

High-speed rail

By Trevor Garrod

trevor.garrod@railfuture.org.uk

A two-day conference on high-speed rail took place in October in Amsterdam.

It was attended by transport and industry professionals from many European countries and from North America.

The passenger perspective was provided by myself – as Chairman of the European Passengers' Federation – and Railfuture vice-president Christopher Irwin, representing Passenger Focus.

The challenges of building high speed lines in Great Britain, Poland, France, Russia, Spain and Portugal were explained.

German, Dutch and Italian speakers dealt with competition with other modes and on the tracks. The conference opened on the day after the first German high-speed train arrived in London on a test run.

Distribution was also a major theme of the conference, with information technology consultants eager to show how the rail industry could learn from airlines on ticketing and sales.

In my presentation I referred to previous difficulties in obtaining information about and booking international tickets – as demonstrated by the Railfuture mystery shopper exercise in 2008.

Online ticketing has become more popular in Europe over the past few years and the formation in 2009 of the European Technology and Travel Services Association reflects this trend.

However, there is always likely to be a role for human contact. Staff training is vital – both in using the internet and selling the product – and operators'

computer systems need to be able to talk to each other. I also stressed the importance of the end-to-end journey. High-speed rail is usually only part of a long-distance journey and travel to and from the high-speed station must also be considered, otherwise time gained on the high-speed journey is lost finding out about local public transport and buying tickets.

There are good examples of best practice here, however, such as the British PLUSBUS, German city ticket and Belgian zonal ticketing which can be added to your Eurostar ticket for a small extra charge.

Christopher Irwin gave a presentation on *Delivering a true alternative to the car* in which he highlighted passengers' concerns as shown by the British National Passenger Survey.

This showed that passengers' priorities included value for money, punctuality and reliability, and sufficient services at times wanted.

Faster journey times alone were only part of the solution, though the additional capacity created by high speed lines was also welcome.

It is important to have shorter end-to-end journey times, dependability, convenience and attention to service and comfort.

He also posed some questions for operators to consider, such as: Is there more we can do for our passengers; is the train operator necessarily the best retailer; and is the passenger inconvenienced by the structure of the industry?

The conference was organised by Marketforce and the Adam Smith Institute.

Railfuture AGM notice

Notice is hereby given that the annual general meeting of the Railway Development Society Ltd will be held at Brighthelm Church and Community Centre, North Road, Brighton, East Sussex BN1 1YD on Saturday 7 May 2011, starting at 11.00.

There will be a morning session with one or more guest speakers followed by a buffet lunch. The formal AGM will commence at 13.30.

Nominations for election for chairman and to the board of directors must be sent to Railfuture Returning Officer, PO Box 7690, Hinckley, Leicester LE10 9WJ to arrive by 31 January

2011. Nomination forms can be obtained from the same address or from the Railfuture website at www.railfuture.org.uk.

Motions for discussion at the AGM (in typed or electronic format) must be sent to: M Crowhurst, 33 Station Court, Aberford Road, Garforth, Leeds LS25 2QQ to arrive by 23 April 2011.

Further details and a booking form for the buffet lunch will be sent to members later.

By order of the board, L Butler, Company Secretary, 1 December 2010

Railfuture is the campaigning name of the Railway Development Society Ltd

LOCAL ACTION

North West

By Arthur Thomson

arthurthomson@f2s.com

■ ■ Pacers until 2020

The Pacer railbus has been given a new lease of life by the Department for Transport. The Pacer dates back to the 1980s when British Rail was under pressure from the then Conservative government to create a "cheap and cheerful" train with low running costs – or face the threat of more line closures. The four-wheeled Pacer with its Leyland bus parts may be widely derided but it is now likely to remain in service for another 10 years. The class 142 diesel already has a waiver that allows it to remain in service until 2014, even though it doesn't meet current disability access requirements under the Equality Act 2010, which replaced the Disability Discrimination Act of 1995. It is understood that the Department for Transport has now extended that waiver to 2020.

The Pacer's extended life was revealed by a senior Northern Rail executive at a recent consultative forum with user groups. The move is seen as discriminating heavily against those who have access limitations in the north of England where the majority of class 142s are based with the Northern Rail franchise. The North West branch of Railfuture is planning to pick up on this issue and appeal to the DfT to reconsider its action and give the north of England a fairer deal.

Northern Rail was recently granted a two-year extension to its franchise and the franchise will now end in 2013. So any successor franchisee will have to manage the use of 142s for at least another seven years from the start of the new franchise.

■ ■ Garden blooms thanks to Friends of Hindley Station

The Friends of Hindley Station group has been busy over the summer keeping up their hard work on maintaining the attractive garden feature they started on the Manchester-bound platforms some time ago as a way of improving the general appearance of the station. The volunteer workers uncovered an old station sign in the undergrowth and set about making it an attractive feature of the station again. The group has held "Garden Restoration days" regularly over the summer where members come along about once a month and spend an hour or two helping to make it look good. The volunteers have received many compliments on the work they have done. They are now looking at restoring the Wigan-bound platforms which are in dire need of removal of overgrown vegetation. The group has also been busy in cyberspace, promoting their work through a new website <http://fohs.web.officelive.com>



The Hindley station sign restored by the Friends

