



Your letters

Station wish list

I understand that Passenger Focus is seeking views as to the facilities that are or should be provided at railway stations. I would suggest that the following are basic requirements at all stations: Booking office open for most or all of the day, proper waiting rooms, not open bus shelters, toilets open 24 hours possibly provided in conjunction with local authorities at smaller stations, proper seating with wood not cold metal seats on open platforms, information on local buses and taxi services, adequate car parking at low cost, for example, not more than £2.50 per day.

Other desirable facilities include: Secure cycle parking, pillar boxes for mail, litter bins.

On larger stations there is a need for additional facilities: Many more seats at concourse level, for example in the open areas at Euston and at Birmingham New Street, lifts and/or moving sloping travelator, important if the European Union proposals to ban carriage of push-chairs on escalators is brought into being, catering facilities at reasonable prices and not at the current excessive levels, free toilet facilities kept open at all times trains are using the station. Such toilets should never be out of use for days or even hours as is often the case at Birmingham Snow Hill.

If our railway system is to be used more extensively, other facilities should be added to this wish list. At present many of our stations are of poor quality.

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British Rail

I believe it would be disastrous if Railfuture, as an organisation, were to declare in favour or against the campaign to Bring Back British Rail. While there is probably a majority of members who are, or were, against privatisation, there are others strongly in favour, and either way we should risk losing members.

Given that our constitution specifies that we are non-party-political it might in fact be unconstitutional.

Personally (for what it is worth) I was dead against privatisation and did my level best to campaign against it at the time. This included writing, as a private individual, to nearly 40 peers before the Upper House was to vote on the matter, in the hope their opposition could delay it until after the next election, after which we expected Labour, if it won, to scrap the project.

To renationalise at this stage, however superficially attractive to some of us, would have serious drawbacks, particularly that the companies would have to be bought out with government money, and we know who would pay for that.

Also we must remember that fares began their climb in British Rail days, thanks to Thatcher policy. A return to the status quo at that time might have little benefit.

I think it might be OK to campaign for the continuation, beyond two years, of the East Coast non-franchise, in order to allow comparison between private and public running, or "give the train operators a chance to prove their superior functioning".

Without wasting too much time on it, the whole issue could be reviewed by the Railfuture board but any declaration in favour would need at least a vote at the annual general meeting.

Clara Zilahi, Wimbotsham Road, Downham Market, Norfolk PE38 9PE

Christmas trains

Although I have missed earlier parts of the debate, I would like to offer my view on Christmas trains.

The way major festivities like Christmas are celebrated evidently varies between countries, and so does the way the transport implications are dealt with.

Here in Germany, the key event is Christmas Eve - on 24 December, basically all shops close at lunchtime, and people go home to prepare their festive dinners, exchange presents and the like, which takes place in the late afternoon or evening. In transport terms, this is probably the quietest evening of the year, although quite a large number of people go to church in the afternoon or evening, which usually implies rather short journeys. Public transport on

this half-day was traditionally very limited with services in rural areas and small to medium cities ceasing around 16.00 and mainline trains and urban operators providing a much reduced service.

However, with changing lifestyles and habits, demand for other activities has grown, and at least in the big cities there is now quite a choice of restaurants and night-life activities, which evidently find their custom.

Transport providers responded, and some now even offer almost the normal Saturday timetable. They certainly do not earn money with this, but if one considers public transport as an adequate alternative to the car, then at least some kind of service should be provided when there is a need for it. In my view, this is also the position passenger lobbyists should take.

Of course, the level of service offered requires some consideration, and staff should get adequate compensation for working at such unpopular times.

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Clapham Junction

For Clapham Junction, Britain's busiest station, to be identified as one of its most neglected, surely highlights deficiencies in the franchising system under which our railways operate. It's like a chain store neglecting its prestige shop in Oxford Street.

No mention was made of the fact that fast trains to and from Waterloo are unable to stop at Clapham Junction in peak times, due to heaviness of traffic, thereby depriving passengers of interchange possibilities at the very times when demand must be greatest.

Using platforms at Waterloo and track space to Clapham Junction freed by Eurostar's move to St Pancras, and then a new tunnel to New Malden, a major increase could be achieved in capacity to SouthWest Train's main line and its many branches.

With longer distance fast trains going through the tunnel, semi-fasts to Surbiton and beyond could stop at Clapham Junction and perhaps Wimbledon even in peak hours.

Transferring some services between London and the West Sussex coast to Waterloo and to Horsa via Raynes Park and Epsom would augment capacity on the heavily used Brighton main line through East Croydon

With more track space for longer distance fast trains through the Clapham Junction to New Malden tunnel to Salisbury and beyond, redoubling the main line between Salisbury and Exeter could open

up much attractive country for London commuter living.

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Gremlins

You were good enough to publish a letter of mine concerning the Dunstable to Luton line in *Railwatch* 122. Unfortunately some gremlins crept in. I normally proof read carefully but must have slipped up.

There is a reference to South Bedfordshire District Council (now part of Central Bedfordshire Council) as covering Dunstable and Luton. This should have read Dunstable and Leighton Buzzard.

Luton has its own council, now a unitary authority, and is the main supporter of this busway scheme.

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Double confusion

I am grateful that your journal continues correctly to report the campaign for the re-doubling of the Kemble-Swindon Line.

Sadly much local support for this project ceased in 2009 because many residents believe approval has already been given.

The approval was of course for re-doubling of the 'Cotswold Line' which many people in this area wrongly believe to be the one that runs through Kemble!

Perhaps the old definition of a Cotswold Commuter as one who travels from either Kington or Kemble is to blame!

Professor Keith Chittenden, Barcelona Drive, Minchinhampton GL6 9DS

Redundant sidings

As a railfreight enthusiast, I was interested to see reports in the railway press of the Freight Transport Association warning that more railfreight terminals are needed.

Network Rail needs to look no further than the redundant sidings alongside the West Coast main line once used by Leyland Motors. I understand the sidings are in places which would be ideal to service west Lancashire.

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Metro tickets

In *Railwatch* 122, Trevor Garrod mentions the inconvenience of through Belfast-Cork train tickets not being available for the tram between stations in Dublin. This also applies to railway tickets for through journeys requiring a cross-city change between Manchester Piccadilly and Victoria. It can be

very inconvenient to arrive at the tram stop, burdened with the usual luggage and, in my case often a cat as well, and buy a tram ticket. On occasions that has led to missing the tram and subsequently the main line connection as well.

I usually overcome the problem by buying separate tickets to/from Manchester Central Zone rather than the terminus. However I do wonder whether this entails paying twice for the link. It also raises the question why, if heavy rail and tram operators can negotiate an arrangement for a rail ticket to be valid within the central zone, they cannot issue a ticket for a journey which continues by rail out of it.

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Level crossings

I agree with K A Sutherland's suggestion in *Railwatch* 122 that level crossing warnings should have a light permanently illuminated. When I visited Sweden I noticed how a flashing white light was always shown, proving to road users that the lights were working. The excuse of a fault, in the event of an accident, would be less believable.

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High fares

I agree that high rail fares can deter people from travelling and that the pricing set-up is complex, unless you are in the know. Yet I was bemused by the quote from Cat Hobbs of the Campaign for Better Transport (*Railwatch* 122) when she says that "research has shown that if you cut train fares by 20% you would boost demand by 17%".

This would simply lead to a loss in income, something no rail company would be prepared to face.

What you need to do of course is to increase patronage by more than the amount you cut fares, something that happened when British Rail introduced Big City Savers in the 1970s.

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Croxley link

I was delighted to read of the Department for Transport's plans for the Watford Junction to St Albans Abbey line. Having lived near Watford for many years I can remember when even the future of the line was under scrutiny before it was electrified.

However, there is one other public transport scheme in the Watford area which I truly believe would revolutionise travel here and that is "The Croxley Link". This missing link in the Watford area transport plan has been on and off since I was at school in the early 1990s and yet to those of us who live locally it is such an obvious scheme with so many benefits. One last point somewhat closer to home is the



There has been dissatisfaction with the decision of National Express to withdraw restaurant car facilities on its East Anglian franchise. The loss has been particularly annoying because the service which ran until December 2008 was so good and had won awards.

At the time, Derek Monney of the Essex Rail Users Federation, said: "Someone at National Express' head office who doesn't care has said 'we don't need restaurant cars, let's take them away'. It is a dumbed down, pack 'em in and sell 'em cheap way to run a railway."

There were protests at the time but now it is suggested that, if it won't run a restaurant car service itself, the company should hand it over to "somebody who can". In a postcard to Railwatch, we were told: "Let the WI serve afternoon tea - and what about the Colander Girls? www.colandergirls.co.uk"

The loss of catering facilities highlights the failure of the franchise system to protect the overall railway service. Few of the train

Luton Dunstable Busway. I cannot believe that this is truly the right option for the Luton to Dunstable rail corridor.

I currently live in Stevenage and work in Luton (near Junction 10) and have done so for most of the past five years. During this time I have had to fight my way through the long-running East Luton corridor works and I know that the last thing that Luton currently needs is more lorries and road works!

I strongly believe that the reinstatement of the railway in either heavy or light form would be a much better option for many reasons. First, most of the work could be done without having to put extra vehicles on local roads, which has to be a positive.

Second, it is a reinstatement of an extant transport system as most of the rails are at least still in place, and if it was electrified it would be a much greener option than a guided busway. Surely the les-

sons should be learned from the Cambridge-St Ives fiasco where I understand the busway could open a year late. This delay is on top of the fact that the cost will have reportedly reached a figure in excess of £150 million compared to a reported original estimate during the "consultation phase" of £65 million.

Perhaps longer term an extension could also be built on a reinstated line from Dunstable to Leighton Buzzard creating further opportunities for a reduction in car journeys on the A5-A505 corridor. Obviously this would need a new station in Leighton Buzzard or alternatively a new route to a junction with the West Coast main line.

*Jonathan Flood
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Editors' note: Mr Flood also wrote in similar vein to Transport Secretary Lord Adonis, who asked David Hibbs, Team Leader Community Rail at the DfT to reply. Mr

operating companies have a clean record in keeping up standards. Station cleanliness is often questionable, lavatory facilities poor, information provision sometimes abysmal.

In 2007, when National Express took over the East Coast franchise, the Department for Transport secretly removed the obligation for restaurant cars on the East Coast main line and left train catering to NXEC discretion.

The DfT's press release of August 14, 2007, appeared to confirm that the obligation remained, when it said: "National Express East Coast will provide a full restaurant service on 87 train services, with an improved range of full meals." NXEC later withdrew them.

Railfuture's media spokesman Bruce Williamson said: "Dining cars are a great railway tradition and it is shortsighted to remove something which makes trains more attractive than less sustainable modes of transport." Now the DfT wants to hand over franchises for 10 to 20 years. Passengers should beware of misleading "information".

Hibbs wrote: "The Croxley Rail Link scheme was re-confirmed by the East of England Region as a priority in the second round of the Regional Funding Allocation advice submitted to the Department earlier this year and officials here have now received a Major Scheme Business Case from Hertfordshire County Council seeking Programme Entry approval for government funding.

"We will be discussing with the Council how the scheme can be delivered." But Mr Hibbs claimed that heavy and light rail alternatives to the proposed Luton-Dunstable busway scheme offered poor value for money, as there would be insufficient patronage to justify the initial capital costs and the operational costs. Railfuture believes the rail option has never been properly considered.

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