



This dramatic picture of a Virgin Trains Pendolino on Beattock Bank shows part of a simulated rescue test on 5 September. The rescue unit hauled a “failed” sister train over the summit at 70 miles per hour from a standing start on the steepest part of the incline. Virgin Trains’ chief executive Chris Green said: “Pendolino has once again proved its competency during the most demanding circumstances.”

Picture: Milepost 921/2

‘The railway is the mode of travel for the future’

Prime Minister Tony Blair 20 September 2004

Prime Minister Tony Blair launched Virgin’s Pendolino service on the revamped West Coast main line in September.

He said: “I hope over the coming years there will be more such events showing that the railway is the mode of travel for the future.”

He added: “I love taking the train. I still think it’s the best way to be able to travel and work at the same time and for us now to give people a glimpse of what the future can be, I think should give us great confidence and great strength for the future.”

The West Coast main line upgrade was planned by British Rail and would have cost a fraction of the eventual bill if it had been carried out before privatisation intervened.

It will allow nine-coach £11million tilt trains to run at 125 mph – rather than the planned 140mph – providing a 2hr 6min journey from London to Manchester, for example.

It has also created problems of capacity. One area affected is Milton Keynes where fewer Virgin trains now stop and there have been many complaints about the overcrowding and quality of the slower Silverlink service.

With more house and business expansion planned for the area, the railway will have to find a way to cope with increased demand.

The nearby branchline, the Bedford to Bletchley line, has however also received attention with a completely separate £35million investment which has upgraded signals and converted nine level crossing to automatic operation.

If this kind of investment had been available to the railways in the 1960s, the Bletchley to Oxford and the Bedford to Cambridge line need never have withered away – and we would still have an effective East-West link.

This link must now be re-created at greater expense than was needed to keep it going.

How to get a new station in 6 (not very easy) stages

The Strategic Rail Authority has produced a guidance document setting out the processes required to open a new station on the railway network, just at the time when the Countryside Agency has published its Rail Re-opening Toolkit.

The SRA’s *New Stations: A guide for promoters*, is intended to help local authorities and developers but it will also be of benefit to campaign groups to help them understand the procedures.

The report does not contain new requirements or policy regarding new stations, but collates existing policy and defines good practice.

A six-stage process is outlined, however it is the first stage of the process, the project inception, that campaign groups are most likely to get involved with in order to convince local authorities that the new station is worthwhile.

According to the SRA, it is aware of around 350 proposals for new stations, but warns that a large number of these will not be acceptable to the railway industry. Many of these stations would fail at the first stage of the process, project inception, which is to determine the extent that the proposal is compliant with SRA and local planning policy and to assess the suitability of the station site.

The latter stages of the process develop this basic information into a full business case.

The basic SRA requirements are a transport needs statement, alternatives, support in local authority planning and transport strategies, compliance with the SRA capacity utilisation policy, suitability of the site, the impact on existing track and signals, the train service at the new station and impact on existing services and a preliminary cost estimate. With regard to cost, the SRA suggests that even a simple single track station with little requirement for track and signalling work could cost £2-4million. Compare this with the cost of past station reopenings list in *A-Z of Rail Reopenings* to show how costs have risen! Copies of the report are available from the SRA. All rail



campaign groups seeking new stations should get a copy and review their proposals against the SRA requirements set out above.

The Countryside Agency launched its *Rail Re-openings Toolkit* in Leeds in October 15. It is a guide to the process of reopening a disused railway and has been put together by the Independent Railway Consultancy, based in York.

The Association of Community Rail Partnerships had a considerable input into the publication and is now responsible for its distribution (see below). It aims to provide local authorities, campaigners and other interested parties with a clear guide to the long and tortuous process of re-opening a railway. It is available price £5 from: ACoRP, Rail and River Centre, Canalside, Slaithwaite Civic Hall, Slaithwaite, Huddersfield HD7 5AB. Tel: 01484 847790. Email: paul@acorp.uk.com