

Lincolnshire

By Brian Hastings

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■ ■ Network Rail 'gift'

One of the name boards from Gainsborough Lea Road signalbox – which closed last year as a result of fire damage and latterly was open only for a single shift – has been donated by Network Rail to Gainsborough Model Railway Society. Closure of the box has however left a longer block section on the Joint Line between Stow Park and Gainsborough Trent junctions.

■ ■ Coal trains on the line

The line between Gainsborough Trent junction and Barnetby is now in regular use for freight trains loaded with imported coal. The line is however unavailable for one third of the day because of engineering work.

■ ■ Rail strategy for the county

Railfuture Lincolnshire has congratulated the county council on its draft county rail strategy but has called for better Sunday services because of increased commercial and retail activity and the growing need for student travel to Lincoln University. We have pointed out that Sunday rail services were better 20 years ago. At the moment, the first train from Lincoln is not until 15.00. We have also passed on the results of a Railfuture members aspiration survey to Network Rail which raises many of the issues that the county rail strategy also highlights.

■ ■ Bridges are rebuilt

Rail campaigners are pleased to see Network Rail improving the county's infrastructure. Two under-bridges on the Doncaster-Cleethorpes route – one at Barnetby dating back to 1914, the other at Doughty Road, Grimsby – have been rebuilt.

■ ■ Overcrowding problem

The replacement of some three-car trains on the Manchester Airport to Cleethorpes route with two-car trains has caused overcrowding, especially between Sheffield and Manchester and promised Railfuture to lodge a complaint.

■ ■ Crumbling edge of quality

Railfuture is unhappy to see that catering trolleys have been withdrawn on trains running east of Doncaster on the route to Cleethorpes. The move has prompted redundancies and the closure of a catering facility at Cleethorpes.

■ ■ Action at station

The Lincolnshire branch of Railfuture has welcomed the formation of Friends of Hykeham Station. The station is to be improved with new passenger shelters and a larger car park.

■ ■ Boost for tourism

Direct trains from Lincoln to London by train operator East Coast will be introduced in May next year, six months later than initially planned. Railfuture welcomes the planned seven return journeys which are expected to boost tourism, but will be campaigning for a more frequent service more in line with other cathedral cities like Canterbury, Worcester and Exeter.

■ ■ Upgrade for diversionary line

Railfuture's campaign to make better use of the Peterborough-Doncaster "Joint Line" is being rewarded with work starting on upgrading it for use as a diversionary route for freight from the East Coast main line. Track is being replaced during the night and at weekends, between Sleaford South and Donington. Level crossings will also be modernised.

Eurostar's snow blow

By Trevor Garrod

Eurostar services were suspended for three days before Christmas when trains failed and passengers on five services had to be evacuated from the Channel Tunnel.

The breakdowns were caused by heavy snow in northern France entering the motors of the trains and then melting in the warmer air inside the tunnel.

The problems, and the need to adapt trains, inconvenienced many thousands of passengers between London, Paris and Brussels. As late as 10 January services were still subject to considerable disruption.

Eurostar set up a review, under the chairmanship of Christopher Garnett and Claude Gressier, to investigate the pre-Christmas problems.

The European Passengers' Federation, to which Railfuture is affiliated, discussed the problems in January and as chairman, I sent a submission to Messrs Garnett and Gressier.

The submission said that the trains should have been better equipped to cope with snow, as indeed are those Eurostars used on services from London to the French Alps.

Evacuation of the first stranded train was quite well handled by Eurotunnel, owners of the tunnel, but evacuation of the other four was much less satisfactory. The evacuation procedures of Swiss and Austrian Federal Railways in their longer Alpine tunnels could usefully be studied.

The EPF submission notes that Eurostar's level of customer care has been widely criticised and

must be fully investigated. We called for the real reasons to be put in the public domain, rather than passengers having to rely on some of the more sensational reports.

We urged that passengers should be properly compensated and given proper assistance under European Union and international conditions of sale rules.

The likelihood of similar problems could be offset by improving staff training and guidelines.

We said: "It was reported that on-board staff did not relay useful information to passengers; that there were inadequate supplies of food and water on some stranded trains; and that insufficient advice was given to passengers with onward connections."

Many of us consider Eurostar to be the best way of travelling to Continental Europe and the service also brings millions of visitors to our country. We want that situation to continue. Lessons need to be learned from the pre-Christmas problems, however, and then applied.

Railfuture's international and EU committee also produced a series of questions for the investigators.

The Garnett and Gressier report was published in February and recommended engineering improvements to the trains, better evacuation procedures and better communication.

Eurostar chief executive Richard Brown said the company would invest more than £30 million to implement all the inquiry's recommendations.

Rights for rail passengers

The culmination of eight years of consultation, debate and legislation came in December, when European Rail Passengers' Rights regulation 1371/2007 came into force, writes Trevor Garrod.

The outgoing Transport Commissioner, Antonio Tajani, launched it at a press conference in Brussels, flanked by representatives of the European Passengers' Federation, Community of European Railways and European Disability Forum. The EPF representative was its vice-chairman, Christopher Irwin, also a vice-president of Railfuture.

The regulation provides significant new protection for rail passengers and their luggage, makes provision for the needs of people of reduced mobility and provides a system of compensation and assistance if passengers suffer significant delay or are involved in an accident.

In a press release EPF also looked forward to the unveiling of rights for bus, coach and maritime passengers, and is contributing to a review of air passengers' rights - which have already been in been in



TRANSPORT CHIEF: Mr Kallas

place for five years. Our aim is to see a consistent and effective system of rights for users of all public transport as they travel in and around Europe. For more information, log on to www.epf.eu

The new EU transport commissioner is Siim Kallas, a former prime minister of Estonia. He has promised to move towards creating a level playing field through the "internalisation of external costs of all modes of transport." That should mean that rail gets a fairer deal.