



Blockade: A First TransPennine train at Medge Hall in March Picture: Network Rail

Lincolnshire

By Brian Hastings 01724 710528

■ ■ Blockade survey

Railfuture members in north Lincolnshire are surveying the replacement buses during the closure of the rail line between Thorne Junction and Scunthorpe West Junction from 22 June to 6 September. £10million engineering works are under way at Medge Hall to deal with the 10mph speed restriction. Another £6million is being spent on upgrading Thorne Junction.

Train operator First South TransPennine is choosing to run replacement buses over the whole 52-mile long corridor between Doncaster and Cleethorpes, with the buses stopping at Scunthorpe, Barnetby, Habrough and Grimsby Town in a complex pattern of stopping and express buses.

Northern Rail, which operates a Sheffield-Scunthorpe stopping service, is however planning to stop at Hatfield & Stainforth station with buses serving Thorne South, Crowle and Althorpe before terminating at Scunthorpe.

A concrete structure is being constructed at Medge Hall to stop the rail line sinking into the peat. Much of the material is being delivered by canal. Railfuture's survey will monitor timekeeping, bus seating capacity, connectional margins, provision of co-ordinators, interchange points and customer assistance.

■ ■ Brigg line revival

The Gainsborough-Barnetby line comes into its own when diverted freight from the Scunthorpe route as a result of the Medge Hall blockade takes to the Brigg line. The Saturday passenger service operated by Northern Rail runs to an accelerated timing between Gainsborough and Barnetby to increase the availability of paths for freight on single-line sections.

■ ■ Information hold-up

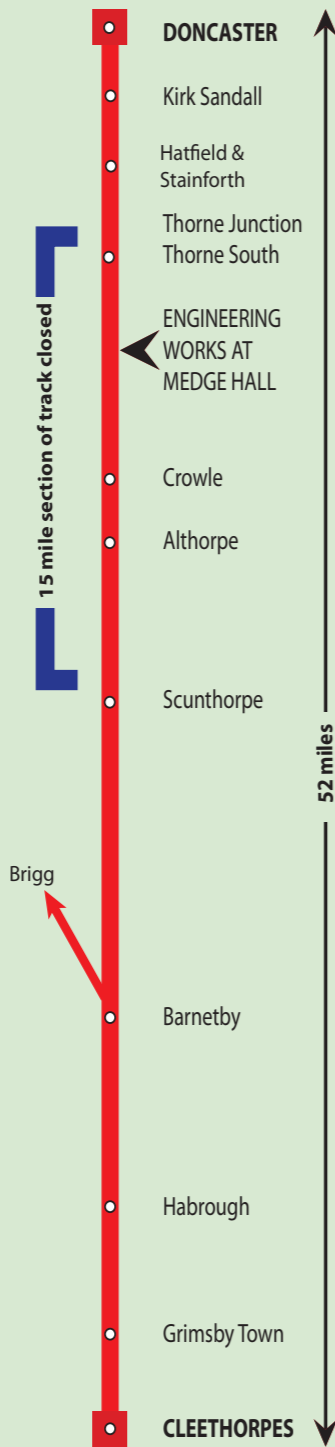
Railfuture Lincolnshire chairman David Harby condemned the imminent closure of Lincoln station's travel centre when he was interviewed on Radio Lincolnshire. East Midlands Trains has been told that the closure will increase pressure on the booking office windows.

■ ■ Skegness benefits

Former BR InterCity 125 trains operated by East Midlands Trains are running into Skegness to boost capacity on summer Saturdays.

■ ■ Signal box closure

An electrical fault was blamed for a fire at Gainsborough's Lea Road signal box which was open only for one seven-and-a-half-hour shift.



Railfuture AGM

held in Leeds May 2009

2009 Elections – Board of Directors

Chairman	Mike Crowhurst	Unopposed
3 x 3-year term		
1 st	Clara Zilahi	338
2 nd	Colin Elliff	315
3 rd	Roger Blake	313
2 x 1-year term		
4 th	Ian McDonald	306
5 th	Trevor Jones	297
6 th	Rowland Pittard	236
7 th	David Redgewell	102

Until 2012 / Until 2010 / Not Elected

New Board of Directors

Chairman	Mike Crowhurst	1 year	
Roger Blake	Colin Elliff	Clara Zilahi	Until 2012
Jerry Alderson	Philip Bisatt	Andrew MacFarlane	Until 2011
Trevor Garrod	Trevor Jones	Ian McDonald	Until 2010

Mike Crowhurst

Chairman Mike Crowhurst told the AGM: "This year marks 30 years since I joined the then Railway Development Society, and 15 years since privatisation was inflicted on the railways.

"It is salutary to recall that 30 years ago not only would we soon have to fight off 'Son of Beeching' in the form of Serpell, but our main concern was to generate as much patronage as possible for all parts of the network, and fight a programme of incremental closures – overt or 'by stealth' – the latter famously in the case of the Settle-Carlisle.

"What a different world we are now in! Not only are closures almost completely off the agenda but virtually the entire network is now bursting at the seams most of the time, and overcrowding is now the biggest problem. It's nice to have the problems of success!

"And it is good to have a man at the top, Lord Adonis, who seems to know what he is talking about and an enthusiasm for rail. He could be the mandarins' nightmare."

Peter Lawrence

Railfuture president Peter Lawrence sent a message to the AGM: "I am sorry I am unable to be with you this year, having suffered a slight stroke on 21 March but I am pleased to say I am making rapid strides in regaining my health.

"I have concerns about railway capacity, fares, electrification, reopenings and freight. Fares are a very emotive issue. With the Government wishing to reduce the subsidy to the railways and make the passenger pay more for investment, it does nothing to encourage greater use of the railways. While car manufacturers are to be helped in this 'credit crunch' by awarding £2,000 towards the purchase of a new greener cars, it is also time that the rail user was given some more encouragement.

"The rail user needs to see and get value for money. Passengers should expect a comfortable guaranteed seat for their journey. It is important that everyone campaigns strongly against future fare increases."

Resolutions passed:

Design of rolling stock

While recognising the ability of airline-style seating in trains to accommodate more passengers, and that many lone passengers prefer this seating style with more leg room, Railfuture regrets the consequent loss of luggage space between seat backs provided in many bay-style seating arrangements. We call for ideally 50% of seating to be provided in facing bays grouped together to facilitate family groups and tourists travelling together; for every seat to be provided with an unobstructed view through a window in all new and refurbished trains, and for the tables in airline style seating to be large enough for a laptop.

This AGM further regrets the adoption of Tube-style longitudinal bench seating in London Overground trains.

Proposed: Norman Bradbury. Seconded: Keith Dyall.

Amendments proposed by Ian McDonald. Seconded: Jerry Alderson.

Refund policy during "bustitution"

Railfuture urges ATOC member companies to explore all alternatives to bus substitution, including diversionary routes, and to offer part refunds to cover sections of journeys where buses or coaches were substituted for rail travel. This concession is already offered by rail passenger operators in other countries including Via Rail in Canada.

Proposed: Garth Smith. Seconded: Trevor Garrod.

Christmas and New Year holiday trains

This AGM agrees that Railfuture adopts as one of its aims the reinstatement of rail services over the Christmas, and in Scotland New Year, holiday. Initially a Boxing Day service should be provided on key routes.

This would bring us into line with the rest of the European Union and accommodate social changes in recent years such as geographical mobility and the acknowledged dangers of drink driving.

Proposed: Clara Zilahi. Seconded: Peter Wakefield (for East Anglia branch)

Cost cutting by train operators

Railfuture regrets recent measures which could discourage rail travel in favour of road or air alternatives, such as: ticket office opening hours, reductions in out-of-town railhead access to inter-city services (such as at Watford Junction and Stockport) and reductions in restaurant car services, whilst both fares and parking charges, even on Sundays, continue to rise.

Proposed: John Davis. Seconded: Norman Bradbury (London & South East branch)

The resolutions were sent to Transport Secretary Lord Adonis by Railfuture chairman Mike Crowhurst, to Lib-Dem transport spokesman Norman Baker by Norman Bradbury, to the Green party by Ian McDonald and to the Conservative Stephen Hammond by Keith Dyall.

Green way forward

Trains are already the greenest form of public transport but efforts are being made to ensure it becomes even more environmentally friendly.

Fuel consumption of trains operated by First TransPennine has been reduced by 1.8million litres a year and CO₂ reduced by 5million kilograms a year by encouraging drivers to use "eco mode" and to have a light touch on the throttle.

The operator's public relations manager David Mallender told Railfuture's AGM that a train's third engine can be taken out of service automatically.

Mr Mallender was pleased to see people still "flocking to trains" even though growth has slowed slightly because of the recession.

Efforts were being made to ease bottlenecks. The Manchester hub project is the "key to the Northern network" and its benefits would go far beyond Manchester, probably adding around £16billion of value to the economy. But the dangers facing the industry were highlighted by author and former Brit-

ish Rail manager Ted Gibbins. He said other industries were given money to recover after the Second World War but the railways was not. But British Rail was both successful and innovative. BR managers were extremely well respected throughout the world and had a significant and successful engineering and scientific department.

Even Railtrack reluctantly had to admit that BR had got working well with limited resources "down to a fine art".

But sadly, if BR was able to live within its budget, the Government claimed the balance back.

"So there was no reward for imagination and progress," said Mr Gibbins.

Now, he said, there were still threats. Guided buses were robbing the railways of their network and road hauliers were still trying to get anti-social and dangerous road trains accepted in Britain.

He warned: "Don't hold your breath waiting for the Government to do the right thing."

Severnside

By Nigel Bray

01452 501986

■ ■ All-weather service

Heavy snow on 6 February caused the total cancellation of bus services in and between Gloucester and Cheltenham for much of the day but trains serving both towns ran as booked. It was good to see the railway maintaining an all-weather service and the branch has suggested to Gloucestershire County Council that more publicity be given via local radio stations, to available public transport at times of severe weather.

■ ■ Clued-up MP

George Bailey recently wrote to his MP, Dan Norris (Labour, Wansdyke), on the need for more capacity in the West rail network generally and was pleased to receive unsolicited support for Radstock-Frome reopening from Mr Norris, who forwarded the correspondence to Rail Minister Lord Adonis. In his reply the Minister said it was encouraging that the South West region was considering investment in rail schemes for the Bristol area by means of the Regional Funding Allocation.

■ ■ Vandalism

The problem of vandalism at unstaffed and partly staffed stations was raised at the branch AGM in Bristol on 25 April by our guest speaker, Mr John Leach, chairman of Frome Public Transport Users Association. He instanced graffiti attacks on nameboards at Frome, damage to shelters at Bruton and wrecking of self-ticketing machines on the Bristol-Weymouth route. The group had recently met with British Transport Police to discuss ways of tackling the situation.



Frome station

Picture: Miekko Kuroki

Successes of the group have included the creation of a special budget by First Great Western for station improvements between Freshford and Weymouth inclusive. Frome has regained two direct London trains each way and these helped to fill gaps in its Weymouth line service. The group monitored passenger loadings at busy times with a view to asking FGW to provide longer trains where possible.

Asked whether Frome station could support a cafe or other retail outlet to provide a human presence when the ticket office was closed, Mr Leach replied that half-day trading, as at Castle Cary, might be viable but probably not in the evenings, when trains were infrequent. He noted that rail-bus connections were difficult to achieve because of the irregular train timings but could become feasible if the Weymouth line had an hourly frequency.

■ ■ Value-for-money rail

Gerard Duddridge presented a draft map to accompany a projected leaflet setting out the branch's strategy for expanding rail services. He contrasted the value for money of rail schemes in the regional funding application bid with those for major roads. Reopening of the Portishead line is now estimated at £25million for an 11-mile route, whereas the Kingskerswell bypass would cost £129million for five miles.