



Rail reversal

I understand Consignia (Royal Mail) intends to phase out travelling post offices by December 2003. The tradition of sorting mail on trains goes back 150 years but, because of delays and penalties incurred through faulty infrastructure, it is now considered more cost-effective to move mail by road and air.

I also learn that the direct rail service from Chelmsford to Basingstoke is to be withdrawn on 28 September. The Crosslink service operated by Anglia railways enjoyed funding from the Strategic Rail Authority's rail passenger partnership scheme.

It appears passengers were only using the service to travel certain bits of the route.

In future though, anyone wanting to travel from Chelmsford to Basingstoke will have to go to Stratford, by Jubilee line to Waterloo and then take a South West Trains service to Basingstoke.

I never thought a Basingstoke service had a lot going for it but a direct service to Oxford, calling at Slough and Reading, with connections to Wales and the West Country – as well as Basingstoke – would be more feasible.

Roger Smith, 67 The Street, Little Waltham, Chelmsford CM3 3NT

Editor's note: The potential for through services via the North London line remains high. For many reasons, Crosslink did not succeed. But the SRA should not let the idea die.

Electrify now

Why is it that I feel so unutterably depressed when I read letters such as that in your June issue about electrification? It is after all a thoughtful letter, expressing doubts about the need-desirability for more electrification in the UK to add to

Your letters

indeed share some of his views. I accept that the new Coradia and Voyager units are quiet and extremely fuel-efficient, a vast improvement upon the earlier generation of diesel trains.

But class 142s, 150s, 156s and 158s were also clean and efficient when they were built in the 1980s. Nowadays wear and tear from constant use has resulted in many of these units becoming noisy with excessive exhaust emissions. In 10 years or so, surely this will happen to the new Coradias and Voyagers, which will eventually mean millions will need to be spent replacing engines.

our current (under-used) 31% of lines equipped. (Japan has 64%, Italy 60%)

Perhaps it is because views such as these (and I am sure your correspondent is not alone) debating the rights and wrongs of further electrification seem at least 75 years out of date. Surely the debate should be about how and when, not whether?

I wonder if these views take any serious note at all of what is happening outside the UK apart from expressing rather vaguely the feeling that things are, of course, different here.

If electric traction is preferable to diesel on core routes throughout Europe that is good enough reason to demand more electrification in Britain now, and without further time-wasting "studies".

From next year it will be possible, should one so wish, to travel behind electric traction from London to Vladivostok – yes, I did say Vladivostok!

But, it is still impossible to do so to Bristol, to South Wales, to Sheffield or across the Pennines. What a pathetic comment on the lack of British vision and drive.

Here in Britain we go to endless and enormous lengths to find reasons to avoid making improvements. Other countries get on and make them.

I bitterly resent being palmed off with second-rate diesels on the Great Western and Midland main lines when, in a European context, these routes and others would have been converted long ago. It is absolutely absurd.

John Gilbert, 27 Pixiefield, Cradley, Herefordshire WR13 5ND

Think electric

I read with interest the letter from David Lowe (*Railwatch* 92) on electrification and

damaging a fast diminishing countryside or incurring enormous expense. A far better case can be made for investing in increased loading gauge within the existing lines, to increase freight capacity and usage.

Christopher Padley, Hambleton Cottage, Walesby Road, Market Rasen, Lincolnshire LN8 3EY

Editor's note: High-speed railways are still a better bet than roads, taking into account land and fuel use and environmental damage.

Japan and UK

I was very disappointed in the article *Land of the Rising Railway* in *Railwatch* 92.

The article infers that the typical journey time from London to Newcastle is 215 minutes. Only two trains, the 21.00 and 22.00 from London, take longer than 215 minutes (222 and 231 minutes respectively). Some of the comparisons made between the UK and Japan are wrong. The two countries have neither similar areas nor similar populations.

Just what is the statistical basis for the claim that Japanese railways are 100 times safer than those in the UK?

Howard Thomas, 24 South Primrose Hill, Chelmsford, Essex CM1 2RG

Bideford reopening

At the serious risk of bringing opprobrium of North West Devon rail campaigners down on my head I am owning up to being the author of the Maunsell Rail Supplementary Report to Devon County Council on the re-opening of Barnstaple to Bideford that your correspondents Gerrard Duddridge and Stuart Watson so peremptorily condemn.

I would say that those consultants involved in the main report and I are among the most pro-rail that you can find. We all worked at some point or other in our careers on developing new rail links or re-opening those closed in the aftermath of the Beeching Axe. The aim of Maunsell Rail was to give honest and objective answers to difficult questions.

In respect of the re-opening of Barnstaple-Bideford we found it extremely difficult to find a financial or economic case for the reopening in the short to medium term. The capital costs far exceed the likely revenues

(Barnstaple to Bideford and any contributory revenue from longer trips). With new track costing £6-700,000 per single track kilometre the economics were not in rail's favour in this particular instance. In terms of the "best value" approach now required for local government expenditure I could not recommend the building of an opening in the Barnstaple Western Bypass given the limited likelihood of the line re-opening in the short to medium term.

The railway geography does not assist the case in that neither of the current routes (Paddington or Waterloo via Exeter) provide direct or fast links to Barnstaple. The average journey time by rail is over four hours. Given the area's high car ownership it is likely that those making longer distance journeys are going directly by car or by car to a better railhead, e.g. Tiverton Parkway or Taunton.

Except where there are journey time limitations on competing modes, rail markets with journey times above three hours are quite small. Most of the Exeter to Barnstaple route is currently outside this limit because of the need to interchange and the long interchange times at Exeter. The best total journey time that might be expected for a *Fast direct* Bideford to Exeter/London Waterloo service is no better than 1 hour 20 minutes/4 hours 30 minutes. Journey times by car from Bideford to Exeter are certainly no worse than 1 hour 20 minutes and probably better. The same problem also exists in respect to the current Barnstaple to Exeter service where car journey times match or better rail journey times.

Rather than knocking the consultants report it would perhaps be better to start campaigning for reductions in rail journey times and reductions in interchange times. This in turn might make it easier to justify the reinstatement of links such as Barnstaple to Bideford!

Please note Maunsell Rail no longer exists and the firm of Maunsell has now been incorporated within the Faber Maunsell Consultancy.

Ernest Godward, 8 The Hollows, Bessacarr, Doncaster DN4 7PP

Single track

With regard to the list of recommended doubling of single track sections, prepared by Michael Caton and published in *Railwatch* 91, there is one glaring omission – the 14-mile single-track section between Swindon and Kemble. If any

blockage occurs on the direct route from Paddington to South Wales through the Severn Tunnel, the Swindon to Gloucester line has to carry all the diverted traffic. I hope this line can be added to Mr Caton's list immediately!

Perhaps not so important (but equally important as some other single-track sections in the list) is the need to re-double the Ledbury to Hereford (Shelwick Junction) line.

John S Whiting, 42 Fordwich Rd, Welwyn Garden City AL8 6EY

Slam door

Why do I often read of criticism concerning the old slam-door trains? These were very good for busy services, enabling passengers to get on and off quickly. In contrast, there is inevitably a delay when you only have one door at each end of the carriage.

Safety has been good on the railways for years and years. Really, it is the roads which need more action in this regard.

Tim Mickleburgh, 33 Littlefield Lane, Grimsby, Lincs DN31 2AZ

Eye opener

During a very pleasant charter rail trip to the Lake District I was surprised to hear so many passengers say they had not travelled by rail for years. It was also apparent they had no idea as to who does what in the modern rail system. It seems that despite the constant criticism in the media and by politicians there is a poor level of knowledge about rail travel among some sections of the community.

It was also interesting to note the very favourable comments about the condition and comfort of the stock. The carriages were Mark 1s, with windows aligned to seat, something often not the case in more modern stock.

Passengers to whom I spoke had no idea the rolling stock would in the near future be taken out of service by Government order, nor that the likelihood of such charters being run along the West Coast main line would become less within a year or two.

Alan Crowhurst, 1 Mawley Court, Lower Inhedge, Cleobury Mortimer DY14 8AH AlanEADC@aol.com

Rural need

Railwatch 89 was right to use Herefordshire to illustrate how railways have been lost from rural areas, and your June cor-

respondent wrong to dismiss railway reopenings in the area as unrealistic. The environment remains a concern, as well as social issues such as younger people needing to reach Hereford and beyond for education and employment.

The suggestion of improving car parks at stations may benefit a few users, but is of marginal use to those who would like to travel by train to places such as Hay-on-Wye and Brecon. There is a bus, but only five times daily and not in the evening.

In the short term bus links must be improved, but the ride quality of buses can never match a good train. One return trip by express bus, for example on the sinuous road from Lix Toll near Killin to Stirling Station, should be enough to convince anyone that rail is usually the answer. The success of many reopenings reported in *Railfuture* publications helps to illustrate this. The message to Government must be: Far greater investment in rail is needed to reduce road traffic.

Gerard Duddridge, Higher Exwick Hill, Exwick, Exeter EX4 2AW.

Central issue

The prospect of a high-speed line from London to the north was mentioned in *Railwatch* 92. Surely more widespread benefits to many northern cities and towns would come from reopening the Great Central up to Sheffield and on to Manchester via Woodhead tunnel, and restoring a Midland main line from Derby through the Peak District to Manchester and the North West.

More intensive use of Leeds-Settle-Carlisle for main line passengers and freight is desirable with passengers fed in via the existing Blackburn-Hellfield and reopened Burnley-Skipton routes.

Railwatch 92's picture of a Japanese "spaceship" should not lead us to dream of over-expensive prestige projects.

Lots of the more modest reopenings would benefit more railway users, more often, more affordably.

David Schofield, 5 Greenway Close, Halton, Leeds LS15 7DU

Well done, Trevor

I would like to record a personal thank-you to Trevor Garrod who helped us set up the South East Lincolnshire

Travellers Association. He gave us tremendous support at a time when he was busy building RDS from nothing into the organisation it is today.

His work and loyalty to the society have been immense. I hope he continues to work as tirelessly as he has done to build a better railway.

My thanks also go to a group of like-minded people – including Steve Wilkinson – who came to Boston in 1976.

Their vision should not go without recognition.

Paul Jowett, 8 Deepdale Drive, Leasingham, Sleaford NG34 8LR

New town trains

It was kind of *Railfuture* to put Cumbernauld at the top of your new town chart in recognition of the improvements made by ScotRail and Strathclyde Passenger Transport by transforming the one-time shuttle to Springburn into a network of through services to Glasgow, Motherwell and Falkirk

The situation is even better since the northern part of Cumbernauld is served by Croy, once a sleepy village station which narrowly escaped closure under the Beeching Report. Now Croy is a very successful public transport hub and park-and-ride location which since 1999 has become a stop on our flagship Glasgow-Edinburgh service and is set to receive further investment in expanding parking capacity.

John Yellowlees, External Relations Manager, ScotRail, Caledonian Chambers, Glasgow G1 3TA

Pick-up goods

I must agree with Joe Barr (*Railwatch* 92) that the pick-up goods is not the answer to rail operations in the 21st century.

Peter Fleming, 7 Station Road, Dunstable, Beds. LU5 4HS

Statistics

I would like to see more useful statistics published in *Railwatch*, including accident figures for road and rail.

I would also like to see an article on how much de-congestion would occur on the M25, M2 and M20 if 75% of freight went by rail.

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