

# Your letters



## Face the facts

In *Railwatch* 109, Peter Rayner cites the road lobby argument that rail accounts for 40% of the transport budget, but only carries 6% of the traffic.

The road lobby would be ill-advised to pursue this line of argument. A 44-tonne lorry causes 6,500 times more damage to the roads than a private car, but does not pay 6,500 times more tax. Road freight does however emit far more greenhouse gas per tonne-mile than does rail freight, and with growing evidence of climate change, this is rapidly becoming the biggest single concern.

In fact, the entire road-based goods distribution system is underwritten by taxpayers.

If it were not, and roads had to be paid for on a commercial basis, there would be much less long-distance movement of goods by road, and far more by rail, the true economic costs of which are much lower.

There would also be less movement of goods in general, especially low value-added products.

The external costs of road transport are also enormous. Even though they mostly lie outside them, motorways and trunk roads (designed, of course for cars as well as lorries) have triggered a restructuring of land use patterns inside our urban areas, so that more motorised travel is needed within them.

By contrast, railways tend to concentrate land uses within walkable distances of stations, making car use less essential.

It is interesting to note that in the 1960s, the US government actually pressed that country's Postal Service to transfer traffic from the railroads, which were private sector businesses, to the publicly funded highway network.

More recently, the UK Post Office also transferred most of its business from private rail firm EWS to the UK taxpayers' roads. So much for the idea that "private" road transport is somehow paying its way!

Philip Bisatt, 3 Ilford Court, Taunton, Somerset TA1 4JT  
philip@brackenedge.wanadoo.co.uk

## Political quiz

Great questions for the politicians in *Railwatch* 109. Please publish a follow-up with the responses. I suspect they may be disappointing but at the end of the day all the parties are trying to win votes and should be making an effort.

Would it be worth emphasising the carbon footprint benefits more forcefully in some of your arguments for rail solutions?

Ruth Coman, Pinner, Middx  
r.coman@virgin.net

## East West rail

By concentrating on the issue of the rowing lake on the route of East-West rail, we are allowing another issue to slip under the fence.

In approving the construction of this lake, Bedford planners have unwittingly (we'll give them the benefit of the doubt) strengthened the case for not keeping existing railway land through the town for railway use.

Rail travellers have already seen the old line to Hitchin filled with housing, near the old St Johns station site. If housing (or anything else) is built on that site then any opportunity to route the East West line through the centre of Bedford will be gone for good.

Glen Dersley, 4 Castle Acre, Monkston, Milton Keynes, Bucks MK10 9HS  
dersleyglen@yahoo.co.uk

## Petition ignored

As a member of Railfuture I am angry that the Railfuture petition against the rowing lake at Willington, Bedfordshire (which blocks the East-West rail route) was not presented.

I signed the petition as did mem-

## Send your letters to:

The Editors, 4 Christchurch Square, London E9 7HU.

Email: editor@railwatch.org.uk

Railwatch also welcomes articles.

bers of my family and friends. Why was the petition not presented?

Paul Aitken, 352 Kingsbridge Drive, Glasgow G73 2BX

**Editors' note: Council officials were said to have told the councillors what the petition said**

## Bedford alternative

The old East-West rail route has been blocked in other places.

In Bedford, the new Rope Walk will be very difficult for a rail line to cross.

The East-West rail consortium has already suggested that a new line could be built from Bedford to Cambridge but using a different route. The East Coast main line is already full so cannot cope with any more trains. It will therefore be necessary to build a flyover to avoid conflict with this line.

The will exists to build the line but it is not practical to use the old alignment. It will have to diverge from the Midland main line further south and rejoin an existing line to Cambridge.

I feel this is the most practical solution. All that is needed is to persuade all the parties that it is a good idea to have this line built as soon as possible. The cost will be considerable as new land will need to be purchased as well as the price of the infrastructure.

I note your wish for a new line from Bedford to Northampton. That will be even more difficult. Has anyone done any survey for that route? I feel the line can go around new housing but there are still many obstacles to overcome.

There remains a further problem and that is the way the railways have been left by the governments since privatisation. They seem to be in a muddled state.

How can we go back to a system where they were held at arms length from the Government by the British Rail Board? The Department for Transport now seems to be running the railways but I would question the way they are doing it.

They are trying to run franchises but it costs a lot more than before and they seem inconsistent, with some franchises being able to be amended but others not. What is to happen to companies that hit financial troubles?

Mr William S Knights, 35 Plover Way Brickhill, Bedford MK41 7HU

## Anti-rail? Not me

Bedfordshire on Sunday has supported the lake and country park. It seems a very good and environmentally friendly way to transform a quarry site. It could also bring financial benefit, if built in time for the London Olympics.

I have never opposed the rail link, although it is unlikely that it will happen east of Bedford in the next

20 years, and I certainly do not believe we should stand still on the off-chance.

The two could of course co-exist. You do not have to go under it, over it, or through it, just by the side of it. The proposed new town of Wixams, to the south-west of Bedford, will need a railway station.

Steve Lowe, editor, Bedfordshire on Sunday, 22 Mill Street, Bedford

MK40 3HD

steve.lowe@lsnmedia.co.uk

## Station for Ilkeston

Since 2000 there has been talk of a train station for Ilkeston but this has never happened. I can find limited information on this. In a local paper I found that the project had been approved around 2000 and again in 2003 but then nothing!

Ilkeston is the only town of its size in the East Midlands not to have a station. The main line from Nottingham to Sheffield runs right through the town and a number of sites could be used for a station, yet no station for us.

Why is there no station in Ilkeston? There are many people in Ilkeston who would like a station more than a Tesco store.

Simon Taylor  
taylor5@tiscali.co.uk

## Rail user group

Guildford's Conservative MP Anne Milton is planning to help in setting up a rail user group in her (marginal) constituency, although I would prefer it would be a transport users group, so as to include public transport in general. A public meeting may be organised for February. Anyone interested is invited to send me either an email or a stamped addressed envelope in order to receive details.

H Trevor Jones, 67 Guildford Park Avenue, Guildford, GU2 7NH  
htjones@raildev.fsnet.co.uk

## Noisy trains

There is real concern about the environmental impact of railways. I live by the Metropolitan line. The "A" stock, due to the nature of its construction, is a very noisy train, inside and out.

It is good that the frequency has increased on the line, also that the trains will run later into the night at weekends. But for us this does mean greater noise pollution.

Likewise, the public address announcements at my local station can just about be heard from our house. I am concerned that the now almost constant use of announcements in central area stations will spread out to the suburbs as stations are refurbished.

David Burnell  
david@burnell31.demon.co.uk

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