

Your letters



A good link

The new service from Peterborough to London Liverpool Street (*Railwatch* 108) provides a potentially easier and quicker link for people to travel from the North and Midlands to Suffolk and Essex without going through London.

However two-hour gaps between trains are too much and can lead to lengthy waits at Peterborough or Ely if connections are missed.

The service is also poorly marketed, possibly because of a lack of liaison between train operators.

Table 26 of the timetable includes Cambridge and Norwich but does not include Colchester and Ipswich where the trains also call.

JH Asquith, 24 Links Road, Romiley, Stockport SK6 4HU

Editors' note: Overall journey time from Peterborough to Colchester on the new ONE service is 30 to 40 minutes quicker than going via London.

Electrify now

Petrol prices are at record highs and as a result BP made half-year profits of £6billion. BP has been accused of contributing to global warming and not paying enough attention to solving the problem.

With this in mind, is not this a golden opportunity to invest more in the railway network, especially electrification?

With the future of oil supplies in doubt, there are many rail routes that should now be electrified.

The British Railways plans of the late 1950s and early 1960s did not include electrification of the Great Western or Midland main lines but times have changed, with a vast increase in road traffic and aviation which was probably not anticipated at the time.

The following are also now top priority for electrification: Crewe-Holyhead, Edinburgh-Aberdeen, Reading-Redhill (for Gatwick), Gospel Oak-Barking.

Reopening disused rail lines – like the East West route and Central

Railway proposal – is also a positive way to deal with global warming. Road and air transport are the greatest causes of global warming and living under the Heathrow flightpath I suffer many of the other disadvantages of these modes.

Increasing levels of road traffic have also seriously damaged the value of nearby Richmond Park.

Car-bound visitors to Kew Gardens also cause major pollution and congestion problems, often parking in neighbouring residential roads.

Simon Barber, 8 Hilditch House, Kingsmead, Richmond, Surrey TW10 6HA

Railway bible

As someone who in the 1980s and 1990s used to travel extensively around the whole of Britain by train with a copy of the all-line timetable in my bag, I really appreciated the reduction in size and weight when its format was reduced from A4 (or equivalent) to A5.

Therefore reading John Ginns, suggestion that the National Rail timetable could be improved by using “larger print and the larger format this would entail” in his article “Our railway bible” in *Railwatch* 108 bought a wry smile to my face as I thought of the additional strain this would impose on my arms and shoulders if I was still travelling in the same manner today.

Maybe there is some advantage in my being short-sighted after all.

*Christopher Coward, High Wycombe
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I need timetable

I'm sorry to learn that the National Rail Timetable might be available only on the internet in future (*Railwatch* 108). Not everyone has a computer, let alone internet access, and this would therefore discriminate against non-web users.

Perhaps few buy the “All Lines” these days, but many more – including myself – use it at their local library. I find it easier to skip through its pages than checking electronic sites, with no risk that computer failure might find you

being unable to get the times you require.

*Tim Mickleburgh, 33 Littlefield Lane, Grimsby DN31 2AZ
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High speed

I have seen the fantastic effect the French TGV system has had, not least on undermining the domestic routes on that most environmentally damaging form of transport – aviation.

My natural inclination therefore is to be pro-high speed line (*Railwatch* 108). Indeed anything which would reduce the nonsensical spread of domestic air routes in this country would be welcome. But having said that the reality of politicians with their short-termism and apparent lack of interest in our railways (despite the obvious success of the Larkhall extension *Railwatch* 108) suggests a high-speed line is years away. My own preference, therefore, would be to upgrade the present routes, especially the East Coast main line – and for simplicity and weight reasons to use non-tilting trains.

For a modest outlay, the various remaining East Coast main line level crossings could, and as a matter of safety and urgency should, be replaced by overbridges. The Hitchin flyover should be put in for the same reasons, before new housing further erodes that possibility, and capacity could be increased at Welwyn by the simple expedient of moving Welwyn North station northwards towards the built-up area of Woolmer Green, having first re-instated the four-track section to the North Tunnel's northern extremity.

With energy prices on the rise and likely to continue so, the additional weight, small as it may be, incurred by the recent fad for armchair-style seating with seat backs so high that the whole carriage becomes a claustrophobic experience instead of a light and airy one, should be reversed to the style of the much-loved British Rail high-speed train.

None of this would preclude an eventual high-speed line, but if meanwhile the good sense prevails such that aviation fuel is taxed (why shouldn't it be?) and aviation's serious environmental climate change impact is recognised, then maybe we could expect the balance to tip back towards rail at least for those journeys up to 400 miles, providing the Department for Transport's unhelpful altitude (p.2 of the same issue) doesn't prevail.

John Davis, 41 Fairmead Avenue, Harpenden, Herts AL5 5UD

International traffic

I read Alan Crowhurst's letter (*Railwatch* 108) with interest. I grant you that Polish lorry drivers earn less, but I wouldn't make too much of the lower fuel costs. This has

been a constant theme of the propaganda campaign by road haulage, and remarkably successful it has been in convincing the one person who matters, the Chancellor.

Polish lorry drivers will still have to pay road tolls on motorways in some countries, including France, even if they get it for nothing in Britain. No, the advantages are not so much economic. It is the problem of barriers. While lorries can pass freely over the territory of the European Union, trains cannot.

In some countries, and here our nearest neighbour is a bad offender, freight trains face horrendous red tape. It is a lot easier in Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany.

Things are slowly improving, however. EWS, under its European hat of ECR, has been making steady inroads into the French market. It has proved much more responsive to the needs of the market than the rather sluggish Fret SNCF, the national provider. Given the state of the railways in Eastern Europe after 50 years of Soviet rule, Mr Crowhurst may have to wait sometime to see Polish railway wagons.

David G Guild, 53 Grange Road, Edinburgh EH9 1TX

Harrogate line

The report of the Harrogate Line Users' Group in Railfuture's Yorkshire Rail Review 2005 presents an optimistic forecast for developments on the Leeds-Harrogate line.

It is therefore disappointing that the latest update from Burford, whose Horsforth Woodside development scheme endeavours to facilitate the provision of a new railway station at this site, reports that a recently released Metro study casts doubt on the viability of a station at Woodside.

The density of traffic on neighbouring main roads, together with on-street parking by commuters with its attendant inconvenience to residents and through traffic in the area of the present Horsforth station, must emphasise the need for an additional station for those wishing to use the railway between Horsforth and Leeds city centre.

Burford are to be applauded for reserving land within their scheme and for their efforts generally to promote and facilitate the provision of a station and car-park.

It is hoped Metro and the appropriate train operator will be able to take advantage of this opportunity.

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Fare carve-up

Restrictions are being placed by First Capital Connect and Midland Mainline on the times of return journeys for holders of the cheaper tickets from London for travel to Bedford from Monday to Friday.

This appears to apply only to the Midland main line so ignores other services, for example, to Cambridge. Why is this? Are the companies trying to drive customers away from the trains to their cars? Can Railfuture challenge this ruling and ensure a change of heart by the companies.

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Free travel

Tim Mickleburgh asks in his letter (*Railwatch* 108) if free bus travel for pensioners will be detrimental to rail. In my case the reverse is true.

There are no realistic bus alternatives to East Grinstead's only railway direct to London, while to reach the coast and most of inland Kent and Sussex by public transport without changing buses and taking two hours or more, it is necessary to take the bus to Tunbridge Wells, Three Bridges or Haywards Heath and then go by train. The advent of free bus travel has seen me undertaking such journeys more often than I would otherwise have done, sometimes even travelling by train before I can use my senior railcard, uncomplainingly paying full fare because I am saving so much on bus travel.

My impression locally is that pass-holders, though using the buses more, are not doing so in significantly greater numbers, nor is there a perceptible decrease in the number of them travelling by train.

*MJ Leppard, 20 St George's Court,
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Lavatories

Perhaps a scheme for local authorities to fund, in whole or part, toilet facilities at all railway stations, with supervision by rail staff where stations are manned might be a worthwhile subject for a campaign.

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Noise plea

I am trying to tackle a fiendishly complicated problem in my West Central constituency concerning noisy tube station announcements and I am wondering if this is an issue for Londoners beyond my own patch. Let me explain:

For nearly a year now I have been struggling, along with local councillors, to find a solution to noisy station announcements coming out of the PA system at Earls Court Underground Station. There seems to be a similar problem at Putney Bridge, which is also in my constituency.

Both stations have just undergone refurbishment and sit in the middle of residential areas. The noise problem seems to have got worse since these refurbishments, and despite endless attempts at resetting the volume controls at Earls Court, residents are experiencing what amounts to noise torture.

The situation is compounded by Health and Safety rules which apparently require endless an-



Fifty years ago this train was introduced to America by General Motors. But the Aerotrain and its principles of design were passed over. Why? Was it running ahead of schedule?

The Aerotrain was revolutionary in concept but built of well-proved components and aimed at making passenger business profitable. Only three were ever built, and two survive in American train museums.

An Aerotrain for the future?

If Japanese researchers get their way, trains will fly. They are hoping to take advantage of the effects of wind that both lift a moving object and drag it backwards, the same effect as what happens to your hand when you put it out of

the train window. The Japanese Aerotrain looks like an plane, with wings at both ends of its 25ft frame. By shaping the wings, scientists hope to use the wind like a cushion to support the train just a few inches off the ground as it speeds through a special concrete corridor.

Stabilising fins are designed to keep it from bouncing off the walls. Prototypes of these floating trains now reach speeds of up to 180 miles per hour. Using solar energy and wind turbines, researchers hope to achieve almost double that speed by the time the Aerotrain is ready for mass production.

Information from the living on earth website <http://tinyurl.com/od6t3>

ouncements well into the night, and in the early hours of the morning too.

The failure of both London Underground and local environmental health officers to find a solution has proved so frustrating that both the Mayor, Mr Livingstone, and his London Underground chief, Tim O'Toole, have agreed to visit Earls Court station with me, to witness the problem first-hand, and to discuss ways of tackling it. This should happen in the next couple of months.

I would however welcome the chance to hear from any readers who have had similar experiences of abnormally loud systems, in

order that I may enlighten the Mayor as to the extent of this problem, and to seek out a solution.

If you have been affected by excessive noise pollution from station announcements, feel free to email me the details at the address shown, or write to me at City Hall.

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Editors' note: To put this into context, the Conservatives in London are campaigning against the Congestion Charge which has done so much to improve London's quality of life as well as led to improvements in the bus service.

Joint tickets

In the article about International Tickets (*Railwatch* 108) joint Eurostar-ScotRail through tickets and a potential joint Eurostar-Southern ticket are mentioned.

However, rather than isolated, and presumably operator-specific, ticket options, international rail travel-

lers would surely be much better served by full integration of Eurostar ticketing with the National Rail ticketing system, so that buying a ticket to Paris or Brussels from any UK station is as straightforward as buying a ticket to London.

Such a system should also allow passengers the same flexibility with respect to connections that is taken for granted when travelling on the domestic railway; that is, a passenger should not be penalized for joining a Eurostar train at London, and leaving at Ashford International on the return.

This will become particularly important when the Channel Tunnel rail link is opened, with the increased Eurostar stops on the UK side. Unfortunately, Eurostar seems so wedded to the idea that it is an airline without wings that such a common-sense idea is probably as likely as pigs with wings.

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Editors' note: The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect Railfuture policies.

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