

# Rail is key to healthy economy

The rail network is absolutely crucial to the success of the British economy, with almost 80% of commuters into central London dependent on it, rail users were told last month.

Everyone benefits from rail – even car drivers. Roads would be even more congested if rail passengers were forced to go by road or the massive tonnages of rail freight were switched to lorries.

That was the message from Chris Austin, when he outlined the Strategic Rail Authority's *Case for Rail* to more than 100 rail users from around Britain gathered for the Railfuture national rail users conference, on Saturday 1 November.

Even though some transport "experts" try to dismiss the contribution of rail, currently 75% of solid fuel, 30% of metals and 30% of petrol is delivered by train. That is nearly 6 million lorry movements avoided because of rail.

Railfuture believes that for social, environmental and economic reasons, that percentage should be increased dramatically.

Mr Austin, who is the SRA's executive director for community rail development, said that planners and politicians wanted the rail system developed for many reasons, including urban regeneration and to prevent social exclusion.

But so far the funding for these initiatives had not been agreed.

He urged Railfuture to give more support to the SRA rather than opting for easy publicity by attacking it.

## Success story

First Great Eastern's managing director Theo Steel stressed that road developments can drive rail expansion.

The opening of the M4 motorway put pressure on rail to compete – with the introduction of InterCity 125 trains.

But more and more people can choose how to travel. He said 53% of his passengers had access to two cars.

He asked for understanding when for instance the overhead electric line "melted" near Shenfield this year during the excessive heat of the summer.

First Great Eastern, which sponsored the rail users conference, was Train Operator of the Year 2003 had a good punctuality and reliability record and was ploughing investment back into the railway.

But he said Network Rail was not "delivering" what FGE needed. The reasons for unreliability were 80% infrastructure and 20% trains.

Even his new Desiro trains were behaving like two-year-olds, and needed "toilet training" when problems developed with the sealed tanks.

On a more general note, he urged Railfuture members to defend town centres from out-of-town shopping developments.

He also called for commercial and housing developments to be concentrated near rail



lines, in line with the Government's planning policy and for those developers to partner the railway in expanding and promoting services.

## Cast.Iron determination

Jerry Alderson told the conference how the fast-growing Cast.Iron group hoped to lever in £20million to get the Cambridge-St Ives line reopened.

He said the crucial date for the project was 17 December 2003 when Cambridgeshire County Council met to decide on a plan for a guided bus. He said Cast.Iron had to persuade four councillors to change their minds and stop the £73million guided bus plan. He appealed to Railfuture members to help Cast.Iron by joining even if they did not live in the area.

"If we can open the railway this way, it will show the way for other railways," he said.

Membership costs £10. Send a cheque to Cast.Iron at St Francis House, 10 Newmarket Road, Cambridge CB5 8DT.

## Local assets

Paul Salvesson of TR&IN stressed how important rural railways were. For instance, bringing an excursion train with 400 people on board to a small seaside resort will bring a big influx of money to the town.

He called for more local input. German railway costs were a fraction of British costs because the railways are locally managed.

He said he hoped the Esk Valley line would be the first micro franchise in Britain – with a local train depot at Whitby.

He conceded that local authority officials are sometimes frustrated by the hassle of implementing rail schemes and their high cost.

He said Railfuture members should seek out pro-rail councillors and officials and give them help and support in trying to overcome the opposition and obstacles to rail schemes.

If necessary Railfuture members could tackle the situation from the inside, by getting themselves elected to the local council.

He urged local councils to protect former rail routes for future rail development.

He predicted: "The next six to 12 months will be a key era for the railway. There is a root and branch review being carried out by the Strategic Rail Authority."

## Draw winners

Railfuture annual draw winners:

1. 18490 £500 F V Thomas, Harleston, Norfolk
  2. 12932 £200 D Brockbank, Wakefield
  3. 11554 £100 P Bettess, Preston, Lancs
  4. 24779 £50 S Adams, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk
  5. 25781 £10 H Hammerschmidt, Oxford
  6. 26433 £10 C O Vickers, Queniborough, Leicester
  7. 10281 £10 S Gray, Winlaton Mill, Blydon, Newcastle
  8. 14348 £10 R Powderhill, Quinton, Birmingham
  9. 12971 £10 C Lougee, Cononley, Keighley
- Mr Lougee asked for his £10 prize to be re-invested in Railfuture funds)
10. 08980 £10 R Rundell, Basildon, Essex

## Membership

As from 1 January, Railfuture membership will cost £18 (up from £17.50) while reduced rate members will pay £10 (up from £8.50). Corporate rates are under review.

## Rail images

Martin Murphy of Railfuture North East has suggested that we need "realistic railway clip art" which could be used for leaflets and other publicity material.

He suggests we should have images of current generation (HST or newer) British locomotives or train sets.

Martin also suggests that some standard railway pictograms might be useful.

It may be possible to build up a library which could be made available on the Railfuture website, or to point to other sites where such material is available.

If members have any ideas on this subject, please contact Ray King (editor@railwatch.org.uk)

## Lottery results

Railfuture lottery winners for October: Margaret Waide, Shrewsbury £56, Elisabeth Jordan, Corby £35, John Foster, Ormskirk, Lancs £21, John Hume, York £14, M J Breslin, Liverpool £7, A G Davies, Leeds £7.

If you would like to join the lottery, send a £12 cheque payable to Railfuture to Edgar Locke, 3 Langton Court, Worthing BN14 7BZ

## Green Express

Green Express Railtours which runs excursions from the Huddersfield area has joined Railfuture. Its 2004 programme starts in April. Details: 49 Byram Arcade, Westgate, Huddersfield HD1 1ND. Tel: 01484 422920