

Platform *Your letters*



Regional airport links

Chris Packham makes a valid point about Regional Eurostar services (*Railwatch* 84).

At Leeds/Bradford airport, there are regular direct flights to both Paris and Brussels.

The airport is planning to grow by over a million extra passengers per annum over the next few years. This is likely to cause considerable problems on the narrow roads around the airport. It is very unlikely that these extra passengers would use a regional Eurostar service instead.

The airport is barely two miles from the Leeds-Harrogate line yet there has been little campaigning by RDS for a new airport rail link. How much does it cost to build two miles of railway line through open country?

Other regional airports would also benefit from better air-rail links: Bristol, Cardiff, Exeter, Edinburgh, and especially Belfast.

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Could do better

If we are to have any hope of persuading car drivers to switch to rail, we must heed the complaints of people like Michael Weinberg (*Railwatch* 83) and step up our demands for fast, comfortable and affordable services that interconnect with other modes of transport (including, where appropriate, the private car).

Merely lecturing and hectoring drivers about pollution and congestion will not suffice, and may even prove counter-productive in the longer term.

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Turbostars

I must say how I agree totally with Michael Weinberg's comments on the Midland Mainline

Turbostar class 170s in *Railwatch* 83.

I too remember the days when class 45s pulled comfortable trains to Sheffield, and beyond, in times not that different to today.

Real coffee (with biscuits) was served in real china from silver plate pots.

We thought it bad enough when the execrable Maxpack coffee came in, but little did we know what was yet to come.

Last summer I travelled several times on MML, including Class 170s. My immediate opinion, which I have no cause to change, was that these are glorified Class 158s with streamlined ends and, like the latter, are unsuited to medium-distance main-line travel.

I unfortunately had cause to complete more than one "comment" form (readily available at the north end of the up platforms at Leicester) and, in addition to delays, included comments on these trains.

MML replied with the usual platitudes including the inference that the trains had been carefully designed in response to customer needs.

This latter is clearly not the case as the Class 170 is "off the peg" and to be found, with cosmetic changes, on many other lines.

As to the complaint of overcrowding (hardly surprising with a two-car unit) I was advised to reserve a seat!

The most glaring illustration of the inadequacy of these trains was shown at Derby station. Two essentially identical two-car Class 170s were at the station. One was a Central Trains unit for Matlock stopping at six small communities en route, the other was a Midland unit for St Pancras stopping at Loughborough, Leicester, Market Harborough and Kettering.

Admittedly the Matlock train may have been on a running-in duty, but even so 150 years of

railway development seems to have shown that no diversity of rolling stock is necessary.

There is nothing inherently wrong with the Class 170s, they are quite nice trains as far as diesel multiple units go, but they are not suited to main lines.

It is simply a question of horses for courses. Regrettably the mentality of many railway companies (the bus and aircraft influence perhaps?) is simply one of "pack a pleb".

The only good thing about MML is that it does indicate in their timetable which trains will be Class 170s so that it is possible, up to a point at least, to avoid them.

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Waverley reality

Cedric Martindale's comment's in *Railwatch* 84 regarding the lack of obstacles on the former course of the Waverley through Hawick were spot on.

However, I'm not sure why he chose to criticise the local authority for the contents of the article in *Railwatch* 83.

Local authorities and the Scottish Office deserve to be criticised for past policies which have resulted in numerous, expensive to remedy breaches in the alignment (mostly from road schemes, of course), but the fact is that Scottish Borders Council has swung right behind the project over the past couple of years.

In an internal technical services department report into the situation in Hawick, I was able to conclude in February 1999 that "there do not appear to be any serious problems through Hawick which cannot be solved by engineering means", which I do not think is indicative of a lack of initiative.

I am writing this as an RDS member, not as an SBC employee!

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Leaflet intrusion

Is *Railwatch* so insignificant that members are intended to cut it up on receipt?

It seems to me to be a tasteless waste of money to give a centre colour page over to a membership campaign rail ticket (*Railwatch* 84).

Surely this item could have been included as an insert and the colour page used for rail photographs. I hope that RDS

will not be wasting money like this in the future.

*Thomas E Rookes, 77 Ruskin Avenue,
St Giles, Lincoln LN2 4DE*

Cash for transport

Car drivers are making lots of noise about the price of petrol, and how 75% of it is tax.

If every taxpayer in the UK paid somewhere in the region of the combined price of annual road tax and car insurance into a fund entirely for public transport, every train operator, every bus operator and ferry operators of services within the UK could be paid so much in subsidies that they could operate the current level of service for free with their current fare-box revenue assured.

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Power to passengers

The *Independent on Sunday* is to be congratulated on its current passenger power campaign. All too often, rail companies do not keep the public informed with the result that they lose faith in public transport.

Take, for instance, a local example involving Stagecoach and Great North Eastern Railways. A joint bus-train fare used to enable passengers to get from Grimsby Town to King's Cross for just £22.50 and gave an arrival time in London of just after 09.00. Now the price has risen to £25 and you don't even arrive until 11.41, too late for a full day in London.

Companies ought to get their act together if they really want to encourage people to leave their cars in the garage.

*Tim Mickleburgh, 33 Littlefield Lane,
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King's Lynn-Norwich

In the light of recent reopening of rail lines in the area, I feel it a crying shame that the possibility of a King's Lynn-Norwich service feels like a distant fantasy.

The fact that more people of King's Lynn work and commute to Cambridge than to their local administrative centre of Norwich (mainly due to the fast King's Lynn-Cambridge line) reflects the dire need for such a rail service.

Standing on King's Lynn station each morning as I await the train to take me to my work in Cambridge I notice the number of unused platforms.

If a Norwich service were to be introduced, I am almost certain it would see vast numbers of passengers using it for both

business and pleasure, benefiting the economies of the two towns and bringing revenue to the rail company.

But I dream! The reason for this e-mail was to see if you knew of, or could put me in contact with, anyone who also feels a need for a service such as this and for more information on the Norfolk-North Cambs rail network (what little there is of it) as a whole.

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Mobile menace

My wife and I travelled from Lincoln to London recently, and we were plagued by our immediate neighbours both receiving and making mobile phone calls.

I can't understand why some people cannot bear to be incomunicado for an hour or so.

None of our train journeys on this island last more than a couple of hours these days, so I say "ban 'em", and the sooner the better.

*Bill Johnston, 3 Vasey Close, Saxilby,
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Missing the point

In *Railwatch* 84, George Boyle states that the newly opened National Cycle Network, instigated by Sustrans, encourages more congestion on the roads because "most cycles [are] carried by motor car deep into the countryside and our national parks for recreational use [while] a reopened rail route could carry those cycles to the same spot without involving private cars".

Unfortunately this is not true. If the existing rail routes cannot encourage more cyclists to use them, why should reopened ones do so?

The fact is that railway companies do not encourage the carriage of bicycles on trains. What is most needed to increase bikes on trains is to remove the uncertainty of cycle space being available and the need to reserve in advance.

The existing railway lines could also be used more effectively for the transportation of freight without worrying about routes which currently do not exist.

Congratulations to Sustrans for their efforts towards encouraging more cycling. Following a 40-year decline in this mode of transport (cycling really is transport), mainly due to perceived danger on our roads, the past year has seen a 5% increase.

The National Cycle Network must take some credit for this.

My source is *Bikes on Trains – a study of potential uses*, Transport Research Laboratory Report 402, 1999.

As a new member of the RDS I do not see any committee working towards the integration of bikes on trains, only a single individual. Is this sufficient?

*Phyll Hardie, Thorpe St Andrew,
Norwich*

Sustrans response

In reply to George Boyle's letter, (*Railwatch* 84), I would like to make it clear that Sustrans owns some 400 miles of rail fragments. We hold all of this for future public transport use and in the meantime utilise the routes and maintain their continuity by managing them as cycling and walking routes.

Far from being "given" the routes, Sustrans is responsible for the maintenance of bridges and viaducts, for fencing and other liabilities.

A not inconsiderable portion of the total has been laboriously pieced together by patient negotiation with private landowners through acquisition, lease or licence.

To date only one route has been examined for freight by EWS (Rugby-Long Itchington) and that was found to be uneconomical, partly on account of the large number of structures along the route.

In the circumstances, I hope you will agree that Sustrans is doing a valuable job in keeping at least part of the derelict railway routing intact.

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Strategic advantage

I attended my very first branch meeting in response to the society's appeal to demonstrate support for the reopening of the line from Cambridge to St Ives and Huntingdon. I was impressed by the organisation of the meeting, the presentations, and the many well-informed questions.

But I didn't speak because I'd been wrongly expecting a time for general discussion towards the end of the meeting.

The point I wanted to make was that in campaigning for the reopening we should emphasise the great contribution the line could make to solving the acute planning problems of the Cambridge city region. The new

regional guidance endorses a new town north of Cambridge but it also envisages development in the green belt. The location and size of the new town have still to be decided.

To serve its strategic purpose, it should be big enough to have a wide range of homes, jobs and services, with travel into and out of the town more or less in balance.

It will need not just good public transport links to Cambridge city centre, but as well to outlying concentrations of jobs such as the Science Park and Addenbrooke's hospital.

More, it will need direct links to London, and to the main line north to Peterborough and beyond. Only the railway can meet all these needs.

So a reopened railway can make a vital contribution to the successful creation of the new town, and the two-way movement generated by the town can help to ensure the financial viability of the rail link. I shall be making these points in my letters to the SRA, the county council and the Government Office for the Eastern Region.

*David Grove, 84 Tenison Road,
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Bad timing

Travelling to and from Paignton in Devon from Birmingham was extremely good up until a couple of years ago. Being elderly and disabled, it is necessary for me to travel on a straight-through train.

This used to arrive at about 2pm and the return train left at about the same time. Then it was altered and one arrives late evening and the return journey starts at around 8am.

This means arriving at my hotel after the evening meal, and leaving before breakfast. To arrive in the dark and leave in the dark during many months is annoying.

Hopefully, Virgin Trains will see how much more sensible it would be to return to the former timetable.

*Mrs M Ashby, 87 Dufston Road,
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Short cuts

Why does the Virgin-run South West to North East cross-country service take such a tortuous route from Poole to York, Newcastle and Edinburgh?

We have found the service tedious and often overcrowded

at a feeble average speed of 47 mph. However we still prefer it to the hassle of crossing London from Waterloo to King's Cross, laden with luggage by Underground and there is virtually no difference in the total journey time – nearly five hours!

Rather than going via Coventry it should be routed via Solihull and Tuseley.

Mexborough-Doncaster is also a better route than via Wakefield.

Different routings could knock 30 to 45 minutes off the journey.

In addition, the cheapest fare is a £39 return (book ahead seven days). But we now have an economical diesel car which can do the journey in five hours and costs us £36 in petrol – and remember two travel for the same price as one in a car.

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Back the bus

RDS and the National Federation of Bus Users both have an agenda of improving public transport and they ought to co-operate more than they do so at present. Some of us are members of both organisations. If other RDS members would like to join, the federation's address is PO Box 320, Portsmouth PO5 3SD.

RDS is right to oppose buses being substituted for trains and the conversion of rail routes into bus lanes.

But buses can be partners to the railways, which is the usual thing in France and Germany, rather than competitors.

There is money available in the form of the rural bus grant and local authorities ought to make bus-rail partnerships a priority.

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Thames crossing

A Thames tunnel or bridge should be provided linking North Woolwich to Plumstead.

It would connect the many freight users of North Kent with existing lines in the Stratford area or even direct to Cambridge for onward connection to the North and North West.

This route from North Kent to Cambridge would put added emphasis on the advantages of a flyover at Hitchin on the East Coast main line to reduce conflicting movements there.

It would have other advantages when the East-West rail link links Bedford to the East Coast main line.

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