



Your letters

problem and if there's any feature I particularly want to keep, it can be photocopied and filed.

Start sending them on to your MP/MSP/MWAG/local councillor/chair of transport committee with an introductory letter with the first one, checking first with the appropriate Railfuture office-bearer to make sure that the recipient is not already getting a copy from Railfuture; ask them to put it in the Members' Library or Members' Lounge when finished with it.

Donate back copies, and copies of any other magazines with a similar pro-rail tone (e.g. Modern Railways) to your local dental surgery or medical practice for their waiting room, where they will make a welcome and readable change from the usual collection of gardening, car and women's magazines and National Geographic.

Andrew McCracken, 44 Kylantra Crescent, Grantown-on-Spey PH26 3ES

Wider audience

Kenneth Bryant (*Railwatch* 98) enquired of ways to reach a wider audience.

After reading my copy I always give it to the local library for their magazine racks. Perhaps other readers might to the same.

Ted Bottle, 114 Meadow Lane, Coalville, Leicestershire LE67 4DP edwardbottle@onetel.net.uk

Two for one

I don't throw away my copy of *Railwatch*. I pass it on to a friend.

M J H Ellis, Westways, Wotton Road, Rangeworthy, Bristol BS37 7NB

Library benefits

I always pass on my copy of *Railwatch* to the local library for their reading room.

Mrs M E Felix, 18 Wallwood Road, Leytonstone, London E11 1DF

Just leave it

Often in the past, I have actually left my old *Railwatch* in the public library to see if anyone read them.

Malcolm Smith, Southbank, Surbiton KT6 6DA

Midlands Rail

I have realised that it is time I put pen to paper (well, cursor to screen, actually) and respond to various items in *Railwatch*.

1. Channel Tunnel Link. I hope

Tony Blair puts his money where his mouth is when he says we need to renovate a large part of our transport infrastructure. Too true, when successive governments since the Second World War have signally failed to do so. He also praises the imagination and vision that created the project. He didn't say that this was something that the government of the day was totally lacking at the time the Channel Tunnel was built, even although he missed the opportunity of knocking Margaret Thatcher. Glass houses, maybe?

2. Services in the Midlands continue to give little cause for rejoicing, although it is pleasing to note that Wolverhampton will get an extra platform and we get a couple of extra bays at New Street. Will it really help when the biggest problem is squeezing trains in and out of New Street over too few tracks?

3. The new Walsall to Birmingham International service could be enhanced by an additional station at Soho Road, where the track layout still shows where the old island platform was. Also it is time there was an interchange station with the Jewellery Line at Soho (Benson Road), like the one at Galton Bridge.

4. I've never really understood why a chord to enable Walsall trains to run to-from Snow Hill was ever envisaged. The juxtaposition of the two lines in a heavily developed area precludes this unless there is an extremely sharp curve or massive demolition of industrial property. Far easier to achieve would be a spur that allows trains from Wolverhampton to gain access to Snow Hill.

The lie of the two lines is much more favourable for this and a relatively small amount of property would need to be demolished.

It is ironic that the affected units are on what used to be railway-owned land. It was short-sighted policy to allow the redevelopment. A dive-under connection could be made, but this would do serious damage to some well-used allotments. Think of the uproar and forget the idea.

Some local services from Wolverhampton could then be diverted to Snow Hill (how about electrification to Moor Street and beyond?). Also a number of Virgin Trains heading to Oxford and beyond could take this route and Chiltern could extend to Wolverhampton (Ho-ho!)

5. How about some other services stopping at Sandwell and Dudley apart from Virgin



The vast engineering work under way at Stratford, east London to build the international station for the Channel Tunnel rail link. The line goes through Stratford in a tunnel.

Picture: Rail Link Engineering

Trains and the Wolverhampton-Birmingham local services? It is stupid for trains to places such as Shrewsbury and Wales, and Liverpool to go flying through. Sandwell and Dudley has plenty of parking space and people would not be forced to change at Wolverhampton or Birmingham on their way to places served by Central's longer distance services or by First North Western.

6. It's time there was a station at Willenhall served by the Walsall to Telford trains.

7. I make maximum use of my bus pass and find that even journeys such as Tipton to Castle Vale can be made in reasonable time (Tipton, New Street, Aston, then Bendibus to Castle Vale in one hour overall). I can't drive it any quicker. But why isn't there a station and an adequate service to Castle Vale? Castle Bromwich station used to serve the area and there is scope for another station at Park Lane if ever a service to Walsall via Sutton Park and Aldridge was re-instated.

8. Electrify the Camp Hill line and provide a local service to Kings Norton and other destinations. If some of the locals were taken off the West Suburban line it would increase track capacity for Virgin Cross Country.

9. Will I live to see four tracks between Coventry and Wolverhampton? Will they even build in the capacity for four tracks at Tipton when the new dive-under replaces the level crossing? I'm not holding my breath.

10. I'm glad to hear about Cast-Iron. I hope that they succeed,

and also their colleagues working on Bedford-Bletchley.

11. Let's not mess about with Metro Line Two. Let's have a proper train service between Walsall, Dudley and Stourbridge with interchanges with the Metro at Wednesbury and also at Dudley Port. The line can then be used as a through freight route as well.

12. I'm not a great enthusiast for the Metro, but it would be improved greatly if there was a connection with the railway and bus stations in Wolverhampton. A loop through Dudley Street, Lichfield Street and Pipers Row would do the trick. Likewise an extension in Birmingham to New Street along Bull street, Corporation Street and Stephenson Place, before heading out along the Bristol Road or Hagley Road or wherever.

13. Other Metro extensions should terminate in a way that connects with as many other modes of transport as possible, for example, a route to Oldbury should terminate at Sandwell and Dudley station, or even continue to West Bromwich Central. That way a proper network can be built up.

14. Better co-ordination between bus routes and rail is needed. Every station should be well-served by buses and bus times should be co-ordinated with trains.

15. Maybe some Virgin Trains should be routed regularly via Aston, to relieve pressure on New Street. It's a pity there is little scope to lengthen the platforms there.

16. This one's a little more fanciful, but how about a spur

between Duddeston and Sattley to allow through running from West Coast main line to the south-west?

Donald Payne, 69 Dudley Road, Tipton, West Midlands DY4 8EE donpayne@callnetuk.com

Passenger care

I recently used Ashwell station to catch a train to Cambridge. The station being unstaffed, I had to use the ticket machine. I found the system tedious and confusing and had to start all over again at one point. As we needed two tickets, I then had to repeat the rigmarole. There was a travel-permit machine, which referred to advertised conditions. We did eventually find the advertised conditions, nowhere near the machines.

The toilet facility was smashed up. And a man walking around, seeing our problems with the machine and toilet, said: "Now I know why I do not use trains".

Fortunately, the train itself was more encouraging. We had a display and regular announcements. On leaving the train, we were called passengers and the late arrival of the train was explained. It would have been nice to have been made aware of the latter point while we were waiting for the train.

Colin Bricher, 126, Broadmead Avenue, Northampton NN3 2QQ

Leaf fall timetable

For a four-week period in the late October, early November leaf fall season, Central Trains reduced the 10-minute service on the Birmingham Cross City line to a train every 20 minutes. The reason for this cut was responding to passenger demands for a more reliable train service. The result was ter-

rible. Season ticket holders discounts shot up to the maximum 10% although Central Trains insisted there was a great improvement in reliability. But it was a miserable experience for passengers.

While admiring the train operator's cheek there is a more serious point for rail users.

It would appear there are train operators prepared to seriously inconvenience passengers rather than tackle a problem in a way that might cost money.

The trains involves are class 323 electric multiple units which have a poor record for slipping and sliding. The solution is to modernise the drives and braking systems to make them sure-footed

The class 323s are the wheel flat champions of Europe, a distinction I would like them to lose.

Nigel Cripps (A Cross City line commuter), 42 Sunnybank Road, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands B73 5RE nigelcripps@hotmail.com

Paris-Basle

I've booked a return to Basle via Paris for £99 for through RailEurope (SNCF).

I waited half an hour at their London office although it could be done on the phone).

I checked the separate journey legs on the internet. They would have cost me about £70 each return if booked separately. Eurostar didn't do Basle as an add-on themselves.

My trip was to represent Railfuture on a European Passenger Federation working group on international trains

H.Trevor Jones, 67 Guildford Park Avenue, Guildford GU12 7NH htjones@raildev.fsnet.co.uk

Golden Goose?

How can we milk the Golden Goose? Relaxing watching television after wading through yet more volumes of excuses by the Scrooges running public transport (no business case for this, no robust strategy for that), I always find it exhilarating to be transported into the surreal world of car advertising where obviously no such financial constraints apply. Untold millions "sloshing around" to promote the sleek cool image of a new car every 15 minutes. Though advertisers are doing nothing illegal, let's not forget that the rest of society has to pick up the costs of car advertising. The fact that road space is exhausted and congestion endemic, has to be addressed by governments, councils and above all by local communities, not by car manufacturers.

But do advertisers have any moral responsibility at all? Perhaps we have a precedent set by cigarette adverts and more recently the questioning by health professionals of junk food adverts targeted at children.

Though cigarette advertisers always claimed that they merely tried to persuade smokers to change brands, health campaigners were convinced that the underlying agenda was to make smoking respectable, and to encourage young people to take up the habit.

I see a clear parallel here with saturation car advertising. The message being sent to the young and impressionable is that car ownership is an obligation and anyone missing out must be doomed to failure.

Newspapers too, of course, contain pages of car adverts so are hardly likely to countenance rational debate on this taboo subject in their columns. That's why I feel that bodies like Railfuture are well placed to give this topic an airing.

Perhaps we need legislation to give financial parity to promoting public transport or higher level of taxation on car advertising.

ing. Unlike the political hot potato of higher taxes on petrol, I can't see motorists squealing too loudly at a levy on advertising.

Why, motor manufacturers might even be embarrassed at having to justify to the rest of society the billions they spend on promoting their products.

John Pitcher, Railfuture Kent Division Organiser, 205 Elms Vale Road, Dover, Kent CT17 9PR john.pitcher@ic24.net

Sleeper to Beijing

I wonder if Michael Guerra (Second Chance for Euro Sleepers, *Railwatch* 98), having just finished dinner in the Midland Grand Hotel, had misread Hamburg for Amsterdam on the destination indicator for his train. The new high speed line north of Brussels will put Amsterdam within a mere four hours from London and thus just an easy day trip away. Not surprisingly Mr Guerra makes no mention of the gauge change on his journey to Spain. Some years ago I travelled on the night Talgo from Paris to Madrid. I was looking forward to waking up at the frontier to observe the procedure only to find that I slept like a log throughout the journey.

Yes, trans-European rail travel can still be one of the delights of our age. But wait, in the picture of St Pancras there is a second double-deck sleeper train.

Could it be for Beijing calling at Berlin, Warsaw and Moscow?

Anthony Berridge, 47 Eastfield Road, Barton-Upon-Humber DN18 6AW

Railwatch outlets

You ask for ideas for more outlets for *Railwatch*. Can I suggest the following, which although not producing any more sales might help spread the word. They are based on members not wanting to keep copies of *Railwatch* once read. No offence intended, but I find that old magazines create a storage



Your letters

the modest Beccles Loop project on ice, and thereby put back the prospects for an hourly train service on the East Suffolk Line between Ipswich and Lowestoft, is a case in point. That is why we in the East Suffolk Travellers' Association have protested to local MPs.

However, I can also get excited about Crossrail and the Channel Tunnel Rail Link. The former will reduce the number of commuter trains into Liverpool Street and free up more capacity for longer distance services.

The latter will provide a more attractive alternative to short-haul airlines and improve the links between Continental Europe and places north of London - including East Suffolk and indeed Lincolnshire where Mr Mickleburgh lives.

Trevor Garrod, chairman, East Suffolk Travellers' Association, 15 Clapham Road South, Lowestoft NR32 1RQ

Council defended

While I agree with Lyndon Elias's complaint (*Railwatch* 97) about the Strategic Rail Authority's withdrawal of the Bristol-Oxford service and failure to endorse reopening the 11 miles between Claydon and Bletchley, his idea that people might want to travel from Barnstaple to Skegness via Yeovil and Steeple Claydon is bizarre.

However, my main reason for writing is to refute his totally unjustified accusations against Oxfordshire County Council which has always pursued policies to promote public transport. In the past the Council has supported the restoration of train services to Islip and Bicester North. It is fully supportive of proposals to introduce train services between Oxford, Bletchley and Bedford, and also has plans for new stations at Grove/Wantage and Kidlington. If Lyndon is looking for someone to blame for the failure to achieve these aims, he should blame the Conservative Government for creating the present chaos in the railway system and the Labour Government for failing to remedy the situation. Also to blame are Railtrack/Network Rail and the Strategic Rail Authority, but the local authorities in the Thames Valley area are generally pro-rail.

Furthermore, Lyndon misunderstands Oxfordshire's policy on commuting. One policy in the Oxfordshire Structure Plan 2016, Deposit Draft, states "Significant additional housing development . . . should be avoided where this is likely to

be largely in commuting by car to urban centres and where travel needs are unlikely to be well served by public transport". It should be a general principle of sustainable development that the continuing growth of long-distance commuting is undesirable on economic, environmental and social grounds.

My only complaint about Oxfordshire County Council is that they, like Cambridgeshire, have been bitten by the guided busway bug, and believe that a guided-busway between Oxford and Witney will solve the problem of traffic congestion on the A40. The Mott MacDonald report of November 1991 into the feasibility of reopening the Witney branch line concluded that heavy rail would not be viable, but recommended that further studies be done into the alternatives of light rail or guided-busway. The estimated costs of both alternatives were about the same, and I deplore the County's failure to pursue the light rail option.

Although it is not my part of the country, I wonder whether light rail would not be the best means of restoring rail services between Huntingdon, Cambridge and Sudbury, with direct access to the centre of Cambridge. The frequent stops for Cast.Iron's proposed service between Swavesey and Cambridge Science Park would seem more appropriate for light rail. We should not be dismissive of light rail solutions. Remember that the old Railway Development Association was an offshoot from the Light Railway Transport League, formed by members who wanted to promote economical light rail operation of lightly used "heavy" rail lines.

Martin Smith, secretary, Railfuture Thames Valley branch, 57 Bath Street, Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX14 1EA

Overcrowding

Can I please respond to Mr Hooker's letter on page 12 of December's *Railwatch*?

His comment that nothing has been done for years to tackle the problem of overcrowding is simply not true.

Firstly, on the route through his station, Radyr, rail passenger partnership funding from the Strategic Rail Authority has resulted in two of the busiest commuter services into Cardiff becoming four cars rather than the previous two-car formation.

Secondly, RPP funding from the SRA has also led to services from the Rhymney Valley and Barry into Cardiff being dou-



bled in length. All of this to help cope with a 47% increase in patronage within five years.

Thirdly, to create extra space on the route from Radyr into Cardiff via Llandaf, we have introduced a far cheaper fare via the alternative service that uses the City Line.

Fourthly, RPP funding from the SRA has assisted with any off peak overcrowding (i.e. Saturdays) by the introduction last September of an additional service per hour serving the Aberdare line and the Taff Corridor.

Finally, use of class 156 and 158 vehicles on the busy Valley Lines routes would make no sense at all given their door configuration and interior layout. Station dwell times would also have to be increased so much that it would render timetabling more resource hungry. There is also the fact that 23 metre length stock is not route cleared north of Radyr because of platform clearance problems at numerous locations.

That said, Arriva Trains Wales has various developments proposed for the next two years to help provide more capacity, including a standard pattern (repeating) timetable that would improve frequencies over the core routes. Additionally, there is an option that the SRA may be able to fund, to provide extra vehicles on yet more peak services, combined with some platform lengthening.

So I hope you can see that we have made moves to cope with this growth phenomenon both in the past and for the future.

Tom Clift, general manager, Valley Lines, Arriva Trains Wales, Brunel House, 2 Fitzalan Road, Cardiff CF24 0SU

Eurostar

It is important that such an admirable and generally accurate publication as yours maintains its high standards. Therefore the remark on your front page that "Eurostar is still largely operated as a rich businessmen's club" is regrettable to say the least. It is both inaccurate and unnecessarily contentious and clearly reflects the writer's own prejudices.

I have been a relatively frequent traveller on Eurostar since its inception. Without even looking at the numbers, it is obvious that business travellers make up a small proportion of the traffic. Furthermore, those that do generally make many journeys each year which are time critical and paid for by companies. It is therefore entirely sensible for

them to be charged premium fares.

As a result of such a base load of traffic, millions of tourists, holidaymakers, Disney visitors, skiers, and lovers of Paris and Brussels can enjoy fast and convenient travel making use of the many cheap concession tickets.

A simple comparison of present traffic to Paris now with the former combined air and ship, shows that the whole market has expanded enormously - howbeit not as much as the wild estimates of those who built it!

How do I know this? I used to manage British Airways air services to Europe. I will leave you to check the numbers which demonstrate the above.

And the reason that Eurostar services are not properly integrated is entirely down to John Major's decision not to sign the Schengen agreement on European border controls and not to introduce British identity cards.

Richard Graham, 26 Chipstead Street, London SW6 3SS richardgraham@btinternet.com

Editor's note: Eurostar is fantastic but it has the potential to be much more useful and relevant - and to make more money.

Before the tunnel opened, the national railways forecast that by 2002, 16 million passengers would be travelling on Eurostar services between London and continental Europe. In fact less than 7 million passengers were carried in 2002.

The forecast for freight was 7 million tonnes by 2002. The reality: 1.5 million tonnes.

Despite the problems created by politicians, Eurostar must find ways to integrate itself into the rest of the European rail network.

Busway cash

Does anyone really wonder why our conservative county councillors are so very desperate to push the guided busway through on the Cambridge-St Ives rail line?

Just before the old St Ives railway line joins the main railway line at Chesterton there is a huge area of disused sidings, piled up with a huge amount of debris and very overgrown.

This area has been like this for the past few years and could be sold for housing or factory development were it not for the old St Ives railway line cutting through it.

So what do you do if you are

Railtrack [first] and lately Network Rail and you are desperate for money as the Government has refused you unlimited funding?

If county councillors can be persuaded to force through the busway, the disused sidings can then be sold for development.

We the taxpayers are left saddled with something the huge majority of us obviously does not want. But it doesn't have to happen. We can speak up for what we want.

P R Keepin, 33 Kent Road, Huntingdon, Cambs PE29 7JF

Scots Railwatch

There was nothing on Scotland in the December edition of *Railwatch*. Is this deliberate? Are there plans for a Scottish *Railwatch*?

Have you taken devolution to its logical conclusion? If so, you deserve a special accolade for anticipatory prescience but could you please let your readers know what is going on.

Randolph Murray, 119/2 Grange Loan, Edinburgh EH9 2EA

Editors' note: Railwatch is produced by volunteers and we depend on volunteers to send us contributions from Scotland - and elsewhere.

Environment?

I note that recently *Railwatch* has contained advertisements, application and a letter of recommendation for Environmental Transport Association membership. ETA mainly supply assistance to motorists.

I have been a member for many years and I have found their service most efficient and cost effective. They do not campaign for more motorways or even cheaper petrol.

However, it would be remiss of me if I did not warn Railfuture members that the ETA policymakers appear to be "anti" rail development as most Railfuture members would understand it.

This view has been put in articles in ETA's magazine and in replies to myself and other pro-rail members of ETA. The ETA's directors are not being underhand. They do not hide the fact that they encourage people to use existing trains but believe that money that may be spent re-opening or new-building railways would be better spent on other forms of more environmentally friendly transport.

Railfuture members

should satisfy themselves of ETA's policies on railway development before joining. I would imagine that ETA directors would be quite willing to outline their rail re-opening policies for an article in *Railwatch*.

Ralph Barker, 90 Carlisle Road, Crawford, Lanarkshire ML12 6TW ralphbarker@tiscali.co.uk

Politics

I was under the impression that Railfuture is intended to be a non-political organisation. The letter from Neville Pritchard printed under the heading "Wrong party" in *Railwatch* 98 was accordingly something of a surprise on two counts.

First, that Mr Pritchard had chosen to be gratuitously insulting about the Liberal Democrat party, from whose ranks I suspect a fair proportion of Railfuture's members are drawn. Secondly, that you had seen fit to publish his letter in the columns of *Railwatch*.

I accept of course that it is a legitimate use of the columns of *Railwatch* to present a fair criticism of any political party's views, although in that regard Mr Pritchard might wish to reflect upon the old adage about those who live in glass houses!

David Mawdsley, 7 Ashbourne Avenue, Blundellsands, Liverpool L23 8TX

D.H.Mawdsley@btopenworld.com

'Wrong Party'

I was somewhat surprised by the odd attitude of the county councillor to another of our political parties. He may not agree with the Lib-Dems, he has that right, but his attitude coming from a party which twice in my lifetime has done great damage to our railways by their policies does him little credit!

Roderic Beale, 14 Conesford Drive, Norwich NR1 2BB.

NORTH MIDLANDS BRANCH invites you to a presentation by Mr Tim Shoveller Operations Director Midland Mainline "Future developments, how we will get there and where we have been?" 11:00AM Saturday 3rd April 2004 Venue: The Waterfall, Railway Terrace, DERBY (Opposite Railway Station) The branch Annual General Meeting will follow the presentation Visitors Welcome More details http://www.rdsnm.btinternet.co.uk

An open case

The Strategic Rail Authority can at times appear a curious creature, wishing us all to get behind its "case for rail," while often denying us the information which could give us the confidence to do so.

Rural branches and "sugar loaf" stations are apparently sacrosanct. Yet Coventry-Nottingham is to be executed, despite its popularity and the imminent creation of around 4,000 jobs next to Leicester station.

This, we are told, will avoid the need to spend up to £100million on an underpass for freight and passenger trains at Nuneaton. With an alternative solution having been found for freight, it would be instructive to learn the cost of adapting the existing underpass for the doomed passenger trains, or of renewing the south end crossovers at Nuneaton station.

Numbers for an East West rail link from Bedford to Cambridge "do not stack up". Possibly they do not, but it is asking a lot of campaigners to accept defeat without being allowed to see any of the numbers.

The winning Arriva bid for Wales and Borders was "outstanding." Maybe it was, but it would be reassuring to glimpse a summary of the others.

Locally, it appears possible that the SRA will impose savage cuts in service at Ely and Thetford during 2005. The limited evidence available to us suggests that this will not reduce costs nor increase revenue.

But it will make life easier for ballast trains to the new March depot. Should these really be the priority?

And please, certain officers of Norfolk and Suffolk county councils are allowed to demand cuts in other counties but do not have to produce any figures, let alone funding, to support their demands.

I should have more confidence in a "case for rail" if:

■ The SRA was significantly

slimmed and streamlined to reduce duplication and apparatus fragmentation.

■ Many decisions were handed back to train operators, who are closer to the passenger and freight customer, and who collectively have the necessary expertise.

■ The SRA and statutory stakeholders were forced or persuaded to be more open and accountable, replacing spin and "aspirations" with facts and numbers.

John Saunders, Peterborough-Norwich Rail Users. john@penrug.fslife.co.uk

More puff

What a breath of fresh air was the *Railwatch* article, Railways with lots of puff, in December.

I am the buffet manager with the Rother Valley Railway based at Robertsbridge station on the Hastings-Charing Cross line.

If we reopen to Bodiam it will be possible to visit the second most popular National Trust property, Bodiam Castle, by rail.

Thousands of people each year already take advantage of free entry to the grounds at Bodiam and many people who call at Robertsbridge want to visit the castle.

Of course the Kent and East Sussex Railway and Tenterden are both great attractions in themselves.

I did try to explain why we are trying to reopen the line to fellow Railfuture members at a railfuture meeting in London but was not taken seriously. I hope the article will change minds. We are not playing at trains.

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

Rail in provinces

I agree with Mr Mickleburgh (*Railwatch* 98) that central government needs to do more for public transport development in the provinces. The Strategic Rail Authority's decision to put