

Rail needs to go regional

Each year since 1992, RDS has organised a national conference at which campaigners can gather to discuss issues surrounding rail reopenings and new railways.

Trevor Garrod reports from this year's event which was held on 5 June at the New Walk Museum, Leicester, and was attended by nearly 70 delegates.

The importance of the new regional bodies in developing train services and reopening lines was stressed.

Councillor David Bill highlighted the role of Regional Assemblies. The East Midlands Assembly, on which he serves, consists of 70% councillors and 30% elected members.

It had put forward rail suggestions to the regional Government Office and been advised that these should be as detailed as possible, with particular emphasis on integration and freight.

Mr Bill urged a cross-party approach when lobbying councillors, adding: "You'll find far more sympathy than you might expect."

It was important for rail campaigners to take part in the consultation for Regional Planning Guidance and argue for measures to increase rail's share of the passenger and freight market.

The refranchising process also opened up a window of opportunity to press for reopenings.

For example, bidders for the Central Trains franchise must be pressed to include the full Ivanhoe Line scheme in their proposals.

One seminar, led by John Barfield and Trevor Garrod, dealt with rail links to airports. Stansted airport was used as an example of where we were pressing for a new line from the east to enhance the existing services from London and from the north.

We need to remind people that airport owners have a special responsibility to develop inte-

grated transport. They often own the infrastructure required and a large section of the potential users of rail services to the airport would be the airport workers themselves.

Denise Carlo led the seminar on multi-modal studies.

A final plenary session on Route Protection included a presentation by RDS Reopenings and New Railways Committee member Cedric Martindale, with particular reference to the Penrith-Keswick line.

It was important to protect land where there was a need for a feeder railway or strategic link, but urban planners often did not appreciate this.

Where agricultural buildings had been erected on a trackbed, it would be necessary to negotiate with the owner.

Sometimes, it might be appropriate to lease land from the owner to build a rail diversion. Sometimes the abandonment of a railway had led to roads crossing it being straightened and levelled, causing cars and lorries to travel faster.

Reinstating the railway could involve slowing the road traffic at that point and making nearby residents happier!

To put the cost of rail reinstatement into perspective, Mr Martindale said that resurfacing a mile of the A6 cost about the same as reinstating a mile of the rail track to Keswick.

For a full report of the conference, send £1 (payable to RDS) to our Administrative Officer John Lee, The Birches, Eye Lane, East Rudham, Norfolk PE31 8RH.



John Barfield and Howard Thomas with a TGV at Lille

Network

Rail users from Britain have joined forces with rail campaigners throughout Europe in a drive to make a greater impact on European decision making.

The first meeting – organised by the RDS international committee – took place in Lille on 8 July. German, Austrian, French, Belgian and Dutch representatives met with a nine-strong delegation of RDS members.

We are hoping the meeting will be the beginning of fruitful co-operation between pro-rail groups throughout Europe. Delegates highlighted the failure of national railways to integrate their computer-booking systems to make life easier for passengers.

It was agreed that the French system was not particularly useful for through booking, but the German computer system appears to be the most efficient and flexible. RDS put six "position" papers on the table for discussion at Lille.

A major RDS concern is the relatively high and complicated Eurostar fares and we believe Eurostar should be better integrated with other services, particularly from the ticketing viewpoint. It was interesting to learn that our Continental counterparts found similar problems with high-speed trains like the French TGV, the French-Belgian-Dutch Thalys service and the Spanish AVE. A useful exchange of views also took place on the pros and cons of premium fares.

We believe relatively simple things can be done (like selling Paris or London Underground tickets on Eurostars) to make international rail travel more user-friendly. Howard Thomas presented his paper, dealing with this subject, in French. It

was warmly received. We would also like to see Eurostar check-in times reduced. The French and British representatives agreed to look at the feasibility of running local train services through the Channel Tunnel, for instance from Brighton to Bruges. Robert Macke, who lives in Calais, will be liaising with John Pitcher from Deal to produce a discussion paper.

The British delegation were surprised that the French representatives knew little or nothing about the Central Railway proposal for a high-speed freight line from Liverpool to Lille.

John Barfield reported on his talks with MEPs and European Commission officials and raised the question of how to persuade national governments and the European Union to contribute finance for rail projects.

Discussion followed on how our various national associations can work together to find out about, and submit our views on, future European proposals. Some national delegates said it was not easy to keep track of what their own MEPs were doing.

A pleasant lunch at Le Meunier restaurant was followed by a decision to meet again with our European colleagues in Lille in November.

Among the organisations represented were Pro Bahn from Germany, Fahrgast from Austria, BTTB from Belgium, FNAUT from France and Rover from the Netherlands.

For a full report of this meeting, please send £1 (payable to RDS) to Trevor Garrod, 15 Clapham Road, Lowestoft, NR32 1RQ.

■ *Railwatch* report by Trevor Garrod and John Barfield

Wensleydale reopening

Trains could be running between Northallerton and Redmire next year following Railtrack's agreement in principle to transfer its interest in the line to the Wensleydale Railway Company, which has long-term plans to reinstate the 22-mile line between the East Coast main line and the Settle-Carlisle line at Garsdale. Passenger trains will only be able to run if an application for a Transport and Works Order is successful.

The line has seen only occasional use recently between Northallerton and Redmire by military trains of armoured vehicles to Catterick garrison but limestone trains ran until 1992. The aim is to maintain the line as part of the national rail network – another transpennine route. It is hoped the transfer can take place within six months. The voluntary Wensleydale Railway Association has 2,000 members. For details write to PO Box 65, Northallerton, North Yorkshire DL7 8YZ.