



Your letters

Alternative routes

Like your other correspondents in *Railwatch 94*, I too was unable to travel by a sensible alternative route to avoid the North Western main line closures.

My journey was London to Conwy, and my proposed route was Midland main line to Nottingham or Derby, then Central Trains to Crewe, then First North Western to Conwy.

The travel office clerk agreed this was a sensible routing and the times connected; but when he fed it into the computer, it was rejected as an approved route on a through ticket although I understand it had been an approved route under BR.

In the end I was routed Paddington to Birmingham by Virgin, Birmingham to Crewe by Central, Crewe to Conwy by First North Western. I could not book a seat on the Virgin train as there was doubt as to whether it would run.

It did, but had so many standing passengers that by Oxford people were asked to get off and await the next train to Birmingham.

As I had only a nine minute connection I stayed on.

The Central Trains train I caught was more comfortable than the Virgin Voyager (Voyager seats were hard and upright).

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Well done but...

As a member of Railfuture and of York Cycle Campaign, I say congratulations to York on receiving a CycleMark as the most cyclist-friendly railway station (*Railwatch 94*). Nevertheless there remains

much to be done before York station is cyclist-friendly in the full sense.

A planned cyclist and pedestrian path will improve access to the station from the northern (Scarborough bridge) side. For motorists too this will effectively bring the Marygate car park closer to the station.

Unfortunately, certain parties in the railway industry are apparently doing their utmost to prevent the opening of the path. Recently (and perhaps not entirely coincidentally) new tree saplings and a substantial metal fence have been placed across its route.

Railwatch also quoted Chris Austin of the SRA (the sponsor of the CycleMark awards): "We are taking integrated transport seriously".

It is to be hoped that the SRA will demonstrate that these are not empty words by using its authority to ensure this project goes ahead as soon as possible.

Keith Richmond, 26 Grosvenor Terrace, York YO30 7AG

Crowded trains

A couple of weeks ago a friend and I travelled from Leamington Spa to Bourne End. It seems to happen every time I travel; there were all sorts of problems, a vehicle (road or rail - it wasn't announced) hitting a bridge, a broken rail. Just a normal day on the network.

At Reading we went for a Voyager, newly arrived, and on boarding we found conditions like the very worst of the Underground in the middle of the rush hour, such that we got off and took a local to Oxford, only to have to board another overcrowded Voyager to get home. While waiting at Oxford it was announced that the second train due, another Voyager, was experiencing serious over-

crowding, customers should travel on the first one and change at Birmingham New Street! For us the situation was academic, in that we were going just as far as Leamington; the first Voyager, at Oxford was going to Glasgow, the one we caught at Oxford, was going to Liverpool, and the seriously overcrowded one was heading, I think, for Edinburgh. The prospect of going all that way in such conditions was appalling.

So here's a question: Given that the capacity of most main lines these days is full to capacity, and given also that most stations in this country can easily cope with trains of 10 or even more coaches, what sense is there in flooding the system with trains of four or five coaches?

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Let us in

I was disappointed to see *Railwatch 94* giving contacts for people, but only listing email addresses. Not everyone has a computer, and this leads to individuals being excluded from consultations.

An example was the article about a proposed national railcard, with members being invited to contribute their views. Unfortunately, only an electronic address was given.

Please therefore take care in future, so that non-computer owning individuals don't feel like second-class citizens.

Paul Freeman, 105 Southend Crescent, Castlecross, Warwickshire

Editors' note: Quite right. We will try harder.

Cuts

The Strategic Rail Authority service reductions recently announced include Oxford-Bristol, the western portion of what was to become the East-West rail link through services. We should now ask the SRA how they intend to serve **O x f o r d - M i l t o n Keynes/Bedford**, if the Turbos which were to form this service have been taken off between Bristol and Oxford! I am far from happy at this decision, which appears to be deliberate on the part of the SRA.

However, I am aware that new Adelantes would have been better trains, because of their speed profile, than essentially slower (suburban) Turbos!

My son is at university in Bristol and regularly uses the Bristol-Oxford trains, connecting into the Stagecoach X5 coach service at Oxford station for Bedford.

I assume he will now have to change additionally at Didcot - but will additional stops be inserted by First Great Western in their services at Didcot? Has the Rail Passengers Council asked for this to happen? This is the integrated railway!

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Driving me mad

Before anyone joins forces with Association of British Drivers member Colin Rose in his call for a national transport alliance (*Railwatch 94*), I suggest they check out the ABD website.

A glance at the articles and press releases makes clear that the ABD is vehemently hostile to any mode of transport other than their beloved motor-cars. They oppose bus and cycle lanes, pedestrianisation, traffic calming and speed cameras.

Public transport is dismissed as dirty, unreliable and dangerous. The ABD want to see a big new programme of road construction and fiercely ridicule the concept of global warming, which they view as part of an anti-car conspiracy by environmentalists.

The "Links" section of their website includes a "featured link", the most recent of which was an article by Alfred Sherman calling for all rail subsidies to be abolished.

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Electric v diesel

To all people who wish to propose absurd "diesel trains are now preferable to electrics" arguments, I suggest a simple test. Spend a day on the concourse at Paddington Station, followed by a day on the concourse at Liverpool Street or Kings Cross. Diesel trains might be a little bit quieter inside and accelerate a little bit faster today, but they are just as

anti-social to people outside of them as they have always been.

*Dr Max Roberts, 95 Broome Grove, Wivenhoe, Essex
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Metric muddle

The trouble with the metric system (*Railwatch 94*) is that it provides far too many opportunities to lose or misplace the decimal point, or to quote the wrong suffix.

Page four (same issue) provides a classic example. How big are those "Minimodal" box containers? Surely not!

Please stick to feet and inches, miles and chains (for railways), and if anyone doesn't know what a furlong is they should ask a racehorse.

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Tracksharing

Surely the whole point of the tram train system in Karlsruhe is that it dissolves the distinctions between tram and train.

With regard to platforms, our own Metrolink in Manchester is a high platform system. Conversion to light rail upped the usage of former heavy rail lines.

With regard to voltage there are now multivoltage light rail vehicles on the market.

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Alan Bevan comments: My article in *Railwatch 93* is still entirely valid and still accurately reflects the situation on the Wednesbury-Dudley route. Centro has rejected tracksharing.

While Manchester and Sunderland metros have high platforms, the West Midlands system uses low-level platforms.

Token tactic

I read with interest and sadness but not surprise the letter from Gerard Duddridge of Railfuture South West, regarding the Maunsell Report on the future of transport in North Devon and its rejection of the reopening of the Barnstaple-Bideford line.

I was not surprised at the rejection of the rail reopening, as it seems all layers of government are more or less anti-rail, something I find very frustrating.

While North Devon is well

beyond "my manor" and I have not seen the plans for the Barnstaple western by-pass, I did wonder if Railfuture South West were to buy a token piece of land that was to be covered by the solid embankments would this give Railfuture South West some sort of legal right to insist on the embankment being made into a viaduct?

As I say it is just a thought and may not be possible financially or legally.

May I wish Railfuture South West success in their campaigns and who knows, all may not yet be lost.

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Network effect

I was dismayed to read the letter in *Railwatch 94*, from Gerald Duddridge of Railfuture South West, on the difficulties created to the reopening of the Bideford line. Truly, the injunction of Peter Rayner in the same issue "Beware the bus bandits", applies.

It should never be forgotten that petrol tax is the sales commission paid by multi-national oil companies to national governments to promote their product. Hence treasuries and their subservient ministries of transport will always opt for the maximum oil burning solution.

Work undertaken by myself at the Westminster University on the Robin Hood Line, available in their library, shows that opening a new line leads to a substantial contribution to the network as a whole.

As far back as 1897 this was recognised by Wellington's Law, devised by the academic and author A M Wellington.

Bus company managers, given the disastrous fall in bus traffic over the past 50 years, instead of adopting "dog in the manger attitudes" and pleading sub-optimal solutions, would be better employed in considering how their links into rail could establish sustainable long mutual revenue maximising flows.

Down here on Canvey Island over the past 20 years, severe reduction of the evening bus services, in contrast to those in the early morning, connecting with rail; has simply led to the selection of the island as preferred location for non-travelling retirees, as opposed to newly wed commuters.

Bus companies, whose head-

quarters are as far away as Aberdeen, have not even begun to grasp the nature of the London market, where shift-working to match the American stock market, late evening overtime and attendance at evening classes or socialising are the norm.

Robin Whittaker, 12 Lakeview, Canvey Island, Essex SS8 9XR

Multi-modal

It is hardly surprising that M1 widening figures largely in the East Midlands multimodal study since rail has barely responded to certain traffic-generating developments even when strategically placed to do so.

A perfect example is provided by the Meadowhall shopping complex next to the M1 junction 3A, rail served since it opened in 1990.

Meadowhall's catchment area covers much of the East Midlands but it is starved of direct rail access from the south, thus ensuring increased road congestion, producing calls for extra M1 capacity.

How do we address this issue then? The starting point must be to provide an attractive alternative to private transport which should eventually match Meadowhall northern rail access, though improvements from this direction are necessary too.

From the north, improvements could be achieved via the extension of the Belper-Derby-Nottingham link, serving Chesterfield and Sheffield before Meadowhall, then continuing to either Rotherham or Doncaster.

Such a development would not be purely shopper-based for it would also cater for the considerable Meadowhall commuter market which could be addressed by a cross-city link offering stiff competition against private transport.

The measure would also embrace the reopening of Clay Cross and serve Dronfield, a classic commuter town where road traffic congestion needs to be dealt with.

Over the border in South Yorkshire the jigsaw would be completed by Millhouse and Heeley reopenings which feature in the passenger transport executive's target 2020 aspirations. Dore main line platforms also need to be reinstated. Given the Government's aim of

reducing road traffic congestion, rail must not opt out of possible markets to woo passengers from private transport. This demands that the Strategic Rail Authority should recognise that a proportion of road traffic congestion is attributable to a lack of alternative rail services and then act accordingly by driving through schedules such as Meadowhall.

Past mistakes regarding boundary-crossing services should not be repeated.

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Piggyback

I refer to Jonathan Dalton's letter about piggyback in *Railwatch 94*.

Technically, containers and swap bodies are the preferred means of intermodal freight transport.

My understanding however is that many potential consignors prefer the concept of piggyback to give them more flexibility in the event of rail problems.

In the case of transport of liquids and powders in tankers, the curve of the tank makes them better adapted to fit loading gauges more readily. Road semi-trailers of box section usually foul arched bridges and tunnels by about seven inches at conrail level.

I am by no means convinced that all the space within these large box trailers is used. Often there is a gap of one foot to three feet between cargo and trailer roof! This leads me to think that many consignments would fit into a trailer designed for rail use.

It may be too expensive to increase clearances to accept box trailers. Would there be advantages in developing a trailer with a flexible "chamfered" top corner which could be converted quickly to a square corner as necessary? Such a trailer could be used for intermodal piggyback service and then converted as necessary for road haulier use.

Such a trailer could perhaps be developed by a wagon-leasing company and leased primarily for intermodal use, but available for road haulier use when otherwise idle, thus giving useful flexibility.

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