



Your letters

A wider view

We in Railfuture South West were interested to read Ernest Godward's letter in *Railwatch* 93, written in response to our concerns about the Maunsell Rail report (original and supplementary). The report rejected the idea of reopening the Barnstaple to Bideford line and this has allowed the report's sponsors, Devon County Council, to pursue plans for the Barnstaple Western Bypass with solid embankments covering the disused railway trackbed.

Economic arguments were used to reject the idea of railway reopening within the time span of the Devon county structure plan. We feel that the low-revenue projections may partly reflect on the fact that gains from bus users transferring to the rail service had to be excluded. More importantly it was also assumed the service would be separated from the Barnstaple to Exeter service. We have always argued that the Bideford service should be served with direct trains to Exeter and London Waterloo.

Separation is an old trick used to trigger railway closures, but now used to block reopening proposals. In the early 1990s when we argued that the new A30 should be built at the correct bridging height, across the Sidmouth line formation, the Department of Transport contacted British Rail. BR did not want to reopen the railway, therefore the reopening must be private, therefore it must be a shuttle service, therefore the service will be unattractive and uneconomic, therefore there is no need to provide for reopening.

In his letter Mr Godward argues that Bideford journey times would be an unattractive 1 hour 20 minutes to Exeter and 4 hours 30 minutes to Waterloo.

These times are considerably slower than our calculations which are derived from our computer model that takes into account factors such as the speed possible on curves. This gives us a Bideford to Barnstaple time of 12 minutes, inclusive of the Instow stop, and around 1 hour to Exeter St Davids. Bideford could be less than 3 hours 30 minutes away from London Waterloo and Paddington 3 hours.

Direct revenue is not the only factor that must be considered. Lines such as Bideford should never have been closed, and today people who become unemployed or need higher education have a more limited chance of getting to places such as Exeter. Live in a place such as Doncaster (as Mr Godward appears to) and there is a wide choice (Leeds, Sheffield and many other places in under an hour). It is also of concern that Mr Godward assumes that everyone wants to, is old enough or has sufficient money to own a car to get to Tiverton Parkway for onward rail journeys.

However, what is most disappointing is that the Maunsell Rail Report did not contribute any useful research information on the question of the rail reopening. In summary people seem to have been paid to undo all the work we have done on a voluntary basis. At the end of the day the people of Bideford will have to get along without their rail service for a few more years. Don't they matter?

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Busway

You report in *Railwatch* 93 that Cambridgeshire County Council is now pressing ahead with a guided busway on the mothballed Cambridge-St Ives

line. The Conservative-led cabinet of the county council has voted for this and because they have a majority on the council, that is perceived to be council policy.

For my part and indeed many others on the opposition benches, we would prefer to see what was promised in the 1990s, a reopening of the heavy rail service, but we don't have the votes to get it.

It seems that HM Government is only interested in the guided bus!

The frustration for me as an urban member of the county council struggling with car congestion is to have seen this line covered in weeds for two decades when if the Government had pulled its finger out a long time ago, this line could now be operating Class 170 Turbostar units.

County Cllr Geoffrey Heathcock (Lib-Dem), *Queen Ediths Way, Cambridge*
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Bad news

As a Nottingham resident of some 18 years, I was very interested in the *Railwatch* 93 feature on the reopening of the Robin Hood line. While the line has been a success from the point of view of passenger numbers, it was possibly disingenuous of the gentleman from the council not to mention the very serious continuing problems of vandalism and attacks on trains on this line on a weekly, and at times daily, basis. The fact that all stations on this line (outside Nottingham) also have permanent uniformed security staff on duty as a result of regular aggressive behaviour (surely unprecedented on a UK railway line?) was also not mentioned.

Martin Garvey, *Nottingham*
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Future planning

I have just read your summary of the past 10 years events in the organisation of our railway system published in the latest issue of *Railwatch*. Absolutely excellent and most useful.

When it comes to "What we need to do now", I am more dubious.

Under transport policy and

administration, you suggest elected regional bodies for planning. This would give more power to local government. Heaven forbid.

At the present time here in Warwickshire we are blessed with local authority planners who are totally road-orientated, who have no interest in a national rail network to get people and freight off the roads.

In consequence we are choking our transport system to death with cars and heavy goods vehicles, the latter getting heavier by the year.

The only solution our planners can see (supported by a good supply of anti-rail NIMBYs) is wider roads and more of them.

If Saudi Arabia pulls the plug on our oil supplies we are sunk.

So please let us think ahead, beyond 10 years, and seriously try to plan for a truly national transport system that will supply our needs in the future energy-starved world.

David Goodman, *12 Blue Cap Road, Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire CV37 6TG*

Railroded

Your article "Ten Wasted Years" (*Railwatch* 93) could equally have been written about roads.

The truth is, this government doesn't care a damn about transport. It does as little as it can get away with and that grudgingly.

While we transport campaigners attack each other, pro-rail, anti-car, anti-cyclist, pro-pedestrian etc, they can afford to laugh at us and do nothing.

We need to form a National Transport Alliance, so the government will find itself beset on all sides, forcing them to realise transport is just as important as those other two great priorities, health and education.

Colin Rose, *Association of British Drivers, 5 Wood Stanway Drive, Bishops Cleeve, Cheltenham GL52 8TL*

High-speed rail

The prospect of more high-speed railways in this country seems to be provoking a mild backlash from Railfuture supporters. Given a choice between four new high-speed

lines, or reopening the entire closed network, then I would choose the latter.

However, it seems that the Strategic Rail Authority, with its plan for a new railway to the north, is looking at the wider transport picture, and not just at the needs of existing rail users. It may be a case of "this is what is proposed - take it or leave it."

Therefore I believe Railfuture was right to seize the moment and promote high-speed lines. The increase in demand for transport is unstoppable, and the choice for future travel is either: 1 High-speed railways, 2 More and widened motorways, or 3 Massive expansion in regional airports.

In their defence, high-speed trains run on (potentially renewable) electricity, and therefore do not contribute to local pollution.

The new railways will free up the existing mainlines for freight and local services, and allow former stations to be reopened (for example there are no less than 14 closed stations between Carlisle and Lancaster on the West Coast main line).

Most important of all, they will increase rail use, which will create more demand for improvements to the existing network, including "more modest reopenings".

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Speed-efficiency

May I contribute to the debate on high-speed trains? It is an exaggeration to say, as Mr Padley has in *Railwatch* 93, that energy efficiency drops "exponentially" as speed increases. The relationship is linear or polynomial at least until one approaches the speed of sound, which is not currently in prospect. Furthermore, this can be offset if the higher speeds attract enough passengers to improve load factors. Another argument for new lines (whether high speed or otherwise) is that they provide a means of increasing capacity without the disruption to existing services that current upgrades (e.g. to the West Coast main line) involve, and furthermore they provide additional passenger benefits in terms of reduced journey times.

However, I am not sure that the benefits from high-speed routes are where they are most

needed. For the city centre to city centre market which they are most suited to, rail is already a market leader, and I suspect that what is needed to attract most of those who now go by car is lower fares rather than quicker journeys.

Where improvements are most needed is in serving edge of city locations, and towns in the rural hinterlands, from which people don't want to have to trek to the central areas. The priority should therefore be to provide good connections (by rail or bus, with the former likely to require reopenings or new routes) to well-served rail-heads on the main line.

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Design faults

Mike Breslin (*Railwatch* 93) writes that classes 142s, 150s, 156s and 158s were also clean and efficient when they were built in the 1980s. I beg to differ about the first two he lists.

The class 142 was nothing more than a glorified bus, intended for lightly used rural services. But they found their way on to long-distance routes, and additionally served on commuter services, where the lack of doors - a common failing of all modern units - helped to cause congestion at peak times.

Mind you, they had one advantage over class 150 units, whose seats were not aligned with windows, a drawback for any passenger interested in scenery. What's more, the seats easily fell apart, even after just a year or two in service.

I'm sure it wasn't just the enthusiasts who at the time longed for the traditional diesel multiple units.

Tim Mickleburgh, *33 Littlefield Lane, Grimsby, Lincolnshire DN31 2AZ*

Sandy link

I have pleasure in announcing the completion and publication of the Bedfordshire Railway & Transport Association Bedford-Sandy Rail Link report. It is illustrated with diagrams, photographs and a wide-ranging commentary giving views, observations and comments on the campaign so far.

Also it projects the sort of future we would like to see developed with the railway as a core infrastructure to underpin sustainability of development and land-use planning.

The report is available at £7.50 per copy. Please make cheques payable to BRTA and send with details of quantity required, your name, address and post-code. Cover price includes postage and packing per copy.

BRTA is voluntary and all profits go back into our ongoing effort to see equity in the transport system for Bedford and surrounding areas and to forward our projects.

Richard Pill, *BRTA chairman, 24c St Michael's Road, Bedford MK40 2LT*

Crazy prospect

With the abandonment by the Strategic Rail Authority of plans to electrify even the modest couple of lines in the South central region, despite their being located in an otherwise totally electrified area, the descent into anti-electrification madness in Britain accelerates. One has now to ask where it will all end?

Presumably as we have no more schemes to cancel, the SRA will move on to dismantle existing routes, say between Ipswich and Norwich. If so, it would be utterly crazy.

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

Power questioned

I read with interest the further comments on this subject. It is, of course, essential to take note of what is going on outside the UK. But the UK is different in certain respects and these differences cannot be ignored. First, some countries have an abundance of cheap electricity. Switzerland, for example, has hydro-electricity and France has nuclear, which I recently learned to my surprise is also exported to Switzerland.

Second, the mainland European systems are, and have been, largely electrified for many years.

Times sometimes change - it would be interesting to ask (say) a French or German or Italian railway manager if they would electrify now i.e. largely starting from scratch given the advances made in diesel propulsion.

Having said all that, the case must remain strong for infill electrification in the UK, for strategic reasons, even if it does

not stack up financially. But the public purse is not bottomless. Are funds better spent on electrifying, or on new trains, new stations or line reopenings?

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Email discussion

I have set up a discussion group on Yahoo which is a forum for those interested in Railfuture to exchange views. There are a number of railway related discussion groups on the web, particularly relating to preserved railways as it seems the internet is a great media for railway fans. Preserved railways with such sites have had considerable success with this leading to more members and more active involvement. This is my intention for Railfuture.

If you are interested please visit at http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Rail_Campaign/

To subscribe please send a blank email to UKRailfuture-subscribe@yahoo.com or email me at malcolm-smith@talk21.com

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Piggyback

The loading gauge problems of piggyback only arise if large lorries are to be carried. These are not economically justified for the short-distances at either end of a rail leg. Small vans and pick-ups would fit the existing system as well as small roads.

It is unnecessary to carry the road vehicle. Small containers, swap bodies, pallets and trolleys can be easily transferred between road and rail without heavy and expensive handling equipment.

The restoration of local freight facilities is viable and would minimise the length of road collection and delivery.

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Priority one

First Great Western could usefully spend more money on recruiting maintenance engineers than again changing its colour scheme.

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