

Looking to the future

By Mike Crowhurst
Railfuture chairman

I come to the job of chairman with humility and trepidation at a challenging time.

Let me start by paying tribute to the retiring chairman Peter Lawrence, who has guided us through five difficult years, to the retiring president, Dr Michael Caton, who has served for over a decade as president and prior to that as chairman, and also to Elisabeth Jordan, who retires after a decade as membership officer.

Peter Lawrence now takes over as president, and Dr Caton joins the ranks of vice-presidents. We are also appointing a number of other new vice presidents, including retiring Rail Passenger Committee chairs Wendy Toms and Jim Beale, journalist Rhodri Clarke, and long-serving Railfuture member George Boyle.

The vice-presidents are our equivalent of the House of Lords. Just as there are two types of Lords (hereditaries and life), so our VPs come in two types – the “aldermanate”, or working VPs who have given sterling service and who will continue active if reduced involvement, and the “nomenclatura” – politicians, retired senior railway managers or Rail Passengers Committee chairs, who lend us their name and their support but usually less active involvement, with some notable exceptions.

The national executive also changes. Vice-chairman Ray King and treasurer Tony Sheward remain in situ. Elisabeth Jordan is replaced by David Harby as membership officer.

Guy Hardy had already stood down and is replaced by Rowland Pittard (also from Wales). The other newcomers are Trevor Jones (one-time computer officer) and Howard Thomas.

We are now a limited company, to safeguard our legal status. This means that the national executive becomes the board, and the executive members become the directors.

Every paid-up member is a shareholder, with part of the membership subscription representing your share. We do not intend issuing share certificates, but membership cards are available on request to the membership officer if you need them.

We are registered as Railway Development Society Ltd, but we have also registered Railfuture Ltd, and will continue to campaign as Railfuture.

Admin Officer John Lee becomes company secretary and Robin Fennell will continue to advise on constitutional matters. New letterheads are being produced, and there will need to be some

other changes, for example to the financial autonomy of branches, but ordinary members should not notice much significant difference.

Peter Lawrence will continue to handle our media relations, and he and Michael Caton will remain our principal public faces in high-profile dealings with politicians.

My own main interest is in policy work, and I intend to continue this, especially as changes in the structure of the rail industry are again on the agenda.

We have the opportunity to influence this process through dialogue and well-argued contributions, rather than confrontation. But we have to set our own house in order, and not waste our energies on internal strife. That is my first priority.

Then we must draw in more new members and widen our appeal to women, to all ethnic groups and especially to the young.

We have to set our finances on a firmer footing and we have to recruit and retain some professional staff. All this has been said many times.

Our branch and committee structure is generally good, our internal communications are improving, as is our media presence.

But Government policy still leaves much to be desired, the motoring lobby is still strong and the aviation lobby is growing in power too.

We are not alone. If we work closely with friends in like-minded bodies, we can win, but it is a long uphill struggle and there is much lost ground to recover.

We now have a membership promotion and fund-raising officer, an officer manager and new people to look after the Lottery (from next January) and the annual draw. We still need a sales and publications officer.

In the longer term we could do with a full-time campaigns officer, which post has been vacant since Alix Stredwick left, and ideally someone to organise our conferences, but these will depend on first securing a solid longterm income.

Meanwhile offers of voluntary help are always welcome. I hope to get round to visiting more of you on your home ground over the coming months, especially in those areas less familiar to me, but this may have to wait until I qualify for my senior railcard in the autumn of next year, unless we get a national railcard before then! But I am afraid you will all have to accept that I am not wired for the “information superhighway”, nor do I boast a mobile or an answerphone, and for various practical reasons none of this is likely to change in the foreseeable

future. I depend principally on “snail” mail and the “dog and bone”, but I do use a word processor and a fax (by prior arrangement only, please), and I am available on the phone at most reasonable hours.

Opportunity to make £1,000s

It's a great shame Railfuture has been unable to find anyone to take on the role of sales officer for the past couple of years, writes Tony Smale.

As a former holder of this post, I can say that it is quite challenging, but nevertheless interesting and enjoyable.

Through the sale of books and other merchandise, there is the potential to contribute around £2,000 profit each year towards Railfuture's campaigns, and to spread the word about rail to a wider public.

You may have noted from the treasurer's balance sheet, just published, that there is well in excess of £3,000 worth of stock held in storage – what an opportunity for someone to get cracking and make some much-needed cash for Railfuture!

Members may recall that Martin Ball and I shared the various tasks of buying, selling, advertising and mailing out the goods in the 1990s, and our experience is that “Sales” is well suited to a small team-working together or perhaps a married couple.

So how do you feel about being Railfuture's new Sales Officer or one of the team? Some of the old hands would be happy to help you get started! Please phone or email me if you would like to know what is involved: tony_smale@lineone.net or ring 01329 843356.

Case for Rail

A new booklet entitled *The Case for Rail* has just been published by Railfuture. This is packed full of arguments for rail campaigners and statistics to back up arguments – enlightenment for the unconverted!

For instance the original TGV route from Paris to Lyon now carries 65% of all journeys, with 30% by road and only 5% by air.

The Tokyo to Osaka Shinkansen line transports 362,000 people a day, the equivalent of a jumbo jet every two minutes.

Written by Norman Bradbury and edited by Keith Dyal, it is available for £2.75 including post and packing from Railfuture, Room 206, The Colourworks, 2 Abbot Street, London E8 3DP. Please make cheques payable to Railfuture.

Railwatch

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is edited by Robert Stevens and Ray King, 4 Christchurch Square, London E9 7HU

Tel 020 8985 8548

Fax 020 8985 8212

editor@railwatch.org.uk

To subscribe to Railwatch, send £5 (cheque payable to Railwatch) to: Alan Cocker, 11 Franklin Road, Ipswich, Suffolk IP3 9DX

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Contact: Robert Stevens
info@railfuture.org.uk
020 7249 5533

Printed by Print-Out,
High Street, Histon,
Cambridge CB4 4JD
Tel: 01223 232709

 is an

independent voluntary campaign group.

Room 206, The Colourworks,
2 Abbot Street, London E8 3DP
Tel 020 7249 5533

Fax 020 7254 6777

Website <http://www.railfuture.org.uk>

General enquiries: John Lee,
The Birches, Eye Lane, East
Rudham, Norfolk PE31 8RH
Tel 01485 528088 (and fax)
john.lee@rdsadmin.freewire.co.uk

Media enquiries:

Chairman Peter Lawrence,
3 Hellesdon Road, Norwich
NR6 5EB Tel 01603 627217
peter.lawrence@paston.co.uk

Chairman: Mike Crowhurst, 33
Station Court, Aberford Road,
Garforth, Leeds LS25 2QQ
Tel 0113 286 4844

New members always welcome

Membership: £18 per year.
Pensioners, students and
unemployed £10. User groups,
community and parish councils
£18 or £25 to include 10 copies
of Railwatch plus other relevant
publications. Other local
authorities and companies £35.
Families £2 extra per member,
after £18.

New members and
membership queries:
Railfuture, 6 Carral Close,
Lincoln, LN5 9BD
david.harby@ntworld.com