

Scotland

■ ■ Keeping rail issues at forefront of voters' attention
Elections for the Scottish Parliament will be held on Thursday 5 May and Railfuture is keen that rail is a key issue for voters. Donald MacPhee reports that Railfuture is concentrating on the following five points:

1. Devolution has brought many improvements to the rail system in Scotland. This momentum must be maintained during the forthcoming Parliamentary session.
2. We need to have strong regional public transport authorities with good leadership and a firm commitment to co-ordinate all public transport. Ideally most travellers should be able to reach railway stations without using a car at any stage in the journey.
3. Rail fares are too high and are becoming disproportionately more expensive as each year passes. A national railcard should be introduced to redress this and avoid the danger of the cost of rail fares becoming a barrier to rail travel.
4. There seems to be a growing emphasis on some routes to aim for speeding up end-to-end journeys to the detriment of some intermediate locations. This philosophy also manifests itself in an apparent reluctance to commit to some obvious new stations. There is a need to balance local access needs with competitive speeds for longer distance services.
5. The Scottish Government should be a supporter of freight movement by rail.

■ ■ Victory for Scottish freight grants campaigners
The Scottish Government has reversed moves to axe freight facility grants. The decision came in February after the Rail Freight Group teamed up with Transform Scotland, the sustainable transport alliance, to campaign together. Ahead of a Scottish Parliament debate in January, a joint briefing paper was issued. The RFG's David Spaven said: "The retention of the successful freight grants scheme is absolutely critical to shifting more freight from road to rail in Scotland. This is a great decision, and is tribute to the cross-party support for retaining an unsung but very successful scheme. I would like to give thanks to the Scottish Government and to all others involved, including the Parliament's transport, infrastructure and climate change committee, and to Cathy Jamieson MSP for leading the helpful debate on FFG in Parliament on 13 January. The country should not lose out on the widespread economic and environmental benefits which FFGs deliver." RFG chairman Tony Berkeley said: "FFG has taken over 33 million lorry miles off Scottish roads annually."

■ ■ Railfuture supports plans to expand railway
Railfuture Scotland submitted a 13-page response to Network Rail's draft second generation rail utilisation strategy including four pages on gaps not identified in the RUS.

■ ■ Railfuture member shocked by road building
An English visitor who thought Scotland had adopted a more modern and positive approach to rail was shocked by the extent of road building still going on. He reports: "As I was chugging out of Glasgow on the train, I noticed the biggest new road you ever did see; so I investigated and found it to be part of a new motorway, the six-lane M74, £500 million for five miles. So I further investigated and found that despite there being protestations and threats from the Greens to disrupt it like never before, it is to open nine months early later this year. Obviously building one motorway through the centre of the city is not enough, so you then have to build another!" The petrol-heads, ignoring both the need for a sustainable transport policy and the need for a new approach resulting from reduced supplies of oil worldwide, are already campaigning for the next road scheme, "upgrading" the A9 between Perth and Inverness. The bill for that scheme is expected to be more than £3 billion.

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New but not better

Linda Irvine (*Railwatch* 126) is right to draw attention to the defects in the design for Newport's new station. A recent appraisal of the facilities (from a passenger viewpoint) produced the following:

1. Improved access to the city centre? No. The station entrance is now less convenient.
2. Improved concourse? No. The previous one was much more user-friendly with more space, better heat insulation and more seats and information display.
3. Improved travel centre? No. The travel centre for advance bookings and enquiries in the old concourse has been abolished.
4. Improved footbridge? No. The new one is higher so there is an extra flight of stairs. One passenger lift per platform is provided but this is inadequate if there are many people arriving off a train and there is no alternative if it breaks down. In a new station, surely escalators should have been provided?
5. Improved passenger facilities? No. The W H Smith bookstall is now tucked away on the north side of the station which is the least-used part. The main toilets, cafeteria and waiting room remain in the old part of the station which is now away from the part of the platforms used by trains. Thus, they are now less convenient.

So a large sum of money has been spent on producing a "trendy" tube-like footbridge and

booking hall which appears to have worsened the service and convenience of passengers. Network Rail should be called to justify such wasteful expenditure in view of the worsened passenger environment.

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A misleading picture

In *Railwatch* 125, you carried an article, with photograph, of the remodelled Newport station.

You quoted from the public relations statements, which gave the impression that the station is a great improvement on the original.

This is untrue. The new station is a disaster. It cost £22 million (not the £13 million you quoted) and in most respects is less convenient for passengers than before.

Here are some main points:

1. The new entrance is 200 yards further from the town centre and the bus station.
2. Bus services have not been adjusted to call at the rail station.
3. On entering the station, one naturally looks for an electronic board giving details of train arrivals and departures. There is none to be seen; there is one, but it is behind the passenger! Whose bright idea was that?
4. The new stairway and linking passage to the platforms seem unnecessarily high above the track.
5. The new entrance means that departing passengers arrive at the wrong end of platforms and have further to walk along the platform to reach most

Your letters extra

East Midlands

By Anthony Kay and Roger Bacon A.Kay@lboro.ac.uk
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■ ■ East Midlands AGM

The branch AGM has been provisionally booked for 12.30 on Saturday 2 April at the European Inn Hotel, opposite Derby railway station. A speaker from CrossCountry Trains has been invited. CrossCountry runs around 50% of the services at Derby, as well as some to Nottingham and Leicester, but does not seem to hold stakeholder briefings in the region.

■ ■ Longer trains on Nottingham to Liverpool route

During 2011, East Midlands Trains plans to provide some longer trains on the Nottingham-Liverpool route, with 17 two-car trains doubled in length.

■ ■ Nottingham-Leeds rolling stock

Railfuture has complained that class 150 rolling stock is being used by Northern Rail on the Nottingham-Leeds route instead of the class 158s that have been used since the route reopened nearly two years ago. Railfuture believes a service between two major cities should have something approaching inter-city standard and not take two hours to cover 75 miles.

■ ■ Cities to benefit from high-speed rail

High Speed 2 could cut journey times between Nottingham and Leeds by 66% to only 40 minutes. Nottingham to Sheffield will be reached in only 20 minutes. This will be a major economic benefit for these cities. HS2 is the company set up by the Government to consider the case for new high speed rail services between London and Scotland.

■ ■ Nottingham Express Transit phase two

Railfuture is backing plans by Nottingham City Council in its draft local transport plan strategy to extend the city's trams to Beeston, Chilwell and Clifton. But Nottinghamshire County Council is withdrawing most of its support for the tram expansion in a bid to save £18 million.

■ ■ Ripley reopening plan

The Midland Railway Trust recently commissioned CES Group Partnership to assess the line from Ripley to Little Eaton with a view to reopening as a preserved railway, but Desmond McKinley of CES Group Partnership reckons it has a future as a commercial railway. He has applied to the European Union for funding towards the £45 million cost of an ambitious scheme for seven stations and a new business park with intermodal facility.

■ ■ Nottingham signalling work

A major signalling upgrade will halt train services into Nottingham for up to six weeks in 2013, Network Rail has warned.

■ ■ Beeston station

A £250,000 project to improve Beeston station with CCTV, a new taxi rank, and improvements to lighting and footways, is being funded by Nottinghamshire County and Broxtowe Borough Councils. There is an urgent need for 100 new parking spaces and a bus turning circle, but these will depend on land acquisition and further funding.

■ ■ Missed connections

Passenger numbers at Corby continue to grow as the reopened line approaches its second anniversary in April, but there have been problems with missed connections at Kettering for passengers changing to northbound trains on the Midland main line. Railfuture member David Fursdon is enlisting the help of Corby Borough Council and local MP Liz Bagshaw to resolve the problem. It is also hoped that a rail users' group for the Corby line will be formed this year.

trains. Similarly, most arriving passengers now have further to walk to exit the station. In the case of platform 1, this means a long walk without a shelter in rainy weather, as you can see in your photograph.

6. The passenger is delivered at the wrong end of platforms, further away from station amenities.

7. Passengers changing trains have further to walk (up to 100 yards further) to reach trains on other platforms. In some cases this could mean missing connections.

How has this absurd situation come about? Basically, because Network Rail was mainly responsible.

Of course, its remit is to look after platforms and tracks. It does not come into contact with passengers directly, unlike train operators, and so can – and does – overlook what passengers want and need. In short, design has taken

precedence over function, and the highly paid consultants who won't actually use that station have delivered an inferior product.

I understand that Swansea station is being redeveloped. As a terminus, not a through station, it does not give the same opportunity for most of the Newport errors.

I have not seen details of the planned redesign, but the easy task of integrating bus stops into the station itself has not been done.

I hope that in future the convenience of rail passengers will be considered better than at Newport.

I hope you can print this, to put the record straight after the misleading picture painted by Network Rail.

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No action on killer air

More than 4,300 deaths in London are believed to be caused by poor air quality every year and 200,000 premature deaths in Britain every year are linked to the same cause.

The UK has repeatedly failed to meet European Union air pollution targets for years, with more than 20 towns and cities now emitting pollution at twice the World Health Organisation limits.

Even the House of Commons environmental committee has accepted that 50,000 people a year die prematurely because of air pollution. Of particular concern are dusts, sulphates and nitrates from road traffic and other sources, known as particulate matter.

These small particles can be carcinogenic and are able to pass through the lungs into the bloodstream, causing inflammation and other more serious conditions.

Twice as many people today suffer from lung disease and asthmatic conditions caused by air pollution than did 20 years ago.

Studying data from 2008, the independent Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants estimated that completely removing particulate pollution would have added six months

to the life expectancy of every new birth in the UK that year. Air quality campaigners have been fighting hard for the Government to publish annual statistics on the premature deaths from air pollution.

James Grugeon from Environmental Protection UK said the latest figures showed the massive impact air pollution has on the health of the UK public.

Simon Birkett, who has long campaigned for action to clean up London's air pollution, said officials now had little excuse not to act given the statistical evidence of the health burden.

The UK faces a £300 million fine for failing to meet new EU targets for reducing air pollution and has desperately sought to delay its deadlines.

London Mayor Boris Johnson has however delayed extending curbs on diesels, introduced by his predecessor Ken Livingstone, and scrapped the extended congestion zone.

The Government is also considering encouraging more car driving by introducing a "fuel price stabiliser" which will protect drivers from the increasing cost of oil. Prime Minister David Cameron has said he "understands the pain" of drivers forced to pay more.

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