



Platform *Your letters*

reopen the Uckfield-Lewes line, only three miles of motorway could be built.

*Bruce Oliver, York House,
59 Chelsea Road, Southsea,
Hampshire PO5 1NH*

Editor's note: A longer version of this letter was sent to deputy prime minister John Prescott. A civil servant replied to Mr Oliver reiterating that "funding for light rail cannot be a priority at the present time". The reply appears to have confused bus lanes on existing roads – which we all want – with guided bus systems which we do not, particularly if they replace railways.

This is no bypass

Please do not refer to the A130 new road as a bypass (*Railwatch* 80). The promoters are calling it that. It is a massive road and with the to-be-improved section of the A120 east of Stansted will form part of the much-denied D Orbital road round London, also known as the Outer M25. Just watch it go straight to Canvey Island and hop across to Kent. Over the years it is growing, bit by bit, but being denied officially all the way

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Electrification

During the summer a survey was carried out of the views of the 17 RDS branches with regard to the policy of electrification of lines in their area.

Eleven branches gave their views and I would like to express my thanks to the branches who responded to my request for information.

A policy document is to be produced in the near future.

*Peter G Davies, 25 Dewhurst Road,
Brighouse, West Yorkshire HD6 4BA*

Welsh and Gaelic

I was interested to see you have included the Welsh along with the English name for the North Wales RDS branch in the Local Action section of *Railwatch*. This action is to be applauded. The use of Welsh in print anywhere does a great deal to raise awareness for the language. As a Gaelic speaker I am writing to ask that you similarly include the Gaelic name alongside the English name for the Scotland branch. The Gaelic for Scotland is Alba. As in Wales, many of Scotland's stations are bilingual, including all of the stations on the West Highland and Kyle Lines and many of the stations on the Far North line. Glasgow Queen Street station is also

bilingual and it is likely that all the stations on the Perth-Inverness section will be bilingual in future. Many of Scotland's railway users and activists are also Gaelic speakers. I hope that *Railwatch* will also print in the Welsh names for the South Wales and the Mid Wales and Marches sections in future. Keep up the good work. Is mise le meas mor.

*Alasdair MacCaluim, 4/2 Sraid
Mhioltain (Milton St), Cnoc na h-
Abaide (Abbeyhill), Dun Eideann
EH8 8HF*

East-west

Trevor Garrod rightly draws attention to the need to develop rail links between Stansted Airport and London (to the south) and the Fens (to the north), and to open up a new eastward link to East Essex via Braintree. But what about the west? As a first stage, may I suggest linking the Milton Keynes-Luton Airport Virgin bus with Anglia's Colchester-Stansted service? The bus would not be particularly fast, but there is currently no fast road link on the corridor. In fact one reason to promote such a public transport link is to prevent pressure building up for such a link, which would be very damaging to the local environment.

Stage two would seek to replace parts of this bus link by rail.

*Simon Norton, 6 Herford Street,
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Out of time

I attempted to buy the new GB Passenger Timetable at the booking office at Exeter St Davids. After queuing for some time I was told that they do not sell timetables because they will not fit through the ticket window. Advised to try bookstall next door. Sold out!

*Derek Buttivant, Bene Court, Trenance,
Newquay, Cornwall TR8 4BZ*

Why are we waiting?

The Government is putting £800 million up front for capital expenditure on new, integrated transport initiatives. Local authorities are now engaged in producing local transport plans. The problem is that, democratic bodies though they are, they come up with proposals that are not always in the best interests of the people.

In northern Wiltshire, for example, county, borough, district and town councils approach local transport problems with integrity, but as yet, not one of the stations closed down by Beeching has been reopened. The Government must streamline the procedure for opening

Welcome Alix

Much as we welcome Miss Stredwick (*Railwatch* 81) might I remind her that many of us did not join RDS out of interest in social and environmental issues, but because we want the efficient, smoothly running rail service our country deserves. By the way, the capital of Azerbaijan is Baku, on the Caspian Sea.

*Aidan Rankin, Crown Cottage,
Bishopsdale Court, Settle, North
Yorkshire BD24 9EB*

Card trick

I was interested to read the response (*Railwatch* 81) from Peter Meades of Anglia Railways, in which he gave a spirited defence of his company's fare policies. However, I take issue with his final comment in which he assures us of the company's commitment to developing pricing policies and solutions which encourage rail travel. Recently I bought a Network Card. As many of your readers will be aware, this card gives the holder and an accompanying passenger a third off the cost of off-peak travel throughout a large region of southern and eastern England. The Network Card miraculously survived privatisation and is valid on the services of virtually every railway company in the region except, er Anglia Railways.

*Ian Bradley, 29 Porlock Place,
Calcot, Reading, Berks RG31 7AR*

Guided bus systems

My expectations for public transport have been seriously undermined by the increasing number of references being made to guided bus systems. I refer specifically to Chester and Edinburgh, where such schemes are being actively pursued.

The ugly threat of guided bus systems seems to be gaining ground. Indeed, realisation of this ghastly concept seems imminent in, at least, two places. Why is this, I ask, when

the initial promise was of a thrust in the direction of rail-based systems?

The civil servant view seems, characteristically, to be completely detached from public taste, inasmuch as it disregards the very deeply rooted public loathing of buses these days, in any context. Buses are despised for many reasons, not least because too many of them seem to spend their time chasing each other round towns, virtually empty while neither being associated with efficiency, cleanliness nor the discipline of a timetable.

Rail-based systems are disciplined high-density movers of people, that do, generally, inspire confidence. The very worst rail-based service tends to be preferred to the very best that buses can offer, probably without exception, and in spite of occasional difficulties.

LRT systems, given their inherent attractive advantages, command respect, while positively encouraging people away from private transport. Buses do not, and never can, command such advantage, being perceived as just another wretched contributor to urban congestion. The civil service view, or that of self-nominated experts, that "buses are flexible, and thus desirable" is a myth that needs exploding.

In this country, Manchester has set an example of some excellence, the very success of which should require any plans for non-rail-based systems to be scrapped. At the same time, LRT systems should be extended as widely as possible and as soon as possible, with the zealous determination that was applied a few years ago nationwide to the installation of cable communications systems.

Along with such a policy there should be a fast track approach to the reopening of heavy rail lines. What interests are at work when reopening schemes are endlessly delayed or rejected. For the £30 million needed to

up a modern, expanded rail network. There are many thousands of car drivers and non-driving people who would like to see an end to congestion and pollution, gridlock and stress, but feel helpless to do anything that would speed up the change.

Eric Beint, 118 Lydgate, Burnley BB10 2DU

Light response

Where use by high speed or heavy freight trains is not required, closed lines which have suffered from lack of protection can be reopened more easily using light rail technology, which can also be a more economical and appropriate method of operation. Light goods trains as well as trams can be handled. Where housing has been built on station sites a light railway can run as a tramway along the estate road which often follows the line of the route, minimising demolition of property.

It might also reduce the need to replace bridges. If desired, upgrading to a conventional railway can be undertaken at a later date.

Jonathan Dalton, 2 Regency Court, Enys Road, Eastbourne, Sussex BN21 2DF

Information

Those who wish to use or campaign in favour of bus/rail links will probably need an index of relevant local authorities (county councils, unitary authorities, passenger transport executives and principal bus companies, as well as lists of publications, timetables and maps, together with the dates of publication. Barry Doe's Directory of Bus and Rail Timetables (tel 01202 528707) is exactly that.

In West Sussex, the buses and trains seem to operate as though they were on different planets, with the 73 bus (mornings and early afternoons only) connecting Amberley Station with nearby villages being the only evidence of integrated timetabling so far.

Southern Vectis's publications (Nelson Road, Newport, Isle of Wight PO30 1RD) are wonderful and they seem to be going from strength to strength, when local bodies allow. Alas, they have had to cancel publication of *Getting around the Highlands and Islands*, possibly because local authorities and transport operators are too silly to see the advantage of such a publication, but their Great Britain Bus Timetable is a wonderful source of information.

If there has been a change of bus timetable in your area, why not fax it to the Editor on 01983 812983? The Getting Around series contains all public transport within a region, often a region not very well covered by other publications, such as Norfolk and Suffolk, Cumbria and the Lake District, the City of York, the North York Moors and Wales.

No resident of, or visitor to, Wales, should be without the FWT map: *Wales Bus, Rail and Tourist Map and Guide 1999*. This might become an annual publication. It is available from any local authority in Wales (e.g. Gwynedd, 01286 679535) or the Welsh tourist board. Alas, it isn't available from tourist offices in England, which doesn't strike me as evidence of useful co-operation between tourist boards.

Bus enthusiasts should not be without *Scenic Britain by Bus*, a charming brochure published by Transport Marketing Ltd, 13 Station Road, Knowle, Solihull B93 0HL. It's free if you send an A5 stamped addressed envelope. It contains details of Countrygoer News available for £5 per year from the same firm.

I'm annoyed at the number of attractions that give only road directions in their literature, for example: four miles from Junction 3, M27 and no public transport information. When members see this, they should protest (I often do) and send them current public transport information.

Edgar Locke, 3 Langton Court, Langton Road, Worthing, West Sussex BN14 7BZ

Passenger power

It has become apparent recently that the privatisation of the rail network has created a structure that does not work. A company whose first duty is to its shareholders, rather than its passengers, is extremely unlikely to perform to passengers' satisfaction.

The unfortunate dismissal of the Wisconsin Central director Ed Burkhardt proves my point. Ed saw the situation purely as a railman – the chronic underfunding, the outdated and insufficient rolling stock, and realised the situation required long-term funding. His consequent purchasing of the Class 66 locomotives and many wagons depressed short-term profits, which caused the share price of Wisconsin Central to halve. This

price was still higher than when he came on to the British scene, but the men in suits were not happy, and he had to go. Never mind that what he did was right for the railways, it was wrong for short-term profits.

Now let me mention the R-word. Gerald Corbett of Railtrack's primary duty is to his shareholders – or else they will bring about his dismissal. So Railtrack invests in station refurbishments, which by leasing areas to shops may make a handsome return. They aren't interested in preventing rails breaking because their bottom line doesn't suffer.

I believe there is something the frustrated, patient, beleaguered passenger can do to redress this lopsided situation. Passengers need to have a voice in all this, and to speak with real authority. This is possible. We are dealing with a company whose shares are traded on the Stock Exchange.

So, passengers, buy some shares and band together.

Form a loose grouping called "Friends of Railtrack". Have a council consisting of private individuals who just happen to have links with the train operators, RDS, local councils and other interested groups. There is nothing to stop individuals buying a few shares. You don't have to declare an interest. Every time your train is late because of Railtrack, buy some more.

When FoR has got a sufficient percentage, it can say to that nice Mr Corbett: "Now then, about these broken rails..."

Or better still: "Now then Mr Burkhardt, what about these rails?"

We could change the whole face of transport in this country if we insisted on Railtrack restoring all the routes currently talked about, like the Central Railway and the Waverley, plus many other lines and chords; if we compelled Railtrack to widen the gauge for freight; if we insisted they started work immediately on bottlenecks like the Welwyn Viaduct, instead of waiting seven years, rail use would increase dramatically.

The share price would go down for some years, but the benefits to the country and the passengers would be immense. Shareholders might even end up better off, in the long run. There would also be significant benefits from reduced pollution from road traffic such as fewer

children with asthma. Surely it is now time on the railways for passenger power?

David Marshall, 55 Berkeley Close, Abbots Langley, Herts WD5 0XD

Interlocking

One aspect of the recent Paddington tragedy does not seem to be getting the attention and publicity it deserves. Namely what appears to me to be the penny pinching lack of investment in one of rail's great safety features, interlocking.

Not only did the ill-fated Thames train run through the notorious signal 109 at danger, it also ran through a set of points that were set to route it on to the line in which the Great Western express was running under clear (green) signals.

Not so long ago it just would not have been possible for the points and signals to have been set that way. Long ago when points and signals were operated though wires and rods, by the sheer strength of the signalman, they were so interconnected that signals could not be cleared while points were set to allow a conflicting movement. Conversely, points could not be set for a movement on to an adjacent track while signals were clear for a through run on that track.

With modern electronics it would be no big deal to arrange the circuitry so that signals for a through run just would not go to clear unless all points connected to the affected track were set away. Conversely it would be no big deal to arrange the circuitry so that points could not be set to route a train on to an adjacent track while signals were cleared for another movement along that track.

Peter A Moore, 24 Charles Watson Court, Shuckburgh Grove, Leamington Spa CV32 7NT

Old friends

The slam-door trains operating in Kent are old friends and I shall miss them, but their 1960s bogies with axle-hung motors must be costing Railtrack a lot of money in track maintenance. Is this an economical way to run a railway that is the main route for Eurostars?

There does not appear to be a section in your Local Action pages for the South East so I guess that your members in this area are happy with what they have and are looking forward to an eventual re-connection of the Kent and East Sussex Railway with the main line to London at Robertsbridge.

John Pearson, 2 Mercers, Hawkhurst, Kent TN18 4LH

Letters should be sent to:

The Editor, *Railwatch*, 4 Christchurch Square, London E9 7HU

Fax: 020 8985 8212

email: railwatch@argonet.co.uk

Platform *Your letters extra*

Plan for future

I welcome the letter from Gavin MacPherson (*Railwatch 81*) outlining the positive attitude of Midland Mainline to expanding the network, as with the proposed Bradford Interchange-London St Pancras service.

There is almost unlimited scope, given the necessary investment in infrastructure, for much better use of the existing network.

RDS could do more work in this direction. The Halifax-Huddersfield link, when restored next year, will allow potentially exciting developments for many sizable places, particularly Bradford, starved of a variety of inter-city routes for many years.

The curtailment of direct inter-city links from large towns and cities which lie just off the major arterial routes has been one of the tragedies of the past 30 years.

Places like Hull, Sunderland, Middlesbrough, Harrogate, Huddersfield, Blackburn, Blackpool and Barrow have either been left without inter-city services or with a token one a day.

A fast journey from home to destination, direct or with one good connection, is an attractive proposition for most travellers.

Offering customers a local service, with a restricted regional dimension, means many people will never even think about travelling by train.

Providing a much enhanced variety of routes would enfranchise vast numbers of people in terms of rail travel.

The Spenn Valley line is a classic example of a line which would bring rail to some large centres, and enable crucial connections to be made, potentially at Wakefield, for example, with the link to GNER and Virgin CrossCountry services.

The old route is protected by planners in the relevant local authorities, but would need bridges replacing and viaducts restoring.

As a commuter line, capable of taking a large amount of traffic off the M62 and M606, it could serve a vital purpose.

The investment would be large, but if we mean business about road congestion and air quality and are willing to plan 30 to 50 years ahead instead of tomorrow, is not this what we should be doing?

Rowland Dale, 19 Grange Avenue, Shipley BD18 4BT

What a rip-off

Mrs Thatcher's government said it could not afford to install automatic train protection throughout the rail system but soon found a larger sum to prepare the system for privatisation.

The rail network was sold for much

less than it was worth and despite being called "private", the new owners are still receiving public subsidy. Even though we have an unreliable and inadequate rail system, we pay the highest fares in Europe.

Railtrack continues to charge the train operators enormous access charges to use the system. To put a vehicle on the road costs a few hundred pounds while on the railway it's several thousand!

Railtrack's £1.2 million daily profit should be forcibly redirected by the Government into updating the system and making it safe. Better still Railtrack should be dissolved and the infrastructure at least renationalised.

Run properly, the railway is by far the safest way to travel on land.

J Hayward, 50 St Lukes Road, Brighton, East Sussex BN2 2ZD

Slow down!

Trains are often admired for their high speed but can't we just enjoy watching the trees, hills and streams pass gently by as we proceed at an ordinary speed? Must speed and getting there be our primary values?

Alec M Wilding-Smith, 5 Doune Quadrant, Glasgow G20 6DL

Speak clearly!

Train announcements must be clear and not rushed. At Birmingham New Street, sometimes they are good but sometimes they are impossible to decipher. The woman announcer is fine which suggests it is not necessarily the sound system which is at fault.

Mrs M Ashby, 87 Dufton Road, Birmingham 32

Reservation puzzle

I was pleased to see my letter published in *Railwatch 81* but there are two slight errors. My name is Way not May and the booking was to Penrith, not Penzance.

Since then I have been to Perth with very good journeys both ways, changing at Haymarket going north and at Edinburgh coming south.

I did have difficulty in finding space for luggage on the Inverness to King's Cross train in a carriage where virtually all the seats were reserved. A short elderly lady cannot possibly reach the overhead racks!

I have met this problem before. Why are reserved seats all in one or two coaches which may be full, when there are often plenty of seats elsewhere?

It is good to see at last that seat numbers are shown above the windows which makes it easier to find one's reserved seat. The numbers are even visible outside which makes it easier to board at the right end of the coach.

Miss W M Way, 20 Ormsby Court, 160 Harborne Road, Birmingham B15 3JD

Editor's note: My apologies

21 new stations in prospect for 21st century

By Alan Bevan

During 1999 only five new stations were added to Railtrack's network. These can be found at Braintree Freeport, Horwich Parkway, Luton Parkway, West Ham and West Brompton.

However for 2000 there are 10-12 new stations in prospect with a further eight to 10 in 2001.

The prospective new stations are as follows:

Scotland: Beaulieu (Highlands) May 2000, Dunfermline Queen Margaret January 2000, Brunstane (Edinburgh) May 2000, Kinnaird Park (Edinburgh) May 2000, Howwood (Strathclyde) September 2000, Dawsholme (Strathclyde) October 2000, Gartcosh (North Lanark) October 2000, Chatelherault (Strathclyde) 2001, Merryton (Strathclyde) 2001, Larkhall (Strathclyde) 2001.

Northern: Brighouse (West Yorks) May 2000, Wavertree (Merseyside) May 2000, Lea Green (Merseyside) 2001.

Central: Kenilworth 2000, East Midlands Parkway 2001, Warwick Parkway 2001, Moor St Terminus 2001, Willenhall (Walsall) 2001.

South-East: Chineham, Hants October 2000, West Hampstead 2001.

An A-Z of all reopened and new stations during the past 50 years plus new routes and lots of other information is available price £7.50 (including postage) from RDS Sales, 113b Pembroke Road, Clifton, Bristol BS8 3EU. Cheques payable to RDS. We now accept credit cards. If using this facility, please send your card number, expiry date and name as it appears on your card.

RDS annual draw

The first prize of £400 in the RDS annual draw went to Mrs E Gold of Dalwood, Axminster, Devon.

The draw, made at the rail users conference in London, also provided a £200 win for W L Ebbett of Grosvenor, Bath, Somerset, £100 for D Morgan, Penllwyn, Pontllanfraith, Blackwood, Gwent, and £50 to J F Evans of Northwood, Middx.

Runners-up prizes went to Mrs Wiles of Bristol, Flora Jones of Hethe, Bicester, Mr Wilson of Horsforth, Leeds, A S Bell of Bracknell, Berks, G V Crine of Truro, Cornwall and R Coulson of Market Rasen. The holder of ticket 04303 has not yet been identified.

Monthly draw winners

August: Philippa Hamlyn, London W8 £68.40, Andrew Macfarlane, Timperley £42.75, D J Barr, Harrogate £25.65, F R Strutt, Birmingham £17.10, C Skinner, Warley £8.55, John Hounslow, Watford £8.55.

September: G Davis, Worthing £66.60, Ernest Evans, Birmingham £41.62, M J Savage, Cleethorpes £24.97, Dr I Hallack, Altrincham £16.65, A J MacBeath, Grange-over-Sands £8.33, John Vokins, Lewes £8.33.

October: A S Cleveley, Birmingham £65.80, R J Williams, Plymouth £41.12, Ian Sesnan, London SW2 £24.67, J R Bissett, Bromsgrove £16.45, Peter Jobson, Stockton-on-Tees £8.23, Martin Meredith, Kidderminster £8.23.

You can enter the lottery for £1 per month – £12 for a year. Send cheques made payable to RDS to Dave Finch, lottery organiser, 105 Meadow Hill Close, Kidderminster, Worcs DY11 6JX.

Annual meeting

The RDS national AGM will be on Saturday 29 April, provisionally in Croydon, Surrey.