

Wales boost



PLANNED: Crosskeys station in Wales

Picture: BLAENAU GWENT

Work started in July on a project which will lead to the opening of six new stations in Wales next year.

The freight-only Ebbw Valley line will be reopened to passenger services which last operated on the line in 1962.

The project represents the first time that a local authority has had responsibility for commissioning and building a railway line.

It is a key part of plans to regenerate the valley following the closure of the Corus steel works in Ebbw Vale four years ago and cutbacks at Llanwern works at Newport.

The new stations will be at Rogerstone, Risca and Pontymister, Crosskeys, Newbridge, Llanhil-leth and Ebbw Vale Parkway.

An hourly service to Cardiff will begin next year but there are also plans to provide a link into Newport.

In future, there will be additional intermediate stations at Cwm and Pye Corner and the line will be extended to Ebbw Vale town centre and Abertillery. The Welsh Assembly is hoping that the link to Newport will be in place by 2009 but there has been speculation it could be delayed by three years.

The £14million contracts involve installation of 18 miles of single track with a three-mile central

passing loop, plus signalling, tele- coms and power.

The stations will be fairly basic unmanned halts with CCTV, shelters, a real-time information system and cycle lockers.

Ticket purchase will be purely "on-train".

Network Rail reportedly recently removed track at the point where the Ebbw Vale line turns towards Newport, and is said to expect the Welsh Assembly Government to pay for new track to be laid.

The ambitious proposal to reintroduce passenger trains on the Ebbw Valley railway line is being led by Blaenau Gwent Council, in partnership with Caerphilly and Newport Councils, and is supported by the Welsh Assembly Government, Network Rail and Arriva Trains Wales.

In Scotland, the first slice of funding for the reopening of the Waverley line has been agreed.

Transport Minister Tavish Scott announced the allocation in mid September of £29million to allow surveying and land purchase to go ahead.

The Scottish Executive has promised a total of £115million to get trains running from Edinburgh to Tweedbank, just beyond Galashiels, by 2011.

The Waverley line, from Edinburgh to Carlisle, closed in 1969.

Assemble your forces for rail

By Peter Kenyon

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There is a regional assembly meeting near you.

The North East was chosen by central Government for a pilot referendum on the provision of an elected assembly, as the basis for the future re-organisation of local government throughout the country.

The result was a rejection of plans for elected assemblies. Unfortunately the campaign leading up to the vote did not stress that an assembly with a representative (but not elected) membership was already in existence, and would continue to function whatever the result of the referendum.

The local press in northern England recently discovered this situation.

There are in fact eight regional assemblies in England, made up of area representatives with defined objectives, a budget and the support of a small professional staff.

The eight assemblies in England (excluding the elected London assembly) are: South West www.southwest-ra.gov.uk, South East www.southeast-ra.gov.uk, Eastern www.eera.gov.uk, East Midlands www.emra.gov.uk, West Midlands www.wmra.gov.uk, North West www.nwra.gov.uk, Yorkshire and the Humber www.yhassembly.gov.uk, North East www.northeastassembly.gov.uk

Railfuture campaigners are urged to look on the internet and discover the available information about their assembly, since one of its concerns is transport planning.

Each region has drawn up a regional spatial strategy, which covers transport.

The North East branch of Railfuture contributed extensively to the examination in public of the North East Regional Spatial Strategy, through its membership of the regional transport activists' roundtable.

Over the past few years, the Chancellor has been devolving more responsibility for funding decisions to the regions.

Although the railway industry is being given large amounts of taxpayers' money there never seems to be enough for crucial schemes. Not-for-profit Network Rail has asked the Government for an extra £8billion to modernise the infrastructure

and provide more capacity for the period 2009-2014.

Tory spokesman Chris Grayling said the rail industry had already received too much taxpayers' money.

But it is lack of money which for years has held up the delivery of an expanded Thameslink and a new Crossrail for London.

Transport for London has rightly warned that hundreds of thousands of jobs depend on getting rail services right.

It has launched the Overground rail network and set out its plans for expansion in a new report called Transport 2025.

It is also pressing ahead with plans for an orbital rail line as part of the Overground network.

You can download articles and pages from
<http://www.railwatch.org.uk>

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<http://www.railfuture.org.uk>