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Printed by Print-Out,
High Street, Histon,
Cambridge CB4 4JD

Tel: 01223 232709

Railfuture members receive
Railwatch free.

Non-members can subscribe to
Railwatch by sending £6
(cheque payable to *Railwatch*) to:
Alan Cocker, 11 Franklin Road,
Ipswich, Suffolk IP3 9DX

Copy deadlines

Copy for the next issue, to be published in June, must be in the hands of Mr King by:

Last copy on paper: 1 May

Text by email: 6 May

Copy to: editor@railwatch.org.uk

Advertising

Full page: £190. Half page: £95

Quarter page: £45. Small ads:

30p per word (20p to members)

Railfuture

is an independent voluntary campaign group.

Railfuture is the campaigning name of the Railway Development Society Ltd, 18a Grantham Road, Bracebridge Heath, Lincoln LN4 2LD

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Elections

The board is elected annually and nomination forms can be obtained from the Returning Officer, PO Box 7690, Hinckley LE10 9WJ.

You can also download a form from www.railfuture.org.uk

Left in the lurch

National Rail operators virtually abandoned their passengers on Boxing Day.

Only Southeastern ran any kind of service, with three trains an hour from London Charing Cross as well as hourly trains from London Victoria to Orpington.

Train operators should provide more services on Boxing Day, according to 70% of respondents in a Passenger Focus website poll.

Cambridge Heath and London Fields rail users have asked whether London TravelWatch should be calling for a proper Boxing day service on all lines in the London area.

Transport for London ensured there were Tubes and buses running in London.

In the rest of the country the Department for Transport "rail group" let us down.

Boxing Day rail services disappeared in the late 1960s but they were re-introduced by British Rail for three years 1974-76. Although services were sparse, they were well patronised.

Boxing Day is a big day for travel, particularly to sporting events and for family visiting. In *Railwatch* 109,

we asked whether MPs should only be allowed to claim travel expenses if they travelled by public transport. We have since learnt how much money is spent on their travel claims.

What other ways are there to remind them of their responsibility to provide a public transport service for people without cars and people who don't want to use cars?

Perhaps they want to retain the freedom to carry air around the country in their empty heads, just as most motorists carry air – certainly not fresh air – around the country in their cars.

National Express, which on normal days runs many of the trains in East Anglia, did not run any trains on Boxing Day. But its buses and coaches did run. At the time National Express took over the franchise in 2005, the Competition Commission undertook an investigation. Railfuture at that time believed it did not create a monopoly.

When Passenger Focus was asked about its policy on Boxing Day trains, passenger contact adviser Laura Groves said: "Passenger Focus do not have a policy regard-

ing Boxing Day services, though after a recent poll on our website 71% of passengers said they would prefer more trains, 15% said they wouldn't and 14% said they did not mind. This information will be passed to train operating companies for their consideration on future Boxing Day services."

The runners

Southeastern ran hourly trains on four routes: Charing Cross-Greenwich-Slade Green (return via Eltham), Charing Cross-Eltham-Slade Green (return via Greenwich), Charing Cross-Orpington-Tonbridge-Ashford and Victoria-Orpington.

Southern ran trains from West Croydon to London Victoria, and Scotrail ran trains only in the Strathclyde area.

The former Thameslink, which has in the past run trains, was a train-free zone on Boxing Day. The franchise is now run by First Capital Connect.

As well as running services on Boxing Day, TfL sponsored free travel on many National Rail services out of London from midnight until 05.00 on New Year's Day

The electric way

Railfuture vice chairman Jerry Alderson was intrigued to see – on the back cover of *Railwatch* 110 – the British Rail electrification map from 1980, which Reg Harman presented at the Railfuture conference in Reading.

He said: "What a pity that the rail industry today, whether Network Rail or the DfT, has no equivalent map.

"I'm sure readers will be pleased to know that Railfuture's Network Development Committee is producing a leaflet to promote further electrification on routes where the benefits would outweigh the infrastructure, maintenance and disruption costs.

"I would be pleased to hear from anyone who can provide me with fact-based evidence to support further electrification."

Graham Larkbey, of the Barking-Gospel Oak Line rail users said modest fill-in electrification schemes, like Ashford-Hastings and Barking-Gospel Oak, were important.

Philip Shelton, however, emailed (philip@rooksfarm.fsnet.co.uk) to say that he was appalled by the map because it did not show either of the two direct routes from London to the South West, from Waterloo via Salisbury (already electrified for about a third of the distance

to Exeter) and from Paddington via Westbury.

He said these routes do not appear to be even "longer-term prospects" for electrification.

He said: "It's a classic case of those in the rest of the country thinking that the south west peninsula begins and ends at Bristol, so it's perfectly reasonable to "shove them all round via Bristol", whereas in fact Bristol is nearer to London than it is to Penzance.

"Presumably the idea is that a second-rate slower service should be provided on the two routes I have mentioned."

He asked: "Does Railfuture wish to keep the members which it already has in the South West, let alone attract new ones?"

It obviously was not clear that the map was not a Railfuture publication or meant to reflect Railfuture policy. However, it also coincides with reawakening interest in electrification by policy makers.

Gerard Duddridge, chairman of Devon and Cornwall branch supports moves to promote more electrification of Britain's railways.

The map on the back cover of *Railwatch* 110 shows the main line from Penzance proposed for electrification, but only on the longer route via Bristol to London. We are campaigning for an hourly

Penzance-Paddington service via Castle Cary, Newbury and Reading. If Penzance to Plymouth is electrified, so must the direct route to Paddington via Castle Cary. Only this shorter route, with its mostly 100 mph line speed, is able to offer Plymouth to Paddington timings of around three hours.

The Plymouth business community considers that journey times of less than three hours are essential for the local economy and inward investment. Faster journeys should be possible.

Plymouth to Paddington in two hours 45 minutes is achievable. The line needs some upgrading, mainly east of Westbury, for a one-hour schedule between Taunton and Reading at an average speed of 107mph.

By comparison, a one-hour time from Taunton to Reading via Bristol would require non-stop running at speeds of up to 137mph. It would be difficult to negotiate the busy Bristol area without delays.

Without speed improvements east of Exeter, to compensate for the mainly 60mph railway from Penzance to Exeter, more and more people will drive to Exeter to catch their train. "We cannot support the apparent suggestion to downgrade the Castle Cary main line from Penzance to Paddington," said Gerard.