



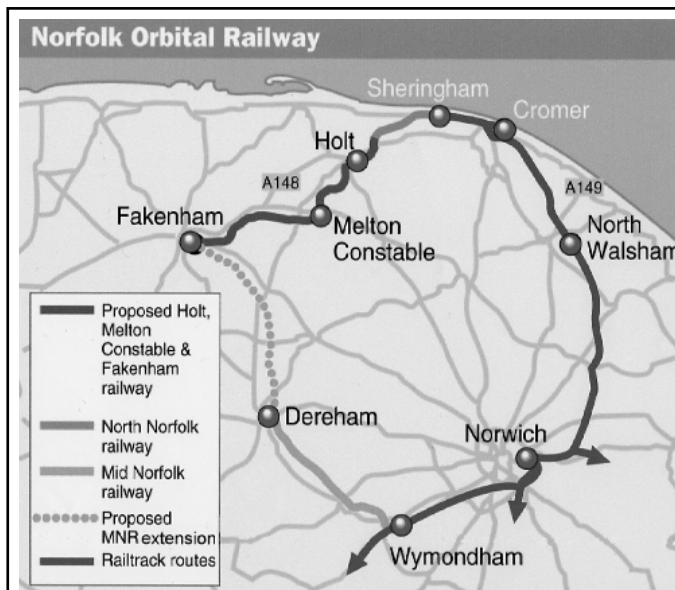
## Midlands

By Alan Bevan

A scheme to build a new Tesco supermarket in Stourbridge and re-route a three-lane "race-track" ring road which would dangerously sever the bus station from the adjacent railway station has been strongly opposed by the branch via letters and attendance at council meetings. Fortunately the prospect of bus and rail passengers having to cross the busy road on the level has now receded as planning permission was refused. Notwithstanding our 20 years of lobbying for a new Aldridge station (three miles north-east of Walsall), purchase of the land by Centro, local planning approval, and LTP funding bids, the Midlands Railtrack Zone intervened to claim that future freight traffic is likely to preclude paths for a half-hourly local passenger service. We have of course protested to the Strategic Rail Authority and Railtrack and we hope a solution can soon be found.

Among the West Midlands Multi-Modal study recommendations are welcome plans for a "regional express" (RER) network of frequent, electrified train services across the conurbation. Cannock and Walsall would be linked via Snow Hill to Stratford-on-Avon and this would require a new north-to-east Benson Road chord taking trains from the Handsworth Park/Soho Road line down to the Hockley-Snow Hill route. Railfuture proposals for an extra platform at Wolverhampton have been adopted by all the authorities. It would require removal of a spare siding and would face the through goods line. A mobility standard footbridge and access is required. The old Moor Street terminus, which closed in 1989, is now starting to be renovated for reopening in 2003 by Chiltern Railways and the adjacent Bull Ring developers. The old and new stations will be linked as one station. Birmingham Airport and Virgin Trains have proposed renaming Birmingham International as "Birmingham Airport for the NEC" and the Transport Authority has endorsed the suggestion. Railtrack's view is awaited.

Plans for a £12million Longbridge-Frankley extension for Cross-City line trains are apparently awaiting a joint SRA and DTLR funding deal. The UP settlement declared that the RPP bid had pre-qualified but neither party seems willing or able to make sufficient funds



**It is possible to create the Norfolk Orbital Railway for as little as £30million, a W S Atkins report published in February has shown.**

**The engineering and environmental report assumes that the Mid Norfolk Railway will devise ways of funding its own extension to Fakenham.**

**There is strong support for the project and it is now shown to be practical.**

**One problem highlighted by the report is the escalating cost (to an astonishing £4.25million) of reinstating one level crossing at Sheringham!**

**For more information on the scheme, telephone 01263 822962 at look at the website: <http://www.norfolk-orbital-railway.co.uk>**

available. Reopening the two-mile branch past the car works and into recent housing and commercial developments with stations at Rubery and Frankley has been planned for 30 years and once gained parliamentary powers. South of here at Bromsgrove plans are being drawn up for a new four platform park and ride station immediately south of the existing station. Plans to extend some Cross-City trains and wires to Bromsgrove appear to be out of favour.

## Thames Valley

By Chris Wright

Reopening the Oxford-Bletchley line remains a key issue. We were pleased to see freight operator English Welsh & Scottish Railway welcoming the possibility in the Strategic Rail Authority's Strategic Plan in the next two-three years. The East-West Rail Consortium is developing a new Rail Passenger Partnership funding bid to be submitted to the SRA around now. We hope for more success than last time. The issue was also raised in the House of Commons in November and a Hertfordshire Railtours special was due to operate on the

Bicester to Aylesbury section on 31 March from London Paddington.

Witney-Oxford. A pre-feasibility study report is expected shortly. The branch is in touch with the West Oxfordshire District councillor who has pressed for a study as opposed to a busway. We are concerned that financial estimates will be based on Railtrack's inflated costs.

Chiltern Railways is meeting our officers to provide an update on the doubling of the nine miles of branch between Bicester North and Aynho Junction. During the works, some services will be diverted to Oxford and Paddington.

Bletchley-Bedford line upgrading and signalling to 50miles per hour has been approved by Railtrack.

Virgin Trains is providing a speaker for our annual general meeting at Bicester.

The Cholsey and Wallingford Railway Preservation Society has secured its site at Wallingford and in the longer term hope to provide a commuter link on the line.

The Gatwick-Rugby service has now been cut back to Watford Junction. We have protested at

the cutback in the service. Traffic growth has already been inhibited by the unreliable of the service. This in another missed opportunity by the Government and the SRA. Let's hope there is a change of mind and a last minute reprieve.

## North Wales

By Dave Sallery  
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### Assembly strategy ignores key Welsh rail schemes

Rail users in Wales are dismayed that the Welsh Assembly has dropped key rail schemes from its official Transport Framework. The Railway Development Society has been campaigning for years for the railway track to be replaced between Bangor and Caernarfon. A train service would help the residents of Caernarfon – one of the most deprived towns in Wales – to seek jobs and travel around without a car, boost tourism in the town by creating a direct link from Chester and other places, and help to cut traffic and air pollution in the town.

The scheme took a step forward last year when consultants reported to Gwynedd county council that the scheme would cost just £14m – a pittance compared with even minor road schemes.

But the Assembly's new Transport Framework for Wales does not include the Caernarfon line as a strategic improvement to the Welsh transport system. Neither does it mention proposals to reopen the railway between Gaerwen and Llangefni, in order to give another regionally important town direct access to the rail network.

Said Dave Sallery: "We welcome the Assembly's commitment to reopening the Ebbw Vale and Barry to Bridgend lines in south Wales to improve the economic conditions there, but Caernarfon and Llangefni are also suffering severe deprivation and their need for train services is equally great.

"We are especially disappointed that the Caernarfon line has been ignored so soon after a favourable consultants' report. This should be a prime candidate for Objective 1 funding but it seems that the Assembly is determined to keep Caernarfon in the slow lane for many more years to come."

## Severnside

By Phil Morris

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**Rail freight revival** The first commercial freight train for 20



years ran out of Portbury docks, near Bristol, in January carrying 1,200 tons of imported coal along the reopened Portishead line. The train – on its way to Firfoots power station in South Wales - carried the headboard The Avon Gorge Rail Freight Revival. The Portishead line was reopened by Transport Minister John Spellar in December 2001. Since then drivers from the EWS rail freight operator have been training on the eight-mile long line. When fully operational the line will carry at least seven coal trains a day and there are also plans for trains carrying timber, plaster board and cars. It could mean 24 trains a day use the line.

The line was rebuilt with a £16million freight grant and port owners Bristol Port Company put up £8million.

EWS has worked long and hard with the Bristol Port Company over the last three years to make this happen, said EWS business manager David Israel.

This provides the rail industry with access to one of the most modern port facilities in Europe.

It is estimated that freight traffic on the line will save around 98,000 lorry movements in and out of the docks in a full year.

This should reduce congestion on the M5, particularly around junctions 18 and 19.

The only drawback to this reopening is that the new line is single track throughout, with not even a passing loop. Firfoots power station, is situated in what was once the heart of the Welsh coal fields.

## Yorkshire

By Peter Davies  
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### A Rail Strategy for Yorkshire

The final draft of this document is being circulated before approval at the annual general meeting in March.

### Huddersfield Penistone Sheffield rail users

The Holmfirth Branch line 'bus which operates from Shepley Station to Holmfirth and connects with rail services on the Huddersfield to Sheffield line has not worked very well because of reliability problems with the rail service. Local passengers use the service between Holmfirth and New Mill without using the rail link.

### Harrogate-Ripon-Northallerton. Proposed re-opening.

The current situation is unclear with regard to the £40,000 SRB grant for the feasibility study into

the possible re-opening of this former route.

### Expansion

Consideration is being given to the opening of five new stations in the West Yorkshire area, however, four of the stations may be delayed because of difficulties with financial funding, and new regulations being imposed by Railtrack. It is understood that Glasshoughton may open in 2003.

### Planned cancellations by Arriva Trains Northern

Rail services in the Yorkshire area have been disrupted by planned cancellations since October. It is hoped that an improved service will be provided from 25th February, 2002.

### Leeds First scheme.

The project for Leeds station is now almost complete, and the penultimate stage is expected to be completed by 25th February, 2002

### Annual general meeting and luncheon

The Annual General Meeting of the Branch is to be held in Huddersfield on Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> March, 2002. The Guest Speaker will be Mr. Jonathan Tyler of Passenger Transport Networks.

### Annual Report 2001 – Yorkshire Rail Review

The report is shortly to be produced and copies will be available from the Membership Secretary, Mr. G. Collett, 16 Wilstrop Farm Road, Copmanthorpe, York, YO23 3RY. The cost is £1 including postage, cheques to be made payable to 'RDS – Yorkshire'. If you would like a copy, please enclose an A4 size stamped addressed envelope with your request.

## South Wales De Cymru

By Julian Langston  
and Peter Clark

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**Ebbw Vale** On the anniversary of the Corus announcement of steelworks cutbacks and closures, the National Assembly announced a £93m package of 'recovery measures' for the Ebbw Vale area, of which £15m is for introduction of a passenger train service on a single line between Ebbw Vale and Cardiff. Phase 1 involves an hourly service from an Ebbw Vale Parkway station (close to the Ebbw Vale Garden Festival site) to Cardiff, but avoiding Newport. This is because of alleged signalling

problems: apparently Railtrack don't have faith in their 100 year old box controlling Park Junction and would prefer to lock it in either the Cardiff or Newport direction. This plus alleged lack of capacity in the tunnels west of Newport Station is the reason for this surprising route. An hourly frequency will also necessitate a passing loop or stretch of double track, though this has not yet been specified as far as we know.

Three members of the South Wales branch met Peter Law, Assembly Member for Blaenau Gwent, and a long-time supporter of the line, to put our concerns and find out more about the project. He emphasised the importance of certain elements of Phase 2, notably, the relaying of track from Aberbeeg (on the Newport to Ebbw Vale line) to Abertillery and providing a half-hourly service to Newport and Cardiff. The latter would involve an hourly service from both Ebbw Vale Parkway and Abertillery. So running into Newport is also seen as crucial. Peter Law is lobbying for these necessary enhancements, as

are we. Extension from Ebbw Vale Parkway to Ebbw Vale Town is seen as a further desirable development.

We warmly welcome this recognition of the role of railways in regeneration – we have been campaigning for this reopening for many years. We shall, however be keeping a close eye on the scheme to try to make sure that the hoped for half-hourly service and the planned extensions will also happen.

**Refranchising:** the SRA announced in December the reactivation of the bidding process for the Wales & Borders franchise, with a view to selecting a preferred bidder in autumn 2002 and commencing the franchise in spring 2003. Six weeks later it announced that eight companies have prequalified (Arriva, Connex, FirstGroup, GB Railways, National Express, NS/Dutch Railways, Serco and Keolis SA). At least this will end the present unsatisfactory position whereby the existing operator is running the shadow franchise under three months' notice of termination. We will be contacting the bidders to remind

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them of developments which we would like to see over the projected 15 years of the franchise. The SRA's comments about looking for 'further improvements to services through greater flexibility but without increasing overall franchise support' do not augur well. The prospective franchisees have been told to bid on the basis of the present timetable, and it is not yet clear how service development over the 15 years will be provided for.

**Strategic Plan** The much-vaunted SRA announcement in January contained few proposals for development in our area. It did mention the Newport-Ebbw Vale and the Vale of Glamorgan line re-openings (though the latter is merely repeating an announcement made more than a year previously). Other parts of Wales may benefit indirectly from the WCML upgrade, but in our case the GW mainline improvements are postponed until after 2010! Needless to say this has not gone down well with user groups or local politicians.

**Policy review of public transport** The final report of this National Assembly document resembles the proverbial curate's egg – i.e. good in parts. Our response to the consultation version last year can be viewed on the Assembly's web site. We are disappointed at the low profile still given to Light Rail (*see later item*) and the failure to extend the forthcoming free bus travel for senior citizens to local rail travel. The consultation report posed questions about future organisational structures

in Wales, and in particular whether a PTA-style approach was preferable to the existing (voluntary) groupings of unitary authorities into regional consortia in delivering the Assembly's transport vision. The result was an even split on this issue, with all user/consumer groups and individuals (including academics) favouring the PTA approach, and all local authorities and consortia favouring the consortia! Transport providers were virtually the only response group with answers on both sides, with Cardiff Bus and Wales & Borders Trains (also Sustrans) favouring consortia, and Arriva and Serco going for PTA. Faced with this, the Assembly's Environment, Planning & Transport Committee has recommended that the Minister "work up proposals for options for organisational change, including PTA options, and report on the preferred option within 6 months". There are many issues here, including the extent of the Assembly's rail powers (it does of course have responsibility for the roads budget, as did the former Welsh Office before it).

**Meeting the Minister** In December we met Sue Essex, the Assembly's Environment/Planning/Transport Minister, to discuss various concerns and aspirations. This was before the SRA's re-franchising announcement (*above*) and we were advised that RPP funding could be the solution to improving the present unsatisfactory service between Cardiff and Swansea (Wales's two largest cities). This might have

been appropriate if the shadow franchise was to continue until 2004, which was possible under the existing agreement, but now it is crucial to get a much improved PSR for the new franchise. Our concerns about free bus travel for senior citizens are that Valley Lines especially, where most travel could be classed as 'local', stand to lose a significant part of their off-peak business. If that happens, it will be even more difficult to make a case for additional rolling stock and staff to cover growth in 'peak' usage. It was admitted that we 'had a point'. To keep things in perspective, it is fair to say that the Assembly is much more pro public transport than was its predecessor, the Welsh Office.

**Light Rail** The various authorities seem determined that Wales will continue to lag behind England in this area. As well as the scant reference to LRT in the Policy Review report (*above*), in January a proposal for 'driverless taxis' to serve Cardiff Bay was unveiled with much PR hype (which sections of the media swallowed almost without question). The scheme might work for regular but not heavy flows between specific points, but is difficult to accept as a serious solution to the city's transport needs. Soon after, it was confirmed that a new arts centre is to be built in this inconvenient (for public transport) location, with a seating capacity of 1900. It was not explained how 1900 people all leaving at the same time after a performance can be accommodated in 6-seat driverless taxis, so presumably it is expected that most patrons will use their cars. The failure to incorporate Light Rail into the Bay development from the outset represents a past planning failure and absolutely no progress is being made in rectifying it. The driverless taxi scheme is said to cost between one third and one half of that of an equivalent LRT system. The key question surely is which would be more successful in achieving modal shift, and hence be best value for money? We are planning to raise the profile of LRT and how it could benefit Cardiff, as it has done elsewhere.

**Fishguard:** It seems that our aspiration for regular passenger trains over the Swansea District Line will soon come to pass, albeit in a limited way and not as we intended! First Great Western will not be operating the mid-day service to/from Fishguard this summer (it has been doing so only during the

peak period anyway). Instead the Valley Lines loco-hauled set will be used, running from and to Cardiff, and will avoid the problems of reversal in Swansea and Carmarthen by simply not calling at those places. Swansea will be avoided by using the District Line (which was built 90 years ago for just this purpose!) and Carmarthen by using the avoiding line.

**Wales email list** An email list has been set up for rail campaigners in Wales (or anyone with an interest in Wales). Anyone on line can send a message to [railfuture\\_wales@topica.com](mailto:railfuture_wales@topica.com). All members of the list will receive this and one or more can reply to it; their messages will also go to all members...and so on. This is a good way to discuss points of interest or just to make announcements. To join the list, send an email to [railfuture\\_wales-subscribe@topica.com](mailto:railfuture_wales-subscribe@topica.com) with the subject blank. There is no cost and you can leave the list at any time by emailing [railfuture\\_wales-unsubscribe@topica.com](mailto:railfuture_wales-unsubscribe@topica.com).

## East Midlands

Anthony Kay  
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### Fare increases

Midland Main Line have increased First Class and Standard Open fares by 10%, although leisure fares are subject to smaller increases. This was announced shortly after the publication of a report on public consultation on the East Midlands Multi-Modal Study, which showed that by far the best incentive for people to switch modes from car to rail would be cheaper rail fares.

### AGM

The branch has again secured speakers from both of the TOCs operating in its area for an open meeting preceding its AGM. Andy Cooper, Managing Director of Central Trains, and Peter Garrod, Projects Director of Midland Main Line, will be speaking on "Rail Services in the East Midlands" at 1.45pm on Saturday 9th March at the City Rooms in Hotel Street, Leicester.

## North East

By Peter Wood

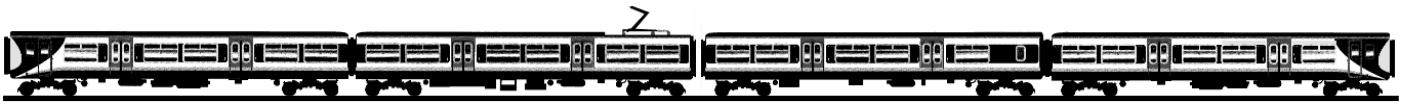
### TransPennine

Working with Railfuture branches and rail user groups across the north we have prepared collaboratively with the Rail Passenger Committee for North-East England a paper entitled *The TransPennine Express*

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Franchise: A Passenger View from the North of England The RPC has submitted the document to the Strategic Rail Authority and bidders Arriva, Connex and First/Keolis. We are asking for rigorous targets for both reliability and punctuality; rolling stock and speeds matching the best of inter-city services, clock face departures, better Sunday services and trains operating from "early till late" as well as full integration with other rail, bus and train services. We expect TransPennine to be a "maximum investment" railway.

#### Strategic Plan

The belated publication is welcome as are the proposals expected to benefit the north-east in due course. The ECML does need upgrading; a new north-south high speed line and alternative freight routes/increased freight capacity are necessary and developments solely within the region including better Durham coast services, Leamside reopening and passenger services restored to the Ashington, Blyth lines are long over-due.

#### Meetings

Recent branch meetings have included discussions about our aspirations for the Tran Pennine franchise and formal consultation with Nexus about their transport plans for Tyne and Wear "towards 2016". We are more than satisfied with their light and heavy rail proposals.

#### Media involvement

Branch members are featuring more in the media - TV, radio and press partly as the BBC etc become more aware of our existence. Hopefully, our more constructive approach will bear fruit set against still demands from elsewhere for boycotts of rail services. While we cannot promise never to be critical in public of train operators, it really should be a last resort. Better, surely, as a general rule to be supportive/understanding in public and critical in private.

#### Miscellany

Members have also been involved actively through the transport activists round table network in work on a regional transport strategy and the AI multimode study, emphasising the importance of better rail links.

We are hoping the TransPennine document will prove a precursor to a similar approach to the Northern franchise, concerned with other high-speed routes in the North of England as well as local services



**If you are old enough, you will remember the humble pick-up goods train operating in Britain. It still survives in America. This one is at Martinez, California. The Government and British Rail failed for years to deliver what the public wanted – more freight on rail. Now, belatedly, freight is slowly being won back from road to rail. Maybe we will soon see the return of the pick-up goods train to Britain.**

Picture: Michael Weinberg

While strikes and cancellations present a somewhat bleak picture early in 2002 the opening of the extension of the Tyne and Wear Metro to South Hylton ("Sunderland Direct") at the end of March represents, hopefully, a more promising railfuture prospect.

## Scotland

By David Hansen

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It is difficult to avoid being gloomy regarding railway development in Scotland. The Labour/Liberal Democrat government is busy spending loads of money on large scale road schemes, something that was not in either of their manifestos, while spending relatively little on the sustainable transport they did promise. Still, there are some glimmers of light. My thanks to the few within and outwith the railway industry lightening the gloom.

**New trains** Scotrail have obtained class 322 trains to operate the North Berwick service in place of London's class 305 cast-offs. The cascade of trains from Glasgow that was to see this service operated by class 318 trains largely failed to materialise, due to problems with new trains in the West. We congratulate Scotrail for its initiative in healing this open sore.

Virgin Trains are rapidly introducing class 220 (Voyager) trains to their services. This has allowed a number of unsuitable trains to be eradicated, including the class 158s which were totally unsuitable for services on the WCML. Virgin have been mounting a marketing programme that will reach a

crescendo in time for the even interval timetable on these services. Many people have mocked Virgin Trains in the past, but the fruits of their investment will soon be clear for all to see.

**Railtrack does well** It is fashionable to criticise Railtrack. Some of this criticism is entirely justified, some other criticism is unjustified. Railtrack Scotland have fought several battles to run the upgrade of the WCML in Scotland from Scotland. These battles have paid off, the upgrade is more more to time and budget in Scotland than in England. It is true that the upgrade is less involved in Scotland (and northern England), but even so it is good to be able to record the progress made on this project.

**New stations** Re-openings and new stations have slowed to a trickle due to rail privatisation. However in 2002 we should get three new stations. Beaulieu is an innovative short-platform design, though we must be living in a very strange railway world for the length of a platform to make much difference to the cost of a station. It appears that those who over-guard safety are now willing to allow the short platform, following a wobble on the subject a while ago.

**Edinburgh Crossrail** The other two new stations will be Brunstane and Newcraighall, part of the Edinburgh Crossrail scheme. This will extend local services through Waverley station to a well sited park and ride site at Newcraighall.

**Sleeper fares** The most sensible way of reaching London for an early appointment is by sleeper train. It is a pity that the

ability to reach Bristol in the same way has still not been restored, following the stopping of the service by those privatising the railways. A range of discounted fares are now available to encourage use of the London service, which has not recovered from the Hatfield fiasco.

**New freight facilities** A platform for loading timber at the lineside is under construction at Kinbrace and the Scottish Executive have awarded a £289,000 Freight Facilities Grant to Thurso Building Supplies for a new railhead with hard standing at Thurso Station. The hard work of those involved is continuing to pay off.

**Freight threat** The issue of asylum seekers is not just something for South East England. It is affecting rail freight services to Scotland, with freight being switched to the roads. This problem is nothing to do with the railways. It is amazing that trains can run from one country to another with little or no fuss throughout the whole of Europe, except for those trains that run between England and France. These journeys sometimes involve long tunnels, a few of which are underwater. Even at the height of "the troubles" trains travelled between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic with little fuss. Only the near-draconian attitudes of parts of the UK government prevent the same ease of travel happening between England and France. By forcing freight on to the roads the Home Office is undermining the stated aims of UK transport policy. It is long past the time for joined up thinking, now is the time for the EU to investigate this barrier to free trade.

**Railtrack does not do well.** Railtrack has withdrawn from four enhancement projects, leaving Edinburgh Crossrail as the only such project at the moment. It cites lack of signalling staff and lack of money as the reasons. Scotland is the only part of the UK that has been treated in this way and it appears the decision is actually part of the "Strategic" Rail Authority's decision to concentrate resources on marginal parliamentary seats in SE England. The same reasoning could also be applied to other services in Scotland, such as roads and telephone charges, but it seems that this sort of reasoning is only ever applied to the railways. A number of stories in the English media have criticised the money spent on Scottish rail services as "excessive" and claimed that it would be better spent in SE



England. We have our suspicions about who is behind these stories. The Highland Rail Partnership has done an excellent job of rebutting these stories. The last thing we need is another round of Beeching Cuts. It was the Labour Party that approved most of the Beeching Cuts, including the Waverley route. Do they really want to be blamed for doing the same thing again?

**Don't ask, won't get** It would be wrong to blame the SRA for all of this. It appears that the SRA has been asked to take forward very few projects in Scotland, while councils down south have been banging the table about their projects. We have urged Scottish railways and councils before to become serious about asking for money for rail schemes. It will not come automatically. Please start asking, forcefully.

**Airport links** The Scottish Executive is talking up yet more reports on rail links to Edinburgh and Glasgow airports, services we have campaigned on for a long time. It is not clear whether this is serious or a delaying tactic. While roads are built with little or no real evaluation (the one for the M74 extension is so bogus that the Executive tried to keep it secret) railways apparently need huge numbers of reports. If the Executive is becoming serious about railways under the new Transport Minister then it is to be applauded. At the moment it has an out of control road building programme and a minuscule amount of railway development.

**I was misled** In the last issue of Railwatch I said that the guided bus project in Edinburgh appeared to be dead. This was because the council stated "CERT is dead." However, its statement was at best misleading. The CERT project is very much alive, under a new name. Son of CERT is now fully funded, thanks to the Scottish Executive. The published route is precisely that of the original CERT, but shorter. However paragraph 2.30 of the December 2001 Draft Edinburgh and the Lothians Structure Plan gives the game away by talking about implementing "the full CERT scheme or an equivalent light rail line". It appears that Son of CERT is intended to mature into CERT in the fullness of time. So it seems Edinburgh will now throw good money after bad on something that remains as an unextended curiosity in the only two places it has been tried, Essen and Adelaide. It's difficult to know whether to laugh or cry.

**Let's have a station** More than 85% of people living in Stow, Lauder and villages in the Scottish Borders want to see Stow station reopened. A survey by TR&IN showed that large numbers of motorists would switch to using the reopened Waverley line for journeys into Edinburgh. Current proposals before the Scottish Executive do not include a station between Galashiels and Gorebridge.

## London

By Ray King

English Heritage's decision to "list" Braithwaite viaduct, Shoreditch, as being of historical and architectural interest has jeopardised plans to expand the "throat" of London's Liverpool Street station.

There are only six tracks serving this busy terminus at the heart of the city of London but there was an historic opportunity when the viaduct was to be demolished to clear the way for the East London line extension, for a further two tracks to be provided for the Liverpool Street lines.

The campaign to save the viaduct has been largely promoted by current short-term non-railway users of Bishopsgate goods yard.

Yet the decision by English Heritage has long-term implications for rail users all over East Anglia as well as east and north London. Liverpool Street "throat" is the cause of many delays and operating difficulties, particularly for WAGN services.

It is hoped that many London boroughs, the City of London, and locals authorities further out from London will unite to ensure that the eight-track proposal goes ahead and that some compromise is found with English Heritage. Railfuture members should alert their local authorities and elected representatives.

## Kent

By John Pitcher

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I recently met leader of the Opposition on Kent County Council, Councillor Mike Eddy to discuss a wide range of rail-related issues. This was particularly useful since Mr Eddy gave advice on the workings of local government machinery and where lobbying could most effectively be applied.

He looked forward to the opportunities for improvement to commuting journeys offered by the Channel Tunnel rail link and thought that more detailed information should be available soon.

Commenting on Railfuture's aspirations for improved rail services from Kent into East Sussex he thought that prospects for the Ashford/Hastings upgrade and the Tunbridge Wells/Lewes reinstatement were good because they would bring clear benefits to people at a local as well as regional level. The fact that in these cases much of the necessary infrastructure and land requirements were already largely in place was a further important factor. He agreed that for the Ashford/Hastings Marshlink route it ought to be possible in the short term to provide more passing loops as an interim measure until the track could be fully doubled.

He was interested to see notional timetables prepared by Railfuture Coastway branch from Sussex showing how with improvements the whole south coast line could be used to its full potential. This included such features as through services from Ashford as far as Southampton, and regular journeys between Ashford and Brighton taking about 1 hour 20 mins

Mr Eddy rejected criticism from political opponents that we would be unlikely to see local rail improvements in the Kent and Sussex region since Labour had to devote most resources to its heartlands further north.

He agreed that while local services within Kent might be feasible based on Maidstone and Canterbury, more research needed to be done locally to determine demand and routing patterns before these could be seriously considered.

## East Anglia

By Nicholas Dibben

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### Good news from the SRA

Following all the recent doom and gloom rail news over recent weeks Chris Austin from the Strategic Rail Authority had some good news for passengers at the Eastern England Rail passengers Council meeting in Peterborough in December.

\* Work had started on the East London Line extension

\* Work was due to start this week on the Edinburgh cross-city link service

\* More money would be available (£40m/year) for rail passenger partnership schemes and new guidance on bidding was being issued to speed things up.

\* Approval for some RPP schemes in the North East

would be announced before Christmas.

### Honesty from Railtrack

Robin Gisby, Eastern Zone Director of Railtrack explained some of the key issues that needed to be addressed if the rail network was operate properly. Railtrack needed to have much more control over their contractors. This was being addressed by having more Railtrack engineers working in the contractor's offices. There was still uncertainty over the state of their assets, a major task was underway to resolve this. Finally, Railtrack needed greater access for maintenance to the tracks. An example given was the key junction on the ECML at Hitchin, Railtrack has just four hours per week to carry out inspections and repairs!

Mr Gisby noted that the fast lines on the ECML were nearly back to normal but the slow lines were behind on maintenance. The GE mainline was in balance with the speed restrictions being removed at a similar rate as new ones were added, there should be improvements by March/April.

The only ECML work in progress were extra power supplies and clearance work for Class 373 Eurostars to Leeds for next May. The ECML upgrade was now up to the SRA.

### Hull Trains Plans

Jim Morgan of Hull Trains outlined the company's first year of operation as the only open access passenger operator on the network. Passenger numbers are growing and there is overcrowding on some Sunday trains. They did not compete with GNER as the latter trains were faster and many people still drove from Humberside to GNER stations. Due to slack schedules caused by pathing issues, current timekeeping was around 90% (0-10mins)

Discussions were going on with Railtrack to secure a 10 year track access agreement. When this was done, new 125mph trains would be ordered. Hull Trains were also looking at direct services from London to Lincoln and Cleethorpes using Class 170 units (or similar). Frequency would be every two hours to Lincoln with two trains each way to Cleethorpes.

There were also presentations from WAGN nad GNER but nothing very exciting except for...

Access at Kings Cross will be affected by the CTRL/underground works. GNER are being evicted from their offices on the west side of the station. as the