

LOCAL ACTION

Scotland

The Scottish Branch started its campaign to make the railways a major issue at the general election, before it was postponed until 1992. We have written to all the known candidates in many of the most marginal seats in Scotland.

All branch members have been sent a circular urging them to contact candidates. The postponement of the election will we hope allow time for further pressure.

The branch has proceeded on the basis that it is much more effective to start lobbying now when election literature has still to be finalised rather than wait until the election has been called.

The letters to candidates have emphasised the reality behind the Government's oft-repeated boast that "it is investing record sums on the railways". The branch intends to force ministers clearly to differentiate between state funding which has declined and so-called investment which has mainly consisted of BR being allowed to spend its own money — raised from very high fare levels.

The branch has also emphasised the overwhelming environmental advantage of rail over road transport.

The principal projects for which support is demanded are Dornoch, electrification, and various station openings all over the country.

The branch will take action to ensure that electrification to Aberdeen will be a major issue in the Kincardine & Deeside by-election.

Now that the new road bridge over the Dornoch Firth has been opened the Scottish Press has lost no time in explaining the enormous time disadvantage now suffered by the rail line thanks to Government intransigence and the failure of ScotRail to continue the momentum for the scheme which they themselves established some years ago. The bike race mentioned in the last issue of Railwatch was won by the cyclists by 12 minutes.

Douglas Smart

East Anglia

Cuts in services on most Regional Railways routes in East Anglia were made at the end of September. The cuts mainly affect Sunday services and were introduced at short notice, amid management protestations that they were the result of the recession but would be restored next summer.

Great Yarmouth Borough Council has saved Sunday morning train services to and from the town this winter by giving a £9,000 grant to BR. Via the East Norfolk and Suffolk Rail Alliance (in which RDS participates) efforts have been made to persuade other councils to contribute, but generally without success. It is understandable that some councils feel they are being "taken for a ride" by BR.

Again, the problem underlines the need for minimum service levels to be guaranteed, as RDS argued in its report *Regional Railways? Who Pays and for What?* Then neither councils nor BR will have to keep indulging in short-term panic measures. Our report is still available from Alan Harwood at £2 (post free). Suffolk County Council agreed at very short notice to subsidise buses to replace certain Sunday train services but not, apparently, with interavailability of ticketing.

Congratulations to Ipswich Borough Council, which has rejected most of the recommendations of the Halcrow Fox report for massive road building in and around the town (see last Railwatch). The weight of public opinion (including a submission by RDS) no doubt helped. We now look forward to a more balanced assessment of the area's future transport needs.

Trevor Garrod

A Gala Performance: Our display stand has recently been to two British Rail events. Large numbers of people visited our stand at the Colchester Open Day and at the Cambridge Gala

Day. There were many membership enquiries and we were able to sell £150 worth of RDS books over the two events.

New Station Proposed: Huntingdon District Council have approved outline plans for a new town just south of Peterborough. The development will be built on the site of old brick clay workings. The hole has been filled by using pulverised fuel ash delivered to site by rail. A new station on the King's Cross to Peterborough main line is included within the plans.

Nick Dibben

Wessex

The branch attracted a lot of attention with its stall at Portsmouth Friends of the Earth conference on transport on September 8. Over 50 people attended the conference, at which RDS General Secretary Trevor Garrod was one of the speakers.

North West

Busmen with blinkers: Greater Manchester's biggest bus company G M Buses which also operates the Metrolink light rail system has decided to pull out of the multijourney Saver and PeakWayfarer schemes run by Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Executive. This a major blow to those who want to combine use train and bus and ultimately the light rail system and will fragment further Manchester's public transport network. The branch has written to G M Buses protesting at the move and has also sent out a press release condemning the company and the 1985 deregulation Act which led to this disastrous action.

Labour reality: The proposed reintroduction of trains over the Blackburn-Hellifield line now awaits a change of heart by councillors of Labour-controlled Blackburn Borough Council who voted against giving £10,000 for revenue support and £50,000 for a new station in the town's northern suburbs. This important rail development is being held up by a Labour-controlled authority when Tory Ribbles Valley Borough is eager to support the scheme. The branch has written to Labour's transport spokesman asking him why, considering Labour's insistence that it would support the railways, this development is being delayed.

Open line: The branch's stand at Crewe diesel depot open day was quite a moneyspinner and helped spread the RDS message.

Robert Cummings

London and Home Counties

Many of the threatened cuts in NSE services have now been implemented. The cuts have included reductions in peak hour services on some routes, and reductions or cancellation of services in the evenings and at weekends. Peak hour cuts have included a number of services from Blackfriars and Victoria to North Kent destinations with gaps of 40 minutes between trains becoming commonplace. Off-peak cuts have left a number of stations on the Catford Loop with only an hourly service and Sunday services have been withdrawn from the popular North London Line.

However, it has not all been bad news. Threats to reduce substantially services, and close a number of stations, on the Thameslink route north of the Thames on Sundays have now been removed. But it is still the case that travel opportunities which Thameslink was supposed to open up have withered away on Sundays. Also, the threat to close the Enfield Town and Hertford East branches and a large number of stations in the North East London suburbs on Sundays has also been lifted. This set of closures would have meant that, apart from the Stansted Express, which is not a lot of use for local passengers, only three trains per hour would have left Liverpool Street for West Anglia lines: two for Chingford and one for Cambridge calling at Hackney Downs, Seven Sisters, Lower Edmonton, Cheshunt, and most stations to Cambridge. This latter would have been the only Lea

Valley service on Sundays.

The North London Line Sunday closure has been raised with Network SouthEast which has responded that the "service is not running this winter to facilitate engineering work, but this is not intended as a permanent arrangement". No publicity has been issued that engineering works are the reason for the closure, nor have we been told what the engineering works are, although there are chalked notices on some stations saying that Sunday services will be resumed on 22 March 1992.

A particular cause for concern has been the way in which information surrounding the cuts has been handled. Hasty decisions have obviously been made since the main 30.09.91 to 10.05.92 timetable was printed, and further decisions since the timetable amendments were printed.

What adds to the confusion is that the NSE local timetables are now off-prints of the ABC Rail Guide. There are now five versions of the Monday to Friday peak hour timetable between Chelmsford and Liverpool Street in circulation. The differences between each for departures from Liverpool Street to Chelmsford between 1800 and 1859 are significant. NSE has been asked to clarify the position as a matter of urgent public relations. Similar timetable confusions are reported from other parts of NSE.

Howard Thomas

Chiltern line: The long-awaited improved Chiltern line timetable (now to start on 20 January) will still not include an all-day service at Sudbury Harrow Road or Sudbury Hill, Harrow stations. Both will continue with just a skeleton peak-hour service which is among the worst in London, despite the modernisation of both stations at considerable expense. Efforts are being made locally to get BR to reconsider. The Princes Risborough - Aylesbury service will also be sharply reduced with the intermediate stop at Little Kimble especially badly hit.

Closure by stealth: The London Regional Passengers Committee was holding a public hearing in October into BR's plans to withdraw services between Watford Junction and Liverpool Street. Over 70 objections were received to the plan which would involve closing Primrose Hill station and the Graham Road curve in Hackney which was built at a cost of £2.5 million as part of the conditions for closing Broad Street station. Now reduced to one unreliable train each way Monday - Friday, it is cited as a blatant case of closure by stealth. Both this and the Westbourne Park (BR) closure proposal may be seen as a test case of the Government's professed commitment to rail. Will Transport Secretary Malcolm Rifkind be closing stations in the run-up to a general election?

Graham Larkbey

Cycle sense: RDS national executive member Malcolm Conway has been appointed cycling officer — a key role as cyclists complain that BR policies and new stock are making it increasingly more difficult to use bike and train. Malcolm who lives at 58 Greengate Lane, Kirkbarrow Estate, Kendal, Cumbria LA9 5LL will also be responsible for liaison with the Cyclists Touring Club, Friends of the Earth and other interested bodies.

A record task: RDS is looking for someone to make sense of the society's records. Ray King holds the society's library of press cuttings but someone is needed to collate records, minutes and reports from our past. The society's Fact File also needs updating. If you can take on this job, contact Ray King.

Drawing together: £150 from the national draw is going to North West branch to help the campaign for Manchester — Blackpool electrification. £100 will also go to RDS Wales for their campaign to develop the Chester — Holyhead line.

Multifret wagons on Railfreight's Harwich - Liverpool service have been approved for 90 mph running, clearing the way for a Harwich - Glasgow service with a 24-hour turnaround.