

Your letters



Trams shame

It seems beyond belief that the Government has pulled the plug on the Merseytram project when the rails are waiting on the quayside in Scunthorpe!

One wonders how much has actually been "saved" by abandoning this, plus two other similar projects?

Current figures show that to build one mile of motorway costs £28million! Yet there is little Government talk of cutting back on road building.

The only way to get people out of their cars is to offer a viable alternative which tramways or light rail systems do, especially in larger conurbations.

Buses tend to be less effective – except in places like London with large numbers of visitors – as they are perceived by many car users as the prerogative of the "lower orders".

The big train operators are, however, unlikely to encourage rail travel when they are introducing inflation-busting fare increases. The reason they give is that the extra money is needed to fund improvements but this is of little consequence if people cannot afford to travel by train.

It can now cost £210 for a return journey between London and Newcastle upon Tyne, about £60 more than a mini-break to Amsterdam, inclusive of coach travel, ferry, four-star hotel, breakfast and excursions.

Roger A Smith, 67 The Street, Little Waltham, Chelmsford, Essex CM3 3NT

100% fares rise

The media have concentrated attention on the lack of cheap rail fares over the Christmas period. If my own experiences are anything to go by, restrictions applied over a much longer period.

I wanted to travel from Newport, south Wales, to Birmingham and return, on 26 November. Applying a month in advance, I was told no cheap fares would be available. The lowest was £21.50 with my senior railcard. Last year I made the same journey at the same time

of year for less than £10 return. The reason given for withdrawal of cheap fares was "rugby matches in Birmingham" although when I checked, I found there were matches in Leeds, which would hardly impinge on a Cardiff-Nottingham service.

On the day, the 09.04 from Newport was perhaps 25% full. Not until its last pick-up at Cheltenham was it anywhere near full. The return train, the 17.30 from New Street, was even less well-occupied, a train that in the previous year had been full to standing. It would seem that the train operator must have lost revenue by its actions.

Railfuture must keep its eye on cheap fares.

Ray Catson, 22 Pentrepoeth Road, Bassaleg, Newport NP10 8LL

Women only

I am a now a senior citizen but I remember years ago seeing women-only carriages on trains, for women travelling alone and breastfeeding mothers. In this day and age, with rape and other sexual assaults, it's important that women can have somewhere they can travel in safety and without embarrassment.

I agree that luggage space for pushchairs, luggage and other large items is at a premium just when people have more to carry with them.

A guards van would be very useful for storing such things.

Lynn M Dyson, 80 Grayswood Park Road, Quinton, Birmingham B32 1HE

Satisfied passenger

I am writing to support a suggestion made in *Railwatch* 106 in the article by Allison Cosgrove "Hurdles we face".

She suggests all trains be designed with "a particular door with an easy access ramp". I would suggest that the door might be positioned in the same coach as any guard's van.

As well as being used by passengers with push chairs and luggage and by people like me with arthritis who cannot step up, it would also be useful to the men and women staffing mobile refreshment trollies. I now think twice about using the train just because of the difficulty

of getting on and off and I am also aware that if I seek help I am causing the train to stop longer than the 50 seconds target time now operating.

It would be an interesting question to explore in any future passenger enquiry.

Marjorie Cleaver (very satisfied passenger of many years on South West Trains), 1 Weeke Manor Close, Winchester Hants SO22 5JE

Editors' note: Sadly many trains now do not have a guard's van. Some do not even have any convertible space.

Steam appeal

I read with interest Julian Myerscough's letter to *Railwatch* 106. I've been a member of Railfuture for several years and have also been an active member of a heritage railway

(Peak Rail) since 1987. Greater links between heritage railways and Railfuture is something which has advantages to both and to the travelling public. On that basis and in a personal capacity, not as an official spokesman for Peak Rail, I would like to respond to a few of Mr Myerscough's points

1 Any expansion by heritage railways into providing commuter services has at the very least to cover costs and preferably make sufficient money to invest in their continuation. A seven-day-a-week all-year-round operation cannot be sustained by volunteers alone and would need paid staff supplemented by volunteers working long days, particularly if trains are to be steam-operated.

2 Commuter operations on the national network are often subsidised but local authorities have many existing demands on

Rideabout!

by Merseyrail to 5 countryside cycle tours

Train operators' attitudes to bikes are confused to say the least but Merseytravel is sending out the right signals. It has issued two booklets to encourage cyclists to use its trains to gain access to the countryside. Each booklet describes five rides.

Ride 3 in booklet one is the Old Liverpool Loop Line which takes cyclists through Halewood Triangle Country Park, once a busy junction and a network of sidings. Ride 4 in booklet two includes a ride from Broad Green station along the former Cheshire Lines Committee rail line.



60 people are killed on Britain's roads every week



Traffic has increased tenfold in the last 50 years



Half the population are exposed to road noise above 55 decibels



A person hit by a car at 35mph is twice as likely to be killed as at 30mph



Greenhouse gases from UK air travel doubled between 1990 and 2003



A big lorry causes thousands of times more road damage than a car



The Government has abandoned its commitment to cut traffic



Local bus fares have gone up by over 20% in the last ten years



Traffic delays cost the country around £20 billion every year



Since fuel protests in 2000, duty has been halved on many HGVs



UK buses get the lowest government subsidy in the EU



The number of children walking to school fell by 20% in the last ten years

isn't it time we read the signs...

GRAPHIC REMINDERS: This Transport 2000 leaflet highlights many of the Government's failures to address transport issues

transport budgets, including rural and unprofitable bus services.

3The main income generators for heritage railways are special events. Their scheduled services at other weekends and in holiday periods are dependent on the weather and competing tourist attractions.

4Work on the safety-critical sides of the railway such as footplate crews, guards and signalmen entails passing exams as well as demonstrating competence in the same way as the national network. Having sufficient volunteers and paid staff – most lines have a few – to run their existing services can be a problem. Many volunteers are retired so can be flexible in the days they are available, but most have family commitments and other interests. Many travel significant distances to work on the railway.

6There are indeed waiting lists to do things such as driver experience courses and they are great fun. I can speak from personal experience! However people paying to do these need to be supervised by a qualified driver and fireman who will then probably go on to run the services for the rest of the day.

7What is an appropriate uniform and badges is a matter of opinion. Most will have been purchased by the volunteers themselves. A uniform indicates that the person is fulfilling a role on a railway, important for visitors to know.

If Mr Myerscough really wants to understand the potential contribution heritage railways can make to the national network he should perhaps join one and become actively involved. Most could use more members and volunteers.

Mick Bond, 68 Pearson Place, Meersbrook, Sheffield S8 9DE
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A proud record

I don't normally feel sufficiently riled to write to *Railwatch* but as

someone involved in the heritage rail industry for 20 years the comments by Julian Myerscough and Nigel Watt in the letters page of *Railwatch* 106 cannot go unanswered.

Mr Myerscough in particular seems to think those people giving up their own time to operate train services to the public are somehow to be despised. The fact that heritage railways carry millions of passengers a year and contribute significantly to some of the local economies of the area where they operate, while generally costing the taxpayer no operating subsidy, is obviously in his view something to be pitied rather than commended.

The reason such lines do not generally provide all-year-round, and early-morning, services is that those lose large amounts of money due to the cost of providing them as opposed to patronage in that locality. That's generally why those lines closed in the first place.

It is a sad reflection on our country that in the past decade, the record of private companies in reopening standard gauge lines to passenger traffic has been conspicuously better than the national network, at least so far as England is concerned, and at a cost of peanuts compared to the billions from the taxpayer vacuumed up by Network Rail and the train operators each year either in subsidy or what is described as "debt" in NR's case.

Mr Myerscough makes an implied dig at the Mid-Norfolk Railway in his reference to Dereham. I could

point out the MNR has managed to restore to passenger use, and the odd freight, 11 miles of branch line using diesel multiple units, a service halted by BR in 1969.

Mr Myerscough and Mr Watt are free to correct me on this point but that's about 11 miles more than Railtrack and Network Rail have so far managed in East Anglia despite their huge operating subsidies from the taxpayer, a source of money not generally open to the 200 or so heritage rail operations in the UK.

I have no doubt if the same revenue support was available pro-rata that ONE Railway gets for its branch lines in the same region, the MNR could offer a far more comprehensive service that would then allow Mr Myerscough to leave his car behind. The back page of *Railwatch* expresses concerns about the future survival of rural railways in Britain and refers to the benefits of the West Somerset Railway and the North York Moors Railway to their local economies.

I suggest with respect that while nothing should be taken for granted, the survival of the WSR and NYMR, both of them profitable and using a paid-volunteer staff mix, is rather more certain in the foreseeable future than the services *Railwatch* expresses concern about on the national network.

Michael Bailey, 102 Milton Road, Prestwich, Manchester M25 1PU

Real railways

The responses to my letter regarding heritage railways providing "real" services has led me to believe either I did not set out my ideas clearly enough or those disagreeing cannot get out of the heritage philosophy.

My belief is that heritage railways, on the back of their heritage and preservation activities, could offer a genuine affordable service to the local community. Yes, unpaid volunteers could be used. And what is so peculiar about that?

After all people, individuals, companies, professionals et al., give their time to local and national charities for nothing to provide a true community benefit.

Local authorities might be faced with some subsidy but perhaps not so high as that required by a commercial train operating company.

I feel those who support them cannot grasp that their unpaid energies could also be directed to providing a true service for others rather than satisfying their own personal fantasies.

Julian Myerscough, 7 Alexandra Road, Lowestoft, Suffolk NR32 1PH
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Threat to men too

After reading Allison Cosgrove's article (*Railwatch* 106) I feel I must point out that drunken men make most law-abiding passengers feel threatened, not just females.

Tim Mickleburgh, 33 Littlefield Lane, Grimsby DN31 2AZ
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Family day-out

I was delighted to see Berney Arms station on your rear cover. I went to Berney Arms in October with my family and some friends, to explore the marsh and visit the Berney Arms Inn.

The guard did not take our fares, nor did he on the return journey between these two unstaffed stations, so eight passengers to Berney Arms were missing from the figures for that day.

I hope that in 30 years, my children will be able to take theirs to Berney Arms by train.

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Send your letters to:

The Editors, 4 Christchurch Square, London E9 7HU.

Email: editor@railwatch.org.uk

Railwatch also welcomes articles



I told you so

Some time before the last general election you published a letter from me stating that anyone concerned about our railways should vote Green, for which I received some criticism. I can now say "I told you so".

The current Labour Government is pursuing a disastrous anti-rail policy, apart from the Olympics investment. The decisions on the trams for Liverpool, Leeds and Portsmouth are deplorable.

Sadly the opponents of the Edinburgh trams (there are quite a few such neanderthals) are now using Mr Darling's anti-tram stance as an example Edinburgh Council should follow.

It is ironic, to say the least, that while Mr Darling is pursuing such damaging policies in his native city has benefited from some new stations and will hopefully get a tram network.

I am ashamed I once voted for Mr Darling. He seems to have forgotten global warming.

The seven Green MPs in the Scottish Parliament are raising issues which no one in Westminster dare raise.

How many Lib Dems know it is Lib Dem ministers who are promoting roads such as the M74 on stilts through the centre of Glasgow and the Aberdeen bypass through the green belt.

How many English taxpayers are aware that Chancellor Gordon Brown's largesse is enabling the Scottish Executive not only to expand, modestly, the railways, but to spend vast sums on a gargantuan road building programme creating white elephants which will make Holyrood House look like a white mouse.

They are also willing to spend a vast sum tunnelling a rail line under Edinburgh airport while the council is likely to get parliamentary permission to build a tram line to the airport.

All of this is predicated on a vast increase in airport traffic which will be an environmental nightmare, but in Scottish politics and the entire Scottish media, only the Greens are voicing objections. It seems the new

Tory leader David Cameron is going to be environmentally friendly. We will see. The first touchstone will be whether he will oppose the expansion of Stansted airport and see the vast spare capacity in the Channel Tunnel as an economic and environmentally friendly alternative.

Doug Smart, 15/2 Bellfield Avenue, Musselburgh EH21 6QR

Rack railway?

Mr Rothwell (*Railwatch* 105) suggests building a new line from Ridgmont to Flitwick in Bedfordshire. I know the area very well having spent all my childhood days in the area. Hills near Ridgmont would probably mean any new line would need a tunnel. Or perhaps Mr Rothwell had a funicular or rack rail operation in mind!

I believe the line from Bedford to Sandy should be opened up again and a chord constructed off the GNER line at Hitchin to connect to Cambridge and beyond.

R J Hobourn, Travershes Lodge, 27 Drakes Avenue, Exmouth, Devon EX8 4AD

'Overpaid' staff

Much though I admire Bob Crow and the other rail union leaders, I fear that your correspondent J Berry (*Railwatch* 106) is incorrect in crediting them with having raised their members' rates of pay to astronomical levels.

The simple answer lies not in trades union militancy but in market conditions, and changes brought about by privatisation.

In the run-up to, and immediately after privatisation, the age profile of the driving staff meant that significant numbers of drivers in the higher links, who drove the fastest long-distance passenger and freight services, were reaching retirement age.

Naturally, the long-distance passenger and freight operating companies needed to replace them. They therefore had to offer rates of pay which would recruit drivers in sufficient numbers, and this they did. In consequence, local train operating companies found themselves losing trained staff to the long-distance operators.

But the local companies also had

franchise obligations, and faced financial penalties, and to prevent their training budgets doing a vertical take-off, were compelled to improve pay and conditions, in order to retain a higher proportion of staff who might otherwise have sold their services to the highest bidder.

Simple labour market economics. Nothing to do with trades union militancy. And the high cost of running the railways has less to do with wage costs, which are market-driven, than with the massive access charges necessary under the privatised regime, and not least, the rip-off lease charges being exacted by the three rolling stock leasing companies exercising their near-monopoly supplier position to the benefit of their shareholders, and the need for all the component elements of the privatised railway to extract an element of profit.

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Dismay over pay

I am somewhat dismayed by the letter printed in *Railwatch* 106 Letters Extra "overpaid" rail staff by J Berry.

This is not the kind of stuff Railfuture gets involved with. If we are to have a debate on this subject here are some facts:-

Rail staff are professional people who since privatisation some 10 years ago have (not that the vast majority wanted) had the benefit of being a sought-after commodity.

Why? Market forces dictate how many drivers, guards that the private train and freight operators need.

As many of the pre-privatisation companies got rid of frontline staff in the run-up to privatisation, the ones left have become valuable assets. I speak as though these people are commodities because to the train company managers they

are. They don't want to lose highly trained people to rival train operators, because of the costs involved in replacing them.

The trade unions have done exactly what they were set up to do. They negotiate on behalf of their members with these private companies for better wages and conditions.

The fact that train drivers have done "so well" is down to the fact that in the 10 years J Berry has stated we have had privatisation.

Train drivers always had a low basic pay under BR but made it up with additional allowances and payments. Now these are all incorporated into salary.

How J Berry can state that frontline staff in the industry are to blame for "the high cost in providing rail services" is incomprehensible.

The real reasons for the high costs of providing rail services include the payments these companies have agreed to pay the Government in return for them being allowed to operate the franchises, and increases in the number of lawyers, consultants, contractors, sub-contractors and livery designers.

*L Davies, Railfuture and ASLEF member
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Count carefully

Passenger statistics available on the Strategic Rail Authority's website can be unreliable.

After years of counting real passengers, I know that Cambridge Heath and London Fields stations attract roughly the same number of passengers.

But according to the SRA, London Fields is 823rd in the national rankings with about 266,000 passengers, while Cambridge Heath is 1,307th in those rankings with patronage of just 101,000 passengers.

This extent of this discrepancy poses serious questions about the reli-



The 1920 royal coach featured in *Railwatch* 102 has been completely restored at Alstom's Wolverton plant and been taken to the Midland Railway Centre in Derbyshire

It will be exhibited at the Princess Royal Class Locomotive Trust's museum at West Shed, Swanwick Junction, Butterley, which was opened to the public in October. Its website is at <http://www.prclt.co.uk>

ability of the data upon which rail planning may be conducted.

Roger W. Blake, Principal Transportation Planner, London Borough of Hackney E8 1HJ
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Birthday party

Back in 2003 you mentioned the 125th anniversary of the first trains to run over the Haringworth Viaduct, the longest masonry structure on the UK rail network.

Celebrations were very successful with the publication of two books, exhibitions staged and a passenger shuttle service between Melton Mowbray and Kettering that carried over 1,000 passengers.

In 2004 a huge £1.5million repair project began to replace and repoint brick and stone work on the viaduct that spans the Welland Valley on the Northamptonshire-Rutland borders. It is three quarters of a mile long with 82 arches. The final year of this work will be marked by another opportunity to travel over this famous landmark not normally used by passenger services except for Midland main line diversions and an increasing number of rail tours in the past few years. The provisional date set is August Bank Holiday Monday 2006 with shuttle trains running between Oakham or Melton Mowbray to Kettering passing through Corby, a town expected to double its population from 50,000 in the next 20-30 years. The case for the station reopening is now being taken seriously by the borough council and the regeneration company, Catalyst Corby, which met with the local MP Phil Hope and Transport Minister Derek Twigg in November 2005 at the site of the former station in Cottingham road. To make this a reality I feel we need to promote the fact that the rails and other infrastructure is already in situ to ensure rail is the key to Corby's future.

I hope many *Railwatch* readers will make the journey in August. I will send an information sheet to anyone interested who sends a SAE to me at the address below.

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Gretton, Northants NN17 3BX.
davidfursdon@amservice.com

Bike ban

From 16 January 2006, bikes are not allowed on Southern trains during peak hours 07.00-10.00 and 16.00-19.00 on the London-Brighton line.

This covers any journey in any direction on this line whether or not anyone else is on the train.

There will be no discretion by train/station staff. The instructions to them can be read at:

<http://www.h1n5.org/southern1.pdf>

Roger Stocker, Project Officer, Cycling Sustainable Transport Team, Transport Group, Southwark Council
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Editors' note: Sadly train operators make themselves look stupid

Tracking Wild Britain
Watching wildlife by train

RSPB National Rail Mammals Trust UK

This 24-page booklet helps train travellers appreciate their journey more, providing interesting information about 10 rail routes, London-Brighton, Leeds-Manchester, Sheffield-Derby, Peterborough-Norwich, London-Harwich, Oxford-Hereford, Llanelli-Shrewsbury, Exeter-Penzance, Southampton-Weymouth and Newcastle-Edinburgh.

Muntjac deer, kestrel, dipper, marsh harrier, shelduck, otter, red kite, little egret, red deer and common seal are just some of the animals and birds you can see. The leaflet is produced jointly by the RSPB, the Mammals Trust and ATOC.

The booklet can be downloaded from <http://www.trakkies.co.uk/wildlife.htm>

and negative when they impose blanket bans like this. How many trains in the reverse peak are running empty? Despite the Government's own confusion over the issue, the general public is happy for the railways to receive subsidies as

a way of promoting sustainable travel.

Up the creek

It is often argued that rail is more environmentally friendly than road. It is therefore sad to note that in

New Zealand environmental arguments may force the closure of rail freight services on ferries between north and south islands.

The authorities are trying to impose a lower speed limit for ferries in the sounds approaching Picton. As a result the ferries will not be able to complete enough trips a day to make them financially viable.

New ferries do not usually carry rail wagons.

It is likely therefore that freight will be lost to rail, a sad result for the overall environment.

I looked for the erosion problems cited by local authorities for their action but could see none. How often do sound arguments produce unsound transport policies?

Alan Crowhurst, 1 Mawley Court,
Clebury Mortimer DY14 8AH

Name that train

In the days of the London North Eastern Railway, some branch line trains were worked by Sentinel steam railcars which were named after stage coaches that had plied the routes 100 years previously.

Inside each car was a notice giving details of the stage coach after which the car was named. Virgin Trains have adopted this idea with their Super Voyagers, with a notice in each unit giving details of the person after whom the unit is named.

I have always thought some of the trains working branch lines could be named after historic or interesting public houses within easy reach of a railway station. A notice inside the unit could give details of the pub after which the unit was named.

The idea would be to encourage passengers to make journeys by train they would not otherwise make, to visit these pubs. After all you can't drink and drive.

James Rogers, 17 Grove Street,
Starbeck, Harrogate,
North Yorkshire HG2 7PH

Sevenside plea

I have been a member of Railfuture for many years but unless you can give me an assurance regarding the former Sevenside region I shall let my membership lapse.

Although I live in Burnley, I spent many years as a fitter in the Swindon railway works and naturally I am very interested in rail matters in the Swindon, Bristol, Taunton and Cheltenham "triangle" but this area is ignored.

I am sick and tired of seeing the name of Bedford on virtually every page of *Railwatch*.

I notice that you are in the process of realigning the regional boundaries. Perhaps you will remember that over a million people are disregarded in the Swindon-Bristol area.

Eric Beint, Woodside HFE, Burnley Road, Padiham BB12 8SD

Editors' note: We are reliant on volunteers for news of local action. In this issue we have a report from Sevenside.