

Carry on campaigning

By **Alix Stredwick**

The time always comes to say goodbye, and much as I hate to say it, now is the time for me to give up my role of campaigns director for Railfuture.

After nearly two years of writing press releases, appearing on the TV, visiting Railfuture branches and working with other transport campaigners, I'm leaving Railfuture to work as a researcher into passengers' needs for CILT, the Centre for Independent Transport Research in London.

It has been an extremely busy and exciting two years for me, but unfortunately not without the stress that results from tragedy on the railways.

I hope I and the other Railfuture members who have been loudly reminding the media and the public about the relative safety of trains have had some effect.

On a brighter note, I'm glad that RDS has moved with the times to embrace the new Railfuture image, and much credit for this, and of course for the new website, goes to our marketing director Kate Tudor-Pole.

Do remember to visit the website www.railfuture.org.uk and sign the cyber-petition 2001: a Rail Odyssey, which calls for continued investment in the rail network for improvements that



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we all want to see. It looks like the next few months will be crucial for rail in the UK, with the SRA finally putting together its strategic plan for passengers and its plan for freight starting to kick in. With the calls from

many areas to re-think how the industry is structured and whether it should be in private hands at all, UK rail has to prove that it can tempt people back to using trains and encourage people to try services for the first time.

Railfuture will continue to play a crucial role in putting pressure on the powers that be to make sure that improvements are made so that this can happen.

However, it looks like this could be even more of an uphill struggle than usual, what with the doubts over Railtrack's future capabilities and the Government's re-think on rail expansion.

The future for new lines and stations looks in doubt, which to me is ridiculous considering our increasing problems with traffic congestion and weather resulting from global climate change.

I'm sure that Railfuture's dedi-

cated volunteers and staff will continue to shout as loudly as they can to press for improvements that will enable more people and freight to go by train.

Although I'm sad to leave all this behind at Railfuture, I'm really looking forward to my researcher role at CILT. Hopefully I will keep in contact with a lot of Railfuture people who have been extremely supportive and helped me gain the experience I need.

In fact I've enjoyed it so much that you haven't quite got rid of me yet.

I'll be clinging on to Railfuture for one day a week (Fridays) to help with staff continuity.

I'll be developing the campaigns material on the website and produce Railfuture's newsletter for activists, Railfuture Campaigner.

Keep on looking to a rail future!

If you do not hold a position in Railfuture but would like to receive Railfuture Campaigner three times a year, please send a cheque for £5 payable to Railfuture with your name and address, to Alix at the London office: Alix Stredwick, Railfuture, Room 207, The Colourworks, 2 Abbot Street, London E8 3DP. Please mark your envelope clearly RAILFUTURE CAMPAIGNER.

If you have information that you think would be useful for the website, please send it to me at the office marking the envelope clearly WEBSITE or send me an email to alix@railfuture.org.uk stating website in the subject box. Please do the same for information that would be useful for Railfuture Campaigner, stating Railfuture Campaigner.

Eurostar, TGVs and trams – but road lobby is still rampant

By **Jim Walker**

Jimwalker@mistral.co.uk

Railfuture members went to Grenoble, a beautiful city with snow-capped mountains visible at the end of every street – and an interesting public transport system.

TGVs now travel the 574 kilometres to Grenoble – in the Alpes Maritime – direct from Paris in three hours.

Before the TGV the journey took nearly six hours. Now business people can go there and back in a day by train.

During our April visit, some members visited Geneva and others went to Lyon.

One day almost everyone travelled on the Chemin de Fer de La Mure, a preserved railway which starts at St George de Commiers near Grenoble and climbs into the mountains rising 560 metres in 30 km.

The views were breathtaking. This line is a must if you are visiting this part of France. The metre gauge electrified line was

built to carry coal from now closed mines at La Mure down to the standard gauge track at St George which connects to Grenoble. Our party went to St George by bus because the train timetable is too infrequent.

One evening the group heard from the national public transport group's president who lives in Grenoble. M Sivardiere of FNAUT told us Grenoble currently has a very good tram system with two lines covering 11km of track and 31 stations, with a third line planned.

He said that up to 1945 Grenoble had had a good public transport system with trams and trolley buses, but that after the war local transport policy became car oriented resulting in no investment in these systems. The trams finished in 1952 and the trolleybuses ceased later; many highways were built, especially for the Winter Olympics in 1968.

From 1974 to the end of the 1980s policy improved with investment in buses and bus

lanes based on the "social idea" that not everyone has a car, plus a desire to keep the economy of the city centre alive, and the beginnings of green thinking.

M Sivardiere founded a citizens group in 1974 and after a long battle, including a close-fought referendum in 1983, the first tram line opened in 1987 and the second in 1990. The trams are very successful and are self supporting although the local bus services are subsidised.

Since 1990 however, although the rhetoric has become greener, the authorities are backsliding, going back to prioritising the car and allowing low density development unsuitable for public transport.

The new fight for the citizens group is against a road tunnel under the city.

They want the money to be spent on more public transport instead. The Green Party got a good percentage of the votes in Grenoble (a university town) and this may help the decision. FNAUT is a national transport

umbrella group with 150 affiliated groups mainly covering road safety, environmental issues and transport users groups.

They have had some local successes but it is difficult to assess their national impact. This is a critical time in France where a 20-year transport infrastructure plan is being discussed. It is good on green rhetoric and railways but also contains very many road schemes.

On returning to Paris three members of the group (plus five more direct from the UK) attended the first European Rail Passengers Conference which was held in the French Railways offices next to the Gare du Nord. There were 30 delegates representing 11 organisations from eight countries, with proceedings in English, French and German.

■ A full conference report can be obtained by sending Trevor Garrod £1, payable to RDS, and a large stamped addressed envelope.