

West Midlands

By Peter Cousins

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■ ■ Coventry upgrade

The branch has welcomed the announcement by Centro of plans for a major upgrade of the Coventry-Nuneaton local service. The scheme – Phase I of the NUCKLE (Nuneaton, Coventry, Kenilworth, and Leamington) Project – will provide a new bay platform at Coventry and new stations at the Ricoh Arena (Foleshill) and Bermuda (Nuneaton) as well as a longer platform at Bedworth. The full scheme, including the cost of an additional diesel multiple unit needed for a half-hourly service, has a very favourable benefit-to-cost ratio and is proposed for funding support from the Department for Transport via the regional funding allocation. Phase II of NUCKLE, which is a joint project with Coventry City Council and Warwickshire County Council, will consider the reopening of Kenilworth station and the potential extension of local services to Leamington Spa.

■ ■ Evergreen good news for branch AGM

The guest speaker at the branch AGM on 24 April was Ian Baxter of Chiltern Railways. He gave an interesting talk on the company's Evergreen III project to upgrade the Chiltern line and provide a new Oxford-Bicester-Marylebone service. The first phase, in December 2010, will see two of the bay platforms reopened at Moor Street station and faster services between Birmingham and Marylebone. The transformation of the Chiltern line from virtual dereliction in the 1980s is astonishing and it is a pity that the logical extension of the route to Wolverhampton Low Level station is no longer available.

■ ■ Questions over high-speed line plan

The high-speed line proposals have inevitably resulted in a lot of discussion in the West Midlands with many residents and MPs opposing local details of the route. Although the branch has welcomed the project in principle, members are disappointed the new line will not provide direct through services to the continent.

We already have reasonably fast and frequent services to London but travel to Cambridge, Leeds, Newcastle and Scotland is relatively slow and it will be many years before the proposed high-speed network addresses these inter-regional gaps.

The need for passengers from Coventry, Walsall and Wolverhampton to walk from New Street station to the proposed new high-speed terminus near Curzon Street is also a cause for concern as Birmingham City Council has so far failed to provide an acceptable walking route between New Street and Moor Street stations.



By rail in Sweden

By Trevor Garrod

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Public transport users from 13 European countries gathered in Malmö, Sweden, on 20 March for the annual conference of the European Passengers' Federation.

Trevor Garrod, Trevor Jones and David Allard represented Railfuture while Christopher Irwin and Tunde Olatunji represented TravelWatch South West and Passenger Focus.

Keynote speakers were Asa Torstensson, the Swedish Infrastructure Minister, and Veronica Manfredi, a member of the cabinet of Mr Siim Kallas, the new European Transport Commissioner.

Mrs Torstensson emphasised the essential role of public transport in tackling environmental issues and creating jobs, but said that operators must address passengers' needs and offer good, affordable services.

Mrs Manfredi reported on the efforts of the European Commission to implement passengers' rights in the air and rail sectors, and complete the same process for bus, coach and ship passengers.

The commission also handled thousands of queries from passengers via EuropeDirect and she looked forward to a "Common Charter of Passengers' Rights."

Other speakers covered a range of train and bus topics including information, ticketing, customer care and integration and there was much audience participation in questions and discussion.

The speakers' presentations can be found on the website www.epf.eu and the conference report (in English) is available in hard copy from Trevor Garrod, 15 Clapham Rd South, Lowestoft NR32 1RQ.

EPF tries to ensure that its events, like many of those of Railfuture, combine local public transport experiences with the presentations and debates of the conference hall. On this occasion, Kurt Hultgren, secretary of our Swedish sister

organisation ResenarsForum, as well as organising the conference, also arranged two interesting excursions the following day

Some visited the exhibition of the rail tunnel which has been built under the city of Malmö, giving improved access to business, residential and leisure areas, and travelled over the magnificent combined road/rail bridge across the Öresund to Denmark.

The bridge and its associated infrastructure were opened in 2001 and have made travel by rail in the regions on either side of the Öresund (or Sound) much easier.

Others took a rail trip northwards to the Swedish towns of Lund, Landskrona and Helsingborg.

The rail infrastructure along this corridor has been greatly improved during the past two decades.

We used innovative bus services in Lund and a trolley bus link in Landskrona, all accessible, like the trains, with a regional smartcard.

At Helsingborg we visited the impressive interchange between train, bus and ferry.

We appreciated how rail and other modes of public transport are helping to regenerate communities in this fascinating cross-border region of Europe.

It is also easier to reach it now by train from Great Britain - but if you need to fly, choose Copenhagen's Kastrup Airport from which you can catch a frequent train to any of the places mentioned in this article.

Next year's EPF conference will be in Barcelona, Spain, on Saturday 12 March.

German-speaking members will also be welcome at this year's Salzburger Verkehrstage in Austria 11-13 October. For details, go to www.regionale-schienen.at/3

Brochures should also be available from Trevor Garrod by August. The conference will focus on international travel by train and bus.

Staff at stations are essential

The station booking office is the railway's shop window. Despite the increased use of the Internet many passengers will continue to value face-to-face contact and station staff can often provide more accurate and appropriate information about fares and connections than on-line systems.

Railfuture believes that all stations with an annual footfall of over 80,000 passengers should have at least a part-time staff presence with full time staff provided at busier stations. Priority should be given to those stations where the only access to some platforms is provided by a footbridge and passenger lifts have been installed but are not continuously available.

Resolution at the Railfuture AGM 2010. Proposed by Peter Cousins and seconded by Howard Thomas. Carried overwhelmingly, with one abstention.

Public ownership of rail

Railfuture does not currently campaign for the railways to be restored to public ownership as one of its policies, but instead concentrates on maximising investment, whether from public or private funds, in the improvement, modernisation, and expansion of the railways. Railfuture supports projects of maximum benefit to rail users, and policies which encourage a major transport modal shift towards the railways, as well as opposing the current fragmentation of the network.

However if the railways were restored to full public ownership, then Railfuture would not oppose this, nor campaign for a reversal of this status, but would continue to seek good stewardship of the railways, alongside its other policies in promotion and development of the railways, suitable for the 21st century.

Proposed Railfuture AGM 2010 resolution. Referred back to the policy committee for further discussion.