



Your letters

Ticket despair

I despair sometimes over train ticketing. I went to Scunthorpe station to ask about a night sleeper to Fort William, but they were unsure if it was still running and could not sell me tickets. So I went direct to ScotRail telesales, who gladly booked me a sleeper ticket, mentioning they were quite busy.

On the other hand when I asked ScotRail telesales about making a reservation from Motherwell to Doncaster at about 16.05 on the return journey, they said that on their system this train did not exist and I would have to visit my local station.

Ticketing should be made a lot simpler and straightforward enough to complete in one operation.

Incidentally, why does the trainline.com suggest changing at Dalmeir at 06.00 when it is far more comfortable to get off the sleeper at 07.43 at Crianlarich? I am also bemused by the huge differences in prices for travel to Europe both by Eurostar and by train and ferry. Often it seems the trains are far from full.

I would be interested to hear some advice from Eurostar and Rail Europe about how to find reasonably priced tickets.

Perhaps other Railfuture members could also advise where best for people to buy their tickets.

Nearer to home, I wonder if other Railfuture members have views on the two-car units which are used for the Cleethorpe to Manchester Airport service. The three-car units just about coped with demand. Why did TransPennine order two-car trains?

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Overground seats

I periodically travel between Richmond and Highbury & Islington and have always found this Overground (the former North

London line) to be very useful. However, I made the mistake of coming back to Richmond during rush hour. It is not a good idea on the new class 378 trains if one wants a seat which I always do as I find long standing quite a strain.

London Overground claims that "on the Class 378, the average journey time per passenger is seven minutes which we believe is an acceptable duration to expect passengers to stand."

Well for me – and no doubt many others – my journey between Highbury & Islington and Richmond can take an hour or more.

London Overground also says that "our services during rush hour were extremely congested on our old-style trains, so the seating layout was planned to enable more passengers to be able to use our services."

Yes – if they stand. The old trains were extremely congested because there were not enough of them to cope with the rush hour.

Even at off-peak times when I travelled into Highbury & Islington, every seat was filled before long.

In a letter in response to my complaint, the Overground spokesman said: "I hope I have been able to explain why the new trains have less seating than our old-style trains. At present there are no plans to refurbish the carriages to change the layout of our trains. Our entire fleet of trains has now been manufactured."

What a roll-over-and-die attitude – the trains are manufactured, so that's that.

It is a shame because otherwise these new trains felt very pleasant to be on, light and airy, thanks to the open-ended carriages.

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Editors' note: London Overground also said: "Whilst there are fewer seats on the new trains we believe that the layout is well adapted to the demand profile and average length of journey that are being made on our services. The seating

capacity of the new class 378 trains is 112 seats and this will increase to 152 seats when the four-car trains are introduced on to our network over the next few months.

"The new three-car trains offer a total seating and capacity of nearly 500 people, representing an 8% increase in total capacity to the older trains. When the additional fourth carriages are delivered the total capacity of the trains will increase to 667 passengers, a 45% increase in capacity."

Transport Watch

Mr Gibbin's letter in *Railwatch* 125 says we compare rail with motorways. Instead we compared rail with the motorway and trunk road system. It has a lane length of circa 52,000 km compared with rail's track length of 31,500 km. Both networks serve remote areas. The advantage of rail's is that it serves the hearts of our towns and cities. Despite that the density of use, found by dividing the passenger or tonne-km by track or lane length, is 2.5 and 3 greater on the strategic road system than on the railway.

Mr Gibbins goes on to complain that we have ignored the 200,000 miles of the tarmac cow trail and urban back streets that constitute most of the rest of the road network. We leave your readers to decide which of us is sensible on that score.

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Editors' note: This correspondence is now closed.

Ghost trains

There was an interesting programme on Radio 4 called *The Ghost Trains of Old England* in October.

It dealt with the "ghost trains" that run at very infrequent intervals to maintain the pretence that a station or line is still open for use.

I have noticed one of these myself in recent months now that I occasionally use the London Midland service from London to Crewe.

Trains never stop at Polesworth which looks as if it is still open. A close study of the timetable shows that one northbound train stops soon after 07.00 on Mondays to Saturdays, but there is no corresponding southbound service. Very useful for the residents of Polesworth I am sure. I was also surprised during a

recent trip to London to find that the Circle line no longer lives up to its name.

After more than 100 years of going round and round central London, the line now embraces the Hammersmith branch.

A change of trains is now required for Circle line passengers who previously travelled through Edgware Road station which is now rather confusing with twice as many trains terminating there than formerly and many passengers having to make an enforced change at this rather bleak and basic station.

It is a particular problem when travelling from Paddington station because all District and Circle line trains only go as far as Edgware Road. It is better to use the Hammersmith line platforms where you can board trains direct to Euston Square, King's Cross and Liverpool Street.

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Overcrowding

I read that in a Belgian newspaper that the Belgian rail authority NMBS has achieved a 50% reduction in overcrowded trains this year, largely thanks to the introduction of more double-decker trains. Almost as a footnote, the article gives NMBS's definition of "an overcrowded train" as one in which ONE passenger is unable to find a seat. If only!

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Local action

I am a long-standing supporter of Railfuture, and am glad to read encouraging news in *Railwatch* whenever it arises. Thanks for providing very enjoyable and meaty reading matter. But I would like to see more news from Devon and Cornwall. It has been reported elsewhere, for example, that although details are yet to be finalised, there is a real possibility of restoring a regular weekday train service between Okehampton and Exeter, which was withdrawn in the very early 1970s. No doubt there is other worthwhile and encouraging news to lighten the hearts of your readers. Incidentally I am also membership secretary of the Dartmoor Railway Supporters' Association.

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Editors' note: Railwatch depends on volunteers to report what is happening in their branch area and often,

the active volunteers are overwhelmed with Railfuture work. If members are prepared to help with reports, they could contact their branch secretary or the Railwatch co-editors. According to local news reports, however, the Okehampton plans are being scrutinised by the Office of Rail Regulation. Okehampton residents are said to be excited by the prospect of the return of an all-year-round regular Exeter-Okehampton passenger service. Chamber of Trade chairman Ian Bailey says it will be a major factor in the regeneration of the town. There is also talk of a parkway station on the A30 road.

Closure by stealth

I was impressed by an excellent Radio 4 programme in October on Ghost Trains of Old England, presented by Ian Marchant.

He highlighted absurdities such as Stockport-Stalybridge, the weekly Ealing Broadway-Wandsworth Road bus (train), and Newhaven Marine and he did it very well. It was notable that the Department for Transport did not put in an appearance to justify the so-called "parliamentary" trains which allows a rail service to be effectively withdrawn without complying with the legal procedures!

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Editors' note: Ian Marchant also wrote the entertaining 2003 book *Parallel Lines*, a humorous and affectionate study of railway enthusiasts and railways in general. A recommended read.

Passenger's view

My recent visit to the new Newport station which was featured on the back page of *Railwatch* 125 was a disappointment. Arriving from Paddington, I found the island Platform 2/3, which the majority of trains are still using, unchanged, with the original toilets and refreshment room near the old exit, a long walk from the new overbridge at the opposite end of the platform. The information screens have been removed so

Send your letters to:

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Email: editor@railwatch.org.uk
Railwatch also welcomes articles and pictures
Please use email if possible

◆◆◆◆ Norway is studying five routes for potential high-speed rail services from Oslo



Zefiro speeding towards Britain

This is one of the latest high-speed trains specially designed to work across European borders.

The V300 Zefiro has been chosen by Italy's national railway Trenitalia.

Fifty of the Zefiros will be jointly built by Bombardier and AnsaldoBreda at a cost of £1.3 billion and will enter service in 2013.

The Zefiro will be based on the high-speed

trains which Bombardier has supplied to China but will be adapted to meet European interoperability specifications.

The train can carry 600 passengers and can travel at 250 mph. Italian Railways said it had chosen the Zefiro partly because it was substantially cheaper than the rival bid from Alstom. Trenitalia is looking forward to operating the Zefiro to Germany, France, Spain and Britain.

passengers changing trains at this well-connected station could not find the platform number for their next train.

Fortunately a member of staff on the platform was very helpful, and when I told him the screen in the refreshment room was not working, he immediately set off to deal with it. However, it was still not working five days later!

On this return journey, my train arrived at platform 1, giving me the opportunity to use the new overbridge which, although spacious, is not as glamorous inside as the seagull's view in *Railwatch* suggests, and the lift down to platform 2 deposited me in the rain as there is no canopy at its exit.

By far the most serious complaint, however, concerns the enormous gap between train and platform, with some passengers even being lifted on or off.

I was told by staff that there have been "many" accidents already, with a man falling between train and platform "just the other day".

All in all, much improvement is needed before this station will "encourage even greater use of

the railway network" as Network Rail's Mark Langman hopes.

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South London battle

I hope John Stewart (*Railwatch* 125) will accept that my previous letter in *Railwatch* 121 was no more than a response to what appeared in the Local Action report in the previous issue, well over a year ago now.

He and I know that there is much more to the story of the South and East London lines, and that in some respects things have moved on since. The underlying questions – in particular, how to retain and enhance links between Clapham High Street and Wandsworth Road with London Victoria – however appear to remain substantially unresolved.

Following the comprehensive spending review by the Government and with Transport for London and Department for Transport budgets under unprecedented pressure, and the future of the Thameslink programme in general and London Bridge station remodelling in

particular still undecided, there is uncertainty and apprehension.

The need for the South London line campaign continues. The former East London Line Group lived through a similar experience.

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Editors' note: John Stewart reports that London Mayor Boris Johnson has backed plans to stop Kent trains at Peckham Rye and Denmark Hill if South London Line trains are withdrawn, as is threatened within the next couple of years. The plan to stop Kent trains has the backing of Transport for London and local members of the London Assembly.

Southwark Rail Users Group's Eileen Conn said: "This would still leave some big gaps in services. But in the meantime this is a very cost-effective, common-sense solution to maintaining some of the service to Victoria. We will be working with all parties to try to ensure it happens."

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