

Up and at 'em before they ruin our local rail services

I can usually find something on the railway scene to cheer me out of my worries about the heavily-handed way the railway is being controlled.

At present, however, we are really up against a road-orientated, Treasury controlled Secretary of State with a weak railway branch and an Act of Parliament in place which affords us less control over our destiny than our predecessors had under Beeching, and my generation had when we fought the Thatcher-Major wars which first split the railway into business sections before selling off what became a further fragmented system.

Safety was my main concern then and I return to it later in this article.

The Department for Transport now has its mandarins controlling the way the railway is run, Network Rail is engineering led with little or no business or operating acumen, while the Association of Train Operators is for the most part acquiescent.

There are franchise changes (with South Eastern to be returned to a franchise with the fast bit of the CTRL commuter services tacked on) all leading to big company profits. But does it help the railway?

On top of that Railtrack shareholders are still arguing the toss and defending an organisation which was dangerously flawed and which failed to honour its safety commitments in so many ways. I could write an article about that alone. In fact I could write another book about that.

"Don't" I hear you cry, "one was enough!"

Reading the press statements about the upgrade for London, I see that Crossrail is hardly given a mention. I thought the Olympics would probably at last get that through and we should free up Liverpool Street and Paddington capacity which would make

better and better opportunities for trains to run through the capital from west and east thus relieving motorway congestion.

I would be interested to know what the political or financial effect is of not providing that much-needed link.

Issuing press releases at August Bank Holiday is an old trick designed to ensure that the public is kept in the dark about bad news.

Articles on August Bank Holiday Monday about Whitehall plans to cut local rail services is an example.

It is galling to see that one reason given for cuts is to free up lines for more freight.

It is good "argument", undermined somewhat by the best freight route through the West Midlands being handed over for a tram service – which would virtually exclude freight services and ruin any prospects for the development of freight services.

Even the Inspector at the Transport and Works inquiry into the extension of the Metro tram line from Wednesbury to Brierly Hill said that in the long-term the Railfuture-Peter Rayner report was probably right but – and I quote – "For better or worse, Mr Rayner is not the Strategic Rail Authority".

Those of us who fought in the Beeching and privatisation wars at least knew what the protagonists believed in.

Now the cuts and closures which do away with the lesser, local feeder services – services that are environmentally sensible – are made in the name of "progress". They certainly help the big boys of the rail industry make more money.

All these arguments about freeing up paths and protecting track capacity can sound reasonable but campaigners now know that information on train planning, timetable compilation, junction optimisation and much more

besides can be manipulated to provide the answer required by those in power.

When British Rail existed, its employees drew strength from the knowledge that we ran the railway for the public, maybe not always well, but certainly for the public.

SNCF runs the railway for France. British railways are now run for profit – at considerable cost to both train users and, ironically, taxpayers.

At long last we are fighting back. In my *Railwatch* 103 article I warned about the holding of station opening conferences and suggested we should be holding "Don't Close It" conferences.

I am glad to see Nick Lewis's paper for Railfuture tackles the anti-rail bias that exists deep in the Government's psyche.

Every member of Railfuture should engage in that debate, involve others, recruit members and fight. It's the last chance we have to prevent local service dismemberment. The "train operators" are all bus companies remember!

It is not just over train services that I mistrust this Secretary of State. On train protection systems he said we would go for the best European Rail Traffic Management System (Level 3), and lead the world.

I wrote in *Railwatch* 96 that this was hype and merely allowed them to keep the Train Protection and Warning System which is a technological cul de sac (according to Professor Uff at the Southall Inquiry).

There was talk of pilot schemes on the Shrewsbury-Aberystwyth line. Perhaps they should have tried it out on the Romney Hythe and Dymchurch line.

Now, slipped out again at a "convenient" time for a press release, we find that elsewhere in the world ERTMS (Level 2) is progressing but we won't be getting it until 2020! That is 10



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years after the deadline set by Lord Cullen. How many high-speed accidents shall we have before then? For TPWS will prevent many SPADs (signals passed at danger) but will not avert the big one.

TPWS can cope with ordinary situations, for instance, where the driver is trying to stop but has left it late to apply the brake.

That is unlikely to result in a catastrophe.

The real risks are at high speed for which TPWS is not designed.

These catastrophic incidents will be avoidable on continental Europe where they are already installing ERTMS, but will not be preventable in the UK.

Incidentally ERTMS would also increase track capacity. So ERTMS could have a role in preventing service cuts blamed on congestion.

But of course that's where I started. Perhaps some will say this a Rayner's Rant rather than a Rayner's Review but I believe we need to be "up and at 'em" before it is too late.

■ Peter Rayner is a former British Rail operations and safety manager

■ For more information on ERTMS, see <http://www.ertms.com/>

■ For more information on TPWS, see <http://www.hse.gov.uk/railways/liveissues/tps.htm>

Farewell to film maker, campaigner Richard

By John Barfield and Ray King

A Railfuture member who had a strong feeling for truth and justice and helped to expose the harsh reality of life in Thatcherite Britain has died aged 62.

After a career with the BBC, Richard Macqueen worked as a film editor on the award-winning documentary series *Breadline Britain*, broadcast by LWT in the early 1990s.

He also worked on several historical documentaries including one memorable series about the Great Depression, and educational programmes for

the Open University. But Richard also made his mark as a rail campaigner on the international front, travelling to Brussels on several occasions to lobby the European Commission and MEPs for more rail-friendly policies.

Richard, who grew up in London, joined the Railway Invigoration Society in the mid 1960s, following the example of his father who was RDS treasurer.

He also had useful contacts in Ireland and was instrumental in setting up contacts between MEPs and local members in Belfast. Ironically it was the coming of Eurostar to St Pancras – which he

supported – and the subsequent redevelopment of the area that forced his film-editing company Syntaxis Video to move out of its studio adjoining the station.

The award-winning Syntaxis, which he ran with his business partner Sarah Vincent, was forced to close when Richard's heart problems deteriorated.

Having upset powerful people in his film career, he worried that he was being victimised, twice being the victim of physical attacks in London. But he was supported by his partner Jane Edwards who survives him. After he

moved from Twickenham to Walthamstow, he joined the Barking-Gospel Oak line rail users and campaigned for better rail services in the Lea Valley and to Chingford.

He enjoyed good food and wine, was well-read and a knowledgeable film fan. His philosophy of life was to enjoy the journey as much as the destination. He was always helpful to young film makers and was an excellent teacher.

In his recent illness, he received comfort from his "best friend" and god-daughter Gabrielle and conversion to the Roman Catholic church.