

# Your letters



## Sound policies

Mike Crowhurst does not find the Strategic Rail Authority's strategic plan an inspiring document (*Railwatch* 91) but I thought it presented a good, logical case.

I particularly welcome the news that Rail Passenger Partnership support is being given to the Swanage Railway Society to provide passenger trains at two hourly intervals, upgrading of the line between Swanage and Norden, and reinstatement of track between Furzebrook and Norden. £6million is on the table. I suggested park-and-ride at Swanage as long ago as 1980.

The strategic plan is a final vindication of the principles of the railway restoration movement, which were outlined as far back as 1941 when Arthur Rimmer first proposed that volunteers were the key to economically resuscitate the Welsh Highland Railway. At that time the Ministry of Transport gave me the brush-off when I suggested it.

Now, though, the SRA has recognised the importance of the volunteer railways. And I hope Richard Bowker will be sympathetic to the idea of a Rhyll-Rhuddlan park-and-ride as proposed by Conwy councillor Dr Stuart Anderson. I will speak about this and the Giant's Causeway Railway, the world's first hydro-electric line, at Abergele Community Centre on 14 November at 14.00 (details: 01745 832624).

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## Clear throat

Your Local Action report from London (*Railwatch* 91) rightly highlighted the need for renewed campaigning to "clear the throat" at Liverpool Street. The March decision, actually by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport to "list" a small part of the so-called Braithwaite viaduct is a major new stumbling block in the path of the proposed Greater Anglia franchise. The franchise will be expected to

contribute to achieving the target 50% growth in rail patronage within this decade, before CrossRail can be built.

Liverpool Street is the premier rail gateway to the City and the rest of London for virtually the entire East Anglian region. Every single organisation across that region with an interest in higher capacity and more reliable rail links with the capital should now lobby the Strategic Rail Authority and bidders for the new Greater Anglia franchise, to prioritise eight-tracks at the Liverpool Street throat.

Bridge 19 (near Brick Lane, Bethnal Green) and part of the viaduct needs to be demolished to make way for the East London Line Extension as well as the wider mainline track.

Once Railtrack Property applies for permission to demolish this now-listed structure, it will need the support of rail user groups and other organisations to demolish part of the viaduct – about 20 arches. More than 160 arches which stretch all the way out to Mile End will remain, carrying a vital working railway.

Don't anyone be fooled by English Heritage hype. It claims the Braithwaite viaduct is the East London equivalent of the Euston Arch. It is not. Shoreditch station, which was destroyed by fire in 1964, was magnificent and deserved preservation, had it survived the fire.

*Roger Blake, 70 Dynevor Road, Stoke Newington, London N16 0DX*

## Network card

I object to the way the train operators have tried to undermine the value of the network railcard.

To my mind, this is a greedy attitude by the rail companies who don't seem to realise that in order to attract passengers this, and other ideas, are essential.

Bearing in mind that, as the article in the recent *Railwatch* states, a number of trains in London contra-peak are running empty, if they extended and improved the network

rail card the trains would be well used.

For myself, I use my rail card on an average of five days per week and I know others who do the same.

Railfuture should be shouting loud against this stupid, greedy act on the part of the rail companies – otherwise, passengers are going to be driven away – for good. Is that what the rail companies want?

Many times I have been on a train where fares were not collected or tickets checked. No wonder they are losing money!

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## Electrification

Railfuture often states that Britain needs to follow the European example and electrify more lines, and on the face of it this is a compelling and attractive notion. While the argument for filling the strategic gaps is strong I wonder if any independent advice has been sought as to whether the case for wholesale new electrification in the UK can still be made to stand up to scrutiny?

We know that many of the train operators are not enthusiastic about electrification, which presumably means that there are no appreciable savings in running costs with electric traction. This being so, the infrastructure provider is unlikely to take the lead when resources are scarce and demand muted, to say the least. As far as I can see the overall advantage is not now so clear cut.

Electrification is costly, both in capital and maintenance, especially if the overhead system is used. Environmentally, it requires the use of scarce resources to make the structures, and some pollution in so doing. There is the further visual pollution of the unsightly gantries and overheads. There are problems in winter with icing and high winds; a dewirement can be very costly in terms of delays. Significant delays can be caused by articles falling – accidentally or on purpose – on to the overheads, and of course there are, each year, a few tragic losses of life due to electrocution.

It is said by some that electric trains cause less pollution because of the absence of diesel fumes, but of course there is pollution at the source, the power station, unless the power is generated by non-fossil fuels, for example wind, wave, or hydro-electricity.

Switzerland, for example, has no indigenous oil supplies but an abundance of hydro-electricity (though some nuclear power is

imported from France) and so electrification makes sense. It would be interesting to receive expert advice as to the relative position in the UK in this regard.

Electric trains have always been thought of as faster in acceleration (though some say the latest diesels are almost if not quite as good), and certainly electric trains can be quieter and potentially cleaner.

While in my heart I would like to support further electrification I think it is important that if RDS is to campaign for a cause then it needs to be absolutely certain of its facts (not opinion) by consulting with the railway professionals and those who are experts in the field with up to date information available.

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## Post-BR progress

I was pleased to attend my second consecutive annual general meeting of the Lincolnshire branch recently. Showing that we have links with the railway companies, it was interesting to listen to speakers from both Arriva and Hull Trains.

Hull Trains have successfully shown that if you provide a product the customers want, rail can prosper. In this case, it is extra direct trains from Hull to London. More excitingly for those of us living south of the Humber, is the news that there will be through services from Lincoln and Grimsby to King's Cross by 2004.

Travellers are put off by having to change, whether it's because they are carrying heavy luggage or because of the problems of connections in these post-British Rail days. So it's good to give credit to a company that has realised this.

*Tim Mickleburgh, 33 Littlefield Lane, Grimsby, Lincs DN31 2AZ*

## Top 40

I was disappointed to read in *Railwatch* 91 that our line (Luton-Dunstable) was not mentioned in the top 40 improvements submitted to Minister Spellar. Hopefully the minister was told the list was not exclusive.

Past issues have featured our line and for that we were always grateful, but an omission can be misread by Luton Council which, as the ASA ruling has shown, is capable of not telling it as it.

A study of the ASA judgment shows that Luton stated that a Transport and Works Order is needed to reopen the railway. This has subsequently been denied in writing by the Strategic Rail Authority. Had this, along with the



interest of a train operator been put to the ASA, we feel the scoreline would have been Luton Council 1 Railway campaign 4. The single Luton Council "goal" was based on the claim that buses would attract greater use because there were more bus stops than rail stations within 500 metres walking distance. In fact rail stations attract passengers from a much greater distance than 50 metres.

I suggest *Railwatch* offers either an apology or a caveat that the list is not exhaustive. Coverage of the ASA verdict would be even better.

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**Editor's note: The list of 40 schemes was drawn up quickly in response to a request from the minister. It is not always possible to consult everyone, and trying to rank schemes can create endless arguments. Railfuture is sorry the Luton-Dunstable line was not included. It remains a campaign priority to see it reopen. You can also read about the ASA verdict on Page 3 of this *Railwatch*.**

## Ultra-daft

I read with interest Tony Smale's article in *Railwatch* 91 entitled Light rail and reality.

He wrote about a proposed scheme for the Portsmouth area: "Variable Level Rail System", a monorail system. Tony appeared to give this qualified approval subject to many questions that need answers, concerning not least, safety.

In Cardiff a vaguely similar scheme has been proposed, called Ultra, this also to run on an often elevated formation. One difference is that rather than using some form of rail carriage, vehicles would be six-person driverless "pods", so the system is being dubbed an automatic taxi system.

Unfortunately, we can't greet this with any kind of enthusiasm. It's completely untested technology and would be subject to the same reservations that Tony has and more. A system like this can never cope with the large numbers of people that conventional light rail can, and which would be needed if the Cardiff Bay developments are to fulfil their potential.

Moreover, Ultra is distracting attention away from light rail, which (albeit in a diesel form) looked to be a serious proposition a few years ago. Now, nothing is happening while Cardiff County Council is flirting with a system which, undoubtedly has novelty, but which would perhaps be better suited to a fairground ride.

A test track has been constructed in the docks and a year-long evalua-

tion is taking place – let us hope that this shows up Ultra for what it is and we can get back to planning for serious transport for a serious number of people.

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## Get real

I refer to your map of Herefordshire Lines and Stations as published in the August issue of *Railwatch*, showing the stations in Herefordshire which had been closed by Beeching (some were closed prior to Beeching, for example, the Golden Valley Line and the Leominster-Bromyard branch).

If the motor car had not been invented, I could support the policy outlined in the accompanying article headed "Put Beeching in reverse".

But "we are where we are" as Sir Alastair Morton might have justifiably remarked in this context, and I am afraid it is totally unrealistic to suggest that any of the erstwhile rural stations in Herefordshire should be reopened (with one exception – see 2 below), particularly when it is borne in mind that Herefordshire has the least density of population of any English county.

So far as railways in Herefordshire are concerned, it would be much more profitable to concentrate our efforts on achieving the following limited objectives:-

- 1 Redoubling of the line from Ledbury to Shelwick Junction (north of Hereford), thus reducing significantly the delays caused by late running services.
- 2 Reopening of Pontrilas station, to provide a convenient railhead for south Herefordshire.
- 3 Devoting more extensive publicity to the existence of local railheads at Hereford, Ledbury, Leominster and (hopefully) Pontrilas, and improving the car parking facilities at these stations.

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## Train regulation

I was interested to read the comments on train regulation in *Railwatch* 91.

On page two you say Railfuture complained to the Transport Minister about escalating delays to long distance trains being held behind local stopping trains and you proposed that trains be regulated under a system based on clas-

sification and speed, rather than giving all operators' trains the same status. Peter Rayner (page six) says that train operation is random and uncontrolled, ... railwaymen ... have subscribed to a new method of train regulation ... Railtrack and the train operators contrived an agreement ... the train on time takes preference.

This is news to me and, I would suspect, to the vast majority of my colleagues. I have been involved in signalling and regulation of trains for many years (pre- and post-privatisation) over a large and busy part of the North of England rail network. My colleagues and I are intrigued and puzzled by these statements because they do not in any way accord with how we actually work and, because, despite what Peter Rayner says, there has been no instruction to us regarding a change of policy.

We still try to regulate trains in the most sensible way – which is to minimise overall delay having regard to speed, stopping patterns, connections, train weights, track availability and so on. We liaise as appropriate with our friends the station and freight yard staff, and with Control, although the latter don't usually get involved unless we wish to run a freight train early for example.

We do not run stopping passenger trains in front of late running expresses unless there is a good reason to do so – for example that the express is so late that there is sufficient margin so that the further delay to the express (if any) will be by only a minimal amount, or because there is no other option – for example if another express is following the first. The "stopper" has to go sometime!

The classification of trains is of lessening importance (though still a factor) as the speed differential between trains has diminished. However, the signalling general instruction still tells us: "Trains must generally take precedence according to classification. When necessary the signaller must ascertain how trains are running in order that they can be regulated correctly."

No change here!

It might, for example, be sensible to run an on-time Freightliner in front of a late running stopping passenger, (or even a class one express) even though this would be contrary to the general system of preference by classification.

It is worth pointing out that signalmen do not take any account of which operator's trains are involved. We do not actually have

this information (though we may know it through local knowledge).

We go by the TOPS/TRUST display (most boxes have them) or by the working timetable (as usually reduced down to a simplifier) or both, and neither TRUST not the timetable show the train operators.

We do not get involved or concern ourselves with penalty payments between operators and themselves and/or Railtrack though we are very conscious that errors on our part may lead to Railtrack being penalised!

If train regulation of the kind you describe is being practised in some areas then clearly representation needs to be made to the appropriate area management, but do not tar us all with the same brush. An organised visit to a busy signalbox or signalling centre might be very worth while so that RDS officers can see for themselves "how it is done and why" and can question the methodology.

Finally, train regulation is an inexact science, and it is impossible to get every decision right. Many of us like to follow the progress of a regulating decision to see how it worked out and to learn any lessons from it.

RDS/Railfuture and Peter Rayner can be assured that we will continue to regulate trains to the best of our ability in the time honoured way.

Professional railwayman and  
Railfuture member  
(name and address supplied)

## Pick-up goods

I am old enough to remember the pick-up goods. I understand it to be among the least practical and profitable of railway operations.

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**Editor's note: Isn't this the same kind of argument that says branch lines are not profitable when in fact, branch lines are crucial in delivering people and revenue to the main lines? In the same way doesn't the pick-up goods deliver freight and revenue for long-distance trains? A wagon picked up in the Highlands of Scotland could be taken by rail to the southern tip of Italy. One tricky question would be how to apportion the revenue.**

## Your magazine

What features would you like to see in future issues of *Railwatch*? Let your editors know. How about writing about an issue yourself?

## Railfuture events

A what's on diary for Railfuture

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