

East Anglia

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Lowestoft airshow

For this popular event on 24 and 25 July, thousands of people came to the town by rail. The East Suffolk Travellers' Association (which is affiliated to Railfuture) wrote to the train operator appreciating the way in which it rose to the challenge with additional Norwich-Lowestoft trains and buses to supplement the very busy Ipswich-Lowestoft trains.

However, ESTA's letter also expressed concern that many passengers had a free ride. We hope that in 2009 more staff will be on duty to issue and check tickets and that perhaps a way of selling tickets in advance for the event can be devised as well. Airshow visitors are among the many people who appreciate the favourable position of Lowestoft station. ESTA has also produced a survey form that can be used as part of its campaign against any proposed moving of the station. It is seeking funding for this survey from a number of sources.

Freight scheme approved

The Transport and Works Act order to upgrade the line to Felixstowe Dock and Ipswich Yard has been approved by the Government. The branch was among many local supporters of the scheme. The project will provide a section of double track and extend the sidings in Ipswich yard. It will allow the number of freight trains to be doubled without affecting the passenger service.

Overcrowded trains

Information released by the Department for Transport following a freedom-of-information request shows that nine out of the top 20 commuter trains in the country are in East Anglia with four of the top six being trains between King's Cross and Cambridge. New rolling stock is promised for the line, but will not arrive until May 2009.

Unsustainable development

A study by Cambridge University Architects Department into the new settlement of Cambourne has shown that the town has above average car ownership and 85% drive to work. Although the town was designed on green principles it has no railway station and limited bus links to the nearest station in St Neots.

Coastway

By Dick Tyler
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Lewes-Uckfield

There is disbelief locally at the long-awaited report which has ruled that there is an "insufficient business case" for the reinstatement of the Lewes-Uckfield rail line in East Sussex. The line is in the most crowded part of the country, would give relief to an overcrowded Brighton line, and passengers are returning in droves to the environmentally friendly railways because of the rise in motoring costs.

The negative Network Rail report commissioned by the Central Rail Corridor Board was published on 23 July.

But former transport minister Tom Harris said before the board convened: 'I would really like to see this go ahead, I think you have a very good case.' He added: 'I want this project to succeed.'

Although there are no major obstacles to the reopening and the reinstated line would make a profit, Norman Baker MP, one of the board members, revealed the "business case" flaw. Network Rail is obliged to use current cost benefit analysis models which are loaded against rail. A review of the process is under way and hopefully there will soon be a new approach to analysis.

Currently the Treasury says time saved for the motorist is a benefit and has a monetary value while time saved for train and bus passengers, cyclists and pedestrians is unimportant. It does not know the monetary value of landscapes, global warming, accessibility, social inclusion and quality of life.

Eurostar campaign success

By Trevor Garrod
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I wrote to Eurostar managers at the beginning of August welcoming the news that, from December, Ashford International will again have a daily train to and from Brussels.

Eurostar has responded to the many representations made to them – including one of the main recommendations in Railfuture's Snapshot Survey – and reinstated a call at Ashford, which had seen its services drastically cut in November last year.

It has also announced a higher than expected increase of 30% in London-Brussels passengers since November last year.

Ashford now has a train to Brussels at 06.27 (weekdays) and 08.28 (Sat) with a weekday return arriving at 17.33. There is also a Sunday evening arrival from Brussels at 17.33 and a departure to Brussels at 18.55.

These trains will enable business travellers from east Kent to do a full day's work in Brussels or indeed visit other Belgian cities for the day (at no extra cost) such as Antwerp, Ghent or Liege. The trains should also suit some of the people who live in Kent, work in Belgium and do a weekly commute.

It should also be possible to leave Ashford at 06.27 and be in Cologne at 12.45 local time (one hour ahead of British time) or Amsterdam at 12.06. We hope to publish more about journey possibilities in our next issue, once Continental timetables for December are available.

Saturday and Sunday Eurostars will also enable people from east Kent and East Sussex to spend a weekend in Belgium or German cities such as Aachen or Cologne.

What they do not do is encourage Belgian visitors to come to Ashford, Canterbury or other Kentish towns for the day.

As we said in a Railfuture news release, the reinstated trains are a small but significant step forward. We hope that they will be well-used and encourage Eurostar to introduce one or two further Ashford stops when they revise timetables during 2009.

Tickets to Continent

Following publication of the Railfuture Snapshot Survey, Trevor Garrod had a meeting in July with the Association of Train Operating Companies' Commercial Director to discuss ticketing to the European mainland.

He was pleased to learn that nine Train Operating Companies now offer this facility and that on-line bookings are increasing. A visit to the companies' websites tells passengers about the through tickets and leads them to the Eurostar website where they can actually book. Train operators in this scheme are: East Midland Trains,

Virgin, National Express East Coast, National Express East Anglia, First Great Western, First Capital Connect, Chiltern, Southern and Hull Trains. However, how many of these are advertising the facility by means other than their websites?

The Rail Team consortium of Continental high-speed operators (including Eurostar) has not yet swung into action, but has, we understand, been busy appointing its management team. They have promised that better connections, easier booking facilities and contingency plans should start to materialise in 2009.

Off to Hamburg

The next Continental group visit for Railfuture members and their friends and families will be to Hamburg on Monday 11 May, returning on Saturday 17 May. Details will be available immediately after Christmas. You can receive them by sending an SAE to Trevor Garrod, 15 Clapham Road South, Lowestoft, NR32 1RQ.

Euro federation

The European Passengers Federation is planning a survey of passengers making international rail journeys during 2009. The survey will be based on a multi-lingual questionnaire distributed via EPF's member organisations, including Railfuture, and we hope to announce details in the next *Railwatch*.

By then the European Commission's Action Plan on Sustainable Urban Mobility should also be published. We hope that this will contain constructive proposals for encouraging greater use of environmentally friendly modes.

EPF representatives will be meeting officers of UITP (the international public transport operators' association) in Brussels on 28 November to discuss how we may work together on this issue, having already held a useful meeting with them in June.

The European Commission has a new Transport Commissioner, Mr Antonio Tajani, following the move of the former Commissioner, Mr Barrot, to Legal Affairs.

Trevor Garrod and Christopher Irwin plus a Belgian colleague met one of Mr Tajani's cabinet members on 3 September mainly to discuss the implementation of public transport users' rights.

There will also be an EC speaker at EPF's next annual general meeting and conference, to be held at the SBB Conference Centre, Berne, Switzerland, on Saturday 14 March. The theme will be *Transport Integration for Passengers*. On the Sunday there will also be an optional rail trip on the Lotschberg line, passing through the new and old tunnels.

More information will be available shortly at www.epf.eu and in the next *Railwatch*.

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An unhealthy policy

Transport in Scotland is deep-fried unhealthy and is time-warped in the age of the car. Any failure to address the issue will have tremendous social, economic and ecological costs.

Yet there are solutions – developing rail, light rail and tramways is the progressive way for the future. But the public has to be made aware of the transport realities, and popular pressure is needed to establish a more progressive approach. That is the argument of a book by Professor Christopher Harvie which offers a vision of a first-class public rail network.

It has been said that the book *Deep Fried Hillman Imp: Scotland's Transport*, should be compulsory reading for all Members of the Scottish Parliament.

Christopher Harvie is a modern historian with an unerring ability to get behind events and establish who was responsible for what.

He has written in the past on North Sea Oil and its over-rapid exploitation, and is currently a Member of the Scottish Parliament.

Deep Fried Hillman Imp, published in 2001, refers to some of the architects of rail privatisation, many of whom are still around.

On 29 January 2008, John Redwood MP for Wokingham, the well-known Conservative Party railways expert, attended a dinner to discuss the future of the railways.

From his recent public comments you would not guess that he was responsible for leading a 1988 conference, which led to rail privatisation by fragmentation.

One wonders if he was seduced by his "petrolhead" constituents working at the Transport and Road Research Laboratory, who gave us such gems as Hall and

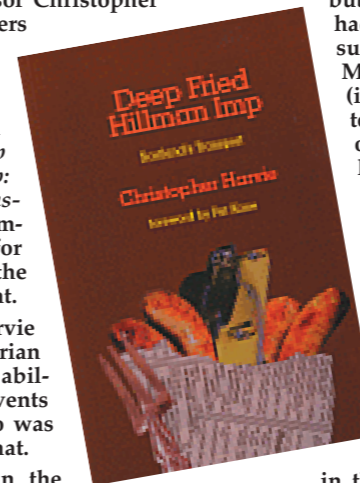
Smith's *Better Use of Railways* in 1976 which has never been disowned, so presumably is still government policy. It certainly led to the creation of the Crawley Busway – and maybe others.

On page 52 of *Deep Fried Hillman Imp*, Professor Harvie gets to the core of the problem stating that railway privatisation was: "a notion of the Adam Smith Institute, which the then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher had sensibly kept her distance from, but whose shamans had access to her successor, John Major. Its notions (initially intended to wipe railways off the British landscape) were tidied up, made pro-rail and given an economic gloss by Sir Christopher Foster, who had travelled far and fast to the right since his days with Barbara Castle

in the 1960s." While much of the book addresses Scottish problems, there is enough material in its 94 pages to make it a good buy for English and Welsh readers. Perhaps we should not be too hard on Mr Redwood for "not knowing one end of a shunting pole from the other".

His ambition of getting railways out from under a stultifying civil service was admirable. Too bad that in the process the system was broken into such small bits that the expansion of activities requiring national co-ordination – tourism, hotels, parcels, pallets, home delivery, refrigerated foods, and so forth – was impossible.

One hopes he will pursue his sensible suggestion that single wagon marshalling to serve private sidings be developed in answer to his own question: What are railways for?



Thames Valley

By David Eldridge
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Freight

The Ministry of Defence and English Welsh & Scottish Railway have established a new traffic flow to Felixstowe recently from Bicester, won from road haulage. It travels via Didcot and north London. This is another strong argument for East-West rail, which would avoid such a roundabout route. Network Rail is proposing Oxford-Bletchley-Bedford as part of a core freight network in the long term for Southampton-Yorkshire. The business case depends on East West rail link passenger services.

Chiltern performance best ever

Punctuality on Chiltern Railways has reached an unprecedented level for a British railway, of over 95% of trains arriving within five minutes of schedule. They and the new owners Deutsche Bahn are to be congratulated. No jokes about the trains running on time then, please.

Line speed enhancements are being reviewed with Network Rail in order to speed up services; the ultimate aim is for 90 minutes from London to Birmingham Snow Hill.

Wrexham direct

The Wrexham, Shropshire & Maryebone Railway services to Wrexham started on 28 April but are currently limited to maximum speed of 60 mph south of Bicester North due to the state of some embankments. Initially coaches are top and tailed with Class 67s until driving van trailers become available. Apparently the weight of two class 67s has caused Network Rail to investigate the stability of some embankments between Marylebone and Bicester.

Aylesbury Vale Parkway

The new station is now expected to open on 14 December as work continues to upgrade the track with welded rail and new signalling. Chiltern Railways wishes to open the station before home owners at the Berryfields development establish alternative travel patterns and also to serve villages on the north west of the town.



Renovation for historic station

Work is shortly to be completed on Southern's latest station upgrade, partly funded by the Railway Heritage Trust. It comprises renovation work to the listed building booking office area at Bexhill, East Sussex, with provision of much-needed toilet facilities. A privately run coffee shop now operates in the old travel centre which will be transferred to the more centrally placed newsagent vending facility.

The much needed redecoration of the area, in keeping with the heritage status of the building, brings this part of the station up to the standard of the remainder which has been transformed over the last few years. Only the old parcels office, now a pharmacy, needs a revamp.