



# Platform *Your letters*

## Core electrification

I applaud your criticism of the shadow strategic rail authority in *Railwatch*, particularly its non-committal attitude to electrification.

Is there no one in this visionless land who will extend the wires? The present absurd fragmented railway structure actually inhibits any further electrification.

Only an over-arching authority, which means the SSRA, can formulate and usher through such a policy for major new wiring.

As a moderately small island, we could have a core electric network with just four major schemes, with some add-ons as finance permits.

But we also need a return to locomotive haulage for trains proceeding beyond the wires. It is insane to run diesels for hundreds of miles under wires!

The four schemes should be: 1 Great Western to Bristol and possibly Weston and Swansea, 2 Midland main line to Sheffield and Leeds, 3 York-Derby-Bristol, 4 A Transpennine route.

Subsequent add-ons could be: Manchester-Preston-Blackpool, Edinburgh-Glasgow, lines to Hull.

All that is needed is vision and drive.

*John Gilbert, Ranat, 27 Pixiefield, Cradley, near Malvern WR13 5ND*

## Lorries in towns

In towns with pedestrianised areas, there is a problem with lorry deliveries in arranging arrival in the restricted hours allowed. This can be overcome by setting up local distribution centres where goods can be brought in as convenient and delivered at suitable times to local premises in small environmentally friendly vehicles. Serving these centres by rail and/or water transport will not require additional handling, and avoid the danger and damage associated with road

haulage and its infrastructure. Where piggyback carriage is desired, small vehicles will fit the existing loading gauge as well as narrow roads and restricted premises.

They are appropriate for the short distances at the ends of the rail haul – the economics of large lorries are based on long distance road trunking.

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

## I'm with you, Alix

Aidan Rankin (*Railwatch* 82) has a funny way of welcoming our new campaigns director, and I am puzzled by the reason he gives for joining RDS in the first place. Personally, I joined precisely because of the social and environmental benefits to be gained from an "efficient, smoothly running rail service", but I suppose it takes all sorts.

As for Azerbaijan, who knows? I hear a British aid train recently made it to Bosnia.

*Simon Hartley, 70 Cranmore Avenue, Swindon SN3 2EG*

## Frugal flying

It may interest RDS members to know that in 1998 over 68% of the flights handled in EuroControl airspace were for journeys of less than 1,000 kilometres. With this, and increasing airport congestion in mind, according to an article, *Frugal Flying*, in the November 1999 issue of *Resurgence*, Lufthansa plans to replace all its domestic flights with trains by the year 2002.

Considering the, on average, even shorter distances in Britain, it would surely make good sense to discontinue domestic flights here, and replace them with fast rail connections. When one considers the need to book in advance on account of the limited accommodation offered by aircraft, plus the time taken in getting to and from airports and in checking in, there are many instances

where rail would be a far more practical alternative. Service, expediency, and lowering of pollution and environmental impact should take precedence over airlines' profits.

*Alan Dodson, 6 Newtown Road, Malvern, Worcs WR14 1NZ*

## Objection!

I am very concerned about a planning application by Safeway Stores to construct a superstore across the trackbed of the former railway line from Pickering to Rillington which I understand is currently proposed for reopening.

Should this short section of route be re-opened it will provide a through route from the south to Pickering, the North Yorkshire Moors and Whitby and open up all manner of travel and commercial opportunities for the whole region as well as encourage motorists to leave their cars at home.

Pickering, the North Yorkshire Moors and Whitby are extremely difficult to reach by rail as there is no access from the south and for several years we have wanted to run a regular programme of excursion trains to Whitby and the North Yorkshire Moors Railway, but have been deterred by their inaccessibility.

Should the North Yorkshire Moors Railway be once again linked from the south, then Cheshire Railtours would undoubtedly look to run a regular series of charter trains, each carrying around 550 people to Whitby via Pickering. No doubt other charter train operators would also be interested, as would the main train operating companies and freight hauliers.

I would therefore like to offer the strongest possible objection to Safeway's proposal, or any other construction on the trackbed that may prevent this route from re-opening.

I have written to Ryedale District Council to object to Safeway's plan. Roy Scorrach on 01751 473077 is the local contact for objectors.

*David Latimer, proprietor, Cheshire Railtours, Golsuncott Cottage, Rodhuish, Minehead, Somerset TA24 6QZ*

## Make the connection

Mr John Pearson (*Railwatch* 82) is not alone in looking on slam-door stock as old friends. Mind you, having worked on them, I am in a position to know what damage the slamming does to the doors!

I too would like to see more about the South-East in your local action pages. When the

Uckfield line is reopened, no doubt there will be a section mentioning it.

As the buffet manager at Robertsbridge Junction, I will also be pleased to see the day when you can report a connection from the Rother Valley Railway/Kent and East Sussex with the main line at Robertsbridge. Both Bodiam Castle and the Kent and East Sussex Railway are exceptionally popular and consequently the narrow, winding Wealden roads are jammed in summer.

If private individuals are prepared to reopen such lines they should be encouraged.

*M L Jary, 28 Conqueror Road, Saint Leonards on Sea, East Sussex TN38 8DD*

## New approach

The articles on Stansted point to the need for a direct link between Essex and the Midlands, the north of England and Scotland. As far as north-east Essex is concerned, the track exists and is awaiting development – namely Iswich-Peterborough.

There were through services from Colchester to these destinations until the early 1990s.

With an increasing population in south-east Suffolk and north-east Essex, surely there is an opportunity for attractive, long-distance services.

*J H Asquith, 24 Links Road, Romiley, Stockport, Cheshire SK6 4HU*

## New line

Instead of building roads across Essex, how about a new line to connect Essex with Kent, from Kelvedon to Sittingbourne, linking two main lines. Using light rail vehicles, the new line could serve town centres.

*James Levens, 14 Fell View, Garstang, Lancashire PR3 1WQ*

## Cycling day

It's time to dust off the cobwebs, oil those chains and get fit for the 2000 RDS Cycle Ride. I have already written to past participants from 1998 and 1999 to start the ball rolling.

It is intended that the ride will start at Cambridge and travel towards Sudbury to highlight the campaign to restore rail services between the two towns. Cambridge of course is well served by rail and has a youth hostel next to the station. It is very pleasant and relatively flat cycling country and the Colne Valley Railway is an appropriate point to visit en route. As well as raising money for good RDS campaigns and making new friends, it should also be a great day out and fun too! There is

still a lot of planning to do for the ride, so few details as yet. Date is currently scheduled for early June. Anyone wanting to participate in the ride, or help with with planning or on the day, please contact me.

*Andy Hoines, 17 Sells Road, Ware, Herts, SG12 7LQ  
Phone: 01920 468796 (Home).  
07939 031818 (Mobile).  
Email: ACH39310@ggr.co.uk*

## Interlocking

Peter Moore's letter (*Railwatch* 82) raises unjustified fears about signal interlocking – or the lack of it. The primary purpose of interlocking is to ensure that two trains cannot be given clear signal indications on to conflicting routes; a secondary consideration is, wherever possible, to move points that are not involved in an active route to a position which minimises the consequences of a signal passed at danger.

What it can never do is guarantee a safe path for a train which passes a red signal. For example, at Ladbrooke Grove, six tracks reduce to four, and that on which the ill-fated Turbo was travelling ends there. The points sent the Turbo to the left rather than right (also into a conflicting route) because it allowed about 50 yards more after passing signal 109 for an emergency stop; irrelevant in the event because the Turbo did not do so until well past the signal.

The track design may be suspect; the visibility of signal 109 certainly so; but there was no criticism of the interlocking.

*Julian Hayward, 7 Heathmoors, Bracknell RG12 7NR  
julian@ratbag.demon.co.uk*

## Unfair fares

Train operators who do not bother to collect fares properly should not be considered for a franchise extension, otherwise the honest passenger ends up subsidising the dishonest.

*Bill Collins, 8a Moorland Road, Mickleover, Derby DE3 5FX*

## ScotRail catering

Perhaps you might be more successful in eliciting a reply from ScotRail regarding the abysmal standard of catering on the sleeper services. The service is otherwise very good and I am a frequent traveller on this service; many friends have been converted from car/air to this delightful journey. However, I have written and e-mailed ScotRail a number of times with regard to the lounge car service. In the most recent issue of *High Speed Train and Sleeper Services*, it clearly states that "a full dinner

menu is available" which is clearly not true. It would take such a small effort to supply the needs of customers, if not a full dinner menu, at least an attractive meal service with a plentiful supply of drinks, etc. The lounge carries just one full bottle of wine - can you believe it!

*Alan Young, 116 Barton Road  
Cambridge CB3 9LH*

## Unique CD on offer

In June 1998, possibly the first ever theatrical revue on a train was performed on the 2015 Huddersfield-Penistone service train. It was run in aid of the Penistone Line Partnership who are helping to promote services over the line, in conjunction with Northern Spirit, the operators of the route and co-sponsors of the performances.

The shows were a great success and gained valuable publicity both locally and nationally, being performed on four consecutive evenings by professional artistes.

The music (all of it original material) was composed by myself, a lifelong railway enthusiast and supporter. Many of the lyrics have topical references for example to privatisation (and the aftermath), John Prescott, and Railtrack.

Now at long last, a CD of the songs has been produced with members of the original cast, together with (on one track) supporters of the Penistone group performing.

The design of the CD incorporates a Northern Spirit Class 142 unit, and this must be the first occasion these units have been spotlighted on a record cover.

It is my intention now to launch similar shows and recordings on rural lines to promote them to the local community.

*Henry Lewis, 33 Regent's Park Rd, London NW7 7TL  
Tel: 0171 485 5431  
Fax: 0171 428 0955  
henrylewis@easynet.co.uk*

## Tickets on board

It is impossible for even an honest traveller to buy a ticket at Amberley station in West Sussex because there is neither a ticket office nor machine. The Portis ticket bought on the train is not accepted on London buses or on the Tube. Perhaps the answer is to have card-issuing ticket machines on the train.

I have seen machines of the same make used in England

inside the trams of East Berlin, offering a full range of tickets.

At Worthing, the ticket machine does issue London Travelcards but not the recently introduced equivalents valid on buses in Brighton, Oxford and several other towns. What hope for the ordinary traveller?

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

## Wooden wheel

May I suggest RDS sets up an annual wooden wheel award for the council which has done least for rail. I would nominate Vale of the White Horse Council and Wiltshire County Council.

*Lyndon Elias, 10 Sandringham Road, Didcot OX11 8TP*

## Christmas gloom

Most years I travel from Lincolnshire to spend Christmas with my family in Somerset. The outward journey went fairly well but the return was a shambles.

I have always been pro-rail but having suffered serious delays, unplanned extra expenditure on taxis and food, as well as numerous other frustrations and inconveniences during five out of six of my Christmas period journeys.

I wonder how many other people have been put off rail travel by the dismal levels of service over the Christmas and New Year period.

*Paul Holley, 22 Tennyson Close, Caistor, Lincolnshire LN7 6NZ*

**Editor's note: Every year the rail companies let down customers who rely on them at this time. By contrast, in Germany, trains ran normally, even on Christmas Day.**

## Slow trains

Trains should be comfortable rather than fast. When I go on a railway journey, I like to enjoy seeing the fields, trees and rivers which you can't on a bus or coach as you are going through towns most of the time.

*W Kitchener, 15 Hipley Close, Holme Hall, Chesterfield, Derbyshire S40 4LH*

## Answer back

It seems the powerful roads lobby has forced John Prescott to back down on much-needed measures to reduce traffic.

People need reminding that: 1 Motoring does enormous harm to the environment and social fabric. 2 Increasing cancer rates

at least beg the question: Are cars to blame? 3 Cars cannot provide access to many towns and cities. There is no room to park them. 4 90% of London commuters rely on rail.

*Tim Mickleburgh, 33 Littlefield Lane, Lincolnshire DN32 2AZ*

## Wales rover

The North and Mid Wales seven-day rover ticket allowed me to leave Shrewsbury, go to Aberystwyth, Barmouth, Dolgellau, Portmadoc, Blaenau Ffestiniog, Conwy Valley line to Llandudno, Caernarvon, Welsh Highland and back to Shrewsbury via the north coast, stopping for a few hours in Chester.

Great scenery and value for money but so poorly advertised by the rail companies.

*Trevor Wignall, 27 Windward Close, Littlehampton, West Sussex BN17 6QX*

## Plea to Blair

As a Labour Party supporter, I have recently written to Tony Blair urging him consider the railways as a social service. I urged him to use the present Transport Bill as a means to change things.

As the present franchises come to an end, they should not be renewed.

I also called for urgent action on: 1 The tramway linking Fareham, Hants, with Gosport which appears to be held up by red tape. 2 The need for a new railway halt at East Oakley on the Basingstoke-Southampton line. 3 A link with the private railway between Bishops Lydeard and Taunton. 4 A similar link for the Dart Valley Railway so its trains could run into Totnes station on the Great Western. 5 Speedy doubling of the tracks between Alton and Farnham which Railtrack is delaying. 6 Reinstating two drivers in the cabs of long-distance trains. 7 Re-staffing of every rail station throughout every day.

*R Maitland Earl, Little Orchard, Bentworth, Alton, Hampshire GU34 5RB*

## Crazy cards

We have a crazy situation here in Exeter whereby a Network Card is valid Exeter-Waterloo but not Exeter-Paddington.

No one wants to use the Waterloo route because it takes a year and a day and it's not necessarily the most convenient.

Can anyone explain why this crazy situation exists at all and what can be done to get it changed?

*Donna Sharp, Saffron House, 2 South Avenue, Exeter EX1 2DZ  
donna.sharp@which.net*

Letters should be sent to:

The Editor, *Railwatch*, 4 Christchurch Square, London E9 7HU  
Fax: 020 8985 8212 email: railwatch@beeb.net

# Platform *Your letters extra*

## Central alternatives

Of course we are very grateful for the support from RDS of our proposals. However can I reassure Martin Smith (Alternative view of the Central Railway *Railwatch* 82) that we are still consulting widely and have not made any firm proposals yet. These will follow detailed engineering and environmental studies.

More relevantly we have recently commissioned independent initial engineering studies, one for the Chiltern Railway (where the report indicates adequate capacity for our trains and Chiltern's) and also one on a route parallel to the M25, which indicates this idea to be feasible.

Whilst our 1996 proposal through London was engineered as feasible, we are mindful of the concerns held by locals and are inclined, if at all possible, to look at alternatives.

*Robin Raffety, development director,  
Central Railway, 17 Cockspur Street,  
London SW1Y 5BL*

## Lorries on trains

I was pleased to be a member of the sub-committee that met to consider RDS policy on the lorries-on-trains Central Railway, and I'm glad to see it being debated in *Railwatch*.

May I point out that the sub-committee was only convened to consider this one definite scheme, and was not intended to draw up a fantasy ideal freight route (many of us have done that in idle hours, unfortunately with no tangible result).

There was a full discussion, and letters from Thames Valley branch (whose representative was unable to attend) and from London & South-East branch (who didn't want to) were read out and carefully considered.

The London section of the railway has always been the most contentious, but was thoroughly surveyed and mapped for the original scheme, and was approved by the Department of Transport before the application for a Transport and Works Act Order went to Parliament.

It is therefore accepted that the route through south-west London and Croydon is technically feasible. The Chiltern Line was not as busy then, and is not particularly busy now by London standards; and most stations were built on passing loops, with through lines that could be reinstated.

The Northolt to Acton section is grossly under-utilised, and, like the Great Central and the Great Western joint lines, was built to a generous loading gauge. As for the West London Line, Central Railway has never intended to use this track, but would meet it and could connect with it. Far from causing congestion here, Central could relieve this line and the busy South London routes of existing freight heading to Kent. Nevertheless, Central Railway is

now carrying out a detailed survey of an alternative route located just inside the M25, which would join the Chiltern Line near Gerrards Cross. This would, like the other route, have a terminal on the west side of London for receiving lorries from various motorways converging on the M25 (M3, M4, M40, M1, A1M) and for traffic originating more locally – London does generate freight as well as passenger business!

An outer route as suggested through Guildford and Oxford would impinge on many very busy Railtrack lines with attendant congestion and ownership problems, and also miss the crucial London terminal.

The Shadow Strategic Rail Authority is currently examining the Central Railway's scheme, and other railway proposals. Railtrack is easing clearances on some routes for larger containers; although welcome, this won't produce a change in the volume of rail freight.

The Piggyback Consortium idea for using the West Coast Main Line has been overtaken by events and is now totally impractical; the proposed density of passenger traffic will leave very few paths for additional freight, the proposed loading gauge would not accommodate full-height lorry trailers, and the civil engineering expense would be totally unjustified for the small amount of possible piggyback traffic.

The Channel Tunnel Link now under construction through Kent will be no use for heavy freight, with or without passing loops, because some of its gradients are nearly as steep as the notorious Lickey Incline; this is a pity, because the Thames crossing in Stage Two might otherwise make an excellent heavy freight gateway into Essex and East London. It's no use for lorries on trains either, because its UIC "C" loading gauge is not high enough for full-height trailers on trains, as we were told at the RDS AGM at Norwich in 1997.

It's a fact that most freight now travels by lorry and not by train, and will continue to do so despite the efforts of EWS and Freightliner.

However, there is no road through to France, so Eurotunnel carries increasingly vast numbers of lorries across the Channel; but not one continues its short Eurotunnel rail journey by Railtrack or SNCF, due to their restricted bridge heights.

Many RDS branches intend to have an input to the new Multi-Modal Studies which will look at alternatives to widening such roads as the M1. Without the Central Railway to give lorries or trailers a lift, there won't be a credible alternative, and more motorway widening will be inevitable.

*Malcolm Goodall, Albemarle Cottage,  
Kirklington Road, Eakring, Newark, Notts  
NG22 0DA*

## How much does a station cost?

The Railway Development Trust plans to publish a report on station costings, drawing partly on work done in the mid 1990s by RDS member Ken Davies, but also looking at the actual costings of stations and halts built since then; and at costings quoted for new stations. Can you help in this respect?

Has there been a reopening or new station proposal near where you live? How much was quoted by Railtrack, a contractor or the local authority? Are you able to give a breakdown of costs? Even if you are not, the global figure, perhaps given in a press report or other document, would still be helpful.

Please send any such information to David Soames, 158 Atherstone Avenue, Peterborough PE3 9UN.

The second major project of the trust is to build up a database of publications (and some unpublished material) that can be used by people conducting research into modern rail issues.

Trust adviser Mike Beckett is working on this, and already has information on over 200 items – ranging from a report on the case for extending the East London Line northward, to a set of graphs showing emission and land-take comparisons for road and rail.

If you have any material that you would be willing to donate to the trust, or make available to researchers, please contact John Saunders, Sawyers Lane, Sutton, Wymondham, Norfolk NR18 9JH.

## Cash for campaigning

Last year's RDS national draw raised over £1,500 to help local campaigns. Thank you to all members who bought or sold tickets.

The Reopenings & New Railways Committee, meeting on 22 January awarded a total of £1,725, including £225 from its own budget, as follows:

£150 to RDS Lincolnshire branch for leaflets on rail freight and the Peterborough - Lincoln - Doncaster line.

£100 to Wash Railways Users' and Promoters Association, for station and line reopening campaigns.

£200 to CKP Railways Ltd. which is seeking to reinstate the Penrith - Keswick line.

£100 to RDS South Wales branch to help publish its Development Plan for the Railways of South Wales.

£75 to Oxon & Bucks Rail Action Committee to mount an exhibition and fund a circular.

£50 to Wharfedale Rail Users' Group for publicity and a campaign for train strengthening.

£50 to RDS Thames Valley branch to help set up a rail users' group at Wolverton.

£100 to RDS East Anglia branch to help the ongoing campaign for a Braintree - Stansted link.

£100 to RDS London & South East branch to help with multi-modal study campaigning along the south coast.

£400 to RDS London & South East branch for a publication on new rail projects, for distribution during the London mayoral election campaign.

£100 to RDS Midlands Branch for help in campaigns to reopen lines and stations in the West Midlands.

£100 to Friends of the Severn Beach Line to help with a publication on the potential of the rail network in Bristol.

## Car-Free Day

Britain will join its European neighbours in September in staging a car-free day. Last year French, Italian and Swiss cities took part and 89% of the French population were in favour of the day, with 81% wishing to see it happen in every French city.

ETA director Andrew Davis said: "We will be working with local councils across Britain to close some town centre streets to traffic for the day, to show what things could be like. Last year Paris closed down some 40 miles of roads, and people simply could not believe how tranquil their cities could be without cars for a few hours."