

S R U B L U K

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

The Branch Line Reinvigoration Society

Progress Report

No.40, December, 1961 - January, 1962.

A happy New Year to all our members.

FUTURE S.R.U.B.L.U.K. POLICY

In view of changes expected to be brought about as a result of the Transport Bill, published last November, careful consideration must be given to future S.R.U.B.L.U.K. policy. There is little doubt that an increasing number of lines is likely to be threatened with closure and that it will become even more difficult to prevent these closures from taking place.

The Committee is now considering what will be the best action to take. We will of course continue to oppose closures and to assist local authorities in preparing their cases for presentation to the Transport Users' Consultative Committees, although efforts can still only be concentrated on a limited number of lines.

Under the Transport Bill, the British Railways Board will only be required to give notice of a closure six weeks before carrying it into effect. Any objection must be made in writing to the local T.U.C.C. for their consideration as at present. There will, however, be no hearing and the Railways will no longer be required to produce a written statement of their case for the withdrawal of a service. When the local T.U.C.C. has made its recommendation, the matter will no longer go to the Central Transport Consultative Committee but will be presented directly to the Minister of Transport for the final decision.

Provided that the Bill is passed, therefore, closure proposals will be considerably speeded up and the chances of saving a line once closure has been proposed may become very slender indeed. It is considered, therefore, that more should be done to re-invigorate lines before they are actually threatened but where the possibility of closure seems likely; urging the Railways to improve services and to make operating economies. The Committee is at present studying several lines in this category and suggestions are being made for increasing the traffic. Where possible, this is being done in co-operation with the local authorities.

Amongst such lines being studied are the Kingsbridge branch, the Exe Valley line (Exeter to Tiverton and Dulverton) and the Princes Risborough - Thame - Oxford line.

It is also considered that more effort should be made to approach the problem at a national level, stressing in particular the social need for branch lines. A step in this direction has already been taken in the letters sent to Members of Parliament, detailed later in this circular. It is also intended to aim at more publicity in the press. X

SUBSCRIPTIONS, 1962.

The Committee is grateful to the large number of members who have already paid their 1962 subscription, due on January 1st. Those who have not yet renewed are asked to do so as soon as possible, sending their remittance (10/6d, or 6/- if aged under 21 on January 1st) to the Membership Secretary whose address appears at the end of this report. At this critical time for rail transport we hope that all our members will continue to support us and to encourage others to join.

PUBLIC MEETING

We are pleased to announce that a public meeting has been arranged to take place on Monday, 2nd April at 7.0 p.m. at the Caxton Hall (near St. James Park Underground station), London. This is being organised as a joint effort by S.R.U.B.L.U.K, the Railway Development Association and the Pedestrians Association and there will be three speakers dealing with different aspects of the railways and the way they are likely to be affected by the passing of the Transport Act.

The problem of the closure of rural branch lines will be discussed in an address by Mr David St. John Thomas, the well-known authority on rural transport and the author of several publications including 'Lake District Transport Report' and 'Rural Transport'.

A second speaker, yet to be announced, will lecture on the railway problem from the national angle and there will be a speaker from the Pedestrians Association who will deal with the contributions which the railways can make towards reducing road accidents.

There will be ample opportunity for questions and discussion and it is hoped that all members who can possibly do so will come to this meeting and bring their friends.

Publicity will be by means of printed handbills and it will be helpful if members will advise the Hon. Secretary as soon as possible how many copies of this handbill they could usefully distribute. These would then be sent out either with or before the next Progress Report.

LETTERS TO MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

The Transport Bill, now before Parliament, has been studied by a Joint Committee of S.R.U.B.L.U.K. and the Railway Development Association and, as a result, a representation has been prepared and sent to a number of Members of Parliament.

✕ This representation has drawn attention to the fact that the Bill will enable the Railway Authorities to withdraw train services without there being a preliminary enquiry by the T.U.C.C. at which objectors can present their case against withdrawal. The opinion was strongly expressed that this is an unfair provision which will not ensure that justice will be done. It was recommended that the Bill should be amended so that the Railway Authorities should be required to provide a written statement of their case on any particular line or lines to be considered for closure by the appropriate T.U.C.C. and that such statements should be available to persons likely to be affected by the proposal.

Under the Bill, the only notice of closure which the Railway Board will be required to give will be the publication of the proposals on two successive weeks in any two local newspapers circulating in the area affected, not less than six weeks before carrying them into effect. This is not considered adequate and the representation recommended that in addition a similar notice be provided in a prominent position at all stations which will be affected thereby.

Our representation also asked for consideration to be given to the subsidisation of unremunerative railway passenger services where such services are considered necessary to the public interest so that no undue hardship will be caused. ✕

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The recent referendum of members resulted in 75% of the voting being in favour of the Annual General Meeting being held on a weekday evening and the other 25% in favour of a Saturday.

In view of this, the 1962 A.G.M. has been arranged to take place at 7.15 p.m. on Wednesday, 11th April in Room 15 at the Friends Meeting House, Euston Road, London, N.W.1. It will be an encouragement to the Committee to see a good attendance at this important and very necessary meeting and we hope that as many members as possible will give it their support.

CARLISLE AREA REINVIGORATION PARTY

A Reinvigoration Party, to take place on Saturday, 5th May, has been planned to cover several lines in the Carlisle area. It is

hoped to visit the Alston, Silloth, Langholm and Kirkcudbright branches and full details will be published in the next Progress Report. It is expected that a reduced fare of 143/3d will be available for the whole tour for those travelling from London, the outward journey being made on the Friday night from King's Cross and the return on Saturday night to St. Pancras. It may be possible to arrange suitable reduced fare facilities from other areas if sufficient support is forthcoming and it is hoped that this tour will appeal to our members and supporters in the North.

It would be much appreciated if all those interested in going on this tour would get in touch as soon as possible with Mr Croughton at 27, Tolmers Gardens, Cuffley, Potters Bar, Middlesex.

SCOTTISH SUMMER TOUR

The summer tour of Northern Scotland, of which preliminary notice was given in an earlier Progress Report, has now been definitely arranged to take place during the last two weeks of June, 1962. The itinerary is as follows, all journeys being by train except where stated:-

Fri, 15th June..Leave King's X by Sleeping Car Train for Kirkcaldy.
 Sat, 16th June..Kirkcaldy to Aberdeen via Crail, St. Andrews & Dundee.
 Sun, 17th June..Leisure day in Aberdeen.
 Mon, 18th June..Visits to Peterhead, Fraserburgh and St. Combs, returning to Aberdeen.
 Tues, 19th June..Aberdeen to Ballater then 'bus to Braemar. Return by same route to Aberdeen, then proceed to Banff.
 Wed, 20th June..Banff to Inverness, via Elgin, Craigellachie, Aviemore and Moy.
 Thurs, 21st June..Inverness to Thurso.
 Fri, 22nd June..Thurso to Wick then 'bus to John O'Groats and Thurso.
 Sat, 23rd June..Thurso to Lairg, then 'bus to Durness or Kinlochbervie.
 Sun, 24th June..Leisure day in Durness or Kinlochbervie.
 Mon, 25th June..Return to Lairg by 'bus then train to Inverness.
 Tues, 26th June..Inverness to Kyle of Lochalsh then Steamer to Portree.
 Wed, 27th June..Portree to Armadale by 'bus, ferry to Mallaig and train to Fort William.
 Thurs, 28th June..Fort William to Fort Augustus and back by omnibus.
 Fri, 29th June..Fort William to Ballachulish by 'bus and ferry, train to Oban, returning by Steamer to Fort William.
 Sat, 30th June..Fort William to Glasgow.
 Sun, 1st July..Arrive back at London (St. Pancras).

The total fare for the complete tour from London, including all rail, road, steamer and sleeping car charges will be about £ 25 (second class), but those wishing to join only part of the tour will also be welcome. All interested are asked to contact Mr G.R. Croughton 27, Tolmers Gardens, Cuffley, Potters Bar, Middlesex, if possible by 15th February in order that accommodation can be arranged.

The tour has been arranged to cover most of the railways serving the Highlands and the North of Scotland and to assess the transport needs of the area which is of particular importance at a time when a large number of the rail services are threatened with withdrawal. It is appreciated that it will be an annual holiday for most of those taking part and there will be plenty of opportunity for break of journey and relaxation at places of interest.

It is hoped to hold a meeting in London in April primarily for those interested in this tour, when Mr Forrest of the Branch Line Society and Mr Purser of SRUBLUK will be showing colour slides and films of Scottish scenery and railways. All members will be welcome and full details will appear in the next Progress Report.

P U B L I C I T Y

LECTURE TO CUFFLEY Y.P.F. - SRUBLUK was recently invited to give a talk to the Young Peoples Fellowship at Cuffley, Hertfordshire. This invitation was gladly accepted and the Chairman gave an account of our work and aims, illustrated with colour slides and followed by a discussion. We were grateful to Dr. Tomlins of the R.D.A. who gave his support and provided many of the slides depicting the different forms of traction used on branch lines both in this country and in Switzerland. This event was a successful new venture and provided useful publicity.

NORBURY TRAVEL AND TRANSPORT EXHIBITION. - Further valuable publicity for our cause was provided by the SRUBLUK stand at the Exhibition of the Norbury Transport and Model Railway Club on December 16th. Copies of the Manifesto and Progress Reports were distributed and a photographic display showed the working of branch lines both before and after modernisation.

INDIVIDUAL LINES ON WHICH S.R.U.B.L.U.K. HAS BEEN WORKING

Chester (General) - Denbigh - Ruthin.

We regret to announce that the closure of this line has been approved by the Transport Users' Consultative Committee and that the matter is now awaiting the decision of the Minister.

Clapham Junction - Kensington (Olympia).

Members may know of the line between Kensington (Olympia), formerly known as Addison Road, and Clapham Junction which, although still operating a public passenger service, does not appear in the public timetable.

SRUBLUK recently enquired of the Central T.C.C. whether the line was officially open or closed and, in the latter case, whether the T.U.C.C. had given their approval. In their reply the C.T.C.C. stated that the line is officially closed but that the closure took

place at a time before approval by the T.U.C.C. was required. A further letter was sent to the C.T.C.C. pointing out that the service was last published in the timetable in the Winter of 1955/6 which was some years after the T.U.C.C. procedure came into existence. The reply to this was that the line is still open but that it is not necessary for a service to be advertised in the timetable !

The service, usually of three trains each way every weekday morning and evening, is provided mainly for the benefit of Post Office workers, and is fairly well used by them.

A member of the SRUBLUK Committee recently had a letter published in the Guardian referring to this service and pointing out that perhaps the reason that British Railways do not publicise it is that they are afraid that, if they did, it might pay!

Brent - Kingsbridge.

Last year British Railways introduced a single-unit Diesel railcar on the line to Kingsbridge in Devon and revised the timetable giving, in particular, a good connection with the "Torbay Express" in each direction, thereby reducing the journey time between London and Kingsbridge to five hours. This will be of considerable benefit to the area, in particular to the various seaside resorts for which Kingsbridge is the railhead. Operating costs on the line have been cut by reducing two of the three intermediate stations to unstaffed halts. The line still cannot be regarded as safe from closure, however, particularly in view of the drastic closures expected with the coming re-organisation of the railways. Since British Railways have gone to some trouble to modernise this line and have, in fact, done precisely what SRUBLUK would have recommended, we have decided to look into the matter and see whether other steps could be taken to encourage further traffic. The matter is now being studied in conjunction with the South Devon Railway Society and it is hoped to publish a full account in a later Progress Report.

Princes Risborough - Thame - Oxford.

Members will recall that this line was visited on our last Reinvigoration Party when it was agreed that the future passenger service on this line should be directed to cater for the traffic in the direction of London via Princes Risborough. Unfortunately the connections with the main line were considerably worsened with the introduction of the present timetable and suggestions for improvement have been made to British Railways. The local authorities at Thame have also been contacted in order to obtain their views on the future of the line.

Abingdon branch.

As we go to press we hear that it is now proposed to close the Radley - Abingdon line to passenger traffic. SRUBLUK is assisting the local authority in opposing this closure and a report will appear later.

Didcot - Newbury.

A SRUBLUK representative recently visited the Newbury to Didcot line which is now under threat of closure. Some of the passengers were interviewed, the majority of whom were using the line for local travel although through journeys included one from Didcot to Pewsey and one from Cardiff to Aldershot.

Of the twelve regular passengers interviewed, two considered the service should be increased, nine found it adequate and one more than adequate. Ten would be greatly inconvenienced if the service were withdrawn, one moderately inconvenienced and one would be put out unless a school bus were to be provided.

Most passengers interviewed considered that British Railways was doing everything reasonably possible to attract traffic to the line. Suggestions for improvement, however, included an additional train into Newbury at about 1.00 p.m. and from Newbury at about 5.45 on weekday evenings. The latter would be of use to shop workers who have now to travel by 'bus or car. It was also suggested that the 'bus connection at Upton & Blewbury station could be improved.

Ditton Junction - Timperley.

The proposed closure of this Cheshire line has been brought before the T.U.C.C. and a decision is expected shortly. SRUBLUK has been in correspondence with one of the local objectors, Mr M.C. Casson, who has been co-operating with the local authorities and has produced a detailed and comprehensive memorandum challenging the facts and figures submitted by British Railways in support of the closure and offering suggestions for operating economies and for encouraging more traffic on the line. We welcome Mr Casson as a member of SRUBLUK.

NEWS OF THE BRANCHES

Scotland.

The reduction in the number of trains on several lines in Central and Southern Scotland took place on and from December 4th, followed by a further batch on and from January 8th. Full details are given in timetable supplements issued on these dates.

The Galashiels - Peebles - Rosewell & Hawthornden line is to close to all traffic on 5th February. This will isolate Peebles from all rail services and will no doubt have a detrimental effect on the efforts which are being made to attract new industry to the burgh.

Closure dates for the Eyemouth and North Leith lines are not yet known but T.U.C.C. approval has been given. The following closures have been, or will shortly be, submitted to the T.U.C.C. for approval - Edinburgh Suburban Circle, including the Rosewell branch; Lugton to Beith; St. Boswells to Kelso and Tweedmouth; Hamilton to Holytown and Coatbridge.

Dr Beeching has pledged to Scottish M.P.s that no further lines in Scotland will be closed for at least a year.

Wales.

All the lines converging on Brecon are down for closure, i.e. those to Newport, Hereford, Moat Lane Junction and Neath. These sweeping closures, which will leave a vast area without railways, are being fought by the Railway Development Association. There is to be a national protest headed by the Lord Mayor of Cardiff.

We regret to announce that the T.U.C.C. have given their approval to the closure of the Newport - Blaenavon; Newport - Brynmawr and Aberbeeg - Ebbw Vale lines. It is now proposed to end the passenger service between Wrexham (Central) and Ellesmere and to close the line completely between Cadbury's private siding near Pickhill Halt and Ellesmere.

It is also proposed to close the Whitland to Cardigan line to all traffic and this is also being opposed by the R.D.A.

West of England.

Some idea of how many Southern Region lines will be left in the West Country by the end of the decade was given by Mr F.P.B. Taylor, Line Traffic Manager of the South West Division, at a recent press conference at Salisbury. Mr Taylor spoke in broad terms, carefully avoiding the mention of individual lines and stations but according to a press report it is possible to foresee that if carried to its logical conclusion rationalisation plans would mean that all lines in East Devon would close except Exeter to Exmouth and possibly the continuation to Budleigh Salterton. West of Exeter passenger trains might still run to Ilfracombe and Plymouth and possibly also to Bideford, Bude and Launceston, but lesser lines would be closed. On the freight side, West of Exeter, there might be stations only at Crediton, Barnstaple, Okehampton, Launceston and Tavistock. It is unlikely, however, that this drastic pruning will take place in the near future.

The Ashburton line, closed to passengers in 1958, is now to close completely. The 'bus service introduced to replace the passenger trains is also threatened with withdrawal.

It is proposed to withdraw the passenger service from the Plymouth - Launceston line of the former G.W.R. and to retain only the portion between Lifton and Tavistock South for freight traffic, access to be gained by a connection with the Southern line at Lydford.

Other lines in the area which are under review include the following:-

- 1) The Helston branch - to be retained for parcels and freight traffic.
- 2) Taunton - Castle Cary; local service to be withdrawn.
- 3) Taunton - Chard - Chard Junction; to be closed to passenger traffic throughout - it will be remembered that the former Southern Railway section between Chard Junction and Chard is now operated by the Western Region.
- 4) Witham - Wells - Yatton.
- 5) The Portishead branch, despite the fact that a fine new station was constructed at the terminus as recently as 1954.

STOP PRESS ... The Passenger train service between Bedford (Midland Road) and Northampton (Castle) will be withdrawn on and from 5th March.

The Midlands.

The expected closure to all traffic of the Rugby (Midland) to Leicester line took place on January 1st.

The two branches from Kingham - to Chipping Norton and to Cheltenham - are both to go before the T.U.C.C. in the near future and SRUBLUK will be making a strong representation in favour of the retention of the Cheltenham line.

British Railways have also announced their intention of withdrawing the passenger train service between Wolverhampton and Stourbridge Junction in the Western Region.

London & Home Counties.

In the London Midland Region, a case is being prepared for the closure of the Leighton Buzzard - Dunstable line although there is at present no threat to the Dunstable - Luton (Bute Street) service which is provided mainly by the Eastern Region.

The Western Region are proposing to close the short branch from West Drayton to Uxbridge (Vine Street).

Eastern Counties.

We hear from Mr L. Hipperson that certain trains from London to Yarmouth may be re-routed via Norwich. It has been denied by the Norwich area Traffic Manager, however, that British Railways propose to close the Ipswich to Lowestoft and Yarmouth line via Woodbridge and Beccles. The East Anglian T.U.C.C. have been unable to endorse the B.T.C. proposal to withdraw Sunday services in winter between Kings Lynn and Hunstanton.

It is understood that British Railways would be prepared to consider re-opening the Thetford to Bury St. Edmunds line if development at Thetford warrants it. Passenger services on the line ceased in 1953 and complete closure followed in 1960.

The Immingham to New Holland service is likely to be withdrawn soon and the intermediate stations between Grantham and Lincoln, with the exception of Leadenham, are also expected to close shortly.

The North.

The service of Diesel railcars operating between Keighley and Oxenhope was withdrawn on January 1st and closure to freight traffic is expected to follow in June.

Despite last minute efforts to save it, the closure of the Barnard Castle - Penrith line took place on 22nd January.

The Blackburn to Clitheroe and Hellifield line is at present under review as also is the line from Rose Hill to Bollington in Cheshire, and the stations at Elland in Yorkshire and Hundred End in Lancashire are under consideration for closure too.

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