

Good fun but a valuable asset too

By John Ginns

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Following the article entitled *Railwatch* 98 I must thank (in alphabetical order) Ralph Barker, David Bill, Malcolm Jevons, M J Leppard, Mike Naphthine, Simon Norton, Brian Pearce, Richard Powderhill, Chris Smyth and David Woodhouse for their emails and letters sent in response to the issues raised.

At least five of the responses were from *Railwatch* readers with a declared involvement in the heritage railway movement as well. That says a lot.

Pulling together the various thoughts presented, along with ideas from others gleaned over the past year or so, but leaving out any reference to specific preserved lines this time round, the consensus seems to be that Railfuture should at the very least be on speaking terms with the railway preservation movement and, in more than one opinion expressed – it's steam locomotives as well!

As with Railfuture's membership, feelings within the heritage railways movement are inevitably divided on some issues. That's life.

On the question of individual heritage railways providing "real and useful" services, thereby persuading people out of their cars, on the one hand there are those who see a real need for

their particular railway to play a more positive role in the local community, if only it were extended or connected to the national network.

At the other extreme there are those who look back on the many, many years they have dedicated to building up their heritage line. We should acknowledge that for some people it is literally their lives and their response may be a resounding "No!"

But we need to be philosophical and ask what it is they are not wanting to do. And there are those, perhaps among the wisest, who would allow 'useful' trains from the outside world to run on their line where a network rail connection exists or could be provided.

Some could even run 'useful' trains themselves – and are already working on it – on the clear understanding that their heritage service is not compromised.

Every heritage railway in the UK is an individual case, but the logistics of a preserved line adapting to provide commercial alongside or end-on to its existing heritage services should not be underestimated.

Among the issues to be addressed are additional rolling stock and trackwork upgrading, additional staffing and volunteering for working unsociable hours in all weathers, the implications of line speed upgrading

to even just 35 or 40 mph. The list provides ample scope for those looking for reasons to turn their backs. But there can be few preserved lines that can afford to turn their backs on the opportunity to at least consider the potential for earning extra revenue, especially if it involved no additional financial outlay on their part, in a world where funding from various sources may be available for enterprises that show determination and credibility.

We are often reminded of the power of the consumer. Many of us can remember how we consumers closed down literally thousands of cinemas, theatres, corner shops, local rail and bus services in just a very few years by doing absolutely nothing. We simply stayed away.

This isn't scare mongering. It's a fact of life. Fortunately there are those in the heritage rail movement who recognise the need for their eggs to be in more than one basket. In fairness there are others who see protection of our railway heritage – steam trains, semaphore signalling and historic station buildings – as the only thing that matters and diversification as the slippery slope to extinction.

But this world is big enough for both and some Railfuture members at least will recognise that a short but professionally managed railway in the right location, run by volunteers, with the potential to be extended and/or

network connected and planned around for the future, is just too valuable a national asset to remain solely a "fun and leisure" enterprise.

People are always going to need to travel even over short distances where speed doesn't matter. The car-indoctrinated mind needs to be brought under control and our lifestyles of the future re-thought.

The wheel, the hammer and the lever have stood the test of time – so have railways (and buses) even for short journeys. Let's keep it that way and build on it

Inter-continental ballistic trains may be the thing of the future for some of us some of the time, but at the local end of our lives our cross-country 158s, 170s and the like, community railways and our heritage railways are an invaluable asset. The preservation people began by declaring "Save our railway!" Well, they've done just that and created a new concept in railway operation.

In the big world of railways it may seem a low-profile issue but let's invite each other round for tea and remember that Railfuture is all about railway development

At the time of writing, Railfuture's network development committee has still to discuss the issue and to formulate a heritage railways policy.

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A guide to planning freight railways

Book review by

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This book is a collection of papers by specialist authors, who have extensive knowledge and experience of the railfreight industry, and is edited by Nigel Harris of The Railway Consultancy and Felix Schmid of Sheffield University.

It is aimed at the serious student of the industry, those in senior positions and potential users of railfreight. There is a shortage of published information for the student of the railfreight industry and this book fills the gap.

The book covers primarily British practice, but examples are given from Europe, USA, Australia and some African countries.

By way of introduction, the first chapter gives a brief history of freight railways from the earliest instance of grooves found in Roman roads, to the present day

Freight Operating Companies. Chapters 3 to 5 cover the business aspects on planning, forecasting and network strategy within which business decisions have to be made.

The chapter on Heavy Haul Railways stresses the need for vertical integration in order to permit a full understanding of vehicle/track dynamics.

Until Hatfield this was overlooked in the dash towards privatisation, but has now been rectified by the creation of the Wheel/Rail Interface Systems Authority.

After a chapter on logistics, which uses for illustration the supermarket delivery patterns in the Sheffield area, there is a description of the Freight Multiple Unit, and the trials which it has undertaken, although little has been heard of this project in recent months.

Following a chapter on Intermodal, which stresses the need for innovation, there is a description of freight rolling

stock. This does not go too deeply into technical matters, but gives a description of the more common types of wagon currently in use.

The requirements of the railfreight industry are outlined, and there is emphasis on the "intelligent freight vehicle" of the future, which uses electro-pneumatic brakes and a system of identification of vehicle condition by sensors.

The chapter on Operational Planning uses as a case study Ikea Rail AB, which runs its own trains from Sweden to several storage and distribution depots in Europe.

Railway infrastructure is covered by chapters on new freight lines, infrastructure maintenance and terminal design.

The latter is illustrated by description of LIFE at Colnbrook and the proposed Land Rover terminal at Solihull, neither of which, unfortunately, came to fruition.

Finally, the economics of railfreight are covered. In the summary and conclusions, it is felt that because of globalisation the importance of transport is increasing, and there is a potentially bright future for railfreight.

But rail must learn to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances and provide a thoroughly reliable and fast service.

Planning Freight Railways provides a clear and fairly detailed description of the subject for the serious reader, without being too difficult to follow.

One minor criticism is that because of the size of the book, the maps are difficult to read and the map supplied by Network Rail for Capacity Utilisation has some of the routes incorrectly labelled. The book is obtainable from A and N Harris, The Railway Consultancy, 43a Palace Square, Crystal Palace, London SE19 2LT, price £30