

We want more trains but all they can come up with is more buses



Rayner's Review

Well, Mr Darling has gone. No loss in my view to Railfuture. He was long on concept, short on reality and appeared to have a conflict of interests in that he was Minister for Scotland and Secretary of State for Transport.

He could happily enjoy the more sensible approach to road/rail co-ordination in Scotland and at the same time deny Leeds, Liverpool and Portsmouth a tram system and restrict other large conurbations in England from further development of their existing systems.

His famous remark, "We are not carrying fresh air about" was the excuse for closure.

His specifications allowed First Great Western franchise to propose an inferior service in many parts of their region.

Worse still, by restricting services, many school facilities will be lost, train connections only to remain in the peak.

Many of these restrictions can be found in the draft timetables for December 2006, and if Railfuture members are not there before me it is a good idea to examine proposed timetables for their areas and be prepared to campaign for something better.

I do wish Mr Darling's replacement, Douglas Alexander, better judgement, ironically he also has the dual role of Minister for Scotland and Secretary of State for Transport. Maybe the two jobs go together, although perhaps it does

not matter; the Treasury makes many of the decisions anyway.

One hears of great, grand plans for the future and one of the most recent examples is the new Express Link through central England to provide high-speed services from London to Edinburgh and Glasgow. Presently put forward by Network Rail, it would have parkway stations adjacent to large conurbations.

Planning will take several years of public inquiry, the links into cities several more.

It all sounds wonderful until you look at a much less ambitious scheme being undertaken by Network Rail.

To optimise the junction at Woking and Basingstoke (Worting Junction) and railway operating experience and engineering knowledge suggests these ample resources could be used to keep the trains running.

There are four lines between Woking and Basingstoke (Worting Junction) and railway operating experience and engineering knowledge suggests these ample resources could be used to keep the trains running.

Bus services between Andover and Woking. I ask you!

I chose to travel on the Sunday before Bank Holiday Monday (30 April) to northern Italy.

I could not get to London either into Waterloo or Paddington without bus substitution on part of the journey. This at my age, with luggage, I was not prepared to endure.

I ended up paying for a taxi instead. However, once on the Eurostar the journey was seamless, the trains comfortable and on time.

The return journey a week later, again on Sunday, leaving Italy at 09.37 with changes in Lausanne and Paris, arrived promptly in London at 19.58 but once again for the last leg of my journey I was faced with weekend engineering and bus substitution.

I am afraid, despite the big scheme optimism of the politicians, we are in the doldrums and many of our country services will be curtailed and eventually replaced. The much vaunted opening of Stone station in Staffordshire has still not resulted in any trains, only buses.

The Government is in trouble all round and people are more and more worried about health, education, Iraq and other foreign affairs to say nothing of the behaviour of its ministers, so how can we make them listen to us about transport needs?

We must not let the general public believe that never have more trains been running. The operators run smaller trains and those trains

have never been so full. Small trains, fewer seats or worse, a bus replacement is a far from satisfactory choice.

The process appears to be orchestrated to lead us towards busways and bus replacement.

Even with regard to the older persons' free travel so proudly put forward by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, which came in appropriately on 1 April this year, examination of the small print shows "bus only" and "local travel".

As a result, all over the country different solutions have been found often resulting in cheaper tram and train travel being lost to many older people. It is another gift to the bus industry.

■ Peter Rayner is a former British Rail operations and safety manager

International tickets

What are train operating companies doing to make their customers aware of international rail journey possibilities and rail/sea/rail?

On behalf of Railfuture International Committee I wrote to 12 of them and received nine replies.

Arriva Trains Wales explained that fares are available from any station in Great Britain to any station in Ireland and any staffed station should be able to issue these, together with ferry reservations.

But more needs to be done to make customers aware of British/Irish tickets and of specialist travel agents who can help them.

One TOC agreed to remind its staff to recommend such agents although another said "we are expected to be impartial and therefore do not promote individual travel agencies."

On Eurostar, it was encouraging to learn of ScotRail's through

ticketing to Paris, Lille and Brussels using the Caledonian Sleeper service and Eurostar. Joint tickets can be booked through their telesales office on 08457 550033.

Southern told me that they are working with Eurostar to retail a joint Southern/Eurostar ticket.

Several operators promised to update their call centre and retail staff about international tickets.

All operators should be able to sell tickets to "London CIV" which includes the fare to the appropriate London terminal plus the Underground to Waterloo.

It will help to receive feedback on members' experiences with individual TOCs when they enquire about bookings to Ireland or the Continent.

With Eurostars also coming north of the Thames in about 18 months time, the opportunities to promote rail travel to Continental Europe will be even greater. Will the TOCs rise to this challenge?



FLANDERS

Long weekend by train from London

Two nights in hotel in Ghent

Price should be £200 maximum. Hopefully less



29 September to 1 October

RDS Group Travel

for Railfuture members, their families and friends

For details, send an SAE to Trevor Garrod
15 Clapham Road South, Lowestoft NR32 1RQ