



Scotland

By Mike Harrison

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Waverley-North Berwick

The first of five class 322 trains undergoing a £3million refurbishment programme returned to service in April on the North Berwick to Edinburgh line.

Seating capacity has been increased from 252 to 293 and First ScotRail has also funded the installation of eight dedicated cycle storage spaces. This is useful for recreational cyclists as well as commuters. A popular ride for Edinburgh people is the 25 miles to North Berwick, but a strong westerly wind is often a deterrent to riding back home!

The refurbishment was carried out by Hunslet-Barclay, the railway engineering company based in Kilmarnock. It is also responsible for the refurbishment of First ScotRail's class 318 trains, of which five have been completed and are operating in Strathclyde. The full refurbishment programme is set to be completed by the end of 2006.

Larkhall-Hamilton

Restoration of a three-mile rail link closed in 1965 has brought Larkhall, with a population of 14,000, back on to the rail system. In March, just seven weeks after the reopening, Strathclyde Passenger Transport confirmed that patronage was running at 34% above projected estimates, and further confirmation of the massive public response usually experienced with new or reopened rail facilities.

Maryhill-Anniesland extension

The 1993-created new Northern Suburban diesel route from Queen Street high level station to Maryhill was extended in September 2005, to a new Kelvindale Station and on to Anniesland Station with its bay platform interchange with the Clydeside electrified routes (which were also extended from Hamilton to Larkhall during December 2005). SPT confirmed in March that usage was running at 21% above the original estimate.

Regional Transport Partnerships

These began their work from the beginning of April. Most of the members of the boards are from transport operators or councils, but each board has a few places for non-governmental representation. At most there was a possibility of one person from transport campaigning groups. So far we have not heard who has been appointed, but I know of at least one member of Railfuture who applied to be on the board of the South East (Scotland) RTP and got as far as the interview stage.

Masterplan for Haymarket

Halcrow has been appointed by the City of Edinburgh Council and the Scottish Executive to prepare a feasibility study and masterplan



This advert for a pick-up truck was painted on the side of two Amtrak locomotives when a new Toyota factory opened in San Antonio, Texas.

One loco was regularly used on Amtrak's Texas Eagle train from Chicago to San Antonio, with the other on the Silver Service route from Washington to Miami.

"Nothing says big, powerful and unstoppable like a speeding locomotive," said Deborah Wahl Meyer, Toyota's corporate marketing communications manager.

In April, First ScotRail announced it would be introducing advertising panels on 50 trains linking Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Inverness.

Peter Williams, head of marketing at First ScotRail, said: "The average time spent by customers travelling on a train journey is 42 minutes, making the panels an ideal opportunity to expose brand advertising messages."

Of course, the safest and most environmentally acceptable way for pick-up trucks, lorries and cars to travel around is by rail. Many already go by rail in Britain.

EWS, Britain's largest rail freight operator, and STVA have introduced a new rail service from carmaker Ford's facility at Dagenham Docks to Garston, Liverpool. The service operates five days a week. Trains can haul up to 250 cars in one movement and operate at speeds of 75mph, far faster and in greater volumes than road transport can provide.

for a new western gateway to Edinburgh's city centre. The £730,000-multi-disciplinary study for the Haymarket Interchange will consider the creation of a multi-modal interchange around Haymarket station. With a new tram line expected by 2010, growth predicted in rail, bus and taxi usage and the development of new services – such as the proposed Edinburgh Airport rail link – the study will examine a range of options to accommodate the demands of new passengers and pedestrians, as well as a range of ancillary activities. The area is close to the Edinburgh International Conference Centre, the city's financial district and numerous office developments. With the planned mixed use development of the adjacent Morrison Street site, the economic regeneration of the area looks set for a leap forward.

Parliament

The Scottish Parliament has begun considering a Bill which will connect Edinburgh Airport to Scotland's national rail network. The Edinburgh Airport Rail Link Bill, which was introduced to Parliament on 16 March, will provide

direct rail services between the airport and a wide range of towns and cities throughout Scotland.

The Glasgow Airport Rail Link Bill was introduced on 31 January.

On 29 March the Edinburgh Tramline 1 Bill passed Parliament and went for Royal Assent. The Bill for Tramline 2 passed (88 for, 20 against) a week earlier. Now the Council will prepare the business case, and construction is expected to start near the end of 2006. For funding reasons a combination of parts of Lines 1 and 2 effectively linking Leith Docks with the airport will be built first. A spur to the Granton and Waterfront developments is expected to follow and the link along the front between Granton and Ocean Terminal (the Docks) will be last. Unfortunately, without the income from congestion charging, Line 3 – to the new Royal Infirmary – is in abeyance.

■ Best wishes to Mike Harrison who was injured in a road crash in April.

Transport Scotland

Transport Scotland, a new agency responsible for road and railways in

Scotland, published its first annual business plan in May, setting out its targets to improve transport in Scotland.

The agency is responsible for delivering a £1.2billion programme of investment.

The plan is on the web at www.transportscotland.gov.uk/defaultpage1221cde0.aspx?pageID=107&rlID=586

East Anglia

By Trevor Garrod and Nicholas Dibben

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Branch backs upgrade

The branch has supported the Transport and Works Act application made by Hutchison Ports to upgrade the line to Felixstowe Docks. The £44million scheme involves providing a section of double track on the route and changes to Ipswich Yard to allow for extra and longer freight trains.

The company has agreed to pay for the work and also contribute to upgrading the line between Ipswich and Peterborough as a condition of extending the length of quayside at the port.

Plans for east coast towns

The branch has responded to a consultation on future development at Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft. The plans provide both an opportunity and a threat to the existing railway. In our response, we have opposed plans to move the existing stations away from the town centres. We have suggested refurbishment and improved station facilities, better access between station and town centre, increased train service and the retention of rail freight facilities.

East Suffolk

Following rumours in late autumn that train operator ONE managers were considering withdrawing the through services from Lowestoft to Liverpool Street (introduced in December 2004), East Suffolk Travellers Association has been in correspondence with managers, MPs and others, and had two meetings with managers. We are assured that there are no plans to withdraw these trains. They have been successful in gaining new business but as a result there have been overcrowding problems, particularly south of Ipswich. During the winter, the class 170 three-car trains operating the services have undergone some refurbishment, which has involved removing some of the first class seating and creating 46 additional standard class seats.

In the longer term, ESTA has suggested combining the units forming the Peterborough-Bury St Edmunds-Liverpool Street and Lowestoft-Liverpool Street trains at Ipswich and thus running a six-



car train south of Ipswich. If this service operated every two hours, an electric multiple unit train could run between Ipswich and the capital on alternate hours.

Autumn meeting

ESTA's autumn meeting will be on Saturday 7 October at 14.30 in St Mary's Church Hall, Market Hill, Woodbridge. Details will be advertised locally or available on the ESTA website: www.eastsuffolktravel.org.uk.

Wessex

By Trevor Jones

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The Wessex branch annual general meeting on 11 March was held in an old Salisbury coaching inn with about 40 people attending.

Julian Crow of First Great Western gave an up-beat address. He said FGW's approach with the new franchise is to improve things and get more people on to trains. The Department for Transport gave a very highly specified timetable compared with earlier franchises, but it has been persuaded of a few changes and is now being a bit more flexible, allowing running of more trains if there's a commercial case and it doesn't cost any more. Adelantes are going back to the leasing company because they are too short as five-car trains but too long as 10-cars.

There will be one control office for the whole region, co-located with Network Rail at Swindon. FGW is committed to continue community rail funding, including the former Wessex share.

It is not FGW's role to put any pressure on the Government to do things differently. If Railfuture does not like something, Railfuture must put pressure on the Government.

Peter Argent told how the Heart of Wessex Community Rail Partnership gives good coverage of Railfuture Wessex. A "foodie" trail is now being added to the Rail Ale trail.

The then chairman David Stevenson said the main officers were all standing down but would still be willing to help out in the future. Officers had been involved with Stagecoach, First Great Western, and National Express which are bidding for franchises, and they had been involved with the Rail Passengers Committee and its replacement Passenger Focus.

The following were elected: chair Alan Shotton asho658311@aol.com, secretary Mike Perkins 02380 897500, membership secretary Josephine Martin.

Devon and Cornwall

By Gerard Duddridge

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Learning from history

Friday 3 March marked 50 years since closure of Dartmoor's Princetown branch. The following Tues-

day was 40 years since closure of the Somerset and Dorset Railway from Bath to Templecombe and Bournemouth. The lost route from Templecombe has ever since left West Country passengers, bound for Bournemouth and Poole Ferry Port, with a long and circuitous journey via Southampton.

Also shut on 7 March 1966 was the Glastonbury branch in Somerset, numerous stations on the Exeter-Waterloo line and the Seaton branch. Over 100 miles of West Country railway and 48 stations were closed.

Labour swings axe again

8 March 2006 was the closure date for responses to First Great Western's proposed December 2006 timetable. The Department for Transport has imposed numerous service reductions on the new franchise. The number of lost trains seems as devastating as Labour's 1966 cuts.

The DfT wished to remove almost all Westbury stops from West of England to Paddington trains, so cutting good connections to Southampton and Portsmouth. Travel to Bournemouth would be made even more difficult. The one through train from Penzance to Portsmouth via Westbury would also be discontinued.

On the Barnstaple line fewer trains would run, fewer intermediate stations would be served and many would no longer run to Exeter Central for the city centre. The first and only up stopping train would arrive too early for Exeter Central commuters at 07.50. In the evening one down stopping train to Barnstaple at 17.44 would replace current services at 16.46, 17.50 and 18.46.

The former Wessex main line Alphaline services would be cut, so reducing trains at places such as St Germans, Saltash, Ivybridge (10 trains reduced to three) and most direct trains from Cornwall and Devon to Weston-super-Mare and south Wales.

Services in Cornwall would be reduced on the Looe line (13 down to eight) and to St Ives (26 down to 16 in the winter). There would be no additional summer trains to Newquay and one less on the Fal-mouth line.

Change for the better

Following over 9,000 responses to the consultation, and a press campaign by the *Western Morning News* and *Plymouth Evening Herald*, some changes have been made.

First's press release of 3 April announced the restoration to the draft timetable of two London Paddington to Exeter stopping trains serving Westbury, and two fast Plymouth-London Paddington trains taking just three hours. The first Barnstaple-Exeter train is to run half an hour later and more Barnstaple trains will continue to run to Exeter Central station. In

Cornwall additional calls will be made at Saltash and St Germans.

However, it appears that Ivybridge residents may still have to use their cars for commuting in the Newton Abbot and Exeter direction. The four-coach platforms are too short for additional calls by Paddington HST services or Virgin's Cross-Country Voyager trains.

Our proposed changes

Railfuture considers all the planned December cutbacks of the new Greater Western Franchise must be completely withdrawn and replaced by a programme of expansion to reflect the growing demand for train services. There should be:

- A new hourly service between Torbay, Plymouth and Cornwall to provide frequent trains for Ivybridge and St Germans and new stations at Kingskerswell, South Brent and Plympton

- No cutbacks on the branch lines

- Exeter-Barnstaple service to be retained and upgraded towards main line status

- The Penzance to Southampton and Portsmouth train to be retained and integrated into the South West Trains franchise

■ Westbury to be retained as a major stopping point on the Penzance to Paddington route. Fairwood Junction to be upgraded from 40mph to 90mph to reduce the time lost when stopping at Westbury.

Branch annual general meeting

The branch held its AGM on Saturday 8 April in Plymouth. Our thanks were recorded to Stuart Walker who has worked tirelessly for over a decade as secretary. We welcome long-standing committee member Peter Mulley as our new secretary, and Philip Dredge (Ivybridge Rail Users Group) as assistant secretary.

Our guest speaker was Julian Crow, First's general manager for West of England. He said that the new franchise had involved bidding against the timetable proposed by the Department for Transport and saying what premium the company could pay to the Government.

There would be nine London-Penzance trains rather than seven at present, as it was almost as cost effective to run a through InterCity 125 beyond Plymouth than a separate local train for Cornish stations. Regrettably the first Paddington

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to Plymouth train will continue to run via Bristol. He considered that £2million per year would be required to run a faster more direct train. The new morning train from Torbay to London operated by an InterCity 125 would also help solve crowding for commuters travelling into Exeter. Similarly Truro will benefit from a 125 working in the morning.

First wishes to develop St Erth as a park-and-ride station, as Lelant Saltings is full in high summer and not so easy to find. St Erth would serve the main line as well as the St Ives branch. The proposal may be dependent on the purchase of the old scrapyard site that could provide 500 car parking spaces.

East Midlands

By Anthony Kay
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Network Rail assessment

TravelWatch East Midlands, the new name for East Midlands Passenger Transport Users' Forum, has given a cautious welcome to Network Rail's business plan for the East Midlands and Midland MainLine. Train capacity between Leicester and Nuneaton, an important route for freight as well as passenger traffic, will be improved by resignalling in 2006-7. However, there seems to be a lack of urgency on other important issues: Nottingham station and its western approaches are heavily congested, but won't be resignalled until 2010 and there is no firm commitment to the much-needed track layout improvements at Bedford, Kettering and Trent Junction.

Franchise seminar

TravelWatch East Midlands invited rail user groups and other stakeholders to a seminar it is organising on the new East Midlands franchise, at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Nottingham on 19 May.

Loughborough improvements

Loughborough is one of 47 stations around the country that will benefit from a Government fund for making stations accessible for disabled people. Currently, platforms two and three are only accessible via a footbridge with stairs. Railfuture East Midlands is pressing for lifts to be installed rather than the cheaper option of a long ramp.

Derwent Valley line

Work to strengthen three bridges on the Derby-Matlock line will take place in 2008-9. Local user group, Friends of Derwent Valley Line, are hoping this could allow the direct service from Matlock to London to be restored. The service was suspended in 2004 because Midland Mainline's Meridian trains were too heavy for the bridges, but its future will depend on the results of the franchise renewal in 2007.

Airport link

Network Rail intends East Midlands Parkway station to open in

2008, and there will be a regular shuttle bus to Nottingham East Midlands Airport. The airport has recently published its draft master-plan covering the period until 2030. The plan states that a rail link into the airport is unlikely to be feasible before 2030, but they would support investigations into the possibility of such a link.

Blaby

Leicestershire County Council is drawing up plans for a station at Blaby, on the Leicester-Nuneaton line, to relieve congestion on roads entering Leicester from the south. The plans are at an early stage, but it is hoped that a station could be opened by 2015.

St Pancras

Both the county council and the Chamber of Commerce in Leicestershire have warned that the four platforms allocated to Midland Mainline at the new St Pancras station are insufficient to meet the expected demand over the next two decades. Commuting and business travel between Leicestershire and London is increasing year by year, but the rebuilt terminus was only designed to cope with 1994 levels of demand.

Thames

By Chris Wright
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Good news on the progress of recent campaigns.

Aylesbury Parkway (formerly North) has secured £11m funding - from the Office of Deputy Prime Minister (£8.1m), Chiltern Railways (£2.8m), Bucks County Council (£1m) and the developer. The station will be three miles north of Aylesbury serving new housing but also as a parkway. It is expected to open in 2009.

East West Rail Aylesbury/Oxford-Milton Keynes has moved forward with publication of further reports proving the case and costings. The latest reports, on eastwestrail.org, also suggest a funding mechanism. A new study is under way to refine costings, for half hourly 90mph services and further work on funding. The report is due out in July to feed into regional planning studies.

Bletchley re-modelling work includes consideration of a platform as the flyover so Bedford-Bletchley services can be extended to Milton Keynes Central and also used for East West rail services.

Bicester North has had a £600,000 extension to car park facilities to cope with an increase of 15% in passengers in the past 12 months. Remodelling of the entrance has also been undertaken, resolving another of the branch's concerns.

Oxford Bicester Rail User Group continues to press for improvements at Bicester Town and footpath to Bicester Village completed.

Milton Keynes Central Funding has been agreed for a new bay platform at Central Milton Keynes

for Bedford-Bletchley and/or East West rail services as part of the capacity enhancements which are due for completion in 2008-9. Milton Keynes Partnership and Council are funding the £2.8million plan partly with developer funding.

London & South East

By Laurence Fryer
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Line to shut for two years

The end of June marks the 20th anniversary of the closure of the City Branch of the North London Railway between Dalston Junction and Broad Street, reports Roger Blake.

"So it came as a disappointment to learn on 3 May that the East London line which is to use the revamped City branch will itself close for two years," he said.

The BBC reported that a leaked London Underground memo shows plans for it to be the first Tube line to be run by the private sector, once work is completed in 2009.

The line, which will play a major 2012 Olympic role, will shut in December 2007 for work to be carried out.

Once completed it will be handed to a private operator in 2009 when it will be tied into services on the overland North London Line, creating a new franchise.

Unions unhappy

Currently only the Docklands Light Railway is run by a private operator, with Transport for London overseeing the contract.

Mayor Ken Livingstone opposed privatisation and fought an unsuccessful campaign against the privatisation of maintenance on the Underground.

The Rail, Maritime and Transport union said it was unhappy at the plans and intended to fight "privatisation".

Transport for London said it would continue to set fares and the frequency of services, and would offer a better service and more jobs under an integrated rail service.

"There will be absolutely no redundancies and all current staff will be offered alternative positions within London Underground in full consultation with trade unions," it said.

Further information: <http://ellp.tfl.gov.uk/UserFiles/File/Documents/Shoreditch%20Closure.pdf>

AGM

The branch held its AGM at the London Welsh Centre on 20 April.

The new committee comprises: Keith Dyall chairman, Howard Thomas vice-chairman, Richard Pout secretary, Trevor Jones treasurer, John Pitcher, John Davison, Norman Bradbury, Laurence Fryer, Eric Wright and Roger Blake.

Improvements

The Barking to Gospel Oak line rail users were delighted to have a major improvement in June to their Monday-Friday train service, thanks to Transport for London funding.

At the height of the morning and evening rush hours, a 20-minute interval service now operates. And in the evenings, the half-hourly service will operate right through until the last train (apart from a one-hour gap between the 22.08 and 23.08 from Barking).

"This is excellent news," said secretary Graham Larkbey. "We have been campaigning for improved services for many years, and the new timetable is the best any of us can remember."

"Weekend services are basically unchanged, but we hope subsequent improvement packages will include these as well."

Bike ban

A ban on bikes at rush hours is however being proposed on the Barking-Gospel Oak line.

The rail user group is seeking views prior to responding to the operator's consultation process.

Please send views to the Secretary at 35 Carr Road, London E17 5ER, or g-larkbey@dfid.gov.uk

Takeover

Transport for London is expected to take over the line from 2007.

Mayor of London Ken Livingstone said: "This announcement means that, from 2007, Transport for London can begin to revitalise London's overground rail services just as it has done with buses and is doing on the Tube."

On transfer to TfL in autumn 2007, passengers are promised immediate benefits including:

Additional station staff to provide improved customer service, security and revenue protection

Oyster ticketing including the ability to use Pay-As-You-Go

Extra train services, running earlier in the morning and later in the evening.

Over the next five years, TfL plans to deliver further improvements, including:

New, higher capacity, accessible trains replacing the existing fleet

A £25million station enhancement programme to bring North London Railway stations up to TfL standards

Service frequency improvements on all routes with the provision of eight trains per hour on the core North London line route between Stratford and Willesden

Ian Brown, TfL Managing Director London Rail, said: "TfL's policy is to put passengers' comfort, safety and security first."

Graham Larkbey said: "This is all music to our ears, and we look for-



ward to working with TFL in the months to come, to help bring about the improvements passengers want to see and to help publicise a route which is still not half as well known as it should be."

More news: www.barking-gospel-oak.org.uk

Lincolnshire

By Brian Hastings
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Helpful response

Central Trains responded to appeals from Railfuture for detailed improvements to its timetable. From the June timetable changes, Collingham benefits from additional services including a useful 07.55 fast commuter train to Lincoln and a 16.56 arrival from Lincoln. Shoppers will enjoy the retiming of the 17.49 Lincoln departure to Nottingham to a more convenient earlier departure at 17.29.

The retiming of the 16.56 Lincoln to Sleaford train to make it a 17.09 departure will help commuters. In addition, the 20.40 departure from Lincoln is reinstated.

All change

After 19 years as branch chairman, I stepped down at the branch's annual meeting in Grantham this year. I am pleased that the branch has grown in stature and is well respected by both train companies serving the county and local authorities. I wish the branch continued success in putting the case for rail across Lincolnshire.

Alan Waddington from Metheringham takes over as chairman with David Harby continuing as vice-chairman and Mike Savage as treasurer.

Good news

Striking improvements in performance have been achieved by Central Trains since the introduction of the December timetable, the annual general meeting was told by its route managers Nigel Carlisle and Paul Burnage. Improvements were also reported on the Sheffield-Lincoln route by Northern Rail which was represented by service quality manager Peter Myers and stakeholder manager Stuart Rands. There was also a positive presentation from Chris Watson, development officer for Grantham-Skegness Community Rail Partnership. The line is now known as the Poacher line.

New trains

New class 185 trains, built in Germany by Siemens, have started to appear on test between Sheffield and Cleethorpes although their public launch on Manchester Airport-Cleethorpes services will not officially take place until August. Rumours are circulating that not enough new trains have been ordered and some services will be run using refurbished class 158 and class 170, from South West Trains.

Steam and scene

Steam specials will be running on the Cambrian Coast line throughout August after a sell-out run last year.

Starting at either Machynlleth or Aberystwyth, and running along the Cambrian Coast Line as far as either Porthmadog or Barmouth, they will take in some of Wales' best mountain and coastal scenery. The steam locomotive

76079 will be provided by the West Coast Railway Company which has run the successful Jacobite steam train from Fort William in the West Highlands of Scotland for over a decade.

WCR's James Shuttleworth said: "I am sure that the month of steam services will draw a large number of tourists and rail enthusiasts to the Cambrian Coast."

Steam trains will run on the Cambrian Coast Line between 30 July and 28 August, Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Sundays.

Tickets for the steam trains (£27 for adults) can be booked on 0870 428 4077. Through train tickets (£32) are available from Cardiff Central, Shrewsbury, Chester, Crewe and Birmingham New Street stations for connecting Arriva Trains Wales services on the same date of travel. Child and daily tickets are also available. More information at <http://www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk>

Picture shows a steam train alongside Friog Cliff, near Fairbourne

Picture: ARRIVA TRAINS WALES



We hope the Manchester-Cleethorpes route will go over to class 185 operation completely.

Safety film

A new film to encourage road users to behave properly when using level crossings was made in April at Hibaldston on the Gainsborough-Barnetby line.

Track improvements

Railfuture was delighted to be told that major track remodelling and resignalling will take place at Lincoln as part of a two-year scheme. The work will bring direct benefits to existing services as well as reduce the need for empty stock movements and free up train paths.

It will also make it possible for a Grimsby-Lincoln-London service to be introduced at some future date.

New cross-overs and using realigned freight lines for passenger trains will allow services from Sleaford and Barnetby to gain access to all the platforms, while trains from Newark and Gainsborough will be

able to go into platforms six and seven as well as five.

The work will be carried out next year and in 2008 when there will be complete closedowns during the August holiday periods. One new signal box will replace four.

Automatic ticket gates at Lincoln

Railfuture supports the fitting of automatic ticket gates at Lincoln, partly as a way of combating deliberate fare dodging. However, passengers arriving from Hykeham, Saxilby, Metheringham, Ruskington and Market Rasen often do not have chance to buy their tickets from the train conductors so an excess fare window will be needed on the platform at Lincoln.

North East

By Peter Kenyon

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Links with rail groups

The branch annual report records that members are active in or in touch with the following user groups and community rail part-

nerships: Esk Valley Line and CRP, Saltburn Line, Coastliners (Sunderland-Hartlepool-Middlesborough), Heritage Line and CRP (Darlington-Bishop Auckland), Tyne Valley Line and CRP plus South East Northumberland, Alnmouth, Belford, and Berwick Station Partnerships.

Liaison

Links have been established with Passenger Focus, the new look RPC, and contact with Network Rail is developing, particularly through the East Coast main line route utilisation strategy work and the RUS covering the whole of the national rail network in the North East.

The branch was represented at a Freight on Rail workshop in Durham and in meetings with PD Teesport about 9'6" containers and gauge enhancement. The lead-up to the renewal of the Northern Rail franchise gave the opportunity to engage constructively with a wide range of political bodies.

Correspondence with Alnwick District Council has revealed the interest of the Northumberland Federation of Women's Institutes in campaigning for rural railways. Branch and user group members have attended the stakeholder liaison meetings of various train operating companies.

Recent speakers at branch or group meetings include Ian Yeoward of Great Central Railway, Steve Butcher area director, Kathryn O'Brien stakeholder manager, and Peter Myers, quality service manager of Northern Rail.

Regional action

In the wider transport field the branch is a member of the North East Combined Transport Activists Roundtable and provided a joint chairman for the Transport 2000 seminar Developing the Railways in York. The Association of North East Councils has supported the campaign to retain and enhance North East local rail services.

Suggestions include extending the four-track system north of Darlington and the association has reconfirmed its backing of proposals to reopen the Leamside line and to reintroduce passenger services on the Blyth and Tyne route.

Wansbeck District Council has approved an application for a 607-metre rail line at Battleship Wharf in the port of Blyth which will link to the national network and carry three coal trains a day, each carrying the equivalent of 50 lorries.

Documentary submissions

The branch is fortunate to have among its members people capable of submitting detailed and reasoned documents which make the case for rail development. Recent examples are: the Consultation on the Capacity Study for the East Coast Main Line, the baseline submission to the East Coast main line rail utilisation study, the Consultation on the Implementation of the Railways

Local action



Act 2005 (provisions on closures and minor modifications), and the enquiry by Passenger Focus into the specification for Refranchising of the Cross Country Network.

The Government's North East Regional Planning Assessment was published in March and is on the web at http://www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft_railways/documents/page/dft_railways_611453.hcsp

The RPA looks at the development of the railway in the region over the next 20 years and sets out where greater rail capability and capacity will be needed, and the options for responding to that need. The RPA recommends optimising timetables, improving accessibility and interchanges, and matching resources to demand to best use existing capacity and improve performance.

There will eventually be 11 RPAs covering England and Wales.

Campaigning success

The work of branch and group members in lobbying and corresponding has borne fruit in the recent decision of the Office of Rail Regulation to allow Grand Central access rights to run three trains each way from King's Cross to Sunderland and the conclusion in March of the enquiry into the Northern Rail franchise that no changes need to be made. In the latter case the value of representations from the Northern Region was acknowledged by the minister. Also the Department for Transport plan to cut the remaining hourly national rail service between Sunderland and Newcastle has been dropped from the regional planning assessment.

Campaigning continues

The tactic of introducing cuts in rail services surreptitiously through prescriptive franchises, of which the Great Western franchise is the most recent, has led the branch chairman to contact Commons transport committee chairman Gwyneth Dunwoody MP. The re-introduction of passenger services on the Ashington, Blyth and Tyne line has featured at the Examination in Public of the Regional Rail Strategy and is being pursued actively

by the South East Northumberland rail user group. Belford rail users continue to advocate the provision of a platform at Belford, to allow the existing visits of Northern trains for reversal to be used by passengers. The supporters of the re-laying and reopening of the Alnwick-Alnwick line have commissioned a study by Manchester Metropolitan University of a suitable light rail system. The welcome and runaway success of the Alnwick Garden scheme masterminded by the Duchess of Northumberland, and the revival of passenger traffic at Alnwick (where some eight CrossCountry trains and six GNER trains in each direction stop daily), should provide a ready tourist traffic for a reopened branch line, and reduce car journeys to Alnwick.

Wales

Birthday celebration

Over 225,000 passenger journeys have been made on the Vale of Glamorgan line in south Wales since it opened one year ago.

The line, which runs between Bridgend and Cardiff via Barry, has restored a vital link for commuters and leisure travellers to and from the Vale of Glamorgan and provided a rail link to Cardiff International Airport for the first time.

Bob Holland, managing director of Arriva Trains Wales, said: "The huge success of the line represents a major achievement for all the partners involved in bringing the rail link to fruition. We are delighted to have played a part in restoring much needed train services to communities in the Vale of Glamorgan.

"The Vale of Glamorgan Line was Wales' first new passenger railway line for several decades and we look forward to building upon this success when the Ebbw Valley Line is opened next year."

New stations built at Llantwit Major and Rhoose have become a much valued resource for local people. Llantwit Major station has been adopted by the town's chamber of trade and commerce, along with local resident Bill Price. Steve Hunt,

president of the chamber said: "The new rail link has had a huge impact upon Llantwit Major and opened up the town and surrounding areas without the hassles of parking and traffic queues.

"On a personal level, I have never used the train so much. With a young family, we find it cheaper and often quicker to travel locally by train and it's a more interesting journey for the children."

Severnside

By David Redgewell

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The branch is still campaigning hard against the loss of three-car units on the Cardiff-Portsmouth line. Going from three-car to two-cars reduces capacity by 1,000 seats during peak times.

Campaigning continues for the Bristol-Southampton service following the Department for Transport and Government offices agreeing to fund other services.

Changes to Southampton via Chandlers Ford and Eastleigh services has caused outrage among users in Trowbridge, Warminster, Dilton Marsh, Melksham, Chippenham and Swindon.

MPs are angry that the Swindon-Southampton service should go from a train every two hours to every 14 hours. It would appear that DfT civil servants have more interest in protecting the road-building budgets than growing the railways.

Labour MP Alice Seabek, Plymouth Devonport, co-ordinating the battle to save the South West railways with Conservative Gary Streaker MP.

Lib Dem Don Foster has accused the Government Office South West of running the region's railways like that of a colony of the British Empire. They could do justice and be more effective running railways in India, which is run by Ministry of Railways.

This model certainly doesn't work in England.

Other cuts being hard fought in the South West are those on the Exeter-

Plymouth local service where trains are being withdrawn from 12 per day to just three in each direction.

Bristol-Penzance and London Waterloo-Plymouth are being withdrawn by the Government Office South West and Department for Transport from December.

The final round of cuts iseing made by Bristol's Liberal Democrat city council which is withdrawing £136,000 of subsidy from Bristol Severn Beach and suburban services.

The service will end in December next year unless there is a change of heart by Bristol Council.

Railfuture, Transport 2000 and rail user groups are working together to apply pressure to get these cuts reversed.

Bristol City Council ignored a 3,000 signature rail petition and they also ignored representations from local people who tried to defend their bus services.

Bristol City Council has reduced its budget for buses and trains, cutting the entire local rail subsidy and removing five bus routes.

Bath and North East Somerset Council have cut 11 bus routes, some previously jointly funded with Bristol, which has also removed its money. Only South Gloucestershire Council has voted to maintain its rail subsidy.

Campaigners are particularly angry about Bristol's decision to cut the £136,000 rail subsidy. This money could have provided a half hourly service at peak times on the Severn Beach line. Without the money, the service has had to be reduced. Services start later and finish earlier, and the stretch from Avonmouth to Severn Beach has become a bus link. With the subsidy, it could have been covered by train.

West Midlands

By Peter Cousins

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New station plans

Funding for a new station at Coleshill, Warwickshire, was approved by Government in March and work is expected to start later this year. This new transport hub on the Birmingham-Nuneaton line, which is adjacent to the large Hams Hall distribution park, will have a five-bay bus interchange and a 200-space car park. A new road bridge is included in the cost.

It is expected that the station will be served by the existing half-hourly trains from Birmingham to Leicester but not by any services on the Birmingham-Derby route. West Midlands branch believe that this omission is regrettable, particularly as a dedicated bus link to Birmingham Airport is planned.

North Staffordshire

The local service from Stafford to Stoke-on-Trent remains suspended



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with a bus service covering Stafford to Norton Bridge and the X1 bus running from Stafford to Stoke via Stone, Barlaston and Wedgwood. This service is unusual (for a rail replacement) as it also serves Stafford Hospital and continues north beyond Stoke-on-Trent station to Hanley town centre. Rail tickets are valid throughout and, by using the A51, the bus also passes the long closed stations at Ashton by Stone, Sandon and Weston & Ingestre!

Despite the promise by the Strategic Rail Authority, there is still no definite news of when the rail service to Stone and Barlaston will resume. It is however clear that five-car Voyagers, lacking any selective door opening facility, cannot call at the shorter northbound platform at Stone which has an operational length of only 98 metres.

Worcester signalling

A long-awaited enhancement to the signalling at Worcester Foregate Street came into operation at the end of February. Trains can now reverse directly from either platform avoiding the time-consuming detour over the river Severn to Henwick which was formerly necessary.

New parkway station

Shropshire County Council has funding under the Transport Innovation Fund to look at transport problems in the county. There are already three bus park and ride schemes in Shrewsbury and part of this new funding will be used for a further study of the potential demand for a combined rail-bus park and ride station on the main line east of the city. The preferred site, near Preston, would be close to both the A5 and A49 trunk roads.

Yorkshire

By Peter Davies
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Annual report

The branch annual report *Yorkshire Rail Review, 2005* was launched in March and received excellent press coverage from the Yorkshire Post newspaper. The report highlights the need for more rolling stock in West Yorkshire and clearly points out that only 16 trailer vehicles have been provided since rail privatisation. These trailer vehicles are for the Airedale and Wharfedale electrified lines. Rolling stock which is used on other lines is more than 20 years old compared with 12 in the London area.

Since the report was published finance has been provided by Yorkshire Forward for Northern rail to acquire six class 158 Sprinter units from Transpennine following the introduction of the new class 185 trains.

Northern rail review

The branch has been very concerned with regard to the Northern Rail Review, and it was very pleasing to note that rail passenger usage

Parry Associates
LIGHTWEIGHT SUBURBAN RAILWAYS
New technology to suit the needs of shorter lines
12 environmentally-friendly, congestion-busting attributes
in one intermediate Mode

IN THE THREE decades prior to 1980, thousands of miles of railway routes in Britain went out of public transport use. This was a period when the conventional wisdom was that, due to massive investment in roads, branch lines were unlikely to be needed in the future. Many of the vacated corridors remain clear to this day, some with the track lifted or with it left in place for possible future freight use, others as leisure lines used to run historic oiling stock lovingly preserved by volunteers. Such has been the growth of traffic on local roads that resumption of passenger rail services can now be contemplated – but not in their original form. Rail patronage is growing strongly year by year but the industry is running out of ways of providing additional capacity on existing tracks – and the pressures are greatest on urban commuting. With limited funds available, how do we increase the provision of suburban rail transport? I need for some fresh thinking...

Trains BUSES TRAMS
? THE CASE FOR A RAIL-BASED INTERMEDIATE MODE ANALYSED – see overleaf

Clear and quiet transit at an affordable cost

The Parry People Mover has now been running every Sunday for four months on the half mile Stourbridge Town Branch. By early March the PPM 50 had carried over 2,500 passengers with a reliability that many train operators would envy.

The Parry People Mover, which uses a small gas powered engine linked to a flywheel for energy storage, was developed at Cradley Heath in the West Midlands. The PPM 50, which has room for 20 seated and 30 standing passengers, is a development of the PPM 35 which ran on Bristol Harbourside from 1998 to 2000, carrying over 50,000 passengers.

A number of proposals for extended operation include the possible use of a similar vehicle on the former Cambrian main line between Gobowen and Oswestry.

Railfuture member Graham Collett wrote to John Parry to congratulate him. Graham said: "This is a very significant breakthrough which opens up the network for light rail vehicles of the PPM type. It also provides very useful ammunition in the battle with Department for Transport over light rail!"

For more information see the Parry website at <http://www.parrypeoplemovers.com/index.htm>. There are details of other towns which could benefit from a PPM.

in the Yorkshire area has increased by 10% overall. There are to be no reductions in rail services and there are to be no closures of stations.

Regional spatial strategy

The branch was invited to comment on the Yorkshire and Humberside Regional Spatial Strategy which it supported. The strategy highlights

the need for the rail journey to be part of the whole tourism offer, and encourages improved rail services on the region's scenic railways, Yorkshire Coast, Penistone, Settle and Carlisle, and Esk Valley lines.

The strategy also supports the development of the heritage railways (Wensleydale and North York Moors), and suggests investigating

reopening of Skipton-Grassington and Malton-Pickering.

A submission has been made to the Yorkshire and Humber assembly supporting the proposals contained in the strategy.

Rail minister Derek Twigg visited Scarborough on 7 June to see the £1million refurbishment of the station.

Hook ferries

Since 1883 trains have connected at Harwich Parkeston Quay (now Harwich International Port) with ships to Hoek van Holland, where trains from the quayside station take passengers to Rotterdam and beyond. It is a classic example of integrated transport, writes Trevor Garrod.

The crossing is operated by Stena Line, which in 1999 introduced the HSS Stena Discovery, a high-speed catamaran which takes three hours 40 minutes and does two return crossings per day.

The HSS was introduced to give a faster journey in response to competition from low-cost airlines and the Channel Tunnel.

It is well marketed in East Anglia, with a minimum £50 return fare between any ONE station and any station in the Netherlands.

I have also found it a useful and cheaper alternative to Eurostar on trips to Belgium, the main drawback being much lower frequency than Eurostar.

However, rising fuel prices and airline competition have led Stena to reevaluate the future of the HSS.

As chairman of the European Passengers' Federation, I am assured by Stena Line that they "will remain as a major passenger operator on the Hoek van Holland-Harwich route, either with the fast ferry or a conventional ferry with slightly extended crossing times."

The HSS will continue to operate her normal timetable throughout the summer season and "probably through early 2007".

To book Dutch Flyer and other rail/sea/rail tickets, you can contact Travel Cannon Ltd., Saxmundham Rail Station, Station Approach, Saxmundham, Suffolk, IP17 1BW email: travel@cannon.co.uk Tel: 01728 604600.

Lottery winners

Railfuture lottery winners are: December, H R F Mills, J W Taylor, Mrs I E Lean; January, Mrs J Powell, C J Harley, A J Boulton; February, F R Strutt, C Martindale, Ms Mary Hill

Pollution

Air pollution in parts of London exceeds European Union targets by up to 50% and is endangering health, says the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy.