

# A rescue at last for 'station of shame'



Wakefield Kirkgate is now in a sorry state Picture: Flickr/rs1979

Campaigners from Railfuture Yorkshire were delighted that major improvements were ordered following a visit and subsequent intervention by Transport Secretary Lord Adonis.

A scathing letter from Lord Adonis to Network Rail's chief executive Iain Coucher seems to have worked magic at an important station in Yorkshire – Wakefield Kirkgate.

He said local campaigners and officials were "frustrated by the apparent inability of the rail industry to work together to deliver improvements".

He wrote: "Kirkgate is probably the worst 'medium-large' station I have seen in Britain.

"It is a largely derelict, grade II listed building, which brings shame to Britain's railway.

"In October 2008, there was a serious sexual assault at the station, and the public perception is that it is a dangerous place to be. It is unwelcoming, bleak and inaccessible.

"Metro, the local authority and Northern Rail have been trying their best to improve things.

"However, a recent grant of £300,000 for improved security systems from the national stations improvement programme has still not been spent due – I was told – to delivery issues with Network Rail.

"Similarly, the shuttle bus service to and from the town centre has been discontinued for some time because the car park has become dangerous and requires resurfacing – something Network Rail has been unable to do so far.

"I do hope it will be possible for your local management to speed up these small but important improvements.

"In the medium term, I hope Network Rail will be able to take the lead on finding new uses for the fine buildings at Kirkgate, and ensuring passengers get the kind of station environment they deserve."

Lord Adonis was prompted to write after visiting the station with MPs Mary Creagh and Yvette Cooper.

Since the Adonis letter was published, a traveller was attacked by youths with baseball bats while waiting for a train at 22.45.

Almost immediately, Metro announced that car park repairs,

allowing the return of the free city shuttle bus, were to commence that week.

"This is just the first stage in making the station more accessible and more attractive," said Metro Chairman Cllr Ryk Downes.

Included in the announcement are details of a two-year improvement scheme drawn up by a steering group, comprising Metro, Network Rail, Northern Rail, Wakefield Council and the Railway Heritage Trust.

The plans include enhanced CCTV coverage, the removal of the spine wall and redundant canopies on platform 2, and refurbishment of the platform 1 canopy.

Other planned improvements include refurbishment of the subway and lighting, and refurbishment of the lobby area.

Metro is also seeking funding from the Department for Transport's Access for All programme for modern customer information screens.

Yorkshire branch chairman Chris Hyomes said: "We strongly welcome such long overdue improvements. Kirkgate has a much improved train service – the station now needs to live up to this!"

He paid tribute to the local paper, the *Wakefield Express*, which called Kirkgate the "station of shame".

A longer term Vision for Kirkgate includes a new glazed footbridge with staircases and lifts linking all platforms, which would replace the subway.

This enhanced vision also includes a staffed booking office and retail

facility, a multi-modal interchange with a car park, taxi and drop off point and cycle storage facility.

A new direct inter-city service connecting Bradford to London will call at Wakefield Kirkgate when it begins operation in May next year.

It is to be named the "West Riding" service. Grand Central aims to start running three return trains a day between Bradford Interchange and London King's Cross but is waiting for Network Rail to finalise the timetable for the service before announcing a start date.

The new service will operate via Halifax, Brighouse, Wakefield Kirkgate, Pontefract, Monkhill and Doncaster; restoring direct rail links to London from these West Riding communities for the first time in many years.

Grand Central's Giles Fearnley said: "Kirkgate station should be staffed. Staff will provide security, information and reassurance for passengers.

"We will be lobbying hard with all the parties involved in the station. The station itself is unloved and it needs very serious refurbishment.

"We will be working with Northern Rail to see what can be done to improve it for passengers."

Currently all the train services at Kirkgate are operated by Northern Rail. Inter-city trains from London to Leeds call at Wakefield Westgate.

## Winning ways with Railfuture

**ALAN THORPE** enjoyed a birthday meal on Railfuture after taking the £40 top prize in our monthly lottery draw – and you, too, could celebrate. Each entry costs just £1.00 per month and there are currently six prizes to win every time.

For more information, please email [lottery@railfuture.org.uk](mailto:lottery@railfuture.org.uk) or write to Railfuture Lottery, 24 Chedworth Place, Tattingstone, Suffolk IP9 2ND.

**Recent winners:** June 2009, P Sherwood, Matthew Blackburn, Richard and Olive Hambly, John Moore, Jane Vokins, Peter Little. July 2009, Alan Thorpe, Felix Schmid, Robert Mains, Robert Burrows, P J Rowland, Alan Koolman. August 2009, Frank Connolly, Keith Montague, Alan and Hilary Everett, David Barr, Keith Porter, John Johnson.

# Public transport pioneer

By Philip Bisatt

[philip@brackenedge.wanadoo.co.uk](mailto:philip@brackenedge.wanadoo.co.uk)

The Railfuture group visit in 2009 was to Hamburg, the "free and Hanseatic city".

Hamburg is a commercial centre on the scale of a capital city, with a population of 1.7million or 3.3million if the wider metropolitan area is included.

Around 20 people left St Pancras on the 10.57 Eurostar to Brussels.

From there, we went by Thalys to Koln and then on a loco-hauled Chur-Hamburg train on which we enjoyed an evening meal in a "classic" Swiss restaurant car, a cut above your average buffet counter!

Hamburg is served by a U-Bahn (underground or metro) system, which has three lines, as well as an S-Bahn (electrified suburban rail) network.

From the city's vast Hauptbahnhof, a network of regional rail services extends to serve the city's wider catchment in neighbouring Lower Saxony and Schleswig-Holstein.

At present, there are no trams (the last traditional tram ran in 1978), although plans exist to reintroduce them in some areas, possibly from 2014. There is also an extensive network of bus services.

Roughly 25% of all journeys in Hamburg are made by public transport, rising to 67% within the inner city.

In the Hamburger Verkehrsverbund (public transport association) area, 637million passengers were carried in 2008 – a significant increase from the 400million carried by HVV in the mid-1960s.

A rapid rise since 2005 is in part ascribed to substantial increases in fuel prices. Being relatively flat, cycling is also a key mode of travel in Hamburg, and there is a target to double the current 11% share of trips by 2020.

On our first day in Hamburg, we were hosted by Deutsche Bahn at its regional offices close to Altona station. This included a visit to the nearby S-Bahn control centre.

We were told that on-time performance is at 95% (an S-Bahn train being "on time" if it is less than two minutes late) and that 30-40% of delays are caused by "unauthorised persons on the line".

Passenger safety and security have been given a high priority, and the S-Bahn has 829 CCTV cameras covering 59 stations.

As well as providing personal security benefits, the introduction of CCTV reduced the annual 2million euro bill for tackling graffiti and vandalism by 50%.

The S-Bahn runs mostly on 1,200v DC, side-contact third rail, which is unique in Germany.

There are six S-Bahn routes, which extend to 30 miles out from the city centre, often parallel to DB main lines, with tunnels in the city cen-



Hamburg S-Bahn: A line S1 train calling at Blankenese station

tre. The standard service frequency is a train every 10 minutes. The S-Bahn accounts for 40% of all passenger-km in the HVV area. Passenger numbers average 590,000 per day (195.4million per annum), and there is 24-hour operation on Friday and Saturday nights.

Plans exist to extend the S-Bahn further along DB lines.

We were impressed by the ingenious portable ramp which has been devised to enable access to trains by disabled passengers. DB stations tend to have lower platforms than those on the S-Bahn.

HVV has existed since 1965, and as well as Hamburg itself, embraces counties in neighbouring Lower Saxony and Schleswig-Holstein, part of the city's wider catchment.

It provided the first example in the world of inter-operator co-operation to deliver integrated timetabling and ticketing for a city region.

Sadly, many British cities are still waiting for this nearly half a century later.

HVV has responsibility to co-ordinate around 40 transport operators, embracing regional trains, S-Bahn, U-Bahn, buses and ferries. While some services are subject to a tendering process, it would be unthinkable to vary bus timetables with the frequency that is allowed in Britain.

HVV promotes its brand as a symbol of stability and reliability, and timetables seldom change significantly over the course of a year. During the six-day visit in May, the

Railfuture group also visited the city of Lubeck, a UNESCO world heritage site, and Schwerin, capital of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, with its amazing palace, now the seat of the regional parliament.

The city of Hamburg itself has many fine sights, and a ferry trip down the Elbe to a fish restaurant was organised by Karl-Peter Naumann of Pro-Bahn, which was enjoyed by all.

A concert at the Laeiszhalle featuring Mahler's 10th symphony provoked a more varied reaction!

The return journey to the UK was made by high-speed train as far as Koln, travelling via Wuppertal which afforded glimpses of its unique monorail.

A further Inter City Express then took us to Brussels where the connection was made with Eurostar to London.

We were very well looked after by our German hosts in Pro-Bahn, DB and HVV.

Thanks are also due to Trevor Garrod and Peter Cannon for making all the arrangements, and to Jim Walker and Michael Leppard for leading the group in Germany.

It is hoped the group visit for 2010 will be to Lyon in France by Eurostar and TGV. The dates are 10-16 May.

Details will be in the December issue of *Railwatch*.

You can receive them by sending a stamped addressed envelope to Trevor Garrod, 15 Clapham Road South, Lowestoft NR32 1RQ.



U-Bahn overground: Hamburg U3 train at Rodingsmarkt

## Thames Valley

By Chris Wright

[Chriswrightmk@aol.com](mailto:Chriswrightmk@aol.com)

### Improvements on the way at last

Recent months have seen some of the aspirations of Railfuture Thames Valley move forward:

Windsor and Maidenhead Council is reported to be interested in exploring the use of the Wycombe-Maidenhead line for trams.

The announcement of the electrification of Great Western main line including Oxford has been welcomed although OxRailAction expressed concern over service disruption.

### New route could be useful as an alternative

Chiltern Railways Evergreen3 (Bicester-Oxford plan) was the subject of the well-attended Railfuture branch meeting. This scheme could help alleviate some of the disruption by providing an alternative route. It has been discovered, however, that the track bed of the Oxford-Bicester line is suitable only for a single 100mph track and extra work would be needed to accommodate East West rail link services.

### Strategic value of East-West rail link

East West rail link planning continues and the East West Rail Consortium met Lord Adonis in September, to seek his support and emphasise the strategic value of the link. The Department for Transport seems to be more positive to the proposals and is involved in the scoping of the stage 4 study.

The EWRC has also recently discussed with Bedford Borough Council and Central Bedfordshire Council their involvement in future EWRL work.

### Network Rail plans upgrade

Network Rail has detailed plans for upgrading work at Bletchley to begin in late 2010 and be completed by 2013. Signalling would be transferred to Rugby, with platforms 4 and 5 extended for 12 cars, a goods loop provided, 125mph running, provision for Bedford trains to access Milton Keynes Central and the Denbigh Hall Junction to remain as a double junction.

### Commuters boost new station



Picture: CHILTERN RAILWAYS

Aylesbury Vale Parkway's new station buildings (above) were officially opened by Lord Adonis in July. One thousand passengers were initially using the station over a four-week period. This will grow when the delayed building in the area recommences. Picture: Chiltern Railways

### Reopening opportunities

Witney was one of the lines suitable for reopening suggested by the Association of Train Operators in its report *Connecting Communities*. £95million would be needed to reopen the line which could be viable. David Cameron's constituency includes Witney. Grove (costed at £4million) and the EWRL also figures in the report.

### Rail user group keeps tabs on operator

Milton Keynes Rail User Group continues to monitor the performance of London Midland and will step up pressure for fast services to London and more destinations northwards.

### Expansion work under way

Cotswold Line re-doubling phase 1 work has commenced and when completed, by 2011, should improve the reliability of services by increasing capacity.