



New station for integrated transport

Network Rail contractors are making good progress on the work to rebuild the existing Allerton and Garston stations in Liverpool, as one new integrated bus, train and park and ride station, to be called Liverpool South Parkway Interchange.

Currently there are two separate stations in Allerton. Garston is on the Merseyrail Electric Hunts Cross to Southport line, while Allerton is on the main line from Crewe to Liverpool Lime Street. Part of this rebuilding plan is to move the Garston platforms on the Hunts Cross-Southport line some 300 yards to the east so that they can be the "low level" platforms of the new integrated station.

The "high level" part will be the platforms on the Liverpool-Crewe line, currently being re-furbished as in the photograph. Platforms one and two have been temporarily shortened to allow the work on the new platforms.

All the new platforms will comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act, which will mean that the track-work through the station has to be adjusted, as well as some work on both the overhead and third rail.

The work also includes a new pedestrian overbridge on the high level, formed from two steel spans swung into place during a Christmas Day 2004 possession. To ensure good integration, de-



Station rebuilding and new link bridge work at Allerton station in June 2005.

Photo: Trevor Bishop

parture information displays will be available on both platforms and bus stops. It is intended that there will be direct services to Liverpool Airport, only a few miles away, and that significantly more services than the present hourly Northern Rail service will call at the high-level platforms.

In the long term, one of the options for future expansion of the Merseytram scheme includes a line that passes through the new station and goes on to the airport.

Garston MP and Government minister Maria Eagle visited Merseytravel's biggest project to check on progress and declared, "This is an amazing development. It is going to mean a tremendous improvement to transport links in South Liverpool and to John Lennon Airport as well as improve the economic prospects of the area. The state of the art design of the building is also an incredible

improvement on the old Garston and Allerton stations." The interchange, due to be completed by the end of the year, will be a key transport hub linking regional rail services to Merseyrail.

The scheme's key features:

- Refurbishment of Allerton station
- Relocation of Garston Station which is being moved 300 metres to be incorporated into the interchange
- A single integrated booking office and passenger information and enquiry point
- Incorporated bus and taxi stops
- Park-and-ride car park
- Dedicated high frequency bus shuttle to Liverpool John Lennon Airport
- CCTV and customer information systems.

and light industrial development at Brinsford on the site of a former Ministry of Defence depot north of Wolverhampton. The plans include a new park-and-ride station just inside the Staffordshire border, two miles south of Four Ashes, which would have direct access to the A449 and M54.

The developers have suggested a four-track layout with a 300 metre island platform and central turn-back siding so that both local trains from Birmingham and Virgin West Coast services, which currently terminate at Wolverhampton, could use the new station. Unusually the fast through lines would be on the outside of this layout.

Etruria

Transport Minister Derek Twigg has given consent for the closure of Etruria station and the withdrawal of the hourly bus link from that station to Stoke-on-Trent (see *Railwatch* 101). On 24 July Mr Twigg repeated the Strategic Rail Authori-

ty's assertion that savings amounting to £3million per annum would be made if the platforms at Etruria were demolished and the track re-aligned for 110 mph running. This figure was challenged by the Rail Passengers Council in its report, as only the southbound track is constrained by the station and most trains will continue to stop at Stoke. The minister also suggested that the cost of a new station at this location would be an astonishing £14million, almost tripling the figure of £5million given at the enquiry by Network Rail. Sadly there is no compensation for regular passengers whose lives are disrupted by such closures and similar service withdrawals on the railway.

Following the track upgrade in 2003, Central Trains had been unable to provide a service to Etruria as the stepping distance on the curved platform had become too great for the class 156 and class 158 sprinters used on the Derby-Crewe route.

Although Northern Trains' Class 323s were still permitted to call, even this service had been reduced this year to two northbound trains in the morning peak with no southbound calls at all. There is no car park at Etruria and pedestrian access from the west, across the busy A500, was very difficult. However the developers of the Festival Park and former Shelton Bar steelworks site do have plans for a new park and ride station about one mile north of Etruria - which may eventually help plug the gap for local passengers.

New trains

Over 50 guests attended a preview and trial run on 9 June of the new class 350 electric multiple units which have been built by Siemens for Central Trains. The event commenced with a formal opening by Jim Steer (SRA) and David Franks (NEG) of Central Trains' new staff depot at Crewe. The new Desiro fleet is similar to the Class 360 units which operate on suburban services in Essex except that they have 2+2 seating throughout, including a small first class section. In addition two rows in each coach, which have an additional six inches of leg-room, are designated priority seats for passengers with impaired mobility. Since the launch, these new 100mph units have been running a peak hour Birmingham to Preston service, and are now being introduced on Birmingham to Liverpool, and Birmingham to Northampton services.

West Coast upgrade

The preliminary work for quadrupling 12 miles of the West Coast Main Line between Tamworth and Armitage started in the spring and is now very visible. In anticipation of the main earthmoving phase almost ten miles of tarmac-surfaced road have been laid, mostly to the north of the existing tracks. Major

work planned to start this summer includes the construction of a new bridge over the River Tame at Hopwas, near Tamworth. This will be followed in the autumn by rebuilding eight road bridges and widening of two deep cuttings at Tamworth and Handsacre. Keeping the main line open on weekdays will be a real challenge for the contractors while this work is in progress.

Station upgrades

Centro announced a £1.2 million local rail investment in May. At least twenty stations in the West Midlands PTE area will be fitted with new customer information displays based on the successful trial installations at Selly Oak and Sutton Coldfield.

Route strategy

The branch produced a detailed response to the West Midlands route utilisation strategy. The SRA's conclusions were published on 21 July and are discussed on page 4.

North West

By Trevor Bishop

trevor.bishop0@btinternet.com

Council wants Fleetwood back on the rail network

Wyre Council leader Russell Forsyth has given his support for a project to get the currently disused track to Fleetwood brought back in to use for passengers and freight. Although he said plans were at an early stage, he was clear there were benefits for the local economy from re-opening.

A local group of business leaders, the Poulton Market Town Initiative, is leading the project, which is preparing to open negotiations with both train operator Northern Rail and track company Network Rail.

The route was last open in 1970. The new plans for it also include an adjacent cycle track, which would provide connections from local towns to Stannah County Park. Putting freight on this route is expected to ease pressure on the A585, getting cargo to and from Fleetwood docks and its thought it could handle traffic to the proposed Lancashire County Council waste treatment plant at Hillhouse, Thornton. The A585 is recognised in the area as being at capacity, so transferring traffic to the railway would benefit the towns of Thornton and Cleeveleys, and give a boost to the port of Fleetwood. Blackpool North and Fleetwood MP Joan Humble has also given her backing, saying the track should be preserved, for whatever use it can be put to.

North West meetings

The next meeting of the North West branch of Railfuture will be on 19 November at Quaker Meeting House, Court Road, Southport. Next year's AGM will be on 4 February 2006 at the Stretton Hotel, Blackpool. Members are welcome at all meetings, which start at 11.00.

It's expected that the speaker at the September meeting will be David Godley, area director, Northern Rail.

Celebrating 175 years of rail travel

The world's first passenger railway, the Manchester to Liverpool line, celebrated its anniversary on 15 September.

Peter Strachan, route director (LNW), said: "This busy line is still as important today as it was all those years ago and the railway contributed in making Manchester and Liverpool two of the most significant cities in Britain.

"The railways were the Victorian's greatest legacy and changed the world we live in today. It enabled people to travel across the country quickly and safely. The railways also allowed larger numbers of goods to be transported at speed, helping Britain to become one of the richest countries in the world and contributing to the growth of its enormous empire."

Yorkshire

By Peter Davies

peter@bh-cc.co.uk

Ribblehead

The disused sidings to the quarry have been cleared of debris with a view to their reinstatement to move out timber felled in nearby forests.

Millhouses

The former Midland Railway depot on the outskirts of Sheffield has been offered for sale for redevelopment. The building is largely intact some 40 years after it last saw railway use.

Sheffield

Sheaf House, the former British Railways divisional headquarters building next to the station, is being demolished to make way for redevelopment.

York

First TransPennine Express has negotiated a £4 add-on fare for sight-seeing bus tours of the city. Similar schemes operate in Newcastle, Liverpool and Manchester. Work is now underway to improve access to the station for buses, taxis and cars. To be completed by December, the scheme should provide better bus information.

Huddersfield

Work is to commence on refurbishment of the station entrance area with the removal of the London, Midland and Scottish Railway former booking office screen. New ticket machines have been provided, and work is to start on improving waiting facilities and the cafe on the island platform.

Grand Central Railway

The proposal to operate a direct rail service from Bradford (Interchange) to London (King's Cross) is being considered by the Rail Regulator. It is understood that the Rail

Regulator is undertaking a detailed economic appraisal of the new service before making a final decision early in 2006.

East Anglia

By Trevor Garrod

trevorgarrod2000@yahoo.co.uk

and Nick Dibben

nick.dibben@btinternet.com

ESTA

The East Suffolk Travellers Association has protested about changes to the bus services between Ipswich, Framlingham and Aldeburgh, particularly because these no longer serve Ipswich rail station. We have written to the Commission for Integrated Transport which replied saying it can do nothing about local problems.

During August, ESTA carried out its annual survey of bus and train services, with members completing a questionnaire about the good and bad points of journeys which they undertook. The results will be among issues reported and discussed at our autumn meeting on Saturday 22 October in the Victory Hall, Campsea Ashe, starting at 14.15. All train and bus users will be

welcome at this meeting, at which we shall also welcome as guest speaker Mr Shaun Dawe, Ipswich-based traffic superintendent of First Eastern Counties Buses. Wickham Market station is in the centre of Campsea Ashe village, opposite the Victory Hall.

New cycle shed

Ron Callaby, who died a few years ago, played an important role in the campaign to reopen Watlington station on the route between Ely and King's Lynn. Fund raising by Clara Zilahi and other members collected £600 to help enable WAGN to construct a new cycle shed at the station. After much discussion, the cycle shed has now been installed to the benefit of the station's users.

A seat at the table

The branch has been awarded a seat for the transport and overall plan delivery sections of the East of England Plan examination in public which starts in November. We will be urging that new public transport provision is put in place to match the proposed growth in the region and will support the argument that later phases of each development should not proceed unless the public transport has been provided. In one of the preliminary

West Midlands

By Peter Cousins

peter@lichfield-software.uklinux.net

Coventry-Nuneaton

After 13 months of painful bus substitution, trains made a welcome return to the Coventry-Nuneaton route on Monday 13 June.

Sadly this service, which once linked Coventry with Nottingham, is now reduced to an hourly shuttle between Coventry and Nuneaton. The line first reopened in May 1987 with a new service along the Trent Valley from Stafford but by 2003 this had withered to a single peak-hour through train, with all others running to or from Nottingham.

The withdrawal of the through services results partly from the simplified phase one layout imposed by Network Rail at Nuneaton but was also recommended in the Midland main line route utilisation strategy last year to alleviate congestion between Leicester and Nottingham.

However we are pleased to note that the intermediate station at Bedworth, Warwickshire, was cleaned up by Central Trains and new platform shelters provided for the return of the trains.

The single-car class 153 unit used on this service occupies a through platform at Coventry for 10 minutes in each hour. This would be avoided if the service was extended south to Leamington Spa where, with just a relatively minor layout enhancement, an existing bay platform could be used. West Midlands branch strongly supports this idea and will be campaigning for this southern extension which could also serve the long-planned station at Kenilworth. There are plans for another new station - north of Coventry - to serve the new Arena Stadium.

Brinsford

A planning application has been submitted to South Staffordshire District Council for a major housing



A breakdown service that puts the environment on the road to recovery

For over 14 years the ETA has existed to promote greener motoring in Britain: actively campaigning for a sustainable transport system.

As a national motoring organisation we provide a 24 hour, 365 days a year breakdown service. And with an average response time of 35 minutes and 80% of breakdowns fixed at the roadside, our members quote us as the most efficient they've experienced.

Starting at just £39, we offer the full range of services from roadside recovery to home rescue and rest-of-europe cover.

You should join the ETA today for total peace of mind roadside rescue and to support greener motoring.

Phone 0800 212 810 or visit www.eta.co.uk

Lines are open 8am to 6pm Mon-Fri and 9am to 4pm Sat. Offer only available to new members and cannot be used in conjunction with any other offer.



Join the drive for greener motoring

ROADSIDE RESCUE



meetings, the Highways Agency admitted that even if over 100 new road schemes were completed in East Anglia, traffic congestion will still increase by 44% by 2016! This cannot be considered sustainable transport or value for money.

New posters

In the run-up to the ACORP community rail event in Norwich at the end of September, the branch produced a series of A1-sized posters. Two of the laminated posters cover Railfuture national issues, the other regional concerns. If other branches would like copies of the national posters, please contact East Anglia branch secretary Nick Dibben.

East Midlands

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

Merger

Progress continues towards a merger between Railfuture's East Midlands and North Midlands branches, which cover areas served by the same Midland main line services, as well as both being within the Government's East Midlands region. An interim committee was formed at a joint meeting of the branches in July, and a public meeting is planned to be held in Derby in October.

Loughborough station

The branch has responded to the public consultation on the "Eastern Gateway" scheme which is aimed at regenerating the rather derelict area in front of Loughborough railway station. It is important that we don't miss the opportunity to upgrade the station itself (to provide platforms of sufficient length to accommodate all the trains that stop there) and to improve access to the station by all modes of transport.

North Midlands

By Paul Clark
paul.clark@nottingham.ac.uk

East Midlands transport users forum

The first public meeting of the East Midlands transport users forum took place on 6 September in the branch at Newstead, on the Robin Hood Line. The meeting was attended by more than 60 people. The main speakers were Nick Brown, director of National Express, Phillip Davis, Rail Passengers Council, and West Midlands transport users forum, Mark Hudson, group manager, passenger transport, Nottinghamshire County Council.

EMPTUF was formed to fill the void left by the demise of the Rail Passenger Committees, and has an interim steering committee including two East Midlands Railfuture members. A list of issues that Railfuture intends to bring to EMPTUF's attention is:

- 1 Passenger Transport Executive for the East Midlands
- 2 Joint timetables booklet for the region
- 3 Public transport interchanges at stations
- 4 Mainline services north to Leeds and Manchester
- 5 MML infrastructure investment
- 6 Central Trains services re-distribution

Nottingham Express Transit

The patronage of NET is up by 40% compared to this time last year and it was pretty healthy then.

Additional trips were planned on Saturday and Sunday from September. During the Goose Fair, NET was planning to run at five-minute intervals.

According to the annual report, and with a background of reductions in Government transport funding, money for NET line 2 possibly will be approved this autumn. If financial support is approved, then line 2 may well be operational by 2011.

Wessex

By Peter Argent
fintrain@hotmail.com

Rail Ale

An interesting branch meeting in Weymouth heard from Heart of Wessex Rail Partnership Officer, Catherine Phillips, on the success that recent initiatives have had on the use of the line. Two of these have local support from the branch. The very successful Rail Ale Trail is monitored by members who ensure pubs are kept fully stocked with leaflets and have stamps to hand for visitors to the trail. The branch is also hoping to set up a user group to cover the southern end of the line.

Refranchising

It has been a busy time with refranchising both Greater Western and South West Trains. Members attended the Stagecoach annual conference and heard about progress made by South West Trains during the last year. Committee members also met with National Express to discuss aspirations and concerns and also to try to find out about its plans.

In connection with the Greater Western franchise, members attended a presentation by First Group. This provided an opportunity to hear about that company's plans and to express some views on services in the Wessex area.

Members also attended a presentation by Stagecoach Rail to hear their plans for the Greater Western franchise. It was interesting to compare the slightly different approach of the two bidders. Whoever the preferred bidder and whatever the outcome, it looks increasingly likely that reducing

the call on the Treasury coffers will be a prime objective.

Those members attending the various presentations and meetings generally held the view that while there are areas for improvement, the existing incumbents (SWT and First) provide a reasonably good service and could not see an overwhelming case for change.

HST relaunch

The branch also attended the launch by First Group of its refurbished HST units at the steam museum in Swindon. A particular improvement was the redesigned buffet coach that gave more room for users and a better ambience. The proposed lime green curtains were, however, less attractive!

Paddington open day

An invitation was received to the First open day at Paddington and this provided a very interesting opportunity to see how the busy station coped with everything from dealing with delays and cancellations to train cleaning.

Heritage railway

The branch also attended the launch of the heritage railway between Brockenhurst and Lymington pier with its refurbished slam door stock.

South Wales

By Guy Hardy
cawdronhardy1@yahoo.co.uk

New dawn in South Wales corridor
The introduction in December of Arriva Trains Wales standard pattern timetable heralds a step forward in rail travel along the South Wales east-west route.

Right from Milford Haven in the far extremity of west Wales to Manchester, travellers will benefit from more, faster long-distance services. This will enable the operator to develop new marketing and sales strategies to achieve substantial modal transfer in this corridor with, hopefully, some "out of the box" thinking yielding better initiatives than the usual two for one give-aways.

Obviously the new arrangements will take some bedding-in. Even in BR days the first day of a new timetable was for the brave! And it is already apparent that rigidly adhering to a standard pattern between west Wales and the north west has disadvantages as well as benefits. The new service will be operated by class 175s which have not demonstrated the best reliability statistics up to now.

Current arrangements show the problem of getting joined up thinking at train operator boundaries and connective arrangements will no doubt be examined and honed after the new service has been implemented.

However its easy to be critical. The new timetable is a substantial step

forward and we welcome and will support it while endeavouring to improve connections.

Scotland

By Mike Harrison
Secretary@RailFutureScotland.org.uk

Engineer remembered

A plaque was unveiled on platform four of Edinburgh's Haymarket Station on 26 July to commemorate the work of engineer John Miller, the designer of several Scottish lines, including Edinburgh-Glasgow, Glasgow-Dumfries and Edinburgh-Berwick-on-Tweed (the first cross-border line).

Forth Bridge closure

The Forth Bridge was closed for eight days at the end of July for scheduled work. This meant 450 trains per day being either diverted via Stirling or being replaced by buses. The closure - the longest in the bridge's 115-year history - was part of Network Rail's £13million investment in the structure's future. It allowed extensive scaffolding to be erected so that more than 170 people could work on steel close to the track, a job that cannot be done while trains are running.

Passenger satisfaction

First ScotRail has recorded its strongest customer satisfaction figures in terms of punctuality and reliability for the past five years, according to the latest results from the Strategic Rail Authority's National Rail Trends, issued on 24 June 2005.

Punctuality and reliability are at an all-time high at 82%, compared to the national average of 74%, while overall satisfaction has improved from 84% in spring 2004 to 86% in spring 2005.

Satisfaction with the cleanliness of trains has continued to show considerable improvement, rising to 78%, well above the national average of 66% and the highest score since the introduction of the survey in 1999. The Scottish franchise is one of the largest in the UK with nearly 2,000 miles of track, 650,000 train journeys a year and 336 stations.

New station

A new station has opened at Gartcosh in Glasgow, and there is a new bus-rail interlink service for the Vale of Leven. The Vale of Leven RailLink bus service will operate every 10 minutes during the day and there are up to four trains an hour between Vale of Leven railway stations and Glasgow.

South Suburban reopening

Edinburgh City Council has handed over plans to reopen the South Suburban Railway to the Scottish Executive. Rather than take the project forward by themselves, councillors believe Scottish ministers are better placed to re-introduce passenger trains in the



The most contentious proposal in the stakeholder consultation for the Greater Western franchise is the withdrawal of the sleeper service which has prompted the creation of a Save our Sleeper Group with the full support of Railfuture Devon and Cornwall.

An on-line petition has received more than 2,000 signatures at the time of writing including Tim Smith, founder of the world renowned Eden Project in Cornwall.

The Strategic Rail Authority claimed the service did not offer value for money, but requests by Railfuture and Save Our Sleeper to get any detailed figures to prove this were rejected on "commercial confidentiality" grounds by both the SRA and First Great Western.

Local and central government is rightly subject to an immense amount of scrutiny in the way tax payers' money is spent and often have to provide detailed accounts of their spending.

By comparison Railfuture Devon and Cornwall finds it strange that details of how taxpayers' money is spent in the rail industry has to be kept secret.

It is unlikely that the SRA and First Great Western know precisely how much income the sleeper generates as takings from turn-up-and-go fares cannot be allocated to specific trains. The costs saved from withdrawal are likely to be very small. The class 57 locomotives would be retained as they are used as daytime cover for InterCity 125 train failures. Marketing and advertising is now almost non-existent so there would be no savings there.

The line would still have to remain open at night for freight services. In fact the only savings

south of the capital. Campaigners have fought for decades to reopen the service after it was withdrawn in 1962. Despite initial reservations, the council recently embraced the scheme and transport chief Andrew Burns pledged to use cash from the planned road tolls project to help pay for reopening the line. But following the congestion-charging referendum defeat, the council now hopes to persuade the Executive to find some of the £18million funding needed. In a council report, city development director Andrew Holmes said the local authority wants to secure the reopening of the South Suburban at the same time as the Edinburgh-Borders rail link opens in around three years. But he said: "The Executive has to approve



The Save Our Sleeper petition being presented at 10 Downing Street. In the picture are, from left, former Governor of the Bank of England Lord (Eddie) George, St Ives MP Andrew George, Night Riviera steward Marion Fisher, Falmouth/Camborne MP Julia Goldsworthy, Night Riviera steward Linda Maynard, South our Sleeper joint chairman Andrew Roden, North Cornwall MP Dan Rogerson, Olga Polizi, Robin Hanbury-Tennison, and Tim Naylor member of Railfuture Devon and Cornwall Branch Committee

would be from the leasing costs of the coaches and a few staff. The National Rail Enquiries on-line journey planner did not contain any details of the Sleeper for "technical reasons". When



pressed on this NRES said "One of the main reasons we are unable to show the sleeper services on the journey planner is that ticket purchase cannot be completed with the online retailers.

Any journey shown on the journey planner must have tickets that are available through the retailers. If it becomes possible to purchase online then we may include the services at this point." This is pa-

tently rubbish as all turn-up-and-go fares are valid in the seating accommodation for the sleeper and these can be booked on line.

There are many who feel the sleeper is being deliberately under-promoted, although both First Great Western and NRES deny this.

Statements in support of the Sleeper have been made in the Commons by local MPs Andrew George (St Ives) and Julia Goldsworthy (Falmouth/Camborne), and the petition was personally delivered to 10 Downing Street by the Campaign on 14 September.

Anyone who wishes to sign the petition should visit the Save Our Sleeper website: www.saveoursleeper.com. Six months after Railfuture Devon and Cornwall pointed the problem out, the sleeper was eventually included in the National Rail website journey planner in September.

any new passenger services on the Scottish network. The project can now effectively be taken forward only by the Scottish Executive. The council's role can best be described as project champion."

The Edinburgh Suburban & Southside Junction Railway opened in 1884, running from St Leonard's to Haymarket with stations at Duddingston, Newington, Blackford Hill, Morningside Road and Gorgie. Backers believe the service could now play a crucial role in an integrated transport network, enabling passengers to get off trains and board trams at new interchanges or existing stations.

St Andrews needs rail

First ScotRail have been boasting that their arrangements for bus-rail

link from Leuchars to St Andrews for the Open Golf Championship were a great success.

This may be so, but how much better it would be if trains actually went to St Andrews again? Fife Council has recently been talking about it, but it seems as if only in terms of taking no action! The cost would probably be about £35million. To improve the road access could be about £190million - and St Andrews is a small, compact town so where would the cars go? It's already congested and spoiled by motor traffic.

Other special services have included late-night trains from Edinburgh while the festival is on, but these seem to be only for the benefit of those on the Glasgow route.

Airport rail link

Even before the official consultation on the Edinburgh Airport Rail Link officially closed in mid-August, it looked as if official minds were already closed and the very expensive tunnel option would be chosen. Of course, if electricity rather than diesel were the fuel, several of the problems (like the power needed to climb out of the tunnel, the release of exhaust fumes) would be solved.

Dunbar rail boost

Dunbar now has Virgin CrossCountry services stopping every two hours in addition to the existing GNER calls. While the A1 road between Edinburgh and Dunbar has recently been upgraded to dual carriageway making the 30-mile trip easier, the car user still has the problem of what to do with the car once in Edinburgh. The improved train service should help reduce car journeys to Edinburgh - and elsewhere.

Thames

By Chris Wright
chriswrightmk@aol.com

Fighting cuts

Oxford Bicester Rail Action Group is furious at Strategic Rail Authority plans to cut the service to one return train a day in the new franchise. A public meeting with Tony Baldry MP saw him present a petition to the Commons and raise the issues in a debate. The group has secured a link between the town station and Bicester Shopping Village. It is hoped to organise a delegation to the Department for Transport.

Rail enhancements

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister received detailed funding bids for rail enhancements in connection with the expansion of Milton Keynes and Aylesbury Vale in July. These included Milton Keynes Central extra platform and increased capacity, Wolverton station building and a new Aylesbury Parkway (with Chiltern Railways). A funding decision is due to be announced in the autumn.

East-West

The ODPM study into East-West Rail (Bedford to Oxford and Aylesbury) and transport needs on the axis was due in September. It is thought to accept the case but sees the service as only making a limited contribution to the travel needs. Funding options are now being explored.

New homes

Greenway Homes was due to consult in September for a major housing development at the former Great Horwood Second World War airfield, near Winslow. Planning gain may include a major contribution to reopening the line.

New franchises

We submitted our aspirations for the franchise to the companies



bidding for the Great Western franchise.

Meeting point

Laing Rail are speaking at the 16 October branch meeting in Aylesbury.

Rail users celebrate

The Bedford to Bletchley Rail Users Association is celebrating 25 years of campaigning with a Rail Day on 29 October in Bletchley, and a dinner with Chris Green as guest speaker in September.

Devon and Cornwall

By Stuart Walker

raifuturesw@swalker79.fsnet.co.uk

Exeter to Barnstaple

Contrary to our report on page 18 of *Railwatch* 104, there were no extra stops for Morchard Road in the 2005 summer timetable and Coplestone gained the trains instead. Evidently the change was done at the last minute as not all published timetables are correct. Coplestone may be the right choice, as its parish population will soon reach 900, whereas few people live at Morchard Road.

Greater Western could mean fewer trains

The stakeholder consultation for the Greater Western franchise has revealed plans to cut back services in Cornwall and Devon. The proposed cuts are:

- Withdrawal of one daytime train between Penzance and Paddington

- Possible withdrawal of the Night Riviera sleeper service

- Reduction to two trains per day for intermediate stations on the Newquay branch

- Withdrawal of semi-fast services from Exeter to Paddington, only introduced in December 2004

- Tiverton Parkway to Paddington reduced from 11 trains to seven trains per day

- Withdrawal of all but two direct services between Taunton and Westbury

The proposed withdrawal of direct Cornwall and West of England to Westbury trains will result in longer journey times for passengers travelling between Cornwall and Devon to Southampton and the South Coast.

They will be forced to travel via Bristol (on Virgin's already overcrowded Cross Country service), the infrequent and slow Exeter-Salisbury service or via Reading, adding an hour to the journey time and at higher fares.

There is a strong demand for journeys from Cornwall and Plymouth to Portsmouth because of their links with the Royal Navy. Through services from the West of England to Newbury and Pewsey will also be withdrawn forcing passengers to travel via Bristol and Westbury or via Reading at

higher fares. The proposals for the Newquay branch are perhaps the most surprising. It is proposed to withdraw all but two stopping trains a day, effectively creating a "closure by stealth" service for intermediate stations, and instead run a year round through service from Paddington. The SRA's Community Rail Strategy was supposed to allow the local community to influence service levels on the branch lines, yet Railfuture has failed to find any support for the Newquay branch proposals. They have clearly not come from the local community. Tying up two eight-coach InterCity 125 trains for four to five hours at Newquay every day in the quiet months of November, January and February cannot be the most efficient use of these trains especially bearing in mind the cuts in Paddington services proposed elsewhere.

The Branch Line Working Group has suggested that although through services in the summer are necessary, in the winter a service of six to eight stopping trains carefully timed to connect with Paddington trains at Par would be more appropriate. The county council has expressed the same view, but has said it would support cuts in the Newquay branch if the Sprinter was used to provide a two-trains per hour service to Falmouth instead.

Chris Austin, who spearheaded the Community Rail Strategy for the SRA, told Railfuture Devon and Cornwall the following when questioned about the Newquay proposal: "Your question on Newquay deserves a proper response, and I hope this is helpful, although I would not claim it is complete. The basis of the proposition is, as you indicate, around meeting the market which, from Newquay is almost exclusively long-distance, and recognising that usage otherwise is low outside the summer peak.

"This does not fly in the face of the community rail development strategy, which is based on developing the potential of the lines, but also about containing or reducing costs. You will recall that the foreword to the strategy says that 'too many empty seats are running up and down Britain's branch lines safely and reliably, but expensively'.

"Where we can fill them, that is good; in other cases, we have got to look at other ways of putting the lines on a long term sustainable basis. Remember too that this is a minimum requirement, and we would always consider improvements that were self funding, providing there were capacity to do so reliably (which there should be on the Newquay branch.)

"Your proposition about making the question of frequency one for the

community to determine begs the question of who would pay for this. The attraction of running a longer distance train from Newquay is two-fold: not only does it serve the market better, but it can reduce the resource cost by making use of marginal time of an HST, and avoiding the core cost of a class 153 lease.

"I am sure this is not the end of the debate, and I would underline that this is a consultation, so do make your points to my planning colleagues, who will consider them before decisions are made."

The good news is that the consultation document appears to keep current frequencies on the remaining branch lines, although with a few cuts to Looe in the winter. However there have been local and railway press reports of a confidential timetable proposing greater reductions on the branch lines than stated in the consultation document. Those who have seen this timetable have been asked to keep it secret so it is not clear whether it will be implemented.

Ryanair cuts Newquay flights

One of the reasons quoted by the local press for the proposed cuts in Cornish rail services to London is the availability of cheaper and faster flights to Stansted offered by Ryanair. Its website (www.Ryanair.com) recently promoted fares as low as 29 pence one way, although pointing out that taxes, fees and charges need to be added which would increase the cost to "no more than £14.70". The cheapest single rail fare from Truro to Paddington is the Apex for £34.

Newquay Airport is currently subsidised by the county council and in an attempt to reduce the cost to the council taxpayer and provide for improvements, an airport development fee of £5 per passenger is proposed from October.

Ryanair objected and now intends to withdraw around half its flights in protest. Could Ryanair's loss be the railway's gain? Recently, when one of Newquay airport's last flights of the day to London was cancelled, passengers travelled to Bodmin Parkway to catch the sleeper instead.

St Ives branch line new fares and service a success?

According to the Association of Community Rail Partnerships, the changes in the fares structure and timetable on the Community Rail pilot St Ives branch has resulted in a 35% increase in use.

The changes have caused controversy locally as the timetable was amended to provide a better service for Lelant Saltings Park and Ride but a reduced service at Lelant and Carbis Bay. The return fare from St Ives to Penzance and Hayle was also increased by 37% without any prior warning.

National Railcard Holders found

there were no longer any discounts on fares between St Erth and St Ives, except for Cornish Railcard holders. After complaints by residents holding the Senior Citizens Railcard, a special discount card was sent out to St Ives residents who held that railcard.

Although Wessex Trains have correctly identified that tourists as the main users of the branch and have targeted the service and higher fares to this market, there is still a view in the local community and within the newly formed Friends of St Ives Branch Line that Wessex is not supporting the few local residents that use the branch all year round. There is concern that the winter Sunday service is not timed to meet main line connections.

Lostwithiel and Bugle win garden support

Bugle on the Newquay branch and Lostwithiel on the Cornish main line are to benefit from volunteer support for garden projects. Funding has come via Restormel Borough Council, the National Trust's rural stations project and Wessex Trains. John Hobby, manager of the National Trust's project, said: "We are delighted to receive funding from Restormel for these stations and hope the local residents will see the improvements this autumn.

"These are pilot schemes and more will be done if it is well received, and more people come forward to get involved."

Andrew Griffiths - Wessex Trains business manager for Devon and Cornwall - said: "The station gardens project is a great idea, very popular with our passengers and an excellent means of getting communities more involved with their local station."

Ten years ago, Railfuture Devon and Cornwall identified Bugle as the worst station in Cornwall. There was no shelter and no timetable information provided on the platform, just one solitary lamp. Since then a shelter and timetable display board have been provided. These have been vandalised in the past so it is good news that the local community has got involved to improve the station.

However the SRA is proposing to reduce the train service to two trains per day. Railfuture hopes that Bugle will not end up like Stone in Staffordshire, a well-kept station but with hardly any train service.

North East

By Peter Kenyon

peterkenyon@yahoo.com

At the branch AGM I agreed to take over as correspondent for *Railwatch* in place of Peter Wood, to whom the branch is much indebted for his work as press officer for many years. The branch continues to hold informative meetings, and to liaise

with new and established franchise holders, user groups and local forums.

Campaigns

One campaign which failed was that to preserve existing services on the Saltburn line and the through service from Teesside to Newcastle. This was supported by local authorities, user groups, regional MPs, passengers and those concerned with regional development. All this was to no avail. The cuts went ahead. The reason given was a drive to improve cross country punctuality.

The campaign in support of the renewal of the GNER franchise on the main line was similarly supported, Northern MPs and passengers swelling the support for the franchise holder. In this case the level of payments by GNER for the privilege of operating the service secured the deal.

In this context it will be interesting to see the fate of the proposal by the Grand Central Railway Company to operate services without subsidy between King's Cross, Halifax, Bradford and Sunderland. Recent press releases report petitions containing 3,000 signatures from Sunderland and 2,000 from Halifax organised by regional newspapers, together with support from MPs in an early day motion, local authorities, regional groups and passenger transport authorities. Objections from existing track users have been countered by a proposal to operate the 125mph five-coach Class 222 Meridian trains in tandem from King's Cross to Doncaster, with one portion going ahead to the West Riding and the other continuing to Sunderland via York and Hartlepool. For more information see www.grandcentralrail.com

Tyne and Wear area

Events and proposals concerning the Tyne and Wear Metro have been of interest and some concern. The system, opened in stages in the early 1980s, is unique in that the passenger transport executive (trading as Nexus) owns the track, trains and stations on a system that carries 37million passengers a year. An extension to Sunderland was opened in 2002 with the track from Pelaw to Sunderland being owned and controlled by Network Rail and shared by Metro, Northern Rail, and freight services.

The recent Tall Ships festival on the Tyne saw the Metro handling huge crowds (the *Evening Chronicle* estimated 250,000 extra journeys!) and ended with a late night firework display. Late services were provided by the Metro, except on the Sunderland line where agreements with freight operators made it impossible to run after 23.15, resulting in stranded passengers.

Traffic on the Sunderland extension,



Another air-rail link for London

The Docklands Light Railway is expanding. It is extending its network, carrying more passengers and lengthening its trains.

In December the DLR opens its £140million branch to London City Airport with a three-mile new line from Canning Town. Work has also started on the extension under the Thames to Woolwich Arsenal.

The original two-car articulated units on the DLR are being expanded to three cars, as in the picture above.

This was all made possible by an agreement in July 2004 when the Government gave its support for Transport for London to borrow £3billion over five years for capital projects under a new "prudent borrowing" regime.

But TfL says it is still over-dependent on central government as the main source of its income.

Picture: DLR

which continues from the centre of Sunderland to South Hylton, with a major bus interchange at Park Lane and three other intermediate stations, has not reached the projected level and there are now plans to curtail services.

So far there has been a Northern train every half hour which runs from Sunderland to Newcastle Central with one intermediate stop. Since the Metro stops 11 times between Sunderland and Newcastle Central and all tickets are interchangeable, this service has proved popular.

Now, without any prior consultation with the PTA or the rail users, Nexus proposes an hourly train service, and also intends to reduce the Metro service from Sunderland to South Hylton. The branch is challenging this, but the arrangements have an air of finality about them.

Plans for the future of transport in the Tyne and Wear area have hitherto included street tramways linking with the Metro lines, but a recent announcement of a bid for a £500million investment in the Metro dropped this concept.

The main emphasis now is on refurbishment of the existing system with a new fleet of state-of-the-art vehicles, new signalling, new ticketing systems plus refurbished stations and bus interchanges. Details are to be found at www.projectorpheus.com. Car ownership has been growing more rapidly in this region than anywhere else in the UK during the past 10 years, so development of public transport

is essential. It will be interesting to see how funding is provided. It seems unlikely ownership of the track, trains and stations by Nexus will continue.

Tyne Valley (Newcastle-Carlisle)

The Tyne Valley User Group organised Music trains from both Newcastle and Carlisle during August and on 4 and 18 September has advertised Event Trains. On 24 and 25 September a Last of the Summer Tyne weekend was planned with events at various points on the line. As well as being a route with untapped passenger potential, scenically this line is one of the neglected gems of the rail network and the user group is to be congratulated on its energy and enterprise. Its website is www.info@tynevalleyrail.org.uk

Ashington-Blyth-Tyne line

Network Rail is now re-examining the business case for the restoration of passenger services. The SE Northumberland Rail User Group has contacted the Department for Transport, which is the holder of the purse strings.

London & South East

By Robert Stevens

robert.stevens@raifuture.org.uk
and Graham Larkbey

Lobbying pays off

The Strategic Rail Authority threat to the Victoria-Dartford line has been lifted after strong lobbying.

Dover-Folkestone

A £10million upgrade project to the chalk cliff tunnels was carried out

during the summer. Replacement bus services were frequent and well organised with staff at both stations to guide passengers.

An unexpected spin-off was a better train service at the far end of the line between Dover, Deal and Ramsgate. Only one through service was being operated from Dover and Deal to London via Minster, but stopping most services on the Dover-Ramsgate section at Minster did offer better connection opportunities.

It was hoped that this service pattern would continue after the tunnel work was completed.

Marshlink, Coastway

There are planned cutbacks in the December timetable. The Hastings-Eastbourne-London service will disappear, and three trains per hour along the coastal stretch would be replaced by one, which would be the diesel unit from Ashford to Brighton.

Railfuture Kent division welcomed the long overdue introduction of a direct Ashford-Brighton train, but this should not have caused reductions to other services.

There had also been concerns that Ham Street and Appledore would come under threat. The introduction of new trains on the Marshlink Line last year had been the first improvement the line had seen for decades, but now it was clear that the single track working is inadequate to cope with faster services.

Barking-Gospel Oak

Following major engineering works during a two-week blockade in August, temporary speed restrictions on the line have been lifted. Some permanent restrictions are still in force but some relaxed. This should all aid punctuality and ultimately lead to shorter journey times, thus helping to increase line capacity.

Sudbury Hill, Harrow

Chiltern has indicated that the Monday-Friday off-peak service should be evened out in the December timetable change.

However Chiltern has turned down requests for an evening and weekend service to be introduced (most other London stations have both as a matter of course).

The campaign on these continues. The station is now shown on maps as an interchange with London Underground.

Calling all women

Railwatch is keen to highlight the problems – and advantages – for women using trains.

If you have ideas or would like to write an article for Railwatch, please contact the editors.