But Beeching in reverse

What a shocking state of affairs: This map shows how many communities in just one county have lost their access to a rail service since Beeching did his worst. The potential for the former rail network shown on this map, produced by Rail for Herefordshire, to form the basis of an integrated public transport system, must be obvious to even the densest planner or politician.

Just look at the map on the right and you realise why so many people are forced to rely on their cars. Often there is just no alternative with so many rail stations closed. The comprehensive basic public transport infrastructure which did exist has been dismantled by politicians and officials who had no mandate to do so.

But even now the railway, starved of cash and hobbled as it is, is performing a massive social and economic function far beyond what it is credited with.

In many places the railway infrastructure remains and new life could easily be breathed into it. If technical advances, like diesel multiple units, automated level crossings and modern signalling, have been embraced with vigour in the motorway industry, like train operators, Railtrack and the Strategic Rail Authority, is failing to see the case for rail even when it is so obviously the local, regional and national choice.

Take the case of Cambridge, where a well-meaning but badly thought-out plan has recommended converting the Cambridge to St Ives light rail line into a busway.

Apart from Railfuture and other rail campaigners trying to make the case for bringing the line back into the national rail network, there is the deafening silence from the official rail spokesmen.

In fact Railtrack has collaborated with the people trying to convert the line into a busway, the local council and the SRA, which has given permission for guided buses to be incorporated on the line so that it can be reintegrated into a busway. The SRA has also allowed the busway to operate on part of the trackbed.

Even now, many former rail lines could be reinstated, sometimes as light rail lines, to help fill in the gaps in the public transport network.

While there is still virtually unrestrained use of the roads, rail will never be able to provide the reliable service necessary.

At present it often cannot deliver you to the railway station comfortably and on time. Government efforts to improve bus services can only be welcomed. They are also multi-modal strategies that can impact on city and country areas.

But even now the existence of rail lines with guided buses is doomed to failure and the private road users in the rail industry, like train operators, Railtrack and the Strategic Rail Authority, is failing to see the case for rail even when it is so obviously the local, regional and national choice.

Government’s “commitment” to integrated transport – can their efforts be 70mph or capable of more than around 40mph?

Guided buses are usually not of providing it would be by reserv- ed multiple units, automated level crossings and modern signalling, which has been embraced with vigour in the motorway industry, like train operators, Railtrack and the Strategic Rail Authority, is failing to see the case for rail even when it is so obviously the local, regional and national choice.

Railfuture is also supporting a wider campaign to put Beeching in Reverse which is the title of a new report from TRANIN this month.

It calls for a national programme of line and station reopenings. If you would like a copy send £10 (or for rail user groups) to TRANIN, Brian Jackson Centre, New North Parade, Huddersfield HD1 3JF. Make cheques payable to TRANIN.

A national conference is being staged by TRANIN in Nottingham on 27 September. A few places are available to Railfuture branches at the subsidised rate of £25. Details: 01484 547975, Fax: 01484 544234. Email: mail@platform5.demon.co.uk

A mock trial of Dr Beeching takes place in the evening of 26 September at the Galleries of Justice in Nottingham.