



Your letters

Local action first

Railfuture could show its commitment to train passengers by monitoring high-speed rail in other countries. High-speed train fares are very expensive in northern Spain, for example, but local train services are being run down.

Politicians and local authorities need to show their commitment to affordable train fares for both local and inter-city train journeys. Congestion in and around Bristol is so bad that it can take as long to do a 10-mile local journey by road as an inter-city journey by train.

Yet transport campaigners are confronted with obstructions when attempting to persuade decision makers to invest in local rail. Passengers should come first.

The Campaign for Better Transport is running a campaign to persuade the Government to reform the fares structure with the aim of reducing fares.

More than 70 MPs have signed an Early Day Motion (1852) proposed by Clive Betts, Labour MP for Sheffield Attercliffe, calling for lower fares.

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Editors' note: Investment in high-speed rail must not be at the expense of existing services or reopening stations and lines. High fares are the biggest block to rail growth. There is tremendous untapped demand for rail travel if fares were to come down. Railfuture has shown that a national rail card would attract more passengers by making fares cheaper but would also expand the overall revenue take.

Vision of the future

I am afraid I shall not be joining Mr Shuttleworth in his view of the future of the network split into six regional track and train companies. Six of course to allow for the two bits that the Scottish and Welsh "parliaments" will obviously want to take control of.

Whenever politicians make this suggestion I shake my head in disbelief as they only ever seem to think of passenger traffic. The problems of a freight company

trying to arrange a spot path for a multiple boundary crossing freight train can only be imagined at, and the ability of such as Hull Trains, Great Central etc to get on the rails, would appear somewhat remote!

I would also suggest that the national passenger and freight flows no longer necessarily fit easily into regional companies; commuter and short distance travel probably does, but much non-London centred travel does not.

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Timely reminder

Railwatch 121 has given me a sharp reminder of the wisdom of using the 24-hour clock.

In my review of Adrian Vaughan's book *The Greatest Railway Blunder*, I could not resist citing one of his very telling anecdotes illustrating the ethos of railway workers in past decades – that of the 62-year-old ganger, called out late in the evening (having presumably worked normally during the day) in order to get a line re-opened as quickly as possible after a breakdown.

He was called out at 23.30 and then worked through until the line was re-opened at 18.00 the following day, which I had unfortunately referred to as 6pm. The pm got left off, so the reader was left with the impression that he had worked just a long night-shift – not perhaps even deserving of the bonus of one guinea which he was awarded for his efforts!

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Cotswold Line errors

I have just been looking through *Railwatch 121*, which I receive through work, and as a local journalist and Cotswold Line commuter I was pleased to see some coverage of the start of the redoubling project.

However, the gremlins seem to have crept in. The map is incorrect, as the section between Ascott-under-Wychwood and Moreton-in-Marsh has always been double track. The sections being redoubled over the coming year are Ascott to Charlbury and Moreton

to Evesham. Also, the singling was carried out in the second half of 1971, not the 1960s. And one little railway quirk. Although the village outside Oxford is spelled Wolvercote, the railways have always stuck with the Victorian style Wolvercot. There is a sign alongside the points proudly declaring it to be Wolvercot Junction.

*William Crossley
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Dunstable to Luton

I would like to comment further on the Luton to Dunstable line, destined to become a "guided busway", as discussed in Peter Kirk's letter (*Railwatch 121*).

This has been a political hot potato for over 20 years.

In the late 1980s there were stories that a passenger service (closed in 1965) was to be reinstated. This was reported in the *Daily Telegraph* and there was some evidence backing it up, such as Dunstable as a destination on the trains working the then Thameslink line.

This all went quiet. Arguably with privatisation imminent it became a low priority. Chiltern Trains also put forward proposals for a shuttle service from Luton to Dunstable.

At this time daily cement traffic from North Kent to the Dunstable depot also ceased. This unfortunately meant that the infrastructure was no longer maintained and fell into disuse.

Luton Council put forward proposals for the guided busway on the alignment. This was, understandably, widely criticised. It was opposed by the South Bedfordshire District Council (covering Dunstable and Luton), Dunstable Town Council, and Bedfordshire County Council. Unfortunately Bedfordshire County Council (now disbanded) changed sides. The scheme has been modified several times and now no longer extends to Luton Airport.

Time passed and public enquiries followed which eventually found in favour of the busway. Unfortunately for Luton Council, significant funding would be required from them.

It is probably fair to say that the only people in favour of the scheme are Luton Council. Their dependants, the people of Luton, have no interest and Dunstable people are against it.

Among many objections are that the single-track formation would not be wide enough for two buses passing, and that buses would still need to use public roads. Dunstable has a regular problem with heavy congestion whenever there are problems with the nearby M1.

So the go-ahead has been there for some years now but nothing has been done. Bridges have been

fenced off, track removed in a few locations, and the route is heavily overgrown. In recent months, however, steps have been taken to rescue and relocate rare reptiles which have colonised parts of the formation.

A practical problem is that the line was originally separate from the St Pancras line (although a siding connection was put in for cement and other traffic). The line in fact carried on beyond Luton to join the King's Cross line at Hatfield.

A shuttle rail service to the reinstated branch platforms at Luton would be possible, but clearly a through service would be much preferable. Unfortunately the branch is on the "fast side" at Luton so that a connection would not be easy, but far from impossible.

Incidentally, there are plans to rebuild Luton station. I suspect that they make no provision for the Dunstable line.

For all sorts of reasons a railway has to be preferable to a guided busway.

A shuttle service would be adequate, but a through service much preferable. I have not seen many suggestions about extending it to Leighton Buzzard, although the line did continue beyond Dunstable as far as the West Coast main line at Leighton Buzzard. This service closed before the Dunstable to Hatfield service.

Reopening to Leighton Buzzard is probably still feasible, allowing for the usual problems of new buildings on the formation and would open up all sorts of possibilities for through trains to Milton Keynes and beyond, including such services as Birmingham Airport to Luton Airport to Gatwick Airport.

Interestingly, in the days of BR there were not many through trains (presumably a legacy of the LMS and LNER) from Luton to Leighton Buzzard. There were fewer trains on the Dunstable to Leighton Buzzard section (double track) than there were on the Dunstable to Hatfield section (single track). This is reflected in the current bus services which are extensive between Dunstable and Luton, but only half-hourly between Dunstable and Leighton Buzzard.

A pressure group called ADAPT has existed for about 20 years to promote the reopening of the line, but I am not aware that it has a website.

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Double appeal

When, if at all, will the branch line between Hereford and Worcester be double-tracked, so that trains do not have to wait at the stations for others coming in the opposite direction? It is such a nice line to

travel on and I have been on it many times when having a day-out from Cardiff in Ledbury, Malvern or Worcester.

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Level crossing safety

Following the tragic outcome of the September collision at Halkirk level crossing, Caithness, it was said that Britain's level crossings were the safest in the world.

I believe a simple safety improvement to the 23 ungated level crossings in Scotland could be achieved by substituting double sets of normal road traffic lights as a more powerful warning message to vehicle drivers.

The first advantage is that standard British road traffic lights are more immediately identified, respected and complied with than is possibly accorded the very infrequent application of 'different and unusual' warning technology at level crossings.

Second, and more crucially, road traffic signals give powerful and permanent (24 hour/ 7 day) information that there is a junction and potential conflict ahead.

By contrast, especially on low frequency lines, rail crossings give no visible confirmation that it is safe to proceed for most of the time.

Safety enhancement could be achieved by an advance set of traffic lights at up to 50 metres from the rail crossing. Although of normal head design they could show either green or cautionary 'flashing amber', similar to pedestrian crossings. At the crossing itself, the light display would be either green or double red, but no amber (for avoidance of doubt and safeguard against single red bulb failure). Klaxon horns would also reinforce the 'double red' message.

The introduction of modified but easily identifiable 'traffic lights' at level crossings would deliver more direct understanding and compliance with the law by road vehicle drivers compared to the 'unexpected, unfamiliar and abrupt' railway warning technology currently employed.

This is not intended to excuse deliberate unlawful contempt and driver misuse of existing level crossing warning arrangements.

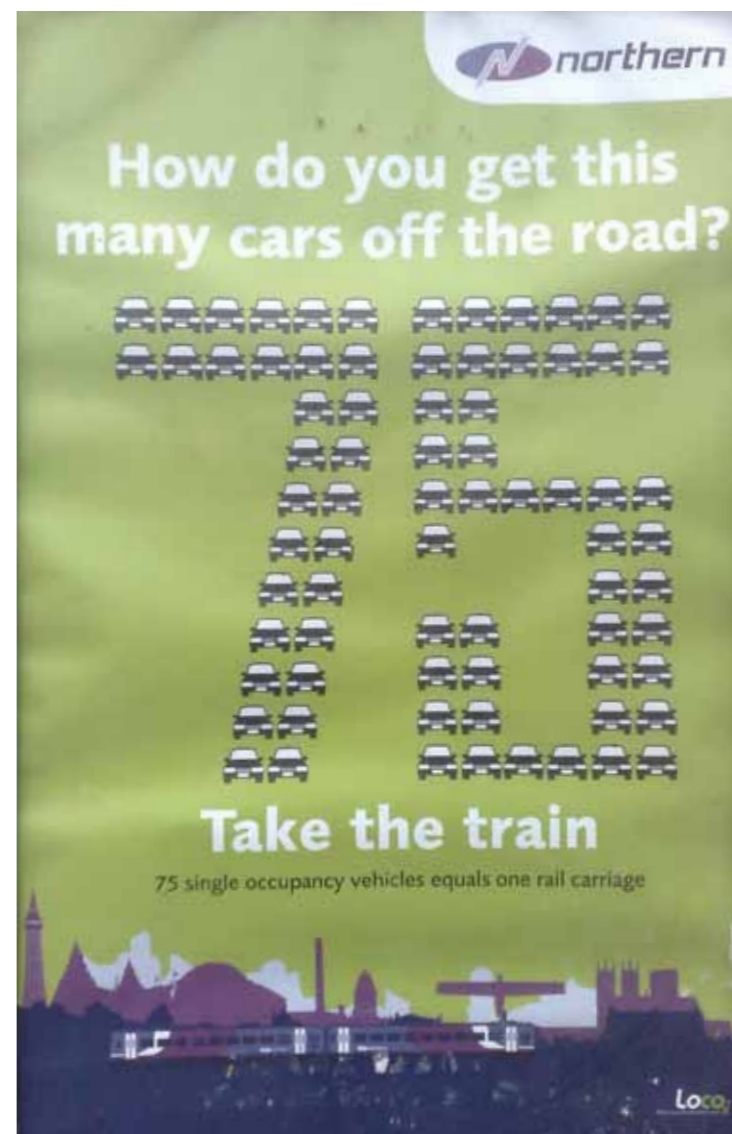
But my idea could be pursued by Network Rail as a practical, cost-effective safety improvement where crossing barriers or bridge segregation is unlikely.

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Even faster

I have just received my copy of *Railwatch*, another splendid effort.

Can I comment about the front page article referring to the high-speed line in Russia? The Velaros are capable of nearly 220mph, not 155mph. In France at present I believe that there are about 1,180 miles of high-speed line, rather than 500 miles as stated. Spain,



NORTHERN SENSE: This poster was spotted at Haltwhistle station in Northumberland. It's a good message but it's preaching to the converted. Maybe posters like it should be placed close to the expensive new roads which the Government has funded all over Britain.

If car drivers heeded the message, they would do themselves a good turn as well as saving the taxpayer from pouring any more money into the black hole of road building. Ironically, the TaxPayers' Alliance, which claims to represent ordinary taxpayers, wants more money wasted on roads.

where I live, has rather more than France, about 1,864 miles already, but it looks as though China is going to leave European countries well behind!

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Greater choice

I have heard the fear expressed that when Chiltern Railways' Oxford service starts, there may be problems, especially in the peaks, in pathing all the required trains through the tunnels outside Marylebone station.

Some years ago I used to travel regularly on the once-daily Chiltern train to Paddington.

That train is no more, but the Solihull and Leamington Rail Users Association's newsletter assures me that there is still a once-daily route training train FROM Paddington.

No doubt Chiltern, understandably, prefers Marylebone. So too, probably, do most of Chiltern's

customers. It is what they are used to. Nevertheless, Paddington would be a very good second best, if sufficient trains could not be got through the tunnels into Marylebone. I doubt whether, for the number of trains to be affected, it would be necessary to redouble the crucial line between South Ruislip and Paddington.

I suggest that it should not be the Oxford trains that are diverted into Paddington, which already has trains to Oxford.

The Oxford trains could perhaps be accommodated at Marylebone by diverting some West Midlands services into Paddington. Restoration of some of the old Great Western Hill-Solihull-Leamington-Bicester-Paddington services, if only in the peaks, would not come amiss.

I understand another Chiltern proposal is to extend their hourly service to Aylesbury Parkway via Amersham along the old Great

Central to Calvert and thence to Bletchley and Milton Keynes. Then, west of Milton Keynes, only a short portion of the old East-West route – between Bicester and Calvert – would be bereft of Chiltern trains.

This leaves a prospect of Chiltern "filling the gap" with a service between Oxford and Milton Keynes or perhaps Bedford.

I am proud to say that I am a committee member and past chairman of the Solihull and Leamington Rail Users Association. Nevertheless the above views and suggestions are entirely my own.

*Peter A. Moore
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Historic disgrace

I was pleased to read in *Railwatch 121* that Stockton station is getting an upgrade.

When I first travelled there in the 1960s to visit my maternal grandmother, it possessed a proper overhead canopy, similar to Darlington, as well as having an historic Victorian coach on display.

However all that is long gone, with today's station bereft of character and facilities. Considering though Stockton's role in Britain's railway history, it is really a disgrace when one considers how many lesser heritage sites have been developed over the years.

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West Midlands action

Whenever it is published I read *Railwatch* with great interest to see what is going on in other regions of our organisation. If it was there I would read of developments in our West Midlands area with even greater interest.

Very rarely do we get a mention. Fortunately developments do sneak in occasionally. At last Kenilworth is to get its station back!

Here in Stratford, flooded as we are by large tribes of tourists, we now have a computerised station ticket machine available. But if you want to buy a ticket to travel tomorrow or next week, you can't!

Our new Birmingham-based signalling system creeps on at snail's pace while the new class 172s are delayed. Stratford station lacks basic operating facilities.

So where are our West Midlands reports?

Perhaps our reporters have given up because of the exhausting battle to get Warwickshire County Council to support the reopening of six miles of line south of Stratford – making use of the extant track bed – to meet up with the redoubled Cotswold Line at Honeybourne.

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