



## East Midlands

By Anthony Kay  
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**Future of Midland MainLine**  
The "double-headed" open meeting held in conjunction with the branch annual general meeting on 17 March attracted over 70 people to listen to the managing directors of the two train operators in the region. Brian Burdsall of Midland MainLine gave a generally positive outlook, noting that it was easier to attract investment in the private sector. MML had had the fastest growth rate in passenger numbers of any train operator before the Hatfield crash. The company is now looking to replace the Turbostar trains with something more suitable, possibly a new design. One cloud on the horizon is the likelihood of MML being given only four platforms in a rebuilt St Pancras station, which would be insufficient for the proposed level of services. However, all this optimism may now need to be put to one side, since Mr Burdsall was sacked only one week after speaking to us, due to a clash between his vision of a top-quality passenger railway and the desire of National Express Group (owners of MML) to make staffing cuts to save money. It is also rumoured that NEG may want to change MML from an inter-city operation to a long-distance commuter line connecting the East Midlands to London. It is not clear what would happen to Sheffield in this scenario. Another rumour is that NEG might merge MML and Central Trains, despite them being very different operations.

**Future of Central Trains** Back at the meeting, Central Trains managing director Andy Cooper was less upbeat than his MML counterpart, due to CT's much lower level of funding than MML. Also, the stalling of the franchise renegotiations has left CT unable to plan for the future. CT has been barred from running a Nottingham-Leicester-Birmingham-Bristol service because Virgin's operation on the Birmingham-Bristol route is protected. It also appears that lack of train paths will prevent the introduction of a Leicester-Coventry-Oxford service. The branch has recently been told that CT is now not recruiting any new staff, so we can look forward to more train cancellations and other problems.

**Leicester bottleneck** A major constraint on developments in the East Midlands is the capaci-



**This leaflet has been published by the Peterborough to Norwich Community Rail Partnership to boost use of March station. It gives details of ticket prices, bus connections, parking, on-train and station facilities, and telephone numbers. The Countryside Agency provided some funding for it through the Cambridgeshire Rural Transport Partnership. If you would like a copy, send an SAE to 24 Bure Close, St Ives PE17 4FR**

ty problem at Leicester. Signal wiring is rather fragile, which has meant a reluctance on the part of Railtrack to alter it to enable the installation of crossovers, new platforms and other items which are needed to improve capacity.

However, the signalling itself is quite modern, so is unlikely to be replaced unless the project to upgrade the Peterborough-Leicester route for use as a major freight artery from the east coast ports to the Midlands and beyond goes ahead. Railfuture highlighted this problem by getting two major articles published in the *Leicester Mercury*.

**Corby** The feasibility study into the Corby reopening is continuing. There is now the prospect of two stations in different parts of the town, with the possibility of a developer funding one of them.

**Customer survey** The branch is helping the Midlands Rail

Passenger Committee with its station survey by providing information on Leicestershire stations.

## Midlands

By Alan Bevan

**Parkway** Warwick Parkway station is a great success, according to Chiltern Railways, after six months of operation. The station has 250 regular passengers per day who apparently travel by car from Redditch, Kidderminster, Sutton Coldfield and Nuneaton. The majority of passengers travel south to London and about 20% are destined for Birmingham.

**Brownhills** A leaflet calling for the reopening of the 10-mile Lichfield-Brownhills-Walsall route has been circulated by the branch. The line could overcome the serious shortage of capacity on the Tamworth-Water Orton route where there is no capacity for more trains beyond 2003.

**Action stations** Six new stations are proposed for the Birmingham to Tamworth and Nuneaton lines in a new study by Oscar Faber. Now Railfuture is lobbying to encourage support for the stations – The Fort, Castle Vale, Kingsbury, Hams Hall, Arley and Galley Common.

Central Trains has aspirations to provide more trains in the Birmingham area within the next 18 months. The operators head of performance and planning, Mike Haigh, told the branch annual meeting in April that Central wants to see six trains per hour on the CrossCity line and an upgrade to 80mph on the Wolverhampton-Shrewsbury line. Central is also planning to provide an hourly service between Birmingham and Derby, possibly extended over the Matlock branch.

## North East

By Peter Wood

The branch annual meeting, at Newcastle's Royal Station Hotel, on Saturday 31 March, was well attended. Borders Rail was the theme of the meeting with presentations from Simon Longland and Bill Jamieson entitled Campaign for Borders Rail and Borders Rail Futures. Such was the satisfaction with officers and committee that all were re-elected! Our next meeting, in June, will be at Newcastle Airport, the topic being Surface Rail links to the Airport. The Tyne and Wear metro link has proved very successful and the hope now is for heavy rail services, from Scotland as well as

the south. Watch out Manchester! Northern Spirit A meeting at Darlington with managing director Nigel Patterson and other senior colleagues in mid-March, pursued concerns about services in the wake of Hatfield as well as problems resulting from flooding. We understand NS are seeking to improve communications with the travelling public.

David Bishop has recently moved on from his role as general manager north. David was a real rail enthusiast who developed an excellent relationship with the branch. We wish him well in the future. Welcome to Peter Limbert, his successor.

Arriva has kept the branch informed of its plans for the TransPennine franchise, should its bid be successful. We are impressed with its efforts to consult and communicate with people in the region. Its approach has been far more professional than any of their rivals.

**Constitutional changes** The fact that there has been no national vote effectively disenfranchises many Railfuture members. There is a need to establish a mechanism for postal voting for all measures of importance to the society. Even a charge of £1 to do so (to cover the administrative cost of a ballot) would be much cheaper than the rail fare to a meeting in for example Birmingham.

**Multi-modal studies** Branch members are playing their part in a number of current studies, for example the A66 road safety study, the A1 North of Newcastle study and the Tyneside area study – ensuring rail's future potential is not overlooked.

Proposals for reopening Leamside and restoring passenger services to (Ashington) Blyth and Tyne, in Weardale and Wensleydale all seem to be progressing encouragingly. Hopefully there will be better news soon as far as Alnwick is concerned.

**Franchise delays** Continued delays with the awarding of franchises for the region – East Coast main line and TransPennine – do concern us. "Disappointing; could do much better" is our initial report upon the Strategic Rail Authority which is still only a shadow of what we had hoped.

## North West

By Rob Cummings

**Virgin** Any sympathy North West users had for Virgin in the aftermath of gauge corner cracking, quickly evaporated when it



announced yet another huge fare increase. Yes, Virgin has undoubtedly suffered post-Hatfield but coming hard on the heels of regular, above-inflation increases, this just seems like a convenient excuse! So much for grassing over the M6! Virgin also came in for some heavy criticism from the Railfuture-affiliated Mid Cheshire Rail Users Association when it removed stops at Hartford station without informing the regular users at that station. Imagine the surprised regulars waiting on the platform as their usual services cruised through the station without stopping. While you can perhaps understand the reasoning – inconveniencing the few to benefit the many – perhaps Virgin's customers at Hartford would appreciate the courtesy of prior consultation. Likewise, the Lakes Line Action Group was similarly angered when an emergency timetable was introduced which saw expresses departing Oxenholme minutes before the arrival of the branch service from Windermere. The industry may be fragmented but it is still supposed to be a network and given that the emergency timetables have proved, largely, to be a work of fiction, proper cognisance to feeder services such as that from Windermere, should have been given.

**Good news** from Virgin is that their Pendolino trains are running behind schedule and will not be introduced on time! Good news? First impressions of the new stock suggest that people of above average stature will find them somewhat claustrophobic.

## South Wales De Cymru

By Julian Langston  
and Peter Clark

**The Transport Framework for Wales** This is the title of the National Assembly's latest consultation document. We have submitted our response, cross-referenced to our Development Plan *On Track for the 21st Century*. The document seeks views on priorities and contains several maps linking transport with factors such as topography, environmental and heritage conservation, population, rail and bus routes and traffic flows. Some of the data presented show how far there is to go in Wales before rail can be said to be realising its full potential; usage of rail in Wales is less than in the UK overall. Car ownership is also lower, but usage is higher. This is attributed – perhaps not altogether correctly –

to the smallness of the rail network in Wales. But, as the maps show, rail does serve the most densely populated parts where transport demand is greatest, so rail's low market share suggests that perceived quality deficiencies in service provision are influencing choice of travel mode.

Another statistic, perhaps connected with excessive car usage, is that the child pedestrian fatality rate in Wales is the worst bar one (Ireland) in the whole of Europe – a shameful state of affairs which in itself should motivate major changes in transport arrangements. Guided bus is mentioned as an example of "innovative solutions" but light rail is not, despite the latter's superior record in effecting modal shift. Freight-only railway lines are shown on the rail network map but the possibilities of using them to extend the passenger network are not explored. The framework document overall is a potentially useful exercise provided it leads to firm plans and implementation.

**Valley Lines investment** Cardiff Railway Company took some exception to the comments made in *Railwatch 87* that it was not exploiting the opportunities presented by publicly funded infrastructure improvements. Its managing director pointed out that the number of trains serving Taffs Well has increased significantly. This is so, but many of these are northward extensions of City line trains which previously turned round at Radyr. Using the higher line speeds and reduced headways made possible by the signalling upgrade to run some fast services with reduced journey times has not happened yet, nor has there been any significant improvement in the very poor Sunday service provision, though this ought to have been possible with the reduced operational costs arising from not having to staff several signal boxes. We remain of the view that ensuring that public investment in rail infrastructure realises its full potential is a live issue, and one which we hope will be addressed adequately in the new franchise terms. Meanwhile, news that Cardiff Railway is seeking Rail Passenger Partnership funding to improve winter Sunday services is very welcome and we hope the bid succeeds.

**Vale of Glamorgan** In view of problems which have arisen through only two-car platforms being provided on the Maesteg line when reopened, we have sought and obtained an assurance from the National

Assembly that the two new stations on the Vale of Glamorgan line will accommodate four-car trains, and that body also advised us that at least two of the four shortlisted bidders for the Wales & Borders franchise have indicated a desire to extend the service beyond Bridgend – another feature which we feel is highly desirable. The SRA has stated that the 90-day bidding process for that franchise is expected to be commenced "soon after Easter", so should be in progress by the time this appears in print.

**Franchise extension sought** First Great Western is seeking to extend its current franchise by two years, from 2006 to 2008, and held a series of meetings around its territory to present its proposals and seek feedback. A start would be made on high speed train replacement by introducing a small fleet of gas turbine high-speed trains, and there would be "more trains" to Carmarthen (probably two each way instead of one). Otherwise the innovations proposed affect areas outside Wales. The imminent doubling of off-peak Cardiff-London service frequency is an existing franchise commitment. The Cardiff meet-

ing gave a very strong message to FGW on the need for a more robust system of connecting services and we hope it will listen to this and act on it. Although the brochure and presentation made no mention of Fishguard Harbour, it was confirmed in informal conversation that FGW will continue to run there, and will also continue the summer Saturdays Pembroke Dock line service. Our response to FGW included these matters plus a plea for Tenby to get the same improvements as Newquay (the two resorts having much in common), a daily through London service in summer. We also raised the question of fares, pressing for higher APEX quotas now the number of trains between south Wales and London is being increased, and easing of saver/supersaver restrictions, for example to allow earlier arrivals in London.

**West Wales connections** Meanwhile, the Wales Rail Passengers' Committee has been trying to secure a connection to Pembrokeshire from the main down "business" train from London, the 17.30 Paddington-Carmarthen. Its analysis shows starkly how badly Pembrokeshire has fared

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since privatisation. It now takes nearly two hours longer to reach Milford Haven by this service than it did in 1993 (when the Paddington train ran through). The situation is made more exasperating by the existence of a very good London-bound morning service with proper connection from the west. It's not difficult to predict that lack of a corresponding return service is likely to suppress usage of the good outward one. This seems to be another service deficiency which we will be looking to the new franchise agreement to rectify, but the RPC, very commendably, feels a solution cannot wait until then and is brokering an application for RPP funding for an additional Carmarthen-Milford Haven train to connect out of the 17.30 ex Paddington.

**Ebbw Vale** Our assertion that the likely closure of the Corus steelworks makes the rail reopening even more desirable has been echoed by many people and the proposals have gained a higher profile recently. Many people in high places are saying all the right things – yet still falling short of a commitment to proceed in a timely manner. The Assembly's First Minister was quoted as being in favour, but that in view of the high cost, it could take six or seven years to bring about. What is it being compared with? Perhaps the wider costs of not reopening the line should also be considered. Unfortunately the effect of any steelworks closure will be felt long before that. But consultants Steer Davies Gleave who are working on a business plan for the scheme said such a timing is unduly



**These video screens – at Liverpool Street – are just one of the many ways rail passengers can find the information they need to board their trains.**

**At Liverpool Street, these screens are backed up by large, traditional, easy-to-read departure boards.**

**At Waterloo, the traditional boards have now been taken out of use to make way for a vastly inferior system of smaller screens which are much more difficult to read.**

**Mainline stations can be confusing places even for experienced travellers and rail managers should bear in mind their responsibility to provide good information systems for those most in need of it.**

**The biggest complaint from passengers who attended Connex "Your Comments Count" forums was lack of information – 51% – while 35% complained of delays and cancellations and 40% about the station environment.**

**The details of this passenger survey were pasted up at Clapham Junction where the information systems are glaringly inadequate.**

pessimistic, that four or five years was a reasonable guess, but this timetable could be shortened if the steelworks does close because of not having to cater for the steel freight trains.

## South West

By Gerard Duddridge

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**Ivybridge gain** The summer timetable change saw South West Trains extend some of its

Waterloo-Exeter services to Plymouth, calling at Ivybridge on the way, giving the town a through London service. Since Ivybridge station was opened it has suffered from an infrequent train service which has never delivered the hoped-for park and ride scheme for Plymouth commuters, but has benefited from some long-distance use. South West Trains' innovation will hopefully encourage more traditional rail use, particularly as it will provide connections with Eurostar at Waterloo and many connections to the South East and South Coast at Clapham Junction.

**First Great Western** In addition to replacing some high-speed trains with older locomotive-hauled stock as a stop-gap measure until its Adelante units are delivered, First Great Western has cut some services from May 21. Most of the services affected are Plymouth-Paddington trains via Bristol rather than the faster Berks and Hants route trains. However, the summer-only additional Paddington-Penzance daytime service which ran Mondays to Fridays has also been withdrawn together with the Camborne and St Erth stops from its 13.33 Paddington-Penzance service. Passengers for these stations will have to change at Redruth on to the following Virgin Dundee-

Penzance train. St Ives passengers will have to change twice with a two-minute connection at St Erth which Wales & West admits is very tight. It is difficult to understand why Great Western has done this, especially as the train formed the first evening peak service after 17.00 in West Cornwall and is presently very heavily used by commuters.

There has been much negative publicity about the short term use of some loco-hauled sets of Mk2 stock. However, First Great Western has carried out a full interior refurbishment with new seats, tables, vestibule doors, and wheelchair access. Once the Adelante units are running from Paddington to South Wales, the InterCity 125s will be returned to the South West, with the loco-hauled sets retained to provide cover and perhaps even offer additional services. Longer term, FGW's Gerald Taylor told the South West branch annual general meeting that a trial is likely to take place with gas turbine units with a view to replacing the InterCity 125s.

**Freight depot** Newton Abbot Railfreight Limited intends setting up a depot at Hackney Yard, leasing the site from Railtrack. The depot would have good local road access on to the A380 which links South Devon and Torbay. Local press reports say the company is talking to several other companies about moving traffic via the depot and that up to 100 jobs could be created by the scheme.

**Bus links** Truronian has introduced a connecting bus service from St Austell station to the recently opened Eden Project, but unfortunately it has not prevented some very lengthy queues of cars trying to get into the attraction. The service follows the same formula as the "Helston Branch Line" bus with low-floor easy-access vehicles timed to connect with most trains at St Austell. Details from Truronian on 01872 273453. The county council also plans extending the "branch line" scheme to First Western National's Bodmin Parkway-Padstow service. Unfortunately, Devon County Council is planning to withdraw some of its less well used local bus services. One will be the Weymouth-Exeter service which will no longer serve St Davids station but terminate at the bus station instead. Users wishing to connect with the train will have to walk into the High Street and catch the local minibus to the station instead, or face a longer walk to Central station for a Wales & West train. The reason

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for the cut is to "obtain better operational efficiency". Apparently only occasional passengers travelled through to St Davids.

**Brixham Branch** Brixham, on the southern side of Torbay, has no trains to serve the population of over 18,000. We would like to see Exeter-Paignton trains extended to Kingswear, which would then bring regular services to within two miles of the town at Churston. Had the two-mile branch from Brixham to Churston been retained, with through rail services to Newton Abbot and beyond, it would undoubtedly have been well used today. Regrettably the trackbed has disappeared within the town, and a new station on the edge would leave passengers to reach the town centre and other districts through a maze of residential roads. However, rail-based transport may still return to the Brixham branch as a tourist attraction. The Bristol-based Ultra Light Railway Company is putting together a scheme for electric trains to run from Churston to the edge of Brixham, from where Edwardian-style buses would run to the town centre.

## Thames

By Chris Wright

**Lobbying for the future** Branch members and rail user group representatives attended a meeting organised by M40 Trains to discuss franchise renewals. We mentioned our strategy and there was a wide-ranging discussion about airport links, East-West rail, Kidlington, Bourne End to Wycombe, Greenford branch, customer service, train condition and information.

**Action** The branch annual general meeting was addressed by a speaker from Chiltern Railways. We welcomed proposals for the new franchise and said we are keen to see the secondary operations implemented, including Aylesbury-Milton Keynes, Oxford-Princes Risborough and Calvert-Rugby. Subsequently Chiltern agreed an £11million deal with the Strategic Rail Authority for improvements prior to finalising the 20-year franchise. It includes seven extra vehicles, bus links, grants to user groups and development work on Project Evergreen dealing with capacity.

**Birthday celebration** Thames Trains have been asked to help celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Oxford-Bicester (Bletchley) line.

**Cash hold-up** Stations at Kidlington and Grove/Wantage



**This attractive leaflet gives details of 17 places in South Wales linked with writer Dylan Thomas. It is a very useful aid to tourists who want to visit the area, with some information in Welsh, German, French and Dutch.**

**The map shows major and minor roads and the rail route from Swansea to Fishguard. Sadly it fails to show the Central Wales line although it was published "in partnership" with Wales & West which runs trains on the line. Roads are shown as far as Llandovery but the 11 stations between Swansea and Llandovery are excluded.**

**For many tourists a trip on the Central Wales line would be a journey of discovery in itself. The leaflet was published by Carmarthen County Council, the city and county of Swansea, Cerdigion County Council, Pembrokeshire County Council, Antur Cwm Taf/Teifi, First Cymru, with financial support from the Wales Tourist Board.**

Road are still being pursued by Oxfordshire County Council. Planning applications are being made and funding sought from Railtrack and the SRA. It is

hoped Rail Passenger Partnership fund applications are processed more efficiently than they are for East-West rail.

**East-West Bids for Rail Passenger Partnership funding for Oxford-Bletchley are still with the SRA, over a year since work started and six months after the bids were lodged. We have lodged our concerns. Skanska has meanwhile been appointed by the East-West Rail Company (part of GB Railways) to promote the project.**

**Stop here please** Winslow town council has agreed to have a public meeting on East-West rail to make sure Winslow gets a new station, probably on a new site.

## Yorkshire

By Peter Davies

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**Strategic Rail Plan for Yorkshire** At the annual general meeting of the branch held at the Queens Hotel, Leeds, it was agreed that the branch would produce a Strategic Rail Plan for Yorkshire. This will be a campaigning document for the branch to work to over the next 20 years.

**Class 333 electric units** Fourteen of the new Siemens class 333 electric multiple units are now in service, and the final two are awaiting completion of trials before they can be accepted. All the units will be working on the Airedale and Wharfedale lines. The eight remaining class 308 units are expected to continue in service until December 2001.

**Leeds 1st Scheme** After the problems experienced during the Christmas period, the rail network in Leeds was closed down over Easter to allow further infrastructure work to be carried out.

**Brighouse** The new station enjoyed the benefits of additional services during the blockade of the station at Leeds. Despite initial problems, services have been operating direct to Leeds and Manchester Victoria.

**Light rail for Leeds** The branch was delighted to learn about the allocation of funding for the return of trams to Leeds. At a cost of £500million, 28 kilometres of track will be laid from Tingley in the south of the city, to Headingley and the eastern part of Leeds.

## London

By Ray King

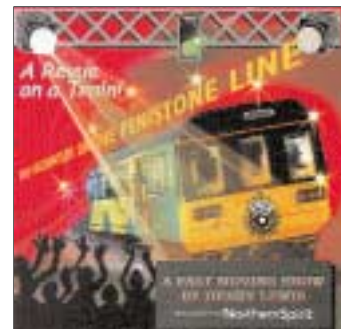
It was party time in Hackney on 21 May when the new timetable

came into force. For the first time for years, Cambridge Heath and London Fields stations enjoyed an evening and a Saturday service. The local rail user group invited WAGN managers, councillors and passengers to a party at the Pub on the Park in London Fields. Campaigner Graham Larkbey composed a special song for the occasion and sang it to the assembly, accompanying himself on a guitar.

The next stage of the campaign is to try to persuade WAGN to increase train frequencies and to run Sunday trains. There were many messages of support sent to the group from people who could not attend, including MPs Brian Sedgemore and Oona King, London Assembly member Meg Hillier, BBC newsreader Mike Embley who lives near London Fields, and Crispin Truman of the London Cycling Campaign.

As Hackney is home to Europe's biggest community of active artists, the group is also hoping to get some creative input into brightening up the stations. Sculptures, murals and mosaics are some of the options the group is hoping to investigate.

At one time, it looked as if the two stations might close. Now they are fulfilling a vital social function and the future looks brighter.



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