

Local action



Midlands

By Alan Bevan
0121 745 6001

Lobbying The branch has produced a four-page colour leaflet summarising our rail aspirations for the West Midlands. We have distributed hundreds to MPs, councillors, rail companies and other interested parties. For copies, send an A4 sae to Peter Hughes, 19 Redwood Road, Kings Norton, Birmingham B30 1AE.

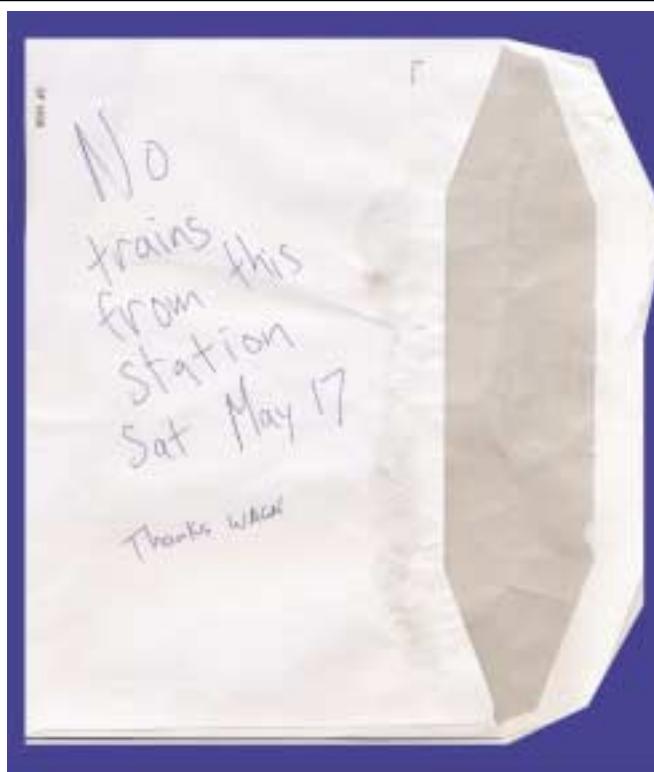
Freight Between Bescot and Walsall station three rail freight developments are in progress. Enhancement of the English, Welsh and Scottish Railway express parcels depot; expansion of the steel supplies terminal; and a new cement terminal for rail-served deliveries from Buxton. However re-use of the dormant two-mile Brierley Hill-Pensnett branch and construction of a new steel supplies warehouse was rejected by Dudley Council after protests from vociferous residents who prefer to keep the greenery of the branch line. The council's official policy is to promote rail freight and re-use of the Pensnett branch.

Farewell Maurice Members were saddened at the death of Maurice Newman in November a few months before his well-earned retirement. He was a conscientious engine driver and a stalwart rail campaigner. He helped retain the Stratford-on-Avon to Birmingham line and worked hard to reopen his local Cannock line to passengers.

Frankley For a second year running, a bid for Local Transport Plan funding to reopen the Longbridge-Frankley branch line for extended cross-city line trains has been declined by the Department for Transport. This time the department claimed the need for even more details of the scheme. The delay enabled the Strategic Rail Authority to defer its share of the funding package and subsequently suspended its Rail Passenger Partnership scheme. A fresh bid is possible in 2004.

Bloxwich The Midlands branch has been promoting relocation of the "temporary" wood frame platforms slightly south to the original Station Street location to serve a wider area, facilitate car parking, and a much-needed ticket office. The present site is hidden in a cutting and makes an unsafe and uninviting situation, used as a haunt for vandals and drug users.

West Coast main line In our response to the SRA West Coast Strategy, the Midlands branch



This was what awaited passengers who wanted to catch a train from London Fields station on Saturday 17 May. Scribbled on the back of an envelope was the message:

"No trains from this station. Thanks WAGN."

The envelope, presumably written by an angry passenger who had discovered there were no trains, was tucked into the door which led into the foyer of the station. There is no ticket office at the station but, on that day, there were three large posters detailing ongoing engineering work on the line on various dates. No engineering work was listed for 17 May.

WAGN, the train operator responsible for the station, has a dismal record of providing information at London Fields and nearby Cambridge Heath station where there was no sign at all that no trains would run on 17 May. On a normal day, 1,000 passengers use the two stations.

In its wisdom, however, the Strategic Rail Authority has shortlisted WAGN's parent group National Express to take on the Greater Anglia franchise which will include all the trains currently run by Anglia, First Great Eastern – and WAGN – from London's Liverpool Street.

welcomed the more extensive quadrupling of the Trent Valley line, re-use of the Nuneaton fly-over and fly-unders together with a new east side platform, an extra platform at Wolverhampton, and electrification of the Kidsgrove-Crewe line. To aid main line capacity and line speeds, the branch is also urging "in-fill" electrification of the Walsall-Rugeley line so that slow Sprinter trains can be replaced by higher-speed electric trains. This would benefit the Trent Valley main line and provide a useful diversionary route.

Editors' apology: This report should have appeared in Railwatch 95.

line upgrading and a deferment of such projects as Leamside and Ashington, Blyth and Tyne re-openings. Both the Tyne and Wear Passenger Transport Authority and local authorities in the region have made representations to the Government expressing their concern.

Annual meeting The branch AGM, at which all officers were re-elected, was held in Newcastle on 22 March. Neil Buxton of the Association of Community Rail Partnerships spoke about developments in the Esk Valley. The plans for community involvement and development of services presented a refreshing alternative to Richard Bowker's downbeat message.

Arriva Our next branch meeting will be on 17 June at the St Mary's Centre, Middlesbrough at 19.00. Peter Myers, head of stations for Arriva Trains Northern will be our guest and we hope also to see Andrew Haley, Arriva's new external liaison manager.

Darlington interchange Darlington area members are looking at the possibility of supporting a campaign to persuade the local authority to develop a transport interchange for the town.

Journey ambience A survey by one of our members identified 700 tonnes of scrap over the 100 miles of the East Coast main line between Darlington and Berwick. There is a need to tidy-up the railway. It would improve travellers' perceptions of their journey. Some weeding and more regular litter collections at stations would be a good start. And please, Arriva, can we have litter bins back at your stations?

North-East

By Peter Wood
0191 5226036

Strategic lecture A number of members attended the public lecture given by the Strategic Rail Authority chairman Richard Bowker at Newcastle University on 27 February. Members were prominent during the questioning that followed. The message was not a palatable one, with Mr Bowker emphasising the current financial problems facing rail and the need to get costs under control. In the north-east the recently published SRA Strategic Plan has indicated a radical scaling down of the East Coast main

Devon and Cornwall

By Stuart Walker
railfuturesw@swalker79.fsnet.co.uk
and Gerard Duddridge
C.A.Duddridge@exeter.ac.uk

Rail-bus links First Group introduced a new Cornish bus network from 13 April in an attempt to reduce heavy losses from the old bus network. Services are faster by reducing the number of deviations to small villages. In Devon, Stagecoach has also cut back country services from 27 April. Boscastle and Tintagel lose their bus-rail link to Exeter St Davids. The bus starts instead as a new service from Newquay, still serving Camelford and Launceston. The Newquay coach is promoted as faster than the train (although most buses



are slower than the summer Saturday through trains) and offers a £3 off peak return fare, undercutting the £19.20 day return rail fare. Although some of our suggested bus-rail links were included in First's new network, a link between Launceston, Callington and Liskeard station was not. First Group has not taken up our challenge to provide premier bus-rail links. With the exception of the Exeter-Bude service its buses are not timed to connect with train services in the same way as Truronian does with their Helston Branch Line service. Budleigh Salterton, which lost its rail service in 1967, now loses almost all its buses to Exeter. In place of two buses per hour, just three per day run to Exeter in the morning and two back in the evening. The Exmouth-Exeter bus now runs every 10 minutes to compete with the railway, but the train still provides a faster service to the city centre and St James Park halt is close to the University campus. St Davids station gains a regular service to Cowley, five buses per day to Thorverton and Tiverton, plus new evening buses to Okehampton and Bude at 19.25 and 20.40. However, since reorganisation the university bus no longer serves either Exeter St Davids or Central stations.

Integrated transport? Some readers may have seen Railfuture Devon and Cornwall's involvement with Barry Doe's article in *Rail* magazine about the new First Devon and Cornwall Bus/Railcard. It was introduced by First Group for £10 giving unlimited travel for the day on First Group's buses and First Great Western Trains between Penzance and Totnes. Fine in principle, except that First Group is not the main train operator in Cornwall and run none of the stations. Thus the ticket was valid on only eight out of 20 trains between Plymouth and Penzance and none of the Cornish branches – but you could use the bus instead! None of the Cornish rail station ticket offices issue the ticket as they are run by Wessex Trains, so rail users either have to buy it from a bus driver or ignore all the posters (including First's) advising you to buy your ticket before boarding a train, and buy the ticket from a First Great Western train manager. Already, Wessex Trains has advised Railfuture it is getting complaints from passengers who did not understand that their train is not a First Great Western service and wonder

why they have to pay twice. Despite some mixed messages about offering choice to passengers between using their buses and Wessex's branch line trains, First denies that the aim of the ticket is to compete with the branch lines. It has said it would participate in a multi-bus and train operator scheme, provided it offers "revenue benefits" for First. However, it does not want the hassle of running such a scheme itself and would prefer another company or a local authority to do it instead. Railfuture Devon and Cornwall will bear this in mind when the Greater Western Franchise competition eventually starts and hopes other companies will offer a multi-operator bus and rail rover ticket as part of their bid.

Branch line improvements The Newquay branch has had its summer Sunday service extended to run from the end of May to the end of September this year. Previously the service was only available in July and August apart from one through First Great Western train. All Cornish branch lines now have Sunday services throughout the summer, with Falmouth and Gunnislake Sunday services running in the winter as well. This is a recognition of the leisure market these branches serve when weekend services can be in more demand than weekday trains. Unfortunately, the weekday early morning summer train on the Newquay branch has been axed, along with Falmouth's Friday night late service. This is apparently a casualty of Wessex Trains having to fill main line gaps left by Virgin Train's withdrawals.

East Anglia

By Nick Dibben

Rising costs It's not just the cost of rail projects that is rising. Road scheme costs also appear out of control. The difference is that the Government does not appear to care about the cost of road projects and is happy to hand over the money. For example, when the Cambridge to Huntingdon multi-modal study recommended adding an extra lane to the A14, the cost of the 23 mile project was put at £192million. In April 2003 just 15 months later, the Government gave its approval in principle to the scheme now costing £490million. That's a £300million increase or 155%.

Busway plans Cambridgeshire County Council is planning to put its (mis)guided bus proposals on the former St Ives line out

to public consultation in the summer, prior to applying for Transport and Works Act. There are still many questions about the scheme which are unresolved such as the exact route into Cambridge city centre, or even if that's where the buses will end up. How the scheme will integrate with other existing bus services is also unclear. Councillors have taken to calling their pet project rapid transit even though the buses on the busway will run at a slower speed than they could on existing roads!

Strategy required Following the failure of the Government to give approval to the Thameslink 2000 project, the branch has written to the Strategic Rail Authority asking about its plans for short-term improvements on the Great Northern local services to Peterborough and Cambridge. We have suggested longer platforms, more coaches to ease congestion and better access to stations. The branch has also written to the SRA about its freight strategy. Following the announcement that the preferred route between Felixstowe and Nuneaton is via

London, we have suggested that the line between Felixstowe and Peterborough still needs to be upgraded. Both English Welsh and Scottish Railway and GB Railfreight are running extra freight trains between Felixstowe and the north-east.

Services under threat? The branch is questioning suggestions by the SRA that the Greater Anglia franchise bidders cut midday and evening services to allow for extra maintenance work. The branch does not understand why the rural routes need several extra hours maintenance time each day and considers that late night trains out of London after 23.00 are very busy with people having spent an evening in the capital.

Lincolnshire

By Brian Hastings

01724 710528

Railfuture members had the opportunity to question three rail managers and the county transport chief at the branch annual general meeting on 22 March. The venue was only two minutes from Lincoln station. The guests were Tony Brown,

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network director of Central Trains East, Nigel Carlisle, group station manager at Lincoln for Central Trains, Peter Myers, stations manager for Arriva Trains Northern, Cliff Mayall, Arriva Trains Northern's sales manager for East Yorkshire and Lincolnshire, and Tony Cross, head of transport services for the county council.

Members called for more frequent trains between Lincoln-Doncaster and Lincoln-Grimsby. Mr Brown gave a very positive address assuring us that Central Trains recognised the need for stronger management in Lincolnshire and accepting performance had been below par in 2002. The appointment of Mr Carlisle would reinforce management on the spot.

He said reliability would improve by terminating Skegness to Manchester Airport trains at Crewe. A dedicated Lincoln-Newark North Gate shuttle would begin on 18 May, a compromise that would see the Nottingham service separated and run independently. Central Trains plans to improve train cleaning and to speed up turnrounds and servicing at Nottingham. On the Skegness line, Mr Brown said: "Year on year, we have promised an end to overcrowding. This summer will see an end to use of single-car 153 units on the Skegness line. Judge me in four to five months."

Mr Cross said the original optimism of the 10-year plan had disappeared. The Strategic Rail Authority had little in its plan to encourage rail campaigners in the county. The moratorium on Rail Passenger Partnership schemes has dashed hopes of improvements. But the county hoped to develop partnership schemes for Lincoln-Spalding and Grantham-Skegness where rail's share of the market could easily be improved.

He concluded: "We have to make the case for rail by working with the SRA and regional planners."

Arriva's Mr Myers said 2002-2003 had been a difficult year because of industrial action. Morale needed to be rebuilt and management restructured. TransPennine and Northern Rail will become two separate franchises from September 2003.

During the business part of the building, a new position of vice chairman was created – and filled by Railfuture national executive member David Harby. Peter Honniball stood down as a

The lure of real ale is helping to attract people to the Manningtree-Harwich line in Essex. The leaflet, left, produced by First Great Eastern, the local branch of the Campaign for Real Ale and the Essex Community Rail Partnership – based at Mistley station – lists many of the pubs which can be visited from what is now dubbed the Mayflower Line. You don't even need to leave Manningtree station because the station buffet serves Adnams bitter. At Harwich Town, 12 pubs are listed. But you have to take the bus, or walk, to the Devon at Tolgate and Ye Olde Cherry Tree, a CAMRA favourite at Little Oakley.

committee member but will continue to distribute the branch newsletter.

Lincoln-Newark The services were reorganised for the May timetable, closing some of the big gaps between trains. With the A46 road widening well advanced, the need for improved services is pressing. Good publicity is now needed.

Allington chord Central Trains will be able to timetable better connections with GNER at Grantham and improve reliability once the chord is reinstated in 2004-2005.

Rail relief A scheme to use Grantham station approach road alignment as an extension of the inner relief road has been dropped after Railfuture and the rail industry mounted stiff opposition. The county council blocked our attendance at a key meeting but did agree to meet Brian Hastings and David Harby at a separate meeting where Railfuture put a well-presented case against the scheme. We said we did not want to see the mistakes of the 1960s and 1970s when towns such as Doncaster, Peterborough and Port Talbot saw their rail stations marginalised by inner relief roads.

Airport potential The former RAF Finningley is to reopen

next year – as a regional airport. The Lincoln-Doncaster joint line skirts the airfield so Lincolnshire and Yorkshire branches are to co-operate in promoting use of rail for the airport.

Communication breakdown Work is under way at Gainsborough Lea Road making good the ravages of vandals. But a different sort of vandalism which broke up the railway is intractable. The former BR public address system for the station is silent. Network Rail controls Gainsborough Trent junction signal box where the announcements should be made from, but Central Trains runs the station. Customers are completely out of the loop, completely forgotten on a bleak, windswept station if services are late, cancelled or disrupted.

Distant memories BR would not have tolerated the situation at Stow Park where the up distant signal was left out of commission for several weeks by Network Rail. All trains had to slow down to check the home signal.

Wessex
By Peter Argent
peter@fintrain.fsnet.co.uk

The branch has been campaigning relentlessly for the reopen-

ing of Chandlers Ford station and the reinstatement of services on the Romsey to Eastleigh line.

So it was a red letter day on 8 March when the branch AGM, with over 50 members present, received a presentation from project engineer Richard Stocks from Hampshire County Council on the progress towards reopening of the station.

It reopened this May when the summer timetable was introduced. Despite the cuts imposed from the Strategic Rail Authority, this project got the go-ahead and we were informed of the planning and design process and saw impressions of the station buildings.

With a catchment of 21,000 potential passengers the station has been designed with future expansion in mind. Initially served by a new Romsey to Totton service, linking with Southampton Airport and Southampton Central, there will be an hourly service from 06.30 to 23.30 using new Class 170 units. The station will be staffed for one shift from 06.30 to 13.30 but if demand rises a second shift will be introduced. The SRA has committed revenue support for three years for the project. The station, footbridge and buildings are being financed from developers' contributions.

On a less enthusiastic note the branch understands that, to relieve congestion, the only fast or semi fast service between Southampton and Bournemouth in the morning peak is being withdrawn. Commuters to Bournemouth and students at Brockenhurst College face an hour's wait at Southampton. The branch is taking this up with the SRA, particularly as the operator may continue to be paid under the current contract even though passengers have to stamp their feet on the platform. A campaign to promote the Weymouth to Westbury line, currently being "reviewed" as to its viability, will be launched by the branch in the early summer.

Yorkshire
By Peter Davies
peter@bh-cc.co.uk

Annual get-together The annual general meeting and luncheon was held at the Union Bank Restaurant on Saturday 15 March and the guest speaker was the Railfuture chairman Peter Lawrence.



New waiting shelters New shelters are to be provided at 13 stations in West Yorkshire: Lockwood, Brockholes, Baildon, Ben Rhydding, Bramley, Burley in Wharfedale, Crossflatts, Deighton, Fitzwilliam, Garforth, Headingley, and Morley.

Sadly, two stations (Lockwood and Bramley) have already been vandalised before the work has been completed at all the stations.

Rail reopenings report A launch of a joint report by the Countryside Agency, and the Transport Research and Information Unit has indicated that in the medium to long term the following former rail routes should be reopened within the Yorkshire area: Harrogate (Dragon Junction) to Northallerton, Redmire to Garsdale, Malton (Rillington Junction) to Pickering, and Otley to Arthington.

Trans-Pennine Express Franchise A further delay has occurred with regard to the announcement of the preferred bidder for Trans-Pennine. It is interesting to note, however, that Connex has not been selected for the North of England franchise.

Cononley The village council is delighted with services calling at the station. The only problems over the past two years have been an increase in vandalism and an overflowing car park.

Copmanthorpe No money is available for new stations at Haxby and Strensall on the York to Scarborough line but the City of York Council has commissioned a study into the possibility of opening a new station at Copmanthorpe. The opening would require realignment of the East Coast main line to accommodate it. Consideration is also being given to a new station at Poppleton Park on the Harrogate line.

York The National Railway Museum expects 50,000 visitors for the special nine-day 2 exhibition to mark the two hundredth anniversary of the introduction of the railways.

Thames Valley

By Chris Wright
chriswrightmk@aol.com

Bicester-Oxford-Bristol This service was withdrawn in May "to ease rail congestion". Thames Trains are withdrawing five lightly used evening trains. We have suggested the services should have been extended to Milton Keynes and Bedford.

East-West This vital rail scheme

The longest railway station bench in the world has been brightened up as part of a community scheme for young offenders.

The 152 yard long bench is at Scarborough Station which is managed by Arriva Trains Northern. Peter Myers, Arriva's head of stations, explained: "We suggested the painting of the bench at Scarborough Station as a worthwhile project for young people to be involved in. It is an interesting landmark which they have helped to maintain for the local community and visitors to the town." Now Christine Botham, sales and quality supervisor at Scarborough Station, has something else to be proud of.

Picture:
Arriva
Trains

has again faltered because the Strategic Rail Authority has failed to decide on the Rail Passenger Partnership bid, pending the outcome of a new freight study undertaken in May. Meanwhile road schemes continue to be approved and proposed. Some encouragement has however emerged from the recent multimodal studies and proposed expansion of Milton Keynes where the line is a key project. Newton Longville, near Bletchley, is also to be the site of new Shanks waste facility which will have to be rail-connected. This will provide another argument for reopening the Oxford-Bletchley line. Will the SRA respond?

Winslow The station, if it ever reopens, is now proposed for a new site west of Buckingham



Aylesbury-Risborough service), car park extensions, fare offers, discussions on Aylesbury North. Chiltern is an example to other train operators of what can be achieved.

Rail advocate Oxfordshire County Council has appointed a rail officer who has been invited to speak at the branch meeting on 12 July.

Kent

By John Pitcher

John.Pitcher@ic24.net

Fast link At a meeting in Sandwich in February, Peter Collingbourne reported that domestic services on the Channel Tunnel rail link - which opens in four years time - will come under the same franchise which covers existing trains in Kent, currently operated by Connex. That franchise ends in 2006. As to which parts of Kent were to be served by the new express services, John Pitcher said it appeared the Government was going for the cheapest option, London St Pancras, Stratford and Ebbsfleet to either Gravesend or Ashford/Folkestone or Ashford/Canterbury. Failure to serve the Thanet area would be inexcusable, particularly since it was likely that the trains would be stabled at Ramsgate. However Mr Collingbourne said the Strategic Rail Authority's remit did not include the regeneration of Thanet.

Chris Fribbins from the Rail Passenger Committee for Southern England praised Shepway's campaign to bring high-speed trains to Folkestone, but pointed out that there was bad feeling in Maidstone which considered itself left out. He urged the SRA to think again about omission of Medway stations from the plans. He thought that this would cause more road traffic.

Jackie Davidson was concerned about the effect of new services on the existing network, particularly on connecting trains to towns not favoured by direct services. Mr Collingbourne felt that once the timetable for the high-speed trains had been decided, the existing timetable would need considerable re-evaluation. He also wondered if the planned freight-passing loops on the CTRL would be of any benefit to domestic high speed trains and allow increased capacity.

Folkestone Harbour Kent County Council has been told the harbour branch had been "mothballed" but remained part of the national rail network and

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had to be maintained to a basic standard. Closure could not take place without an extensive consultation process.

Network Rail's plans for the Kent network Jackie Davidson said re-signalling of the network was being constantly postponed. Don Clegg felt that capacity at Rochester station was under-utilised, since there were still four tracks available. Peter Collingbourn reiterated that extension of Charing Cross trains from Gillingham on to Sheerness would also be an aid to local journeys since all stops in Medway could then be served. Jackie Davidson reported the Sheerness branch was due to close for three weeks in August for re-signalling. He called for the track to be doubled since this would enhance the prospect of the line being used for freight traffic to the docks.

Wealden Line Campaign East Sussex County Council has now costed reopening at £97million and was committed to preserving the trackbed. SEERA too, was becoming interested. MP Charles Hendry (Con, Wealden) had also attended a Wealden campaign meeting and had expressed support. Running trains through to Seaford, rather than Brighton was now being considered which would avoid need for reversing. Peter Collingbourn recalled that some years ago the consultants Mott McDonald had spoken of the possibility of an Eastbourne / Tunbridge Wells/Ebbsfleet service so this did appear feasible. On the Kent section of the line Peter Collingbourn thought the news that a short section of line between Tunbridge Wells Central and Tunbridge Wells West was to be brought back into use for train stabling brought at least a glimmer of hope. It was discovered in January that a phone company wanted to site a mast on the trackbed in Tunbridge Wells adjacent to the Eridge route. Prompt action by Wealden Line campaigners and Tunbridge Wells councillors ensured that the mast was resited away from the trackbed.

Marshlink A meeting in Rye brought together long-suffering users of the Ashford-Hastings service and a decision was made in January to set up a Marshlink Action Group to fight for improvements, principally electrification and doubling of the track. About 100 people shared experiences of frustrating delays and missed connections. The fact that the service run by



One of Scotland's foremost advocates of rural rail development, Frank Spaven, died at his Inverness home in February, aged 85.

He was credited with saving much of the Highland rail network from oblivion when he was a civil servant at the Scottish Office at the time of the publication of the Beeching Report in March 1963.

He wrote a critique which exposed the mistakes of Beeching's "re-shaping" closure policy.

He pointed out that no account was taken of the social, economic and environmental benefits of the railway to the regions they served and no assessment of the increased road building costs that would result.

He exposed the false figures presented in the report and the failure to include the contributory revenue of secondary lines to the main lines.

Picture:
David Spaven/ TRAIN

Gavia operated between two stations managed by Connex just made things worse. The SRA's citing of low passenger numbers as justification for indefinite postponement of modernisation was roundly condemned. The poor service and unreliability were the very factors keeping passengers away and the lack of ticket checks and problems with buying tickets meant that even the numbers of remaining passengers were consistently underestimated. John Pitcher learnt at first hand of the problems of

people travelling to work from Ham Street to Ashford, or Appledore to Folkestone, and how even the most understanding employers' patience was being stretched to the limits. Returning from this meeting his delayed train pulled into Ashford just as his connection was leaving. MP Michael Foster (Lab, Hastings) referred to it as "the joke line".

Rail watchdog Wendy Toms, present chairman of Rail Passengers Committee for Southern England has not had her appointment renewed despite apparently having expressed willingness to continue. At committee meetings open to the public, Mrs Toms had impressed with her polite but firm approach. John Pitcher felt she had worked tirelessly on behalf of all railway passengers. Perhaps Mrs Toms has been too good at her job for some of the people in power.

East Midlands

By Anthony Kay

A.Kay@lboro.ac.uk

Loughborough station The shortcomings of Loughborough station, which relate to platform length, access to platforms and car parking, have been highlighted by the branch in discussions with the Midlands Rail Passenger Committee. For safety reasons, the platforms have been limited to a usable length equivalent to four-and-a-half coaches, which causes obvious problems for passengers using the high-speed trains that stop there. The safety problems are partly due to insufficient space under a road bridge where the A60 passes over the station. The A60 was closed for several weeks earlier this year while part of the bridge over the slow (freight) lines was rebuilt, but it never occurred to anyone that it might be a good idea to rebuild the whole bridge so the full length of the platforms could become usable! The Victorian footbridge which gives passengers access to platforms two and three is greatly inferior to provision at many other stations on the Midland main line. Although passengers with disabilities or carrying heavy luggage can be escorted over a barrow crossing, a station with the level of usage of Loughborough deserves something similar to the covered bridge with lift access at Kettering. The car park was recently given a tarmac surface, but can still only cater for about 50% of the demand. However, there is a regeneration scheme for the adjacent disused railway

land, which could include a solution to this problem.

The only really positive recent development at Loughborough station has been brought about by the local bus company, Kinchbus. For many years, buses were far too infrequent to be of much use to rail passengers, but Kinchbus now provide frequent services from the station to Loughborough University campus (every 10 minutes during term time) and to Shepshed, both routes passing through Loughborough town centre. Only the taxi drivers have complained about this, although Kinchbus's reluctance to continue services into the evening will still leave the taxis with a fair amount of custom.

East Midlands to Manchester Midland Mainline has recruited over 200 new staff for the London St Pancras to Manchester service which will be running for 12 months during the West Coast main line modernisation. The trains will mostly run non-stop between Leicester and Stockport. If successful, this service will boost the arguments for reopening the direct route to Manchester, via Matlock and Buxton.

Vandalism Network Rail has become so concerned about trespass and vandalism in the Corby area it will be using a helicopter to patrol the railway. Operated by British Transport Police, it will allow officers on the ground to be quickly directed to any incident.

High-speed trains The first of the 16 Midland Main Line HST sets to be refurbished was rolled out on 5 March. The makeover is intended to improve reliability, performance and passenger comfort. However, there have already been complaints that the seats still have fixed armrests.

RPC meeting The branch was represented by Ron Steven at a public meeting held by the Midlands Rail Passenger Committee in Loughborough on 6 February. The Strategic Rail Authority gave a presentation in which it discussed the recent passenger service cancellations and referred to the Midland Main Line utilisation study 2005-8. While considering regional aims and aspirations, this is unlikely to take passengers' expectations and needs into account.

East Midlands Parkway Progress with this new station, to be sited close to Ratcliffe-on-Soar power station, is stalled again, because PowerGen wants indemnity against a future collapse of a cooling tower.