

Your letters



Coventry arena

I was extremely disappointed that the Strategic Rail Authority has refused to sanction a new rail halt at the Coventry Arena development (the new home to Coventry City Football Club and a major retail park) on the Coventry-Nuneaton line.

I understand that the local council has secured the land and funding for the project so the rationale behind the decision is incomprehensible.

If it is a question of safety on match days (as reported in the local newspaper) then have they considered how much more dangerous the thousands of extra car journeys that this decision will generate will be?

On a general point I note that the SRA seems determined to frustrate the demand for new rail stations across the country. It seems that cheap air travel, with its enormous external social and environmental costs, can expand with gay abandon yet it appears to be beyond the wit and wisdom of the powers that be to provide even a modest expansion of rail infrastructure.

Yours more in sadness than anger

Steven Harman, 5 Goodyears End Lane, Bedworth, Warwickshire CV12 0HJ

Airport rail link

There was mention in *Railwatch* 102 of the proposed rail link to serve Edinburgh Turnhouse airport.

This is a quite grandiose scheme, currently costed at something in the region of £550million, and involving tunnels under the main runway and neighbouring river Almond.

As envisaged at present a new line will spur off the existing Edinburgh to Glasgow line at Gogarbank, another will spur off the North line at Gogar, and they will join at an underground station by the airport terminal.

Then it would continue under the main runway and the adjacent river Almond, then split to join, in the westerly direction the existing freight line from the Forth Bridge, and to the north-east back to the North line. The first problem that

arises is that for "health and safety reasons" the GNER InterCity 125s will not be allowed on to this route because of it being in tunnel.

It is a matter of history that there used to be a siding off the North line to the now defunct RAF premises at Turnhouse; it makes me wonder if there is a much simpler solution.

Suppose the tracks at that old site were skewed apart enough to allow the placing of an island platform, and then a chord built after the river crossing, at Craighall farm, to join the freight line from the Forth bridge - this could easily be a flying junction design, as could the necessary junction at the other side where the Edinburgh-Glasgow and North lines diverge at present.

This would have the benefit of no major tunnelling, if any, would allow the IC125s access, and provide the desired Fife to Glasgow area facility by a simple cross-platform interchange.

Access to the airport terminal by lift and escalator down to an underground passage under the old main runway, fitted with moving walkway as in Schipol and Geneva, or shuttle as in Gatwick and Birmingham couldn't be difficult.

Alternatively, a shuttle bus round the airport perimeter; people parking at the long stay parks have to do this. I wonder if someone could explain why this could not be done and for not more than £100million.

Malcolm Lowe, 130 Perth Road, Blairgowrie, Perthshire PH10 6EQ
malcolmlowe@supanet.com

Attention to detail

Investment in the rail infrastructure should address minutiae.

At the start of November, Network Rail announced laudable plans to borrow a further £20billion to fund investment in its 21,000 miles of track. Furthermore, in July Alistair Darling published a white paper outlining the future of the rail network in the UK. It outlined the key priorities for the rail industry - improving performance, getting a grip on costs and maintaining a high standard of safety.

The same white paper highlighted

Government plans to endow the Office of Rail Regulation with responsibility for safety, performance and cost. However, the real issue with the UK rail network is its record of under-investment stretching back for decades.

In order to help counter this under-investment, plans need to be made that address the minutiae of track and train management. Many technologies already exist to decrease trackside maintenance requirements and cost, while at the same time improving safety.

Indeed, in many cases it is merely a matter of employing that technology to achieve both. For example, trackside boxes could easily be made from glass reinforced polyester thus increasing their lifespan, reducing their susceptibility to damage as the result of vandalism and reducing maintenance costs.

Simple measures such as this, when extrapolated over 21,000 miles of track, could really maximise Network Rail's investment. Mr Darling should know what happens when you look after the pennies.

Adrian Walker, Business Development Manager, Sarel - Schneider Electric, Stirling Road, South Marston, Swindon, Wilts SN3 4TQ
adrian.walker@gb.schneider-electric.com

Ireland worries

What a concern it must be for the people of Ireland that their railways have such little investment.

I understand that there are slow trains on the branch lines, services reduced on the main lines and old trains used almost everywhere.

Does not Ireland have any railway societies or a Railfuture branch?

Does Ireland want its railways to die out altogether?

Paul Hooker, Northwood, 23 Drysgol Road, Radyr, Cardiff CF15 8BT

Railfuture chairman Mike Crowhurst writes: Over the past few months I have been trying to help in the formation of a Railfuture branch in Northern Ireland.

The picture is not entirely bleak in the North. A threat to close two lines has recently been lifted, for the time being, but lines in the province certainly need urgent investment.

In the Republic, investment is taking place and restoration of closed sections of the west coast route are under consideration.

In the South, Ireland is represented on the European Passenger Federation by Dorothy Gallagher of the Consumers' Association of Ireland.

<http://www.consumerassociation.ie/>

Matlock-Buxton

May I suggest that those who oppose the reopening of Matlock-Buxton should be made to stand by

the A6 on a bank holiday Monday.

On my last visit, I missed the Peak Rail train I was aiming for.

But I wasn't prepared for neither of the two buses turning up. After having to breathe traffic fumes for nearly an hour I felt nauseous.

If Matlock-Buxton was open then we could introduce a park and ride system and close the A6 through Matlock Bath and Bakewell to extraneous traffic.

Motorists would have a choice between buses and trains, both of which would be able to run to schedule.

On the same day I was robbed of a connection even though the train I was on was only one minute behind the one I needed to catch and it would have been a cross-platform interchange.

I don't know how to convince the relevant rail operator that what it did was wrong and that their rules of operation need to be changed.

Why do we have to put up with a system which is so strained that any problem is liable to cause disaster?

Simon Norton, 6 Hertford Street, Cambridge CB4 3AG
S.Norton@dpmmms.cam.ac.uk

Take an inch

I am concerned that *Railwatch* magazine is using metric-only measurements. If your publication is aimed at ordinary people as well as officials, you would be better to use imperial units with metric in brackets.

The London Underground system excluded, the national railway network is marked out in miles, quarter miles and chains.

You also use the term ROSCO without explanation. If you must use jargon, please explain it.

Philip Iveyray, 6 Auckingford Gardens, Shelley, Ongar, Essex CM5 0BG

Editors' note: Co-editor Robert Stevens is a volunteer with the British Weights and Measures Association and co-editor Ray King is old enough to have been brought up in a largely non-metric world so *Railwatch* is very aware of the issue of metric and imperial measurements. However even the two *Railwatch* co-editors would not necessarily agree on everything and there is a wide difference of view in the public. Generally we agree that most people are comfortable with imperial measures but industry and science often only use metric. We also try to avoid jargon. A ROSCO is a rolling stock leasing company.

Cycles and trains

Railwatch 102 reports that only 2% of passengers arrive at train stations by cycle, as compared with 35% in the Netherlands. Holland is however a much flatter country than the UK. Indeed I gave up cycling when I moved to hilly West Yorkshire.

Personally, though I'm all for joint bike and rail projects, provided

you realise that the option is a non-starter for those who aren't fully mobile. Also, I feel security is an issue these days. Sadly, I know I'd not feel happy leaving a bike in a cycle rack all day, something I didn't think twice about in the early 1980s.

Tim Mickleburgh, 33 Littlefield Lane,
Grimsby DN31 2AZ

timmickleburgh2002@yahoo.co.uk

Mobile noise

With regard to the modern obsession with making and listening to noise everywhere including on the railway, it has become a source of great irritation to me as frequent rail user to endure loud 'personal' audios and, worst of all, mobile phone ring-tones.

I know I'm not alone in finding it even more stressful in the so-called "quiet coaches" where either because of blindness, wilful ignorance or crass insensitivity most passengers continue to leave phones on and use them frequently.

I am aware that most of the population appears to be incapable of being divorced from their mobiles even for a short time but is there not some more effective way of ensuring that there is some haven of relative peace on trains? I heard a rumour that it was possible to put screening material around coaches to kill mobile signals? Is this true? I would be happy to pay a supplement on my fare just to avoid ring tones which induce homicidal tendencies in me! Have any representations on this issue been made to train operators via rail user groups, perhaps?

Bob Steel, 14 Palmerston Road,
Carshalton, Surrey SM5 2JZ
bobsteel@blueyonder.co.uk

Green railways

Norman Bradbury's article *Energy half truths exposed in Railwatch 102* was useful and timely, but I think the broad pro-railway lobby has invited the kind of attacks Norman refutes, by being inconsistent over its approach to environmental issues. If concerns such as carbon dioxide emission, global warming and land use are major reasons for supporting railway investment, logically these factors must also direct policy over the type of railway we invest in, and how, as a society, we wish to see the railways used.

Too often, lobbyists are happy to drag in the environment when it can be used as a side argument, but then forget all about it when it comes to the detail, or where the case no longer supports a particular investment. When this happens, we are bound to appear hypocritical, and to be out of touch with the realities of our own arguments.

This is probably seen at its clearest over the question of high speed trains. Energy efficiency drops like a stone as speeds increase over 100mph. We cannot consistently advocate, one day, new even higher speed inter-city passenger services, and the next say freight should be transferred from road to rail because this saves energy.

In the same way, if improving crash worthiness of trains imposes

such weight and space penalties as to reduce their energy efficiency, safety investment would be better directed to ways of reducing the incidence of crashes, rather than the consequences when they do (in any case, the railways get little credit when trains crash spectacularly with little loss of life or injury, but a lot of credit for them not crashing at all).

We also need to be careful over the stand on new freight traffic. We delight at flows of coal to power stations, because it brings revenue to railways, but coal burning is very bad indeed for the global environment. Similarly, it is obvious that the continental container traffic should be carried by rail for the sake of the environment, but from the same

Rail fares have soared over the past few years. Railfuture believes a national railcard is needed. Not only would it give cheaper fares to committed rail users, it would also boost income for train operators and save Government money



environmental point of view, much of that traffic should never exist in the first place (things like importing foreign apples in the British apple season, or carrying empty yoghurt pots from one side of Europe to the other).

We can, of course, reasonably say that so long as the traffic exists, it is better it goes by rail. However, unless we keep the bigger picture in sight, we will often risk supporting projects which on the larger scale are environmentally very bad, on the grounds that using the railway makes them marginally less bad, a stance not very credible or creditable.

Nor should we assume that the railway industry itself wishes to be driven by its own environmental advantages. It will do whatever makes it money. The Virgin group, for example, is best known for operating airlines, and is even now setting up a new Virgin brand low cost airline in India with the stated intention of taking India's mass travel market away from the railways. With environmental credentials like that, I doubt that Richard Branson will be pushing the environmental advantages of his train companies very hard.

Chris Padley, Hambleton Cottage, Walesby Road, Market Rasen, Lincolnshire LN8 3EY

Solihull potential

I disagree with the statement in the letter by Chris Gibb, managing director of Virgin Cross Country, about the removal of the stop at Solihull (*Railwatch 102*).

When the Manchester (or other west coast stations) to Birmingham and Reading through service was increased to half hourly, alternate

trains were diverted on the shorter route from New Street Station to Leamington with a stop at Solihull, rather than the longer route with stops at both Birmingham International and Coventry. With the difficulties of a single track from Coventry to Leamington, punctuality was not affected by the stop at Solihull, this route taking, with the Solihull stop, about four minutes less than via Coventry. It would have been more logical to have removed the Birmingham International stop, and expected passengers to change at Coventry. I believe that CrossCountry does not like commuters from Birmingham to Solihull, using their trains. Solihull station is at the centre of a town of a quarter of a million population. Almost every bus route

journey and nip out to buy a ticket for the second stage of one's journey. Any station booking office can issue tickets for journeys from any other station.

When I take the train from Oxford to Birmingham, I ask for a cheap day return to Banbury and a cheap day return from Banbury to Birmingham. The only restriction is that the tickets are not valid on trains which do not stop at Banbury. I save about £5 with a railcard. The fare from Oxford to Banbury is set by First Great Western Link and the fare from Banbury to Birmingham by Chiltern, but the through fare is set by Virgin Cross Country which does not want to encourage short trips on its trains.

Martin Smith, 57 Bath Street, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 1EA

Reopening appeal

Because of where I live, I would really like to see the Taunton to Barnstaple line reopened. Most of the line is there, and it would be great to have it again. I am sure a lot of people around Dulverton, Wiveliscombe etc, would agree.

Jeremy Lane, Farrant Close, Bishops Hull, Norton Fitzwarren, Somerset.
jrmly_lane@yahoo.co.uk

Rail 'disasters'

It is tragic when people are killed or injured on our railways and of course everything must be done to ensure better maintenance and improve standards, but I recoil at the continued national pastime of focussing on these thankfully rare occurrences when every year 3,500 people are killed on our roads and every attempt to increase safety on the roads is met with derision, resentment from appallingly arrogant motorists or even criminal sabotage as in the case of speed cameras removed or put out of action deliberately.

Can we not get all this in perspective? The railways in this country have been run into the ground by successive administrations and because of this people have no other choice most of the time but to use their cars. But that same lack of investment and anti-rail policies is at the heart of train "disasters", shocking though they may be – but even so it is far safer to travel by rail than road. The figures speak for themselves. There is no argument.

John Rivers, 3 Ashdown Place, Heathfield, East Sussex TN21 8ER
cjrivers@tesco.net

Railtrack payout

Anyone who received a payment from Railtrack as compensation for their shares might consider, following the Indian Ocean disaster, donating it to a really good cause, perhaps even to reinstate the railways in Sri Lanka.

Leslie Freitag, 22 Cravells Road, Harpenden, Herts AL5 1BD
william.freitag@btopenworld.com

Editor's note: A journalist in Sri Lanka in early March reported that the rail line had been relaid and the coaches wrecked by the Tsunami let as a monument to the victims.