



Your letters

Conference cost

Don't you think that £20 is rather a lot for people to pay to attend the Railfuture rail reopenings conference at Corby? It might be fine for delegates from private companies or local authorities, who'll have their expenses paid for, but it hardly encourages the individual member to turn up, especially when he or she will have to fork out the cost of getting to Corby. At the very least, you should have different rates of payment like you do with subscriptions.

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Railfuture vice chairman Jerry Alderson writes: The £20 cost includes a buffet lunch and refreshments on arrival plus printing and postage of the conference report. This represents about £10 (including VAT), leav-

ing £10 to cover the cost of the venue (up to £500) and extra facilities, such as a sound system, and then there is the cost of printing (around £100), acknowledging bookings and bank charges for cashing the cheques.

Railfuture aims to break even on its conferences and we have done so on the Northallerton conference, but only because we are all unpaid volunteers and none of our speakers claimed travel expenses.

In the past we managed to obtain sponsorship but this is time-consuming to identify, negotiate and put into contract form.

I would be interested to hear from any members who have not attended a conference solely because of the conference fee.

If enough members felt that Railfuture should subsidise events, which will be necessary if we are

to offer concessions to seniors or the unwaged, then I am sure the board would consider the suggestion. To give us a mandate may I suggest that Mr Mickleburgh submits a motion for the 2010 AGM?

We aim to offer high-quality conferences at a low cost for the benefit of the attendees and I believe that most are better than those costing £300 or so. I recently attended a "free" rail conference in London but this was little more than an advertising seminar, and on reflection I would have avoided it.

Our conferences last six hours and I am confident that few cinemas or theatres would offer all-day entertainment plus lunch and a programme for £20.

We have tried to negotiate travel discounts for our conferences. Grand Central offered us a 34% discount to Northallerton, which several attendees made use of.

Some people may go by car to the Corby conference (because of the limited rail links from some directions) and it may be possible to put people in touch with one another so that car sharing is possible.

Christmas trains

It would seem I have stirred up quite a response to my article about running services over the Christmas holidays. I would like

a chance to respond to some of the points raised.

I have seen that Railfuture has passed a resolution to campaign for services on Boxing Day and I welcome this. I am not against train services running on Boxing Day but I am against Christmas Day. I have worked both these days in the past in my 24 years on the railway.

What I ask is that consideration is given to the welfare of staff who may have to work on those days.

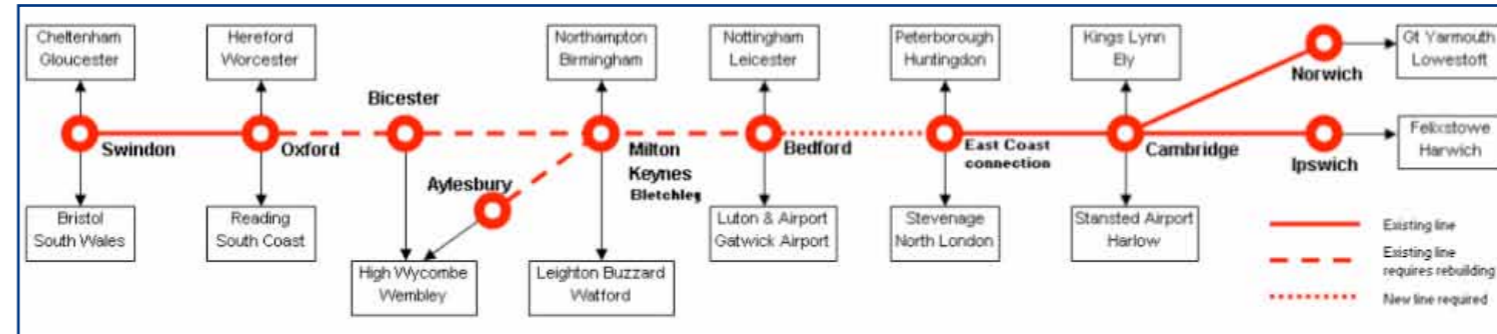
Not all football fans are yobs, but the railways seem to attract trouble makers who go out of their way to get drunk and cause a nuisance to other passengers and the staff.

Some people say trains are the answer to drunk driving but I find that hard to believe. Drunk drivers are generally out after the last train has gone. If they want to drink, they could take the option of getting home by taxi.

Unions opposed the withdrawal of services in the 1960s and that was the correct approach. After all, it was their members' livelihood that was being withdrawn.

However, being in my early 40s, I cannot remember these services and the vast majority of the present workforce probably do not either. Most now expect to have Christmas and Boxing Day guaranteed.

That was the reason I said let's start a debate. Rail workers now enjoy



ORBITAL ADVANTAGE: Reopening Oxford-Cambridge could provide an outer orbital route to avoid the congested capital

and expect their two days off at Christmas in England and Wales.

To be told they are now required to work on Boxing Day for an as yet unknown number of passengers will be hard to argue for.

I know how empty trains are on New Year's Day with only Anglo-Scottish trains getting busy around lunch time as revellers return home.

The next question is who will pay to travel on Boxing Day? It will have to be a premium fare to cover the additional costs.

Staff will not work for basic rates. How will they get to work? Not everyone has a car and buses are few on this day.

The closedown is also used for engineering works.

The works at this time are generally large undertakings, with total closure enabling the works to be completed within the time.

I don't think bustitution would go down too well with passengers and most train operators do not pay the costs of allowing staff to maintain knowledge of diversionary routes. This route knowledge would perhaps be required only to run one day a year?

So please think about my points when campaigning for services and be assured that I support the idea but have difficulty understanding where the passengers will come from to use the trains on Boxing Day.

Lee Davies, Railfuture freight committee and train driver

Orbital advantage

In *Railwatch* 120, Peter Wills wrote that he had asked for his MP's support in reopening the Oxford-Cambridge line. His MP had replied that a higher priority should be given to an outer orbital route around London.

In fact the Oxford-Cambridge line would provide excellent orbital connections, at least on the semi-circle from the east through north to west.

Once Oxford to Cambridge is reopened, train services could run over existing lines east of Cambridge and west of Oxford, linking Ipswich with Swindon.

This extended route - East West Rail - would have interchange with nine radial routes from London, with the Great Eastern main

line at Stowmarket or Ipswich, with the West Anglia line and Fen line at Cambridge, with the East Coast main line at either Stevenage or Hitchin (not yet decided), with the Midland main line at Bedford, with the West Coast main line at Milton Keynes, with the Chiltern line at Bicester, with the Cotswold line at Oxford and with the west-bound Great Western at Swindon.

A diagram of the interchanges, as well as comprehensive information about the route, can be found on the Railfuture webpage www.railfuture.co.uk/ox-cam.

Visitors to the page can also support the scheme by registering on the petition.

Please note that when you register on the petition, the space for an email address on the petition can be left blank. A postal address is sufficient.

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Busway battle

I read with interest your *Railwatch* article on the Luton to Dunstable railway line.

I was born in Luton and lived there for 23 years frequently using this line.

I am amazed that a website has not been created already, lobbying support for the reinstatement of this line or a committee formed to put pressure on local and national government.

The extension to Leighton Buzzard would make great sense as passengers could then get connections to Birmingham, Manchester and Glasgow via trains ex Euston and potential for passengers to travel to the Midlands from Luton.

I remember when the line went through to Welwyn Garden City where you could pick up trains travelling north to York, Newcastle and Edinburgh ex Kings Cross.

If not a public line then why not a heritage line?

I am quite willing to start a website if I can get enough support and historical material.

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Editors' note: We put Mr Kirk in touch with Railfuture campaigners who have been involved with the struggle to preserve and

reopen the railway, rather than seeing it smashed to pieces to provide a busway.

The *Dunstable Gazette* reports that train operators have told South West Bedfordshire MP Andrew Selous that it would be easy to resurrect a rail link between Luton, Dunstable and Leighton Buzzard.

The MP said he had been informed by the Association of Train Operating Companies that the line was intact and could accommodate a new railway if the Luton and Dunstable busway scheme were "to bite the dust".

He says the controversial scheme, which should be completed by 2012, could be in jeopardy should the Labour party lose the next general election. Conservative shadow transport minister Stephen Hammond has said a future Tory government would review the busway project, leaving the door open for a railway option to be considered.

In a letter to Mr Selous, ATOC chief executive Michael Roberts said Dunstable was the third largest town in the UK without a railway.

He said: "We are also aware that the line formation is more or less intact and mothballed, and so would be easy to resurrect as a heavy rail link if it were decided to do so."

Mr Selous said that although the former railway track near Leighton Buzzard had been built on, it would be possible for the track to join elsewhere.

Fare extra

Some time ago, I attended an organised mid-week event in Barnsley, the timetable for which was fluid.

An anytime return rail ticket was marked up at £35.60 from Loughborough but on top of this would have been an £11 fee to park my car at the station, thereby making a total of £46.60.

I went by car, which was a cheaper option and took 30 minutes less in time. It has long been the case that two can travel more cheaply by car but this appears to be down to one now.

I wonder who can afford to travel by train unless they are on expenses or able to pre-book and restrict themselves to specified services. Even so, I might have fore-

gone the car and gone by train had it not been for the greedy parking charges.

The rail company tells me it is to cover a 24-hour charge, but how many leave their vehicles for this amount of time.

If I park for eight hours why should I pay for 24? Incidentally I managed to park in the centre of Barnsley all day for £4.10.

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Forgotten metro

Your cover picture on *Railwatch* 120, and accompanying short article, is indeed impressive but you do not mention the poor relation in all this, the West London Line.

Its metro service between Willesden and Clapham Junctions runs only twice an hour, and goes nowhere from either end.

Barking would be the obvious extension to the north-east, if the line from Gospel Oak is ever electrified, and there is plenty of choice to the south-west via Richmond.

The other is even more feeble, just a four-car train once an hour, though at least it gets to Milton Keynes and East Croydon. Both services could be so much more useful than they are today. What about a campaign to develop the neglected WLL?

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Political direction

Chris Davies MEP questions why Railfuture's international committee sought the views of political parties rather than individual candidates in the months before the European Parliament election.

The answer is very simple. On 4 June, we European citizens, rightly or wrongly, had to vote based on a party list, not for individuals.

However, we on the international committee now look forward to constructive dialogue with Mr Davies and all other MEPs who are serious about developing Europe-wide transport, environmental and consumer policies over the next four years.

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A conflict between comfort and capacity on long-distance commuter trains

I read Trevor Jones' comments about the Guildford-Waterloo train service with interest (*Railwatch* 120) but I challenge his claim that South West Trains run two class 444 long-distance services per hour at peak times.

As a long-distance traveller who has to endure the class 450 suburban trains, I wish it was the case. Sadly there are lengthy periods with none of the more comfort-

able 444s, including Saturday all day. The pattern seems to be completely illogical.

However, Mr Jones' contentment is understandable as class 450s were specifically designed for short journeys such as London-Guildford.

Many morning services start from Guildford so local passengers should have no problem find-

ing a seat. Woking is even better served, with 19 trains per hour to the capital at peak - one every four minutes.

Portsmouth's requirements are entirely different. Services are busy at peaks near London but never overcrowded, except in the event of a short formation or a previously cancelled service. Class 450 suburban stock just is not warranted on this route and

has driven away many passengers to other forms of transport, a trend which will accelerate following completion of the A3 Hindhead tunnel in 2011.

Wessex Railfuture's bid to restore a proper service to the Portsmouth Direct Line is entirely sound.

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Picture: MATTHEW BLACK



Picture: PAUL FERBRACHE

ROOMY: Two by two seating in the class 440s

CRAMPED: Two by three seating in the class 450s