

Railfuture

is an independent voluntary campaign group.

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Membership

£20 per year.

Family: £20 plus £2 for each extra person. Pensioners, students and unemployed £12.50. User groups, community, parish councils £20. Companies and large local authorities £35.

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Elections

Railfuture is the campaigning name of
Railway Development Society Ltd,
18a Grantham Road,
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Lincoln LN4 2LD

The board is elected annually and nomination forms can be obtained now from the Returning Officer, PO Box 7690, Hinckley LR10 9WJ. You can also download a form from www.railfuture.org.uk/tiki-index.php?page=elections

Trains needed seven days a week

RAIL USERS CONFERENCE Manchester 5 November 2005

Sponsored by First Group and the Rail Passengers Council

Network Rail chose the day of the national rail users conference in Manchester to carry out engineering work at Ardwick Junction, just outside Manchester Piccadilly.

The work was in connection with the commissioning of the new train depot for TransPennine Express at Ardwick and involved the closure of terminal platforms at Manchester Piccadilly for the day.

Trains from London Euston, already diverted via the West Midlands because of engineering work in the Trent Valley, and trains from Birmingham terminated at Stockport with an onward bus connection to Manchester Piccadilly.

TransPennine Expresses were also diverted. Many rail users had to use buses or trams to complete their journeys. The difficulties of getting to the conference were highlighted by **Brendan O'Friel**, chairman of the North West Public Transport Users Forum.

"We're paying for a seven-day-a-week railway but only getting a five day one," he said.

There was a disgraceful lack of rail transport at the weekend. Network Rail should be put

under a lot more pressure over its failure to provide weekend trains.

Mr O'Friel paid tribute to rail users' voluntary work in putting pressure on politicians and the rail industry to secure better conditions for passengers. "They are an unsung group," he said.

He reminded people of the radical changes over the past 12 months which have swept away a whole raft of statutory protection for rail passengers.

Mr O'Friel had spent seven years as the chairman of the North West Rail Passengers Committee which has now been abolished.

He said the committees gave the public an opportunity to quiz the industry about improvement opportunities, while also demanding information and progress reports from the industry.

He said it would be difficult to obtain those benefits under the new system. Many of the old committees' reports had been lost and it was unreasonable to expect the new centralised Rail Passengers Council to be able to provide a local and regional focus.

He also highlighted wider issues like the problems of global warming for which rail can provide solutions as part of a sensible policy of sustainable development.

These huge concepts have to be applied at local and regional level where it is relevant to local people.

Rail user groups are good, but not

often recognised. Many passengers are desperately dependent upon public transport, particularly elderly people, children whose parents do not have cars, and people with disabilities. Those people rely on rail user groups to improve services for them. This is an ethical dimension to the rail industry which is often overlooked.

Information was a key issue. He said there was a breakdown of information provision on every rail journey he took in the week prior to the users conference.

When buses replaced trains, often no one told the passengers where they were going or why.

In the North West there was a lack of electronic information screens. Even Government ministers admitted the problems but said: "We doubt if anything will be done."

He said there was overcrowding on many routes but many of the old Virgin trains – which had been replaced by Pendolinos and Voyagers – had just disappeared off the scene.

They could be used to augment overcrowded services.

He said there was still a lack of co-ordination between buses and trains.

At airports, there were too few reminders that trains were available.

John Mooney, who is one of two passenger link directors of the new Rail Passengers Council, explained how the RPC

with a budget of £14million over three years would improve life for the rail traveller while "giving better value for money".

The RPC will carry out research and give strategic advice to the Government and the industry as a consumer representative.

Four times a year the RPC would meet with the rail industry planning group.

It would "identify issues" and represent passengers when rail franchises are being awarded or when route utilisation strategies are being drawn up.

One of the RPC functions would be to "engage with and empower local rail user groups".

It would also work with the train companies to tackle the root causes of complaints. There would be 12 local managers who would work from home. Mr Mooney said 2006 would be a key year for rail fares,

with a major shake-up likely. **Brian Simpson** described how the North West Rail Campaign was established because of a feeling that all investment was going to the south, on Crossrail and on rail enhancements for the 2012 Olympic Games in London.

Mr Simpson, a former Labour Euro MEP, is director of the campaign. He pointed out that the number of air passengers arriving at Manchester airport was expected to rise from 20million to 40million over the next 10 years. There was a clear need for a third platform at the airport rail station. The current service was affected by trains being turned back before they reached the airport.

He said Crewe should be a prestigious gateway station which must be brought into this century rather than languishing in the nineteenth century.

The campaign was talking to the council, Royal Mail and local MP Gwyneth Dunwoody to try to get improvements.

He said electrification of the Liverpool-Manchester route via Earsltown would speed up running times and allow better train services to other areas.

He looked forward to a period when the North West Development Agency had the will and enough money from the Transport Innovation Fund to provide real improvements for rail travellers.

But he called on rail campaigners to feed ideas into the system. He said: "You are the eyes and ears. We need that kind of input so that we can take up the matters with various bodies."

But he said that everything now has to be costed.

"The days of wish lists are over," he said. "We can have our longer term visions but we also have to be realistic.

"The real enemy is road congestion. We need political courage, and a bit more regulation back into our bus services. He who pays the piper should call the tune.

"We need investment and we need it now and we need planning for the future."

Railfuture board member **Trevor Garrod** described how the European Passengers' Federation was set up in 2002 following informal co-operation between groups in organising conferences in 2001 and 2002. Since then the EPF has

staged conferences at Namur in 2003, Leipzig in 2004, Strasbourg in 2005 and plans next year's in Maas-tricht.

EPF campaigns for passenger rights throughout Europe by conducting research, publishing reports and holding conferences. EPF is an international not-for-profit organisation and does not have individual members.

Fourteen voluntary groups, such as Railfuture, or statutory bodies like the Rail Passengers Council and others from European countries, are the members. Three more organisations have applied to join and the EPF has contacts in Spain, Poland, Denmark, Sweden and Hungary.

EPF has talks with international rail organisations, including the European Commission and European Parliament, as well as Eurostar and Thalys.

Membership applications can be made to EPF, 570 H Frere Orbanlaan, B900 Ghent, Belgium.

For more information, see www.epf-eu.be

Neil Buxton, general manager of the Association of Community Rail Partnerships said it was sometimes difficult to support rail.

Although the Beeching cuts have left the rail system emasculated, even the remaining parts of the network have to be justified on financial grounds.

In the case of Chester-Shrewsbury, there were increasing numbers of passengers, which made a clear

business case for more services. Newsletters and information boards – especially in tourist areas – were a good medium.

Each direction sign to a station along one particular walk in North Yorkshire only cost £20. The Campaign for Real

Ale wanted to help rural pubs so were keen to develop railway-based real ale trails.

There was a synergy with ACORP. It was even possible to create an "80-mile pub crawl", turning visiting pubs along the line into a game.

He praised the idea of station adoption which Wessex and Arriva Trains Wales have signed up to.

He said an adopt-a-station toolkit is available from the ACORP website. <http://www.acorp.uk.com/>

He said art projects – like the one at Stapleton Road, Bristol – could help to prevent graffiti. He highlighted the case of a German rail line which

POWER FOR THE FUTURE: But work to commission a depot for 51 new Desiro diesel trains for TransPennine delayed people getting to the rail users conference in Manchester on 5 November. The first TransPennine Desiro is expected to enter service in March

Artwork: Real Creative Group

was earmarked for closure in 1998 but had been turned round by innovation from a local consortium.

It now has new trains, is fully accessible, with cycle lockers, integrated ticketing and adequate car parking. Passenger numbers had gone up from 500 a day to 15,000 a day.

Dutch rail managers have discovered that car parking itself can be a big money-spinner on rural lines.

Light rail consultant **Tony Young** pointed out that plans to build a new light rail system in Leeds had been dumped by Transport Secretary Alistair Darling.

But Mr Young said it had been established in Manchester and Dublin that trams attract property development.

The costs of tram systems are similar in Britain to France where there are twice as many tram networks.

He highlighted the irony that the tram station at the gateway transport interchange on the Oldham-Rochdale line was practically finished but will not see trams for five years, or maybe 10 years. In fact trams may never run there.

But the House of Commons transport select committee has advised the Government to build up its expertise in light rail because it has the potential to meet important transport needs.

Railfuture chairman Mike Crowhurst also pointed out that light rail has been shown to be more cost-effective in getting people out of

cars. **Dr John Pugh**, MP for Southport, said he is currently revising the Liberal Democrat policy on the railways.

Dr Pugh, who is a member of the transport select committee, said rail use is up, regularity improved, rolling stock is new, investment is up on stations and rolling stock, and freight is an unsung success at the moment. The rail companies are profitable, but they have not been successful in pulling traffic from the roads. There are not many new customers, especially for short journeys.

Britain has the most expensive tickets in Europe. If you make the mistake of not getting a Saver, or ordering in advance, it can cost £180 from Liverpool to Euston or £250 first class. There are many first class seats but many of them are empty. People are being priced off rail but people are avoiding some road journeys.

Increased rail use does not necessarily indicate things are good or that we have the solution.

The rail industry is not really a private industry at all because large amounts of public subsidy are needed by most of the companies involved.

But at least Network Rail has started to use experienced rail profes-

sionals to scrutinise estimates for work which Railtrack failed to do. No other country has a rail system like ours.

He said that Transport Secretary Alistair Darling was trying to establish his credentials for saving cash so he could achieve his ambition to become Chancellor of the Exchequer after Gordon Brown.

But some of the public money being paid as subsidies to rail companies is paying dividends for company shareholders.

He highlighted the rolling stock companies as making large amounts of money.

He was suspicious that the Department for Transport wanted to close rail lines.

The Lib Dems wanted a clause in the Railways Act on how to open railways but the Government said it was not necessary.

Dr Pugh said: "We need a different vision."

If Network Rail and South East Trains are more efficient than private companies, perhaps there should be a system where the public sector competes against the private sector. He called for maximising the potential of railway land, perhaps building flats at stations.

Small changes, like the Burscough curves, can make a big difference.

■ **Report and pictures: Peter Harris, Andrew Macfarlane, Jerry Alderson and Ray King**