



Your letters

Energy analysis

I am a *Railwatch* reader and member of Railfuture for many years. I have recently finished a book, aimed at the thinking public, called *Sustainable Energy - without the hot air*.

It is available for free online (from www.withouthotair.com) and also on paper from booksellers.

The book is an honest look at energy consumption and energy production, showing what the laws of physics say about our sustainable energy options for the future.

You can see the book's endorsements from across the spectrum on its website.

Professor David MacKay, Department of Physics, University of Cambridge.
mackay@mrao.cam.ac.uk

Editors' note: For more details, see the "antidote to half truths" on page 19.

Message to cyclists

As a keen cyclist myself, I was astonished to read that I had rebuffed cyclists at our Community Rail Conference last year (*Railwatch* 118).

Strangely enough no one mentioned this offence to me at the time.

Perhaps I did not make myself clear, but I welcome the opportunity to set the record straight.

Of course we do not discriminate against cyclists and of course we would like to carry more of them.

That is why we have an integration manager and why we work with a variety of organisations to promote travel to stations by all modes.

But it would be foolish to ignore the fundamental difficulty we have in that most of the local services in the South West are operated by two-coach trains of the Sprinter and Pacer type, which were not designed with cycles in mind and which at peak times are full to capacity with passengers.

By putting in tip-up seats a compromise is reached for the needs of all passengers, but this is a poor substitute for a dedicated cycle storage area.

Our refurbishment of the class 158 fleet has managed to squeeze in racks for two cycles, but this is

impossible for the class 142s, 143s and 150s.

With only two bike spaces available and no means on local services of reserving them, we cannot realistically promote the facility.

As such it is only common sense for us to concentrate on aspects where improvements can more easily be made, namely secure cycle storage and bike hire at stations and encouragement of taking folding cycles on trains.

There was no mention in your report of the city-wide Bristol bike hire schemes, which we are delighted to be a leading partner in, and which I'm sure I mentioned at the conference.

If *Railwatch* readers would care to put forward some constructive suggestions about bikes on trains we would be happy to listen, but we must bear in mind the needs of other passengers.

Andrew Griffiths, Head of Environment & Sustainability
First Great Western
andrew.griffiths@firstgroup.com

Freight potential

We should not lose sight of the important part freight could play in a future East-West rail link.

There is considerable potential for freight, not only from Felixstowe and Harwich but also from distribution centres, such as Alconbury, Ridgmont and other further west.

However, it obviously needs a through-running route avoiding reversals and the Railfuture proposal obviously meets this requirement as opposed to some of the leaked plans from the GRIP stage two (Network Rail's Guide to Railway Investment Projects).

Further, there is a need for the Bedford link to the East Coast main line to have a direct feed northwards (to Peterborough) as well as that to Hitchin and Cambridge.

This would open up many more opportunities for passengers as well as freight.

John Asquith, Links Road, Romiley, Stockport SK6 4HU

Berne gauge Eurostar

In *Railwatch* 118 is a reference to the city of Berne. This reminds me of a

letter that I sent to *RAIL* magazine some time ago about seeing Berne gauge vehicles in London. There is no reason why not.

However, should this happen what would be the future of the current Eurostar vehicles? They made an excellent effort of the East Coast main line even if they did make big demands on the power supply.

Someone should look into this and not be caught unawares, otherwise there is going to be a graveyard of Eurostars - at Barry?

D Brown, Orchard Close, Great Oakley, Harwich, Essex CO12 5AX

Christmas trains

"Millions stranded in trains fiasco" - that was the sensationalist headline in the *Independent* on 24 December 2008.

The story went on about the blame for the 58-hour railway shutdown over the Christmas bank holidays.

Government blamed the Association of Train Operators and train operators blamed Network Rail. The paper went on: "The failure to act has led to another festive season in which anyone wanting to travel by rail on Christmas Day or Boxing Day will be stranded."

What utter rubbish this is. In nearly 25 years of working for the railway, I have not known of services on Christmas Day, although on Boxing Day there have been limited services in certain areas.

It is widely known that all major engineering works are programmed to take advantage of the closed-down around Christmas. This gives the engineers total possession of the lines.

Further on in the piece it quotes a group of 34 MPs of which John Grogan, MP for Selby, has tabled a motion.

All well and good, but who are the customers for all these services on Christmas Day?

Maybe non-Christians who do not celebrate? I live close to the AIM and traffic on the road network on Christmas morning is very sparse.

When it comes to Boxing Day, the MPs cite football fans wanting to travel to matches.

Let them travel by train, but who will pay for the damage they cause when they do so? Maybe it is time to have football specials reintroduced with old stock kept in sidings and brought out once a week to cater for these so-called fans.

Then the Boxing Day sales are quoted and we are told people need to get to the sales. Do people really need to get to the sales?

Why not start the sales on the 27th? Or why not have the sales start in January like they used to?

The *Guardian* even ran a poll: Should trains run every day of the

year? Many countries have trains running over Christmas. In France, SNCF trains operate all year round, Christmas Day included. So do the RENFE trains in Spain. And if stuck in Germany, you could travel while Santa finishes his rounds.

But should trains run every day of the year? *Guardian* readers voted: 79.6% Yes 20.4% No.

I don't have a problem with trains running on Christmas Day or Boxing Day. I have worked these days in the past, although not by choice. But people wanting services on these days please remember that we railway workers have families too!

If you want to get on a train, then expect to pay a premium price for the privilege. Taxis charge extra so why not the trains?

That brings me on to the subject of how do the drivers, guards and other staff get to work on these days?

I could not get a bus home from Newcastle on New Year's Day after work.

Nor could I catch a Tyne & Wear Metro, yet a near full service was run by the train operator I work for. Mostly fresh air being moved, apart from the Anglo Scottish services.

Then the engineering work needs to be accommodated. How is this to be done?

We don't have the diversionary routes we had even 10 years ago, either closed in the case of Leamside or unavailable because of drivers' lack of route knowledge.

So to those calling for trains on Christmas Day and Boxing Day, I say: Let us start a debate. Let us see if the people who will have to operate them can be suitably recompensed for their time at work, time away from family, and a suitable and fair way of rostering can be agreed before we consider who will pay the extra costs involved in actually running the services.

Lee Davies, Railfuture North East and freight committee member.
Email and address supplied

Electrification

As a transport economist I was intrigued by an argument put forward to the Railway Study Association.

It seemed to rely on making a choice between privatisation and nationalisation.

We could however have had a more syndicalist solution, bringing in workers as part of the management rather than detached. Appointments to the top jobs could have used more people with transport and economic experience rather than the Dr Beechings of this world who have no knowledge of such elementary economic ideas as cost benefit analysis. Finance does not

have to be provided solely through fares or general taxation but could be provided by site-value taxation since it is obvious that in many cases land values have risen by more than the general rate of property prices.

It is also obvious anyway that one cannot have a sensible policy for the railways in the absence of any rational way of allocating prices for the roads. The present system does not do that.

It could however include a sensible way of charging for all the parking space which currently gives a subsidy to the car, although this is ignored by people who claim to believe in the free market.

I assume that Railfuture will be commenting on the almost unbelievable ideas of the Government for a third London runway at a time when at long last, air travel has fallen at Heathrow.

As a then Southend councillor in the 1970s I remember the arguments being put forwards about the airport at Foulness, later also referred to as Maplin.

We as a nation seem to have learnt nothing since then. We have obvious problems of pollution and global warming yet the Government seems to be ignoring this.

The idea of electrification of the Midland main line and also the Great Western is of course a sweetener but should go ahead on its own anyway.

David Spurling FCILT, Periwinkle Close, Sittingbourne, Kent ME10 2JT
davidjohnspurling@yahoo.com

Train sardine

I write with dismay that the illustration for the Train Sardine campaign in *Railwatch* 118 quotes a website address and nothing else.

It does not cater in any way for people who might wish to join the campaign but who do not have access to a computer.

Dr Robert Manning, Tetherdown, London N10 1NB

Editors' note: Apologies. We do try to include post and telephone details when we are able. The trainsardine campaign is not formally linked to Railfuture but according to the website it has a hotline at 07092 372160 and an email address: info@trainsardine.org. There does not appear to be a postal address.

Even though some Railfuture members may not have a computer at home, most people can gain access to computers at public libraries where there has been a massive investment in providing online facilities.

Heathrow failure

I read in *Railwatch* 118 that "more recognise that just building more roads and expanding airports is not a sustainable option and is more expensive".

Trouble is, I have just learnt that the UK Government is to go ahead with a new terminal at Heathrow.



Humble Pacer is the latest boat train

It may look like a humble Pacer but to the Aire Valley Rail Users Group this is something special - a boat train.

In its latest newsletter, the group proudly announces that, as from December 2008, the 10.19 Leeds-Morecambe was extended to Heysham, to meet the Isle of Man ferry.

Editor Steve Broadbent pointed out: "So the Aire Valley now has its first boat train for very many years, even if it is not as grand as it used to be!"

John Bearpark took this picture, capturing it on its first day of operation at Heysham

station. It shows the reality of rail travel with people encumbered by bags, walking sticks and rucksacks which is widely different from the many slick public relations "artist's impressions" issued by the railway industry.

Sadly many new trains do not adequately cater for real people. As John is quick to point out, the Lancaster & Skipton Rail Users Group has long complained about the unsuitability of Pacer units on their beautiful line. For information on the Leeds-Lancaster-Morecambe line. see www.lmr.co.uk/ and for more on the Aire Valley: www.avrug.org.uk/

And, that they are to help people get loans to purchase motor cars, due to the fact that the recession has depressed sales. It is becoming harder for anyone with an interest in public transport to consider voting for the present administration.

Considering their promise to reduce car travel in their original 1997 manifesto, it is clear that they have failed the rail and bus advocates.

Tim Mickleburgh, Littlefield Lane, Grimsby DN31 2AZ
timmickleburgh2002@googlegmail.com

Peak oil and trains

I like Peter Rayner's work, but his column in *Railwatch* 118 has forced me to write in with a bit of a correction. Peter seems optimistic that the serious depletion of oil and gas reserves will increase our chances of being able to make an end-run around the threat of man-made climate change, and in particular that it will force us to change transport policy for the better, leading to more promotion of rail, etc, over road.

This would be very welcome, but Peter neglects to mention anywhere in his piece that such "new" fossil fuels as the tar sands and shales explode this logic.

If we do not stop a "business-as-usual" attitude to economics and to extractive industry, then the main effect of peak oil will be a dire worsening (a much faster overheating) of our climate. For carbon emissions coming from the Hoovering up of the tar sands and shales

vary between being about four and about 20 times worse than those from oil. Peak oil is no panacea at all to the menace of manmade climate change. Unless we have the political will to bring about a massive green revolution - removing carbon emissions from the picture altogether, peak oil will inexorably hasten climate catastrophe.

We need to lower demand, support local living, cycling, reduce losses by means of energy efficiency measures, build better trains and replace fossil fuels with genuine renewables powering our vehicles instead.

The challenge for us who want to make the transport system of the future work with, rather than against the environment, is to ensure this doesn't happen... But we can't rely on peak oil to take care of that challenge for us.

Councillor Rupert Read, prospective Green Party MEP, Merton Road, Norwich NR2 3TT
rupertread@fastmail.co.uk

Closed lines

Shadow transport minister Stephen Hammond recently wrote to me courtesy of my MP Ed Vaizey as follows:

"You mention railway openings, and one of the other initiatives that forms part of our rail review is a moratorium on building on disused rail paths. This will last for at least our first term in government and will conserve any disused railway lines still in public ownership. As well as keeping alive the

the possibility of reopening them to rail travel in the future, protecting these corridors will also facilitate their use by pedestrians and cyclists in the interim."

Lyndon Elias, Sandringham Road, Didcot
lyndonelias@yahoo.co.uk

Inter-city history

The anonymous reviewer of the DVD version of Christian Wolmar's excellent book perpetuates the myth, already extensively trailed during the Capital of Culture celebrations, that the Liverpool and Manchester was the "world's first passenger railway." It wasn't.

The Liverpool and Manchester opened in 1830. The Stockton and Darlington opened in 1825. Wolmar himself recognises this, merely claiming "as a prelude, the Stockton and Darlington in 1825".

Wolmar's claim is that the opening of the Liverpool and Manchester marked the real start of the impetus for railway development, and I incline to agree with him.

However, the pioneering experiences of the S&D probably helped the proponents of locomotive haulage, against those who argued in favour of static lineside engines with cable haulage.

Liverpool and Manchester was indisputably the world's first inter-city passenger railway.

Peter Johnston, Kendal Road, Bolton, Lancs BL1 4DS
peterjohnston3936@btinternet.com

More letters: Page 14