

Waverley on way back

The Waverley line, closed by a Labour Government more than 30 years ago, could soon be reopened – for half its length at least.

But the cost of reopening is £25million more than it should have been because the route was not protected after the line closure.

Two roads, the Edinburgh bypass and the A7, have been built to block the alignment so millions will have to be spent to allow the railway to go under the bypass, over the A7 and to clear other obstructions.

Let us hope that RDS and other transport campaigners are successful in persuading the Government – in its current headlong rush to dispose of railway land – to introduce more rigorous protection than its road-obsessed predecessors.

Hopes were raised for reopening in February when consultants Scott Wilson reported that a half-hourly service from Edinburgh to Tweedbank would produce enough revenue to pay for itself.

The importance of a frequent service was stressed as a key way of attracting car users to the line. An hourly service was thought to be insufficient.

The challenge now will be to find the capital cost of rebuilding the line.

The feasibility study was funded by the Scottish Executive, the Midlothian and Scottish Borders councils and Scottish Borders Enterprise. But Virgin Trains (after Sir Richard Branson was won over) provided funding at a key stage and

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Trains can bridge the policy gap



This is the scene at Esk Bank, Midlothian, where the trackbed of the Waverley line has been breached by the A7 road at its junction with two minor roads. Everyone will benefit from the return of the railway, not just those who travel by car. Civilised transport will be an option for all for the first time for 30 years and even those who do not use the railway will enjoy the reduction in traffic, danger and pollution.

Picture: Scott Wilson

persuaded Railtrack to get involved too. Now it is hoped EWS and ScotRail will help put together a funding package.

Substantial housing development in the Tweedbank area improved the case for a rail service and it may be that more housing will follow once the railway is open.

With the Borders losing large numbers of jobs, the fact that the rail project could create 900 new jobs in the Borders and 450 in Midlothian was a boost for local confidence.

The study came up with various options but the favourite seems to be a £73million package to reopen from Edinburgh to Tweedbank, near Galashiels.

Three train sets would be needed and ScotRail could run through from Bathgate to provide a cross-city service for Edinburgh.

Tweedbank could be a park-and-ride gateway station for people from all over the Borders to reach the trains by bus and car. Virgin would not be directly involved but is confident the scheme would bring more rail passengers into Edinburgh where cross-country services

will soon be expanded with the delivery of its new Voyager trains.

Sadly, the consultants said the £200million cost of reinstating the line all the way to Carlisle was not likely to bring in enough revenue. Steep gradients make it a difficult route for freight but the whole line may still have a future if the pendulum continues to swing against wasteful road-orientated policies.

Of course it would be good value compared to the £77million recently announced for improving one small section of the A77 road.

As a first step, the line from Carlisle could be reinstated as far as Kielder as a £26m freight branch if the Scottish timber industry recovers from the current flood of cheap Latvian imports.

Then only the middle section of the Waverley route centred on Hawick would need to be rebuilt.

But at Hawick, the viaduct over the River Teviot has been demolished and the line is blocked by a leisure centre and major development south of the

river. The importance of protecting routes was certainly an issue at the time the Waverley line closed. There was lots of talk and little action. Will new Labour repeat the mistakes?

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