



London

By Keith Dyll

keith.dyll@tesco.net

Cricklewood All appears to have gone quiet as Barnet Council consider the submissions regarding the future of the rail freight sidings site. One concern is that the council is believed to have an interest in part of the site. The developers want to put a 40-storey office block on the site, a shopping centre on the opposite side of the North Circular road to Brent Cross, as well as low-cost housing at the Cricklewood end of the sidings. The main claim for the development is that only 25% of site users will come by car. The London branch of Railfuture regards this as ridiculously low. We believe the most likely volume of car usage to be 75% even with a new station on the main line. Existing roads are already full and could not cope with a 25% rise in traffic. Taxpayers will be left footing the bill for road improvements at a later date. At the same time rail freight potential of the site will be ruined. Organisations known to be against the development are: the Freight Transport Association, EWS, the Rail Freight Group, Railfuture, National Council for Inland Transport, and Transport 2000.

Wessex

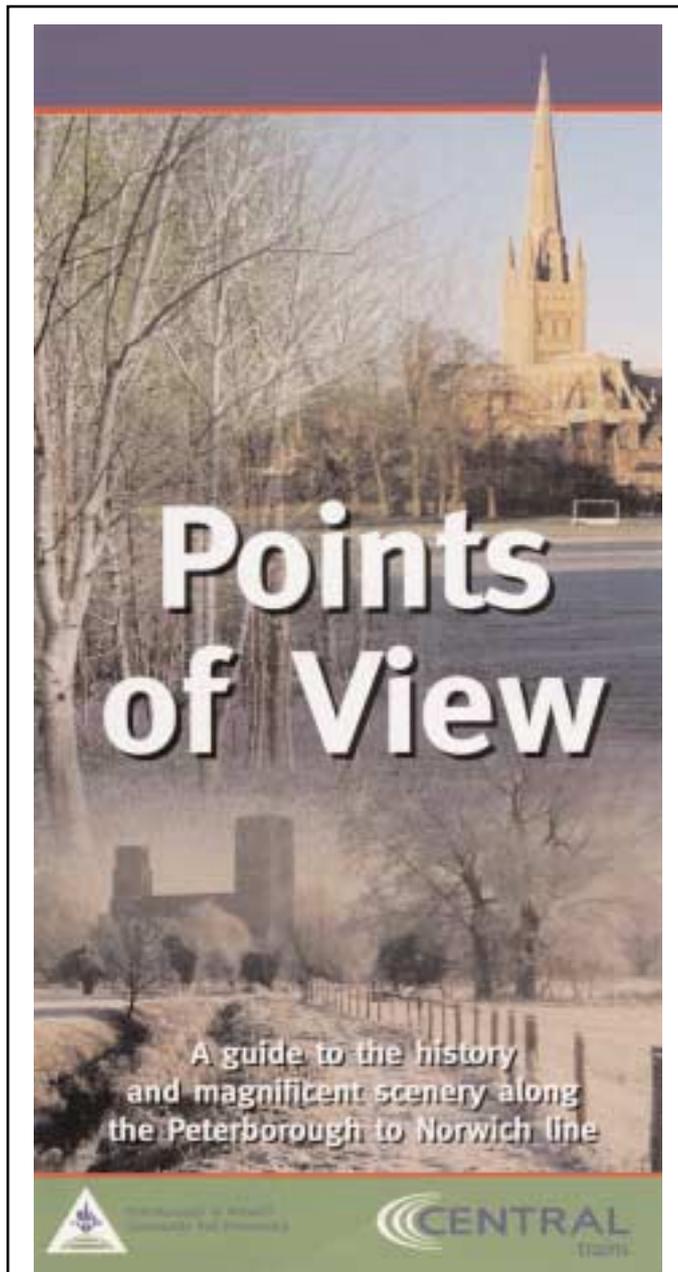
By Kevin Kidney

railfuture@kkca.co.uk

St Mary's In the light of recent redevelopments at Northam, Southampton, in conjunction with the Southampton Football Stadium at St Mary's and development of a Siemens Desiro train care depot at Northam for new South West Trains EMU's, there has been local campaigning for the inclusion of a new station to serve the football ground.

Salisbury freight yard After hearing of proposals for redevelopment of Salisbury east yard we responded to the planning department of Salisbury district council pointing out the need for space for any future rail freight facilities within Salisbury.

Isle of Wight Railways Our group is actively following events on the Isle of Wight concerning future redevelopment of the line. A recent study has recommended proceeding with the purchase and refurbishment of more second hand ex-London Transport Tube trains rather than conversion to light rail with possible extensions. We have also learned that the



This leaflet folds open to reveal a map of the Norwich-Peterborough line and is aimed at promoting its use. It gives ideas of where to visit, details of fares as well as telephone numbers and website addresses. Funded by local authorities and rail businesses along the route, it also promotes a photographic competition based on the line. The prize is a free family trip by train from East Anglia to Nottingham. If you would like a copy, please send an SAE to Nick Dibben, 24 Bure Close, St Ives, Cambridgeshire PE27 3FE

Linkland consortium is now proposing a rail tunnel from Portsmouth to Ryde. It suggests running through to Newport on the island and is talking about Waterloo-Newport through journeys.

Govia We have seen the first result of Govia's takeover of the Connex South Central franchise. A four-coach electric train has

been observed freshly repainted in Green Govia livery.

Alternative transport day We had a stand at the Alternative Transport Day in Winchester on 22 September. Merchandise was sold to raise money for Railfuture while we raised awareness of our aims and ambitions.

Dibden Bay Associated British

Ports are planning a major expansion of Southampton Docks which is currently awaiting a public enquiry. If it goes ahead major rail developments will be needed including a new branch of the Fawley line plus other capacity improvements on the Romsey-Chandlers Ford line, which has recently seen the reintroduction of limited Wales & West passenger services. There is an active local campaign to reopen Chandlers Ford railway station.

South Coast Corridor multi-modal study We have been represented at consultative meetings of the study group which is investigating future developments in transport across the south coast of south east England.

Next branch meeting Eastcliff United Reform Church, St Swithun's Road (off Holdenhurst Road), Bournemouth 13.30-16.30, Saturday 24 November 2001. Directions from Bournemouth station: Leave the main exit (platform 3, down side) then turn left and head for the church with the clock tower. Walk across Holdenhurst Road near where it crosses the railway - the church is on the corner opposite B&Q.

Branch AGM The branch AGM will be on Saturday 2 March in Salisbury with a 2pm start. Venue to be announced.

Email The branch is investigating the possibility of sending out a periodic newsletter by email. Would members in the Wessex region who would like to receive this please email the branch: railfuture@kkca.co.uk. Also any comments would be welcome.

South Wales De Cymru

By Peter Clark and Julian Langston

Ebbw Vale The latest feasibility study report is the third one in two years and the third one to report positively on rail reopening proposals. The absence of Corus steel traffic after autumn 2002 would reduce costs somewhat, by not having to provide for the steel trains (though the Strategic Rail Authority, commendably, has said it wants a freight capability to be maintained) and by being able to do the civil engineering work on a non-operational railway. The option of introducing a low-cost hourly service, quite quickly after the steel trains cease, is not recommended on the grounds that the subsequent disruption to upgrade for the projected half-hourly service would be too



great. As it is, a two-stage process is envisaged, with opening to Ebbw Vale Parkway (that is, Victoria, south of the steelworks site) as stage 1. Stage 2 would see a possible extension to Ebbw Vale centre and rebuilding to Abertillery. Our view is that this is acceptable provided there is a clear commitment to proceed with stage 2 and within a reasonable period of time. The projected timing for stage 2 which we have seen is definitely not acceptable and does not demonstrate that commitment. Meanwhile, stage 1 could be complete by mid-2004 but only if the device of a "Special Purpose Vehicle" can be successfully used to overcome Railtrack's inability to undertake the project before about 2008. Funding is envisaged from the Rail Passenger Partnership fund, and some of the money allocated for regeneration of areas affected by Corus closures. It will be essential that the service is built into the public service requirement for the new Wales & Borders franchise when and if this comes about. As noted previously, not all the bidders for this franchise included Ebbw Vale in their proposals. But Valley Lines ran a special train (an inspection saloon) over the line (and the Vale of Glamorgan line) for decision makers in August – the first tangible sign of a train operator showing interest in Ebbw Vale.

Objective 1 funding We have sent press releases highlighting the opportunities being lost for gaining European Union (Objective 1) funding in Wales. Part of the problem seems to be that the National Assembly for Wales does not seem to be geared up to applying for such money, and in any case, doesn't see its rôle as spearheading rail-based investment. We have called on the Assembly to get its act together over this as well as pointing to the success Ireland has had in using Objective 1 funding for rail investment.

Refranchising As elsewhere, the Government's presumption against long-term franchises has led to uncertainty as to whether the proposed Wales & Borders (WB) franchise will actually come about and, if so, when. But work had already been done in separating the Wales parts of Wales & West from the west of England parts, and Cambrian lines (but not yet the north Wales lines). The winter timetable already shows services run by Wales & Borders! The practical consequences, as far as passenger services are concerned, are few

initially. West Wales loses its through trains to and from Portsmouth Harbour and Brighton (which are now part of the Wessex franchise east of Cardiff) but gains an equivalent number of through trains to places, including London Waterloo, Penzance, Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool. As before, except for one daily "fast" working, these are very slow trains as they operate as SwanLine locals between Cardiff and Swansea and, especially westwards, have long layovers at Cardiff and again at Swansea. They certainly cannot be regarded as regional expresses, something much needed to overcome the railway's geographical disadvantage compared with road between Cardiff and Carmarthen. Delays in future franchise awarding seem likely to rule out any improvements in the near future. One item of good news however concerns the west Wales connection from the 17.30 Paddington-Carmarthen service (see Railwatch 88) which is now to be restored following a successful RPP funding bid. This award came too late for the new service to be included in the National Rail Timetable book, and results from hard work and persistence by passengers and user groups over several years.

Sunday service improvement: The Heart of Wales Line Forum made a successful bid for Rail Passenger Partnership funding to double the Sunday service over the line from one train to two on those Sundays on which a service operates (April to November inclusive). This is a welcome first step to other much-needed service improvements on this route, including better weekday provision and operation of the Sunday service throughout the year.

First Great Western's woes The franchise commitment of providing a half-hourly service between Cardiff and London got off to a very shaky start in May, for all sorts of reasons, including Railtrack's continuing speed restrictions and delay in commissioning new Class 180 trains. As an emergency measure some trains were withdrawn and some of these withdrawals continue into the winter timetable. The unreliability and poor punctuality has had its effect within South Wales as FGW is now the main service provider between Cardiff and Swansea; but commuters on that section will not receive compensation as the fares within Wales are set by Wales & West. FGW's

autumn fares promotion applies only to journeys to Reading and London.

Kent

By John Pitcher
john.pitcher@ic24.net

The Railfuture-funded leaflet produced by the Wealden Line Campaign entitled *The Wealden Line, a breath of fresh air for the South East*, had been sent out to Railfuture members and others along with the report of the previous meeting. One member raised concern about the Spa Valley Line, which at present runs heritage steam engines between Tunbridge Wells West and Groombridge.

Following complaints to Kent County Council about the disappearance of local transport timetables, the council said timetables were being prepared for the rural areas of Romney Marsh and Sheppey, but generally the production of county-wide timetables was considered unrealistic due to the level of bus service changes which would mean timetables becoming out of date within weeks. The Integrated Transport

Commission and the Government Office for the South East had so far not responded to complaints from Railfuture about the lack of information about integrated public transport in Kent.

There was strong support for public transport from virtually everyone who attended workshops in Canterbury relating to the South Coast Corridor Multi-Modal Study which covers the area from Ramsgate to Southampton. Despite this, there are still fears that the study is a cover for building new roads.

East Anglia

By Nick Dibben
nick.dibben@ukgateway.net

Guided bus The Eastern England Local Government Conference has backed the multi-modal study consultants' view that guided bus is best for the former Cambridge-St Ives railway line. Their report to ministers however urges that further studies be carried out to resolve some of the key issues. Although the alternative rail reopening was dismissed by

**50% OFF
ETA MEMBERSHIP**

AA, RAC or  ?

The environmental choice.

Call 0800 212 810 Today

Quoting reference number 12701003

Established ten years ago as an ethical alternative to the AA and RAC, the ETA offers a wide range of insurance services to its members at extremely competitive prices. The ETA actively campaigns for a sustainable transport system for Britain and also co-ordinates ETA Green Transport Week and National Car Free Day.

www.eta.co.uk

The motoring organisation that won't cost the Earth

Local action



many including the Strategic Rail Authority as not viable, there is no clear route for the guided bus into Cambridge and other issues such as the interface with existing bus services have not been addressed. In a separate move, the county council has decided that an offer by a developer to build the busway if permission was given to build a new settlement is illegal. This is because there is a need for the former railway line to be turned into a public transport corridor irrespective of any new house building.

In our comments on the study, the branch noted that the cost and user figures for the busway were at risk as there was no clear scheme. We also complained about the lack of coverage on existing rail routes such as Peterborough-Stansted, or freight. There was some success in that the view of Railfuture, and other groups, that public transport should be improved before major road building appears to have been accepted. The report is now with ministers for a final decision.

Norwich-Yarmouth There is better news on the A47 Norwich-Great Yarmouth study which is backing a half-hourly service on the rail route. The study has also not supported local demands for total dualling of the A47, only local improvements including small sections of dual carriageway are proposed.

March station award March station has won a Cycle Mark award for recent improvements. There is new secure cycle parking and the station is linked to the national cycle network. The new disabled access ramp to the

Ely platform will also benefit cyclists and avoid the need to carry bikes over the footbridge.

Anglia services Following the introduction of extra trains on the Ipswich to Cambridge-Peterborough route, Anglia Trains is seeking further rail Passenger Partnership funding to operate additional services. The branch has welcomed the move as an hourly service on these lines has been a long-running campaign. Anglia Railways has produced a new booklet claiming that a franchise extension rather than complete franchise renewal will deliver benefits more quickly to the region. It says the reorganisation involved and the time needed to assess bids for the new Anglian franchise will mean it will be many years before new stock can be ordered for the main line between Norwich and London and local services. The Class 86 electric locomotives used on the main line are now 35 years old and failures are becoming more common.

East Midlands

By Anthony Kay
A.Kay@lboro.ac.uk

Transport blueprint Consultants W S Atkins have proposed a variety of schemes to improve the East Midlands transport infrastructure in a report commissioned by the Government. Although ideas such as widening the M1 are featured, there are also several forward-looking rail-based schemes.

The National Forest Line (previously called the Ivanhoe Line) from Leicester to Burton-on-Trent is again proposed for

reopening. It's less than a year since Leicestershire County Council decided the scheme was not viable unless funds could be found from new sources! The Institute of Directors has added its voice to the many others calling for the scheme to be implemented, claiming it will be viable if there is a "properly marketed business approach to running the line to maximum capacity". The estimated cost is now £70million and current estimates of patronage are about 1,000 passengers per day.

Other reopenings proposed in the W S Atkins study include Melton Mowbray to Nottingham. This was once part of the London-Nottingham main line. Although the last few miles of track into Nottingham have been taken up, the remainder is in use as the Old Dalby test track.

Reopening of the old Great Central route from Loughborough to Nottingham is also suggested.

Another suggestion in the report is for a tram system with three lines radiating from Leicester to East Goscote, Blaby or Narborough, and to a new park-and-ride facility near junction 22 of the M1. Railfuture has been campaigning for several years for a new station to be opened at East Goscote on the Leicester-Peterborough line.

Too much demand Due to overcrowding, Midland Main Line has trialled a boarding card system for their 18.55 departure from St Pancras to Nottingham during September. The future of this system is uncertain, but from the start of the winter timetable, Saver tickets will no longer be valid on northbound evening peak services (departing from St Pancras between 16.00 and 19.00). This means that a passenger who would previously have used a Saver at this time will face a fare increase of, for instance, 81% for a London-Derby ticket.

MML has done a good job of meeting the growing demand for rail travel by introducing their semi-fast Turbostar services. It's a pity it is now reverting to the tactic of coping with increasing demand by suppressing it with fare increases, instead of looking for ways of increasing supply further.

LANRAC Leicestershire and Northamptonshire Rail Action Committee is still pursuing its long-running campaign to open new stations at Desborough and Kibworth. However, it is now looking at the possibility of a

park-and-ride station to serve Great Glen and other nearby villages as well as Kibworth.

Football Stadium The promoters of Leicester City's new stadium at Freeman's Common are proud that it will be an environment-friendly development. For transport, there will be cycle facilities, more coaches to matches and incentives for car-pooling. But the Leicestershire & Rutland branch of the RMT union is now promoting the idea that it should also have a railway station. This would require 200 yards of new track and a basic two-platform halt.

East Midlands Parkway The new Parkway station on the A453 near Junction 24 of the M1 has overcome its latest planning hurdle, with the Government Office for the East Midlands deciding that they do not need to intervene.

Rushcliffe Borough Council now seems likely to give planning permission, although the scheme still faces opposition from some environmental groups. The target date for opening is now the winter 2002-3 timetable.

Scotland

By David Hansen
davidh@spidacom.co.uk

There are no dramatic changes to report in Scotland, but beneath the surface things are moving slowly.

New stations Work has at last started on Beaully Station. This is an innovative design with a platform shorter than the trains. Only selected doors will be opened when the train stops. With luck the platform will be extended in the not-too-distant future, as the station should be attractive for people travelling to Inverness. Edinburgh Park station is now being progressed quickly. It is now only about 10 years late: it should have been built before Edinburgh Park was occupied.

Longer platforms These are being discussed for some stations, including some recently built ones, as a means of easing congestion. The Fife Circle service is one of the lines under consideration.

New trains The new trains for Glasgow are entering service, allowing the cascade of trains to the North Berwick line, with a great increase in speed and reliability. Voyager trains are being used for training in Scotland.

New lines The on-off Larkhall project seems to be on again. Railtrack withdrew from this flagship private finance initia-

For sale

Railfuture envelope re-use labels. Pad of 100 £2.95

On Track for the 21st Century. A development plan for the railways of South Wales. Limited print. With A3 fold-out map. Bilingual. £3.50

Station Improvement project report. By Railfuture North East. Shows how a little co-operation and communication can improve everything about travelling by train. Limited print. £3

T-shirts promoting East London Line with motif UP AND RUNNING and a map of line on the back. Available in large or extra large only. Grey with orange and blue lettering. £4.50 each including a free souvenir introduction leaflet

All prices include postage.

Orders and enquiries to Phil Morris (Railfuture Sales), 113b Pembroke Road, Clifton, Bristol BS8 3EU. Fax 0117 973 4274
Email queries: rdsbooksales@lineone.net

■ Railfuture Sales can supply any Ian Allan or Midland Publishing title, delivered to your door post free. Buy from Railfuture and help Railfuture funds.



tive because of a "lack of money", so it is now essentially a government-funded project. Despite some last-minute problems the Edinburgh Crossrail project is also progressing.

New safety The Train Protection and Warning System, another government funded project, is being installed rapidly. The gaps mentioned previously, in some of the more complicated locations, are being filled in. Equipment is being wired up and trains are being fitted.

Visions The guided-bus project in Edinburgh appears to be dead, though it does twitch from time to time under a new name. This has allowed consideration of a serious means of accessing the airport, by rail. Of course, Glasgow airport has been waiting for years for a rail link.

Yorkshire

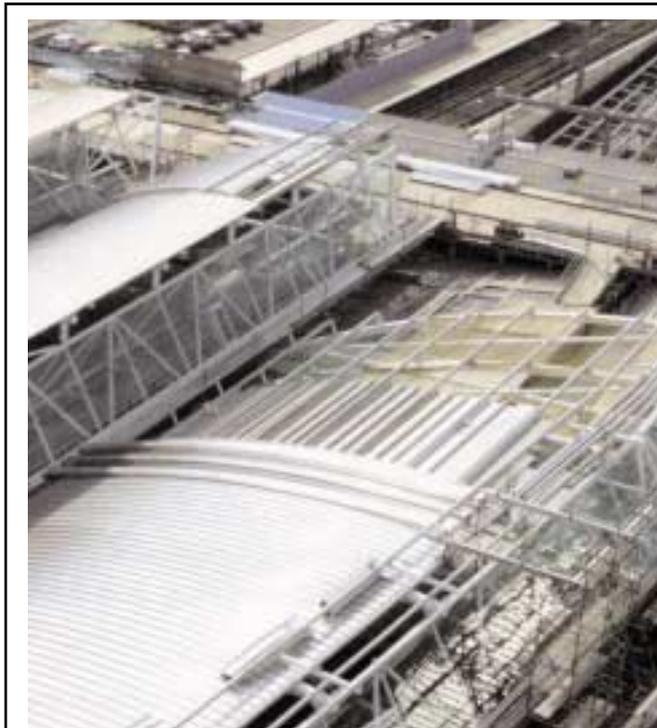
By Peter Davies
peter@bh-cc.co.uk

Leeds First The penultimate stage of the Leeds First Scheme started on 1 October with the closure of Platforms 13 to 16. Rail services from Knottingley, Sheffield and Goole start and terminate from the Leeds Whitehall temporary platform with a free bus connection to Leeds station, creating several months of inconvenience to rail users travelling from the south. Virgin CrossCountry services are not affected. The final stage of the work is now scheduled for completion by 31 May. This involves further re-modelling at the west end of the station.

Expansion New stations have been proposed for Horsforth (Woodside) and Kirkstall subject to financial funding from the Strategic Rail Authority.

Rail Services to Bradford A public meeting was being held at the City Hall, Bradford, on 26 October to discuss the poor way in which the second largest city in West Yorkshire is served by rail. An Act of 1890 authorised the construction of a cross-city link between the then Bradford Exchange Station and Bradford Forster Square. One hundred years later, the Yorkshire branch is actively campaigning for this link to be provided either by light rail or heavy rail. Demolition of some buildings in the city centre to make way for a shopping development may give some hope that a link may be built.

Arriva Trains Northern The Yorkshire area has been suffering from continuing cancellations to rail services with, in some instances, no transport



The roof of Leeds station is being renewed as part of the Leeds First scheme. Railtrack says the station will be lighter, brighter and better ventilated as a result. Rail travellers will be relieved when the work is completed having suffered delays and problems for over two years.

being provided at all. It is understood, at the time of writing, that the Leeds to Glasgow service is to be terminated at Carlisle until the problem of the shortage of drivers can be resolved. Through passengers will be at the mercy of a connecting Virgin service at Carlisle with additional travelling time. The fare via the Settle and Carlisle line is cheaper than that via the East Coast Main Line and is therefore very attractive to passengers, although it is not well publicised.

Trans-Pennine The three bidders for the Trans-Pennine franchise have been invited to bid again. No consultation has been undertaken with the five passenger transport executives through which the rail routes pass, and the consultation process has had to be started again. It is understood the Strategic Rail Authority may be looking for the cheapest possible option which is not desirable for such a busy route.

North East

By Peter Wood

The proposed TransPennine franchise is currently the main concern of the branch. Arriva has impressed us with its presentation, we have had constructive discussions with First Group about its proposals,

while Connex has rejected all our approaches. Can their plans really be that bad? We welcome the request to the three companies to resubmit their bids which include new rolling stock. We will lobby for the final decision to be taken on the basis of best value. This should include an assessment of quality and cost and not just based on cheapness.

We welcomed the Strategic Rail Authority's decision to set aside £17.5million to advance the East Coast main line upgrade, especially as it encompasses work between Northallerton and Ferryhill and on the Leamside line.

The branch has joined the Tyne Crossings Alliance which is opposed to the Tyne and Wear Passenger Transport Authority's plan to for a second Tyne road tunnel.

Nexus is currently consulting about its transport development plans for the Tyne and Wear area until 2016. Railfuture will be making an input and proposing both heavy and light rail projects. Happily, our thoughts are broadly similar to the Nexus proposals.

Arriva Trains Northern has proved adept at hitting the headlines, although not always for the right reasons. We sup-

port its Adopt a Station scheme and understand its problems with driver recruitment. It is also to be commended for keeping us informed. Train cancellations are never welcome, but if they are going to happen it is better to plan and give well-advertised prior warnings.

Direct Work on the Metro extension to Sunderland continues apace, although the opening is now delayed until 31 March.

North West

By Rob Cummings

The North West Branch sales stand ventured out to Newton Heath open day, near Manchester, on 14 October. The event proved to be a worthwhile exercise with funds raised and the society's leaflets distributed. Thanks go to all those members who turned out on the day.

The TransPennine franchise saga rumbles on. Many in the branch were very relieved that the franchise was not awarded to Connex, who were rumoured to have been preferred bidders, when it was announced that the process was to restart. Users of the TransPennine services will not be impressed that the decision will result in any new rolling stock for the route potentially being delayed a further two years.

While the industry is looking at its future, perhaps some thought should be given to incorporating TransPennine Express into the proposed Northern Franchise.

The next North West Branch meeting will be on Saturday 24 November 2001 at the Royal Station Hotel, Carnforth, commencing at 11.00. The 2002 North West Branch AGM will be on 2 February in Blackpool.

Thames Valley

By Chris Wright

A visit to Bicester military depot showed how effective the Government's integrated transport strategy is proving. Rail staff are being made redundant, rail use cut back and 700 new lorries purchased. The British Army "distinguished" itself in the Balkans by being the only Nato army to be completely supplied by road. All the others use rail.

Wolverton rail user group annual general meeting in September considered plans for a new station building to replace the existing hut. As usual, building is held up by funding difficulties.

A public meeting to discuss the



impact of the East-West rail link was dominated by car drivers, worried about being held up at level crossings and the prospect of night freight trains. Plans to modernise level crossings – that would have secured the line's future if they had been implemented in the 1950s – continue to generate objections. Some of the objectors seem to want the rail line to close.

East-West link The Strategic Rail Authority's rejection of the strategic east-west rail link has caused dismay among rail campaigners. Alternative ways forward are being investigated by the councils, the consortium and the civil engineering company Skanska. Railfuture, the Oxon Bucks Rail Action Committee and the Bedford-Bletchley Rail Users Association have been in contact with MEP Mark Watts and Milton Keynes MP Phyllis Starkey who will be raising the issue in Parliament. The Rail Passengers Council has also called for the scheme to go ahead. The SRA suggests that Bedford-Milton Keynes-Oxford might be viable but would need work on the West Coast main line. It also claims the shortage of signalling engineers was a big factor in its decision, a factor which could be used to halt most enhancement schemes. Of course many signallers were sacked by Railtrack following privatisation.

The Oxford area now sees regular Virgin Voyager trains, replacing locomotive-hauled trains. This is a major step forward and will be followed by significant enhancements of the service.

The Strategic Rail Authority appears to have failed to grasp the strategic significance of the Milton Keynes-Gatwick service. It is to allow the service to be cut back to Watford next year. The issue has been raised with Milton Keynes MP Dr Starkey, the Rail Passengers Committee and Govia, the parent company of South Central which operates the service. The rail embank-

ment at Newton Blossomville, near Olney, is being demolished at a cost of £100,000, following a partial collapse on to the road. This will be a blow to campaigners wanting to reopen the Bedford-Northampton line.

South West

By Gerard Duddridge

Exeter The Devon local transport plan progress report in August mentions the Exeter St Davids station gateway project. A high-quality public transport interchange is planned. A station square would replace a small part of the car park, the remainder of which would be landscaped with trees.

Barnstaple After the *Railwatch 89* report about protecting the Bideford line trackbed, our letter of objection was acknowledged by the Department of Transport and passed to the western bypass public inquiry inspector. But the DTLR did not forward our detailed report. It said it would be treated as "post inquiries correspondence" by the Secretary of State for Transport along with the inspector's report. We were unable to produce our detailed evidence in time for the public inquiry as there was no notification to us or other organisations such as the Rail Passengers Committee and Devon Transport 2000.

Western Advance We commented on the Rail Passengers Committee *Western Advance* document in *Railwatch 86*. The final version was published in September 2001 and includes targets for major line speed improvements on Paddington-Penzance and Exeter-Salisbury main lines. The RPC wants to see the development of metro-style passenger services around urban areas such as Exeter, a minimum hourly frequency on all lines in Cornwall and Devon, plus Sunday services throughout the year on Cornish branch lines. Padstow (subject to accommodation of cyclists on the Camel Trail), Tavistock,

Bideford and Okehampton would return to the network. Consideration would be given to reopening Okehampton-Tavistock (for a second Exeter to Plymouth line), from the Great Western main line to Tiverton (as we suggested), to Sidmouth and Ilfracombe.

Virgin cuts again Following Virgin Train's virtual abandonment of services west of Exeter for weeks at a time during last autumn, it is again cutting services in Cornwall. Four of Cornwall's eight trains a day were axed on 1 October until further notice. Although Virgin initially told Railfuture this was because of Railtrack work, it later confirmed it was due to staff being redeployed for training on the new Voyager units. Virgin considers it is a "minority operator" in Cornwall and thinks the effect will not be serious. In fact, Virgin is the only operator of trains from Cornwall to the North East and Scotland. It also operates the last train of the day from many stations in Cornwall to Plymouth. These have been replaced by buses, but cannot maintain train timings, with missed connections as a result. Cornwall County Council leader John Lobb has written to Virgin's chief executive challenging Virgin to confirm it has overcome its own internal difficulties and will reinstate the services immediately. Virgin Trains has apologised and promises to monitor the situation on a day-to-day basis. However, it will not say when the services will be restored.

Railfuture South West is calling on the Rail Passengers Council's investigation into First Great Western to be extended to Virgin Trains in the region. Forty one Virgin Trains services failed to reach their destination or start from Cornwall between May and August.

Branch secretary Stuart Walker said: "The impression Virgin gives is that whenever there is a problem on its CrossCountry network trains should terminate before they get to Cornwall and passengers must wait for an hour or more for another operator's service. Virgin needs to learn there is no such thing as a minority operator, only an essential train service that all the train operators must jointly provide."

125s return First Great Western reinstated some high-speed train services in the winter timetable. The full service will be restored in May. Following

complaints from Railfuture, the St Erth and Camborne stops have been reinstated during the evening peak in West Cornwall. Others have expressed support for FGW's two-year extension to 2008 but Railfuture South West has decided not to support the extension. There is an urgent need to upgrade the main line and to open the second route to Plymouth from Exeter via Okehampton. Objective 1 and 2 funds also need to be accessed for infrastructure improvements. This is unlikely to happen if we have to wait until 2008 for a 20-year franchise. The two-year extension proposal is for the testing of four gas turbine trains and only the planning of infrastructure improvements.

Fifth train operator The number of operators running services on the Exeter to Penzance mainline has been increased to five from October 13. On the instructions of the Strategic Rail Authority, Wales & West Trains services will be divided between Wales & Borders Trains and Wessex Trains. The other operators continue to be South West Trains, First Great Western and Virgin Trains. South West Trains Penzance-Plymouth-Paignton-Exeter to Waterloo services will be transferred to Wessex in two years time when the franchise proper is let.

In a letter to Railfuture, the SRA says this has been done to assist in the process of establishing the new franchises and that no decision has yet been taken on the choice of franchisees. The SRA is still likely to pursue the concept of a Cornwall and Plymouth business unit and is well advanced in developing what this would mean in practice. The unit is likely to be a part of the new Wessex franchise, but will not exist until the new franchise is let in two years time. This clearly rules out the possibility of making it part of the Great Western or even the CrossCountry franchise, and there will continue to be at least three train operators in Cornwall.

Railfuture South West met the managing director of Wessex Trains, Charles Belcher, on 2 October. Mr Belcher explained that Wessex Trains will be setting up offices in Exeter and is looking for a train maintenance facility in Devon. Railfuture South West provided a summary of its rail strategy for Cornwall and Devon and also a list of "Easy Wins" – improvements to current services and facilities which could be introduced now at little cost.

Brief Encounters on the Penistone Line . This CD includes

12 songs and is available for £9 including post and packing. The songs were first performed live on a Huddersfield-Sheffield train. Orders and enquiries to Phil Morris (Railfuture Sales), 113b Pembroke Road, Clifton, Bristol BS8 3EU. Fax 0117 973 4274. Email queries: rdsbooksales@lineone.net

