The collapse of Railtrack could give Government and the Strategic rail Authority the opportunity to pursue a radical and positive approach to getting Britain back on track.

At a critical moment, the Strategic Rail Authority is being urged to take a new stance by reversing key links and returning major towns to the railway network.

The new study sponsored by Railfuture and five other bodies finds that putting the tracks back will boost the rail network generally. The new study sponsored by Railfuture and five other bodies finds that putting the tracks back will boost the rail network generally.

The report Beaching in Reverse - the case for a programme of line and station reopenings identifies a number of schemes in the South East as leading contenders for reopening. They are:

Bedford to Sandy
Bicester to Bletchley
Bletchley to Aylesbury
Hythe to Southampton
Leaves to Uckfield
Princes Risborough to Aston Rowant
Romsey to Eastleigh
Shanklin to Ventnor
Tunbridge Wells to Eridge

However, the report stresses that this is not an exclusive list. There are many other contenders.

The report highlights the success in the 1980s of the community reopenings carried out by British Rail and local authorities. It goes on to say: "Since privatisation the cost of such schemes has doubled and the number of lines and stations reopened has slumped. Although, with the creation of the Strategic Rail Authority, the pace has picked up again, there is still real potential for programmes of reopenings - and many viable schemes are still at the planning stage.

The report recommends that regional audits should be carried out to identify all towns to 20,000 or more without a direct rail service as a pre-cursor to providing dedicated rail link buses, or direct services. The report also shows that the cost of bringing back the tracks is, in most cases, cheaper (male for miles) than building major new roads.

"This report shows the extraordinary success of most of the lines and stations reopened during the eighties and nineties," said the report's author, Paul Salveson, director of the Rail Transport, Research and Information Network (TR&IN), only seven of the 17.75 miles of line and stations closed by Dr Beeching should be restored as there is no demand for more rail travel and the proposed schemes will increase journey opportunities for those wishing to use environmentally friendly public transport."

Stewart Francis, chairman of the Rail Passengers Council, said: "While no one is suggesting that all the lines and stations closed by Dr Beeching should be restored there is a strong case for accelerating a targeted programme of selected schemes.

"At a time when the public is deeply concerned about the future of the railway there can no longer be a greater symbol for a wider rail revival than putting back the tracks to those towns for which there are viable and cost effective proposals."

Jonathan Bray, advisor to Transport 2000's Platform network and coordinator for the Beaching in Reverse report, said: "There are many parts of the country where the wounds inflicted by Dr Beeching's axe and rhine of those were closed before nationalisation in 1948. Nine stretches of the track shown on the map were closed before Beeching, while only one was as a result of the 1963 Beaching report. Nationally a total of 2,335 miles were closed between 1948 and 1962, while 1,630 stations were closed between 1963 and 1969.

By Simon Hope

1 fully support efforts to put Beaching in reverse but Dr Richard Beeching was not responsible for all line and station closures.

The process actually began in the 1950s and many of the lines closed as a result of the 1963 Beaching report were already in a sorry state because of a consistent lack of investment, followed by some misguided investment under the 1975 modernisation plan.

In addition, local passenger rail services were not properly publicised and cost-cutting was as a way of making services more viable was neglected. With the lack of a coherent national strategy, it was not surprising that the Ministry of Transport concentrated its efforts on gearing up for the “motor age” with massive road investment all its sad consequences.

While many railway officials of that time who bore a heavy responsibility escaped public scrutiny, Beeching became a scapegoat for serious errors of judgment made over a period of time as chairman of BR from 1961-65.

To take the map of Herefordshire published in Railtrack 89, only seven of the stations were closed during the Beeching era, while 30 were closed before Dr Beeching swung his axe and rhine of those were closed before nationalisation in 1948.

By Paul Salveson

The Trial of Dr Beeching at Nottingham’s Magistrates Court on 26 September proved to be a close run thing by a narrow margin (invoking two recounts) the audience/jury found Dr Beeching guilty of “wilful failure to take into account the transport needs of future generations.”

He was sentenced to be detained at Her Majesty’s pleasure at HMP’s Riccarton Junction, pending the arrival of the next train to Carlisle. This could be some time. Dr Beeching, played by Brian Barnes, erstwhile music manager of the Peace Theatre, Wrexham, from TR&IN, Brian Jackson Centre, New North Parade, Huddersfield also featured.

This was debate on a very controversial theme - railways and road investment with all its sad consequences. While many railway officials of that time who bore a heavy responsibility escaped public scrutiny, Beeching became a scapegoat for serious errors of judgment made over a period of time as chairman of BR from 1961-65.

The trial was intended as a bit of light entertainment for delegations attending the conference, but it turned into a fascinating discussion of the rights and wrongs of transport policy in the 1960s, and its continuing impact on today’s policy and practice.

The conference highlighted the findings of the new report Beaching in Reverse by TR&IN on railway reopenings, and also heard presentations on reopenings in Northern Ireland and the Robin Hood Line and new stations on Merseyside. The proposed reopening of the Wrexham to Chester Line, from TR&IN, Brian Jackson Centre, New North Parade, Huddersfield also featured.

TR&IN also staged a conference on Regional Rail on 21 September, at the National Railway Museum, York. The theme centre was railways and regeneration and heard presentations on reopening in the West Midlands, Greater Manchester and the Sus-