

Trains to the new towns

By Richard Pout

Railfuture recently submitted evidence to the Urban Affairs Select Committee on the future of new towns.

We concentrated on rail and public transport access, and how rail can contribute to long-term sustainability in towns designed for cars that fostered a car dependent culture.

Earlier new towns had stations but planning policies discouraged commuting. Jobs and people were encouraged to move out from London.

New central areas often did not include a station as planners supported cars for local travel in the 1960s.

Inadequate public transport increased social exclusion leading to pockets of deprivation in some districts where residents were left to endure indifferent deregulated bus services that rarely linked to rail.

Fortunately planning and transport policies have improved, so we highlighted good and bad.

We award nil points to Peterlee, where stations at Easington and Horden closed in the early 1960s. It is ten miles to Durham for the East Coast main line and seven miles to Seaham for a train to Newcastle. The other way is to take the car.

Railfuture supports the joint initiatives from Durham County Council

and Tyne & Wear Passenger Transport Executive to reopen these stations.

Washington is little better, designated a new town when the local line closed in 1962, apparently with no objections to the withdrawal of the one train per week! Railfuture would not stand for that now!

Tyne & Wear PTE integrated bus services with local rail and the Metro at Heworth and Gateshead although this very successful policy was nearly killed off by bus deregulation after 1986. Fortunately some integration remains.

Railfuture is concerned there is no commitment to Rail Passenger Partnership funding for reopening the Leamside Line from Ferryhill to Pelaw and a station at Washington, particularly as this reinstated route will also relieve the East Coast Main Line.

Tyne & Wear PTE originally planned the Metro extension to Sunderland through Washington, partly using the Leamside Line, a new alignment and restoring the abandoned colliery line through South Hiltun. This could still be re-evaluated based on an earlier consultant's study.

Skelmersdale in Lancashire is still without a railway. We have campaigned for electrification from Kirkby towards Upholland, the nearest station, and Wigan. A new

link into the town centre is the ideal solution and cheaper than road schemes.

The failure to restore trains to Corby is also unacceptable. The solution is simple; the railway line is operational and with a new station, this could be a major adjunct to the next Midland Main Line franchise, providing a frequent shuttle to Wellingborough and regular trains to London.

Some towns did not have stations built near to new commercial centres as road transport dominated. Common sense eventually prevailed and stations were built at Basildon, Milton Keynes and Telford.

It has been said that rail has only a limited local function in new towns although there would be a pay-off in Milton Keynes, for instance, if the east-west rail project was approved along with diverting some east-west trains to Milton Keynes!

In our submission to the House of Commons committee, we also highlighted good practice, where a spiral of growth replaced the spiral of decline.

Provide a decent train service and people use it. Many new towns in the south-east now enjoy better services. Stevenage and Bracknell are two examples.

Nationally, Redditch is our choice for second place,

proposed for closure after designation as a new town.

The branch survived after a vigorous campaign by local commuters that argued future growth would justify retention and a better service.

Trains were cut from hourly, with a peak extra, to just three daily in 1966.

Local BR management showed little interest in improving the service and were content to leave public transport to Midland Red, the local National Bus operator.

In 1970 the Railway Development Association started campaigning for an improved service.

West Midlands Passenger Transport Executive, Worcestershire County Council and the Redditch Development Corporation worked together to add a Redditch service to the invigorated Cross City line from Longbridge to Lichfield after 1980.

It was a great success and electrification followed in 1993. Trains now run half-hourly every day to 23.30, the maximum capacity of this single track branch line.

Top of Railfuture's new town chart is Cumbernauld. Initially a half-hourly diesel shuttle connected with Blue Train electrics at Springburn. Passengers later benefited from new stations such as Greenfaulds, opened in 1989 giving better access to the town itself, and recently the Cowlairst link, so trains now run direct to Glasgow Queen Street.

Alternate trains also continue to Falkirk, a welcome ScotRail initiative.

Combined with a new service to Motherwell, there are new rail journey opportunities for work and leisure.

Copies of our submission will be available to branches and members once the select committee publishes its report later this year.

If you have any information about services to new towns, please write to Richard Pout, Network Development Group, 105 Crouch Hill, London N8 9RD as we hope to look further at new town rail links later this year.

Railwatch

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New members and membership queries:
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Help make national draw a success

Would members please return sold ticket counterfoils to the Promoter, not later than 2 October 2002. Further books of tickets for selling can be obtained from the Promoter, Lewis Buckingham, 25 Drury Road, Colchester CO2 7UY. Please help to make this year's draw a success. We apologise to members who received tickets but who have previously requested "no raffles". It has not been possible, because of the new more economical mailing system, to omit draw tickets from individual mailings.

Strategic rail

The Strategic Rail Authority has refused to help towards rebuilding the railway to Keswick from Penrith. The battle goes on say campaigners who point out that the SRA seems to have abandoned efforts to expand the rail network. They say: "It is extremely difficult to understand how they can justify such a decision."

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