

Charity tickets

I read with some alarm the letter from Martin Wright concerning Virgin Fares in *Railwatch* 116 and immediately took up the issue with Passenger Focus.

I received a reply from Passenger Focus Link Manager Julie Warburton. It's good to see that the ticket collector was wrong and that Virgin Trains has confirmed that it has no plans to withdraw the concessionary fares for charity workers and railcard holders.

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Editors' note: It appears that Virgin is continuing to offer reduced rates allowing charity workers and railcard holders to use discounted Saver fares at peak times but Arriva - which has taken over the CrossCountry franchise - has withdrawn the facility. Virgin is however under pressure from other train operators. Ms Warburton comments: "Virgin tell us it has no plans to alter the rules. The other companies should take note. Arriva has sacrificed these benefits on the altar of simplification. We congratulate Virgin on this Saver innovation and urge other train companies to follow its example."

Wolfhampcote chord

Like most Railfuture members I am in favour of re-opening lines where this is credible and feasible, and practical difficulties can be overcome. This certainly includes the old Great Central line (including the Grendon Underwood Junction to Ashendon Junction link) which must be a valuable asset to the overcrowded infrastructure.

It is certainly feasible to put in a chord at Wolfhampcote (*Railwatch* 116), but to what purpose? This would merely connect with the Weedon to Leamington line, a long-closed and little-used single line serving Daventry.

I somehow doubt if the various quangos, TOCs and regulators running the railways these days would welcome a connection to the west coast main line. The Daventry International Rail Freight Terminal is not at Daventry but at

the old Kilsby and Crick station on the Northampton loop. So the suggested chord would be of no direct benefit for the DIRFT.

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Cheap travel

Do you remember a gentleman by the name of Freddie Laker? He was a pioneer of cheap trans-Atlantic air travel in the 1970s, with his famous Skytrain. The idea of this was that unlike traditional air ticketing, you would simply turn up for the journey as you did with train travel.

Alas, it seems as if the railways have gone in the opposite direction to Laker, with the emphasis on advance bookings and complex regulations. Take for instance a recent trip I made to Brighton. Buying the ticket the day before and wanting to depart King's Cross between 3pm and 7pm made the cost £132 for a return journey. This is a lot of money, certainly a deterrent to travelling if you've got the option of going by car. And that's sad, as many don't want to purchase tickets well in advance, for all kinds of reasons.

Railfuture must fight for cheap day-of-travel tickets, which certainly encourage those who see the weekend is going to be fine and want to let the train take the proverbial strain.

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Public profit

In his letter in *Railwatch* 116, Mr Bottle says that "the Chancellor benefits greatly from taxes aimed at the motorist". As it is often alleged that the Government's transport policy is skewed by its vested interest in increased traffic, it is worth pointing out that whether or not the Chancellor perceives things this way, it simply isn't so.

The alternative to driving will usually be to use a train or bus. If the number of train passengers increases then the provision of the service becomes more profitable (or less unprofitable) so that train operators can, and thanks to competition will, offer better deals to

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the Government. As the cost of rail fares per mile is many times the level of fuel tax, the Government will benefit if people switch to rail.

Similar arguments apply for supported bus services, or for bus services that will soon require support if passenger levels continue to decline, and that's most of them.

There is however a problem: as the Government has long ceased to signal a policy of traffic reduction, train and bus operators will be basing their franchise bids on a continuation of current policy. That represents many billions of pounds down the drain every year.

To my mind, the above is a strong argument for returning public transport (except for the actual operation of services) to the public sector, as is the case with London buses, for example. If this were done, the Government would gain instant benefit from any modal shift to public transport and wouldn't have to wait until the next franchise renewal for any particular service.

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Better timetable

I'm sure we're all delighted that The Stationery Office continues to publish the UK timetable (*Railwatch* 116). As a writer myself I would be very happy to have 12,000 people willing to buy my books twice a year. Websites are all very well if you know exactly when you want to leave and/or arrive - and, indeed, which places have stations - but the old-fashioned book gives the full picture of what is possible.

It's a pity, though, that no attempt has been made to make the volume more user-friendly. Two examples that affect me directly are:

Table 51, which shows only trains run by Cross Country, with no connections by other operators to stations listed, and no mention at all of major destinations such as Hull, Liverpool, Barrow, Swansea or Portsmouth.

Table 126, which omits connections at Worcester from London/Reading to Malvern and Hereford, and fails to tell you that the latter city can be reached more quickly via Newport. TSO, it seems, is merely printing information supplied by Network Rail. Perhaps Railfuture should approach the latter about this subject.

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Clarification

The report about the TSO timetable in *Railwatch* 116 implies that it is the only version. There is also a Middleton Press publication called *Rail Times* which also gives the

reader a sense of railway geography. *Railwatch* 116 also states that Alloa was closed in 1968 by Dr Beeching. Richard Beeching was chairman of the British Railways Board from 1963 to 1965.

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Editors' note: *Railwatch* 114 carried a report about the Middleton Press timetable and how to buy it. A letter referring to *Rail Times* was also published in *Railwatch* 115

Alloa closed to passengers in 1968, following the 1963 Beeching report *Reshaping of British Railways*. We are told that in administrative or legislative terms, Dr Beeching never closed any railways, he only recommended them for closure.

It was up to the Minister to approve or refuse closure when an application was made by the relevant region of BR. All the various lines centred on Alloa were submitted for closure, and subsequently approved by the Minister.

The following anonymous comments were found on the internet by people commenting about the Alloa reopening:

"Great to see Scotland fixing the damage done by the English bigot Dr Beeching."

"It's good to see that the Scots at least are undoing some of Richard Beeching's work."

Food for travel

While as an organisation, Railfuture is campaigning for retention and improvement of services and a much improved rail system, electrification, high speed routes and many other things, which is great, very little mention appears to be given to the improvement of catering facilities.

I recall travelling by inter-city back in the 1970s, from London to Edinburgh and London to Penzance and full catering services were on offer, with a properly designated restaurant car where the passenger could enjoy a substantial meal at lunch time. On the longer journeys, afternoon tea was also served.

The current trolley and buffet services are inadequate for travellers undertaking long journeys. On several occasions I have attended events in London, travelling from Devon, returning the same day. I have not had time to eat at a restaurant, just grabbing a sandwich or baguette at the station. By the time I arrived home it was too late in the day for a meal, resulting in not eating properly.

The full restaurant facilities of the past were a great asset. The dumbing down to mere buffet facilities has made long journeys less com-

fortable. Clearly we must focus more direction on the resurrection of restaurant services.

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Central Trains fan

I have been finding it difficult to find the CrossCountry equivalent of the £10 "seat filler" return fares which Central Trains promoted on the Manchester-Norwich route over the past two summers.

I used them to travel to Cambridge, with a connection at Ely, and also to visit my grandson at Nottingham University.

I always found Central Trains to be fast, clean and punctual with polite staff, contrary to remarks in *Railwatch* 116 about their trains being poorly maintained.

As an 80-year-old railway buff, I now feel disadvantaged by the new CrossCountry franchise.

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Back-door rise

I travelled from York to Darlington by train and bought my ticket at the travel centre. I was told there is now no standard day return for this journey and I would have to buy two singles. Compared to the last time I made this journey in April, that means a fare increase by the back door of 75%.

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CrossCountry blues

It is encouraging to see reports in *Railwatch* of some positive developments - along with others not so good. I regret to have to add one to the latter which I do not recall having been mentioned, regarding the Birmingham-Edinburgh service. Previous to the CrossCountry shake-up, trains via the East Coast and West Coast often departed within a few minutes of one another - not ideal, but now some demented genius has decreed that they leave at precisely the same time, three minutes past the even hour, 08.03 to 18.03 on weekdays (somewhat fewer at weekends).

A child could have predicted that this ridiculous situation would result of course, in endless confusion and a great risk of people getting on the "wrong" train - as happened to my wife recently. She asked at the "Connections" desk, where she was, as it turned out, misdirected.

Loudspeaker announcements warn: "Be sure to get the right train", but as usual there was no one on the platform to ask. Having a reduced-fare ticket booked in advance, she was then faced with a belligerent ticket-snipper demanding payment of the full fare when she had done nothing more than make an honest, and understandable, mistake. She pointed out that all the ticket said about route was "XC and connections only", and how was she supposed to under-

stand hieroglyphics? Why couldn't it state the route clearly? The attitude of CrossCountry seems to be "it isn't our fault, Network Rail gives us slots, the timetable is very tight, we can't do anything about it and it is up to you to make sure you are on the right train."

There isn't room for the route on the ticket because "via York" takes up more space than the phrase above! It would be nice if some heads could be banged together to sort out this mess before the new December timetable but I shan't hold my breath.

Anyone unaccustomed to trains and subjected to such an experience would probably vow never to use them again. This sort of nonsense (along with expensive fares, uncomfortable airline seat-

Historic films on sale

Points and Aspects is the eighth volume of the British Transport Films collection, which has been re-issued in digital form as DVDs.

Volume 8 shows some of the British Transport Commission's work in the "bread and butter" titles from the BTF film unit.

Staff training films such as Single Line Working and Day to Day Track Maintenance played a large part in its core activity, and a good proportion of films made by the unit were never made available to the general public.

They were produced for staff meetings, lunchtime screenings, and as part of training courses. The staff instructional documentary is the focus of the first disc.

The second disc looks at some of the wider aspects of BTF's work.

Travel to the Channel Islands and a further reminder of reasons to visit Scotland are the subjects of two very different styles of the travelogue documentary, while a journey with the staff of a British Road Services lorry reminds us that BTF was the film unit for all nationalised transport and not just the railways.

Also included are illustrations of technical achievement. Points and Aspects is a double-disc DVD digi-pack containing 13 films - nearly five hours



of footage, copied from the films which are preserved in the BFI National Archive.

A booklet with notes by BTF historian Steven Foxon, who programmes this series, accompanies the discs.

Volume 8 which costs £20, contains Single Line Working (1958), The Long Night Haul (1957), Day to Day Track Maintenance Pt 1 (1952), Care of St Christopher's (1959), Day to Day Track Maintenance Pt 2 (1952), Measured for Transport (1962), The Signal Engineers (1962), Channel Islands (1952), Mishap (1958), Under the Wires (1965), Spick and Span (1962), Points and Aspects (1974) and Scotland for Sport (1958).

A 17-disc BTF box-set will be released later this year with an exclusive disc.

BFI DVDs are available from many DVD shops, from the Filmstore at BFI Southbank, London SE1, by mail order from the Filmstore on 0207 815 1350 or online at www.bfi.org.uk/filmstore

Free BFI DVDs are on their way to six of the best letters published in this Railwatch.

C C Thornburn, Allman Road, Erdington, Birmingham B24 9DZ

Foolish restrictions

I may well not renew my Railfuture membership next time since I feel, probably along with countless others, that rail travel with its foolish restrictions, is no longer a pleasure.

I had thought that on retirement I would enjoy myself travelling around the country by train. However with the awful CrossCountry

services, which unfortunately replaced Virgin Trains, I cannot now afford to travel far since the company has failed to honour Virgin's concessions, particularly being able to use any train with a saver fare any time before 09.00.

This dreadful company, which also replaced Central Trains, tipped me off one train at Nottingham because I was aboard the 18.00 to Birmingham New Street (Cardiff service) with a cheap day return. I and my aunt were humiliated. I complained to a member of the station staff who informed me that people like us were not wanted by the rail company because the company preferred to have businessmen sitting in their trains, since such people were more lucrative.

Needless to say, I was incandescent with anger. As a result of this I will probably not renew my railcard and I will travel, where possible, by coach instead.

Maybe Railfuture could galvanise the public against this invidious and repugnant company. It is possible I am sure - look what happened when the passengers on FGW revolted.

It surely cannot be right that taxpayers, who are helping to subsidise the railways, are treated thus.

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Threat to trains

It appears that from December the Chester-Crewe line may be losing its through services to North Wales, apart from a very few West Coast main line services. This means inconvenience for Crewe-North Wales passengers, and for those from Stafford, Trent Valley, Stoke and so on. It makes a rail trip to North Wales more effort than it is worth. If we want to get there we will have to use the car!

Bear in mind that under First North Western auspices Crewe-North Wales had pretty well an hourly service, well patronised, and ask whether it is sensible to throw all this away.

It would appear that there is a desire to keep the Arriva Trains Wales trains off the WCML, so that their Birmingham-North Wales trains will go via Shrewsbury and Wrexham, taking a full two hours to get to Chester, combined with the wishful thinking of the Welsh Assembly in imagining the main flow as being North-to-South Wales. Watch a Cardiff train at Chester as it discharges its passengers and a new load gets on, and consider whether this is true.

As far as I can see the ATW trains on Crewe-Chester will operate as a shuttle only.

Timetables are well hidden. I found a draft timetable at www.saveseverntrains.co.uk.

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Persistence pays off

It was good in *Railwatch* 116 to read of the Alloa reopening finally coming to fruition.

I lived in Scotland for a few years in the 1980s, and this was one of the main items on our Scottish branch's agenda even then, so persistence does pay off!

However, I have always wondered why the plan was only to reopen for passengers from Stirling to Alloa, rather than through to Dunfermline.

The Dunfermline connection was mentioned in the *Railwatch* article, and would open up many more journey opportunities, not just Alloa to Edinburgh, but also direct services from Glasgow to Fife without putting extra burden on the Forth Bridge.

Maybe such a service could end on a reopened Leven or St Andrews branch.

Also, we shouldn't forget the many more communities that could be put on the rail map by an Alloa-Dunfermline reopening, for example Clackmannan, Kincardine, Culross (a small village but an important tourist destination) and Valleyfield.

Incidentally, there is another route from Alloa to Dunfermline which at least one local councillor was interested in reopening in the 1980s.

The line through Oakley was more direct than the Kincardine route, and the trackbed was intact in the 1980s, although I'm not sure of its status now.

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Rail bargain

Your coverage in *Railwatch* 116 of Transport for London's East London Line Project was welcome and timely.

I'd like to follow up on your reference to the final phase to complete the capital's "Outer Circle" as this autumn is decision-time.

We have Ken Livingstone, the first Mayor of London, to thank for fast-tracking the link from Dalston Junction to Highbury & Islington.

This is now expected to open in February 2011, to coincide with the doubling of frequency on the core section of the North London Line, and all in good time for the London Olympics.

The new Mayor now has within his grasp the opportunity to finish the job and open the completed Outer Circle a mere 10 months later.

Concluding a funding agreement this autumn involving his own TfL, the DfT and Network Rail, would enable him to open a new orbital rail link within a single term of

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office! The new link's seven stations include one new one, and all the rest are interchanges with radial mainline or Tube routes. Magic!

As well as a quarter-hourly direct service between Dalston Junction and Clapham Junction taking little more than just 30 minutes, we'll need those extra four trains per hour to boost capacity on the cross-river core section by 33% (from 12 trains per hour to 16) to cope with expected demand.

So who pays? Timetable changes necessitated by Network Rail's Thameslink Programme works at London Bridge will, without a mitigating package of other services, disadvantage some important south London users such as King's College and Maudsley hospitals.

Network Rail's route utilisation strategy for south London, however, sings the praises of the ELLP's final phase for providing additional capacity and a key part of that mitigating package of alternative services.

The Office of Rail Regulation, which has approved the south London rail utilisation study, has indicated that if the ELLP final phase remains unfunded there are potential issues about compatibility with the south London RUS.

If the scheme remained unfunded by any critical date, it seems they would consider that the relevant part of the RUS should be re-opened to decide what changes needed to be made. Serious stuff!

The Thameslink programme has an agreed budget of £5.5billion. The ELLP final phase has a capital cost of £105million, less than 2% of the former.

At that price the funding and finishing of the whole ELLP by December 2011 must be the bargain of the decade!

Rail campaigners should write to Mayor of London Boris Johnson, the Secretary of State and Thameslink Programme Director Andrew Mitchell, urging them to see sense and do the deal. Please write now.

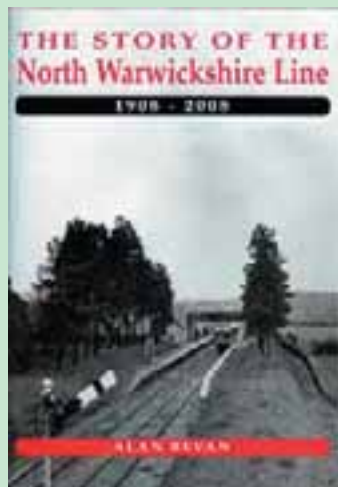
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More stations

I believe East Ayrshire Council are pressing for five new or reopened stations. Hurlford, Mauchline and Cumnock lie to the south of Kilmarnock on the G&SWR line to Dumfries.

Altonhill and Queen's Drive would serve Kilmarnock's suburbs giving far better access in a town where the main station is not easily accessed.

Queen's Drive is on a spur, part of a truncated avoiding line, closed in haste and now part of a bypass. The existing terminus is near a huge Asda and the line carries



- Birmingham Snow Hill
- Birmingham Moor Street
- Bordesley
- Small Heath
- Tyseley
- Spring Road
- Hall Green
- Yardley Wood
- Shirley
- Whitlocks End
- Wythall
- Earlswood
- The Lakes
- Wood End
- Danzey
- Henley-in-Arden
- Wootton Wawen
- Wilmcote
- Stratford-upon-Avon

The Story of the North Warwickshire Line

A 60-page A5 book illustrating its 100-year history

£5 including post and packing from

Alan Bevan, 12 Morris Field Croft
Birmingham B28 0RN

Centenary book on offer

The 100-year history of the 25-mile Birmingham to Henley-in-Arden and Stratford-upon-Avon line is the subject of a new 60-page book compiled by Railfuture member Alan Bevan, who is secretary of the Shakespeare Line Promotion Group.

With 58 photographs, plus maps, track plans, diagrams and much more, the book relates the early years, a 1911 train crash, opposition to two closure schemes and the more recent renaissance of the former Great Western Railway main line.

Modern diesel trains work the every-day services but there are also heritage steam train operations.

More than 2 million passengers every year use the stations, which serve Birmingham's shopping and business districts, urban suburbs, market towns, rural communities and Stratford-upon-Avon.

occasional oil trains. Freight and park and ride could develop well as road links are good.

We need further development with through trains to Leeds and into the Glasgow Crossrail system, a phenomenon waiting to happen. Both are necessities.

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Clean sweep

While in Austria in July, I boarded a local train at Worgl and was greatly impressed by the design. Four articulated carriages had entrances at platform level.

There were seats at this level and up a step on the level above the wheels.

The seats were slung from the sides of the carriage, leaving the floor totally clear with more room for legs and luggage and making cleaning much simpler.

Perhaps there are problems in sup-

porting seats from carriage walls in British trains but it appears to be an ideal design for short journeys where seats do not have to be suitable for more than an hour's use.

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Electro-diesels

I was interested to read Peter Rayner's column in *Railwatch* 116. He is as stimulating as ever.

I thought I should point out that South Africa also has electro-diesels. There are 50 [class 38] single cab diesels for shunting in non electrified yards but with pantographs for DC running, all on 3ft 6in gauge track of course.

Peter Odell, PO Box 1104 Kimberley 8300, South Africa.

Extra potential

It was extremely interesting and a great pleasure to read your article in *Railwatch* 116 about the extensive work now taking place to reinstate,

improve and extend the East London line.

Years ago I regularly used a train from the former Broad Street station to Gordon Hill station, routed via Dalston Junction, Canonbury, and Finsbury Park.

This route could, with upgrading, be used, perhaps, to form a useful part of a Thameslink 2 system in the future if it is deemed desirable to extend the East London in a northerly direction.

In the same issue in a letter about the Hall Farm chord, Martin Mesias states that it would be a useful addition to the local rail network.

A few miles along the track is Seven Sisters station where, if the now-single connecting chord to South Tottenham station were redoubled and a reasonable service introduced to Stratford from Enfield Town and Cheshunt, the advantages would be many.

Apart from a greatly improved interchange between Seven Sisters and South Tottenham, this would encourage more customers to take advantage of the soon-to-be improved Barking-Gospel Oak service which presents many more useful travel opportunities.

Stratford would certainly be a beneficial destination giving easy access to the existing rail services there, plus the approaching 2012 Olympic games and also the Docklands Light Rail which offers access to the many workers to Canary Wharf and beyond.

There was a limited service years ago from Enfield Town to Woolwich to cater for dock workers.

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Carbon count

Railwatch 116 published my letter in which I asked whether high-speed rail and lengthened commuter trains are tenable in the context of the Climate Change Bill with its likely minimum reduction of 80% or more in carbon emissions.

What surprised me was that the letter was published under a heading: "Questions for future".

The fact is extra rail capacity and high speeds could add to carbon emissions rather than reduce them. Climate chaos is an emergency in the making. Having criticised predict-and-provide road transport planning, rail campaigners must not be guilty of the same approach.

Additional rail capacity can only be justified in carbon terms if travel by other means fades away.

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US trains boom

I see from America's *Trains Magazine* that Amtrak ridership is up 15%, with some routes registering spectacular increases, because of the increasing cost of petrol for car journeys, yet politicians on both sides of the Atlantic still seem



Revamp for branch-line trains

They may not be the most exciting rail vehicles but class 153 trains have provided sterling service on a whole range of Britain's branch lines.

Now some of the 20-year-old vehicles are getting a £750,000 facelift. In August, train operator London Midland put the first of the refurbished 153s back in service.

It has 10 of the 153s and they work on the Coventry-Nuneaton and Bedford-Bletchley lines and the Stourbridge Town shuttle.

The refurbishment, which took place at Wabtec's Eastleigh depot, provided improved cycle storage, information

screens, and CCTV as well as new seat covers, carpets, table tops and interior lights. London Midland's engineering director John Barlass said: "This is part of our £243million investment to bring a more reliable, more comfortable and more modern rail service across all our routes. As well as the £3million refurbishment across the existing fleet, we're buying three new fleets of trains and introducing a comprehensive programme to improve reliability."

London Midland has been operating train services from London to Northampton, Birmingham and Liverpool since November last year.

Picture: LONDON MIDLAND

reluctant to adopt pro-rail policies because of funding from the road lobby. Please keep up the excellent work with *Railwatch*.

Clive Barton, Halsey Road, Burley in Wharfedale, Ilkley LS29 7PW

Claustrophobia

I have stopped booking Virgin Trains tickets through thetrainline.com because it seems impossible to book table seats or seats facing the front of the train. I am fed up with sitting in windowless seats which induce a feeling of claustrophobia.

Alan Crowhurst, Cleobury Mortimer, Shropshire DY14 8AH

Rail petition

In response to Peter Rayner's recent call for action I have re-submitted a petition on the Downing Street website calling for positive action and funding from the Government in support of the East-West rail scheme.

Hopefully this will get the powers that be to shift from their apathetic position of present.

The petition can be found at <http://>

petitions.number10.gov.uk/east-westfunding and I hope you will be able to sign it.

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Matlock outlook

I was dismayed to read in Rayner's Review in *Railwatch* 116 that building a Sainsbury's superstore at Matlock would "prevent for ever the reopening of a direct route from the West Midlands up through Burton and Derby to Millers Dale and Chinley".

Having planned a visit to Matlock, I went to look at the damage.

The store is now built and operating and is situated on one side of the rail line, a new bridge having been built over the rail line to take Sainsbury's traffic from the main road to the car park.

I could not see how this would affect reopening the rail line, and when I spoke to a volunteer at the Peak Rail shop, he agreed.

There might be many obstacles to the reopening, but the Sainsbury's

superstore at Matlock does not appear to be one of them.

*Janet Cuff, Tatton Road North, Stockport SK4 4QX
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Railfuture East Midlands secretary Roger Bacon writes: It was a pleasant surprise when I found the newly laid double track passing the supermarket and the access bridge to it looking more like High Speed 1.

The new tracks are laid to within a few metres of the Peak Rail track and joining the two lines is now, I understand, down to talks between Network Rail and Peak Rail who have ambitions to run into Matlock station.

Send your letters to:

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