

Devon and Cornwall

By Gerard Duddridge

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■ ■ Lapford and North Devon Line

Since December 2008 the Exeter to Barnstaple service has been hourly during the day. There are now 14 trains each way Monday to Saturday and six on Sunday. Most run through from Exmouth alternating with the Exmouth/Paignton service. However, Lapford continues to be missed out for 10 hours of the day, despite there being ample time to stop between the



Lapford station

Picture: Owen Dunn

passing places at Crediton and Eggesford. It would make no difference to end-to-end journey times. We suggest that more trains should stop at Lapford. It is one of the larger villages on the line and it has lost six

of its 14 bus services to Exeter. In comparison, Morchard Road and Coplestone, which are no more important, have the full rail service, plus respectively 23 and 37 daily buses to Exeter.

The original rationale for missing out Lapford dates from the time when the timetable was being developed, with passing near Cowley Bridge Junction and Eggesford. Although this option would have provided faster services to Barnstaple, the distance was too long for reliability of an even-interval hourly service. No more than two stations could be served between Exeter and Eggesford and the timings did not link with those of the Exmouth line.

■ ■ Barnstaple bus-rail connections

Rail passengers at Barnstaple, needing to continue their journey by bus, have been disadvantaged by the £42million Barnstaple Western bypass since its opening in May 2007. Numerous buses including those to Westward Ho!, Appledore and Hartland no longer pass near the station. Their old route via Sticklepath Terrace was closed off by Devon County Council's road scheme. The £42million bypass, paid for by taxpayers, also blocks the Bideford line trackbed.

It has left a limited range of buses to run via the station and bus-only subway beneath the bypass. Since May some Great Torrington and Holsworthy buses have been routed via the station, but this is of limited value as there are direct buses from Exeter St David's station. Most needed are bus-rail connections with Ilfracombe.

The county council was awarded a Green Apple Environment Award by the Green Organisation in November 2007 for their work on the bypass. The Green Organisation says it is "an independent, non-political, non-activist, non-profit environment group dedicated to recognising, rewarding and promoting environmental best practice around the world".

■ ■ Okehampton

Five Sunday trains are running between Exeter and Okehampton from 7 June to 20 September. There are ideas to run it as a separate service connecting with Barnstaple line trains at Yeoford. This requires restoration of the disused former down platform at Yeoford.



Okehampton station

Picture: Owen Dunn



Varsity plus

Simon Taylor wrote referring to the east west rail link eventually passing at least three universities: University of East Anglia, Cambridge and Oxford.

The University of Bedfordshire, Cranfield University, the main campus of the Open University, Buckingham University and Oxford University all lie within short cycling distance of the western section of the route. That's five from Bedford west; six if one includes Oxford Brookes.

Ben Waine
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Question for London

I wrote to my MP Frank Dobson to thank him for supporting the idea of reopening Primrose Hill station and also to ask him to support the reopening of the link between Oxford and Cambridge.

He wrote back to me to say he was "happy to go along with it".

He added: "However, I believe that a much higher priority should be given to providing (by new build and joining up existing parts of lines) an outer London orbital rapid rail route. This would enable people to travel fairly quickly by public transport from one part of outer London to another without coming into the centre.

"It could also be linked to 'parkway' stations on the main national rail routes into London with the same effect for long distance travellers wanting to get round London or to the Channel Tunnel, Heathrow, City Airport, etc" I don't recall Railfuture campaigning for an orbital route further out than the Overground, East London line, Croydon, Clapham Junction and Willesden route.

Are there any suggestions for an orbital route outside that?

Peter Wills, St Paul's Crescent,
London NW1 9TN

Home thoughts

I returned from Portugal travelling via Manchester Airport, which enabled me to use the excellent rail services into and out of that station, which did not apply to the connecting service.

I could perhaps claim that using public transport eased my conscience after flying from Faro but I paid the price when I boarded the connection to Ludlow from Crewe.

I do not think I have ever had a more uncomfortable journey, standing for most of the way in a two-car class 175 unit which was packed on arrival at Crewe and

Your letters extra

which demonstrated the lack of capacity for luggage which was stored in the vestibule, outside the toilet and in every conceivable space. There were at least 15 people standing at my end of the second car and plenty more at the other end. I did not get on the first car as it was so obviously full.

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Computer access

I was interested to read the letter by Dr Manning in *Railwatch* 119, regarding the lack of a computer.

A good third or more of the population does not have this facility, but many organisations, including train operators, seem to feel it is the only way of communication.

In some respects this is discriminatory! I agree with your comment that most people can gain access to computers at public libraries. However in rural areas such as Lincolnshire, the county council has cut down on the hours and days that libraries are open - to save money! In my village library, there are only two computers, and they are fully booked by students and others when the library is open.

It should be a matter of course to provide a website, email address, postal address and telephone and/or FAX number, so that communication is maintained between an organisation and its "customers".

A M Waddington, Viking Way,
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More options needed

Dr Robert Manning wrote about the problem faced by people who do not have access to a computer when only electronic forms of contact are given (Train Sardine, *Railwatch* 119).

In your response, you state that most people can gain access to computers at public libraries.

Some people are unable to use a computer because of a disability. This makes it important that non-electronic means of contact are always given where possible.

Joanna Griffiths, London SE2
(full address supplied)

Chafford query

I am trying to get details of the construction and later electrification of the single-track rail link between Upminster and Grays and in particular near Chafford Hundred station. A public right of way footpath (No 16 in the Thurrock Statement) runs alongside this line but there is now no access to the station at the ancient brick bridge immediately to the south of the station.

The path connected with a track which existed before the excava-

tion which lowered the land to what is now occupied by the Lakeside shopping complex.

A wire barrier has been installed, although Thurrock Council has provided a new tarmac surface.

Can anyone advise me as to how I can see what records exist of the history and construction of the railway at this location?

Michael Cullen, Whitmore Avenue,
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Well done, Peter

I took the opportunity to buy Peter Rayner's book *On and Off The Rails* and am bound to say that I read it entirely in a short time.

I was also part of the "mother railway", as Peter so often described the sadly missed BR. Despite being written some years ago its message hasn't changed and, in company with many others, I feel the many good things which existed in the days of British Rail have been lost.

There is no doubt that the fragmented railway is leading to many problems, with crises coming about all too often.

As someone who has a professional interest in railway ticketing and fares and who travels widely on the network on a regular basis, it is sad the coordination of Network SouthEast and InterCity in particular has been replaced by each train operator doing its own thing, with some different arrangements for child fares, railcard acceptance and even whether Saturday or Sunday services are provided on a bank holiday.

Where the Association of Train Operators brings it all together they cannot even advertise the excellent All Line Rail Rover. As I write this, it appears that National Express East Coast is having a difficult time and one must really question the whole purpose of the franchising system and the separation of trains from track.

Very well done, Peter, for providing an excellent insight into the running of that vast organisation, known as British Rail, an organisation which was "getting there" and running services from "city to city, heart to heart". That WAS the age of the train!

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Ticket troubles

At this time of recession, when growth on the railways is probably non-existent, it is important rail companies do everything to encourage travel by train, and not discourage potential passengers.

However, I am sure many people are now frustrated by the complexity and unfairness of the system,

with the train operators appearing to rip off their customers.

In February when I tried to buy a ticket at Cambridge to Bury St Edmunds, the ticket machine did not offer an off-peak day return even though it was a Saturday. I could only buy a single or an Any-Time (peak-time) return.

On the train I spoke to the guard who told me that there was an off-peak ticket but I needed to select "Bury St Edmunds Buses".

What madness that I need to request an unwanted bus connection to get a cheap ticket that I should be entitled to anyway!

On May bank holiday Monday, I tried to book a train to Leeds using my home computer and www.nationalexpress.co.uk.

I chose my ticket, completed a series of pages and entered my credit card details to be told that Visa credit card was an "invalid payment type".

I phoned up their internet helpline and spoke to a technical expert who explained that NXEC had just upgraded the website but there was a problem and it was not accepting credit card payments at the moment. He kindly put me through to telesales.

However, they had no authority to sell me the ticket at the internet price and I had to pay the "phone price" which was £8 higher.

I was advised to take a screen print from the website and then write in to customer services for a refund.

To rub salt into the wounds, my colleague Nick Dibben told me that he had bought a little-known "open" Peterborough-Leeds ticket for £28, compared to my £46 Advance (train-specific, no refund) fare.

I suggest that ATOC urgently implements changes to make purchasing tickets as easy as possible and fares easy to understand.

Jerry Alderson, The Oaks, Milton,
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Sign your support

I would be very grateful if Railfuture members would sign our pledge for an improved Salisbury-Swindon passenger rail service via the following link <http://www.transwiltts.org.uk/pledge.html>

Although our line will not be local to some of you, we are aiming to demonstrate a degree of support from outside our area for our campaign. Therefore, your help in this regard would be very much appreciated.

Lee Fletcher, TransWiltts Save The
Train Campaign
<http://www.savethetrain.org.uk/>

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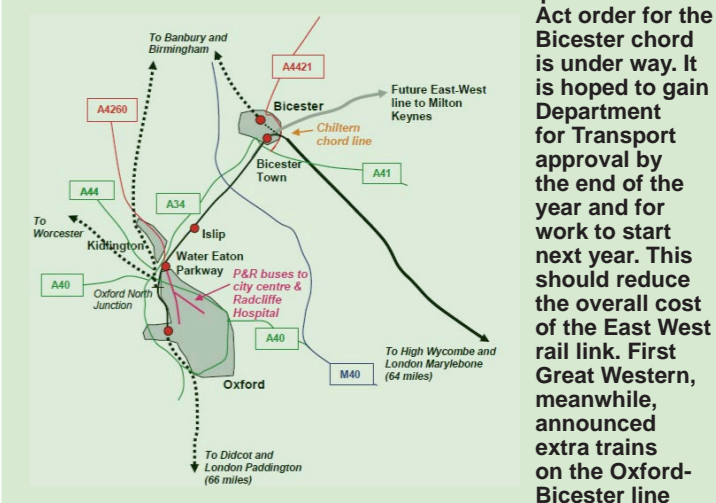
Thames Valley

By Chris Wright

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■ ■ Oxford-Marylebone

Chiltern Railways took its plans forward for an Oxford-Bicester to Marylebone service with a public consultation in April. The proposals were exhibited along with the environmental impacts. Feedback was generally positive although some concerns were identified. Work towards a Transport and Works



Act order for the Bicester chord is under way. It is hoped to gain Department for Transport approval by the end of the year and for work to start next year. This should reduce the overall cost of the East West rail link. First Great Western, meanwhile, announced extra trains on the Oxford-Bicester line

including a late evening service and Sunday trains. FGW plan a marketing campaign and to emphasise the Bicester Village link. The Oxford to Bicester Rail Action Group had been encouraging these developments for some time. More information: <http://www.chiltern-evergreen3.co.uk/>

■ ■ Bicester freight

The Ministry of Defence is hoping to encourage private freight companies to share its 1,550-acre rail-connected storage and distribution centre at Bicester.

■ ■ Quanton specials

Chiltern Railways ran special trains from Aylesbury to the preservation centre at Quanton Road on the May bank holiday. Many people took the opportunity to view the new station at Aylesbury Vale Parkway. The company plans to run the hourly Quantonian service again on August bank holiday Monday.

■ ■ East-West

The Bletchley-Bicester route was cleared of undergrowth during February so consultants could investigate the trackbed condition in detail as part of assessment work preparatory to reopening the route. East of Bedford route options have been reviewed and published by the East West Rail Consortium who sought comments by the end of March.

■ ■ London Midland

Milton Keynes Rail Users Group has developed an excellent website www.mkrailusers.org.uk and has been battling to get train operator London Midland to improve reliability and to communicate properly with users when services are disrupted. Likewise, the Bedford-Bletchley Rail Users Association has protested about cancellations on its route. Milton Keynes rail users group met the Department for Transport, and Milton Keynes Council has called for improvements from the train operator. London Midland has agreed an improvement action plan with Network Rail.

■ ■ Link to Brighton

Southern has introduced a Milton Keynes-East Croydon service, which with minimal publicity has proved popular. It is surprising Brighton is not served at the weekend in the summer.

■ ■ North Cotswold redoubling

Twenty miles of double track is being reinstated between Evesham and Charlbury at an "estimated cost of £105million". Railfuture, Tory leader David Cameron and Transport Secretary Lord Adonis attended the project launch ceremony at Charlbury in March.