

Railway Financing – What future for Inter-City?

In our last editorial we dealt with Privatisation. This time it is the turn of Sectorisation in the particular context of the recent report of the House of Commons Transport Committee to which, through the Society's Parliamentary Liaison Committee, we gave evidence.

In their report* the independent Committee of MPs take issue with British Rail and the Government not only on the level of financial support for the railways but also on some aspects of Sectorisation, in particular the Government's insistence that the Inter-City Sector should no longer be eligible for PSO Grant from 1988-89 (Para.120).

This grant is, as members may be aware, the method by which British Rail is compensated for running those parts of the railway which serve a public need, currently Inter-City; Network SouthEast and, of course, the Provincial Sector which covers all the local services which many of our affiliated rail users' groups were set up to defend. First and foremost it is NOT a subsidy but is based on E.E.C.Regulations and its method of operation was laid down in the Railways Act of 1974 which is still the statutory basis for the compensation for running those sections of the railway which serve a social role.

In December 1974 the Secretary of State imposed a Direction upon the Board "...from 1 January 1975, to operate their railway passenger system so as to provide a public service which is comparable generally with that provided by the Board at present." This Direction was subject to expenditure limits which in recent years under the present government have been gradually whittled down and it is this aspect of Government policy which has been causing the most controversy.

Whilst the original Direction has had the effect of freezing the network at its 1974 size and has been a useful

safeguard against "a major programme of closures", it has provided little incentive to BR to "expand and develop the system" – which is what RDS is all about. Even more worrying is the statement that "Inter-City may thus be freed from the obligation to maintain its services and unprofitable Inter-City services may become vulnerable to closure...", subject of course to the normal statutory closure procedure.

The main conclusion of the Report which concerns the Society is "...we believe that the existence of a social role for Inter-City should not be ignored and this should be taken into account when deciding the financial framework within which BR is expected to operate. (The Department of Transport is at present considering the need to amend the original 1974 Direction).

The problems of Settle – Carlisle (Para. 66) cause the Committee to conclude "that this is one case in which payment of a specific grant would be appropriate" (See also Regional Notes). More particularly it states "Such grants should not be rendered valueless by a compensatory deduction from PSO grant." Ribbleshead Viaduct will still require continuing expenditure as a "Listed Structure" so the savings anticipated by closure may well be illusory.

Apart from the method of appraising the viability of railway investment, as against that for road schemes; the appropriateness of the present level of PSO grant; BR's financial objectives; Bus Substitution; Closure Procedures; Privatisation etc., the main conclusion of the Report upon which RDS will undoubtedly be focussing its attention in the coming months is: "We therefore recommend that the Government should reconsider the treatment of the Inter-City targets, with particular attention being paid to the social role played by Inter-City rail transport."

JWB

and Provincial; or where Railfreight ends and Parcels begins RDS has just produced a new Briefing Paper on Sectorisation, and upon which your comments would also be welcome, as a contribution to a well-informed dialogue between RDS and BR management. The Paper is free – but please send a stamped addressed foolscap envelope to its author, John Saunders, Stockwell Gate, Whaplode, Spalding, Lincs. PE12 6UE.

FARES RISE UNFAIR

Some trains on InterCity routes are so popular that it is difficult to find a seat. At the end of June, BR responded to this overcrowding problem by increasing some InterCity fares to force people off the overcrowded trains. Whether these passengers have travelled on other trains – which may have been less convenient for them, – turned to BR's competitors or simply not travelled at all, has not yet been revealed.

RDS General Secretary, Trevor Garrod, has written to the new Secretary of State for Transport, Paul Channon MP, protesting at this situation.

"We are aware," Mr Garrod points out, "that central Government does not actually tell BR what to charge on InterCity services. However, the financial policies of successive governments have forced BR to reduce rolling stock... so that it often cannot cope with demand at busy times."

"In contrast," the General Secretary's letter goes on, "when the M25 and other motorways suffer overcrowding at times, we do not see efforts to force passengers off them by tolls or other charges. On the contrary, we hear calls for widening schemes or new roads."

The letter concluded by urging the Secretary of State to allow BR to invest in sufficient rolling stock for the business on offer, and to adopt investment criteria to rail similar to those for road, to ensure fairer competition between road and rail.

* Third Report of the Transport Committee. Session 1986/7. "Financing of Rail Services." May 1987. HMSO. £7.00

If you have ever been puzzled by the difference between Network SouthEast

Swiss Rail Convention a Huge Success

Heathrow Rail Link - RDS Input

RDS is studying a consultant's report into a possible new rail link between London and Heathrow Airport, and will send its comments by the end of October.

When the report was published in July, the Society issued a press statement welcoming it and adding that "a rail link to the airport is long overdue as it would provide speedy access with minimum environmental problems." However, we also set out a number of questions to which we seek answers, notably:-

Would Paddington, the terminal favoured by the consultants' report, be the most satisfactory one, even for London?

Should there not also be a link westwards to Reading? (Stansted Airport, after all, is being given a rail link both southwards to London and northwards to Cambridge);

Should not the scheme be considered in conjunction with arrangements for the Channel Tunnel? Both require facilities for passengers who do not wish to travel into the centre of London.

In short, is full consideration being given to the needs of a fully integrated public transport system?

A to Z of Rail Reopenings

This is the title of a new RDS book being prepared, and due to be published this winter. It will contain a comprehensive list of new and reopened stations and lines, particularly over the last two decades - explaining how and why they were reopened, what they cost, who paid etc.

The book will thus show what has been achieved by positive rail development in recent years and serve as a guide and incentive to pressure groups, firms, local authorities and all others working for further expansion of the network.

Thanks to all who have helped so far with its compilation. Further contributions and photos should be sent to our Chairman, Alan Bevan.

Thanks also to those members and supporters who sponsored Reopenings Committee member, Richard Pill, on his 120 mile cycle ride from Bedford to Lowestoft on August 8. The money raised thereby will go towards that needed to publish the book. Further loans/donations will be gratefully received by the National Treasurer.

About 15 delegates, mostly members of RDS, spent an action-packed week in Basel, Switzerland, from 22nd - 26th June, studying transport development in this go-ahead country at the first Annual Convention of the Rail Transport Study Circle.

Highlight of the week was a paper by Dr Stricker, Head of Secretariat of the Swiss Federal Railways (SBB), on the "BAHN 2000" plan to introduce regular interval ("Taktfahrplan") services which will enable 33% more trains to be run with existing resources of staff and rolling stock.

Visits were made to two freight depots, one intermodal the other refrigerated wagons and also to the workshops of the Berne - Lotschberg - Simplon Railway and the works of Schindler-Waggon which manufactures both railway rolling stock and trams.

The final Session of the Convention was held in an open tram which in view of the adverse weather conditions was thankfully still ensconced in the Depot

of Basel Transport which formed the subject of our final visit.

A full report of the proceedings can be obtained by sending a stamped addressed foolscap envelope to the Secretary of RTSC, Pat Crane, at 206 Alexandra Park Road, London N22 4UQ.

The programme for 1988 will be published shortly to those on our mailing list - the 1988 Convention to be in Holland - and all future London-based events at the new Alexandra Palace Complex (opening January 1988) thus providing delegates with every comfort and modern facilities.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

For those members whose subscriptions expire within the next 3 months, a renewal form is enclosed.

New London Rail Group off to good start

The South London Line Travellers' Association (SOLLTA) was set up in June following the very successful meeting organised by RDS (reported in our last issue). It is clear that the people who use the Victoria - Denmark Hill - London Bridge service are far from happy with its present run down state and can think of many ways in which it can be improved. SOLLTA exists to represent everybody who uses the line and complaints or comments on the service have been sought from all passengers. Contact is being maintained with BR management and regular newsletters will be produced to keep people in touch with what is going on.

BR have at least stated that there are no plans to withdraw the peak-hour service between Victoria/Battersea Park and London Bridge. They also have a proposal to reintroduce an off-peak service along the line, which would run from Dartford to Victoria via Lewisham and Peckham Rye (stopping at Clapham and Wandsworth Road) but this depends on funding by the five boroughs involved. This would definitely give the line a new lease of life - as would a much-needed new station at Brixton and another at Brockley.

One big drawback of the existing service is the fact that several trains start

and terminate at Battersea Park instead of Victoria. BR say that this is because of lack of platform capacity at Victoria, but it makes life very inconvenient and does nothing to encourage traffic. Even worse, however, is the appalling state of the station at Clapham. Despite its situation on a main road in a densely populated area it has no facilities and is utterly disgusting. BR say that few people use it - what do they expect? Improvements are urgently needed - at present there is not even anywhere to shelter from the rain!

The station is badly signposted from the road and many people do not even know that it is there. Yet while Clapham rots away, a disgrace to British Rail and to the neighbourhood, hundreds of people daily try to cram on to overcrowded tube trains at Clapham North across the road. BR merely say that in view of financial constraints no improvements will be carried out to Clapham for at least two years. It is appalling that such a dreadful place should exist anywhere on the network, let alone in Inner London.

Comments and complaints should be addressed to SOLLTA, c/o Graham Larkbey, 57, Drakefield Road, London SW17. Membership of SOLLTA costs £2.00 per year.



One morning Leeds - Carlisle train arrives at Settle on 7th April 1984. The number of passengers indicates the interest in the Settle & Carlisle line.

Photo: Tom Heavyside (from "Lancs & Cumbria by Rail".)

SALES AND PUBLICITY

RDS DIARIES for 1988 are executive style, each double page opening inside having the current week shown on one side, and blank page for notes, etc., facing it. It is available for a special early order price of £2.50 incl. postage (normally £2.75). Branches can obtain bulk supplies at a handsome discount.

Available from Geoff Kent, 21 Fleetwind Drive, East Hunsbury, Northampton, NN4 0ST.

Also available from Mr Kent is the RDS booklet A VOICE FOR RAIL USERS, at 60p plus 22p postage. This handbook full of useful advice on campaigning better services and rail promotion. Every active member of RDS and its affiliated groups should have one.

LEAFLETS: These are available from the Publicity Officer, Roland White, "Latymer", The Drive, Belmont Surrey, SM2 4JT. They are FREE! New items available this autumn are:-

(1) General RDS recruitment leaflet - updated version.

(2) THE HEAVY LORRY PROBLEM - IS THERE NO ALTERNATIVE? An A5 sized leaflet, ideal for mass distribution, concentrating on the case and possibilities for more heavy long-distance road freight to go by rail.

(3) LIGHT RAPID TRANSIT leaflet - a 4-page leaflet aimed particularly at politicians and opinion formers, putting the case for light railways, similar to the Tyneside Metro and the Docklands Light Railway, in various other British cities. This leaflet will be available in the second half of the autumn.

(4) PEOPLE NEED TRAINS - a new poster contrasting a congested road with a fast modern railway. This poster is A3 size with a space for local RDS details.

Why not use this material to help spread the RDS message and help us swiftly towards our TWO THOUSANDTH MEMBER?

CHRISTMAS CARDS

The printing is a pleasing brown on off-white card, with the front picture being a drawing of Watlington Station on the Paddock Wood - Maidstone West line, by a local artist, as also reproduced in "Kent & East Sussex by Rail".

The price by post has been rounded to 20p. per card, for any quantity, with a discount of 10% off orders of 20 or more cards to the same address.

If you did not have any of our cards last year, please order NOW a good supply from Ian Crighton, 19, Oakdale Avenue, Kenton, Harrow, Middx. HA3 0UJ, making your cheque payable to "RDS London & Home Counties Branch".

KENT & EAST SUSSEX BY RAIL

SPECIAL BARGAIN until Christmas: Order 3 books at once from the above address (for Christmas presents or any other reason) for only £5.00, and have the books sent post free to a single address.

TURNING TRUCKS INTO TRAINS

This report* prepared by Steer Davies & Gleave was launched by Transport 2000 at a Conference entitled "Making the most of the Link" held at the Hyde Park Hotel, London, on 19th June under the auspices of BRB; Trade Unions; Eurotunnel and Transport 2000.

The aim of the report is to examine the potential for the transfer of freight from road to rail following the construction and opening of the Channel Tunnel. It is a valuable effort and confirms my long-held view that the main revenue-earner of the C.T. Group will be freight, provided BR gear up their management and marketing skills to meet the potential transformation in the size and scale of international railway operation!

To quote from the report "The prospects for through rail freight are indeed exciting. Against a current market where the use of rail in the UK to or from the Channel/North Sea ports is little more than 1.5m. tonnes p.a., the forecasts show that the tunnel alone would capture between 3.1 to 5.8m. tonnes of traffic in its first year of operation. These figures assume no change in the technical feasibility of adapting BR tracks or developing new wagon technology in order to facilitate the development of new forms of inter-modal freight service. Herein might lie an even greater prize."

The report does not mention the high cost and short life of the road goods vehicle against the lower cost and much longer life and higher capacity of the rail counterpart, and the fact that each comparatively small load requires a high wage earner as driver but for those who are concerned that the U.K. should "Make the most of the Link" this report is essential reading.

Roland White

* Available from Transport 2000, Walkden House, 10 Melton Street, London NW1. Price: £4.00.

What is RDS HELPLINE?

RDS HELPLINE is a file of 125 members who have offered their help and advice to RDS Branches, individual members and affiliated groups. The 125 include members skilled, qualified or experienced in railway operation, engineering, economics, accounting, the law, local government, graphics, photography, computers, sales, planning, architecture, journalism and a number of other fields.

If you need help or advice, contact the General Secretary, who will put you in contact with the most appropriate person on HELPLINE. The General Secretary would also be pleased to receive further offers of help.

PLATFORM

Portsmouth – Southampton

Dear Mr Willson,

Re my letter in the last issue of RAILWATCH I have subsequently heard from Winchester about the matter of electrifying the Portsmouth – Eastleigh/Southampton link and they attribute the problem entirely to British Rail and its priorities, regarding getting some scheme under way.

Maybe there is some presently secret grand plan to electrify everything east and south-east of Salisbury, incorporating Chandler's Ford, and that British Rail wish to keep quiet until they can make some grand announcement based upon assured investment. Any delay most certainly places Fareham at an increasing disadvantage, as it is such an expanding area both residentially and commercially.

It also occurs to me that, one day, they might even consider relaying and electrifying the line from Romsey to Andover. Again the social and economic significance of the area have changed so dramatically since closure that a direct link with the Eastleigh/Southampton area must be worthwhile. In any case, Stockbridge and Andover itself must offer greater potential for income than Dunbridge and Dean on the direct route to Salisbury.

Alas, I do not know if subsequent building has rendered the re-birth of the line impossible. Let it be said, though, that no building would ever be sufficient reason for abandoning ideas about some new road scheme!

Bruce Oliver,
Southsea, Hants.

We apologise to Mr Oliver for mis-spelling "Netley" when printing his letter in the last RAILWATCH. ED.

From Electrification to Privatisation

Dear Sir,

I would like to remind Bruce Oliver that we are the Railway DEVELOPMENT Society.

His suggestion for a triangle to run trains from Southampton to Fareham via Eastleigh ignores the fact that there are six stations between St. Denys and Fareham, several of which have housing developments nearby. I agree that the present service is slow (slower than in 1963) in fact, on some curves, I note a tendency to slide down the seat due to the speed being below the designed speed of the super elevation. There is also a tendency to put on the brakes where drivers used to maintain full power.

This suggestion of a shuttle would kill the line because people don't like chang-

ing trains – especially in the middle of nowhere. There may be a case for partial singling to allow improved alignments but the cost of the required equipment would probably exceed the savings made!

The real answer is electrification, with modern electric stock to replace the DEMUs (which were supposed to last ten years in 1957) and average speeds above 30 mph. Incidentally, an RDS meeting was assured that withdrawal of the semi-fast service due to shortage of paths, whilst the Southampton Tunnel was single track, would not be used as an excuse to scrap the service. The tunnel is back to two tracks – where is the semi-fast service?

I have written to the Southern Region suggesting that St Denys Junction could be improved if the Island Platform was eliminated, platform 1's face cut back to extend the up slow line through the station, platform 4's face brought out to the down slow alignment and the junction moved to the north end of the station. The up and down slow lines should join the up and down lines just south of the road bridge north of St Denys.

This would produce a station with two platform faces for London and Portsmouth line services and two through lines for non-stopping services. It should also give a faster speed for trains joining or leaving the branch.

With regard to the probability that Mrs Thatcher will eventually turn to privatising the railways may I suggest that we marshal all the available economic facts (see article in "Modern Railways") and also that it would be a good idea to draw up workable plans to privatise the roads in this country, as a counter attack.

I would suggest that trunk roads should be put out to tender. The successful bidder would lease the road and be responsible for maintaining it to the correct standard, with failure to do so resulting in the imposition of speed restrictions, cancellation of the lease without refund or remedial work being carried out by the Department at the Lessee's cost. The lessee would be able to charge tolls and make a profit.

Local roads would be leased or maintained by local authorities, the finance coming from the user.

R.E.Golding,
Bursledon, Hants.

Gretna Green

Dear Sir,

Back in March this year I made a trip to Gretna Green, just over the border in Scotland.

Forgive me for saying it, but I went by coach. I went for five days and, whilst there, I discovered that Gretna Green was situated on the Carlisle to Glasgow Central (via Dumfries and Kilmarnock) line. The station building remains, but no platform is left. The line, double track thus far, becomes single here, and is operated by the usual dmu stock.

I understand from a local lady that Gretna station has been closed some twenty years. The station house is still occupied and nicely kept, while the booking office/waiting room area is currently used as a store. I also learned that there has been some talk locally of reopening this station, but to no avail.

The population of Gretna, Gretna Green and Springfield is quite substantial. Local bus services (from Carlisle etc.) seem to be minimal, and only run in the morning and evening peak periods. Everybody must therefore travel by car, or whatever transport they may have.

Gretna Green is a very popular tourist resort, and attracts many coach operators during the main season. Should not we press for the reopening of this station, not just for the benefit of the local population (who would welcome it), but to encourage the tourist trade by rail. I am sure that this would pay BR dividends by increasing the trade on this lightly used link between Carlisle and Glasgow.

B.D.Druce,
Hounslow, Middx.

Singling

Sir,

How right is Mr. Moore in his letter (RW32) about single lines and false economy!

I use the main line to Penzance and it seems incredible that this busy line should be subject to this. Some years ago, a stretch was singled in Cornwall, save maintenance over some viaducts. Can you see the M1 being cut to single lane in each direction to save on costs?

In Lincolnshire, the Skegness line had three sections singled some years ago. This does not cause too many problems, but it has put a ceiling on the number of "Saturdays only" trains which can be accommodated in summer. But you only need one train to be delayed and it causes a mushroom effect. Witness July 25th when a train broke down and got to Skegness 90 minutes late. The delays continued throughout the Saturday. God forgive if a train fails on a Summer Saturday, on the single line, late in the day, and the staff go home when the infamous 10 hour shift ends. The mind boggles.

Single lines, staff cut-backs (in some cases at stations which should be a preserve for customer care), stock

reductions, closely programmed diagrams, and many other problems all seem unfair when rail has to compete against other forms of transport.

Would it be more economical, beneficial to the user and the country if all forms of transport were integrated? But now I dream. Integration? – the present administration would see red.

P.B.Jowett,
Leasington,
Sleaford, Lincs.

Politics

Dear Mr Willson,

I have read with interest issue 32 of Railwatch.

It seems to me that the strength of the society lies in a non-political approach in the problem of safeguarding the future of rail transport, gaining support from all sections of the community.

Your leading article (Privatisation – when and how?), however, presents a strong political bias that it may alienate some of our members.

May I make a plea for a less political slant in future?

W.L.Fletcher,
Abergavenny,
Gwent.

(RDS does not support any political party. There is no reason, however, why individual members should not express a political view in the pages of Railwatch. Transport policy is made by governments and it is their political colour which determines their attitudes to public transport. Surely we should not eliminate politics from Railwatch but, rather, make sure that all points of view are heard. ED.)

Letters to the Editor

Editor is always pleased to receive letters, articles and good quality black and white prints for inclusion in Railwatch.

DID YOU KNOW...?

Did you know that every police force in the United Kingdom has had its numbers increased since 1979 except one? Which one? The British Transport Police which looks after our rail network, including London Underground and some ports.

There is a case for strengthening the BT Police, to give greater protection to passengers and freight travelling on BR and to help curb vandalism. This is an issue on which RDS has campaigned for over a year; and in the summer the General Secretary wrote to BRB Chairman Sir Bob Reid urging the Board to "look actively at ways of increasing the size of the British Transport Police and at obtaining more financial support for this from the Home Office."

REGIONAL NOTES

SCOTLAND

The double standards which the Government applies to road and rail affairs are even more blatant in Scotland than in England. It is becoming increasingly clear that while the Scottish Office has almost total freedom to spend money on roads and an apparently unlimited supply of money to feed the insatiable demands of the road lobby for ever more tarmac, they could not find £3m to provide a rail crossing at Dornoch. Although BR have more or less given up the fight for a crossing, the RDS Scottish Branch has pledged to continue the fight, being convinced that the alternative to a joint crossing is the closure of the Far North Line.

Another issue in which the Branch has involved itself is the planning permission for opencast coal working in Lanarkshire. RDS has promoted the idea of total rail use for coal transport, so far without success. The Branch has lodged objections to a major extension of the Motorway/dual carriageway network within the City of Glasgow called the Ayr Road, to cost £28m. – plenty of money for that!

The Branch has had letters in all daily and weekly newspapers in Scotland, most of them blaming the Government for the state of the railways. During the election the Government offered nothing for rail passengers but announced a bribe for motorists in the form of an extension to the M74, said to cost £200m. It is evident that no thought was given to the real cost of the project. This is a clear case of a political will to serve the needs of the road lobby while taking a cost accountant's attitude to railways. The £3m. for a Dornoch rail crossing would not be missed out of the grandiose Scottish road budget. Scotland has become a land of near-empty dual carriageways and motorways and a declining rail network. Even two independent reports which both discount the road lobby's lies that better roads help the economy have been totally ignored by the Government.

Douglas Smart

MERSEYSIDE

At the commencement of the 1987/88 Timetable, Liverpool lost its through train to Bristol and the West Country. However, InterCity have been forced into a dramatic turnaround, as they announced in July that they plan to relaunch direct services between Liverpool and the South West in May 1988. Many BR employees privately admitted that they were horrified at management's decision to withdraw the service, since it was based purely on grounds of

cost and not on Liverpool's potential to attract passengers. Neil Atkins, InterCity's Cross-Country Manager, admitted that the withdrawal was a mistake. The local press were bombarded with letters of complaint from rail users when BR originally announced that the through trains to Plymouth and Penzance were to be axed – with the exception of a Saturdays Only service. It just goes to show that if the public complain hard enough, they can get decisions reversed.

Mike Breslin

NORTH WEST

On Saturday 11 July the Ribble Valley Rail group held a very successful Ribble Valley Rail Day. A "Pacer" DMU provided four return trips from Preston to Clitheroe and in all 1100 passenger journeys were made. Demand was heaviest from Clitheroe, with standing room only on some trains! Comments heard frequently during the day included "When are you doing this again?" and "What we need is a regular passenger service." The event was staged to demonstrate the demand for the restoration of regular passenger services on the Blackburn to Hellifield line. The RVR will be considering the holding of a similar event at its next meeting. To boost the case for reopening the line it is hoped to commission Jonathan Roberts to write a report similar to the highly acclaimed "New Life in the Hills".

As reported in the last RAILWATCH the campaign to restore the Burscough curves (which would join the Ormskirk to Preston with the Wigan to Southport line) is gaining momentum. Lancashire County Council is now able to go ahead with the £15,000 study, both West Lancashire District Council and Sefton Borough Council having agreed their shares of the cost. The Ormskirk to Preston Travellers' Assn. were due to hold a further public meeting in Southport on Tuesday 6 October to review progress and possibly to set up a Southport group.

On the Furness Line, pressure is mounting for more through trains from Barrow to Preston, Manchester and London. The Furness Line Action Group (FLAG) are concerned that the connections available at Lancaster are not as good as they could be into/out of Furness Line trains. This situation may improve, however, as "Sprinters" replace the existing DMUs.

A decision on the future of the Settle – Carlisle and Blackburn – Hellifield lines may be made soon. There has been considerable speculation as to how the line may be saved. Fears that the line

may be privatized have been fuelled by the "Guardian" and "Yorkshire Post" articles which said that a consortium of businessmen led by McAlpine were looking at buying the line. Whatever the truth behind these stories it would seem that David Mitchell is looking at all possible ways to save the line. His problem is political. The Government wants to cut cash support to the railways and so cannot be seen to burden BR with the backlog of maintenance necessary to bring the Settle - Carlisle line up to standard again - especially the Ribbleshead Viaduct. Thus David Mitchell has not only approached private sponsors but also the local authorities to see what funds they can make available. Unless he can get the support of some or all of these bodies then no matter how much he may want to save it he will have no political choice but to close it.

On Tuesday 28 July the Branch launched its second Railguide "Lancashire and Cumbria by Rail" at a special media event at Preston Station.

Richard Watts

YORKSHIRE

With the abolition of the West and South Yorkshire County Councils, the establishment of the PTAs, and the deregulation of the bus services, both authorities have within the last three months published consultation documents outlining plans for public transport for the next five years.

The West Yorkshire report lists 35 possible sites to be safeguarded for new stations, including 8 such as Brighouse and Elland on reopened lines. Frizinghall and Sandal are to open this year and a further 9 stations have been agreed for construction in the next three years. New lines suggested for reopening are Mirfield to Halifax, via Brighouse, the Spen Valley Line (Low Moor to Heckmondwike) and Wakefield to Pontefract, via Featherstone. A cross-Bradford link would significantly improve Bradford's position in the rail network and a new spur at Scouthill would enable Spen Valley services to extend southward through Dewsbury. More attention to rail promotion, publicity, timetables and more attractive fares are suggested as well as the improvement of rail services from hourly to half-hourly.

The South Yorkshire report also aims at more frequent services, suggesting a half-hourly service throughout the day with hourly services in the evening and on Sundays. Improvements to the layout of stations are suggested, particularly at Sheffield, Barnsley and Mexborough. Better car-parking facilities and the installation of public address systems are called for. Some 11 new stations and also a possible rail link between Barnsley and Doncaster and cross-town links in Doncaster and Sheffield, both of which are designed to reduce traffic

congestion on the roads.

Branch Line status for Hull

Slowly but surely British Rail appear to be reducing Hull to branch-line status similar to that inflicted on Bradford. During the past 18 months the direct services between Hull and Liverpool, which compete with the M62, and Hull and Carlisle have been taken off and there is no connection for Carlisle without a long wait at Leeds. The Hull to Sheffield service has been reduced to a two-car DMU, frequently overcrowded. Previously it was a four or five coach loco-hauled train. There are plans to cut back on the Hull to King's Cross trains in the 1988 timetable. Some two years ago Paragon station was threatened with the removal of its roof, but this was averted when the station was made a "Listed Building". Local stations, like Hessle, have been allowed to deteriorate. On the freight side, the Freightliner terminal closed earlier this year; everything now goes by road and as at Goole road haulage is booming.

As a result of persistent "badgering" by the Pontefract Rail Users' Group British Rail are stopping two express trains at Pontefract Baghill station. The Birmingham to York train is calling at Pontefract at 10.30 and the Scarborough to Bristol train at 18.35. This is helping to plug the enormous gaps in the timetable which occurred when the new services were introduced in May.

Denis Bradbury

LINCOLNSHIRE & HUMBERSIDE

The Grantham and Skegness service settled down quite well, with less reliance on buses to combat overcrowding on Saturdays. As the season built up, Saturday trains were very full, so much so that from the middle of May a Class 37 loco and six coaches were diagrammed to run two round trips as required. This arrangement was so successful that it was decided to run these trains weekly from 11 July until 3 October. Between these dates an additional DMU from Derby and Nottingham started to run, returning from Skegness at tea-time. There was also an additional direct train from Derby and Nottingham to Skegness on Fridays, giving an additional two-car unit for the first train out on Saturdays.

This all goes to show that BR have at last realized that there is a need for extra Saturday trains to Skegness. It is to be hoped that this welcome trend will continue in 1988 and that additional starting points will be considered - something that SELTA and Skegness hoteliers have long requested. In the past BR have been loath to run extras for many reasons, including "not needed", "no stock" etc.. The resort now enjoys 11 extras instead of eight, the highest number operated for many years. Sad to relate, the new ones are not adver-

tised, even on boards at stations, except at Boston and Skegness.

Skegness station on summer Saturdays is now a joy to behold, and almost like old times. All platforms in use, queues of passengers, a full departure board, PA system in use, and a thriving refreshment room with a trolley of refreshments to see each train off. Long may this continue. With extra Sunday trains on the line until 4 October, the 09.03 "Sprinter" Boston to Matlock provides a very reasonable £3.00 Day Ticket to Matlock Bath, returning by the 17.42 Matlock Bath to Boston. It is nice to see excursions return. On the other side of the coin, there are several things to deplore, in particular the lack of suitable day return facilities from South Yorkshire, Lincoln etc., to Skegness, now the Sheffield SX special is stopped.

The wet summer of 1986 and the Miners' Strike probably ensured its demise. The wet summer of 1987 has not helped the Jolly Fisherman trains from Leicester and Derby, now running five days a week plus Sunday, and from Nuneaton and Burton and running from May to early September on weekdays and on Sundays until 4 October. Early in the season the poor weather meant almost empty trains. As the season built up the loading improved, but with hindsight, one train would probably have sufficed until July. It would be a great pity if these trains were to go like the Sheffield train, for their catchment areas are ideal for experimental services, if only on a once-a-week basis, with which to combat the coach operators. The line needs to capitalize on leisure travellers and to provide through services. Early in the season, non-corridor, toiletless DMUs were used (with comfort stops at Sleaford and Boston!).

Connections at Sleaford continue to give cause for concern from the Lincoln direction to Boston in the middle of the day. A new Sleaford Town Plan has been issued and a paragraph concerning land use treats the Sleaford avoiding line as the perimeter for industrial land but states that it is anticipated that the line will close and that in consequence land to the east will be opened up for use. The avoiding line is very busy at present, especially in view of the electrification of the ECML, and its future really needs to be spelt out, as it will probably still be needed for diversions after the electrification has been carried out. A rash of newspaper articles in the "Sleaford Standard" have reported that parish councils in the area have realized that they need their rail services and that these must be safeguarded and expanded. This initiative is to be welcomed, but it is not surprising in view of the fact that local bus services seem to be in for further cutbacks.

The Spalding Bulb Festival again saw a handful of excursions to the town and a shuttle service between Peterborough

and Spalding. A welcome idea was to open the Peterborough to Spalding line on the following Sunday and provide a shuttle for visitors to see the decorated floats and flowers. Problems in the tulip industry have cast doubts on the future of the Bulb Festival, so this source of revenue may not be available in future years.

Paul Jowett

NORTH MIDLANDS

British Rail staff showed considerable ingenuity in improvising two miniature platforms at Shirebrook on 6 June, which permitted speedy loading of four-car DMUs to ferry visitors between the Freight Depot Open Day sites at Shirebrook and Worksop. This first-ever event gave several thousand people an insight into the important local freight business, while the passenger service operated over a section of the Worksop - Mansfield - Nottingham line that RDS is campaigning to have reopened. A fresh statement of the RDS case, citing the successful precedents at Bathgate and Derby was presented to Mansfield District Council as a contribution to the Town Centre Action Plan, and further contact is being made with other local authorities.

Malcolm Goodall

EAST ANGLIA

Branch Vice-Chairman, Charles Taylor, represented RDS at the signing ceremony for the historic Reedham - Yarmouth line agreement, under which £52,500 will be paid to BR each year for the period up to May 1991, to allow the track to be maintained and renewed and thus prevent closure. The Society is one of 14 signatories to the agreement.

Part of the RDS contribution comes from the Anti-Closure Fund, which was boosted by a further £120 when Trevor Garrod and Clara Zilahi undertook sponsored cycle rides to Finningham, Suffolk, in National Bike Week. At Finningham they were welcomed by local member David Bridge, who is leading the campaign for Finningham station, on the Ipswich - Norwich main line, to be reopened. The Finningham station survey of potential usage is now being analysed by RDS Reopenings Committee Member, Chris Milnes and a full report will be published later this autumn.

Extremist Norfolk County Councillor, Ian Coutts, has again attacked the payment of Public Service Obligation money for Provincial rail services. In particular, Mr Coutts (who opposed Norfolk County Council's financial involvement in saving the Reedham - Yarmouth line) has called for the closure of the Norwich - Sheringham line and its replacement by buses. Several RDS members have had letters published in the press, or broadcast by the BBC, refuting his arguments, as has the BR

Provincial Manager.

Our corporate member the North East Norfolk Travellers' Association has continued to attract new business to the Sheringham line with four more successful charter trains this season, while the proximity of the Sheffield Arms public house to Gunton station continues to be exploited by local member, John Peacock, with his "No need to drink and drive" campaign. RDS has also voiced support for a company wishing to build a tourist-orientated narrow-gauge line on the trackbed between Wroxham and Aylsham, which would bring further business to the Sheringham line.

On 21 June the freight-only Dereham line was again open to passengers, when our corporate member the Wymondham - Dereham Rail Action Committee filled a special train to Lowestoft. Two hundred and twenty people had a pleasant day out in good weather; others had to be disappointed because the demand for tickets meant that they were all sold out a week before the train ran.

Branch members combined with their Lincolnshire colleagues on 20 June for a useful public meeting in Peterborough, chaired by National Executive member, John Saunders. Unlike a previous rather stormy commuters' meeting in the city, ours centred on constructive discussion on how the main line and cross-country services could be further developed, and on the scope for co-operation between BR and the Nene Valley Railway.

The next meeting of the Branch (to which members of neighbouring branches will also be welcome) will be on Saturday 21 November at 2.0 p.m. in the YMCA, Gonville Place, Cambridge. The speaker (subject to confirmation) will be from Travellers' Fare.

Trevor Garrod

THAMES VALLEY

The RDS Branch covering Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire has been renamed Thames Valley, and has a new committee, including, as Chairman, Rev. Tom Comber, 32, Alexandra Road, Oxford, OX2 0DB and as Secretary, Martin Smith, 57, Bath Street, Abingdon, Oxon. OX14 1EA.

A summer newsletter has been issued and a meeting was held in Reading on 4 July, at which Oliver Lovell of the Cotswold Line Promotion Group gave a talk. One major priority of the group will be to publicize the new Oxford - Bicester service and campaign for an increased service, especially a mid-day train throughout the week. It has also been agreed in principle to compile a Railguide for the area. The next meeting is due to take place in Reading on 10 October.

Trevor Garrod

SOUTH WEST

The Society's Fifteenth Branch, the South West Branch, covering Devon and Cornwall, was formally inaugurated at a meeting in Exeter on 27 June, when our Railguide, SOUTH WEST BY RAIL, was also launched.

The formation of this Branch means that our Branch structure is now complete, with fully functioning Branches covering the whole of Great Britain. Chairman of the new Branch is Mrs Joan Fuller, 25, Sweetbriar Lane, Heavitree, Exeter, EX1 3AF. The Secretary is Ian Dinmore, 33, Charles Street, Barnstaple, Devon, EX32 7BG.

Trevor Garrod

LONDON & HOME COUNTIES Wealden Line Campaign

The latest information received by the Branch Chairman is that we can effectively forget any ideas of BR involvement at Tunbridge Wells West but that BR is quite interested in reinstating the line from Uckfield to Lewes provided the counties and/or districts can find £4.5m. of the £6m. required, but it could end up as a case of spirit willing but flesh weak, despite keenness of East Sussex and some consideration even by Kent. Interested members in the area should keep up the pressure on their county and district councillors.

TWERPS appear to be making good progress, as a result of much hard work, to buy or lease and get going a combined commuter and preserved railway from Tunbridge Wells West to Eridge.

Following a meeting held at Starfield on 17th July to discuss the reopening of the Lewes - Uckfield railway a spokesman for the Wealden Line Campaign said:-

"Whilst we naturally regret the exclusion of the Eridge - Tunbridge Wells line as part of the network I am sure I speak for all of our supporters and co-workers when I say I am delighted and greatly encouraged by BR's positive response to the Uckfield - Lewes section which remains the key to future investment, electrification and prosperity of the entire railway (Oxted - Lewes)". Response to the attitude(s) of the County Councils was less encouraging but the spokesman said ".....we intend to explore some new suggestions and work closely with the local councils in order to achieve the aim of having a modern, electric railway connecting Oxted and Lewes, serving our growing towns and being a useful and profitable part of Network SouthEast."

East Grinstead Gala Day

Also in Sussex the Branch was due to hold a meeting in East Grinstead on 26 September, timed to coincide with the BR Gala Day there to celebrate the introduction of electric trains. The main

aim of the meeting is to set up a group for local rail travellers similar to the one formed for the South London London Line after the meeting in Brixton in June.

Road could threaten future of Ashford - Hastings

Following information received by the Branch Chairman that road improvements at Rye could threaten the future viability of the Ashford - Hastings line and, more importantly its prospects for electrification, the Branch held a meeting in Hastings on 5 September attended by an almost equal number of RDS members and concerned local users.

After a short talk by our member, Michael Dearing, (who is also Secretary of the National Federation of Bus Users) on the effects of Bus deregulation on local services and how RDS and NFBU can work better together for the common good of public transport, the plans of the Department of Transport were displayed and discussed at great length.

Apart from the key issue of whether the road was necessary at all and whether the preferred route was the right one most concern was expressed over its effect on the railway and the convenience of users of Rye Station, which would be moved north by some 25 metres and thereafter be accessible only by a footbridge over the new road which would use part of the existing railway formation.

The Branch has already submitted comments to the Department of Transport arguing that if the railway facilities are to be made less commodious by the new road the least the Department can do is to provide funds for its improvement and electrification - AT NO COST TO BRITISH RAIL. More importantly we are concerned that proposals for the new road will not be used as an excuse for putting off electrification which we understand is now being seriously considered by British Rail. After the meeting a few members travelled on to Rye to see for themselves the problem on the ground.

In addition to co-ordinating the Society's comments on the proposed rail link to Heathrow Airport the Branch is also studying (and making representations to Camden Council) on the recently announced proposals for the redevelopment of King's Cross and St. Pancras stations. At its meeting on 27th August the Committee passed a strong resolution to defend the existing facilities and good interchange with the underground from both stations.

H. Trevor Jones.

Labels

RDS now has on sale some attractive re-use envelope labels 10 x 14cm, showing a Sprinter and giving a few figures on road accidents, plus the slogan "Feel no pain - travel by train".

Lincolnshire leaflet has Wider Implications

At the end of August, the Lincolnshire branch of RDS launched a quality leaflet entitled "Tomorrow's Lincoln needs Tomorrow's Railways", pointing out the advantage to future prosperity and employment prospects in Lincoln of both existing rail services and a modest programme of development. Some of the points made are relevant to other towns and cities. Copies of the A5 sized leaflet are obtainable on receipt of a stamped addressed envelope from the Lincolnshire Branch Secretary, Phil Strong, 19 Carline Road, Lincoln, LN1 1HL.

Register of Speakers

National Executive members John Saunders and Peter Wakefield both gave talks on the work of RDS to meetings of other organisations in September and John Barfield was due to do the same in September and October. RDS is always pleased to provide speakers to other bodies, and a list of more than 20 members willing to do this is kept by the Administrative Officer. The list also contains details of which topic(s) each member is willing to speak on, within what area he/she is prepared to travel etc., so if you are a member of an organisation which you think would be interested in having an RDS speaker then drop a line to Reg Snow (Address at end of RAILWATCH).



The newly-modernised Linlithgow Station

Photo: British

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