

## Yorkshire

By Chris Hyomes

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### ■ Vice president welcomed

The annual general meeting and luncheon of the Yorkshire branch was held in Knottingley on Saturday March 13. All serving branch officers were re-elected. This year's guest speaker was BBC broadcaster Alan Whitehouse, who accepted the position of vice president of the Yorkshire branch in recognition of keeping the local railway network high on the agenda in his work as transport correspondent.

### ■ Questions to Nick Clegg

Branch chairman Chris Hyomes got the chance to question Nick Clegg, leader of the Liberal Democrats, at a Question Time style debate organised by *The Yorkshire Post* before the general election. Mr Clegg said he wanted the Midland main line electrified and said a high-speed rail link to Yorkshire was vital for the area's long-term future.

### ■ 25 years of action celebrated

Campaigners are celebrating 25 years of the Halifax & District Rail Action Group and 10 years since Brighouse station reopened. To make it a triple celebration Grand Central's long-awaited Bradford-Halifax-Brighouse-London trains started running on 23 May, with the start of the summer timetable. Grand Central's managing director Tom Cliff is one of the invited speakers at HADRAG's annual meeting this year in Brighouse. Local train operator Northern Rail will be represented by Drew Haley. Completing the panel, Metro's David Hoggarth is looking forward to renewing his acquaintance with Brighouse having played a key role when the station opened in 2000. HADRAG continues to argue for a list of improvements, including faster Brighouse-Leeds journeys. The top issue continues to be overcrowding of commuter services.

### ■ Grand Central

Halifax's Labour MP Linda Riordan is one of the people to benefit from the return of direct trains to London. The first regular through train in 30 years from Halifax to London was the 08.06 (08.18 from Brighouse) on Sunday 23 May for London King's Cross at 10.57. She said the service will be a great boon to the town and its businesses. The first Monday-Friday train is the 06.51 from Bradford, Halifax 07.07, Brighouse 07.20 arriving in London at 10.06. Saturday times are a bit different and the first train is earlier. Halifax has a population of around 100,000 but the Grand Central service will also provide direct trains from London to Pontefract (population 35,000) and Brighouse (32,000).

What about fares? The £67 "Grand Central trains only" flexible off-peak return from Halifax to London will be available on all GC trains including the first Monday-Friday service. This is competitive with fares on peak-time East Coast business trains, but the Leeds-London operator will still be offering cheaper advance-purchase deals if you are prepared to sacrifice flexibility over travel plans and change at Leeds. Train fares are still complicated.

### ■ Trolleybuses are now called New Generation Transport

Before the general election, the Labour government said it would provide £235 million for the £254 million trolleybus scheme for Leeds. West Yorkshire Metro says the proposed trolleybus will have 40% of its route reserved for trolleybuses only, while 23% of the route will be in bus-only lanes, and 27% of the route will be shared with ordinary road traffic. Construction could start in 2013 and buses operating by 2016. More info: [www.ngtmetro.com](http://www.ngtmetro.com) and [www.wymetro.com](http://www.wymetro.com)



# Making international travel by rail easier

By Trevor Garrod

The European Railway Agency is aiming to harmonise the national rail networks so it is easier for international freight and passengers to travel across borders.

For passengers, this means easier information and booking facilities.

Part of this process is the Telematics Applications for Passengers, Technical Specification for Interoperability – or TAP TSI for short. Earlier this year, draft recommendations were issued by the ERA,

and many of the rail users' organisations around Europe have studied and responded to them.

Railfuture's response was sent to the ERA on 30 March. While welcoming the TAP TSI as "an important step towards easier international rail travel", our response set out several concerns and suggestions for improvements.

The TSI should cover domestic as well as international rail services. This is important in Great Britain, where there are many domestic

train operators and effectively only three or four "international stations." For most passengers, their international journey starts at a domestic station.

In line with European consumer strategy, passengers should be given as much information as possible so they can choose the most suitable fare. That also includes making them aware of the London International ticket which should be available from their local station. We are not convinced that

the TSI as presently drafted would guarantee this facility.

Railfuture also calls for creation of a single, impartial electronic portal for timetable and fares information. The existence of such a portal should be mentioned on all train operator websites and where appropriate in other publicity.

Experience has shown it is not enough to rely on the goodwill of operators to provide such information. Some degree of enforcement is necessary.

## London and South East

### ■ Passenger numbers soar

Passenger numbers at Cambridge Heath and London Fields stations increased by 15% in a year up to May 2010, campaigners discovered. After monitoring the stations from 05.40 to 19.30, they found that the train service was reliable and generally punctual. But several other problems emerged during the day. The customer information system was out of action for several hours at Cambridge Heath. At London Fields, one panel of the information system has been blank for two months. The ticket machine at London Fields was completely out of action for several hours and all day failed to allow Oyster top-ups. One of the Oyster touch-in machines malfunctioned on average 50% of the time. Local rail staff were informed of the faults.

### ■ Rail users' 30th anniversary

The Bedford to Bletchley Line Rail Users Association has celebrated its 30th birthday. Only 20 people turned up to its first meeting in 1980 but about 70 attended the AGM in March 2010, including London Midland operations and safety director Wallace Weatherill and British Transport Police Sergeant Peter Goodchild. Sgt Goodchild told how rail enthusiasts had helped to trap copper wire thieves by alerting police. He urged rail travellers to use the national transport police hotline 0800 405040 to report vandalism and crime.

### ■ No joy for some suburban campaigners

Chiltern Railways' first draft timetable for May 2011 includes a number of improvements under their Evergreen 3 upgrade programme but not for some of their long-suffering London suburban users. As ever, Sudbury is the main loser. Sudbury & Harrow Road remains rush-hours-only, Sudbury Hill Harrow's service actually becomes worse at certain times of day, and both stations remain closed all weekend. Representations have been made for these deficiencies to be addressed in the next draft. By contrast, London Midland introduced extra services at Harrow & Wealdstone with the May 2010 timetable and recorded "our best-ever figures for punctuality and customer satisfaction".

### ■ Essex Thameside franchise consultation

London & South East branch chairman Keith Dyal submitted a three-page response to the Department for Transport's consultation on the Essex Thameside franchise. The branch called for peak-hour services to be operated by 12-car trains to reduce the amount of overcrowding and for some trains to operate via Stratford and Forest Gate, giving Thameside residents access to Stratford City shopping centre and onward travel to North London, Stansted Airport and East Anglia, as well as via Eurostar. We also called for all stations to have real-time information, CCTV, and public address systems. Grays, Basildon and Stanford-le-Hope should be incorporated into the London Travelcard area.

### ■ Rail users highlight long-standing problems

A new rail user group in Charlton, south London, is calling for more trains to Charing Cross and Cannon Street. Spokesman David Thompson said the short trains made life difficult for some passengers. He also pointed out that the ticket office is rarely open, the toilet often closed and the lift does not work. Bus stops are not convenient for the station. Unresponsive ticket machines mean that passengers have to queue and often miss their trains. For more information, email [david@ynca.co.uk](mailto:david@ynca.co.uk)

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## Election promises

In the run-up to the general election, the three main parties were, amazingly, outbidding each other on promises of high speed rail and electrification.

We all know that money will be tight, and that manifesto pledges are not always kept, but this was unprecedented, and it is great to see that rail investment is now rated sufficiently highly to be included in the list of national priorities for Britain.

We have indeed come a long way since the dark days of the 1970s where the political priority for rail was to cut costs.

There were also three important pledges relating to local lines and services:

■ Labour said it welcomed franchise bids from not-for-profit, mutual or cooperative enterprises.

■ The Conservatives said they would place a moratorium on building on disused railway lines.

■ The Liberal Democrats said they would invest in local rail improvements, such as reopening closed lines.

Can the winners adopt all three pledges, please!

With good timing Go-Coop, which aims to be the first cooperatively owned train operating company in Britain, ran stakeholder consultation meetings during April on its plans to raise money to introduce a new open-access service between Yeovil Junction and Oxford with a possible extension to Birmingham Moor Street.

### Local elections

The Association of Community Rail Partnerships produced its

own community rail manifesto, encouraging the new clutch of politicians and their advisers to engage with community rail partnerships and station adopters to make the most of one of the most valuable assets in their constituencies – their local railway.

The rail side of the partnership is now working well, with good support from most train operators underpinned by a requirement in the franchise agreement.

For local authorities, however, community rail is a discretionary activity. The good ones embrace it willingly and with financial support, and huge progress has been made in counties such as Cornwall, Devon, East Sussex, Norfolk and Lancashire.

Others, however, commit little thought or funding to rail, regarding it as solely the responsibility of central Government.

There is no local authority equivalent to the franchise agreement to make rail a priority for local authorities. This is one area where a change in policy would make a big difference at modest cost.

If local authorities were given a duty to encourage rail travel, it would enable local government officers and portfolio holders to do far more to support local rail initiatives, in preference to spending more on roads which are a local authority responsibility. Now is the time to start campaigning for this change.

### Adopt a station

Whether working with community rail partnerships



Station adopters at Whalley on the Ribble Valley line

or independently, more and more station adoption groups are being set up. Local people really can make a difference, and some stations like Glossop or Mytholmroyd have been transformed by the hard work and dedication of these groups.

They provide a little tender, loving care for stations, but most have gone well beyond this, restoring derelict buildings, landscaping disused sites or providing information displays, a clock or more seats for passengers.

Trespass and vandalism has reduced and above all, the groups are ambassadors for the railway in the town or village served by the station.

Southern is the latest company to take practical steps to encourage station adoption, launching its strategy at Hassocks on 20 April supported by Sussex Community Rail Partnership. Initial adopted stations include Hackbridge, Plumpton, Winchelsea and Three Oaks.

Taking the railway into the community includes selling tickets locally too, whether

through reopened ticket offices, as at Looe, or with the imaginative carnet schemes on the Tamar Valley and Tarka lines. Initiatives include selling tickets through tourist information centres, and this has now been extended to Aldeburgh, Suffolk.

There may no longer be a J15 steam engine waiting to take your train to Saxmundham, but this is a welcome development to encourage further growth on the East Suffolk line.

### Network development

A start was made in March on ancillary works for the Borders Railway project in Galashiels.

Dartmoor Railway has announced that its plans to extend services from Sampford Courtenay to Yeoford (to connect with the Tarka line) are deferred until later in the year.

Weardale Railway plans to start services from Stanhope to a temporary station at Bishop Auckland on May 23, although much remains to be done to achieve this.

Consultation on the Abbey Line tram/train proposal closed at the end of March.

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