



Scotland

By David Hansen

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After the bumper notes in the last *Railwatch* there is less to report this time. Short term the news is good, long term the news does not look good.

Edinburgh Park station should be open shortly, completing the original Edinburgh Crossrail scheme.

Larkhall

After pressure from various organisations those involved appear to have signed a watertight contract to deliver this project before the powers expire. We have been here before though and hope that Network Rail/Strategic Rail Authority do not pull out of the scheme in a few months, as Railtrack did before them.

Glasgow still is not planned to have a proper train service to London, which means at least a train every hour. The machinations of the WCML upgrade in England means that the promised hourly London-Glasgow train service is not going to be delivered by the so-called Strategic Rail Authority. Instead they are going to waste some trains on services to Edinburgh, a route already served by new trains. This is a disgrace.

Strategic Gloom Authority

It would be too depressing to list all the stalled projects that the Strategic Rail Authority has failed to implement. The Rail Passengers Committee for Scotland was quite right to say, "the rail network is bleeding to death at the moment". We need more than plans, we need projects happening on the ground. It is not good enough to concentrate almost all rail spending on marginal constituencies in SE England, which appears to be the strategy at the moment.

East Midlands

By Anthony Kay

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Multi-modal study

The final package of measures recommended by the West to East Midlands Multi-Modal Study consists almost entirely of schemes to increase road capacity. After a series of reports and consultations that included a variety of useful rail schemes, e.g. reopening the Ivanhoe and Castle Donington lines, the only rail scheme in the final package is a new Coleshill Interchange station.

An hourly bus service is suggested for the Ivanhoe route (Leicester-Burton). This is all hugely disappointing, and sim-



Extra coaches are being fitted to electric trains operating on the Wharfedale and Airedale lines between Leeds, Skipton, Bradford Forster Square and Ilkley. Arriva Trains Northern, working in partnership with Metro – the West Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive – and train leasing company Angel Trains, are adding eight additional carriages to increase passenger capacity on its fleet of class 333 trains.

When the operation is complete, all 16 trains will be lengthened from three carriages to four. This will add a further 800 extra seats in total per day on MetroTrain services. Ray Price, Arriva Trains Northern's managing director, said: "This is a positive investment as it means more larger trains on the network. The 333 trains have been very well received by our customers."

Metro Chairman, Councillor Mick Lyons said: "The introduction of these extra carriages will help meet the growing demand for rail travel in West Yorkshire." The Siemens-built 25kV 333 trains were introduced to West Yorkshire in January 2001, replacing class 308 slam-door trains.

The 333 – assembled in Zaragoza, Spain – is based on the 332 Heathrow Express units.

Siemens is responsible for the maintenance of the 333s at Neville Hill in Leeds, with the assistance of Arriva maintenance staff.

ply contradicts the study's stated aim of providing people with attractive alternatives to how and when they use the car.

DIRFT expansion

A proposal for an expansion of the Daventry International Rail Freight Terminal, which could take a further 56,000 lorry journeys off the roads, will be referred to the Secretary of State and may be the subject of a public enquiry. Daventry District Council supports the scheme, but people in nearby villages have raised concerns about increases in traffic, noise and light pollution.

Loughborough station

A report by Charnwood Borough Council's planning department has highlighted what regular users of Loughborough station already

know about the station's many deficiencies: the platforms that are too low and short, the antiquated bridge between the platforms and the inadequate parking and bus links (although the latter have improved considerably in recent years).

East Midlands Parkway

Plans for the East Midlands Parkway station continue to be held up by a dispute with Powergen, owners of the adjacent Ratcliffe power station. There will now be a public enquiry into the compulsory purchase of a strip of Powergen's land that is required for the new station.

Corby

The SRA is commissioning a new study into the viability of reopening Corby to passenger rail services. The reopening is

being enthusiastically backed by Catalyst Corby, the town's regeneration company, which has ambitions to double the size of the town within the next 30 years.

East Anglia

By Nick Dibben

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Freight boost for region

Branch members heard an upbeat presentation from Tim Robinson, Commercial Director of GB Railfreight at our Ipswich meeting in June. GBRf have more locomotives on order and are buying more wagons to cope with growth. As well as hauling maintenance materials for Network Rail, the company now runs two container trains each day from Felixstowe with a third due to start to Manchester. All this traffic is new to rail. New methods of working have helped reduce loading and unloading times so that a round trip can be made inside 24 hours making a more efficient operation.

Clearly the SRA believes that freight is set to grow in East Anglia as it is allocating more train paths for freight in its route capacity utilisation policy. For example the number of freight trains per day expected to run between London and Ipswich is set to increase from 23 today to 36 in 2011. The downside of this growth is that some off-peak passenger services may have to be cut.

Franchise bidders commit to rural services

Questions to the three bidders for the Greater Anglia Franchise at a Norfolk Rail Policy meeting (Railfuture were also there) centred around the future of rural services and the status of the London-Norwich service. The SRA had suggested that some trains be replaced by buses and that additional stops be added to the London-Norwich trains so that other London outer suburban trains could be cut. All the bidders, National Express, Arriva and GB Railways expressed their commitment to rural routes and their dislike of substitution. They also gave assurances about the continuation of fast London to Norwich trains. Bids were due in on 1 September and the preferred bidder should be known by the end of the year.

Talking to industry

The Branch has met with representatives of the Eastern Region CBI to discuss their views on railways. There was a lot of common ground with support for Branch campaigns for additional services between Cambridge and Ipswich and the



East-West Rail Link. The Branch is working on a leaflet aimed at encouraging business to consider rail.

Busway on show

Cambridgeshire County Council held a series of exhibitions about its proposed guided bus system on the former St Ives line in July. Results of the exhibitions are not known, but judging by the letters in the local papers, the public are still sceptical. There are doubts that the system will create a change in public transport that will tempt people out of their cars. For example, it is possible that existing buses will be used, at similar frequencies and journey times, but fares will cost more to cover the access charges to the busway.

The county council will certainly be able to claim that there are more users, simply because a new town of 20,000 people is built along the route. The branch has questioned some of the figures produced by the council.

For example the Cambridge-Huntingdon multi-modal study two years ago said there were 5,000 existing bus users. The county are claiming 8,000. A 60% increase in two years is not realistic and is not supported by observation of existing buses. If the initial numbers are wrong, then the predictions will also be incorrect.

The county council claims that the figures have been pored over by Government. If so they appear to have missed this obvious error.

London and South East

By Richard Pout and Keith Dyllal
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Progress

Following the High Court decision on Braithwaite viaduct at Shoreditch, demolition has started to clear the way for the East London Line Extension. The Strategic Rail Authority has yet to put a funding package together, so the line will not be finished until 2009.

Our 1997 proposal for an Outer Circle link to Clapham Junction is now included in the scheme. Sadly the Wimbledon via Dulwich and Streatham link has gone.

In the north the scheme has again been cut back to Highbury and Islington, even though there is insufficient room to provide an adequate turn-back facility, particularly if the North London Line four track route were reinstated. We believe trains should operate to Finsbury Park and at

least to Camden Road as track capacity can easily be reinstated.

Crossrail

Crossrail One has passed a single yellow signal but our concern is that various new extensions will add so much to the cost, that it becomes too expensive and is shelved again.

Thames Gateway

Our response to the Thames Gateway Bridge consultation argues the case for a rail link, at least a Docklands Light Railway route or, even better, the Tube extension to Thamesmead. A four-lane dual carriageway with a busway will simply generate new car traffic. This view has many supporters in the Thames Gateway Forum grouping (of which we are a member).

Cricklewood

The property development proposals for Cricklewood sidings are not moving ahead. Barnet Council has rejected EWS plans to build aggregates and steel terminals on the site. Apparently Barnet has no objection for any site development or use for up to three years but will not consider longer-term plans. Barnet still has an interest in part of the site for other non-rail commercial development.

Thameslink and Midland main line

The branch's response to the Strategic Rail Authority's Midland Main line capacity consultation notes the need for greater flexibility for Thameslink services around Kentish Town and also suggests upgrading the Hendon freight lines for passenger use.

The decision to drop Wimbledon from the East London Line extension adds to our concern over the inadequacy of Thameslink Metro services to Wimbledon and Sutton. The Wimbledon-Sutton section is again being evaluated for light rail.

Channel Tunnel rail link domestic services

Kent Coast commuters fear they may be asked to pay too much for premium services. They say they have already been paying too much for poor Connex services and do not see why they should have to pay more if and when they improve. There is considerable opposition to possible service diversion to St Pancras, particularly as many commuters walk from existing termini to their workplace, saving the cost of a Travelcard add-on.

Uckfield line

The summer speed restrictions and other problems on the Brighton line have reinforced

the need for a second alternative diversionary route to the south coast. A reopened Uckfield-Lewes line would fill the bill but while the SRA has deferred Uckfield electrification, both projects currently are off the agenda. We continue to press for these essential schemes.

Thames Valley

By Chris Wright
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East-West rail

The East West Rail Consortium has set up a Western Team to press the case for re-opening the link to Oxford. Talks are now linked to the delayed Strategic Rail Authority study for freight on the route. The Rail Passenger Partnership bid is still on the table and Local Transport Plan bids remain with the Government Office for the South East. We are increasingly frustrated at the SRA's approach.

The Milton Keynes and South Midlands Strategy sees the Oxford-Cambridge link as vital to population expansion plans. This is supported by the London and South Midlands and the South East of England Regional Assembly. The SRA remains unconvinced about a strategic

rail link. We will continue to try to embarrass the Government on their lack of commitment to people who want and need to travel by rail.

Bletchley

Bletchley is subject to major regeneration proposals which include relocating the entry to the station closer to the town and links to the proposed football stadium.

Aylesbury

Buckinghamshire Structure Plan sees Aylesbury as regional transport hub and is committed to options for rail links, including the link to Milton Keynes. Former trackbeds in the county are to be safeguarded. We have supported the plan.

Upgrade missing

Oxford-Bicester was closed for two weeks for track replacement and represents another farce and failure to upgrade to improve train times and prepare for the future. Similar hopes that track from the West Coast main line upgrade could be reused to reopen the line to Milton Keynes have also been missed. The SRA needs vision.

Meeting

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which provided a speaker at our last branch meeting, is to progress a planning application for Kidlington as it has shown a station could be viable and could cover its costs. Network Rail and operators say stopping trains could affect existing services. Grove/Wantage Road is also on hold following the SRA cutting out the Oxford-Bristol service which was to be a part of the strategic East-West Link. How can the SRA not see this?

A cunning plan

Milton Keynes to Gatwick and Brighton is another brilliant example of the strategic development of the railway by the SRA. The service which was developing well was cut by the SRA. Network Rail has now found paths to re-instate the service but a new business case needs to be made. How come Bedford has Thameslink and expanding Milton Keynes lost its service?

South Wales

De Cymru

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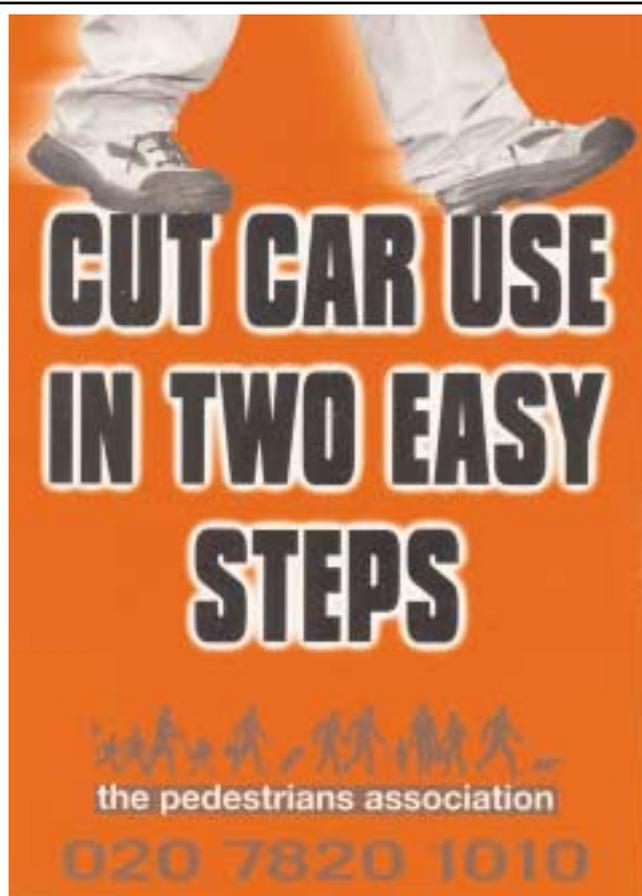
freeserve.co.uk

Franchise decision at last

In August came the long-awaited announcement of the preferred bidder for the Wales and Borders franchise, and this turned out to be Arriva Trains. The franchise is to run for 15 years. There was general relief that at last a decision has been made and that, for the time being at least, threats of significant service reductions appear to have been lifted.

But the commitments announced by the SRA are weak, especially considering the length of the franchise, and are in stark contrast to those of the Trans-Pennine franchise, announced just a few days earlier.

There is no mention of service development, and no mention of significant rolling stock replacement. Does this mean that the Valley Lines Pacers are expected to last more than another 15 years? We are told, as if it were a major step forward, that seven class 150 diesel trains (now more than 15 years old) will be introduced by December 2004 to replace the existing loco-hauled rakes used by Valley Lines (also used on the summer Fishguard service). These will presumably become available through a cascade which will be started by Scotland receiving new trains and Wales will have to continue to make do with



Despite the Government's failure to deliver on a sustainable transport policy, the number of people and organisations demanding change is constantly growing. One of them, the Pedestrians Association, has recently relaunched itself as the Living Streets campaign.

The Government must pay attention to this growing alliance of groups who want a sensible transport policy and stop listening to discredited road lobby organisations.

No politician, least of all those at the Department for Transport, can claim they don't know road building only creates more problems or that they don't know the real value of railways in both town and country.

The vast majority of people want a transport policy based on safety and clean air for pedestrians and cyclists.

Politicians should stop prevaricating, stop road building and start delivering sensible policies. They have wasted enough time already.

Living Streets is at 31-33 Bondway, London SW8 1SJ

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Website: <http://www.livingstreets.org.uk/about.htm>

other people's cast-offs. Perhaps that is the way the Pacers will eventually be replaced. Another commitment is to introduce another 30 integrated train-bus tickets by November 2005. This is fair enough, but it needs to be recognised that the primary need in promoting inter-modal transfer is to improve the physical arrangements on the ground; the ticketing is a bit like the icing on the cake – nice to have, but rather useless if connectional and accessibility arrangements are inadequate. A com-

mitment to develop a simplified timetable, "making train services much easier for passengers to use", is fine but not if it is political-speak for cuts in frequency. Meanwhile we will endeavour to form a constructive relationship with Arriva, who will be running the franchise within the constraints imposed by the SRA.

Suburban vision

The South East Wales Transport Board (SEWTB) – an amalgamation of the former SWIFT and TIGER consortia of local coun-

cils – published its Regional Public Transport Strategy in June. It covers an area which includes half the population of Wales. The rail part of the strategy includes what was known to be in the former consortia's plans but makes quite impressive reading nevertheless; as well as the two line reopenings (Ebbw Vale and Vale of Glamorgan), new stations are proposed at several locations (often needing new local train services) and most routes would have increases in frequency, for which in some cases infrastructure upgrading would be needed. This is all very commendable, and mirrors our own Development Plan to a large extent. But will it happen? The document admits that resumption of Rail Passenger Partnership funding will be an essential component. But there are other issues. The SRA's capacity utilisation policy could militate against frequency increases (SEWTB recognises the need for frequent services if rail is to attract local passengers out of their cars), and some parts of Valley Lines already operate at 100% capacity. And where will the additional rolling stock come from? What about the SRA's announcement regarding reducing maintenance on some routes? And the Rail Regulator's anticipated cut-back of the amount Network Rail can spend? There are interesting – if frustrating – times ahead.

Cardiff LRT campaign

The Cardiff LRT subgroup has sent another open letter to leading politicians and officers, reinforcing the call for Light Rail in Wales's capital city. The letter argues that now that the ULtra (driverless taxi) scheme has been kicked into touch, there is no time to lose in progressing a serious LRT scheme. The letter was reported by the *Western Mail* and the *South Wales Echo* newspapers, and a number of politicians have written to us expressing interest or support for our ideas. The *Echo* coverage in particular was excellent. They even carried out a readers' poll, which resulted in 92% of respondents saying they were in favour of trams for Cardiff to help reduce congestion. We're planning meeting with Cardiff County Council this autumn to further discuss their public transport plans, in the light of a study that should be published shortly.

Cardiff could do better

Cardiff County Council's Environment Scrutiny Committee invited Professor David Begg, Government trans-



port consultant, to advise the council as to how it could reduce car use and get people using alternative methods of transport in the short term. RDS South Wales sent an observer. In summary, the message was that Cardiff could do better in a number of ways. Apparently Cardiff has fewer metres of bus lanes than any comparable city in the UK. It is also a pedestrian-unfriendly city. Disappointingly, rail received little mention, Professor Begg arguing that heavy rail is an expensive option, and it would be hard to justify much development for a medium sized city.

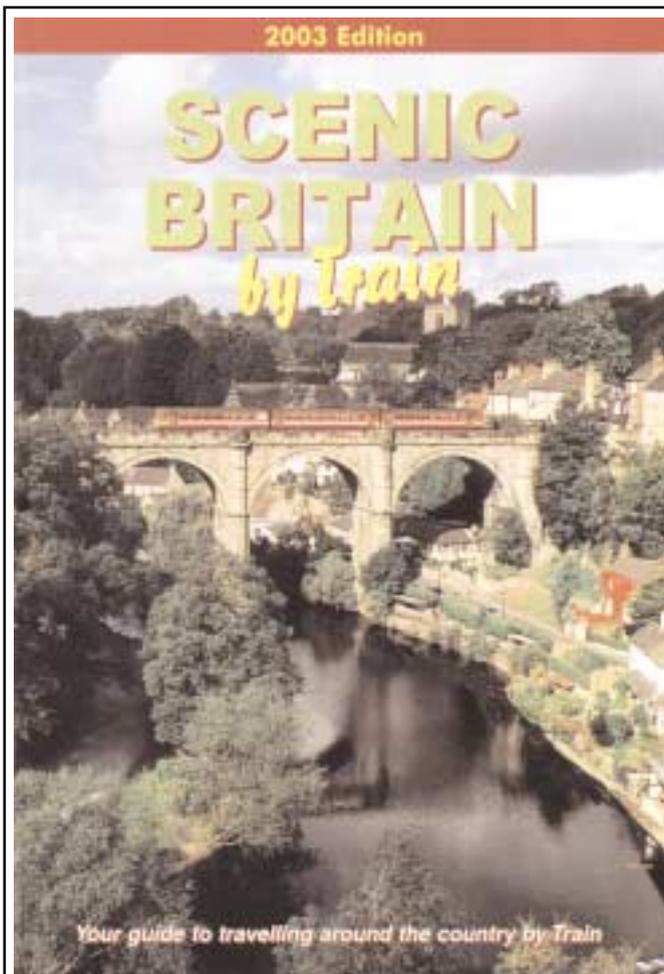
Perhaps he was unaware that the city enjoys perhaps the country's most extensive rail network for a city of its size, with twenty stations in a city of just over 300,000 people. He was more positive about Light Rail, showing that it has potential to pull people out of cars, but at the same time saying that re-allocation of road space is necessary, otherwise more drivers will appear to replace those who are using LRT.

Professor Begg concentrated on what bus improvements could achieve relatively cheaply, though he acknowledged that bus has an image problem which deters many people from using buses. He drew on what he regarded as good practice in Nottingham and his native city of Edinburgh. We have submitted our comments on his talk to the Environmental Scrutiny Committee, including the points above and others.

Rural railways

There is considerable concern within RDS South Wales that the future of rural lines is somewhat uncertain. In the Principality we have a considerable mileage of rural branch lines, many serving peripheral areas. Recent statements by senior people in the SRA that railway lines are not good vehicles for delivering public transport to low population areas, the decision of the SRA to drastically reduce maintenance on these lines and the massive increases that Network Rail claim have occurred in infrastructure costs are all factors that bode ill for their long term prospects.

To endeavour to address these problems the branch has set up a rural railways sub committee to examine what a rural railway really should cost to operate, what structure would be the most beneficial to the passengers and the least cost to operate, and to recommend just how rural railways can play a meaningful and cost-effective role in the transport infrastructure.



The best way to tour Britain is by rail and many of the lines are tourist attractions in their own right. Now a 36-page booklet containing information on 24 scenic rail lines around Britain has been published by the Association of Community-Rail Partnerships.

Just one of the lines featured is the Borderlands Line from Bidston to Wrexham. The booklet, produced in co-operation with Transport Marketing Ltd, gives details of the routes, tourist information centres, and ticket deals. Many of these lines are supported by Community Rail Partnerships.

Copies of Scenic Britain by Train are available from Transport Marketing, 15 Station Road, Knowle, Solihull B93 0HL

Members of the sub-committee have asked the Rail Passenger Committee for Wales to co-operate with them making this a joint project.

What future for Waterloo?

The SRA's apparent decision to withdraw Wales & Borders through London Waterloo services in Spring 2004 has rightly attracted a considerable amount of opposition in West Wales and along the Marches line.

Introduced in the run-up to privatisation, these trains provide a whole new spectrum of through journey opportunities for West Wales residents. Initially running from Carmarthen eastwards, Wales and Borders subsequently extended them and

now Milford Haven, Haverfordwest, Pembroke Dock and Fishguard Harbour all have direct services to or from the English capital. These are slower than the Swansea services to Paddington provided by First Great Western but routed as they are through Bristol, Bath, Trowbridge, Warminster, Basingstoke and Clapham Junction they serve a different area and of course provide convenient connections along the way and for Eurostar at Waterloo. Introduced a little later than the South Wales services, the Manchester-Waterloo through trains again offer access to this area of Central Southern England following the Marches Line and then the same route

from South Wales onwards.

The SRA have recently adopted a one operator per terminal policy for London which the three West Wales and one Manchester trains in each direction would violate (all other Waterloo services are South West Trains). Senior management at Wales and Borders have intimated that these trains cover their costs east of Cardiff/Newport and in any event trains will still run on the present routes in the future but passengers will be faced with multiple changes. Currently the passengers enjoy a range of economically friendly walk up and advance purchase fares which must be in doubt in the event of the through trains demise.

Railfuture South Wales is committed to do whatever it can to retain these services and urges other branches in the areas affected to lobby those concerned to achieve a satisfactory result.

North East

By Peter Wood
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Meetings

"Virgin Trains in the North-East" is the title for Colin Harris, from Virgin, who will be speaking at our September meeting in Durham in November, at Darlington. Shaun Fisher from GNER will be talking about "timetabling the region's trains".

Franchises

At long last, the Strategic Rail Authority has awarded the Transpennine franchise to First Keolis. We look forward to the £260million of promised investment with a new fleet of 100 mph diesel multiple units and, also promised, improved services

Next comes the Northern franchise which will serve 20% of England's population. The branch has continued to talk to potential bidders and welcomes the re-issuing by the Rail Passengers Committee for North Eastern England of its *Northern Rail: Guidance to Bidders* document. This was originally compiled by the branch and its associated rail user groups. Getting costs under control nationally is no reason for not looking for better services (and stations, etc). We believe this is a more cost-effective approach than substitution where the passengers simply melt away or stay in their cars!

Inquiries

The branch continues to respond to opportunities to put its point of view - most recently about *The Future of the Railway* - to the House of Commons



Transport Committee. We have also supported objections by the Tyne and Wear passenger transport authority (Nexus) and the SRA to a planning application in Sunderland, the granting of which compromises the location of a parkway station at Washington on the Leamside line, for the reopening of which we continue to campaign.

We await the public inquiry with interest. But what an interesting comparison. Durham County Council has proudly reserved a site at Belmont for a Durham parkway (as A690 users are reminded daily) while the city of Sunderland planners meekly surrender!

Stop knocking the railways

We think it's time to fight back! Too often the media portray all news about the railway as bad news. The railways play a vital role as an integral part of the national transport network. Now it's time we began to accentuate the positive. As our chairman Martin Murphy said at a recent branch meeting: "We have a good railway we want to be improved, not a bad railway not worth travelling on."

Time for a "Stop Knocking the Railways" campaign?

Dales rails

A special unit has started making journeys on the Weardale railway to keep the weeds under control. They plan to start running trains again in July 2004.

Wessex

The branch has teamed up with the Heart of Wessex Line Rail Partnership and is currently in discussions as to how to assist the Rail Ale Trail.

This is a novel idea from the partnership to encourage publicans to publicise the Weymouth to Westbury line in return for free literature that encourages line users to take their refreshment in nominated public houses. Anyone with the stamina to visit every public house on the line will receive a suitable award.

The branch will be campaigning in Dorset shortly and plans to hold a meeting to ensure that all voluntary effort is focused upon the Weymouth to Westbury line. South West Trains introduced an innovative Rail Link bus service between Romsey and Winchester station some years ago.

This has been a huge success. Less successful has been the Stagecoach 66 service between Romsey and Winchester that stops at all stops and takes huge detours from time to time. So

local people were dismayed when SWT announced plans to withdraw the direct Rail Link and encourage rail users to get on the 66.

They did not use the 66 before the Rail Link and probably would not do so again. Instead they would choose to drive to Winchester station where the car park is already overflowing. SWT has promised to find a solution to the lack of station car park places.

A local commuter group offered to provide a peak hours service to Winchester station if the Rail Link bus was withdrawn.

This would very likely make money. SWT has ditched its proposal to withdraw the Rail Link bus. The branch is delighted that common sense has prevailed.

Yorkshire

By Peter Davies
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Wensleydale Railway

Friday 4 July 2003 witnessed the reopening of the Wensleydale Railway between Leeming Bar and Leyburn. Members of the Wensleydale Railway Society were invited to join the first train and pay a premium fare for the privilege of riding on the first scheduled passenger train for more than 50 years.

Following speeches by the Chairman, Keith Cameron, and William Hague MP, passengers joined the first train which drew into Leeming Bar station to the accompaniment of a band, and detonators which had been placed on the track.

The three car Class 107 diesel multiple unit departed on time, and the opportunity was taken during the day to photograph the train at various locations.

Trans-Pennine franchise

After a delay of nearly three years, the Strategic Rail Authority has finally announced the successful bidder for the Trans-Pennine franchise which is for just over eight years.

New 100mph trains are to be provided for the route, although there is to be no change to the current infrastructure. Improvements to main stations along the route are planned, and Huddersfield is to become a key station on the route.

Cross-Bradford rail link.

A rail user group has been formed in Bradford and is now affiliated to Railfuture. The group is actively campaigning for a direct cross-Bradford rail link between Bradford Interchange and Bradford

Forster Square stations. It is felt that the city needs improved rail links which have steadily declined over the years.

Horsforth station

A new waiting room and ticket office have been provided at the station for the use of rail passengers. During August 2003, Bramhope Tunnel between Horsforth and Weeton is to be extensively repaired, and a backlog of maintenance work is being carried out.

Northern Rail franchise

The six bidders are seeking the views of rail user groups and other interested parties. The final bids have to be submitted by 24 September, 2003, and an announcement regarding the successful operator is expected some time during the autumn of 2004.

Rail reopenings

Following the publication of a joint report by the Countryside Agency and consultants TR&IN, a working group has been established to examine the contents of the report and to campaign for rail re-openings.

Included in the report are many lines which closed pre-Beeching and those which were closed following the publication of the Beeching Report. It is hoped that in the long term some of the routes may be re-opened to passengers.

Midlands

By Alan Bevan
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Moor Street

The original 1909 Moor Street terminus station which lost its services in October 1987 when the tunnel to Snow Hill was reopened, has been extensively renovated and rebuilt in keeping with its Edwardian architecture.

New awnings and concourse area integrate both the original and 1987 stations. Although the original platforms and tracks are as yet out of use the presence of GWR loco 2885 offers a nostalgic feature on platform five.

The "reopening" coincides with the adjoining new Bull Ring shopping centre and both are well worth a visit. It is hoped to connect up the original tracks into Moor Street terminus when resignalling and a new Bordesley connection is laid in 2006.

Pensnett

The promoters of a new rail-served steel distribution warehouse planned at the end of a two-mile "mothballed" branch line from Brierley Hill have for-

mally appealed to the Secretary of State against the decision by Dudley Council to refuse planning permission. A formal public inquiry is to be convened and Railfuture has made a detailed submission in support of the application. Although the council claims undue noise and lorry intrusion the proposal is included in the Local Plan as a supported policy and the planning officer actually recommended that approval be given.

New platforms

The SRA has confirmed that new platforms are to be built at Wolverhampton (a new Up through platform); at New St (two new bay platforms); at Nuneaton (a new island platform for trains using the new/reopened flyover); and at Rugby where new "outer" platforms will arise from a demolished and remodelled station.

Branch AGM

The Midlands branch AGM will be on Saturday 28 February 2004 at Dr Johnson House, Bull St, Birmingham.

Metro inquiries

Formal public inquiries are to be held into the proposed Midland Metro Extension through Birmingham city centre and from Wednesbury to Brierley Hill. The city centre scheme may be heard later this year but the Brierley Hill Inquiry is likely to be early spring. The Midlands branch is formally objecting on the basis that the Metro will cause the unsatisfactory singling of the existing twin-track rail route and will obstruct any opportunity to restore twin tracks. Our "statement of case" has already been submitted.

Service changes

Major revisions to train timetables planned for October 2004 are prompting several changes to West Midlands services. With Silverlink no longer running to Birmingham, Central Trains will extend semi-fast electric units to Rugby and Northampton, perhaps deploying new stock secured by the Strategic Rail Authority. A new Walsall-New Street-International local service will operate, and Snow Hill-Stourbridge services will be enhanced.

Of great concern is the severance of Leicester-Coventry services at Nuneaton where the SRA seems disinclined to reopen the dive-under route. Moreover the SRA has refused to support a planned new station at Foleshill serving both an urban area and a new stadium. Instead is investigating scope for the route being used by a Metro on a track-share basis.