

# *The Society for the Reinvigoration of Unremunerative Branch Lines in the United Kingdom*

## *The Branch Line Reinvigoration Society* PROGRESS REPORT - JULY, 1960.

"We hope that members approved of the improved Progress Report last month, with the greater emphasis on news of the Branch Lines. This month that feature is extended - and the reports are given in somewhat greater detail.

RECENTS COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS OF INTEREST. The views and proposals of SRUBLUK have been forwarded to the Chairman of the Railway Board for the Committee of Enquiry. It is understood that our representations were amongst the earliest received.

The Committee discussed the circumstances surrounding the closing of the Dornoch Branch, and of a number of intermediate stations on the main line. In connection with this closure there were strong protests and two M.P.'s took the matter up with the Minister asking for the closure to be postponed. Further details regarding this matter appear later in this Progress Report.

The Committee discussed the proposed closure of the Westerham Branch, and it is understood that a local Association in that area has briefed Counsel to appear to present the case for retention. The Association are hopeful of success.

Two members of the Committee reported on a visit that they had made to the Staines West and Uxbridge (Vine Street) Branches. A report of this visit appears later on in this issue.

The Chairman drew the attention of the Committee to an interesting point in the recent report of the Central Transport Users Consultative Committee, where it was stated that if it is considered that the amount of hardship caused outweighs the economies obtained by closure of a line the Committee are prepared to recommend that the service continue. A number of other lines were also discussed, including the Burton - Tutbury, and Redditch - Ashchurch. SRUBLUK's studies of these lines are continuing.

### SRUBLUK REPORT ON THE PRESENT CONDITION OF THE WEST DRAYTON - STAINES (WEST) AND UXBRIDGE (VINE STREET) BRANCHES.

The Sub-Committee arrived at West Drayton and Yiewsley station by the 2:42 pm train from Paddington and purchased day return tickets for the 6 $\frac{1}{4}$  mile trip to Staines (West). The examination was made on a Saturday afternoon. The 3:13 pm

to Staines consisted of Gloucester R.C. & W.Co. single unit railcar No. WW55019, and nearly half of the 65 seats were filled on departure.

At Colnbrook (3 miles) 5 passengers joined the train; none was observed to alight. Colnbrook is the only passing loop on the branch, having up and down platforms, both in use.

No stop was made at Poyle Estate Halt ( $3\frac{1}{4}$  miles); this request halt serves a very limited area between Colnbrook and Poyle Halt for Stanwell Moor ( $3\frac{3}{4}$  miles) where  $5\frac{1}{2}$  passengers joined the car while 2 alighted. A conspicuous roadside nameboard was observed at this halt.

Two passengers joined at Yeoveney, who were probably railway enthusiasts.

A short distance south of Yeoveney the facing spur connecting the branch with the S.R. Windsor and Eton (Riverside) line was passed. This is now overgrown but, if restored, could provide a through connection to Staines Central. The Staines (West) line crossed the electrified Windsor Branch by an overbridge and continues alongside this line until Staines (West) is reached.

Several omnibus routes were noted to terminate immediately in front of the station, which is only a very short walk from the main shopping centre. No signposts to the station were observed in the town, however.

The Sub-Committee next visited Staines (Central) which is to the east of the town. This station was well signposted at the overbridge in the town centre, and is also conveniently situated. There have been conflicting reports regarding the intention at a future date to divert the Staines (West) trains to Staines (Central); it is considered no serious inconvenience would result, indeed the branch would have the advantage of main line connections at both ends. Judging by the bridges now being built over both the Windsor and Staines (West) lines, it would appear that this diversion is not now contemplated.

On the return journey, the 4:52 pm left Staines (West) approximately half-filled. No stop was made at Yeoveney, but at Poyle 11 passengers alighted. There was no further exchange of passengers until arrival at West Drayton.

Judging by the pattern of traffic on this Saturday afternoon, the original intention to curtail this service at Colnbrook, replacing the Colnbrook to Staines section by a bus, would have been disastrous - it would appear most important that a through link be maintained between West Drayton and Staines.

There has been, however, a favourable postscript to this visit which appeared in the press at about the same time: under the heading -

### BRIDGE PLAN SAVES A RAIL LINE.

A change of plan by the Ministry of Transport is saving a branch railway line. Four stations were to be closed so that a proposed viaduct to carry the new Staines by-pass at Wraysbury, Bucks, could be shortened and the cost cut by £120,000.

The stations on the line between Colnbrook and Staines are Poyle Estate Halt, Poyle for Stanwell Moor Halt, Yeoveney Halt, and Staines West.

Now the Ministry have another plan involving the building of three separate bridges.

One of these would be unnecessary if the line were closed. The saving in this would be £30,000 - not enough to justify closing the line, say the Ministry.

Neither can British Railways (Western Region) put forward a case on economic grounds to withdraw the services on this line.

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On return to West Drayton, the members of the sub-committee purchased single tickets for the  $2\frac{1}{2}$  mile journey to Uxbridge (Vine Street), (7d). The 5:18 pm (ex-G.W.R. Diesel railcar No. W30W) left with no other passengers and no passengers joined at Cowley ( $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles). This was surprising since conditions on both the Staines and Uxbridge branches appeared superficially to be similar; there was no apparent reason why the potential traffic should be so much less.

Uxbridge (Vine Street) station is conveniently situated near the town centre, and is only a very short walk from the Metropolitan Line station. The station front was observed to be entirely devoid of any nameboard; the only indication of its railway ownership was the presence of a few railway posters. Cheap day travel to Southend-on-Sea was amongst the matters advertised, but no indication was given of the local train service, main line connections, etc., on the exterior of the building.

The bus stop, ideally situated in the station forecourt, provided an explanation of the absence of passengers on the branch. A well-loaded single deck omnibus was leaving - destination West Drayton station. This service follows the rail line closely for the whole journey, and operated at an interval of 5 - 10 minutes throughout the day. The journey time is 15 minutes, against 7 minutes on the railway. While it may be considered that the bus service provides a more convenient service to the intermediate residential district, the timetable heading rather belies this intention - it reads - "Special Shuttle Service - Uxbridge

Station to West Drayton and Yiewsley Station". The bus appears, in fact, to be running in direct competition with the railway.

Cowley station is as entirely devoid of publicity as Uxbridge. The roadside nameboard has been removed, and the station entrances are unmarked. Separate entrances exist, on opposite sides of the road overbridge, for the up and down platforms. No internal connection exists between the platforms, but booking facilities are available on each. An atmosphere of neglect pervades the station: the entrances and platforms are overgrown, and the nameboards and buildings are in need of renovation.

The answer to the traffic problem would appear to be a regular interval service on the branch throughout the day, with adequate publicity at stations. This would tend to make the train as easy to catch as the bus. At present there are no trains, on weekdays, between 10:30 am and 4:40 pm, and on Saturdays between 2:30 and 5 pm. It would hardly be surprising if travellers, forced on to the buses at certain times of the day, formed the habit of bus travel.

A further visit was made by a member of the sub-committee on a weekday when he arrived at West Drayton station at 2:15 pm. The buses were running approximately half full, at frequent intervals. A considerable proportion of the passengers alighting entered the station, but it is possible that some were merely making a short cut across the railway. On the arrival of the 2:12 pm train from Paddington a number of passengers who desired this bus had to chase it to the emergency traffic lights installed because of the bridge rebuilding. So much for road/rail co-ordination at West Drayton!

By far the most important intermediate bus stop is Station Road, Cowley; an area served by Cowley Station. The bus does in fact run beyond Vine Street Station in Uxbridge, to the bus station, but the distance is negligible. The main road in Uxbridge is very congested, thanks, in part, to the buses.

These observations demonstrate the usefulness of this branch line.

LONDON AND HOME COUNTIES ELECTRIC TRACTION SOCIETY'S ELECTRIC RAILTOUR, 18 SEPTEMBER. This Society is organising a series of electric railtours in the London Area, the first of which will take place on 18 September. The stock will be a 4 car train of F Stock with high speed motors built in 1920, and will start from Wembley Park, LTE, at 2 pm. The route will be Watford (Met), Harrow-on-the-Hill, Uxbridge, Acton Town, fast line to Hammersmith, Earls Court High Level, High Street Kensington, Baker Street, Inner Circle Outer Rail complete

finally reversing at Baker Street for a non-stop run to Wembley Park, arriving at 6:43 pm. There will be photographic stops. Fare 10/- (children under 14 5/-), including itinerary, and may be obtained from Mr. Trinder at 31 Atheldene Road, S.W.18.

#### NEWS OF THE PROVINCES.

There has been a lot of talk lately about railway branch lines and their closure: we think members will be interested too in news of the Jack Committee which is investigating the trends of rural bus services. According to the Jack Committee, few people seem to realise that rural bus routes can be just as unremunerative as rural railway lines, and that in a few years time the country bus could be as nearly extinct as the country train. The Committee's job is to enquire into the adequacy of these bus services, and consider possible methods of ensuring adequate services in the future.

A sub-committee have just completed a visit to mid-Wales, and what they saw made a big effect on them. This area contains a very scattered population, but the same problem in varying degrees, is found in other areas. The trouble is simply this: there are few bus routes anywhere today which are self-supporting, and economic, judged individually. The general manager of one large bus company in the provinces has stated that 66% of his routes are completely uneconomic. They are paid for, (or subsidised) by the few services that do make a profit. The economics of running a bus are something like this - it costs 2/- a mile to run a bus, but the passenger only pays twopence a mile. As the bus has to average 12 passengers throughout the time it is on the road, it is as well to remember that many rural routes only average two. There has got to be some give and take somewhere: either the country people will have fewer buses - particularly cutting out the once a week to market type of routes, or increased fares - probably to 6d a mile. And if that makes more people buy their own personal transport - scooters and so on, and so the vicious circle goes on! Members will probably be interested that the rural bus services are not now seen to be the magic answer in place of branch lines, and there have been several recent cases where branch line closures were proposed and the bus companies refused to provide alternative services. Food for thought here.

The South Devon Railway Preservation Society, with whom we are allied, recently arranged a special train on the line from Newton Abbot to Moretonhampstead, which is the centre of their endeavours - and hopes. The special carried 225 persons, and at Teigngrace Halt (the first on the branch) the train was welcomed by the Society's Chairman, Canon O.M. Jones. The halt was dressed overall, and there was a large crowd; probably the largest that the halt had ever known. The guests included the Chairmen of Newton Abbot Urban District Council, and also of the Newton Abbot Rural District Council; the Chairman of the S.D.R.P.S. was officially presented at Moretonhampstead Station with that Society's Green Tie. It is surprising what can be achieved, given the effort!

The line from Bury St. Edmunds to Thetford has now closed; the passenger service was withdrawn in 1953, although goods services did continue. British Railways claim that the complete closure will save the sum of £9000 per year. The line was opened in 1876, and cost £3500 per mile to build; quite a sum in those days.

Entwistle, on the line from Bolton to Blackburn, is under threat of closure, and the population of 300 is energetically opposing it. There is no bus service to the centre of this community, and in winter they rely on the railway to bring in supplies for both humans and animals. In 1947 all roads in to the village were blocked for five weeks. The saving claimed by closing the station would amount to £1374, and the traffic census shows that the traffic to Bolton is 35 joining, and 20 alighting; on Saturdays, 48 joining, and 20 alighting; and on Sundays 4 joining, 8 alighting. The figures to Blackburn are similar. Parcels forwarded were 494, and received 192. The nearest bus stop is up a 1 in 7 hill which is impassable in winter, and the village has no shops, doctor, school, bank, or post office. From a census carried out in the village, of the 200 living within walking distance of the station, 50% travelled by rail regularly, and a further 30% occasionally. They claim in the village that this is a higher percentage than most urban communities. The result of the deputation and enquiry is awaited.

It is proposed to close Wearhead and St. John's Chapel Stations, but the latter would become a public delivery siding. The effect of this is to shorten the Weardale Branch - at a time when it is government policy to endeavour to attract industry to Upper Weardale! Wearhead Rural District Council are entering a strong protest.

Wamphray, Dinwoodie, Nethercleugh, Ecclefechan, Kirtlebridge, and Kirkpatrick stations on the Glasgow-Carlisle main line have been closed. Dinwoodie and Nethercleugh goods stations have already been closed, and Wamphray Ecclefechan, Kirtlebridge and Kirkpatrick goods stations will be converted to unstaffed public sidings.

Tutbury Jinnie (on the direct line between Burton-on-Trent and Crewe) has now run for the last time. The line was losing £7000 so it was said, and the last run was patronised by over 300 persons. Mr. John Jennings, M.P. for Burton, who led the protests, was on the last trip.

Admirers of the Mumbles Electric Railway will no doubt wish to note that the last coach of this railway left Swansea (on a train) left for its permanent home on the Leeds University Middleton Colliery Railway Society, where it will have a specially built length of 2 miles of track.

Clowne South, also Clowne and Marlborough have also been closed. No passengers have used these stations for two years - British Railways manager this apparent feat by keeping the stations open to passengers, but arranging that no passenger trains called there!

Speculation that Marlborough station may be closed to passenger traffic in the not too distant future is backed by an official "hint" from Paddington. A spokesman stated that the closure of the Midland and South Western Junction Railway between Cheltenham and Andover (which SRUBLUK have been expecting) may be suggested shortly to the transport users consultative committee for the area. The line is losing money, but no date for closure has yet been decided upon.

Regarding the closure of the line from the Mound Junction to Dornoch, the Highland Fund has decided not to proceed with its scheme to operate this line, since the Commission will only cede the passenger traffic, but will still deal with parcels and freight traffic from Bonar Bridge, 14 miles away. In addition, the Mound Station would remain closed, unless the Highland Fund would guarantee British Railway's losses on operating it. They would not be agreeable to the Highland Fund operating it. In the circumstances, the Highland Fund decided that in view of the many difficult conditions of which the above are only some, which British Railways would impose, that they could not proceed with the plan. The Provost of Dornoch also expressed his disapproval of the way things were

going, and stated that he disapproved of any attempt to celebrate the closing of the line. He felt that it should rather be a day of protest against the withdrawal of a public facility. He added that if an invitation were sent to the council to be present when the train made its last run he would turn it down. To do otherwise would be to depart from the line that they had taken all along. It would be fantastic to go out and look at the last train, and perhaps even to travel in it.

Fifty new buses have been placed in the North of Scotland in supplement of the existing buses following these closures: but apparently it has not been realised that buses with open doorways, no snowploughs, and only rudimentary heating, are not at all suitable for the North of Scotland in the middle of winter.

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Chairman: Mr. C.F. Manley, 42 Hillsborough Court, London, N.W.6.

Membership Secretary: Mr. J.V. Groves, 46 Stonepark Avenue, Beckenham, Kent.

Editorial:- 68, Mayfield Avenue, Crpington, Kent.