

Goodbye Labour

Douglas Smart (Letters, *Railwatch* 100) will no doubt be pleased to hear that I have announced my intention not to renew my membership of the Labour Party after 23 years, because of the Government's transport policy.

My specific complaint is the refusal of the Government to accept that dualling the A428/A421 between Cambridge and Bedford will exacerbate the already critical traffic problems of Cambridge (and Bedford for that matter, though its problems aren't as severe), or to do anything to safeguard, let alone restore, a rail link on this corridor.

Neither will I be joining the Lib Dems. As the ruling party on the City Council they flunked the opportunity to join me in opposing the A428 dualling.

They are also throwing away the opportunity to provide an alternative to road travel by opening a station at Addenbrookes Hospital (Local Action in *Railwatch* 100).

However, I strongly disagree with the last paragraph of his letter. In elections run under the first past the post voting system, one may have a duty to vote for a party one doesn't like to stop a worse one from getting in, and it is the people who vote for "no hopers" who are abdicating responsibility.

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Labour response

I have been actively involved with pro-rail campaigning since the early 1960s. I have been a member of RDS for many years having at various times served on both the East Midland's branch committee and the national executive. I have led a successful rail users group in my home area for 25 years.

But I read the letters pages of *Railwatch* 100 and find that I am considered a fool and a traitor!

My crime: I supported, and still support, the Labour Party!

I had always considered RDS/*Railfuture* as being "non-political" but having printed such a blatantly political letter from Douglas Smart in *Railwatch* 100, I hope you will allow at least this one attempt to redress the balance of opinion.

In all of my years of pro-rail activity I have never experienced a period of government, of any political persuasion, which has invested so heavily in Britain's rail industry. Having taken over a total mess from the Conservative's "privatisation at any cost" policy in 1997 I consider the patient rebuilding of something approaching a sensible structure for a successful rail industry as being worthy of sup-

port rather than bland criticism. It would have been easy for the Labour Government to wring its hands and say "not my fault guv" but instead we have seen a progressive reassessment of Britain's rail industry and some bold decisions to restructure and rebuild.

I am not "head in the clouds" applauding everything this Government has done. I believe there have been mistakes and shortcomings. But, considering the current alternatives, and let's be quite clear there is only one realistic alternative for a governing party, then I think rather than attacking from the sidelines we should be enthusiastically involved and supporting the re-election of a Labour Government.

Mr Smart suggests pro-rail supporters vote for the Greens. What a quaint and hopelessly futile suggestion! When it comes to the next general election every vote must be made to count. Britain will either have a further term of Labour Government which has proved very capable of running a stable economy and has invested heavily in the rail industry, or we vote for, or by abstention allow a Conservative Government to take office. In only a very small number of constituencies is there any likelihood of any party other than Labour or Conservative being elected.

We need to be realistic and aware of likely alternatives! Michael Howard still applauds Margaret "I don't like trains" Thatcher. Old colleagues like Redwood have in recent months hinted at the level of investment in rail being too high! The Conservatives are openly looking for big cuts in public expenditure. I have heard them give assurances that health, education and defence will be safeguarded. I haven't heard any mention of rail!

A final comment: Mr Smart applauds a letter from his local Labour MP. I wonder what response he can honestly expect from that MP next time around if he reads this drivel in *Railwatch*. We should be careful of what is printed in *Railwatch*. It is received and read by those in Government and letters like Mr Smart's can do nothing but harm in our ongoing campaign to win political support for the rail cause.

Richard Crane, 23 Hatfield Crescent,
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Tough talking

So "any rail passenger who votes Labour is a fool, and any *Railfuture* member or rail worker who votes Labour is a traitor" according to Douglas Smart (*Railwatch* 100).

Fighting talk, with an element of truth, but hardly words designed to win friends and influence

people. For let us remember, at election time voters look at a wide range of policies, not just parties' attitudes to rail.

What's more, many of us have never had a Green candidate in our constituency, and are loath to desert Labour if it means a Tory getting elected instead. Remember, it was they who were responsible for Beeching.

Thus while I'm disappointed with the Blair Government, I realise the situation could be far worse. And I don't want to unduly antagonise those inside the Labour movement who remain strong friends of the pro-rail lobby.

Tim Mickleburgh, 33 Littlefield Lane,
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Editors' note: *Railfuture* is indeed a non-party political body but it cannot ignore the political process. Some *Railfuture* members are active in political parties while others may choose not to be. But *Railfuture* is keen to accommodate those of different political persuasions who nevertheless want to see an improved rail system.

We would rather not waste too much time in general political debate but we do want to know which parties are helping the rail cause and which are trying to undermine it. Sometimes that can be a matter for debate.

We have friends in all the main political parties and we certainly do our best to encourage our friends with information and argument.

But perhaps there is also the danger of keeping quiet about issues which should be aired.

Memories of founder

Your tribute to Owen Prosser kindled a number of distant memories. As a schoolboy tram and rail enthusiast, I became caught up in the Railway Development Association around 1952 when I became appointed to the exalted position of assistant publicity officer at a meeting in a Birmingham city pub.

My brief was to write letters highlighting the cause to the local press which, to my surprise, published most of them. This was two years before my National Service days when we lost touch.

In the summer of 1953, Owen introduced me to a week working experience on the Talylyn Railway which ran under conditions which would have given modern health and safety officers apoplexy.

This wonderful episode began a life long association of working on narrow gauge lines and organising numerous groups of boys to the Welsh Highland from the school where I taught. Owen

also arranged a never-to-be-forgotten trip on the Welshpool line in the days when one sat in coal trucks and trundled in between the washing at the town end. His enthusiasm was contagious, his energy seemed boundless and he always treated me as an equal, not an adult addressing a schoolboy.

I was always a welcomed visitor to his Sutton Coldfield home where he lived with his mother. It was a privilege to have known him; he was truly one of the most influential people during my adolescent years.

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Open verdict

May I first thank *Railfuture* for granting me the honour of a vice-presidency. I shall continue to contribute as much as I can, mainly through email, due to other commitments, and endeavour to be one of Mike Crowhurst's "aldermanate" VPs.

I read with incredulity the item in North West Local Action about closing the line from Hoylake to West Kirby during the open golf in 2006. By what authority does Wirral Borough Council seek to close the operations of a private company? When you read further and see that one of the reasons is that the trains will add to traffic congestion the mind boggles!

I trust that Network Rail and Merseyrail will be objecting to this ridiculous proposal and, if necessary, will be seeking full compensation and exemplary damages in court. Let us hope the ratepayers of Wirral have deep pockets to pay the resulting bill!

George Boyle, Vice President,
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Ticket dilemma

There is a distinct lack of publicity for European rail tickets. Even here in York you now have to buy two separate tickets, ie York to London and London to Paris or Brussels. The latter ticket has to be bought direct from Rail Europe or Eurostar (the rail operator that thinks it's an airline) because these operators no longer give any commission to GNER on international ticket sales!

There is a ticket from York to London which is cheaper than the normal saver and available during peak hours (necessary for those of us catching morning trains from London Waterloo). This is only available for those holding an international ticket from London to, for example, Paris or able to quote a booking reference to the GNER staff in York. So when we were planning to go to Holland in

September via the Channel Tunnel we may have to buy two (or even three) tickets from two different rail operators and make sure we get the international one(s) first. What a crazy system!

Graham Collett, Membership Secretary, Railfuture Yorkshire branch
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Dual plea

My MP Robert Walter recently asked the Government to re-commit to the provision of dual track on the Salisbury-Exeter line, but it has failed to do so.

Dual track on this line would greatly improve its efficiency and reliability. Please could members keep the pressure up for this important improvement?

K J Rabbetts, Silk Hay, High Street, Stabridge, Dorset DT10 2LH

Change on way?

I read *Railwatch* features and letters columns with great interest, but I look in vain through the Local Action pages for any news of what may be happening in the South East.

In this prosperous region we are privileged to ride on a vintage railway, in Mk I slam-door coaches to a timetable that is practically the same as it was in the 1960s, and it is quieter now since the Eurostars went over to their new line.

The majority of members seem to be focused on the area to the north of a line through Folkestone, Ashford and Bromley to London. Does Railfuture not take account of what is often referred to as the "main line" to Ashford and Dover, that is the route through Sevenoaks and Tonbridge?

No doubt this calm will be shattered one day and you might perhaps give us some warning of changes that may be taking place in the rolling stock. Is the silence an ominous sign of an intention to replace these trains with something less user-friendly? Does anyone have any information on future plans for this service?

John Pearson, 2 Mercers, Hawkhurst, Kent TN18 4LH

Rail link sense

Philip James's 'Making sense of rail links' (*Railwatch* 99) reminded me of the time in 1972-3 when, as a committee member of the Railway Invigoration Society London and Home Counties branch, I managed to persuade London Transport to depict West Hampstead as a BR interchange on the Underground diagram.

It was a struggle, as they didn't want to show interchanges involving street walking. Their mind was changed, however, when I pointed out that Metropolitan Line diagrams indicated Baker Street as an interchange for British Railways Marylebone.

The West Hampstead interchange is currently depicted with the note



Train operator Midland Mainline has donated over £9,000 to the Railway Children following a charity auction as part of RailFest 2004 at the National Railway Museum in York.

Midland Mainline donated two nameplates – Midland Pride and BBC East Midlands Today – together with a limited edition silver teapot showing the old Midland Mainline bambi and an old poster, for the charity auction.

Together, these items raised over £19,000, which was split between Midland Mainline and Porterbrook for their chosen charities.

Midland Mainline selected to donate its share of the proceeds, to the Railway Children, a charity that helps runaway and abandoned children who live in and around the world's railway stations.

Working through partner organisations, the charity offers shelter, healthcare, education, training and friendship to the vulnerable children. Midland Mainline managing director Paul Bunting presented the cheque to Katie Mason of the Railway Children.

"200m". As "m" can be the abbreviation for miles it could make it rather a long walk.

It is difficult to understand LT's obsession with metrication, given the fact that metric-only highway signs (including those for pedestrians) are illegal in this country. As Philip James suggests, it is more practical to give interchange times, not distances. The National Railways timetable has done this for a number of years, and Transport for London should follow suit.

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Philip James comments: I am pleased you succeeded in getting the West Hampstead interchange recognised but concerned that LT were opposed to it. Having used it myself, it is the simplest of connecting journeys and of strategic importance.

Hopefully having seen sense before, LUL will do it again. If they can be persuaded that they thought of the idea themselves, then so much the better. With regard to metrication, I believe that all distances on the Underground

are measured in kilometres and my map shows them relative to the buffer stops at Ongar! which is kilometre post 0.

Your support for the use of time rather than distance is welcome and accords with most comments I have had.

Joy in the Vale

We as a rail pressure group have campaigned over 20 years to British Rail and local authorities with a view to the reactivation of passenger services on the Vale of Glamorgan Line, and are greatly encouraged that work now gets under way on the awaited link for passengers to Cardiff International Airport.

The track is expected to be opened in the spring of next year. There will be a new platform at Bridgend Station, and new stations at Llantwit Major and Rhoose for a link to the airport by bus.

Asking passengers to change modes is however a disincentive. We respectfully suggest that the Welsh Assembly government gives early consideration to a direct rail "spur" to the airport. This

is a very exciting project, when the catchment area could be greatly extended for the train operator. First Great Western has expressed interest in running some inter-city trains to the airport. Also ideally Swansea and West Wales Trains could have direct trains to the airport.

Despite the recent delays for the project we hope that the line will reopen to passenger service in spring 2005.

M Matthews, chairman, Welsh Railways Action Group, Llwyndewi, Capel Dewi, Carmarthen SA32 8AE

European rail

I read Mark Booker's article in *Railwatch* 100 with great interest. In recent years, I have travelled by rail in Ireland, Spain, France, Germany and Switzerland where a wealth of interesting (and not always flattering) comparisons can be drawn with our own rail services.

As well as being a regular rail user in the UK and abroad, I am a professional translator, working from French and Spanish into English, and I would be delighted to offer my services to Railfuture.

Best wishes, and more articles on foreign rail services, please,

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Stamps wanted

I am collecting used stamps, postcards and picture phone cards for Guide Dogs for the Blind. I was wondering if any of your readers would be kind enough to send me any of their used stamps. Please send all stamps, postcards and picture phone cards to me.

Diana Ashton, 66 Highbank, Roe Lee, Blackburn, Lancs BB1

Charity appeal

Many of your readers will have an old mobile phone or printer cartridge tucked away. These unwanted items can benefit the Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation.

Old mobiles and empty printer cartridges can be recycled and the proceeds used to help fund vital research as well as providing support for sufferers and families. Lung cancer is the biggest cancer killer in the UK.

For details just call 08712 50 50 50, visit our website www.recycling-appeal.com/roycastle or simply drop your unwanted items in the post to: Roy Castle Recycling Appeal (EL), 31-37 Etna Road, Falkirk FK2 9EG

Janine Drew, Fundraising Manager, Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation, 200 London Road, Liverpool L3 9TA

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The opinions expressed by contributors do not necessarily reflect Railfuture policies.