

Bring back the trains



Unforgivable: How road planners have blocked former rail lines such as this one at Daventry, Northants. The Government still does not have a rigorous regime to protect railway rights of way which will be needed in future

Picture: ATOC

Rail campaigners were delighted in June to find that train operators are now publicly promoting the idea of reopening railways and stations in England, following the success of reopenings in Wales and Scotland with passenger levels far higher than predicted..

The Association of Train Operating Companies published a report calling on the Government to reverse some of the Beeching cuts.

Fourteen extra lines and about 40 new stations could be reopened to meet current demand.

In its 24-page Connecting Communities booklet, ATOC focuses "on schemes which could be delivered relatively quickly, through short links to (or new stations on) existing lines, and by making use of freight lines (current or recently closed) as well as railway land left by the line closures and capacity reductions of the 1960s and 1970s".

ATOC chief executive Michael Roberts added: "Many past studies have looked at reopening old railways, but this one looks first at the market, not the map.

"It starts with people, where they live and where they want to travel. The schemes identified in this paper as having a positive business case would provide access directly and indirectly for a million people not currently well served by rail."

The report concludes: "Our analysis suggests that in England there are 14 places where there could be a positive business case for a new line to provide access to communities each with a population of 15,000 or more but which are currently not served by rail.

"Using the same approach, a number of new station locations were evaluated and seven had a good business case.

"There is a strong case for safeguarding routes that are likely to be required in the long term, and for making passive provision (when other works are being carried out on relevant existing lines) for routes likely to be required in

the medium term." Nine of the schemes looked at by ATOC had a benefit-cost ratio exceeding the normal 1.5:1 rating demanded by the Department for Transport for rail schemes.

Of ATOC's new line proposals with a positive ratio, three would also link two separate parts of the rail network: Leicester-Burton, Washington (Leamside Line) and Brownhills (Walsall-Lichfield).

The new lines would thus also have potential for freight, and diversions during engineering works.

A Railfuture team met ATOC while it was carrying out the survey work for the report. ATOC was careful to adopt a methodology to ensure it had a robust reopening model which would be acceptable to Network Rail, the train operators and the Department for Transport.

One rail campaigner commented: "The very high score for the Leicester-Coalville-Ashby-Burton line is greatly to be welcomed and something of a slap in the face for the Regional Government Office."

But the study was limited to towns with more than 15,000 population.

Several schemes backed by Railfuture do not fall into this category because they are strategic links without such a town en route.

Countryside campaigners at CPRE called for more innovative use of ultra-light rail.

ATOC's report was published a fortnight after the latest new station opened - Chiltern Railways Aylesbury Vale Parkway in Buckinghamshire.

The report can be read and downloaded from www.atoc.org/

Many rail campaigners could happily identify many other routes.

**Railfuture
Reopenings
conference
Corby, Northants
14 November 2009**

North East

By Peter Kenyon

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Leamside

The branch continues to campaign for reopening the vital Leamside line and, supported by Nexus, has urged that the necessary development work be brought forward five years. Committee member A Walker gave a talk to the Durham Public Transport Partnership about the line's prospects, which led to the chairman of the Partnership writing to One North East (the Regional Development Agency) and Network Rail giving strong support to reopening.

Tyne & Wear Metro

Nexus has increased the frequency of trains to South Hylton at the end of the Sunderland line from an irregular pattern to a 12-minute weekday service from 07.00 to 19.00. This is in response to increased passenger numbers. The upgrading of Haymarket station in central Newcastle is entering its final phase and was expected to be completed by the end of June.

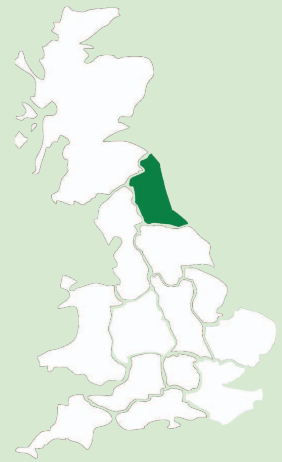
Ashington Blyth & Tyne reopening

The then transport secretary, Geoff Hoon, toured station sites by car in March. Dennis Fancett of the South East Northumberland Rail User Group gave a short presentation of the case for a station at Woodhorn. However the news is mixed. Network Rail is engaged in removing a vital crossover at Ashington which would have facilitated the reversing of passenger trains.

SENUG at Morpeth

Richard Gibson, head of communications at CrossCountry, addressed a packed meeting South East Northumberland Rail Users' Group on 26 March with a lively question and answer session. There seems to be little hope of reinstatement of lost CrossCountry services at Morpeth.

Rail supporter Dennis Murphy, the MP for Wansbeck, is to be speaker at SENRUG's AGM on 16 July. After a trial period in 2006 when commission from ticket sales covered operating costs, the business case for longer booking office opening hours at Morpeth has been finalised by Northern Rail. An early decision is hoped for. The group has continued its campaign against the high parking charges (£4/5) which Network Rail proposes to introduce at an enlarged Morpeth station car park. These compare unfavourably with the Metro park and ride charges (£1 at the Airport Line Callerton Parkway, and £2 at Four Lane Ends on the Coast Line).



Stephenson 150

The anniversary of Robert Stephenson's death is being suitably commemorated in Berwick-upon-Tweed. Celebrations began in May and continue until October. The programme includes lectures, film shows, and an exhibition in the Guildhall. An A4-hauled steam special ran from York to Berwick and Edinburgh in June. The 28-arch Royal Border Bridge, constructed by Robert Stephenson & Co in 1850, has been illuminated, and a re-enactment of the opening of the bridge in 1850 by Queen Victoria will take place on 29 August. For further details see: www.berwickmuseum.org.uk/stephenson150.html. A smaller exhibition will be held during the Summer Festival from 1-8 August at St Mary's Parish Church, Ponteland, where William Weallens "Late resident partner in the firm Robert Stephenson & Co" is commemorated.