

Yorkshire

By Chris Hyomes

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■ Eureka timetable

Railfuture Yorkshire is monitoring reaction to the new timetable for the East Coast main line, planned for December this year. There has been widespread concern about the changes and some commentators suggest any changes may be delayed until May 2011.

Train operator East Coast – which is being run by the Department for Transport's Directly Operated Railways – says the new Eureka timetable will mean more trains and faster journeys for York passengers.

A spokesman said: "It will add thousands more seats, provide new services, speed up average journey times, improve connections, and make better use of available track space across the East Coast main line."

Most trains going north will in future terminate at Edinburgh not Glasgow. East Coast has invited Railfuture to presentations in Leeds and York.

■ Northern rail utilisation study

Network Rail's draft Northern rail utilisation study is expected in September and will look forward to what infrastructure improvements will be needed over the next 30 years. Passenger Focus expects it to include an analysis of electrification proposals, for example from Manchester to York, the need for new and cascaded rolling stock, "unexploited capacity" on some routes, for example the Settle-Carlisle, and the need for signalling upgrades. It is also expected to give a judgment on reopening proposals for Woodhead, Colne and Bradford, restoration of through services between Wakefield and Manchester, smart ticketing, and restoration of double tracking. More information: northernng2@networkrail.co.uk

■ Council backs plan for more trains

Wakefield Council has reacted favourably to the Pontefract and District Rail Action Group's plan for a two-hourly Leeds-Goole service, and for a possible proper service between Pontefract and York. The group plans to meet with Wakefield Council.

■ Better stations

Friends of Hebden Bridge Station and the Upper Calder Valley Sustainable Transport Group have both sent in comments on the *Better Rail Stations* report produced for Transport secretary Lord Adonis by Chris Green and Sir Peter Hall. The Friends are worried that the Victorian nature of Hebden Bridge station has not been recognised and should be protected. South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive was delighted that the report labelled Barnsley, Doncaster and Sheffield as "world-class". The report said: "SYPTe has delivered an inspired public transport access to Barnsley station. An upgraded station takes passengers via an escalator to the brand new bus station, which includes a travel centre and a 24-hour information service. Passengers wait for their buses at 18 airport-style gates in a warm, seated environment and the gate doors are opened by the arriving bus driver. Extensive real-time bus information is displayed in the train station and vice versa." The report can be downloaded from www.dft.gov.uk/pgrrail/passenger/stations/

■ Rail is best for urban transport

Railfuture Yorkshire is also considering a report by the Prime Minister's strategy unit called *The Analysis of Urban Transport*. Initial reactions were that it was good in promoting public transport generally, but failed to take into account the importance of rail.

■ Rail for Bradford regeneration

Bradford Civic Society has produced a report *Common Sense Regeneration; A Plan to revive the fortunes of Bradford*. The society suggests there is a need for a cross-city rail link and a high-quality circular rail route serving Bradford, Leeds, Normanton, Wakefield, Brighouse, Halifax and Bradford again. It also wants improved inter-city links to bring in tourists and a railway to serve Leeds-Bradford airport.

Guided busway is a transport disaster

By Mike Mason

During development of the Cambridgeshire guided bus scheme, the DfT commissioned the Transport Research Laboratory to scrutinise costs and the bills of quantities.

These were quoted at £74 million in 2001 and rose to £86.4 million by the time of the public inquiry in 2004. In a funding statement in December 2003, the DfT had already promised £65 million.

At the Transport and Works Act Public Inquiry the Inspector and objectors were unaware that TRL had reported errors in the preparation of costs.

Requests for the TRL report to be made public were declined, the Inspector subsequently concluding that the county council figure of £86.4 million was correct.

A freedom of information request later revealed that the cost-benefit ratio had been miscalculated by a factor of 4, bringing the previously published figure down to a marginal 1.21 to 1.

Furthermore DfT "optimism bias", normally applied to schemes of this nature, revised the cost to £106 million.

Was Alistair Darling, then Transport Secretary, made aware of the TRL report when he signed the TWA order in 2005?

The decision letter said he was "satisfied" that the busway was "reasonably capable of attracting the funds to implement it."

The contractor's final "target price" rose to £116 million, to be funded by £92.5 million from the Government (a revised grant) and £23.5 million from developers by means of section 106 payments.

But both business case and passenger forecasts were dependent on housing development at Northstowe new town, Cambridge Northern Fringe (Orchard Park) and Cambridge Southern Fringe.

Critically important was the proposed redevelopment of the area around Cambridge station, comprising an interchange with guided bus stops and trackway leading to an underpass at Hills Road, adjacent to the Cambridge rail signalling centre.

Land assembly negotiations between Ashwell Group, the county council and Network Rail, together with section 26 disposal consultations, were supervised, in 2008, by the Rail Regulator.

Cambridge City Council granted planning permission in 2009. The developer was required to contribute £3 million to the guided bus project and £4 million to NR for station area improvements.

In a 2003 report, the county council had previously been warned that the Hills Road underpass route was a high-risk, high-cost option, necessitating replacement of adjacent electrification masts, signalling cables and equipment,

at a total cost, then estimated at more than £9 million. Nevertheless the rail infrastructure work went ahead in 2008 with the Cambridge area network being shut down over four weekends. Nineteen months later, the Hills Road underpass remained unfinished and was blocked from both directions!

Late design changes, public consultation, discharge of planning conditions and other factors have pushed the busway scheme towards total disaster.

The collapse of the house building market has delayed or severely curtailed major development around Cambridge and put in doubt the £24.7 million contributions the council hoped to receive from developers.

Years after the original conception, the government's Homes and Communities Agency is seeking a new development partner for Northstowe.

Orchard Park is the only development to provide an "up front" £2 million contribution so far.

The city council in November 2009 agreed to defer the first payment of the guided busway contribution from developer Ashwell, amounting to nearly £1 million, but Ashwell went into liquidation a month later.

Serious construction problems with the guideway at Trumpington may delay the section 106 payments, which include revenue subsidies to the operators.

Guided bus services were expected to start in spring 2009. Three publicised dates for the opening of the northern guideway section have come and gone. Now buses, without guidewheels, are being used on ordinary services, carrying the slogan: "We will be on the busway soon, will you?"

Meanwhile the situation for rail users at Cambridge station remains dire. The published busway map for Cambridge shows no connection with Cambridge station. There is chronic congestion for the six million rail passengers who use the station in a year.

What is the ultimate cost of the busway to the taxpayer? The hidden total may be over £200 million, although the council is officially expecting it to be £161 million.

Cambridgeshire has finally admitted that a decision taken in secret some months ago has authorised borrowing of an additional £41 million.

County taxpayers are thus already paying the interest on loans to make up the difference between "vision" and reality.

The "private negotiations" between the county council and NR, together with contributions from other regional government agencies such as Cambridgeshire Horizons, have obscured the actual financial position. The original rail-



HEAVY HAULAGE: A freight train at Histon in 1978. Now the busway has killed any prospect of taking freight off the roads



SPECIAL: This March 1979 picture shows the RDS train which proved the railway could be developed and people wanted it



ENTHUSIASM: People crowded Swavesey station for the RDS special in 1979. Politicians and planners failed to respond

way assets were partly owned by the taxpayers and any disposals, according to the Rail Regulator, should be "transparent".

Cambridgeshire busway disposals do not appear on the ORR website but there is a reference in the Cambridge station document to "an agreement between Network Rail and Cambridgeshire County, dated 19 November 2004."

That date was before the public inquiry closed and the Inspector's report had been written!

Taxpayers and transport users are entitled to answers to the following. If the county council had already negotiated an agreement with Network Rail, why spend £2.2 million on a public inquiry to acquire compulsory purchase powers, which were apparently

not used for the railway land? In addition to being misled by wildly optimistic passenger forecasts and cost-benefit figures, did the inspector have information that had been denied to the public?

Had the promise of funding from the DfT in 2003 prevented him from coming to any other conclusion? Was he in any way unduly influenced to produce such a flawed recommendation?

In June 2005 the *Cambridge Evening News* reported: "City's controversial guided bus proposal hit by new delay. Inspector loses final report on £2.2 million inquiry."

Did the "2004 agreement" include a realistic valuation of the railway infrastructure from Chesterton Junction to St Ives and Cambridge

London and South East

■ Franchise consultations

Our branch will collaborate with East Anglia to respond to the Greater Anglia and Essex Thameside consultations which were launched by the Department for Transport in January and needed responses by 19 April. The new franchise will probably run for 10 years.

■ Mayor's transport strategy

Several rail user groups, including the Chingford Line Users Association and the Cambridge Heath and London Fields rail users responded to the Mayor of London's draft transport strategy in January.

■ Southern timetable consultation

With input from Railfuture's Coastway division, branch chairman Keith Dyllal responded to Southern's timetable proposals for December 2010. Key changes are splitting the Ashford-Brighton service at Eastbourne, serving Winchelsea and Doleham stations throughout the day, and using ex-London Overground/Silverlink Metro 3rd rail stock to enhance capacity, if not quality! Network Rail's forthcoming London and South East route utilisation study, the first of the second generation RUSs, is expected in the autumn and may offer the opportunity to press for infrastructure improvements, such as doubling and electrifying the Ashford-Ore Marshlink line.

■ Tram-trains in Hertfordshire

Campaigners hope the St Albans Abbey to Watford line could be extended to serve the town centres at either end of the line, following proposals to convert the line for tram operation. The Department for Transport consultation into the idea ran until 21 March. It should result in a more frequent service.

■ Surrey reopening hope

There will be a public meeting on 17 April to try to promote the reopening of the Guildford to Cranleigh line. It was one of the schemes listed in the report *Connecting Communities*, published by the Association of Train Operating Companies last year. The meeting will be held in the Guildford United Reformed Church's Jubilee room in Portsmouth Road and will run from 14.00 and 17.00

■ Vital link

Save the South London Line campaigners have published *The Vital Link*, a report arguing the case for enhancing services on the South London line. John Stewart, co-ordinator of Lambeth Public Transport Group, said "The South London Line is a vital link for South London. There should be no question of scrapping it. Indeed, there should be more trains stopping in South London rather than fewer." More information from www.southwarkrailusers.net



■ West London line

The Department for Transport has decided that from May, the once-weekly "ghost bus" between Ealing Broadway and Wandsworth Road will be replaced by a once-daily train operated by Southern.

■ Chiltern

Chiltern's Evergreen Three plan will cut journey times from Marylebone to Birmingham and introduce a new service to Oxford but regrettably will offer no benefits to its London suburban users.

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