

Light way forward



TRAMS AND TRAINS Heavy and light rail are ideal partners

The tram-train concept pioneered in Germany allows better use of both rail and road infrastructure.

Trams are able to wind their way through the streets of towns and cities but also to travel over the heavy rail network.

It is the ideal solution for many parts of Britain where branch lines and former rail lines could be used by a new breed of light rail vehicle equipped to travel on the traditional railway and on tram tracks in town.

The concept allows long-distance and cross-country services to be integrated with a more intense urban pattern.

The concept of tram-train operation was explained when Network Rail's future railway development manager, Ian Ambrose, gave a presentation to members of the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport at Merseytravel in Liverpool on 2 December.

Network Rail's aim is to produce a "do it yourself" guide to tram trains and to produce a set of standards to allow on-street trams and heavy rail to live together.

Different wheel profiles and flange depths will raise questions about points and crossing designs.

It has been suggested that lightweight tram-trains could run on rail tracks embedded in the Dornoch road bridge.

This option would be far cheaper than a new rail-only bridge and would provide rail access to Dornoch for the first time in nearly 50 years while causing minimal disruption to road traffic.

Elsewhere in Scotland consultants Mott MacDonald believed that the concept could also be useful on the Paisley canal line, the Glasgow Underground eastern extension and the Borders Railway from Edinburgh Waverley to Eskbank, as well as from Inverness to Wick and Thurso.

A tram-train could run on a new loop at Eskdales to serve new housing. At the Edinburgh end they could run on to the planned Edinburgh tram line 3 and also over the South Suburban line.

There are many other places in Britain where tram-trains could provide a cost-effective, popular and proven way to attract people out of their cars. Guided busways are a tenth rate alternative which, at least in Cambridge, have proved staggeringly expensive and divisive.



THE GERMAN WAY:

Britain has a lot to learn

Pictures: Mott MacDonald

Coastway

LOCAL ACTION

By Dick Tyler

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■ ■ Vision for Sussex rail

Coastway hosted a special meeting in Lewes on 6 September at which we heard speakers from Network Rail, Passenger Focus, Wealden Line Campaign and others, under the banner title *Vision for Sussex Rail*.

Brian Hart gave us a comprehensive reasoning as to why he thinks the Lewes-Uckfield gap will yet be filled. Comments from him also appear on page 8 of this issue of *Railwatch* under the letter headed What went wrong? He explained why he thinks the recent Central Rail Corridor Board failed to recommend reopening. I think important lessons can be learnt for others seeking reopenings elsewhere.

Paul Best of Network Rail encouraged us by saying that the Highways Agency has been told to concentrate on improving roads serving railway stations.

He also informed us that the Stakeholder Management Group under the Sussex and Kent rail utilisation studies are considering new and reinstated lines.

A contribution by Councillor Duncan Bennett highlighted the fact that reinstatement of double track using Network Rail's own figures for Swindon-Kemble is £2.6million per mile, whereas a new 3.5 mile Bexhill-Hastings relief road will cost us a whisper under £100million.

Even reinstatement of Lewes-Uckfield to an unnecessary full standard is £18.8million per mile against £29million per mile for motorway widening.

Sharon Hedges of Passenger Focus struck a note of caution that the present financial crisis will probably affect rail projects, but encouraged us to be pressing for improvements to Coastway's own Hastings-Ashford section of single unelectrified line and new stations.

All presentations given can be viewed on the Railfuture website.

■ ■ South Central franchise

The stakeholder briefing for the South Central franchise has been published concurrently with the invitation to tender to the four bidders: Govia (Southern), NedRail, National Express and Stagecoach, three of whom were at our 6 September meeting.

The Department for Transport has retained the Rye shuttle in the invitation to tender. However it is left to the bidders whether or not to strengthen the two-car Brighton-Ashford service to avoid overcrowding. A similar approach is adopted for the Uckfield line which also uses class 171 diesels.

The real solution is, of course, to double and electrify the lines giving a larger pool of carriages and better frequency, for which Railfuture and others have been pressing for many years now.

London

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■ ■ Chiltern suburban battle

The campaign continues to persuade Chiltern Railways, whose mission statement is "to be the best passenger railway in the UK", to relinquish its dubious mantle of providing the worst suburban service in London at its stations at Sudbury and Harrow Road and Sudbury Hill Harrow. Chiltern now operates the last rush-hours-only station in the capital. That same station is also closed all weekend for no good reason.

Railfuture annual draw

£500 R E Hodgson, Carnforth; £200 Mrs M Sylvester, Blackpool; £100 Jon Moore, Norwich; £50 A P Koolman, Bromley; £20 M Lewis, Bedford; £20 J Bennett, Staines.

£10 each to: M Bond, Sheffield; E E Nice, London; John Groves, Cam; R G Silson, Tring; Ray King, London; P Finigan, Caterham; P Jacobs, Seaford; Martin Messias, London.