



East Anglia

By Nick Dibben

Anglia across London The branch welcomed the announcement that Anglia Railways is to get money from the Rail Passenger Partnership to operate services between East Anglia and Basingstoke. A total of £2.8m will be available over three years to help start the service. If train paths can be agreed with Railtrack the service should start in May this year with six services in each direction between Chelmsford and Basingstoke. Trains will stop at interchange stations on the North London Line providing excellent connections to many other operators. If the service proves a success, Anglia wants to run an hourly frequency and extend trains to Southampton. Our main concern had been that it might cause stock shortages on Anglia's core services; but we understand only two of its eight Turbostar trains will be needed to operate the new service and that as a result more use will be made of the electric inter-city sets between Norwich and London. Anglia Railways has also told the East Suffolk Travellers Association it has taken on extra staff at Crown Point Depot to keep trains clean.

Stansted airport With nine million passengers per year and nearly 9,000 workers on the site, the airport has a major impact on local surface transport. Recognising its responsibility, the airport has published a transport strategy and has set up a Transport Forum to look at ways of improving public transport in the area. At present, 33% of all passengers using the airport arrive by coach, bus or train. The airport aims to increase this to 35% by the end of 2000. In 1991, 12% of passengers arrived by train; the proportion has now doubled to 25%.

RDS and local rail user groups are pressing for extended hours of operation on the Central Trains services from Stansted to Birmingham and an upgrade to half-hourly frequency. Our long-term plans include rail link eastwards to Braintree. One small but important detail that needs to be changed quickly is the train information screen. At present it says "Bham New St" which must be difficult for people to understand. Why not "Birmingham"?

A47 study The second multi modal study in the region looking at the transport corridor between Norwich and Great Yarmouth is due to start shortly.

The branch is suggesting a half-hourly service between the two towns, an aspiration shared with Anglia Railways. There are now regular freight trains of fertiliser from Great Yarmouth, and general freight traffic could increase if the port is expanded.

Reopening bid A meeting of the Cambridge-Sudbury Rail Renewal Association held in Haverhill on 20 January attracted councillors, council officials, parish councillors, rail campaigners and members of the public. The consultation was chaired by Councillor Jeremy

Farthing, vice-chairman of the transport and works committee of St Edmundsbury Borough and a presentation by the Reverend Malcolm Hill, secretary of the association, highlighted the issues involved in restoring the rail route. The industrial base of Haverhill is a very strong one and it is expected industry will continue to expand. The present population of Haverhill is 22,000 and is expected to grow to 35,000 by 2015. The association claims it has a good case for a restored rail route. For further details of

the campaign contact: Malcolm Hill, 11 Meadow View Road, Sudbury CO10 7NU. Tel: 01787 375503.

East Midlands

By Anthony Kay

AGM Railwatch columnist and former BR safety and operations manager Peter Rayner will be guest speaker at the East Midlands Branch annual meeting. The meeting will be held at 14.00 on Saturday 18 March in the City Rooms, Hotel Street, Leicester. Mr Rayner's topic will be *Safety and operations: are we making progress at last?*

Central Trains Leicester will benefit from service improvements promised for September. The Lincoln-Nottingham-Leicester-Coventry services will be extended to Leamington Spa and Oxford, providing a useful cross-country link avoiding the notorious congestion at Birmingham New Street. Frequency of Birmingham-Cambridge services will be doubled to half-hourly, with some trains serving Norwich. This will increase the Birmingham-Leicester frequency to three trains per hour.

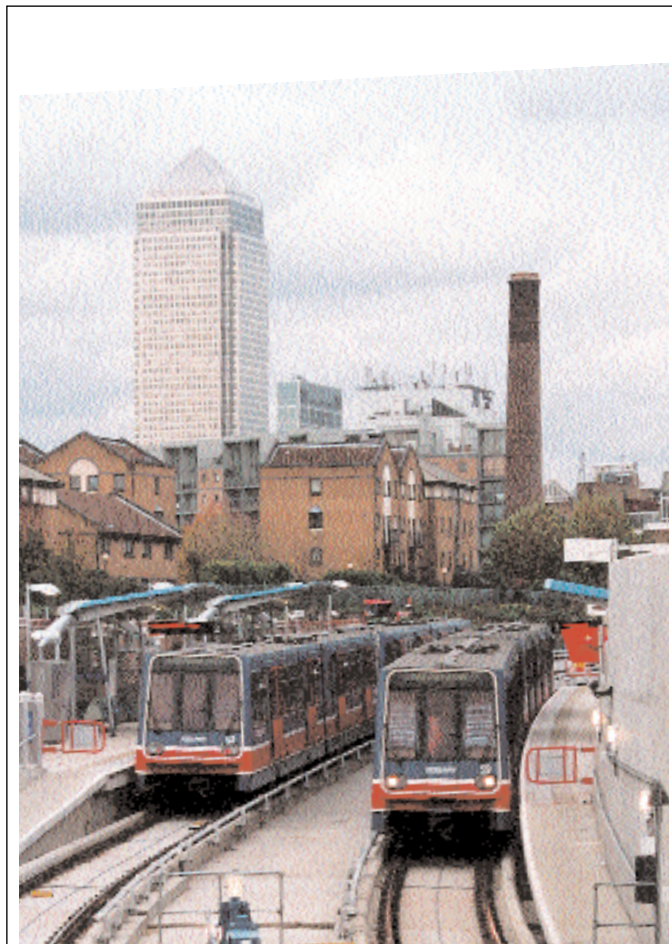
Evening trains campaign The branch, together with the Rail Users Consultative Council, has had some success in persuading train operators in the region to provide later trains. Central Trains will provide a 22.40 departure from Birmingham to Leicester (currently the latest departure is at 21.36, changing at Coventry), and also a later train from Stansted to Leicester. However, Midland Main Line has not yet improved on its 20.08 last southbound departure from Sheffield, which restricts travellers from the north-east who want to make southbound connections at Sheffield.

South Wales

De Cymru

By Peter Clark

On track for the 21st century This is the title of our development plan for South Wales railways, launched in February. The main aim is to influence decision makers at all levels and so it is being distributed to all MPs, Assembly Members and local authorities in our area and other organisations. A secondary but important aim is to provide a focus for branch activity in the coming months and years. It is a vision of what the rail system in our area could look like given the political and commercial will. As such it is a significant contribution to the franchise replacement discussions now



Some may say it is not a real railway – and it certainly can't carry freight – but the Docklands Light Railway has now tunneled under the Thames to serve Greenwich and Lewisham. This picture shows the rebuilt Mudchute station on the Isle of Dogs with Canada Tower (Canary Wharf) in the background.

"The Lewisham Link is a shining example of a successful private-public partnership, a £200m flagship project opening two months early, to specification, and to budget," says David Quarmby, chairman of the DLR.

The DLR now has interchanges with four main line railways and eight Tube lines with trains running every six minutes at peak times. Another DLR extension is planned to serve London City airport, with the possibility of another cross-river service to Woolwich. What is really needed at Woolwich, however, is a heavy rail crossing to allow the rail networks of Essex and Kent to be integrated. Currently the DLR is just another block to progress on that



under way, but it goes beyond that to include some longer-term possibilities which we feel should be floated now, to get them on the agenda for discussion by various bodies. Copies are available to members at £2.50 from RDS South Wales (to whom remittances should be made payable), 84 North Street, Abergavenny NP7 7ED.

National Assembly In advance of our development plan we submitted an abbreviated version entitled *Rail Developments for the 21st Century* to meet a deadline in November. The Welsh Assembly's environment committee has resolved to develop a series of long-distance coach services linking various parts of Wales, including routes not served by rail or served only by roundabout journeys. Our position is that such links should be regarded as complementary to, not instead of, developing rail services, with proper road-rail integration, timetabling and through ticketing.

Midlands

By Alan Bevan

Lobby time November and December proved to be a busy time for rail lobbying in the Midlands given our contributions to the BBC's excellent Rail Week and several other important issues. On 16 December a group visited the Parry People Mover in Cradley Heath where the semi-metro prototype for trials on the Stourbridge Town branch was sampled. In November we published our idea for an extra platform on the spare through line at Wolverhampton station to ease serious congestion.

For the turn of the year we announced our quest to reopen the 22-mile Stourbridge-Walsall-Lichfield route as our top priority millennium challenge for both passenger and freight traffic. Following presentations Centro has now agreed to feature this route in its new 20-year strategy.

Representatives of RDS Midlands attended a stakeholders meeting into major capacity constraints around the Birmingham area and we have submitted our suggestions, including the creation of six tracks from Proof House Junction to New St station by opening out the twin tunnels.

The Midlands branch has also made a start towards co-ordinating views and ideas ahead of the refranchising opportunities for the Central Trains network. At our annual meeting at St Martin's church hall in

Birmingham's Bull Ring on Saturday 19 February the guest speaker was Graham Smith, planning director for English Welsh & Scottish Railway.

Mid Wales

By Chris Magner

Talylyn Railway Since its formation at a meeting in Birmingham during October 1950, the Talylyn Railway Preservation Society and the Talylyn Railway Company have always been good supporters of the Cambrian Coast Line. The 1952 Ealing Comedy, *The Titfield Thunderbolt*, was based on the efforts to revive the Talylyn Railway using volunteer labour. It is interesting to reflect on one of the perceptive comments made in the film that if the local railway closed and was replaced by cars and buses, then soon afterwards, the roads would be flooded with such traffic!

North Midlands

By Bill Collins

Farewell John Branch chairman John Thelwell died in December. He will be missed, having given his time generously to both RDS and the Leicestershire and Northamptonshire Rail Action Committee.

Watchdog speaks Former official rail watchdog David Bertram will speak at the branch AGM to be held at the Winding Wheel Theatre in Chesterfield on Saturday 25 March at 14.00.

North East

By Peter Wood

Meetings Branch meetings at approximately two-monthly intervals continue to be varied, stimulating and successful. Recent speakers have included the highly entertaining and equally enterprising Alex Nelson, proprietor of Chesterle-Track, David Bishop, general manager north of Northern Spirit, Peter Stoner and Gordon Harrison from Northumberland County Council (talking about reopening the Ashington, Blyth and Tyne line for passengers) and Don Heath from Virgin Trains.

Campaigning Alongside the regular meetings the branch has stepped up its campaigning activities. Railtrack's Network Management Statement makes encouraging reference to the reopening of the Leamside line (including new stations for passenger services) and the restoration of passenger services to the Ashington, Blyth and Tyne line. Our stations survey has been well received and we are seek-

ing better publicity for run-about/rover tickets in the region which currently only seem to be available under the counter. We are turning our attention now to the need to re-establish a rail user group for the Tyne Valley line

Stations survey Branch members have recently surveyed all the region's railway stations (Esk Valley apart), looking at facilities, location, signing and integration with other forms of transport. The report, with recommendations, has been discussed with Railtrack, GNER and Northern Spirit and was very well received by them.

On the initiative of Railtrack a pilot project is being undertaken involving five stations served by Northern Spirit (Cramlington and Morpeth on the ECML and Prudhoe, Stocksfield and Wylam on the Tyne Valley line). The local authorities are also cooperating enthusiastically with a view to effecting a number of improvements at little additional cost. GNER has also proved very responsive, keen to share its plans for its stations and take on board constructive comments.

Service developments The

extension of the Tyne and Wear Metro to Sunderland and South Hylton has finally been given the green light, which we welcome. Apart from doubling rail services between Sunderland and Newcastle it will allow Northern Spirit to cascade a number of Pacer trains to improve services elsewhere in the region. A more frequent Sunderland-Hartlepool service is expected in May.

Freight Blyth is being used to ship coal to Tilbury. It arrives by rail from RJB's open cast mines in Northumberland. There have been sporadic coal trainloads again to Camus power station and two successful trial trains carrying steel coil from the Port of Tyne to Wolverhampton. It is hoped the closure of Ellington colliery in Northumberland will allow coal to be brought in by rail to the Alcan smelter in that county.

It is understood a Fairmont tracklaying machine imported from the USA for work on the West Coast main line modernisation is being tried out on the Leamside line, helping to get the branch ready for re-opening.

New secretary Ian Walker has taken over as branch secretary

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following Peter Atkinson's departure from the region. Grateful thanks to Peter for all his hard work and best wishes for the future.

Consultation We have also participated in the consultation exercises organised both by One North East (the new regional development agency) and the Association of North East Councils in relation to transport issues and regional economic strategy/regional planning guidance.

Scotland

By David Hansen

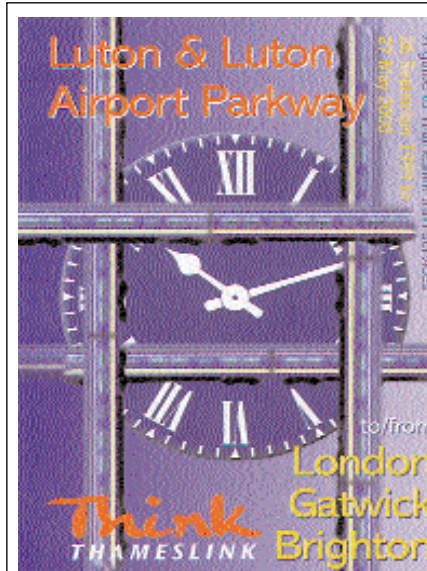
Extra trains By September ScotRail expects to have three spare 158s, following the introduction of 170s and the hand back of some 158s. Two are earmarked for the Edinburgh Crossrail scheme. It would be an excellent demonstration of commitment to sustainable transport if the third could be used for a Stirling-Alloa service. The Scottish Parliament simply has to provide the money and planning can commence. In comparison to the excessive number of roads built around Stirling in the past decade the cost would be negligible.

Money gap The Edinburgh Crossrail and the Larkhall scheme in the west have been delayed by a funding gap. Most of the funding package is in place but the last part needs to be assembled. This funding is in marked contrast to road funding, where £92 million was made available just for the traffic-generating A1 and M77, without the sponsors having to assemble any sort of funding package. Meanwhile the whole Scottish Public Transport fund remains stuck at a miserly £30 million a year. So much for integrated transport. The cynical might conclude that the funding hurdles are designed to ensure that as few rail schemes as possible are funded. The two road schemes were funded despite not being compared with sustainable alternatives. Such comparisons have been promised for years, but promises seem to count for little. We may have a very good transport minister, but it seems she is not supported by her colleagues, whose transport policies are very old indeed. Time the Government took its words on modernisation and new ideas seriously perhaps?

Winter highlight RDS Scotland was very pleased to welcome ScotRail managing director Alastair McPherson to our meeting in November. In an inspiring talk Alastair outlined some

of his plans, which have been publicised as ScotRail 2000. Particularly encouraging was his feeling that it is better to have 10 passengers paying £5 each than 5 passengers paying £10 each. This is The People's Railway espoused by Ron Cotton, probably the best marketer BR ever had. An aspiration for an hourly Fife to Glasgow

ments. The tight timetable has been something of a shock for the operators. If it starts off well then it usually works for the rest of the day but a bad start is difficult to recover from. Compared to timetables operated in Glasgow and many other English cities the timetable is not that tight, so hopefully the staff will get used to it.



The new Luton Airport Parkway station is now open with an impressive four-trains an hour service during the day, and a limited service through the night. Thameslink offers a tremendous service with links to many other rail and Underground lines. It was RDS which campaigned for the creation of Thameslink and is now calling for the Thameslink 2000 scheme to be implemented as soon as possible.

service was also welcome. The competing buses run every 30 minutes so the business is there.

Coal complaints The operators of that rarity in "New Britain", a deep coal mine, have been complaining that rail freight operator EWS is not giving them a good service to transport coal from Longannet to England. EWS had to find new markets following the ending of deep mining and has been successful in competing to take imported coal from port to customer. Following a quick reaction these complaints have subsided.

New timetable The central Scotland timetable has been recast to allow for 15-minute intervals between Edinburgh and Glasgow and a number of other changes and potential services. It has had a rocky start in places but some tweaking has already produced improve-

Station regeneration ScotRail has pointed out that the red seats, mentioned in *Railwatch 81*, removed from Haymarket are to be refurbished and used in Fife and the Bathgate line. This issue's station regeneration oddity is station clocks at Waverley. Not too many years ago the dial clocks were replaced by digital clocks. Now dial clocks are being strapped on to empty digital clock casings. Curious. A very good regeneration is that the ripped plastic sheets that form the "roof" on parts of Waverley are being replaced with glass. This would have been better to do in the summer, but at least it's happening. The result looks very good. It's nice to be able to praise Railtrack.

Goodbye old friends With the exception of a few enthusiasts everyone breathed a big sigh of relief when the elderly diesel multiple class 117 trains on Fife services retired at the end of November. Since they replaced steam trains they have given valuable service, but they should have been replaced a decade or two ago. They were literally held together by sticky tape in places (not vital places I hasten to add). Some are being retained at Perth for a time. The Fife timetable immediately became more reliable and more capacity is to be provided soon. Class 170s are operating an increasing number of services from Glasgow to Aberdeen, so Fife has seen a change from the oldest to the newest trains.

Borders report Every week brings a new rumour about the conclusions of the Virgin-Government funded report into rail services for the neglected but beautiful Borders area. It seems likely the report has used a very narrow definition of costs

to evaluate the various options. If such definitions were applied to Borders roads then most of them would be closed. So much for integrated transport.

SPADS It's rare for a railway term to make it into the mainstream media, but everybody is still talking about them. To keep things in proportion ScotRail had 35 SPADS last year, out of 580,000 trains passing 6,000,000 signals. That's an extremely good record rather than a cause for concern. Many of these SPADS were of one or two yards.

Juniper delays The class 334 trains to replace the last Blue Trains in Glasgow and allow a cascade on to the North Berwick line are at last being tested. In customary fashion this is a slow process. Passengers may use them sometime this year.

Seated sleepers Seating coaches for sleeper trains have been introduced. These replace the old guards van by a seated coach with guard's hutch and a small luggage space (with no wide doors to allow access). When publicised this service should be popular with those who can't sleep on a sleeper.

Franchise extension It's time for the SRA to act strategically. Twenty-year franchises are an unparalleled opportunity to get real railway development from the industry. In management speak the SRA should leverage real improvements from this round of franchising. Electrification of the Edinburgh-Aberdeen-Glasgow triangle and to Inverness, a whole host of new and improved local services, the Dornoch Bridge, freight terminals and airport links are just a few projects that should be delivered in return for the franchises. That's the way to get people out of their cars. We wait with interest to see whether the SRA and Government is up to the job of delivering an integrated transport system.

Severnside

By Alan Bevan and Phil Morris

New bridge obstructs rail route RDS has been actively protesting about plans by Cheltenham Council and Waitrose to impose a formidable obstruction along the disused Cheltenham-Honeybourne rail route contrary to the county council's policy and Government's planning, policy and guidance number 13 which should protect the route.

Railtrack and EWSR formally declared their interest in reopening the line in March 1999 but the council seems to prefer an expensive deviation north of



Cheltenham. In conjunction with the provision of new supermarkets on the St James site the council gave approval in November 1999 for Waitrose to breach and massively alter the existing embankments with a new flying footbridge across a new link road. The scheme removes a conventional 16ft headroom rail bridge and substitutes a "Sydney Harbour" lookalike span of 52 metres, 2.3 metres above the existing formation level, and incapable of carrying any light or heavy rail traffic. Any resumption of rail services would entail the very costly removal of the entire footbridge and its replacement with a new double-width heavy-weight bridge resting on new abutments and central piers.

To reach the new bridge height the council plans to raise and narrow the 100 metres-long embankments leaving a mere three-metre wide path along a formidable 1:28 gradient. The cumulative effect of these works is to obstruct a strategically important rail route and we must therefore continue with our strongest possible objections. The branch issued a press release in December in a bid to protect the route.

Protesters are angry that earlier representations about the route, which produced assurances that the trackbed and way would remain available, have proved to be false. RDS is calling on the Government and Strategic Rail Authority to uphold its existing directive (as set out in PPG13 para 5.8).

South East

By Trevor Jones

Guildford priorities RDS has listed the following priorities for Guildford in a submission to Surrey County Council: Improved pedestrian access between main rail station, bus station, and town centre, new suburban rail stations in the town, new rail link and direct services to Heathrow Airport and reinstated rail service to Cranleigh, preferably as a mainline railway with through services to points north, north-east, or north-west of Guildford.

Key speaker at one meeting was the Mayor of Guildford, Dr Robert Blundell, who demonstrated his keen interest in public transport by arriving by bus in full regalia instead of in the Mayoral car. Dr Blundell spoke on the need for new suburban stations, especially at Merrow, on the existing railways within the built-up area of Guildford. Afterwards County Councillor Tom Sharp reminded us of past proposals including Cranleigh

re-opening, a local Metro operation on existing lines with lots of little stations, and more recently a Variable Level Rail scheme (or monorail) on a totally new alignment from the town centre to the university and hospital to the west. All are agreed that Guildford needs something to overcome chronic traffic congestion, but the proposed Merrow and other mainline stations have a lot of opposition (mostly fear of commuter parking).

James Birt of South West Trains, who is their Woking general manager, told of good things happening on SWT, such as new 24hour press-button Customer Information Points at 175 of their 176 stations (no point at Waterloo!) and CCTV security

tions on Paddock viaduct, and local representations have been made to Railtrack. Rural bus links are now available from Honley and Denby Dale rail stations. Services over the Penistone line are well loaded, unfortunately, revenue is not always being collected owing to inadequate time between stations and faulty ticket machines.

James Towler Plans to unveil a memorial plaque to our late branch chairman at Settle station have been delayed until the spring.

Leeds First A new Customer Information System with a brand new train information board has been fitted. New track was laid to the east of Leeds to increase the speed, comfort and

The next branch meeting will be in Brighouse, following the reopening of the rail link to the town after an absence of 30 years. The venue will be the Civic Hall, Bradford Road, Brighouse on Saturday 17 June, commencing at 14.00.

South West

By Gerard Duddridge

Cornwall LTP We commented that the draft local transport plan gave a good overview of transport in Cornwall but it lacked ambition to develop the Cornish railway network for local rail travel. This perhaps reflects the view of the wider community to consider the railway in Cornwall as only having



The first station to open in the 21st century: Dunfermline Queen Margaret station began operation in January and is well situated for the hospital, which has parking problems like many other hospitals. The next station to open in Fife should be in east Kirkcaldy. This will complete the long gestation of stations in south Fife that started with Thornton. Congratulations to Fife Council for progressing these despite endless problems.

Pictures: David Hansen

cameras at 102 stations, new revenue protection staff and barriers, efforts to remove graffiti, and new rolling stock now being delivered.

Local RDS organiser Trevor Jones has been invited to join representatives from other local environmental groups for a meeting with consultants appointed by Surrey County Council to seek solutions to the county's chronic traffic problems.

Yorkshire

By Peter G Davies

Elland West Yorkshire Transport Authority has decided a station at Elland is not justifiable as it would attract less than 150 passengers a day. New stations which are being evaluated on the Calder Valley line are at Salterhebble, Hipperholme, and Laisterdyke. It is hoped a revaluation of the proposal for the new station at Elland will be considered at a later date.

Huddersfield-Penistone-Sheffield Concern has been expressed about weight restric-

flexibility of journeys to and from the east end approach of the station.

Work on the Globe Road Bridge will increase track capacity by 50% and give major lines into Leeds a dedicated route into the station, making journeys faster and more reliable.

Baildon Improvements in the Baildon area are being campaigned for by the local community, and they include a direct rail service from Baildon to Leeds, a covered seating area, and a direct bus link to Baildon village.

Kildwick and Crosshills It is hoped sufficient finance will be found for a feasibility study to be carried out into the provision of a new station at this location on the electrified Airedale line between Leeds and Skipton.

Branch meetings The annual general meeting of the Yorkshire Branch will be held at the Queens Hotel, Leeds, on Saturday 18 March, at 20.00 and the guest speaker will be Alan Whitehouse, transport correspondent for BBC Look North.

a role for transport to Plymouth, London and the north. We suggested there is potential to integrate rail and bus services to form a premier network of hourly to half hourly rail and bus services.

Trerulefoot was the only new station site considered by the LTP on the Cornish main line. However, opportunities for new stations were identified by RDS at Marazion, Carn Brea (Pool), Grampound Road and with diversion of Newquay to Par trains via St Dennis and St Austell, a station in the Charlestown-Carlyon Bay area. Work is also needed to restore double track between St Austell and Truro (Burngullow to Probus section) and passing places to be provided on the Falmouth branch for increased service frequency.

North Devon Despite representations to Devon County Council by both RDS and the North Devon Rail Users Group, it has granted itself planning permission to build the Barnstaple western bypass



which will be detrimental to access to the existing railway station as well as to reopening of the former lines to Bideford and towards Ilfracombe (*Railwatch* 81). The consultants employed by the county produced figures to show that extending the rail network beyond Barnstaple might only be feasible in 10 to 15 years time.

AGM Saturday 18 March Swarthmore Centre, Plymouth. 13.30

This has arisen as the local train operator has shown no interest in running a Barnstaple-Bideford service. Accordingly revenue assessments have been done by consultants for Devon County Council as if the railway was to be operated as a separate service from the Barnstaple to Exeter line. Contributory revenue which would be gained on new journeys generated on the Barnstaple to Exeter line and routes beyond are ignored. The case for reopening the Bideford line cannot be assessed in isolation from the railway to Exeter and the examination of the potential for through services to Waterloo. In correspondence to the NDRUG, the Government Office of the South West has indicated that the issues raised are only locally contentious and they would not justify the

Secretary of State calling in the application for his own determination.

Lincolnshire

By Brian Hastings

Upgrade The upgrade of the East Coast main line was one of the topics dealt with by our annual meeting speaker Simon Norton, communications manager for Railtrack London North Eastern. Mr Norton also discussed improvements planned for the Doncaster to Peterborough line via Lincoln which also goes through Saxilby, the venue for our meeting on 11 March.

Cuts query The branch is asking Central Trains for an explanation of why Barnetby has lost its weekday evening connection train from London (the 18.37 Newark Northgate to Grimsby).

Use those trains We are also asking Central Trains to consider making the last Lincoln to Sleaford train return to Lincoln, instead of continuing to Boston empty.

Cut fares please The Ramblers Association has joined RDS in a plea to Northern Spirit for a wider range of leisure fares on its revamped services from Lincoln to Sheffield, including

cheap day returns to destinations on the Penistone line.

Freight hopes There is a chance that limestone from Melton Ross near Barnetby will go by train to a new desulphurisation plant at West Burton power station to be built by 2002. Daily limestone trains may also go to Scunthorpe steelworks.

Days out by train A charter train is being run from Skegness on Saturday 29 April, over the Settle-Carlisle and then back via the West Coast main line. The train will pick up at Wainfleet, Boston, Heckington, Sleaford, Ruskington, Lincoln, Gainsborough and Doncaster. Details: Railtourer 01482 659082.

Edinburgh Another trip is planned from Cleethorpes to Edinburgh on Saturday 27 May, with pick-ups at Grimsby, Stallingborough, Barnetby, Scunthorpe, Crowle and Thorne South. Brian Hastings (01724 710528) is making up a party to support the venture.

Success! It may have taken three years but Northern Spirit has finally acceded to our request to reduce cheap day return fares from South Humberside to Meadowhall and Sheffield. The new fares are beginning to attract customers.

Speed up please We have asked Railtrack Midlands to check why there are several permanent speed restrictions near Lincoln. Railtrack executive Chris Rowley says he hopes to find ways to improve services.

Good news waiting The branch is still looking for village newsletters in which to promote RDS.

Interchange plea We have also called for improved bus facilities at Station Road, Sleaford.

Road hazard We are worried by plans by the county council to build a new road which will cut Grantham station off from the town centre.

Road noise Local MP Douglas Hogg has joined motorists complaining about delays at the level crossings at Sleaford. They are worried increased freight on the line will hold them up although they don't seem to realise that the freight will not affect them. It will use the avoiding line!

Thames

By Chris Wright

The branch responded to the draft local transport plans prepared by three local councils. Buckinghamshire is supportive of East-West rail as well as passenger services north of Aylesbury, and park-and-ride

for Sanderton (High Wycombe). The Bucks LTP also talks of encouraging bus links to rail stations. Milton Keynes is also positive towards rail but although we had highlighted the need for a new station at Wolverton, potential to reopen Castlethorpe, new services to Heathrow and Essex, they were surprisingly omitted from the draft LTP. Oxfordshire's LTP includes a positive role for rail, with new stations at Kidlington, Grove/Wantage and possibly Kennington, support for East-West rail, enhancement of Bicester-Oxford and the Cotswold line mentioned, along with the importance of better access to rail stations.

Chiltern bid The branch supported the Chiltern Railways bid to extend its franchise. Rail user groups could be eligible for grant aid of up to £5,000.

Specials More Clubman specials using the Aylesbury-Claydon Junction-Oxford route are planned for 28 May and 4 June.

Coach links The Stagecoach deal with Virgin Trains included enhancement of the X5 Oxford-Cambridge coach link. What a farce! The coach calls at Milton Keynes Central but Oxford station is served on the return journey only! Traffic delays prevent a call in both directions. The coach ignores Bicester North and Bedford Midland in spite of passing nearby. Cambridge station is not served. The Rail Regulator says these are commercial decisions. Timekeeping is poor. The Milton Keynes-Luton coach link has very poor loadings.

New rail user group The poor facilities and service gaps in Wolverton have resulted in the formation of a new user group. RDS is providing support and grant aid. The inaugural meeting was in February.

Central Trains The branch has welcomed plans to extend the Nottingham-Coventry service to Oxford.

Rail Strategy We reviewed our overall strategy at the last branch meeting and a new draft will be discussed at the next meeting.

Unfair charge

New regulations will enable the Health and Safety Executive to charge for safety case work in the offshore, railway and gas transport industries.

The dangerous road haulage industry escapes yet again, giving it yet another price advantage over rail.

Clear-out sale

Exploring Strathclyde By Rail. Trips from Glasgow. Was £5.75. One copy left. £2

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