

# How we saved our Sleepers

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The struggle to save the Paddington-Penzance sleeper service was the highest-profile rail campaign in recent years, Stuart Walker and Andy Roden told the Raifuture campaigners conference at Stoke-on-Trent.

The SOS website generated 3,000 plus online signatories, about the same number, we were told, as those who opposed Jeremy Clarkson getting an honorary doctorate! However, off-line ways of signing the petition were also used. Campaigners should not assume that everyone has a computer.

Coverage of the campaign was obtained from all regional newspapers, radio, TV and national newspapers.

There was a conscious attempt to generate news stories and "milestones" – for example, when reaching 500 and then 1,000 signatures.

Much use was also made of press releases. Tip: Keep them short.

The Government was challenged over the sleeper service costs and revenues. SoS suggested that the service was probably breaking even, or close to it.

By contrast, the Government even argued that withdrawing the sleeper would be good for Cornwall!

The importance of the sleeper is demonstrated by the fact that the earliest daytime arrival in Penzance from London is 13.23. In the reverse direction, the earliest Saturday arrival in London is 12.05.

It is true that there is an air service, but it only serves Newquay, but the airport there is affected by fog, and is also under threat of closure.

There is no high-speed railway in Devon and Cornwall and line speeds reduce dramatically west of Exeter.

Stuart and Andrew argued that it is essential to get support from politicians and celebrities.

In response to questions from the floor, it was said that:

Sleeper patronage is higher than before the campaign. Publicity has generated demand.

Before the campaign, marketing of the sleeper service was poor. First Great Western is doing a bit more now.

Lack of shower facilities in the coaches is still an issue.

The voluntary sector must fight for things that have a credible case.

We should aim for reasoned argument expressed eloquently.

It was also suggested that there is demand from people wanting to get to Cornwall and London from

other places, but there are no sleepers. Another asked: "Can we have an East Coast sleeper back?"

We were also reminded that a "temporary" diversion of East Coast sleepers to Euston became a permanent withdrawal.

## Rural revival

Stuart Walker joined forces with Ruth Annison to talk about reviving rural railways

He argued that it is important to "brand" rural railways to give them an identity, and to encourage people to use them.

He said Cornwall is the second most deprived county in the UK, with 90% of Cornish firms employing fewer than 10 people

The West Country branch lines have seen a significant rise in patronage since 2001, with Looe up 16%, St Ives line up 25%, the North Devon line up 26% and the Newquay line up 40%.

St Ives station handles 213,000 passengers per year, which makes an interesting comparison with a commuter station like Lichfield City which copes with 183,000 per year and has the benefit of electric trains.

Raifuture's suggestions to improve services with the new Great Western franchise were not taken forward by Department for Transport and First Group.

Connections at junction stations are likely to be worse in the new franchise than at present, and there will be substantial cuts in calls at some main line stations.

Raifuture chairman Mike Crowhurst presented Stuart with a certificate honouring his voluntary service as a rail campaigner.

Other speakers at the Stoke conference included:

Caspar Lucas of JPM Parry and Associates who spoke of the achievement in running the first regular Sunday service on the Stourbridge branch since 1915 with a Parry Peoplemover.

Manuel Cortes of the TSSA rail union who said the TSSA wanted an end to fragmentation, not by creating another version of British Rail but through a new form of publicly accountable organisation.

Most TSSA members favour re-nationalisation, although not all. The TSSA solution is for the Government to take back the franchises into public hands as their time runs out – thus avoiding large increases in cost to the taxpayer.

Raifuture member Graham Nally called for a network of high-speed rail lines to serve city centres, particularly those with over 1million population.

# Return of Dick Turpin

By Andy Cullum  
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Remember the stories of The Highwayman? Legend has it that a certain notorious man rode from London to York on the Great North Road, robbing those who dared use the stagecoaches in the 18th century.

Today it seems that this trend has continued, as influential men in York at the GNER headquarters insist that if we travel on public transport we must give up more of our money.

Today in the 21st century, travelling on the Great North Road (now known less romantically as the A1) can be much more stressful than in the days of Dick Turpin when you could have taken a stagecoach.

Many a wise traveller knows there is a better option – take the train! A company like GNER would certainly have us believe that this is the best method in today's modern world and I like many others agree that in theory this is true.

Let me take you back to the latter part of 2004. It was franchise renewal time on the East Coast main line.

GNER was being pro-active trying to encourage its loyal passengers to support their "Back Our Bid" campaign.

In fact it was so successful it won a Chartered Institute of Public Relations award for the strength of its campaign.

It claims 30,000 people supported its bid to win the franchise for another 10 years. I was one of them and I was pleased that GNER won the bid.

From 1 May last year GNER began a new era in providing rail services on the East Coast main line.

Meanwhile, a Dick Turpin style Great North Eastern management team based in York were preparing for the "Get off the Highway Robbery".

Suddenly on 16 June this year GNER placed leaflets on the wind-screens of cars using its station car parks. Peterborough station was one of them. I arrived back at my

## COMPARISONS

**Overnight the price of car parking at Peterborough went up from £5 to £10 in July.**

**The local council at Peterborough charges £10-£15 a day in its car parks.**

**But daily parking costs £6 at the First Capital Connect stations at Cambridge and Bedford.**

**In Birmingham there are 46 stations where parking is free and six where there are charges. At Dudley station daily parking costs 30p.**

**Of course in Birmingham a public body, the West Midlands Passenger Transport Executive, has responsibility for transport provision.**

**But the West Midlands also has high levels of car use.**

car like many other commuters to learn that a huge price increase was imminent in just over two weeks.

From 3 July commuters and rail travellers, including the loyal 30,000 passengers who had supported its bid, were to be asked to pay up to 100% more money to park at GNER stations.

They might as well have said "Park and deliver if you want to use our trains!" I like many other commuters was outraged to learn that GNER was prepared to "slap us in the face" with such a huge price increase.

At my station – Peterborough – we were to be affected by an imposed increase of 82%.

I knew that when I next renewed my annual season ticket I would have to pay an additional £486 taking the car parking renewal from £594 to £1,080, but for those who pay daily it had increased from £5.50 to £10. This was the story up and down the ECML includ-

ing Doncaster where the full 100% doubling of prices took effect.

In all, eight of the 10 GNER stations were affected.

How unfortunate that unlike train fares, car parking is not regulated by the Department for Transport. In my commute, I travel regularly with colleagues and friends from Peterborough as well as other places such as Retford and Leeds.

This increase was going to hurt everyone, not just me, so now I was moved to act.

In Peterborough the local newspaper had started a campaign called "The Great Train Parking Robbery" and I intended to join it.

For several mornings I arrived at Peterborough station around 6.00am to encourage passengers to sign a petition indicating their objections to the car parking increases.

I was overwhelmed by the support from the public.

During the morning commuter rush I had people queuing up waiting to sign.

In total 1,044 signatures were received in conjunction with the *Peterborough Evening Telegraph*.

The level of support at Peterborough was equivalent to 3.5% of the public that had supported GNER's "Back Our Bid" campaign.

Had we known then what was coming after the franchise renewal we might not have supported the bid as strongly as we did!

The petition was presented to GNER on 30 June at King's Cross station by the leader of Peterborough City Council John Peach.

On Thursday 6 July I joined Shailesh Vara, MP for North West Cambridgeshire, and Andrew from the Peterborough Evening Telegraph to present a copy of the petition to Downing Street.

I also submitted a letter to Douglas Alexander – Secretary of State for Transport.

On 30 June Douglas Alexander delivered a speech at the *Future of Rail* conference where he stressed the



**ANOTHER KIND OF PARKING:** Bicycles near the rail station in Malmö, Sweden.

**If more people went to British rail stations by bike, it would ease overall road congestion and pollution problems.**

**The cost of providing cycle parking is a fraction of that required for cars. Network Rail and train operators have made some progress in providing cycle parking at stations.**

**At Finsbury Park, London's biggest staffed cycle park opened in May. The new cycle park**

importance of the environment: "The third challenge is perhaps the most important long term challenge we all face.

"Tackling climate change by reducing carbon emissions as well as offering people more and better sustainable ways to travel.

"The rail industry must play its part in lowering carbon emissions."

In accordance with Douglas Alexander's call, the Government would surely want to encourage us to get out of our cars and use the trains, wouldn't they? How-

ever, when I received a response from the Department for Transport the following was confirmed: "During the bidding process GNER informed the Department of a proposal to increase car park charges."

Therefore the Government knew of proposed car parking increases GNER intended to enforce on the travelling public once the franchise renewal period had started.

Collectively the DfT and GNER have endorsed a "swift nick!" discouraging us from taking advan-

**was set up by Transport for London to enable people to leave their bicycles in secure and weather-proof surroundings and continue their journeys by bus, rail or Tube.**

**The bike park was a pilot project, but also part of TfL's £10million interchange project for Finsbury Park.**

**There is room for 24-hour parking for 125 bicycles, using a new smart card lock system that TfL is piloting at the facility.**

Picture: Konstantin Klyagin <http://thekonst.net/>

tage of the GNER car parks and use the trains – a greener form of transport. Travellers in Durham now have to pay more to park in a GNER car park than it costs to travel by train to Newcastle!

The Great North Eastern "Get off the Highway Robbery" may have been contrived by men in York, but many may be tempted to look out for an alternative to station parking. The successors to the stagecoach are the private car and coach. Only they will benefit from GNER's robbing tactics.

## REGULATION:

**Campaigner Andrew Long warned: "Car parking charges are outside the 'basket' of regulated fares and charges defined at privatisation. Train operators can in theory charge what they like, based on supply and demand and to maximise revenue. GNER are doing what First Capital Connect**

**have done with cheap fare restrictions on Thameslink and Great Northern.**

**"Given GNER's heroic 'premium payment' profile for the new East Coast main line franchise, we could justifiably ask: Is this the new face of the rail industry now that the Department for Transport has taken over from the Strategic Rail Authority?"**

**WATCHDOG: Eleven weeks after GNER put up its parking charges, statutory watchdog Passenger Focus announced it was asking Transport Secretary Douglas Alexander to intervene.**

**It said car parking should be a fundamental part of encouraging people to use the railways. Passenger Focus chief executive**

**Anthony Smith said: "We are concerned other operators will enforce similar increases, further putting a squeeze on passengers' pockets. How can this possibly be in the passenger interest?"**

**In August the DfT's franchise manager for GNER Nicola Wood reportedly said there were no plans to regulate car parking.**

**AMERICA: Building work started in July on a new station with 3,200 car parking spaces on Rhode Island in New England. The £120million Warwick Intermodal will allow passengers to hire cars, take the bus, or take a travelator link to nearby T F Green Airport. The station will be served by trains**

**from Boston when it opens in three years time but developers are hoping to find the £50million needed to provide for Amtrak intercity trains to stop too. "Air-rail facilities are vital not just for people making air-rail connections, but also for Amtrak passengers renting cars," said rail campaigner Ross Capon.**