



Four tracks

I see from *Railwatch* 113 that the East Anglia branch of Railfuture is calling for a four-track section between Chelmsford and Colchester.

Surely this should be between Shenfield and Colchester, otherwise the sections between Shenfield and Chelmsford would still be two-track, somewhat defeating the object of the exercise.

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Railfuture East Anglia branch secretary *Nick Dibben* comments: "Yes, ideally it would be all the way from Shenfield.

"However in the short term, a four-track section is needed for the proposed new station north of Chelmsford and it would be more practical to extend this section first."

Railfuture passenger committee chairman *Howard Thomas* and a member of Railfuture's London and South East branch said: "Yes, four-tracking should be continuous all the way from London to Colchester, and possibly to Manningtree.

"Most of the Great Eastern main line between Shenfield and Colchester is in London and South East branch territory.

"I believe there have long been plans for a 'dynamic' third track along some or all of this stretch.

"However, there would be considerable engineering problems at some of the more congested locations, precisely where four-tracking is most needed:

1 The approaches either side of Chelmsford which include cuttings in residential areas, two viaducts and extensive embankments and a station built on a viaduct.

2 The approaches to Witham which include a substantial viaduct to the west of the station. Interestingly, Witham is a four-platform two-island station, and there is a short stretch of four tracks to the east.

3 The approaches to Colchester

where, once again, there is a substantial viaduct to contend with.

"In principle, the Great Eastern main line should be four tracks all the way to Colchester. There is no doubt that there will be considerable growth both of population and of international trade passing through the Essex-Suffolk ports, and that this alone will justify four tracks.

"To carry out such a project successfully will require a huge commitment of investment.

"The question is, among other things, whether Parliament, the Treasury, the Department for Transport, Essex and Suffolk MPs, Essex and Suffolk local government and 'Sir Humphrey' have the political wisdom and commitment to predict and provide for the railway, and invest accordingly."

London and South East branch chairman *Keith Dyal* adds: "We support and welcome the scheme but I agree with Howard's comments.

"I was under the impression though that dynamic passing loops would be provided.

"However of more concern is the effect that Crossrail will have on GE main line services.

"There is apparently no understanding of how or why Thameslink works. Nothing has been learnt from it.

"What Transport for London is trying to do is to superimpose a new service on to an already heavily used line.

"The intention is that 12 trains per hour in the peak and significant numbers off-peak will run from Shenfield, calling at all stations.

"This will leave no capacity on two of the lines for other services, either passenger or freight.

"So for everywhere beyond Shenfield there will be effectively a two-track railway. Whether this will work is open to doubt.

"With Thameslink, instead of imposing services on to the system, the planners have integrated with what is there. This is more satisfactory all round and works.

"Rail campaigners should be considering now how we try to get

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things amended over the next 10 to 12 years while Crossrail is being constructed."

Fare anomalies

I know that it is easy to point out the absurdities of rail fare structures. It is a bit like shooting fish in a barrel. Anyway, here goes.

I was thinking of travelling to the Aston Villa football ground either from Leighton Buzzard or Northampton.

The cheap day return is £13.30 from Leighton Buzzard, although going by Virgin pushes it up to £26.50, and from Northampton £10.30. Both are good value and better, on a pence per mile basis, from Leighton Buzzard.

On the other hand, to travel a few miles further to Aston or Witton pushes the fare from Leighton Buzzard up to £26.50.

At first I thought this may have involved Virgin, but it is the same fare via Northampton.

Obviously the solution is to buy separate tickets on from Birmingham, as long you have the knowledge and the time. The cheap day return to Witton is £1.50 and Aston £2.00. This is a bit of an anomaly as Witton is further than Aston, I assume it is something to do with local government support.

What about fares from Northampton? Well the CDR to Witton and Aston is exactly the same as to Birmingham. So to travel a few miles further adds no cost to a Birmingham fare from Northampton but doubles it from Leighton Buzzard!

All data is from the trainline website, and I assume it is correct.

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High speed rail

Colin Elliff in *Railwatch* 113 makes interesting comments about possible alignments for a north-south high speed rail route.

However, his suggestions, like many others currently on offer, suffer from one major conceptual flaw.

They assume that the major purpose of a high-speed line is to provide a link between London and the provinces.

Colin Elliff's suggestion offers the bonus of providing an east-west Transpennine access.

However, it was obvious as long ago as the inaugural meeting in Glasgow which was jointly promoted by the Scottish Passenger Transport Association that there was and is also a demand to provide an alignment which would link central Scotland to north-west England and the West Midlands.

Therefore what will be necessary is an alignment which links Edinburgh-Glasgow with Liverpool-Manchester and Birmingham on its way to London.

Whether or not this involves the use of suburban parkway stations is to some extent a matter of taste.

However, those proposed alignments which link stations at principal airports will not do at all.

In general, few journeys originate anywhere near airports or their associated railway termini, and the additional time penalty in getting from airport rail stations to ultimate destinations via existing local networks largely negates the advantages of high speed rail.

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London! Who cares?

I'm afraid I can't get excited about new multi-billion pound schemes such as Thameslink and Crossrail.

I see it as yet more money being spent in London, which already has the best rail network in the country.

As a national organisation Railfuture should try to address this discrepancy, rather than automatically welcoming any rail development.

After all, we know the public purse is limited when it comes to public transport.

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Editors' comment: Railfuture tries very hard not to be London-centred. Chairman *Mike Crowhurst* is based in Leeds and our conferences are often held in regional towns and cities.

But the Government has been accused of putting too much rail investment into the London area at the expense of the rest of England and Wales.

Labour MP *Graham Stringer* raised the issue in the House of Commons transport committee. He said that London's £16billion Crossrail was given the go-ahead at the same time as only a feasibility study was announced for Manchester.

Mr Stringer, MP for Manchester Blackley said the North-South funding gap was real and growing.

He quoted figures for 2005-06 in which The South East received £1.2billion, London £872million, North East £224million, Scotland £280million and Wales £168million.

Mr Stringer said Manchester Piccadilly needed platforms 15 and 16.

Transport Secretary *Ruth Kelly*

Editors' note: The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect Railfuture policies. Letters may be edited.



Wales

By Rowland Pittard
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North-South

Transport Minister Ieuan Wyn Jones has told the Welsh Assembly Government that he aims to create stronger links between north and south Wales over the next four years. Trunk road schemes will receive significantly more than the £50million promised in the *One Wales* document. Both rail and coach links between north and south are also set for improvement, with an upgraded railway timetable to be introduced in December 2008, said Mr Jones. He hopes the new faster rail service would include business class facilities and operate southbound in the morning and northbound in the evening. "Improving transport links throughout Wales will make our economy more competitive and will bring the people of our nation closer together," he said. A new Sustainable Travel Towns initiative will improve facilities for walking, cycling and public transport.



Carno

The village of Carno that challenged Network Rail in a battle to reopen a local railway station has won the right to have its case heard by ministers. Carno Station Action Group petitioned the Welsh Assembly using a scheme launched after last May's elections. Chairman Tony Burton said: "The committee has taken on board the opportunity for rural regeneration the station would provide and concluded that our position, on a stretch of line between Caersws and Machynlleth where there is no station for a distance of more than 20 miles, adds considerable weight to our case."

Improved stations

Bangor, Rhyl and Chester (in England but run by Arriva Trains Wales) are some of the stations to have benefited from increased investment.

Rail freight

Railfuture will be submitting comments on the the Welsh rail freight strategy which is now out for consultation.

Reopening

It was hoped that Ebbw Vale would be opening on 16 December with an official celebration on 14 December. Driver training was scheduled to start on 28 November.

Accessibility for all

A quarter of households in Wales do not have a car, which means that many people rely on public transport. A new report by the Bevan Foundation *Accessibility for All - Public Transport and Social Inclusion in Wales* outlines ways in which accessibility in Wales could be improved, and ranges from recommendations to strengthen the regulation of public transport to tackling crime. <http://www.bevanfoundation.org/17.html>

who is also MP for Bolton said: "I would argue that the regions have done quite well out of the White Paper." She pointed to the high cost of land in London which made all projects there more expensive and said that evidence for a Northern Hub at Manchester

had not been produced. But Mr Stringer said: "The evidence of what is wrong with the Northern rail system has been presented to the DfT over 30 or 40 years." Later Mr Stringer told Railnews that he had not been impressed by Ms Kelly's performance. "I thought

her line of argument was becoming incoherent," he said. "The fact is we are getting very little." He said Ms Kelly would be recalled before the committee for another grilling.

He added: "This debate will not go away, both on the funding of trams and the funding of what is the equivalent of Thameslink in the North."

Back to the view

It is pleasing to note that new trains are being built for the proposed London Overground services.

However, I am concerned that no consultation seems to have been undertaken over the interior design and seating arrangements of the class 378 electric multiple units to be used.

It appears that seating will be longitudinal, requiring passengers to sit with their backs to the view from the window.

Longitudinal-only seating may be appropriate for deep-level Underground trains on the Central and Northern lines where a substantial part of most people's journeys is in tunnel.

In the case of Overground, a substantial part of most journeys will be in the open.

Many people like to look at the view from the train. Given that there are many fine vistas to be seen from the North London Line it seems a pity to force people to twist their necks to admire it.

One of my favourites is the view over the King's Cross-St Pancras complex and beyond seen from the train between Camden Road and Caledonian Road.

I hope it is not too late to bring pressure to bear through your columns for a change of mind so that there are at least some transverse seats in each carriage of the new trains.

Howard F Thomas, 24 South Primrose Hill, Chelmsford, Essex CM1 2RG

Coach network

I understand that Richard Walker is on secondment from the Department for Transport to the South East of England Regional Assembly and is examining a strategic coach network for the South East region.

Coaches have been described as the Cinderella of the public transport network. It is worrying that perhaps the DfT & SEERA see a need for this work, rather than fully standing behind rail reopenings such as East West Rail (Western section) and others.

The DfT and possibly now SEERA seem to have the view that coaches offer a potentially low-cost, high quality solution to some of the public transport accessibility gaps in the wider South East. Remember that Stagecoach recently stopped its X5 Oxford to Cambridge service from calling at Oxford railway station.

The excuse was drivers' hours, traffic congestion and running times.

The X5 has never called at Bedford Midland or Cambridge railway stations, despite continual requests from rail user groups through Passenger Focus and LondonTravel-Watch for it to do so!

I am afraid I am as cynical about the regional strategic coach network as I am about the guided busways and see another agenda at work.

It is also very surprising that a coach network can seriously be considered for the South East, given the levels of road congestion and unreliability of journey times!

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Rail users and roads

Council taxes pay for police, highway maintenance, street lights and certain highway construction costs.

General taxation pays for the NHS which in turn helps subsidise the roads by paying the costs of 10 dead and 1,370 injuries on the roads on average, daily.

Rail users contribute to these road costs, but do not "enjoy" what they have paid for, because they are using rail.

Buying rail tickets means they also contribute towards British Transport police, rail maintenance, rail staffing costs, safe roads over rail lines, and level crossings (which benefit road users).

Research by Professor Richard Knowles of Salford University showed that 20% of motorists leave their cars at home and go by light rail. Maybe this is why the Government cancelled the Liverpool and Leeds tram systems because it is afraid of losing the honeypot of fuel taxes.

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Reopening hope

The Skipton-East Lancashire Rail Action Partnership warmly welcomes the inclusion of Skipton-Colne reopening in Network Rail's new Strategic Business Plan.

The plan says: "There may be a business case to reopen the Skipton-Colne line and this is being progressed by a number of interested stakeholders.

"This would not be straightforward as not all of the land is in railway ownership, but it would bring benefits through reduced journey times between Nelson and Leeds."

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