



CRUISE CONNECTION: The chartered train meeting Cunard's Queen Victoria at Southampton

Picture: Train Chartering

Ocean liner link recreated

For the first time in decades, a boat train took more than 250 passengers to Southampton western docks Mayflower Terminal to join Cunard's Queen Victoria. A brass band greeted the train as it arrived, on time, beside the ship.

In the comfort of their train seats, passengers were checked in by Cunard personnel travelling on the train, which avoided queuing in the Mayflower terminal.

The train also picked up passengers from the Queen Victoria who

were returning home after a three-week cruise on one of the world's most luxurious ships. On the outward journey the train picked up passengers from Manchester, Birmingham and Oxford where it also stopped on the return.

The charter train was organised by Train Chartering, Direct Rail Services and Premier Train Catering. Simon Pielow of Train Chartering said: "Train Chartering has been making tracks for 10 years but now we are also making waves!"

Cash for rail campaigners

By Jerry Alderson

Railwatch readers should know that Railfuture is the UK's only independent national organisation that campaigns exclusively for a bigger and better passenger and freight railway.

It is less well known that Railfuture can provide funding to rail campaigners to enhance, promote and protect the railway.

Railfuture's Fighting Fund currently holds around £20,000, which has been accrued from donations, appeals and the annual draw.

The board encourages its branches to request funds for local campaigning where it cannot be covered by the annual cash grants.

Any organisation can apply for a grant. Typical awards are £100-£500. There have been only four applications in the past two years, which is somewhat disappointing. All were successful. East Suffolk Travellers Association was recently awarded £200 as part of its cam-

paign against relocating Lowestoft station away from the seafront.

In 2007 the South East Lancashire Railway Partnership was awarded £500 towards its professional report into the reopening of the Skipton-Colne line.

Outside organisations are expected to contribute towards their campaign and show that attempts have been made to obtain funding elsewhere.

Railfuture expects to be given public recognition for any funding that it provides. Like all grants, the organisation must put forward a case for funding, with evidence.

Forms can be downloaded from http://www.railfuture.org.uk/tiki-index.php?page=fighting_fund.

The form explains how to submit an application and the process that Railfuture adopts to ensure that money from the Fighting Fund is allocated only to deserving projects.

Railfuture conference in Northallerton

Railfuture's summer 2009 conference will be held at County Hall, Northallerton on Saturday 4 July – the sixth anniversary of the Wensleydale line reopening to passengers. The speakers will include a representative from Grand Central Railway, the open-access operator. Conference attendees are expected to be offered special rates to travel on the Wensleydale Railway which operates on Sundays.

Wessex

By John Friedberger

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■ ■ SWT trains and tickets

Following closure of Travel Centres at large stations earlier in 2008, SWT proposed a drastic cutback of opening hours at station ticket offices. Weekday hours were to be shortened and closures effected on Saturday and Sunday. Following vigorous representations by Passenger Focus (briefed by Railfuture members) and by concerned MPs, the Minister of State for Rail did not permit all SWT's proposals to be implemented. Nevertheless, shorter hours and some weekend closures are now in force in many places. Apparently the Department for Transport criterion is: "12 ticket sales per hour".

SWT managers justified their proposals by pointing to the introduction of ticket machines at all their stations. Machines are a valuable additional means to buy most types of ticket but the current generation are not very reliable, they do not sell the full range of tickets and they can be confusing, resulting in the intending passenger not buying the cheapest or most appropriate ticket. Queues quickly build up. A machine can never be a full and satisfactory substitute for a staffed ticket office.

Personal security is also affected as a greater number of stations will be without staff for longer periods.

■ ■ Unpopular trains used on long-distance services

The unacceptable standard of rolling stock on the main line from Portsmouth to London was covered in *Railwatch* 118 and is still alive. Evidence that the suburban-style 3x2 seating on class 450 Desiro trains is unpopular with passengers is provided in the National Passenger Survey, published by Passenger Focus for the Department for Transport. The item: "Rating of Train – comfort of seating area" for line 328 (trains south of Guildford) reads:

Poor	Spring 2006	3%
	Autumn 2006	6%
	Spring 2007	17%
	Autumn 2007	20%
	Spring 2008	21%

Passengers who are not in a rush to reach London from stations in the Portsmouth/Havant area can avoid SWT service, as Southern trains run from Southampton and Portsmouth along the south coast to Victoria, via Gatwick Airport. Fares are generally cheaper and standard class seating is 2x2.

■ ■ The trains you won't find in SWT's timetables

Unlike some other operators, SWT does produce, in one booklet, a comprehensive timetable to its services, including bus and ferry links. Sadly, though, information on other companies' trains is patchy. For example it is not shown, even in a footnote, that Arriva CrossCountry trains run further to the north than Reading from Bournemouth and Southampton. There is no indication that most FGW trains from Portsmouth to Bristol go on to Cardiff, nor that the Southern service mentioned above provides a route to Brighton and London.

■ ■ Centenary celebrations at Eastleigh

The railway works at Eastleigh is celebrating its centenary on 23 to 25 May and the branch plans to have a stand at this exciting event. More information: www.eastleigh100.com/

New station planned A new station could be built at Darwen, Lancashire, after the local council agreed to £500,000 funding. Talks are being held with Network Rail and Northern Rail.