



East Midlands

By Anthony Kay
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Franchise consultation

Attention in this region has been focused on the East Midlands franchise consultation over the past few months. The Railfuture branch has had a major input into the response from TravelWatch East Midlands as well as making further submissions ourselves.

The biggest change proposed in the document is to reorganise the service pattern on the Midland main line, with the aim of segmenting long-distance and commuter passenger flows.

We support this aim, but have some reservations about how it is proposed to achieve it. In particular, the idea that one of the four services in the "standard hour" timetable should split into Nottingham and Derby portions at Leicester has been criticised as making the timetable less robust.

There will be an hourly train to Kettering, with a proposal that this will be extended to a new Corby station. We certainly support this, but leaving Market Harborough with only one train per hour is not acceptable.

The proposed service pattern will also make it difficult for passengers from stations south of Leicester to connect to Birmingham, Peterborough, Sheffield and beyond.

We strongly support the proposal for a regular direct service from Nottingham to Leeds, and for the retention of the through service from Liverpool to Norwich, rather than splitting it at Nottingham.

However, another direct service which is not mentioned in the franchise document is Leicester-Manchester.

The Route Utilisation Strategy showed that a two-hourly service would be possible, and this would greatly improve travel opportunities between the East Midlands and the North-West.

Bedford Commuters' Association has also made a response to the consultation on behalf of several rail users' groups in the Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes area.

As well as highlighting the needs for better rail services in all directions from this area, which is targeted for major growth, they have mentioned some more ambitious schemes.

These include restoring four tracks between Bedford and Kettering and around Leicester, and reconnecting the Old Dalby test track to Nottingham.

Loughborough station

Readers of this column are probably getting bored with items on this topic, but the franchise consultation has given an opportunity for a major push to make the fourth busiest



TRACK WATCH: The VIEW TM Technology checks for worn components on trains

Picture: AEA

Cold eye on components

A device developed by a British company is now being used in Sweden to keep trains properly maintained. The VIEW TM equipment is a track-side detecting system which has been used in rail depots in Britain for more than four years.

It measures brake pads, wheel profiles and third rail pick-up shoes for wear and reliability, analyses the measurements, automatically produces statistical reports, and predicts the remaining life of components.

VIEW TM was developed by AEA Technology Rail – now renamed DeltaRail – which joined forces with EuroMaint AB, the Swedish rolling stock maintenance specialists to develop a cold winter version.

The collaboration began with an installation at Hagalund depot in Stockholm. Now a second system is to be installed at Bro depot, which maintains commuter trains for Stockholm. The system performed reliably through one of the worst Swedish winters in 20 years but some subtle improvements were made as a result of the trial.

station in the East Midlands "fit for purpose". We have received strong support from Loughborough's Labour MP, Andy Reed, and we are also working with Charnwood Borough Council.

Car parking is totally inadequate, but the biggest problem is that the usable part of the platforms is only about half the length of some of the trains that stop there; this cannot be remedied without resignalling, which is due to be completed in 2012-13.

Meanwhile, Loughborough is due to play a major role in the 2012 Olympics because of the concentration of sports facilities in the town.

The only immediate sign of improvements is that Loughborough has been selected and funded for step-free access under the Access for All scheme, intended to make stations more usable by people with disabilities.

Cycle restrictions

A rearguard action by cycling campaigners has brought a slight alleviation of new restrictions placed by

Midland Mainline on the carriage of cycles on their trains. The restriction to two cycles per train (four used to be allowed) was introduced without any publicity earlier in the summer.

A campaign of letters to MML management resulted in four cycles being allowed on HSTs. MML Meridian trains remain with a restriction to two cycles.

It is disappointing that after decades of campaigning by cyclists, TOCs still fail to recognise the demand (especially the suppressed demand) for the cycle-rail combination, and so continue to specify train designs with totally inadequate levels of cycle space.

Transport 2000

Transport 2000 has compiled a list of improvements it would like to see in the East Midlands and planned a public meeting to publicise them on Thursday 28 September in Nottingham.

It wants: Sunday service on Robin Hood to Mansfield, expansion of the East Coast main line, resignal-

ling at Trent Junction, reopening Kettering-Corby, reopening of the Matlock-Buxton, speeding up services and increased frequencies.

East Anglia

By Nick Dibben and Trevor Garrod
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Change of plan?

Evidence given by Railfuture and other environmental groups at the East of England Plan examination in public during 2005 has been taken on board by the Planning Inspector in his report.

We argued that the proposed transport strategy which would have resulted in a substantial increase in road traffic and congestion was not sustainable and was counter to the urgent need to address climate change.

The Inspector agreed, and has suggested a total rewrite of the transport policies to give greater emphasis to reducing car use and achieving modal shift to public transport.

The new policies include priorities for improving rail services between key centres within the region and extra capacity to allow greater use of rail for shifting goods to and from the region's ports.

The only disappointment within the report was the lack of support for a new East-West rail link between Bedford and Cambridge.

In a follow-up to the report the Branch is meeting with representatives from the Eastern England Regional Assembly to discuss how to take these schemes forward.

Unfare practices

The branch has complained to First Capital Connect about changes to evening peak ticket restrictions that no longer allow day return tickets to be used between 16.30 and 19.01.

Following the widespread protest against the changes, FCC have eased some of the restrictions, although there is no change for longer distance travellers within the branch area.

We have also commented on the lack of information on departure boards and announcements on trains where the restrictions apply.

FCC is undertaking a study into ways of increasing seating capacity in the short term on its longer distance trains from King's Cross, and the branch has attended a seminar where the constraints on the route and possible solutions were discussed.

There will be another seminar before the report is issued at the end of the year.

East Suffolk

There was good news for the East Suffolk Travellers Association in August when consultants Faber Maunsell – commissioned by Suffolk County Council – recom-



mended construction of a passing loop at Beccles to enable an hourly service to run between Ipswich and Lowestoft. The cost would be £3million, rather less than previous estimates by Railtrack/Network Rail.

Transport portfolio holder Councillor Guy McGregor called for all interested parties to push for this investment.

Meanwhile, ESTA has opposed the bright idea (or rather, hoary old chestnut) produced by regeneration company First East for moving Lowestoft station back 400 yards up the line from its present excellent location.

ESTA secretary Rod Lock has been in contact with Department for Transport officials and, based on their advice, argues that the high cost of relocating the station would not stand up to the Government's own cost to benefit criteria.

Furthermore, a regeneration company has no powers to close a railway station (which is what relocation would entail).

That can be done only by Network Rail or a train operating company (both of which have stated that they want Lowestoft station to remain where it is) or the Secretary of State for Transport.

London & South East

By Graham Larkbey

After years of campaigning for better train services on the Barking to Gospel Oak line, it has happened!

Trains run every 20 minutes during the height of the rush hour, and the Monday-Friday evening service is half-hourly all the way through, apart from one gap of an hour between the 22.08 and 23.08 from Barking.

The users group has suggested a way in which that might be filled, together with a proposed extra 22.55 from Gospel Oak.

Weekend services are basically unchanged, but we hope subsequent improvement packages will include these as well - particularly an earlier start and later finish on Sundays.

For some reason, new timetable posters did not go up on station platforms as they usually do. We filled the gap by printing our own and putting those up, but the full-size ones ought to have been up from the beginning.

Silverlink's website was also rather tardy in making the new timetable available.

At the users group meeting in May, the guest speaker was Hugh Chaplain, head of rail franchising at Transport for London, who outlined TfL's plans for the Silverlink Metro group of routes from autumn 2007 onwards.

Fasten your seat belts and hold on to your hats - this is heady stuff. Basically, by December 2010 TfL

intends to have four trains per hour running on the Richmond-Stratford route, plus four trains an hour on a new Queen's Park-Stratford route via Primrose Hill and Camden Road.

The Barking-Gospel Oak line is also to have four trains per hour, running between Barking and Clapham Junction via Willesden Junction.

The idea is to get this vastly improved service pattern in place in time for it to bed down before the Olympics, but obviously it will bring massive benefits to the whole area for years afterwards.

Stations will be improved and extended where necessary to accommodate longer trains, and other infrastructure improvements will be carried out in collaboration with Network Rail. Our line could even be electrified!

The shortlist of bidders to take over operation of the Silverlink Metro routes from November 2007 was announced in August.

They are Govia (operators of Southern), MTR Laing (operators of Chiltern), NedRailways (main train operator in the Netherlands and operators of Merseyrail) and the current incumbents, National Express Group.

Three of them have already asked to meet us to discuss what we want to see under the new regime.

We recently had a useful session with Govia and look forward to meeting the others.

A few weeks ago, local Friends of the Earth activists blitzed the accumulation of cans and rubbish at South Tottenham. Nice work, guys. But isn't this the job of the train operator?

The users group can be found at: <http://www.barking-gospel oak.org.uk/index.html>

North West

By Trevor Bishop
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Golf victory

Wirral Transport Users Association found out fairly late in the day that Network Rail was planning to take possession of the Wrexham to Bidston line from the evening of Saturday 22 July and keep it closed for engineering works on Sunday 23 July, the final day of the British Open Golf Championship at the Royal Liverpool Golf Course, Hoylake.

It came as a surprise to Arriva Trains Wales too. They planned to run longer trains during the event to help with the estimated 50,000 visitors a day that were expected during the tournament. They were hoping to use the event to promote the line significantly to those who aren't regular users. Network Rail's apparent offer of up to 50 extra buses to the Wirral peninsular seems not to have taken any note of the expected congestion that the event

caused. Indeed in a leaflet produced by Merseytravel, travel by train was strongly advised, "leave the car at home, and travel by train to avoid delays and congestion".

Letters were written to several parties including the Parliament Under Secretary of State for Transport, the Welsh Assembly Government and the Local MP, Stephen Hesford. The upshot was that Network Rail saw the error of its ways and postponed the works.

CrossCountry cuts campaign

North West rail user groups and Railfuture North West has protested to the Department for Transport regarding the future shape of the new CrossCountry franchise. The DfT published its proposals for the franchise in June and the key changes for the North West are the loss of CrossCountry services from points north of Manchester and Crewe to Birmingham and beyond.

The removal of these services also removes Manchester-Scotland services from the CrossCountry network and these are proposed to transfer to TransPennine and be operated by class 185s. It is also

proposed to divide the South West services from the North West which will not go beyond Bristol. There will be no through services beyond Reading to the south coast.

Railfuture NW's objections to these proposals are principally about the loss of through services for many key cities and towns across the North West, with the enforced change at an already overcrowded Birmingham New Street being a major disincentive to travel.

Additionally, those who want to travel to Brighton or Gatwick from north of Crewe or Manchester could face up to five changes to get there, whereas there are now services with just one change (at Manchester). A minimum of two return journeys a day to the South Coast and the South West should be retained.

Railfuture NW has made a strong point that if there are needs elsewhere for rolling stock, this should not be done at the expense of existing services. New stock should be bought. The running of Manchester-Scotland services by class 185s is bound to impinge on timings.

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ROADSIDE RESCUE

Local action



The 185s are 100mph maximum, whereas the tilting Voyagers currently on this route run at 125mph over much of the West Coast main line.

The point has also been made about consequent reduction in the long-term prospects for return of CrossCountry services to Liverpool and Blackpool, with Liverpool being European Capital of Culture in 2008 and Blackpool still being a major leisure destination.

We are also worried about the impact of CrossCountry trains running via Wilmslow on local services.

Some local morning peak trains were lost as a result of the introduction of half-hourly Manchester-London services in 2004.

Transport 2000

Transport 2000 was planning a Growing the Railways event in Crewe on Friday 15 September.

Scotland

By Mike Harrison

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We have considerable sympathy for GNER in its reaction to the July judgment denying a judicial review against the Rail Regulator. GNER considers that the judgment is fundamentally flawed. It considers that two train operators calling at the same station and picking up the same set of passengers are not in competition because of their differing contractual arrangements with government. It is obvious that GNER and its competitors operate in the same market.

Anything which threatens the fragile profitability and structure of the GNER franchise would have serious effects for Scottish users of the East Coast main line.

Chris Garnett has been a "weel-kent" face in Scotland for many years. While we don't think that GNER is perfect, we do appreciate the tremendous effort he has put into improving its services. We wish him well.

RAGES

Rail Action Group East of Scotland, a Railfuture affiliated group, continues to provide good service to its members by sending email bulletins promptly with details of proposed service disruptions on the East Coast Line (Virgin & GNER) whether caused by maintenance or strikes.

Megatrain

We now have Megatrain fares on offer on the Glasgow/Edinburgh-Manchester and Edinburgh-Morpeth routes. It is too early to comment on effects.

First ScotRail cycle facilities

The train operator has invested over £200,000 in installing cycle hoops at 178 stations across Scotland. The completion of this project comes shortly after First ScotRail won the award for customer ser-

vice at the 2005 National Cycle-Rail awards after increasing the number of bike spaces on trains and launching a cycle rescue service.

Customers can now take advantage of cycle hoops, lockers or cycle racks at 331 stations. The first stations to have cycle hoops installed were Hamilton West, Kirkwood and Maryhill, with the final ones going in at Invergowrie, Roybridge and Corroir. The average investment per station was £1,100.

New through ticket

First ScotRail and Stagecoach have joined forces to offer customers a new through ticketing opportunity for travel between Inverkeithing station and Edinburgh Airport on to the airdirect747 bus from Inverkeithing station.

Bathgate birthday

Since the Edinburgh-Bathgate re-opening 20 years ago, a series of improvements have been introduced:

1987 evening services, 1988 Sunday services, 1998 half-hourly services to and from Edinburgh during the day, 1999 24 hour online CCTV, 2000 bus link from Livingston North to Kirkton campus, 2002 line extension to Newcraighall, 2003 opening of Edinburgh Park station, increasing commuter opportunities, 2004 introduction of customer information systems and extension of platforms, 2005 class 170 trains used on line and extension of car parks at all stations along the route

Bombardier deal

First ScotRail has awarded two contracts to Bombardier. The main contract is a fleet support agreement for which Bombardier will provide technical support and spare parts for First ScotRail's 59 class 170 trains, until 2011.

Bombardier will also supply heavy maintenance materials for these carriages which operate services between Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Inverness, as well as in Fife and local services from Glasgow Queen Street.

This maintenance work will be carried out at Haymarket depot, which is currently undergoing a £6million programme of enhancements, thanks to joint funding by Scottish Executive and First ScotRail.

In addition, the contract includes the installation of remote monitoring hardware and the development of condition monitoring software, to further improve and enhance fleet performance.

A second contract, valued at over £1.5million, has also been agreed. This will see the installation of passenger information systems on First ScotRail's class 158 diesel trains as well as the upgrade of the existing equipment on the earlier class 170 trains. This programme of improvements will also be carried out at Haymarket depot.

150 festival

Celebrations took place on Friday 7 April at Dunkeld and Birnam sta-

tion to mark 150 years since the opening of the rail line between Perth and Dunkeld and Birnam. As part of the re-enactment, a plaque was unveiled by the Earl of Mansfield to commemorate the occasion. This was followed by a reception at the railway-founded Birnam Institute. Originally, Dunkeld and Birnam was the terminus for trains from Perth. In 1863, when the line was extended to Pitlochry, it became a through station and from 1865 it was part of the Highland Railway until 1923 when the London Midland & Scottish Railway took over before nationalisation in 1948 with the arrival of British Railways.

Fares overhaul

Passenger Focus, the rail consumer watchdog, has sounded a warning about First ScotRail's overhaul of long-distance fares to be introduced on 10 September. Routes affected include journeys linking Edinburgh/Glasgow to Aberdeen and Inverness.

Robert Samson, passenger link manager for Passenger Focus, said: "Introducing a new Standard Open Return for long-distance journeys before 09.15 instead of the Saver ticket means some passengers are going to be hit by a significant fare rise of up to 10%.

"While the new book-ahead Value Advance tickets, which are subject to availability, can offer good deals for those people who can be flexible about when they travel, this move will be a blow to those who don't have the luxury of choosing to travel later or being able to book in advance. On some of the routes covered by this new fares policy, Value Advance Returns will simply not be available."

Passenger Focus' latest National Passenger Survey results show that despite satisfaction with their overall journey remaining high, rail passengers in Scotland are increasingly disappointed with the value for money of their ticket with just 55% satisfied.

The latest results fares research showed that 45% of leisure and business passengers like to book tickets in advance because they think tickets will be cheaper, they won't have to queue and can reserve a seat

Seven out of 10 leisure passengers have decided not to travel by train because of the cost of the ticket, with 44% of those choosing to travel by car instead.

Robert Samson concluded: "Our recent research indicates that the balance between a turn-up-and-go and a book-ahead railway is vital.

"As First ScotRail seeks to maximise income and manage increasing demand for peak time services, there is a risk we shall lose the affordable walk-on railway that passengers value.

"Our research shows that some people decide not to travel because

of cost. We will keep monitoring the impact of this new fares structure to ensure passengers are getting a good deal and that the right balance is struck between book-ahead and turn-up-and-go."

Yorkshire

By Peter Davies

Rail users unite

Passenger Focus arranged the first ever Rail User Group Conference for rail user groups in Yorkshire and the North East of England at the Royal Station Hotel, York, on 17 June.

The meeting was chaired by Christine Knights of Passenger Focus and the speakers included Richard Thompson of Network Rail and Malcolm Brown of Northern Rail.

David Sidebottom, rail link manager of Passenger Focus gave a presentation on the work being done with rail user groups. The emphasis of the presentation was the value of intelligence from rail user groups, and the commitment of Passenger Focus to work effectively with them.

Richard Thompson of Network Rail stressed the importance of the forthcoming Rail Utilisation Strategy for Yorkshire and Humberside. The strategy would be produced by Network Rail to assess what capacity constraints the railway system has to further growth in the region. Among the aspects to be considered are additional track and signalling, extra or longer trains and longer platforms.

A valuable question and answer session followed the presentations.

CrossCountry franchise

The Yorkshire branch of Railfuture has made a submission to the Department for Transport in respect of the new CrossCountry franchise. Concerns have been expressed with regard to the increased need to change trains at Birmingham New Street and the lack of through services to the South Coast from Yorkshire.

Regional strategy review

Following a submission to the Government Office for Yorkshire and Humberside, the Yorkshire Branch of Railfuture is to be represented at the forthcoming Regional Spatial Strategy Review to be examined in the autumn.

Lincolnshire

By Brian Hastings
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Train for a walk

Railfuture Lincolnshire has supported an initiative to encourage ramblers to use the train on the Huddersfield-Sheffield route and the Lincoln-Sheffield rail corridors.

The initiative has involved the Penistone Line Partnership, the Ramblers Association, Lincolnshire



Wolds Countryside Service, Northern Rail, Travel South Yorkshire and West Yorkshire Metro Rural.

A leaflet lists 10 organised walks with experienced leaders. Railfuture member and Ramblers county secretary Stuart Parker says support for these events is growing. A current leaflet can be obtained by calling 01522 534655 or sending an SAE to Stuart at 129 Broughton Gardens, Lincoln LN5 8SR.

Bus failings

A replacement bus service has failed to pick up intending passengers at Gainsborough Lea Road and Saxilby. The failings highlight a lack of liaison and forethought by three separate rail bodies. The Sunday service at these two stations is provided by Northern Rail with Sheffield-Lincoln trains, although the stations are under the control of Central Trains. When Network Rail

carries out engineering work on Sundays, it notifies Northern Rail but gives little if any warning to Central Trains, whose staff would need to travel from Lincoln to provide warning notices at the two stations, explaining where to catch the replacement bus.

The replacement bus – organised by Northern Rail – passes close to the two stations but prospective passengers are unaware that there is

no train, or where to catch the bus. Various excuses were offered but Railfuture Lincolnshire is pursuing the issue with the three bodies. Network Rail needs to provide timely information and the train companies must arrange suitable local publicity. One operator has rejected our suggestion that bus drivers should check the station platforms for passengers on the grounds that they are not allowed to leave the bus.

Crossing safety

More films for TV have been produced at Hibaldstow where there is an automatic half barrier crossing, in an attempt to make car, van and lorry drivers aware of the dangers – and their responsibilities. The county has a large number of level crossings.

Membership drive

A new drive to boost Railfuture membership has been launched by branch chairman Alan Waddington. A new leaflet is planned. Members with ideas on distributing the leaflets should contact Alan Waddington, 25 Viking Way, Metheringham, Lincoln LN4 3DW or David Harby, 6 Carral Close, Lincoln LN5 9BD email: david.harby@ntlworld.com

Bouquets and brickbats

The branch plans to highlight the performance of Network Rail and train operators in its branch newsletter. If you have suggestions, contact Brian Hastings on 01724 710528

First information

Train operator TransPennine has asked for Railfuture's help in providing information for customer help points to be provided at Scunthorpe, Barnetby, Grimsby and Cleethorpes. The help points give access to train running information, local amenities and access to public transport.

Skegness line overcrowding

Lincolnshire branch has been alerted to continuing overcrowding on trains into Skegness from Grimsby. The South East Lincolnshire Travellers Association reports improvements on Saturdays but growing problems on Fridays, Sundays and Mondays. Railfuture is calling for action from Central Trains. Gross overcrowding was evident on 19 August when large numbers of intending passengers were left behind at Grantham.

Rail partnership

Railfuture is supporting the work of the year-old Barton-Cleethorpes community rail partnership which is led by David Moir. Projects are being identified for various time spans and good relationships forged with Network Rail and the Department for Transport.

Poacher line

The year-old partnership on Grantham-Skegness line is also making good progress. There have been music trains and a schools art



Eco-friendly station for Liverpool

Merseyside's newest transport interchange, Liverpool South Parkway, opened its doors to travellers and commuters in June. The £32million transport hub is Merseytravel's biggest project, and links bus and rail with Liverpool John Lennon Airport.

It is designed to be eco-friendly with a sloping roof that collects and recycles rainwater, and a wall fitted with solar panels to contribute towards the building's energy needs.

The building joins together the two stations of Allerton and Garston with a bus station and taxi rank. High frequency shuttle buses will run to nearby Liverpool John Lennon Airport.

The half-hourly service from Manchester Oxford Road to Liverpool Lime Street and an hourly service to Crewe and Birmingham serve the station as well as the regular Merseyrail network services. Services to Sheffield and the East Midlands are expected to start later this year. From May 2007, the aim is to introduce an additional series of train services across the Trans-Pennine network with further service enhancements with each timetable change.

Merseytravel will be exploring further routes in advance of the 2008 European Capital of Culture Year. The station was named national champion in the transport and freight category of the Green Apple Awards.

Merseytravel chief executive Neil Scales who was also the engineer in charge, said: "Liverpool South Parkway is a state of the art interchange that is breaking new ground not just nationally but internationally. It is unique and is pioneering new forms of sustainability in transport infrastructure.

"We're justifiably proud of what we have achieved at Liverpool South Parkway which we hope others within the transport industry and elsewhere will emulate."

David Finnegan, Merseytravel's access officer, himself a wheelchair user, has worked on the project ensuring that there are detailed access features incorporated into the design. These include easy access doors, colour contrast design features to assist people with poor vision, variable height ticket counters, accessible WCs and induction loop systems for people with impaired hearing.

Councillor Mark Dowd, Chair of Merseytravel, said: "Liverpool South Parkway is the most modern station in Europe and will be a great asset to the people of Merseyside and beyond, linking them to the airport and job opportunities."

The station has a single integrated booking office and passenger information and enquiry point for bus, rail and airport journeys and a 240-space park-and-ride car park free to users of the facility, secure motor bike and cycle storage.

Picture: Merseytravel

Local action



competition to design murals for Skegness station. The partnership also aims to boost travel from Skegness by residents and holidaymakers to places like Boston and Sleaford.

Network Rail has been asked to ease the restrictions on locomotive-hauled charter trains as only 10 are allowed each year.

East Midlands franchise

The possible inclusion of Northern Rail's Barton-Cleethorpes service in the new East Midlands franchise is being investigated as a way of improving reliability and punctuality.

North East

Peter Kenyon

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Documentary submissions

Three opportunities for contributions by the branch have been utilised. The response to the House of Commons Transport Committee inquiry into passenger rail franchising was initiated and coordinated by Martin Murphy who also looked after the Railfuture response to the DfT's consultation on the new Cross Country franchise.

The branch input into the Office of the Rail Regulator's review of the procedure for rail closures was looked after by Malcolm Chainey who also compiled the branch response to the Department for Transport's closure procedure consultation in April this year.

All these responses were carefully researched and present constructive critiques of the current situation.

Morpeth station

The improvement in services and passenger numbers at Alnmouth (for Alnwick) has been replicated further south at Morpeth, and is a tribute to the enthusiasm and negotiating skills of the members of the South East Northumberland Rail Users Group which recently held its AGM in Morpeth.

The principal speaker was Dr Paul Salvesson, now head of community and regional strategies at Northern Rail. Paul's work spans liaison with both the DfT and local groups.

The "quite remarkable growth" of rail usage in the north had shown up the inability of the rolling stock to cater for present services and future anticipated growth in passenger numbers. The long overdue replacement of the Pacers must be faced. Significantly he had recently been to Belford for talks with community representatives about the provision of a low-cost station.

The group enjoys a good relationship with the franchise operator Northern Rail, which controls Morpeth station. Northern has provided additional opening hours for the booking office in the afternoon for a trial period, with hopes for permanency. Members have applauded recent improvements in the rolling stock provided on some evening trains.

In association with Northumberland County Council, SENRUG negotiated the provision of stops by two Virgin trains each way giving links to Scotland, the Midlands and the South West. Passenger numbers have increased by 88% between Morpeth and York and 62% between Morpeth and Edinburgh. Virgin now has plans for another train from Newcastle to call at Morpeth later in the evening from December 2006.

Tyne Valley services

Malcolm Chainey of the Tyne Valley Rail User Group has highlighted concerns that the excessive leasing costs of the ex-BR fleet (which makes up just about everything Northern runs) must have a detrimental effect on the economics of local services. The user group is to take up this matter with the Rail Regulator.

Another campaigning issue is the disruptive effect of threatened industrial action.

A new campaign with the slogan Make Your Journey Count relates to the inadequacy of on-train ticket purchase provision. Conductors do not have enough time between stations to issue tickets, which results in loss of revenue and under-reporting of passenger numbers, both of which provide ammunition for those who would close sta-

tions and cut services. The TVRUG wants Northern Rail to consider other methods for the purchase of tickets before travel, such as combined travel and entry tickets (for events like the County Show or the Tynedale Beer Festival) and scratch cards sold in shops.

The Community Rail Partnership now has a part-time officer and is running event trains again this summer with a jazz band and refreshments. It hopes to raise its profile and become more self financing.

Coastway

By Dick Tyler

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The threatened curtailment of the Hastings end of the Victoria service at Eastbourne as recommended in the Brighton Main Line route utilisation strategy has been averted. Bexhill, for instance, will continue to enjoy a regular three train per hour service, not two as proposed, (or one as incorrectly reported in *Railwatch* 105).

A campaign was waged by the local paper supported by Railfuture Coastway, associated Bexhill Rail Action Group and local MPs Greg Barker and Michael Foster.

The then Parliamentary Under Secretary of State Derek Twigg wrote to Railfuture Coastway about the rail utilisation strategy proposals for the "Coastway East route between Ashford and Brighton".

He said: "This line, in common with several other rural railways, has not fulfilled its potential partly because of the untargeted nature of some of its services."

A few weeks after this incomprehensible and inaccurate (Coastway East ends at Hastings) reply, the same man, in a letter to another of our associates, revealed that as the reason for the rail utilisation strategy proposal was delays caused by waiting for joining services at Eastbourne, and these no longer seemed to be occurring, the proposal could be dropped!

Coastway Division's concerns about the new two-car diesel Ashford-Brighton service were report-

ed on local radio and television. Although the service is performing reasonably well, despite the limitations of single line sections, the predicted overcrowding is evident.

A consultant's report for the official Hastings development organisation, Seascope, has justified and costed options for infrastructure improvements to enable extra trains to serve stations which have a vastly reduced service under the new timetable.

Coastway Division met the new Southern management and the feeling was there is now a more positive attitude to development. Southern and owners Go-Via are now into the second half of their seven-year term, which they are determined to renew. Southern and South Eastern (now "Integrated Kent" to include the Channel Tunnel Domestic Services), although both under common ownership, will continue to operate as separate organisations, thus rejecting the disastrous synergy exercise of Connex, who at one time held, then lost, both franchises.

Polegate

A Polegate Parkway station is proposed by a developer who would build houses on a triangle of land bordered by the old A22-A27 and a new A27 cut-off road from the new Coppall roundabout.

Leaving aside the question of whether we need more houses in the South East, this new proposal would be good for railways but bad for the environment. Good for both would be new stations adjacent to existing houses.

The existing Polegate station is already a magnet for cars from a large area which has no rail service. The station car park is full from very early in the morning with serious overspill into surrounding streets. The recently completed Polegate by-pass has made traffic worse.

Rail is the solution to traffic congestion, not more roads. A new Willingdon chord would be a good start, allowing through trains from the Hastings direction towards London and Brighton. Many take their cars to Polegate from the Bexhill area because of the 20 minutes wasted going in and out of Eastbourne. Moreover East Sussex County Council is considering moving County Hall here. It is essential for this to be rail connected for which a new Willingdon chord is a must.

There are vast areas of new housing at Stone Cross beside the railway, but residents have to go to Polegate or Hampden Park to catch a train. Older housing stock in the Willingdon area has the same problem.

The Coastway line is still largely semaphore signalled so if we are to have a "Railway for the 21st Century" a lot needs to change and Coastway division is in the forefront of trying to make it happen.



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Thames

By Chris Wright
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New station

Green Park, near Reading, on the Basingstoke line, is to be the site of a new £7million two-platform station and interchange. Expected to open in December 2008, it is being funded by Reading Borough Council and Prudential Property Investment Management.

Railfuture is delighted with the investment – so rare for new stations since privatisation.

All eyes on Reading

Reading Council continues to pursue development plans for Reading station. The branch is assisting in the planning of the Rail User Conference in November in Reading.

East-West

Cowley and Kidlington are the subject of an appeal by the branch to Oxfordshire County Council to review the case for reopening as part of the East West Rail Link.

The EWRL £300,000 latest study has been delayed and is now expected in the autumn. It is still hoped the EWRL will be included in the South East Plan on the basis of work completed and the major growth plans for the area.

A briefing for MPs is being re-arranged by the consortium promoting the strategic link. *Modern Railways* magazine in July carried an article on EWRL with help from the chairman.

It is hoped that the report will move the project to the next tier of project planning (expected to cost £2million). This is normal for major investment schemes (including roads). Several branch members and user group representatives met Dr Phyllis Starkey, MP for Milton Keynes South West, to receive an update on the scheme.

Lake Woebegone

The branch made unsuccessful written objections to the plans for a rowing lake at Willington (near Bedford) which could make restoring links to Cambridge more difficult. (See front page)

Franchise changes

Virgin CrossCountry and West Coast main line service proposals have been commented upon, including concern at the loss of services to Glasgow and Brighton from Oxford. We called for a third train to Birmingham from Milton Keynes and extension of Bedford-Bletchley services to Milton Keynes Central. First Great Western attended the branch meeting in July to discuss its new franchise.

Email news

The branch is asking members if they wish to have newsletters and news via email. A decision is due at the next meeting.



MILESTONE: Colin Cartwright (second from right) receives a certificate from Welsh Assembly member Lord Dafydd Elis-Thomas while BTP Inspector Derek Cheetham and station manager Gerald Jones look on

Picture: Arriva Trains Wales

100 stations adopted

Arriva Trains Wales has celebrated its 100th station adoption – at Betws-y-Coed on the beautiful Conwy Valley line.

The station has been adopted by Colin Cartwright and the Conwy Valley Railway Museum team and Marion Bettaney and other members of Betws-y-coed Community Council.

Volunteers from Wales and the border counties of England have now adopted over half of the unstaffed railway stations on the ATW network.

The Adopt a Station scheme was set up in April 2004. Station adopters include teenagers, a sprightly 85 year old, a train buff, a psychiatrist, a pub landlord, Neighbourhood Watch, families, rail user groups and city commuters.

Marion Bettaney said: "The Community Council is keen to get involved in the scheme to ensure that the station remains a

welcoming gateway to the village. The train station is what helped to make Betws-y-coed famous so it's an important part of our history and culture."

Colin said: "We count ourselves lucky to have the station and gateway to the scenic Conwy Valley Line practically on our doorstep."

At a number of ATW's adopted stations British Transport Police have reported a drop in crime and anti-social behaviour. Gowerton Station, near Swansea, has seen a 40 per cent reduction in incidents of trespass and vandalism.

On the other side of Britain, train operator ONE is urging more people to come forward to adopt stations. Rochford station, on the Liverpool Street to Southend Victoria route, has become the 50th of ONE's 167 stations to be adopted. You can call 01206 363948 to enquire about ONE's unadopted stations.

Wales

By Rowland Pittard

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The National Assembly for Wales has carried out a strategic review of the rail network following the Transport Act Wales giving the Assembly new powers to take action.

In June it published a costed programme of "achievable" improvements in rail infrastructure and service enhancements. Its priorities include a fast north to south train in the morning, returning from

Cardiff in the late afternoon, infrastructure works near Swansea to remove the capacity constraint at Gowerton, provision of enhanced services on the main line through west Wales, particularly west of Carmarthen, enhancing the frequency of services on the Valley Lines at Rhymney, including a new station at Energlyn, Pontypridd to Merthyr Tydfil, Ebbw Valley and Cardiff-Treherbert, enhancing capacity between Wrexham and Saltney by dualling most of the present single line, electrification of the Borderlands Line between

Wrexham Central and Bidston, enhancing capacity on the Cambrian main line to allow hourly services between Shrewsbury and Aberystwyth, more and better quality rolling stock and timetable improvements on the Heart of Wales Line.

The report from the Rail Infrastructure and Improved Passenger Service Committee includes tables showing details, including costs of individual schemes. You can download the 20-page report in PDF format from <http://www.wales.gov.uk/>