

Our railway 'bible'

There are reports that this summer's National Rail timetable will be the last to appear in print.

In future it may be available only the Web in PDF format. Perhaps it should be improved rather than dumped.

By John Ginns

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First of all thank you to all those members who have sent in emails and other messages over the past months about heritage railways.

Apologies for not having replied directly – a *Railwatch* members' heritage feedback is long overdue. Next time round hopefully.

It is not every Railfuture member who forks out £12 twice a year for the National Rail heavyweight, the 2,752-page National Rail timetable.

Nearly 2½ inches thick and weighing in at 3¼ lb, perhaps our money would find better use in Railfuture's coffers.

On the other hand, without this War and Peace of UK Railways, how can we really be in touch with the full national rail picture, and be able to comment on, advise and persuade other people about getting there by train? After all, isn't this one of our jobs as Railfuture members?

But at £12 a time we ought to get at least a free magnifying glass.

Doesn't the sanity of rail travel deserve larger print and the larger format this would entail?

Just suppose Haines & Co turned out their DIY car manuals in small print, glove box format. There might even be a Government department looking into it.

Almost at the back of the National Rail timetable (only information on rail customer representation bodies is deemed sufficiently unimportant to be allocated the very last pages) there are nine pages dedicated to "Heritage and Tourist Railways".

Here we find information on 48 UK preserved railways. That is less than half of them.

The noticeable thing about the entries is their inconsistency. In fairness to all concerned I mention no heritage line by name, but point out that some of them give precise information on how to reach them by rail – either by direct train access at a shared station, or by rail then a stated bus service and/or journey onwards by foot.

As rail users we couldn't ask for more. So a big thank you to those heritage lines.

Other heritage railways don't give us rail users a clue. Do they really see motorists as their only hope for the future?

Some of us know that, within reason, you can get to outlandish places, and home again the same day, by bus-train combinations,

97-year wait for four tracks

Picture: Nigel Cripps

By Peter Cousins

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Major work is still continuing to upgrade the West Coast main line. A £340million project is creating four tracks on the 14 mile section between Tamworth and Armitage.

This will eventually mean that more trains can be run and there will be fewer weekend diversions.

The narrow cutting at Gungate, just west of Tamworth station has already been cut back to its planned new width with soil nails in place ready for the new grass-filled gabions.

At Hopwas the new bridge over the River Tame was lifted into place in March and new gantries are being installed to allow the track to be diverted over the new structure as the old bridge deck is replaced.

The Trent Valley line was originally built as a twin-track railway but successive widenings in the 19th and early 20th century created several four track sections.

This current work will finally fill the gap left in 1909 when the London and North Western Railway's widening project ran out of money!

Although most of the new track will be on the east of the existing line, in several places the new tracks will run on either side or on the west. This means a

given a good pair of feet, determination and will power.

Here are some things that need to be done:

■ Move towards getting ALL preserved railways into the National Rail timetable. Remember, the National Rail image is Railfuture's business.

■ Get National Rail and rail-bus-walk access information for every



BIG DIG: Four tracks are being squeezed into this cutting west of Tamworth on the existing two-track Trent Valley line

complicated series of track slews and resignalling will be needed. The Trent Valley line will be open again from the summer timetable but weekend blockades resume in September with a blockade expected at Christmas.

When the work is completed it is proposed to run more express trains on the West Coast route – three trains per hour to Manchester and Birmingham with an hourly service to Chester and beyond.

A additional bonus will be increased reliability for local Centro services in Birmingham

that are at present erratic at weekends because of capacity being taken up by trains diverted through Aston.

From December 2008 normal weekday services will be able to run on Birmingham cross-city and Walsall lines

A good train service will be introduced, serving stations such as Atherstone and Rugeley Trent Valley.

In the Trent Valley an hourly local service linking Northampton to Crewe is planned for 2009 serving Rugby, Nuneaton and the local stations to Stafford.

heritage railway included in the Big Book.

Sure, there are plenty of questions. Who reads the Big Book? After all it can hardly be a best seller.

How did heritage railways get into it in the first place? Does National Rail charge heritage railways for entries?

How are new entries submitted and existing ones changed? And last but

by no means least - do individual heritage railways actually *want* to be in the Big Book? The lucky lines don't seem to know either!

Finally, referring back to a previous *Railwatch*, do we have any new local branch heritage line liaison members yet? Are you making progress?

John Ginns is Railfuture Heritage Railways Liaison Officer.