

Local action



North East

By Peter Wood
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Weardale Railway: The Way Forward

This was the title of the presentation given to members at the September meeting in Darlington by Stephen Raine and Arthur Temple. The plan is to re-open the line to regular passenger services between Stanhope and Bishop Auckland in 2004 (six trains a day, every two hours) and provide a commuter service between Eastgate and Darlington by 2006. This is a project the branch is happy to support.

Northumberland services The start of the winter timetable on 29 September saw more Virgin services travelling the East Coast main line between Newcastle and Edinburgh. Berwick, already reasonably served by GNER, is the main beneficiary. Morpeth and Alnmouth, unfortunately, continue to be virgin territory in a different sense for cross-country services. Alnmouth, for example, continues to suffer from a six-hour afternoon gap (12.02 to 18.05) in southbound services. Better services for these railheads should be a priority.

Northern franchise The document *Northern Rail - guidance for bidders* has now been published by the Rail Passengers Council for north-east England. It is a joint submission from the RPC, Railfuture north-east, Yorkshire and Lincolnshire branches and user groups. Meetings with GB Railways, another bidder, have also taken place to exchange views.

Arriva v. RMT The conductors' dispute rumbles on. We do not believe in taking sides though the fact that the strikes have lasted so long and are planned so far into the future makes us wonder how keen certain of the key players are to resolve the dispute. What is certain, however, is that little can be achieved seeking to encourage people to leave their cars at home and use public transport instead in such circumstances.

Submissions Either directly or via NECTAR (the north east combined transport activists round table) the branch has recently made submissions to two House of Commons inquiries, two franchise proposals, the Regional Transport Strategy (attacked by the CBI as being pro-rail!), the Regional Economic Strategy, the A1 multi-modal study, the A66 road safety study, the A69 Route Management Strategy and the new Tyne crossing consultation. It has also nominated topics of interest for the Government consultation into the future of aviation.

South West

By Stuart Walker

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Winter timetable For Devon passengers, the winter timetable brings good news in the form of more services to the Midlands and the north. Exeter now has 20 trains per day to Birmingham instead of 12, and Paignton four instead of one. Passengers from

The Metro pub guide

CAMRA's guide to the best pubs along Midland Metro

Real ale fans are often steam enthusiasts too. But now it seems they like modern traction too. After all, there is nothing worse than mixing alcohol and car driving. So the campaign for Real Ale has got together with the Midland Metro to produce this leaflet telling drinkers where they can find real pubs near metro stations. Of the 23 stations between Birmingham Snow Hill and Wolverhampton St George's, 13 have recommended pubs nearby. At Dudley Street, five pubs are listed. As the leaflet points out, for just £3, you can get one day's unlimited travel on any TWM bus and Midland Metro tram. You can buy a day ticket from the driver (exact change) or at metro stops.

Birmingham can now enjoy a day trip to Penzance with the 05.42 from New Street arriving Penzance at 11.00 and the last train departing Penzance at 16.30 arriving Birmingham at 22.30 (change at Exeter). In fact there are now more trains to the Midlands from Exeter than to Paddington. However, First Great Western point out that although they run trains less frequently, they have more seats on their trains than

Virgin will have on their new Voyagers. Less encouraging is the timetable in Cornwall. Despite promises that Virgin's revamp of services will mean all operators working together to provide a basic hourly service to Penzance, the current gaps continue to exist. This includes the infamous gap between 16.00 and 18.00 from Truro to West Cornwall when there are no trains at the height of the commuter rush hour. Wessex Trains say they have tried to fill this gap by applying for Rail Partnership Fund money, but do not have any spare trains. However, First Great Western ran a train of empty coaching stock from Plymouth to Penzance in this two hour gap last summer when it could easily have carried passengers providing another through London service - so much for joined-up timetable planning. In other changes, Hayle has lost its morning stop from the sleeper service, used by commuters travelling to work in Penzance. On Saturday evenings until 16 November, Virgin and Wessex Trains have withdrawn two services from Plymouth to Penzance because of engineering work west of Truro, leaving a two and half hour gap. In an increasingly common situation for Cornish engineering work, they have decided to abandon passengers at Plymouth rather than provide replacement bus services.

Station improvements Plymouth suburban stations are to receive a major refurbishment, thanks to funding from the Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership, the Rail Partnership Fund, Railtrack, Wessex Trains and the City Council. The stations will have CCTV, new shelters, better lighting and seating. The stations currently suffer from the worst vandalism in Devon and it is hoped that these improvements will be vandal proof. Unfortunately, there is no sign of any improvement in the number of trains serving these stations. They will continue to be served by the two-hourly service to Gunnislake with a few peak period stops for Penzance trains.

Red faces for new trains in Cornwall Two new or refurbished trains let the side down in Cornwall recently. After Virgin flagged off the last locomotive hauled train from Penzance, the first Voyager service into the county the same day failed at Plymouth. At another high profile event, Wessex Trains arranged for a naming ceremony for the first of its refurbished Class 150 trains. Held at Penzance to celebrate the railway's 150th anniversary there, the Class 150 that was due to arrive at around 10.00 broke down and the naming could not take place until 13.00. The Class 150 refurbishment is long overdue. These units with their inner-suburban style seating and no tables were originally built for local commuter services in the Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire areas. They are now often used by Wessex on journeys of three hours or more. They will receive 2+2



seating, some with tables, and aisles wide enough to allow the catering trolley to get through.

Disruption Tim Maddocks, area production manager for Network Rail and Ian Smith, performance manager for Wessex Trains, will speak about *Managing Disruption on the Railway* at a Railfuture meeting at the Unitarian Church hall, Notte Street, Plymouth on Saturday 23 November at 13.30.

East Anglia

By Nick Dibben

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New trains, new service The branch has welcomed the new Anglia Railways service linking Cambridge and Norwich. Four new two-car diesel trains will operate 15 services each way during the week and 10 on Sundays. Trains contain a first class section and a trolley service will provide refreshments on the 70-minute trip. The branch was well represented on the initial press run, where we were able to talk to GB Railways managers as well as local councillors. To coincide with the new service, Anglia has extended its Anglia Plus ticket to include the new route. The £9 off-peak ticket now covers travel between the regional centres of Cambridge, Norwich and Ipswich as well as the coastal towns of Great Yarmouth, Lowestoft, Felixstowe and Sheringham.

On display The branch had a very successful stall at the Impington College open evening. The college had arranged an exhibition of local groups to go with their enrolment evening. A new set of display boards were produced for the event covering general and local rail issues such as the St Ives line. Although there were not many people there, we did manage to get three new members. One visitor to the stand was a county council transportation employee, who considered our comments on the proposed St Ives guided bus scheme provocative.

Airport links The branch is considering its response to the Government's draft airports strategy. Under pressure from the airline lobby, the Government may agree three new runways at Stansted Airport. Although the plans include extra rail capacity and perhaps an eastward link to Braintree, the branch feels that these should be provided even if there is no further expansion. Also in the plans is a possible new airport at Alconbury near

Huntingdon. The site is alongside the East Coast main line, although the branch doubts if there is capacity for a dedicated airport rail link service. If the airport goes ahead, we would also want to see the east-west rail link serving the new development, a much more suitable transport scheme than the proposed guided bus.

South Wales De Cymru

By Julian Langston
and Peter Clark

Another steelworks closure The placing of the ASW, Cardiff, steelworks (a major rail freight customer) in receivership prompted us to press the local authority and the National Assembly to ensure that whatever happens to the site, the rail route serving it is protected for future possible transport use. It could provide a valuable link into the developing Bay area from the east, by either conventional or light rail. Reasonably encouraging replies were received, and meanwhile the future of the works remains uncertain.

Valley Lines Sunday services improved – by buses We have long maintained that the sparse Sunday winter service on most of the Valley Lines network is out of step with present-day social habits. This winter Valley Lines are tackling this, not by running Sunday morning trains but by arranging for dedicated bus services to operate, on which all rail tickets will be valid. The buses provide two or three departures on most routes, before the trains start running in the afternoon. This is clearly a welcome development, though we hope it is but an intermediate step to ultimately providing a full train service on Sundays. Meanwhile, on four pre-Christmas Sundays there will be an enhanced service on the Rhymney and Treherbert lines, as in most previous years.

Virgin Cross Country The much-vaunted revamp of the cross country timetable provides for seven daily trains (weekdays) from Cardiff to north-east England and east Scotland. One train only is extended to and from Swansea, as previously and as per franchise obligation. Most, but not currently all, trains run via Bristol Temple Meads, adding about 25 minutes to the direct journey via Chepstow. Both Central Trains and Wales & Borders are maintaining their own services between Cardiff and Birmingham, so there are

now 26 trains between those places – market saturation perhaps, but unfortunately intermediate stations such as Chepstow do not benefit at all from this largesse and still have poor services. A casualty of the new timetable is the Cardiff to south-west England service; the number of through trains to Exeter and beyond is reduced from seven to three. So as always with major timetable revamps, there are both winners and losers.

Swansea District Line The daily use of this route during peak summer this year has served to draw attention to its existence! There is increasing recognition of its status as an under-used asset and of its potential as a means of serving north Swansea with parkway station(s) and of speeding up west Wales to Cardiff (etc) trains. We have long advocated such use. But an essential component of such development must be a greatly improved Cardiff-Swansea-west Wales service, because trains going via the District Line would have to complement those running via Swansea High Street station, not replace them.

We will be doing further work on how the District Line might be used to optimum benefit.

Cardiff LRT campaign The branch published an open letter advocating light rail as a means to address Cardiff's traffic problems to coincide with "In Town without my Car" day on 22 September. The letter contained an impression of how a modern tram could look in a city centre Cardiff street in order for it to have maximum effect. It was addressed to Sue Essex (Assembly minister for transport and the environment) and Russell Goodway (leader of Cardiff County council) and copied to all Cardiff County Councillors, Cardiff MPs and local assembly members. A number of responses have been received, most of them positive. At about the same time, members of the branch attended a lecture on Ultra, the driverless tram system advocated by Cardiff County Council. The lecture was upbeat, but several of the arguments used appeared flawed or at least not properly thought through. Cardiff County Council seem intent on going ahead with this system

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and have put the first phase of the system – a short loop in Cardiff Bay – out to tender.

Severnside

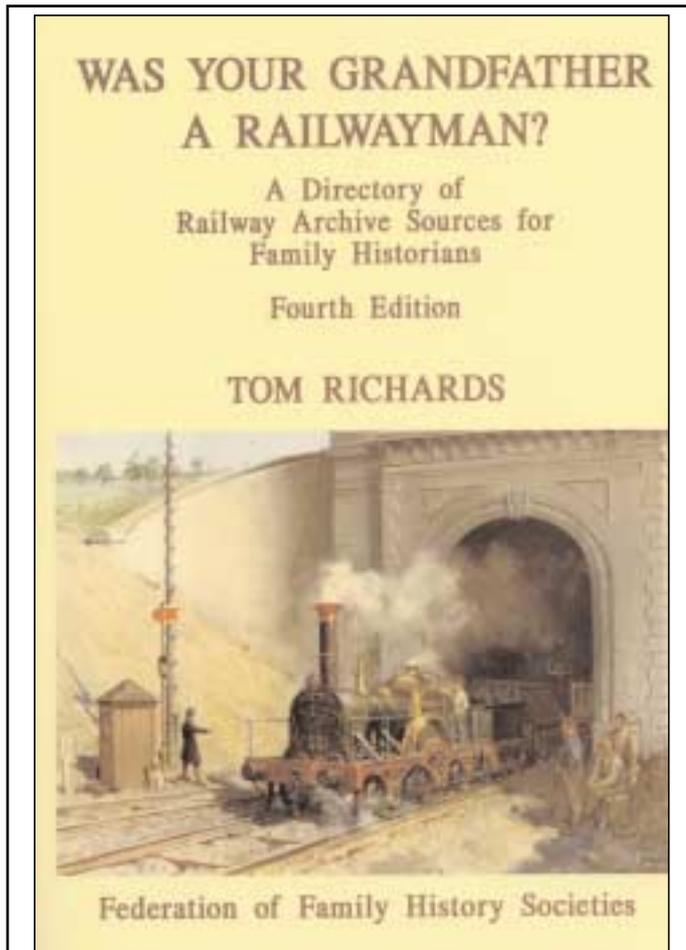
By Phil Morris

Portishead Line Another milestone was reached on the reopened Portishead Line on 19 September when 200 new cars were transported by specially built wagons from Royal Portbury dock to Scotland. This weekly train will replace 10 lorries on the two-day return journey. This new cargo adds to the list of coal, timber and plasterboard that is already carried from the docks to destinations around Great Britain, replacing some 11,000-lorry trips per year from around junction 19 of the M5. Now that the Portishead line is a going concern, in near record time, we are pressuring for a passenger service to be run over the line. Railtrack saved £300,000 when reopening the line by providing no passing loops or passenger signalling. Now £2million will have to be spent to make the line suitable for passenger trains.

Bristol Temple Meads A new campaign is under way to reopen platform 2 and 2a for passenger use. At present the bay platforms are used by EWS to store Post Office and parcel vans. This ties up the station for empty stock working. The constraints put on the working diagram by EWS bringing empty stock into a passenger station and using two platforms beggar's belief.

Bristol Metro Until early this year South Gloucestershire and Bristol City wanted the Metro to terminate at Aztec West in the North, and Bristol City Centre in the South. For the past five years Friends of the Severn Beach Railway (which is affiliated to Railfuture) has argued that the Metro should terminate at Cribbs Causeway, the largest shopping mall within a 80-mile radius. At last South Gloucestershire Council has seen the sense in the arguments put forward by FoSBR, for running trains 18 hours per day, 7 days a week, for use by both workers and customers who would travel to the Cribbs Causeway terminus. The council has adopted the terminus at Cribbs Causeway as the northern terminus, with Bristol City Council having to accept the idea. But the two authorities, South Gloucestershire and Bristol have formally signed an agreement to co-operate.

AGM David Redgewell and John Walker will in future share



Researching family history is now a popular pursuit and this book is designed to help.

It provides tips on how to find information on people you are trying to track down and details many of the places where lists and documents about railway workers can be found.

The guide also suggests how to trace the many people who went out from Britain to work on foreign railways. The hundreds of sources are carefully categorised and catalogued so as to be useful to general railway historians as well as family researchers.

Author Tom Richards joined the Great Western at St Ives, Cornwall, in 1940, and retired in 1982 as a senior officer at the Paddington headquarters of British Rail's Western Region.

Copies of the 130-page £6.95 book are available from Tom at 1 Apsley Road, Clifton, Bristol BS28 2SH. Tel 0117 9739411. Email: tom.richards@btinternet.com

the role of branch chairman with David concentrating on policy and John on running the branch and representing it.

East Midlands

By Anthony Kay
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Regeneration Catalyst Corby, the company charged with regenerating the Northamptonshire town, has been involved in negotiations with Midland Mainline and the Strategic Rail Authority regarding providing a rail station for

what is now the largest town in Britain without one. Midland Mainline sells 1,600 tickets per week for its bus service from Corby to Kettering station, but its last feasibility study showed that expected passenger numbers would not be enough to make a rail service viable. However, Catalyst Corby is optimistic about the possibility of a rail link being established as early as 2005. Unfortunately, the company's request to local residents to write in explaining how essential the railway sta-

tion is to the town's future drew only 11 responses, although these were all positive.

In an unrelated development, Housing Minister Lord Rooker has announced an £8.3billion plan for regenerating an area of the South Midlands over the next 30 years. This would concentrate on the Midland Mainline corridor, with massive expansion in Wellingborough, Kettering and Corby, and a major upgrade to the railway.

Phantom station The mystery of the lengthened journey times from Nottingham and Derby to Leicester has been solved: the extra three minutes on most journeys is to allow for stopping at the not-yet-built East Midlands Parkway. Although the station was at one time scheduled for opening in Summer 2002, the project is still nowhere near completion.

Meetings Nick Brown, managing director of Central Trains, will address a branch meeting on Saturday 8 November in Leicester. The branch annual general meeting will be on 8 March 2003 in Leicester.

Thank you, Bob Bob Mullins intends to step down at the AGM after 18 years as branch treasurer and sales officer. Any volunteers to take over these posts would be welcome.

Scotland

By David Hansen
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On a small scale there are many welcome developments in Scotland, but on a large scale things are more bleak.

Food at last Food trolleys were withdrawn from the Glasgow-Carlisle line via Dumfries in 1996. In August they returned thanks to the enterprise of a local company. Also in August ScotRail opened a train crew depot in Dumfries, avoiding the occasional nonsense of staff being sent from Glasgow by taxi. We wish both ventures success.

Trains at last The winter timetable saw more suspended train services being re-introduced, following their suspension during a bout of Aslef-inspired disruption. Hopefully in January the remaining suspended services, in the Glasgow area, will be re-introduced. There may even be some extra services.

New trains at last In the autumn, class 334 trains started running in the north of Glasgow, without fanfare. This follows a difficult period of



introduction, reminiscent of the problems of introducing the class 308 trains to Glasgow in the early 1960s. It doesn't have to be this way, other electric trains have been introduced far more easily, even under the current comic railway approval regime.

New stations The Newcraighall line, hopefully the first part of the Waverley Route, has done steady but unspectacular business since opening. Use of Brunstane station, a "leave your car at home and ride" station has been encouraging, even though it is not ideally placed due to the increasingly silly requirements of the once highly respected Railway Inspectorate.

Kissing the frog The new cross-country timetable has got off to a reasonable start. Train punctuality could have been better, but it could have been a lot worse given the doubled and faster services. The public seems to be taking to the service, though there have been problems with some peak hour trains. Virgin and Stagecoach are often criticised, but their investment deserves success. Perhaps Network Rail could extend the track-based tilt supervision system, not reduce it, in order to make the most of the new trains. That is the sort of low-cost improvement that the railways should be doing, without expecting others to pay for it.

Bad to worse Other things are not so encouraging. In January 1998 the first proper estimate for a Scottish Parliament building was £90million. September 2002 estimates now indicate the Holyrood building will now cost almost £310million. The extra £220million would have paid for 44 five-coach Voyager trains. Readers may wish to consider whether this building or 44 Voyagers is a better investment. No wonder there is little money for a better railway.

Freight no more Until recently the Scottish Executive was relatively enlightened about freight facilities grants, enabling a slightly more level playing field and getting some traffic back on the railways. However, in recent months the Scottish Executive seems to have reverted to the approach of its Scottish Office predecessors, who never approved such a grant. This apparent change in policy does not line up with the hot air produced by the Labour-Liberal Democrat government on sustainable transport.

Plane to train? There is a lot of party political pressure for expansion of aeroplane services,



Rail treat for Chernobyl children

Thanks to the generosity of Arriva Trains Northern, children on a recuperative holiday from Chernobyl were also able to pay a visit to York.

The Chernobyl Children LifeLine approached Arriva Trains Northern asking for help with transport costs to the historic city. So for the third year running the train operator supported the charity by donating free rail tickets.

The group of 16 children, aged between eight and 15 years old, were on a visit from Belarus (just over the border from Chernobyl) and were staying with families in and around the Bradford area for two weeks. All of the children had been exposed to radiation and the idea behind the visit to the UK was to help them rest and recuperate before they face the winter back home.

Jan Taber, from the Chernobyl Children LifeLine said: "We were absolutely delighted with the support from Arriva Trains Northern. Donating tickets means a huge saving for the charity and without it we could not give the children the opportunity to experience the city of York. It was the first time most of them have been away from their homes and I am sure their memories of the fun they had will stay with them for the rest of their lives."

Ray Price, managing director of Arriva Trains Northern, said: "We are delighted that we have been able to lend our support again and help make their visit to York possible."

The Chernobyl Charity LifeLine is a national charity, which has helped thousands of youngsters from Chernobyl visit the UK. If anyone is interested in finding out more about the organisation, or wishes to help in some way, they can e-mail Jan Taber at taberjan@aol.com

The picture shows the youngsters from Chernobyl and their host families in York.

complete with rail links to take people to the airports. This is supposed to strengthen the Scottish economy, even though it actually appears to strengthen the economy of other countries as more people fly to get out of Scotland than in. What are the railways doing to offer an alternative vision, based on high speed electric trains for passenger and freight? We know that these services can be highly attractive, for example EWS is already running some express services for private parcel carriers. Is the Government door closed firmly against such offers? How hard have the railways pushed? How many visi-

tors come to Edinburgh by train and plane?

Public Transport Fund RIP?

The Government used to run the PTF. This was far too small, but enabled a number of improvements to go ahead. What is to replace it? Nobody knows at the moment: Government has not bothered to tell people. While a few crumbs have been handed out to sustainable transport the real money has been spent on an out of control road building programme, very much at odds with claimed government policy. Perhaps the widow's mite of the PTF is to be used to

help fund a shortfall in the road programme. People should remember the huge discrepancy between the claimed and actual policies of the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties when voting in future elections. They certainly speak with forked tongues. The most ridiculous of these roads is the M74 extension in Glasgow, an elevated eight-lane motorway set to devastate the economy of south Glasgow. In California, the home of car culture, they have discovered that removing this sort of motorway boosts the economy. Why are our government so backward that they think this sort of expensive mistake is a



step forward? The £250million squandered on this one road would be far better spent on 50 new five-coach Voyager trains.

Now we know The Scottish Executive was asked on 5 September 2002 what plans it has to progress further electrification of the rail network. Lewis Macdonald replied: "The Scottish Executive has no current plans for further electrification of the rail network in Scotland." Is the rest of Europe wrong?

Yorkshire

By Peter Davies
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Otley Otley Town Council has produced an *Aspirations for Rail along the Wharfe Valley* brochure indicating its full support for the reinstatement of the former route from Menston to Otley, and from Otley to Arthington on the Leeds to Harrogate line. The Yorkshire branch of Railfuture fully supports this proposal.

A future rail strategy for Yorkshire The first edition of this eight-page publication is now available from the chairman of the Yorkshire branch of Railfuture. Please write to P G Davies, 5 Dewhurst Road, Brighouse, West Yorkshire HD6 4BA, enclosing a cheque or postal order made payable to RDS Yorkshire for £1 together with a large A4 stamped addressed envelope. The strategy is to be reviewed and amended as the case may be from time to time.

Halifax The Halifax and District Rail Action Group is calling for improvements to Halifax station and the facilities provided. It would like to see improvements in litter collection, and the appearance of the station.

Horsforth The daily one-way direct service operated by GNER from Harrogate to London (King's Cross) now calls at Horsforth at 07.45 and will provide a fast commuter service for people employed in Leeds.

Ripon It is hoped that financial funding towards a feasibility study into the reopening of the former route from Harrogate Dragon Junction to Northallerton may soon be provided.

Doncaster Work on the new transport interchange has been deferred for two years following objections to the existing proposals.

Hull Hull Trains are to invest in eight new Voyager trains for the service between Hull and London (King's Cross).



With the introduction of new Voyager trains, the days of loco-hauled trains on Virgin's CrossCountry network came to an end in August. The last trains were between Penzance and Birmingham New Street and Derby-Toton. This was the scene at Toton depot on 19 August when class 47 locomotives in a variety of liveries were lined up for a farewell photo-shoot. What will happen to the redundant locos and coaches is not clear but most will end on the scrapheap. In the past, before the triumph of the railway accountants, the equipment would have been stored, cascaded to other areas or refurbished. In turn, that would have allowed low-cost charters, relief trains at busy times and the introduction of experimental services.

The scope for all these enterprises is severely limited now and the railway is the weaker for it.

Picture: Milepost 921/2

Harrogate Forty teenagers from the Army Foundation College have been employed removing litter from railway lines in the area.

York The city council has been told it will have to issue the tenders for the new stations at Haxby and Strensall, which are scheduled to open for the summer 2005 timetable. This is eight years later than originally planned.

Kent

By John Pitcher
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Fast link The Channel Tunnel rail link should provide a proper mix of services including Eurostar services to the British regions and reasonably priced fast domestic services. John Pitcher told a meeting in Canterbury on 17 August that direct trains from Ashford or Ebbsfleet to Birmingham and Glasgow would prove highly attractive to passengers from Kent. But fears about security and the decision not to have onboard passport checks were undermining the usefulness of Eurostar services. Now artificially cheap air fares were also having an impact, with a rumoured drop in Eurostar premium-class passengers. Even MPs are finding it impossible to

find out what kind of domestic services and what kind of fare levels were likely for the Channel Tunnel rail link which is now under construction.

Canterbury The authorities have failed to take action on Railfuture's suggestion for a park-and-ride station at the former Chislet Colliery halt in Canterbury. Nor has any action been taken in response to Railfuture's suggestion for a reinstated link between Canterbury's two rail lines. The situation highlights the pitiful state of public transport in Canterbury. Kent county council and Connex are preoccupied with commuter links with London when they should be developing rail's potential for local journeys. Reinstatement of track on an existing spur could allow trains to run from Faversham into Canterbury West which be a great benefit to people travelling to Ashford. Peter Collingborn also suggested a circular Maidstone-Strood-Canterbury-Ashford-Maidstone service. Several local services could be useful, including Canterbury-Dover-Deal-Minster-Canterbury.

Light rail The failure of the Government to consider light rail other than in large cities is a mistake. There could be effec-

tive systems based on Canterbury, Medway and Maidstone, and Thanet. Cities with populations of 200,000 on mainland Europe have efficient light rail systems.

Buses John Pitcher was involved in "protracted correspondence" with the Department of Transport about lack of bus information at Kent's railway stations. Connex and bus companies hardly seemed to communicate and no-one wanted to take responsibility. Rail passengers seeking local bus information would soon give up in frustration. The situation at Dover was a disgrace. At Canterbury the East and West stations were nearly one mile apart but neither station was served by bus. Buses passed near to the East station without stopping! There was a street map outside the East station which did not show the bus station, the focal point of East Kent's bus network. A new bus station had opened but councillors of all parties were contacting Stagecoach to ask for proper facilities. At present there were no toilets, no clock, no telephones, inadequate shelters with sliding seats and no café. A passenger transport executive for Kent would be an improvement.

International rail tickets The continental ticket office at Dover Priory station has closed. Railway journeys via the short sea ferry crossing were considerably cheaper than Eurostar, and the advantage of booking in Dover had been that the ferry crossing was included and that it was possible to pay for the whole journey in sterling. Bruce Laird said this would cause considerable inconvenience to many occasional travellers and tourists passing through Dover. John Pitcher also reported the closure of the office at Canterbury West from where he had previously bought continental tickets without difficulty. Continental non-Eurostar tickets are still available from Ashford International domestic station, though this is less convenient since it could involve a break of journey specially to buy a continental ticket, then getting back on the next train to Dover. It appears that the continental booking service has collapsed, with other train operators closing similar offices. Continental ticket issue could be time consuming and unprofitable and there was no legal requirement to offer the service. Connex still retains overseas booking at Charing Cross and Cannon Street, though telephone booking is not available. The SNCF



agency Rail Europe in Piccadilly, London, sells rail tickets but cannot make ferry bookings. This was one of the facilities that died at privatisation. Deutsche Bahn's London office at Surbiton can also issue Europe-wide tickets, as could the company Trains Europe based in Cambridgeshire. Railfuture's French ally FNAUT has been told that the withdrawal of long distance trains from Calais to the South of France and Italy was largely the result of lack of travellers coming from England, where people were finding it increasingly difficult to make continental bookings. Railfuture's International Committee discussed this at some length and the European Commission was now aware of international booking problems.

Electrification John Pitcher condemned the Government's decision not to proceed with electrification on the grounds of expense. This was yet another kick in the teeth for the railways. The news was all the more sickening given the Government's promises to improve rail transport. The upgrade of the only rail link between East Kent and East Sussex is essential to improve communications all along the South Coast. Travellers can now, thanks to New Labour, look forward to years and years of frustrating car journeys along crowded roads. Yet the South Coast is in dire need of an inter-

city route. John Grubb said he was at least pleased to hear of the SRA's commitment to relaying the track across the Willingdon chord, the Eastbourne "rail bypass" – an essential part of the south coast upgrade which would enable faster direct services from Kent to Brighton.

Cycles on trains Connex's commitment to provide cycle lockers at stations, which are now increasingly in evidence, is welcome. But whereas 12 cycles could be carried in existing Mark One stock, there is much reduced space for cycles on new trains. The cycling group Spokes has contacted Connex to request installation of cycle racks in trains similar to those in trains in East Anglia. The class 508 stock on the Sheerness line was more satisfactory as there was at least designated cycle space, although a symbol was needed on the side of the carriage so cyclists knew where to board.

Thames Valley

By Chris Wright

Cheap fares Silverlink has agreed to a request from Bedfordshire County Council to allow holders of the concessionary travel scheme permits to travel at half fare at off-peak times on the Bedford-Bletchley line. Silverlink will also accept the discounted tickets from the

branch line to any Thameslink station between Bedford and Elstree. The council is now approaching Thameslink to request that it also accepts discounted tickets from Thameslink stations to stations on the Bedford-Bletchley line. Several questions still remain about when and how the scheme will be implemented. The Bedford to Bletchley Rail Users Association is following it up.

Aspirations Chiltern Railways have "longer-term aspirations" to run train services to Princes Risborough-Oxford, Aylesbury North and Milton Keynes according to an initial report to the Strategic Rail Authority.

Cash for station Aylesbury North has moved a step forward with the issue of a planning brief for the Berryfields area. Up to 3,000 homes are proposed and a station site has been reserved. We have noted our concerns that developer funding is not being sought. A levy of £300 on each house could go a long way to providing the necessary funds.

Holiday specials Chiltern railways operated Turbo specials to the Quanton Road preservation site at August bank holiday.

Bletchley-Bedford Upgrading continues but is not now expected to be completed until November 2003. A new signalling and control centre is

being built at Ridgmont while manual signal boxes at Stewartby and Bedford will be closed. The change from local manual operation to centralised electronic control will take place during a two-week closure on the line. Replacement buses will be run.

Another way Coaches have replaced trains on the West Coast main line at weekends. An hour is allowed for the direct journey from Milton Keynes Central to Hemel Hempstead. If the route to Aylesbury had been upgraded, trains could have been diverted and a capital asset provided.

East-west A further bid for rail passenger partnership funds has been made to the Strategic Rail Authority to restore the train service between Bletchley and Oxford. The outcome is awaited. A further bid for funds has been made through local transport plans in Buckinghamshire which include proposals for an extra platform at Bicester Town, a new station at Winslow and a high-level platform at Bletchley. The East-West rail link consortium believes a service from Bristol to Bedford could start by 2004 or 2005.

Special Hertfordshire Rail Tours plan a special train on 22 December from Paddington to Bicester Town and Aylesbury which will help provide a focus for the campaign to restore a train service.

Letters extra

Metric muddle

In *Railwatch* 93 you describe a "one-kilometre long underground box" and 46-mile and 24-mile sections of the Channel Tunnel rail link. Referring to a five-furlong concrete box would have done just as well.

Even now it is illegal to display a road sign showing metric distances, and I think the same should apply to all other measurements. But mixing imperial and metric in the same article is surely the height of muddledom.

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Editor's note: Technical magazines in Britain usually use metric while general-interest

publications stick to imperial. In *Railwatch* we usually convert metric to imperial, although we know this might antagonise younger readers.

It's debatable whether five furlongs or one kilometre is more readily understood.

Short-sighted

I was interested to read in *Railwatch* 93 of the alternative services suggested by the Midlands branch during the weekend blockades on the West Coast main line between Hemel Hempstead and Milton Keynes.

But when I enquired about travel from Colchester to Crewe via London on 17 August, I was told I was not permitted on a through ticket to travel via Derby using the

Midland main line and Central Trains. This advice came from both the national rail enquiry service and the Association of Train Operators.

I was told "alternative arrangements" for travel had been made. I was told by ATOC that I could use Chiltern Railways from London Marylebone to Birmingham Snow Hill and then walk to New Street for onward travel.

I suspect the reasoning is connected with the apportionment of fares income which seems more important than the customer.

I have taken this up with the Rail Passengers Committee for Eastern England and await a response with interest.

In the event, I went via Derby

using a Midland Mainline ticket but noted on my return that a passenger opposite had a return Crewe-London stations Saver ticket. This was accepted by the train conductor on inspection of the ticket. The only question was: "Where are you changing?"

The answer was Derby.

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Editor's note: What a sad example of the disaggregated railway. ATOC and Midland Mainline should have ensured that tickets were interchangeable. Thankfully, on-train staff are often more reasonable than their petty-minded bosses. They know the real difficulties travellers face.