



Your letters

Rails at risk

This is a request from one of the probably very few New Zealand members of Railfuture. At a time when I hope many countries are rediscovering the virtues of rail and expanding and upgrading their systems, the present NZ government seems to be going in the opposite direction.

Strong noises are issuing that it is – through Kiwirail – proposing to close three of the remaining branch railways in the North Island. All are quite substantial and two are more like secondary parts of the main trunk than a true branch line.

As I am involved in a developing campaign to fight for the retention of one of the three lines under threat, I am looking for accessible information about any general worldwide trend to expand and upgrade rail. I do not expect you to provide this information personally, but I wonder if you are able to refer me to any relevant sources or websites. Thanks for any help you can give.

Graham Bush, Political Studies Department, University of Auckland, Private Bag 92019, Auckland, 1142. NZ gbus002@artsnet.auckland.ac.nz

Editors' note: We have already advised Graham that much of the positive news about railways worldwide can be found in back numbers of Railwatch which are accessible on the web. There is also a wealth of information on the Railfuture website which also links to many other sites of importance. But if members feel they can help Graham, please get in touch with him directly

Rail and tourism

I noted the item on the importance of rail to rural tourism in the Wales local action notes in the last issue of *Railwatch*. During the autumn, I took advantage of First Group's

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Club 55 promotion to have a weekend in Cardiff. While there I went up the Taff Valley line to Merthyr Tydfil when the sun was shining and the trees were still in full multi-coloured leaf and thought that the view compared well with many more recognised scenic routes in Britain.

This is now probably true of many other lines in once industrial areas and those largely used by commuters.

As someone who spent many years on the fringes of the tourist industry, I would generalise that those who work in it, as providers, advisors or policy makers, are not much more aware of the importance of public transport than the population at large. For example there are still far too many hotel and attraction brochures and websites that make virtually no reference to travel except by car. Train trips are often seen as attractions for days out rather than a means of transport.

Yet many overseas visitors to Britain must arrive by air and even those from the nearby parts of Continental Europe may be wary of bringing their cars and having to drive on the wrong side of the road.

There are many ways in which Railfuture and tourism could join forces to achieve better rail services.

Obvious areas of co-operation include improved links to ferry terminals and airports, better bus services to railway stations, opening of new stations in some areas and even a more comprehensible fare structure. We should perhaps be more active in making the tourist industry an ally.

John Stanford, Colvestone Crescent, London E8 jhn.stnfrd@tiscali.co.uk

Editors' note: Railfuture members are urged to write to the publishers of tourist leaflets and other material when public transport information is not given.

Railfuture members are often more knowledgeable about transport than the people compiling the tourist material. Quite often, it is very simple to go by public transport and almost always more enjoyable than travelling by car.

Politicians as 'allies'

Peter Rayner sounds a bit like Victor Meldrew when he laments the shortcomings of "our current breed of politicians". The headline says: "Politicians fail to understand rail" but rail campaigners also sometimes ignore what might be called "the politics of projects". If they want to be successful, rail campaigners need to be more realistic about the importance of getting politicians on side. Sometimes they need educating about rail, but often they are supportive of campaigners.

Roger Blake, Dynevor Road, London N16 0DX roger.blake@railfuture.gov.uk

Boston possibilities

Would it be possible to give Boston back its direct route to London? I am thinking of a relatively short new curve just west of Swineshead station to link up with the Sleaford to Spalding line at Donington. Later perhaps the Firsby to Louth section could also be reopened.

Roger Brown, Folkingham, Sleaford, Lincs NG34 0TS lubbock888@yahoo.co.uk

Extra benefits

The proposal to launch a Carlisle to London Euston service, mentioned in *Railwatch* 126, could serve Carnforth's main line platforms. Restoration of these platforms has long been desirable as it would allow Leeds-Lancaster trains to be diverted to Barrow, after reversing at Carnforth, and to connect for Windermere. I believe there could still be a Hawes to Kendal service to provide a link from the Settle and Carlisle line to the Lake District.

I believe that at the London end a more suitable location for the parkway station would be Hemel Hempstead, rather than Kings Langley. This could be where the line crosses the A414 road, about halfway between the existing Hemel Hempstead station and Apsley. Both the existing stations could remain open for stopping trains. The

new station would be just as close to Hemel Hempstead town centre, and would become a major interchange, being well sited to provide bus links to Heathrow, Luton and Stansted airports as well as places like Whipsnade Zoo. The station would also be accessible by bike using the Featherbed Way.

Simon Norton, Hertford Street, Cambridge CB4 3AG S.Norton@dpmmms.cam.ac.uk

Fares chaos

I should like to see more campaigning by Railfuture on the chaotic situation of booking rail fares.

People familiar with the internet have an immediate advantage in being able to find cheaper fares. With the virtual removal of nearly all rail station travel centres, it is almost impossible to get personal service for anything more than a simple single or return journey.

I had to spend 45 minutes standing at my nearest booking office in order for up to three staff to work out a cheaper route for a journey which involved two destinations. This would not be necessary if fares were simplified. Currently train operators seem to me to be carrying the fewest number of passengers possible with the highest fares possible. What sort of public service is this?

David Eldridge, Berinsfield, Wallingford, Oxon OX10 7PR david7pr@btinternet.com

Dartmoor delays

As you may know, the Dartmoor Railway, which now has American owners, had hoped to run a daily service between Exeter and Okehampton from May 2010.

Unfortunately it did not materialise and like the Tavistock-Plymouth reopening, is a long time coming!

I am told it could take another five to 10 years before Tavistock-Plymouth is reopened.

When I wrote to West Devon Borough Council about it, they replied in December that: "The railway developers are currently confident that the railway line can be delivered alongside the development of new housing, with the line being completed in the next five to 10 years."

This is indicative of the poor state of railway transport

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planning in England today. Both Wales and Scotland seem to fare better.

Garth Smith, 22 Lillybridge, Northam, Bideford EX39 1TL garthsmith@talktalk.net

Green lines

Some of the station facilities called for by Alan Crowhurst (*Railwatch* 123) do already exist on or adjacent to a good many stations. For example, there is a post office pillar box in the precincts on Brockenhurst station which is run by South West Trains. There are also very good waiting rooms and well-kept public toilets at that station.

I have yet to observe recycling facilities on any UK railway station, however. These would not need to be the massive skips we find in car parks and in municipal recycling centres. They could instead be dustbin-size, semi-transparent containers which are situated on railway platforms in Germany.

For example, on the station serving Eisenach, Saxony, I noticed four of these mini-skip bins – for glass, plastic, paper and landfill, red on the left, green on the right.

I should like to suggest that this type of arrangement be introduced at stations run by both Network Rail and train operators.

Perhaps Railfuture members could raise the issue at meetings with Passenger Focus and the community rail partnerships.

Local authorities may well wish to co-operate, as this type of scheme would help to reduce Britain's dependence on landfill.

Josephine Martin, Downs View Villa, Camp Road, Freshwater, Isle of Wight PO40 9HR

Plea from North

Looking through *Railwatch* 126, I see that yet again most of the rail schemes to get the go-ahead are in the south. They include the rebuilding of Gatwick airport station, major projects at

Send your letters to:

The Editors, 4 Christchurch Square, London E9 7HU
Email: editor@railwatch.org.uk
Railwatch also welcomes articles and pictures
Please use email if possible

◆◆◆◆ Deutsche Bahn has ordered double-deck trains for German inter-city services



Picture: LONDON MIDLAND

LIGHTWEIGHT WINNER: Crowds of passengers seem to have given the new Stourbridge branch line service their backing. Train operator London Midland said its innovative service (using a lightweight Parry People Mover) was 99.5% reliable last year.

In the first full calendar year of operation, the lightweight, low-energy class 139 railcars maintained their reliability even in the challenging winter conditions at the beginning and end of the year, when many rail services

elsewhere in Britain were affected by problems associated with leaf fall, snow and freezing temperatures. About 465,000 passengers used the service in 2010, a 20% increase on 2009.

"This is a solid demonstration of how lightweight rail – which cuts carbon and costs – can help make big improvements to local transport," said John Parry, chairman of Parry People Movers. "We now must move onwards to supply railcars and trams for many more applications, both in the UK and abroad."

Reading, electrifying lines from London to Oxford and of course Crossrail. Meanwhile you report elsewhere about the reopening of the East London line.

No wonder therefore that those of us in the North of England without even a direct train to London feel that we are getting a raw deal when it comes to investment.

Tim Mickleburgh, Littlefield Lane, Grimsby DN31 2AZ timmickleburgh2002@googlemail.com

Editors' note: Network Rail says that 70% of all rail users either start or finish their journey in London

Flawed competition

I was listening to a debate on BBC Radio 4 today about how to stop overcrowding on trains. I was shocked to learn that some franchise agreements forbid train companies to compete with each other on price. In any other

industry, this kind of price fixing would be considered illegal, and for good reason.

I call on the Government to end this practice, and allow the companies on our supposedly privatised railway more freedom to improve prices and services in order to compete with each other and with other modes of transport.

David Willey, North Harbour Street, Ayr KA8 8AB davidwilley@hotmail.com

Railfuture success

I write to praise the recent Shoreditch conference. The content was generally relevant, speakers entertaining and informative and I learned a lot about the impact, and the hard work behind, initiatives such as speeding-up services. In fact, I would say that Jim Bamford's presentation was the highlight of the day for me.

The only downside was very poor "admin" on the day. Time management was sacrificed for a degree of "enjoying the sound of one's own voice" and quite why we had to sit and wait for a local councillor to come and "open" the day when she could not even get herself across East London on time for a late-morning appointment, I genuinely do not understand. I suspect it is that it was a "trade-off", as in "you can use our venue, if you let one of us open the event".

But overall, excellent, and I look forward to the next one. Oh, and the "beard count" was impressive. Some things never change where trains are concerned.

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