

# LOCAL ACTION

## Midlands

**PULLING THROUGH:** The experimental Hednesford - Walsall shuttle becomes a through service to Birmingham New Street from July. More trains are scheduled and Sprinters will replace the 30-year-old diesel multiple units. Hopes remain that services can be extended north to Rugeley and Stafford. Now RDS is again promoting the idea of using the Walsall - Wolverhampton line for a passenger service, using the marginal cost formula pioneered in West Yorkshire for Pontefract - Wakefield.

**CHUNNEL FREIGHT:** The location of a Channel Tunnel freight terminal for the Midlands is still to be decided. There are local objections to the use of Bescot. The other contender is the redundant Hams Hall power station site, east of Water Orton, which seems more likely now following the cancellation of the Toton Channel Tunnel depot site.

**STRATEGIC SUCCESS:** Our Rail Strategy for Staffordshire, published in April, gained good publicity and has stimulated interest in the potential of rail. New and better services were advocated with a stress on more electrification as well as park-and-ride schemes.

**LOOKING AHEAD:** A draft 10-year plan has been prepared by Centro which suggests a Metro link between Snow Hill and New Street stations, as well as electrification of the Stourbridge - Snow Hill - Solihull line, extra tracks for the Wolverhampton - New Street - Coventry lines and a chord link between Soho Road and Hockley. RDS will be submitting observations and proposals for the 10-year plan.

**NEW TRAINS:** To cope with an expected 10 per cent growth in rail passengers, Centro has ordered four more of the class 323 electric multiple units being built for the Cross-City line. From mid May, new class 158 Express units started work on cross-country services via Birmingham to Peterborough, to Cardiff and to Derby.

**SAVED:** The famous signal box at Shrewsbury has been given grade two listed building status. The "urgent" resignalling for the area has been postponed for five years. The town-side platform three, although officially out of action, is in daily use because the present layout cannot cope with all the traffic.

**SAFETY COSTS:** The "underground" status of New Street makes it necessary for £17 million to be spent on safety improvements. A new north end footbridge will be built serving platforms 2 to 11 for interchange and peak-hour access.

**ALLIES:** The branch has been fostering several new and re-formed rail user groups this spring, mainly on the south side of Birmingham.

*Alan Bevan*

## North West

**FLYING SPARKS:** The best news from the North West concerns a development outside our region, namely the completion of the Carstairs - Edinburgh electrification which will result in useful timesaving for services to Edinburgh through our area.

**SO NEAR:** News of electrification in our region remains tantalisingly close. It will be a scandal if

the go-ahead for the Blackpool - Manchester electrification is being delayed to coincide with the general election.

**STARVED OF CASH:** The passenger transport authorities have lost their powers of precept so must now compete with education and social services for cash from local authorities who are struggling to keep their poll tax bills down. Manchester has been particularly badly hit. There is the threat of cuts which could mean no trains after 8pm, 20 per cent fare increases even though they are on average already double those on Merseyrail, and even line closures. This sad state of affairs is partly because of demands for investment by the PTA in Metrolink and the Manchester airport rail link. BR and the local PTA could make a more concerted effort to provide a better service, thus boosting our pitifully poor patronage levels towards those of our more progressive neighbours in Merseyside and West Yorkshire.

**STRATEGY:** Copies of the North West Rail Strategy are still available, price £2.80 post free, from Robert Cummings, 37 Haughton Street, Hyde, Cheshire SK14 1QW

*Robert Cummings*

## East Midlands

**DAILY SUCCESS:** Our first rail day was an outstanding success thanks to the support of so many people. Nearly a thousand people paid to see rail displays, model layouts and much more at Kettering Corn Market Hall. The event received good local media coverage.

**PLANNING AHEAD:** We have responded in detail to the Leicestershire county structure plan review and the East Midlands Planning Forum report which is full of new roads.

**STOP HERE:** Our campaign partners, the Leicestershire and Northamptonshire Rail Action Committee, has published various papers on the need for local stations and services on the Midland main line. Leicestershire County Council has produced a paper suggesting some 15 new stations but alas it is only on paper so far. Even the much vaunted Ivanhoe line plans remain purely on paper. We are working on the less progressive county councils.

*Darryl Taylor-Smith*

## Scotland

**GIVE US THE MONEY:** Immediately prior to the RDS annual general meeting in Edinburgh, Public Transport Minister Roger Freeman confirmed that there would be some relaxation of the eight per cent rules on railway investment. We have therefore asked the Minister and ScotRail to look again at numerous investment schemes such as Dornoch and electrification. We are a little nearer a "level playing field" between road and rail but there is a long way to go.

**GREEN PUZZLE:** Friends of the Earth (Scotland) produced an excellent environmental charter calling for transport and planning policies which minimise the use of cars while encouraging public transport, cycling and walking. The list of authorities which have adopted the charter contains a few surprises. Some are carrying out policies which contradict the charter. Decisions about recycling

waste are relatively easy but it seems difficult to make policy changes which alienate motorists or involve switching resources from road to rail. We shall be looking for explanations from the authorities concerned.

*Douglas Smart*

## East Anglia

**GREAT EXPECTATIONS:** Following several donations from members, the branch has bought £135 worth of shares in the Great Eastern Railway (1989) Company which is planning to reopen the Wymondham - Dereham line to passengers. We first started campaigning for this reopening in 1973.

**CONSERVATION DILEMMA:** RDS welcomed BR plans to rebuild Lowestoft station on its present site. We will expect the plans when they are published to do justice to the key site in the town centre and to provide at least two platforms and a full service for tickets, parcels, shops as well as waiting and lavatory facilities. The recently formed town civic society condemned BR plans before seeing them, calling instead for the refurbishment of the existing 1850s building. This would cost more than a £500,000 new station and the society has not said where the extra money would come from. In many places, stations have been successfully restored with the help of cash from local councils, businesses and other bodies. If such benefactors do emerge at Lowestoft, RDS may consider its policy.

**DOOR TO DOOR:** The branch has produced an attractive four-page leaflet publicising the service from the three stations between Royston and Cambridge. The leaflet has been delivered door to door in Foxton, Meldreth and Shepreth and we will monitor its effect on ticket sales.

**BIKE TO THE FUTURE:** New editions of two Rail and Ride in East Suffolk leaflets have been produced by the local travellers association for the Ipswich - Lowestoft line. A completely new Rail and Ride in East Norfolk leaflet for the Norwich - Yarmouth and Lowestoft lines has also been produced. They can be obtained from me (address back page). Please send an SAE.

*Trevor Garrod*

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**This offer closes on 31 August. Send orders for books or an sae for a sales list to RDS sales officer, 139 Harrowdene Gardens, Teddington, Middx TW11 0DN**