



# Your letters

## Local action first

Railfuture could show its commitment to train passengers by monitoring high-speed rail in other countries. High-speed train fares are very expensive in northern Spain, for example, but local train services are being run down.

Politicians and local authorities need to show their commitment to affordable train fares for both local and inter-city train journeys. Congestion in and around Bristol is so bad that it can take as long to do a 10-mile local journey by road as an inter-city journey by train.

Yet transport campaigners are confronted with obstructions when attempting to persuade decision makers to invest in local rail. Passengers should come first.

The Campaign for Better Transport is running a campaign to persuade the Government to reform the fares structure with the aim of reducing fares.

More than 70 MPs have signed an Early Day Motion (1852) proposed by Clive Betts, Labour MP for Sheffield Attercliffe, calling for lower fares.

*Julie Boston (Friends of Suburban Railways), Bristol BS6 5AW  
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**Editors' note: Investment in high-speed rail must not be at the expense of existing services or reopening stations and lines. High fares are the biggest block to rail growth. There is tremendous untapped demand for rail travel if fares were to come down. Railfuture has shown that a national rail card would attract more passengers by making fares cheaper but would also expand the overall revenue take.**

## Vision of the future

I am afraid I shall not be joining Mr Shuttleworth in his view of the future of the network split into six regional track and train companies. Six of course to allow for the two bits that the Scottish and Welsh "parliaments" will obviously want to take control of.

Whenever politicians make this suggestion I shake my head in disbelief as they only ever seem to think of passenger traffic. The problems of a freight company

trying to arrange a spot path for a multiple boundary crossing freight train can only be imagined at, and the ability of such as Hull Trains, Great Central etc to get on the rails, would appear somewhat remote!

I would also suggest that the national passenger and freight flows no longer necessarily fit easily into regional companies; commuter and short distance travel probably does, but much non-London centred travel does not.

*G P Brown, Fieldview, Bowthorpe Road, Norwich NR5 8AQ  
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## Timely reminder

*Railwatch* 121 has given me a sharp reminder of the wisdom of using the 24-hour clock.

In my review of Adrian Vaughan's book *The Greatest Railway Blunder*, I could not resist citing one of his very telling anecdotes illustrating the ethos of railway workers in past decades – that of the 62-year-old ganger, called out late in the evening (having presumably worked normally during the day) in order to get a line re-opened as quickly as possible after a breakdown.

He was called out at 23.30 and then worked through until the line was re-opened at 18.00 the following day, which I had unfortunately referred to as 6pm. The pm got left off, so the reader was left with the impression that he had worked just a long night-shift – not perhaps even deserving of the bonus of one guinea which he was awarded for his efforts!

*Clara Zilahi, Wimbotsham Road, Downham Market, Norfolk PE38 9PE  
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## Cotswold Line errors

I have just been looking through *Railwatch* 121, which I receive through work, and as a local journalist and Cotswold Line commuter I was pleased to see some coverage of the start of the redoubling project.

However, the gremlins seem to have crept in. The map is incorrect, as the section between Ascott-under-Wychwood and Moreton-in-Marsh has always been double track. The sections being redoubled over the coming year are Ascott to Charlbury and Moreton

to Evesham. Also, the singling was carried out in the second half of 1971, not the 1960s. And one little railway quirk. Although the village outside Oxford is spelled Wolvercote, the railways have always stuck with the Victorian style Wolvercot. There is a sign alongside the points proudly declaring it to be Wolvercot Junction.

*William Crossley  
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## Dunstable to Luton

I would like to comment further on the Luton to Dunstable line, destined to become a "guided busway", as discussed in Peter Kirk's letter (*Railwatch* 121).

This has been a political hot potato for over 20 years.

In the late 1980s there were stories that a passenger service (closed in 1965) was to be reinstated. This was reported in the *Daily Telegraph* and there was some evidence backing it up, such as Dunstable as a destination on the trains working the then Thameslink line.

This all went quiet. Arguably with privatisation imminent it became a low priority. Chiltern Trains also put forward proposals for a shuttle service from Luton to Dunstable.

At this time daily cement traffic from North Kent to the Dunstable depot also ceased. This unfortunately meant that the infrastructure was no longer maintained and fell into disuse.

Luton Council put forward proposals for the guided busway on the alignment. This was, understandably, widely criticised. It was opposed by the South Bedfordshire District Council (covering Dunstable and Luton), Dunstable Town Council, and Bedfordshire County Council. Unfortunately Bedfordshire County Council (now disbanded) changed sides. The scheme has been modified several times and now no longer extends to Luton Airport.

Time passed and public enquiries followed which eventually found in favour of the busway. Unfortunately for Luton Council, significant funding would be required from them.

It is probably fair to say that the only people in favour of the scheme are Luton Council. Their dependants, the people of Luton, have no interest and Dunstable people are against it.

Among many objections are that the single-track formation would not be wide enough for two buses passing, and that buses would still need to use public roads. Dunstable has a regular problem with heavy congestion whenever there are problems with the nearby M1.

So the go-ahead has been there for some years now but nothing has been done. Bridges have been

fenced off, track removed in a few locations, and the route is heavily overgrown. In recent months, however, steps have been taken to rescue and relocate rare reptiles which have colonised parts of the formation.

A practical problem is that the line was originally separate from the St Pancras line (although a siding connection was put in for cement and other traffic). The line in fact carried on beyond Luton to join the King's Cross line at Hatfield.

A shuttle rail service to the reinstated branch platforms at Luton would be possible, but clearly a through service would be much preferable. Unfortunately the branch is on the "fast side" at Luton so that a connection would not be easy, but far from impossible.

Incidentally, there are plans to rebuild Luton station. I suspect that they make no provision for the Dunstable line.

For all sorts of reasons a railway has to be preferable to a guided busway.

A shuttle service would be adequate, but a through service much preferable. I have not seen many suggestions about extending it to Leighton Buzzard, although the line did continue beyond Dunstable as far as the West Coast main line at Leighton Buzzard. This service closed before the Dunstable to Hatfield service.

Reopening to Leighton Buzzard is probably still feasible, allowing for the usual problems of new buildings on the formation and would open up all sorts of possibilities for through trains to Milton Keynes and beyond, including such services as Birmingham Airport to Luton Airport to Gatwick Airport.

Interestingly, in the days of BR there were not many through trains (presumably a legacy of the LMS and LNER) from Luton to Leighton Buzzard. There were fewer trains on the Dunstable to Leighton Buzzard section (double track) than there were on the Dunstable to Hatfield section (single track). This is reflected in the current bus services which are extensive between Dunstable and Luton, but only half-hourly between Dunstable and Leighton Buzzard.

A pressure group called ADAPT has existed for about 20 years to promote the reopening of the line, but I am not aware that it has a website.

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## Double appeal

When, if at all, will the branch line between Hereford and Worcester be double-tracked, so that trains do not have to wait at the stations for others coming in the opposite direction? It is such a nice line to

travel on and I have been on it many times when having a day-out from Cardiff in Ledbury, Malvern or Worcester.

*Paul Hooker, Drysgol, Radyr, Cardiff  
CF15 8BT*

## Level crossing safety

Following the tragic outcome of the September collision at Halkirk level crossing, Caithness, it was said that Britain's level crossings were the safest in the world.

I believe a simple safety improvement to the 23 ungated level crossings in Scotland could be achieved by substituting double sets of normal road traffic lights as a more powerful warning message to vehicle drivers.

The first advantage is that standard British road traffic lights are more immediately identified, respected and complied with than is possibly accorded the very infrequent application of 'different and unusual' warning technology at level crossings.

Second, and more crucially, road traffic signals give powerful and permanent (24 hour/ 7 day) intimation that there is a junction and potential conflict ahead.

By contrast, especially on low frequency lines, rail crossings give no visible confirmation that it is safe to proceed for most of the time.

Safety enhancement could be achieved by an advance set of traffic lights at up to 50 metres from the rail crossing. Although of normal head design they could show either green or cautionary 'flashing amber', similar to pedestrian crossings. At the crossing itself, the light display would be either green or double red, but no amber (for avoidance of doubt and safeguard against single red bulb failure). Klaxon horns would also reinforce the 'double red' message.

The introduction of modified but easily identifiable 'traffic lights' at level crossings would deliver more direct understanding and compliance with the law by road vehicle drivers compared to the 'unexpected, unfamiliar and abrupt' railway warning technology currently employed.

This is not intended to excuse deliberate unlawful contempt and driver misuse of existing level crossing warning arrangements.

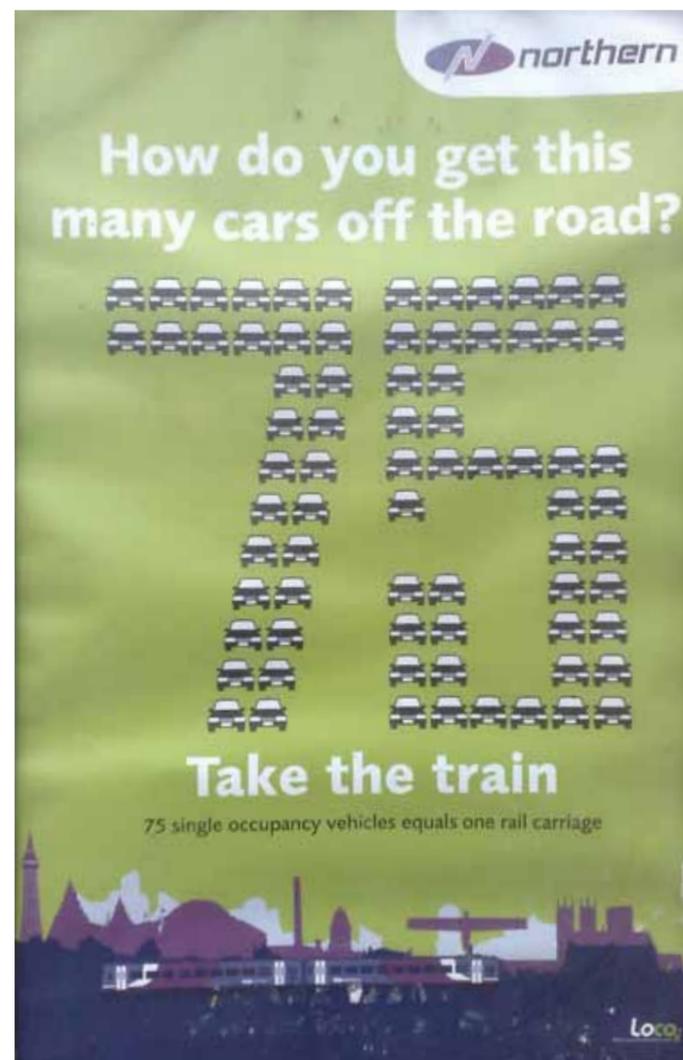
But my idea could be pursued by Network Rail as a practical, cost-effective safety improvement where crossing barriers or bridge segregation is unlikely.

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## Even faster

I have just received my copy of *Railwatch*, another splendid effort.

Can I comment about the front page article referring to the high-speed line in Russia? The Velaros are capable of nearly 220mph, not 155mph. In France at present I believe that there are about 1,180 miles of high-speed line, rather than 500 miles as stated. Spain,



**NORTHERN SENSE: This poster was spotted at Haltwhistle station in Northumberland. It's a good message but it's preaching to the converted. Maybe posters like it should be placed close to the expensive new roads which the Government has funded all over Britain.**

**If car drivers heeded the message, they would do themselves a good turn as well as saving the taxpayer from pouring any more money into the black hole of road building. Ironically, the TaxPayers' Alliance, which claims to represent ordinary taxpayers, wants more money wasted on roads.**

where I live, has rather more than France, about 1,864 miles already, but it looks as though China is going to leave European countries well behind!

*Peter Owen  
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## Greater choice

I have heard the fear expressed that when Chiltern Railways' Oxford service starts, there may be problems, especially in the peaks, in pathing all the required trains through the tunnels outside Marylebone station.

Some years ago I used to travel regularly on the once-daily Chiltern train to Paddington.

That train is no more, but the Solihull and Leamington Rail Users Association's newsletter assures me that there is still a once-daily route training train FROM Paddington.

No doubt Chiltern, understandably, prefers Marylebone. So too, probably, do most of Chiltern's

customers. It is what they are used to. Nevertheless, Paddington would be a very good second best, if sufficient trains could not be got through the tunnels into Marylebone. I doubt whether, for the number of trains to be affected, it would be necessary to redouble the crucial line between South Ruislip and Paddington.

I suggest that it should not be the Oxford trains that are diverted into Paddington, which already has trains to Oxford.

The Oxford trains could perhaps be accommodated at Marylebone by diverting some West Midlands services into Paddington. Restoration of some of the old Great Western Hill-Solihull-Leamington-Bicester-Paddington services, if only in the peaks, would not come amiss.

I understand another Chiltern proposal is to extend their hourly service to Aylesbury Parkway via Amersham along the old Great

Central to Calvert and thence to Bletchley and Milton Keynes. Then, west of Milton Keynes, only a short portion of the old East-West route – between Bicester and Calvert – would be bereft of Chiltern trains.

This leaves a prospect of Chiltern "filling the gap" with a service between Oxford and Milton Keynes or perhaps Bedford.

I am proud to say that I am a committee member and past chairman of the Solihull and Leamington Rail Users Association. Nevertheless the above views and suggestions are entirely my own.

*Peter A. Moore  
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## Historic disgrace

I was pleased to read in *Railwatch* 121 that Stockton station is getting an upgrade.

When I first travelled there in the 1960s to visit my maternal grandmother, it possessed a proper overhead canopy, similar to Darlington, as well as having an historic Victorian coach on display.

However all that is long gone, with today's station bereft of character and facilities. Considering though Stockton's role in Britain's railway history, it is really a disgrace when one considers how many lesser heritage sites have been developed over the years.

*Tim Mickleburgh, Littlefield Lane, Grimsby DN31 2AZ  
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## West Midlands action

Whenever it is published I read *Railwatch* with great interest to see what is going on in other regions of our organisation. If it was there I would read of developments in our West Midlands area with even greater interest.

Very rarely do we get a mention.

Fortunately developments do sneak in occasionally. At last Kenilworth is to get its station back!

Here in Stratford, flooded as we are by large tribes of tourists, we now have a computerised station ticket machine available. But if you want to buy a ticket to travel tomorrow or next week, you can't!

Our new Birmingham-based signalling system creeps on at snail's pace while the new class 172s are delayed. Stratford station lacks basic operating facilities.

So where are our West Midlands reports?

Perhaps our reporters have given up because of the exhausting battle to get Warwickshire County Council to support the reopening of six miles of line south of Stratford – making use of the extant track bed – to meet up with the redoubled Cotswold Line at Honeybourne.

*David Goodman, Blue Cap Road, Stratford upon Avon  
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Scotland

■ ■ Fightback over Glasgow airport rail link decision

Railfuture Scotland has been drumming up support for the Glasgow Airport Rail Link which was dropped by the Scottish Nationalist led government in Edinburgh.

East Dunbartonshire voted in November to reaffirm its support for the project, joining a growing list of organisations in Glasgow and throughout Scotland which are telling Finance Secretary John Swinney that he is wrong to sacrifice the rail link, which is worth £300million to the Scottish economy and 1,300 jobs.

Many MSPs, from as far afield as Aberdeen, have also condemned the decision. Scottish Labour leader Iain Gray said the scrapping of GARL was a "significant factor" in Labour's win over the Scottish Nationalists in the Glasgow North East by-election on 12 November.

Mr Gray said the cancellation of the project had been an "enormous mistake" and said the SNP couldn't explain why the project couldn't go ahead.

Railfuture Scotland had already welcomed a vote by Glasgow City Council on 29 October to reaffirm its total support for the Glasgow Airport Rail Link as well as the Glasgow Crossrail project.

The motion said: "This council condemns the decision by the SNP Scottish Government to cancel the Glasgow Airport Rail Link and considers that the case for Glasgow Crossrail, which would benefit many thousands of existing and potential rail users, is now overwhelming, given economic and environmental priorities which the SNP Government claims to support."

The motion was put forward by Labour's Alistair Watson and the Greens' Martha Wardrop.

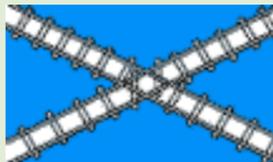
Although it lies wholly within Glasgow, completing the short Crossrail route would have a far wider significance because it is a "missing link" for the whole Scottish rail network.

A wide range of political, business, industrial, academic-transport study, trades union and community groups supports both rail projects.

Billy Hendry, deputy leader of East Dunbartonshire Council, said: "The Glasgow Airport Rail Link is an important part of the regional transport strategy for the west of Scotland which would bring benefits to many communities including those situated in East Dunbartonshire.

"It would also have benefits for the economy and the environment, giving people a realistic alternative to the car."

■ ■ St Andrews rail campaign puts on a show



Campaigners fighting for a rail service to St Andrews headed for the theatre in early November. At a production of *Murder on the Fife Coast Express*, set in the 1950s, Starlink (St Andrews Rail Link) supporters staged their own presentation in the foyer of

the town's Byre theatre. Material which Starlink put on show included a statement of the campaign's aims, quotes from supporters and maps showing possible routes. A questionnaire and newsletter were also distributed to theatre-goers.

The latest survey carried out by the Starlink campaign also reveals more support for a rail service to St Andrews, said convener Jane Ann Liston. Ms Liston told the *St Andrews Citizen*: "86 per cent said they would use a St Andrews rail service, including 92 per cent of those non-residents who had travelled all or part of the way by car.

"At the Scottish Senior Open, 70 per cent of car users said they would use the train, with 66 per cent saying the same at the Dunhill. It is a demonstration of a definite willingness of car drivers to use a rail service, which would make a tremendous difference to traffic patterns in St Andrews and the surrounding area."

Starlink is sending the results of its survey to Fife Council.

More info: [www.starlink-campaign.org.uk](http://www.starlink-campaign.org.uk)



Improved service

David Dixon writing in *Railwatch* 121 is a bit pessimistic about the West London Line.

After all, it is not that many years ago that the only service was an unadvertised workmen's service between Clapham Junction and Willesden Junction at breakfast and teatime.

This has expanded to two trains an hour between those destinations (with a continuation to Stratford for some trains) plus an additional hourly service from the south to the north. Actual starting destinations have varied from Brighton, to Gatwick, to East Croydon in the south and Watford, Milton Keynes and Rugby in the north.

Add to that new stations at West Brompton, Shepherds Bush and Imperial Wharf and things have certainly improved.

Mr Dixon is certainly correct, however, in pointing out that the service is rather isolated and could be improved. The platform for the Overground trains at Clapham Junction is not a bay platform, but is used as such.

There is no real reason why it should not revert to a through platform with trains continuing to, say, Richmond, where there are terminal platforms, although I think a connection may have to be reinstated between the main line and the North London line.

At the north end, Willesden Junction high level is totally unsuited to being a termination point. There are only two lines, with no possibility of expansion. The terminating train has to progress beyond the station to a reversing siding and wait. This means conflicting

# Your letters extra

movements with the Stratford to Richmond trains and freight trains. Surely a different destination could be chosen. With numerous connections there are all sorts of possibilities including, presumably, the East London line soon. However as Mr Dixon suggests, a continuation via Gospel Oak and an electrified line to Barking would make most sense. I could never understand Gospel Oak as a terminal station or interchange point. Barking trains used to go to St Pancras.

*Peter Fleming, Lovers Walk, Dunstable LU5 4BG  
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Sitting comfortably

Thank you for another excellent edition of *Railwatch* which I save for reading on my longer journeys to Redruth.

I love the First Great Western high-backed airplane style seating. It is comfortable and provides a certain amount of privacy and protection from flu-ridden coughs and sneezes and constant chat even in the "quiet" coach. It has decent knee space and you don't have to play "footsie" with an opposite passenger!

But I wonder what criteria Mr David Azema is basing his comments on when he says it will be easier to provide high speed rail in Britain than in France (*Railwatch* 121). We are a third of the size of France and do not have those wide open spaces which you see on the TGV line between Calais and Paris.

*Colin Stewart, Chesterton Towers, Cambridge CB4 1DZ  
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High-speed rail

Encouraged by growing interest in high-speed rail, I am concerned that Network Rail's preferred route option from London north-westwards to Birmingham, Liver-

pool, Manchester and Scotland is too London-centred and insular in thinking.

While the Channel Tunnel has reconnected the principal island of Great Britain with continental Europe, only London of our major centres of population has direct passenger train links with the Continent. Such has been the development of direct air links that passenger train use of the tunnel is far below original estimates.

For movement of freight by rail the Channel Tunnel is also very under-used with traffic similar to that in the last days of rail ferries. Yet over 50% of Britain's international trade is with our Continental European Union partners.

Economically Britain is very London-centred, as is our rail network, with a brain drain to London denuding other regions of talent.

In and around the London area there is an under-supply of housing with much priced far above costs of construction, yet in other regions abandoned housing estates are being demolished.

For environmental reasons passengers need transferring from air to rail and goods from road to rail.

The Direct Link North proposal for high-speed rail links between the

Scottish Lowlands, the Birmingham and Manchester areas and South Wales and the Channel Tunnel, seeks to address these issues.

Its north-south spinal route on the flatter eastern side of England would be interlinked with the East Coast main line.

The new lines would be directly accessible at 20 out-of-town regional passenger and freight railports, with highway and local transport links. Commercial development at the railports is envisaged similar to that at major airports with development gains helping to defray costs.

A branch line round the north of London to Heathrow would be linked to main lines to the north and west. It would have a London Parkway station connected to central London by two tube lines and Thameslink.

Through Kent, new lines for goods trains are planned with passenger trains using High Speed 1. A triangular junction with High Speed 1 would provide access for domestic high-speed trains to St Pancras.

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## National Express makes history

National Express surprised users of its internet rail booking service just before it handed back the East Coast main line rail franchise to the Government - by offering cheap deals as long as its customers switched from rail to its road coach services. The "National Express team" offered 50% off coach bookings and a chance to enter a £1,000 prize draw for people who switched from rail to road.

It was a reminder that National Express has a history. It was National Express which wanted London's Marylebone station closed in 1984 and converted into a road coach station. National Express also paid consultancy fees to Sir Alfred Sherman who had a long history in the 1980s of campaigning to get railways converted into roads.

## Join Railfuture

**You get four copies of *Railwatch* magazine a year and the chance to help make Britain's railways great again**

Membership is £21 per year for an individual ■ Family: £21 plus £2 for each extra person ■ Pensioners, students and unemployed £14 ■ User groups, community and parish councils: Please use this form to ask for group rates

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Address .....

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Send to Railfuture, 6 Carral Close, Lincoln LN5 9BD  
Please make cheques payable to Railfuture  
Tel: 01522 874513 Email: [membership@railfuture.org.uk](mailto:membership@railfuture.org.uk)

## Annual general meeting

Notice is hereby given that the sixth annual general meeting of the Railway Development Society Ltd will be held at Wrexham Football Club, The Racecourse Ground, Mold Road, Wrexham LL11 2AH at 11.00 on Saturday 8 May 2010.

There will be a morning session with one or more guest speakers starting at 11.00, followed by a buffet lunch. The formal AGM will commence at 13.30.

Nominations for election for chairman and to the board of directors must be sent to Railfuture Returning Officer, PO Box 7690, Hinckley, Leicester LE10 9WJ to arrive by 1 February 2010.

Nomination forms can be obtained from the same address or from the Railfuture website at [www.railfuture.org.uk](http://www.railfuture.org.uk)

Motions for discussion at the AGM (in typed or similar format) must be sent to: M Crowhurst, 33 Station Court, Aberford Road, Garforth, Leeds LS25 2QQ to arrive by 24 April 2010.

Further details and a booking form for the buffet lunch will be sent to members later.

*By order of the Board, C A Lingard, Company Secretary, 1 December 2009*

East Midlands

By Anthony Kay

[A.Kay@lboro.ac.uk](mailto:A.Kay@lboro.ac.uk)

■ ■ Corby station

Figures released in September show that Corby station, opened in February, is attracting around 200 journeys per day. Maybe this figure will rise when pedestrian and cycle access to the station is improved with a new bridge over the railway, reducing walking time between station and town centre to five minutes. The bridge, which forms part of "Corby Walk", is expected to be completed next summer.



■ ■ National Forest line

Leicestershire County Council continues to refuse to fund the reopening of the Leicester to Burton-on-Trent line to passengers, following a report that put the capital cost at £50million and said that it would need £4million annual subsidy. This is despite the Association of Train Operators saying that there was a good business case. The council ignores the wider economic benefits of improved transport links through a former coalfield area which is now reinventing itself as a destination for eco-tourism. The cabinet member for transport at the county council said: "When we need resources for park-and-ride on various bypasses you can understand why we cannot do this". Perhaps she doesn't comprehend that a rail link would take people straight into the city centre, with no need for park-and-ride?

In December's *Railway Magazine*, editor Nick Pigott points out that reopened lines and stations are attracting 200% more passengers than anticipated. He writes: "How sad and infuriating it is to see that those who are obstructing the National Forest line can't get it into their skulls that a similar success story is just itching to be told with regard to the Leicester-Burton route.

"Not only does it share much with Ebbw Vale and Robin Hood in that it passes through a deprived former coal mining area, but it parallels one of the slowest main roads in Britain, as anyone who has tried using the A511 will testify.

"ATOC and many others in the rail industry would love to benefit from the flexibility the route would bring, but county council consultants bizarrely claim it would attract only 150,000 passengers a year and thus require heavy subsidy.

"Not only have such pessimistic forecasts been proved hopelessly wrong elsewhere, but it's high time the authorities in that part of Middle England stopped viewing the route as a self-contained branch and began seeing it as part of a badly needed 'Circle Line' through the heart of the nation, which would, with a couple of reversals, provide a gyratory system serving three of the UK's largest cities: Leicester, Derby and Nottingham.

"The Forest line doesn't even need relaying, for heaven's sake. It's fully operational and already carries freight and loco-hauled passenger charters. Excuse after excuse has been trotted out over the years as to why it can't be used for regular services. It's time for everyone concerned to make it happen."

■ ■ Derby interchange

Plans have been submitted for an improved transport interchange at Derby station. The scheme will include new bus stops, taxi rank and more cycle parking, and forms part of the regeneration masterplan for the city centre.

■ ■ Harringworth viaduct

Railfuture member David Fursdon has set up Friends of Harringworth Viaduct to promote interest in the longest masonry viaduct across a valley in Britain. He drew attention to diversionary rail services across the viaduct, which have again been running on Sundays this autumn until 6 December.