

Local action



North Wales

By James Harris
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Good news

At the end of October members of Railfuture in North Wales held a meeting in Flint. James Harris was elected branch secretary and Ted Evans branch chairman and treasurer. Other members to serve on the rejuvenated branch committee would be most welcome. A number of issues were raised and action agreed, including the items below.

Cancellations

The branch is to ask Arriva Trains Wales how and when it plans to end the serious problem of cancelled trains on the North Wales Coast line. One Railfuture member reported that delayed Manchester-Llandudno workings were being turned around short at Llandudno Junction, to save time. This leaves passengers for Llandudno, a major resort for tourists and conference, having to make their way by taxi or bus for the last three miles.

Conwy Valley line

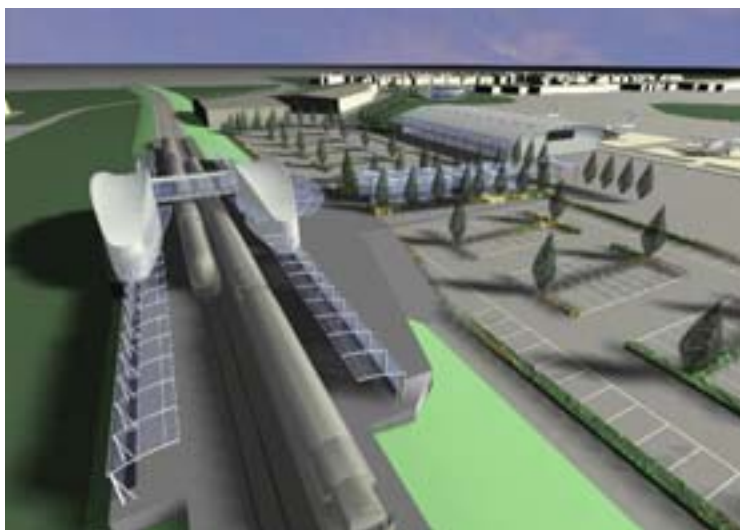
Concerns were raised about a negative attitude from some Conwy councillors towards the proposed Conwy Valley slate trains. This delayed scheme is intended to carry waste slate from Blaenau Ffestiniog to England, and the alternative being suggested is road haulage along the A5 through Llangollen and other communities. Railfuture is to express its support for the rail proposal to the council, stressing the environmental advantages of rail. We will also point out that investment in better signalling for the branch for the slate trains could make passenger services more economical to run, especially on winter Sundays when the branch is closed.

Airport services

North Wales is one of the few regions of the UK still without any direct trains to an airport. Railfuture will ask Andrew Davies, the Transport Minister at the Welsh Assembly, to begin negotiations over extending the current Llandudno-Manchester workings the short extra distance to Manchester Airport, and for direct trains between North Wales and Liverpool via the Halton Curve to serve the new South Liverpool Parkway station (for John Lennon Airport) as well as Liverpool.

Shotton

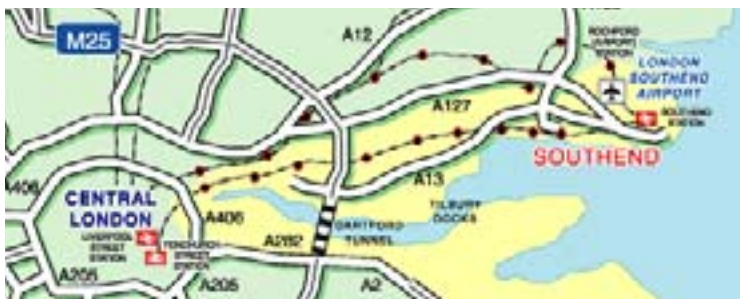
The situation at Shotton station is a disgrace, both in terms of the train services provided and the facilities. It serves a bigger population than many other stations in North Wales but has only an hourly service on both the main line and the Wrexham-Bidston line. The smaller town of Flint has recently gained some Virgin Trains services to London, but Shotton has not. Enormous traffic jams regularly plague the area but there is no attempt to



Multi-million pound plans for a new terminal and rail station at Southend airport are aimed at allowing the airport to handle 300,000 passengers a year and for bigger jets to fly in.

Details of the plan were presented to Rochford Council in October although outline planning permission for the station was agreed five years ago.

An airport spokesman told the local paper: "We are pleased to be in this position after a lot of hard work. There is a lot of excitement surrounding these plans."



publicise the congestion-free train service from Shotton. Railfuture hopes to work with the Wrexham-Birkenhead Rail Users' Association to highlight the potential of Shotton station as an interchange between two inter-regional rail routes and between rail, bus and taxi. The first action should be a giant poster on the railway bridge over Shotton High Street urging motorists to park and ride!

Lincolnshire

By Brian Hastings
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Franchise speculation

The branch will be contacting the Strategic Rail Authority following news that the Central Trains franchise will not be renewed in 2006. We will seize the opportunity to stress the importance of Lincolnshire's rail services and ensure that any new franchise delivers a better rail service in the county. Central Trains has appeared to treat Lincolnshire as an end-of-the-line peripheral operation. This attitude must change in the future and Lincoln should be given a key role in operating rail services.

New station for Misterton

Railfuture is swinging its support

behind a "rural renaissance" group campaigning for a new station at Misterton, six miles north of Gainsborough on the Lincoln-Doncaster line. The village lost its rail service 37 years ago but the group was inspired by news that Finnerley station – eight miles along the line towards Doncaster – may reopen to serve the international Robin Hood Airport which will open in May to serve the Doncaster-Sheffield area.

Speed-up

Railfuture lobbying of both Arriva and First Group aimed at removing the temporary speed limits affecting TransPennine services on the Cleethorpes-Doncaster line has paid off with the removal of most of the restrictions. Now work has started to stabilise canal banks near Medge Hall crossing, which has forced speed restrictions on the adjacent rail line. Once water seepage has been stopped, the trackbed can be strengthened.

Fares "business"

Central Trains' policy of axing cheap day return fares over 50 miles has led to fury among rail users. In one case the £11.90 day return fare from Peterborough to Birmingham has increased by £20. Central Trains sent along a business development director to justify the indefensible

decision at a rail users meeting in Cambridge on 21 September. He promised to "monitor" the situation and "look at it" again if it "adversely affected the business". This businesslike response begs questions about how much public subsidy is and should be paid to Central Trains, which is planning to axe more cheap day return tickets in January.

Lincoln market

Railfuture has urged Central Trains to beef up train formations for the three-day Christmas market in Lincoln from 3-5 December. We are hoping the operator can hire an InterCity 125 unit as it did last year. Five charter trains, including one steam special, are planned for the Christmas market weekend.

Railfuture booklets

New editions of rail guides for Saxilby and for Crowle, Barnetby and Brigg have been produced by Railfuture. We are also working on a new line guide for the Nottingham-Skegness route jointly with the South East Lincolnshire Travellers Association and East Lindsey district council. We are also planning a guide to promote the Peterborough-Doncaster "Joint" line.

Freight cheer

The little-used Barnetby-Gainsborough route was boosted in October when a series of freight trains ran over several weekends, because engineering work closed part of the line from Barnetby to Doncaster.

Photo survey of stations

Railfuture members are to be congratulated for their volunteer work in completing an updated audit of nine Lincolnshire stations. This was part of a bigger audit of 50 stations organised by the East of England Rail Passengers Committee. One of the most useful aspects was on-site photographs to highlight faults and problems at the stations.

North West

By Trevor Bishop
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Sunday success

The Wirral Transport Users Association has been campaigning for years to have the Bidston-Wrexham Sunday service terminate in the new Wrexham Central station the same as the Monday-Saturday service.

From the start of the winter timetable Arriva Trains Wales are doing just that, with 2.5 return services using the new Wrexham Central station, the last service to Wrexham terminating in Wrexham General. The Wirral Transport Users Association is to continue to work and press for an all year Sunday morning service on this line.

Bolton-Bury line

On 7 October a Railfuture delegation, including the chairman of Railfuture North West England, met David Chaytor, the MP for Bury



North, to explain the reopening proposal and discuss further action. Mr Chaytor was very supportive and agreed to have his photograph taken with us against a map of the network (including the proposed line) which he would forward to the local newspaper, together with a Railfuture press release. It was agreed that links with other bodies, like the Bury Environment Forum, should be established, and that in due course a public meeting should be convened, followed by a mass walk along the trackbed. The main task was to increase public awareness of the benefits of re-opening the line that, at present, was sadly lacking.

Integrated tickets

Ben Davies, stakeholder liaison manager at Arriva Trains Wales, addressed a meeting of the North West branch on Saturday 18 September. Mr Davies outlined the principles guiding the Arriva approach to the Wales franchise. Plans include the use of a standard pattern timetable, 30 new integrated train and bus ticket schemes by November 2005, the introduction of adopt-a-station across Wales and the border counties and £400,000 investment in improving car parks.

With respect to the proposed standard pattern timetable Mr Davies said: "We want to use a variant of a clockface timetable, but designed within the constraints of the current infrastructure."

This approach is designed to provide services at the same time each hour with more regular spacing between services e.g. every half hour. By providing an earlier service into Aberystwyth from Birmingham (at 09.18, almost two hours earlier than current) Mr Davies hopes Arriva can help to "get people and business into Wales". Andrew MacFarlane, Railfuture national executive member, asked whether the clockface approach to timetabling took account of the start and end of the school day in those schools where rail was a key mode of transport. Ben Davies said that indeed there had been consultation with headteachers to design the timetable starting from the schools' needs.

Mr Davies reported that the consultation exercise over the Arriva TW business plan had generated some 200 replies.

"We approach consultation with the view that we don't have all the answers, but the answers are out there, often in groups like this and within community organisations."

Station enhancements

Mr Davies announced Wales Assembly funding of £750,000 for station and security enhancements particularly in North Wales. Arriva Trains Wales are contributing a further £250,000. Enhancements will include: CCTV, real time passenger information and new shelters.

Northern franchise signed

As Railfuture members may have read, after the announcement of Serco-Ned Railways as preferred bidder for the new Northern Trains franchise on 1 July, the original start date of 17 October did not go ahead, with the parties citing "contractual difficulties," but has now finally been signed by the Strategic Rail Authority, the five affected passenger transport executives and Serco-Ned Railways. The start date is now 12 December for a period of eight years nine months with the final two years of that depending on achieving performance targets.

One promise the new franchise holder gave was to establish a cycle users forum. With luck, this should open up some beautiful areas to more cyclists.

The operating company's chairman is Brian Burdsall, who said: "Our priority is to deliver a truly unique and first class service to all our customers and employees."

Real-time train information

Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Executive has introduced a new hotline for up to the minute train running information. Sadly the information given is not totally reliable, as several times I've been waiting for trains that are clearly running late, but the information line is giving information on the next departure, assuming the earlier train has gone.

New £2m station for Blackburn

The Government Office North West has told Blackburn with Darwen Council that cash has been secured to build a new rail station to serve the growing Blackburn business district. The station is to be situated close to Greenbank, Whitebirk and nearby business parks.

Local services between Blackpool South and Colne will stop there, making it attractive for workers to commute to the nearby business parks and plans are already in place to run bus services to connect them to the new station. Work is expected to begin on the site next year and be complete by 2008.

Future meetings

The next meeting of Railfuture North West will be on 13 November in the Royal Station Hotel, Carnforth. Next year's annual general meeting is scheduled for the Stretton Hotel, Blackpool on 12 February. Members are welcome at all meetings which start at 11.00.

East Midlands

By Anthony Kay
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"Outdoing them all"

This is the stated aim of Paul Bunting, managing director of Midland MainLine. He wants the infrastructure of the route updated, and is planning to raise the profile of the route once the blockade at St Pancras is over. MML's plans came

under scrutiny when Operations Director Tim Shoveller addressed a meeting organised by Railfuture East Midlands at the City Rooms in Leicester on 13 November.

Corby

Corby and East Northamptonshire MP Phil Hope and Corby Council officials argued their case at a meeting with Transport Minister Tony McNulty on Thursday 21 October in London. Mr Hope said: "We presented a strong case to the minister for the early opening of a passenger railway service in Corby. The minister was very receptive and he will be giving serious consideration to giving Government support to bringing forward the opening of the service". Work could begin on the new railway station in four years. Earlier this year the Strategic Rail Authority carried out an independent study which said that a business case would exist for a railway station in Corby by 2013. But civic leaders are arguing the pace of the town's growth is so fast the service would make a profit before then.

Poor service at Northampton

The ending of through services via Northampton means a poor deal for South Midlands travellers. Journeys

such as Long Buckby to London or Wolverton to Birmingham now require a change at Northampton, which isn't going to encourage people to leave the car at home. There is now only one fast and two semi-fast trains from Northampton to London every hour, and one train to Birmingham every hour.

Loughborough platform

Loughborough MP Andy Reed has added his voice to the many calling for platform lengthening at the town's station; the existing platform leaves passengers in the last three coaches of an InterCity 125 having to move forward through the train before alighting. A spokeswoman for Network Rail has said that the required works would be "horribly expensive". However, Charnwood Borough Council and Network Rail are seeking a developer to revitalise the run-down area in front of the station; one hopes that any agreement with a developer would include a substantial contribution to bringing the station up to the required standard.

No repeat of Selby

In an incident all too reminiscent of the Selby crash, a van driver lost control and careered through a fence

Ref: 1220-1008



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Local action



and down a railway embankment at Melton Mowbray, ending up in a ditch near the track. No serious injuries resulted, but the incident has led to calls for new barriers and general road safety measures in the area, to prevent a repeat with possibly fatal consequences.

Kibworth

The cost of the Kibworth bypass on the A6 is now estimated at £18million, leading to Leicestershire County Council to consider whether it should drop the scheme. This is a classic example of road improvements simply moving the problems elsewhere, as congestion in Kibworth has worsened since the Great Glen bypass was opened a few miles up the A6. Meanwhile, there is no hint of taking some of the traffic off the roads by opening a new station at Kibworth, which campaigners have been calling for since at least the 1980s. Even at current inflated railway infrastructure costs, this wouldn't be likely to cost anything close to £18million!

Oops!

I really should check the information my sources send me! Corby and East Northants is not the only parliamentary constituency in the country without a railway station, as stated in *Railwatch* 101. Furthermore, Gosport disputes Corby's claim to be the biggest town in Britain without a railway station: Gosport does have a bigger population, but is only a short ferry ride from Portsmouth Harbour station. Nevertheless, Corby does have some of the most active rail campaigners in the country.

Yorkshire

By Peter Davies
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Northern Rail Franchise

On 19 October, the Strategic Rail Authority announced that the bidder for the Northern franchise had signed the contract to operate rail services for the next eight and three quarter years in the north of England. The franchise will cover operations by the former First North Western rail company and Arriva Trains Northern. The final two years of the franchise are subject to achieving performance standards. It has not yet been officially confirmed that the new operator has been in discussion with a train building company in China with a view to purchasing new trains for the franchise. This will depend on value for money. However, it is understood that the new operator is examining ways of reducing operating costs on the existing Pacer units.

Annual General Meeting 2005

The annual general meeting of the Yorkshire branch of Railfuture will be held at the Huddersfield Hotel on Saturday 19 March. The guest speaker will be Stanley Hall, and



Scotland's railways were handed over to a Scottish company in October.

First – which runs buses and trains throughout Britain – has its origins in Aberdeen.

This picture of Queen Street Station, Glasgow, shows Moir Lockhead, chief executive of FirstGroup plc in the cab.

On the platform is Mary Dickson, managing director of First ScotRail.

his address will be Rail Safety in the era of privatisation.

ShIPLEY

New passenger facilities were opened at the beginning of October. Improved waiting shelters, lighting, and CCTV cameras have been provided. Regrettably no provision has been made for toilets.

Settle and Carlisle

With the commencement of the new timetable from September to December the successful locomotive-hauled train between Leeds and Carlisle was withdrawn. The rail service has now reverted to Sprinter unit operation only. The effect of this has been to increase overcrowding on the Harrogate line, as the locomotive-hauled train operated over this route between Knaresborough and Leeds and vice-versa during the morning and evening peak periods. The return journey between Leeds and Carlisle was during the day.

York

Improvements are to be carried out by GNER at York station. New information screens are to be installed, CCTV cameras are to be provided, and improvements are to be made to the footbridge and subway.

A 16ft x 14ft arch has been erected at the new Holgate Park industrial park to commemorate the former importance of the carriage works. The structure, which has cost £130,000, glows at night because it has fibre optic cables running through the steel and plate glass.

Grand Central Railway

Following the refusal by former Rail Regulator Tom Winsor to al-

low the company to operate a service from Newcastle to Preston via the Calder Valley, the company has announced it intends to operate direct services from Sunderland via the Durham Coast to London King's Cross, and between York and Chester from December 2005. The service between York and Chester is to be operated by displaced 90 mph units. An application is to be made for a licence to operate these services.

Scotland

By Mike Harrison

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Village hopes raised

Plans to reopen the railway station in a Kincardineshire village 30 miles south of Aberdeen, which closed more than 35 years ago, are close to becoming a reality.

The 10-year campaign to bring commuter trains back to the village of Laurencekirk, 30 miles south of Aberdeen, has received a major boost in a report by Scott Wilson Railways commissioned by Aberdeenshire Council. This claims that it may cost only £3.2million to restore the B-listed railway station that still stands in the village, and the consultants have revealed that a reopened station at Laurencekirk could generate up to 36,000 rail journeys to and from the rapidly expanding village each year.

Nicol Stephen, the Scottish transport minister and former MP for Kincardine and West Aberdeenshire, has pledged his "wholehearted" support for the project. Iain Gabriel, Aberdeenshire Council's director of transportation and infrastructure, states in his report

to the infrastructure services committee that the new Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG) assessment, carried out by the consultants, has significantly revised the new passenger journeys a reopened station would generate. The original assessment estimated 25,000 rail trips a year.

A benefit-cost analysis, he added, takes the scheme over the accepted threshold for gaining government support.

Transport Scotland

The Scottish Executive, with its new powers for managing transport in Scotland has decided that it should be further devolved to be under the control of the local transport partnerships. In October 2003 Sestran (the South-East Scotland Transport Partnership) had a conference where it agonised about its role. In general the problem was that it was a voluntary partnership of councils with no teeth. In November this year the conference is to sharpen the teeth it has now been given. No doubt the other partnerships (Hi-trans, Nestrans and Westrans) will be doing the same kind of thing. This leaves Dundee and Angus at the moment out in the cold, as are Dumfries & Galloway.

New freight facilities grant

Lorry use on Scotland's roads could lessen by one million miles every year as a result of a Scottish Executive freight grant. On 29 September Transport Minister Nicol Stephen announced the award of a freight facilities grant to two Scottish companies which will enable them to deliver Asda goods from a depot in Grangemouth to four stores in the Aberdeen area by rail rather than road. The environmental benefits of the project have been estimated at £2.3million over five years, reflecting the lorry miles which will be removed and the economic benefits of cleaner, more sustainable transport. To date, this service has taken approximately 17,500 miles (1,944 gallons of diesel) off the road per week for the company, equating to 910,000 miles (101,111 gallons of diesel) per year and saving 41 tonnes of solid carbon per year. Asda now shifts five per cent of goods by rail and it hopes to reach 10 per cent in the next five years. The grant is of £283,000 and the total cost of the equipment is £688,000, with the two transport companies providing the balance of the funding.

Since July 1997, 25 previous freight facilities grant awards have been made for Scottish projects representing a total grant award of over £68 million, including five awards either part or wholly funded by the Department for Transport.

The published target to make awards of freight facilities grant by March 2006 which will remove 25 million lorry miles each year from Scotland's roads was achieved. However, a new higher target is being finalised. The Executive



provided £500,000 in April this year to the North East Rail Freight Development Group to complete preparatory engineering work and establish the costs to upgrade the track between Elgin, Aberdeen and Mossend in Lanarkshire.

ScotRail puts cyclists on the map

ScotRail is the first train operating company to join forces with Sustrans, the sustainable transport charity to provide information on routes to and from stations. In the first few weeks, there was a 40% increase in visitors to this area of the ScotRail website.

The station facilities section of the website, which lists each of ScotRail's 336 stations alphabetically, now provides details on access, car parking and retail facilities, as well as the station addresses and locations. Linking to a map on the Sustrans site shows the stations location in relation to the national cycle network and the local road network. The strange thing is that it does not indicate anything about cycle parking, either stands or lockers, but the information is particularly useful to the disabled.

What's new in Edinburgh

The City of Edinburgh Council has recently formed a new body called *Transport Edinburgh* which will be a one-stop shop for information about all forms of transport development. It will include trains, trams (due in 2009), congestion charging, the city centre management plan, buses, cycling and walking. There is so much in development that the public doesn't know where to go for information. For each transport mode they state the current situation, plans for the next two years, and then plans beyond that. About trains they list:

Trains Today

- ❖ Three new railway stations – Newcraighall, Brunstane & Edinburgh Park

- ❖ One ticket for bus and train journeys

- ❖ 25% more rush hour passengers into Waverley Station since 1997

Trains after 2006

- ❖ Edinburgh Airport Rail Link

- ❖ Major upgrade of Waverley station

- ❖ Edinburgh to Glasgow rail link via Bathgate and Airdrie

- ❖ South Suburban railway

- ❖ Working towards a new railway from Edinburgh to Galashiels and Tweedbank (Borders)

Airdrie-Bathgate

In *Railwatch* 101, I mentioned this as possibly opening in 2007 at an estimated cost of £107million. We now hear that a feasibility study confirms that the reopening of the Airdrie to Bathgate rail link can be achieved at a cost of between £185 and £220million.

The Scottish Executive is promoting the next stage of the study



A 4VEP train at Fareham station on 9 May 1990 with, left to right, railway writer Barry Doe, Jon Honeysett and Peter Madsen.

Recalling electrification

This picture shows lifelong rail campaigner Peter Madsen who died in September at the age of 67 after a long illness.

The 1990 occasion was a major success for Peter and the Wessex branch of Railfuture which under his chairmanship in the 1970s campaigned for the extension of the Southern's third-rail electrification to the Solent Lines and opening of new/reopened stations at Hedge End and Chandlers Ford.

The 9 May ceremony at Fareham station was to mark the start of electric train services between Southampton and the Havant-Portsmouth area and from Eastleigh to Fareham and the opening of the then new station at Hedge End by transport minister Cecil Parkinson.

The new Chandlers Ford station opened only last year, but this was again thanks to campaigning by Peter and the Wessex branch.

Peter, an osteopath, was mayor of Eastleigh in 1992 and was originally a member of the Railway Invigoration Society which later developed into RDS and then Railfuture.

He was also an accomplished musician, leading his own dance band in the Count Basie style in Southampton during the 1960s and 1970s.

Fellow campaigner Jon Honeysett who now lives near Stoke-on-Trent said: "I was privileged to have known Peter and worked with him for three decades. He will be much missed."

which will outline the detailed business case for the route which closed in 1968. If final approval is given for the link, trains would run a 15-minute service, travelling at up to 80mph with a 63 minute journey time for Edinburgh Waverley to Glasgow Queen Street. The engineers concluded that increasing train speeds to 100mph "yielded only minor improvements in journey time against a substantial capital cost increase".

Some web links:

www.earlproject.com
www.tiedinburgh.co.uk
www.feta.gov.uk

www.forthrightalliance.org
www.firstscotrail.com
www.sakrailway.co.uk
www.waverleyrailwayproject.co.uk
<http://qube.scottishborders.com/~btf/index.html>
www.railfuturescotland.org.uk

East Anglia

By Nicholas Dibben

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St Ives busway objection

A big thank you to all Railfuture members who responded to the request for donations to help pay

for a transport expert to help us put our case together. Around £550 was received. Railfuture are working with other local groups such as St Ives Town Council, St Ives town centre management group, the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England, and local civic societies and conservation groups. Together we have employed the services of Alan James, Transport Consultant with Ecologica. Mr James has developed our case, using his knowledge of transport planning and ecology assessment to produce a 27-page booklet setting out our case as to why the guided busway is the wrong approach to the Cambridge-St Ives-Huntingdon corridor. By comparison the county council's documents run to thousands of pages and are full of contradictions and misleading statements. Typical examples are errors in the times and frequencies in existing bus routes, claims that guided buses will leave the guideway at certain points to serve local villages when there is nothing in their traffic model to suggest this will happen, and finally a claim that the CAST.IRON proposal to reopen the route as a community railway would cost £300million! Despite all their claims, their latest transport assessment shows that the number of peak hour car journeys will only reduce by 400 out of 78,000 by the year 2016 if the busway is built. Is this good value after spending £86million? We think not!

Services getting better

The latest train performance figures from WAGN and One show that punctuality levels of train services in East Anglia have returned now to above 90%. The branch has written to the operators congratulating them on their performance. We have also written to the local media congratulating One on the way they have handled services during the closure of Ipswich tunnel. Unlike other long closures, Ipswich Tunnel has not made the national news with passengers complaining of delays and confusing alternatives. Local commuters are asking that the increased parking at Manningtree station during the work should be retained.

Lack of capacity

The SRA has expressed its concerns to the planning inquiry into the Bathside Bay ship container terminal at Harwich about the lack of track capacity to handle any new traffic. Although train services on the Great Eastern Main Line to Ipswich will be cut from four to three per hour in December to make more room for freight, the SRA say this might not be enough. The developers want to ensure that around 25% of containers travel by rail from the port. Elsewhere in the region, there is concern that Central Trains may be forced to cut stops at Ely on Norwich to Liverpool Services because of congestion. This move will be strongly resisted by the local rail



user groups and Railfuture. Letters have already been written by many to express their opposition to such a move. Lack of capacity would also prevent an hourly Ipswich to Peterborough service. This is one of only two routes in the region that does not operate a minimum hourly service at present. These examples of limited track capacity, show why it would be foolish to rip up the track on the St Ives line when the route has the long term potential to add extra capacity.

Thames

By Chris Wright

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Rail users revolt

Milton Keynes Rail User Group has been set up following an uprising by local commuters when the September timetable change saw the loss of peak Virgin services and other changes. Local MP Dr Starkey raised the issue in the Commons but it seems that Transport secretary Alistair Darling has no solutions again. Interestingly earlier attempts to set up a group failed because users were generally satisfied, but not any more. Commuters into the area are also upset.

New station

The Wolverton Rail User Group continues to monitor the station and has commented on the proposed new station which is due to seek planning permission in January.

Service cutbacks

The proposed cutback of the Watford-Gatwick/Brighton service to Clapham Junction is the latest loss of services by stealth, with Milton Keynes users being discouraged by the first cutbacks and train enquiries ignoring the route.

Slow progress

The Government is proposing to expand Milton Keynes yet is allowing rail services to be cut and failing to make progress with the East-West Link. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is helping to fund another study into private funding. Are roads to be privately funded? Sir Bob Reid, the BR chairman at the time BR proposed a Peterborough-Swindon service, has become chairman of Milton Keynes Partnership and is following up the failure to progress the latest proposals.

Bedford-Northampton

The remaining trackbed at Olney has been recommended to be safeguarded, after a recent planning inquiry, in case it is needed in the future for rail. The Bedfordshire



Virgin Trains started calling at Llandudno in 27 September and local schoolchildren were invited to the celebrations. Previously Virgin Trains has served only Llandudno Junction, where passengers needed to change trains for the town.

Now the 11.21 departure from London and 15.23 from Llandudno provides a direct link. Executive director Chris Gibb said: "It is almost 40 years to the day since Llandudno last enjoyed through weekday services and 13 years since the last summer Saturday holidaymaker trains ran.

"I know that the town has campaigned long and hard for reinstatement of through trains, and I am delighted that we have been able to oblige."

Rail and Transport Association had fought hard for this.

East-West rail

Buckinghamshire County Council latest transport strategy recognises the importance of East-West Rail and the Aylesbury/Wycombe link. Aylesbury North is to have the business case developed and has been designated Aylesbury Parkway. Oxfordshire County Council also supports the East-West Rail Link and the Princes Risborough to Oxford line as a longer term option.

We fight on

Clearly the branch has much left to campaign for and needs to work on the Great Western franchise bidders.

Devon and Cornwall

By Stuart Walker

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Alternative rail route needed

Railfuture Devon and Cornwall has called for an alternative inland rail route to be reopened following disruption on the coastal route caused by storms. The former Southern Railway route from Exeter via Okehampton to Plymouth was closed in the 1960s leaving only one rail route to Plymouth and Cornwall – along the sea wall at Dawlish notorious for disruption from winter storms.

In a press release issued on 28 October, branch secretary Stuart Walker said: "We have been campaigning for some time for the alternative route via Okehampton to be reopened. As well as providing a local rail link from Okehampton through Tavistock to Plymouth, it would enable trains from London to Plymouth and Cornwall to be diverted when the coastal route through Dawlish is closed.

"There was severe disruption as

trains broke down affected by high tides and gale force winds along the South Devon coast. If this were a problem for the A30 or the M5, the Highways Agency would be spending millions of pounds of taxpayers' money building an alternative route. "Rail users have been told that a second rail route would not be cost-effective. Devon County Council even told us they would require the rail industry to keep the Dawlish line open 24 hours a day seven days a week. With increasing sea levels and stormy weather caused by global warming, they simply will not achieve this.

"The rail route from London to Penzance is as important to the economic prosperity of the region as the airports and the road network. We find it amazing that local authorities, the Regional Assembly and local politicians will implement major schemes to improve road and air links, but will not do anything to prevent disruption to our main rail link."

The severe disruption to rail services between 27 October and 1 November was caused by a combination of 80mph winds and stormy seas. The line between Exeter and Newton Abbot was closed for four days and between St Erth and Penzance for five days as result of sea damage to the infrastructure.

Worst affected were Virgin Trains. Although most of the Voyagers' earlier problems caused by rough seas at Dawlish seem to have been resolved, the heavy seas on 27 October caused trains to fail stranding passengers in the train on the sea wall at the height of the storm. Some passengers described their experience as frightening as heavy waves crashed over the failed train. They were eventually rescued by being transferred to a First Great Western InterCity 125 brought

alongside.

Between Teignmouth and Dawlish sea damage to an under-bridge, together with the need to replace ballast washed away, was the main reason for closure. At Penzance the station was flooded on 27 October requiring major repairs to signalling equipment. As many of Virgin Trains' Voyagers were trapped at Plymouth, services between Exeter and Bristol were significantly reduced with Wessex Trains two-car sprinters suffering serious overcrowding. A four-coach Wessex Trains locomotive hauled set at Bristol could not be used as it was not passed to work to Taunton. The lack of train services west of Bristol led Virgin to issue a press statement advising passengers not to travel to or from the West Country.

Virgin's problems continued into the next week as the Voyagers at Plymouth could not receive their major maintenance work at Central Rivers depot in Burton on Trent and this meant that Birmingham to Manchester services had to be reduced.

With sea levels forecast to rise and global warming resulting in more severe storms, disruptions of this nature could become more frequent. Re-opening the Tavistock route will become a strategic necessity.

Meanwhile Virgin Trains have said that they intend stabling a Class 57 locomotive in Devon when bad weather is forecast. The locomotive would be used to rescue any Voyagers that became stranded on the sea wall.

Improvements to Cornish stations

Improvements to Liskeard station are now virtually complete with the main station building receiving a major rebuild and a new glass fronted extension to the ticket hall and waiting area. A new waiting shelter has been built on the down main line platform. On the Looe branch line platform, the original station building has been restored with part "opened-out" to provide a shelter.

At St Ives a new ramped entrance and exit has been built with new stainless steel waiting shelters. Regrettably some of the glass in the shelters was smashed by vandals within days of them being erected. It is understood that a Tube-station style entrance and exit system will be in place at the station to cope with the summer crowds – although with some trains having three-minute turn-round times this may not be easy to operate.

At Saltash the Welcome to Cornwall sign (also shown in Cornish – Kernow a'gas dynnergh) have been reinstated.

New rail user groups

Two new rail user groups have formed in the Devon and Cornwall area. They join the North Devon Rail Users Group, Totnes Rail Transport Group and Torbay Line

**2005 Railfuture
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Users Group which are already actively representing rail users in the region.

The Ivybridge Rail Users Group was formed in October aiming to gain improvements to the rail service and the station. Ivybridge station was opened by Devon County Council in the hope of promoting a park-and-ride facility for Plymouth. However this never really took off due to the infrequent train service and the car park remains empty most of the time. The station has a loyal following of regular commuters and also a number of long-distance passengers as many trains travel to Bristol and the North, and some South West Trains services offer through trains to Waterloo. More details can be obtained by emailing: phillip.dredge@btinternet.com

The second group is the Friends of St Ives Branch Line. This has been set up to promote use of the branch line particularly to local residents during the less busy winter period and also to undertake improvements to stations in cooperation with the rail industry. The branch line features as one of the pilots under the SRA's Community Rail Strategy and the setting up of a Friends Group formed part of Wessex Trains' action plan for developing the line. More information can be obtained from Perry McDonagh, Marina, Dock Lane, Penzance TR18 4AS or email SIBL@swalker79.fsnet.co.uk

Extra Newquay services prove a success

The doubling of the Newquay branch line service to eight trains per day during the summer has proved a resounding success. The extra services were tied in with better connections at Par with main line services and a bus link from Roche to the Eden Project with a joint travel and admission ticket. According to Wessex Trains passenger journeys are up 43% compared with last year, and these figures exclude the summer weekend through trains operated by Virgin and First Great Western. It is hoped to repeat the service improvements next year. Other branches have maintained or slightly improved on last year's substantial increased patronage, with the exception of the Gunnislake which has seen a 3.2% decline. This fall is attributed to declining employment in Devonport Dockyard and the two week long engineering blockades.

Devon cuts rail-bus links then restores some

Two bus links to rail stations have been cut back following service reductions by Devon County Council and First Devon and Cornwall Buses. The link from Barnstaple station to Ilfracombe was withdrawn in October, blamed on unreliability caused by traffic congestion in Barnstaple town. Passengers have been required to make their own way to Barnstaple

bus station instead or catch one of the Bideford buses that serves the rail and bus stations and change at the bus station. However, following protests by Railfuture and the local community we have been assured by First Group that the Ilfracombe link will be restored in December.

The second link was First's Tiverton Parkway to Barnstaple which also served South Molton. This has been cut back to Tiverton town centre and passengers now have to connect with the station using the Stagecoach Devon bus link or take a taxi. Meanwhile our requests for First's X53 Exeter-Weymouth-Poole bus service to be extended to Exeter St Davids Railway station continues to be rejected. The latest reason given is traffic congestion in Exeter. Although the bus serves Weymouth, Wareham and Poole rail stations the bus terminates at Exeter bus station. Passengers then have to walk to another stop in the city centre to catch a bus link to St Davids station or pay for a taxi.

Kent

By John Pitcher

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Railfuture member Gary Gill has reported that, after years of delay, the refurbishment of Folkestone Central station is almost complete and includes art work featuring 101 hands cast in bronze. Information screens and announcements in the ticket office now seemed to be working well for the first time in living memory.

At a meeting on Saturday 21 August 2004 at Folkestone Methodist Church, Mike Whitson also reported that the new Hastings station was expected to open in September. Platforms had been smartened up and the appearance was generally good, though calls for the missing track to be re-laid at platform one had been unsuccessful. Ticket barriers had been ruled out on cost grounds but the latest design did include a bus interchange, under the canopy in front of the station. Stagecoach Buses were talking of withdrawing services, however, since Network Rail intended charging £1 for every bus calling.

John Pitcher said he had been impressed by the recently completed bus interchange at Ramsgate station, especially important since the town centre was over a mile away. There were new shelters immediately outside the station door and for the first time in decades someone arriving by train would be greeted by accessible bus timetables clearly indicating the correct stop for onward travel by bus.

Mr Pitcher reported that Railfuture London and South East Branch would be calling for a passenger transport executive to cover all Greater London. This should be better than the present set-up where Transport for London con-

trolled bus and underground, but not National Rail services. A single authority for the whole London commuting area roughly following boundaries of the M25, should hopefully aid strategic regional decisions. The creation by BR of Network SouthEast had been a step in this direction, but NSE had been split up by privatisation.

From Sussex, Mike Turner reported that Railfuture Coastway had written to MP Mike Foster calling for South Central and South East services to be combined together under a single franchise. A reply from the then Minister of Transport Kim Howells indicated that this might be considered in the longer term.

Mr Pitcher noted that in Kent the Sheppey Branch and Medway Valley Line had both been proposed for community rail designation. This was ironic given that these lines both contained stations proposed for reduced services in the Strategic Rail Authority's Kent Consultation document and the Sheppey Branch was earmarked for reduced frequencies.

Mr Pitcher also noted that the Marshlink line from Ashford to Hastings had not been proposed for community rail designation. Railfuture believes the line should be a national through route, part of the Trans-European Network. Mike Turner said Railfuture must continue stressing its importance as a strategic link between the Channel Tunnel and the South Coast.

London

London Mayor Ken Livingstone gave a boost to Railfuture's campaign for the Croyley Link when he announced on 12 October a £10 billion investment plan for the Tube.

The £60million scheme would extend the Metropolitan line to Watford Junction, to connect with the National Rail network. Trans-

port for London said negotiations were at an advanced stage with Hertfordshire County Council.

The mayor also plans to use fare revenue from two years of inflation-plus fare increases and recently relaxed local authority borrowing rules to raise the funds for the overall investment scheme.

Better signalling should squeeze more trains on to the Jubilee and Northern lines.

The main worry for Railfuture is the go-ahead for the Thames Gateway bridge which we felt should have a much better public transport component. We believe a dedicated tram crossing would be better than the current plan for a bus lane.

Busway alert

Luton Borough council's ill-conceived plan to convert the Luton-Dunstable line into a busway goes to a public inquiry on 15 February. It will take place in the Council Chamber at Luton Town Hall and is likely to run for six to eight weeks.

The council has set up a website which it claims will have "unbiased" reports from the inquiry.

If it is unbiased it will probably be a first in British transport planning. The website is at www.translinkexpress.org.uk/inquiry01home.htm

A railway could be operating for a fraction of the cost of the proposed busway and would have the extra benefit of connecting to the national rail network. With extensions, the railway could have a regional and national impact in improving travel in a badly congested area of the south-east. Even if the busway performs above expectations it will have only a limited local impact.

The statutory watchdog, the London Transport Users Committee intervened in September to get the "appalling state of the trackbed" at Hackney Downs cleaned up. LTUC director Rufus Barnes said: "It is important that stations are kept clean and tidy."

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