked with any political party, and has members of all shades of political opinion.

We seek a better rail system in Britain because we believe that railways offer a safer and more fuel-efficient alternative to the uncontrolled growth of road transport for both passengers and freight. Trains are much less damaging to the environment of towns and countryside, and to the health and safety of our citizens.

As campaigners, we have pressed, with some success, for better local and regional trains, for re-opening of lines and stations closed to passengers, and for retention of network benefits as the railway industry was restructured for privatisation. We also act as a national advisory and co-ordinating body for the many local rail users' groups. We hold regular conferences, and publish books, reports and leaflets on specific issues. Members receive a quarterly national magazine *Railwatch*, and newsletters produced by their individual branch.

As a voluntary body financed mainly from members' individual subscriptions, we cannot match the power of the roads lobby. Nevertheless, we have made sure that the case for railways is heard and we are determined to continue pressing for a better future for rail transport in Britain.

Membership costs £15 p.a. for individuals, (£7.50 for students / unwaged / retired). Family membership is available at £15 plus £1 for each additional member of the household. Corporate rates are available on request.

Please write to
RDS Wales Membership Secretary
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Acknowledgments

The Railway Development Society is grateful to the following, without who's help and hard work, this book would not have been possible:

Nick Clark, Peter Clark, Rhodri Clark, Julian Langston, Robert Neville,
 Bill Price, Steve Snook.
 The suppliers of photographs and graphics (acknowledged individually).
 Residents of the Vale of Glamorgan who provided material for the book.
 Blue Circle Industries PLC, who provided financial assistance.

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Published by the Railway Development Society South Wales.

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Rails to the Vale

The story of the Vale of Glamorgan line

Rails to the Vale is about the Vale of Glamorgan line, past and future. It looks back with recollections of the line in its heyday and its effect on the local communities. Then it looks forward with details of innovative proposals for the passenger service to be restored. These proposals show how an under-utilised section of railway could be used to provide daily passenger trains serving Llantwit Major, Gileston, St. Athan, Rhoose and Cardiff International Airport.



The photograph shows the potential site of a new station at Llantwit Major. This is adjacent to the small bus station, thus having the potential of an important interchange between train and bus.

Photo: Bill Price

Price £1.99

Published by the Railway Development Society South Wales, November 1997

ISBN 0 901283 12 6