

Scotland

■ Glasgow airport rail link

Railfuture campaigner Ken Sutherland is keeping the issue of the Glasgow Airport rail link alive and continuing to fight for the Scottish Government to reverse its decision to cancel the project.

He had the following letter published in the *Herald* in April:

'An unexpected outcome of Glasgow's Transport Museum celebrations provided another reminder of Finance Secretary John Swinney's determination to sabotage the Glasgow Airport Rail Link (Garl) project.

'Alongside a mock-up of the new electric trains, Scottish Government leaflets were still being handed out extolling the benefits of the intended airport trains offering "a fast, reliable service every 15 minutes into Glasgow, with increased luggage space to accommodate customer baggage". A map indicated the rail route into Glasgow Airport, confirming "Rail link from 2013".

'That such tangible evidence of the government's pledge to deliver Garl in time for the 2014 Commonwealth Games still survives in the public domain is an inconvenient truth for ministers.

'Mr Swinney's scrapping of Garl as a reluctant response to UK Government cuts became increasingly suspect, given his refusal of help volunteered by Network Rail and an independent professional engineering study. This offered a 30% reduction in construction costs and earlier completion.

'Documentation on the Garl saga has been forced out of the Scottish Government by Freedom of Information. Yet the wholesale redaction of swathes of vital information is a denial of this legislation.

"One consultant's report has had more than half the pages completely or partially blacked out, including three whole chapters with nearly two-thirds of the vital executive summary concealed below the censor's ink.

'For what purpose is this publicly funded information being withheld? The Garl saga will haunt the SNP administration as a contradiction of First Minister Alex Salmond's promise to oversee open and transparent government.'

Ken added: "Glasgow Airport's management is increasingly frustrated over the axing of this planned high quality rail link, given that it is already recognised within the government's National Planning Framework 2 (NPF2) as a project of 'national importance' justifying early implementation."

■ Free bus travel hits rail

Ken is also continuing to campaign for free travel for old people and disabled people under the concessionary fares system to be extended to the railways. He is urging ScotRail to make more of the fact that rail is now suffering from unfair competition.

■ Waverley work under way

The first serious physical work on reopening the Waverley line as far as Tweedbank began in March, a satisfying milestone for the Campaign for Borders Rail. For more information: <http://www.campaignforbordersrail.org/>



Season tickets

Peter Cousins produced some interesting information on fares in *Railwatch* 123. There are two figures I would query however. Does the St Albans ticket take the rider further than St Pancras International, for example, to Blackfriars in which case the passenger may get, in effect, zone 1 thrown in? Also Tonbridge is 29 miles from Charing Cross and Tunbridge Wells 34. Which is wrong, the place or the distance? If it is Tonbridge, the 2009 cost per mile goes up to £103, a figure nearer Sevenoaks on the same line.

The problems of changing to a simpler fare structure seem to be intractable as the train operator franchises are based on probable revenue and although the high fares could be cut, and receive a quiet word of thanks from the passengers, any balancing rounding-up in this captive market would not be accepted and would be met with howls of protest, mostly justified. In the past hikes have been brought in after serious improvements in the service, for example, electrification. The recent 30% rise in Southeastern's fares for trains using HS1 is a good example.

I think we have to accept that the UK sees railways largely as a business where the first objective is to maximise revenue by fair means or foul. Railways are not alone in being so priced. Gas, electricity, water, phone, airlines, coaches and hotels all market price their services

Your letters extra

using a system which is mostly unfathomable to their customers and is often deliberately obscured but which, for them, we must assume works, as they all choose it. We live in free enterprise, capitalist Britain, not Italy or China. The private sector by definition exists to make money and the present railway fares jungle is a manifestation of this.

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Fare play

I suggest the conclusions in the "season ticket lottery" article in *Railwatch* 123 are highly misleading and only add to the perception that train fares are excessively expensive.

The cost of a season ticket from St Albans to London for £2,680 is only correctly expressed at £134 per mile if one single journey of 20 miles is made in any 12 months period.

The average commuter is estimated to make 40 weeks journeys of five days per week or 20x2x5x40=8,000 miles, in the case of St Albans. The cost per mile is then 33.5 pence and compares with 40 pence per mile for most reimbursement mileage rates for use of private cars on company business.

Using travel costs from Bedford as a guide, the position appears to be as follows, albeit ignoring the actual mileage on the Overground or Underground system. Full price tickets: A daily full-price return ticket including London Travelcard zones 1 to 6, £42.50, 100 miles travelled, 42.5p rate per mile. Five days of A, £212.50, 500 miles travelled, 42.5p rate per mile. Weekly full price season

return, £106, 500 miles travelled, 21.20p rate per mile over five days (although valid for seven days). Annual season including zones 1 to 6, £4240, 20,000 miles travelled (40x500), 21.20p rate per mile. Off-peak tickets: Daily (Mon-Fri), including London Travelcard zones 1 to 6, £24.50; 100 miles travelled, 24.5p rate per mile. Weekend "super off-peak" including London Travelcard zones 1 to 6, £19.50, 100 miles travelled, £19.5p rate per mile. I have ignored the discounts available for railcard holders.

Assuming a season ticket is used only for the five days and for 40 weeks a year, the rate per mile is less than the Monday-Friday off-peak rate.

I suggest it would be helpful to your readers if the article was reworked for all the examples given, using the above criteria. I am afraid I cannot agree that the ticket prices quoted as "per mile" represent "daylight robbery".

It would in fact not be at all unreasonable if the season ticket rate did represent an excess on the off-peak rate to justify the provision of extra rolling stock and staff to deal with the peak period.

I would also suggest that it would be helpful to extend the comparison to, say, the past 10 years to cover the period before the current "1% over inflation" came into effect and to indicate the corresponding increase in the retail price index.

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Peter Cousins writes: I am pleased the table of season ticket prices in *Railwatch* 123 has attracted interest and apologise for an error that crept into the analysis. As David Bosomworth suggests, I quoted the mileage from Tunbridge Wells (34) rather than from Tonbridge (29.5) and the cost per mile from there therefore rises to £75.93 (2003) and £101.70 (2009).

All the London prices quoted are for travel to "London stations" and not the zonal options so onward travel by London Underground would be excluded. I agree with D G M Young that season ticket prices are generally good value for money, although some variations in the annualised uplifts are surprising. However it is the variation in the cost per mile which I find astonishing. Yes, the need to retain additional rolling stock for peak-hour services increases the cost of running commuter services into London but this does not explain the large

discrepancy in rate per mile charged from St Albans (£134) compared to Colchester (£76). Neither does it explain the wide variations in the regional group where relatively few extra coaches are retained for peak-hour services. Efficient communication and transport networks are vital to the economy and our major cities could not function without the rail network. The fares tabulated reflect a structure that was largely inherited from British Rail and season ticket prices have generally been regulated since privatisation in 1997. These large variations in the cost of travel are a distortion of the regional economy.

Luggage plea

I have watched people struggling at stations such as Sittingbourne. In Germany, however, many stations have the equivalent of a conveyor belt beside the stairs so that people with suitcases, pushchairs or even bicycles can easily get them from one platform to another when lifts or escalators are not provided. Why cannot the same be done here?

The railway used to run a door-to-door passenger-luggage-in-advance service. Given that many trains seem to be designed for the passenger with only a briefcase or a handbag, such a service is needed now.

Many people find crossing London or other big cities such a daunting concept that they resort to expensive modes of transport such as taxis or they go by car to avoid such difficulties.

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Crisis opportunity

The volcanic ash crisis that disrupted aviation served as a stark reminder of our addiction to aviation and oil as a fuel.

As I live under Heathrow's flight path, I have been grateful for the respite from noise, noxious fumes and CO2 emissions. Is not this an opportunity to invest more in the railway, electrification, new and reopened rail routes, more freight and station facilities, indeed, any aspect of our railways?

I was also moved by the letter in *Railwatch* 123 regarding station facilities. I agree that litter bins should be compulsory in all stations. Lifts and travelers should be fitted in all stations where there is steep access, including two near me, Barnes Bridge and Kew Gardens.

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East Midlands

By Anthony Kay and Roger Bacon

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■ Buses break the link

Both East Midlands Parkway and Loughborough stations have recently lost their bus services to East Midlands Airport. To get from Parkway to the airport, passengers need to pre-book a taxi at £3 per person, per journey. To get from Loughborough station, they will need to catch a local bus into the town and change on to the airport bus that comes from Leicester city. This is disappointing now that work on a better public transport interchange at Loughborough station has just started but highlights the fragmented structure of public transport within the region where train companies, airport owners and local government wax and wane on support. Now that funds are tighter, phrases such as "CO2 reduction" and "sustainable transport modes" are quickly forgotten.

■ Signalling the way to better operations



After the branch AGM at Derby in April, a delegation of 20 was invited by Network Rail to visit the new East Midlands signalling centre (pictured above) which will eventually take over from Trent and Leicester power boxes and others. The centre also hosts a liaison control room with both Network Rail and East Midlands Trains staff ensuring minimum disruption when anything untoward happens. It was noticed however that although around 50% of trains that pass through Derby are run by operator CrossCountry, it has no staff at the centre. That's strange because it is CrossCountry trains that are often late!

■ Liverpool-Norwich

East Midlands Trains has secured funding to improve the Liverpool-Norwich service, which has become notorious for overcrowding. From May next year, 10 services each weekday will be strengthened from two to four-car trains, providing an extra 1,500 seats on the route each day.

■ North from Corby

The once-daily service north from Corby to Oakham and Melton Mowbray was extended to East Midlands Parkway and Derby with the start of the new timetable in May. We hope that the service will be popular enough to persuade East Midlands Trains to provide a more regular service on this route.

■ Tourism for Rutland

The efforts of Railfuture member David Fursdon to promote rail services in the Corby area have come to the attention of Tourism for Rutland, who have asked him to keep them informed of local rail developments which he is, of course, happy to do.

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