



North West

By Rob Cummings
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Monopoly The branch laments the passing of the direct rail service between Rochdale, Manchester Victoria and London in the summer timetable. We were further disappointed to learn it would not be resurrected next year. This means Virgin has a London-Manchester monopoly.

Franchise failure First North Western has failed to meet a franchise commitment to provide real-time information at all its stations by March 2000. Initial proposals were for a two-way link between passenger and control room. This has now been downgraded to a simple call box on only one platform from which users dial a freephone number in order to get train running information. First's lack of commitment to its customers was further compounded by repeated cancellations on many of the lines around Manchester during June and July. The fact that many of its stations are unstaffed demonstrated just why real time train running information is vital.

Crewe Open Day The branch ventured out with its sales stand. Overall a well organised and interesting event (thanks Adranz), a good opportunity to spread the message and swell branch funds!

Resignalling The Manchester South resignalling scheme kicked off in May with 52-hour engineering possessions in the Stockport area every weekend throughout the summer. The disruption will continue next summer. Lets hope all the disturbance is worth it!

Thames Valley

By Chris Wright

Phase one Anglia Railways has bid to operate the Oxford-Bletchley rail service, phase one of the East-West rail link. Our May branch meeting was told that Anglia and the East-West Rail Consortium are seeking Rail Partnership funding for an hourly service. Winslow and possibly Claydon are suggested as new stations. If the finance is forthcoming, the service could start in June next year. Anglia has also agreed with the EWR consortium to promote the full Oxford-Cambridge project.

Bid for Chiltern An impressive £900million bid to operate the Chiltern Lines has been made by Go-Ahead, the operators of Thames Trains. It is similar to the M40 Trains bid but also

includes proposed services from Milton Keynes to Aylesbury, Oxford-London via Bicester and on a reopened Thame branch.

Branch meet Silverlink is providing a speaker for our branch meeting on 25 November at St Mary's Church Hall, Church Green Road, Bletchley at 14.00.

User group contacts The branch has been in contact with user groups in our area - the Cotswold line, Cherwell users and the new Wolverton group gave presentations to the branch and the Marlow and Maidenhead group are planning to meet us soon.

Reopening birthday party RDS is joining with the Oxford-Buckinghamshire Rail Action Group to mark the 150th anniversary of the Islip to Bletchley line. and the expected reopening in 2001. One meeting

will at Winslow St Lawrence Rooms at 14.00 on 30 September and the other is at 19.45 on 2 October at Bicester Methodist Church hall in Sheep Street.

Mid Wales

By Chris Magner

Cambrian Lines Railtrack has made major improvements to Tywyn station on the Cambrian Coast Line. New platforms have been provided and also new shelters. Railtrack has told Gwynedd Council it has spent £1.6million on Barmouth Bridge over the past three years and wants to increase the charge for the use of the pedestrian walkway alongside the bridge. Railtrack has asked for £31,500 (instead of the £25,000 Gwynedd have been paying since 1996) for the yearly cost of keeping the walkway open.

Chester-Shrewsbury Much to

the annoyance of the Shrewsbury to Chester Rail Users Association, Central Trains has not honoured its pledge to extend the 17.22 Birmingham to Shrewsbury train through to Chester. Central Trains said it could not afford Railtracks' £2,380 access charges to run the train over the Shrewsbury to Chester line during the summer timetable, despite the service being included in the national timetable. Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin Council have launched the Mainline Europe campaign to develop the Chester to Wolverhampton line. SCRUA has launched a campaign to reopen Rossett, Johnstown, Cefn, Weston Rhyn, Whittington and Baschurch stations.

Frodsham-Runcorn The North Cheshire Rail Users Association has asked all RDS members to



The RDS banner was used to decorate a class 143 unit when Friends of the Severn Beach Railway supported a fun day at Severn Beach station. Pictured are Julie Boston of the Friends, train conductor Terry and driver Simon. Sales officer Phil Morris presented RDS's "shop window" at Bristol Temple Meads selling goods and providing information to the visitors who travelled from Bristol by special train to Severn Beach.

The Friends are campaigning for development of the line and want to see a proper service, half hourly between Temple Meads and Avonmouth with a feeder service to Severn Beach. They believe it would be an ideal proving ground for the lightweight Parry People

Mover. This year was the third year that Bristol City Council had hired a train from Wales & West and run the Severn Beach fun day, with organised walks, balloon races and other attractions. More than 1,000 people travelled to Severn Beach on 11 June. The staff of Wales & West entered into the spirit of the day and we had children singing songs and reading poetry over the address system. This line serves the hinterland of Bristol that no other public transport covers. It is the only means of travel from East Bristol to industrial West Bristol (Avonmouth) before 07.30. The first train arrives in Avonmouth at 06.20. The first bus at 07.35. Yet several thousand workers travel each day into the area - mostly by car.



support the only train of the week on the Frodsham Junction-Halton Junction "link line", the 15.38 Saturdays-only Chesterton Runcorn main line train. The association continues to develop Helsby station gardens.

North Midlands

By Graham Nalty

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Newark north curve The branch welcomed the proposal in the Railtrack Network Management Statement for 2000 for a West to North curve to be built at Newark. The facility to offer a fast direct service from Nottingham to Doncaster opens up an opportunity for a new high-speed service. Trains could start at Bristol or Plymouth and run hourly to Newcastle via Nottingham. By using the line avoiding Derby, the journey time between Nottingham and Birmingham would be reduced to be more competitive with cars. We also see another opportunity for fast limited stop services from Hull or York via Doncaster to Nottingham and Leicester with the opportunity to go forward to Luton, Oxford and Coventry.

Yorkshire

By Peter G Davies

By rail to Brighouse Brighouse station has reopened after closure 30 years ago. The new station has full access for the disabled, security cameras, and a public address system controlled from Huddersfield. Services are hourly to Huddersfield, and to Leeds via Halifax and Bradford. Two exceptions to this are a morning train direct to Leeds via Dewsbury, and an evening return train during the two peak periods.

Huddersfield Work is now almost complete at the station entrance, and provision should shortly be made for a new waiting room on platform one, and a newsagents.

Yorkshire Rail Review Copies of the Yorkshire Branch Annual Report for 1999 are now available. RDS members nationally, who would like a copy are invited to write to Graham Collett, 16 Willstrop Farm Road, Copmanthorpe, York YO23 3RY. The cost is £1, please enclose a large stamped addressed envelope with stamps to the value of 44p. Make cheques payable to RDS Yorkshire Branch.

Wharfedale Integration of road and rail transport is very evident in the new Wharfedale pocket line timetable supplied by Metro, the West Yorkshire

Passenger Transport Executive. Bus connections at Menston are shown in the timetable for passengers wishing to travel to Otley.

Concern has been expressed that there will be no direct connection from the Wharfedale line for passengers travelling to London following the change of timetable in July. This is in connection with the major resignalling and trackwork currently being undertaken at Leeds.

Sheffield The South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive is investigating possible sites for new stations at Millhouses and Swallownest, which are listed in a new Target 2020 strategy document.

Ribblehead The Settle and Carlisle Railway Trust has completed the restoration of the 124-year old station building which it leases from Railtrack. Over the past two years, the derelict structure has been returned to its original condition, including re-roofing, for conversion into a visitor centre, waiting room and information area. The trust is now focusing on other characteristics of the route which are not essential parts of Railtrack's infrastructure, but are of historical importance.

Hull From the start of the summer timetable, services operated by GNER are being routed via Selby. This has restored a direct link to London, and there is a daily through service in each direction. The Rail Regulator has given his approval for Hull Trains to operate in competition with GNER. The new operator will be able to use the route via Selby. However, services will not be allowed to call at Doncaster.

Freight campaign The Yorkshire branch is to be represented at the public hearing in York during July into the draft regional planning guidance. We will press the Regional Assembly for Yorkshire and Humberside for greater movement of freight by rail to the Humber ports.

North East

By Peter Wood

Summer meeting The role of the SRA with regard to franchising and new developments in the region was the theme. The speaker was Gavin Bostock from the SRA public affairs department. Attention centred on the proposed Trans-Pennine "inter-city" franchise (but why not including Newcastle to Carlisle and the Settle-Carlisle line?) and the north of England local lines franchise.

Rail user groups More recogni-

tion. NEXUS (Tyne and Wear PTE) is looking to include representatives of user groups in the revised make-up of its transport advisory committees serving the five districts of Tyne and Wear.

Stations Hot off the press is the outcome report for the station improvement pilot project which has involved the branch with Railtrack, Northern Spirit, Northumberland County Council and the Tyne Valley Rural Transport Partnership. The aim has been to enhance smaller stations with inexpensive improvements which can be financed from existing budgets. We're getting there!

Railway development Exciting times lie ahead with good news about the possibility of trains again in Wensleydale (another trans-pennine route?) and talk of services north from Hexham towards Kielder. Efforts continue via the rail passenger partnership to restore passenger services between Ashington, Blyth and Newcastle.

But it is the Leamside line (the reopening of which has been the subject of the branch's longest-running campaign) which may enjoy the biggest change of for-

tune. Take your pick from use as a diversionary route, to accommodate freight, use for a new local passenger service (between Tees and Tyne with stations at Belmont and Washington), electrification and development as the new East Coast main line bypassing Newcastle with a new Tyne river crossing and parkway station serving Durham, Newcastle and Sunderland in the Washington area. How times change!

East Anglia

By Nick Dibben

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Support for rail reopening Over 100 people attended a meeting arranged by the branch in support of the Cambridge-St Ives-Huntingdon rail reopening. Local MPs Anne Campbell and Andrew Lansley could not attend but sent messages of support. Anne Campbell also confirmed that the Government would fund the outcome of the A14 multi-modal study which includes the rail route.

Some 2,000 people responded to the multi-modal questionnaire. Nearly 38% wanted improved bus-rail facilities as their first

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choice compared with 48% who wanted to improve the road. It is not clear what these improvements are, and need not imply an extra lane on the road as claimed by the local newspaper.

There was 100% backing for the rail reopening between Cambridge and Huntingdon.

Messages of support were read out from local MPs Anne Campbell and Andrew Lansley.

The meeting applauded Anne Campbell's message when she wrote: "The Government has pledged to make the resources available for the recommendations which arise from the study so it is important that the study comes to the right conclusions."

The meeting expressed its concern that the A14 multi-modal study (NMS) would not consider the railway running through to Huntingdon.

I told the meeting: "Although re-opening to St Ives will provide a valuable local train service, we need to extend the route to Huntingdon. Yes, it will be difficult but the benefits of creating a new regional rail link are enormous. This link must form part of the study."

RDS has written to NMS consultants Mouchel on this matter.

Presentations at the meeting were by: Nick Dibben – rail, Peter Wakefield – busways, Ivan Ivanovic – multi-modal studies.

Good news is that following the Cambridge public meeting, some members e-mailed GO-East with reference to including the Huntingdon link in the multi-modal study.

The reply from GO-East is that



RDS national executive member Ken Cropley (third from right) went to the Treasury in June as part of an alliance of national groups which are calling on the Government to provide more cash for rail investment. They delivered a letter and posed with a mock-up of a cheque for £2 billion from the Bank of England for A Better Railway. In reality of course Britain spends half the European average on rail infrastructure investment. The event was organised by Transport 2000's Platform coordinator Jonathan Bray who said: "Although the Government has been talking up rail travel it has actually been spending less on it year-on-year. It is time the Government put its money where its mouth is." The picture shows Sue Hall of the Cyclists Touring Club, Frank Ward of the rail union TSSA, a sympathetic passer-by, Alan Tipping of TSSA, Susan Rabin of the Women's Institute, Nick Goss of the RADAR disability rights group, Diana Lamplugh of the Suzy Lamplugh Trust, Jonathan Bray, Dr Daphne Click of the National Council of Women of Great Britain, Lawrence Christiansen of Help the Aged, Janet Tuggey of the Joint Mobility Unit, Ken Cropley of RDS, Tim Pope and Sharon Bowell of the Joint Mobility Unit.

the link will be included as part of the study.

Freight safeguard A revised scheme for the Fordham by-pass has been approved by Cambridgeshire County Council to allow for future rail sidings to nearby factories. A

number of new warehouses have recently been built adjacent to the Ely to Bury St Edmunds line at Fordham and although there is no short-term prospect for rail freight, the county wanted to ensure a future connection was possible. A revision to the road was one of the comments made by the branch on the county's draft Local Transport Plan. The branch had a letter published in a local paper congratulating the county on its forward thinking.

East Midlands

By John Armstrong
and Anthony Kay
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The train to Coalville is running 12 years late The branch has been active in fighting to save the Ivanhoe stage two rail scheme from Leicester to Burton on Trent via Coalville, following a Leicestershire County Council recommendation that it be held in abeyance on the grounds that it did not represent value for money. Council officers propose that an improved bus service offers better value and should be given Council financial support. This has caused great consternation among the area's politicians and local people. The

Ivanhoe scheme was first proposed in 1988 and was due to open in 1990.

RDS organised a mass leafleting and petition at the Coalville Snibston Discovery Park Millennium Open Day, and within a few hours attracted 500 signatures. Local feeling was very strong that the trains were needed and that a bus service was not going to be an attractive alternative.

County Councillor and RDS member David Bill received front-page coverage in the *Leicester Mercury*, claiming that council officers had adopted a defeatist attitude to the scheme, and had not pursued all avenues for funding.

The branch has pressed the council to take a more positive approach by entering into negotiations with the two bidders for the Central franchise (National Express and Group 4) to press for the Ivanhoe reopening to be part of their bid for the 20 year franchise.

We believe the council has been slow to exploit the refranchising process. SRA chief executive Mike Grant has said: "The Central Trains area has seen one of the lowest levels of invest-

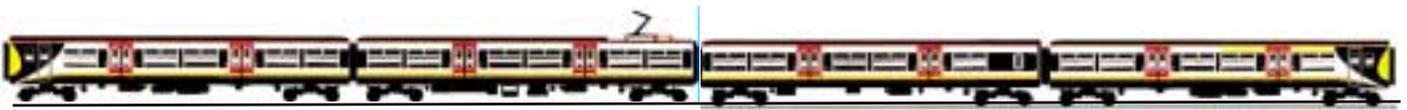
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ment in the country and I expect the successful franchise to rectify this."

Threat to East-West rail link The route of the East-West rail link reopening through Bedford is threatened by proposals for an international size rowing lake at Willington between Bedford and Sandy, which would sever (and flood) the track bed. A company called Sportmatters is promoting the scheme and launched a publicity campaign biased against the rail scheme. Sportmatters hosts an organisation called Stop Train Traffic Assassinating Bedford (STAB), and is promoting a local survey which contains questions heavily biased against the railway.

Improved service between Leicester, Birmingham and Peterborough After three years of pressing by the branch for later evening services and a more frequent daytime service, the winter timetable will see a big improvement. Three trains an hour from Leicester to Birmingham and half hourly to Peterborough, with later evening trains, rewards our persistence. We continue to press for regular interval frequencies at Hinckley and at South Wigston. Congestion at Leicester and the fragile state of wiring at Leicester power box making signalling changes difficult and expensive, are reasons given for slow progress.

Midlands

By Alan Bevan

Refranchising RDS Midlands has contributed to the current franchise replacement review by circulating a 10-page document detailing our views and aspirations to both Group 4 and Central Trains and to the Strategic Rail Authority, the West Midlands Passenger Transport Authority and the Rail Passengers Council. The document collates the views of Midlands Rail User Groups and lists new route and station proposals, enhancements to existing services, as well as rolling stock and information improvements. Included in the document is a proposal for a new Matlock-Derby-Lichfield train service which requires one extra diesel train to operate a new hourly through service.

Frankley A recent Centro report advised of the greater financial and other benefits of extending trains from Longbridge on a half-hourly frequency via a new Rubery-Great Park station to a Frankley terminus. The £11million project is included in the latest West Midlands local transport plan bids for Government

support. Although a small number of residents near Rubery Lane have expressed opposition to the railway due to concerns about an adjacent ancient wood, RDS organised deliveries of over 3,000 information and survey forms to homes throughout Frankley and initial results show that over 70% of households on the estate fully support the rail scheme.

More wires Proposals for the £36million electrification of the Walsall-Rugeley line have been included in the latest local transport plan bid for Government support towards implementation in 2003-04 along with the £6million electrification of the Ryecroft-Aldridge route.

North Wales

Gogledd Cymru
By David Sallery
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and David Walters

Conway Valley con The future of the scenic Conway Valley line, Snowdonia, hit the headlines locally after the branch raised concerns about cost cutting in the new summer timetable.

First North Western has altered the service between Blaenau Ffestiniog and Llandudno, so

that only one train is used throughout the day. The number of services each day is the same but the only commuter train home from Llandudno at 17.35 has been replaced with a departure at 18.37.

This could deprive the line of important business which lasts throughout the year, not just the summer. The new arrangement is a missed opportunity to increase train frequencies, at least over the northern half of the line.

We warned that a close watch must be kept to ensure the passing loop and signal box at Llanrwst, not needed for the new timetable, were not decommissioned. We believe it is essential for the future Wales and the Welsh Borders franchise to include a far better service in the Conwy Valley, including at least an hourly shuttle between Betws-y-Coed and Llandudno. A commitment to this has to be obtained now, as the Wales franchise looks likely to be one of the earliest to be settled.

"We are disappointed that resources are being removed from the Conwy Valley line when there is more demand for rail travel in Britain and increas-

ing concern for the environment, especially in Snowdonia," Dave Sallery told the press. "It would have been much better to keep the old timetable, and then to invest in modern electronic signalling. That would allow a frequent shuttle service between Llandudno and Betws-y-Coed and reduce costs at the same time. We understand that Snowdonia National Park are planning to create a major Snowdonia Gateway car park at Betws-y-Coed with shuttle buses into the National Park, and this makes it even more important for Betws-y-Coed to have a good train service."

Lion's share to roads Car drivers are likely to gain most from Anglesey's local transport plan. The extension of the A55 will bypass villages but the main beneficiaries will be foreign juggernauts travelling to and from Ireland free on a shadow-tolled road paid for by the taxpayers of Wales.

A commitment to reopening Gaerwen station is given in the draft Anglesey Local Transport Plan. This is particularly important as part of the proposed reopening of the mothballed Amlwch line, which diverges from the main line at Gaerwen. Both these items have been lobbied for by the branch.

Anglesey council are committed to supporting the existing services and pressing for further improvements.

In the LTP there is also a commitment to seamless change-over from road to rail at stations.

New trains - what new trains? Yet again the widely heralded introduction of new trains, in this case First North Western Class 175's, has not happened. Due to the familiar combination of production delays, modifications, Railtrack approval ad nauseam passengers in North Wales are still enduring the out-of-date stock they have had for too many years.

Scotland

By David Hansen
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All-party rail group RDS attended the initial meeting of Members of the Scottish Parliament rail group, where the bidders for the East Coast main line franchise gave presentations.

Airdrie-Bathgate RDS gave an excellent presentation on our study of this line to a meeting attended by many MSPs. We were particularly commended for our speaker. RDS has also had meetings with MSPs in



If you think your local line needs investment, spare a thought for Georgian Railways which are struggling to cope following the country's independence after 70 years as a part of the Soviet Union.

The trains may be rusty and have windows broken but large numbers of people still rely on them.

Happily the European Union is investing money in Georgian Railways which are run down after three years of civil war in the 1990s.

But note that even here on a branch line from Kashuri to Surami electrification is the order of the day. In car-crazy Britain, railway planners seem to have abandoned environment-friendly electrification in favour of diesels.



order to try to start a campaign for this route to be re-opened.

Freight With the aid of grants from the Scottish Executive, the scheme to put Safeway supermarket produce on trains is slowly expanding. Grants for schemes like Stirling-Alloa have been applied for and we look forward to a speedy and positive response.

Cycle saga With "new trains" on the far north route, there is now a shortage of space for cycle carriage as we warned there would be. At a meeting with Scotrail, RDS was assured this would be looked at, but the operator says it must reconcile competing interests. Issues include the removal of first class which would allow more seats, bikes, wheelchairs and seating capacity generally. The trains are also used on Fife commuter services during the crush hour, and there are contracts with the Strategic Rail Authority and Fife Council on seat numbers. A growing number of cyclists are journeying from John O'Groats to Land's End on charity/personal rides. They need to get from where they live, to the start of the cycle ride or to return home at the end of their ride. This can represent a single journey from Thurso to Penzance, a good source of income for the railways.

Cyclists are investigating the bus as a means to get to the north. Following prompting from a number of organisations Scotrail has agreed to hire a road van, which will parallel the most popular train for the second half of this summer. This is welcome but a proper solution needs to be found soon.

What we need The Scottish Parliament and Executive need to get serious about railways. They need to approve a 10 or 20-year rail development plan, to include electrification of Edinburgh-Glasgow-Aberdeen and associated lines, and many other schemes such as St Andrews, Dornoch and Borders rail. With signs that the Strategic Rail Authority is to be largely the South East England Rail Authority, the Scottish Parliament needs to buck up its ideas. In recent months the Executive stirred itself and made public comments on franchise replacement, calling for better services to Dunbar. Hopefully this is the start of them taking their responsibilities seriously.

Lincolnshire

By Brian Hastings

Rail trail RDS and the Lincoln Ramblers Association are planning a rail ramble on 26 August

based on Barnetby. Another walk is planned through West Lindsey to Saxilby. Details from Stuart Parker on 01522 534655

Freight After RDS pressure North Kesteven District Council has revised its local plan to include a section on railfreight.

New image The county council is considering a suggestion from RDS that Sleaford station should be renamed Sleaford Interchange.

Radio link RDS branch chairman Brian Hastings featured on Radio Lincolnshire's Rail Digest programme in July.

Leaflet success An RDS leaflet campaign by Andrew Court and Bill Johnston has helped to boost patronage at Saxilby. The branch now plans to target Market Rasen.

South West

By Gerard Duddridge

Kingskerswell Consultants Halcrow Fox have failed to recognise the contribution public transport can play in recommending building a £74million bypass for Kingskerswell, Devon. Alternative public transport improvements and other sustainable modes were said to only marginally reduce traffic on the A380 from Newton Abbot. This seems hardly surprising given that these modes would receive less than a tenth of the sum allocated to the new road. Particularly worrying was the suggestion that a new station for Kingskerswell was no more than a long-term project. RDS is concerned that the alternatives have been assessed at a very low budget and accordingly appear ineffectual. At minimum we would recommend new stations at Kingskerswell, Torbay Hospital and Preston (between Torquay and Paignton) plus extension of Paignton trains to Goodrington and Churston (for Brixham). The £25million saving by just building a single carriageway road would more than pay for these improvements and allow other connecting bus and rail services to be improved.

Car Parking First Great Western came in for criticism at the July Rail Passengers Council meeting in Plymouth over their car parking policy (*Railwatch* 84).

Devon Local Transport Plan The draft LTP contains a number of rail schemes, but many are projects that have made little progress from previous years. For example the Devon Transport Policies and Programme for 1995/96 went as far as suggesting a price of

£750,000 for the construction of a new station at South Brent in the period 1998-2001. Now there is just a commitment to undertake a feasibility study. Apart from determining the level of service, this seems hardly necessary as the old station site is the only possibility. It is in the centre of the village.

South Wales

By Peter Clark
and Julian Langston

New franchise An all-Wales franchise would be more efficient and would work even better if there were adequate funds available to develop better services, consultants Gibb have reported to the SRA. RDS is hoping that, should it be necessary, the National Assembly – which is already funding a south-north Wales service – may be persuaded to provide some top-up funding.

Local Transport Plans The branch has been attempting to monitor these and to become involved in the consultation process. This is the first year in which Welsh authorities have had to prepare LTPs and despite the existence of guidance notes the results are very variable (as are the consultation processes and levels of research which have led to them). We are pleased to find some councils incorporating points from the RDS Development Plan but others contain very little in the way of actual commitment to rail development.

Sitting on the fence Research by RDS South Wales has revealed that the National Assembly for Wales has no intention of taking a lead role in developing schemes involving rail for Objective One funding. Instead it intends that county councils should define their own rail needs. As these councils are mostly too small to usefully set rail strategies just for their own areas, we shall be calling on the Assembly to at least take a co-ordinating role.

Cash crisis

The RDS national executive met in July to grapple with the society's financial problems. As we try to cope with campaigning at local, national and international level at a time when railways seem to never out of the news, costs have increased. Ways to save money have already been implemented but the executive has agreed that subscriptions will probably have to rise, for the first time in four years. A national appeal to members is also being considered.

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