

Yorkshire

By Chris Hyomes

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Business backs high-speed rail

Business and transport chiefs in Yorkshire and the East Midlands have thrown their weight behind the case for bringing high speed rail to the region. At a meeting in Barnsley in July, business leaders met with representatives from South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive, West Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive and local authorities to reaffirm their commitment to plans for a new high-speed rail system through their region. Andrew Denniff of Barnsley and Rotherham Chamber of Commerce, said: "The business case for bringing high-speed rail to the eastern side of the Pennines is compelling." Ben Still, director of strategy at South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive, said: "A high speed line to Yorkshire would have a transformational effect on the economy of the county. It will attract business, help make firms more competitive and create jobs."

MPs call for rail investment in the North

A new cross-party group of MPs was formed in July to promote investment in rail in the North of England that supports economic growth. The group wants new commuter trains for the North because growth in rail use has been much faster here than in the rest of the country, even though the North has some of the oldest and most overcrowded commuter trains in the country. It also wants to see modern, fast and frequent trains between northern cities. The first step towards this would be delivering the £530 million Northern Hub project.



The group's chair, Angela Smith, Labour MP for Penistone and Stocksbridge, pictured above, said: "Now more than ever the North needs its MPs to take a lead in ensuring that our rail networks get a fair deal. The North has not been getting its fair share of rail investment, particularly when compared to London and the South East." Professor David Begg, chairman of the Northern Way Transport Compact, said: "The North's railways and the North's economic future are inseparable."

CCTV lookout on Northern trains

Passengers travelling on Northern Rail inter-urban services will soon benefit from increased safety and security because on-board and forward-facing CCTV is to be fitted to more than 160 train coaches. Approximately a quarter of the Northern Rail fleet, class 158 and class 333, will be fitted with Petards eyeTrain equipment, at a cost of £500,000. The upgrade will be completed by spring 2011.

Inquiry into plan for Skipton link to preserved line

The benefits of reconnecting the Embsay & Bolton Abbey Railway to the national rail network at Skipton, are to be investigated by transport planner JMP. The work has been commissioned by the Yorkshire Dales Railway Museum Trust. The railway currently operates a heritage service for more than 100,000 visitors and tourists a year from Embsay to Bolton Abbey, which is 20 miles from Leeds and a gateway to the Yorkshire Dales National Park.

The railway is supported by the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority, North Yorkshire County Council, Craven District Council and Yorkshire Forward. Railway business manager Stephen Walker, a speaker at the Railfuture Northallerton conference in July 2009, said that the Network Rail study had indicated that the cost of reconnection would be in the region of £1.1 million to £2.6 million, depending upon the technical solution adopted.

Journeys	April 2007-April 2008	April 2008-April 2009	April 2009-April 2010	% rise 2008/09-2009/10	% rise 2007/08-2009/10
Par-Newquay (FGW)	45,976	46,390	71,822	54.8%	56.2%
Derby-Matlock (EMT)	92,115	111,438	158,553	42%	72.1%
Truro-Falmouth (FGW)	264,879	300,085	413,544	37.8%	56.1%
Bristol TM-Severn Beach (FGW)	251,269	308,952	361,287	16.9%	43.7%
St Erth-St Ives (FGW)	446,647	433,740	501,002	15.5%	12.1%
Preston-Blackpool South (Northern)	209,378	218,972	249,368	13.8%	19%
Liskeard-Looe (FGW)	77,102	75,090	84,935	13.1%	10.1%
Exeter-Barnstaple (FGW)	313,899	353,353	394,401	11.6%	25.6%
Oxenholme-Windermere (FTPE)	299,337	308,770	339,37	39.9%	13.3%
Plymouth-Gunnislake (FGW)	139,019	147,287	160,738	9.1%	15.6%

Statistics: Association of Train Operators

Build on success

The Prime Minister's vision of a "big society" fits rather well with Community Rail, which embraces his ideas of "empowering communities, redistributing power and fostering a culture of volunteerism."

David Cameron called for "forward-thinking, entrepreneurial, community-minded people ... to come forward to play their part".

The Association of Community Rail Partnerships has rightly responded that there are already 4,000 community rail volunteers playing their part around Britain supporting their local railway.

The other side of this coin is, of course, that Government and local authority support for community rail lines and partnerships needs to continue, to allow the volunteers to carry on the good work. Railfuture members may want to lobby their councillors and local MP to ensure that support for the local railway is properly protected in the forthcoming comprehensive spending review.

Record growth

Community rail is worth supporting because it is working! Figures published by the Association of Rail Partnerships in August shows the huge growth on the top ten branch lines, all of which are supported by active community rail partnerships. The figures are stunning, with three lines showing more than 50% growth over the past two years, despite the recession. They also confirm the

approach that Railfuture has advocated for years. A good train service, properly marketed, will bring in many more passengers.

Look too at the big numbers, with the St Ives branch now logging more than half a million passenger journeys a year. The figures are worth reproducing in full - please make use of them with councillors, officials and your local MP.

Accessibility

As rural pubs and post offices close and people have to travel further to new hospitals or schools serving huge catchment areas, and as job opportunities migrate to regional centres, it is essential that public transport is improved and expanded to provide access to these centralised services. We know that the car cannot cope, even in rural areas, and it would be madness to cut local trains or buses at the same time as local services and faci-

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ties. Community rail has shown what can be achieved for rail passengers, and buses would benefit from closer local input from passengers as well.

As Railfuture has advocated, there is plenty of scope to adapt bus services to feed rail links and to increase the proportion of car-free journeys, otherwise the centralisation of services and facilities is just not going to be sustainable.

Tram train

The tram-train concept has been very successful in Germany in transforming lines and producing hugely improved services and enormous increases in patronage.

The characteristics of the route need to be examined carefully,

and in selecting the St Albans Abbey branch, the department for Transport could be on to a winner.

This is a corridor with a high population and congested roads between St Albans and Watford which restrict the scope for bus improvements.

The existing railway is limited in only being able to offer a 40-minute frequency (at best) and by having stations on the edge of the towns at each end of the line. Trams are expensive to buy, but could cut operating costs. More importantly, they are designed for "drive on sight" which has the potential to reduce signalling costs dramatically and could cut the cost of providing a crossing loop to increase capacity and service frequency. Station costs are reduced and the way is cleared for better bus and bike interchange. The greatest opportunity would be extension of the line, using street running, into the town centre at Watford, and, at the other end to link with the Midland station at St Albans. This is a big ask for a cash-strapped government, but if the pilot scheme is to test the potential of what is virtually a new mode of transport, then it needs to be tested.

The extensions may take time, for both planning and financial reasons, but the thinking, and the safeguarding, needs to start now.



NETWORK EFFECT: Branch lines extend the reach of the main line. This picture shows Plymouth station, with the inter-city train from London to Penzance, left, connecting with the two-car local train to Gunnislake, right

Picture: PHILIP BISATT

London and South East

Reopening campaign

Railfuture Kent is keen to support efforts to get the Uckfield-Lewes line reopened. Members believe that the views of East Sussex County Council remain uncertain. The reopening campaigners are now hoping to sell the idea as a way to relieve the overcrowded Brighton main line. For more details, see www.bml2.co.uk. Railfuture Kent organiser Peter Collingborn attended the Kent rail summit at County Hall, Maidstone, earlier in the year. It included an impressive presentation by former railwayman Geoff Mee, who is now director of integrated strategy and planning at Kent County Council. He called for a Transmanche Metro, serving all stations between London and Lille, as well as Ashford-Hastings electrification.



Passenger numbers soar in the inner city

Campaigners from two East London rail user groups had a joint meeting with National Express East Anglia at Hackney Downs station in August. NXEA was waiting to hear how long a franchise extension it is likely to be granted. Train drivers union Aslef said that costs arising from delays in replacing franchises amounted to £6 million for Essex Thameside and £18 million for Greater Anglia.

We were disturbed to find that official figures from the Office of Rail Regulation are reporting passenger numbers down at both Cambridge Heath and London Fields - and many other London stations. This is because no Oyster pay-as-you-go journeys are being counted! Cambridge Heath and London Fields Rail Users told NXEA that passenger use at both stations had in fact gone up by as much as 20% over the past year. We know because we have physically counted them twice a year for more than 15 years. Chingford Line Users Association were told that more Oyster gates are to be fitted in their area. It could involve passengers being inconvenienced if fewer entrances are available. We are hoping that Hackney Council will be putting a funding package together to open a second entrance at London Fields station this financial year.

Transport for London reports that more than 50 million EXTRA journeys are now being made annually using Oyster pay-as-you-go cards on National Rail after former mayor Ken Livingstone paid for the system to be extended to 350 Greater London rail stations. After dragging their feet for years on Oyster provision, train operators and the rail industry generally now seem unable or unwilling to recognise its value.

Stratford on target for the Olympic Games

Volunteers from Railfuture Coastway undertook an all-day passenger count at Bexhill station in June. This followed their previous all-day count undertaken at Rye station last September. While the numbers recorded at both stations were broadly in line with the official station usage data on the ORR website, unlike the inner London stations mentioned above, there was a different and striking comparison to emerge later. In Network Rail's station categories list, Rye is listed as a category E "small staffed station". Amazingly so is Bexhill, with generally six trains per hour compared to Rye's two. Bexhill has well over three times the level of patronage. As soon as that sort of anomaly becomes apparent one wonders how many others there are. Even after a quick glance, the Sussex rail utilisation study seems to contain some similar howlers.

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