

Local action



Scotland

By Mike Harrison

Secretary@RailFutureScotland.org.uk

Writing this at the beginning of January, it's a time of waiting – partly because the country is just coming out of its almost three-week suspension of normal activity caused by the ever-extending winter holiday.

Edinburgh airport rail link

The consultation period for this closed on 17 December. We feel that the results are predictable, and will not be the best solution. Our preferred option (even ignoring the projected tram extension to the airport) was for a new station on the existing line to the bridge with an additional chord by Carlowrie to link in with the Glasgow line, rather than the huge expense (£500million) of a tunnel under the runway (or two runways). The money saved could have been allocated to solve some of the problems of Waverley with its access limitations. This scheme has not been considered by the consultants because it would not deliver passengers direct to the terminal building – a fair comment as we recognise that travellers do not want changes of mode if possible. We await reports.

Glasgow airport rail link

On the west side of the country, the Glasgow airport rail link has been proceeding and Railfuture Scotland submitted an extensive critique of the proposals, approving the basis, but making many comments on the details. The aspect which has been emphasised in the press is the emotive one of the fact that the link to the airport will cross diagonally playing fields containing some 20 football pitches. An embankment would significantly reduce the number of pitches while a viaduct would have much less impact. In Scotland, and especially in the Glasgow area, loss of football pitches would be sacrilege! More information is at <http://www.spt.co.uk/gar1/>. Again we await reports.

Third Forth crossing

In the 1990s there was a proposal for a third crossing at Queensferry. This was to have been a road bridge, though some of the schemes put forward by consultants considered, but rejected, a multi-modal bridge which could include light or heavy rail on a second deck. The present Forth road bridge is literally under stress. The volume and loadings of daily traffic are now many times more than were designed for – currently 68,000 vehicles per day. In summer 2004 half of the bridge was closed all weekends (except during August) for carriageway repairs, and the main cables are currently undergoing their first full internal inspection. The design life of the road bridge is 125 years. It may not last that long. A large number of commuters live in Fife and work in Edinburgh or West



The number of passengers using this new station is more than twice as many as rail chiefs expected. About 1,100 people a day are travelling to and from Edinburgh Park station 12 months after it was opened.

The station serves a business park on the city's western fringes and connects with a cross-city bus service. Edinburgh City Council, which provided a grant to help build the new station believes it is now one of its key public transport projects.

The station – funded by the council, the Strategic Rail Authority and the Scottish Executive – was expected to attract around 500 passengers per day by the end of its first year of operation.

Services from Edinburgh to both Dunblane and Bathgate stop at the station, which is also linked with two other stations at Newcraighall and Kinnaird Park, which were the first new stations to open in Edinburgh since 1987.

City transport leader Andrew Burns said Edinburgh Park station had been a "fantastic success". He added: "About 20,000 people work at Edinburgh Park, which is more than are working in a city centre like Dundee."

Malcolm Deans, executive director of New Edinburgh Ltd, the joint venture company responsible for the business park, said: "Being the only business park in Scotland to have our own railway station has proved to be a great success for us and the station has made the park a more attractive place to work."

Picture: FRAZER HAY

Lothian. The majority of those who work in central Edinburgh already use the train. The Fife Circle trains are being lengthened as soon as the platforms have been, work which is almost completed. But the trains are not convenient for those who work in the commercial and industrial areas at the west of the city or in West Lothian. Park and ride bus services to these areas are being expanded. What used to be a Joint Bridge Committee is now the Forth Estuary Transport Authority and like other transport authorities is required to produce a Local Transport Strategy. The board of FETA consists of three members from Edinburgh Council, three from Fife Council and one or two from the other district councils close to the crossing. Can you detect the political scenario developing here?

During 2004 the FETA Board produced its draft LTS, which included several options. The first few were measures to upgrade existing rail

services and the park and ride bus services, to improve flow on the road bridge by measures to discourage single-occupancy vehicle use at the morning peak and to allow variable toll-rates depending on vehicle occupancy and time of travel. Option four however resurrected the notion of a third bridge. This was described as a "multi-modal" bridge, and this is where Railfuture members had a problem. Railfuture had opposed the previous plan because it was to be simply a road bridge, so had a number of other environmental organisations (who banded together in the Forthright Alliance). If the 2004 plan were to have a bridge which would include heavy rail, then Railfuture would not want to oppose it, but if the bridge were to be road only, then we would stick to the same decision as in 1996 and be against. The road plus heavy rail was of course the most expensive option. As the consultation went on we were left in limbo, not knowing what to say.

The consultation has finished and the consultants have made their report to the FETA board, but the results have not been printed and distributed yet. I attended the last board meeting as an observer and heard the consultants say that their recommendation would not be for heavy rail to be included in the design. If a bridge were to be built it would have provision for buses and heavy goods vehicles and cars with more than one person while other traffic would use the existing bridge. It would be designed so that the bus lane could carry light rail (idea being that the tram line to the airport could be extended to Dunfermline). So it seems that "multi-modal" means different kinds of road vehicles (buses, HGVs and multi-occupancy cars) not road and rail vehicles as we had imagined. Asked at the meeting as to what they would recommend, the consultants hinted that a new bridge was not needed if all the other (cheaper!) measures were put in place and the bridge continued to work. If (or rather when) extensive repairs are needed to the bridge, then a second bridge would be of benefit. FETA is expected to have read the printed reports by the next meeting and to make a decision. Again we wait.

What else are we waiting for?

Of course, the East Coast main line franchise. Bids went in in December, the new franchise is to start in May, so by the time this magazine is printed we will know who will be running the line.

ScotRail

First made a lot of promises. How is it doing? Well, perhaps it's not as easy as First thought! After the first flurry of train and train-toilet cleaning, not a lot seems to have changed. I guess that managers needed to have their hands on before they could really identify the problems and start to find solutions. I see that there is now a frequently asked questions section on their website <http://www.firstscotrail.com> www.firstscotrail.com. This selects popular questions which have been asked at regular *Meet the Managers* sessions. I think First is trying, and needs time to resolve difficulties.

Edinburgh south suburban rail

In May 2004 the council received the Atkins Report. While not negative, it was not received very positively, and it looked as if there would be no action. However, since then a further study has been done on possible competition issues between the south suburban line, Tramline Three and the Waverley route to Galashiels. This indicates there would be little competition between the three schemes and there could be opportunities for integration. Accordingly in November the council resolved to seek funding to progress the south suburban.

Dewiring North Berwick

People are asking questions about this, and I'm not sure what the



current definitive answer is. I understood that the idea was to keep electric services if suitable train sets could be obtained. Looking further into the future though, there are possibilities that instead of being North Berwick-Waverley/Haymarket that trains could go through, possibly to Bathgate. That line has no wires. Of course, we would say that if or when the Airdrie-Bathgate* project goes ahead, then wiring up the bit between Airdrie and Edinburgh would make a lot of sense, but for the moment the only place that North Berwick trains could go to under the wires would be Kirknewton. Surely no-one is actually proposing to remove the wires! The branch to North Berwick is only about three miles long after it leaves the East Coast main line at Drem, maintenance costs of this section would be minimal, and it would be stupid to lose what will probably be needed again in the future.

For information on Airdrie-Bathgate take a look at <http://www.airdriebathgaterailink.co.uk>

Million-pound transfer

To give Scottish ministers the ability to use new powers conferred on them by the Railways Bill, £325million was transferred from the Department for Transport to the Scottish Executive in January. The new powers allow Scottish ministers to determine railway strategies and to control the ScotRail franchise. The extra money should allow for "a range of enhancements to Scotland's railway". Scottish transport minister Nicol Stephen said: "We want to work closely with the rail industry to provide a better deal for passengers."

East Anglia

By Nicholas Dibben
nick.dibben@btinternet.com
 and Trevor Garrod
trevorgarrod2000@yahoo.com

Freight boost

An upbeat presentation from Tony Berkeley of the Railfreight Group on the future of rail freight in this country was given to a well-attended branch meeting in Cambridge. Rail freight traffic had risen by 50% since privatisation and rail had increased market share from 8.5% to over 11.5% in the same period. There had been large investment by the private sector and competition between freight operators had helped the industry become more efficient. The future was encouraging. There was a shortage of lorry drivers and increasing road congestion meant that the road haulage industry was finding it more difficult to meet "just in time" deliveries. Lord Berkeley concluded that road and rail had to work together to provide, with each sector doing what it does best, to provide integrated transport solutions for business and industry.

Right lines for Norfolk freight

Norfolk County Council has updated its rail freight strategy to

coordinate with local and regional development plans. The document highlights the variety of goods sent by rail within the county, lists freight sites and provides contact details for those in the rail industry or who can help new schemes, including Railfuture. The county has identified a number of potential sites for new freight terminals and these will be protected against other development.

Regional plan in chaos

Progress on the revised draft Eastern England Plan was nearly halted when the Eastern England Regional Assembly withdrew its support for the plan. The decision came after Government failed to give assurances over transport funding to match the proposed development in the region. The bad news is that the EERA concerns appear to be about road funding and the fact that little or no funding for the many rail schemes included in the report did not appear to bother them. The environmental assessment with the plan notes that the rail schemes are more likely to be consistent with the aims of the regional transport strategy in terms of promoting sustainable development, reduced car dependency and social inclusion.

Timetable welcome

The East Suffolk Travellers' Association has welcomed the new rail timetable, under which most weekday trains on the Ipswich-Lowestoft line run to and from London. This should enable the railway to compete more effectively with the A12 road, especially as the trains to and from Lowestoft also call at four important stations in Essex. ESTA does have some misgivings which it has voiced in the media and to the operator. These are the lack of a through service from Liverpool Street to Lowestoft in the evening peak and poor connections between the Ipswich-Cambridge line and the East Suffolk Line at Ipswich. ESTA's spring meeting will be in St Mary's Church Hall, Woodbridge, at 14.30 on Saturday 5 March. The association's AGM will be on Saturday 14 May at 14.30 in St Mark's Church Hall, next to Oulton Broad South station. Full details of ESTA activities are on the association's website www.eastsuffolktravel.org.uk or obtainable from Trevor Garrod, 15 Clapham Rd South, Lowestoft, NR32 1RQ.

South West

By Stuart Walker

railfuturesw@swalker79.fsnet.co.uk

Aspirations for Greater Western

Railfuture Devon and Cornwall has published a list of improvements that could be achieved by the new Greater Western franchise holder within the next 10 years. There are few major infrastructure projects included but instead a targeted programme of incremental improve-

ments is suggested. The document *Cornwall and Devon's Railways - The Next Ten Years* also recommends:

- Replacement of Cornish mechanical signalling with Multiple Aspect signalling or removal of long block signalling sections
- Automation of Eggesford and Salmon Pool crossings on the North Devon Line
- Extension of double track section on Exmouth branch to allow a 15 minute frequency Exeter to Topsham
- Passing loop on the Falmouth branch to allow an approximate 30 minute interval service.

On train services we suggest that the Intercity 125 sets - which will be approaching their fortieth birthday during the franchise period - should be replaced.

For the West of England we are suggesting a fleet of four or five-car Adelante style trains with gangway connections so they can work in multiple.

These trains could provide an hourly service from Paddington to Penzance, running fast as eight or nine-car sets to Plymouth then detaching four or five cars to run through Cornwall calling at most intermedi-

ate stations. This could run to clock face timings and replace the present haphazard service provided by some Paddington trains and Wessex two car sprinters.

The new Adelante-style trains could also displace two car trains currently operating from Plymouth to South Wales. There would also be the flagship Golden Hind with restaurant facilities on Mondays to Fridays. This could be operated by new high-speed diesels that will be needed for services from Paddington to Bristol and South Wales.

We are also suggesting an hourly semi-fast service from Paddington to Paignton serving main stations between Reading and Exeter then Dawlish and all stations to Paignton.

If anyone would like a copy of *Cornwall and Devon's Railways - The Next Ten Years*, an electronic or paper copy can be obtained by writing to Railfuture Devon and Cornwall, 149 Polwithen Drive, Carbis Bay, St Ives, Cornwall TR26 2SW or email railfuturesw@swalker79.fsnet.co.uk.

A talk on the Greater Western franchise will be given by branch secretary Stuart Walker at the branch AGM on 12 March in Plymouth.

Ref: 1220-1006



A breakdown service that puts the environment on the road to recovery

For over 14 years the ETA has existed to promote greener motoring in Britain: actively campaigning for a sustainable transport system.

As a national motoring organisation we provide a 24 hour, 365 days a year breakdown service. And with an average response time of 35 minutes and 80% of breakdowns fixed at the roadside, our members quote us as the most efficient they've experienced.

Starting at just £39, we offer the full range of services from roadside recovery to home rescue and rest-of-europe cover.

You should join the ETA today for total peace of mind roadside rescue and to support greener motoring.

Phone 0800 212 810 or visit www.eta.co.uk

Lines are open 8am to 6pm Mon-Fri and 9am to 4pm Sat. Offer only available to new members and cannot be used in conjunction with any other offer.



Join the drive for greener motoring

ROADSIDE RESCUE



Probus doubling complete

The reinstated double track between Probus and Burngullow was completed on Sunday 21 November and reopened to trains the following day. The £14million project was completed on time and within budget. £3million was funded by European Regional Development Fund grant. Sadly, the continued fragmentation of the rail network meant that there were few timetable benefits to rail users in Cornwall and this is unlikely to change until the new Greater Western franchise is in place in 2006.

The formal opening ceremony took place at Truro station on Tuesday 30 November. Transport Minister Tony McNulty flew into the county to open the line. He joined a special train at Par hauled by steam locomotive City of Truro from Par to Truro. At Truro, the minister renamed a First Great Western HST power car City of Truro and welcomed the redoubling of the line. He said it had been a good week for transport in Cornwall with the news of the £70million new A30 dual carriageway road around Goss Moor and planned new air links from Newquay Airport to Bristol and Leeds/Bradford. He had no news of any new train services in the county.

Before he left, the minister was given a copy of *Devon and Cornwall's Railways - The Next Ten Years* with our aspirations for the Greater Western Franchise. It was hoped he would have time to read this on the flight back.

Government and SRA fail to act

The Government Office for the South West has declined to support Cornwall County Council's Local Transport Plan bid to instal a passing loop on the Falmouth branch. This is because the Strategic Rail Authority will not support the proposal and will not confirm that additional train services would use the branch. The SRA will not support the scheme unless there is robust evidence of future levels of patronage. The county council now faces having to fund the scheme itself and making its own application for Objective one grant.

St Ives riddle

As part of the St Ives Branch Line Community Railway Pilot scheme, Wessex Trains and the SRA have said that the timetable will become half-hourly clockface from Saturday 26 March - but unfortunately it does not. There are two crucial one-hour breaks in the service (in the morning and the afternoon) and a one-hour-20-minute gap in the evening - just when many long-distance passengers and commuters arrive at St Erth station wanting to make connections. All but two through trains from Penzance are withdrawn making it difficult for disabled passengers to make connections (St Erth cannot handle disabled passengers). The new timeta-



CHEERS: Peter Farhall, landlord of the Queen's Head pub, with Emma Haley, marketing manager for Wensleydale Railway

Another Wensleydale station

Wensleydale Railway has opened its third new station since last summer, making five stations in all: Finghall, Leeming Bar, Bedale, Leyburn and Redmire. The unstaffed station at Finghall, serving a classic small village set in pleasant walking countryside, reopened in December.

Pub landlord Mr Peter Farhall said: "We look forward to receiving passengers from the Wensleydale Railway at the Queen's Head. This is one of the oldest pubs in the dales and was mentioned in the Domesday Book."

Local resident Mrs Ann Graham said: "It will be nice to go up to Leyburn on the Friday market day by train. All the years that I've not had a car, I've had to stand and wait for a bus that seems to come when it feels like it. The first bus up to Leyburn is not until 11.40, so if you've got a doctor's appointment at 10.00 you have to get a taxi at £14 for the journey there and back"

Eight trains will call at Finghall seven days a week except for Christmas Day. Trains run eastwards to Bedale and Leeming Bar; both stations are close to the A1 motorway.

Wensleydale Railway plc's share offer in 2000 raised funds of £1.2million. "This enabled the company to convert a former freight-only line to allow passenger services, thus ensuring that regular passenger rail services are now part of the fabric of Wensleydale life," said chief executive Scott Handley.

A new share offer, launched last summer, aims to raise £2.75million. "With funds from the new share offer the company will increase the capacity, the number of trains operating on the line, increase speeds, open new stations and could point the way forward for reinvigoration of the rural railway network," said Mr Handley.

"By being responsive to the needs of the local community we have been able to bring new jobs, assist in the regeneration of the local area and bring back into use a wasted community resource, all for a fraction of the high costs we have become used to for railway projects."

The train timetable, and current share offer details, are on the website <http://www.wensleydalerrailway.com> and by telephoning 08454 50 54 74.

ble is aimed at park and ride traffic from Lelant Saltings rather than "traditional" passengers wanting to make main line connections.

Lincolnshire

By Brian Hastings
01724 710528

Valued route

The value of the Barnetby-Gainsborough route was highlighted when a freight train derailed at Joan Croft Junction on the East

Coast main line near Doncaster in late November. Freight trains were diverted along the little-used artery connecting Barnetby (Wrawby junction) with Gainsborough Trent junction and also to the northern arm of the Great Northern-Great Eastern joint line from Trent Junction to Doncaster. It was not possible to relay the junction points at Joan Croft immediately and the ECML was reopened temporarily as "plain line". New points were reportedly ordered from a Swed-

ish factory. Most freight from South Humberside into West and North Yorkshire, Teesside and Tyneside was therefore diverted over the Brigg Line which was opened continuously for the purpose, thus obviating reversal of traffic at Doncaster. The complete repair at Joan Croft junction was expected to go ahead in February.

Track and signalling upgrade

Track and signalling engineers took over Wrawby Junction near Lincoln for 11 days over Christmas to allow a £3.75million upgrade. This affected First Group South TransPennine operations and Northern Rail's Saturday service on the Brigg line and Central's Lincoln route. In order to meet the need for continued freight operation, the up goods line was reopened at prearranged times during the 11-day possession to suit freight flows of imported coal, oil, steel and other material. Over the New Year weekend, buses replaced trains between Doncaster and Cleethorpes to enable a resignalling upgrade. Railfuture commends the upgrades as part of Network Rail's commitment to South Humberside but feels that publicity at stations and in the media could have been better. On this occasion no informative timetable leaflets were available as had been in a similar blockade at Keadby in November 2003. Worse still the replacement buses organised to replace Grimsby-Lincoln trains left Grimsby up to 55 minutes earlier. Hapless passengers at Habrough, Barnetby and Market Rasen found out too late that their bus in lieu of train had in many cases gone when they turned up for a non-existent train. First Group likewise displayed no information posters at Doncaster where their trains terminated.

Rest day working dispute forces timetable cuts

Central Trains introduced an amended timetable on all Lincolnshire routes from 3 January when the ASLEF/Central Trains Rest Day Working agreement expired. While the effect was patchy in the county, there were examples of timetable cuts affecting important journey to work flows and of some cuts affecting calls at minor wayside stations, such as Swineshead, Hubberts Bridge and Thorpe Culvert. Sudden cancellations at such locations inspire little confidence in the railway. Railfuture hopes that the situation can be resolved promptly before lasting harm is done. The branch is urging Central Trains to be more pro-active in using the media to warn people of timetable changes.

New timetable

Railfuture has been in touch with First Group after complaints about the introduction of a new "roughly clockface" timetable. Early morning rail users at Althorpe, Crowle and Thorne South are up in arms because changes by First Group to



the South TransPennine (Cleethorpes to Manchester) times mean they have to catch a train 45 minutes earlier. Railfuture has suggested additional stops are inserted into another train's schedule to fill the gap.

New Lincoln link

Northern Rail's new Doncaster to Lincoln via Sheffield service which calls at Meadowhall shopping centre has been provided at the expense of direct Lincoln-Huddersfield trains. This has led to complaints from Lincolnshire ramblers who found it useful to gain access to *Last of the Summer Wine* country from Huddersfield.

Annual meeting

Lincolnshire branch will hold its 2005 annual general meeting on Saturday 19 March at Lincoln St Mary le Wigford church hall (two minutes from the station) at 11.30am. The afternoon public session will start at 13.45. For confirmation of speakers, please phone 01724 710528.

Thames

By Chris Wright

chriswrightmk@aol.com

Let's have some action

Oxford Bicester Rail Action Group and Chris Wright (representing Railfuture and Oxon and Bucks Rail Action Committee) met with Tony Baldry MP and Oxfordshire County Council to discuss the cuts in service, Community Rail Partnerships and East West Rail. Grave concern was expressed about the lack of progress for improvements. £1million offered by Bicester Village to improve the line is unspent while car use is six times above expectations.

The chairman is again pressing the need for rail improvements at a second meeting, in February, with Sir Bob Reid, chairman of Milton Keynes Partnership, the body responsible for expanding Milton Keynes.

New station hope

Oxfordshire County Council is seeking planning permission for Grove/Wantage Road station.


Milton Keynes' needs

Pressure in Milton Keynes, including that from Sir Bob Reid and MPs, has seen announcements for Bletchley platform extensions and a new platform at Milton Keynes Central to increase capacity.

Express way to more delays

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has funded a new study into the best way to meet east-west transport needs and funding. This is incredible. The Oxford to Cambridge express coach now takes four hours and travelling by car is subject to severe congestion and can take over three hours. Things can only get slower when speed limits of 50mph from Bicester to Finmere are introduced in 2005. Rail would take two and a half hours so unless

Birds by Train!



www.rspb.org.uk



The East of England has many excellent places to watch birds – and a great rail service too! A selection of the RSPB's reserves that can be reached by train are described in this leaflet. So why not take the green and hassle-free route to the birds?

For more information about train services and times, please contact National Rail Enquiries, on 08457 48 49 50, www.nationalrail.co.uk.



someone is going to claim that a plane service would be best, what needs to be discussed? £68million would provide a rail link to Milton Keynes and the Aylesbury link. Meanwhile a £40million-plus bypass is underway in North Bucks. Milton Keynes Council and the South East Regional Assembly are however still bravely pressing for the East-West rail link scheme to be implemented.

Chiltern Railways

Progress continues with extra trains to Birmingham, resignalling

between Bicester and Marylebone and a study into Oxford-Bicester-Marylebone services. Laing Rail are involved in talks over Aylesbury North and the East-West rail link.

Use and abuse of rail

The Great Western Route Utilisation Study has been published and is miles from where we should be but suggests looking at use of an underpass at Reading and extra coaches on some Oxford-London trains. Restoration of the Oxford-Bristol service and East-West rail link are low priority.

Fly me to the birds

It always seems sad that many nature lovers use their cars to visit the countryside as well as nature reserves and bird reserves.

The pollution and danger that results has a severe impact on wildlife, particularly birds. Between four and ten million are killed every year on the roads and their habitats are disturbed and degraded.

Now the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has teamed up with other agencies to produce this leaflet which will help bird lovers to get to reserves in the East of England by train.

Featured on the leaflet are Fowlmere, near Shepreth, Cambridgeshire, Berney arshes and Breydon Water, near Great Yarmouth, the Stour estuary reserves near Wrabness, Essex, Sandy, Bedfordshire and Rye Meads, Hertfordshire.

The RSPB, the National Trust and the Countryside Agency helped fund the leaflet.

For each reserve, there is a map showing access from the nearest station, which often involves a short but interesting walk.

There is also advice on how to get information at some of the reserves as well as telephone contact details.

This leaflet is an exemplary exercise particularly when many tourist attractions seem to go out of their way to prevent people finding out about public transport. Several preserved railways are guilty too, seemingly preferring people to arrive by car for a trip by rail.

The leaflet is available from chris.wood@rspb.org.uk or 01603 697515

West Midlands

By Peter Cousins and Peter Hughes
peter-r.cousins@virgin.net

New Street station

Birmingham City Council unveiled plans for the redevelopment of New Street station on 8 November. When opened in the 1960s the station was expected to cater for 60,000 passengers per day. It now handles 120,000 so change is long overdue. The £350million scheme developed by Wil Alsop & Partners for Network Rail is intended to more

Local action



than triple the passenger circulation space and double the width of staircases to the underground platforms. No significant changes to the track layout are involved at this stage although a thirteenth through platform is planned. West Midlands Branch has welcomed the scheme as the best option for improving this difficult and congested site.

Wolverhampton

The new platform four at Wolverhampton opened just in time for the September timetable change and this busy station now has four through platforms and two bays. They are numbered five and six although they are adjacent to platform one. Access to the new island with platform No four is via a new enclosed footbridge spanning all four tracks which will also relieve congestion on the narrow stairs to platforms one and two/three. Unfortunately direct access from the booking hall to the new overbridge will not be possible until the station itself is fully redeveloped.

Modern facilities

It is sometimes difficult to grasp how long improvements on the railway can take to complete. In August 2003 the Strategic Rail Authority announced a £2million upgrade had been approved for three stations in the West Midlands. This was a small part of a £25million package to enhance the facilities at 60 stations across the network under the Modern Facilities at Stations scheme. Early in January 2005 the promised new customer information screens were switched on at Erdington, Four Oaks and Lichfield City with upgraded waiting rooms and modern toilets expected to open shortly at the latter two stations.

Local services

Serious overcrowding is occurring on some local trains running between Coventry and Birmingham which are limited to a single Class 321 or Class 323 unit by several stations with short platforms. The situation is worst on Saturdays with many people going to the National Exhibition Centre or the new Bull Ring Shopping centre. With the enhanced Virgin services to London and many Cross Country services now running south via Coventry there are currently fewer paths for local stopping services on this long twin-track section. The original plan to split the local services at Birmingham International from September cannot after all be implemented until a new crossover is installed next summer. Quadrupling the whole route is a distant dream but some three-track sections might be possible.

Midland Metro

The inspector's report on the Midland Metro (Brierley Hill) Transport and Works Act Order was released on 22 December. Line two will run from the existing Metro Line one at



GO EAST: Britain's easternmost point is just one of the many interesting places you can gain access to with the East Suffolk Line.

This leaflet is an example of the promotional activities of the East Suffolk Travellers' Association.

It costs £4 to join. Details: Membership Secretary, 51 Links Way, Thurlton, Norwich NR14 6RF

Wednesbury south along the former South Staffordshire Railway formation to Dudley and Round Oak with a terminus at the Merry Hill Shopping Centre. While West Midlands branch welcomes the benefits that this new Metro route will bring to the local community, we are disappointed that the inspector rejected our concerns that provision should be made for more than the planned single freight track alongside the Metro tracks. The approved plan effectively restricts any future heavy-rail provision to a single track along most of the route. This would allow five paths per hour in each direction, but at least three of these have already been earmarked for freight by the SRA.

Trent Valley upgrade

The final approval for the project to quadruple 11 miles of the Trent Valley section of the West Coast main line, between Tamworth and Armitage, was given by the Department in late October and Network Rail hastily convened briefings in Lichfield and Tamworth to explain the scheme to local councillors. Work on the new four year project, which is estimated to cost £350million, will start with the construction of haulage roads and diversion of services. The former MAFF depot

at Lichfield has been purchased as a main project office and construction depot. Deep cuttings at Tamworth, Lichfield and Handsacre will have to be widened, two canal bridges rebuilt and the bridge over the river Tame near Hopwas completely replaced. At least four houses will be demolished and their occupants re-located; several more properties, some less than 30 years old, will lose part of their gardens. Sadly the need to widen the railway was simply not predicted when these houses were built.

Station bridge demolished?

The concrete footbridge that was the only access to Norton Bridge station was demolished over Christmas. This old structure was badly cracked and the concrete had spalled to show the steel reinforcing. It had become a dangerous structure. The service to this station was replaced by buses from May 2004 and was expected to be reinstated in June 2005. However before this can happen, a full four-track closure of the main line will now be required to replace the footbridge.

Train fleet boosted

Central Trains has acquired an extra 13 Turbostar trains from Midland Mainline to upgrade the service on its Citylink services.

The 100mph Turbostars will operate from Birmingham to more than 40 towns and cities across the country including Wolverhampton, Penkridge, Stafford, Liverpool, Nuneaton, Leicester, Peterborough, Cambridge, Stansted Airport, Tamworth, Derby, Nottingham, Bromsgrove, Cheltenham, Gloucester and Cardiff.

Central Trains deputy managing director Steve Banaghan said: "We want to improve the journey experience for our passengers".

More seats for commuters

Commuters in the West Midlands will also benefit from the introduction of five extra two carriage Class 150 diesel trains funded by local transport promoter Centro to provide more than 1,000 more seats at peak times.

Centro services director Robert Smith said: "Rail travel in the West Midlands is increasing, and we want to provide longer trains to address the issue of overcrowding."

South Wales

De Cymru

By Julian Langston
julian.langston@virgin.net
and Peter Clark
peter@clark8.fsnet.co.uk

Connections debacle

Unfortunately the dysfunctional side of the rail industry was displayed when First Great Western changed its London-Swansea timetable in December.

Arriva Trains Wales however is reserving its "big bang" change

for December 2005 although some changes had to be made for pathing reasons associated with the FGW changes.

The result is that many long-established connections between the two were destroyed. Especially in the late evening, connections to stations on the Marches line, in West Wales and some Valley Lines destinations require very long waits at Newport, Swansea or Cardiff, where there is a trend towards earlier closing of waiting rooms and toilets.

Earlier "last departures" from London to several places are now necessary, and with that comes the need to pay higher fares, because Supersavers cannot be used on the 19.15 from London, which some passengers now have to use. Hitherto they would have obtained their connections by using the 20.00 from London. FGW altered the earliest time of validity for Supersavers from 19.10 to 19.20, to coincide with the timetable change!

It is sad that both operators appear to think that these connections are used by such a small minority of their passengers that the problems are not very significant. We beg to differ! Some of the aberrations will be corrected when the Arriva standard pattern timetable starts in December 2005. But how many passengers will have found other means of travel by then?

Motorway madness

The continuing clamour, especially by business interests and local authorities, for a relief motorway to be built around the south of Newport appears to have borne fruit, with the Welsh Assembly giving the go-ahead to this project in December.

This major "investment" is likely to take up the entire transport budget for many years, and, although wholly compliant with the UK government's current transport policy, is nevertheless a very disappointing development.

When will the lesson be learned that expanding road capacity simply encourages even more traffic, and so shifts bottlenecks elsewhere? Five years ago, transport consultant John Davies, a former BR manager in Wales, produced his blueprint for a South Wales Metro service along the main line corridor from east to west – a service of frequent trains serving existing and reopened stations and with inter-connections facilitating a wide variety of journeys throughout the area. The idea was not taken up as such, though some improvements are evident in some places. This type of investment would, we feel, offer better value for money, not to mention compliance with the Assembly's obligation to promote sustainable development, than would huge road building schemes.

Development plan follow-up

When Railfuture's *On Track for the 21st Century* (2nd edition) was pub-



lished last autumn, it was circulated widely among decision-makers and others.

Since then, we have had meetings with several of those recipients, including, up to mid-January, Arriva Trains Wales (twice), the South East Wales Transport Alliance (local authority consortium), the Assembly Deputy Minister (in charge of transport) and the Assembly opposition spokesperson on transport.

We have received favourable comments on the document – which is not the same thing as saying that any of our aspirations will come to pass!

But getting these ideas on to the agenda for consideration was always a main objective, and we hope to build on these initial contacts with the various bodies.

Ebbw Vale disappointment

It has emerged that the Ebbw Vale line reopening scheme has become a victim of the rail industry's out-of-control cost escalation. Phase one (Ebbw Vale to Cardiff hourly) will not now commence until 2007, and instead of a lengthy double-line section in the central part of the route, most of it will be built as single track with single-platform stations. This will preclude a half-hourly service and eliminate freight paths. This hardly inspires confidence that phase two will ever be funded.

That was to include building back into Ebbw Vale town, and to Abertillery, with two trains per hour in the valley – one to Newport and one to Cardiff. We regard this later phase as essential if the railway is to fulfil its potential.

Although the reasons for the cutback are appreciated, history shows that when a minimum capital approach is taken, subsequent expansion is much more expensive. Both the Aberdare and Maesteg lines illustrate this.

East Midlands

By Anthony Kay
A.Kay@lboro.ac.uk

AGM

The East Midlands Branch AGM will be at 14.00 on 5 March at the Corn Market Hall in Kettering. The guest speaker will be Adrian Lyons, chairman of the Railway Forum.

Corby

Bee Bee Developments has submitted a planning application to Corby Borough Council for a £200million rail freight depot. About 3,500 jobs could be created if it comes to fruition. The local council commissioned a study to investigate whether the proposed site at the Stanion Plantation would be suitable.

Although the site was found to be adequate, concern has been raised over the suggestion made in the report that it was particularly suitable because workers in Corby would accept lower wages.



Pocket size computers, equipped with wireless internet technology, are being issued to Central Trains station staff to ensure that passengers obtain up-to-the-minute train running information. On GNER it is now possible for passengers to connect to the world wide web via a wireless connection on the train. Train operator Southern is also introducing a similar service on its trains
Picture: CENTRAL

East Midlands Parkway

Planning permission has eventually been given for the East Midlands Parkway station to be built near junction 24 of the M1 motorway. The planned opening date is autumn 2007. As well as attracting long-distance travellers, it is hoped that the new station will be used for park-and-ride into Nottingham, Derby and Leicester.

Transport campaigners in the region are also meeting officials at Nottingham East Midlands Airport to discuss ways of alleviating road congestion around the airport. Bus links from the new station will need to play a major role in this.

Loughborough station

Central Trains plans to extend the car park at Loughborough station by 120 places, although agreement is still awaited on a purchase price for the land required. Meanwhile, Charnwood Borough Council and Network Rail have shortlisted three developers for the regeneration of 11 acres of largely derelict land outside the station, to provide an Eastern Gateway to Loughborough. The project would include an improved transport interchange, which is desperately needed since Loughborough currently has the worst station facilities of any town on the Midland main line.

Wessex

Branch contacts: Peter Argent
and Jeremy Sleightholm
jeremy@jeremysl.fsnet.co.uk

Rail-bus victory

The Romsey-Winchester rail bus link which was merged with the local bus service in February last year was finally reinstated in December after a campaign by Wessex branch. Several users wrote to thank Railfuture for its input.

Passenger surveys

Surveys of passengers on Waterloo-

Bristol and Waterloo-Exeter lines were carried out by members in January after requests for help from the Rail Passengers Committee.

Metro action

Despite the Government deciding in July not to approve the South Hampshire Rapid Transport scheme, the branch is continuing to campaign for it, targeting local councillors.

Central links

The branch is looking at ways to improve liaison with Railfuture nationally, particularly as it does not have a member on the Railfuture board.

Cambrian

Contact: Dylan Lewis
Lewisdylan@yahoo.com

Allies

A joint meeting was held in January with the Shrewsbury and Aberystwyth Rail Passengers Association.

Pressure

We have raised questions over the past year about standards, quality and punctuality of trains on the Cambrian line with the Welsh Rail Passengers Committee

North West

By Trevor Bishop
trevor.bishop0@btinternet.com

Farewell Chris

Chris Ryan of Whaley Bridge, a long-time activist in Transport 2000 and the High Peak Railway Passengers Association and a member of Railfuture, has died.

Metrolink extension

Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Authority put forward a funding submission to the Department for Transport on 27 January, as part of plans to improve the existing system separately

from the extension. The existing lines (Altrincham-Bury and Eccles lines) are now carrying 19 million passengers per year, much more than forecast. There's been strong annual revenue growth over the past two years (14%) and it's expected to reach £22.5million for 2004-05. With operating costs at £17.5million, this results in healthy operating surpluses of £5million per annum, 70% of which are accruing to GMPTE.

Passengers' friends

The Rail Passengers Committee for North Western England will cease to exist on 30 June. The final meeting of the committee will be on Tuesday 14 June at the Mechanics Centre in Manchester.

The only two RPC offices to survive in England will be in London and Manchester. Railfuture North West very much regrets the passing of the RPC for the North West. The committee has done much good work over the years in helping rail passengers with information and compensation claims.

It has also been effective in holding the rail industry to account. In recent years the work of the committee has widened to include conducting surveys and producing reports on issues of interest to rail users.

The fear is that much of the present work of the committee will simply not be done in the new streamlined structure. An RPC passenger link manager is to be based at the RPC office in Manchester. There will also be a national network of 2,500 voluntary passenger advocates

Railfuture North West

An unfortunate error (room shortage) meant that the details included in the last Rail North West bulletin for the meeting on 16 April are wrong. We will be meeting in the Town Crier in Chester not in the Friends Meeting House in Manchester.

Rail Day in Chester

The Mid-Cheshire Community Rail Partnership is going ahead with another Rail Day on the Mid-Cheshire line (Chester-Northwich-Manchester) on Sunday 1 May.

Last year's was a brilliant success and this one promises to be even better. Once again there will be events at Chester and at stations all along the line. A steam shuttle service will operate an all-stops service using an LMS Black 5, which were once regular sights along the line.

ACoRP will be there with a stall and staff and hope other community rail partnerships will also bring along their wares. CRP co-ordinator John Kitchen is organising the event, with lots of help from the local rail users' association.

For further details (including tickets for the steam special) contact Andrew MacFarlane at andrew@mcrua.fsnet.co.uk.