

A green Brown

The biggest challenge for Prime Minister Gordon Brown has to be tackling climate change.

It is 10 years since Tony Blair took on the same job. Back then the new Labour government made bold promises about cutting emissions of greenhouse gases. But it did not follow up its promises with the necessary policies.

Now ministers admit they will not meet targets that were included in three of their election manifestos.

Gordon Brown has to share the blame for this. But now he has a real chance to make amends.

All the major parties speak frequently about the need to act. Major companies – from Virgin to Marks and Spencers – are falling over themselves to support green solutions.

More and more individuals have realised the gravity of the problem and want to do their bit. We need the Government to help us all by making it cheaper and easier to act. Against this backdrop of huge public and corporate support, Mr Brown takes over responsibility for a proposed new law – the Climate Change Bill.

If he is serious about tackling climate change, he will have to ensure this law is up to the job. The current Bill just isn't tough enough. Its targets are too low to stop dangerous climate change and it doesn't even count most emissions from aeroplane flights.

Worse still, the current proposal is to monitor targets every five years which will almost always span more than one term of government. This will make it easier for politicians to blame preceding governments for any missed targets.

For all our sakes, Mr Brown really has to be Mr Green – and he must start by ensuring the Climate Change Bill leads to cuts in all our carbon dioxide emissions of at least 3% each year.

A J Garrett, Tides Reach, The Moorings, Lower Heswall, Wirral CH60 9JU

Obituary

We are very sorry to report the death on 24 May of Philip Roche, a long-standing member of Railfuture and treasurer of the Thames Valley Branch for nearly 20 years.

Despite being totally blinded in an industrial accident many years ago, he managed the branch finances very efficiently, and he was also treasurer of his local Workers Educational Association branch.

He was an active supporter of the Royal National Institution for the

Your letters

Blind and the Bucks Association for the Blind. Philip showed great determination in overcoming his disability, and was a frequent train traveller, travelling on his own on the train from Aylesbury to London, and finding his way around on the Underground to attend meetings.

To come to branch meetings in Reading, he would make his way from Marylebone to Paddington, and get someone to put him on the right train.

Martin Smith, 57 Bath Street, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 1EA

Load factors

We hear regularly that trains are more environmentally friendly than planes and cars. *Railwatch* 112 reports the latest claim by Virgin about the Pendolino trains. Yet these claims are meaningless without consideration of the load factors.

I suggest that the only true measure is to take the total amount of energy purchased, multiplied by a factor that allows for the relative amount of carbon dioxide released, and then divide that by the total passenger miles sold.

I do not dispute that rail must be better than air in this calculation, but when a Pendolino passes the bottom of my garden at the weekend with empty first class coaches, the waste of energy involved is palpable.

David Pearson, 56 Windermere Avenue, Wembley HA9 8RY

Unhappy drivers

I read with interest the letter from Mr Currie in *Railwatch* 112. I would agree that the media is certainly very pro-motorist.

Nevertheless I do agree with the sentiments expressed by Mr Currie with regard to the attitude towards motorists that sometimes appears in *Railwatch* and certainly very strongly in the correspondence on the website which sometimes seems to infer that to use a car is a crime. Exaggerated, no doubt, but it is the impression that can be given to a casual reader.

As one who cannot readily travel by train unless I first drive to the stations that I regularly use due to the lack of public transport and my physical inability to use a cycle over the distances and terrain involved I will maintain and continue to use my car for as long as I am able but I do not think that this makes me any less pro rail.

By all means address the imbalance in reporting by promoting the many advantages of rail, heavy and light, but not by attacking those who drive (or fly).

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LOCAL ACTION

North East

By Peter Kenyon
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■ ■ Regional assemblies
The abolition of the entire network of Regional Assemblies was announced by Local Government Minister John Healey in July, with their functions being divided between local councils and regional development agencies to “give local authorities and communities greater responsibility”. So far as rail transport is concerned the record of the existing local authorities in the North East ranges from seeming indifference to positive action, so the change will not necessarily boost the fortunes of rail travellers.

■ ■ Consultation

Continuing its policy of submitting reasoned responses, Railfuture North East is preparing a document for the Office of Rail Regulation on charges relating to freight only lines, stressing the need to link charging with the duty placed on the ORR to promote rail freight.

■ ■ Campaigning

Chairman of the South East Northumberland Rail Users Group, Dennis Fancett, was invited by MP Denis Murphy to meet Rail Minister Tom Harris in July as a member of a delegation pressing the case for reopening the Ashington Blyth and Tyne line. The minister was “intrigued”, but stressed that the cost-benefit ratio must be improved. The funding partners determined to look closely at this. Overall the meeting was regarded as highly encouraging.

■ ■ Saltburn line news

The Saltburn Line Users Group recently awarded certificates to three station officials in recognition of their “excellent and continued customer service”. A meeting with the senior management of Northern Rail is planned in October.

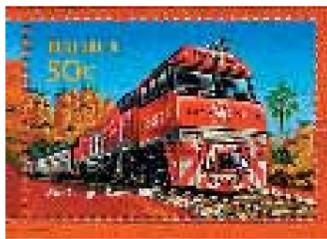
■ ■ Encouraging the next generation of travellers

Northumberland County Council's Bus Meets Train project at Alnmouth (for Alnwick) station has a new logo designed by a local pupil. The winner of the school competition received a Virgin family day return to Edinburgh from Brian Johnson, the Virgin Cross Country Franchise Director. The project promotes a connecting bus link to Alnwick and Plus-Bus through ticketing is available. As well as encouraging tourism in Alnwick it should go some way to reducing the heavy dependency on car transport of the popular Alnwick Garden. It should be said that this degree of integration of bus and train travel is not typical of Northumberland. The reopening of the Alnwick-Alnmouth branch railway would be a greater attraction, but despite much local activity over the years this has not yet been achieved.

■ ■ Linking the past with the present

Monkwearmouth station, the original Sunderland terminus opened in 1848 is a magnificent classical style building. Abandoned by rail services in 1968, later converted into a museum and subsequently closed, the museum reopened in August after a £1million refurbishment. The first exhibition is Sunderland to Saigon, the story of an epic journey by rail from Sunderland to Ho Chi Minh City (formerly known as Saigon) in Vietnam, which was completed in March 2007.

GLASGOW CROSSRAIL: Business leaders from across Scotland have joined with transport experts and politicians in calling for Crossrail Glasgow to be approved as an urgent priority. You can register your support at <http://crossrail.fs-server.com/>



Green questions

It is difficult to know what to make of the editors' comment at the end of Douglas Smart's letter (headed Green way) in *Railwatch* 112. You give a wish list of transport decisions for Scotland and ask if the Green Party's deal with the SNP will bring them about.

Is this a genuine question, or is it rhetorical and intended to be answered no? I cannot tell.

Either way, the real answer is that the Greens in the Scottish Parliament will certainly be working for all of those measures, which no other party will be.

But, with only two MSPs, it is unlikely that they will have enough muscle to bring about more than a small part of them. If it had received more votes it would have more MSPs, and would get more of those decisions through. Maybe some Scottish Railfuture members would have liked to know that?

So far as the rest of Railfuture members are concerned, surely they would want to have the policies of all the political parties, as they affect the railways, reviewed in the magazine?

It might be argued that the Greens are too small to make a difference, and you cannot review all the small parties right down to the Monster Raving Loony Party.

But the Green Party is now able to make a difference, even if it is small. It has significant representation on several city councils where the balance of power is such that the Greens are able to make a practical difference to policies.

It also has two members on the Greater London Assembly, and because Ken Livingstone has had to have their support for his budget to be passed, they have been able to get a better deal for transport in London, as part of an open and above-board deal.

Then there is the Green MEP, Caroline Lucas, whose record on transport issues, and the lead she has taken in the European parliament over them, is too well known to need further comment.

At the local level even a single councillor can make an important difference. In Lincolnshire there is only one Green on East Lindsey District Council, but because of the balance of power on the council and the fact that he has won cross-party confidence over the years, he has been given the portfolio for planning and development.

Under the portfolio system, that means he is effectively the planning authority. Now a district council does not have a direct say

Your letters

on transport issues, but planning policies impact on transport indirectly to an enormous extent.

Christopher Padley, Hambleton Cottage, Walesby Road, Market Rasen, Lincolnshire LN8 3EY

Stirling railway

Railwatch 112 reports that the reopening of the Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine railway is delayed.

The report is incorrect in giving the impression that changes to the specification for the level crossing at Cambus explain why the summer 2007 opening has not been achieved. It is only a small part of the overall reason.

The new station at Alloa is far from complete, and in mid-June, there were still signals, cabling and all level crossings to be installed. As for the crossing at Cambus, HMRI informed me that the original proposal was for a full barrier at Cambus, so after local pressure, the scheme has simply returned to what had originally been proposed!

As for signalling, Network Rail has recently been installing selective colour light signalling at Larbert, plus a single signal southbound on platform 3 at Stirling, interfacing with other mechanical signals. It seems strange that Network Rail is able to achieve this but the SAK railway project cannot.

Similarly, regarding cost increases, local news reports have allowed the impression to be given that an increase from circa £70million to £85million is linked to the changed specification at Cambus. Again I am grateful to HMRI for indicating that the cost difference between half and full barriers is less than £1million, so this leaves the bulk of the increase unaccounted for.

If the new Scottish Executive wishes to show it really is different from the previous administration, it has a great opportunity to require that public statements give full disclosure of the facts.

David Hodgson, 16-18 Forth Street, Cambus, Alloa FK10 2NU

Disunited Wales

There is a lot in *Railwatch* 112 to cause feelings of despair, especially Rowland Pittard's article on Wales on page 9. I see that money is being poured into improving services in South Wales – all well and good if you live there. However, I would like to remind everyone, including the Assembly Government, that there is life north of the valleys.

Feelings are already quite strong round here about the way everything in South Wales is favoured.

The last Assembly elections should have made the members think and I assure them that should they not improve, the next Assembly elections could prove even more disastrous for them.

Mrs Barbara Trueman, 4 Coppa View, Buckley, Flintshire CH7 2AA

LOCAL ACTION

Thames Valley

By David Eldridge
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■ ■ White Paper

The White Paper on rail investment for 2009-2014 has given its approval for the expansion of Reading station, at a cost of £425million. Also, £150million is allocated for improvements to 150 stations, some of which we presume will pay for the new platform at Oxford which is planned to be completed by 2010.

■ ■ East-West rail link

East West Rail did not feature in the recent Government White Paper, and indeed any reopenings or even the need to protect disused trackbeds were ruled out. Tony Baldry, MP for Banbury and Bicester, took up the issue and Phyllis Starkey, MP for Milton Keynes South West, emphasised EWRL is not a DfT-led project and would be developer-led and funded. Clearly, rail groups will need to monitor the situation. Work is continuing to the next study stage and the East West Rail Consortium was meeting the DfT in August. Steer Davies Gleave have just been given a £500,000 contract for yet another study (the 26th!) on the financing of services from Oxford and Aylesbury to Milton Keynes and Bedford, which is due to be published in December. Oxon and Bucks Rail Action Committee (and Railfuture) met with Buckinghamshire County Council to learn that developer funding is the key and all studies show a strong business case.

■ ■ Flooding (and freight)

The desperate need for the rebuilding of bridges in connection with the Southampton-Birmingham 9ft6in container upgrading which is still not funded was spectacularly demonstrated again during the floods. While some may have thought the blockage south of Oxford was due to very high water, the main reason was (as has been the case four times in the past 20 years) the fact that the track was dropped below the Abingdon Road bridge to gain clearance for existing 8ft6in boxes, and this puts it into the flood zone. For nine days the line was closed, causing massive disruption and a big switch of time-sensitive containers to the A34, together with passengers switching to car, with all the extra danger and pollution, etc. We understand three bridges will need to be replaced between Oxford and Didcot as part of the scheme, to provide clearance. If there was ever a case for advanced works this must be it.

■ ■ Chiltern line news

In July, fund manager group Henderson appointed accountancy group KPMG to advise on the sale of its Laing Rail subsidiary that includes MTR Laing and Laing Rail's 50% share of WSMR (Wrexham-Shrewsbury-Marylebone Railway). As a result, Chiltern Railways could be sold by fund manager Henderson with bids expected to approach £100million with the actual sale completion happening in early autumn.

■ ■ CrossCountry crush

Arriva has won the CrossCountry franchise with a promise of a 35% increase in capacity. Five eight-car InterCity 125 sets will be acquired and refurbished with more passengers squeezed into airline-style seating. On the Voyagers, the shop-buffet will be removed to provide extra seating, and a trolley service substituted. The DfT has specified that the few services east of Reading will be curtailed at Guildford. Why should Guildford be considered as a more important destination than Gatwick and Brighton?

