

Railway goes west

Your article, *Railway goes west*, *Railwatch* 110, contains a little good news about building a case for Oxford-Milton Keynes rail services.

It opens, however, with the briefest mention of the Cambridge guided busway, now being built along the alignment of the old Cambridge-St Ives railway.

Where was Railfuture when the case was being fought to re-instate services along this still largely extant line?

Anybody concerned about effective public transport provision in general and the railways in particular, should be alarmed at the way the Cambridgeshire guided busway was "railroaded" (if only!) through.

From the county council's early pre-emptive action to get the route designated as disused (using hasty backdoor measures) via the rubber-stamping official inquiry, to the Government's readiness to bankroll its gold-plated price-tag – this project begs the question of a rational public transport policy.

The whole justification for lavish transport investment in this area was to relieve chronic congestion along the A14.

To achieve this, travellers must be attracted away from driving in and out of Cambridge. Yet, despite the busway's high initial cost, it will offer no time saving over the present unpopular buses and yet charge higher fares.

A key point is that there are no pre-existing examples of such long guided busways in Britain (or probably elsewhere). This is an expensive experiment which will have to win a big but quite unproven public endorsement to justify the high cost.

The railway could have been re-instated at half the cost – and would have offered the beginnings of a serious public transport corridor into the city, calling at the crucial science park.

A light-rail variant could have sprouted tramways into the city. Such systems have been extremely popular in other parts of Europe (for example, around the German

city of Karlsruhe). A rail route would have improved general connectivity with the surrounding rail network and could probably have been used to divert freight from the roads as well.

Next time (if there is such) it would be welcome to see some hearty, cogent and timely support from pro-rail groups like Railfuture.

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Editors' note: Many Railfuture activists were involved in the fight to reopen the Cambridge-St Ives line over a period of many years. They won the argument but lost the battle. Many of us are angry that the busway was approved instead. The Government Office for the East of England, Cambridge Council, the political parties and developers Gallagher Estates have a lot to answer for.

High speed rail

I read with interest Graham Nalty's article *Fresh Thinking on High Speed Rail* in *Railwatch* 112.

I'm a keen supporter of the campaign to keep up the momentum, and to roll on from High Speed One to High Speed Two as soon as possible.

A major problem is to choose the best route that will both deliver early and incremental benefits (unlike Maglev), and also spread the benefits as widely as possible.

There has been much debate as to whether we should have an east-sided or a west-sided route from London to Scotland.

To my mind, this debate is both divisive and ultimately futile. Given the likely pace of development, and assuming a west-sided route (as per the recent Greengauge21 proposal exclusively serving the north-west corridor, providing London-Heathrow-Birmingham-Manchester links) the east side of the country would have to wait perhaps 20 years before seeing similar benefits from a line of their own.

Media, politicians and business groups in Yorkshire and the North East see this as potentially 20 years of lost investment opportunities.

Your letters

So what we need is a route that equitably serves both sides of the country. We also need a route that can deliver a credible network, rather than simply high speed along radial routes to London.

I believe I've managed to develop such a proposal.

This is similar to Option 8, developed by Atkins for the Strategic Rail Authority, but with the route to Manchester and Liverpool reconfigured from a Trent Valley alignment to the Woodhead Transpennine route.

At first, it might seem odd, to follow the Great Central's long way round into Manchester.

But it provides a dedicated reserved route for virtually the full route into Manchester Piccadilly, rather than "mixing it" with the Cheshire commuter traffic through Stockport.

I believe that a one hour 30 minutes London-Manchester journey time is achievable via Woodhead, as via the more conventional southern approach.

But the more crucial benefits of Woodhead are that with a reserved route, it would be easier to upgrade to duplex stock, and also, that a whole range of Transpennine journeys become possible.

Hence a network is created, one that can also serve inter-city needs and relieve congestion on the M62 corridor. There are already aspirations for a Liverpool-Manchester-Leeds-Newcastle super-region.

This spine-and-spur route would naturally follow the M1 corridor.

Note how the original section of the M1 motorway from Hendon to Crick was aligned to serve both East and West Midlands, with onward development both sides of the Pennines.

In the longer term, a second route would probably be required, either following the M40 or the East Coast main line.

But the initial unifying nature of the M1 alignment would pull the system together as a network, with much greater added value accruing from all the non-London journeys that would become possible.

I note the discussion of options for high speed routes into, and through Birmingham.

Mr Nalty is correct in identifying either the Great Western's Solihull route or the Midland's Water Orton route as the optimum corridor into Birmingham.

My preference is for the Water Orton route, since it gives an equally direct route to London as via Solihull, but also it allows northward connections from the centre of Birmingham on to a north-south high speed route, rather than relying on out of town park-

ways for a connecting service. Also, the Water Orton route is generally clearer, allowing a full Continental gauge route to be created.

But either of these routes would only be of use in gaining access to Birmingham city centre.

Greengauge21 has already proposed building the terminal at an extended Moor Street station because New Street platforms are too short, and congested.

It wouldn't be practical to continue through the centre of Birmingham. No surface route could give the necessary 185mph speed for through traffic, and so it would be necessary to build a tunnel maybe 20 miles long, with an underground city centre station.

This would entail the excavation of caverns on a similar scale to those established in the Channel Tunnel, but with collapse risks similar to Heathrow Express. The cost would be immense.

The need for speed to Scotland, to compete with the airlines, explains why all high speed line proposals have tended to deviate around major cities.

The tendency is then for intermediate cities on a high speed route to be served by suburban parkway stations, with services into the city centre only provided from the south.

The advantage of configuring as a network is that other less time-sensitive axes, such as Transpennine and CrossCountry, can provide the more local inter-city services that cannot be sustained on a single-purpose high speed route. This could be achieved without tunneling through city centres.

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On-train information

As a fairly frequent traveller on South West Trains I have always appreciated the clear and helpful announcements made by the guard or conductor on board.

Alas, the same cannot be said of Chiltern Railways which runs trains without guards from Aylesbury to Marylebone.

Instead, almost unbelievably, I understand they are now demanding that the drivers make the station announcements! Pre-recorded announcements also seem to have been discontinued. Can the company chairman explain this, I wonder?

Josephine Martin, 6 Downs View Villa, Camp Road, Freshwater, Isle of Wight PO40 9HR

Journey opportunity

In your last issue, Dr Maxwell Roberts criticises the "journey

Wales

By Rowland Pittard

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■ ■ **Progress**
Much development work is taking place thanks to our campaigning over the past few years and positive policies of the Welsh Assembly Government.

■ ■ **Cambrian**
In August, a £31million scheme was announced to upgrade the Cambrian line with new passing loops. The aim is to improve reliability on the line from Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth.

■ ■ **Ebbw Vale**
The reopening of the Ebbw Vale line is now behind target and may miss its official December date, partly because protected slow-worms have been found on the route.

■ ■ **Merthyr**
Upgrading of the Merthyr Tydfil route is on time and a major new layout and station – involving the closure of the North station – is expected to open at Abercynon next year.

■ ■ **Pontypridd**
In August and September major trackworks were undertaken at Pontypridd to allow platform lengthening.

■ ■ **Llanharan**
The new Llanharan station on the main line near Bridgend is also expected to open on time this December.

■ ■ **Freight**
The 10-mile long Ystrad Mynach-Cwmbargoed branch line reopened in September for driver training. Coal trains from Ffos-y-Ffran open-cast coal mine near Cwmbargoed to Aberthaw power station are expected later this year.

■ ■ **Longer trains**
Railfuture welcomes a Network Rail £13.2million scheme to extend 42 platforms in south Wales to take longer trains.

The Rhymney to Penarth line will be able to use six-car trains after work at Rhymney, Tirphill, Brithdir, Bargoed, Pengam, Hengoed, Ystrad Mynach, Llanbradach, Aber, Lisvane, Llanishen, Heath High Level, Cardiff Queen Street, Grangetown and Dingle Road.

The Treherbert to Cardiff Queen Street line will also be able to use six-car trains after work at Ynyswen, Treorchy, Ystrad Rhondda, Llwynypia, Tonypandy, Pontypridd, Radyr, Cathays and Porth.

The Maesteg to Gloucester line will be able to accommodate three or four-car trains after work at Maesteg, Ewenny Road, Garth, Tondy, Sarn, Wildmill and Caldicot.

LOCAL ACTION



all carbon footprint. It would also help rail franchisees fill off-peak seats and bring England in line with Scotland, Wales and London. If you belong to a group that has a website please get a link to the petition on it.

You can access the petition at <http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/FreeSeniorsRail>

It can also be accessed from the West Wiltshire Rail Users website: www.wwrug.org.uk

Bob Lee, secretary of West Wiltshire Rail Users Group, Frog Cottage, 9a Petticoat Lane, Dilton Marsh, Westbury BA13 4DG robert.lee483@blueyonder.co.uk

Railwatch new look

I do not like the new layout at all. Please re-instate the local news reports into one feature.

Still, we should be grateful for some things. After many years we finally have a new picture of Peter Rayner.

Martin Garvey, Nottingham mj.garvey@ntlworld.com

Roads folly

One day in July, Jeremy Vine proclaimed on BBC radio a "new idea - to pave over railways and run express buses on them".

That "new" idea had its 53rd birthday last month, which he should have known as I sent him an email last autumn informing him of my unique research into this old – recently regurgitated – chestnut, in the hope that he would discuss it on his show.

I enclosed a synopsis of my book *Railway Conversion - the Impractical Dream*, which examines all conversion proposals and demonstrates with fact, figure and photograph why it is impractical, costly and would not deliver the benefits claimed. Despite this, I was not invited to take part.

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Engineering works

I was pleased to read in *Railwatch* 112 various contributors criticising what happens when engineering works are undertaken.

It really was better in the days of British Rail. You would never have had such organised disruption on Saturdays, only Sundays when fewer people travelled.

Tim Mickleburgh, 33 Littlefield Lane, Grimsby DN31 2AZ timmickleburgh2002@yahoo.co.uk

Fares

National Rail Trends, produced by the Office of Rail Regulation, shows that by far the greatest complaint from passengers is to do with the "value for money" of fares.

In Government speak, this means that people think fares are too high. Yet this fact is ignored by the route utilisation strategies and Government statements.

Instead, the concentration by Network Rail and the Government is

on punctuality (the avoidance of bottlenecks) and shaving a few minutes from journeys – both important but not the greatest source of dissatisfaction.

If I were the chairman of a retail business and I were constantly being told that my customers' greatest complaint was my company's "poor value for money" I should want to do something about it.

And if I were the head of a government, I should want to appear to address the most serious problem. As it is, this biggest problem is totally ignored by the detailed reports and by the Government.

Cutting three minutes from a journey of four hours (which may cost many millions of pounds to achieve) matters very little to the vast majority of passengers.

On the other hand the fact that people are paying hundreds of pounds for a journey when they want to travel, makes people as angry as angry can be.

How many do not travel by rail at all because of the UK's "highest fares in the world" policy?

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158 correction

In *Railwatch* 112 in the article "Sprinters drafted in to give a boost to Liverpool" the last paragraph states that Northern Rail has acquired 29 class 158 trains, some recently withdrawn by South West Trains.

This is incorrect on two accounts. SWT have recently acquired 11 two-car class 158 trains which they are putting through refurbishment, along with eight three-car versions which have been converted to class 159/1 variants.

They are also in the process of releasing their class 170 units to First Transpennine Express, this enabling full fleet compatibility in terms of selective door opening and gangway connections afforded by the base class 158 unit design.

The class 158s that were recently taken off lease were those from the ex-Wessex trains fleet which were stored at Eastleigh. Others being transferred are those being on short-term lease with First Great Western as stated in the Severnside section of the newsletter.

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■ **More letters:**
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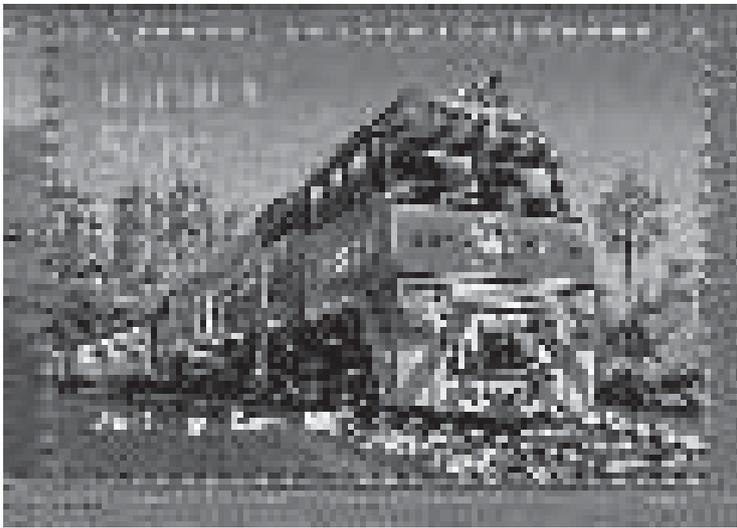
Send your letters to:

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

Email: editor@railwatch.org.uk

Railwatch also welcomes articles and pictures

Your letters



Misleading 'statistics'

Are Network Rail and the Office of Rail Regulation subject to the Trade Descriptions Act and the Advertising Standards Authority?

They persist in talking about "station usage" and "footfall" when at the same time they acknowledge that the figures they use are estimates, based on ticket sales. The latest example is the route utilisation strategy for the North West, published in May. It threatens the closure of up to 44 supposedly "low-footfall" stations. It produces a map of the 50 least-used, according to those ticket sales figures.

Comparing the latest ORR "station usage" data for 2005-06 with the previous year, 42 of those 50 stations showed patronage growth!

What other business would think of closing so many outlets, its shop windows and front doors to the wider network, which were growing in patronage, however modest?

At the other end of the country, Railwatch co-editor Ray King and I have obtained over a decade's regular and consistently comparable twice-yearly headcounts at Cambridge Heath and London Fields stations.

Both have been de-staffed for about 15 years, and both have only one unreliable ticket machine each, so how reliable are ticket sales figures likely to be as an indicator of actual footfall? Many in London use Oyster cards and Travelcards which do not register at either station.

London Fields station is said by the ORR "station usage" data to have patronage of 55,600 in 2005-06. That period includes our counts undertaken on term-time weekdays in May and December 2005, the first of which recorded 420 entries and exits in both peak periods and the second of which recorded 503 entries and exits in both peak periods.

Approximating for 195 term-time weekdays in the year, that already gives annual patronage of 82,000 and 98,000 respectively, the first around 50% higher and the second around 75% higher than the ORR figure. Then on top of that, those figures still exclude around 60 non-term-time weekdays, all daytime

and evening off-peak and all weekend use, which would swell those figures further. Nearby Cambridge Heath station also shows similar discrepancies between ORR and hand-recorded data.

Colleagues in the North West concerned about a threatened station closure near them would be well advised to invest a little time gathering some real patronage data.

I'd be very surprised if their headcounts did not generally come out appreciably higher than the ticket sales figures.

Meanwhile the rest of us should lose no opportunity to get the message to the ORR and Network Rail: Stop presenting us with mutton dressed as lamb. If your figures are just estimates based on ticket sales, then describe them properly as just that – station ticket sales, not station usage or footfall.

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Peak oil

While agreeing entirely with your laudable aims, I am nevertheless more than a little amazed that your website (and wider campaign?) appear to make no reference whatsoever to what is surely the strongest argument for a renaissance of the rail industry... peak oil.

As you are no doubt aware, global oil exports reached a peak in 2005 and have been declining since.

This is largely due to the simultaneous, and partly unexpected, terminal decline of many of the most important oil fields (Saudi -5% per annum, Kuwaiti -5% pa, Mexican -11% pa and North Sea -8% pa) and the simultaneous growth in the consumption of both the oil exporting nations and China.

The consensus view of independent oil industry experts is that this fall in the amount of buyable oil is the start of a permanent trend that will lead to an uncontrollable hike in crude oil prices.

Oil could cost \$200 plus per barrel by 2010 and even more thereafter. While policy makers in Britain and other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

nations still appear to be basing their medium-term transport policies on the fancifully over-optimistic and discredited projections of future oil supply published by the likes of IEA, BP, Exxon, AramCo and CERA, etc., it surely behoves independent pressure groups like Railfuture to present the uncomfortable facts to the UK government in the hope of precipitating the major restructuring of the UK transport system that will be needed if we are to have any hope of riding out the imminent crisis.

I put it to you that climate change and road congestion considerations are not sufficiently pressing to induce the Government to put large amounts of new investment into rail, the most energy-efficient form of transport after the bicycle and the barge. You need a stronger stick.

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Editors' note: Oil prices were \$100 a barrel in October, compared to \$60 a barrel in 2005.

A shameless plug

A few years ago I founded and chaired SELRAP, the volunteer group campaigning for the "missing link" between Skipton and Colne to be reopened as part of the national rail network.

I left them three years ago but am slowly being drawn back in, and in the meantime they have made astounding progress and have massive and widespread support. Skipton-Colne really is on track to be the first English-outside-London reopened line and SELRAP is truly breaking the mould in its campaigning.

The next crucial stage for SELRAP, and I stress this is a volunteer campaign body, is to commission a consultant's report on the traffic potential for the line and likely costs, etc, such that it will inform the Network Rail North West rail utilisation study. This "CBR Report" will cost £10,000 plus VAT. The consultants are lined up, all that is needed is the money.

SELRAP has raised much of that sum already, and back on 1 April it chartered the first train for 37 years to run between the two towns, albeit via a round-about route. The four-car train was packed and 150 bookings had to be turned away. Profits from that trip went to the CBR Report's funds, and a professional standard DVD was made of the journey, highlighting SELRAP's aims and showing the support there is for them.

Profits from sales of the DVD also go to the fund, and I urge you to consider purchasing a copy – at just £5.99 – to help this most worthy of aims. Donations are also welcome.

For full details of SELRAP, the trip

and the DVD see the website www.selrap.org.uk - click on "SELRAP DVD" to order a copy.

The DVD is also available from: Derek Jennings, 3 Hamilton Road, Carr Hall, Barrowford, Lancashire BB9 6DE. Tel: 01282 690411. Email: derek-jennings@ntlworld.com

Please help to break the mould and keep SELRAP on track. And please pass this message on to your "railway chums".

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Nuclear power

At long last the Government is talking about large scale nuclear electric power generation in the UK.

Until now, because of the wasteful and inefficient way electricity has been generated in the UK, large-scale electrification has not been a serious option without increasing pollution.

True, many European countries have electrification of many of their main lines, but in the case of France, there is much relatively cheap nuclear generation. Switzerland and the likes of Norway have the geography for cheap hydro-electric power.

Of course renewable generation should be encouraged and developed, but how many wind generators would it take to take a Pendolino at speed over Shap?

Nuclear power is controversial, but if one considers what climate change could do to our atmosphere, nuclear power does to me seem to be the lesser of the evils.

Together with electrification, we should encourage potentially efficient combined heat and power systems for our trains using hydrogen fuel cells charged with clean nuclear electricity.

With efficient power sources, high-speed rail in the UK becomes attractive indeed. In addition, perhaps on local lines, we need to consider the Parry Flywheel trains with the flywheel trickle charged by the electricity from fuel cells.

But the key to all this is nuclear power generation and Railfuture must campaign to make sure it happens – not just talked about.

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Railfuture chairman Mike Crowhurst writes: I welcome Mr Clark's support for electrification and he is entitled to his views on nuclear power. Many others are opposed to the nuclear option and it is not appropriate for Railfuture to campaign for nuclear power.

More letters: Page 16