

Bikes and trains magic

By Stephen Wade

The cult of the private car and over-dependence on road transport have a large part to play in the world's present economic and environmental ills.

Allowing more people to use a combination of bike and train may not be the complete answer but it is most certainly a large part of the solution.

Railway managers have sometimes been slow to recognise the importance of cycling in winning rail a bigger share of the transport market.

I believe they should join with Railfuture and other campaigners to ensure that in future there is ever-growing provision for bikes on trains.

But often the relationship between campaigners and managers can be strained.

In his message to cyclists in *Railwatch* 119, Andrew Griffiths of First Great Western raises questions about my report on the West of England community rail conference that took place in Bristol and was published in *Railwatch* 118 under the headline: First rebuff for cyclists.

Mr Griffiths wrote that he did not recall having rebuffed cyclists and that if he had done so, asked why no one responded to his remarks at the time.

The reason is that his remarks came at the very end of the conference in response to a final question put by Councillor Ricky Knight from north Devon on the subject of better provision for cyclists on trains.

Immediately after Mr Griffiths had finished speaking, the meeting was formally brought to an end, having run out of time. No further questions were possible.

It was because so many people had wanted to come back on this very important topic, but had been unable to do so, that I decided to begin my report with it, although chronologically it came last, behind other items which I also reported.

I can appreciate Mr Griffiths might have some difficulty in recalling his words several months on, especially since they were at the end of a long conference to which he made a major contribution.

Although published two months later, my report was written within two hours of the end of the conference, based on the notes I was taking when Mr Griffiths was speaking.

I also made mention of the cycle parking and cycle hire schemes he referred to but pointed out the limitations of these schemes which may be helpful to some but, to many, are impractical and do not answer the basic need.

Mr Griffiths tells us that he is a keen cyclist.

Some people are happy for cycling to be a weekend recreation and are happy to carry their cycles on

a rack attached to their car. Others see their cycle as a practical, everyday means of transport, and a way of avoiding driving a car.

A growing number of us have found that life without the burden of a private car is actually freer and more versatile, allowing us to be more mobile and healthier while being less stressed. Cycles allow us to be more economical and more environmentally friendly.

We know that the train and the bike are perfect, natural allies.

I speak for many when I say that if I were not able to bring my bike on the train, instead of using the train several times every week, I would probably rarely, if ever, take the train. I would be forced to be just another motorised addition to the damaging and unacceptable congestion of the roads.

Rail managers would do well to accept that cyclists are not a problem but are valuable customers. The train's ability to carry bikes should be one of its strong selling points, not a nuisance, and can attract customers to the railways.

Most people, at least most of the *Railwatch* readership, are aware that First Great Western is not responsible for the shortage of trains and carriage space to meet increasing demands for rail provision in the West Country.

Many of us blame this on the short-sighted attitudes of Whitehall mandarins.

We accept that, if he had his way, Mr Griffiths and FGW would give us as many trains and as much carriage space as we want.

That would lead to more revenue and more profit for them.

The solution is not to take away the facilities that make rail travel attractive in the first place.

The demand for space for large items, including bikes, is not new.

At one point, Mr Griffiths told the conference: "We do not want to go back to the old guard's van." He did not explain why.

The guard's van did at least provide some security and accepted liabilities for items carried.

Railfuture has called for more "convertible space" areas on trains where bikes, push chairs and luggage can be carried. Fold-up seats could be provided in these areas for passengers at peak times.

FGW provision for cycles on Sprinter trains, such as it is, is appreciated although it is not always adequate to rising demand.

If I had my way, adequate provision on trains for bikes and heavy or bulky luggage would be a statutory requirement. Provision for wheelchairs already is.

Rail managers and campaigners should be pounding on the doors of politicians and planners demanding more and better rail provision at local, regional and national level for both passengers and freight.

TruckTrain way to high-speed freight

By Philip Bisatt

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Railfuture's Freight Committee welcomed Peter Foyer of TruckTrain Knowhow Ltd to a recent meeting in Birmingham. TruckTrain is a consortium of specialists with practical road, rail, air and maritime expertise, and is a joint venture between Coventry University and TruckTrain Developments Ltd. They are working to fit rail into an integrated logistics system by developing a freight multiple unit.

FMUs are not of course a new idea. However, as Peter Foyer suggested, the trains that have already been demonstrated are "too high, too slow, too heavy, and have no 'grip'."

TruckTrain wants to crack these problems with a two to seven car FMU, capable (thanks to an 18-tonne axle load) of carrying standard containers at passenger train speeds. It would be bidirectional, with a cab at each end, and, significantly, all axles on the train would be powered.

The proposed train would be capable of travelling on over 80% of the UK mainline rail network, enabling it to reach parts where "traditional" intermodal rail freight cannot go.

Peter said TruckTrain will use existing infrastructure and make rail attractive for moving high value consumer goods. Key market sectors include food, building supplies, specialist chemicals and manufactured goods. It should out-perform road transport costs over short, medium and long distances and reduce fuel costs and CO₂ emissions by 40 to 50% compared with road transport.

TruckTrain should also be highly productive, making three return journeys of 150-200 miles per day, and covering 150,000 miles per annum. A typical lorry covers 100,000.

The biggest "driver" in the TruckTrain project is the need to make rail freight more competitive by cutting turn-round times at intermodal depots and avoiding the high costs involved each time a container is transferred between rail and road.

A TruckTrain would cost about the same as a class 66 locomotive and 20 wagons, but would do a job that the class 66 cannot, although the traditional freight train can move bulk goods very well. In response to Peter's presentation, there was a discussion about the parcels sector.

Interestingly, he did not see how Royal Mail's existing road-based distribution model could be viable with so many lorries having to be used.

Picture: TruckTrain



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