

East Anglia

By Nick Dibben

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■ ■ Meet the council

The branch has had a very useful meeting with Cambridgeshire County Council to discuss a range of rail-related issues including the possible reopening of the Wisbech branch and ensuring that a new landfill site near Peterborough is rail-served.

■ ■ Meet the train operator

The branch has also met with National Express East Anglia. Issues covered included changes to the catering arrangements on London-Norwich services, connections and the need for a seven-day timetable.

■ ■ PLUSBUS issues

While welcoming the introduction of PLUSBUS tickets for Huntingdon, the branch noticed some anomalies in the information. Following several contacts with train operator First Capital Connect and local bus companies, the tickets are valid on both operators' buses that serve the station and through tickets to St Ives have been restored after they were accidentally deleted from the fares manual.

■ ■ Interchange funding package agreed

The Eastern England Regional Assembly has agreed to contribute towards the £22million funding package – around £19million is coming from the Government – to create a transport interchange at Chesterton, north of Cambridge. The Interchange will clear the way for trains to terminate at Chesterton rather than Cambridge, thereby relieving platform capacity. It will also allow rail passengers to change to the guided bus to St Ives.

Thames Valley

By David Eldridge

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■ ■ Aylesbury Vale Parkway

Aylesbury Vale Parkway station opened on Sunday 14 December but with temporary station buildings and free car parking until May when the main station building and cafe is expected to open. Around 60 cars are currently using the car park Monday to Friday, with fewer at weekends

■ ■ East-West Rail Link clearance work

Around 12 miles of disused railway line between Bletchley and Claydon Junction in Buckinghamshire was cleared of scrub, brambles and overgrown vegetation in January and February so that survey and investigation work can be carried out for the design development phase of the East-West Rail project.

Starting on 26 January, the clearance took two to three weeks. Some of the more densely overgrown areas needed to be cleared with chainsaws and tractor-mounted flails. All of the waste material was chipped and spread on the site.

Patrick O'Sullivan, East-West Rail project manager at Milton Keynes Partnership, said: "Once the site clearance is completed, the engineers and surveyors will begin their technical surveys and ground investigations to enable the design work of the new track and associated railway engineering works for the western section of the East-West Rail project."

The design development work is being undertaken by Atkins which was recently appointed to carry out the design work (Guidance for Railway Investment Projects – GRIP Stage 4) on the western section of the East-West Rail project.

Milton Keynes Partnership is the lead member of the East-West Rail Consortium, a group of local authorities and government agencies with an objective of securing a new rail route from East Anglia to Oxford via the Milton Keynes South Midlands growth area.

Supercilious, condescending and ignorant

But well worth reading

Have you ever wondered at the mystery of why John Prescott's plans for an integrated transport system evaporated, following Labour's general election victory in 1997?

If so, read this book. Although hard to find, it has been stocked by Foyle's bookshop, and there are copies in one or two academic libraries. It is the document you were not intended to see and perhaps explains why Labour's initial drive for an integrated transport system was subverted.

It was published the year after the Department for Transport was split off from the Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

At £30 for 108 pages – or nearly 28p per page – Integrated Transport and Land Use Planning was clearly not aimed at the general reader but rather an effete Marsham Street elite (to whom it was probably given free of charge).

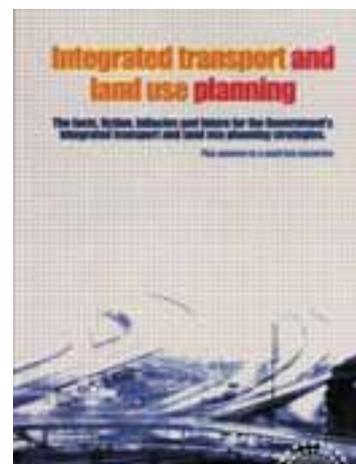
These are the Department for Transport "public servants" who, mesmerised by econometrics, construct daft transport policies in the apparent interest of maximising oil burn. The work is the result of deliberations by a panel of "experts", assembled by the Construction Industries Council and is produced by Thomas Telford, who are associated with the Institution of Civil Engineers.

As far as can be seen, no railway operations expert was present on the committee but an eminence grise, the mysterious A N Other – perhaps a retired civil servant or consultant from the age of Serpell – was. Significantly, the representative of the Council for the Protection of Rural England left before it was published.

Although the report makes some good points and raises challenging questions, these are masked by a supercilious, condescending style and an evident ignorance of railway history and operations.

Integration and co-ordination policies are traced to a *Yes Minister* TV programme in December 1982.

This might be stupidity or a disingenuous attempt to conceal previous assaults on integration



by road lobbyists and economic rationalists, such as the 1968 IEA monograph *Integration in Freight Transport* by A A Walters, who later became famous as Mrs Thatcher's monetarist guru. He used his position to scupper plans for a 1980s programme of electrification of the BR network and was influential in getting the 1982 Serpell inquiry set up which recommended a massive rail closure programme.

Railfuture fought the proposals and the closures did not go ahead. Sir Alan Walters died in January this year and Sir David Serpell died last year.

In this book, buses are portrayed in a poor light. It is implied that they are not as fuel-efficient as cars, yet illogically, guided busways are promoted in preference to tramway construction.

The Government target of 50% more rail journeys by 2010 is ridiculed but the problem of rolling stock being over-priced at privatisation, and hence subsequently reduced in quantity, is not addressed.

Cycleways are dismissed, though the promotion of cycling advocated. On the other hand, the protection of disused railway lines is championed, and it is noted that too few high-level professionals are left in local government.

In short this is a "curate's egg" which despite its stink, requires close examination and exposure by railway experts. At 28 pence per page, it is not worth buying. It is worth reading though to see how Britain's body politic is distorted by half-truths.

Green D for CIC Panel, *Integrated Transport and Land Use Planning: The facts, fiction, fallacies and future for the Government's integrated transport and land use planning strategies. Plus answers to a good few mysteries.* London Thomas Telford for Construction Industries Council (CIC) 2002 £30 paperback.

Privatisation boss ousted

Sir Steve Robson, who was a Treasury mandarin in John Major's administration, drawing up plans for privatising the railways, left the board of Royal Bank of Scotland in February. The bank has been propped up with £20billion of taxpayers' money. Sir Steve sat on the bank's audit committee which has responsibility for the accounts published by the bank. RBS is on track to record the biggest loss in British corporate history, of about £28billion.