

North West

By Arthur Thomson

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■ ■ Leigh station battle

A local campaign has been launched calling for the town of Leigh in Greater Manchester back to be put back on the railway network. A businessman is the main driver behind the campaign which has considerable local support. Current plans by Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Executive are for a guided busway to be built using part of the old railway formation from when Leigh was part of the national railway network. Now campaigners say parts of two old rail lines could be brought back into use. Using the old Great Central line that ran from Glazebrook through the west side of Leigh to Wigan would enable a new station to be provided near Leigh town centre. That could then be connected to the Manchester-Liverpool Chat Moss line, with connections both east to Manchester and west to Newton-le-Willows and Liverpool. The scheme has been costed by Stobart Rail at £52 million, which is £24 million less than the guided busway. The campaigners believe it offers a much better proposition than the single-destination guided busway. Meetings were held over three nights in December 2010 to gauge what local people thought of the plans and they were overwhelmingly in favour of the idea. GMPTC sent a four-page document arguing that it did not serve towns that the guided busway would. It is understood that a meeting is planned to discuss this further.

■ ■ SELRAP presses on with renewed strategy

The Skipton-East Lancashire Rail Action Partnership that campaigns to reopen the line from Skipton to Colne, is looking at different ways to achieve its goal. After a successful conference in 2009, SELRAP was able to get professional consultants to consider its options:

- SELRAP taking the project forward itself via a project development group as outlined by JRC Consulting in a SELRAP-commissioned report
- Persuade the Department for Transport to include the project within invitation to tender for the possibly re-worked Northern franchise after 2013
- Persuade potential bidders for the franchise to include the rebuild as an added benefit
- Persuade a private company to take on the rebuild on the back of industrial, housing or regeneration development opportunities
- Persuade a freight operator to fund the rebuild on the back of access charges paid by future users
- Take advantage of the Government's recently introduced £1.4 billion Regional Growth Fund via the new Local Economic Partnerships
- Persuade the Government to fund the rebuild of the line as a pilot, based on best practices, as a test for ideas in Sir Roy McNulty's value for money study
- Persuade the European Union to part-fund the rebuild as part of a new east coast to west coast, port-to-port route and as part of the Trans European Networks
- The formation of a consortium based, maybe, on a hybrid combination drawn from the above

The latest edition of *CravenRail*, the magazine that SELRAP produces, looks at a number of areas where this might be achieved, in particular at possible housing gain and the way that a connected network is "greater than the sum of its parts."

For more on SELRAP, go to www.selrap.org.uk



Rail needs bus links

Simon Norton was impressed by *Transport for Suburbia*, a book reviewed in *Railwatch* last year by Peter Wakefield.

He read an extract from it on the web and knew he had to buy the book. He believes it is particularly important now that so many buses look like being axed as a result of Government cuts.

This book is a wake-up call to those of us who have been bemused by the Government propaganda for cuts in public services.

It should be compulsory reading for all politicians and planners with any influence on transport policy – but since it is not, it needs to be read by campaigners so they can use the relevant arguments.

The book's main purpose is to debunk the notion that one can't provide quality local public transport outside densely populated city areas. Its title is slightly misleading in that it also concerns itself with rural areas.

The author comes to the uncompromising conclusion that the most important need is to have a public agency in charge of what he calls "tactical planning" – timetables, fares and ticketing.

This of course is at odds with our deregulated bus system.

But the author also condemns our railway franchising system as combining the maximum of bureaucracy with the minimum of accountability.

The best verdict independent consultants have been able to come up with is that it has avoided the worst results of bus deregulation.

He points out that it was under a franchising system that the historic light rail networks in cities such as Los Angeles declined, leading to their takeover and closure by General Motors. More enlightened countries took their tramways into public ownership when the private sector was no longer able to perform satisfactorily. Public sector tactical planning is essential for the development of integrated net-

works. He cites the canton of Zurich (and other parts of Switzerland) as an example of best practice. It won't surprise most of us to hear that Switzerland's public transport is better than ours, but few of us will know how good it is.

In Zurich canton, a village with just 300 people can expect an hourly all day service seven days a week. In fact it has only two villages that fail to qualify – Volken, which still has an hourly service as it lies en route to a larger village, and Sternenberg, with a population of 349 scattered among several hamlets, which still has five to seven buses a day seven days a week.

If Sternenberg was in Britain it would have no public transport at all. Sternenberg's railhead, Bauma, with a population of just 1,000, has two trains per hour throughout the day, plus all-night buses at weekends.

Many Railfuture members will be interested in the chapter on busways, in which the author refers to Adelaide, Brisbane, Curitiba, Foz do Iguacu and Ottawa.

The Brazilian cities are particularly instructive. The system works in Curitiba, which has network planning, but not in Foz do Iguacu which does not.

He also says that if a system works well then there is likely to be pressure to replace it with a rail based system, as has happened in Ottawa.

The author debunks the myth that superior performance is reliant on high subsidy levels. In fact Zurich, London and Manchester have very similar levels of subsidy per journey.

Zurich is successful because 66% of journeys to work in the city are by public transport, compared to a woeful 14.6% in Greater Manchester, and 8.9% in Cambridge.

Transport for Suburbia: Beyond the Automobile Age is by Paul Mees, and published by Earthscan. You can read an "impressive" extract at <http://worldstreets.wordpress.com/2010/11/08/beyond-the-automobile-age>

Would you believe it?

British Rail will stage a comeback if Labour wins the general election. Franchising of rail services will stop while responsibility for running trains will be given back to a revamped British Rail which will have new aims – to increase rail use. The new Labour policy called Consensus for Change – launched in late May – will also commit Labour to setting national and local targets for shifting freight from road to rail. There will be targets for improving public transport and reducing traffic congestion.

– *Railwatch* July 1996