



Devon and Cornwall

By Stuart Walker and Gerard Duddridge

G.A.Duddridge@exeter.ac.uk

railfuturesw@swalker79.fsnet.co.uk

First pulls out of Bodmin-Padstow bus link

As part of a series of cost-cutting measures, First Devon and Cornwall has announced its intention to withdraw from the Bodmin Parkway to Padstow bus link after 22 May. The route will be transferred to independent local bus operator Western Greyhound. First's withdrawal from this route came as a surprise as it formed a main plank in First Group's drive to promote bus-rail integration. The route has received considerable investment as part of Cornwall's "Centre of Excellence" in rural transport with real-time bus information, new low-floor buses and integration with the demand-responsive Corlink service. There have been a number of high-profile visits by transport ministers to the route. Despite this investment, First considered the route to be a loss maker. When the bus timetable became regular interval two years ago, a number of train service connections deteriorated with some train arrivals missing the bus by only a few minutes.

Railfuture does not yet know whether the through bus-rail ticket facility will continue after Western Greyhound takes over. When that company took over First's routes to Boscastle and Tintagel, through rail tickets were withdrawn.

Newquay gets two-hourly summer service

A major improvement to the Newquay branch will take place this summer when Wessex Trains increases the Monday to Friday service to eight trains a day each way from 23 May until 29 October. The first train of the day will leave Par at 07.03 returning from Newquay at 07.56. This train connects at Par into the Portsmouth and Dundee services. Sadly, passengers for London will have to change again at Plymouth as First Great Western's service will not stop at Par! The last train of the day will leave Par at 21.08 connecting with the 16.35 from Paddington. This time, passengers from Scotland will have to change at Plymouth as well as Par as Virgin's Aberdeen to Penzance service does not call at Par. The last train from Newquay is at 22.00 and connects with First Great Western's sleeper service to Paddington.

The improvements are excellent news for what many have said is the Cinderella branch line in



A milestone has been reached with the £14million project to re-double the Cornish main line between Probus and Burngullow. On the night of 8 May, the new up line was brought into use over a section of track bed that has been strengthened because of old mine workings. Our photograph shows that the existing single line from Truro has been slewed across to join the new track. The old line has been disconnected and it is understood that work will now commence on strengthening the track bed on what will become the down line. The project, which is part funded by the European Regional Development Fund and the Strategic Rail Authority is on target for completion by the end of the year. Picture: STUART WALKER

Cornwall. With Newquay proving attractive to the younger tourists who are often not car owners, it is surprising that it has taken this long for train operators to recognise such an important market.

Exeter-Barnstaple line

By cutting many intermediate stops from the new summer timetable, Wessex Trains has reduced most Exeter to Barnstaple journey times to less than one hour and managed to run one extra train each way. Reducing the stops is an essential step for running an hourly timetable on the single-track line and must be welcomed. On the other hand there are not enough trains to run an hourly service so the cuts to the village stations have been quite severe. For example, Copplestone will have no train to Exeter between 07.23 and 18.45 and Newton St Cyres will lose its commuter service to Exeter, leaving only one daytime train. There are now no morning services from Yeoford, Copplestone and Morchard Road to Barnstaple. Sixty people are reported to have attended a

meeting organised by Yeoford Parish Council about the cuts. One complaint has been the lack of consultation between Wessex Trains and the parish councils. Railfuture believes that to maintain a fast service to Barnstaple and still serve the villages, the level crossing at Eggesford must be made automatic as soon as possible. At Eggesford, all trains currently have to stop before the station for the guard to get out and operate the level crossing. The time saving could be used to restore more stops to places such as Copplestone and Lapford, without increasing the journey time from Exeter to Barnstaple. It would also help if the line speed was increased to 75mph and the Eggesford passing place moved to Lapford. We need the Strategic Rail Authority to fund all these developments and an additional train for an hourly service. If a daily Exeter to Okehampton rail service could be restored then Newton St Cyres and Yeoford could be served by these trains.

South Molton

From 24 May three Barnstaple

to Tiverton buses (four on Saturdays) on Devon Bus service 346 have been extended to Tiverton Parkway, but few are fast enough to compete with the Barnstaple to Exeter rail service. The main beneficiary is South Molton, as the journey time to Tiverton Parkway is only 71 minutes or less, compared to 105 minutes (six times daily) to Taunton station via Dulverton.

Sampford Courtenay

The station was opened on 21 May by the Dartmoor Railway Company and is served by the summer Sunday Exeter-Okehampton train service (23 May to 19 September).

North West

By Trevor Bishop
trevor.bishop0@talk21.com

Open Golf 2006 to close part of Wirral line to West Kirby

The British Open Golf tournament in 2006, which is to be held at the Hoylake Golf Club, is set to close the Merseyrail Wirral line from Hoylake to West Kirby for the duration of the event which, given the preliminaries,



could be 10 days or more, not just the final four days seen on television. It's believed that closure of the line was a condition that the Royal Liverpool Golf Club imposed on Wirral Borough Council for bringing the tournament to the borough.

The line separates the main club course from a second course, and it is believed the other course will be needed for practice use by the players. There is also a level crossing just to the south of Hoylake station which, with the potential extra traffic, both road and train, is likely to be a major cause of hold-ups.

The Wirral Transport Users Association is not impressed that Wirral Borough Council seems to have accepted this as a fait accompli, with no apparent consultation with user groups or the North West Rail Passengers Committee and also that the substitute bus service would add to the road congestion during the event. One solution being touted is that of building a temporary pedestrian scaffolding bridge over the line where a barrow crossing already exists. It is believed this idea was used to make crossings of the Merseyrail Northern Line when the Open Golf was held at Royal Birkdale a few years ago.

West Coast blockades

The East Cheshire Line Rail Users Group has expressed concern about continuing weekend blockades from Cheadle Hulme-Colwich junction which seem to have resulted from the failure of the contractors to get the work done right during the four-month closure last year. Aside from the inconvenience, they fear the continuing closure will force many regular users to find alternatives, meaning they are lost to the railway.

Railfuture North West is writing to Transport Secretary Alistair Darling, to express its extreme concern at the situation and how the ongoing work seems to require much more closure of lines than it ever used to when the line was being electrified in the 1960s.

Railfuture North West freight officer needed

Are you interested in freight in the North West, its impact and what developments are happening, or maybe you know about those that are needed but aren't happening?

Railfuture NW needs a new freight officer. If you are interested, contact Brian Grey, Railfuture, 56 Coombe Road, Irby, Wirral, Merseyside CH61 4US. Tel 0151 648 3070.

Blackpool to Manchester electrification could be cheaper than first thought

The chairman of the Blackpool & Fylde Rail Users Association has said that with the large amount of electric motive power and coaching stock coming on to the market as a result of their replacement by Pendolinos on the West Coast main line, one of the main areas of cost could be removed from the overall costs for electrification.

The suggestion is that with four coaches and a driving van trailer at the other end, this would be a viable method of getting suitable electric stock for such a scheme, and would also be a much more attractive alternative method of travel for passengers.

20 year celebrations for Lakes Line Rail User Group.

The Lakes Line Rail User Group recently celebrated 20 years since it was formed. Its initial aim was to raise funds to ensure a better station building was provided for Windermere, after what was proposed by the then BR was seen as inadequate.

Recently the line's operation has been taken over by the new TransPennine Express operator First-Keolis and the group met the new operators within three weeks of the start to discuss services.

Future meetings

The next few meetings of the North West branch will be:

12 June in Kendal at the Cock and Dolphin Hotel (actually halfway between Kendal and Oxenholme).

18 September in Chester, venue to be confirmed.

13 November in the Royal Station Hotel Carnforth, all meetings start 11.00.

Members are welcome at all meetings and if attending the Kendal meeting, they are advised to book trains to Oxenholme and take the 41 or 41a bus to Kirkland.

Wessex

By Peter Argent
peter@fintrain.fsnet.co.uk

The branch AGM in Weymouth received a very interesting presentation from Keith Walton from the Rail Passenger Committee Western England.

A number of questions centred upon the Heart of Wessex line that runs from Weymouth to Bristol as this line has been the focus of much branch activity over recent months.

An update was received from Catherine Phillips, the rail partnership officer for the line, and she explained that the Rail Ale Trail would soon be up and running. The branch has helped out on this project and the trail booklet acknowledges this.

The trail encourages use of the

line to visit 28 pubs in 18 locations and there are rewards to be claimed depending upon the number of stations and pubs visited.

The branch has agreed to monitor the operation of the trail both in terms of quality and servicing the requirements of participating establishments. It will also assist, and feature in, several publicity events.

Each branch member has been asked to recruit another person as a member in a bid to improve membership figures. Early signs are that new members are beginning to sign up.

East Anglia

By Nick Dibben
and Trevor Garrod

nick.dibben@ukgateway.net
trevorgarrod2000@yahoo.co.uk

3,000 object to St Ives busway

The branch is among 3,000 groups and individuals that have sent in objections to Cambridgeshire County Council's plans to rip up the track on the former St Ives line and convert it into a guided busway. A public inquiry into the scheme will be held in the autumn. Our objection to the scheme is based around three main headings; lack of detail to support the

benefits claimed by the county council; errors and contradictions in the information and lack of consideration given to alternatives. For example, there are no details of the proposed services along the guideway or how they will co-ordinate with existing bus routes. Given that integration is a key Government objective, this is a major omission. The branch believes that the council has seriously underestimated the running costs of the busway. This will be reflected in higher access charges to operators and higher fares, meaning fewer passengers. The branch has also commented on the lack of consideration into alternatives and has suggested that a combination of improved local buses plus the reopening of the route as a community railway being put forward by Cast.Iron would give the same benefits at much lower cost. The branch is looking to work with other local campaigners such as CPRE and the St Ives Civic Society to put a joint case to the inquiry.

Cambridge gives up on Addenbrooke's station

Although some Cambridge councillors appear intent on progressing with the guided busway that nobody wants, they have effectively abandoned plans to

Green Breakdown Cover



The Environmental Transport Association provides an excellent breakdown service, plus everything else you would expect from a traditional motoring organisation. Where we differ is that we campaign for a sustainable transport system for Britain. We are not anti-car (after all, we are an organisation of car users) but

50% Off Membership* to Members of Railfuture

For further details on a service



to

Lines are open 8am - 6pm Mon-Fri and 9am-4pm Sat.
The ETA may record telephone conversations for staff training purposes
*Offer only applies to new memberships of ETA and may be withdrawn at any time

www.eta.co.uk
1270-1005



build a new station south of the city to serve Addenbrooke's Hospital. When first developed in the mid 1990s, the scheme had widespread support from local people and was expected to be used by around 1,000 people per day. Addenbrooke's Hospital is one of the main traffic generators within Cambridge, and it was accepted that direct regional public transport links would benefit patients who come from a wide area. However a "can't do" attitude from Railtrack and Network Rail and lack of enthusiasm from train operator WAGN and the Strategic Rail Authority, has meant that no further progress was made. Cambridge City Council has now decided that because the station is unlikely to happen it should no longer allocate land for the station. This means that a future station is now near impossible and the branch has condemned this shortsighted attitude.

East Suffolk line walks

A series of 11 walks between stations on the Ipswich-Lowestoft line is being promoted by the East Suffolk Travellers' Association with financial help from the Ramblers' Association and the East Anglian branch of Railfuture. The walks range from 1.5 miles to 10.5 miles and have been compiled by experienced Ramblers' Association member Roger Wolfe, who is also a member of ESTA.

The walks can be accessed on www.east-suffolklinewalks.co.uk and in an illustrated booklet published by ESTA and available for £2 (post free) from Trevor Garrod, 15 Clapham Road South, Lowestoft NR32 1RQ.

East Midlands

By Anthony Kay

A.Kay@lboro.ac.uk

Nuneaton

The East Midlands branch is campaigning for the reinstatement of the direct Nottingham-Coventry service, which will cease to operate because of changes to the track layout at Nuneaton. Although there will be improvements to West Coast main line and Leicester-Birmingham services, it will no longer be possible for trains to pass from the Leicester line to the Coventry line, unless a dive-under tunnel is reinstated. The SRA has decided this would not be economic, and we are trying to persuade them otherwise, not just for the sake of local services but also for longer-distance connections, for example to Birmingham International for the Airport and NEC, and to the line to Oxford and the south

coast. The service between Nottingham and Nuneaton will simply disappear, thus halving the train frequency at several local stations. The ending of the direct service had had surprisingly little publicity in the local press, until I had a letter published in the *Loughborough Echo*. This was picked up by the *Leicester Mercury*, which did a half-page article, and by a local radio station in Loughborough which interviewed me.

East Midlands Parkway

A public enquiry into the proposed East Midlands Parkway station is scheduled for 22 June. Several environmental groups are objecting because of fears that any new traffic attracted from road to rail will be outweighed by increases in traffic on local roads.

Rowing lake

The branch is continuing to fight the proposal for a 2km rowing lake which would cut across the proposed route of a reinstated Bedford-Sandy line, a vital part of the East-West link. There will be a public enquiry in the summer.

Loughborough car park

Central Trains now have funding to deal with the long-standing problem of the inadequate capacity of the car park at Loughborough station. However, some of the land required for the new car park is owned by EWS, which wants £500,000 for it.

Corby

One thousand new jobs will be created within the next five years by moves to develop 200,000 sq ft of office space around the former railway station in Corby. Proposals include reopening the rail link, moving Stagecoach's depot from Station Road and creating office accommodation for 800 workers. This is part of Catalyst Corby's strategy for creating 30,000 new jobs over 20 to 30 years, along with the necessary housing. The SRA has outlined a good business case for reopening the station in Cottingham Road and opening another at Oakley Vale. The chief executive of Corby Borough Council wants to see a bid going to the Sustainable Community Funding of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to help pay for the new station. He expects to see work on the new business park starting next spring or summer.

Welland Viaduct

Network Rail is spending £1.5million on a three-year project to repair Welland Viaduct. It is the longest masonry structure on Britain's railways and is Grade 1 listed. The brick and stonework is being repaired and re-pointed and parts of the para-

pet are being rebuilt. Twenty men are working on the project. They can only work on four arches at a time, and as there are 82 of them it is quite a mammoth undertaking. Vintage Trains will be running a steam shuttle over the viaduct on August Bank Holiday Monday, each journey beginning and ending at Kettering. Details from 0121 707 4696.

South Wales

De Cymru

By Julian Langston
and Peter Clark

julian.langston@yujla.freeseerve.
co.uk peter@clark8.fsnet.co.uk

Timetable consultation

When Arriva was awarded the Wales & Borders franchise it was announced that it would be introducing a simplified timetable, easier to understand than that which has applied hitherto. They duly announced in February a consultation on the proposed timetable, which would be implemented in December 2005. As might be expected, there are features to welcome and others to deplore. Strict timetabling on all routes is something we have long advocated, but for this to work, service frequency has to be high, otherwise individual traffic flows (such as commuting) may not be catered for. Thus on Valley Lines, the high frequency lends itself well to this approach and a number of improvements can be identified. Another very welcome feature, and again something which we have long campaigned for, is a second limited stop service every hour (along with the existing hourly London service) between Cardiff and Swansea. Travel between the different parts of Wales would be facilitated by good connections at Shrewsbury and by a regular two-hourly service between Holyhead and Cardiff (instead of the present single daily train). This will give the Marches line three trains every two hours – a useful enhancement – when combined with the hourly Manchester-Carmarthen trains (which form the Cardiff-Swansea extra service alluded to above).

But there are some disappointments. In all Wales, Pembrokeshire probably fares worst, with no through trains on either Milford Haven (except one each way) or Pembroke Dock lines. Passengers will have to change at Carmarthen and connections there are far from ideal. There are other concerns about connections, especially those with other train operators' trains, and we hope the consultation will lead to some adjustments being made, to minimise the negative impacts

while building on the positive.

Inter-modal ticketing

Another of Arriva's franchise commitments was to introduce a further 30 through rail-bus ticket facilities. But research conducted by a branch committee member suggests a higher priority should be to remove the anomalies and confusion surrounding many of the existing schemes. The problems include unclear definition of validity, exclusion of some bus operators (even when they are the majority providers) and conflicting information on availability. The much-praised Wales Flexi-pass range of tickets is also suffering through reduced availability on buses, mainly because some local authorities do not ensure, when tendered services change operator, that the new bus operator is contracted to be in the Flexi-pass scheme. Our published report on the subject can be viewed at <http://www.chartist.demon.co.uk/rdsdsw/dre-buslinks.com> www.chartist.demon.co.uk/rdsdsw/dre-buslinks.com.

Intra-Wales scheduled air services

Notwithstanding the improved north-south rail services to come in December 2005 (see above), the Welsh Assembly has issued a consultation document which proposes regular air services, operated by 19-seat aircraft, between various points in Wales. In practical terms it seems to boil down to using the airports at Cardiff (which is at Rhoose), Swansea and either Valley (Anglesey) or Caernarfon. Hawarden in north-east Wales is unlikely to be available for scheduled flights. Our response highlighted the environmental disadvantages of air compared with rail, the tendency to exaggerate the time benefits of air travel when airport locations are considered, and the impossibility of serving the widely dispersed population in north Wales (from Holyhead to Wrexham) with a single air terminal. The consultation document uses as an example, not altogether relevantly, Glasgow to Campbeltown. The geographical context is entirely different in that instance.

Our view is that the improved rail service should be monitored carefully before any public money is directed at an air service (also subsidised) which would to some extent compete with the trains which the Assembly is part-funding. We pointed out also, that further investment in the rail service would be possible to make it more attractive to business and other users, such as increased speed (needing investment in both track and trains), and

improved quality of rolling stock with some business class accommodation and associated amenities.

Cardiff LRT

The Cardiff Light Rail transit campaign team has been disappointed by a series of reports that have been recently published. The report from the National Audit Office published in April concluded that for a variety of reasons, existing LRT schemes in the UK were not delivering the promised modal shifts away from cars and were costing too much. We've also recently been made aware of a study by consultants Parsons Brinkerhoff carried out last year, that concluded that the best solution for linking Cardiff Bay with the city centre was not LRT based. Admittedly, this does suggest the lengthening of an existing railway bridge, but this is so that the surrounding area can be developed.

Unfortunately, the existing Cardiff Bay branch cannot effectively serve Cardiff Central Station, and so is little used. LRT could better penetrate the city centre. A further report on feasibility is expected this summer, but this is expected to say that financially LRT does not make sense for Cardiff. Members of the group recently met a senior officer of Cardiff County Council to discuss LRT and were dismayed to learn that ULTRA – the driverless taxi pod system is still favoured by the council, despite being turned down by the National Assembly for Wales two years running. So a negative few months, but the campaign continues.

Scotland

By David Hansen

davidh@spidacom.co.uk

Railway building

Bricks and mortar work for the Larkhall scheme has been going on for a while now, at long last. This scheme has had a long gestation and was reduced in scope at Anniesland in order to reduce costs. However, at long last something is happening. Our thanks to all those who pushed for it. The improved cross-Glasgow service should boost passenger numbers. What is needed now is to implement the complementary Crossrail scheme, with interchange between these schemes at Glasgow Cross.

Platform extensions

Extra trains will be arriving in the East later this year to cope with the crowds trying to use the train to get to Edinburgh. At the moment platforms at several stations on the Bathgate and Fife Circle lines are being extended to accommodate six coach trains.

Weather station

Ramblers, cavers and potholers can now plan their visits to the Yorkshire Dales thanks to an automatic weather station at Ribbleshead on the Settle-Carlisle line linked to the ribbleshead.org website which also provides forecasts.

Farmers, paragliders and schools are also likely to use the new service.

The Settle-Carlisle Enterprise Network with help from the Settle-Carlisle Trust provided the weather station.



Photo: Pete Shaw

ONLINE TEAM: Alan and Babs Shearing, Dave Parker, Ruth Annison, Jon Beavan and John Varney at the launch of the service

This is very good, but there are two niggles. First, stations like Dalgety Bay and Dunfermline Queen Margaret are only a few years old and it is ridiculous that they were not built longer in the first place. The costs of labour and materials to build the platforms to six-coach length at that time would have been far less than the costs of design, overheads, possessions, labour and materials to extend the platforms now. Second, the platform extensions on the Bathgate line are being built on the trackbed, which will be needed for the line if the double track electrified Airdrie-Bathgate line politicians promised before the last elections, is to be built. Either there is abortive work going on, or the railways do not believe the promises of politicians.

Edinburgh Airport rail link

Consultants are studying the most expensive option for this scheme, costed at £500million. If this was just one of 20 railway schemes people would not question it. However, it is not one of 20 schemes and appears to be designed more to boost egos than to address the most urgent transport needs. For this reason most voluntary groups consider the scheme a scandalous waste of money, compared to a more limited airport link and the balance of say £400million spent on other projects. Two more worthwhile projects are the Waverley Line and electrification, but there are many more.

Sense at last

The Railway Inspectorate, which was world renowned before the so-called Health and Safety Executive gobbled it up, has relented and allowed trains

to reverse in the platform at Newcraighall on Mondays to Saturdays, just as they were to do on the stillborn Sunday services. Trains will be timetabled to use the reversing siding, but if they are late will reverse in the platform. We applaud this outbreak of common sense.

Ticket barriers

Railfuture was concerned about the installation of ticket barriers, having campaigned for open stations for a long time. Whatever the merits of these arguments there are a number of badly thought out factors at Waverley station that make the installation much less than ideal. People will have missed connecting trains as they found themselves stuck behind the concentration camp style fences between platforms 18 and 19 and 11 and 12. The barriers are also very slow to open, something which seems to be designed into railways today as the internal doors on any modern train demonstrate.

Pointless so-called security

If you drive a car into Waverley station you can park it by the platforms and the only notices you will see relate to how much it will cost to park. Parking a cycle is free, but there are notices telling riders that their cycles will be searched (for bombs). Even someone of very little intelligence can spot that you can hide a bigger bomb in a car than a bike, let alone the buses and lorries that are driven into the station. There appears to be no reason why cycles have been singled out, those responsible certainly cannot give one. The SRA and government (at all levels) claim to be trying to encourage cycling, but treating cycling

differently from other means of getting to and from stations is not the way to do it. Perhaps we can have some of the famous joined up thinking?

Thames

By Chris Wright

chriswrightmk@aol.com

Bucks County Council Rail Officer met the committee at the end of March to discuss rail in the county. We were pleased to learn that a positive meeting had been held with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on East-West Rail. Support for the project remained strong among 35 councils, as well as the South East and East of England Development Agencies and Regional Assemblies. £50,000 had been spent on a new study updating the proposals for Oxford to Bedford and Aylesbury to Bedford hourly services with two freight trains a day on the re-opened section. Cost was now £68million. A bid for Office of the Deputy Prime Minister funding of £1.5million for work to the tender stage has been made, in preparation for coping with the major population growth in the area. Services could start if funding was agreed for 2007. (See www.eastwestrail.org for details).

Concern was expressed at a land sale on part of the Wycombe-Bourne End route and councils had objected.

Oxfordshire County Council rail strategy was agreed in March. The branch had a briefing in late 2003 and share most of their goals. High priority is being given to work on East West Rail, Cotswold Line issues following franchising, Didcot Interchange, Oxford Station



relocation, Kidlington (a planning application is being made although track capacity is a key issue), Oxford-Bristol reinstatement (so Wantage Road/Grove station can be progressed and East-West Rail benefits are maximised).

The East West Rail Consortium was represented at the public inquiry into the proposed population growth of Milton Keynes and South Midlands. Oxford-Bedford and Aylesbury-Bedford are seen as a first phase and it was hoped could start in 2007. Operating costs could be £3million per annum, a journey time of 54 minutes is suggested and one million journeys a year predicted by 2016. EWRC continues to press the case for Bedford-Cambridge services. Railfuture is perplexed that a Bedford to M1 (Junction 13) road is funded to £171million (£21million per mile) yet the 65-mile rail link remains under discussion.

London and Western Railway Company attended the branch AGM in February and listened to ideas from members for their planned bid for the Greater Western franchise.

Community Rail proposals by the SRA for Oxford to Bicester and Bletchley to Bedford to become community rail lines are of concern as it seems to ignore the strategic proposals for the route.

Cotswold Line Promotion Group is concerned about the timetabling of the line following the takeover by First Great Western. The branch will support CLPG in its efforts to improve the situation which seems to have arisen due to the SRA not allocating enough HSTs to the company.

First Great Western are being invited to the next branch meeting in June to explain its new operation.

Yorkshire

By Peter Davies
peter@bh-cc.co.uk

Otley

Campaigners fighting for the return of trains to Otley have received a major boost.

A meeting with was held with transport minister Kim Howells and campaigners are confident the campaign can move on to its next stage. Representatives at the meeting included MP Harold Best, representatives of Otley Rail Link Action Group, and the Otley Town Partnership, and the author of a report into returning rail to the town.

Mr Howells, who was joined by officers from the Strategic Rail Authority said that SRA officers would travel to Otley to give the scheme greater attention and promised to visit the town if he

was in the area.

A £11,000 report commissioned by ORLAG and Otley Town Council and carried out by JMP Consultants concluded that a single-line track from a new station at Otley to Menston Railway Station providing one train every hour would be cost effective. The scheme would cost £20.5million, and at the end of the day it would actually save money.

Annual general meeting and luncheon

The AGM and lunch was held at Huddersfield Hotel on Saturday 20 March and the guest speaker was Alan Whitehouse, BBC transport correspondent for Look North.

Sheffield

South Yorkshire Supertram celebrated the 10th anniversary of its opening on March 24 with the unveiling of a specially repainted tram at Nunnery depot. Although increasing in popularity, the system is carrying 12 million passengers a year, some way short of the 17 million originally hoped for.

Finningley Airport

The airport was officially named *Robin Hood – Doncaster and Sheffield Airport* recently, and the campaign to have a direct rail link to the airport is continuing.

Northern Rail franchise

At the time of writing a decision is awaited from the Strategic Rail Authority with regard to new operator of the Northern rail franchise.

Trans-Pennine franchise

The launch of the Trans-Pennine franchise by First Keolis was marked at each major station on the route with passengers receiving new information regarding the franchise, and local delicacies which included a bottle of Harrogate Spring Water and a packet of biscuits which had been made locally.

Class 158 units

All the Class 158 units have had maintenance work carried out on them to improve the air conditioning, making a quieter and smoother ride for passengers on the Trans-Pennine route.

North Midlands

By Paul Clark

Paul.Clark@nottingham.ac.uk

Midland performance

Midland Mainline operations director Tim Shoveller gave an excellent address about Midland Mainline performance to a well-attended AGM of Railfuture North Midlands on 3 April in Derby. He explained why MML went from best performing "inter-city" route to worst. He finished by explaining how and

why things are getting much better.

There were many reasons for the poor performance, which collectively ended up being near catastrophic. MML was particularly badly affected following the Hatfield derailment when performance was abysmal.

Much of this is now behind MML, but other problems have been caused by the high-speed train fleet, which is getting old. No spare sets had been available and perversely, the problems had been made worse by taking some sets out for refurbishment. As a result sets were being sent out first thing in the morning with faults that persisted all day. As a result the depots spent time mending trains at night and not having time for the more routine maintenance which was a downward spiral.

Late-running problem trains (for example when one power car is not operating) usually lead to delays to other services and the service fell apart on some days. The depots were simply "fire-fighting". Last autumn, MML rescued a stored HST set and this is now used as a hot standby. As soon as a problem occurs with an HST out on the main line, at the earliest opportunity the hot set replaces it and the faulty set goes to the depot for immediate repair.

The HST sets are going through a refurbishment programme which is resulting in great benefits. There have been a few problems with new VP185 engines, but software modifications should fix this. In most respects it is a good performer.

Now quite often the hot set remains at Derby Etches Park unused for days at a time. Other problems had been caused by the disappointing performance of the 170 units. These will eventually be replaced by the Meridian sets now on test.

Another poor period was shortly after the introduction of the Manchester Rio service. The HST sets inherited from another train company were in a poor state. Their performance had a negative impact on the MML network and for a short period it was almost down to the level after Hatfield.

The problems were exacerbated by the fact that the Rio HST sets usually could not exchange with the regular HST stock because they do not have catering vehicles. So MML was effectively running three sets of rolling stock, existing HSTs, Rio HSTs and Class 170 Turbostars.

Other problems have resulted from some very tight timetabling, tighter than any other inter-city line apparently. The HSTs are worked hard and the

line is demanding because of gradients and speed restrictions at crucial places. It is almost impossible for the Master Cutler to keep time.

Further problems have been concerned with the layout of depots resulting in trains having to be split to get them into Etches Park depot. It was found that when the trains were re-assembled they sometimes didn't work! HSTs are supposed to be fixed formation, only occasionally being dismantled. Of course this is a throwback from the Midland main line not being considered by British Rail for HSTs. This problem is being addressed.

However performance is now improving and is well on the way back to pre-Hatfield levels.

There are very few spare paths available on the Midland main line. It was pointed out from the audience that the line was once nearly all four track! Work is being done to make the timetable more robust to improve performance as part of the SRA route utilisation study. The refurbishment programme is paying dividends.

However there are severely challenging times ahead. The new interim St Pancras station requires very slick operations with little room for error. It does have the advantage however of being a minute nearer to Sheffield! Extensive work is also planned for Derby and Sheffield stations.

There is also the training programme for the new Meridian units underway taking crews away from operational duties.

There is likely to be more freight crossing at Leicester, which is very welcome of course but will not help pathing of MML trains.

It does appear that with the management changes at MML an even stronger forward-looking team is now in place.

Some new services are being considered, and Nottingham will get its second service to London back which was a cause of great concern when it was withdrawn. The Manchester service, while fulfilling a vital role, has been a long way from a commercial success unfortunately. We express our thanks to Mr Tim Shoveller for his first-rate presentation.

In conclusion the long-term future for MML looks tremendous and exciting. We wish them every success.

Branch website: <http://www.rdsnm.btinternet.com/>