

Have your say on Europe

By Trevor Garrod

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If you board a Eurostar train at St Pancras, Ebbsfleet or Ashford, it is often part of a longer journey, perhaps to Germany, the Netherlands or the South of France.

That means changing to another train – often a high speed train – for the onward journey. How easy is it to book? What happens if connections are tight or missed?

How good is the customer service before and during the journey?

These are questions put in a new European Passengers Federation questionnaire following consultation with the directors of Railteam which brings together the high-speed train operators in eight countries including Great Britain.

You can find the questionnaire at www.epf.eu. Why not complete it with your experiences – good or bad. We plan

to analyse and report passengers' experiences on a monthly basis.

Come to Barcelona

On Saturday 12 March, EPF will hold its conference and annual general meeting in Barcelona, as guests of our Catalan member association, PTP.

An attractive programme of speakers on local, national and international issues is being prepared and there will be optional visits on the Friday before and Sunday after the conference. There is much of cultural, historic and transport interest in and around this city.

French high speed trains now enter Spain – just – to the outskirts of Figueras, from where it is possible to catch an onward train to Barcelona, or you can travel on the sleeper from Paris. Details of the conference are at www.epf.eu or send an SAE to Trevor Garrod, 15 Clapham Road South, Lowestoft NR32 1RQ.

railwatch

ISSN 0267-5943

www.railwatch.org.uk

is edited by Robert Stevens and Ray King

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Printed by Print-Out, High Street, Histon, Cambridge CB4 4JD

Tel 01223 232709

Railfuture members receive Railwatch free

Non-members can subscribe by sending £8 (cheque payable to Railwatch) to: Alan Cocker, 11 Franklin Road, Ipswich, Suffolk IP3 9DX

Copy deadlines: For the next issue, to be published in April, copy must be in the hands of Mr King by 21 January.

Copy to: editor@railwatch.org.uk

Advertising: Full page: £190. Half page: £95. Quarter page: £45. Small ads: 30p per word. Free to members.

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New members apply to David Harby, 6 Carral Close, Lincoln LN5 9BD membership@railfuture.org.uk

Renewals and other membership queries: Lloyd Butler, 24 Chedworth Place, Tattingstone, Suffolk IP9 2ND. Email: renewals@railfuture.org.uk

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Elections Board elections held annually. Nomination forms can be obtained from Returning Officer, PO Box 7690, Hinckley LE10 9WJ. You can also download a form from www.railfuture.org.uk/tiki-index.php?page=Elections

Who's Who: Many other useful contact details can be found on the Railfuture website www.railfuture.org.uk

So far, so good – but

By Chris Austin

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One of the predicted benefits of rail privatisation, which had not previously been put to the test, was that the stop/go nature of public sector funding would be replaced with longer term security.

This seems to be the effect following the major public spending cuts announced by the Government in October.

In British Rail days, such a public sector squeeze would have led to cuts in train services as well as to the deferring or cancelling of investment projects.

Now, however, train service levels are contractually committed through the franchise agreements, while capital projects are part of the regulated settlement with Network Rail, with many of them being a requirement in contracts with train operators.

The Government has turned this to advantage with a policy that puts a priority on investment in transport infrastructure to handle and encourage future economic growth.

So the railway emerged in good shape from the comprehensive spending review on 20 October – but we need to be vigilant.

Undecided

Still to come are announcements on the inter-city express project which in turn affects decisions on other new rolling stock, and more electrification which have all been on hold since the Government's earlier spending statement in June.

An announcement on these is now expected in January.

Other outstanding issues include the new policy on franchising, and Railfuture has commented

on the Department for Transport's consultation paper.

Also awaited is the McNulty inquiry into rail costs which was set up by the Labour government but will not be in the public domain until March or April next year.

So a good deal of uncertainty remains, although some bits of the jigsaw have been put in place.

Safeguarded schemes

There is no indication that any train services will be cut as a result of the spending review, and most of the investment in control period 4 (2009-14) remains intact, including the major projects at Reading and the rebuilding of Birmingham New Street, expanding Gatwick Airport station and completing the rebuilding of London King's Cross.

Schemes added after the control period 4 settlement, however, are not safeguarded and no funding is now available, for example, for Swindon-Kemble redoubling.

This will now be considered in the next control period (CP5, 2014-19) where it will be in competition with many other worthwhile projects.

Work will, however, continue on the development of High Speed 2, and Crossrail will continue with the scope of the project untouched, although its completion will be a year later in 2018.

Other CP4 schemes on the Midland and East Coast main lines will continue, as will gauge enhancement for freight on the routes from Southampton to the West Midlands and Felixstowe to Nuneaton.

Light rail schemes surviving are extensions to Nottingham's tram network, and upgrades to both

we need to stay alert



THAMESLINK: Work has already started in London on the Borough Market viaduct for the Thameslink scheme

Midland Metro and the Tyne and Wear Metro.

Fares

Safeguarding investment and service levels comes at the cost of much higher fare increases, from January 2012. From that date, the Government will allow train operators to increase regulated fares by 3% above the retail price index. Currently regulated fares can only rise by RPI plus 1%.

Efficiency savings of £185 million are to be made by Network Rail over the four year period, and savings of £100 million are to come from the efficiencies anticipated by DfT from new and longer franchises.

Roads

On the roads side, things do not look so good. Seven major road projects have been cancelled and an eighth, the A14 between Huntingdon and Cambridge which at over £1 billion (yes, that is over £1,000,000,000 for 16.5 miles of road) is described

as "simply unaffordable under any reasonable future funding scenario" by the DfT. In fact, the Felixstowe-Nuneaton rail freight upgrade will remove thousands of the juggernauts which are at present using the A14 corridor.

We might also point out that investing just 1% of the money earmarked for the A14 road scheme would have paid for a rail link between Cambridge, St Ives and Huntingdon and would have been both more effective than the Highways Agency plans and those for the guided busway.

Sadly the expensive mistake of building the busway has been made. And the latest spending review has given the go-ahead for another 14 major road projects and a number of others have been listed for further evaluation.

We will need to remain alert until we see the full picture next year, but at this stage, we could reasonably say that it could have been worse.

LOCAL ACTION

Yorkshire

By Chris Hyomes

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Leeds station improvement will aid regeneration

The Government has given the go-ahead to a £15 million project to provide a new southern entrance at Leeds station. Metro chairman Chris Greaves said it would help regenerate the area south of the station, including Holbeck urban village, Bridewater Place as well as the riverside and the canal basin. Mr Greaves however pointed out that transpennine rail services were also in desperate need of investment. Instead the Government is spending £150 million on the M62 motorway, proving that it is still doing the road lobby's work despite the talk about climate change. Leeds is also waiting to hear whether its trolleybus scheme will be allowed to proceed.

£8 offer to sample the Settle-Carlisle line

People from West Yorkshire are being encouraged to take a trip on the Settle-Carlisle line this winter. A special £8 day return to any station on the lines to Carlisle or Morecambe from many Metro stations including Leeds is available to MetroCard holders and Metro-issued national concessionary passes. Metro is also running a photo competition based on the line. You can email your photographic entry to settlecarlisle@wypte.gov.uk

Reopening campaign wins new backing from councils

Bridlington Town Council and Cottingham Parish Council have joined the Minsters Rail Campaign, which is already backed by East Riding Council and is determined to get the Beverley-York line reopened. The campaign is hoping to raise £500,000 for a detailed engineering survey of the route which served Market Weighton, Pocklington and Stamford Bridge until it was closed during another cost-cutting era, the 1960s. Hull MP Alan Johnson, who was a Labour leadership contender, is a supporter of the campaign. www.minstersrail.org.uk/

Support for Skipton-Cole reopening

The Skipton-East Lancashire Rail Action Partnership has been boosted by this message of support from Stephen Collicott of Balfour Beatty Rail: "I have been introduced to the project and have seen the impressive amount of support that SELRAP has generated. After a site visit I could see the genuine benefit that the reinstatement could bring to the area. I am keen to see the project succeed and hope that I can contribute." The group adds: "Support for SELRAP continues to climb off the scale. A full list of SELRAP's supporters can be found by following this link to our website: <http://www.selrap.org.uk/>



Electrification will help to deal with overcrowding

A £600 million scheme to electrify the railway from London to Oxford over the next six years was announced by the Government on 25 November.

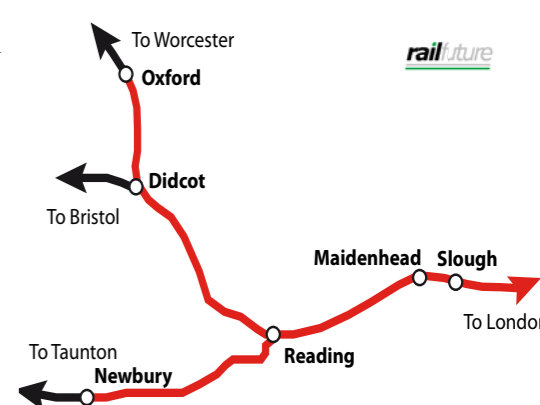
But a decision on whether to electrify the Great Western Main Line west of Didcot, to Bristol and South Wales, has been deferred until the new year. The Government says it wants to assess plans to replace IC125 trains with new all-electric, all-diesel or bi-mode trains. See back page.

Great Western electrification, as far as Bristol and south Wales, announced last year by Labour but put on hold by the new coalition Government will go ahead but only in part. Electric suburban services between Paddington, Reading and Oxford, and between Reading and

Newbury will be provided by transferring trains from the Thameslink route in London. Siemens and Bombardier are both bidding to supply the new electric trains. Transport Secretary Philip Hammond said: "We must carry on investing in the railway, we can't stand still. If we want growth to continue, we have to invest in our transport infrastructure."

Network Rail will also electrify the lines between Liverpool, Manchester, Preston and Blackpool at a cost of £300 million but not between Chester and Crewe despite Labour's announcement in 2009.

The redeployment of electric rolling stock to these newly electrified routes will free up hundreds of diesel units which will be available to train operators to lease after 2015.



GREAT WESTERN: Towards an electric future

◆◆◆◆ The environmental cost of flying: www.airportwatch.org.uk/