

Yorkshire grit inspires Cast-Iron

By Nick Dibben and Ray King

Volunteers in Yorkshire defied the gloom in the rail industry and have brought back trains to the Wensleydale line.

While rail projects all over Britain are frozen, a regular service began running on 4 July 2003 in Wensleydale which last saw daily passenger trains in 1954!

With grit and determination, volunteers raise £1million and administration manager Richard Russell said: "This is not a heritage railway. We aim to provide a service for local people and visitors which will help revitalise the dale and lead to a drop in the number of cars on the roads."

He eventually wants people to be able to buy a ticket from London King's Cross into the heart of the national park

Trains are now running between Leeming Bar, near the A1, to Leyburn, on the edge of the Yorkshire Dales National Park and the aim is to re-establish a rail link between Northallerton on the East Coast main line, and

Garsdale on the Settle and Carlisle.

If you want to travel on the line, phone 08454 505474 or check www.wensleydalerailway.com

The grit and determination in Yorkshire inspired rail campaigners, but none more so than in Cambridgeshire.

Railfuture member Tim Phillips launched Cast-Iron - the Cambridge and St Ives Railway Organisation - in August a bid to bring back trains to the Cambridge-St Ives line, in defiance of the county council's plans to turn the line into a busway.

By September the group had persuaded the county council to delay its Transport and Works Act application to rip up the railway which lost its passenger service in 1970.

Tim said: "There is now an awareness among the public of a rail option on the table."

Cast-Iron wants to create Britain's first community commuter railway, using private finance. The group wrote to every county councillor and has leafleted every village in the line's catchment area.

Cast-Iron now intends to use the two-month delay in the T&W application to produce a robust business case for the 10-mile long rail line. Cast-Iron wants the line to be run as a locally managed and locally operated part of the National Rail network. Railfuture has fought for the line for over the past 30 years and recently against plans for a busway which was backed by a multi-modal study in 2001.

Although the busway is official county council policy, it has been difficult to find councillors who actually support it and can explain why the system would tempt people out of their cars. The local population remains sceptical. Cast-Iron's long-term aim is to recreate a through route from Cambridge to Huntingdon with links to Network Rail. Stage one would

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TEN WASTED YEARS

The then transport minister Roger Freeman toured the Cambridge-St Ives line in 1993 and said reopening made sense.

Mr Freeman, second left, walked the line at Histon with Tory MP James Paice, Liberal Democrat Councillor Neville Pritchard and Steve Wilkinson - then chairman of Railfuture - who lives in Histon.

At that time reopening would have cost £6.5million. Since then there has been rail privatisation and six years of Labour rule in Britain.

Now the county council wants to spend £75million on a busway.

Picture: Philip Mynott, Cambridge Evening News

The Wensleydale Railway's leaflet

involve setting up a service on existing track between Swavesey and the Cambridge Regional College near the Science Park. This would avoid the need for a level crossing over the busy Milton Road.

Cast-Iron believes this work could be complete within a year compared with the earliest suggested busway opening date of 2007. At least £100,000 has been pledged if a detailed proposal can be developed.

A few days after the creation of Cast-Iron, Network Rail

announced that the line, which had been under engineering possession, had been formally closed. The implications are still being investigated.

Railfuture nationally is helping to fund a leaflet and the East Anglian branch intends to make a contribution to Cast-Iron.

For more details, please see the organisation's website www.castiron.org.uk or contact: Cast-Iron, Frances House, 10 Newmarket Road, Cambridge CB5 8DT.