





# Your letters

## Overcrowding

Nothing has been done for many years to tackle the problem of overcrowding which so often occurs on the South Wales Valley Lines.

Ever since the Sprinter trains started in 1987, there has been less space for passengers, especially during rush hours and Saturday afternoons. It's even worse when there is a match on in Cardiff, with only two-car trains for much of the time, rather than four.

Instead of using 150s, 142s and 143s, there should be 156s or 158s in four or even six-car formations.

*Paul L Hooker, Northwood, 23 Drysgol Road, Radyr, Cardiff CF15 8BT*

## Start digging

*Railwatch 97* included two articles on the latest developments with Crossrail line one and in particular on the proposed branches. Crossrail branches appear to be a topical subject in the railway press as a whole at present but is this protracted debate helpful?

The original intention was to have one eastern branch to Shenfield and western branches to Reading and Aylesbury with a tunnel section between Paddington and Liverpool Street to enable through running.

As the plans evolved, services to such places as Watford, High Wycombe, Slough, Chingford and Tilbury have been considered and the tunnel section extended eastwards via Whitechapel.

The latest proposals add an eastern branch through the Isle of Dogs and Woolwich and replace the original western branches with services to Heathrow Airport and Kingston. Further tunnel sections have been added, particularly in the east and these will greatly increase the overall cost of the scheme. There is much debate about where the branches should go and even the core section between Paddington and Liverpool Street has been questioned with Victoria being suggested as a better western destination.

While there will always be different views over what is best, we should remember that the

best can be the enemy of the good, and what London needs is for the arguments to end and construction to commence.

Paralysis by analysis is the last thing this vital project needs. Perhaps we should focus again on the big picture and hence on what needs to be done to make a start to construction.

The vital starting point is the core section from Paddington to Liverpool Street. Without this, there will be no Crossrail and no additional capacity.

This is where the unavoidable costs will lie as it is the essence of the whole scheme. Time will tell which branches are most appropriate but as most lie above ground, the cost of diverting services from one to another are not in the same league as the core section of the project.

Altering destinations may involve remodelling junctions, electrification or new signalling but these are activities that may be needed in time in any case. Whatever we choose now, it will not suit everyone and future developments may require change to meet requirements we can barely anticipate today. It is better that we focus on completing the central section and not get ensnared in an extended debate over the branches.

The cost of a scheme like Crossrail is probably the greatest obstacle. The Channel Tunnel rail link overcame this problem by dividing the route into two sections and hence spreading the cost over time while getting some benefits in the shorter term. The recent completion of phase one vindicates this approach. Could the same approach be applied to Crossrail?

If Paddington to Stratford were regarded as phase one and Whitechapel to Woolwich as phase two, this would help to contain the initial cost while not giving up the overall vision. Tunnelling at Chiswick, if required, would fall into phase two.

Clearly phase one would have to make some provision for the addition of phase two but this would consist largely of work in the Whitechapel area by building the necessary junctions in phase one.

So far, I have not seen a debate about Crossrail line two, the north east to south west route. This of course evolved from the North South Crossrail and Chelsea-Hackney proposals of the Central London Rail Study. Does this lack of comment result from the need for further planning or are we simply convinced

that it will never be built? Clearly if we come up with a scheme that the bean counters consider to be unaffordable then that will be so. Personally, I would like to see it go ahead and look forward to seeing proposals for the branches it will serve, but I hope also that a pragmatic way will be found to break the overall vision down into achievable but compatible chunks.

Returning to line one, the Woolwich branch is of particular interest. The original thinking was that Shenfield services would need all or most of the capacity in the east, hence only one branch.

The Woolwich branch will result in a third of Great Eastern Metro services continuing to run to Liverpool Street and raises the long term question of will the central section have sufficient capacity to cope with two eastern branches?

Given that both branches will include expensive tunnel sections, it would clearly be desirable to make optimum use of this infrastructure. The obvious solution, cost permitting, is for a second central section going to say Victoria or Waterloo. Combining this with perhaps, the Woolwich branch would yield another cross-London route and enable more branches to be served. But before we get too excited about the prospect of a Crossrail line three, let's focus on getting the core of line one built.

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## Power talk

In view of the effects on both underground and surface rail of the electricity failure in south London on 28 August, should we be campaigning for the re-introduction of a dedicated power station to serve the railways?

Thanks are in order to National Rail for at last including zone boundaries on the London Connections map folder.

*M J Leppard, 20 St George's Court, London Road, East Grinstead, Sussex RH19 1QP*

## RailCity 2007

What runs across the middle of *Railwatch 96* issue's cover picture, between bottom left and centre right?

Why, the High Meads Loop, of course! The what? The direct link between the North London Line and the Lea Valley Line through the heart of the former Stratford Rail Lands, now with

the tailor-made opportunity for a new (developer-funded?) local station "Stratford City", right at the centre of the new development, and directly adjacent to and fully integrated with the CTRL Stratford International station.

It would also be only a 10-minute walk to the proposed site for the 2012 Olympics athletics stadium at Hackney Wick.

Coupled with the re-opening of the 500-metre former eastern chord at Dalston Junction as part of the recently re-started East London Line Extensions, there is the realistic prospect of making the east London Olympics venues fully rail-accessible from all points of the compass, providing direct rail links between them and other venues such as Custom House/Excel, Crystal Palace and Wimbledon via the East London Line Extension, and leaving the legacy of a Stratford City development that is public-rather than private-transport-oriented.

*Roger Blake, 70 Dynevor Road, Stoke Newington, London N16 0DX  
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## Rail in provinces

I'm sorry but I can't get excited about either the Channel Tunnel rail link or the proposed London Crossrail.

Can we start to put the provinces at the forefront of future developments? There have been some welcome developments but the increasingly pro-car Government is now threatening to stop building much-needed tramway schemes.

So those in and around Leeds will have to rely on buses, while London has its Underground and an extensive National Rail network.

We should encourage those in London frustrated by overcrowding to move their businesses elsewhere.

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

## Unsafe roads

I am fed up with reading Peter Rayner's tirades about rail safety. Doubtless there is substance in what he says but, health and safety zealots are destroying the rail industry.

Today while cycling home through Worcester's quiet back streets I had a very close shave with an idiot who drove too fast around a blind bend on the wrong side of the road. I could report the incident to the police but what is the point? I have tried that before. On the first



occasion the police told me they could do nothing, the second they messed me about until I gave up and on the third they attended the scene.

My three-year-old daughter had just been driven over in a convenience store car park. The car was travelling forward very slowly and I was yelling at the driver to stop, there were two witnesses besides me and others must have heard me shouting.

After interviewing the driver the police let him go without charge, the excuse being insufficient evidence. So there are my most graphic experiences of the road safety culture. Small wonder there are about 3,500 road deaths each year. This police indifference was in stark contrast to the diligence they showed when my younger daughter died suddenly without explanation only a few months earlier. Where there is a will there is a way.

If railways are to survive in Britain then the industry and its supporters must fight the double standards. We can choose not to use trains, but who can avoid roads? Given universal perfect driving, road safety would still be much poorer than for rail. If the standards applied to rail were to be applied to roads there would be no motor traffic as we know it. There would be no traffic jams or pollution, the roads would be safe to walk and cycle along and doubtless the railways would prosper.

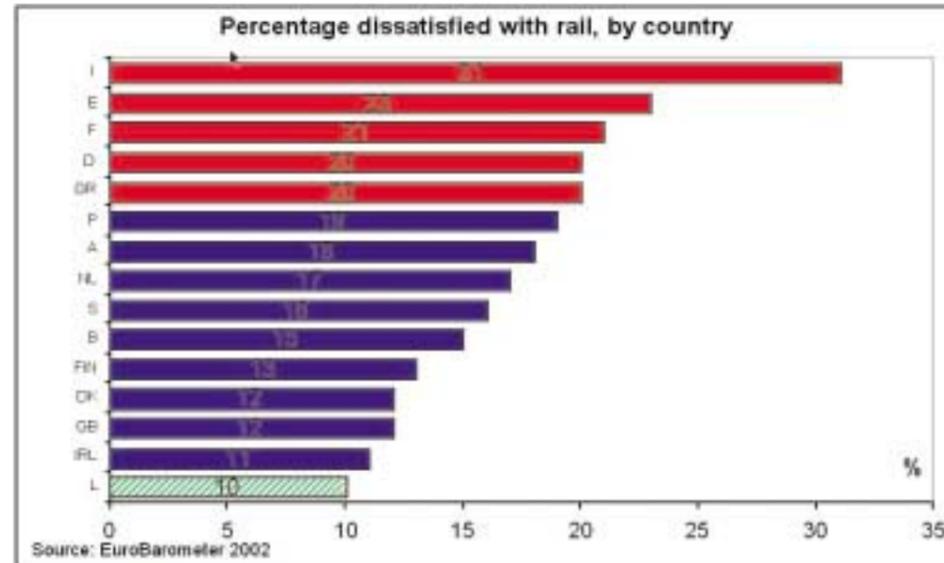
Until recently there has always been talk of the uneven playing field for funding in favour of roads. The bias has always been the same for safety. Now that it is crippling the rail industry it is not time that the likes of Peter Rayner started addressing the issue? I want to continue using trains and I would also like to walk and cycle with my children without fear of being annihilated by some incompetent or just plain stupid motorist.

*Clive Parsons, 7A Marion Close, Worcester WR3 7LP*

## False economy

I have often extolled the National Rail Enquiries system for its extremely prompt attention to callers.

But recently, when I wanted information about the service from Waterloo East to Greenwich, I was dismayed to get a recorded voice, which gave me information which was totally irrelevant to my enquiry. When I did finally get through, I was told there was a train every few minutes. When I got to Waterloo East, I checked the



**SURPRISE: Britain seems to have fewer dissatisfied rail passengers than other European countries or maybe their expectations are lower**  
NS Passenger Rail

timetable and found the service was half hourly.

For the first time NRES had given me incorrect information. Oh dear, when will organisations realise that saving money can be a false economy and can infuriate and exasperate their customers?

*Margaret Howard, 84 Park Ave East, Ewell, Epsom KT17 2PA*

## thetrainline.com

N V Read (Letters *Railwatch 97*) is not really correct in describing thetrainline.com as useful, even though it is indeed one which purports to sell train tickets.

A couple of weeks ago, I tried checking Derby-London over a weekend, coming back first thing on a Monday morning. Thetrainline.com refused to let me use the return half of a Saver ticket (£44) on the 07.25 from St Pancras, offering me instead an Open Return (£93).

Midland Mainline's website, the QJump website, and staff at Derby station all confirm that what I was trying to do was indeed allowed, and thetrainline.com was wrong. The latter, however, at first maintained they were right, and then said that it would "be raised at the next meeting regarding the website". Two weeks later, the website still has not changed.

This error may be minor, only affecting certain Derby-London journeys, but it is more likely symptomatic of a more far-reaching fares database inaccuracy. However, Midland Mainline appear not to be interested that their customers are

being overcharged (well, of course they wouldn't be!) but they seem also not to be interested that potential customers are being turned away by high prices.

So the moral is, if you do have to use thetrainline.com (or the related phone service), make sure you double-check with another source the information you are given!

*David Burbridge, 80 Grange Road, Alvaston, Derby DE24 0JY  
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## Wrong party

In *Railwatch 97* you printed a photograph of me taken 10 years ago walking along the disused rail line at Histon on the old Cambridge-St Ives railway. With me is Transport Minister Roger Freeman, Steve Wilkinson, the then Chairman of Railfuture and Tory MP James Paice.

You have quoted me as a Liberal Democrat Councillor. I was a Tory County Councillor. At no time was I or in my dreams ever a Liberal Democrat and have no wish to be associated with that shower.

*Neville Pritchard, 42 Manor Park, Histon, Cambridge CB4 9JT*

## Chiltern view

"Chiltern is an example to other train operators of what can be achieved" (Thames Valley Local Action, *Railwatch 96*). There is a lot of truth in that - but only if you happen to live beyond Ruislip. At stations between there and Marylebone, Chiltern

offer the worst suburban service in London, particularly at the two Sudbury stations which have a sparse badly timed smattering of peak-hour services, hardly any off-peak trains, and none at all on Saturdays or Sundays.

This is partly the fault of the Strategic Rail Authority, which has allowed Chiltern to extend its tentacles into lucrative long-distance markets at the expense of its core constituency.

Moreover, as Chiltern's reward for this strategy was a 20-year franchise, major changes to this situation seem unlikely in the foreseeable future. However, the London Transport Users Committee is pursuing the issue vigorously and is working with Chiltern to try and secure some improvements for the worst-served stations. Even a basic hourly all-day service would be a start.

*Graham Larkbey, 35 Carr Road, London E17  
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## Irresponsible?

I was impressed when I watched a mail train call at York station. The staff impressed me by unloading and loading at high speed. One train carried far more than any lorry could manage and the train was quieter than any lorry.

As mail will now be transferring to road, which is far less safe than rail, will the directors of Royal Mail be answerable if a Post Office vehicle causes the death of a member of the public? Will they go to jail as a result of their decision?

*Colin Palmer, 29 Stevens Close, Epsom, Surrey KT17 4RG*

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