

Two trains a day

That's all they have at Union station, Vancouver, a city with a population of 140,000

By Michael Weinberg
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I hadn't considered Canada to have much of a passenger rail service but certainly Toronto has a very lively main station with quite an intensive commuter service.

Trains seem to be formed exclusively of double-deck stock with four to twelve coaches.

The main station is served by a modern underground metro which seemed to be very efficient and well-used, if not very extensive. It consists of two lines, one running in a loop through the city centre and the other crossing it at right angles so that there are two interchange stations between the lines.

There are also a few tram routes which mainly stick to the grid roads common in North American cities.

I was pleased to see the tracks being modernised at several locations within the city.

Long distance services are fairly sparse, most being concentrated on the Toronto-Ottawa-Montreal-Quebec corridor with about seven trains a day.

Some of the night stock originally built for the North of London to the Continent services which never materialised, arrived in Toronto on a sleeping car train from Montreal, looking very like the old Midland Mainline, in its livery of light green, dark green and yellow.

I went across Canada by train to Vancouver, a marvellous journey, and covered the whole of the Skytrain network which is basically just two lines, but which takes you some way out into the suburbs, a journey of about 20 miles. You do get some great views of the city from Skytrain.

The trains are very frequent and fast, but being built largely on raised trackways above the city are very expensive to construct.

Although some small extension is being made, there seems to be a groundswell of opinion among the people I spoke to that it was too expensive to consider any more lines.

But for the visitor Skytrain certainly gets you about in double-quick time. Vancouver is very well served by buses and trolleybuses which are very frequent and cheap to use.

They employ a system, common in North America of transfers which in effect gives you freedom to travel anywhere for up to two hours on a single fare which is usually one dollar or one dollar 50 cents.

Vancouver has a huge main station and just two trains on the busiest days! The *Canadian* runs to Toronto three days a week and there is a daily service to Seattle in the United States. Nevertheless it is fully staffed and one end is shared by bus passengers as the bus station is adjacent.

My trip included using Amtrak from Seattle to San Francisco on the *Coast Starlight* which continues down to Los Angeles. Amtrak seems to cling to life almost on a daily basis but it always surprises me how good the trains are and the service aboard is in a different league from what we're pleased to call customer service over here.

One station stop is at Portland, Oregon, a so-called "service stop" where the train is re-provisioned and watered. While there I saw one of the low-level Talgo trains which operate commuter services in the Portland area.

Portland is a much more rail friendly city than Seattle, having a thriving and expanding



TORONTO: A Canadian long-distance train leaving Toronto with a double deck commuter train in the background.



TORONTO: A commuter train arriving at the city's huge station which enjoys a frequent commuter service. Many peak-hour trains are up to 12 coaches long

light-rail system, together with a developing commuter rail service. Fortunately the message of the advantages of light rail is being received in many American cities now with much future housing growth being planned around transit stations. Seattle Union station is being restored to its former glory, which can only improve the image of train travel in that part of the world. Catching the flight home was made easier by yet another extension to the BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit). This one is to the airport and it dem-



PORTLAND: The Coast Starlight during our service stop at Portland. It is four hours into its 36-hour trip to Los Angeles. These are real trains!

onstrates just what an airport rail connection should be. Off the train, a few yards to the end of the platform and straight to the check-in desks. No stairs, no ramps, no hassle, and connections from all parts of the Bay area with at the most, one cross platform change. Loads of room in the trains for luggage, lifts at every station and cheap fares. BART just gets better and better. I've visited San Francisco about six times over the years and each time there is a new line or extension to explore.

Bush to starve Amtrak to death

The American government is putting the squeeze on Amtrak, what is left of its national passenger rail system. Dominated by oilmen and refusing to join the Kyoto countries in combating climate change, the Bush administration is also denying any federal money to Amtrak for next year. Last year it cut Amtrak grants by £200million, saying that individual states must pay for Amtrak. This ignores the national service Amtrak currently provides.

A cross-party group of senators led by Republican Conrad Burns and Democrat Frank Lautenberg has already protested to the Senate budget chief, and the National Association of Railroad Passengers says Amtrak would have to axe all inter-city passenger trains if it received no federal money. Campaigners have less than six months to fight for proper funding. Amtrak is vital for the US to achieve an environmentally sustainable transport policy.

In Florida though, Governor Jeb Bush – brother of president George W – has already managed to get a plan for a high-speed rail service ditched. But in a referendum in Denver, Colorado, voters have agreed to fund the construction of five new light rail lines and in Phoenix, Arizona, voters have backed a 27-mile extension to their new 20-mile-long light rail line. Even Austin, Texas, has agreed to spend £70million on a commuter rail starter line. New York is to build a new eight-mile double-track subway line in Manhattan with 16 new underground stations – its first new subway line for 50 years.

Fight to protect station

By Paul Clark

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Railfuture North Midlands has been heavily involved with a local historical association, Transport 2000 and the local civic society over suitable redevelopment of Nottingham station.

All the groups were alarmed at the possibility of Nottingham station becoming another "concrete jungle".

The station was built in an Edwardian Baroque Revival style at a cost of £1million and was described by the Nottingham Evening News on the eve of its opening in 1904 as a "magnificent new block of buildings".

The station was built using a mix of red brick, terracotta (which was used as a substitute for building stone) and faience (a glazed terracotta) with slate and glazed pitch roofs over the principal buildings.

The station was opened to passengers without any formal ceremony on 17 January 1904, although next day the *Nottingham Evening News* reported that the platforms were still in a state of chaos and these were not expected to be ready for another nine months.

However it did consider that "the result promises to be the provision for Nottingham of one of the most commodious and most convenient passenger stations in the country".

The *Nottingham Evening News* also commented on the public's admiration of the style and elegance of the station approaches and booking hall and went on to describe the day's events.

Since then the Midland station has served Nottingham for 100 years and the original complex of station buildings and much of their original fabric and grandeur still survive, save for some relatively minor physical changes and adaptations.

The challenge for the future is to accommodate the hoped for tram extension and to upgrade the station infrastructure to provide a station that meets the needs of the travelling public into the future.

Railfuture North Midlands is concerned that the station may be developed for the interests of the developers rather than the rail users.

In reality little is likely to happen before Trent Signal Box is renewed. Indeed we would not want major development to take place before signalling decisions have been made as we believe rail infrastructure should lead any development, not rail development fitting around the developers.

The branch has developed its website (www.rdsnm.btinternet.co.uk) as its key way to communicate with members. The website gets thousands of visitors and has been seen by people and drawn responses



Midland Railway majesty: The distinctive red-brick Nottingham station

from all over the world. We have links to it from a multitude of other sites (both professional and interest groups) including an Italian site!

One consequence is that we have not produced a printed newsletter for a while.

On balance we believe our members benefit from the members-only section of the site and our email news/discussion group. We know this excludes members without access to the internet but we consider that this is efficient as a very high percentage of people do have ac-

cess to the internet by some method (work, home, local library, children etc).

This way we can get issues to our members almost instantly. We have produced around 20 email bulletins in recent months for our members, something we could not do so effectively with a printed newsletter.

However if a branch member would like to produce a printed, we would welcome him or her with open arms.

The branch continues to be active and has been busy responding to

such documents as the Midland mainline route utilisation study. We have continued our dialogue with councillors and other local groups with similar interests ensuring a united response to issues.

In addition to all this we also have a good dialogue with the Midlands Rail Passengers Committee and attend their meetings. We have been invited to take part in the East Midlands forum which could replace the RPC.

Railfuture North Midlands website: <http://www.rdsnm.btinternet.co.uk>

Railfuture loses stalwart supporter

By Rowland Pittard

Railfuture lost a hard-working, respected member when Roger Ellis died suddenly on a Bristol-bound train just before Christmas.

He was an ardent supporter of public transport – rail, road and sea. He travelled extensively within the United Kingdom especially since taking early retirement eight years ago.

He never owned a car and resisted offers of lifts, insisting that it was possible to travel almost anywhere by public transport.

In his working life, he was an internal auditor for over 20 years with South Wales Electricity and travelled almost daily using bus, coach, and/or train to SWALEC branches throughout South Wales.

He built up an extensive knowledge of local transport provision and used

ingenious routes to get to the more difficult locations. He built up an excellent knowledge of fares and ticketing systems and always enjoyed mastering the complexity of the fares manuals. His intricate knowledge saved his friends many pounds when purchasing rail tickets.

He will be well remembered for discovering the Kilwinning anomaly which for many years enabled the purchase of a competitive fare to Scotland. He supported the concept of through ticketing which he promoted to rail and bus companies in Wales but was unhappy about recent "bus plus" initiatives.

Roger enjoyed travelling by complex routes and always liked to "test" rail replacement services. He therefore actively researched diversions and closures – and would excel in the provision of

advice for weekend travel to his friends.

Railfuture and Rail Passenger Committees, not just in Wales but many other parts of Britain, benefited from Roger's advice.

Roger was a committee member of the South Wales branch of Rail Wales (RDS) for 11 years. He had an excellent command of English and could simply express complicated issues in an interesting readable style which will be very difficult to replace.

He also published a detailed paper on integrated ticketing within Wales which was well received by operators and groups supporting public transport.

He was a founder member of the Glamorgan Rail Users Federation and was editor of the GRUF journal until that organisation folded in 2001 following an im-

provement in rail service provision in the Cardiff valleys.

Roger was also a member of the Branch Line Society. He provided interesting information for the BLS newsletter especially with regard to service disruption for engineering works.

His interest in sea travel was reflected in his membership of the Coastal Cruising Association and the Paddle Steamer Preservation Society. He also travelled on many British canals and rivers.

Roger will be missed by his many friends in the transport world. He was always supportive, was a mine of information, was a prime supporter of public transport in Wales and an excellent reporter.

Railfuture has lost a very knowledgeable member and the branch has lost a hard-working committee member.