

# Rail could grow by 200%

By Alan Bevan

Following the 8-9% growth in rail passenger traffic over the past five years, consultants now forecast 120% growth in the Midlands over the period from 1998 to 2020.

They say the lowest growth they expect is 80% while it could be as high as 200%!

The promising assessment emerged at the end of June when the conclusions of the West Midlands Rail capacity study were published.

The study by consultants Halcrow identified capacity constraints around the Midlands, tried to make assessments of future demand, and indicated a range of options which will now be evaluated.

As a first step Railtrack has already adopted schemes which will provide quadrupling of the remaining Trent Valley main line and a turn-back platform at Wellington.

The Strategic Rail Authority is also evaluating the following schemes:

- Improving speeds between Coventry and Leamington.
- Improvements at Washwood Heath to enhance operating flexibility.
- Improvements at Worcester station to make way for upgraded train services.
- Infrastructure improvements for faster Stratford-on-Avon to Snow Hill services.

The franchise replacement process is also expected to provide an additional platform at Wolverhampton.

We can also look forward to longer trains and timetable changes to make better use of



**The original Curzon Street station building at Birmingham still survives but these days the trains stop at unloved New Street.**

**Now there is a chance that Birmingham will get a new station. Let's hope it will look as good as Philip Hardwick's 1838 design.**

the network. In conjunction with other agencies, Railtrack has initiated further studies.

There will be a six-month look at the Birmingham-Coventry line with the possibility of quadrupling, providing a new Nechells-Duddleston chord, reopening the Berkswell-Kenilworth line, and a new link from Whitacre to the National Exhibition Centre to cater for north-east to south-west traffic.

There will also be a six-month study into whether the Coventry-Leamington line should be double tracked.

Another six-month study will examine the Birmingham-Leamington corridor, looking

at the possibility of quadrupling between Tyseley and Dorridge, providing a new fast junction at Bordesley, re-using the old Moor Street station, providing an extra platform at Snow Hill and building new chords at Bordesley and Winson Green.

Centro will undertake a four-month study into passenger potential on the Worcester-Stourbridge-Walsall-Lichfield-Derby route.

The Strategic Rail Authority and Railtrack will carry out an eight-month study to evaluate options for a deep-level New Street tunnel and station, a new station east of the present New Street station, and more tracks for the existing New Street station.

"Capacity at New Street station has to be tackled if network congestion is to be overcome over a very wide area," said SRA chief Sir Alastair Morton.

"The West Midlands, and New Street station in particular, have developed into one of the most congested areas on the national network as passenger traffic has grown by 8-9% in each of the past five years.

"We are going forward with Railtrack to study and to consult on other very congested areas of the network in addition to the capacity upgrades already proceeding on the West Coast and East Coast main lines. Several routes into and across London form only part of a growing list."

Altogether a fascinating prospect of various developments which we will watch with great interest.

■ Alan Bevan is a former chairman of RDS and now a member of the national executive.

RDS chairman Peter Lawrence and I were recently invited to the launch of the Wherry Lines Community Rail Partnership at Reedham, Norfolk.

This is one of a growing number of such partnerships and its first project has been to produce an attractive brochure and poster for the Norwich-Yarmouth and Lowestoft lines.

The title Wherry Lines, originally used by British Rail in the 1970s, comes from a sailing barge once widely seen on the Norfolk Broads. Its sole survivor, the Albion, was moored at Reedham waterfront for the ceremony.

Village schoolchildren were invited and commemorative mugs were handed out. It is important to promote rail to the younger generation.

Other invited guests included three other local RDS members who are councillors or active in local users' groups. After the launch came a buffet lunch, networking and tasting a new Swingbridge Ale (brewed specially in the village brewery) at the Reedham Railway Tavern, which holds regular beer festivals and encourages its customers to come by train.

This pleasant event and surrounding publicity was possible because Railtrack, Anglia Railways, five local councils, the East of England Development Agency and three voluntary bodies, including RDS, have come together to form the partnership and put over £20,000 into it. The RDS contribution is just £50 this year, from

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VIEW



Putting

in some

money

profits on our book, *England's Most Easterly Railway*. Obviously we do not have the resources of a local council or company, but it is the principle of "putting money where our mouths are" that is important.

We also contributed (not from members' subscriptions), along with our affiliated East Suffolk Travellers' Association, to a specially designed map at Oulton Broad North station on the Wherry Line.

This shows the travelling public that we are people prepared to do things to make rail travel more user-friendly. We do not simply stand at the end of the platform complaining or pontificating.

Indeed, constant unrelieved criticism of rail services can play into the hands of the roads lobby. There has in fact been an RDS tradition of putting in some money – such as when we helped with the cost of reopening Watton-at-Stone station in Hertfordshire in the 1980s.

We have also been prepared to risk some money when we have chartered trains or,

more recently, bought shares. Those with whom we seek dialogue take notice of such action.

Three of us once met a politician who initially gave the impression that he was spending a little of his valuable time with us out of a sense of duty.

When told that we sometimes organised special trains, he almost visibly warmed to us and took us more seriously. As an organisation taken seriously, we can argue more effectively for improvements.

For example, the Wherry Line is not perfect. Reedham station has some awkward gaps in the timetable. Some of the connections with Central Trains Norwich to Liverpool service are inconvenient.

RDS will continue to press for these to be rectified, while putting time and money into praising the positive aspects of our railways.

■ Trevor Garrod is general secretary of the Railway Development Society.