



East Midlands

By Anthony Kay
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AGM and open meeting

The branch AGM will be held at the Aston Court Hotel, Midland Road, Derby, at 13.00 on Saturday 17 March. It will be followed by an open meeting with two speakers from Network Rail. Spencer Gibbens will talk about East Midlands Parkway and other enhancements in the region, and Dave Scarth will talk about the East Midlands re-signalling scheme.

Corby and beyond

Now that Corby's link to Kettering has been included in the East Midlands franchise document, Northamptonshire County Council is investigating the possibility of further rail links for this rapidly expanding town. In particular, they want to run trains through to Peterborough, to provide links to the north - Corby has a large population of Scots. This would require reinstating a chord at Manton Junction, south of Oakham.

The county council is also considering reopening the line from Northampton to Wellingborough. Some years ago, local Railfuture members surveyed the trackbed of the old line, and found that it had been built on in several places. However, Northampton has seen considerable expansion in recent decades, and certainly deserves a rail link to the east. A rail route from Northampton to Peterborough via Wellingborough and Corby would open up a wide range of travel opportunities in an area of major population growth, and would certainly justify finding a new alignment where needed.

Welland weekend

Saturday 23 June sees the Welland Valley Beer Festival, with vintage buses connecting from Market Harborough station to 10 public houses in the valley. This is a chance to relax while enjoying a pint below the 82 arches of Harringworth viaduct. Details from David Fursdon who is a member of both Railfuture and CAMRA. Tel 07790 197220.

The following day, there is an opportunity to travel over the Harringworth viaduct (a rare opportunity, unless and until the Corby-Peterborough passenger link becomes a reality). A shuttle service run by steam and heritage diesel trains will run between Kettering and Melton Mowbray on Sunday 24 June. For bookings and further information, tel 0121 708 4960.

Market Harborough

The East Midlands franchise document suggested that Market Harborough's off-peak service could be cut from half-hourly to hourly, but Harborough Rail Users are campaigning vigorously against any cuts. They have set up a petition, both on paper and at www.harborough-rail.co.uk. A meeting on 24 November



Many beautiful parts of Britain are inaccessible to people on public transport. Sadly those who use their cars to gain access to the countryside are often playing their part in wrecking the environment they enjoy.

Now train operator ONE is helping nature lovers by providing, from May, weekend trains to small stations next door to nature reserves in East Anglia run by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

The two stations to benefit are Lakenheath on the Norwich-Ely-Cambridge line and Buckenham on the Norwich-Great Yarmouth-Lowestoft line. Lakenheath station is a short walk from Lakenheath Fen, pictured above, while Buckenham Marshes is next to, and

Strumpshaw Fen a short walk from, Buckenham station. There is free entry for people arriving by train at Strumpshaw. A Sunday service already serves Berney Arms station on the Norwich-Yarmouth line for the RSPB Berney marshes reserve.

The RSPB's Chris Wood said: "Lakenheath is close to long-distance footpaths and cycle routes and Buckenham has quiet lanes on its doorstep.

"We intend to work with other partners to promote the four stations of Buckenham, Cantley, Reedham and Berney Arms as a 'string of pearls', allowing easy access to explore the Yare valley on Sundays, by foot or bicycle."

More information: <http://www.rspb.org.uk/reserves/>

was attended by 76 people, and the campaign has the support of local MP Edward Garnier as well as local businesses.

National Forest Line

There is renewed interest in reopening this line from Leicester to Bur-

ton-on-Trent to passenger traffic. Leicester City Council leader Roger Blackmore has pointed out that it would make an important contribution to reducing road congestion in the west of the city and beyond. Leicestershire County Council

officers estimate that the cost of reopening would be at least £15million, and that it would need an annual subsidy of £2million. However Nick Rushton, county council cabinet member for transport, has expressed support while saying that the council couldn't afford to subsidise the line.

London and South East

By Graham Larkbey
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London Rail concession

Transport for London has whittled the shortlist of bidders for the current Silverlink Metro routes down to two - GoVia (parent company of Southern) and MTR Laing Rail (parent company of Chiltern).

Each will now present a "best and final offer" to TfL. The decision will be announced this summer and the chosen operator will take over the routes from November. The Stratford-North Woolwich section closed officially after the last train on 9 December prior to conversion of the Stratford-Canning Town section to Docklands Light Railway - though the actual last train was a special on Sunday 10. This used a unit which was named "Silver-town" at a ceremony at Stratford before the train set out down the line for the last time.

In the meantime, the enhanced Barking-Gospel Oak Monday-Friday service is proving increasingly popular. The line's user group is pressing for the remaining one-hour gaps in weekend evening services to be infilled from May. It is also urging Silverlink to improve the cleaning regime for the line's trains, and for Network Rail to address the chronic and long-standing litter problem behind a number of station platforms.

Chiltern suburban news

Maybe mindful of the need to show a bit more interest in its suburban passengers than it has up to now, Chiltern has announced that it has the capacity to increase calls from one train per hour to two at one of its stations between Marylebone and Gerrards Cross from May.

It consulted user groups on their preferences before Christmas. Front-runner is thought to be Northolt Park, which has no nearby rail alternatives and is already well used. A far cry from the days not so long ago when it had only a skeleton rush-hour service.

Meanwhile the local campaign continues for evening and weekend services to be provided at Sudbury Hill Harrow, something well within current line capacity to accommodate.

Greenford branch

South Greenford station has acquired the subtitle "West Perivale" on its nameboards - a bit more accurate than its official name, since it's actually east of Greenford town centre!



Anglia

By Nicholas Dibben
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Missing passengers

A passenger count carried out by the branch at Whittlesea Station near Peterborough has identified more users than the official figures. We counted 89 passengers using the station during the day, nearly twice as many as the average given by the Office of the Rail Regulator. Such counts are important, as they are used to determine service frequency in franchise documents and priorities when route strategies are being developed.

Campaign priorities

The branch is arranging a number meetings with members to establish our rail campaign priorities over the next few years. Members who do not normally attend branch meetings are being invited to give their views on what improvements are needed to the rail network in the region.

Rail users conference

The branch is helping to organise the 2007 Rail Users Conference that will take place in Ely on 3 November. A range of speakers is currently being invited and full details and an application form will appear in the next *Railwatch*. Forms will also be available on the Railfuture website.

Lowestoft

Rail campaigners are fighting plans to push Lowestoft station out of the town centre.

The idea, supported by the local council, will mean people have to walk an extra quarter of a mile when they arrive by train.

The station's close proximity to the beach and main shopping centre is currently a major asset, increasing the attractiveness of the town for the many people who arrive by train, particularly during the summer and for the annual air show. Relocation would eliminate this great advantage.

So the East Suffolk Travellers' Association has launched a Save our Station campaign and has produced a leaflet setting out the facts.

The association produced and distributed over 1000 leaflets urging people to object, and we know that the council has received objections from people who come to the town by rail as well as from local people. For more information: eastsuffolk-travel.org.uk

Annual meeting

ESTA will hold its annual general meeting and public meeting on Saturday May 26 in the URC Church Hall, Quay Street, Halesworth at 14.00. The hall is less than 10 minutes' walk from the rail station and close to Saxon Way bus stop. As guest speaker we shall welcome

John Gummer, Tory MP for Suffolk Coastal.

Chelmsford borough council is keen to see the existing station expanded and a new station built in the north-east part of the town.

Lincolnshire

By Brian Hastings
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Ticket barriers

Revenue at Lincoln has gone up following the installation of ticket barriers in November. Much of the extra income has come from a new excess fare window to cope with the number of people arriving at Lincoln without tickets. The barriers were officially introduced by Transport Minister and Lincoln MP Gillian Merrion at a ceremony attended by Railfuture branch chairman emeritus Brian Hastings. Within weeks though the "new technology" and a new ticket machine were beset by gremlins and longer queues at the ticket office have also resulted. The barriers have made it more difficult for people seeing friends and family off.

Connections

Connections at Newark for people travelling from King's Cross to Lincoln have deteriorated following the new GNER timetable in December. Tight diagramming has made it difficult for Central Trains to improve matters.

£55million revamp

Railfuture Lincolnshire applauds the Network Rail two-year plan to enhance the rail corridor through Lincoln with track renewal and layout changes to make operating trains easier. We have had a large number of pro-rail letters published in the local press following impractical road lobby calls to put the railway in a tunnel through the city.

Franchise

The branch, liaising with East Midlands, has been active in contacting potential bidders for the East Midlands and East Coast main line franchises. We have also co-operated with Yorkshire branch over the rail utilisation strategies for the East Coast main line.

Bus replacement

Railfuture has asked Northern Rail to check up on rail replacement buses which swept past some stations without checking whether any passengers were waiting. Buses replaced trains between Retford and Lincoln on various Sundays. On occasions, passengers at Gainsborough Lea Road and Saxilby were left completely in the dark.

Brigg line

Railfuture is waiting for a firm date for the Gainsborough-Barnetby line to be brought back into use permanently although some freight traffic has already been diverted on to it.

Bridges

Railfuture welcomed work over four days at Christmas to repair

two bridges at Keadby. We are now looking forward to work to deal with the speed restrictions near Crowle and Midge Hall.

North East

By Peter Kenyon
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Branch affairs

At the AGM in January Martin Murphy was reappointed chairman together with the existing branch officers and committee members. Visitors then enjoyed a stimulating talk by Sean English, operations director of Grand Central Railway. The packed audience was impressed by the planned developments for the Sunderland-King's Cross service and the dogged persistence which had been necessary to ensure the start of the service.

At the November meeting the guest speaker was Tony Smare from the Esk Valley Railway Development Company which is a non-profit-making company aiming at increasing the revenue of the Middlesbrough-Whitby line, and improving the benefits to the community. The school train provides steady revenue in term time, but safety argu-

ments have necessitated additional bus transport for numbers above 150 students. Local people use the train for travel to Middlesbrough and despite the limited service summer tourist traffic often leads to loads 20-30% above seating capacity. Northern Rail has been ready to provide a discretionary fare structure for residents. The North Yorkshire Moors Railway steam trains from Pickering now join the line at Grosmont, running on the Whitby line. The EVRDC would like to see these as a regular part of the service. For further information see www.eskvalleyrailway.co.uk

Branch liaison with train operators continues and Martin Murphy was a principal speaker at the Northern evening stakeholders' conference held in Newcastle during December.

Northern is proving willing to liaise and cooperate with interest groups in providing and adapting services, when timetable and rolling stock constraints permit.

However the discussion revealed the limitations created nationally by the limited availability of rolling stock. The lack of adequate vehicles on Tyne Valley trains for the morn-



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Local action



ing and evening commuter services has led to serious overcrowding. Regularly some passengers have been unable to squeeze on to the trains, a situation which has been reported in the Leeds-Bradford conurbation and the Bristol area recently.

The Tyne Valley Rail Users' Group submitted a timely and well argued paper to the Rail Regulator in August 2006 during the investigation into rolling stock leasing costs. Readers will know that the DfT had expressed concern that the present system precludes adequate (or in some cases any) competition. The TVRUG argued that this situation has contributed to excessive leasing costs which in turn have led to a lower quality of service, and in the long run could threaten the very existence of the Tyne Valley services. To the detached observer the fact that the ageing Pacers are subject to costly leasing arrangements seems incredible, and would not be tolerated in the road transport industry.

Franchise developments

The branch is actively responding to the progress of the new Cross Country franchising process and

the beginning of the replacement for the GNER franchise, though the DfT response to the reasoned cases presented during the consultation on the Cross Country franchise (each and every suggestion was ignored), has proved dispiriting.

Morpeth matters

The active South East Northumberland Rail Users' Group has continued to develop good relationships with rail operator Northern. The opening hours of the booking office at Morpeth were extended into the afternoon during the summer for a trial period at the initiative of the booking clerk. This gave access to the toilets and waiting room, as well as providing advanced booking facilities. The group have asked that this facility be provided permanently. More recently a trial Sunday service was introduced by Northern in the period before Christmas without any DfT subsidy, after a request by group chairman Dennis Fancett. The service opened with a welcome party for the first train led by the Morpeth Town Crier, with a fair organ and distribution of mince pies.

At the initiative of SENRUG, and especially that of branch committee

member Trevor Watson, negotiations with Virgin Trains provided stops by two additional trains each way from December. Brian Johnson of Virgin Cross Country addressed a well-attended public meeting in November with a lively question and answer session.

Trains towards Ashington?

Perhaps the most exciting development for the users' group is that Trevor Watson's suggestion that services towards Ashington be reopened from Morpeth in managed phases, has caught on. Recent attempts by Wansbeck MP Denis Murphy to persuade the DfT to fund the reopening of the Ashington line have met with the usual negative response. However given the time the Northern local Newcastle-Morpeth train spends in the siding at Morpeth before returning to Newcastle, it might be extended to provide a service to reopened stations at Choppington and Bedlington Station. Northern Rail, the NE Assembly and local councils are co-operating to produce a feasibility study by May. If this section of line can be reopened it will focus attention on Ashington. Also the newly extended Woodhorn Mining Museum complex, which now includes the county archives service, could be served by a new station.

The new franchises being negotiated for Cross Country and GNER trains are casting a shadow over the future prospects for the long distance trains calling at Morpeth. The Cross Country stops at Morpeth are voluntary, and their status in the new franchises is unknown. Likewise the stop made by the 17.30 service ex King's Cross (timed at Morpeth at 20.43) was retained voluntarily by GNER. Alternatively, since bidders are encouraged to offer timetable improvements, the number of stops by long distance trains may increase. SENRUG is being vigilant in these and other matters.

For details of group activities contact Dennis Fancett : dennis.fancett@btopenworld.com.

Leamside Line

The intention announced by Network Rail in September to dismantle the mothballed 21-mile Leamside Line (connecting Pelaw and Ferryhill) generated numerous responses demanding that the track and formation be left in situ.

Fraser Kemp, MP for Houghton and Washington, duly hosted a meeting with Network Rail at the House of Commons on 5 December attended by representatives from major local authorities, the Association of North East Councils, Nexus (the operator of Tyne and Wear Metro), the North East Assembly and the MP for Durham, Roberta Blackman-Woods.

Network Rail acknowledged that it had been surprised by the strength of feeling its track lifting proposal

had caused. Nexus personnel and others present at the Fraser Kemp meeting emphasised the strategic potential of a reinstated Leamside Line for both freight and passenger services.

In the event Network Rail agreed that it would co-operate in the preparation of a feasibility study to assess whether a convincing business case could be made for reopening. The study is to be co-ordinated by Nexus and brought to an early conclusion. Meanwhile Network Rail has indicated its wish to commence dismantling the track between Wardley and Ferryhill in order to salvage useable sections for installation elsewhere in the region. It is understood, however, that Network Rail has been asked by the County Durham transport forum to desist from any track removal pending completion of the feasibility study.

Railfuture North East has been active in trying to prevent the destruction of the line. An information-briefing paper was prepared by the branch in November and sent to key "players" to assist in their deliberations. Contact was made with two of the MPs through whose constituencies the line passes and both have pledged their support for reopening.

Network Rail, as Railtrack before it, has acknowledged that it has a "congestion" problem on the East Coast main line between Newcastle and Ferryhill. The branch understands that increasing demand for coal from the Yorkshire power stations is necessitating the running of additional freight trains through the region from Scotland, Blyth and Port of Tyne. These in turn are putting pressure on available paths on the two track section of the ECML from Newcastle to Ferryhill. It is the branch's contention that reinstatement of Leamside would bring relief by in effect creating a four-track route between these very two points. For its part Network Rail is proposing to provide some extra capacity by reinstating the Boldon chord which would provide direct access from Port of Tyne on to the Durham Coast Line.

While this would provide some additional capacity for freight the downside is that the coal trains would have to tangle with frequent Metro services and Grand Central trains. Leamside of course would not entail those constraints.

A successful business case for bringing Leamside back into use would have to embrace three elements, namely freight, passenger and diversionary. The branch believes that the line, if reopened, would make a significant contribution to transport provision in the North East. However, at the time of writing, Network Rail has not indicated that the plans to lift the track will be delayed or abandoned during the compilation of the feasibility study.

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Weardale Railway

The success of the Santa Trains, which were full to capacity, has encouraged the railway to continue with weekend services until Easter, when a new timetable will be introduced. Normally the smartly turned out 141 diesel unit will operate, but the newly acquired NCB steam loco may be used. This service benefits residents in the valley as well as hardy winter tourists.

For timetable details see www.weardale-railway.org.uk

Ian Allan Award for Weardale

The restoration of the canopy at Stanhope station won the award for the best UK station preservation project in 2006. The canopy is a replica of the original NER structure. Volunteers worked for 10 months, using 2,200 metres of timber, 30 sheets of plywood, 2,600 slates, 192 panes of glass and 80 litres of paint. The Heritage Railway Trust, which has featured in these reports before, contributed £20,000 to the cost.

North West

By Trevor Bishop

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New Cross Country

The Department for Transport rail group has ignored submissions from Network Rail, TravelWatch Northwest, the Association of Train Operators and others to go ahead with its proposals in the North West for new Cross Country franchise after it is renewed in November 2007.

The DfT ran a shortened consultation period over the summer for this and then published its "stakeholder briefing document" at the end of October. Many of the proposals contained in the original consultation were retained, most notably the proposals for reduction of the present cross-country network to enable units to be used to strengthen services elsewhere. Particular proposals affecting the North West were the transfer of Manchester-Scotland services to TransPennine Express and the removal of through journey opportunities from north of Crewe and Manchester, to beyond Bristol to the South West and beyond Reading to the South East.

Network Rail pointed out in its submission to the consultation that if class 185s were to be substituted for Voyagers on the Manchester-Scotland route they "would like timetabling modelling undertaken to identify any performance risk caused by TPE 100mph units operating Cross Country services between Manchester and Scotland. There are also concerns about replacing four and five-car units with three-car vehicles. Currently class 185 units are not route cleared north of Oxenholme".

In its submission, ATOC said "we believe the new structure delivers



WRECKED: The car hit by a train near Burscough Picture: BTP

Danger driver jailed

A driver was sent to jail for six months in February after Preston Crown Court heard he drove this car across a level crossing in the path of a train.

The car was hit by the train – travelling at 20mph – at Wyke-Cop crossing Burscough in May 2006.

Richard Yates, aged 32 from Rufford, Lancashire, admitted dangerous driving and failing to report a collision.

"The actions of Richard Yates put his own life at risk and potentially the lives of all the passengers and rail staff on board the train that evening," said Sergeant Brian Dickinson of British Transport Police. "It was amazing that nobody was seriously injured as a result of this incident."

Network Rail's area general manager Jo Kaye said: "13 people died needlessly in one year on level crossings and last year we spent £3million on a radio and TV

advertising campaign. At least four people chance their lives at level crossings each day through misuse and on average one person a month is killed at a level crossing for that reason alone."

In this case, the car was thrown clear of the tracks and was extensively damaged. The train received only superficial damage. No passengers or rail staff were injured as a result of the collision involving the Northern Trains Manchester Airport to Southport service.

The railway is also forced into extra expense as a result of drivers failing to abide by the law, an attitude that prevails on the rest of the road network with very little prospect of being caught. Speed cameras though are at last making some impact on drivers who give no consideration to pedestrians, cyclists and other vulnerable road users.

no significant capacity benefits at Birmingham New Street over the current and that suitable planning will be needed for the increased connectional demand generated by the proposals at Birmingham New Street."

TravelWatch NorthWest has since issued a press release deploring the DfT's decision and in particular calls in to question the basis for the DfT's analysis of travel patterns and its refusal to release the passenger numbers data for that travel (citing commercial confidentiality). Railfuture North West wrote its submission on much the same grounds as the other bodies mentioned

above, with objections being principally about the loss of through services for many key cities and towns across the North West, with the enforced change at an already over-crowded Birmingham New Street being a major disincentive to travel.

Railfuture NW made the point strongly that if there are needs elsewhere for rolling stock, this should not be met at the expense of existing services. New stock should be bought. TravelWatch NorthWest also states that even with bidders being asked to submit proposals to enhance capacity by 30%, this would not even have covered the

growth in the past few years, let alone the life of the franchise.

It does seem they have listened on one point though, one XC service from Manchester to Birmingham or beyond was proposed to travel via Wilmslow and Crewe; it seems there is not enough track capacity to permit that, so they will run via Stoke.

Colne Connected

SELRAP, the group campaigning to reopen the Skipton-Colne line, organised a major conference – Colne Connected – on the issue of the reopening in October 2006 and is reaping the benefits already with support from more than 30 MPs and MEPs for its dream. Coverage of the issue appeared in *RAIL* magazine in early January with SELRAP's liaison officer, Andy Shackleton quoted extensively.

Paul Salvesson, head of community and regional strategies at Northern Rail gave strong support too, adding that electrification should be part of the reopening agenda. SELRAP has a target of getting trains running on the route by 2012 – over four decades since they last ran in January 1970.

More needed

Passenger Focus issued a statement in January calling for more to be done to improve rail services and stations in the North West.

Passenger Focus was responding to Network Rail's 10 year plan for railways in the North West. David Sidebottom, Passenger Focus passenger link manager, said research shows that many more passengers are travelling every day on extremely crowded trains against a backdrop of rising fares.

He said: "With a 10% growth in passenger numbers year on year, many trains are bursting at the seams. Fourteen per cent of passengers on the journey between Bolton and Manchester say that they are rarely able to get a seat, and perhaps more alarmingly, nearly one in 10 commuters on the same route tells us that overcrowding is so bad they can't even get on their train.

"The acute lack of car parking spaces at stations in the North West is also a real concern for passengers, with nearly one in four on some routes telling us they are usually unable to park their car at the station in the morning and another 20% rarely able to park later in the day."

Sevenside

By Nigel Bray
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The branch is supporting a campaign by Stroud MP David Drew for the reinstatement of double track between Kemble and Swindon. The Stroud Valley is not only the main line between Gloucestershire and London but also the alternative route for South Wales-London dur-

Local action



ing closure of the Severn Tunnel. The secretary recommended him to enlist the support of business and political interests in South Wales.

Three committee members attended First Great Western's launch of its refurbished InterCity 125 train at Bristol Temple Meads on 17 January. The new interior is an improvement in terms of seat pitch and lighting but we are concerned at the greater percentage of airline seating in standard class and consequent reduction in the number of tables.

We were represented at Transport 2000's launch of its South West manifesto for "Growing the Railways" at Bristol on 19 January. Reference was made to the 40% growth in rail passenger journeys in the South West region over the past 10 years and to predictions of faster economic and population growth in the region than across the UK as a whole over the next 10. In this context the Department for Transport's imposed reductions in train services and seating capacity in the FGW timetable, which commenced on 10 December, made no sense at all.

Several speakers made strong pleas for politicians and local authorities to sink their differences and work together for a better rail network in the region.

Our co-chairman John Walker pointed out that co-operation between Somerset County, Taunton Deane Borough and West Somerset District Councils had resulted in resignalling of the junction at Norton Fitzwarren to permit through running of passenger trains between the West Somerset Railway and the national system.

Draft copies of the branch's proposals for expansion of rail services in the region were on display, including maps produced by Gerard Duddridge.

Thames

By Chris Wright

Branch secretary Martin Smith and chair Chris Wright were expected to stand down at the branch annual general meeting in March after many years of service. They have

received messages of appreciation from rail industry insiders, councils and rail user groups for their work as news comes through of some progress on long-running campaigns.

The latest report on the East-West rail link is expected shortly and may support reopening through to Milton Keynes. The report has been delayed because of funding considerations and preoccupation with the Channel Tunnel Rail Link.

The Aylesbury Parkway scheme is progressing with the publication of proposals for a seven-car platform and track upgraded for 60mph running.

The Cotswold Line is the subject of a report from Network Rail which suggests double track should be reinstated.

The Bicester Town line is set to receive further funding for upgrades following the expansion of Bicester Village.

Oxford has seen protests over the new timetable and remains the subject of discussions over improvements, including possible use of the freight loop for passenger services.

Chiltern Line improvements have been completed including resignalling, with some car park extensions to follow in 2007-8.

Yorkshire

By Peter Davies
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Harrogate-Ripon reopening

Since the publication in February 2006 of the Arup Report assessing engineering and environmental issues between Harrogate and Ripon, the Ripon Railway Reinstatement Association has kept the issue to the forefront of its activities, reminding the relevant authorities that the scheme is still in existence.

North Yorkshire County Council retains the scheme on the agenda at periodic meetings of the Harrogate line officers rail group which consists of representatives from the authority, Northern Rail, Network Rail and the West Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive.

The group has contacted Network

Rail to enquire as to its position with regard to the reopening, and a reply was received that they would be interested in the scheme if private finance was available. A similar reply was received from Yorkshire Forward.

The association has made a submission to the Regional Planning Assessment for Yorkshire and the Humber, being undertaken on behalf of the Department for Transport by MVA consultancy highlighting the need for a Harrogate to Ripon railway.

No finance is available from any source at present, however the scheme has received official recognition.

Annual report

The Yorkshire branch has produced its annual report of the activities of the various rail user groups over the past year. The report also examines the quality of service in the Yorkshire area, rail reopening schemes, and rail freight within the Yorkshire area. The report will be available for purchase by interested members from April 2007 and the cost is £1.50. Further details will be given in the next edition of *Railwatch*.

Newsletters

In response to a request from the Railfuture board, Yorkshire branch will be producing two newsletters during the year.

Annual general meeting

The annual general meeting was held on Saturday 10 March 2007 in Huddersfield, with a representative from the Grand Central Railway Company addressing the meeting.

East Coast main line franchise

The branch is preparing its submission to the Department for Transport regarding the East Coast main line franchise.

Coastway

By Dick Tyler

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Spare train

Southern is taking a spare class 171 unit surplus to South West Trains requirements. It is currently in SWT colours but has always been inter-

nally in Southern decor in error. It will be used as a spare to cover for breakdowns but also to strengthen some overcrowded turns.

Bexhill refurbishment

Bexhill station will be refurbished inside later this year, the two internal wooden kiosk structures demolished and two extra double doors installed at the front, the latter having already received approval from Rother District Council.

Growth

Southern is in discussion with Network Rail over track condition on the Hastings-Ashford line. Southern want to improve timings by speed limit improvements and even track doubling. Passenger usage has increased beyond even Southern's estimates and they want to build on this. For instance Marshlink to Brighton passenger journeys in the first six months grew by 357%!

Ashford link

Southern is worried about Eurostar's reduction of Ashford stops, and will continue to pressure for them to be reinstated. But Southern is encouraged because retailers at both Brighton and Ashford are reporting increased sales as a result of the through service.

Scotland

Crossrail

Plans for a Glasgow Crossrail, a direct rail link to the city's airport, and bus-based park and ride options are in the third draft of the Strathclyde Transport Strategy. The airport rail connection would involve upgrading five miles of track between Shields Junction and Paisley Gilmour Street station and laying one mile of track between Paisley Saint James station and the air terminal.

Borders reopening

Preparatory works for the Borders railway reopening project were scheduled to begin in February with vegetation clearance.

David Parker, leader of Scottish Borders Council, the promoter of the Waverley line scheme, said: "We remain firmly on schedule and each month we make important strides forward as we continue with the tendering process, land assembly and advance works activity, with construction set to begin in 2008."

Royal Assent for the project, to rebuild the former Waverley line as far as Tweedbank, was granted in 2006 for the £174million scheme.

Rail-air link

The Scottish Nationalist Party has said it will scrap the current plan to build a £650million rail link to Edinburgh airport if it wins the Scottish Parliament elections on 3 May.

Wales

By Rowland Pittard
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Strategy

Railfuture Wales has given a detailed response to the Transport Strategy of the Welsh Assembly



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Government. The branch also produced an eight-page briefing paper in January dealing with Great Western.

Among other issues, the branch pointed out the poor timekeeping and reliability of GW services from London to South Wales with missed connections at Newport, Cardiff, Bridgend and Swansea.

Passengers to the west of Carmarthen only have a two hourly service, there are frequent cancellations of the weekday service from Carmarthen to Swansea and some stops west of Swansea have been removed on the Saturday services, as well as overcrowding on services from Cardiff to Bristol and Portsmouth Harbour.

The branch also called for the reinstatement of Great Western stakeholder meetings at which interested groups could express their views. GW have cancelled them.

Delegation

A Railfuture delegation met the Welsh Assembly on 31 January to clarify what is happening with discretionary rail fares in Wales. The Welsh Assembly Government recently announced that it intends to introduce concessionary rail travel in Wales. Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire already have an agreement for reduced fares for over 60s and there is a half price railcard in the Cardiff valleys to try to attract the over-60s off the buses.

Great Western however is the only operator not to give discounts to Senior Railcard holders on their advance purchase tickets.

The Assembly is planning to give over-60s free travel on the Conwy Valley line and Heart of Wales line and possibly to extend the scheme to Wrexham-Bidston, the Cambrian Coast and Shrewsbury-Chester lines.

Power switch

Rumours that the Department for Transport is handing over power from ATW to Great Western have alarmed Railfuture campaigners who believe that it could have the effect of increasing fares by 18% for some people.

The popular easily understood Supersaver Apex fares which give a discount to railcard holders could be replaced by Great Western's very limited First Minute fares who do not give a discount.

We will be urging the Welsh Assembly Government to ensure that affordable and fair fares are available to Welsh travellers.

Extra trains

The Welsh Assembly Government is paying £1.2million to provide extra rail services in Wales.

As a result Arriva Trains Wales gained eight 150 class trains from Great Western Trains in December.

Two 150 trains will replace class 153 trains on the Wrexham-Bidston line. Three will go to Ebbw Vale and



Two trainee guide dogs took their first ever "walkies" at Worcester Shrub Hill station in February when they were presented with free season passes by Central Trains line manager Ben Farley.

The two labradors, Sheba and Fay, were given the tickets so human trainers from the Worcester area Guide Dogs for the Blind Association can take them on trains between Hereford and Birmingham.

Mr Farley said: "Blind people are often dependent on public transport as they cannot drive themselves."

Helen Bonnett from the GDBA, said: "A busy and fast moving train can be a frightening experience for a dog, especially on their first journey, but I expect Sheba and Fay will take it all in their stride!"

The picture shows Sheba and Fay with Debbie Punchard and Helen Bonnett and Ben Farley

Picture: Central Trains

two to the Cardiff Valleys. ATW has also gained 13 class 175 trains following the delivery of new trains to TransPennine.

Longer trains

Longer four-carriage trains will be running on the Cambrian main line following extra funding from the Welsh Assembly Government.

It follows a successful pilot scheme carried out over the summer and autumn last year.

It means Arriva Trains Wales can provide four-coach trains on nearly all services between Machynlleth and Birmingham.

Andrew Davies, Minister for Enterprise, Innovation and Networks announced the funding on 20 December.

He said: "These strengthened train services have relieved overcrowding and enhanced performance."

He added: "Network Rail has undertaken an initial feasibility study on improving the Aberystwyth to Shrewsbury Cambrian mainline train service from two-hourly to hourly and there are a number of viable options.

"The viable options include improved passing loops and a workable regular hourly pattern timetable on the mainline between

Aberystwyth and Shrewsbury.

Journey opportunities east of Shrewsbury would also be considerably improved.

"The infrastructure improvements, which would facilitate the hourly service, would also be of considerable benefit to performance under the current two-hourly service, if there were to be an interim period between their provision and the eventual introduction of an hourly service."

The action follows campaigning by the Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Rail Passenger Association whose chairman is Gareth Marston.

SARPA membership costs £5 a year. Contact: Ivor Morris, 2 Dingle Road, Welshpool, Powys, SY21 7QB or gareth.marston@btopenworld.com

The Shrewsbury-Aberystwyth Railway Liaison Committee chairman Mansel Williams said: "The recognition by Andrew Davies of the importance in economic and social terms of the Cambrian Railway to Mid and North Wales is very significant.

"The knock-on effects of developing the links from Mid-Wales into the West Midlands are also highly positive."

Devon and Cornwall

By Peter Mulley
and Gerard Duddridge
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AGM

The branch AGM will be on Saturday 31 March with a talk from the Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership. Email for venue details.

New bus and rail day ticket

From early January a *Ride Cornwall* ticket was introduced for unlimited all day (after 09.00 Mondays to Fridays) travel on bus and train including journeys into Plymouth. Price £12 adult, £7.50 child, £24 family. Tickets may be bought on the bus or station.

Newquay line

First Great Western is reported to be planning to run four additional trips daily during the summer from Par to Newquay, and a daily through train from Paddington to Newquay during the eight peak weeks of the season. By making additional TransPennine 158s temporarily available it would appear that FGW has made an effort to resolve the shortage which occurred with the introduction of the winter timetable and the refurbishment programme.

St Erth park and ride

The purpose of the proposed St Erth park-and-ride scheme is to provide a significant road, rail, bus interchange to cater for traffic heading for Penzance, St Ives or Hayle. It was intended that a half hourly St Erth-St Ives and St Erth-Penzance rail service would be the answer. However, while this frequency is likely to be achieved for St Ives, it seems that with an irregular train service on the main line, buses would be needed to fill in the gaps. Parking for 550 cars is envisaged, with a new road layout.

Global warming

A second study is to be undertaken into the effect of global warming on the stretch of rail line between Dawlish and Teignmouth along Devon's south coast. Researcher David Dawson from the University of Plymouth will lead the three-year study for the Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership.

The work will include trying to predict when bad storms will hit the area. A 2005 study said the South West's economy could be seriously affected if part of the line was washed away and the region was cut off.

It recommended that a replacement should be considered. At the time Network Rail said it had no plans to move the line which runs along the sea wall.

Forecasters have predicted parts of the line could be submerged in 50 years because of global warming and bad storm surges in recent years have caused serious damage to sections of the line.