



East Anglia

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Cambridge station

The guest speaker at the branch meeting in Cambridge in December was Larry Heyman from First Capital Connect.

FCC and ONE have agreed to London Underground-style ticket gates at Cambridge station.

This may create problems for customers trying to get to the Trainseurope international ticket office on Platform 4.

The branch is hoping Network Rail's recent announcement of approximately £750million profits may mean some investment in East Anglia such as:

- Passing loop at Beccles on East

Suffolk line to permit hourly Ipswich-Lowestoft services.

- Level crossing and new platform at Sheringham adjacent to North Norfolk Railway heritage line to allow through running.

- Reinstating double track between Littleport-Downham Market and Watlington-Kings Lynn on Ely-Kings Lynn line.

- Flyover at Hitchin to eliminate bottleneck/speed restriction at Cambridge Junction, will hopefully include a north-facing connection (electrified please) as part of future East-West rail link.

It was reported Cambridgeshire County Council is considering disbanding its Rail Policy Group, proof that the bus lobby has the local authority by the throat.

Railfuture member, the East Suffolk Travellers' Association, has published the results of its month-long survey of train and bus journeys.

Members were asked to complete a questionnaire giving good and bad points of local journeys made during August.

The results show an improvement in punctuality on both trains and buses and considerable praise is given to on-board train staff. But among the criticisms were the poor state of Beccles station, lack of ticket inspections south of Ipswich and non-availability of catering services.

Interestingly, 14% of train passengers arrived at the station by bus and 13% of bus passengers continued their journeys by train. Train and bus operators have often told us in the past that they serve different markets and very few of their customers change from one mode to another.

Even with the less than convenient connections at certain stations, the survey still shows a significant

number of people who want to do so. The *Eastern Daily Press* reported that a campaign to introduce hourly rail services between Lowestoft and London received a boost after a company employed to regenerate the Suffolk town threw its weight behind the ambitious plans. 1st East Urban Regeneration Company has pledged to lobby the Government in a bid to raise the £3million needed to get more regular services to the capital.

Sevenside

By Nigel Bray
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Steam link

First Great Western ran one of its diesel multiple unit trains through to Bishops Lydeard on the largely steam West Somerset Railway in connection with a gala day on 7 October. This follows resignalling of the junction at Norton Fitzwarren



Railfuture president Peter Lawrence got himself in the picture at Lowestoft station in September when Waveney Youth Tigers were presented with a new football strip, featuring the Wherry Lines logo.

The under-nine team plays in the Norfolk and Suffolk youth football league. Peter, second from the right, is chairman

of the Wherry Lines Community Rail Partnership which promotes the train services between Norwich, Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft which are operated by ONE Railway.

Peter Lawrence commented: "We were impressed by the commitment and work that Waveney Youth does with youngsters in the area and we

are delighted to sponsor their Under 9 Tigers."

The Tigers' team manager Gary Phillips, pictured right, added: "We are very grateful to the Wherry Lines for their sponsorship which has provided the team with a brand new kit and training jackets."

Picture: ONE Railway



to permit regular passenger trains between WSR and the national network. We understand FGW is considering running through to Bishop's Lydeard on certain weekends in 2007. The branch would like to see a daily service of trains over the WSR from Minehead into Taunton station but we are pleased to have reached an important milestone, thanks largely to years of campaigning by our co-chairman John Walker.

Looking ahead

The branch held an open meeting at Gloucester Leisure Centre in October entitled Developing Gloucestershire's Railways. The speakers were Mike Obst of Gloucestershire County Council and Andrew Griffiths of FGW. Among those who attended was David Drew, MP for Stroud. Railfuture's Nigel Bray was interviewed on Severn Sound.

Mike Obst summarised the position of each rail route in the county and improvements the council would like to see. Network Rail had started work on a feasibility study into reinstating double track between Kemble and Swindon, the diversionary route between London and South Wales whenever the Severn Tunnel, now operating at 90% capacity, is closed. He also described the council's aspirations for the new Cross Country Franchise and the planning process for the proposed Gloucestershire Parkway station. Tight performance margins were likely to prevent Virgin Voyager trains from calling at both Parkway and Cheltenham but the county council wants the Cardiff-Nottingham and FGW London services to serve all three major stations, Gloucester Central, Parkway and Cheltenham. Plans for a freight terminal at Sharpness Docks are making good progress.

Andrew Griffiths explained that the Greater Western franchise had been specified by the Department for Transport with maximum as well as minimum service levels on each route. He said that about half the 40 key issues raised by the FGW's consultation on its December timetable had been resolved by reshuffling resources without additional financial support, but others, including the timing of the early morning local train from Bristol to Gloucester, could not be improved for the time being.

During the 10 year life of the franchise FGW is required to pay £1 billion to the Government and will invest £200 million to improve performance and revenue. Improvements are planned for passenger facilities and customer information systems at Cheltenham and Gloucester. One hundred additional parking spaces and a help point would be provided at Kemble. Measures to improve performance include a new maintenance depot at Bristol to do work currently done at Cardiff.

Bristol campaign

The Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways have launched a half hour train campaign targeting Bristol City Council as a prospective funder.

Some local railway issues are described on these three websites:
www.fosbr.org.uk
www.savethetrain.org.uk
www.saveseverntunnel.co.uk

Coastway

By Dick Tyler

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Following a suggestion from the publicity officer of sister organisation Bexhill Rail Action Group to Bob Turner-Horton of Southern, trains to London will now carry an advertisement over the public address system advertising the Pricebuster ticket. This is an off-peak offer locally for £12.50 travel to London, compared to the full price of over £30. Pricebusters are also available from other Southern stations costing £6.50, £8.50 or £10.50 depending on where the station is.

Devon and Cornwall

By Gerard Duddridge

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First Great Western

Since the *Railwatch* 108 report there have been further improvements to First Great Western's December 2006 timetable. For example there are some reasonable connections at Castle Cary for journeys to and from the west of England and Weymouth. However, some problems remain unresolved, and overall the new timetable represents a step backwards for rail users.

The new early morning Paignton to Paddington via Bristol train will take over the path of a Paignton to Exmouth commuter service. Journeys to Exeter Central and beyond will be longer and less convenient. The train is well used by Exeter College students and Exeter's local newspaper (*Express* and *Echo*) has run a campaign to retain the train.

Some additional Newton Abbot to Plymouth (and Gunnislake) trains mean that Ivybridge will lose fewer trains than feared. However, the last service from the Newton Abbot direction will arrive in Ivybridge at 17.58 compared to 17.49, 18.52 and 21.52.

Gaps remain in the timetable for Saltash and St Germans. For example the six morning westbound trains from Saltash are reduced to three. Two will run close together at 08.06 (Newquay) and 08.25 (Penzance) and then there will be a four-hour gap until 12.52.

Exeter and Barnstaple services will drop from 12 to 11 each way, but at least the timetable is better than that first proposed. The morning arrival at Exeter Central will be at 08.18 rather than the 07.50 proposed by the Department for Transport. As

at present there will be a choice of evening departures from Exeter to intermediate stations such as Yeoford and Copplestone, rather than the one train proposed by the DfT. Thanks must be due to the North Devon Rail Users Group and the Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership for working on this case.

One positive aspect of the Barnstaple line timings is that three additional return trains could be accommodated over the single track route during the morning. This would then be an important step towards an hourly service and the trains could serve Lapford, which has and will still only have a limited service from December 2006. If only rolling stock and funding could be found!

Cross Country franchise

The branch responded to the DfT consultation in August stressing our objection to the proposal to exclude the West Coast route from the Cross Country franchise. We said we were "at a loss to understand why the DfT wishes to cut links from Cornwall and Devon to the entire western side of Great Britain. There are currently regular services from Penzance, Plymouth and Exeter to Crewe (for North Wales

and Ireland), Oxenholme (for Winderemere), Penrith (for Keswick) and Glasgow. We do not believe that these have been running without passenger demand, or that this demand will not continue in the future. The proposed closure of the South-West to North-West link will not be compensated by connective possibilities at Birmingham New Street."

The DfT changes would exacerbate the loss of the Penzance to Crewe (Manchester) via Hereford service withdrawn from December 2005. We said we would like this service restored, but also "extended to Preston, Lancaster, Oxenholme, Penrith, Carlisle and Scotland, if the current service from Penzance to Scotland via Birmingham and the West Coast main line is withdrawn".

Closed lines

Tuesday 3 October marked 40 years since closure of the railway from Okehampton to Wadebridge via Halwill Junction and Launceston. Also closed was the line from Halwill Junction to Bude and Taunton to Barnstaple. Barnstaple retained a rail service to Exeter, but Wadebridge and Launceston lost its alter-

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native routes as well. Wadebridge to Bodmin Road (now Bodmin Parkway) and Launceston to Lifton on the Okehampton to Tavistock line should never have been closed.

Bus-rail connections

Bude has retained a rail replacement bus service for 40 years and First made improvements after taking over from Jennings. However, this summer saw the sudden cancellation of the 18.25 and 19.40 X9 buses from Exeter (time at St David's station) to Okehampton and Bude. The last bus is now at 17.55 except 20.40 on Fridays and Saturdays. What is particularly worrying is that changes have been made after timetables have been published and one correspondent in the *Western Morning News* had to find overnight accommodation in Exeter. Evening services need to be restored and for Okehampton a good option would be to use the railway line.

Across Devon and Cornwall, First bus services seem to be contracting or changing to other operators, so check carefully before travelling. For example there are now no buses from Ilfracombe running through to Barnstaple railway station. Stagecoach has taken over numerous North Devon services and Truronian run Truro to St Mawes.

Western Greyhound are running more bus services in Cornwall including the 555 link from Bodmin Parkway to Padstow and also a once daily service 510 between Exeter and Newquay via Launceston and Camelford. The company has won the UKBUS Small Operator of the Year Award.

East Midlands

By Anthony Kay
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Toton sidings

A disused train shed at Toton sidings could have a new lease of life in the railway industry. A local concrete products firm, Stanton Bonna, is hoping to use the site for a factory to fulfil a contract to supply sleepers to Network Rail. Siting the factory there will of course mean that the sleepers will be transported around the country by rail, with no need for road transport at any stage. Old sleepers will also be returned to the factory for recycling of steel and aggregates.

East Midlands franchise

East Midlands was one of the three franchises for which invitations to tender were issued at the end of October. A number of important developments are proposed in the region, including requirements for Smartcard-compliant ticketing and for more stations to achieve Secure Stations Accreditation. However, TravelWatch East Midlands has expressed disappointment that the decision to halve off-peak service frequency at Market Harborough is not going to be reversed.



Merseytravel chairman Mark Dowd celebrates the start of £2million worth of work to refurbish the interior of Liverpool Lime Street station.

The work will provide a new ceramic floor in the concourse, new information screens, extra cycle parking, extra seating and car parking for disabled people and should be finished in six months time.

Neil Scales, Chief Executive and Director General of Merseytravel, added: "We will be working to ensure we cause very little disruption while these internal works take place, but they are important if Lime Street Station is to reflect the changing, growing face of Liverpool and the wider region."

Picture: Merseytravel

Nottingham tram extension

The Government announced at the end of October that phase two of the Nottingham Express Transit tram system would be funded. Two new lines will be built, connecting the city centre to Clifton, on the south side of the Trent, and to Chilwell to the west of the city. The next stage will be the application for a Transport & Works Act order, followed by a public inquiry which is likely to be held towards the end of 2007. It is hoped the new lines will open to passengers in seven years time.

The existing NET line, running northwards from the city centre, has been a huge success. It has recently been commended by the Institution of Civil Engineers for its high-quality design, reliable services, priority signalling and intermodal links. It carried 9.7million passengers in its second year of operation, and a local Railfuture member reports a tram in the morning peak being full from the beginning of its journey in Hucknall, with conductors unable to continue collecting fares because of the crush later on. Reasons for its success include a long stretch of reserved track, followed by street running along quiet roads, with stops well situated for a variety of important destinations.

Local Railfuture members have been working hard to support NET since it was proposed in 1988, liaising with transport activists, attending meetings and submitting comments on numerous local plans.

NET Forward

A major meeting in Nottingham in November attended by Railfuture

members was held to welcome the news of the tram extension, writes Paul Clark.

The new lines will start by "flying over" Nottingham station as an extension to the existing Station Street terminus. Bizarre how things come full circle as the bridge will be exactly on the same alignment as the old Great Central Bridge closed in the early 1970s!

The meeting opened with Cllr John Taylor who among other things is a NET Development Board member, who welcomed us to the meeting and announced that the programme had been agreed in its entirety. There will be substantial environmental improvement and the new service will run in cooperation with the major bus operator Nottingham City Transport.

The funding will be by partnership of city and county councils and business. The council's contribution will come from road charging and parking charges. Completion will take seven years. Nottingham's twin city, Karlsruhe in Germany, built 18 lines over a similar period.

The keynote speaker was Under-Secretary of State Tom Harris

He said that the current tram line presented a good example to the National Audit Office and the Government will continue to work with Nottingham authorities because they present good value for money. It was encouraging to hear that Government recommends other authorities to come to Nottingham to see how it is done and will continue to support light rail, but not at any costs.

London & South East

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Rug weaving

Following correspondence with Guildford MP Anne Milton, Railfuture member Trevor Jones has been consulted regarding the formation of what could develop into a Guildford Transport User Group embracing public transport on rail, road and water. Initially an internal meeting among local Conservative activists is hoped to be followed by a public meeting probably in February with all political parties invited, together with county and or borough officers and bus/rail managers. We intend this to be under the auspices of Railfuture or Guildford Environmental Forum. Anyone interested is invited to send Trevor Jones either an email or an SAE to receive details of any public meeting if and when arranged.

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Branch AGM

The branch AGM will be held at the London Welsh Centre on Monday 16 April 2007. It is intended via the Rail London mailing to hold a postal ballot for the election of branch officers for 2007-2008.

Pig's Ear 2006

East London CAMRA's resurrected beer festival made a welcome return to the London scene. Volunteers helped with distributing copies of Railwatch to people who enjoyed traditional British cask conditioned ale, traditional ciders and perries, and foreign and bottle conditioned beers. The festival was staged close to Hackney Central, Hackney Downs and London Fields stations in December at Ocean, near Hackney Town Hall.

London Beer Festival 2007

Once again North London CAMRA will be holding this popular event at the Camden Centre, opposite St Pancras station on Wednesday 28 to Friday 30 March 2007. Laurence Fryer will be looking for "ambassadors" to help promote Railfuture. Contact Laurence at his email above if you can help. More info: www.camranorthlondon.org.uk/ldbfi/index.html

Social side

The committee is interested to learn branch members' views on whether they wish to meet on an informal social basis. This could be in the form of a meeting to hear a speaker or just to meet and discuss the future of rail. If you have suggestions, contact Laurence Fryer via email or on 07944 420902.

Barking-Gospel Oak

More trains appeared on the



Connexion

the ormskirk, preston & southport travellers' association

Issue 104

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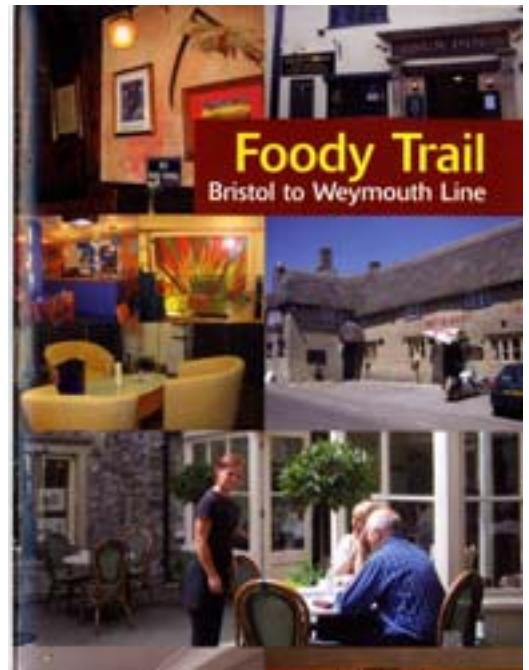
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Launching the Rail Ale Trail leaflet in the appropriate manner at Hoscar station - and at the Railway Tavern next to the station



Food and drink

After the success of the Rail Ale Trail, Railfuture Wessex Branch has created the Heart of Wessex Line Foody Trail.

Members selected 11 places to eat on the line between Clifton (Bristol) and Weymouth. These are described in an attractive leaflet, which was launched in September.

Meanwhile rail users group OPSTA launched its Rail Ale Trail leaflet, left, as reported in its newsletter Connexion.

Barking to Gospel Oak line in the December timetable thanks to Transport for London funding, providing the best timetable for years.

Members of the users group attended a useful update session from TfL on future plans from November 2007, when its chosen operator takes over the London Rail Concession, as the current Silverlink Metro group of routes is to be known. Initially, they have put in a bid to Network Rail to run a 20-minute service Mondays-Saturdays from December 2007. The Sunday service would remain half-hourly, but would finish later. In addition, they and Network Rail have submitted a bid for Transport Innovation Fund money to the Department for Transport, to increase the gauge for freight wagons and also install additional signals to allow a more intensive service to operate.

This is the key to getting the 15-minute service that both we and TfL want to see, and which TfL plans for December 2010. This would comprise two trains per hour between Barking and Gospel Oak, and another two per hour between Barking and Clapham Junction (via Gospel Oak and Willesden). Associated with this is a plan to rebuild the Barking side of Gospel Oak with platforms on the through lines. What type of trains can passengers

look forward to? There is a growing body of opinion that the line should be electrified, but that won't happen in the immediate future, so there will be diesel trains for a while longer at least. TfL's aspiration is for these to be three carriages long from December 2010. The users have stressed the importance of getting the right type of trains to run a busy suburban service with frequent stops but they will be lobbying strongly in the coming months for electrification as the real solution.

The next users group meeting is on Tuesday 13 February, starting 19.15 at Barking Town Hall. The AGM will immediately follow the open meeting. www.barking-gospeloak.org.uk

Sudbury Hill

For the first time ever, the station is shown on the new Piccadilly Line in-train route diagrams as a National Rail interchange with Sudbury Hill Harrow. The Chiltern December 2006 timetable has very welcome evening services at Sudbury Hill Harrow but it's still closed all weekend! This is utterly ridiculous for a London suburban station!

White City

London Underground is debating the naming of the stations serving the new retail development at

White City. If the new Hammer-smith & City Line station is called White City as proposed, the existing station of that name will need to be renamed to avoid confusion. Front-runner seems to be Wood Lane. But why not resort to the old railway standby and call them White City High Level and Low Level?

Wasteful competition

Southern Vectis has been the main bus operator on the Isle of Wight for many years, with a good comprehensive network. It used to be independent until it was taken over by Go-Ahead about a year ago. For many years SV on weekdays daytime ran two buses per hour from Shanklin where the Island Line railway terminates to the most southerly town Ventnor, although they tended to make poor train connections.

One bus took the shorter coastal route and the other went inland via Wroxall on the closed railway route to Ventnor. But in the past few years, the coastal frequency was reduced to a few a day and around the same time a separate subsidised Rail-Link (RL) bus over the direct route making good train connections was provided by a consortium of funders and operated by Wightbus, that is the operating arm of the Isle of Wight Council. This was at first routed via lower Bonchurch to

serve extra housing, but after two days of missing train connections due to obstructive parked cars it was re-routed via the main road.

After Go-Ahead took over SV they put in new management who revamped the bus network to improve it and presumably make it more profitable. The effect is that all SV buses as well as the RL bus now take the coastal route, although some SV buses continue inland via Wroxall on their way to Newport. The RL bus runs a few minutes one side of one of the half-hourly SV buses, but does at least continue to St Lawrence on the coast, which is not served by SV.

RL buses are not allowed to accept SV rover and freedom tickets under the terms of their funding, meanwhile IslandLine refuses to let SV into Shanklin station forecourt, so SV serve (as they always have) a stop just round the corner from the forecourt (which anyway probably saves journey time for through bus passengers). The IoW Council was going to provide a bus shelter in Shanklin station forecourt but seems to have withdrawn this offer after complaints from SV about a publicly funded facility being reserved for certain favoured operators.

Our Ventnor member Stuart George who is involved with his town council says that from October Wightbus

Local action



has decided to operate the Monday to Friday service commercially but only between 08.00 and 18.00. The IoW Council is providing a subsidy for the Saturday service (again only till 18.00) and the Sunday service is being withdrawn and not reinstated for summer 2007, which is unfortunate as SV connections at Shanklin on a Sunday are virtually useless. But at an August Ventnor Town Council meeting, councillors decided to ask Wightbus to provide a quote for a summer Sunday service next year to decide if it would be desirable for the council to subsidise it. Sunday travellers can live in hope!

But having said all that, for the energetic on a nice day, it is actually quite a pleasant coastal walk from Shanklin to Ventnor along minor roads and footpaths!

LATE NEWS: Holders of Southern Vectis Rover and Freedom tickets can now travel on the Rail Link for a flat fare of £1, compared with the normal Shanklin-Ventnor fare of £2 single and £3 return.

West Midlands

By Peter Cousins
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West Midlands franchise

The branch has been very busy for the past four months discussing our response to the three new franchise proposals. The proposed new West Midlands franchise specification retains broadly the same pattern of local services as now; with scope for improved services on the Chase Line and Shakespeare Line. We were also able to welcome the new hourly semi-fast services on the Trent Valley planned for December 2008.

However a key issue is the future role of West Midlands Passenger Transport Executive (Centro) which currently supports all local services within the former West Midlands County boundary and has an excellent record of investing in station facilities and funding additional services, even leasing additional trains. Some services that start or finish beyond the county border also share many of these benefits,

particularly routes to Cannock, Lichfield and Redditch. As the 2005 Railways Act removed the PTEs right to be a co-signatory to the franchise, Centro will be the guinea pig for the new arrangements and the future pattern of our services could be very different.

We were particularly concerned that local services to Hereford and Derby (or Nottingham) should be retained in the West Midlands franchise rather than transferred to Cross Country. The local service to Leicester should also be extended via East Midlands Parkway to Nottingham; and that the recently truncated Crewe-Derby service should again run through to Nottingham.

Sadly these aspirations were largely ignored when the final invitation to tender was published in November, with even the Birmingham to Leicester local service transferred to Cross Country.

New Street station

While we welcome the proposals to rebuild the passenger concourse at New Street, a key issue is still the lack of capacity for additional trains at platform level.

After access to platform 12 has been improved, platform 13a could be opened for passenger use but that is the limit of practical expansion as there is no prospect of easing the bottlenecks caused by the tunnels at both ends of the station which restrict the final approaches to just four tracks at either end.

The central location of New Street station is a great boon to passengers arriving in the city but the foundations of some adjacent buildings effectively prevent its expansion.

It has now been confirmed that the 2008-09 timetable will be planned around a 20-minute interval West Coast service to London. Very little remaining spare capacity will then exist on the key routes into New Street.

However we believe that several local services that currently only operate at hourly or half-hourly frequencies (such as routes to Tamworth, Nuneaton and Worcester) will justify an additional train in the near future.

Coleshill Parkway

Work is now well underway to construct a new station at Coleshill on the line to Nuneaton, just west of Whitacre Junction. The station, which is expected to open in the spring of 2007 will have two 75-metre platforms and a 200 space car park. Four bus bays are provided and a frequent service to Birmingham Airport is planned. This will be the first new station in the West Midlands since Warwick Parkway.

Fernhill Heath

A survey of local residents in Fernhill Heath, north of Worcester, has shown strong support for a park and ride station on the line to Droitwich. The proposed site would have good road links to the A449 and M5 and regular trains to Birmingham Moor Street station. Following a campaign by several local rail groups, Chiltern Trains have agreed to reopen the second access to Platform 2 at Moor Street station which comes out opposite Carr's Lane, avoiding the detour through the old station.

North East

By Peter Kenyon
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Branch activities

During September the branch took part in the Darlington Railfest by mounting a Railfuture stand. In conjunction with the Railfest the Saltburn Rail Users' Group organised an exhibition of railway photographs and maps in Saltburn, and with Northern Rail arranged a music train to bring passengers from Saltburn to Darlington.

A branch meeting was held in Darlington at which Phil Thickett, operations manager for Northern Rail led a wide-ranging discussion on rail safety in the region. Chairman Martin Murphy participated in the national meeting with Transport Minister with responsibility for railways Tom Harris on 10 October, speaking about the possibilities and realities of the present franchising process.

Lines

Northern Rail is reported to be

exploring access to Bedlington and Ashington via Morpeth.

The new rail link with the Port of Blyth is in use carrying coal to Eggborough power station.

The Leamside line is once again in the news. This 16-mile long line was mothballed in 1992 and featured in subsequent planning as a relief route for the East Coast main line. Nothing came of these plans, and in 2003 a daring robbery, worthy of an Ealing film took place. An ex Jarvis employee created a limited company, leased a JCB and tipper truck and hired men from Sheffield whom he fitted out in Jarvis jackets. Work took place for six days in an isolated spot near Peshaw, Houghton le Spring. Two miles of track were lifted and cut into 40ft lengths for removal to a scrap dealer's yard. At this stage a legitimate Jarvis worker noticed the activity and called the police. The ringleader was sentenced to two years imprisonment, but the damage done added £826,000 to the cost of reopening the line. Since then the line has languished, but now there are reports that Network Rail plans to lift the remaining track. The danger of losing this potential alternative route has reportedly led Nexus (Tyne and Wear Passenger Transport Authority) and Durham County Council to raise objections.

Belmont Parish Council has written to Network Rail protesting strongly about the track removal. A new Durham City park and ride scheme, which could link with a reopened railway is situated in the parish council's area. The proposal has also featured unfavourably in the *Durham Advertiser*. The apparent readiness of the rail authorities to dismantle and dispose of track and utilise closed routes for other purposes requires constant vigilance.

Stations

My previous two reports have contained encouraging news about passenger numbers at Alnmouth (for Alnwick) and Morpeth. This time the reports show the other side of the coin.

Durham

Cash-strapped GNER has increased its daily station car parking charges, at Newcastle from £8 to £12, at Darlington from £5.50 to £9 and at Durham from £4.50 to £8. Here the standard day return fare to Newcastle is £5.90, so that it now costs more for an individual passenger to park a car than to travel by train. The consequences have been increased parking in unallocated areas, creating danger both to motorists and pedestrians and, increased car journeys to Newcastle, which has monumental traffic jams morning and evening. This is the consequence of the piecemeal way in which transport is organised in the regions. There are hints that regional authorities may get powers similar to those existing in Lon-



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don, after the experience of near gridlock caused by competing bus companies in central Manchester, endured by delegates to the 2006 Labour Party Conference.

Belford

Belford is a small market town on the A1 and main line between Alnwick and Berwick. In the old days it had its own station, but the service of stopping trains to Berwick was discontinued, and the platforms demolished. Twice a day the Northern stopping train from Newcastle ventures northwards from Alnmouth (for Alnwick) its usual terminus, to Chathill, a pleasant village which, when mail was carried by rail was the connecting point for postal services for the area. However there is no cross-over so the train continues fully crewed for seven miles to Belford, waits for seven to 10 minutes in the siding, and returns to Chathill. There has been a campaign to provide a platform at Belford for years. Alan Beith, MP for Berwick, has initiated two debates in the Commons which concluded that the situation was "an absurdity". A debate in the Lords came to the same conclusion. Funds are available to build a short platform. Arriva Trains paid for a risk assessment study over five years ago. But Railtrack and later Network Rail have refused to submit this to the Railway Inspectorate, thus blocking any progress. This obtuse streak in railway management was noted long ago by Charles Dickens, and the Chathill train is not the only one in the country which speeds over the lines fully crewed but barred to passengers. Belford Rail Users' Group is suffering from collective despair. The chairman writes: "We have 12 neighbouring parishes around us with pupils, students, commuters, hospital visitors, shoppers, local football supporters, and tourists who want to use the service, thus avoiding the notoriously dangerous A1 road in North Northumberland."

Belford is a super jumping-off point for tourist attractions such as Bamburgh, Seahouses, the Farne Islands, the Holy Island of Lindisfarne and the Cheviot National Park.

We have the "spokes" of local bus links to all of these places in Belford. 36% of the annual income of North Northumberland comes from tourism. Network Rail "notes the issue", but does nothing.

Does this matter to anyone except us?

The problems of an area remote from London are not unique to Northumberland. But up here we voted down the proposal for an elected regional assembly!

Weardale Railway

The recently reopened Weardale Railway has purchased its first working steam locomotive. It has been running diesel powered trains since August while the hunt for a suitable steam locomotive



The Uckfield Line
Your guide to The Uckfield Line with details on what to see and do at each station and the surrounding area.

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Tax to fund reopening

Restoration of the Lewes-Uckfield line in Sussex is on the agenda again. A developer has suggested a levy of £10,000 per house if he is given the go-ahead to build up to the quota already outlined for new house building in the area.

He believes that £40-50million would be sufficient for the job, subject to a feasibility study.

The company is Intermodality, part of Kilbride Community Railways which has some experience in this kind of project.

Company representatives have met with East Sussex County Council's "project rail board", and have the go-ahead "to proceed to the next stage". The reopening of the seven-mile link between Lewes and Uckfield would create an important railway line between the Sussex Coast and London, benefiting the overwhelming majority of people in the region. Compared to equivalent road schemes, such as the 3.5 mile Hastings-Bexhill link road costing £52million, it is good value.

was under way. The hunt led to the Colne Valley Railway in Essex where a privately owned steam engine was found to be for sale.

It was built in 1954 in Newcastle by Robert Stephenson & Hawthorns and ran for a while pulling passenger trains on the NCB system in Northumberland before moving to a heritage railway in East Anglia where it was restored to working order. The purchase was agreed on 5 October and finalized on 14 October following a detailed inspection.

The purchase was made possible by a grant from the Northern Rock Foundation, with further generous contributions from a Railway Trust member, Mr Ronald Enticott, and funds from the Sir James Knott Trust and from the trust's own reserves.

Trust chairman Kevin Hillary said: "We are overjoyed to have our own steam locomotive. It's an ideal engine for our line and it has the added benefit of having been locally built and operated, it is a part of North East railway history."

"So, many thanks to those who helped fund the purchase of the loco and to the team of Trust members who scoured the country to find it and negotiate the purchase."

The Weardale Railway ran between Stanhope and Wolsingham every weekend until 3 December, followed by Santa specials.

www.weardale-railway.org

Yorkshire

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Looking ahead

Two members of the Yorkshire Branch including the national chairman attended a presentation with Network Rail regarding the Rail Utilisation Strategies for the East Coast Main Line and Yorkshire and Humberside.

The presentation was very positive and provided an excellent opportunity for questions to be put to the representatives from Network Rail. It is anticipated that the Yorkshire and Humberside Strategy will be in place by next year, and the East Coast Main Line report is expected to be produced in December, 2006.

Direct link

At a branch meeting in Wakefield in September, further concern was expressed with regard to the lack of a direct rail service from Knottingley to Wakefield Westgate, and it is hoped that a joint meeting with the West Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive will be held in the near future. Theft of signalling cable is becoming a problem in the Wakefield area causing disruption to rail services.

Leeds-Nottingham

A four-fold increase in Leeds-Nottingham train services was announced by the Department for Transport at the end of November. Around £2million per year has been

pledged by Department for Transport to substantially increase the number of train services between Leeds, Nottingham and Sheffield. Currently Midland Mainline runs seven trains daily between Sheffield and Nottingham, two of which extend to Leeds.

From December 2008 the cities will have 28 daily services. Passengers will receive a more regular service throughout the day, with extra trains operating at morning and evening peak times.

Rail Minister Tom Harris said: "It will mean more capacity at busy times, more seats for passengers and will develop transport links between these important cities."

The services will be operated by Northern Rail. It is expected that all trains will call on an hourly basis at Wakefield Kirkgate, Barnsley, Meadowhall, Sheffield, Chesterfield and Alfreton, and many will also call at Dronfield and Langley Mill. Dronfield station will receive a substantially better service than today. This is in addition to the existing semi-fast service between Leeds and Sheffield via Barnsley.

Heidi Mottram, Managing Director, Northern Rail said: "This is an excellent opportunity to provide additional services for customers between the major centres of the East Midlands and Yorkshire, building on the early success and significant growth Northern Rail has had in the first two years of our franchise."

Scotland

Passengers said they want faster services and more direct trains when quizzed about the rail services in Scotland. They identified the following priorities:

Edinburgh CrossRail - Most passengers would prefer a direct service without changing trains at Edinburgh Waverley. If there was no direct service half of passengers said they would be less likely to travel by train.

Edinburgh to Aberdeen - Nearly two thirds would prefer a faster service with fewer stops. More than half say they want at least a 15-minute saving in journey time.

Fife Circle services - Passengers confirm the need for earlier commuting services into Edinburgh.

Stranraer services - The vast majority of passengers do not want to change trains at Kilmarnock for a connection to Glasgow, preferring a direct service that serves Ayr, Paisley and Glasgow.

Glasgow to Edinburgh services via Shotts - Passengers clearly opposed a reduction in service frequency but expressed a desire for an improved frequency.

The research was carried out by Passenger Focus to help with its response to Network Rail's Route Utilisation Strategy.