



East Midlands

By Anthony Kay
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Branch merger

The merger of Railfuture East Midlands and North Midlands branches should be finalised when the new branch is formally constituted at an annual general meeting in Kettering on 11 March.

Corby

Corby Borough Council has a target date of 2011 for opening the new Corby station, but is hoping to bring it forward. The bus link run by Midland Mainline from Corby to Kettering currently takes over 4,000 passengers per week, and Kettering station car park has had to be improved to cope with the volume of cars from Corby.

Ticket barriers

Midland Mainline will be installing ticket barriers at Leicester station in April in an effort to deal with fare dodgers. Central Trains also has plans for ticket barriers at Loughborough but the costs have not been sorted out yet. There is concern about the positioning of barriers at Loughborough, which will require passengers to double back through the entrance hall after buying tickets, and then use an outside gate on to the platform. We are seeking a meeting with CT to discuss the proposal.

Users forum

Roger Bacon, secretary of Railfuture East Midlands branch, has been appointed treasurer of the East Midlands Passenger Transport Users' Forum, the successor to the old Railways Passenger Committee for the region. EMPTUF is currently canvassing opinions on the future of rail services in the East Midlands, following the announcement by the Secretary of State for Transport of new arrangements for rail franchises in the region. Midland Mainline services will be combined with local Central Trains services in a new East Midlands Franchise.

Nottingham-Skegness

The Nottingham-Skegness service descended into near chaos during the week before Christmas, less than two weeks into the new timetable. The problems were blamed on the work on the Allington chord, but the worst aspect was the confused information given to travellers. Several trains were terminated at Boston or Grantham, with buses replacing them for the remainder of the journey, but the information given by Central Trains didn't always tally with that on the national rail enquiries website. Back in 2000, Central Trains were criticised by Rail Passengers Committee for the Midlands for providing timetable information which contradicted services actually being run at Nottingham.

MML timetable

EMPTUF has submitted detailed



It's just gone 10.00 on the station clock and the train's not due until 10.28. Time for a coffee and not a pastry maybe.

Stations can be the hub of local life but in recent years many have lost even their basic facilities. So it is good to report that for many stations, life is returning.

After a gap of many years following the closure of the news stand at Farncombe on the London-Portsmouth line, a coffee

shop has opened. Railfuture correspondent Kenneth Bryant was pleased to see it. "The young ladies who run it have worked hard and the place now looks attractive," he said.

Coffee Charisma is an independent firm selling "ethically traded" coffee as well as snacks, other drinks and newspapers.

The outlet is open from 06.30 to 10.30 to service the morning peak travellers.

Picture: KENNETH M BRYANT

comments to Midland Mainline about the services provided in the timetable from December. Suggestions include:

- Faster services from London to Nottingham, Derby and Sheffield in the evening peak

- A regular through service from St Pancras to Leeds, but via Nottingham rather than Derby, since Cross-Country services already connect Derby to Leeds and beyond

- Changes in stopping patterns and rolling stock allocation to address overcrowding problems

- Earlier first northbound train on weekdays

- Later last trains, northbound from London and southbound from Sheffield to Leicester, on Saturdays, although engineering work may make these difficult to implement.

Lincolnshire

By Brian Hastings
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Realistic timetable

First Group's decision to add extra journey time east of Scunthorpe on its Cleethorpes-Manchester airport service was welcomed by Railfuture Lincolnshire. Westbound departures from Cleethorpes, Grimsby, Habrough and Barnetby are advanced, setting a more standard departure time from Cleethorpes at 27 minutes past the hour, and 35 past the hour at Grimsby.

Railfuture has told First Group that,

while pushing for the best possible timings, it accepts some timings were unrealistic and lateness was becoming unacceptable because of the growing number of severe temporary speed restrictions. Indeed most westbound trains were last year accumulating up to eight minutes lateness by Scunthorpe leading to pathing problems at Doncaster and Sheffield. But the accompanying bonus is that the new schedule allows for Habrough stops to be inserted without further adjustment. For many years, Habrough users have been told that additional calls were not possible because they would interfere with the regular-pattern timetable. Habrough is the railhead for the port of Immingham and change point for the Barton-upon-Humber branch.

120-mile bustitution

Railfuture Lincolnshire condemned a decision to have substitute buses on Sundays from 15 January to 26 March over the whole Cleethorpes-Manchester airport route, adding over an hour to the journey time.

Local threat

The Scunthorpe-Sheffield local service provides a stopping service along the route complementing the fast trains on the First Group route between the two centres. There is a threat to the local route which is supported by the South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive. Transport Secretary Alistair Darling has invited PTEs to review their support for local rail and it is

alleged the local trains may get in the way of passenger and freight trains on the East Coast main line at Doncaster.

Railfuture Lincolnshire will be making an input into the main line route utilisation studies which are under way at the moment.

Unreliable service

Railfuture members are collecting data on unreliable and late trains operated by Central Trains in Lincolnshire and co-operating with a similar operation in north Midlands. We have written to Central Trains asking for management action in Lincolnshire, stressing the need for better provision of information when things go wrong.

North East

By Peter Kenyon
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Tyne and Wear Metro

As well as removing one of the half-hourly National Rail trains and reducing the service south of Parkway Interchange, the new timetable re-routed trains from the airport on to the Sunderland line at Pelaw, substituting Coast trains on the South Shields line.

The journey from Sunderland to Newcastle Central Metro station takes about 28 minutes with 12 stops. That to the airport about 55 minutes with 24 intermediate stops. The advantages to passengers using the one remaining



train per hour from Sunderland to Newcastle Central are: Access to the main platforms at Newcastle, no intermediate stops, an average 22-minute journey to Newcastle, where most trains continue to the Metro Centre, and except on Sundays, to Hexham.

Mike Parker, director general of Nexus, which operates the Metro rail system, has gone on record as saying that he does not wish to see the total withdrawal of national trains from the Sunderland-Newcastle line. He also advises that money saved from the reduction in services will be used to fund much needed improvements at Sunderland station.

Disintegrating transport

Rail travellers are not the only ones facing problems in the North East. The passenger transport authority claims that financial provision by central Government is inadequate and that it is faced with the prospect of reducing evening and weekend subsidised bus services to cover the cost of the Government free bus pass scheme for pensioners.

SLUG publicity

The Saltburn Line User Group is currently negotiating with Northern Rail to have an awareness poster designed and displayed on Saltburn line stations plus Middlesbrough and Thornaby TPE stations. The anticipated launch is planned for the group's April annual general meeting.

Both ITV and the BBC have invited a branch representative to appear on railway features, and a number of local newspapers have featured branch-inspired articles about aspects of the stopping services north of Newcastle. Branch committee member Trevor Watson was photographed with civic dignitaries at the inauguration of the improved Virgin Cross Country rail service at Morpeth.

Campaigning

The branch committee, led by its chairman Martin Murphy, has submitted a response to the consultation document originating from Network Rail entitled *East Coast Main Line Capacity*. This only became available on 23 December and responses had to be in eight working days later (or seven in Scotland) on January 10.

The document contains among other things:

Unproven assertions 7.5 "splitting and joining [of trains] represents poor operational practice", Trans-Pennine please note.

Contradictory statements 4.2.6 "There are peak hour constraints of capacity involving Welwyn Viaduct." Page 42: "There is theoretical spare capacity at Welwyn for all aspirations".

Disappointing omissions Network Rail has "not yet considered the feasibility of various options to

increase capacity by enhancing the infrastructure".

Conspiracy theorists may suspect another example of the principle "Verdict First, Evidence Afterwards" in the manner of Lewis Carroll's Red Queen. The full text of the response may be obtained from murphy.martinatbtinternet.com.

Save our services

Branch members have encouraged support for the local MP for Wansbeck Dennis Murphy who tabled an Early Day Motion in the Commons before the Christmas recess. This calls for a reopening of the transport select committee's inquiry into rail services in the north and requests that Government blocks any closures or service reductions until this has taken place.

Berwick MP Alan Beith has added an amendment calling for the use of Belford Station to allow passenger access to the Metro Centre-Newcastle-Chathill trains which go on to Belford empty to cross over and return south. This absurd situation has been a long-standing grievance in the north of Northumberland, but rectification will incur expense on necessary work at Belford.

Darlington meeting

The November branch meeting was addressed by Ian McGregor of the Tees Valley Joint Strategy Unit, Ian Jopling of Hartlepool Borough Council and branch member Peter Walker of Coastliners User Group. Threats to services in the area were highlighted and opportunities for development identified, both stemming from the apparent and dubious assumption of the Strategic Rail Authority that rail services are irrelevant and uncompetitive unless they travel at high speed on the main line.

Metro Centre

Readers unfamiliar with the railway geography and local terminology of the Newcastle area need to know that the Metro Centre, which styles itself *Europe's Largest Shopping and Leisure Centre*, is situated south of the Tyne on the Newcastle Western bypass. It is not served by the Tyne and Wear Metro system, which confuses visitors to the area, but by Northern Rail trains.

The Metro Centre has its own dedicated railway station on the Tyne Valley Line, connected to the shopping and leisure centre by a long covered overbridge. Train services to and from Carlisle, Newcastle Central, and Sunderland call regularly, with occasional more exotic points of origin or destination, including Glasgow, Stranraer, Dumfries, Girvan, Whitehaven; Hartlepool, Nunthorpe and Middlesbrough (via Sunderland); Morpeth and Chathill.

The majority of shoppers travel by car, bus, or long-distance road coach. At peak periods the western bypass is at a standstill choked with traffic, and getting out of the

Metro Centre car parks can be a nightmare.

There have been frequent and anguished calls for the provision of extra lanes on the bypass, so far unheeded, and the opportunity to link the complex with the Tyne and Wear Metro network by means of an electrified rail connection or street tramway has, as *Railwatch* readers would expect, never been seriously contemplated.

North West

By Trevor Bishop

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Signal chaos

Network Rail's three-month, seven-day-a-week closure of the line between Crewe and Cheadle Hulme for total signal renewal, is causing major problems for passengers along the route.

Those who use stations from Handforth to Crewe have to endure replacement buses (Wilmslow still has trains to Manchester via the Styal/Airport line) and it is reported, they are not working well. The service seems to be taking much longer, and connections with trains

at Stockport, Macclesfield and elsewhere are failing. A Railfuture member who lives along the line has written to Network Rail and Northern Rail, but as yet has not received a reply.

Wirral users' success

After their success in getting Sunday services to terminate in Wrexham Central, the Wirral Transport Users Association pressed for an increase in the number of Sunday trains on the Wrexham-Bidston line. Merseyside Passenger Transport Executive has now agreed to fund an extra three services making six return journeys in total for Sundays.

Arriva Trains Wales is providing the service, which started on 11 December. It is hoped the increase in services will be rewarded with increased passenger numbers.

Having extra services will also increase tourism on this line and enable easier access to venues like the Deeside Ice Rink near Shotton station and football matches in Liverpool, Birkenhead and Wrexham.

The obvious further benefit is that it is likely to help the case for the proposed electrification of the Bidston

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ROADSIDE RESCUE

Local action



(Birkenhead)-Wrexham Central line which has made it into the Local Transport Plan Two for Merseyside 2006-2011.

This would integrate the line with the Merseyrail electric system, and improve rail access to residential areas, employment sites and other key services as well as tourism. There are high hopes for the future of this line, as a cross-boundary commuter corridor.

Connections can be made at Wrexham General on to the Shrewsbury, Birmingham, Cardiff and Aberystwyth services and also at Shotton Interchange on to the Chester, Manchester to north Wales resorts and Holyhead services. Bidston Interchange gives access to West Kirby to New Brighton and Birkenhead-Liverpool services.

Partnership

Railfuture and Transport 2000 have been helping to set up a Community Rail Partnership on the Crewe-Derby line.

Members have also been campaigning against the Crewe-Skegness service terminating at Derby.

Other issues in the Stoke area include proposals for a bus-rail service to Alton Towers, the upgrading of Uttoxeter station, the need for a railhead at Stone and the retention of other stations at Barlaston Halt, Barlaston, Wedgwood and Norton Bridge as part of the Manchester-Stoke local Desiro service.

Railfuture member Jon Honeysett has also been involved in the bus-rail interchange proposals at Kidsgrove.

Thames

By Chris Wright

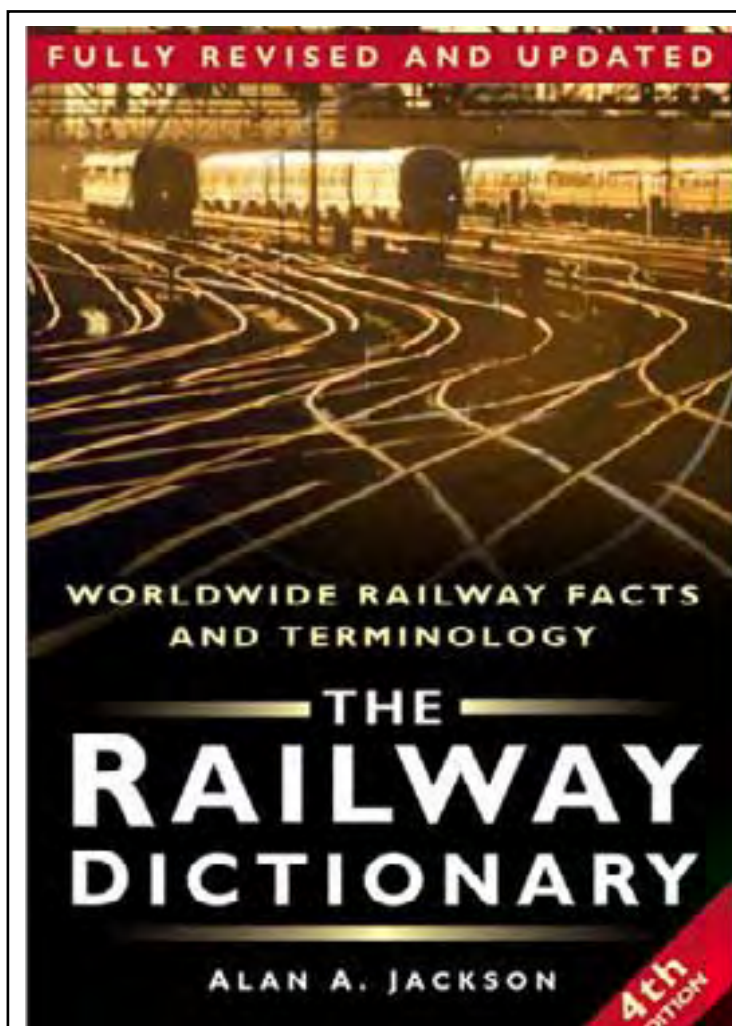
chriswrightmkataol.com

Milton Keynes Central is set to have an additional platform and the bay platform converted to through running to increase capacity by 2008. Wolverton station is also to gain a booking hall. Rail campaigners and local MPs have been involved in both campaigns. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has allocated £24million for the schemes as part of the major growth plans for the area.

Aylesbury North awaits a decision by the ODPM. Laing Rail is promoting the scheme with Bucks and Aylesbury Vale councils. The station is to serve as a park and ride and new housing.

The Bletchley-Bedford line is being further upgraded to cope with ballast trains for Stewartby. The line is to be upgraded for 60mph running. The user group hopes passenger journey times will be reduced but is concerned about the disruption the work will cause.

Olney is to see further losses of the former Bedford-Northampton trackbed to developments after representations from rail groups were ignored. An alternative route



BOOK OFFER: It does not include Railwatch but it does list Railfuture and the Railway Development Society. This latest hardback edition of The Railway Dictionary is full of fascinating information. For instance, did you know that rule 55 demands that, after two minutes at a stop signal, a driver must phone the signal box to report the train's presence?

Or that a "persecuted minority" describes an employee over 65 and still at work? First published in 2000, around 1,000 new entries have been added to the Dictionary which is "international in scope" and covers all aspects of railway terminology, including slang. Sutton Publishing ISBN 07509 42185. 404 pages £25.

Railwatch readers can obtain the book for £20, inclusive of post and packing, by ringing Sutton Publishing customer services on 01963 442030 and quoting promotional code RI. This offer is restricted to UK readers only.

should be feasible, however. The line has been suggested as a possible candidate for reopening as the area expands.

Oxford-Bicester Rail User Group is delighted that the new franchisee for Great Western Trains will see seven trains a day retained after the Department for Transport proposed cuts to two trains per day! It is hoped that recent links between the rail company, Oxon County Council and Bicester Village may see further improvements.

The East West Rail Link - Bedford to Oxford and Aylesbury - latest study for the ODPM has been delayed as further work on service options and funding opportunities was undertaken. It is expected to further

validate the case for reopening, identify possible funding sources and recommend work to develop the project to enable funding bids to be made. Campaigners will continue to maintain the profile of the project.

Lord Berkeley of the Rail Freight Group, a supporter of the East West rail link, was due to speak at the February annual general meeting of the branch.

Yorkshire

By Peter Davies
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Ripon reopening

Moves to create a preferred route for reopening the 11-mile rail link

between Harrogate and Ripon were expected at a key meeting in February.

A consultant's study has already declared that a reopened rail line would be viable. North Yorkshire County Council's transport chiefs called a meeting in February to report on findings for a route and site of a possible terminal in Ripon.

The original line, which had intermediate stations at Nidd Bridge and Wormald Green and links to Northallerton, was closed to passenger traffic by Dr Beeching in 1967 as part of a nationwide axing of "uneconomic" railway lines by the former British Railways.

Phase one of the study was started in 2004 considering the commercial aspects of reopening the line, including a service beyond Ripon to Northallerton and between Ripon and Thirsk.

While consultants say the Harrogate-Ripon line would be a viable proposition, they have discounted the idea of extending to Northallerton and Thirsk. At the meeting in Harrogate International Centre, to be chaired by the Director of Transport, Mr Michael Moore, the engineering and environmental impact will be examined.

Although the Nidd Gorge still has a railway bridge, other bridges along the old route, including one at South Stainley, over the A61 and a viaduct leading to Ripon Station near North Bridge, have long since been demolished. In addition there has been development along the old formation, notably at Littlethorpe and Wormald Green south of Ripon.

Residents at Littlethorpe have already expressed concern about the impact a new railway line would have, following housing development on the old trackbed. Meanwhile the meeting will also hear of a recent study undertaken by consultants ARUP about increasing capacity on the current Leeds-Harrogate-York line. Andrew Eason, the rail support officer for North Yorkshire County Council, has indicated that the study is the result of continuing growth in passengers using the line.

It was originally forecast that reopening the line would cost upwards of £40million. However, it is believed that this figure has now increased considerably.

Huddersfield-Penistone-Sheffield

The fast rail service between Sheffield and Leeds has passed its first anniversary and the service has proved to be a success in competing with the M1 motorway between the two cities.

The Huddersfield-Penistone-Sheffield line received Community Rail status in 2004, and it has been hailed as being one of the better performing Community Rail lines. Additional rail services operated



on five Sundays in the weeks prior to Christmas and this clearly demonstrated the need for an hourly service on Sundays.

Hull and East Riding

The association has been running a recent campaign to draw attention to the continuing "non service" between Goole and Knottingley. There are just two westbound services (early morning and early evening) and one eastbound service (late afternoon).

London

By Laurence Fryer
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The proposed closure of the Silverlink line between Stratford and North Woolwich and its handover to the Docklands Light Railway for a new service between Stratford International and Canning Town was the subject of an inquiry at Hackney Empire by London TravelWatch in February.

Richard Pout and John Barfield attended the inquiry for Railfuture.

There are serious concerns over the loss of the "through route" and the adequacy of the DLR to act as effective local distributor.

Hackney Council warned the inquiry that Stratford station will become very congested as six routes will eventually terminate there.

It may not be able to cope adequately with the potential 100,000 people attending the main Olympic events in 2012.

Hackney Mayor Jules Pipe has announced that the North London Line will have eight trains per hour in three years time and that the three short platforms within the borough will be extended to accommodate lengthened trains.

The branch is liaising with Wessex branch over the South West Trains rail utilisation strategy and will be supporting the idea of a new flyover at Woking, and infrastructure improvements to enable more trains to stop at Clapham Junction.

Railfuture will also suggest through services from London via Sutton to Guildford.

Severnside

By David Redgewell
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Joint action

Severnside branch has been liaising with neighbouring Railfuture branches to retain Great Western long-distance services and frequencies between Swansea, Neath, Port Talbot, Bridgend, Cardiff, Newport, Bristol Parkway, Swindon and London and to retain the half hourly London-Cardiff service via Bristol Parkway.

The branch has also been battling to save the Swindon-Southampton service via Melksham in partnership with Melksham rail develop-

Help! I'm on the train

This was the surprising little chap handed out to people invited to the launch on 25 January of the new body to look after the interests of rail passengers.

He looks as if he needs some help or at least a cuddle from his mum.

Let's hope it is not a subliminal message from the Government – which abolished the old rail passengers committees – that rail passengers can expect an anguished time.

It has cost £60,000 to re-launch the old Rail Passengers Council as Passenger Focus.

Journalists who attended the launch asked sceptical questions about why the new body has not yet rallied to the defence of the Saver ticket, but chairman Colin Foxall insisted they wanted to survey passengers first before deciding their position on Savers.

He said they has asked the Transport Secretary Alistair Darling "to stay his hand" on Saver tickets while the survey was carried out.

Mr Foxall called for a national debate on fares.

Mr Foxall said he was keen to make contact with the many people who do not make use of the railway but will also work "in partnership" with other organisations



like London TravelWatch. Passenger Focus has 42 staff, with 12 in the regions, and is "fiercely determined to be independent" and will campaign on passengers' behalf.

It has 12 Passenger Link managers who are "aligned with individual train operating companies" and who will be liaising with rail users and trying to get service improvements.

The Government has given it the responsibility of producing the National Passenger Survey each year but it also plans to commission significant amounts of other research.

You can find out more about the National Passenger Survey and the new body Passenger Focus at www.passengerfocus.org.uk Passenger Focus is still consulting on its corporate plan so if you want to influence how it develops, download a copy from the website and submit your comments.



ment group and officers at Wiltshire County Council. In the new franchise the service has been reduced from four trains a day to two.

Two of the services are replaced by buses between Frome, Trowbridge, Melksham and Chippenham and they do not call at the rail stations. The journey time is 45 minutes longer than the rail service is at present. For more information, go to www.savethetrain.org.uk/melkshamrailway79_.html

Busway threat

We have been working closely with the Friends of Bristol Suburban Railways and Transport 2000 to retain the Bristol Severn Beach railway line, improve the service and prevent the route from being converted to a guided busway be-

tween Avonmouth and Clifton. We are opposing the proposals to use the northern end of the Portishead rail line to link a new busway to Portishead and Bristol city centre which was proposed by Department for Transport in its Greater Bristol transport strategy.

Railfuture has pointed out that both of these lines are heavy freight lines. The Avonmouth route is a diversionary route for main line trains to north and south Wales, via Henbury, and has a seven-day a week service to power stations at Didcot and Aberthaw. This issue is presently being taken up by MPs and Greater Bristol councils. We were cheered by news in January that the DfT has put on hold guided busway schemes for Greater Bristol

Waterloo links

Railfuture is working hard with local authorities, the regional assembly and the development agency to retain the South West Trains services from Bristol, Bath, Bradford-on-Avon, Trowbridge, Westbury, Warmminster and Salisbury to London Waterloo. This campaign is bringing together Labour's Bristol South MP Dawn Primarolo with the Lib Dem's Bath MP Don Foster, Andrew Murison, the Tory MP for Westbury and Wansdyke Labour MP Dan Norris.

Services to Waterloo from Plymouth, Exeter and Torbay are under threat of severe cutbacks by the Department for Transport and the Government Office for the South West.

Extra trains

The good news in this franchise



proposal and in the South West rail utilisation strategy is that the DfT is proposing an hourly service and in some cases half hourly from Axminster to Exeter St David's with new passing loops between Chard junction and Exeter to allow this to happen.

Railfuture and Transport 2000 would like to see the service extended to Chard junction, a growth town in Somerset, and new stations at Wilton and Porton.

Cuts proposed

Railfuture is also campaigning to retain rail links between Weymouth and south-east Dorset, via Yeovil, Castle Carey, Westbury to Plymouth, Penzance, Exeter and Torbay.

The through direct services have been removed from the Great Western and the South Western franchises by the DfT rail group and Government Office for the South West. This is a battle that Railfuture, Transport 2000 and the local rail users forum cannot afford to lose.

We are campaigning to retain the train services at Highbridge, Burnham on Sea and Bridgewater, which at peak times have been cut to Taunton and Bristol.

We are working to retain local services on the Berks and Hants line between Exeter, Tiverton Parkway, Taunton, Castle Carey, Westbury, Pewsey, Newbury, Reading and London Paddington. The service is cut in the new franchise and will in future operate only to Westbury and Frome.

Green signal

Branch co-chairman John Walker is finally seeing 20 years of campaigning rewarded with the new signalling on the Taunton-Minehead railway with a new passenger train service of charter trains which it is hoped will lead to commuter trains.

We also support the project to reopen the line between Radstock and Frome where the Greater Bristol authorities along with Somerset County Council are proposing a large growth in housing.

We want to see the East Somerset rail line extended from Frome and Shepton Mallet to Wells and we are continuing to campaign for a travel card across the Greater Bristol area.

Good news

The DfT and Government Office for the South West have approved the funding case for an additional platform at Bristol Parkway. Mail trains may return from London to the West Country via Bristol Parkway.

Railfuture, Transport 2000, the local rail users forum, Friends of Portishead and Bristol Suburban Railway have been invited to a meeting in Bristol with DfT rail officials.

South Wales

Railfuture South Wales has produced a 17-page booklet *West Wales Direct* arguing for the greater use

of the Swansea District Line which runs from Briton Ferry (Port Talbot) to near Llanelli which would improve services over a wide area of west Wales, but particularly in northern Swansea and on the Heart of Wales line.

Midlands

By Peter Cousins

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North Staffordshire

The local service from Stafford to Stoke-on-Trent remains suspended with a bus replacement. Travel time is greatly extended and connections are unreliable.

New parkway stations

Shropshire County Council is to investigate potential demand for a combined rail-bus park and ride station on the main line east of Shrewsbury. Worcestershire County Council is supporting proposals for a new two-level parkway station near the site of Norton station but situated instead on the main line from Birmingham, north of Abbotswood Junction.

New franchises

West Midlands branch has started to prepare a summary of aspirations for the proposed new West Midlands franchise. While we broadly welcome the proposals, there is concern that the franchise map should not be set in stone as described by DfT. We would particularly like to see the recently truncated Birmingham-Leicester service extended back to Nottingham. Among the CrossCountry allocations, the Hereford-Nottingham service really belongs with the West Midlands franchise as it serves four unstaffed stations in the commuter belt at Bromsgrove, Water Orton, Wilnecote and Willington. Appropriate management of these local stations is vital if the region is to implement a coherent travel policy.

New service for Shropshire

An inspired proposal from Renaissance Railways and Laing Rail for a new service from Wrexham via Shrewsbury and Telford to London (Marylebone) was announced in February. The promoters hope that up to five trains per day each way will serve local stations in Shropshire before running non-stop from Wolverhampton to London with a journey time of about 3hr 15min. The company hopes its new service will be running in 2007.

Scotland

The reopening of the rail line from Edinburgh to Haddington is in the Labour party manifesto, the local community council has been told. Rail Action Group, East of Scotland was invited to the latest council meeting to update councillors. Three new stations could be built. The council was also told that several national rail studies were under way in Scotland

Western Gazette

A nice tea party but 'no chance' of a train

By Emma Judd

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A railway and transport enthusiast from Castle Cary, who resurrected a decades-old campaign to reopen railway stations in Somerton and Langport, has no chance of succeeding, according to a county councillor.

David Henshaw, who runs transport magazine *A to B* in Castle Cary, came up with the idea in a bid to support plans to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the first trains steaming down the line from Castle Cary to Taunton in the summer.

But Mr Henshaw said he has been told that there is "no hope" of the stations being reopened, despite the stretch of line between Castle Cary and Taunton being one of the longest in the UK without a station. Somerset county councillor Derek Yeomans said the



Somerton Buttercross

by County Hall. "Rather than looking back to the past, I suggest the county council, the two district councils and smaller local authorities along the line reinvigorate the campaign to have Somerton and Langport stations reopened."

According to MP for Somerton and Frome, David Heath, the reopening of the two stations came off the agenda after Government transport reforms shook up the rail industry.

This meant that funds were unavailable to continue with the plan. A bus service was introduced in Somerton as a result of the 1980s campaign, aimed at reducing car journeys to and from Castle Cary station and gauging how many people would be likely to use a Somerton train station.

The service was stopped within a year, due to a lack of support.

Cllr Nancy Langmaid explained that some Somerton residents were interested in the reopening of the station after being consulted for the Somerton town plan.

But she said: "In view of it being explored earlier, it was unlikely to come to fruition. Mr Henshaw has been invited to become involved with the centenary events of the opening of the Somerton viaduct, which allowed the first steam trains to travel through the town."

Events will include a reconstruction of an Edwardian tea party at Lynch Country House, displays and tours of schools.

■ This article was published in January in the Somerton and Langport edition of the *Western Gazette*.



Langport workhouse in 2000

Picture: PETER HIGGINBOTHAM

initial paperwork to find out whether residents would use the train would deter the rail companies, as well as the county council, from considering the idea.

Cllr Yeomans said: "They would have to have a complete passenger survey to work out how many people would use it, and that would be very expensive."

Somerton and Langport East stations were closed in the 1960s after a feasibility study on the future of the railway carried out by Dr Richard Beeching, chairman of the British Railways Board.

Dr Beeching determined that the car would replace the train and that local branch lines were not making enough money, which led to vast numbers of small station closures across the UK.

Mr Henshaw said: "There have been many calls to reopen at least one of them, and these ambitions very nearly came to fruition in the 1980s when Government money was apparently provided, but somehow lost



NEWS IN BRIEF

A Railfuture team had a meeting with the Government's rail transport minister Derek Twigg in December. We asked for fair treatment of rail in government financial assessments as well as raising a raft of other issues.

We pointed out the limitations of relying on buses to shift people out of their cars, the lack of investment in rail schemes recommended by the Government's own multi-modal studies.

We highlighted the waste of large amounts of money on road building and the miserliness in dealing with small-scale rail schemes.

We highlighted the waste of money on preparing plans for light rail which were axed by the Government.

We called for electrification schemes to deal with the looming energy crisis and called for proper cycle space on all trains.

The Railfuture team was chairman Mike Crowhurst, president Peter Lawrence, vice-president Michael Caton and board member Norman Bradbury.

At another meeting in December, Railfuture met the Rail Passengers Council chairman Colin Foxall and director Anthony Smith. The RPC said it aimed to get the best deal for passengers without "wasting effort in arguing for things unlikely to happen". The RPC plans to be supportive of rail user groups and may even consider small grants for specific projects.

The Railfuture team was Mike Crowhurst, Howard Thomas, Peter Cousins and Tony Smale.

Railfuture board member Norman Bradbury has submitted a well-argued paper to Sir Rod Eddington's inquiry into Britain's future transport needs. He pointed out how the current "money go round" system on the railways inflated costs. But the Government's own financial assessments fail to recognise the external costs of road transport and the full benefit of rail services.

MPs are signing up to support the *Growing the Railways* campaign, organised by Transport 2000. An early day motion, EDM1214, calling for expansion of the railways, has been organised by Alan Whitehead, co-sponsored by Tom Brake and John Horam. Railfuture members should write to their MPs to persuade them to sign EDM1214.

Adverts which mixed opinion and fact in attacking railways have been criticised by the Advertising Standards Authority. The ASA upheld six complaints by Railfuture, the Railway Forum and a member of the public against Transport-Watch. In its ruling on



SUGAR: An Egyptian narrow gauge train is loaded in the middle of a sugar cane field near Luxor. The load is taken 25 miles direct to the processing plant.

On the right is the latest British method of transporting bulk powder.

Rail freight operator EWS says the new ISO-Veyor technology is set to revolutionise the dry bulk transportation market just as ISO tanks have done for the global bulk liquids market. EWS says the intermodal tanks reduce handling and storage costs and should help rail win over new customers



Pictures: PAUL KREBS (top) and EWS

2 November, the ASA said Transport-Watch was entitled to express its opinions about the "shortcomings of railways" but not to present claims as facts. It also upheld complaints of exaggeration, about rail subsidy calculations, road capacity in London, fuel figures, environmental damage, and comparison of road and rail fares.

The adverts appeared in several magazines, including *Private Eye*.

Railwatch 103 raised the issue of the adverts and asked Paul Witherington of Transport-Watch where the money for the adverts came from. He said then he thought it came via a trust from a private individual but added: "It is irrelevant where the money is coming from." We still do not know. For more information on the ASA adjudication, see http://www.asa.org.uk/asa/adjudications/non_broadcast/Adjudication+Details.htm?adjudication_id=40464

The European Passengers' Federation, at its meeting in Basle, Switzerland, on 14 January, admitted new member organisations from Catalonia, Ireland and Sweden. EPF, founded in 2002, now has 22 members in 14

countries which between them account for over 75% of the population of the European Union.

Members of EPF, to which Railfuture is affiliated, met European Transport Commissioner Jacques Barrot on 21 December. Issues discussed included international rail passengers' rights, the future of night trains, the prospects for a Eurovignette or lorry charge, and the cost and practicality of short cross-border journeys by train.

The importance of local trains as the first stage of an international train has been highlighted by Railfuture's international committee. We have written to all train operators reminding them that they can benefit from the extra revenue, even if they do not actually sell international tickets themselves.

We are urging them to make international travel information available in all timetable leaflets and booklets, on their websites and on posters at every station. The information should include information about where to buy international rail tickets. In the next *Railwatch* we hope to report on the results of

our approaches to operators. Meanwhile, you can book international tickets through Travel Cannon Ltd, Saxmundham Rail Station, Station Approach, Saxmundham, Suffolk, IP17 1BW Tel: 01728 604600.

Skills register: Trevor Garrod thanks all members who completed and returned the questionnaire enclosed in *Railwatch* 106. If your branch or affiliated local rail users' association needs help or advice on a specific area of work, perhaps legal matters or market research, please contact Mike Harrison, our skills registrar, at 11(2F3) Stead's Place, Edinburgh EH6 5DY.

If you have something to offer the skills register and have not yet completed the questionnaire, he will be pleased to hear from you. You can also complete the questionnaire on line at <http://www.railfuture Scotland.org.uk/skillsDB>

THALYS is a multi-voltage electric train similar to Eurostar and forms part of the service from London to Cologne and Amsterdam, with passengers from Britain changing at Brussels. A delegation from the EPF had an informative meeting with Thalys managers in Brussels on 9 December. Major timetable changes are planned for December next year.

Our members urged that connecting times between Eurostar and Thalys at Brussels be standardised at 20-30 minutes and were assured improvements could be expected next year.

White paper: EPF has submitted eight pages of comments on the progress of the European Commission's white paper *European Transport for 2010: Time to Decide* which was published in 2000.

We point out that "powerful industry lobbyists have undermined Commission proposals such as the Eurovignette for road transport and obligations to provide through rail ticketing and information on journeys involving more than one operator".

While welcoming the concept of key corridors for the Trans European Network and the promotion of high speed trains, EPF also urges action to ensure the social and environmental benefits of classic routes are maintained and developed".

Initiative Fernverkehr which can be translated as *Initiative for Long Distance Travel* - results from the work of an EPF working party.

A selection of information and advice to encourage more use of international long-distance trains was compiled in French and German and has now been translated into English by our member Ronald Schwarz.

It is available on www.rail.lu or by post from Trevor Garrod, 15 Clapham Road South, Lowestoft NR32 1RQ.