

East Midlands

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■ ■ The new lifts and footbridge at Loughborough Midland station, due for completion about now, have been delayed as the planning department at Charnwood Borough Council would like a design more in keeping with the grade two listed station. Network Rail is preparing a re-design. The same planners have also opposed East Midlands Trains' proposals to upgrade the cramped ticket office by removing the existing Victorian wooden design and giving it to the neighbouring Great Central Railway.

■ ■ East Midlands Trains have started to upgrade their "Connect" stock, with class 156s getting a repaint and class 158s taking turns for a week at Salisbury depot for improvements to make them more reliable. Currently a typical South West Trains 158 can manage 12,200 miles between breakdowns whereas an EMT 158 only manages around 3,000 miles. We have also requested that the insides urgently get a deep clean, as the seats and carpets are filthy, and this has been promised. The alleged poor state and reliability of class 153, 156 and 158 rolling stock inherited from various TOCs begs the question about how these assets have been looked after and why the owning rolling stock companies allowed them to become so run down.

■ ■ Railfuture East Midlands are part of a task group set up by Travelwatch East Midlands and Passenger Focus to look at improvements to the Liverpool to Norwich service. This often overcrowded and slow route is now served by a motley collection of BR-era rolling stock, has no promises of anything new for at least nine years, and yet serves five of England's eight core cities. Like the Cardiff to Portsmouth route it gets low status from the DfT because it doesn't go to London.

■ ■ The recent report from Atkins on future high speed lines for England has concluded that a route through the East Midlands and South Yorkshire has the best cost-benefit ratio. Together with the previous news that the Midland main line electrification also has the best cost-benefit ratio of any route, it seems that the penny is starting to drop on the importance of the East Midlands and South Yorkshire commercial heartlands to the English economy. More is the pity then that the DfT has not seen fit to include the new Intercity Express Project on any Midland main line metals from Nottingham and Sheffield to London. Even the money being spent on just the current Rugby station upgrade on WCML far outstrips any proposed spending on the whole of the MML route north of Bedford during the current East Midlands franchise.

■ ■ Robin Hood Line Sunday trains from Nottingham to Mansfield Woodhouse have been given the go-ahead from December 2008 after Nottinghamshire County Council found the money to run the services for the next three years. If the number of passengers using the line on Sundays meets the DfT's targets over this period, then they will fund it after that. Nottinghamshire County Council's proposed Saxondale park and ride scheme near Bingham, which is next to both the busy A46 and A52 single carriageway trunk roads, has not received the £6.5 million it needs from the DfT, so motorists and so called "express" bus services will continue to queue the eight miles to and from Nottingham during rush hours.

Fares rip-off ahead

There are warnings that rail fares are to rise substantially just when it is even more important to reduce carbon emissions by persuading people to leave their cars at home. Some fares may well rise by 10% over the year and some of them will be backdoor price increases.

A "simplification" of the fares structure announced in April – and introduced on 18 May – was welcomed by some passengers, particularly the changes giving railcard discounts on advance fares.

Despite the Government insisting the simplification was not aimed at increasing the price of rail fares, the suspicion remains that it is determined to make people pay for what it says is increased investment in the railways.

This has never seemed fair or sensible when fares could and should be used to achieve a modal switch from road to rail.

Nor is it clear how much is really increased investment and how much is paying for the complex organisational structure, resulting from the Tories' privatisation and Labour's subsequent changes.

Suspensions that more fare increases are planned were heightened when it was revealed that the National Fares Manuals, which some passengers had been buying to get the best deal from a complicated system, would no longer be available to the public from May 2008.

The Association of Train Operators said all the information that was included in the fares manuals could be found online at the National Rail website, so the paper manuals were no longer necessary. It will take Railfuture members some time to test the process of buying tickets before they are able to say whether they agree with that statement.

To make matters worse, a second raft of fare increases (following the usual increases in January) were introduced in May with little or no advance warning.

These additional fare increases were noted by passengers on the Stagecoach-run East Midland Trains, First Capital Connect and also on National Express East Coast. Andrew Long of the Bedford Commuters Association said: "I suspect the hand of the Department for Transport behind all this – to ensure train operators meet their premium payments to the Government."

He also believes the DfT wants to find cash for the £75million fitting out of the St Pancras low-level platforms and the reopening of Corby station, Northants.

A rail industry official said: "In the current year, the value of the regulated Fares Basket is permitted to rise by the retail price index, plus 1% – which is a total of 4.8%. The maximum permitted increase on

any regulated fare is RPI + 1% + 5% which, this year, is a maximum of 9.8%. After the January fare increases were implemented it was found that there was still some room in the fares basket."

In Scotland, the fares simplification was welcomed. Campaigner Ken Sutherland said: "I was encouraged to hear that there will be the ability to 'pick and mix' different types of tickets – on outward and return journeys."

He added: "I hope there will now be some change to the stultifyingly high level of single rail fares charged and the 'price-penalty' for coming back on a different day from outward travel."

But some train operators are using time restrictions on the tickets as a way of putting prices up.

The Government is working towards passengers paying 75% of overall rail costs. Taxpayer support will fall to 25%, compared to the 50-50 share of recent years. Railfuture believes this is both unfair and mistaken on both transport and environmental grounds.

One suggestion which might help rail comes from the Institute of Mechanical Engineers. It wants plane and train tickets to show the carbon emissions released on each trip.

It says: "Having a large carbon footprint should become as socially unacceptable as drink-driving."

For London-Glasgow, the carbon dioxide emissions are: road 80 kilograms per passenger, air 133 and rail 46.

TSSA rail union leader Gerry Doherty said: "We always feared the so-called simpler fares would be used as an excuse to sneak through higher fares and this in

fact, has happened." Railfuture's Norman Bradbury told the Commons transport committee: "We believe the current high costs of the rail industry are in part due to its present structure."

"Reducing these costs rather than pushing up fares to meet them should be the first course of action."

Anthony Smith, Passenger Focus chief executive, commented: "These changes represent another nail in the coffin for the turn-up-and-go railway with passengers having to pay more if they can't book ahead or advance purchase tickets are sold out."

Graham Larkbey of the Barking to Gospel Oak line said: "On our line and the North London line, some fares were summarily hiked up by as much as 100% with no advance warning from 18 May."

There have also been allegations that train operators are not releasing enough advance tickets.

Many rail campaigners are asking themselves: "Is there any more bad news to come out of the woodwork?" Well, yes.

Trainline.com is now charging credit card users £2.50 and debit card users 50p to buy a ticket. It also charges £1 to send the ticket by post. You even have to pay 50p to pick the tickets up at the station!

Not surprisingly, the National Express East Coast site, which can book tickets nationwide, is attracting more customers, partly because it does not charge fees. See: www.nationalexpresseastcoast.com/

Lorry companies are whingeing about the price of fuel. But it is rail passengers who should feel aggrieved at these unfair fare increases. They cannot be justified.

Coventry 2008: Railfuture AGM

There would be a real benefit to our society if more people used public transport rather than private cars, said Lord Mayor of Coventry Dave Batten, pictured below, in welcoming Railfuture to the city for its AGM on 10 May.

He said he had tried to persuade the railway authorities to press ahead with quadrupling more of



the West Coast main line because there would be massive benefits but he was saddened that the papers are now on a shelf "collecting dust".

He said the city had also put aside £2million to build a station on the Coventry-Nuneaton line where the service also needed upgrading, but the railway authorities had said "No".

He was frustrated by their attitude and, in his travels around Europe, had seen far superior facilities in Holland and in Germany. He was impressed by what he had seen at Karlsruhe.

Electrification

Jim Morgan of the Association of Train Operators said attitudes were changing in Britain.

Only a year ago, the Department for Transport had dismissed railway electrification as too expensive, but now there was work under way to see where it was worth electrifying.

ATOC would also be publishing a report soon on the value of the 20 most popular reopening schemes.

He said: "The Ebbw Vale reopening had been a real success story." And he warned that the Government was "modally agnostic" and the benefit of rail schemes had to be spelt out to them.

He added: "It is a challenge for us to prove that rail can do these things."

Ian Walmsley of Porterbrook said global warming was a great opportunity for rail.

He said: "There is not enough land in the world to provide enough biofuels. The switch to biofuels should be stopped now."

He added: "To cope with the extra demand there will be for rail services, we need to think big." He said that electric trains were necessary for the future, adding: "Only electric trains can

realistically support a 35-year life."

He said there was a good case for electrifying the Midland and Great Western main lines, and he added: "The only sensible solution to the Midland main line problems is to electrify it."

But he warned that all the assumptions on which the Department for Transport had made its decisions were wrong, starting with its estimate of what the price of oil would be.

Keep up pressure

Railfuture president Peter Lawrence said it was interesting to see how far we have progress but we had to keep up the pressure to turn lists of schemes into reality.

Railfuture chairman Mike Crowhurst warned: "Mrs Thatcher's lauding of the 'great car economy' continues in the civil service."

He announced certificates of service to the following Railfuture members: Martin Smith, Chris Wright and Frank Hastlow.

The AGM heard that RDS was to be fined because of late submission of our accounts, but work was in hand to ensure that the financial documentation was brought up to date.

In the election for members of the Railway Development Society Ltd board, chairman Mike Crowhurst was re-elected unopposed.

Board members

The following members were elected for a three-year term: Jerry Alderson 332 votes, Andrew Macfarlane 322, Philip Bisatt 299.

For a two-year term: Trevor Garrod 298.

For a one or two year term: Trevor Jones 275, David Redgewell 275, Clara Zilahi 275.

For a one-year term: Rowland Pittard 266, Ian Macdonald 265.

Not elected: Ray King 264.

At a board meeting later in May, Jerry Alderson was elected vice-chairman.

The following motions were passed by the AGM:

Walk-on fares

Railfuture policy should be to support the ready availability of walk-on tickets at affordable prices. We are opposed to the continuing above-inflation increases of such fares.

Proposed by Clara Zilahi and seconded by Steve Wilkinson.

Rail travel agents

Railfuture expresses its concern at the withdrawal of domestic rail ticketing facilities from many travel agents since January 2008. This withdrawal was caused by the Association of Train Operators

policy of progressively reducing agents' commission, which we as customers and campaigners regard as a shortsighted move. We also ask the relevant officers and committees of Railfuture to approach ATOC now, asking them if they have monitored the effects of this policy, and to encourage TOCs and agents to negotiate new arrangements with a view to increasing the number of rail ticket outlets.

Proposed by Trevor Garrod and seconded by Rod Lock.

Rail White Paper

Railfuture welcomes the recognition given in the White Paper to the need for sustainability in transport, in the context of climate change, but nevertheless urges the Government to:

1 Create a framework to encourage train operators to invest in more rolling stock and implement service enhancements

2 Safeguard routes with reasonable potential for reopening

3 Implement an interim programme of electrification within the next decade

4 Consider seriously proposals for construction of new high-speed lines

5 Encourage major cities outside London to bring forward more light rail schemes

6 Discourage expansion of motorways and airports, especially runway 3 at Heathrow

7 Press for equitable taxation of aviation at European level

8 Resist pressure for yet larger and heavier lorries

9 Take forward road pricing schemes at national level

10 Restrain demand by pricing on road and air, rather than on rail

11 Create a level playing field in financial evaluation of rail investment projects, [optimism bias, realistic oil price, treating fuel tax as benefit, NATA etc]

12 Not rely on the farebox as the prime source of funding for rail enhancements

13 Not use the franchising process to encourage above-inflation fare increases, while air fares and motoring costs are static or falling

14 Treat rail and bus more equitably in senior citizens' concessions.

In short, the Government should take serious practical steps to implement a genuinely sustainable transport policy, both for England and UK-wide.

Proposed by Mike Crowhurst and seconded by Norman Bradbury.

Farewell to Eric Layfield

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It is with great regret that I inform you of the recent death of our esteemed member, Eric Layfield. Eric was born in Harrogate in 1930. He attended Harrogate Grammar School and always had a great love of railways.

On leaving school he obtained employment with the newly formed British Railways at Doncaster locomotive works where he worked on Gresley steam locos.

In 1967 he moved to the Railway Technical Centre at Derby where he led a team designing diesel locos. He was responsible for the design of the engine cooling systems on HST power cars. Later, he became an inspector visiting loco works at Crewe and Glasgow. He retired aged 62, and quickly joined the RDS where his in-depth knowledge of railway technical

matters proved invaluable. He passionately believed in moving more freight by rail and in 1994 he joined the Freight Committee, greatly adding to its capabilities. He served as its secretary for a number of years and represented the society at meetings of the Rail Freight Group, winning respect for the society.

He also assisted the A1 group with their project to build a complete new steam locomotive.

Eric loved music including Beethoven, Johnny Cash and brass bands, as long as they came from Yorkshire! He was also steward at his local Methodist church.

Sadly, some four years ago, Eric had to stand down suffering from ill health, to which he finally succumbed in April of this year.

He leaves a widow, Joyce, a son, daughter and three grandchildren.