

North West

By Trevor Bishop trevor.bishop0@btinternet.com

Blackpool South at risk

The Blackpool and Fylde Rail Users Association has spotted a plan being quietly pushed by Blackpool Council that would see Blackpool South station closed and the South Fylde line cut short at Blackpool Pleasure Beach. The proposal, part of the "South Beach Area Action Plan", was available only on a part of Blackpool Council's website that required users to register. Looking for it now brings up the message: "This page is no longer available for viewing. If you have any queries regarding this, please click on the Contact Us link above." The downloaded document contained the following: "Consideration has been given

in the past to the relocation of Blackpool South Rail terminus between (or at) Blackpool Pleasure Beach and the existing Blackpool South Station. Truncation of the line would in rail terms have a negative impact, but in wider terms could significantly improve connectivity between South Shore and the residential areas to the east and better integrate pedestrian links, parking areas and land uses. What are your views on this?" BAFRUA is normally sent copies of the council's plan, but nothing on this one had been sent to them. They plan to raise the issue at the next Community Rail Partnership meeting.



Area covered by BAFRUA

CrossCountry backtracks at Stockport

Following pressure from the East Cheshire Lines Rail User Group and Railfuture North West England, stops were reinstated at Stockport on the Manchester-Bristol services of CrossCountry Trains. However the stops at Macclesfield, lost at the same time, will not be reinstated.

These stops were removed when the new franchise was let and the services were recast, with many previously direct destinations requiring a change of train at Birmingham New Street. Those travelling from intermediate stations between Macclesfield and Stoke-on-Trent wanting a reasonable connection with CrossCountry Bristol services have to sprint under the subway at Stoke and hope the CrossCountry service might be a minute or so late, as there is only one minute between the local stopping service arriving and the CrossCountry departure, clearly not a connection. Travellers who can't make this "connection" have to wait an hour for the next service or catch another CrossCountry service and change again at Birmingham New Street.

The company running the franchise, Arriva Trains, maintained that they had to remove those stops as this was part of the franchise specification, but no-one could find where this was in the Invitation To Tender documents.

Manchester-Sheffield overcrowding

The 17.18 Manchester Piccadilly-Sheffield train suffers serious congestion. Goyt Valley Rail Users Association has been raising the issue with Northern Rail and was promised that class 142s with "three and two" layout giving an extra 20 seats would be rostered on this diagram. These trains also have better cycle accommodation. But on one occasion, three passengers with cycles heading towards Sheffield had to wait around one and a half hours for the next train. At least 10 other passengers were unable to get on because the train was full to bursting, giving those on board a miserable ride. GVRUA chairman Alan Jackson wrote to Northern Rail asking: "Why do you roster larger trains on the services out to New Mills (which travel with spare capacity), when the Sheffield train is invariably packed to the rafters and, on occasions such as described above, customers are left at the station?" Improvements were promised in May, so the group is at a loss to understand why the situation persists.



Mobility scooters

Mobility scooters can be essential for many disabled travellers who wish to have freedom and independence to move around the rail destinations they visit. However, as with passengers, they come in a variety of shapes and sizes. Some scooters are small three wheelers with a maximum speed of four mph, while others may be four-wheeled vehicles equipped for road use with a top speed of eight mph.

Some rail operators, particularly East Midlands Trains and Cross-Country, have an excellent system for accommodating passengers using the smaller of these vehicles providing that they meet the weight, size and manoeuvrability of a wheelchair.

Also, in my experience, Eurostar and Belgian Rail both provide an exceptional service for mobility scooter users. However, some operators including Northern Rail, Transpennine and Scot Rail currently deny access to all scooters including those of the same size as wheelchairs, which they are bound by the Disability and Discrimination Act to accept.

As chairman of East Midlands Railfuture, and a disabled rail passenger who uses a mobility scooter, I have taken the anomaly of this issue to the Secretary of State for Transport and have received a totally unsatisfactory reply from the Department for Transport which has passed the buck back to the offending train operators.

This situation is completely unacceptable to many disabled rail users who are currently denied access to significant parts of the rail network by the refusal of some operators to accommodate their only practical means of independent travel.

This issue is further complicated by The Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency – part of the Department of Health – which has published guidance stating that scooters cannot be transported while occupied!

If this is a safety issue, why is this considered a greater hazard than allowing able-bodied passengers to stand for their journey or to sit on the floor in the toilet area? Many disabled passengers find access to standard seating unacceptable due to seat height and fixed arms and space. To remain on the scooter is their only comfortable option.

This is a cause that surely needs to be taken up by Railfuture and our political representatives through the Association of Train Operators. I can see no justification for the

Your letters extra

denial of these vehicles, even if it is necessary to certificate individual scooter models which meet wheelchair specifications!

Terry Holt, Sutton Bonington, Notts LE12 5NW

Unfair to Wales

Following the Railfuture AGM in May, not a single board member comes from northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales, so Railfuture appears Anglo-centric.

With those parts of the United Kingdom forging ahead in a rather different way from England, both in rail transport and other ways, this is a bizarre and unfair situation especially to our three Welsh branches, celebrating so many successful campaigns over recent years, producing influential research and policy documents and having had fruitful meetings with every Welsh minister of transport since our Cardiff Bay parliament was founded.

If devolved government means anything, it is immensely easier to gain access to those in power! At our last meeting, we discussed a way of making Railfuture more fairly governed.

In the short term, I believe members should be co-opted to represent Wales (the three branches could decide on whom), Scotland and northern Ireland.

In the long-term, go federal! This would mean that all United Kingdom countries would have a guaranteed board member (decided in preliminary, internal elections). Such an arrangement could also effectively serve the regions of England.

How about it?

John Rogers, Llewellyn Street, Nantymoel, Penybont Ar Ogwar CF32 7RF Wales

Busway obsession

Peter Rayner is right in his assessment of the Government's insistence on guided bus replacing rail. The planned busway for the Luton-Dunstable rail corridor has been consistently encouraged by the Department for Transport and the Government Office for the East of England despite failing to stand up to scrutiny all along.

The documents presented to the public inquiry were full of wild promises of routes served by the busway and extremely busy service patterns.

Subsequently the proposed busway has shrunk and the service levels are projected as far lower, yet the (high compared with rail) cost is expected to be at least the same.

For many, many years Luton Borough Council has maintained that no rail company was interested in running trains along the route, a claim that is still made even after a

proposal from a rail company was discussed at the inquiry. The council even went to the trouble of asking a rail franchise applicant not to include Luton-Dunstable in its bid. The inquiry noted that Luton costed a rail alternative using what they claimed was standard "six car" Thameslink units, and that they thought it was "possible" that up to 0.9% of car drivers might switch mode.

The local councils did try to stop the busway at one point, but were heavily leaned upon by government agencies.

I was in correspondence with someone at DfT early in 2008, having been referred from the Rail Minister. All my questions about the viability of the busway were met by DfT with standard Luton responses, with no attempt to justify the destruction of the rail link.

I was told that the Cambridge busway was a big success. When I asked how it could be so successful when it had not even been completed, let alone with any buses running, I was told that DfT wouldn't communicate with me again because I didn't believe what I was told.

Back in the 1930s, the Karrier Rorailer bus running on (and off) the nearby Hemel Hempstead branch showed the superiority of the steel wheel/rail interface achieving double the miles per gallon on rail compared with road running.

It really is absurd to run buses along the route for purely internal transport when the railway has the potential for a future link between the Midland and West Coast main lines and can provide journeys into and out of the area.

John Deaves, Elmwood Crescent, Luton LU2 7HX

Yorkshire challenge

I have been a member of Railfuture for just over a year and I always enjoy reading the Local Action columns in *Railwatch* but, after reading the Yorkshire entry in the last issue, I'm beginning to wonder how accurate are the contents of these columns.

The first items refer to trains to London from Yorkshire under the heading "Direct trains to Yorkshire cities". There are a number of errors and items of misinformation, some more serious than others but, in chronological order, let me correct them.

It is stated that three Yorkshire cities are to get their first direct rail services to London for decades and then specifies Bradford, Halifax and Wakefield, together with the towns of Brighouse and Pontefract. "Halifax" is a town and not a city and Yorkshire folk are always very aware of the difference! More importantly, Wakefield's main sta-

tion (Westgate) has enjoyed a direct service to London King's Cross for many, many years provided by various train operators.

Wakefield's (ex-Midland) station – Kirkgate – is the station which will benefit from the new, proposed London service.

Unless I've been travelling on the Hogwarts Express, Bradford Forster Square has also enjoyed a direct service to London via Shipley and Leeds – albeit a very limited one, for many years, as does Skipton, Keighley, etc. I think the writer ought to have stated that National Express East Coast intends to improve its current main line services to Bradford Forster Square, and to extend the service to Harrogate and Lincoln.

Together with Wakefield Kirkgate, the towns of Halifax, Brighouse and Pontefract will also benefit from the new proposals.

For *Railwatch* to imply that Bradford and Wakefield currently have no direct service to London is to fall into precisely the kind of error of which we accuse our detractors, i.e. if you pretend a service does not exist then you can argue it is under-used and, therefore, a drain on resources and ripe for curtailment.

We need people to be more aware of the Bradford Forster Square/Shipley service to London and this item is not helping.

Richard Hackford, Thackley Old Road, Shipley, BD18 1DS

Editors' note: Thanks to Richard for pointing out the errors in editing the Yorkshire report for which we apologise

Diesel backwater

I recall some 30 years ago, travelling to the West Country on what was then a new InterCity 125 train. A Japanese gentleman sitting opposite me expressed surprise that the train was diesel powered, rather than electric.

Fast forward to 2009 and nothing much has changed. Wonder of wonders, it has recently been announced that new inter-city trains are to be introduced that go as fast as those of the 1970s!

With the current trend of shutting down vast swathes of the rail network at weekends, one wonders about the effect on freight. It's bad enough for passengers but well nigh impossible to transfer freight on to a bus.

Incidentally, I was very pleased with the Christian Wolmar DVD (offered at a special price in *Railwatch* 118).

Roger A Smith, The Street, Little Waltham, Chelmsford CM3 3NT

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London and South East

By Graham Larkbey and Laurence Fryer

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South London line

A new campaign group has been formed to Save the South London Line service between Victoria and London Bridge via Peckham Rye. This is expected to cease in 2012 when the East London Line Extension begins running to Clapham Junction. The South London Route Utilisation Strategy proposed a new Victoria-Bellingham stopping service to maintain the route's Central London link, which hundreds rely on daily to



get to work, but this has been quietly dropped in a behind-the-scenes deal between Transport for London and the Department for Transport. Campaign contact: Val Shawcross (London Assembly Member, Lambeth & Southwark), Freepost, 311 Camberwell Road, London SE5 0HQ. All a case of déjà vu for the London and South East branch, which helped

establish the original (and very successful) campaign to save the then-ailing route back in the late 1980s!

Ghost train replaces ghost bus

The once-weekly "Ghost Bus" between Ealing Broadway and Wandsworth Road (the nominal replacement for the withdrawn Birmingham-Brighton rail service) was replaced from 18 May by one train daily (Monday-Friday) between Kensington Olympia and Wandsworth Road. This token service is almost as useless as the bus, especially as it runs "back to front" – Olympia to Wandsworth Road at 10.12, returning from Wandsworth Road to Olympia at 16.35.

North London anniversary

May 14 marked 30 years since the restoration of passenger services between Camden Road and Stratford after a gap of nearly 40 years. Branded "Crosstown Linkline", the service of elderly two-car diesel multiple units shuttled between Camden Road and North Woolwich on Monday to Friday only, initially with no intermediate stops between Camden Road and Stratford. However, they did call at the new West Ham station which opened on the same day. Back to the present, and extensive upgrade work continues on the NLL and Barking-Gospel Oak lines. The latter's user group continues to campaign vigorously for overcrowding relief and eventual electrification.

Timetable disappointment for Sudbury

Once again the new Chiltern Line timetable offers no improvements at either of the Sudbury stations. The campaign continues, with weekend services a priority. Currently both stations are closed all weekend.

Internet resource

Members of the branch now have the chance to hear about the latest developments via the internet. The branch has set up a new group at http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/Railfuture_LondonandSE

The idea is to keep members advised of forthcoming divisional meetings in the branch area and hold copies of branch minutes, standing orders and branch-related rail documentation. We have invited some members to join via email but many of the addresses supplied, possibly several years ago, have proved not to be working.

So could members please send their correct and up-to-date email address to Lloyd Butler at lloyd@deltic.net

If you would like to join the branch's new Yahoo group, please send an email to Railfuture_LondonandSE-subscribe@yahoo.com quoting your name, address and membership number (if you know it).