



Your letters

Anti-rail Ministry

In the 1970s, we had a "Ministry of Transport" which many dubbed the Ministry of Road Building.

The way its current manifestation, the Department for Transport, are seeking to sever long-established through rail services such as from the South West to Scotland (*Railwatch* 114) suggests that it is similarly anti-rail, possibly because it supports domestic air services, despite the uniquely damaging climate impact of air transport, and does not want rail to undermine that.

Indeed it is the same Department which in its 2002 air transport consultation negatively compared the environmental impact of diesel IC125 trains with domestic air travel for Exeter-London journeys. What it does not seem to realise is that the much-quoted aging population with its off-peak disposable income is not likely to endure train changes and/or 21 minute stand-stills at Birmingham, and hence much longer overall journey times, if domestic air services are available for the same journeys, quietly encouraged by the DfT.

It's time to write to MPs along the lines: "If Government is genuinely concerned, as indeed it should be, about the impact of climate change and fossil fuel usage on future generations, then all Government departments, including the DfT, should be encouraging rail travel, especially for domestic and near-Continent journeys, not fouling it up!"

Incidentally, the diagram on page 4 of *Railwatch* 114 greatly understates the overall climate change impact of aviation emissions by having omitted both international flights and the increased emissions due to the pollution occurring at altitude.

I believe it is generally thought even by Government-financed organisations like the Royal Commission on Environmental Protection that the DfT is simply ignoring the climate change impact, allegedly part of Government policy, just as the old Ministry of Road

Building chose to ignore the visual environment impact that some of those schemes were plainly going to have.

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Brave Scotland

Your headline "Scotland presses on bravely" in *Railwatch* 114 prompts me to say I really cannot see what the Scots have to be brave about in this connection.

Bravery suggests that they are keeping going desperately against all manner of odds while under immense pressure to give up. Nothing could be further from the truth, I suggest.

With their own Parliament they are doing what any sensible country would do where rail electrification is concerned, getting on with it. And good luck to them! It's nice to know that someone in this benighted island has some intelligence!

It is we in poor old England, ruled over by the lardheads of Westminster and Whitehall who are to be pitied because of the aforementioned lardheads' attitude to electrification in England. It's we who need to be brave.

Why, with no more than about four big schemes and some good bits of infill, for example the freight lines from the Midlands to Felixstowe, the electrification of the whole of England's railway could be completed. We're not that big, or indeed anything like as big as, say, France, where electric railways are the norm as far as major routes are concerned.

But it does not seem likely with the intellectual level of those at present in charge.

And the Tories don't seem much better. Remember the privatisation schemes and so-wonderful Rail-track?

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SNP warning

I write to correct an item in your otherwise excellent feature on Scotland (*Railwatch* 114). There is no coalition between the Greens and the Scottish National Party, only a

loose agreement to elect Alex Salmond as First Minister.

Any such coalition would only have lasted a few weeks as the SNP embarks on a gargantuan, climate-wrecking, road building programme, partly inherited.

All the rail proposals you mention were started by the previous administration.

The SNP looks like becoming the most pro-road and air while anti-public transport government since Mrs Thatcher.

Tolls will be taken off the bridges and a brand new toll canopy will be demolished, but cuts are threatened to the pensioners' bus pass. There is a great fuss about hospital car parking charges, but nothing said about public transport to hospitals.

You also mention the huge Stagecoach subsidy to the SNP but did not mention that the SNP promptly dropped its long-standing policy of regulating the buses, now more than ever needed.

We desperately need an enquiry into the vast profits of bus and rail companies but it will not come from Scotland.

Is there anyone in Westminster who can cut off the vast sums Holyrood is spending on road building, without damaging other services?

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Glasgow CrossRail

Good to see the large coverage given to Scottish items in *Railwatch* 114 and also including progress with the Edinburgh South Suburban line reopening campaign.

But some corrections to the Glasgow CrossRail item:

The CrossRail route does not link "between" Central and Queen Street stations but does offer a link between the north and south suburban networks.

There would be three new stations created, not just two (at Gorbals and West Street). The third, at Glasgow Cross would in fact be the most important (under the immediate plans).

It will offer an interchange with many existing suburban services - including a possible new direct Ayrshire-Glasgow Cross-Edinburgh/Aberdeen.

But in addition (with possible reopening of the immediately adjacent low level Glasgow Cross Station), would give an interchange with the range of Argyle Line network stations.

A new viaduct is not needed, as the "Strathbungo Link/Viaduct" already exists. Although the track has been lifted, it is believed to be generally in good structural condition. In January Transport

Minister, Stewart Stevenson was given a presentation on CrossRail and at a later meeting of the SPT it was agreed to pursue the "CrossRail case" for possible inclusion in the Government's Strategic Transport Projects Review which will probably emerge later this year.

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Eurostar question

In with the latest issue of *Railwatch* was a questionnaire about using the Eurostar.

I have been a great fan of the Eurostar in recent years, but I'm unable to fill in your questionnaire as the drastic reduction in services from Ashford means most Eurostar journeys just aren't practical any more for those of us who live in the Brighton area.

I have written to Eurostar about this but didn't even receive the courtesy of a reply.

We fought for years to get a through service from Brighton to Ashford via Lewes, Eastbourne, Hastings and Rye, yet a year after getting it Ashford has become virtually redundant.

Some trips to Paris might still be viable depending on the time of day I can travel, but Brussels is a non-starter now and I'll probably have to fly from Gatwick.

It would be useful if you could somehow get this feedback into your data from the Eurostar survey, though it clearly doesn't fit in any of the boxes!

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Bike space on trains

I really hope that Arriva might consider providing proper space to carry bicycles on its trains now it has taken over CrossCountry.

I mean a decent sized space where one can park pannier-loaded bikes. And when I say park I mean just that. Park, on its two wheels - and not hung up by its front wheel on a "meat hook".

This malpractice is, perforce, carried out on FGV Adelantes and on Virgin Voyager trains - and it's time this was banned.

It's not only damaging for the bike wheel, it also makes for a stressful travelling experience - in first having to unload one's panniers, and then having to find the strength to haul the bike into this horrendous position.

Surely we should have it made as easy as possible to be "green" in using bikes and trains, on all train services. But I can see people fast returning to their cars if this is

Wales

By Rowland Pittard
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North-South links

The Institute of Welsh Affairs held a conference in Llandudno in January on North-South transport links. The IWA is concentrating on road improvements but Railfuture member Ian Murray explained how the rail journey could be speeded up by at least 45 minutes.

Freight strategy

Consultation on the Welsh freight strategy was completed in January with Railfuture responding both nationally and locally. Railfuture called for greater investment in rail and for policies to divert traffic from road to rail. A substantial amount of road freight transport in Wales is to and from Ireland.

New station



Llanharan station, six miles from Bridgend, opened in December and the first train to serve the town for 40 years was a cause of great celebration - although the official opening took place later. Rhondda Cynon Taf Council, Welsh Assembly Government transport grant and European objective one

funding was used to deliver the scheme, which will offer hourly services between Cardiff, Bridgend and Maesteg on Mondays to Saturdays, together with three return journeys to Cardiff on Sundays. At least 100,000 passengers are expected to use the station each year. Picture shows MP Huw Irranca-Davies, rear, with Welsh Assembly Member Janice Gregory, Mrs Berry Rossiter, Mr Leighton Harris and Cllr Geraint Hopkins at the site of the new station in Llanharan in 2005. ePolitix.com

Coal on the line

Coal traffic restarted from Cwmbargoed to Aberthaw power station on 9 January with a long-term contract. Tower Colliery ceased production in January but the washery and railhead will remain in use for coal brought from the Vale of Neath.

Watchdog for Wales

Consultation on the Public Transport Users Committee for Wales was completed in February 2008. The Railfuture response supported the formation of the committee including regional sub committees in which Railfuture would wish to participate.

Trains on the move

Arriva Trains Wales reduced by three, its fleet of single-car class 153 units in December, and the local services between Chester and Crewe and Shrewsbury and Crewe are now worked by class 158 and 150 units respectively. Nine class 150 units transferred from Central Trains to Arriva Trains Wales in November and these are being upgraded by the Pullman Group at Cardiff Canton before entry into service.

made a bike-damaging and stressful experience. And surely, encouraging people to take their bikes on the train would increase revenue instead of being seen as an expense.

I for one would be happy to pay extra to have a decent space in which to take my loaded bike.

Currently, passengers with no bike can take precedence and have more rights to a space than one's

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board" per train. Can they really be serious! Whatever was wrong with the good old guard's van....

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Turn up and go

In November 2005 London Fields station, just seven minutes out of Liverpool Street, had 82 trains per 18-hour weekday.

It had two trains per hour each way, with a few more during the peaks. About 500 people used the station during the peak hours.

Two years later, it had 159 trains per weekday with four trains an hour in each direction with six trains an hour in the peaks. Patronage had more than doubled to 1,200.

The comparable figures for nearby Cambridge Heath station, with an identical train service, were just over 400 and 1,000 passengers respectively.

You might think that the simple lesson is that if only train operators were to increase their service frequencies - by 94% in this case - then patronage will surely respond and grow by at least as much.

In the case of these two stations, patronage grew by 136% and 146% respectively.

I draw a further conclusion by answering the question "What prompted the train operator to near-double the train service in the first place?"

Since 1996, when the weekly service was a mere 38 trains per weekday and patronage of less than 200, two local Railfuture volunteers have developed and maintained a consistent twice-yearly database of personally observed and hand-counted passenger numbers.

My further conclusion therefore, and advice to fellow members and rail user groups with no less a passion for improvements to their own local stations and train services, is that it has been that irrefutable evidence base which has done the talking for us.

No self-important grand-standing in public meetings, no verbose tirades around "they should" and "why don't they", no voluminous papers presuming to know the railway better than those for whom it's their day-job, and no facile assertions about "simple tweaks". Just patient and persistent evidence-gathering, to persuade and promote our cause.

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Birmingham

I suggest Peter Rayner takes a careful look at the deliverable improvements to Birmingham's rail infrastructure before extolling the virtues of the no-hope scheme for the Curzon Street Grand Central station (*Railwatch* 114).

The Curzon Street site was long ago sold on very long-term leases to developers and there has never been an option to develop the

Grand Central station. Even if it was deliverable, it is in the wrong place to serve the city, it has no public transport links and none are planned.

The proposed passenger side improvements at New Street are planned to address the appalling passenger environment that is a legacy of the 1960s "running the railways down" politics.

The solution to the New Street rail capacity problem is to provide terminal platforms on the eastern approach under the Bull Ring and to add extra capacity to the east especially on the Coventry line.

In the short to medium term the proposed loops at Bordesley and diverting trains into Moor Street is the only show in town. The Bull Ring redevelopment has a 30-year life and the site needed for the platforms was excavated in the recent development to provide loading bays for the retail centre.

It is definitely achievable when the Bull Ring is redeveloped around 2030 and will provide the extra capacity where it is needed in the city centre.

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Co-editor Ray King writes: As I understand it there are currently no plans - and none likely - to provide additional platforms for New Street station under the Bull Ring. Railtrack rejected the offer of land before the shopping centre was built.

Peter Rayner adds: "The idea of loops to Moor Street would have little impact on congestion at New Street and the capacity of the Coventry line cannot be increased because it is governed by the key pinch point - the approach to New Street.

"The Government and local authorities should take action to reserve land near the old Curzon Street station, using existing planning powers.

"A new station of 17 platforms would have a common public entrance with Moor Street and be very accessible to the city centre.

"Also, the new station could be built adjacent to existing running lines so as not to interrupt current services - unlike the Gateway plan which, anyway, would only increase the size of the passenger waiting areas at New Street, not platform capacity."

In February the Government approved £400million expenditure on New Street station which will double the size of the station concourse and provide escalators to all platforms.

Send your letters to:

The Editors, 4 Christchurch Square, London E9 7HU.
Email: editor@railwatch.org.uk
Railwatch also welcomes articles and pictures

Severnside

By Nigel Bray
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■ ■ Innovation fund

Hopes of restoring passenger services on the Portishead branch and reopening Corsham station have improved. The branch welcomes the announcement by the West of England Partnership, representing the four unitary authorities in Greater Bristol, at its joint transport forum that those two rail projects feature in the partnership's Transport Innovation Fund bid. The Corsham scheme would however require the agreement of Wiltshire County Council.



■ ■ Threat to station

Railfuture Severnside objected to the Norton Radstock regeneration proposal for a housing estate across the Radstock West station site as it would prejudice reopening of the line to Frome, disused north of Hapsford since 1988 but basically intact. We wrote to Bath & North East Somerset Council, pointing out the similarities between Norton Radstock and the Forest of Dean as former mining areas steeped in industrial history.

The Dean Forest Railway, with its main line connection at Lydney, was recognised by the local authorities as part of the regeneration process rather than a hindrance to it. We pointed out that the Radstock area had the potential to develop a tourist industry in the same way and that a revived railway would be a valuable asset in providing access to it from elsewhere.

■ ■ Minehead-Taunton

Co-chairman John Walker has been in discussion with Somerset County Council officials regarding his proposal for an all-year train service between Minehead and Taunton. He made the point that winter trains would bring visitors to West Somerset when it sorely needed them and also stressed the longer term concerns about gridlock in Taunton in view of the planned growth in the county town's economy.

■ ■ CrossCountry

The branch submission to the CrossCountry 2009 timetable consultation called for Plymouth-Bristol-Manchester services to be extended to Glasgow so as to reinstate direct trains between the South West and Lancashire, Cumbria and Scotland via the West Coast main line.

In reply, Arriva CrossCountry said that, following the reorganisation of franchises by the Department for Transport, it no longer had access rights to run on the West Coast main line, north of Crewe. On a brighter note there was a more positive response to our call for IC125 trains to be deployed on Plymouth services which carry a substantial number of commuters to and from Bristol. Arriva CrossCountry also said it would stop one of its Cardiff-Nottingham services at Lydney.



Network card

I have noticed in the past year that publicity for the Network Card has been very hard to find. Posters advertising it are now almost non-existent in stations I frequent, where they used to be easy to find.

Moreover, the application forms are often not on display and have to be requested at the booking office.

I am beginning to wonder if the train operating companies have a plan to show that take-up of the card has declined and that therefore it should be discontinued.

I guess train companies might think this would bring them in more money, but it would certainly reduce the number of off-peak rail passengers travelling and would probably be self-defeating.

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Timetable

I was pleased to see reference in *Railwatch* to the printed national rail timetable from Middleton Press. Less known, is that the former Network Rail published National Rail Timetable is now available, in identical format, published by TSO (The Stationery Office) Ltd re-titled *UK Rail Timetable*. It is priced at £15 and is available from: TSO, PO Box 29, Norwich NR3 1GN

*John Savage, 16 Lakeside, Tring,
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OAG Guide

I have only just discovered that the OAG guide has been discontinued. This was a big disappointment given how useful it was with information on fares as well as timetables.

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Editors' note: The OAG (former ABC) Guide is a great loss. Other than the internet, do members have ideas about how to find fares for individual journeys?

Ticket changes

Has anyone else noted that since the changes in franchises in December, through Value Advance Purchase tickets may no longer be available on certain routes?

For instance, prior to the December changeover date, I was able to travel from Port Talbot to Carlisle for £18.50 each way. The route was via Bristol Parkway (on FGW) and then direct to Carlisle with Virgin.

Since then, the advertised route is via Arriva Trains Wales, changing at Crewe, and then Virgin to Carlisle. Connections are actually better, but unfortunately, no

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through Value tickets are available. Actually, they are available in theory, according to the ticketing web-sites, but having checked numerous services over the next three months, there are no Value fares available in practice.

Arriva Trains Wales has continually fobbed me off by telling me they are available, but they are so popular that they are snapped up immediately! Just once did they let slip that it was because they are unable to co-ordinate with Virgin to offer these tickets.

I have contacted Passenger Focus in the hope that they will have some influence.

Perhaps you can put pressure on Arriva Wales and Virgin to get their act together? As things stand, National Rail Enquiries quotes the cheapest return fare (so-called Saver Ticket!) Port Talbot-Carlisle as £120! Of course, those in the know will buy a Value ticket to Crewe and then Crewe-Carlisle, for a total of around £25 each way. But National Rail Enquiries won't tell you that!

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Rail reopenings

Many Railfuture members proffer ideas for railway re-openings. The first task is to persuade a local authority at ward level to refuse a planning application for redevelopment on a railway trackbed.

Planning applications join a queue, some lapse and others are routinely renewed. And that is why road schemes that apparently nobody has ever heard of dating from before 1939 stall works; the A21 at Robertsbridge for example.

Quite a few councillors have little, and that is being generous, knowledge of the world in which they live. Those who want to re-open a line and be heard need to be elected. Only that way will the puppets get to meet the puppeteers.

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Rail fares

I was disgusted, but not disappointed, to read that under Labour the cost of travelling by train has risen by 6% above the rate of inflation (*Railwatch* 114). For this was supposed to be the Government that unlike the Tories, encouraged public transport. Yet in reality that certainly hasn't been the case.

Only in London under Ken Livingstone have we seen a kind of Labour policy committed to the railways, and even he had to be first elected as an independent mayor before Labour made peace with him.

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Railfuture annual general meeting

Saturday 10 May 2008 at Warwick Road Church Centre,
14 Warwick Row, Coventry CV1 1EX 10.00 to 17.00.
Five minutes walk from Coventry station