



Your letters

Restaurant cars

Thank you for your item on restaurant cars in *Railwatch* 123. A great tradition died when I had my last dinner in the restaurant car on the 20.30 train from Liverpool Street to Norwich on 9 January 2009.

The restaurant car had survived the old LNER, BR, Anglia and ONE with their high standards and courteous staff. Then along came National Express or National Depress as it is known by some of us.

No longer do we have a restaurant car. The good food has gone, the chance of networking in congenial company has gone and the old-established standards have gone. How can we fight back to reverse the decisions of these short-sighted bureaucrats?

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Dog ban

The inconvenience of having to purchase separate tickets for a rail journey requiring a cross-city change between Manchester Piccadilly and Victoria stations while burdened with luggage and a cat, was mentioned by Keith Noble in a letter to *Railwatch* 123. Well Keith is lucky because if I wish to make this journey with my dog, I am not allowed to travel on Metrolink.

I wonder if dog owners in Oldham have realised that they have lost their rail access into Manchester if they need to take their best friend with them.

The fact that dogs can travel on sometimes cramped buses but not on modern, spacious trams seems very silly to me.

*Derek Herring, Knapton Lane,
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Ferries by foot

The article headlined "Rail-sea-rail links lost" in *Railwatch* 123 by Trevor Garrod implies that foot passengers can no longer use the

P&O Calais-Dover ferries. This is not the case. I went into P&O's website in March and obtained a "dummy quote" for a day trip crossing tomorrow, for one foot passenger. The quotation came up OK (£6) and there is no indication anywhere on the site that foot passengers are no longer allowed. It is true that Sea France no longer accepts foot passengers on Dover-Calais (as stated in the article), but has Mr Garrod perhaps got his wires crossed re P&O?

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Toilets

Alan Crowhurst lists "toilets open 24 hours" in *Railwatch* 123 as a facility which should be provided at a railway station. But if we don't have a 24/7 rail service, why do public conveniences have to be open when trains aren't running? They would only attract drunks and other undesirables.

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❖ Editors' note: Railway stations could always be relied on in the past for providing toilets. Most passengers would appreciate local authorities and train operators sharing the cost of running toilets so they could be available to both passengers and the public in general.

Station links

At last we have a scheme to improve the interchange at West Hampstead between Thameslink, North London Line, and Jubilee Line stations in that Network Rail is installing a new footbridge at the former with its exit (on Iverson Road) "pointing towards" the other two stations rather than, as now, in the wrong direction.

Wishful thinking maybe, but it would have been nice if we had had a chance to comment at the planning stage because we could have asked the obvious questions: a, Why not do it properly and put in a connecting passenger tunnel

so avoiding the busy and narrow West End Lane pavement, and weather no longer than those recently opened at King's Cross Underground.

b, If we can only afford a bridge, why was it not built nearer the South end of the Thameslink platform so as to minimise the walking distance?
*Dr John Davis, Fairmead Avenue,
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Flawed busway

In the light of recent arguments about construction details and the resulting funding issues relating to the Cambridgeshire guided busway, it is perhaps time to reflect on why it was so fundamentally flawed before the first sod was turned.

The scheme has required an unprecedented level of design and engineering input, since no one has ever before laid thousands of stiff, heavy concrete beams on a soggy fen and expected them to stay true to within a few millimetres. This has required, for example, sinking of over 2,000 deep piles and the construction of massive, expensive and – crucially – unique machinery. There is simply no comparison with any other busway in the world and regardless of the latest disputes, credit is due to the design and construction teams for managing this pioneering feat.

Supporters of the scheme have argued that the busway is flexible because "it goes where people want to go". In reality, it does precisely the opposite.

To get to St Ives and Huntingdon, a bus from Cambridge city centre has to travel about two miles (say, 15 minutes) along congested roads in the wrong direction before accessing the busway at Milton Road.

In all that time, passengers going beyond the Science Park are getting no closer to their destination. That is why the overall journey time is longer than via the A14, which is the most direct route.

Northstowe is some distance from the A14 so the situation should be marginally better but there is still no overall advantage compared with conventional bus routes.

The solution is, of course, glaringly obvious. If the underlying advantage of a guided busway is greater speed, safety and greater capacity for local journeys along a narrower corridor, a guideway should be constructed alongside an improved A14 where it can be tied in with the civil engineering

works. This would be much cheaper and would provide some flexibility since the bus can still leave the guideway for villages as required while the two miles of the route near Cambridge are at least in the right direction.

Sadly, the opportunity to reopen the railway to the station and for longer and more varied journeys, without the need for all that expensive piling and concrete, has now been lost, possibly forever.

Local mistakes were made but the Government was wrong to pursue this experiment. It also failed to recognise the fundamental flaws of a "public inquiry" where over £2 million of its own money was used to argue the case for this disastrous scheme in the face of such substantial and well-considered opposition.

*Tim Phillips, chairman,
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Wrexham revolt

A good issue of *Railwatch* as always but the last time I looked, and I know the area well, Wrexham was still part of Wales. Far from being in the North West, it is part of our North East.

There is a growing feeling, evidenced not least in several organs I have read recently that Merseyside and Chester local authorities seem to be casting jealous eyes on north-east Wales and are trying to set up a unitary body which ignores our identity and would swamp Welshness.

*John D Rogers, chairman,
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A broad view

I am now a permanent resident in South Africa, not I hasten to add, because of a good rail network! It is hardly used for long-distance travel, except for heavy goods.

I shall return to the UK every summer for a couple of months and will hope to make contact with old friends.

How the climate for rail in the UK has changed for the better. Congratulations!

Please continue to send me your excellent magazine.

*Rowland Dale, Fish Hoek, 7975,
Cape Town, South Africa.*

Oil money

How pleased I am that *Railwatch* has explained to me that I get my scepticism of the global warming religion from right-wing think tanks funded by Exxon. And there was me thinking man-made

global warming was an inverted pyramid of science based on some extremely dodgy analysis not one mile from where I write this.

Why worry in any case? Isn't it about the time the hole in the ozone layer (remember that?), should have done for us all?

What on earth is *Railwatch* doing publishing such an item as that?
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❖ Editors' note: A Commons inquiry in March said that the scientific reputation of the University of East Anglia climate research unit was untarnished but said the university should have been more open to queries from climate change sceptics. The MPs said there was no evidence to challenge the scientific consensus on man-made global warming. See: Oil money on Page 4.

Nationalisation

I would like to reply to Clara Zilahi's letter (*Railwatch* 123) by citing some cogent and usually forgotten reasons for renationalising our rail system.

There may be some other administrative changes which would bring similar benefits, but the present system certainly won't.

If rail fares accrued to the public sector then the Government would have a financial incentive – and what could be more important in cash strapped times – to increase rail travel. Such revenue would far outweigh any loss in fuel tax revenue if fewer people drove. So we could for example have a revenue-neutral package of a 55mph speed limit (which would also reduce casualties and greenhouse gas emissions) and lower rail fares, the latter being used to counter public opposition to the former. Note that most of the extra travel would be off peak because it is only then that drivers are likely to be able to exceed 55mph anyway.

And, just as it is only at general election times that many politicians listen to the people, it is only at franchise renewal times that rail operators listen to passengers. Just as many issues – including

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Email: editor@railwatch.org.uk
Railwatch also welcomes articles and pictures
Please use email if possible



HOW THE FRENCH DO IT: TGV high-speed trains are used for postal deliveries Picture: La Poste

The rail freight company which hauls mail for the Royal Mail was sold in June to Channel Tunnel operator Eurotunnel for £31 million.

Financial experts said FirstGroup was trying to reduce its £2.3 billion debts by selling GB Railfreight.

FirstGroup, which has its headquarters in Aberdeen, took over GBRf in 2003.

Eurotunnel has made no secret of its desire to expand its rail freight arm.

Eurotunnel chairman Jacques Gounon said it was "a further expression of our commitment to the UK".

He added: "Growing concerns about the environment and the increasing need for freight transport over both long and short distances mean that rail freight is a growing market."

The Rail Freight Group said it was important that Channel Tunnel access charges were

seen to be fair. Germany's Deutsche Bahn bought rival rail freight operator EWS in 2007. GBRf currently moves more than a million postal items per day including first class mail between London and Scotland.

The company brought mail traffic back to rail in 2004 when the company agreed a one-year contract with Royal Mail.

Previously renewed on a year-by-year basis, the GBRf/Royal Mail contract is now for a three-year term.

The company has been "incredibly flexible and responsive" when Royal Mail has required support at very busy times, such as during the delivery of the off-the-press consignments of the last two Harry Potter books.

In France, the postal service uses TGV-style trains built by Alstom between 1978–1986 to deliver the mail.

public transport – tend to get crowded out of public debate at general elections, many issues of importance to passengers get crowded out of debate when franchises are up for renewal. Would people want to sign up to a political system whereby our leaders couldn't be removed for 10 or even 22 years? Even Chiltern is unlikely to be popular with the people of Sudbury (the one in London).

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Railway ancestor

While this organisation is called Railfuture, I wonder if any readers can help me with something from rail past? I am researching the career of my father Edward Hopper who worked on the railway

from 1925 at Waterloo to retire as British Railways Board chief training officer in 1968.

I am especially keen to contact former railwaymen who may have been on one of his general railway courses at Dillington House in Somerset, or his visits to mainland Europe.

Also anyone who came across him during their graduate entry to the railway via the Staff College at Woking or other 'railway schools'.

His career illuminates the transition from private to nationalised railway and his concern for the education and training in a large organisation as part of its ability to function.

My search started as the result of finding in my mother's papers some interesting material on my father's early career on the

Southern Railway at Waterloo. He retired in 1968. He never gave up the railway until his death in 1991 and was a member of Railfuture for many years.

My mother carried on her membership (which has now been transferred to my brother, Paul) up to January this year when she died at 102, our final connection to the railway ending with her pension.

I am already in contact with Chris Green who was one of father's graduate entry trainees in the 1960s.

If you are able to help please contact me on mauricehopper@phonecoop.coop

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