

Chiltern confounds the 'experts'

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Chiltern Trains managing director Adrian Shooter told rail users how he disregarded advice from so-called experts and decided to go ahead and build Warwick Parkway station.

He said consultants advised that the station, which is now a great success, would not necessarily attract enough passengers to make it financially viable.

Mr Shooter said he was very sceptical about traffic forecasting.

"Lots of firms will charge a lot of money to try to tell you," he said. "But when it is a completely new service, they do not really know.

"I think sometimes they tell their clients what they think the client wants to hear.

"With Warwick Parkway, we talked to a lot of potential users, drove around the area and worked out how a lot of journeys could be made easier if there was a station."

He said it was also important for ticket offices to be properly staffed.

He said he could not quantify exactly how many extra passengers Chiltern gained as a result but he said it was common sense that people would come to a station where they could get advice and buy tickets but would be more reluctant if there was no one there.

He said Chiltern was hoping to clinch a 20-year franchise deal with the Strategic Rail Authority and had plans for a £400million investment over five years where three quarters of the amount would be provided by the private sector and one quarter by the Government through subsidies.

He said there was no shortage of private sector investment

money. It was planned to fit a type of automatic train protection and cab signalling which would match the European train control system – the standard for the future.

There would also be a new training school for train drivers.

The plan was to run trains through to Kidderminster every hour by next September.

Answering a question about the "stupidly" high costs quoted by Railtrack, he said the cost of Warwick Parkway was £5.2million.

Chiltern planned to carry out its own platform-lengthening work at Solihull, Dorridge, Warwick and Leamington Spa to provide for eight-car trains, rather than six cars.

The existing Turbo trains would be either replaced or refurbished after a proper consultation process with passengers.

But he ruled out connecting doors between units because "you can't have a satisfactory cab if you have a corridor connection".

But there was also a big expansion plan called Project Evergreen which would be supported by Railtrack as a way of easing pressure on the west Coast main line when it was undergoing its upgrade.

He said that the WCML would be closed at weekends next year while the work was under way.

Chiltern aimed to have Project Evergreen completed by August 2002 so there was an alternative to the WCML between London and Birmingham. The aim was to be able to run long and fre-

quent trains and to upgrade Marylebone station.

He said Chiltern already ran 40% more trains than it was required to under the passenger service requirement of its franchise. It had 40% more staff since 1996.

He said Chiltern would soon be providing machines at stations where passengers could get tickets which they had ordered in advance and he said Chiltern had worked hard to improve links with bus services.

He said they had contacts with 20 passenger groups on the line and Chiltern planned to have a stakeholder board which would include rail user groups.

There were also plans to develop a good interchange at London West Hampstead which provided excellent journey opportunities.

West Hampstead could provide onward destinations to another 200 stations. For example, people would be able to travel from Leamington Spa to Eastbourne once Thameslink 2000 was operational.

Transport for London was involved in that project although it could take six to seven years to complete.

In Birmingham Moor Street station will be rebuilt as part of the Bull Ring, the biggest retail development in Europe.

He said he expected lots of families to be travelling to Birmingham to visit the new Think Tank, which was the old Birmingham Technology Museum reborn. Answering questions Mr Shooter said he

would not be running trains to Stratford-on-Avon even though it was a major tourist destination. "We may promote Warwick Parkway for a bus connection to Stratford but I want to be able to run more trains to Birmingham."

And he said trains had been cut at Sudbury, North London, because of tight timings between Neasden and Northolt.

The situation could be improved by four tracking at Sudbury Hill if "Ken Livingstone puts his hand in his pocket".

Even further improvements for North London stations could result if Crossrail were to be built and were to serve High Wycombe. CrossRail trains would be able to avoid Marylebone station.

Pointers

■ A Railtrack speaker had been expected to address the conference but was unable to attend. The day after the conference Railtrack was put into "administration".

■ We should think seriously about renationalising Railtrack, the conference was told by Jenny Jones, the Green Party's transport expert on the Greater London Authority. It was unacceptable to bail out a private company with taxpayers' money.

■ The Greens want to see proper cycle routes to stations and more cycles on trains.

■ The Mayor of London Ken Livingstone has suggested subsidising cheaper fares, for instance to Heathrow, by central London congestion charging, said Ms Jones.

Bus-rail integration workshop

Railfuture's policy towards buses has been clarified. We are against buses replacing trains but are keen to see bus services generally improve, especially when they integrate with rail, said Tony Sheward.

Ben Walsh called for more through bus-rail ticketing using the latest electronic techniques.

David Croot said it was important that buses connected with trains. If the train was delayed there must be some arrangement for the passenger who misses his bus connection.

John Pitcher said Stagecoach

buses refused to go on to the rail station forecourt because it added minutes to the bus journey. Connex finds it difficult to get reliable bus timetable information.

Phil Morris said there were now 500 integrated ticketing schemes in Britain but very few bus and rail staff knew about them.

Colin Franklin urged Railfuture to liaise with the National Federation of Bus Users and local bus groups.

There was a clear need for Railfuture to provide some campaigning guidelines on good bus-rail integration.

Rail schemes funding workshop

There are no magic solutions to the funding issue, said Railfuture chairman Peter Lawrence but it is vital to streamline the process.

The current high cost and long time scales to develop projects would deter both private investors and local authorities.

Some form of competition for Railtrack was needed. For example the East-West route could be handed over to another company to develop.

Data from recent new stations needed to be shared widely within the rail industry.

Some train operators considered money spent on

extended station staff and ticket office hours represented good value. Others seem more short-sighted.

It was noted that the Channel Tunnel Rail Link was being designed and built with little input from Railtrack and was on time and within budget.

The Government needed to make better use of European Union money for the Trans European Network but had to provide matched funding.

There was growing support for congestion charges in cities such as Cambridge. The number in favour grew each year and was now around 60%.