

# Killing a golden goose . . .

By TREVOR GARROD

I do not often buy a meal on a train. Most of my journeys during the week are on Regional trains with, at most, a trolley service. At the weekend, InterCity generally operates only a buffet service.

When I do patronise a restaurant car, I find it reasonable to pay a little more than in a normal eating establishment, for the convenience and pleasure of dining at up to 125 mph while the countryside flashes by.

I recently caught the down East Anglian from London's Liverpool Street after a busy day in London without a proper meal. With a busy evening in Ipswich ahead of me (yes, we general secretaries jet-set about) before arriving home at 2300, I decided to have a meal on board.

It was a very tasty meal, efficiently and courteously served. But it was rather spoiled by the senior conductor inspecting my standard saver ticket and announcing that I would have to pay the difference between this and a first class single because, since May of last year, the restaurant car on this train had been limited to first class passengers only.

I noticed one other standard class passenger at the next table also having to pay this surcharge, in a dining area that was only half full. The steward said that his business had dropped off considerably since this rule was introduced.

I paid but then wrote to the local InterCity manager, protesting that I was already paying more than the basic fare (supersavers are not valid on the 1700 from Liverpool Street) and was not depriving a first class passenger of a seat since half the seats were unoccupied anyway.

I received a reply admitting that at times this policy can seem a little unfair and saying that he was passing on my letter to the marketing manager.

Other members in similar circumstances may like to make protests. Of course we know that InterCity sometimes, for reasons not of their own making, have tried to price people off overcrowded facilities. But in this case their policy is stubborn and dogmatic and likely to lose them goodwill, quite apart from deterring ordinary mortals from using the on-board catering services.

On a more positive note, high speed trains on the east coast main line and elsewhere now serve a choice of four rather tasty hot dishes in their buffets and I can particularly recommend the chicken curry. What's more, you don't have to be a first class passenger to buy from the buffet.

It has since been announced that the meals service is being withdrawn from the East Anglian and certain other trains.

## Campaigners rap MPs

MPs have been rapped by campaigners fighting to reopen the seven-mile line from Uckfield to Lewes in Sussex. The Wealden Line News reports: "Our MPs have shown themselves to be quite unable or unwilling to do anything other than offer vague promises of future improvements."

"If they were really concerned then they could tell Transport Secretary Malcolm Rifkind that here IS a good case for spending a little money."

"About £20 million would do the job and it would create a superb transport system through the heart of East Sussex, across West Kent and into Surrey. For roughly the cost of two miles of motorway."

The campaigners add: "Our political masters and planners seem short of vision, unable or unwilling to look beyond any short-term financial or political gain. They have no solutions to offer to our deepening transport crisis."

"They talk glibly of encouraging greater use of public transport and curbing the use of the private car, yet when a proposal such as the Wealden line scheme comes along, all sorts of excuses are made. It is no wonder the public remains suspicious and sceptical."

The Wealden Line Campaign can be contacted at PO Box 645, Uckfield TN22 5BZ.

**£20 billion wasted:** Increasing fuel tax five fold while reducing income tax is the only way to end the environmental damage caused by Europe's economic dependence on road transport, it is suggested. Dr John Whitelegg said car users meet only 27 per cent of their vehicles cost on society, while lorries meet only 23 per cent. Dr Whitelegg told the Institute of British Geographers annual conference that the subsidy to lorries, company cars and private motoring almost certainly exceeds £20 billion per year in Britain.

**Sea coal:** Three British ports are likely to be expanded when power stations switch to burning imported coal. Immingham, Liverpool and the Isle of Grain are favourites to handle the fuel which is expected to come from America, Colombia, China, and Australia. The 8.5 million tonnes a year imported in 1993 will rise to 32 million tonnes by 1999. Some of the imported coal is likely to be moved around Britain by coastal shipping rather than rail. (source: Cargo Systems April 1991)

**Unfair fares:** London is the most expensive capital city in Europe for public transport. For a six-mile single fare London costs £1.40, Copenhagen £1.18, Dublin £0.85, Frankfurt £0.80, Amsterdam £0.74, Brussels £0.65, Madrid £0.49, Rome £0.36, Paris £0.32, Athens £0.30. (source: Association of London Authorities.)

**Minority rule:** Only 36 per cent of households in Britain have a car, only 50 per cent of people have a driving licence, only 41 per cent of women have a driving licence. (1987 figures)

**Costs compared:** Widening M1 between Northampton and Barlborough, Derbyshire, £794 million (£8.8 million per mile). Electrifying the Midland main line: £200 million (£1.14 million per mile). Evidence to Commons Transport Committee

**Thinking positive:** What is left of the former Bedford to Sandy rail route should be protected by planners to enable it to become part of a new east-west rail link which could allow trains from Bristol to go via Swindon, Didcot, Oxford, Bletchley and Bedford to both Peterborough and the new Stansted airport. A conference on East-West Rail Links at Bedford in March also discussed the possibility of reopening the Bedford - Northampton and Bedford - Hitchin lines.

## NEWSWATCH

**Danger drivers:** Company car driver have three times as many accidents as other drivers, exceed speed limits more often and have bad driving habits, warns Transport 2000 board member John Peacock.

**Card trick:** Workers could be given public transport travel cards as compensation for losing company cars and free parking at work, says the National Economic Development Council.

**Training ground:** The city and county councils of Nottingham were urged by RDS official Graham Nalty to organise a conference to discuss local rail services and the InterCity status of Nottingham Midland station. He also called for the area to have its own passenger transport executive which could develop new services, including regular interval trains to Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield, Peterborough, Cambridge and Norwich.

**Turbo link:** Plans to force Stratford on Avon's rail station further out of town to make way for new roads are anti-democratic, according to a new booklet which calls for improvements to the existing station and better rail services. The strategy booklet says Stratford's tourism and business life is far too important to relegate its national rail link to a remote out-of-the-way dead-end siding. Published jointly by five transport groups, the booklet also warns against selling off railway land in the south of the town. Instead the line to Long Marston should be reopened to allow trains through to Worcester and to give an alternative route to Oxford. Then new Turbo trains which will begin operating from London to Oxford in two years time could also serve Stratford.

**Villains of the peace:** Britain's largest trade union, the Transport and General, supported the plan to build the East London River Crossing which makes no provision for rail and which threatens the 8,000-year-old Oxleas Wood which is also a site of special scientific interest. The local peasants are revolting against the £300 million road which will wreck one of the few peaceful and pollution-free areas of Inner London. For more information People Against the River Crossing have a hotline: 0426 921 900

**Wanton neglect:** BR wants to close the 140-year-old Primrose Hill station in North London. It has already cut the service to only two trains a day. Roads in the area are of course jammed for most of the day.

**Hara-kiri:** The M20 extension to the British end of the Channel Tunnel, built entirely at taxpayers' expense, was opened in May. The Government has banned itself from spending money on a rail link to the Channel Tunnel.

**Blind eye:** The Government's plan to limit lorries to 60 mph is itself limited. Only lorries up to four years old are affected. The average life of a lorry is 12 years.

**Special offer:** Members of RDS are being offered the chance to read about one of Britain's most successful rail groups at a special low price. For only £2 a year, the quarterly newsletter of the Friends of the Settle-Carlisle can be delivered to your door. FoSCLA celebrated its tenth birthday last month, having saved the line from closure. It is now campaigning for the return of Anglo-Scottish services to the line. RDS Scotland believes a service could be started fairly cheaply by using diesel units which could run peak hour services based on Leeds and Glasgow. The units could then swap ends by running via Settle, Carlisle and Dumfries. If you want to take up the FoSCLA offer, send £2 and your RDS membership number to FoSCLA Newsletter editor, 53 Kirklees Drive, Farsley, Leeds LS28 5TD