

Scotland

North of Edinburgh train reprieved by Government

After months of campaigning, rail activists were relieved by news in October that through trains from London to Aberdeen and Inverness had been reprieved. Transport minister Theresa Villiers decided to reject the idea of enforced changes at Edinburgh. Whether the next generation of trains serving Scotland north of Edinburgh will be diesels or bi-modal is not known.

Work on Borders project cheers rail campaigners

Another reopening campaign was bearing fruit with advance work being undertaken on the Borders rail project. Cowbraehill bridge which crosses the long disused railway was demolished because it had fallen into disrepair. A new permanent bridge will be constructed as part of the project to rebuild the line from Edinburgh to Galashiels.

Steve Milligan, Borders Railway project director for Transport Scotland, said: "The Borders Railway is an important project and when completed will open up real social and economic opportunities for communities in the Lothians and Borders."

Take action now to influence the future of Scots rail

Rail campaigners are being urged to ensure they have an input into the second generation Network Rail route utilisation strategy. Mark Norton of the Dornoch Rail Action Group (Dorlag) said: "The draft captures some good improvements for railways elsewhere, but we barely get a mention. It says next to nothing about the line to the Far North, including Caithness and Sutherland.

"While there are some vague promises on capacity enhancements and train lengthenings, there is no commitment to improving our line or shortening the horrendously long rail journey times on it.

"We need to focus on why they are using the Dingwall-Alness section of the line for journey time improvements, while ignoring the rest of the line. Network Rail also needs to be challenged as to why they are focusing only on Bunchrew level crossing improvements while ignoring the others."

The draft RUS can be found on the Network Rail website and comments need to be made before 13 January.

For more information about Dorlag, see www.dorlag.co.uk

Political row over land for Glasgow airport rail link

In October, Transport Scotland was reported to be trying to sell land needed for the £210 million Glasgow Airport rail link. Labour has objected to the sell-off and says it will resurrect the airport link if it wins the Scottish elections in May.

Scots electrification proceeds apace

Rail campaigners are delighted that a £1 billion programme of improvements and electrification got under way in September in Scotland's central belt. The Edinburgh-Glasgow Improvements Programme will see 215 miles of the existing rail network electrified, including the main Edinburgh Waverley to Glasgow Queen Street. The first £6 million phase of work at Haymarket North was expected to be finished this month. In all, EGIP will benefit eight routes.

Transport Minister Stewart Stevenson said: "The Edinburgh-Glasgow Improvements Programme will revolutionise the rail network in central Scotland bringing real and lasting benefits to rail passengers."

EGIP is being funded by Transport Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Government and will improve the appeal of rail as a greener alternative to the car, said Network Rail's Ron McAulay.

The scheme is expected to deliver a range of benefits by 2016 including a fastest journey time of 37 minutes on the main Edinburgh Waverley-Glasgow Queen Street route and increased service levels on all routes between the two cities from the current five or six services per hour to 13 services per hour.

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Railfuture challenge

The recent attempts within London and South East Branch to impose a rigid set of top-down procedures through changes to standing orders brought me towards examining Railfuture in determining what it was achieving.

It is clear that at a national level the Railfuture directors are not representing members' rail development priorities because no one is making any significant attempt to find out what these are on a regular basis.

Too many people on committees seem to have as "job 1" the need to unravel the Beeching cuts rather than campaign for a modern rail system that can shake off the heritage of a Victorian system that has reached the end of its useful life and is being kept alive by unreasonably large amounts of money resulting in deteriorating service combined with ever-rising cost to the travelling public. I cite attendance at reopenings conferences as a symptom of this.

The directions the society chooses to take are made by a few tens of people that results in it not doing very well on many fronts. In my view, the Railfuture election manifesto exemplified this well. While there were some parts of it that I could go along with, there was much that I had doubts about and yet there was no real opportunity to debate any of the content.

It is not as though a general election was sprung on us as we knew at least two years in advance that Labour would hold out for as long as possible. In

Your letters extra

any event it was so muddled that I would be surprised that any politician would have read it to the end.

The future of the rail system in the UK is very complex and while it is important that the society is aware of what is going on in all aspects of rail, it does not have the resources to have more than a very few simple objectives to aim for at a national level.

The inability of the society to follow through on its understanding that it cannot do everything at the top, either at national or branch level, and to entrust local rail issues to local society activists by first agreeing local objectives and then giving them a more or less free hand, as had been the case for Coastway division for a number of years, is a grave mistake.

My primary interest is how rail, tramways in particular, will be developed in East Sussex, especially with regard to proper integration of public transport services.

I'm not obsessed with having bright new stations and bicycle racks. We can manage without these for many years.

Eastbourne is a prime example of a locality where travel will become chaotic in not too many years because none of the existing transport infrastructure was ever planned with an eye to the future.

There are many fundamental issues that are unresolved to do with travelling well, economically, and mindful of ever-reducing natural resources. This all needs to be planned from the bottom-up at the local level.

The lack of meaningful consultation across the society, combined with heavy-handed bureaucratic control of local

groups can only succeed in deactivating local activists. The directors of Railfuture should be concerned to do something with high speed otherwise they will end up with no members at all once the Beeching cuts brigade are no longer with us.

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Railfuture chairman Mike Crowhurst responds: If lobbying for electrification, Crossrail and high-speed rail, to name but three, does not constitute "campaigning for a modern railway system", then I would like to know what does!

We are not wholly concerned with reopenings. While historically we had a conference on that subject each year, of late we have varied the topics to include high speed, the role of the independent sector, and the wide-ranging "Future of Railways" conference in London two years ago.

It is true that the railways as currently structured absorb rather more public money to less useful effect than they could.

This is largely a consequence of the structures unwisely forced on them by an inappropriate form of privatisation in 1993-4 which we opposed at the time.

Our latest leaflet "Much more for much less" produced for the debate on the comprehensive spending review, addresses how better use of funds can still be achieved.

I am sorry Mr Crooks was unimpressed by our election manifesto. Reaction to this and the A-Z of Rail Reopenings series (now Britain's Growing Railway) has generally been favourable.

Mr Crooks says his primary interest is in "tramways in particular". While we support tramways as a means of extending the network, we treat conversion proposals (heavy to light rail) very much on a case by case basis.

There are also other bodies campaigning for tramways, such as the Light Rail Transit Association. While recognising the importance of intermodal integration, our primary concern is with conventional railways. Mr Crooks is welcome to visit our website and read the series of policy documents on these matters.

Mr Crooks is clearly uncomfortable with our basic

◆◆◆◆ Please remember Railfuture in your will

structure, and the standing orders recently adopted by London and South East branch, at the urging of the board.

While not perfect, the three-level approach of national committees, regional branches and where appropriate, informal local divisions, seems to suit most people and, we believe, offers a reasonable amount of local autonomy while ensuring that we speak with one voice on national policy issues.

What we wish to avoid is different parts of the society campaigning independently and sometimes in conflict with each other.

This simply leads to us being dismissed as an uncoordinated rabble, and ignored altogether.

Individual members, and indeed affiliated user groups are of course free to campaign on whatever they see fit, so long as they do not do so in Railfuture's name.

Build on success

I appreciated Chris Austin's article in *Railwatch* 125 highlighting successes of the community rail partnerships.

However, the article might have given the impression that community rail partnerships are found only on branch lines.

The North Staffordshire Community Rail Partnership on the Crewe-Derby route is among the most successful on every scale of measurement.

It has been an ACoRP awards nominee on five occasions. Three intermediate stations on the line have also won awards through community involvement.

The partnership has levered in £720,000 worth of investment from external sources for station improvements in its five-year life and has seen passenger numbers rise between 2006/07 and 2008/09 by 24% at intermediate stations. Passenger numbers continue to grow apace. Of course, being a strategic link between Crewe, Stoke and Derby, we also have a significant (and unknown) number of through passengers.

With a supportive train operating company and local authorities, designated community rail partnerships can thrive, prosper and deliver significant passenger growth not just on branch lines but also on through routes with unstaffed stations.

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East Midlands

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Loughborough station improvements

Work started in October to improve Loughborough station, as part of the Leicestershire County Council's Eastern Gateway project. There will be a new access road to the station, a public transport interchange, a larger car park and more cycle parking. The council said the project will be completed by August next year. Network Rail is also extending the station's three platforms. The first stage, to be completed by spring next year, will see NR's maintenance team relocating signals, realigning track and other enabling work. Then a NR contractor (currently being chosen by tender) will extend the platforms and provide a new footbridge with lifts which complies with the disability laws. The contractor is expected to start work in late March and will look to complete the construction, testing and commissioning phase by February 2012 ready for the visits of both the UK and Japanese Olympic teams who will prepare at Loughborough.

Campaign to improve Midland Mainline line speeds

At the East Midlands Trains conference of stakeholders in October, the campaign to win Government support for an additional phase of the Midland main line speed improvement project was discussed. Network Rail has funding for £69 million of work which will save eight minutes on the London-Sheffield journey time and five minutes on the London-Nottingham time. This should be delivered in the five-year period up to 2014.

The additional work would provide improvements to the rail infrastructure at Market Harborough to enable trains to travel significantly faster than their current limit of 60mph at this point, and at Desborough to enable freight trains to be looped so that passenger trains can overtake them. Some freight trains are timed to take 30 minutes between Kilby Bridge Junction near Leicester, and Kettering North Junction, and there are no loops for passenger trains to overtake. Provision of loops at Desborough would dramatically improve the train operators' ability to take advantage of faster line speeds, provide additional flexibility and increase capacity for freight.

The improvements at Market Harborough would complete the project started by British Rail way back in 1978 when they repositioned the station buildings. Since then, the Midland main line has gained rolling stock which is capable of 125mph but which travels at speeds not greater than 110mph.

These additional improvements have an estimated cost of £27 million. The current expenditure on line speeds is somewhat less than is being spent on expansion of station car parks on the West Coast main line and is a fraction of that spent on improving line speeds on the West Coast. Extra investment at Market Harborough and Desborough will help to address this discrepancy. Railfuture East Midlands is lobbying MPs along the Midland main line to support the campaign.

Heritage railway shows the way to integrated transport

The final sleeper has been laid on the restored Ecclesbourne Valley railway, linking the Derbyshire town of Wirksworth to the Midland main line at Duffield. It is hoped that the remaining works will be completed by spring, allowing a passenger service to run the full eight and a half miles. Until now, the railway has only run four miles from Wirksworth to Ildridgehay, and up the incline from Wirksworth to Ravenstor. Railfuture supports the railway's intention to devise a timetable to connect with main line services and to offer through ticketing. We hope they can set a good example of a heritage railway providing real transport improvements for the local community.

Government cuts delay plan for new station at Ilkeston

Derbyshire County Council's hopes of opening a new station at Ilkeston in late 2012 have been squashed by the Government cuts. Councillor Chris Jackson, cabinet member for highways and transport, says that the project will not be abandoned but the council is not expecting any funding for the station from the Department for Transport before 2016.