

# Local action



## East Midlands

By Anthony Kay  
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### Rhetoric and responsibility

This was the title chosen by Nick Brown, managing director of Central Trains, for his talk at an open meeting organised by the Railfuture East Midlands branch in Leicester on 9 November. Speaking to a packed audience a few days after the branch chairman had been interviewed on Radio Leicester about the unreliability of Central Trains services, he was frank about the company's poor performance at present. The SRA's figures for July to September showed 70.8% of Central's trains running on time, the worst figure for any regional train operator. Some of the problems relate to the increasing traffic on the railways and are particularly acute for Central's long-distance cross-country services, on which delays can accumulate along the journey.

Mr Brown was optimistic about Network Rail dealing with the deficiencies in the infrastructure. However, in the current economic climate he considered that reopenings of closed lines are simply not on the agenda. In conclusion, he expressed confidence in the future but asked for patience on the part of customers; the problems will not be solved instantly, although he expects there to be noticeable improvement by the same time next year.

**AGM** The branch AGM is on Saturday 15 March at 14.00 in the City Rooms, Hotel Street, Leicester. The guest speaker will be Cedric Pierce, operations director (West) for the Strategic Rail Authority.

**Refurbished HSTs** Midland Mainline is spending £18million on refurbishing its 25-year-old high-speed trains, to improve reliability and passenger comfort. The company's punctuality figure recently slipped to 79.7%, although it remains the best of the national train operators. It has also bought some HSTs from Virgin and introduced two new services, including one allowing commuters from Market Harborough more convenient timings for their journey to London.

**Corby Catalyst** Corby, the regeneration company which has the task of doubling the size of the town in the next 20 to 25 years, presented its vision of the future recently. It includes a rail-bus interchange with half-hourly train services to London



*Volunteers celebrated the arrival of four Gatwick Express coaches at a railway they are trying to restore. WyvernRail said the arrival of the coaches – donated by train leasing company Porterbrook in February – was the first passenger rolling stock to serve the Ecclesbourne Valley Railway since 1947. "The arrival of these coaches will provide the railway with the very best in passenger accommodation," said*

*Martin Miller, managing director of WyvernRail. The coaches will be based at Wirksworth and can be seen by visitors between 10.00 and 16.00 on weekdays and weekends. "We are delighted to provide practical assistance for what promises to be a very worthwhile and exciting project to restore passenger services to the Ecclesbourne Valley Railway between Duffield and Wirksworth," said Rupert Brennan-Brown of Derby-based Porterbrook Leasing.*

*The main picture shows a baggage car with driving facilities, while inset is a new Gatwick Express train. The baggage car was followed by three air-conditioned passenger coaches. They are ideally suited for initial push-pull operations along the line, but can be readily adapted to provide luxury dining facilities as the line becomes fully operational.*

*The line passes through the beautiful Ecclesbourne Valley to the award winning and beautifully restored town of Wirksworth, nestling at the foothills of the Peak District. The line is a time capsule, with its intermediate stations intact and the layout at Wirksworth unchanged since the days of steam.*

*There is eight miles of single-track railway, which joins the Midland main line at Duffield. There are five station sites, two level crossings, a yard with large sidings and a mineral branch to the old Middlepeak quarry at Wirksworth which it is hoped can be linked to the National Stone Centre and the High Peak Trail.*

and trains travelling North to link with the Midlands.

However, the reality is likely to be rather different, at least where trains are concerned. When pressed it said that by 2007 there may be a service, not more than hourly, if that, to Bedford and Bletchley. This is unlikely to generate much business as people will continue to drive to Kettering and catch a train straight to London. Or, having started off in their car, they may drive all the way, though the London congestion charge may make them think twice about that. Also, it does nothing to provide a rail service

northwards, or to give Oakham and Melton Mowbray the better service they deserve.

**Multi-modal study** A consultation on Packages of Measures was issued in January for the West Midlands to East Midlands Multi-Modal Study. As usual in this stage of a multi-modal study, there are plenty of good ideas in the public transport packages, but one wonders whether any of them will actually come to fruition. The National Forest line reopening is included, and there is particular emphasis on reopening the Castle Donington route to passengers, to provide a one-hour

journey time from Birmingham to Nottingham. The possibility of a spur from this line into the rapidly growing East Midlands Airport is not considered.

## Lincolnshire

By Brian Hastings

**Relief road opposed** We have actively opposed plans by Lincolnshire County Council to appropriate the station approach road alignment as a route for an extension of the town's inner relief road. As plans emerged, Railfuture Lincolnshire exposed the folly of the proposal of bringing heavy goods traffic within



inches of the station canopy and forecourt. We are now joined with GNER, Central Trains, Hull Trains, the Strategic Rail Authority, Network Rail and the East Coast Joint Sub-Committee of the East of England and NE Rail Passenger Committees in registering our opposition. We were invited to an opposition planning meeting on 31 January and to meet as a combined protest to face the Lincolnshire County council officers on 5 February.

**Underground opposed** A bizarre proposal to place the entire Lincoln rail infrastructure including the station below ground was launched in 2001 by a mysterious consortium called the Lincoln Rail Working Group (a road working group would be a better title). Opposed by us from the start, it was based on an attempt by the city and county council to blame the existence of the railway level crossing in High Street for the city's road congestion problems. Its architects used the opportunity provided by the news that the joint line (Peterborough-Lincoln-Doncaster) was to become a primary freight artery under the planned East Coast main line upgrade. The group produced grossly exaggerated forecasts that High Street crossing (current down time 17-18 minutes) could rise to 40 minutes based on scare stories that Railtrack (as it was) intended to provide two up and two down freight paths on the joint line each hour. We have constantly reminded the community that the sheer cost of placing the railway below ground was pie in the sky and would have taken three times the total sum then allocated for the joint line upgrade.

Fortunately, the local authorities have significantly moved their priorities and they now remain only as a "long term vision". As we have consistently argued, the highway engineers have plans to pedestrianise that stretch of the high street. A pedestrian subway or an "overhead traveler" could maintain pedestrian access!

**Lincoln-London link** News that Hull Trains are facing problems in introducing a direct London service came as no surprise. The SRA blames "pathing" between Peterborough and London but we also profile the need to upgrade the joint line through Lincolnshire as it has a restrictive 60 mph line speed and two 10 mph user-worked crossings, plus a trackwork and signalling improvement at Lincoln to

accommodate services extending to Cleethorpes. The community certainly wants a through London service.

**Allington Chord** The SRA is soon expected to give the go-ahead for the Allington east chord. This will permit all trains on the Nottingham-Skegness route needing to serve Grantham to be kept off the East Coast main line. Preliminary road access works are complete.

**Skegness overcrowding** The line users' group SELTA has completed its review of summer Saturday overcrowding. Members monitored each Saturday arrival and departure for three months. Results show that overcrowding was still unacceptable on certain dates despite promises by Central Trains to overcome the problem. The train operator now promised a solution this year by use of hired in loco-hauled trains or high-speed trains working shuttles from Nottingham. Railfuture supports SELTA on the issue and has made a backing representation.

**Festive season cuts** Central Trains disappointed rail users by trimming the level of services in the county between Christmas and New Year, even slashing already reduced frequency between Lincoln and Newark Northgate leaving a gap of 10 hours 14 minutes between trains on four days. This is the normal connecting service for travel in London linking up with GNER.

Central Trains defended their action but have subsequently proposed that in future holiday periods care will be taken to provide "suitable journey opportunities". The company also cut frequencies on the alternative joint line route via Sleaford to Peterborough for London.

**Fund-raising success** A branch initiative to raise funds for rail profiling publication has been a big success. *Operation 225* was planned to raise that sum to fund a range of leaflets profiling rail and ourselves. By the end of December, the total raised had reached £189. Chairman Brian Hastings says members' response has been excellent. The campaign to fund activities will continue into 2003 as the branch aims to be more active. Fund-raising ideas have included attendance at car boot sales, sales stalls at meetings and recycling of members' books and magazines.

**Corrections** Lincoln was dealt a new blow when Central Trains

cut out the Newark Northgate connection and stop in certain Lincoln-Nottingham services. Railfuture was first to query this, with branch chairman Brian Hastings facing a Central trains manager live on a morning radio interview. The protests have attracted widespread condemnation following their introduction on 29 September. On the up direct there is now a five and a half hour gap in connecting services between Lincoln and Newark Northgate for London.

In a letter to Railfuture in January Central Trains announced a complete review of the service. It may move Lincoln-Newark shuttles but at the expense of the existing Lincoln-Nottingham frequency.

We shall respond to this review when it is published.

### East Anglia

By Nick Dibben  
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and Trevor Garrod

**No money for busway** The Government's local transport spending for Cambridgeshire announced last December did

not include any money for the Cambridge to St Ives guided busway. The scheme favoured by some in the county council but dismissed by many in the area is to be re-evaluated by outside consultants. Key issues such as how the buses would get past the traffic to reach Cambridge city centre and how it will integrate with existing buses remain unclear. The county council has admitted the scheme would use standard buses rather than the high quality tram-like vehicles on show at last year's public exhibitions. This downgrading of the specification means that claims of a change in public transport provided by the scheme are questionable. The issues raised by the branch about the scheme continue to get good coverage in the local media. So far, the county council cannot provide any answers!

**Cambridge Parkway** The county council is developing plans to build a new parkway station north of Cambridge which would also serve the adjacent Science Park. At £16million the station would

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include three or four platforms to allow trains from London to terminate at the new station. This would ease platform congestion at the existing station. Initial results show that the station would meet the Strategic Rail Authority's investment criteria, although with the cuts in funding the timescale is unclear. The station has been high on the branch's suggestion list for many years.

**Lack of joined-up thinking** The announcement of new transport links in the London-South Midlands multi-modal study appears typical of continuing muddled transport planning. The study backed plans for an East-West rail link between Cambridge and Oxford. It proposed that the route between Cambridge and Bedford would be alongside an upgraded A428 road. On the same day, a public inquiry into a new bypass at Great Barford on the A428 finished, without any consideration as to how the railway could be integrated into the scheme. The branch is writing to local MPs urging them to ensure that proper coordination takes place.

**Integration** At Halesworth station there is now a bus for Southwold connecting with every weekday train (and three Sunday trains) on the Ipswich-Lowestoft line. There is also through ticketing between Southwold and nearby villages to all stations to Ipswich and to London Liverpool Street. This should encourage more of Southwold's visitors to come by public transport. The East Suffolk Travellers Association has published a leaflet to promote the link. Copies from Trevor Garrod, 15 Clapham Road, Lowestoft NR32 1RQ

## North West

By Trevor Bishop

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**AGM** Railfuture president Dr Michael Caton was guest speaker at the North West branch AGM on 1 February. He talked about the Strategic Rail Authority's 2003 plan, costs, reliability, reopenings, fares, high-speed rail and internal issues. Questions addressed the issues of electrification, multi-modal studies, connections and revenue from branch lines.

Branch chairman Brian Grey said the Oxenholme to Windermere line had been improved with welded rail and steel sleepers. The branch is pleased to see the opening of Carnforth Connect which provides a high standard of bus-rail

Picture: Mike Esau

**BLUEBELL RAILWAY**

**Plans by Railtrack to sell the old station goods yard at East Grinstead to Sainsbury's supermarket has been blocked by the Rail Regulator because it would have prevented the Bluebell Railway linking back into the national rail network. The Regulator was given powers by the Government to intervene in rail land sales after a long-running campaign by Railfuture. The Strategic Rail Authority and rail operators urged the Regulator to stop the land being sold to Sainsbury's. The Bluebell line will come into East Grinstead over Hill Place viaduct, above, which has recently had £175,000 spent on it. Volunteers are continuing the work. The Bluebell which reopened in 1960 has gradually extended towards East Grinstead but has also bought the trackbed from Horsted Keynes to the national rail boundary at Ardingly, which could eventually allow trains to run into Haywards Heath. One option is to re-electrify the line from Horsted Keynes towards Haywards Heath.**

More information at [www.bluebell-railway.co.uk/bluebell/extend.html](http://www.bluebell-railway.co.uk/bluebell/extend.html)

integration, information and staffing.

**Future meetings** The next two meetings of the North West branch will be on 12 April at the Railway Hotel, Preston at 11.00 and 14 June at the Friends Meeting House, Manchester, again at 11.00.

**Threat to Wilmslow** The direct service from Wilmslow to London Euston, operated by Virgin Trains, is under threat. According to the SRA's plans for the West Coast main line, some Manchester-Euston services will still run via Wilmslow but they are shown in the consultation document as only stopping once, presumably at Stockport. It seems the calls at Wilmslow, which are well used, are to be sacrificed to achieve a sub-two-hour timing between Manchester and London.

**Lancaster, Morecambe & District Rail User Group.** Improvements for rail passengers achieved by the Rail User Group over the past year:

- Additional fast ticket machine on platform three at Lancaster station

- Stopping at Lancaster of new XC Voyager Glasgow to Plymouth trains

- Free bus between rail and bus stations for holders of rail tickets

- Continued connection at Carstairs for Glasgow from first Edinburgh train

- Improved refunds for passengers when only token reimbursement originally offered

**Metrolink** Serco, which is bidding for both Metrolink phase three and the Northern Trains franchise, has said it will fully incorporate the Metrolink Altrincham line into the national rail ticketing system if it wins both franchises.

**Central and Virgin** The Strategic Rail Authority proposes that the Liverpool-Birmingham-Stansted Airport service operated by Central Trains be combined with the two-hourly Virgin Cross-Country service from Liverpool so that Central Trains would no longer operate north of Birmingham. An hourly Virgin CrossCountry service would operate from Liverpool to Birmingham (and beyond) calling at Hartford and Winsford. Mid Cheshire Rail Users have called for the summer 2002 level of service from Acton Bridge to be retained. They have also called for service improvements at Hartford and Winsford including an earlier train to Crewe and an hourly service from Winsford to be implemented when Virgin Trains takes over.

**Partners** Work continues on setting-up a Community Rail Partnership for the Mid-Cheshire line. A community rail officer, employed by Vale Royal Borough Council and probably based in Northwich, should be operating from April.

**Lost lockers** Because of cuts at the SRA the relatively simple rail passenger partnership bid for cycle lockers for Knutsford and Northwich stations, a bus stop and bus shelter outside Northwich station and possibly closed-circuit TV (CCTV) surveillance for Northwich and Greenbank stations, has been lost, at least for the present.

## Yorkshire

By Peter Davies

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**Philip Ralph** Our branch vice-chairman Philip Ralph died suddenly on 12 December. Philip was a rail enthusiast and supported many of the local rail user groups in the Yorkshire area. He was also secretary to the West Yorkshire rail group of Transport 2000, and attended many rail meetings. Latterly, Philip was involved with the proposals to improve cross-city rail links in Bradford, and to campaign for the restoration of rail services to Otley.

**Selby** There is a shortage of parking spaces at Selby, and concern has been expressed about the delay to the implementation of the North of England franchise which will not be until 2004.

**Huddersfield** A decision is awaited as to who the new operator will be for the Trans-Pennine franchise.

**Brighouse** The long-line public address system is now in operation after an absence of two and a half years since the new station opened. The local rail user group HADRAG is hoping to have a speaker from the new operator of Trans-Pennine at the annual general meeting in May.

**Huddersfield-Penistone-Sheffield** Concern has been expressed about delays on this route. The main cause is the extension of services to Lincoln to save the operation of an additional unit to operate the service between Sheffield and Lincoln. Reliability would be improved if the service operated between Huddersfield and Sheffield only.

**Wharfedale** Concern has been expressed about timetabling evening services between Leeds, Bradford and Ilkley. We have raised the issue with West



Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive and the Strategic Rail Authority.

**Harrogate** Ballast and drainage work is to be carried out in Bramhope Tunnel, and the rail service is to be replaced by buses between Horsforth and Weeton. Work is proceeding at Horsforth to improve the station lighting, and a travel centre is to be provided. The Harrogate to London King's Cross service now calls at Horsforth on Mondays to Fridays, and the service is being used by local people who travel to Leeds.

**Otley** The town council is keen to see the former rail link restored between Guiseley and Arthington.

## North East

By Peter Wood

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**Meetings** The role of unions on today's railways was the theme of January's meeting in Newcastle. Our speaker was an official of one of the rail unions in the region. With railway strikes in the north-east a lively discussion ensued.

**Annual meeting** Our annual meeting will be held at 14.00 on Saturday 22 March at the Royal Station Hotel in Newcastle, to which all *Railwatch* readers are welcome. Speaking about developments in the Esk Valley will be Neil Buxton of the Association of Community Rail Partnerships.

**Train service reductions** Jumping on the Strategic Rail Authority bandwagon, Nexus is planning to reduce daytime frequencies on the Tyne and Wear Metro from 10 to 12 minutes to improve service reliability and help cut costs. Reducing train services is a strange way of encouraging more people to travel by rail! While joint running of light and heavy rail on the Pelaw to Sunderland stretch has proved both feasible and safe, punctuality has suffered.

**Parkway** A welcome result of proposed Virgin Cross Country timetable changes will be more services for Alnmouth "parkway for Alnwick".

**Worries** We are concerned, however, that funding shortages may delay the reopening of the Leamside line and restoration of passenger services to Ashington, Blyth and Tyne.

**User Groups** The number and success of rail user groups in the region continues to increase. The Teesside to Fort William excursion organised for later in the year by Saltburn Line Users



*This July sees the 125th anniversary of the keying of the last arch of the Welland (or Harringworth) Viaduct, the longest masonry viaduct across a valley in Britain. To celebrate this the Gretton Local History Society will be holding an exhibition in Gretton Village Hall on Sunday 20 July 2003, 14.00 to 17.00. Admission free.*

*This will be the occasion of the launch of two interesting books. One is 3,000 Strangers by J Ann Paul, a newly researched and well-illustrated book about the navvies who built the line. The other is a facsimile reprint of the Reverend D W Barratt's book Life and Work Among the Navvies, originally printed in 1880. Mr Barratt was appointed to run the Bishop of Peterborough's mission to railway navvies while this line was being built between 1875 and 1880.*

*Further information about the exhibition or the books can be obtained from local historian Elisabeth Jordan (better known to Railwatch readers as Railfuture membership secretary), at 13 Arnhill Road, Gretton, Corby NN17 3DN. Email: medieval@leisurelearning.co.uk*

Group quickly became fully booked. Coastliners (Durham coast) continues its meetings with would-be Northern Franchise operators. The Tyne Valley group is examining Community Rail Partnership possibilities. Both GNER and Virgin CrossCountry representatives are expected to meet the Alnmouth User Group.

**Regional discussions** Through the North-East Combined Transport Activists Roundtable the branch has responded to both the recent capacity utilisation and overcrowding studies. With the possibility of regional government, discussions are taking place with Government staff involved about appropriate representation on cross-regional forums.

## Kent

By John Pitcher

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**Marshlink** Mr Pitcher had recently attended a meeting in Rye bringing together the long-suffering travellers on the Ashford-Hastings line and a decision had been made to set up a Marshlink Action Group to fight for improvements, principally electrification and doubling of the track. He had learnt at first hand of the problems of people travelling to work from Ham Street to Ashford, or Appledore to Folkestone.

The Kent division of Railfuture is worried that the Thanet area

will not be served by high-speed domestic trains using the new Channel Tunnel rail link. The meeting at Sandwich on 15 February agreed this would be inexcusable, particularly since the trains were likely to be stabled at Ramsgate.

Chris Fribbins from the Rail Passenger Committee for Southern England urged the Strategic Rail Authority to think again about omitting Medway stations from the plans.

John Pitcher echoed this worry for other areas of the county not favoured for high-speed treatment.

**Sandwich-Thamet** Mr Pitcher welcomed MP Steve Ladyman's support for bringing the high speed services to Thanet but warned of the danger of becoming too obsessed with prestige journeys to the detriment of local services. In a long Commons speech last month Dr Ladyman had enthused about expanding roads and Manston Airport but had made no mention of the Cinderella railway line from Ramsgate to Sandwich, Deal and Dover. Plans to place a station near the Pfizer site, where 5,000 people worked, had come to nothing.

**Folkestone-Ashford** Mr Pitcher welcomed the new high speed ferry link to Boulogne, due to start soon, but was sorry this would be from Dover. Did the town really need hundreds more people arriving by car? By

contrast the port of Folkestone still had a rail link which could have enabled direct transfer from rail to ferry.

## South Wales De Cymru

By Julian Langston  
and Peter Clark

**Welsh Assembly to the rescue:** With the SRA evaluating a 20% cut in funding for the Wales & Borders franchise and SRA chairman Richard Bowker's observation that there is little scope for reopening lines, prospects for both Ebbw Vale and Vale of Glamorgan lines looked grim. But these schemes are important components of the Assembly's transport, social, environment and regeneration policies, and it has been announced the Assembly will be providing additional capital plus on-going revenue support for three years in the case of Ebbw Vale. It will also provide all the capital needed for the Vale of Glamorgan scheme, and has secured a commitment from the SRA to provide the revenue support. Both projects were the subject of bids under the RPP funding scheme, made (and even awarded, in the case of VoG) before that fund was suspended. The money will come from the Assembly's block grant, not from the SRA's budget. But it was stated that this revenue support would be additional to the baseline sub-



sidy for the W&B franchise. This is essential, otherwise these new services would simply be provided at the expense of cuts elsewhere. The unwillingness of the SRA to fund rail developments in Wales has drawn attention to the Assembly's limited powers in this area, but meanwhile its action in safeguarding these rail projects is to be applauded.

So Ebbw Vale reopening is now expected to take place in late 2005 and will initially comprise an hourly service to Cardiff, bypassing Newport (a controversial aspect). Vale of Glamorgan reopening has been further delayed. It was announced in January 2001 that services would commence on the Barry-Bridgend section in either autumn 2002 or spring 2003. Two years later, and the reopen-

ing date is still just as far into the future as when first announced! The scheme seems to have become a victim of the Railtrack-Network Rail saga and the most optimistic reopening date is now quoted as late 2004.

**Rugby fiasco** The uneasy relationship between the rail industry and the operators of Cardiff's Millennium Stadium came to a head when the latter insisted on the Wales v England international match on 22 February kicking off at 17.30. The response of Wales & Borders (now the operator of Cardiff Central) was a refusal to operate any trains after the match through the Severn tunnel or via Gloucester, though services did run on other routes. This stance was taken ostensibly on safety grounds, because of difficulties

with crowd control when large numbers of people would have to be shifted in a short time, before the Saturday evening close-down of services. While there was general agreement (except by TV interests whose requirements were at the root of it) that the kick-off time was ridiculous, the railway nevertheless suffered widespread criticism for its inability and unwillingness to plan for and accommodate the event, the timing having been known since last summer. We in Railfuture can only regret that, whatever the reasons, the railway found itself unable to cater for those attending a showpiece event at a major stadium located close to a main railway station. The position which arose reflects little credit on any of the parties involved and we trust they will learn to work together more effectively in future. Although Wales & Borders took the flak, actually it was other operators' trains – First Great Western, Central and Wessex – which would have been conveying homegoing fans to England!

2000. So far this crossing facility has not been scheduled for use by passenger trains. This is but one example of how capital expenditure has been funded by local authorities and the Assembly in Cardiff, but revenue support for increased services thereby made possible has to come from the SRA in London.

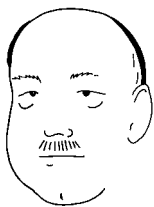
**Heart of Wales Sunday debacle** Relief that the dispute between Aslef and W&B, which led to cancellations and bus substitutions, had been settled was tempered by a bizarre situation on the Heart of Wales line, where the Sunday service – promised to operate throughout the winter for the first time ever – was withdrawn until 16 March. The reasons for this seemed confused but the company linked the decision to possible non-availability of drivers. What appears incomprehensible to passengers is that the trains did run during the Sundays of the Aslef rest-day working ban, but were then withdrawn from 12 January!

Understandably this bizarre situation has been greeted with dismay and disbelief by HoWLTA and the HoW Line Forum. The failure to meet what was regarded as a firm commitment seems so insensitive, bearing in mind the financial support and marketing effort provided by the line's supporters. It seems that W&B has been able to avoid obligations to provide the promised trains because of a legal technicality. No contract had been signed between W&B and the SRA for the period from January 2003. As if this were not bad enough, matters were compounded by lack of information. The voluminous supplement to the national timetable for January 2003 changes indicated that these trains continued to run on all Sundays. NRES call centres were also under the illusion that the Sunday trains were still running. It is believed that W&B did in fact provide taxis for mis-informed customers in January. There was further irony in that the period of cessation coincided with Sunday engineering blockades between Bridgend and Swansea, with all passengers from Swansea and the west being conveyed by bus to Cardiff Central for onward connections.

The effect of all this is inevitably to undermine still further public confidence in the rail industry, and the SRA in particular. Those who have striven for months to spread the word about all-year Sunday trains on the line have been slapped hard in the face.

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### Aberdare line capacity increase

The Welsh Assembly has announced a transport grant of £1.65million to lengthen two-car platforms in the Cynon Valley so that four-car trains can be accommodated. This is welcome news, and serves to demonstrate the folly and futility of cost cutting when the line was reopened in the 1980s (the same applies to the Maesteg line, which is still restricted to two-car trains). Indeed the only reason why Abercynon North station came into existence as a separate station was to save the cost of installing a facing point connection to the Aberdare line from the existing platform of what then became known as Abercynon South. There are clearly lessons here which need to be applied to any future reopening projects. They have been in the case of the Ebbw Vale project, where four-car platforms are proposed and a nine-mile stretch of double track will allow the desired half-hourly frequency to operate eventually. The Assembly's agreement with the SRA referred to above is also to provide revenue support for some additional as well as longer trains, which would be a move towards the SWIFT consortium's long-standing aspiration to run a half-hourly service on the Aberdare line (and on other lines). This was at the heart of the decision to re-site Mountain Ash station (with four-car platforms) on a new passing loop in



But there is hope for next winter, as the Welsh Assembly/SRA agreement should see these trains running then.

**Virgin's nine-day wonder** After many years of a solitary daily train between south Wales and north-east England, last September Virgin's much-vaunted CrossCountry revamp increased this to seven. But, after barely four months of this, the SRA announced that from the summer timetable only two daily trains will penetrate south Wales, and both will run to and from Cardiff only. So Swansea loses its single train which we all thought was protected by the passenger service requirement. To make matters worse, the two trains retained are not those which follow the direct route through Chepstow, but will instead run via Bristol Temple Meads, reducing their usefulness (because it will be possible, as it is now for most of the trains, to leave Cardiff later and change at Bristol Parkway). Subsequently the SRA rubbed salt into the wound by announcing that from the autumn timetable only one train will

operate to and from Cardiff (not Swansea). So we will be worse off even than we were prior to the CrossCountry revamp.

**Light rail for Cardiff?** The branch was delighted by the recent announcement by the Assembly that the proposed Ultra (driverless taxi pod system) would not now receive further funding. The reason quoted was that the Assembly was unhappy with the proposed integration between Ultra and other transport modes. South Wales Branch has been lobbying for the past year for a light rail system, which the city badly needs. Branch members have met with officers from the council's traffic and transportation department to talk about the city's transport plans, which do include some form of light rail. Now, the branch will be urging Cardiff County Council, which is understandably disappointed by the setback to Ultra, to put Ultra behind them and focus on a light rail scheme for the city, particularly linking Cardiff Bay to Cardiff City Centre, and joining Radyr to Coryton to form a loop.

# Where can I buy my rail tickets?

Railfuture members have reported increasing difficulties in booking continental rail travel, particularly rail trips involving use of through tickets on the ferries.

In spite of the fact that rail-sea-rail fares are published, the only station where you can now buy these tickets is at Charing Cross in person. Rail Europe is the principal outlet for all international rail travel, but they refuse to handle rail-sea-rail. They are constantly engaged.

However we thought it might be helpful to publish a list of travel agents who can help. Perhaps members could advise of any update needed to this information after trial and error, since nothing is permanent. We will try to keep an up-to-date list on the Railfuture website.

Some of the train operators still do Eurostar and international bookings, for example, at York, Edinburgh and Euston, but only in person. The situation is truly appalling, and the international committee intends to publish Railfuture's views at the right time to be heard by the media and politicians. However the collective state of the railways in the UK in government hands is so awful, that this issue seems like a pinprick at the moment.

**Network Business Travel** (a subsidiary of Connex) at Cannon Street no longer issues tickets for Continental travel for ordinary members of the public although it still does for existing account-holding corporate clients. The only retail outlet for immediate purchase of rail-sea-rail tickets is Charing Cross station from 08.00 to 20.00 Monday-Friday and 08.00 to 19.00 Saturday-Sunday.

So, where do we recommend people to go? In theory any branch of Thomas Cook can help but you'll be lucky to find someone in a local high street branch who knows anything about rail travel. It is better to go to specialists. Here's a list of specialists which do telesales:

**Rail Europe (SNCF).** It does not do rail-sea-rail but it does sell Eurostar and purely Continental rail journeys. The line however is often engaged. It is possible to book online at [www.raileurope.co.uk](http://www.raileurope.co.uk)

**Ffestiniog Travel** 01766 516050. The full range. The email address is [info@festtravel.demon.co.uk](mailto:info@festtravel.demon.co.uk) and the website is [www.festtravel.co.uk](http://www.festtravel.co.uk).

**Tallyllyn Railway.** 01654 710472. Email: [enquiries@tallyllyn.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@tallyllyn.co.uk). website: [www.tallyllyn.co.uk](http://www.tallyllyn.co.uk)

**German Railways** 08702 4353636. The full range. Specialist in Germany but also Austria and with access to special offers in those areas. The email address is [sales@deutsche-bahn.co.uk](mailto:sales@deutsche-bahn.co.uk) and the website is [www.deutschebahn.sagenet.co.uk](http://www.deutschebahn.sagenet.co.uk).

**TrainsEurope** 01354 660222 or 020 8699 3654. The full range. The email address is [info@trainseurope.co.uk](mailto:info@trainseurope.co.uk) and the website is [www.trainseurope.co.uk](http://www.trainseurope.co.uk)

**Rail Choice** 020 8659 7300. The full range. The email address is [sales@railchoice.co.uk](mailto:sales@railchoice.co.uk) and the website is [www.railchoice.co.uk](http://www.railchoice.co.uk).

**Freedom Rail** 01252 728506. Only offers a comprehensive service to individuals to Italy. The full range for groups of five or more. The email address is [mailbox@freedomrail.co.uk](mailto:mailbox@freedomrail.co.uk) and the website is [www.freedomrail.co.uk](http://www.freedomrail.co.uk).

**7D Travel** 01691 681010 (fax 684994). The full range. Unusual business hours: 06.55-12.55 Monday-Friday and 07.30-12.30 Sat. No email or website.

**A new outlet** *Railwatch* has also heard of a new outlet for rail-sea tickets - Railbookers. Commercial director Andy Brabin told us: "Railbookers.com is a one stop shop for all your European rail needs, including UK domestic. We realise that making bookings for rail travel, especially to and within Europe, can be difficult. Our aim is to make this easier and increase the number of people travelling by rail. We offer attractively priced rail based package breaks in addition to rail tickets."

The postal address is [railbookers.com](http://railbookers.com) 11-15 Betterton Street, Covent Garden, London WC2H 9BP Tel: 020 7866 8171 [www.railbookers.com](http://www.railbookers.com)

## Rail reopenings

A new edition of Railfuture's A-Z of *Rail Reopenings* is now being prepared and members are invited to send in contributions if they have any information such as the success of a new or reopened station. I also need corrections or updates on the 1998 edition.

The loan of good photos or slides of new stations and sites would also be welcome. The chapter five summary of proposed lines and stations will need critical revision, particularly by Railfuture branches. All responses please by post as soon as possible to Alan Bevan, 12 Morris Field Croft, Birmingham B28 0RN

**Road killers** Motor vehicle crash deaths on US roads exceed 40,000 annually, totalling more than 3 million since the car was introduced. Road traffic is the leading killer of Americans aged from one to 35. More info: <http://www.highwaysafety.org/srpdfs/sr3710.pdf>

**Rail groups** Tony Smale has produced the first issue of *The Rail User* after being appointed Railfuture's rail user group co-ordinator. *Railwatch* readers with links to user groups should let them know that Tony is their man.

## News in brief

He will maintain contact with Railfuture branches and national committees to develop two way communications, in order to resolve problems and give advice where necessary and point RUGs in the right direction. Tony can be contacted at: Anjou Cottage, Fishers Hill, Catisfield, Fareham, Hants PO15 5QY email: [tony\\_smale@lineone.net](mailto:tony_smale@lineone.net)

**Language skills** For some years we have had a database of members who can read and translate from foreign languages. This has now become somewhat out of date. We also need members who can read magazines we receive in foreign languages so we can comment and act on material contained therein.

If you would be able help the International & EU Committee in this way please contact John Barfield, 108 Berwick Road, London E16 3DS. Tel: 020 7474 5722 E-mail [Jwbarf@aol.com](mailto:Jwbarf@aol.com) giving details of the languages you can cope with and the level of competency. At the present time we particularly need someone who can read Dutch and/or Catalan.