



Scotland

Alba

By David Hansen

New timetable The new timetable has been running somewhat erratically. Trains on the 15 minute interval Edinburgh-Glasgow service have at times been 20 minutes late! Teething troubles happen with any new timetables. Hopefully the planners are already tweaking things. There have been two additional causes of disruption, one outwith the control of the railways. Shortage of staff is an own goal, with retired drivers being brought back. However a large number of suicides cannot be blamed on the railways. The class 170 is a great improvement on its predecessor in most ways. Areas of concern are the far more limited luggage space. Cycle carriage has not been increased at all while the number of seats has been increased by 50%+. Lastly, although much better than the 158s, the 170s are still not as attractive to passengers as electric trains.

Yorkshire

By Peter G Davies

Leeds First Scheme The Leeds First Scheme was officially launched with the unveiling of a model of the layout of the new station on Thursday 23 September by the chairman of the environment committee of Leeds City Council. Nicholas Pollard then invited guests to travel with him by bus to visit the new temporary station at Leeds (Whitehall) and to comment on its facilities. Toilets are provided for passengers, together with disabled access, and there is a heated waiting room. When the work on the Leeds First Scheme is completed in 2002, the temporary station will be offered to any operator who may be interested.

Huddersfield Work on the new travel centre has started, and is expected to be completed in December 1999. In the meantime, staff are located in a temporary building on the concourse outside the station to deal with ticket sales and enquiries.

Airedale and Wharfedale Complaints have been received about the cleanliness of the ageing Class 308 units which operate the suburban services on the Airedale and Wharfedale lines. It is understood that the new washing plant at Neville Hill is not capable of removing acid brake dust from the windows, and each unit is having to be

handwashed which is a lengthy process.

Brighouse The railway bridge at Huddersfield Road has been replaced and work on the new station is expected to start in January 2000. Services between Leeds and Huddersfield via Bradford and Halifax are expected to begin in May, 2000.

Halifax The new travel centre



This excellent leaflet gives brief details of nine rail lines and three steam railways which take people through some beautiful countryside, including coastal views and wooded valleys as well as the strange landscape of the Cornish china clay industry. The leaflet was produced by the Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership, with help from the European Union, the two county councils, the city of Plymouth and Dartmoor National Park. More information from Devon tourist information

has been opened on the bridge at the entrance to the station and this gives much better facilities for the travelling public. A new waiting room has been provided on the platform.

Wessex

By David Stevenson

A bridge too far? Railtrack's planned replacement of a double-track underbridge at Templecombe with a single

track span is being opposed by local authorities and rail campaigners. It is feared the new bridge would make it difficult to lay double track on this section of the Salisbury-Exeter line if much-needed capacity improvements require it.

Chandlers Ford back on track The resumption of direct passenger services between Eastleigh and Romsey has renewed interest in reopening the intermediate station at Chandlers Ford. Hampshire County Council is actively pursuing funding options and is seeking train operators interested in running a regular service to supplement the infrequent trains currently operated by Wales and West.

Swanage connection The Swanage Railway's plans to connect with the national rail network and restore regular passenger services are moving forward apace. Track laying from the present terminus at Norden is under way towards the Railtrack boundary at Furzebrook and the future signalling interface is being planned. Train operators' interest in running direct Bournemouth to Swanage services, using diesel stock, is being sought to restore the link which closed in 1972.

East Anglia

By Trevor Garrod and Nick Dibben

Direct link The start of the winter timetable brought a through service from Lowestoft to London, via the East Suffolk Line, for the first time since 1984. The East Suffolk Travellers' Association (a corporate member of RDS), marked the occasion by displays in local libraries and a special leaflet, partly funded by Anglia Railways. A passenger survey carried out by ESTA was generally complimentary of Anglia's local services, with 74% rating it as good or very good. The two major complaints were the amount of litter inside the trains and the failure of some staff to make adequate use of the public address system.

Multi modal review The branch has written its response to this study. Our proposals for a reopened St Ives railway parallel would be more effective than adding lanes to the A14 road. The railway would cater for local passengers with its ability to run cross-Cambridge services, and longer regional journeys if connections were made at Huntingdon with the East Coast main line. Alternative uses for the route are a guided

busway, or a single lane toll road. Such proposals would consign this potential strategic rail corridor to something of limited local use.

Railtrack wants to turn railway into busway! No, this is not a mistake. Railtrack in East Anglia is developing the plan mentioned above to turn the St Ives railway into a busway! It clearly does not have faith in its own product and certainly does not want to reopen the railway as a key part of its network, a showcase of what it can achieve. Its East Anglian zone officials have repeatedly stated that they prefer a busway. It appears that any bus operators would pay track access charges similar to those on the railway. We wonder if the bus operators are aware of this? The branch has also been in contact with the Health and Safety Executive over busway safety matters. The dangers were highlighted on 31 October when a six-year-old girl was killed in Runcorn, Cheshire, when she wandered into a busway. The HSE has told us that it is looking carefully at the issues raised by running quasi-trains at high speed on unsignalled guideways. Further evidence that questions the benefits of busways has come from an unpublished Government report. An article in the *Sunday Times* said the report showed that busways could not get people out of their cars. Only 3% of new users on the Leeds busway are former car users. The report also questioned claims that busways are low cost.

East-West progress A public meeting attended by 300 people in Bedford has given its support to the scheme and proposals for the route through the centre of the town. Although members of the East-West consortium favoured the central route in Bedford, the borough council were not sure. The public meeting organised by MP Patrick Hall was part of a process to resolve the issue. Many people felt that the scheme was essential for the future success of the town, while others were clearly concerned about a new line passing close to their homes. The meeting was told that phase one (Oxford-Bedford) had passed the pre-qualification stage for a rail passenger partnership grant. Once final approval had been given work could start within 18 months. At this time Railtrack would submit a Transport and Works Act application for phase two (Bedford-Cambridge). Services on this section could start in five years. At the end of the meeting



the vote was: For inner route 158, against 81, abstainers 13. Many of those against the inner route supported the concept of the East-West link but wanted a different route in the Bedford area.

Backing rail Developers of a massive distribution centre to be built on the former airforce base at Alconbury near Huntingdon are so confident about the ability of rail freight that they are offering to limit the number of lorries entering the site and pay fines if rail does not carry 50% of the goods traffic. Up to two million tonnes of spoil from the site will also travel by rail. Unlike other distribution centres all buildings will have rail sidings and both north and south flying junctions are proposed on to the ECML. The branch is meeting with the developers to get a better understanding of the scheme and to assess whether the claims about rail are realistic. The local authority has rejected the plans and an appeal is expected in May next year.

North Midlands

By Bill Collins

Railway development We pointed out the need for comprehensive, affordable, well-marketed and integrated services when we responded to the East Midlands Development Agency's consultation document *Prosperity Through People*.

Extra trains Midland Mainline has introduced extra Nottingham-Derby trains (at 22.10 and 23.10) following representations from the branch.

Robin Hood line The raising of speed limits in Whitwell tunnel has paved the way for journey times to be cut. But the branch has discovered that Robin Hood trains may have to be diverted via the Erewash Valley line while a section of Nottingham NET light rail line is built in the Bulwell area. The Robin Hood line will have passing loops so that NET can take over one of its tracks. A diversion would leave Bulwell, Hucknall and Newstead temporarily without trains. A branch delegation met Nick Clegg MEP in September to brief him about this the unsatisfactory revenue-support arrangement for the Robin Hood line and the RDS stance over the Central Railway proposal.

Derby station The branch is calling for adequate bus services to be provided at the Pride Park entrance to the station which has been approved by the city council.

Railtrack response Railtrack has responded to our comments on its Network Management Statement. It says Central Trains' Nottingham-Lincoln service will continue to serve both Castle and Northgate stations after the Newark flyover is built. A south-to east curve is included in the plans but a south-to-west curve would "probably not be physically possible". A west-to-north link is being considered. Railtrack is discussing with train operators and local authorities whether it would be feasible to close Northgate and replace it with an interchange station at the point where the East Coast main line crosses the Nottingham-Lincoln line.

Station upgrades Local authorities and Railtrack intend jointly to improve facilities at Langley Mill, Grindleford, Hathersage, Bamford, Hope, Edale, Chinley and New Mills Central stations. Likely measures are improved accessibility and security, extra seating and litter bins, landscaping, improved lighting and parking facilities and more cycle racks.

RDAs We now have Regional Development Agencies, concerned primarily with wealth creation. Many have issued consultation documents stressing our poor performance compared with other EU regions.

RDS says people need to be able to take up education and employment opportunities.

This RDS branch has responded that people often cannot, because public transport starts too late, ends too early and hardly exists on a Sunday – which puts us at a disadvantage compared to the continental regions with which we compete.

South Wales

By Peter Clark

Land of cuts Has your train operator increased services and perhaps ordered new stock, or even pressed for infrastructure improvements to allow it to run more trains? If so, please spare a thought for us. The winter timetable saw a reduction in the number of trains between Wales's two largest cities – Cardiff and Swansea – with Swanline local trains reduced to a two-hourly frequency and combined with what used to be fast trains between Cardiff and West Wales. The implications are many. Eastbound from Swansea, the Swanline trains depart five minutes after the hourly First Great Western London service (having arrived from the west just before the latter) so are virtually useless as extra trains between the princi-

pal stations, which therefore have a service almost back to that of 1992, before the introduction of regular long-distance trains running along the entire south Wales corridor. Despite Cardiff's booming economy, and attractiveness for commuters and shoppers, there is a gap of one hour (between successive FGW London trains) in the evening peak to stations west of Bridgend. Whenever we protest about these cuts we are told that the new timetable meets the passenger service requirement which we do not dispute. Therefore our approach is to draw attention as widely as possible to this unsatisfactory situation, particularly among those who will influence franchise replacement, and to make comparisons with what is happening elsewhere. Meanwhile the irony of the present position is not lost on us. Two years ago we suggested to Wales & West that the through West Wales-Cardiff-England trains could usefully be diverted via the Vale of Glamorgan line which we want to see reopened. The proposal was firmly rejected, on the grounds that the Carmarthen-Cardiff market would not stand the resulting time penalty, and

the long waiting time, often 15 minutes or more, of these trains at Cardiff Central was needed for operational purposes. Lo and behold! in the new timetable Carmarthen-Cardiff through trains are now 22 to 30 minutes slower than they were then (apart from the one daily train which still operates as an express) – and this happens to be the extra time that would be needed to run via the Vale! And it has been found possible to greatly reduce the standing time at Cardiff! Where there's a will there's a way perhaps?

National Assembly We submitted a briefing paper *A Kick Start for Welsh Railways* to members of the Assembly's environment committee (which includes transport) and to other assembly members who showed interest by responding to our pre-election questionnaire. We have met the minister concerned, Peter Law, to discuss this and we also attended the environment committee debate on the Railways Bill. The briefing paper brought some sympathetic and encouraging responses, but there is quite widespread concern over the Assembly's lack of real powers over rail.

Objective one funding This is

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Local action



currently the political hot potato in Wales, with the ruling party seemingly unwilling to commit itself to matching funding. But the Single Programming Document provided another opportunity for us to put forward a list of suitable projects, to a different audience this time. These included line reopenings such as Ebbw Vale-Newport (which scheme is thought to depend essentially on getting Objective 1 funding), new stations on the main line such as Llanharan and St Clears, the possible rebuilding of some former lines such as Pontarddulais-Gowerton, and the enhancement of the Fishguard Harbour line for both passenger and freight. (The SPD places considerable emphasis on improving the land bridge to Ireland and effecting modal shift to rail). The Fishguard line is one of the most under-used in Britain. The train operators have made no attempt to cater for the rapidly expanding ferry traffic, having ignored the introduction of fast ferries several times a day, and continuing to offer connections only with the twice-daily conventional ferry sailings.

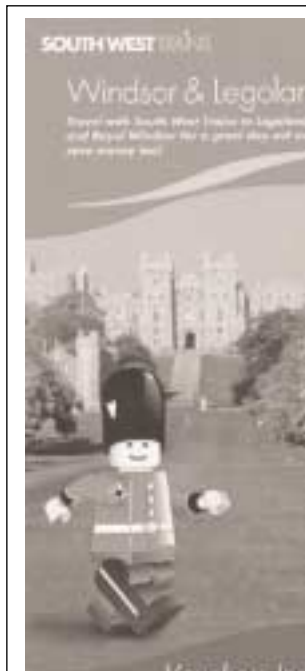
National Eisteddfod The praiseworthy efforts made by Wales & West and the local authority (Bridgend county borough council) to cater for visitors to the Pencoed Eisteddfod in 1998 resulted in 15% of visitors using public transport, compared with a more typical 5%. Next year the event is at Llanelli and we have contacted the various parties to urge them to build on the Pencoed experience, learning from its successes and its shortcomings, to try to secure an even higher modal share for public transport. So far only Wales & West has responded positively. Much greater problems arise when the Eisteddfod site is not near a railway, as will be the case at St David's in 2002, and we have written to the event organisers urging that availability of public transport be accorded a higher priority when sites are selected in future. A response is awaited.

Midlands

By Alan Bevan

Tunnel vision Growth in rail traffic is prompting several major developments around the Midlands. Not least of these is consideration of a possible new cross-city rail tunnel under Birmingham to relieve capacity constraints on the approaches to New Street station. Such a tunnel, thought to cost some £250m, would link Five Ways and Aston and perhaps use the disused

Central goods station tunnels and the former Windsor Street goods lines. A new tunnel under the existing New Street station would of course mean a deep level station with attendant long escalators. A study into this scheme and other solutions to the mounting rail congestion bottlenecks around the Birmingham area is being led by



The train is by far the best way to visit Windsor where the castle, St George's chapel, Eton College, and the river cruises are the most well-known attractions. This South West Trains leaflet includes money-off vouchers and details of an all-inclusive rail-bus and entry ticket to Legoland. Please note however, Legoland does not reopen until March.

the Strategic Rail Authority, which is expected to report by mid-2000.

Freight reopening Congestion is also leading to acceptance by rail industry key players that the strategic north-south rail freight route via Lichfield, Walsall and Stourbridge which closed in the mid-1980s will now have to be reopened. A round table meeting of all interested parties met on 30 September when general support was given to this quest along with strong interest in establishing a new inter-urban rail passenger service between Worcester, Stourbridge, Walsall, Lichfield and Burton on Trent.

Track sharing with a six-minute frequency Midland Metro service would occur between Wednesbury and Round Oak.

Chiltern Railways Strategic Plan for its franchise extension advocates reopening three platforms at the dormant Moor Street terminal station, a new £3m junction at Bordesley to link with the fast lines, construction of Warwick Parkway station, additional services and eventually four-tracking for 10 miles from Tyseley to Dorridge. On the "premier line", it is thought Railtrack will go ahead with quadrupling the Berkswell-Stechford part of the main line.

Not to be outdone Central Trains are planning to extend the Nottingham-Leicester-Coventry services via Kenilworth-Leamington and Banbury to Oxford in September 2000. Also the irregular trains from Walsall to Wolverhampton are to be hourly and extended to Wellington. For rail freight a new Post Office depot is planned at Washwood Heath and an aggregates flow from Caldon Low to Tyseley awaits planning permission. Rail passenger counts in central Birmingham record an increase of 8.5% in 1998-99 over the previous year and on Sundays local patronage is up 27.6%

RDS Midlands branch is busy actively supporting and monitoring these many encouraging developments.

Mid Wales and Border Counties

By Chris Magner

Rugby world cup Once again railways proved the best way to transport large numbers of people to a major event. For the Wales v Japan match at Cardiff on Saturday 9 October, three six-coach locomotive-hauled trains ran from Crewe to Cardiff, via the Marches line. There were two loco and coach diagrams on the Rhymney line and also the preserved Hastings unit on a South Coast to Cardiff working. Most Sprinter units were strengthened. Trains were packed to absolute capacity and proved rail is the best and only way to travel to Cardiff on match days.

Withered arm Service improvements are slow in coming, say the Shrewsbury - Chester Rail Users' Association. SCRUA is concerned that there appear to be no real plans to enhance the level of service on the line apart from possible peak hour services and the raising of the low 70mph speed limit. At the Welsh

RUCC meeting at Welshpool on 21 September, this line was referred to as a withered arm and a Cinderella service. Following success on the Cambrian Lines, a community rail officer for the route is to be appointed and should be in post by this month. Wrexham and Chirk stations have been renovated but Ruabon still awaits essential work to be done. Oswestry borough council has offered to donate £10,000 towards the £38,000 Gobowen improvement scheme which will see a remote-controlled information screen, digital clock, poster boards, two high security counter screens with intercom and facility for impaired hearing, telephone system upgrade, new ticket printing system, and computer hardware.

Renovation Work continues on the renovation of the Gobowen to Oswestry branch. Around one thousand sleepers need to be replaced and eight bridges will have to be checked. Quarry owners ARC no longer pay to keep the line open. Work has started at Oswestry station and Park Hall Halt.

Correction to *Railwatch 81*: Locomotive 37403, not D6700, was in operation on the North Wales Coast Line on 24 July 1999. My apologies.

Rail groups praised The RUCC for North Western England's annual report *Putting Passengers First* praised rail user groups. "These groups provide a local focus for rail passengers and often do invaluable work in promoting rail travel. Feedback from the RUGs plays an important part in keeping the RUCC up to date with events on our very large regional railway system." A picture of the North Cheshire Rail Users Group open day at Helsby station was included to illustrate the committee's comments. On Monday 27 September committee members of NCRUG gave out timetables at Frodsham station and at Helsby station on the following day when an Awareness Day was held.

Thames

By Chris Wright

Reliability The branch was represented at the Rail Users Consultative Council Midlands meeting in September and questioned Sliverlink's managing director Charles Belcher and the Connex representative. Mr Belcher gave assurances that Bletchley-Bedford reliability would improve with the introduction of the class 150s. He is in negotiations with Railtrack



about a new station building for Wolverton, one of the worst on the West Coast main line.

Success The Rugby-Gatwick service has proved a great success for Connex which is seeking to enhance it by extending to Brighton and providing on-train catering.

Franchise extension Chiltern Line invited us to a presentation on its franchise extension bid which we warmly welcomed, particularly its interest in an Aylesbury-Milton Keynes service. Chiltern's co-operation with Hertfordshire Rail Tours to organise special trains north of Aylesbury was a great success. On 17 October, a number of local councillors joined RDS to tour the route. RDS and the Oxford-Bicester Rail Action Committee issued a leaflet entitled North of Aylesbury Again.

Rail support The draft local transport plan for Buckinghamshire is supportive of rail, particularly services north of Aylesbury, with stations at Aylesbury North, Quainton Road, Winslow and possibly Claydon Junction. An RDS representative is to attend a consultation meeting.

New stations Oxfordshire's draft local transport plan support Grove and Kidlington at a cost of more than £1 million each.

Railtrack costs Proposals for a multi-storey car park at Beaconsfield have been dropped by South Buckinghamshire Council because of Railtrack's high costings.

East Midlands

By Anthony Kay

Hope for Corby A partnership between Midland Mainline, Corby Borough Council and Northamptonshire County Council is discussing the re-introduction of passenger services to Corby, with a decision due in March 2000. An initial demand study has already been done, with results encouraging enough for Railtrack and Midland Mainline to do more work looking at the infrastructure. There is potential for a station at Oakley Grange, on the south side of the town, as well as one in the town centre.

Integration with buses Midland Mainline and First Leicester City Buses have taken a step towards integration of train and bus services, with the introduction of a through-ticketing deal on 18 October. For a £1.50 add-on fare, travellers to Leicester by Midland Mainline services are allowed one day's unlimited travel on First Leicester's buses. Unfortunately the deal does not extend to

Leicester's other main bus operator, Arriva.

South West

By Gerard Duddridge

Cornwall Public Transport Forum Speakers from the rail and bus industry attended the RDS South West public transport forum in Truro on Saturday 16 October. Bob Houghton from Wales and West spoke of planned improvements to stations at Falmouth Docks and St Austell, but mentioned problems of vandalism as had happened at Bugle. He wished to see more integration and better information such as the display of train information in the centre of Truro at Victoria Square. Use



Train operator WAGN is providing good clear signs for where to load your bike on to its trains. But with each operator having its own set of rules, the situation is still confusing. RDS cycling officer Andy Hoines points out two useful websites for getting information about taking your bike on the train.
<http://www.railinfo.freese.rve.co.uk/railtravel/bikes.html>
http://www.a2bmagazine.demon.co.uk/Bike_Rail.html

There is also a new bikes on trains email list. Send a blank email to: Bikes_on_Trains-subscribe@listbot.com

of the new Penzance-Portsmouth service was growing and it was thought there may be a case for a second daily service. Richard Wills, assistant county surveyor for Cornwall considered there had never been a better time for public transport

although bus services will predominate, but with rail for longer distances. Rail objectives for Cornwall included an intermodal freight facility, the Newquay line diversion, enhancement of the Bristol-Penzance line and rail freight access to individual development. Brian James from First Western National spoke about the importance of clockface services, vehicles with wheelchair access, improved leg room and regular cleaning throughout the day for Cornish buses. Subsidy to buses had almost doubled to £1.2 million since the RDS meeting on bus/rail links in 1995. There were plans to revamp Penzance and St Austell bus stations, both of which are well located for bus/rail interchange. There was a need for combined public transport timetables and the announcement of buslinks on the trains. David Rabey from the Truronian bus company gave further information on the Helstonbus/rail link which is marketed as the 'Helston Branch Line' about the initial idea and about the Cycle Mark award. There are 13 weekday buses from Redruth including connections from the 18.03 Golden Hind from London Paddington. Unlike the rail branch lines the Helston bus link offers a winter Sunday service. The bus will wait up to 10 minutes for late running trains at Redruth and after this alternative arrangements will be made for passengers. The bus link timetable is now included in the Wales and West local timetable booklet and there have been discussions about including information on the departure screens at Redruth. No progress has been made on inclusion of times in the national rail timetable. Cornwall County Council has made a submission for funding to improve interchange facilities at Redruth.

More problems for the Sidmouth line Despite the long campaign by RDS South West for trackbed protection for the closed Sidmouth line from Feniton the route continues to be under threat. The *Sidmouth Herald* reported that a local councillor has persuaded East Devon district council to commission Sustrans to investigate conversion of the route to a cycleway! Given the desirability in the medium term of establishing a commuter rail service to Exeter, which would bring passengers to the heart of Exeter at the Central station, this is a most worrying development. Meanwhile construction of the new A30 road which is blocking the disused alignment near Feniton continues.

North Devon While RDS considers that reopening the line from Barnstaple to Bideford is the priority in north Devon it is disappointing to see further erosion of the Ilfracombe trackbed. At Braunton the Velator link road will cut across the trackbed and has been described by the county as leading to a sustainable economy and safer environment.

North West

By Andrew Macfarlane

A recent appeal to branch members for donations towards the production of the North West Rail Strategy leaflet has met with a tremendous response and the amount required has almost been reached (further donations still welcome). Thanks to all those who have been so generous. The leaflet is currently in a draft form and should be launched in the new year. The fare increases recently imposed by Virgin Trains have been roundly condemned. Particularly galling are the massive increases applied to unregulated "walk on" fares such as super savers. The branch supports calls by Brendan O'Friel, chairman of the North West Rail Users Consultative Committee for an investigation by the Shadow Strategic Rail Authority into Virgin's fares policy. The branch is also very concerned about the Manchester South resignalling scheme due to start in the new year. The scheme itself is much-needed investment in improving reliability and providing capacity, but it seems to benefit Virgin services at the expense of users of local trains. The two intermediate stations between Manchester and Stockport will find themselves with one platform on a fast line in one direction with the other on a slow and the likelihood of trains going to one destination while coming from another! The scheme fails to address conflict at a number of key junctions and an altogether better approach would have been grade separation.

Branch meetings Saturday 22 January Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester. Saturday 25 March Annual General Meeting, the Stretton Hotel, Promenade, Blackpool. Both start at 11.00am.

Re-use labels

New RDS envelope re-use labels are available for £2.75 for a pad of 100. from Phil Morris, 113b Pembroke Road, Clifton, Bristol BS8 3EU. Cheques payable to Railway Development Society.