

Scotland's new line



Picture: NETWORK RAIL

BLACKRIDGE STATION: An aerial view of work under way to get the line reopened

It looks like an ordinary electric train running through Scotland but our cover picture this issue marks success for a rail campaign that went on for more than 25 years.

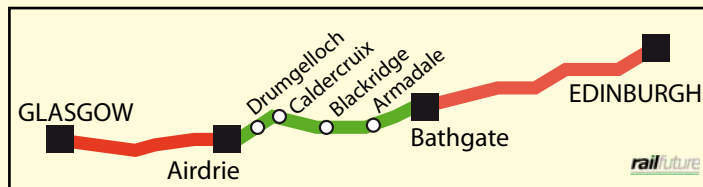
Railfuture can claim some of the credit for the fact that the 15-mile Airdrie-Bathgate line is back in business this month, creating an additional double-tracked electrified line route between Glasgow and Edinburgh, while passing through towns which previously lacked a rail service.

One of the crucial moments in the campaign came in the early 1990s when Railfuture members Ralph Barker and Tony Lennon produced a report showing how the reopening was viable.

Then in 2007, the Scottish Parliament gave the green light for the reopening.

Now Network Rail's three-year-long construction project has been completed and from December, passenger trains are running again between West Lothian and North Lanarkshire, opening up more travel options for people travelling between Glasgow and Edinburgh.

Transport Scotland provided £300 million for the whole reopening and electrification project which includes three new stations at Caldercruix, Blackridge and Armadale as



well as two relocated stations in Drumgelloch and Bathgate. Rail campaigners are sure that the rail link will rejuvenate the area by encouraging investment. It will also encourage more people to travel by train between Edinburgh and Glasgow, rather than on the overcrowded M8 motorway.

Transport, infrastructure and climate change minister Stewart Stevenson said: "Scotland has the most ambitious climate change legislation anywhere in the world and our climate change delivery plan means persuading motorists to get out of their cars and use more sustainable forms of

transport." Forty miles of new track has been laid, 65 miles of overhead electric line has been installed and 69 bridges have been upgraded or replaced.

A train servicing depot has also been built which will clear the way for a passenger service of four trains an hour in each direction. The line speed varies between 85 and 90 mph.

After the Airdrie-Bathgate line closed in 1982, the railway line became a public footpath and cycle track. As part of NR's rail reopening project the cycle track, a 13-mile stretch of the Clyde to Forth cycle route, was moved and can be seen in the picture below.



Picture: NETWORK RAIL

HILLEND LOCH: With electric train running close to shore

...and even England can celebrate now

Railfuture Shoreditch conference

The distant rumble of trains over nearby Shoreditch viaduct could be heard as Railfuture's rail reopenings conference was held in London in November.

The East London line has now been open for just over six months but it has already been recognised as a great success.

One effect has been to increase the value of properties near the new stations. A similar but even greater effect is expected when Crossrail opens in 2017.

London branch chairman Keith Dyal welcomed people to the conference and pointed out that trains stopped running over the viaduct 24 years ago.

Conference chairman Chris Austin was involved in another London reopening – the highly successful Thameslink scheme.

Chris, who spent a distinguished working life on the railways, carried out a study for the then Greater London Council which cleared the way for the reopening of Snow Hill tunnel which was crucial for Thameslink.

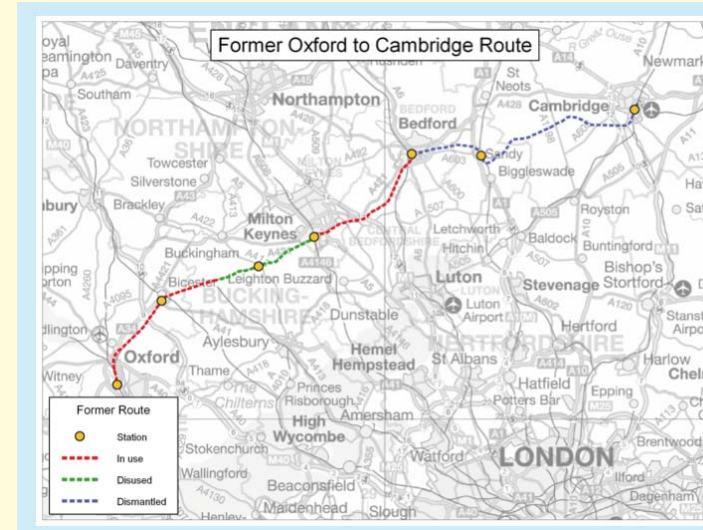
Hackney Council Speaker Sally Mulready opened the conference and pointed out that Hackney was one of the driving forces behind the East London line reopening.

She praised Railfuture for helping the Shoreditch "triangle" find a new identity as the centre of a triangle of rail stations – Old Street, Shoreditch High Street and Hoxton – a sign of positive change in Hackney.

She also paid tribute to the conference's keynote speaker, Ian Brown, and his personal commitment which had been the driving force behind the delivery of London's new Overground rail network.

In his presentation, Mr Brown pointed out that 87% of people travelling into central London use public transport but in outer London, only 25% of trips are by public transport.

The Overground, created by joining up existing lines, was aimed at increasing that number and boosting the capacity of the inner London network by 40%. "Nimbys" were less of a problem in London because most people recognised the need for good public transport and property owners in the



PATRICK O'SULLIVAN

EAST-WEST: An Oxford-Milton Keynes service could be introduced if the section between Bicester and Bletchley was reinstated but the East-West link has the potential to provide high-quality regional transport – and a new route to London

Hoxton area had "made a fortune" out of rising prices on the back of the return of the railway. The Government too recognised the importance of the railway and had given the necessary £75 million to build the Clapham Junction link to the ELL – and so complete London's orbital railway.

Darren Hockaday of London Overground said that there were 2,000 applicants for the ELL drivers jobs. The successful applicants, he said, are some of the best-paid train drivers in Britain.

He said there were still problems. When he paid a visit to the Barking-Gospel Oak line with his baby son, he could see drug dealers "in action" while he changed his son's nappy. The importance of railways to the

community was also stressed by Jonathan Roberts who was described as a "doughty campaigner for rail".

Mr Roberts, a member of the East London Line Group, advised campaigners to be professional, link up with others, try to ensure their scheme is mentioned in official policies like local transport plans and maintain good working relationships.

Sometimes, rail professionals are surprised by the increasing interest in expanding the railway, said David Smith, rail planning officer for the Association of Train Operators.

The Ebbw Vale reopening had been expected to produce 40,000 passengers a year. In fact it attracted five times that figure and the Alloa reopening was

175% above expectations. Glasshoughton on the Leeds-Knottingly line was 170% above predictions. He said ATOC was currently rewriting the Passenger Demand Forecasting Handbook on the basis of what had been learnt.

He said there were now lots of opportunities for rail to fill the gap that roads could not meet. The M25 between Watford to Heathrow is unusable at many times because of the sheer weight of traffic.

Ideally there should be a line coming off the West Coast main line which could serve this corridor, and which with clever use of other links, could go as far as the North Downs in Surrey.

Ian Brown also pointed out that there is not a rail version of the M25 but he suggested the East-West rail link (from Oxford to Cambridge) could be a part of it. Light rail could be used to provide the missing links.

Nottinghamshire rail officer Jim Bamford said rail could achieve big timekeeping improvements by tackling speed restrictions. He said there were many that could be dealt with at reasonable cost.

He also pointed out the problem of Market Harborough station where British Rail started work in 1978 to ease the curve through the station (see below). It rebuilt the station waiting room but then Chancellor Geoffrey Howe cut the funds. Nearly 30 years later, the problem remains, although Network Rail is expected to start work on a revised project this year. See **Local Action Page 19**. He also pointed out that there has been 12 years of growth in passenger

numbers which is continuing. Car traffic meanwhile has begun to decline this year.

Hertfordshire's Trevor Mason reiterated how valuable rail was to people in his county. He said the county wanted more rail services, including services from the West Coast main line to Gatwick.

The county also wanted to extend light rail with various options east towards Hertford and Stansted.

"We want to get the radial rail routes linked up," he said.

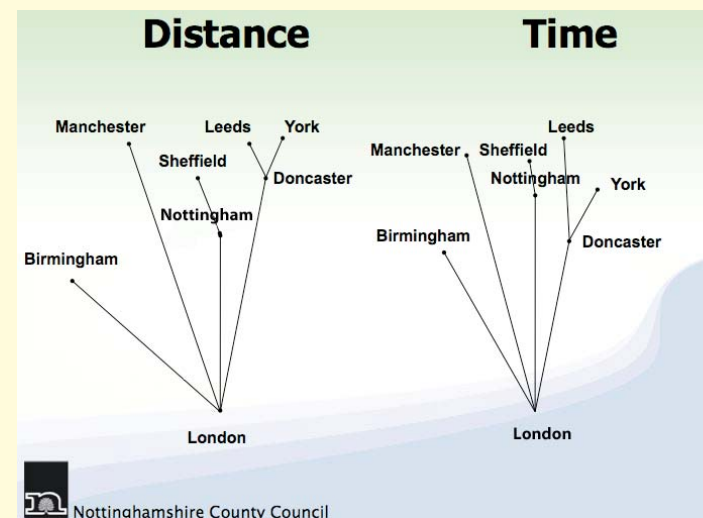
Another potential orbital route is the East-West rail link, based on the line which used to connect Oxford and Cambridge. Current ideas for the scheme which has a fantastic cost-benefit rating include providing a Milton Keynes to London service via High Wycombe.

Patrick O'Sullivan, project manager for the East West rail consortium, said building the city of Milton Keynes was justified on the grounds that it was a good transport hub.

Its role was undermined before the city was built however by the closure of part of its east-west rail link which even Beeching had recommended should remain open.

If the East-West rail link scheme goes ahead in 2017, it might be with class 165 diesel trains which featured on the Railfuture East-West leaflet published in 1995.

Anthony Smith of Passenger Focus warned of big fare rises to come, with double digit rises on some lines as the Government seeks to shift costs to the passenger rather than the taxpayer.



JIM BAMFORD

MINUTES COUNT: This chart from Jim Bamford shows how poor rail services can push cities further away from the capital



JIM BAMFORD

LEARNING CURVE: As far back as 1978 British Rail rebuilt buildings on Market Harborough station in readiness for straightening out the Midland main line. But then the money was axed and the trains kept going round the bend