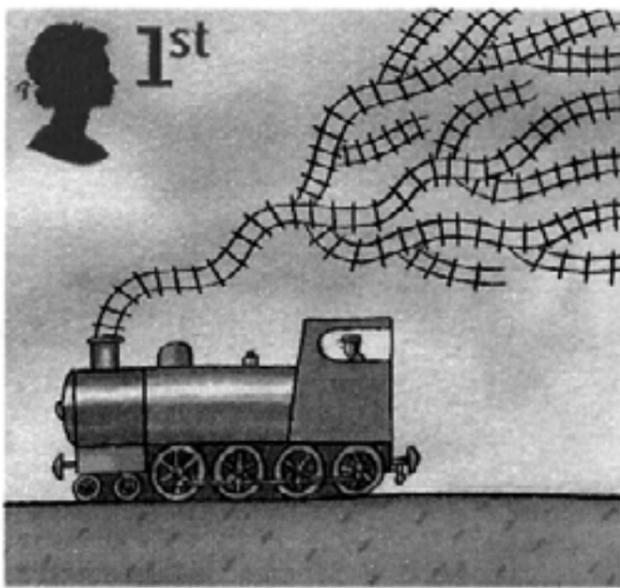


Your letters



Pensioners travel

I support Ray Bentley's article Unfair to rural lines in *Railwatch* 111 and agree the pensioners' free bus pass should be valid for local stopping rail services.

South Lakes District Council has received complaints from pensioners who travel between Arnside, Grange and Ulverston, a few minutes journey by train over two estuaries, but an arduous circuitous journey on limited bus services.

The current scheme also makes nonsense of integrated transport schemes with pensioners able to travel free by bus but not by train.

The result, as Mr Bentley points out, is abstraction of useful off peak passengers from rail to bus with ludicrous consequences.

Additional bus services have had to be provided from Barrow in Furness to Ulverston and Grange, while off-peak trains run a shorter route with space to spare.

Between Windermere and Kendal, council taxpayers are subsidising pensioner travel by bus and a subsidised rail service as well.

While most metropolitan areas allow free pensioner travel on frequent rail and bus services, rural areas often have limited or no bus service and do not allow free local rail travel - leaving rural pensioners doubly disadvantaged.

The South Lakes council cabinet did not accept the recommendation of my working group to extend free passes for local rail use as, unlike Mr Bentley, they anticipated considerable extra cost - indeed the transfer from half-fare bus passes to free bus passes produced an increase of 189% in applications this last year. Most district councils are cash-strapped and cost will discourage any likelihood of voluntary local arrangements.

The only realistic way forward is for the implementation of Clause 8(1)(b) of the Act by Parliament to extend the concession to local

rail stopping services or at least community rail lines. Time is not on our side.

The clause needs to be implemented with the April 2008 extension of passes countrywide and with the funding included in next year's grant to local authorities. If not, local authorities will want more funding for a separate, later implementation, which the Government is likely to resist.

I would like to see more support from rail operators for such a move. South Lakes pays 73.9% of the full fare to bus operators for each pensioner carried and similar payments could be made to rail operators.

Richard Rollins, chairman, SLDC Concessionary Fares Working Group rrollins@globalnet.co.uk

Rowland Pittard reports that concessionary pass holders will be able to travel free on the Conwy Valley and Heart of Wales lines for a trial period beginning on 20 May 2007. More info: http://www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk/Pilot_Scheme.aspx

Concessionary fares

I support Ray Bentley's campaign (*Railwatch* 111) to make concessions available on trains as well as buses. It would be good to see such fare reductions widened in scope to cover disadvantaged groups who aren't pensioners. Ken Livingstone is already showing the way in London, with half-price travel for those on Income Support.

Tim Mickleburgh, 33 Littlefield Lane, Grimsby DN31 2AZ

Walk-on tickets

I am outraged at the prospect of losing reasonably priced walk-on tickets (*Railwatch* 111).

Is this crazy idea seriously proposed by the Department for Transport? Ordinary people do not want the creation of an elitist railway. This country needs an efficient, reliable, reasonably priced rail service. Not

everyone has, or can afford, a computer to book their seats and print their own tickets.

So, ticket machines, travel centres and ticket offices will continue to be required.

Kenneth M Bryant, 6 Grays Road, Godalming, Surrey GU7 3LT

Ticket lunacy

My wife and I decided to visit the Eden Project in Cornwall and checked out the prices of rail travel from Ipswich to St Austell.

We were quoted by thetrainline.com a Saver return at £161.85 for both my wife, who has a Senior Railcard, and myself. Just out of interest, we clicked on the button saying that two singles may be cheaper.

Imagine our surprise when we were offered two one-way first class tickets at £68 each way, making a total of £136, £25 cheaper than the second class fare. What sort of ticketing lunacy is this?

Lloyd Butler, 24 Chedworth Place, Tattlingstone, Suffolk IP9 2ND lloyd@deltic.net

Unhappy drivers

I get tired of reading items in *Railwatch* attacking car drivers. I am a Railfuture member who is also a motorist.

The vast majority of us are responsible, unlike the "danger driver" mentioned in *Railwatch* 111 - I can list at least six regular bad practices of cyclists.

Stop demonising those of us who dare to drive a motor vehicle.

I tried to recruit a new Railfuture member by giving him a copy of *Railwatch*. He was upset by a lot of comments which he thought were a "get-at" the motoring community and he did not join.

P D Currie, 35 West Acres, Alnwick, Northumberland NE66 2QA

Co-editor Ray King writes: The mainstream media are full of promoterist propaganda. I feel the balance needs to be re-dressed. More info: <http://www.brake.org.uk/index.php?p=461>

National Rail

Passengers with luggage can be discouraged from train travel because of the need to change trains (*Railwatch* 111) but so are the elderly.

A further disadvantage is the extra time taken. It undermines the value of upgrading lines for faster trains if people then have to hang around for half an hour or more changing trains. The Department for Transport should stop pressurising train operators to sever long-distance routes in the guise of improved reliability. Or is this a hidden agenda to discourage

train operators operating outside "their areas", further undermining the concept of a national railway, as discontinuing the national rail timetable has.

All-system Saver tickets and railcards could be next to go if the DfT so chose.

John Davis, 41 Fairmead Avenue, Harpenden, Herts AL5 5UD

Station names

I had to smile reading Mike Crowhurst's letter on Station Names in *Railwatch* 111. He asks the question: Does anyone confuse Edgware Road with Edgware? and answers his question: Of course not.

Mike should have been standing on the Circle Line platforms at Embankment on the evening of 6 March this year. Copious announcements were being made apologising for delays on the Circle and District lines "due to an earlier signal failure between Earl's Court and Edgware". Confused? Underground staff obviously were.

Peter G Scott, 6 Upper Road, Higher Denham, Bucks UB9 5EJ peter@scotchexpress.co.uk

Sandy

The importance of the missing Bedford to Sandy section of the proposed East-West rail route goes beyond that of a link between the west of England and East Anglia.

If the East Coast main line is temporarily closed south of Sandy, trains could run into Bedford for onward connections to London. In addition, restoring the rail route through Bedford is likely to be cheaper than adding extra tracks in urban London for east-west movements.

The rail industry and government need to get to grips with the east-west issue.

Gerard Duddridge, 67 Higher Exwick Hill, Exwick, Exeter EX4 2AW

Electrify more

I was very interested to read the article in *Railwatch* 110 on the electrification of our railway network. I feel that attention might be given to electrifying, as a first step, the whole of the Joint Line from Doncaster to Lincoln, Sleaford, Spalding and Peterborough which would provide a diversionary electrified route for the East Coast main line.

Alan M Waddington, 25 Viking Way, Metheringham, Lincolnshire.

Electric frustration

I read with pleasure the constant references to electrification in *Railwatch*.

Yet in truth what hope have we of getting any kind of sensible actions from our politicians and their civil servants? These people have got themselves into a state of mind where they seem pathologically

Wales

By Rowland Pittard
rowlandpittard1@yahoo.co.uk

Disruption

Rail services in the Port Talbot area were disrupted for two weeks in April for the first phase of the £400million South Wales resignalling scheme.

Problems were caused on the bus services with some too large for the bridges on the Bridgend-Maesteg route. There were also buses with five-in-a-row seating, limited leg room and no toilets. Some of the drivers were also unfamiliar with the route.

Aspirations

A £155million package of improvements in South East Wales has been identified in a new 10-year rail strategy drawn up by an alliance of local authorities. SEWTA's rail plan is being presented to the Welsh Assembly with the aim of getting funding from the Assembly and the European Union to support Network Rail and the local councils. You can download the 60-page report from: <http://www.sewta.gov.uk/strategy.htm>

Longer platforms

A £13million programme of 42 platform extensions to accommodate six-coach trains on the Treherbert and Rhymney services and four-coach trains on Maesteg services has been funded by Welsh Assembly which will also invest in eight extra two-car trains at a cost of £5million per annum from December.

Merthyr every 30 mins

Welsh Assembly approval has been given for the introduction of a half-hourly service which will include the construction of a passing loop and the amalgamation of the two stations at Abercynon.

incapable of entertaining any electrification schemes, never mind a rolling programme.

There's a mental blockage which, despite evidence as to the manifest advantages of electrification on the widest front, won't entertain it.

They are in a deep state of denial, and so of course were the Tories in their turn. Remember the East Coast main line - so badly under-specified that we have constant trouble now? But at least they authorised it!

For dogmatic reasons, they also gave us privatisation and then refused to accept the 1980s plan for a rolling programme of electrification.

John Gilbert, Ranalt, 27 Pixiefield, Cradley, Herefordshire WR13 5ND

Green way

I am disappointed that your coverage of political parties (*Railwatch* 110) did not include the Green party which is the only party to put the railways and the environment before the interests of the road and air lobby. For years, even the railway industry itself has not fought its corner against unfair competi-

LOCAL ACTION



more than a handful of services a day do use the station, and a painless way can be found to get to it from the main line station, I'm not interested and will head for King's Cross.

It is always less stressful to catch a long-distance train from its starting point. An extra 30 minutes or so of travel will result in less rush to join the Eurostar train.

The same is true returning home from Liverpool Street, and the ONE platforms at Stratford are a miserable place to wait.

Liverpool Street to King's Cross by Underground is not crowded. The previous journey, requiring Central and Waterloo & City Lines, was worse. The fare will be the same anyway.

There seems to be a "journey opportunities" crowd, campaigning to make our travelling lives easier by maximising interchange opportunities. The unwanted side-effect is trains stop at more stations, and get slower.

When I first moved to Wivenhoe, off-peak Clacton Line trains to London called at Colchester and Chelmsford only. Now they call at Colchester, Marks Tey, Witham, Chelmsford, Shenfield, Romford, and Stratford. Gee, thanks for all those opportunities.

Dr Maxwell Roberts, 95 Broome Grove, Wivenhoe, Essex CO7 9QT mjr@essex.ac.uk

John Barfield of Railfuture's international committee writes: Railfuture did not campaign for a Eurostar station at Stratford.

Before work began on the second stage of the Channel Tunnel rail link, there was a long public argument as to whether the terminus should be St Pancras or Stratford.

Newham, and its then leader, Stephen Timms, argued that there was no need for a station at St Pancras at all, as Stratford should be the "centre of the universe".

I had some rather acrimonious correspondence with him in which I argued that it was all very well getting an international station at Stratford but asked whether he could guarantee the operator would stop its trains there.

There is a case for Eurostar trains not stopping at too many stations. Perhaps Stratford and Ebbsfleet schemes? And will the SNP scrap the Edinburgh tram scheme?

St Pancras

You have made a terrible mistake in *Railwatch* 111 in saying St Pancras station opened in 1850. It actually opened on 1 October 1868.

T S Keep, 5 Welbeck Avenue, Sidcup, Kent DA 15 9BU

Editors' note: Our apologies. Mr Keep is right. The station opened in 1868 and the neo-Gothic Midland Grand Hotel was built from 1868-1877.

Lost leaders

In days gone by, railway lines were only closed for exceptional engineering reasons, for example

to replace a bridge. Nowadays it seems to be *de rigueur* to close down half the network at weekends. This is hardly likely to induce Mondeo Man and his family from the car and on to the train, especially when half the journey has to be made by bus and, as happened to me recently, the bus driver gets lost!

Roger A Smith, 67 The Street, Little Waltham, Chelmsford CM3 3NT

Stations bloom

Congratulations to the people who have worked to make London Fields station a pleasant place to visit! (*Railwatch* 110) A cared-for station, even if no staff are visible, is more congenial for passengers and somehow feels safer.

When I last visited Chesham station, it was an absolute picture. Several local people had taken it over and I believe it has won prizes. In summer the old signal box was awash with fuchsia and other plants in hanging baskets.

I hope other railway companies and Network Rail will encourage people to look after "their" stations. It will bear fruit in that more people will wish to travel.

Janice Uphill, 57 Paines Lane, Pinner, Middlesex HA5 3BX

Parkway stations

I agree with many of the points raised by Cherry Lavell (*Railwatch* 111) about the proposed Parkway station between Gloucester and Cheltenham. Parkway stations have a role to play, but they must not become a substitute for trains linking town and city centres.

Long-distance operators like parkway stations, because they appeal to affluent rural dwellers with cars, and avoid the need to lease additional trains for local services.

But this sounds worryingly like the arguments used in the 1980s to justify out-of-town shopping - more profitable for retailers and developers, but widely recognised now as a serious planning mistake.

Instead of a railway that you increasingly need a car to access, I think there is a case for a much better service between Great Malvern, Worcester and Exeter - akin to that between Nottingham and Cardiff - to serve expanding towns along the M5 corridor.

Philip Bisatt, 3 Ilford Court, Wiltshire Close, Taunton TA1 4JT

Information

Railfuture should try to include details on its website of where people can find agents to buy European rail tickets and public libraries with fares manuals, OAG rail timetables, and/or local bus timetables.

Simon Norton, 6 Hertford St, Cambridge CB4 3AG S.Norton@dpnms.cam.ac.uk

Members are welcome to send such information to editor@railwatch.org.uk or the postal address on page two.

Editors' note: The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect Railfuture policies.