

# Heritage re-think

By John Ginns

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The early 1960s were a very depressing time for those who believed in public transport, particularly railway users and supporters of all kinds.

Cars, roads and motorways were the order of the day and it was widely believed even in some railway circles that by the turn of the century railways would largely be a thing of the past.

It is hardly surprising then that in the minds of many people if railways were to be made redundant, they ought at least to be remembered for old time's sake.

So was born the idea of the heritage value of railways. Eventually, of course, those enterprising and far-sighted people who, thank goodness, took on the challenge of preserving parts of the former British railway network and its steam trains, came to see their lines labelled as heritage railways, taking on a new kind of respectability as working museums alongside ancient monuments and great country houses.

The preserved railway quickly became a Mecca for the mileage-hungry motorist just looking for somewhere to take the family for a Saturday or Sunday day-out.

Any original ideas of providing a useful railway service as an alternative to road travel, in most cases faded into the background. The heritage idea took a front seat.

But something went very seriously wrong with the great British 1960s prediction. It had overlooked human nature, and the winning characteristics of the Victorian coned and flanged steel wheel running on steel rail spreading further around the world.

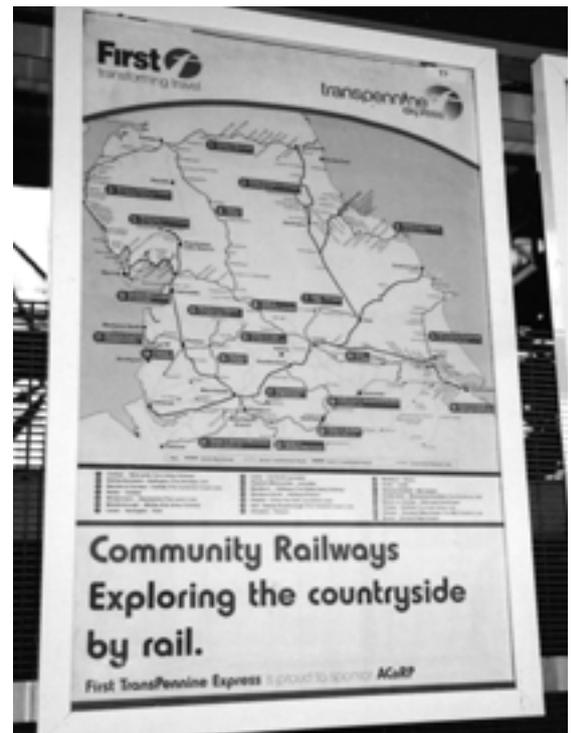
After all, its low rolling resistance, automatic steering and system of traffic control gives railways major advantages.

In spite of the victories of the free-for-all road lobby in all its glory, railways simply didn't go away.

Today, in the age of road congestion and global warming, the railway lives on.

Many so-called heritage railways now offer something more valuable than their mere tourist attraction.

The national rail system has stood the test of time and is continually



**GOOD SIGNS:** First TransPennine posters on Leeds station in summer 2006, bringing heritage and community railways into the national network. With just a few exceptions, we do not see National Rail services promoted on heritage railways. More cross-cultural rail promotion is needed to bring the real value of railways back into people's transport thinking

Pictures: John Ginns

adjusting to the new world while retaining masses of heritage added value itself.

At the same time, it is modernising and developing. In fact you could say it is only now coming of age, increasingly seen as a priceless asset.

Meanwhile, more "modern" rail campaigners are opening their minds to the value of heritage lines. But don't forget that 1960s "wisdom".

At an Institution of Mechanical Engineers, Automobile Division, meeting in 1965 on the subject Transport in the Year 2000, one of the speakers, a Mr C G Woodford, made what, to the speed-hyped minds present in that learned and respected gathering, must have seemed a naive and eyebrow-raising comment in connection with streamlining main line railways:

"We still need the feeders which Dr Beeching has thrown away. The way to do it is by branch-line stations. The branch-line commuter only needs transport at 15 mph to take him from his village station to the main line station."

I can't help wondering if Mr Woodford was a member of one of the earlier heritage railways which were called preserved railways then.

Many heritage railways can do considerably better than 15 mph today. Walking and cycling two or three miles are once again considered very respectable and proper ways

of getting to the "real" train or to the shops, school, into town or out into the country, so maybe it's time to have another look at the slow train.

It has already been suggested that "previous use" diesel locomotives can be driven by the off-duty bank manager, the volunteer driver, with vintage rolling stock reliably jogging along at 25 mph on standard or narrow gauge track, semaphore signals and Victorian stations, which can become part of a wider, more comprehensive national rail network.

They have to be in the right place of course and run to the satisfaction of HM Inspector. On "leisure" days

we can still have heritage fun rides as well.

Call it heritage living, if you like, a more sustainable scenario than being caught in the forward stampede to ... to where?

On the other hand could it be that the word heritage is sending out the wrong message?

Railfuture meetings talk about volunteer railways. Community railways sound better to me but community and heritage railways aren't allowed to be the same. However the gap is closing. It just has to.

We have to have joined-up railway thinking about a joined-up railway system. That is our real heritage.

## Car millions

Car drivers are dodging road tax payments to the extent of £217million a year.

The amount paid in speed fines now adds up to £114million a year.

## Time for action



Help Railfuture's campaigning by acting on at least some of the suggestions below.

- Sign the online petition to 10 Downing Street calling for a national electrification strategy. Ask friends to do the same. <http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/Electrify/>
- Consider signing the other petitions on train overcrowding, bikes on trains and light rail. <http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/list>
- If you see a well-packed train or station platform, take a photo and send it to your local Railfuture branch. The pictures can be used for publicity or to back up our case for people wanting to travel by train
- You could also take a picture of a new or reopened station and send it to Nick Lewis, 36 Common Road, Stotfold, Hitchin, Herts SG5 4DB. He supplies pictures for Railfuture publicity material
- Ask your local library if they would consider obtaining the local volume of the *National Fares Manual*. See page 3