

Hello, Minister

By Michael Caton

A delegation from Railfuture met Transport Minister John Spellar on 8 January.

The Railfuture team included vice president David Bertram, president Michael Caton and chairman Peter Lawrence.

The general theme of the meeting was how to restore confidence in the railways, solve present problems and activate plans for development and expansion.

We pointed out that much can be done in the short term at little or no cost, for example, to ensure that all companies operate clean trains.

Some companies like GNER are doing this well, whereas others have a poor record and make the perception of rail travel worse than it need be.

We said that modest investment in a selected number of small to medium schemes, for example, additional passing loops and restoration of double tracks that had been singled during earlier economy measures could bring substantial quantifiable benefits in terms of train reliability and frequency within a short timespan, two to three years.

Also station and line reopenings, for example Ebbw Vale, Frankley (Birmingham), the East-West line from East Anglia to Oxford, would bring about considerable benefits in enhancing rail use and reducing road congestion at a comparatively modest cost.

Since privatisation, schemes of this nature have proceeded very slowly compared with BR and Passenger Transport Executive-led developments, because of the bureaucracy resulting from the many players now involved.

We agreed to supply the minister with a list of examples of schemes in this category which could be financed by the SRA rail performance fund and agreed to supply the Minister with a list of these.

We said that passenger figures for reopened lines and stations had usually exceeded the estimated figures.

We have collected a list of 40 example schemes which we have sent in to the minister. Thanks to branches for coming forward with information.

We hope it will lead to continuing dialogue with the minister.

We expressed our strong opposition to conversion of former

railway tracks into guided busways.

Quoting Cambridge-St Ives, we said that such a move would take out a valuable future link in an expanded rail network and that, unlike rail, buses would not attract people out of their cars.

On Railtrack's successor, we said it is essential to bring back an integrated hierarchical internal structure and to recruit good quality senior and middle managers.

We also said that train punctuality would be much improved by the introduction of a system of train regulation which would prioritise trains, based on classification and speed rather than the present system of giving all operator's trains the same status.

The latter leads to escalating delays to long-distance trains being held behind local stopping services. The minister made the point that fewer operators could relieve capacity at stations, although good management may achieve this same result.

Local Transport Today and Transit magazines

With this issue of *Railwatch* is a flyer advertising a new deal for members. We are being offered these two professional magazines at half the normal subscription rate. This is for individual subscriptions and also for rail user groups.

Local Transport Today reports general news on transport policy. *Transit* reviews business activity in both rail and bus transport industries.

These magazines are published alternate weeks, so if you subscribe to both, you get a weekly update on the major issues. Both journals support and promote better public transport service provision.

Fill in the form but don't forget to include your membership number which is shown on your address sheet. – Richard Pout

Lottery Winners

The Railfuture lottery winners were as follows:

November: H R F Mills, Cheshunt, Herts £72, Mr A L Reid, Edinburgh £45, W J Measure, London E11 £27, Margaret Waide, Shrewsbury £18, John Savage, Tring, Herts £9, W Maugham, Leighton, Buzzard, Beds £9

December: B Ranwell, Ilkeston, Derbyshire £72, R J Williams, Plymouth £45, J B W Birks, Andover, Hants £27, T J Howes, Warminster, Wilts £18, S Moir, Stockton £9, Mr Edgell, Rotherham £9

January: Roger White, Harrow £72, Keith Porter, London SW14 £45, John Page, Cambridge £27, Mrs M S Davies, Aldeburgh Suffolk £18, W Emmerson, Belfast £9, J V Yearsley, Cheltenham £9

February: P J Morgan, Lingfield £72, Mrs J Cuff, Stockport £45, D J Barr, Harrogate £27, R J Williams, Plympton £18, D J McCutcheon, Portsmouth £9, Mrs H M Stone, Bristol £9

Flemish visit

Our Flemish sister organisation BTB is visiting England from 8-15 April and will be meeting Railfuture people in London.

Among other places they will be visiting are Croydon Tramlink, the Docklands Light Railway and the London Transport Museum in Covent Garden.

Robin Hood

The Strategic Rail Authority is awarding £234,000 to pay for a half-hourly service from June on the Robin Hood line between Nottingham and Mansfield Woodhouse.

Railfuture job opportunity

Railfuture is looking for a self starter to work at our London office. Fund raising, membership promotion and co-ordinating communications are the main priorities. Hours negotiable based on a salary of £16,500 for 35 hours, plus performance bonus. Closing date: 1 May. Contact Peter Lawrence, 75 Marl Pit Lane, Norwich NR5 8XN Tel 01603 743 446 or 0788 419 4510 email Peter.Lawrence@paston.co.uk

Volunteer needed

To replace sales officer Phil Morris, we need someone to hold the society's publications and sell them to both members and outsiders. Contact Peter Lawrence.

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