

LOCAL ACTION

London and Home Counties

CHAIRMAN: Howard Thomas of Chelmsford (24 South Primrose Hill, CM1 2RG) has taken over from Trevor Jones as branch chairman. Howard hopes to make the general question of quality a main theme of his period of office.

SALES: The Branch has held a number of financially successful sales stands at various recent public exhibitions and other events. We are grateful for Graham Collett's able organisation of these stands and for his varying bands of helpers who have manned the stands. Hopefully these have also provided useful publicity for the RDS and our various campaigns.

DIVISIONAL COMMITTEES: The North London Divisional Committee meets regularly in Linda Irvine's home in Southgate, to pursue such matters as the proposed Croyley Link, the present abysmal service to Croyley, and the likely closure of the abysmal Watford - Liverpool Street service that uses a newly constructed link from the time this service was diverted from a more direct route into the former Broad Street Station.

SOUTHERN: The Southern Region Subcommittee, composed partly of user-group representatives, meets quarterly at a pub near Farringdon Station (since the one previously used near Waterloo got too noisy). This committee concentrates on South London and Kent and East Sussex services. We hope sometime to organise a meeting in Uckfield to help pursue the separate campaigns for Uckfield Line electrification and for Uckfield - Lewes re-opening (whether diesel or electric) and to resolve some present differences of opinion over priorities between the two campaigns.

COASTWAY: The Coastway Divisional Committee is now normally meeting quarterly at a pub in Eastbourne, but numbers are thin on the ground and a few extra persons are needed for viability of this group; indeed the last meeting had to be cancelled as too few could come. Nevertheless a successful members' meeting jointly with the Wessex Branch was organised by the committee and held in Wessex territory at Havant to pursue the idea of improved and more coordinated south-coastal train services. Historically these are basically provided by sets of main London services and separate sets of generally shorter and slower local services, but there are poor facilities for long-distance coastal journeys, especially east of (and across) Brighton. As a first step we think the limited NSE fast services west from Brighton (to Portsmouth or Southampton) should be extended to Hastings by reversing in the one four-coach section of platform that is possible at Brighton. But we are also trying to campaign for early Ashford - Hastings electrification, a matter constantly being retarded by BR for financial reasons, notwithstanding the soon to be international services at Ashford (although the latest news is that even Ashford International Station is likely to be postponed, which is ridiculous). But on the positive side, we applaud the Victoria - Gatwick - Hove (though avoiding Brighton) - Worthing - Havant - Southampton fast service.

Trevor Jones

Doe's Bus/Rail Guide is a recommended supplement to British Rail's timetable. Published quarterly, it gives the bus service to all towns and other major destinations off the railway. Departure point at railhead, frequency and first and last buses each way are given, or the full service if it is infrequent. Besides being useful to individuals, it can also be used to persuade friends to use public transport. An annual subscription costs £18 from Barry Doe, 25 Newmorton Road, Moordown, Bournemouth, Dorset BH9 3NU. He will give £2 to RDS funds for any RDS member taking out a new subscription. Quote your membership number.

PLATFORM

Irresponsible decision

I am writing to record my concern at the Government's failure to intervene in the closure of Speedlink - a serious threat to the environment. This is, however, to be expected of a Government which is operating a policy of non-intervention in a "business" where the financial performance is the major consideration.

It has already been pointed out that this closure will save BR £30 million per year. But it will also transfer costs to the roads: additional wear and tear, increased accidents, and increased pollution.

It appears that the Department of (Road) Transport see this as a long term advantage. It will give an excuse to build even more roads!

This will be in the vain hope that throwing public money at the trunk road network will somehow cure the existing problems associated with road transport such as the average annual toll of 5,000 deaths, the damage to the environment caused by more and more vehicles producing pollution, the land consumed to provide roads and parking spaces and our total dependence on oil as an energy source for road transport.

A major cause for concern is the lack of effective policing of the road network such that acts of dangerous and incompetent driving are regular occurrences and nowadays become an accepted part of the hazards of being a road user.

I would like to propose the formation of a traffic division of the Transport Police with the specific brief of enforcing the laws on our roads - the civil police are so overworked and short-staffed that they are not able to follow up every incident. The new police force could be funded by the duties paid by road vehicle users.

I would also like to pose the question: Did the Government's Transport Act waive any requirements for HGV and PSVs to be maintained? Also, did it waive any requirements for the load on an HGV to be properly secured before any journey? It is a pity that quality standards for cleanliness of buses and coaches and for the exhaust emission of ALL diesel-engined road vehicles were not introduced as part of the provisions of this Act.

I am therefore left with the uneasy doubt that the Government's commitment to protecting the environment is simply recognition of a new political issue which can provide votes and popularity. Its commitment seems to go no further than the nominal support of can and bottle recycling schemes and the use of unleaded petrol, all of which are steps in the right direction but leave so many important issues unaddressed.

One of these issues is the closure of the Speedlink network as mentioned above, but another of greater importance to the UK as a whole is the lack of a fast rail link between the Channel Tunnel and London. I am concerned that this not only gives the UK an anti-European image among our trading partners but also that in the long term, the failure to provide communication between London and the tunnel may lead to a loss of the City's position as a major financial centre. On a more local note, it is still not possible to use a Network SouthEast train service to travel between, for example, Brighton and the site of the new Ashford International terminal. Electric services stop at Hastings.

In the year since the Royal Mail began using "new, fast road links" to transport mail to and from Brighton at weekends, the service has become less reliable. I have complained on several occasions. It is obvious that the environmental advantages of using rail should be taken into account. At present they are not.

If the Royal Mail eventually phases out the use of trains altogether, it will have lost a scapegoat and will have to start accepting full responsibility for its failure to provide a good service.

Tom Fairhall 1 Eng MIEIE 3 Mayo Road Brighton BN2 3RJ

Connections

In a recent edition of Railwatch, there were proposals for large scale new routes. Is it possible for us to consider less capital intensive schemes which seem unlikely to occur under the present government? Is it possible for us to have a much stronger look at the potential for more connecting services?

From where I live in Sittingbourne, it is not possible to get to Maidstone except by the use of three different trains. How much would it cost for example at Strood to have a station which was on the main line as well as on the line via Gravesend? This would have been useful in the recent bad weather since people at Strood had services cut off because of problems of points. It would also mean that Strood had a better service to London which might help to reduce road congestion which apparently makes another bridge over the Medway a strong possibility.

On the other side of the river there would seem to be a very strong case to have West Ham reinstated as a British Rail station on the LT&S route so people from Southend and Basildon would have much easier access to the North London Line. The North London Line of course is electrified but seems to have few links with the Underground network. Do other readers with greater knowledge than mine have any ideas how it could be linked for example to have a connection with the Piccadilly or possibly Northern Lines?

David Spurling 13 Periwinckle Close Sittingbourne Kent ME10 2JT

French friends

We are very interested in exchanging ideas and visits with British people from your association. We are a family of four and we would like to correspond with a similar family. My husband and I are both 41 and our children are Caroline, 9, and Guillaume, 7. We live near Paris, in the west suburbs, in a big house. We've got a cat and some birds.

My husband works in Paris St Lazare as manager of the ticket controllers and I work as French and English teacher in a comprehensive school. We hope you can find us a family to visit each other on holidays.

One of my relatives is looking for a British family too, to welcome her 17-year-old boy. He's in upper school and is a very serious boy. She would like to welcome an English boy one month and have the same exchange to England the following month.

Mme Claudine Adroit, 6 Square Perrault, 78180 Montigny le Bretonneux, France.

Editor's note: If anyone is interested, please contact Mme Adroit direct.

Official perks

My experience observing travel habits of public officials to destinations well served by rail reveals invariably no other arrivals by train for interviews, conferences, or party holidays, despite no requirement for cars once there.

Colleagues from equivalent distances are reimbursed according to mileage allowance scales which are double the train fare refunded to the "good, environmentally aware" citizen. Often parking charges are also partly defrayed.

Mindful of the privations which recipients of public-sector services suffer, the question arises, to what extent does provision for society's needy become reduced by lavishing mileage repayments on car journeys lacking moral justification?

Initiatives like No Car Day which received little publicity in the press or coverage on radio and TV, could highlight the impact of such State-endorsed selfishness on public spending resources.

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