

Irish link threatened



Picture: MUNSTER EXPRESS

The Waterford-Rosslare service at Wellington Bridge station

By Trevor Garrod

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The rail line from Waterford to Rosslare, which has potential as part of a rail/sea/rail link between Great Britain and the southern part of Ireland, was threatened with closure in the summer.

The line currently has only one train a day and changes at Rosslare have made it less convenient than it used to be. It is not promoted by the ferry operators.

Railfuture wrote to Gerry Murphy, chief executive officer of the National Transport Authority, objecting to the closure proposal.

Most of the regular passengers at present are in fact local commuters but we pointed out that better promotion of the line and better onward connections, plus advertising the fact that bicycles can be carried, would help encourage more ferry passengers to use it.

Even if pressure to cut public spending did lead to the withdrawal of the service, however, our letter urged strongly "that the rail infrastructure be kept in place so that longer-term options for restoring a service (as has happened in the western corridor) can be kept open and explored."

At the time of writing, the NTA was expected to give a decision on 3 September. Meanwhile, the South East and Mid West Regional Authorities have published a report opposing the closure and suggesting, among other things, the establishment of a Community Rail Partnership to promote the line as part of the 120-mile-long cross-country route through to Limerick.

SERA chairman John Cumins said: "The regional and local authorities in both regions are united in their opposition to

Irish Rail's attempts to close the Rosslare-Waterford line, which is a key element of our region's transport infrastructure.

He said the closure proposal was "half-baked and short sighted" and flew in the face of the National Spatial Strategy.

He added: "The strategy promotes more balanced regional development, 'Smarter Travel', which advocates sustainable travel and the National Climate Change Strategy that urges switching from road to rail and from cars to public transport."

The report can be viewed at www.sera.ie

Dr Mark Gleeson, treasurer of Rail Users Ireland, reports that RUI's timetable suggestions have been incorporated into the recommendations of the report.

Moves are also afoot with three third parties to see if they are willing to run the service "if Irish Rail walk away."

Dr Gleeson travelled to Fishguard with Tanya Fenelon and Sara Garbett of the Save the Rail group from South Wexford to meet with the South West Wales Community Rail Partnership to learn more about community railways and the key role they will play in the future of the Waterford-Rosslare line.

A plan is in place to assist any third party operator. Ireland's 5ft 3in track gauge means rolling stock can be hard to obtain.

Suitable rolling stock has been identified which is not owned by IR but has pre-existing approval for use in Ireland.

Rail Users Ireland can be found at www.railusers.ie

■ The "missing link" in Dublin Area Rapid Transit's network is to be closed by the construction of a five-mile long, twin-bore tunnel under the heart of the city at a cost of £2 billion.

LOCAL ACTION

Thames Valley

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■ ■ East West rail link

The East West Rail Consortium has published the latest GRIP4 study. Funding issues, including the slump in house building and the pressure on Government finances, are to be addressed as well as identifying a scheme promoter. It is a big disappointment that it now seems unlikely that reopening will happen before 2017. The further study work has shown that £178-210 million is required and services from Reading to Milton Keynes (84 minutes), Bedford (106 minutes), Milton Keynes to Aylesbury (33 minutes) and High Wycombe to Marylebone (88 minutes) are proposed.



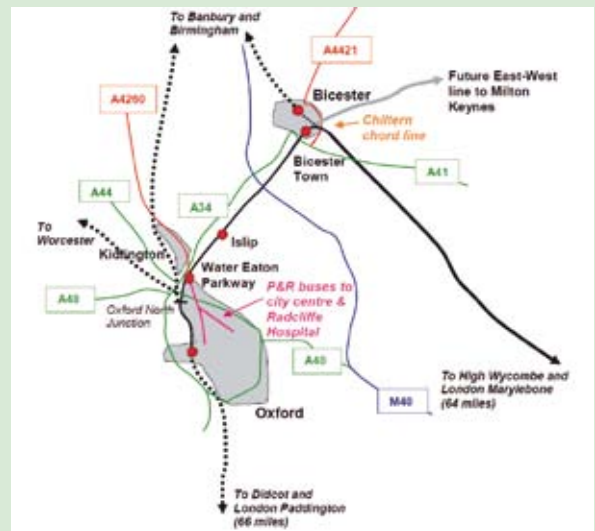
Further work on funding will be undertaken to seek inclusion in the Department for Transport funding plans from 2014. The scheme has a very positive benefit to cost ratio. Further work to prove the case for Winslow and Newton Longville stations may be needed while there may be changes in future population growth plans.

Up to 1.5 million car trips will be removed from the roads. The study notes that freight and the potential use by CrossCountry services (for example a Manchester to Bournemouth service) would further enhance the benefit to cost ratio.

The consortium will now develop the case further, ready for submission to DfT at the end of 2010. A delivery provider will need to be identified.

Railfuture and Oxford-Bletchley Rail Action campaigners were planning to meet officials from the Milton Keynes Partnership and the East West Rail consortium in September.

■ ■ Evergreen plan for Oxford



The plan to provide a new rail link to Oxford via Chiltern Railways along part of the proposed East West link is proceeding with an inquiry into the Transport and Works Act application expected to get under way on 2 November at Oxford Conference Centre. Full details of the Evergreen 3 proposal, including planning documents and maps, can be found at www.chiltern-evergreen3.co.uk/ Atkins has been named to undertake the detailed design work for the Banbury-Marylebone improvements in 2010 and the new Bicester chord for the new Oxford service, subject to the findings of the public inquiry. Railfuture and Oxford-Bletchley Rail Action campaigners plan to make representations at the inquiry.