

Harnessing steam power

There is hope that a supermarket land deal could help a steam railway and at the same time extend the national rail network.

Budgen is buying the entire railway site at Sheringham where the North Norfolk Railway operates from the former BR station.

Budgen wants to build a supermarket on the railway's sidings but is offering to sell the freehold of the station to the preserved line which, it is hoped, could then link up with the Anglia-operated Sheringham-Norwich line.

It raises the prospect of trains from Norwich or even London being able to run on to the preserved line as far as Holt.

Many people working on preserved lines are content merely to "play trains" but many others believe the extensive mileage of preserved lines should be brought back into the national network and run on a partnership basis.

Preserved steam and diesel operations could continue while regular trains could run on the line from the national network.

Some funding mechanism must be found to compensate the volunteer railways for making their lines available, perhaps with the Strategic Rail Authority making grants to the preserved railways.

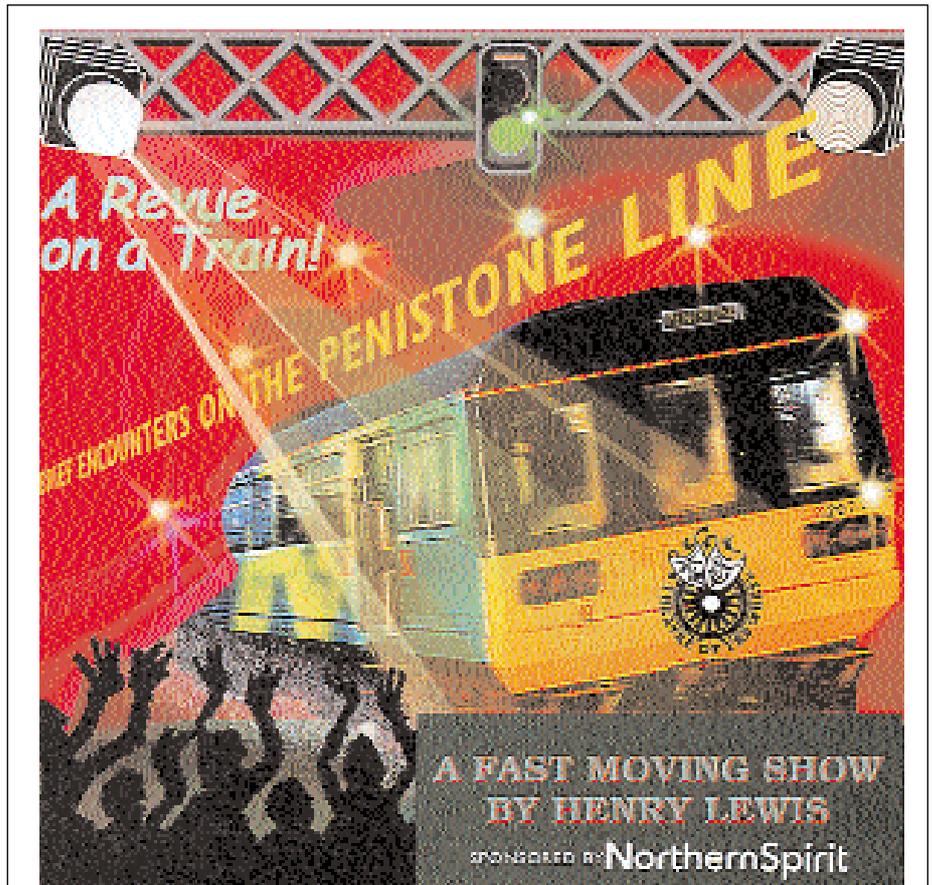
Many other preserved lines could benefit from having public service trains running through.

The fledgling Mid Norfolk Railway could operate from Wymondham to Dereham. It is currently awaiting the results of market research to find out how many people might use the railway to travel into Norwich.

But with greater vision and assured revenue, it could plan a private-public partnership which would allow trains to run to Fakenham and even Wells-next-the-Sea where thousands of holidaymakers have to rely on cars because public transport is so poor.

In Wiltshire, the county council wants to see regular passenger services back on the mothballed Frome-Radstock line, forming a link to the North Somerset Railway.

If there was a proper link with the West Somerset Railway, regular service trains could reach the resort of Minehead. Specials



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and freight trains have already run on to the line from the national network

In Yorkshire thousands of people travel to the North York Moors by car but if Pickering-Rillington was reopened, people could travel by rail from York (or even London) via the North York Moors line to Whitby. Several other lines, particularly the Welsh narrow gauge lines, already fulfil a public transport function. With greater cooperation between the train operators, Railtrack and the SRA their role could be enhanced.

Once the Bluebell Railway joins the national network at East Grinstead, there will many opportunities for the preserved

line to cooperate with the national rail authorities.

The Severn Valley from Kidderminster to Bridgnorth, the Great Central from Loughborough, the Keighley and Worth Valley, the Mid-Hants from Alton and others have potential for public transport.

These railways run a more reliable and attractive service with historic steam engines than the bus companies – and at times more frequent!

Menai bridge special

A special train hauled by a Black 5 steam engine and supported by Virgin, First North Western, Wales & West and Railtrack was expected to run from Holyhead to Crewe to mark the 150th anniversary of the Britannia Bridge across the Menai straits.

Save our Railways



The pressure group Save our Railways which played a key role in exposing the shortcomings of privatisation and subsequently fighting for a better railway closed down on 1 March. Campaigns director Jonathan Bray, pictured left, who is also a national executive member of RDS is moving to Transport 2000 to beef up its rail campaigning. He said: "There is still a need for a strong rail lobby." SoR national secretary Keith Bill who created the campaign said: "I'm immensely proud of what Save our Railways has achieved."

Jimmy Knapp, general secretary of the RMT union which provided funding for SoR said: "It has done a tremendous job." The three rail unions have pulled out because they are spending heavily to prevent the privatisation of the London Underground and are considering setting up a new campaign for the renationalisation of the national railway network.

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