



Your letters

Rail town's hopes

Railfuture is confident the new Corby-London rail service will now commence after the turn of the New Year.

To have missed the original opening date of mid-December is disappointing but we have always maintained it would be better to wait a little longer if that meant better trains and a reliable service.

Although the Department for Transport was not prepared in November to name the date trains will start running, we are very hopeful Corby station will be open for business very soon now.

We are encouraged by the quick reply by the DfT to our enquiries.

The DfT franchise manager for East Midlands Trains has told us that "all parties have been working hard to achieve a reliable, quality service at the earliest possible date".

The DfT added that "it is now certain that the service will begin early in 2009".

We have come from a red signal to a yellow. The green light is when we finally get a date the service will start.

We are not complacent though and Railfuture will continue to do what it can to support the return of a passenger rail service to the town and make it a success.

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And a town's protest

As leader of Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council, I have objected in the strongest possible terms to the decision to withdraw all fast trains from Nuneaton to London after 9.00 am.

Residents of Hinckley and the surrounding area value the service currently provided, with at least one fast train per hour to London during the day.

The decision, which I understand takes effect in December, will mean that residents will have to take a slower journey by going to Northampton. It fails to acknowledge the fact that Nuneaton is a major railhead for the people of Hinckley and Bosworth, and is

essential if we are to continue to have the necessary direct access by rail both to London and the north-west.

Nuneaton is the historical rail centre for this part of the world. At one time it was possible to travel direct to Northampton, Leicester, Norwich, Coalville, Manchester, Glasgow, Coventry and Leamington, as well as London.

One day this country will come to its senses and realise that full use of the railway system and its extension will make a real contribution to combating climate change and the effect of fuel prices.

In the meantime, we need to retain the fast service throughout the day from Nuneaton.

Councillor David Bill, Leader, Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council
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What went wrong?

I have read that the reopening of the Uckfield-Lewes line has been blocked, despite what I see as a very convincing case for reopening.

What went wrong, what lessons can be learnt and will this line ever be reopened?

I used to live in East Sussex, which was one of the few counties blessed with no dual carriageways.

My suspicion is that the councillors involved had a bypass scheme in mind where they thought the money could go to instead.

Are the environmental arguments not being heard?

Furthermore, the longer term financial benefits of rail for the local economy must be much stronger than those for a bypass, which would have the reverse effect.

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Brian Hart of the Wealden Line Campaign writes:

Surprise and dismay have greeted the conclusion of the Lewes-Uckfield Study, but this outcome was inevitable for a number of reasons. First, the business case analysis was narrowly focused with an inaccurate assumption that demand would primarily be just local traffic between Crowborough and Brighton. This is

despite the fact that Network Rail expected account to be taken of all traffic from points north as far as East Croydon to all destinations between Eastbourne and Brighton.

Second, the project brief was determined by East Sussex County Council's highways department with most of the input from the town councils of Crowborough, Uckfield and Lewes being struck out. ESCC also set up the Central Rail Corridor Board which was only to "investigate" reopening, not promote or support it.

A third (£50,000) of the cost of the Study came from the enthusiastic, pro-reopening Uckfield, Lewes and Crowborough councils, yet the CRCB refused them any voice or voting rights on the board – allowing them merely "observer" status. However SEERA and SEEDA, which contributed only £10,000 apiece joined the board and were influential in the decision making. SEERA's representative Martin Tugwell is an enthusiastic road-builder.

To represent the interests of all the parishes within Wealden District (Buxted, Maresfield, Withyham, etc) the CRCB chose Colin Webb of Isfield Parish Council who is a keen opponent of reopening. The CRCB then approved Alex McGilivray of Barcombe Parish Council, a long-term opponent and critic of the study anyway, to represent the interests of the parishes within Lewes District (Newhaven, Seaford, etc).

Mott MacDonald produced the business case, while Network Rail has been responsible only for the engineering work, concluding in its first draft: "If this scheme was to be taken forward then it could be seen as another building block in the development of the Lewes, Uckfield, Oxted and London corridor. Later development could include shorter journey time, redoubling any single line sections, connecting into Tunbridge Wells and electrification."

Such a positive aspiration was naturally struck out of the published report. Similarly removed was the contribution from Kilbride which demonstrated how the private sector could entirely fund the reopening by means of developers' contributions from the existing housing quotas for Wealden and Lewes Districts in the towns already allocated to take this growth.

Network Rail has also "gold-plated" the project in many ways, for example unnecessarily rebuilding every bridge for 25.5 ton axle load when the line will only ever carry class 171s and 375s at 12-ton axle load. The Uckfield line's unelectrified and singled sections have also been used to

count against its obvious benefit as a supporting main line for the BML. Pro-rail councils ask why such a previous positive synopsis has been dramatically changed to be so negative.

However, a detailed critique of the study is almost complete, while a properly scoped business case analysis will be independently obtained.

ESCC intended killing off all hope of reinstating Lewes-Uckfield in the CRCB's chairman's words: "Once and for all".

But this route will return to the network!

Oxford and more

Your report of Chiltern's £200million scheme for a link between Oxford and London Marylebone (*Railwatch* 117) does not mention two additional strong reasons in its favour. First, Chiltern intends to fund the scheme from its own resources and does not require any funding from the Government, thus reducing the number of bureaucratic hurdles to go through in order to start building.

Second, during the inevitable disruption to services and probable blockades caused by the reconstruction of Reading station and junctions, the Chiltern line will provide a useful alternative route for passengers between Oxford and London.

On another subject, we must welcome the growing pressure from many quarters for planning high-speed lines, although I believe that a rolling programme of electrification should take priority.

However it is important that High Speed 2 should not be burdened with the high cost of lengthy tunnelling like the HS1 line between St Pancras and Dagenham. In France, TGV trains approach Paris over surface lines and terminate in existing stations. Do we really need Arup's proposed extension of HS1 from St Pancras to Heathrow, and does HS2 have to start from St Pancras?

When Crossrail is built and electrification is extended beyond Maidenhead, as it must be, to Reading and Oxford, all Great Western local services will go underground at Paddington, releasing spare capacity in the mainline station.

Paddington could become the terminus for high-speed trains to the North, taking the old main line from Old Oak Common to South Ruislip, then running parallel to the Chiltern line as far as Ashendon Junction, where it could take up the old Great Central line.

A branch from Heathrow could join the HSR line near Denham, and connections to the Trent Valley line and Birmingham could

branch off beyond Rugby. Would Curzon Street be a suitable Birmingham terminus for high speed trains, if the "Grand Central" station is no longer feasible? Leicester and Nottingham would have to be bypassed, with suburban parkway stations.

High Speed 2 would have to be built in stages over many years, but there comes a point when reduced times for rail journeys outweigh the time and cost of air travel, eliminating most of the demand for domestic air journeys. It may not be necessary for HS2 to go all the way from London to Edinburgh, but could include the existing line north of Newcastle, except for a new bypass line around Morpeth.

Martin Smith, Bath Street, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 1EA

Bus competition

A day return by ScotRail between Girvan and Stranraer costs £12.60 and a single costs £10.60. There is no period return although I believe a period return – at a reasonable price – should be a legal requirement between any two stations.

A much more frequent bus service between Girvan and Stranraer costs £5.60 return and £3.60 single. That seems a more reasonable price.

Perhaps the railway, which certainly cannot be said to be competing on price with the bus, needs a bit of prompting from its existing and potential passengers. Which is why it is good to see that a lobby group called SAYLSA was founded in September and is actively promoting the Stranraer-Ayr line. You can contact them at rgcarr@tiscali.co.uk

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Editors' note: The Stranraer to Ayr Line Support Association was launched in response to worries about the future of the line particularly south of Girvan when Stena leaves Stranraer and relocates its ferry services to Cairnryan, probably in spring 2009.

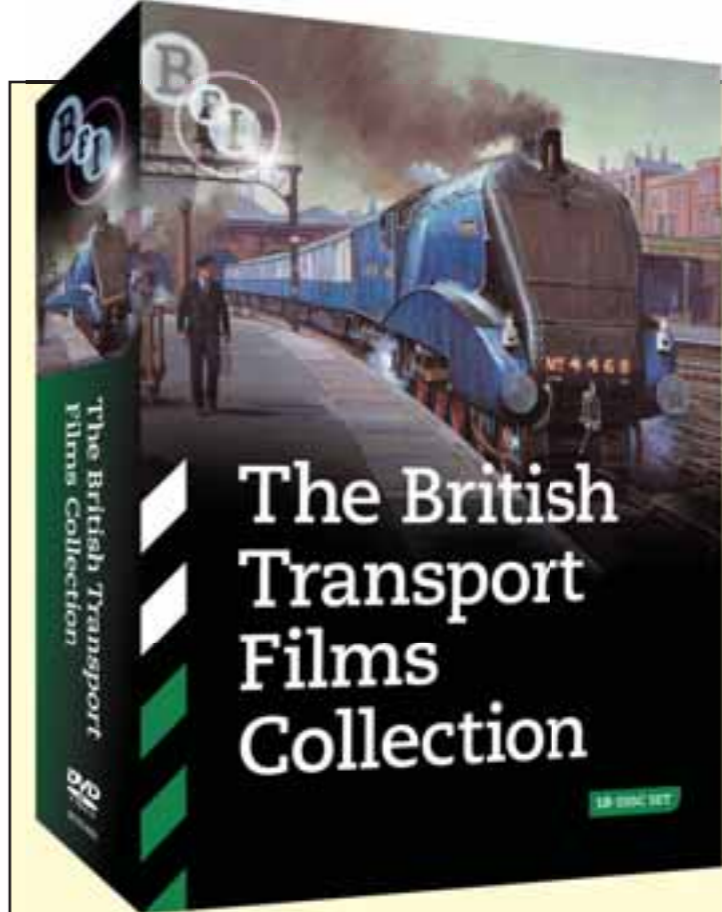
The acronym SAYLSA has echoes of Ailsa, the island that can be seen from three of the key towns on the line: Stranraer, Girvan and Ayr.

SAYLSA is a charity registered in Scotland and is the Community Rail Partnership for Carrick and Wigtownshire.

Chairman Richard Carr said that despite plans to rebuild Stranraer station and assurances that the line between Girvan and Stranraer will not close in the foreseeable future, big questions remain with First ScotRail suggesting that bus services between Cairnryan and Girvan Rail Station present the best option for ferry passengers.

Mr Carr said: "We've got to start looking at what happens once the ferry goes. After all, the ferry is the raison d'être for this route."

SAYLSA wants to see hourly services between Girvan and Ayr and improved timetabling



A large number of classic films from the BFI National Archive are being released this month as an 18-disc box set of DVDs.

It collects together all nine volumes of the BFI's celebrated British Transport Films DVD series, made over three decades.

The 125 films are released in an illustrated box containing slimline cases and a booklet with extensive notes and credits for each film.

The 38 hours of film provide a unique insight into the changing social history of Britain from the 1950s to the 1980s.

The British Transport Films Collection includes the very first BTF film *Berth 24*, and rare gems such as *E for Experimental*, *The Travolators* and *Old Sam the Signaller*.

There are also travelogues revealing a changing Britain like *This Year London and Letter for Wales* and classics like *Blue Pullman*, *Elizabethan Express*, *Terminus* and *John Betjeman Goes by Train*.

The professional craftsmanship and artistry of the BTF Unit and its imaginative approach remains an inspiration to film makers.

The box set was released on 1 December and costs £99.99. BFI DVDs are available from the Filmstore at BFI Southbank, London SE1 and by mail order Tel: 020 7815 1350 or online at www.bfi.org.uk/filmstore; from the BFI, 21 Stephen Street, London W1 and DVD retailers.

for the whole route to ensure better connections at all points between Stranraer, Glasgow and Newcastle.

At present, extremely few onward connections are possible for passengers using services from Stranraer to Ayr without significant waiting times.

SAYLSA will also seek improved facilities at stations including floral decorations and facilities for the disabled in partnership with community groups and Network Rail.

Other committee members are Dr Percy Walker, Kay Siddell, Mike Woolgar and Irene Climie.

Mr Carr said: "We invite anyone

who wishes to ensure improved services, facilities and indeed the future of services between Stranraer and Ayr to join us."

Membership is £5. More information: 07977 139447 or email: saylsa@tiscali.co.uk

Plans to run steam trains between Ayr and Stranraer are being put forward by a separate group, the Wigtownshire Tourist Trains Project.

WTTP hopes that by running tourist trains on this scenic route, more visitors will come to Wigtownshire, boosting the local economy.

Anyone interested in supporting WTTP should phone 01671 403875.

Well done TfL

As usual I find each issue of *Railwatch* most interesting, praising the places where improvements have been made, and campaigning hard where they have not.

I regularly use what is now Overground from Hatch End to South Hampstead, and must say there have been vast improvements.

Stations have been cleaned up and new benches and (rudimentary) shelters provided.

I usually travel off peak in the mornings and am glad to see that the booking offices are now open throughout the morning.

Light refreshments are also provided at a few stations. Information is excellent over the loudspeakers.

I recently travelled through South Hampstead to Caledonian Road in order to go on the normally freight-only line through the closed Primrose Hill station.

Trains were travelling along this route because of engineering work at Euston.

Primrose Hill buildings are still extant on the island platform albeit looking rather sorry for themselves.

On my return from Caledonian Road we were clearly informed that the next train would be for Gospel Oak. Just as well or I would have made a mistake and caught it!

Of course the station is very sparsely furnished but as the trains are pretty frequent, I think the basic shelters are adequate.

Well done Transport for London! After years of delay, with plenty of excuses, the lifts at Pinner on the Underground have finally been installed.

It is reputed that the reason the work took so long to be completed was because the lifts were originally made slightly too big for the shafts!

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

On the map

As a newish member of Railfuture, I am impressed with *Railwatch* magazine. Being new to rail interests I find it difficult, when reading items such as the excellent "Oxford's £200m London Link" article to relate where the lines actually are without having to dig out a map.

Might I suggest that a small map tucked in a corner of such articles would be helpful to those of us for whom this is not our home area?

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Editors' note: Both *Railwatch* co-editors are fans of maps but they need skill and time to create. We are looking for a volunteer to produce maps, preferably in Adobe Illustrator format.

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Your letters

time on a good day. The service to Leeds is also pretty poor from Birmingham, only once an hour and a journey time of two hours.

CrossCountry serves major areas of population and has not received the investment of routes from London.

The current rolling stock is inadequate and overcrowding on the Voyagers is a concern. There is a desperate need to order more coaches or new trains on this route.

My family have travelled to York frequently on CrossCountry and experienced problems with overcrowding and lack of luggage space.

I have just outlined why I consider that the priority should not be to embark on high-speed rail lines but to deal with the problems of congestion in cities like Bristol, Birmingham and Leeds which have no tram system and also poor regional rail services.

My work colleagues would like to see these in the West Midlands and if the dependence on the car and bus could be reduced, the environment will be so much better for my teenage children who are well aware of traffic congestion in the area in which we live.

Finally, would a new high-speed rail line between Newcastle and London reduce air travel between these cities?

There is a very good rail service already and I cannot see that there is any benefit in going by air as one has to allow for time taken to reach the airport from both cities.

I hope that we will not embark on new rail lines but first deal with the issues I have raised above.

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Rail alternative

I agree with David Hughes' letter printed in *Railwatch* 117, and hope that Railfuture will not become too closely identified with high-speed rail.

Instead of seeking to attract air travellers we should be asking, like MEP Caroline Lucas at Railfuture's conference on 15 November: Is your journey really necessary?

The Greengauge 21 scheme, named HS2, would save 30 minutes each way on a trip between London and Birmingham. Not travelling at all saves a whole day! By the earliest time that any new lines could be built, video-conferencing will have reached virtually the same level of inter-personal contact as face-to-face encounters.

The emphasis of Railfuture campaigning should be on refining the present network. This means elimination of bottlenecks, filling in gaps in coverage and a rolling programme of electrification.

Chris Green described a mobile factory, doing everything on site



Just the Ticket is the latest volume of British Transport Films in the BFI's best-selling DVD series.

Presented in a double-disc DVD pack, Just the Ticket contains 13 films – over four hours of footage – with a particular focus on the staff training film.

The award-winning Just Like the Rest of Us is a sensitive portrayal of people with disabilities, teaching staff how to treat them as they would wish to be treated themselves and Manhandling shows a novel way of teaching railwaymen how to lift heavy boxes.

The travelogue films feature the Peak District and England's North Country. They Had An Idea shows how ideas lead to innovation on the railways, and the merits of choosing rail over car is made clear in Give Your Car a Holiday.

A booklet with notes by BTF historian Steven Foxon accompanies Just the Ticket which was released on 1 December, price £19.99.

BFI DVDs are available from all good retailers, by mail order from the BFI Filmstore, tel: 020 7815 1350 or online at www.bfi.org.uk/filmstore

at one go, as a way of dramatically reducing the cost of electrifying a line.

This is the way forward so that every member of the public can journey to every part of the UK with the minimum of hassle.

*David Pearson, Windermere Avenue, Wembley, Middlesex HA9 8RY
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Oil, wars and profit

Ian Hislop Goes off the Rails was an engaging documentary on BBC TV in October which I am sure many of us in Railfuture made a point of watching.

The deliberate under-recording of railway passenger travel was a symptom of the real reasons for a planned programme of perverse closures, based on the flimsy

accounting pretext of "insufficient contributory revenue". In other words, branch lines were now suddenly expected to be self-financing when they never were before.

Yet no one expected the roads to be self-financing. They have been a charge on domestic rates (now council tax) since the 19th century. Moreover, the nationalised roads which were initiated by Ernest Marples and Co were 100% taxation-funded. They were called motorways – and not one of them has yet been required to make a profit or even pay its own way.

By the early 1960s, British motor manufacturers were losing more and more of their overseas captive market, as more British colonies became self-governing and were no longer obliged to buy British

manufactured goods, including cars, in preference to those of other industrialised countries.

There was also the tariff barrier put up by the then EEC (The Six). This was seen as the main reason why UK manufacturers could not export their vehicles to the EEC countries as easily as member states France, Germany and Italy who were by then exporting many thousands of cars every year to the United Kingdom.

The reality was that British industrialists found it too much trouble to export their cars.

And so the infamous "company car" scheme was devised, masquerading as tax relief for the benefit of those who received a car as part of their employment conditions, even though their job did not, in thousands of cases, involve driving.

For most company car recipients, the cash value of the car was not offered as an alternative. It was "take the car or lose the money".

Once Britain had joined the EEC, the directors of commerce and industry could, of course, no longer insist that the company "perk" had to be a British car.

By then, however, another reason had emerged for discouraging rail and bus travel, so far as policymakers were concerned: creating a market for the massively increased oil imports from Libya and the United Arab Emirates to whom Britain was then exporting massive quantities of armaments.

France, meanwhile, was exporting huge quantities of armaments to Iraq. She even equipped the Iraqis with a nuclear reactor in 1962.

Consternation had been felt in the corridors of power both in France and in Britain when the United Arab Republic (Nasser's Egypt) had made a pact with Syria, which was hard-line Ba'athist.

The military boosting of Syria's non-Ba'athist neighbours, therefore, was seen as a way of getting rid of Nasser "by proxy".

In other words, Britain and France hoped that there would be invasion and possible assassination.

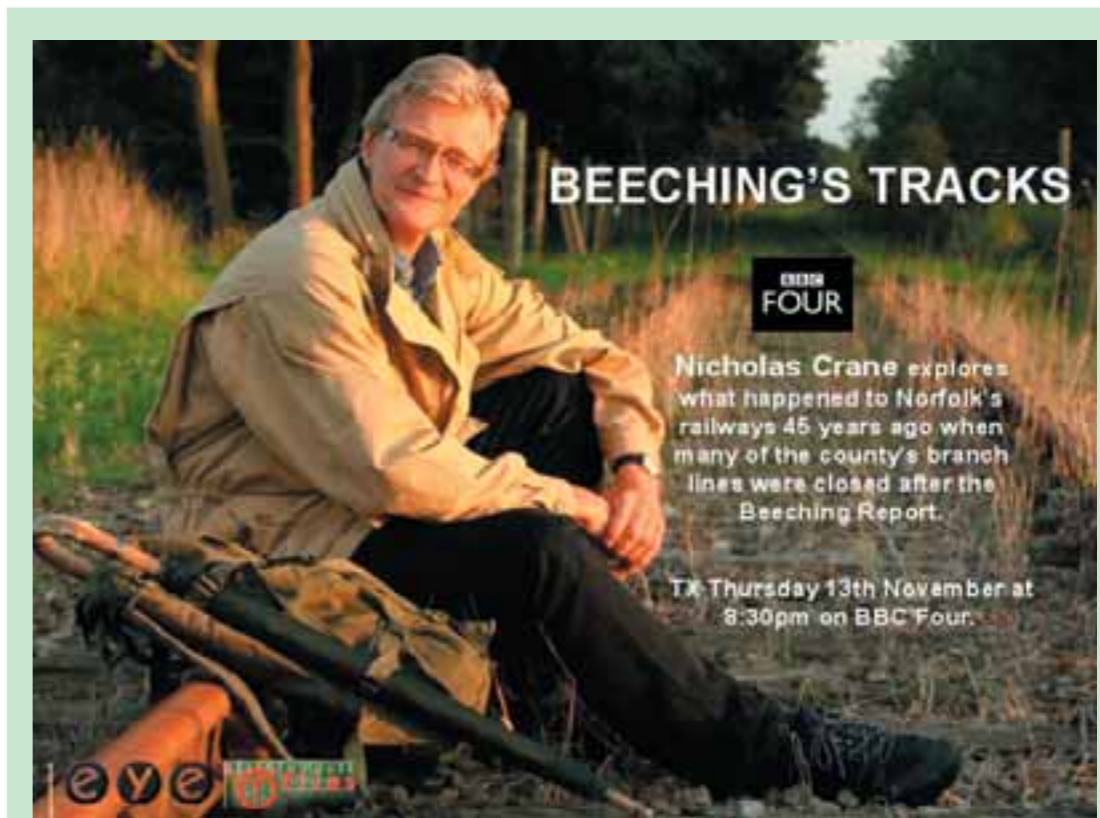
This plan very noticeably failed when Libya and Iraq went Ba'athist themselves, of course. But we in Britain are still living with the damage done to our country's infrastructure and heritage.

Josephine Martin, Downs View Villa, Freshwater, Isle of Wight PO40 9HR

Change ahead

I have joined a "focus group" of 12 regular Eurostar users that has been asked to make suggestions regard-

Send your letters to:
The Editors, 4 Christchurch Square, London E9 7HU.
Email: editor@railwatch.org.uk
Railwatch also welcomes articles and pictures
Please use email if possible



The campaign to reconnect the railway to many parts of Norfolk was given a public airing in November on BBC TV.

Railfuture supports the campaigners who are aiming to get trains running again to Melton Constable, Fakenham and Dereham by reopening old lines, embracing private railways and connecting with National Rail to create an orbital route giving many people the chance to get to Norwich, Sheringham and Cromer.

The Holt, Melton Constable and Fakenham Railway Company has been founded to investigate and, in partnership with others, help put in place a cohesive public transport structure for the benefit of all who live and work in Norfolk as well as visitors to the county.

After prolonged discussions Network Rail has agreed to the provision of an "occasional use" link between the existing Network Rail station at Sheringham and the

North Norfolk Railway's tracks. Although the length of the new link is only a matter of a few yards, the agreement represents a major step forward towards the eventual provision of a permanent link and new interchange station facilities.

The restored link would initially be available for special occasional use, for the delivery of rolling stock and occasional railtour through-working.

To achieve the ultimate goal of creating the Norfolk Orbital Railway will involve major land acquisition or extensive engineering works – others are potentially less complicated.

It will, however, involve considerable effort to bring together all interested parties and arrive at realistic proposals.

**More info: www.norfolk-orbital-railway.co.uk
www.bbc.co.uk/cambridgeshire/history/local_history/beeching/**

ing the design of the interiors of Eurostar trains. The group met for the first time on 16 October, in an office not far from the St Pancras International terminal, and will be meeting half a dozen more times over the next 12 months. If any of your readers would like to provide me with their comments on the state of the current rolling stock, covering such matters as design, comfort and access to services (for example, catering, toilets and the internet), or suggest improvements they would like made, then I would be happy to act as a conduit for their views.

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Eurostar critic

After reading *Railwatch* 117 and having just returned from Berlin via train I felt I had to write about the conditions on Eurostar which I

was looking forward to but I was so disappointed. There was no leg room unless you are 4ft 5ins tall, the seats and drop-down tables were filthy, and there was no trolley service. It made you feel like a sardine in a tin. Why do the British do public transport so badly?

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Fares on CD-rom

No sooner had I advised *Railwatch* readers of the public availability of the National Fares Manuals than publication of them ceased! However, after lobbying from former users, ATOC has now made the information available on CD ROM. The disc contains all rail fares between any given stations, and time restrictions on off-peak fares can be easily called up for the journey in question.

Thus, if you want to travel at off-peak rate from A to B you can tell at a glance exactly when you can and cannot use a discounted ticket.

The information is therefore much more useful, and more easily accessible than that on the National Rail Enquiries website where fares can only be ascertained by entering specific journey times. The disc is called National Rail Fares CD ROM (NFM 01), and is available for £10.59 from: TSO Ltd, PO Box 29, Norwich NR3 1GN. For anybody who travels a lot by rail or who has an interest in rail fares this disc will be very useful.

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