

Railwatch

AN INDEPENDENT VOICE FOR RAIL USERS

No 105

£1.20

October 2005

It can be done



Arriva Trains Wales two-car unit crossing the Porthkerry Viaduct on the Vale of Glamorgan Railway Line on Wednesday 23 June 2005, 11 days after regular services were reintroduced between Bridgend and Barry

Picture: © Rob Williams / Vale of Glamorgan Council

Rail campaigners had something to cheer about this summer with the reopening of the Vale of Glamorgan line in South Wales.

Then came further good news with the Scottish Assembly's renewed enthusiasm for Stirling reopening.

In London, rail should get a significant boost from the Olympic Games but in the rest of England, the outlook seemed bleak with station closures, bustitution and a dead hand holding back essential rail schemes.

Rail passengers can expect yet another period of uncertainty as the Strategic Rail Authority hands over its last remaining powers to the Department for Transport's new

Wales leads the way on rail reopenings Scotland prepares for next scheme England loses in the sustainable stakes

Rail Director General Mike Mitchell. A month after the SRA handed over responsibility for strategy to the DfT, the death sentence for Etruria station was handed out by Transport Minister Derek Twigg.

In the same month the DfT tried to recruit a £38,000-a-year rail closures manager. There was also talk of all the "air being carried around the country by empty trains", ignoring the greater problem that most cars travel around three-quarters empty,

causing far greater pollution, danger and economic damage. Railfuture may have to revamp its rail defence fund if reports of more rail closure attempts are to be believed. Just to add to the gloom, the Association of Train Operators suggested putting up fares to price people off peak trains.

With this kind of talk from within the rail industry, the road lobby can relax and see its work done for it. But MP Gwyneth Dunwoody,

a no-nonsense supporter of rail, seems to have fought off yet another Government attempt to make her quit as chairman of the Commons transport committee.

Fortunately her committee has launched a timely inquiry into whether rail fares are fair.

The RMT rail union has already shown that fares in Britain are three times as high as equivalent routes on mainland Europe.

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railfuture