

Museum piece or transport asset?

By John Ginns

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The railway preservation movement in this country began with the narrow gauge Tallylyn Railway in 1950. In due course the idea, or to be more precise, the discovery that enthusiastic volunteers, professionally managed, could actually run a railway caught on.

I believe the Bluebell line in Sussex was the first preserved standard gauge line to open to the public (please correct me if that's not so, someone) and of course many, many more followed on. Thank goodness.

In the intervening years hundreds of miles of railway, and thousands of locomotives, carriages and wagons have been saved from the scrap yard by the preservation move-

ment. We now have a remarkable but fragmented non-network of reminders of what may have been a more ordered way of life. What a pity they are not all joined up.

Whenever I see families visiting one of these old lines and jogging along at a steady 20 or 25 mph it occurs to me that the parents are in some subconscious way hoping to bestow upon their youngsters the now-perceived security of the past.

There is nothing in any Great Book of Life that I am aware of that decrees "Though shalt go for ever faster..." That idea only belongs to our muddled thinking today.

To be sure, I find it great to whistle down to London in just over the hour, or to emerge at the southern end of the tunnel and accelerate across France to 186 mph. But in

terms of the so-called quality of life where are we going? Is it Schumacher's forward stampede?

In the world of railway preservation significant developments are subtly passing before our eyes. What were once seen as assets have become very expensive liabilities. As boiler certificates run out time and time again, as rust and decay slowly eat into frames and body work, as the once proud owners pass on and their property changes hands, as the old skills are fading, locomotives and rolling stock are moved into sidings officially "waiting attention".

The once-scorned, but ever-ready diesel locomotive or multiple-unit has taken on a new value. And the books still have to be balanced, loans repaid. If a preserved line is

situated close to a major conurbation and passes through attractive scenery, or goes somewhere useful, then hopefully the sun will go on shining.

I certainly hope so. But if the scenery isn't up to tourist standards and they eventually decide to go somewhere else ... mmmm.

But the most subtle change of all is that somewhere along the line preserved railways have become heritage railways, seemingly encasing them in some kind of sacrosanct time capsule, new-style museum pieces, no longer to be part of ordinary everyday life.

That is where the Railfuture 'heritage' railway challenge lies.

■ John Ginns is Railfuture's heritage railways liaison officer.

Railways must be promoted

The following motions were carried at Railfuture's annual general meeting on 7 May.

Railways Act

"Whilst welcoming certain parts of the Act, this AGM deplores:

- the absence of the duty (contained in previous legislation) to promote rail transport,
- the dilution of certain PTE powers in respect of rail franchises,
- the abolition of the regional Rail Passenger Councils, and above all,
- the emphasis placed on new "streamlined" procedures for rail closures. Noting the continued growth in demand for rail travel, we urge the Government to abandon any intention to close rail lines or stations, and instead to give serious attention to the need to grow the network by, for example, (re)opening more routes and stations, increasing capacity by removing bottlenecks, further infrastructure improvements, electrification, cross-city links such as Crossrail and Thameslink, and planning for high-speed lines in the longer term."

Branches

"This AGM (a) endorses the view of the Railfuture Board of Directors that it is desirable that there should be a single Railfuture Branch covering broadly the counties of Leicestershire, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and Northamptonshire.

(b) notes that the two present branches have voted, at their respective AGMs, to co-operate with a view to a merger.

(c) therefore requests the two branches to take the necessary steps during 2005 to set up a combined branch which would come into effect on 1 January 2006."

Audible TVs in trains

"This AGM deplores the introduction of television in trains with

audible sound. We believe this practice contravenes Railway By-law 22(1) which states that portable electronic sound equipment may not be used in trains to the annoyance of passengers."

Annual subscription

"This AGM agrees that annual membership subscription rates shall be as follows:

With effect from 1 January 2006:

- Ordinary £20.00
- Family £20.00 + £2 for each additional member
- Concessionary £12.50

With effect from 1 January 2007:

- Ordinary £21.00
- Family £21.00 + £2 for each additional member
- Concessionary £14.00

On renewal in 2006, members may subscribe for two years by paying in full for two years at the rate applying from 1 January 2006."

Carried with two against and five abstentions.

Life membership

"This AGM agrees that, from 1 June 2005, members may subscribe for life at the following rates:

- Individual Life (Individual aged 18 or over) £235
- Joint Life (Two individuals, both aged 18 or over, living at the same address, recorded under a single name and receiving one copy of material despatched) £255
- Senior Individual Life (Individual aged 60 or over) £115
- Senior Joint Life (Two individuals, both aged 60 or over, living at the same address, recorded under a single name and receiving one copy of material despatched) £130"

Notification of election process

"This AGM calls on the Board of Directors to devise a fail-safe method of notifying all members of Railfuture

in good time of their right to stand for, or to propose candidates for, national Officer or Board membership. These rights should not depend on members finding out from emails, branch newsletters or meetings, as has happened this year. This is without prejudice to any future rules restricting such candidature to members with a minimum length of membership or any other condition."

Specialist skills

"That a new or revised database be created, as a matter of priority, of members with specialist skills, knowledge, experience and/or qualifications, who are willing to help individual and corporate members if required. The functioning of this facility would be subject to any relevant conditions imposed by the Data Protection Act (and any conditions requested by the member concerned). Subject to the member's agreement, their details could also be shared with the European Passengers' Federation."

Railfuture staff

"This AGM recognises the importance of having a National Campaigns Co-ordinator and Manager to raise the profile of Railfuture's campaigning, promote effectively the society's policies and develop its wider activities, including recruitment of new members, expanding corporate membership and improving fundraising activities. This AGM notes with concern

that no permanent appointment has been made to replace former staff members for three years. This AGM therefore recommends and calls upon the Board of Directors to pursue the appointment of a competent person to perform the role of a Membership, Marketing & Campaigns Co-ordinator at the earliest practical opportunity and, if practical, re-establish a suitable national office base. This will ensure Railfuture has an effective voice to counter the unsatisfactory aspects of current Government policy, including its lack of strategy to develop rail networks both nationally and regionally and limiting statutory passenger representation through the abolition of Rail Passenger Committees in the English regions."

Equal opportunities

"This AGM welcomes the adoption of an Equal Opportunities Policy by the Board but again notes the paucity of female members among the candidates for the Board of Directors.

In view of the Government promoting policies on wider social diversity, the Society is unlikely to secure corporate funding, particularly from public sector bodies, without demonstrating an improved gender and social balance in its management structures and membership profile. This AGM calls upon the Board to treat this as a matter of some importance and take steps to redress this imbalance."

City funds for rail expansion

Transport for London is planning to fund rail expansion by borrowing money direct from City of London financial institutions, rather than getting involved in private finance initiative arrangements.

TfL has already raised £200million with a bond issue but it will probably need to raise £3billion. "It allows our project teams to focus on engineers and operations people rather than on financiers and financial packages," said Ian Brown, managing director of TfL London Rail.