

LOCAL ACTION

East Midlands

The branch committee directs me to write to complain about the inclusion of a letter entitled Multi purpose link in October's Railwatch. My committee feels that the ideas expressed have not been sufficiently thought through, neither have interested parties such as this branch and our corporate member the Bedford - Bletchley Rail Users' Association, been consulted.

Appearing in Railwatch with its considerable circulation outside of RDS membership, articles such as this could be misconstrued as RDS policy by non members. What we are suggesting is that a degree of editorial control be exerted over the sort of articles and ideas that are published in Railwatch, bearing in mind its extensive circulation.

We certainly don't want to stifle debate. Indeed, many good schemes emanate from what at first sight seem to be nutty ideas. But we feel strongly that Railwatch is not the ideal place for them to be aired in the first instance. Perhaps the Platform section of Railwatch could be produced as an insert for members only, specifically for the throwing-around of controversial ideas, and only when they are fully thought through and refined should they appear in Railwatch.

Roger Skilton

Yorkshire

Rail offers good value for money. Electrification hopes: Prospects for North Trans-Pennine electrification were boosted by the conclusions of a consultants report commissioned by a consortium of local authorities along the route. This recommended that Liverpool - York electrification be pursued, with the possibility of extensions to Hull and from Crewe to Holyhead. Among the telling figures revealed in the report were that wiring the 100 miles between Liverpool and York would cost £53 million, compared to some £200 million for the planned widening of 20 miles of the Trans-Pennine section of the M62. It also showed that whereas the Department of Transport's trunk road programme shows a benefit:cost ratio of 2.5:1, North Trans-Pennine electrification would give a return of 2.8:1 when assessed on the same criteria.

Service threatened again: The future of the Wakefield-Huddersfield service is once more in doubt, with BR again giving notice of intent to withdraw from the joint-funding agreement with West Yorkshire PTE. The PTE would find it very difficult to meet the full cost of supporting the route given that spending restrictions mean it has problems honouring existing commitments, let alone new ones. For its part, BR claims that improvements to the Huddersfield-Leeds service mean it is better to connect with London trains at Leeds. This ignores the needs of local travellers and the real reason, as ever, is the ceaseless quest to cut costs. While RDS sympathises with its financial predicament, it is time BR managers stopped pursuing the easy option of milking equally hard-pressed local authorities for funds to meet responsibilities which are properly BR's.

Closure campaign latest: The Castleford - Milford Junction closure proposal (see Railwatch 49) attracted over 200 objections, thanks to user group and RDS members who ran a well-organised leafleting campaign. At the very least this should ensure that the matter goes to a Transport Users' Consultative Committee public hearing. It also means that the popular Wakefield - Scarborough day trippers' service should run again next summer.

Euro-terminal confusion: The proposed European freight terminal at Normanton will be delayed owing to the planning application being "called in" by the Department of the Environment. A public inquiry is now likely to be held. The argument is essentially that which has dogged the whole Channel Tunnel project, that is the impact on local residents against the wider regional economic benefits that the terminal would bring. With 1993 now uncomfortably close, and BR against reverting

to the originally envisaged South Leeds site, look for some kind of half-cock temporary solution being adopted unless planners, politicians and builders move fast.

David Pickersgill

Midlands

Capacity: BR, Centro and Birmingham City Council have jointly sponsored a £70,000 study by Transmark into the current and future capacity of the rail network in the Birmingham area. The study follows the Birmingham Integrated Transport Study into potential rail schemes and will seek to identify the potential level of rail services and the scope for achieving the demand with existing or additional track. The role of stock, stations and service frequencies were also discussed. The Stour Valley and International routes are known to be severely congested as, of course, in New Street station which operates 620 services per day despite being designed to cope with around 400.

Moor Street: As part of a major redevelopment of Birmingham Bull Ring shopping centre, the city council and Centro are planning to provide a new moving pavement from Moor Street station to New Street station serving en route the shops and a new Metro station. The 500 yard moving pavement will take a straight route under the present St Martins Queensway and parallel to the New Street rail tunnels.

City metro: The latest Metro extension proposed by the city council and Centro will run from Snow Hill to a new Bull Ring terminal. Snow Hill platform 4 has been reserved for the Metro line 1 services and the new extension will divert over the Great Charles Street underpass into a tunnel alongside Snow Hill Queensway and run underground via Bull Street and High Street to the Bull Ring. Metro stations are planned at the north end of Snow Hill (for St Pauls Square), at Corporation Street (for interchange with line 2) and at the Bull Ring to link with the moving pavement.

Wal-ton Express: In early September, the branch widely circulated a six-page report advocating an express rail link between Walsall and Wolverhampton. Taking just 12 minutes to cover the journey, the train could be much faster than bus or metro services and the scheme could be implemented quickly using existing tracks and stations. The scheme would now prove more viable following the precedent set in the West Yorkshire PTE area where a new Wakefield - Pontefract passenger service will operate over a freight line on marginal costings and an experimental basis instead of incurring the full section 20 costs. Since previously considered in 1983, the scheme will now also benefit from the increased half-hourly electric trains introduced in 1984 and the new Hednesford trains introduced in April 1989. In filling an obvious gap in the Midline network, a direct Walsall - Wolverhampton rail service would also save 43 minutes and extra fares incurred on the much longer route via New Street.

Rugeley Town: A new twin platform Rugeley Town station has been given the go-ahead by Staffordshire County Council along with a second platform at Hednesford served by regular trains operating a through Stafford - Rugeley - Hednesford - Walsall - Birmingham service. The new platforms will cost around £700,000 and are expected to be completed by October 1992 for the start of the new service. One additional two-car Sprinter is required to provide the extended service on an hourly interval basis. To meet additional peak-hour requirements, an older two-car diesel multiple unit will be refurbished to gain an extra three years of life.

Alan Bevan

Severnside

Despite the well known basic proposals for Avon Metro system and publication of additional route proposals under study, the BR Property Board continues to sell and try to destroy the infrastructure.

Following participation in a long public inquiry at Bath against new road projects and towards rail investments, the branch committee has been engaged at two inquiries in Bristol against a projected road which would block the Brislington Metro route and the proposed demolition of remainder of the Clifton Extension route including the Royate Hill Viaduct, which is the subject of a route restoration study to link future Clifton and Fishponds Metro routes.

Proposals for re-use of both these routes were submitted many years ago and recent events prove that alternative possible rail uses (mentioned in RDS Report on BR Property Board) have not been carried out by senior railway managers.

The possibility of Government departments moving to Bristol from London and other cities has prompted consideration of rebuilding platforms at Filton (Junction) station, formerly used by Badminton local services and demolished to prevent use by Gloucester trains. Reopening of North Filton platform and introduction of co-ordinated bus services to widespread aircraft industries for commuters from the Gloucester line as well as Bristol are under study.

Funding provisionally allocated by Gloucestershire County Council for a replacement Ashchurch station has been switched to help Avon County Council build a replacement Charfield station. We have drawn attention to Government grants which could avoid the need for county councils to finance station reconstruction for commuter business on this InterCity line.

The next Gloucestershire priority is for a new station north of former Coaley Junction to help reduce car commuting to Gloucester, Filton and Bristol. It could be a base for shuttle tourist buses to Berkeley Castle and Severn Wildfowl Trust, Slimbridge.

County councillors have supported our complaint that consultants have omitted large existing and planned catchment areas from their countywide studies for reopening of stations.

A possible light rail scheme for Swindon is understood to have been deemed as too expensive, but station reopenings at Purton and Wootton Bassett have been reconsidered. The Swindon and Cricklade Railway Society aims to extend its line to a proposed new BR station at Moreton Bridge on the Kemble route. Alternative methods of servicing by BR trains are being studied.

Reconstruction and servicing of a station at Corsham is still unresolved, which would reduce car traffic to Bath and Chippenham.

Plans have been announced for use of Royal Portbury Dock for importation of coal with construction of a conveyer across the River Avon to feed a frequent shuttle train service from Avonmouth to Didcot via Henbury and Bristol Parkway.

A Weston-Super-Mare resident has paid a great tribute to BR. He is reported in the Daily Telegraph (23 October 1991) as saying: "We are very lucky with this 125 service. It is fantastically reliable. In last winter's snow, we got to work in London when people living two or three miles from London couldn't."

Eric Barber

RDS has always supported extension of the West Somerset Railway to Taunton, its natural terminus. In the late 1970s, we were having to argue against the National Union of Railwaymen (as it then was) which was pursuing, in our view, a misguided policy. That opposition has long since evaporated and there is strong support from local councils for extension of the line. The recent working of occasional specials from BR metals through to Minehead has also been encouraging. Of course, there are practical problems to be surmounted. At present, BR is laying down conditions for entry into Taunton which could considerably increase the cost of the extension. RDS is investigating this issue to see if a compromise can be found.

Trevor Garrod