

# We all depend on the network

By Ray King

It is not generally realised by planners – or even rail managers – just how important the “network effect” is.

Many of them live in a make-believe world where they think that people travel from, say, London King’s Cross to Edinburgh Waverley.

This was Beeching’s biggest mistake.

He either did not appreciate the importance of branch lines as feeders into the main lines or, more likely, he was told by his road-dominated masters to ignore it.

In fact, most people making a long rail journey will experience more difficulty and stress in getting to their “start” station than on the main line leg of the journey.

For any journey from a central London station, I will usually start my rail journey at the inner London station of Cambridge Heath.

This first leg immediately puts my whole journey at risk because WAGN does not maintain a reliable service there.

On the past three occasions when I have used the station, my expected train has been cancelled.

On one occasion I was late for work. On the second occasion, I almost missed my Connex train to Worthing, Sussex, as a result and on the third occasion, I had to abandon a planned shopping expedition because the cancellation caused me a 30-minute delay.

But luckily when I used the station in July to get to Heathrow for a flight to Moscow, everything worked well.

My train to Liverpool Street arrived on time, the Tube to Paddington did not let me down and Heathrow Express provided a comfortable, if expensive, third leg to Heathrow.

For this trip to Heathrow, I had to buy three separate tickets which is probably why rail managers are in the dark about the real journeys people make. They only really want to see the revenue from tickets sold on “their” line.

In fact all rail lines are feeders to other lines.

As Dr Stephen Sheppard points out, people living in the “further out West Midlands including Hereford” will gain from any new freight line to Europe and/or a rail link from Heathrow to the Wycombe-Marylebone line. A Merstham to Heathrow “freight” line involv-

ing a tunnel up to 13 miles long, under the North Downs, is being discussed with considerable local opposition in mid-Surrey.

They would also gain from any relaying or reopening of the Cambridge-Oxford line. He is looking forward to Chiltern Railways relaying double track between Princes Risborough, Thame and Oxford.

“The last, though not essential link is Kingham to Cheltenham,” he points out. “Only one reservoir intervenes and that could be gotten around.”

Dr Sheppard was the founder four years ago of Rails for Herefordshire which now has 20 members.

“Foremost, we want the city’s long-closed lines relaid for trains, including two triangles near Bulmers,” he says, “together with the relaying of Hereford to Ross which has continental gauge tunnels in situ, skirting around the built-over parts, to the junction with the Chepstow-Gloucester line.

“Then, forlorn and forgotten Hereford could have a one-and-a-half-hour journey to London or a two-and-a-half-hour journey to the Channel Tunnel entrance.” He concludes: “It is important to show how the pieces of the jigsaw can fit together.”

It is also important that, once the infrastructure is there, it is maintained properly. After that, all that is needed are good, reliable services.

Dr Sheppard points out that in the past few months railway infrastructure has been destroyed despite planning objections. One former rail embankment and one cutting have been lost. He points out that some councils are sensible enough to protect the routes of old rail lines.

But in many areas, car-driving councillors are often indifferent to rail transport. In Hereford no buses call anywhere near the rail station which is itself badly signposted. Rail sidings have been replaced by two supermarkets with vast car parks.

Rail for Herefordshire meetings take place on every second Thursday in the month at 19.30 in the Salmon pub, on the corner of Old Eign Hill and the Hampton Bishop B4224 road. The next meetings are on 13 September, 11 October and 8 November.

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