

The 'army' of rail user groups

By Tony Smale

We are accustomed to reading about the activities of Railfuture's 17 branches in the Local Action pages of *Railwatch*, but of course there's a lot more local campaign work being undertaken around Britain by rail user groups and similar organisations.

Today, there are nearly 200 such groups, and about half of them choose to pay an annual affiliation fee to Railfuture. Several more are loosely affiliated in that some of their key activists also serve on one of Railfuture's committees. The most up-to-date list of rail user groups can be found by logging on to the Rail Passengers Council website at www.railpassengers.org.uk.

The size of these user groups varies from a handful of souls that might fit in a railway compartment to the mighty Friends of the Settle-Carlisle Line with a membership counted in thousands.

An average-sized group would have around 100 members, so we could legitimately claim that Railfuture's own membership is backed up by an army of some 10,000 rail campaigners!

Rail user groups have been around for a long time, and have their own independent views about how the railway should be run. So what help can Railfuture offer? Well, first we invite our affiliated groups to apply for cash awards from our Railway Development Fund. They can spend this money on perhaps printing leaflets or commissioning a report on the subject of a specific rail project. At the time of writing, bids are coming in for the 2003 round of awards and winners will be announced by the end of the year.

Another important benefit of affiliation is the support of Railfuture for campaign work undertaken by a user group. The first line of communication is usually with the committee or individual members of the Railfuture branch in their locality. By attending each others meetings, branch members and those of user groups are able to share experiences and pool their knowledge.

As Railfuture's newly appointed rail user group coordinator it's my aim to strengthen links at a national level by sending out regular newsletters and email bulletins to our affiliated user groups.

I also want to publicise the work of these groups more widely, and so I'll be sharing news of their campaigns and activities with you via this column in future editions of *Railwatch*.

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In a move that contractors believe will transform the way road and railway links are constructed in the UK, the first-ever corrugated steel tunnel arch support has been installed for Stockton-on-Tees borough council.

The arches – the widest constructed in this country to date – are the first in the world to be lifted and installed over an existing live railway line in less than two hours.

The entire £31million project will provide a third road access into Barwick and will link Stockton town centre with the trunk road network to the north.

The railway tunnels for the Darlington-Saltburn line comprise twin 16-yard twin large span arches formed from corrugated steel buried in the embankment, on piled foundations and reinforced soil headwalls and wing walls. The arches are 120 yards long and 7 yards high and were lifted in six 25-yard long sections using a 350 tonne crane. Mike Fowley of Birse Civils said: "This method is very common in Canada and the USA."

Richard McTavish of Asset International which supplies Super-Cor corrugated steel arches in Britain, said: "Super-Cor provides an innovative concept in the design of railway tunnels for the UK and international markets."

The Stockton project was carried out in conjunction with designers, Stirling Maynard & Partners, OVE Arup, Birse Civils and AW Lewis.

Asset International supplies Super-Cor corrugated steel arches in Britain. First developed in Canada, the makers say Super-Cor structures provide nine times the stiffness of conventional structured plate and are available in spans up to 27ft. For more information, see www.multiplate.co.uk or www.south-stocktonlink.com

Planning freight railways

A new book was published in November to help planners and businesses trying to increase the amount of freight sent by rail.

Planning Freight Railways is a handbook containing the key information needed to understand modern rail freight economics and operations.

The book includes practical details enabling the planning of specific flows, while also providing the underlying concepts on which a deeper understanding of the subject can be developed.

The book, a companion to *Planning Passenger Railways*, is aimed at practitioners (including those from compa-

nies considering using rail freight for the first time) and students looking to enter the industry.

The co-editors are Nigel Harris of the Railway Consultancy and Felix Schmid of Sheffield University.

The Railway Consultancy has been involved with Railfuture in publishing two reports on prospects for a national railcard.

Planning Freight Railways, an A5-size hardback book, retails at £30 and is available from A & N Harris, 43a Palace Square, Crystal Palace, London SE19 2LT, or through bookshops (ISBN 0-9529997-1-4) A review will appear in the next edition of *Railwatch*.