



Your letters

Crossrail to Oxford

I read with interest Mike Crowhurst's article in *Railwatch* 97 on Crossrail and Keith Dyall's suggestions as to how the current proposals should be amended.

I have just spent a year living in the Oxford area and feel very strongly that Crossrail should be built around the electrification of the Paddington-Oxford service, combined with a western access to Heathrow.

For most travellers, one of the world's most important academic centres has nothing more than a semi-fast rail service to the capital city, nor does it have convenient access by rail to one of the world's busiest airports.

Coach operators seem to have pretty well cleaned up these markets, at least in part because of the limited attractions of the current rail services.

Without electrification, Oxford will never have the rail links it deserves, for the simple reason that diesel trains cannot enter deep tunnels under airports or major cities.

However, it is not only the city of Oxford that would benefit from "wiring up". Passengers from the Midlands could be encouraged to access Heathrow via Banbury, instead of congesting the transport system in central London.

In most other European countries, the relatively short stretches between Basingstoke-Reading and Oxford-Coventry would certainly then be wired up, allowing freight from Southampton to the Midlands to be electrically hauled.

Keith Dyall is right that Crossrail service patterns need to be rethought.

Philip Bisatt, 11 Bracken Edge, West Quantoxhead, Taunton, Somerset TA4 4DH

Mail Off Rail

In his letter to *Railwatch* 97, Roger Smith quotes Royal Mail's reasons for taking mail off rail. There is, however quite a different slant that can be put on the proceedings.

First, if Royal Mail felt unable to negotiate a realistic price with EWS, why did they not approach other operators before dismantling the existing set up and thus ensure continuity? Second, why has Royal Mail not

considered the use of rail in inter hub transport rather than adopting a road solution? As this question is slightly rhetorical, perhaps I could supply some possible answers.

The new Midlands hub has been under design and construction for several years. From day one it was envisaged without a rail connection. Doesn't this rather negate the result of any later "consultant's" review? It actually demonstrates Royal Mail's position that rail was to be dispensed with, no matter what.

The alleged reduction in lorry mileage is pure spin, worthy of Tony Blair, and should be taken with a huge pinch of salt!

For a number of years Royal Mail has suffered from major industrial relations problems. Every upset to normal service has been attributed by Royal Mail to the railways with strikes in sorting offices being glossed over. Soon it will be without its scapegoat and will have to explain its problems to the public.

Royal Mail is seeking major job cuts in reorganisation. Part of its solution to help placate the unions is to create as many driving jobs as possible to reduce job losses. This is the real reason for removing traffic from rail and the economics and quality of service issues come a poor second to this objective. I would suggest that the Government should force Royal Mail to use competitive tender for its trunk haul operations which, at a stroke, would stop this abuse of the system and allow rail to bid fairly for the traffic.

George Boyle, Railfuture freight committee, High Peak, Derbyshire FurnessVale@aol.com

Magic Carpet line

London railways in the 1940s proved that they had the capacity to move 45,000 passengers per hour on four tracks. Modern planners don't seem to understand this.

Down here in Devon, where I have lived for the past 15 years, we have been deprived of the possibility of a frequent service by the removal of the second line between Salisbury and Exeter.

I suspect putting the single line in the middle of the track bed was deliberately done to make the restoration of double track more difficult and more expensive.

But putting in double track at every station and some other key locations would allow great improvements on this Magic

Carpet line. Why magic carpet? It serves, or could, Axminster and Wilton.

A later train from Waterloo (at 22.35 or 23.00) to Exeter, Honiton or Yeovil would allow us to have an evening out.

C A Cowland, 10 Lark Rise, Newton Poppleford, Sidmouth, Devon EX10 0DH

Progress?

Dr David Guild (*Railwatch* 97) mentions travelling from Aix-en-Provence to Edinburgh in just one day. I remember 12 years ago reaching London from Aix by train and ferry in just one day (depart 07.00, arrive about 20.55) and with the Channel Tunnel open leaving Milan on the 09.05 to Lausanne and getting to Paddington in time for the 20.35 to Exeter. On the latter journey (19 June 1995) the 18.18 from Paris reached Waterloo in a remarkable 2 hours 44 minutes.

Completion of the high speed line from the Channel Tunnel to St Pancras should help make such journeys commonplace. However, from the west of England the advantages are in danger of being cancelled out, by the all too frequent engineering closures and congestion delays on the way to London.

Upgrading of the Great Western main line is long overdue and we need alternative routes upgraded and reopened such as Oxford to London via Princes Risborough.

Even with the high speed lines too much time will still be wasted on connections, so there should be daily through services to at least Amsterdam and Cologne. Equally we need reasonably priced through ticketing, similar to the zonal open ticket add on fares available between Britain and Ireland. Currently the extra cost of using an early morning train to London Paddington exceeds the cost of some entire air fares. No wonder passenger numbers on Eurostar are failing to grow as they should.

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Rover bonanza

I was interested to read the article on Rail Rovers in *Railwatch* 97.

I used these (East Midlands and West Midlands versions) several times in the 1970s and early 80s when they were well advertised. I also used a National Railcard once as I was visiting a friend in the far north of Scotland and realised that by using the Rover

I could effectively have two days free travel (which I used for the Settle and Carlisle route and a visit to South Wales and the South West).

When I was considering using them again in the early 1990s I found that literature on them was non-existent and booking clerks had to look long and hard to dig out the information. However by the late 1990s I was able to find leaflets freely available at Hinckley station, which is hardly an important place.

It does seem that these tickets are treated as if they are covered by the Official Secrets Act, but why? I doubt if there is a legal requirement to make them available, but if they do they might as well make their existence well known.

Apart from their value for touring I suspect that the daily tickets (Rangers) could be cheaper than alternative fares for longer journeys from one side of the zone to the other.

I have found a website that gives information on the tickets and seems to be up to date.

www.serco-online.com/html/fares/rovers/rovers.htm

One thing I noticed was that the West Midlands ticket (Heart of England) prohibits direct travel by Virgin services between Birmingham and Cheltenham (so presumably one has to take slower trains via Worcester). Why should this be? We all have our views on Virgin but it is a fact that it is heavily subsidised with taxpayers' money and it seems wrong that it can opt out in this way.

One final thought: The old tickets incorporated a map of the relevant area. Current ones do not. In the absence of leaflets I might worry a bit that a ticket inspector would not be aware of these "secret" tickets and might need a bit of persuading of their validity.

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To Birmingham

I was rather disturbed to read under Local Action in *Railwatch* 97 that the proposal for the cutting back of Silverlink services to Rugby-Northampton seems to be being accepted as a fait accompli.

I am no apologist for Silverlink, and recognize that the lines from Rugby to Birmingham are very heavily loaded, but I think that there are several issues to be raised here.

Why does Virgin (hardly the most efficient or cheap TOC)



seem to be getting preferential treatment yet again? As recipients of vast public subsidies there is surely no reason why they should ever be in the driving seat.

Why is Silverlink being apparently discriminated against? Semi-fast trains from Euston via Northampton to Birmingham have been operating since at least the early 1970s and probably since electrification in 1965. The only difference is that in the early days these trains served all stations between Coventry and Birmingham. This is now done by Central Trains services.

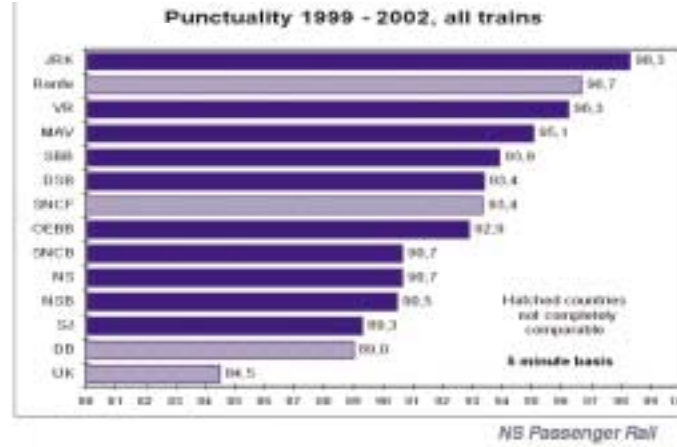
Travelling from stations near here (Bletchley, Leighton Buzzard) to Birmingham it is currently possible to travel much more cheaply (albeit more slowly) by Silverlink. If this service is truncated it will mean a more expensive journey (using Virgin) or a more complex one with changes at Northampton and/or Rugby. I have raised this with my MP who is supportive and keeping a watching brief.

At present Virgin Birmingham trains do not stop at Rugby. If Rugby is to be the interchange then they will have to, which will slow them down. This could be a reason for making Northampton the northern terminus for Silverlink trains. There are rumours that some Virgin trains will call at Northampton in the future, which complicates things a bit more. The present Northampton station was remodelled at the time of electrification. It is essentially a commuters' station and totally unsuited to any sort of changing between trains.

The result would be a step back for Northampton to pre-electrification days. Then there was a pretty good, but irregular, service to London but a very patchy service to the north (including Birmingham). Currently it has (subject to West Coast line works!) a good service north to Rugby (for some connections) or Birmingham (for many more).

What about Long Buckby? As the only station between Rugby and Northampton this could suffer most. I understand there are a number of London commuters using this station (many from Daventry). If Silverlink trains terminate at Northampton, they will need to catch a Central Trains service for one stop and change at Northampton (hopefully with a good connection!). Sounds good?

I would also comment on Rugby station. This used to be a good station with an overall roof and a good place for interchange. Despite the recent changes it is



BOTTOM OF THE LEAGUE: Sadly that is Britain's place

still a civilized station with bay platforms suitable for terminating trains and easy transfer between all platforms with no stairs involved. The only real flaw is that it is not possible for two through trains travelling in the same direction to stop at the same time (I am pretty sure that the platforms are not bi-directional). In practice this does not seem that important. Rumours that there is to be substantial re-building now appear to be well founded. This would not only destroy the compact functionality of the present station but would also raise question marks against the money spent on all the recent re-building which now appears to be only an interim measure.

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Wider audience

Railwatch is a newsy magazine which puts forward sensible comments about the railways and has steadily got better.

Is there any way we could ensure a wider circulation, not just to members? Perhaps a publicity leaflet could be sent to newsagents in various areas?

Kenneth Bryant, 6 Grays Road, Farncombe, Godalming, GU7 3LT

Editor's note: *Railwatch* is sold in a few shops but we would like to find more outlets. Do members have ideas? It is also sent free to selected MPs and opinion formers.

Line to Corby

In an earlier edition of *Railwatch* details were published concerning the 125th anniversary of Haringworth Viaduct and Kettering to Manton Railway. The excellent anniversary exhibition by Gretton Local History Society was so popular it was re-

run again in Haringworth Village Hall on August Bank Holiday Monday to coincide with the special shuttle rail service over the route which attracted about 1,000 passengers.

Finally Kettering Civic Society arranged another showing in the town on 16 November. The celebrations in my opinion have highlighted the fact that we have a fully operational railway passing through Corby to back the current proposals to restore a passenger rail service to London and northwards on a through route.

Results of a new feasibility study are due very soon now.

Thank you to all *Railwatch* readers who wrote to Catalyst Corby, the regeneration company spearheading the town's station reopening.

Two books about the route's construction are now available: *Life and Work among the Navvies* by D W Barrett MA and *3,000 Strangers* by J Ann Pual, published by Silverlink. Tel 01536 330588. I recommend them.

David Fursdon, 9 Southfield Road, Gretton, Corby, Northants NN17 3BX davidfursdon@amserve.com

Glamour on line

It's not often as a regular user of First Great Eastern that I would want to praise a company which failed to inform me about important weekend engineering works at Marks Tey and was about to lose its franchise.

But FGE deserve the highest publicity award in launching their new Desiro class 360 trains on the Liverpool Street- Ipswich service accompanied by Marilyn Monroe lookalikes. This was a splendid well-planned publicity stunt getting good coverage in the local East Anglian press. Surely this is the way to attract more glamour back on to our

railways. Can we have more models displaying their charms when it comes to publicising Britain's crown jewels of public transport? Richard Branson could get some Virgin gals to pose provocatively on the new Pendolino trains. Or what about fashion shows on railway concourses?

I don't want to be accused of being a male chauvinist slob or of offending women working in the rail industry but rarely do I see glamour or fashion featured on the railways.

Nigel Gansell, 36 Corbett Road, Walthamstow E17 3JZ

German sell-off

I was not aware that the line Weinheim to Viernheim was for sale. It is true that the Deutsche Bahn has closed the line to freight as part of its rationalisation plan Mora-C.

If someone would like to run freight trains on the line on a regular basis I am sure the freight forwarder and chemical company that have both fought to retain their rail links from Viernheim would be pleased.

Railfuture's sister organization Pro Bahn is trying to restore passenger services on the line by pressurising the Landkreis Bergstrasse (the local council) and VRN (the local passenger transport authority) to run passenger trains from Viernheim via Weinheim to Fürth im Odenwald.

The line was in regular, not seasonal use, for freight until last year. The trackbed remains dedicated as a railway for 20 years unless there is a hearing with the Land's Regierungspräsidium. In this case both Hessen and Baden Württemberg would have to agree.

The narrow gauge tramway that runs parallel to the line is the OEG. Railfuture members may be interested to know it runs a circular service: Heidelberg-Weinheim-Mannheim-Heidelberg. The system runs over the tracks of the Heidelberg and Mannheim Tramways. These systems run jointly with the Ludwigshafen Tramway and the Rhein-Haardt-Bahn to Bad Durckheim. You can travel by tram from the Odenwald/Bergstrasse to the Pfälzer Wald. The OEG has been extensively modernised and the track from Heidelberg to Weinheim has recently been relaid as double track.

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Your letters

Overcrowding

Nothing has been done for many years to tackle the problem of overcrowding which so often occurs on the South Wales Valley Lines.

Ever since the Sprinter trains started in 1987, there has been less space for passengers, especially during rush hours and Saturday afternoons. It's even worse when there is a match on in Cardiff, with only two-car trains for much of the time, rather than four.

Instead of using 150s, 142s and 143s, there should be 156s or 158s in four or even six-car formations.

Paul L Hooker, Northwood, 23 Drysgol Road, Radyr, Cardiff CF15 8BT

Start digging

Railwatch 97 included two articles on the latest developments with Crossrail line one and in particular on the proposed branches. Crossrail branches appear to be a topical subject in the railway press as a whole at present but is this protracted debate helpful?

The original intention was to have one eastern branch to Shenfield and western branches to Reading and Aylesbury with a tunnel section between Paddington and Liverpool Street to enable through running.

As the plans evolved, services to such places as Watford, High Wycombe, Slough, Chingford and Tilbury have been considered and the tunnel section extended eastwards via Whitechapel.

The latest proposals add an eastern branch through the Isle of Dogs and Woolwich and replace the original western branches with services to Heathrow Airport and Kingston. Further tunnel sections have been added, particularly in the east and these will greatly increase the overall cost of the scheme. There is much debate about where the branches should go and even the core section between Paddington and Liverpool Street has been questioned with Victoria being suggested as a better western destination.

While there will always be different views over what is best, we should remember that the

best can be the enemy of the good, and what London needs is for the arguments to end and construction to commence.

Paralysis by analysis is the last thing this vital project needs. Perhaps we should focus again on the big picture and hence on what needs to be done to make a start to construction.

The vital starting point is the core section from Paddington to Liverpool Street. Without this, there will be no Crossrail and no additional capacity.

This is where the unavoidable costs will lie as it is the essence of the whole scheme. Time will tell which branches are most appropriate but as most lie above ground, the cost of diverting services from one to another are not in the same league as the core section of the project.

Altering destinations may involve remodelling junctions, electrification or new signalling but these are activities that may be needed in time in any case. Whatever we choose now, it will not suit everyone and future developments may require change to meet requirements we can barely anticipate today. It is better that we focus on completing the central section and not get ensnared in an extended debate over the branches.

The cost of a scheme like Crossrail is probably the greatest obstacle. The Channel Tunnel rail link overcame this problem by dividing the route into two sections and hence spreading the cost over time while getting some benefits in the shorter term. The recent completion of phase one vindicates this approach. Could the same approach be applied to Crossrail?

If Paddington to Stratford were regarded as phase one and Whitechapel to Woolwich as phase two, this would help to contain the initial cost while not giving up the overall vision. Tunnelling at Chiswick, if required, would fall into phase two.

Clearly phase one would have to make some provision for the addition of phase two but this would consist largely of work in the Whitechapel area by building the necessary junctions in phase one.

So far, I have not seen a debate about Crossrail line two, the north east to south west route. This of course evolved from the North South Crossrail and Chelsea-Hackney proposals of the Central London Rail Study. Does this lack of comment result from the need for further planning or are we simply convinced

that it will never be built? Clearly if we come up with a scheme that the bean counters consider to be unaffordable then that will be so. Personally, I would like to see it go ahead and look forward to seeing proposals for the branches it will serve, but I hope also that a pragmatic way will be found to break the overall vision down into achievable but compatible chunks.

Returning to line one, the Woolwich branch is of particular interest. The original thinking was that Shenfield services would need all or most of the capacity in the east, hence only one branch.

The Woolwich branch will result in a third of Great Eastern Metro services continuing to run to Liverpool Street and raises the long term question of will the central section have sufficient capacity to cope with two eastern branches?

Given that both branches will include expensive tunnel sections, it would clearly be desirable to make optimum use of this infrastructure. The obvious solution, cost permitting, is for a second central section going to say Victoria or Waterloo. Combining this with perhaps, the Woolwich branch would yield another cross-London route and enable more branches to be served. But before we get too excited about the prospect of a Crossrail line three, let's focus on getting the core of line one built.

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Power talk

In view of the effects on both underground and surface rail of the electricity failure in south London on 28 August, should we be campaigning for the re-introduction of a dedicated power station to serve the railways?

Thanks are in order to National Rail for at last including zone boundaries on the London Connections map folder.

M J Leppard, 20 St George's Court, London Road, East Grinstead, Sussex RH19 1QP

RailCity 2007

What runs across the middle of *Railwatch 96* issue's cover picture, between bottom left and centre right?

Why, the High Meads Loop, of course! The what? The direct link between the North London Line and the Lea Valley Line through the heart of the former Stratford Rail Lands, now with

the tailor-made opportunity for a new (developer-funded?) local station "Stratford City", right at the centre of the new development, and directly adjacent to and fully integrated with the CTRL Stratford International station.

It would also be only a 10-minute walk to the proposed site for the 2012 Olympics athletics stadium at Hackney Wick.

Coupled with the re-opening of the 500-metre former eastern chord at Dalston Junction as part of the recently re-started East London Line Extensions, there is the realistic prospect of making the east London Olympics venues fully rail-accessible from all points of the compass, providing direct rail links between them and other venues such as Custom House/Excel, Crystal Palace and Wimbledon via the East London Line Extension, and leaving the legacy of a Stratford City development that is public-rather than private-transport-oriented.

*Roger Blake, 70 Dynevor Road, Stoke Newington, London N16 0DX
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Rail in provinces

I'm sorry but I can't get excited about either the Channel Tunnel rail link or the proposed London Crossrail.

Can we start to put the provinces at the forefront of future developments? There have been some welcome developments but the increasingly pro-car Government is now threatening to stop building much-needed tramway schemes.

So those in and around Leeds will have to rely on buses, while London has its Underground and an extensive National Rail network.

We should encourage those in London frustrated by overcrowding to move their businesses elsewhere.

Tim Mickleburgh, 33 Littlefield Lane, Grimsby DN31 2AZ

Unsafe roads

I am fed up with reading Peter Rayner's tirades about rail safety. Doubtless there is substance in what he says but, health and safety zealots are destroying the rail industry.

Today while cycling home through Worcester's quiet back streets I had a very close shave with an idiot who drove too fast around a blind bend on the wrong side of the road. I could report the incident to the police but what is the point? I have tried that before. On the first



occasion the police told me they could do nothing, the second they messed me about until I gave up and on the third they attended the scene.

My three-year-old daughter had just been driven over in a convenience store car park. The car was travelling forward very slowly and I was yelling at the driver to stop, there were two witnesses besides me and others must have heard me shouting.

After interviewing the driver the police let him go without charge, the excuse being insufficient evidence. So there are my most graphic experiences of the road safety culture. Small wonder there are about 3,500 road deaths each year. This police indifference was in stark contrast to the diligence they showed when my younger daughter died suddenly without explanation only a few months earlier. Where there is a will there is a way.

If railways are to survive in Britain then the industry and its supporters must fight the double standards. We can choose not to use trains, but who can avoid roads? Given universal perfect driving, road safety would still be much poorer than for rail. If the standards applied to rail were to be applied to roads there would be no motor traffic as we know it. There would be no traffic jams or pollution, the roads would be safe to walk and cycle along and doubtless the railways would prosper.

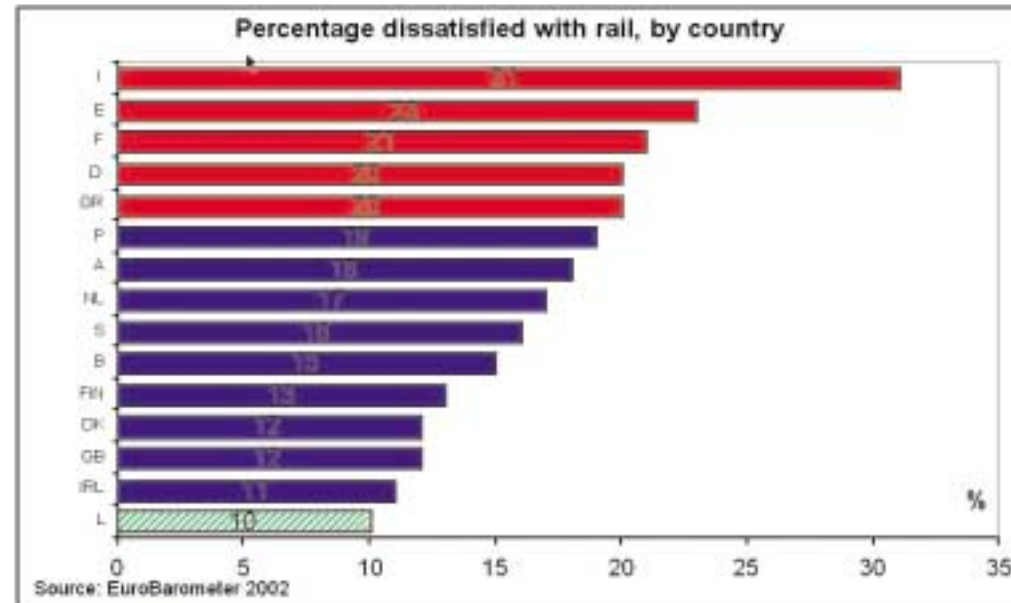
Until recently there has always been talk of the uneven playing field for funding in favour of roads. The bias has always been the same for safety. Now that it is crippling the rail industry it is not time that the likes of Peter Rayner started addressing the issue? I want to continue using trains and I would also like to walk and cycle with my children without fear of being annihilated by some incompetent or just plain stupid motorist.

Clive Parsons, 7A Marion Close, Worcester WR3 7LP

False economy

I have often extolled the National Rail Enquiries system for its extremely prompt attention to callers.

But recently, when I wanted information about the service from Waterloo East to Greenwich, I was dismayed to get a recorded voice, which gave me information which was totally irrelevant to my enquiry. When I did finally get through, I was told there was a train every few minutes. When I got to Waterloo East, I checked the



SURPRISE: Britain seems to have fewer dissatisfied rail passengers than other European countries or maybe their expectations are lower
NS Passenger Rail

timetable and found the service was half hourly.

For the first time NRES had given me incorrect information. Oh dear, when will organisations realise that saving money can be a false economy and can infuriate and exasperate their customers?

Margaret Howard, 84 Park Ave East, Ewell, Epsom KT17 2PA

thetrainline.com

N V Read (Letters *Railwatch 97*) is not really correct in describing thetrainline.com as useful, even though it is indeed one which purports to sell train tickets.

A couple of weeks ago, I tried checking Derby-London over a weekend, coming back first thing on a Monday morning. Thetrainline.com refused to let me use the return half of a Saver ticket (£44) on the 07.25 from St Pancras, offering me instead an Open Return (£93).

Midland Mainline's website, the QJump website, and staff at Derby station all confirm that what I was trying to do was indeed allowed, and thetrainline.com was wrong. The latter, however, at first maintained they were right, and then said that it would "be raised at the next meeting regarding the website". Two weeks later, the website still has not changed.

This error may be minor, only affecting certain Derby-London journeys, but it is more likely symptomatic of a more far-reaching fares database inaccuracy. However, Midland Mainline appear not to be interested that their customers are

being overcharged (well, of course they wouldn't be!) but they seem also not to be interested that potential customers are being turned away by high prices.

So the moral is, if you do have to use thetrainline.com (or the related phone service), make sure you double-check with another source the information you are given!

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Wrong party

In *Railwatch 97* you printed a photograph of me taken 10 years ago walking along the disused rail line at Histon on the old Cambridge-St Ives railway. With me is Transport Minister Roger Freeman, Steve Wilkinson, the then Chairman of Railfuture and Tory MP James Paice.

You have quoted me as a Liberal Democrat Councillor. I was a Tory County Councillor. At no time was I or in my dreams ever a Liberal Democrat and have no wish to be associated with that shower.

Neville Pritchard, 42 Manor Park, Histon, Cambridge CB4 9JT

Chiltern view

"Chiltern is an example to other train operators of what can be achieved" (Thames Valley Local Action, *Railwatch 96*). There is a lot of truth in that - but only if you happen to live beyond Ruislip. At stations between there and Marylebone, Chiltern

offer the worst suburban service in London, particularly at the two Sudbury stations which have a sparse badly timed smattering of peak-hour services, hardly any off-peak trains, and none at all on Saturdays or Sundays.

This is partly the fault of the Strategic Rail Authority, which has allowed Chiltern to extend its tentacles into lucrative long-distance markets at the expense of its core constituency.

Moreover, as Chiltern's reward for this strategy was a 20-year franchise, major changes to this situation seem unlikely in the foreseeable future. However, the London Transport Users Committee is pursuing the issue vigorously and is working with Chiltern to try and secure some improvements for the worst-served stations. Even a basic hourly all-day service would be a start.

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Irresponsible?

I was impressed when I watched a mail train call at York station. The staff impressed me by unloading and loading at high speed. One train carried far more than any lorry could manage and the train was quieter than any lorry.

As mail will now be transferring to road, which is far less safe than rail, will the directors of Royal Mail be answerable if a Post Office vehicle causes the death of a member of the public? Will they go to jail as a result of their decision?

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