

Your letters



Build new lines

I read the very lengthy letter from M Rothwell in the October issue with interest, particularly in regard to the East-West link. Given the present attitude from HM Treasury there is little or no hope of new lines unless they have private funding (Channel Tunnel rail link and Crossrail) or maybe are in Wales or Scotland.

I would also contest the comment that the terrain between Flitwick (Westoning) and Hitchin is relatively flat as there are the Chiltern Hills to contend with.

More importantly though we have to lobby hard to retain all existing rail links and to urge ways to utilise capacity imaginatively.

A number of good points in this regard were detailed in M Rothwell's letter. The lack of rail capacity between Coventry and Wolverhampton is a long standing disgrace for an area of such economic importance to the UK.

To ease congestion on this route, how about a through service linking Shrewsbury-Telford (Wellington)-Wolverhampton-Walsall-Nuneaton to Euston via the Sutton Park line. If Hull Trains work successfully why not Shrewsbury trains?

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Promotion idea

An article in the Railfuture newsletter *Railondon* regarding the wind-up of the Southern Regional Rail Passengers Committee, asked: Will Railfuture be able to rise to the challenge of voicing public concerns to the Government about the railways?

I think it could and should. We do have an excellent magazine in the shape of *Railwatch* which could be a very good means of informing, not only the members, but a wider field of railway activity.

A short while ago, I tried to get *Railwatch* more widely read in this area, but for many reasons was unfortunately, not successful.

But, if it were possible to make some sort of group effort in this busy area, which is on the Waterloo

Portsmouth Harbour line of South West Trains, I think we could do better than I did on my own.

If there are people around here who feel that they could, or would, be prepared to work out some scheme, then maybe they could contact me by post, telephone or email.

Maybe together we would be able to do something positive.

Incidentally, the letter from M Rothwell "Build New Lines" is good and deserves consideration. I agree with much of what he says.

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Valuable alliance

The *Railwatch* 105 headline "It can be done" neatly sums up the culmination of a decade-plus of sustained graft and campaigning by an alliance between a rail users' group and a local authority. The Cambridge Heath and London Fields Users' Group and we are celebrating the new December timetable for ONE West Anglia which sees the fulfilment of aspirations for a user-friendly train service.

Ten years ago just 38 trains per weekday called at each station, Monday-Friday peak periods only, with less than 200 passengers per day using each station. From 11 December there is the restoration of a Sunday service (half-hourly) for the first time in over a decade, plus a regular four trains-per-hour (rising to six in the week day with-flow peaks), 18 hours-per-day service Monday-Saturday, totalling no less than 160 trains per weekday – quadrupled!

How has this, and associated station improvements, been achieved? The short answer is – the hard way. Twice a year for the past 10 years, in May and December, *Railwatch* co-editor Ray King and I have stood in all weathers for four hours in the morning peak and nearly another four hours in the evening peak "counting them all out and counting them all back".

Each May since the inter-peak service was restored in 1998 those peak period passenger counts have been extended into a full daytime head-count. What that labour of love

has generated is detailed statistics which routinely have been passed on to the train operator and other interested parties, to demonstrate rising patronage and the justification for further service and station improvements.

While overall daily peak-periods patronage has more than doubled to over 400 passengers per station, some flows have more than quadrupled. Whereas just 20 souls took the nine-minute ride from London Fields to Liverpool Street in the morning peak in 1996, it's now approaching 100.

Previous station improvements such as improved lighting, additional seating, corner mirrors, and basic help points have recently been complemented by CCTV, dot-matrix real-time train service information displays, platform poster panels, and upgraded help points.

Underlying this has been a working relationship with the train operator and in particular the group station manager for the patch, to develop the mutual understanding which has proven so vital for our credibility.

I suggest that our experience points a way for other campaigners. Leave your armchairs, pick up your deck-chairs/camping stools and plant yourselves at your favourite station for a few hours on a regular and consistent basis, to get some factual data to support your case.

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Rail-air links

Many adverse comments have appeared in *Railwatch* about Heathrow Express so I was surprised to find it so popular when I travelled to Heathrow on my way to Hong Kong. My train was full with some passengers standing.

By comparison, the new airport express at Hong Kong was spacious

and comfortable. Smartly dressed young women in red costumes and white gloves acted as porters to assist us board. When we arrived at Kowloon after an attractive trip along the coast, other assistants approached us to offer trolleys.

Courtesy buses were provided from Kowloon station to all the major hotels. All this for a flat fare of around £7.50, compared to £14 for Heathrow Express.

A 24-hour pass on the five-line 50-station Hong Kong Metro network (excluding the airport line) costs only £4.

Alan Crowhurst, writing from Holiday Inn Hotel, Golden Mile, Hong Kong

Time to keep quiet

It is difficult enough to get a rail reopening scheme off the ground so might I tactfully suggest that members do not talk down schemes they disagree with. They can choose to stay quiet. It is impossible to forecast which plans will succeed and which will not.

But the first aim should be to persuade planners and local authority councillors that there is a good case for a particular route and that it goes into the local plan.

The heritage sector has a good record of taking pigs' ears and turning them into silk purses.

The mayor of Faringdon John Gilman is suggesting reopening the branch to Uffington, partly to reduce car journeys on the A420 road where 11 people are killed every year.

Would anyone who is interested in helping with this project, please contact me.

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Volunteer efforts

A heritage railway, with shiny steam trains, picture-book stations.

Map of Hong Kong metro lines



I see their volunteers, uniforms plastered with badges: their excitement at blowing their big whistle is plain (and embarrassing) for all to see.

But one thing baffles me. These railways which offer no real transport service to the communities they purport to serve, have not found volunteers who would get up early in the morning to offer a genuine commuter service.

There are waiting lists to drive the trains, to blow that whistle, to fancy themselves as real railwaymen. Success in such a scheme would solve two problems: first, it would get these people out of the house and second, it would also provide a decent commuter service for normal people.

Sadly nobody has ever thought of this and I fear it will never be tried. I think I shall be driving my car to visit and do business in East Dereham and always shall.

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Useful heritage

Writing as one of the founders of the Branch Line Reinvigoration Society (SRUBLUK) which was one of the constituent members of what is now Railfuture, I was interested in John Ginns' article on heritage railways.

The event which led to the creation of SRUBLUK was the closure of the Kent and East Sussex Railway. We wrote to the papers and the response was so encouraging that the society was founded. What we wanted was not to encourage heritage railways as such, but to ensure that local railways got preserved in order to continue to serve their communities. It is disappointing that few of the many heritage lines in fact provide a service for local people, though I know some try to do so (Wensleydale, Worth Valley, Swanage...).

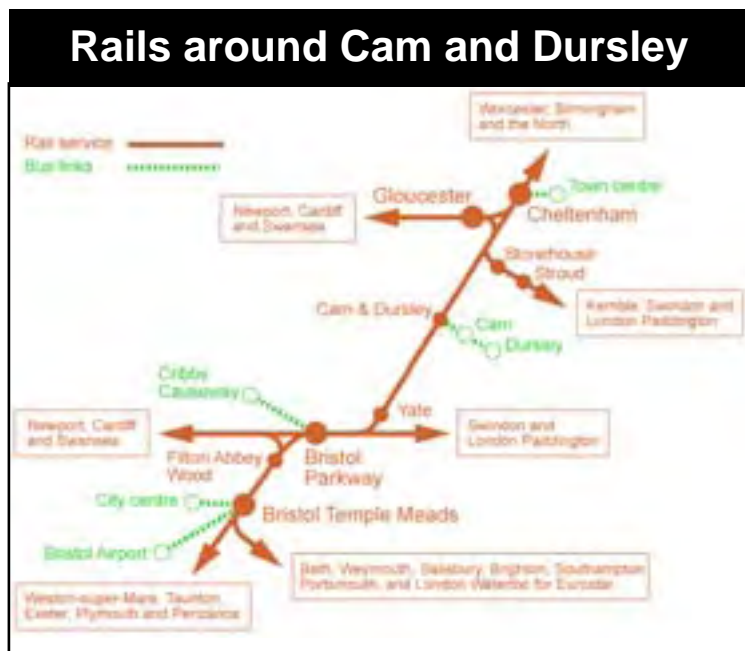
Perhaps the new concept of community railways can somehow enable more of the heritage lines to find the necessary funding to buy railbuses and link more small communities to the network.

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Women using trains

You asked in *Railwatch* 105 for women's views on using trains, so here goes. I commuted for 40 years from 1952-1993, starting Slough-Paddington, various addresses in south London, and latterly in the Harrow area. I never learnt to drive the infernal combustion engine, so travelled extensively by train, much of it on my own, and never felt afraid of being on my own. Since retiring I still travel zones 1-6 on my geriatric travel pass, and again am quite happy to travel by train after dark, though would not like to wait at bus stops after dark these days.

The only time I did feel afraid was, I suppose understandably, just



after 7 July. I travelled one Saturday afternoon to Woodford on the Central line. We did very well until Bank when the driver told us the train was diverted via Redbridge to Hainault without explanation. I therefore got off. There were no Woodford trains indicated and I must admit to feeling uneasy so far underground.

I therefore took the next train to Leytonstone, where although I had a long wait at least it was in the open air. I learnt afterwards that a suspect package had caused all the trouble.

Janice Uphill, 57 Paines Lane, Pinner, Middlesex HA5 3BX

■ **Janice Uphill has also written a review on a new book called *Railwaywomen*. See centre pages.**

Women on trains

I was disappointed to read in *Railwatch* 105 your brief "Calling all women" story, focusing on the problems faced by women using rail transport. For this is going along the politically correct route, as highlighted in an official report earlier this year that even talked of women-only carriages.

Personally, I believe we should treat all passengers as equal, and not get into gender politics. Or do we support the old days of waiting rooms just for women, discriminating against law-abiding male passengers in the process?

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Editors' note: Many women travel by train but only a small proportion are members of Railfuture. The Railfuture board wants to recruit more women so that we are properly representative of rail users in general.

There are also issues that involve women more than men. Safety on trains affects us all but mothers trying to nurse and care for babies and children have been discriminated against by planners, managers, rail workers

and even male passengers. The phrase "politically correct" is surely inappropriate when we are dealing with personal issues. We all adjust our language in certain circumstances so as not to offend individuals and groups of people. But *Railwatch* is ready for a full and frank discussion of the issues.

Misleading map

I was appalled to see the map on page 2 of *Railwatch* 105. Thank you for omitting our local station Cam and Dursley. It has only been open for over 10 years.

If you can't publish accurate information on your specialist subject, who can?

I suspect you have used an old map from a train operator which omitted Cam and Dursley because it opened as an experimental station for its first three years. Sloppy journalism.

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Editors' note: Apologies. The tenth anniversary of the official opening of Cam and Dursley station was celebrated on 18 May 2004. The above map was taken from a website giving more information on Cam and Dursley station: www.cojac.com/home.htm

Vale of joy

It was with great joy that I read the news of the Vale of Glamorgan reopening in *Railwatch*. The Welsh Action Rail Group has been campaigning for 20 years to reactivate passenger services there.

I wrote many letters to the press and presented the case for services to Cardiff International Airport to the House of Lords transport committee, the House of Commons

committee on Welsh Affairs and the British Railways Board at Euston.

Now we respectfully suggest that the Welsh Assembly consider a direct rail service to the airport. Currently more people seem to be using Llantwit Major than Rhoose and the bus link to the airport. Asking passengers to change modes is a disincentive.

A direct service would allow the train operator to expand the catchment area and First Great Western has expressed interest in running some inter-city trains to the airport. Thanks to rail campaigners, residents now have quick public transport access to Bridgend, Cardiff and beyond.

Mervyn Matthews, chairman, Welsh Rail Action Group, Llwyn Dewi, Capel Dewi, Carmarthen SA32 8AE

In the picture

Many thanks for sending me a copy of the current *Railwatch* magazine. The reproduction of my photograph was excellent.

What a pity Arriva Wales have changed the timetable this autumn, because of "leaves on the line". Their customers from Rhoose and Llantwit Major are not able use the train without changing at Barry Station if they wish to go to Barry Dock (the stop for our Council's offices), Cadoxton, Dinas Powys, Eastbrook, Cogan or Grangetown. A peak time morning train from Bridgend to Cardiff is supposed to stop but has consistently failed to do so over the past couple of weeks. My colleagues who use this service don't know where they will land up in the mornings! Barry or Cardiff!

Let's hope the December revamp of the timetable will sort out the access problems they have into Cardiff Central.

*R M Williams, senior technical officer, drawing office, planning and transportation division, the Vale of Glamorgan Council, Dock Office, Barry Dock, Barry CF63 4RT
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Political comment

I refer to the article in *Railwatch* 105 by John Barfield and Ray King about the late Richard MacQueen. The opening paragraph claims that he "helped to expose the harsh reality of life in Thatcherite Britain".

It is very important that *Railwatch* and Railfuture are seen to be politically independent and it is not the place for *Railwatch* to express or allow to be expressed political views other than when strictly related to transport policies.

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Editors' note: Railfuture does not support any one political party.

Editors' note: The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect Railfuture policies. Send your letters to The Editors, 4 Christchurch Square, London E9 7HU. Email: editor@railwatch.org.uk *Railwatch* also welcomes articles.



Letters Extra

are essential anyway to improve access to Stratford from many of London's suburbs:

1 Better links towards Stansted Airport are needed, with a new platform and loop at Tottenham Hale and loops providing extra route capacity along the Lea Valley line. The additional tunnel into Stansted airport would also be beneficial.

2 The Shenfield Line needs a five-minute interval metro service all day, at least to Romford and Gidea Park. Without Crossrail, this line must carry existing and extra passengers employed around Stratford, as well as many Olympic visitors. It needs its pre-Crossrail upgrade by 2012.

3 The East London Line phase one project should be completed by 2012, but it should also be extended to Finsbury Park, serving the new Arsenal stadium with a station near to Drayton Park. At Dalston, an eastern link towards Hackney must be reconstructed, so trains can run from Croydon, Clapham Junction or Crystal Palace through to Stratford.

4 The North London Line is a crucial alternative link between Stratford and Wembley, avoiding central London. Longer platforms and new signalling are planned but missing tracks removed in the 1970s need replacing so trains (including freight) can run about every five minutes.

5 Extending the North London Line north could provide a new commuter link from Walthamstow and Chingford (using the old Hall Farm curve trackbed) to Stratford City development, replacing erratic buses on congested roads. This could boost local regeneration, around both Lea Bridge station, closed 20 years ago, and another new station, Temple Mills, just north of the Olympic site.

6 Upgrading and electrification of London's Cinderella railway, the Gospel Oak to Barking Line is long overdue. This primarily improves local passenger services, but also adds crucial cross-London capacity from Shellhaven and Tilbury, essential during the Olympics so freight trains can avoid Stratford.

If the Government was to make a serious commitment to Crossrail, the rail industry should be able to deliver at least the core route linking Shenfield and Stratford to Central London and Heathrow in six years, in time for the Olympics.

Richard Pout, 105 Crouch Hill, London N8 9RD

'Overpaid' rail staff

It is about time public transport supporting organisations such as Railfuture began to recognise that the high cost of providing rail services is mainly due to the ruthless way that the rail unions RMT and Aslef have increased the pay of rail workers. To my mind Bob Crow is going to do to the railways what Arthur Scargill did for the miners. Train drivers over the past 10 years have increased their pay from receiving the average pay to being paid twice the national average.

J Berry, 252 Prescott Road, Aughton, Lancashire L39 5AQ

Rebuilding rail

Having just read Mr Duddridge's response to my letter in the latest edition of *Railwatch*, I believe he has not read my letter sufficiently carefully before responding.

Anyone reading his reply without having seen my letter would think I was advocating the reopening of the entire former line from Barnstaple to Taunton.

The fourth paragraph of my letter makes it clear I am not. I agreed with Mr Duddridge's earlier comment that the eastern end of the line served a small and sparse population and could not be justified for reopening. My fifth paragraph states what I was suggesting, something which, inter alia, would incorporate a link between Tiverton and the main line, a proposal which Mr Duddridge would appear to support.

He states that my suggestion would require the rebuilding of the Filleigh and Waterrow viaducts. True comment about the former, but the latter was between Venn Cross and Wiveliscombe, on the part of the line which my letter rejects for reopening.

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Gerard Duddridge responds: In agreement with neighbouring Severnside branch, Railfuture Devon and Cornwall has never promoted the reopening of the Barnstaple-Taunton line. This includes the option of running from Dulverton to Taunton via Tiverton (a route which has largely disappeared).

Both options are discussed in our March 2000 Rail Strategy, which can be obtained from the British Library. This work followed trackbed surveys, population studies, computer modelling of potential train speeds and a review of buses and roads in the area. We continue to update our knowledge of the routes by using Ordnance Survey maps, air photographs and the latest population data.

The subject of reopening was raised at our committee meeting on Saturday 22 October 2005, but no one wished to support either route from Dulverton. The population of the whole area is too small and too much track would need to be restored. If we are to change our policy, then we need to see the data and reports that Mr Shelton considers would justify reopening.

Olympic gold?

The 2012 Olympics has stimulated transport planners to promote sustainable access with rail travel.

To make sure there is sufficient rail capacity, the Olympics could be the springboard for several more local rail schemes not in the present Olympic Transport Plan. These local rail schemes

It's time for action

Railfuture relies on volunteers for campaigning.

Here are some ideas for members if they want to take action themselves:

1 Find out if your local station needs adopting. Some train operators run such schemes. You can find contact details for train operators and maps showing which operators are in your area at http://www.nationalrail.co.uk/tocs_maps/

2 Give a relative a rail card or rail vouchers for Christmas. They can be bought from any staffed station.

3 Web surfers: Find pro-motorist sites and contribute to the debate. One of them is <http://www.abd.org.uk>



4 If you know a good cafe near a rail station, nominate it to Railtuck. <http://www.railtuck.co.uk/>

5 Find out when your next Railfuture branch meeting is and try to attend it. Details of many events are at <http://www.railfuture.org.uk/tiki-index.php?page=Events>

6 If you attend a Railfuture branch meeting, try to think of a job that needs doing and volunteer to do it.

Railfuture campaigns and freedom of expression

Railwatch tries to provide a platform for pro-rail campaigners, partly as a way of contradicting the largely pro-road agenda of the mainstream media.

Radio, TV, newspapers and magazines are dependent on their existence for advert revenue from car manufacturers – and susceptible to pressure from those quarters.

Railwatch is published by Railfuture but is not a propaganda sheet for the rail industry. We give a voice to the rail passenger who is often ignored by train operators, local authorities and the Government.

But even among rail campaigners, there is sometimes disagreement about the best way forward.

For example, more than 10 years ago, campaigners were reluctant to discuss in public the alternative Crossrail schemes for Lon-

don because it was deemed not a good idea to upset the appletart when Crossrail was on the verge of being given the go-ahead by the Government.

The go-ahead did not come and discussions about which is the best Crossrail scheme continue.

Individuals have to make their own decisions about how they campaign for their pet schemes but it is good to remember that what they say may cut across other rail campaigners' agendas.

Railwatch does not censor honestly held views and will not be pressured to jump on any one particular hobby horse. We support Railfuture's official policies and provide a forum to debate conflicting campaigns.

We are always looking for articles. If you feel strongly on an issue, we welcome letters and articles for publication.