



Your letters

Frequent Rail Users

I am about to become a "Frequent Rail User" on the Great Western Railway from South Wales to London, as I will be regularly visiting my partner who is starting a new job there.

Having found "frequent flyer" schemes very worthwhile on airlines, I started to wonder about similar schemes on the UK rail network, but to my knowledge, none exist for those of us who are independent adults who are not commuting, nor in the First Class price bracket, nor within the Network SouthEast zone.

Yet it is well rehearsed that one of the major problems in encouraging rail use is that the marginal cost of travelling by train is much higher than that for using one's car.

Can you tell me, has there been any widespread debate of the possibility of a flexible "Frequent Rail User" scheme to reward and encourage increased rail use, to the benefit of both passengers and rail companies?

*Amanda Baker, Department of Physics and Astronomy, Cardiff University, PO Box 913, CF24 3YB
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Editor's note: We haven't heard much discussion about a frequent traveller option for rail users despite the fact that privatisation was supposed to bring marketing skills to the rail network.

Railfuture has been lobbying for a national railcard as exists in Germany and Switzerland which gives 50% discounts for people who are prepared to pay around £50 for the railcard.

In Austria there is a similar scheme where people who pay vehicle excise duty for their car can also obtain a card for reduced rate travel by rail.

Unfortunately, the rail companies seem more interested in undermining the value of the present railcards than in intro-

ducing good ideas. The super saver ticket was one of the first victims of privatisation.

Railtuck

I was very interested to read in *Railwatch 88* about the Railtuck scheme. Two or three times lately I have travelled from Exmouth, breaking my journey at Paddington.

As far as I could find, there is no longer an "average" type buffet at Paddington where one can get a snack or a meal in peaceful surroundings as we have at Exeter and Newton Abbot.

One snack bar had pop music playing and was not cut off from the general noise of the station.

So I went outside the station but could not find a "normal" place to eat in the time I had to spare. So much for improvements!

When I mentioned my problem to a rail adviser on the station I was told that people nowadays only have time for a quick bite!

However, twice I have had to wait more than half an hour for a train.

Best of luck therefore in your plans to get places listed on the world wide web.

It would be nice if you could eventually also publish a booklet of such places for people like me who do not have access to the web.

Geoffrey Burgess, 25 Little Biction Court, Little Biction Place, Exmouth, Devon EX8 2SS

Editor's note: We do hope to publish a printed Railtuck guide but we may well need sponsorship for such an enterprise. Readers without access to the web can often get access at their local public libraries.

New Easyrail

The Railfuture passenger committee hopes to publish in the new year the next edition of Easy Rail Travel, dealing with New Routes and Improved Services. If you have any ideas or gripes about the timetable, I

would like to hear from you. Ideas for through services where a change is now required would be welcome. Reopenings are outside our remit, so please, only comments and suggestions that the existing infrastructure could accommodate. Many thanks in anticipation.

David Croot, Orchard House, Mill Road, Old Buckenham, Attleborough, Norfolk NR17 1SG

Treasury rules ok

In *Railwatch 88*, Alan Crowhurst asks: "Do we really want to go back to the time when every purchase had to be sanctioned by the Treasury?"

No, of course we don't – and we don't have to. Few people know the Treasury rule which crippled the nationalised industries was only introduced in 1956.

Before that, they could borrow on the open market in the same way as private companies.

This Treasury rule is unnecessary and irrational and no other country has it. It is the main reason why other European countries are able to run successful nationalised railways, while Britain isn't.

Change the Treasury rule and we can have a successful nationalised railway – but we'll have to change the Government first.

*Rex Hora, 51 Eastern Avenue, Reading RG1 5SQ
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Litter bins

Travelling to Saltburn recently, I looked in vain for litter bins at both Doncaster and Darlington stations. Then I realised they must still be on security alert, what with the fragile peace in Northern Ireland. But in that case, why do some stations still have their bins? Is it because they are deemed to be less at risk? Or is it that our fragmented railways lack a unified policy on this issue?

What's more, I think the authorities ought to consider the potential fire hazard of litter being dumped anywhere on a platform. For let's be realistic, if people can't find a bin, a good proportion will simply leave their rubbish somewhere that isn't visible, such as behind or under a seat.

Perhaps now is the time to look at the wider implications of having no litter bins, including the station's overall appearance.

Tim Mickleburgh, 33 Littlefield Lane, Grimsby, Lincolnshire DN31 2AZ.

Road lobby

Railwatch is a wonderful read for all of us who are interested in

promoting efficient rail services. However, I sometimes despair of the comments and analyses that make so much sense environmentally and safetywise and then bemoan that Government cannot somehow see the rightness of the arguments.

I think that the story is worse than any of us think. It seems obvious that rail should be preferred. Efficient cheap rail would get even Rolls owners out of their cars. But intelligent politicians cannot see it.

Is it because of the commercial reality and bribery of the car and road lobby? No-one is prepared to risk not selling more and more cars. The manufacturers will suppress the advantages of rail to keep selling.

We are stuck with disaster in this country because we are in hock to the road lobby. If you want evidence, look what happened to the lone voice of Mrs Dunwoody – an attempt to have her removed from influence.

So don't worry that you may be about to sell your soul to road interests; it has already been pawned to them for you and you have no further say in the matter.

Yours, hoping to be wrong,

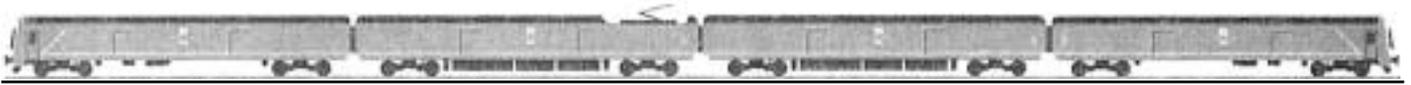
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Reopening reality

While Railfuture South West is sympathetic to a number of points raised in Jonathan Dalton's letter (*Railwatch 88*), we cannot support the idea of reopening the Taunton to South Molton line as a regional link to North Devon. If we were lucky we might gain a feasibility study and perhaps a reopening in 10 to 20 years' time. However, we could end up with neither, and find that the existing line from Exeter was not improved either. The idea of reconverting the North Devon Link Road back to rail use between South Molton and Barnstaple is unlikely to gain serious support in Devon.

Our strategy is to campaign for an hourly service from Exeter to Barnstaple with trains continuing to Bideford over a reopened line. Some trains would run to and from Waterloo. The next stage would consider the reopening of the Barnstaple to Braunton line (perhaps Ilfracombe as well), a more frequent service from Barnstaple to Exeter and some services running direct to Taunton and Bristol via a new Cowley Bridge chord (*Railwatch 87*).

These improvements should



significantly increase the use of the railway from Barnstaple to Exeter and this itself will strengthen the future case for the South Molton line. However, at the moment it is vital to focus on lines that will locally demonstrate the benefits to be gained from reopening railways.

If we do otherwise we may slow the whole process of rail reopenings in Devon. We would of course be supportive to any initiative to reopen the South Molton line for local use and tourism, as is being done by the excellent example in Wensleydale.

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Alternative reopening

A better alternative to reopening the Taunton to Barnstaple line is to reopen from Barnstaple to Dulverton, then down the route of the Exe Valley line to Tiverton and finally across to the main line on the course of the old "Tivvy Bumper".

This would tap the huge expansion there has been in the Tiverton area since the lines closed 40 years ago, and mean that the extension to North Devon only had to be justified west of the Exe.

Converting the North Devon Link Road back to rail is a complete non-starter. Relaying the rail track alongside the road is an entirely different matter.

Reopening to Ilfracombe, Halwill Junction (why not Launceston and Bude?) and even Lynton might be on the cards some time in the future, but not until North Devon has a more reliable rail link to the outside world than is currently provided by the Tarka Line.

Philip Shelton, 11 Rooks Farm Road, Yelland, Barnstaple, Devon EX31 3EQ

Common technology

I hope even Eurosceptic members of RDS will agree that "Euro way forward" in *Railwatch 88* points to the need for regulation from Brussels or somewhere else at the European level about common technologies to be used throughout Europe's rail system so that trains can easily run through from one country to another.

The article "rail fares in chaos" in the same issue, however, is inconsistent in that it is arguing against complicated fare structures, but in favour of allowing operators to set their own fares cheaper than standard national fares. But it is this that actually

now already makes the fare system complicated and personally I am happy about that; but we can't then argue against a complicated system.

The standard off-peak fares are the Saver for long-distance and the cheap day return for short-distance, and that's quite simple to me. You can of course argue about the prices or the definition of off-peak, which does vary from place to place, and I think it makes sense that it does.

The Thameslink Daysave also mentioned in *Railwatch 88* sounds eminently sensible as a promotion to get newcomers on to the railway, with a cheap introductory offer without losing badly needed income from regular travellers who are willing to pay more, when they already know how good rail is compared with the alternative; surely we should encourage this sort of promotion.

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Fares too expensive

The article "rail fares in chaos" (*Railwatch 88*) was apt. Midland Mainline has sent me details of two low-fare schemes designed to attract passengers back to the London route. They offer prices from £5 with the usual strings of travelling off peak and booking well in advance.

Recently I took the 07.30 St Pancras train from Leicester and the walk-on return standard fare was over £40 using my senior railcard (about £60 without) plus £4.50 for parking my car. How do couples manage, or a family?

It is cheaper for me to drive down the motorway especially when visiting North London, than to go by train. Government Transport Secretary please note.

Gimmicks offering very cheap travel will not result in extra regular passengers if they are faced with such expensive costs when using trains more often.

It is not always possible to plan journeys in advance, nor is it convenient to travel off peak when these trains arrive in the capital around midday.

In my limited experience many seats are booked on peak trains but not all are taken. Are these unrealistic fares maintained since most places are paid for by the business world who can pass costs on to their customers? Letters to Midland Mainline on

the subject have not yet produced a reply.

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Passenger power

Once upon a time I was saying good-bye to my daughter who was leaving Cambridge station for Huddersfield via Peterborough on a Sprinter. From up the platform two intending passengers, heavily laden with luggage, were making for the train.

An out-of-use Sprinter was in the bay between them and us and they tried the doors of this train before struggling on toward us. When they were some 10 yards from our Sprinter, exactly on the minute, the guard blew his whistle for the train to leave.

I however was watching this standing between front doors and the guard bawled at me to stand clear. Standing my ground, I waved cheerily at him. He advanced up the platform to tear me off a strip and I pointed out the virtues of common sense and decency. By this time our passengers were safely on the train.

There is much to be said for sensible passenger power. John Harrison's letter in *Railwatch 88* raises a problem at Redhill which needs resolving. It is obvious that the Tonbridge train is intended to connect with the Reading train at Redhill. Why was the Tonbridge train held up outside the station for the vital minutes? Does this happen regularly? We passengers need and must have a joined up railway.

Do we have a local Railfuture presence to investigate at Redhill?

Dr Henry Tribe, 198 Gilbert Road, Cambridge CB4 3PB

London bias

The article in *Railwatch 88* entitled "take off with the train" was spoilt by imbalance, continuing to promote the myth that if want to fly anywhere from the UK, it has to be from London.

No mention in your article of the three BA flights a day from Manchester. More balance please!

John Oates, Mobberley, Cheshire john@xxist.com

Efficient information

The best passenger information I have seen is in Germany. I even

use the German rail website www.db.de for planning journeys in Britain! I recently had an hour to kill at an unstaffed country station in the Black Forest (Worthing's twin town) and spent that time playing with the touch-screen computer that could not only guide me from any German station to any other (not just to or from the station I was at) but also told me the cheapest fare, in contrast

to some railway staff in Britain who allegedly tell customers the most expensive fare, thus pricing rail out of the market.

I have never seen anything like it in Britain.

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Astounding fares

Relatives from America who wanted to see some of Britain by train were astounded by the high cost of rail tickets and the inflexibility of book-in-advance cheap offers.

Dr Alan Berson, 84 Bath Hill Court, Bath Road, Bournemouth BH1 2HT

Plea to Virgin

I wish Virgin Trains would consider providing a better service to people who want to use Oxenholme, Penrith and Carlisle stations.

M C Blanch, 31 Sandringham Crescent, Harrow, Middx HA2 9BW

Too many critics

The BBC contacted Railfuture for help in researching a programme about the problems and frustrations with the British train system from the point of view of the passenger.

I have no wish to be associated with yet another "knock the railways" effort by the media. Were they to research the good things done and the great services offered by the railways, and there are many, then I would be very interested.

M C Murphy, chairman, RDS North East branch, 4 Gorseway, Kirkhill, Morpeth NE61 2XR

Waterloo dimwits

The new blue information boards at London Waterloo are fuzzy and very difficult to read compared with the old, clear, information system. Scrap the blue boards and think about all the people in a hurry who need to see this information at a glance. Remember too that many people have impaired vision. Take professional advice!

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