

Dales link needed

I had to smile on reading the article in *Railwatch* 99 headed The Age of the Train which mentioned how Arriva was promoting travel into the Yorkshire Dales.

There are hundreds of people in the North West of England who want to visit the Dales by train but are prevented from doing so as there is no direct service through to the Settle-Carlisle line.

There should be at least an hourly service on the disused section of the former Lancashire and Yorkshire route between Clitheroe and Hellifield. I fail to see why First North Western and Arriva Trains Northern cannot get their heads together to start such a service. It would certainly pay for itself and give people in the North West the chance to walk in the Yorkshire Dales.

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Ditch Labour

Having sent off the "Way to Go" postcard (that came with *Railwatch* 99) to my MP, I received an excellent letter from him extolling the virtues of the railways. I have now responded by asking him why he is in the Labour party.

If every member of the organisations in the excellent "Way to Go" campaign voted Green, the only party with a sane transport policy), we would soon see a change in policy. Every member of Railfuture who is a Labour party member (and in Scotland their Lib-Dem poodles) should resign in protest against disastrous pro-road and air and anti-rail policies.

Any rail passenger who votes Labour is a fool and any Railfuture member or rail worker who votes Labour is a traitor.

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Beware Treasury

Thank you for *Railwatch* 99, another excellent edition, but I do have a persistent niggle about the recurring references to "mistakes of previous administrations".

I am old enough to recall the railway nationalisation of 1948 with its mistaken idea that one size fits all. If it moves, paint it black or red. Let's build standard types. But no, steam is bad, diesel good. Let's build lots of prototypes. The waste resultant upon such short-term measures was colossal: much of the workforce was deeply concerned. So, let's cut back on waste.

Enter Beeching: exeunt hundreds of jobs. And currently our rail system suffers from crass decisions, made by people fed misleading or erroneous statistics, lies, not facts. Hence the loss of the Woodhead route, whose capacity would be invaluable now; and the one main line built to the continental loading gauge, the Great Central. On the day that I am penning this, the real enemy

Your letters

of the proponents of rail is once again made clear: the Treasury, not Mr Prescott, champion of town centres, has ruled that out-of-town hypermarkets are to be encouraged, preferably adjacent to existing by-passes.

So, even more road traffic will result: the "green" dream will become, like electrification or branch line re-openings, even more distant. So, there's the enemy: somehow the mandarins at the Treasury must be convinced of rail's key role in the nation's life. Do none of them commute by rail and discern the deficiencies in the system?

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Democratic answer

I read with interest the reported views of Rail Regulator Tom Winsor in *Railwatch* 99, calling for five and 10-year planning of railway schemes.

I have been a chartered town planner for nearly 20 years. During this period, there has been a considerable improvement in the way British town planning has addressed the likely transport effects of new developments, although there is still some way to go in matching rhetoric with reality.

Housing, shopping and employment are being provided in more appropriate forms than was the case in the 1980s.

Unfortunately there has been much less progress with the associated transport, without which private car travel seems likely to go on increasing for ever and a day.

One reason for this is that changes to planning legislation don't really cost very much, whereas major improvements to transport involve real money.

But the issue isn't just about who is in control of the money and what their priorities are. For example, it is difficult to see any connection in some areas between the land use and transport policies of local councils and the investment policies of the Strategic Rail Authority.

Sometimes these seem to be in direct conflict, such as the repeated "blocking" of reasonable proposals for new lines and stations.

An apparent inability to deliver rail schemes which, in Fawltyesque terms, are "bl**ding obvious" has created a sense of disillusion with railways among many local councillors and officers.

For these reasons I am in favour of transferring responsibility for most railway passenger services to elected regional governments. These already exist in Scotland and Wales, and may soon be appearing in parts of England.

Railway policy needs to be spatially, rather than commercially focused, recognising the needs and aspirations of real places.

Given that regional bodies have, or will have, overall responsibility for land use planning, economic, social and environmental policies within their areas, they are in a unique position to deliver the "joined up" railway policy that is lacking at present.

The likely alternative feared by Peter Rayner – more Treasury control – would probably set the country back further still.

As Rail Regulator Tom Winsor observes, "it is the role of government to make decisions about what kind of transport we want for the benefit of the community – and that includes the wider community which benefits from transport links". Quite so.

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Beck bettered

I was pleased to read the article in *Railwatch* 99 extolling the virtues of facilitating interchanges between nearby stations on separate lines and thus making the overall system far more useful and user-friendly.

The tragedy is that we seem to be doing so little in his regard.

A classic example is the close proximity at West Hampstead of Thameslink, North London Line and Tube.

Interchange between them requires a walk along a busy narrow street, and having to negotiate traffic lights and pedestrian crossing, when geographically the platforms are quite close.

Surely a covered pedestrian link, perhaps an underground passage, would not cost a fortune and would make interchanging much easier.

Such connections would be made much more obvious if the transport operators would revive the 1960s area folding map London Transport Systems. It overlaid various tourist features with colour-coded Tube lines and the rail network. It showed the inter-relationship between the stations and destinations, better than the much-admired Beck Tube diagram.

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Progress or what?

I have had several pleasant journeys from Manchester Piccadilly to South Wales but what a journey I had from Port Talbot on one occasion.

Part of the problem was at Cardiff where I was waiting for my train to Manchester. When I checked with an official, he said: "The

Manchester train has just gone from this platform!"

Trains had been announced for Gloucester and another destination, but not Manchester.

I had another half an hour to wait as a result, as did a group of other prospective passengers.

For a series of reasons, by the time we reached Stockport, we were two hours late where I got off and took a taxi home, rather than be even later by going on to Manchester Piccadilly. That evening, I had a meeting to chair. I was not at my best.

Of course I sent off a complaint form to Virgin Trains who have previously sent me £10 vouchers as compensation. This time, there was no result. Is this progress?

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Paris lessons

Philip James's article about links on the London Underground in *Railwatch* 99 made me look at the Paris Metro map which I find more handy, partly because it also shows the RER lines while the Tube map leaves out Thameslink, for example.

I recently stayed at a hotel just by La Motte Picquet with its three Metro lines and found that for travel in Paris the weekly Carte Orange is a bargain, for use on both buses and the Metro.

The Paris system seems not to be so directed towards the centre as the Underground.

*George Atkinson, 3 Romeland,
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Step back

After travelling on a new Virgin Voyager from Birmingham to Edinburgh recently, I concluded that they are several steps back in time from the standards of the InterCity 125s which I would use given any choice in the matter.

On the Voyager, we sat against a bulkhead with no view out in backwards facing seats.

Luggage provision was clearly inadequate. The toilets were slow to operate, and claustrophobic. Why do designers insist on complicated electronic controls on toilet doors when simple mechanical levers would be more suitable?

If only the designers had produced two new power cars and then retained the existing design of carriage, I would find travel more comfortable.

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