



North West

By Trevor Bishop

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West Coast closure followed by timetable restrictions

The Cheadle Hulme-Colwich Junction closure did not end with the 28 September timetable change as planned, but the line opened a week later. The major stations' display systems seemed to think that the new timetable was in operation but in fact the summer timetable was continued for a further week. This obviously caused confusion for passengers.

We've also learned there will be problems resulting from diversions as a result of partial closure of the Crewe-Stafford route. Many First North Western Manchester-Stoke locals will be turned back at Macclesfield. This will leave lots of customers on many intermediate stations, who have been without trains for four months, still having to endure substitute buses.

The most devastating part of all is the revelation that the work that had been done was not up to the normal standard, and that more possessions will be needed to put it right. There will of course be continuing speed restrictions. Many expect Jarvis (the main contractor on the work) will get heavily penalised if it turns out they are responsible.

Funding for Burnley and Chorley station improvements

Lancashire County Council has secured help from the Rail Passenger Partnership fund for a new integrated bus and rail station at Burnley as well as improvements at Chorley rail station. It is also doing feasibility studies for other improvements at some rural stations.

Merseyrail in local hands

On 20 July, the Merseyrail network underwent a transformation that might just have consequences elsewhere on the network. The transfer from Strategic Rail Authority responsibility to local authority and the simultaneous award of a 25-year franchise to Serco/NS, is at the moment unique on the network. Some are talking about this being used as a model for other passenger transport executive areas.

AGM

The Railfuture branch AGM will be at the Stretton Hotel, Blackpool, on 7 February.

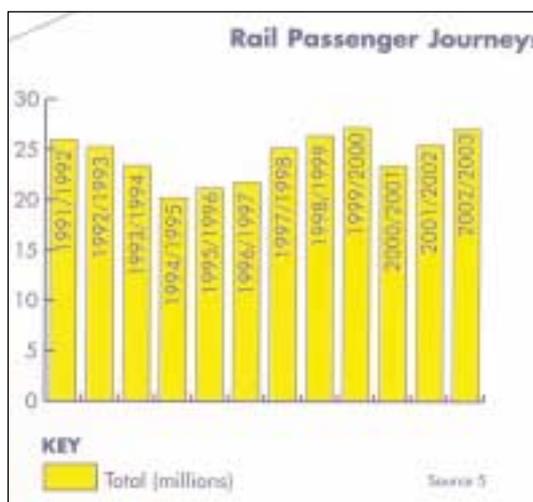
New rail user group for Cumbria

The Cumbrian Coastal route now has a new rail user group,

Rail life in the West Midlands

Trains play a key role in the West Midlands but as these statistics from Centro, the passenger transport executive, show, there is plenty of room for improvement. In its annual statistical report, Centro reveals that the largest item of spending for families is now motoring. The average family spends 15.6% of its income on motoring, 1% more than the national average. By contrast, the average family spends 1.8% of income on public transport fares, slightly less than the national average.

The number of rail journeys increased by 6.5% from 24.8million journeys in 2001-2 to 26.4million in 2002-3. But the costs of going by bus and train has soared over the past 15 years by much more than the retail price index and reliability figures are poor. If ticket prices were held down and trains ran to time, rail use would increase by a much greater amount.



KEY FACTS

AM Peak

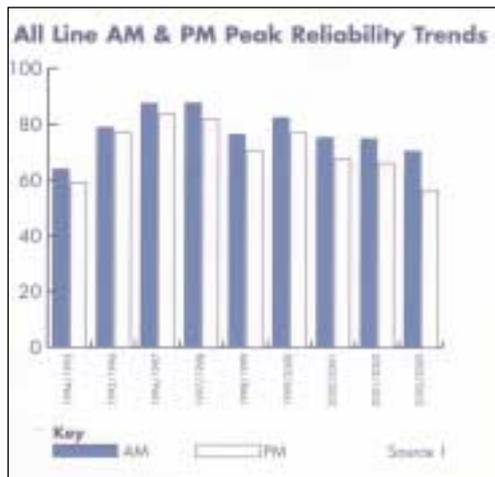
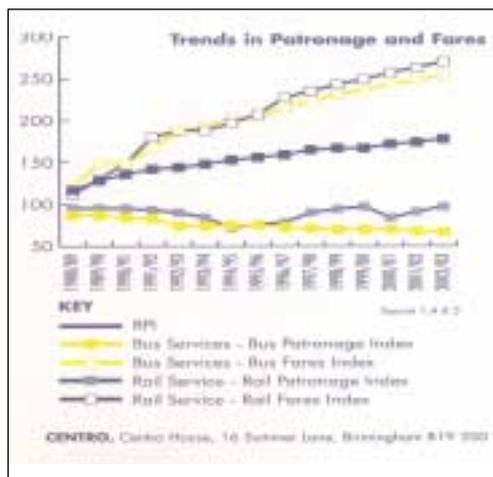
- Overall reliability 70.4%
- Most reliable line, Stourbridge 76.1%
- Least reliable line, Walsall 60.5%

PM Peak

- Overall reliability 56.4%
- Most reliable line, Shirley 69.8%
- Least reliable line, Wolverhampton 37.9%

Facilities

- 68 fully supported stations, and 4 partially supported
- Car park spaces and occupancy levels increased during 2002/2003
- Usage has decreased to 82% from 86%
- Stations with disabled access remains at 56
- 47 Stations have cycle parking facilities



On reliability, Centro reports the Stourbridge line was the most reliable during the morning peak (76% of trains on time) while Walsall was worst (60% on time). The Shirley line was most reliable in the evening peak (69%) while the Wolverhampton line was worst (37.9%)

based in Copeland. The group was formed in May and aims to protect, preserve and promote the line. Members receive a monthly newsletter that keeps them informed of developments and promotional offers.

Membership is growing all the time. There are monthly meetings and membership now totals 730. The group is known as the Copeland Rail Users Group and was launched at Ravensglass. Copeland MP Jack

Cunningham and First North Western were officially invited. The group will ask train operator First North Western to fill a two-hour gap in services each morning and is pushing for better train services from Millom to



Whitehaven. If anyone is interested in becoming a member, the chairman is Tony Potts, 5 Highfield Court, Hillcrest, Whitehaven, Cumbria CA28 6TR. Tel: 01946 69406. The secretary is D Smith. Tel: 01946 822055.

Midland Mainline service to London

The new Midland Mainline service between Manchester Piccadilly, Stockport, Leicester and London St Pancras began on 18 May. The full service of 14 trains each way (Monday to Saturday) started on 30 June. The fares are generally cheaper than on Virgin Trains. The £50 "any permitted route" Saver between Manchester and London is valid on both Virgin and Midland Mainline services. The "Route Chesterfield" Saver (which is valid on Midland Mainline only) is now £49. The first Midland Mainline train on which a Saver ticket is valid is the 07.47 Piccadilly to St Pancras (arrive 11.06) and passengers holding Saver tickets can return on the 19.00 from St Pancras (this compares with Virgin's first Saver train at 10.27 from Piccadilly!). The cheapest Midland Mainline fare is the £20 Capital return, which needs to be booked at least seven days in advance. Bookings and information on Midland Mainline services are available on 08457 125678 or at www.midlandmainline.com. The service was originally expected to continue until 24 June 2004, but it is now expected to continue until the September timetable change in 2004.

August engineering blockade at Longsight

The total engineering blockade that took place in the Longsight area at the end of August, originally scheduled to occur from 23 August to 31 August, was at the last minute changed to restore weekday services in the central week (26-29 August). It is not certain why the full blockade was cancelled but it is believed it was because the signalling system has not yet received Health and Safety Executive approval. This was for like-for-like renewal of track and signalling equipment between Ardwick Junction (exclusive) and Slade Lane Junction (exclusive). The Buxton-Manchester, and peak hour services to and from the mid-Cheshire line and Crewe-Manchester ran to/from Victoria from Stockport (via Denton-Ashton Moss).

The next phase of blockades is now in full swing, with closure of the Crewe-Cheadle Hulme and Manchester Airport sec-

tions over weekends, with replacement bus services, and off-peak weekday closure of three out of four lines between Crewe and Stafford. Trains are diverted along the newly electrified Kidsgrove-Crewe route. Services are being maintained on the Cheadle Hulme to Stockport section on Saturdays, at the same times as if they were going to and from Crewe or Alderly Edge, but the trains are then being sent empty to turn back at Macclesfield. A seven-week blockade of Stockport is expected next year to enable the new layout and signalling to be commissioned.

Editor's apology: Sorry to Trevor and to the North West branch for not including earlier contributions.

Devon and Cornwall

By Stuart Walker
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Newquay line

It was reported in the *Western Morning News* on 30 October that the use of all Devon and Cornwall branch lines has increased. The largest rise has been a 22% increase in passengers on the Newquay to Par line. Railfuture considers that numbers would increase still further if the railway could be diverted to run directly to St Austell via St Dennis. The original idea was to release the trackbed on the old route for use in upgrading the A30 trunk road across Goss Moor. The money saved would be used on the new railway route, but now the Highways Agency is supporting a £51-million scheme to build a new dual carriageway road to the north of Goss Moor, with a public inquiry expected next year.

SRA axes RPP schemes in Devon and Cornwall

The Strategic Rail Authority's decision to cease the Rail Passenger Partnership Scheme has meant that many schemes for Devon and Cornwall may not take place. Schemes that have been axed include access improvements at Exeter St Davids station and refurbishment of eight stations on the Exmouth line. Proposed capacity improvements to the Falmouth Branch line, also dependent on Objective One money, will not receive match funding from the SRA. Instead, Cornwall County Council proposes using its own capital monies to progress this scheme. However, the Falmouth branch improvements now looks less likely, as they depend on the train operators running more

services, something which the SRA is unlikely to support and the county council is unlikely to afford. The SRA has confirmed that schemes already approved will continue, and the plan to redouble the Probus to Burngullow section of the Cornish main line, singled in the 1980s, should still happen. The SRA has confirmed it will support this scheme, as it considers it an important part of its strategy to improve punctuality. However, this depends on whether the scheme is successful in gaining Objective One funding, applied for in July.

East Devon local plan

Our ideas to protect specific disused railways in the revised deposit version of the East Devon Local Plan (September 2003) have been rejected. However, a positive note is that the district council is proposing a specific policy covering all the former railway routes. Proposed Policy TA4B states: "Planning permission will not be granted for development on undeveloped sections of disused railway lines which have potential for re-use as a transportation/recreation route,

if it would prejudice the future ability of the route to perform this function." It's not as specific as we would like, but if this much had been done 25 years ago we would not have lost the potential to reopen routes such as Exmouth to Budleigh Salterton.

East Anglia

By Nicholas Dibben
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New pro-rail web-site for Cambridge launched

A Lib Dem Cambridgeshire County Councillor, Alex Reid, has become increasingly worried that the proposed Huntingdon to Cambridge Guided Bus Scheme is deeply unsatisfactory in environmental and strategic terms. He has set-up a new web-site: <http://www.cambrail.com> to propose a rail-based alternative. The concept put forward complements the ideas of CAST-IRON put forward in the last edition of *Railwatch* but is aiming for a more intensive service from the start. The branch has provided information of other rail schemes and details of pre-

Green Breakdown Cover HOW?



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Local action



rail schemes and details of previous work done on the St Ives line to assist this campaign.

Success for Cambridge to Norwich service

The first year of the new direct passenger service between Cambridge and Norwich has carried over half a million users, nearly a third above the predicted number. A regular hourly service with new trains, on-board refreshments and increasing road congestion are seen as the reasons for the success. Surveys carried out by train operator Anglia Railways suggests that nearly half (44%) of the passengers previously made the journey by car. The success has been widely recognised with a number of awards including the Business Development Award organised by a regional newspaper.

Rail users meet in Ely

Around 80 rail users representing Railfuture, various rail user and environmental groups and regular passengers, met in Ely for the Rail Passengers Council for Eastern England conference. RPCEE chairman Derek Langslow outlined the current issues facing the region's railways and the work the organisation has been doing on station surveys. Chris Austin from the Strategic Rail Authority outlined the *Case for Rail* and highlighted the improvements that had taken place on the railways. Using Ely as an example, he showed the improvements to train service frequency and reduced journey times that had taken place to all destinations over the past 20 years.

RPC national chairman Stewart Francis urged delegates to unite behind the case for rail being put forward by the SRA and noted that the goodwill of the public towards the railways was fast running out. He also called for railway performance targets to be more passenger focused. Delegates were also asked to indicate their priorities for improving train services and station facilities within the region.

East Midlands

By Anthony Kay

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Central Trains One Year On

Last November Nick Brown, managing director of Central Trains, addressed a public meeting organised by Railfuture East Midlands at a time when Central Trains' performance was at a low ebb. He challenged us to invite him back in 12 months' time so that he could update us on improvements,



After the success of Hull Trains – Britain's first open access train operator – in running services on the East Coast main line, there are plans by an operator called Grand Central to operate trains over the Pennines from Manchester to Newcastle.

The Strategic Rail Authority is reported to be sceptical of the plans to bring a bit of glamour back to the railway by using refurbished InterCity 125 trains because it may take passengers away from existing services.

But Grand Central is confident that by using trains which have an unrivalled reputation for comfort, versatility and ride quality, they will attract new business. It will concentrate on providing excellent first class facilities and plans to have a proper buffet with a wide range of food. It will also have space for 12 cycles per train.

The trolley service on many existing trains leaves a lot to be desired and a significant market (cyclists who want to travel with their bikes) find existing facilities woefully inadequate.

Grand Central wants supporters of their plans to contact the Rail Regulator who will make the final decision as to whether their trains will be allowed a licence for trans-Pennine tracks.

Grand Central aims to operate eight trains a day with 268 seats, serving Rochdale, Wakefield, Leeds, York and Darlington. The trains will be routed through the reopened station at Brighouse which Yorkshire Railfuture believes could be a railhead for park-and-ride drivers from the M62 motorway. Grand Central aims to operate without subsidy.

More information: www.grandcentralrail.com

The Rail Regulator is at 1 Waterhouse Square, 138-142 Holborn, London EC1N 2TQ, or contact cct@orr.gsi.gov.uk

and we have taken up the challenge. He is speaking at 14.00 on Saturday 15 November at the YMCA, East Street, Leicester.

No trams for Northampton

Consultants for Northampton County Council have said that the costs of a Rapid Transit system for the town and for a new railway station south of the M1 could not be justified in terms of the benefits that would be provided. Several road schemes were also thrown out by the consultants. The schemes were part of an £80million package of measures proposed by the council.

Thames

By Chris Wright

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East-West Rail

The provision of a service between Oxford and Bedford remains alive. The East West Rail Consortium has continued discussions with the Strategic Rail Authority and was to submit new funding bids following the SRA review of the potential for freight on the route. It was hoped the SRA would work with the Government and the expansion plans for the region to find a way forward.

The branch chairman attended a meeting in Islip to discuss the formation of an Oxford to Bicester Rail Action Committee which it was hoped to launch on 12 November.

Tony Baldry MP has agreed to look into the lack of obvious progress on restoring the service and may try to raise the issue in the Commons.

The chairman also attended a meeting organised by Milton Keynes Chamber of Commerce where Lord Rooker spoke about the expansion of Milton Keynes. He waxed lyrical about the road schemes going ahead and acknowledged the possible potential of rail. The meeting, however, made it clear that the Oxford-Cambridge line must have a part in the plans. Lord Rooker said this had been made very clear and Aylesbury Vale Council had pressed the case for the Aylesbury link. The chamber and local Institute of Directors emphasised the point. Lord Rooker said that government departments would need to bring forward schemes and recognise the need for infrastructure. His department (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister) had funds to help develop schemes.

We are heartened by the news from Anglia Railways, where the first phase of reopening Norwich to Cambridge has seen



44% of users from cars and estimates exceeded by 30%. Well done the SRA but what about Phase 2?

Aylesbury Vale District Plan is being revised. Stations at Winslow, Calvert and Quainton, North Aylesbury and Stoke Mandeville are proposed.

It seems after years of campaigning and the formation of OBRAC, the message has got home. It is shameful that the SRA cannot be more positive and pro-active publicly.

Next branch meeting in December has a speaker from Thames Trains on marketing and customer care.

North East

By Peter Wood

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Alnmouth

Colin Harris from Virgin Cross Country gave a stimulating talk to our September branch meeting held in Durham. Using the improved calling pattern at Alnmouth he drew attention to the increased patronage that has already taken place. He made the point that while there are still seats available on the trains, the station's capacity to handle passengers is now exhausted. His argument was that further marketing of the service would be inappropriate until passenger facilities at the station had been increased with more car parking, better access, longer booking hours and better bus links to Alnwick. We understood Alnwick District Council, among others, is addressing the issues raised.

Hartlepool

The Strategic Rail Authority has decided not to extend funding for the additional trains which have been running for three years between Sunderland and Hartlepool, along the Durham coast, so halving the daily service. This led to a scathing attack upon the SRA by the region's Rail Passengers Committee with a press release headlined "Scant Regard for Plight of Region's passengers. Train services on Durham Coast line slashed by half and more to come". The RPC was also angry at the lack of publicity given to the cutback. The branch fully supports the RPC in its stand

Tees-Tyne services

Worse is in store for the region from the SRA. It has now instructed Arriva Trains Northern to stop running its Tees-Tyne service (from Saltburn and Middlesbrough via Darlington and Durham to Newcastle. This will halve the daily service within the region -



This is Newquay, Cornwall, one of the seaside resorts in Britain lucky enough to have a train service. Pictured is one of the through trains that bring thousands of holidaymakers to the resort.

Amazingly instead of celebrating the fact, some "experts" think people should not have the choice of travelling to Newquay by rail. Jonathan Tyler of Passenger Transport Networks, based hundreds of miles away in Leeds, Yorkshire, dismisses the Newquay branch as "sad" and advocates replacing the train with a bus from Bodmin Parkway.

It's really sad that after years of planners and consultants depriving people of real choices, they can't admit to their own mistakes. Another sad fact is that too many people feel they have no choice but to use their cars. Present them with a bus and they will back away. Give them a train and they will get on it.

A railway will always be able to run faster, more safely and with more comfort. It's the transport mode of the future. Climb aboard Jonathan.

another of the SRA's bright ideas to encourage more rail use!

The RPC has again protested and two user groups in the region, Coastliners and the Saltburn Line group, together with the branch, are organising objections.

The result of this cutback, due from the commencement of the summer 2004 timetable, is that the only direct link between Tees and Tyne will be the longer journey via the Durham coast.

We appreciate capacity on the East Coast main line is at a premium but were the Stillington freight branch from Ferryhill south-east to Stockton to be upgraded for passenger use and the Leamside line (from Ferryhill to Pelaw) to be

reopened, the services could continue without needing access to the main line at all. The added benefit of this approach would be the equivalent of a four-track railway all the way from Northallerton to Newcastle with ample scope for freight, regional passenger and East Coast main line diversionary services.

Yorkshire

By Peter Davies

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Leeds-Settle and Carlisle

Following the withdrawal of the direct rail service from Leeds to Glasgow, Arriva Trains Northern have introduced a locomotive-hauled service. The train is serviced and maintained at Healey Mills, and operates

empty stock to Knaresborough where it forms an early morning commuter train into Leeds via Harrogate. At 09.47 the train departs for Carlisle arriving at 12.15.

The return journey commences at 13.31 and arrives in Leeds at 16.03. A new return commuter train has been introduced at 17.43, and the locomotive-hauled train operates this service to Knaresborough. This is a private investment by Arriva Trains Northern and should prove very popular with visitors during the summer months. The service is on trial for a year, and does not operate on Saturdays. The service which operates on a Saturday departs at 09.49 and returns at 15.51 and is formed of a Class 158 Sprinter.

A new departure has been added to the existing timetable. A Class 156 Sprinter departs at 16.19 arriving in Carlisle at 18.56. The train returns south at 19.36 omitting Garsdale and Dent stations in order to take up the path of the existing 21.00 departure from Ribbleshead on Mondays to Fridays. The introduction of these trains is to be applauded, despite the loss of the direct rail service to Glasgow Central.

Skipton

The feasibility study into the reopening of the 11-mile Skipton-Colne line, commissioned by Lancashire and North

Over-privileged heads in the clouds

Academics who need to travel between Oxford and Cambridge are reportedly so disenchanted with the existing unsatisfactory road and rail links that they plan to use a charter airline which began operating between the two cities in November.

Railfuture has been campaigning for years for the rail line to be reopened and it is an indictment of both the Government and the Strategic Rail Authority that they have allowed this project – which is relatively easy to implement – to fall by the wayside. It is also an indictment of the supposed academic power houses that they have not swung their undoubted weight behind rail – the only environmentally satisfactory mode of travel between the two "ivory towers" which are 70 miles apart.



Yorkshire County Councils, was published on 8 September, 2003. Although no money is currently available, the project is considered feasible and could open up new Trans-Pennine travel opportunities such as Leeds/Bradford-Skipton-Burnley-Blackburn-Manchester/Manchester Airport, and Leeds/Bradford-Skipton-Burnley-Blackburn-Preston-Windermere.

Leeds

The West Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive believes that rail passenger numbers could be increased by more than half over the next 10 years if station facilities are improved, and new rolling stock is provided. A survey has revealed that local residents would prefer better public transport, rather than more roads.

Lincolnshire

By Brian Hastings

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Finningley airport proposal

Branch officers met Yorkshire branch at Doncaster on 20 October to discuss how to ensure that the airport - now approved by the Government - includes a rail link. The airport, for freight and passengers, will be adjacent to the joint line which has only a basic service of five trains in each direction at present.

The former station at Finningley is not suitable for the airport. A basic new station could be built west of Awkley level crossing on the down line. Up trains would have to cross over. An optional long-term plan would be for a spur to the rail terminal, doing away with the need for a connecting bus but this might not be convenient for rail travellers from Lincolnshire.

It was resolved that Yorkshire should be the lead Railfuture branch, contacting Peel Airports, the Rail Passenger Council for North East, Yorkshire Forward, Arriva Trains and the Strategic Rail Authority. Lincolnshire branch will contact Rail Passengers Committee for Eastern England and Central Trains because the existing rail service is in their territories. Railfuture North Midlands may also want to be involved.

Brigg line revival

The scenic mothballed line serving Gainsborough Central, Kirton Lindsey and Brigg is to come back to life. Currently the Gainsborough Trent Junction to Wrawby Junction route only operates on Saturday for a passenger service of three trains



A new generation of customer-friendly ticket machines are under test at stations in England. They are designed to be used by disabled people but should make buying a ticket easier for everyone. Designers had to give special thought to the angle of the touch screens, the position of money and credit card slots as well as ticket and change dispensers. The machines, made by Ascom - with input from designers Hothouse Product Development Partners - are at Gatwick Airport, Marylebone, Haslemere, Wokingham, East Croydon, Haywards Heath, King's Cross, Elstree and Loughborough.

each way. But it will be used for diverted freight when there is a three-week blockade on the Doncaster-Cleethorpes route. Network Rail will not commit itself to use the line but it could happen, given support from the Strategic Rail Authority. Singling of the route in the 1980s has however limited the overall capacity of the line.

Overcrowding problems

The success of the railway in encouraging more people on to rural rail services is remarkable but the problem facing Central Trains is now overcrowding. While Central Trains has dealt with the problem on the Nottingham-Skegness corridor, class 153s are still the backbone of local services on the Joint Line and on the Nottingham-Lincoln-Gainsborough corridor. Overcrowding occurs between Sleaford and Lincoln, Spalding and Peterborough as well as between Market Rasen and Lincoln.

Market Rasen transport hub

The branch wants to see a new transport interchange developed at Market Rasen, offering a seamless transfer from rail to road. Sadly the present station

and adjacent land presents a sorrowful picture. Strenuous attempts are being made to bring together all relevant parties at local councils, county and regional levels.

Undergrounding

The 2001 proposal to put Lincoln's rail infrastructure underground received a cool response from Railfuture, pointing out the impracticalities and the high cost. Our extensive briefing showed that there would be no benefit for rail. Lincoln's road traffic problems could and should be dealt with by pedestrianisation and proper road planning. Unfortunately Railfuture believes there are still "forces at work" which are trying to take the idea forward. We plan a new briefing on the issue next year.

Freight initiative

Railfuture was invited to a freight quality partnership meeting on 25 September at Grimsby called by North East Lincolnshire Unitary Council. Branch chairman Brian Hastings put our long-term and short-term aspirations for rail. There was one other rail advocate (from EWS) while the rest were

from the road lobby. It is important that other branches maintain a watching brief for freight quality partnerships which are being set up nationwide and look at freight issues on a county basis. Make sure Railfuture is invited to be on the partnership.

Keadby closure

Buses replaced trains for most of November when work on two bridges on the line from Thorpe Junction to Scunthorpe was carried out.

Skegness fares

Railfuture and the South East Lincolnshire Travellers Association is calling for relaxation of restrictions on Saver and day return fares from Skegness, Boston, and Skegness to the Midlands. The Rail Passengers Committee for Eastern England and Central Trains have agreed to look at the problems.

Congratulations

Central Trains deserve praise for a series of new guides profiling major cities. The Lincoln version is particularly good and highlights attractions and lists cheap fares, including group save tickets targeted at car drivers.