

Scotland

■ ■ Fighting on for airport rail link

Railfuture activists are continuing to campaign for the Glasgow Airport rail link despite the Scottish government withdrawing the necessary £120 million funding. One correspondent to *The Herald* newspaper in February accused the Scottish Nationalist government of “squandering GARL funding on a host of other, lesser, projects”. The correspondent, Mr Andrew Heatlie, also called for investment in the Glasgow Crossrail project. He concluded: “GARL, with Scotland’s Crossrail, remains crucial to the nation’s future.”

Railfuture’s Ken Sutherland told *The Herald* the government was shameful and perverse to sabotage a previously agreed transport strategy. Of Crossrail, he said: “This short link was recognised as the key element of a more comprehensive, interconnected and accessible Scottish rail network.”

Mr Sutherland pointed out that GARL was needed to honour the government’s pledges over the 2014 Commonwealth Games. He said: “Phase 1 of Crossrail, upgrading and electrifying an existing freight link from the Paisley line to the Queen Street-Airdrie line, could be operational by 2011/2012.

“This would achieve immediate travel benefits with direct, or same platform interchange, electric trains from Paisley, Ayrshire and Inverclyde to Edinburgh and intermediate communities with the Airdrie-Bathgate line which will reopen next year.

“The remainder of Crossrail, already confirmed as ‘a hugely beneficial and worthwhile investment’ by Strathclyde Partnership for Transport’s 2006 study, requires only track relaying on an existing viaduct, and 200 metres of crucial new curve at High Street station.”

■ ■ Borders rail link delayed

The completion date for the Borders rail reopening project has been put back until 2014 but work is under way to identify the contractor who will rebuild and operate the Waverley line to Galashiels. The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change, Stewart Stevenson said: “A fast, efficient rail link connecting communities from the Scottish Borders to Midlothian and Edinburgh will act as a catalyst for economic growth right across southern Scotland, supporting hundreds of jobs during its construction.

“The link will contribute to Scotland’s reduction in carbon emissions while providing opportunities to make the switch from car to train. This will help tackle congestion along the A7 and A68, in turn reducing the number of accidents on those roads.” Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale MSP Jeremy Purvis said: “People in the Borders have waited a long time for the project.”

■ ■ Rail freight upgrades needed

Rail campaigners responded to the Developing Rail Freight Policy in Scotland consultation paper, reinforcing the message that rail’s carbon emissions are one tenth those of road haulage. But they also called for rail infrastructure to be improved to allow more freight to go by rail.

The axle-loading restriction on the Oykel Bridge next to Invershin station on the Far North line means that two-axle oil tank wagons can carry only 60% of their capacity of heating oil for the Lairg terminal, was quoted as an example by the Dornoch Rail Link Action Group. It said strengthening the bridge would enable wagons to carry 100% of their capacity, reducing the number of wagons, as well as cutting leasing and maintenance costs.

It also highlighted the 19-tonne axle loading limit north of Invergordon, which restricts the gross tonnage of freight wagons used on the line, with knock-on effects on payload carriage and costs to operators and users. It said building the Dornoch rail link would improve capacity and accessibility, allowing more efficient and cost-effective deployment of locomotives, rolling stock and manpower. The group called for improvements to the Far North line, followed by construction of the Georgemas chord and the Dornoch rail link.

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Clear view

I would like to respond to Colin Stewart’s letter in *Railwatch* 122 about airline seating in First Great Western InterCity 125s.

While I appreciate many passengers like the privacy of this type of seating, they also believe people are less likely to sit next to you. It is ironic therefore that FGW installed this type of seating in order to squeeze more passengers into the train.

Seating in the Mk3 coach has undergone a number of changes over the years but, as originally built, they seated 72 passengers entirely in facing bays with tables, but the refurbished FGW trains now have as many as 84 seats per standard class coach, almost all of them in airline style.

This may be acceptable for short-distance commuter journeys but it creates a serious mismatch between passenger space and luggage space, resulting in heavy luggage being placed on the overhead racks on longer distance journeys. This also increases the risk of serious injury in the event of a train accident such as at Ufton Nervet and Grayrigg.

A further disadvantage of airline seating concerns the difficulty of aligning the seats properly to the windows, resulting in many of them being positioned against a blank wall. It also means family groups and friends cannot sit together.

A recent Passenger Focus survey found that most passengers want to be able to see through the windows and that no less than 62% prefer seating bays with tables, leaving just 38% in favour of airline

# Your letters extra

seats. Furthermore, at the Railfuture AGM, a motion calling for 50% of seating to be provided in facing bays with tables, grouped together so that luggage space could be provided between the seat backs, was approved by a substantial majority.

In correspondence, FGW has acknowledged it has received a lot of complaints about their current seating arrangements.

*Norman Bradbury, The Mount Worcester Park, Surrey KT4 8UD*

Claustrophobic seats

I certainly do not want to fall out with Colin Stewart over his “love of FGW’s high-backed plane-style seating” but I have to say that at only 5ft and a bit (as at least half of the travelling public) I find them oppressive and, if by a pillar rather than a window, close to claustrophobic. I believe they are far taller than is necessary

However, the main point is that we should have choice and with a typical so-called “refurbished” FGW HST having almost entirely those seats and virtually none of the more family-friendly alcove-style seating, there is virtually no choice. No point in getting that (quite small) extra capacity if at the same time you are going to deter some people from using the train.

*Dr John Davis, Fairmead Avenue Harpenden, Herts AL5 5UD*

Sit uncomfortably

I have recently started subscribing to *Railwatch* and find it an excellent condensed update on current rail initiatives and issues.

I am afraid I have to take issue with Colin Stewart regarding the Great Western high-backed aeroplane style seating, however. In short, I think it is an abomination! I have been taking the IC125s from Taunton to Paddington and back for many years, and always con-

sidered myself to be so lucky to be on a line that offered the space and light in standard class on those trains.

The seats were comfortable, there were wide tables for everyone and the low seat backs enabled a panoramic view of the outside world, which has always been one of the joys of train travel for me.

By contrast, I always disliked having to catch the Voyager Cross-Country trains to Bristol, with their cramped conditions.

My heart sank the first time I set foot on the revamped 125s. Gone were the views and comfortable seats, replaced by claustrophobic charter flight conditions, acceptable for a cheap holiday flight, but not regular business or leisure train travel, with no attempt to align seats and windows.

Gone were virtually all the tables. Now there are just two tiny benches which barely have room for a laptop. Gone was the relaxing green decor, replaced by a bright and intrusive blue.

Mr Stewart may have unwittingly sat in one of the few wider rows at the end of each carriage, but the rest of the seats certainly do not

have decent knee space! Luggage space is also frequently completely inadequate and the ‘privacy’ actually encourages more anti-social behaviour from certain passengers, no longer subject to group disapproval.

Fortunately, since I turned 60 last year, I can now avail myself of cheaper fares with a railcard. This enables me to travel a lot more often by first class, although even here I don’t find the leather seats as comfortable as the previous cloth ones. On those occasions when I have to travel by standard class, I dread the experience. Why does train travel become less and less enjoyable?

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**Send your letters to:**  
The Editors, 4 Christchurch Square, London E9 7HU  
Email: editor@railwatch.org.uk  
Railwatch also welcomes articles and pictures  
Please use email if possible

Why buses cannot replace the train

In 1977 the Railway Invigoration Society, one of the predecessors of Railfuture, published a book entitled *Can Bus Replace Train?* The conclusion of our book was that, while buses had a role, they could not replace trains and expect to attract comparable numbers of passengers.

Although the book has been out of print for many years, copies have been made and sent to our sister organisations FNAUT in France and VEKE in Hungary. That is because “bustitution” is being suggested for rural routes in certain parts of both countries. Via the European Passengers’ Federation, we are able to share each other’s research in this way.

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East Midlands

By Anthony Kay

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■ ■ Branch AGM

The East Midlands branch AGM will be at 12.30 on Saturday 24 April, at the European Inn hotel near Derby station. The guest speakers will be Spencer Gibbens of Network Rail and Jim Bamford, the rail officer of Nottinghamshire County Council. Both will be covering recent and planned improvements to the rail infrastructure in the region. It is also hoped that a limited number of delegates will tour the new Derby-based East Midlands signalling centre after the presentation.



■ ■ National Forest line

Branch chairman Terry Holt and secretary Roger Bacon have both written to the Department for Transport about the lack of action taken to prepare for reopening the National Forest line from Leicester to Burton upon Trent. The DfT’s reply to Terry Holt hits the ball firmly back into Leicestershire County Council’s court, saying that it is up to the county council to prioritise the scheme for funding by the Government. David Taylor, MP for North West Leicestershire, was due to meet DfT officials and had asked for our assistance, but sadly Mr Taylor died in January.



PROGRESS: Network Rail workers near Corby in January, installing five new signals which should eliminate the need for trains to retire into a siding to clear the line. One of the new signal bases can be seen on the right Picture: JIM WADE

■ ■ Corby

Work on signalling improvements in the Corby area started in December, and is expected to lead to an improved timetable in May which may also include an additional northbound train to Derby. The branch has suggested that there should be some celebration of the first anniversary of the Corby reopening, for instance a special excursion train or another Red Dot Day. East Midlands Trains has indicated that it is likely to stage a Red Dot Day (with cheaper fares) on 1 April, to mark the anniversary of the reopening.

■ ■ Loughborough

Planning permission has been given for the Eastern Gateway scheme which will regenerate an area of derelict land in front of Loughborough station. As well as 122 new homes and a link road which will relieve a heavily trafficked residential street, the scheme will open the way to improving parking and access to the station, in particular for buses, cycles and pedestrians. Building work is expected to start in April.