

S R U B L U K

The Society for the Reinvigoration of Unremunerative Branch Lines in the United Kingdom

The Branch Line Reinvigoration Society

BEWARE OF THE PLAN

RAILWAYS FOR EVERYBODY

ON JANUARY 25th, 1955, the plan for the modernisation and re-equipment of British Railways was published by the British Transport Commission.

Parts of the plan are now coming to fruition: Track widening, the building of new flyovers, the changeover from steam to diesel on both main and minor lines, the gradual spread of electrification: all these changes we warmly welcome. We wish they had started many years earlier and that they could be pressed forward at an even greater pace. We wish the Transport Commission success in furthering their plan.

But we cannot do so without reservation. The plan made it clear that economies must be made, in addition to modernisation, if the health of the railways was to be assured. So far so good. Yet one of the most actively pursued ways of attempting economy is a way which is detrimental to the railways themselves, and so to the public they are supposed to serve.

We refer to the closing of branch lines. It was made clear in the published plan that services which were not paying their way were to be dispensed with. It was argued that this was necessary, because by statute the railways must pay their way, and in addition, many of these services were unwanted by the public in any case, and by no standard of public service could their retention be justified. In many cases of lines now closed this was undoubtedly true, but in other cases lines have been closed which were fulfilling a real need. And many more lines are now threatened.

We believe that a stage has now been reached when very few further closures should be made. The railway system should be looked upon as a whole, its parts should not be considered in isolation. Further closures now may lead to a rapid decline in the railway system as a whole, and this is surely something everybody would like to see prevented.

Whenever a line is closed, the Commission are always ready to assure the public that this is a last resort, and that they first had done everything possible to make the line pay. We cannot agree that this has always been so. We believe that much more could, and should be done. It will be our business to show what this 'more' might be.

What is needed above all is a radically new way of running a branch line. Recently the Commission have begun to take steps in this direction. They have begun the introduction of diesel railcars and light-weight railbuses and has met with an encouraging response from the travelling public. But we believe that this 'new look' in the Commission's branch line policy has been initiated too late:

First: many lines now closed would certainly have justified themselves if they had been dieselised;

Second: it would almost certainly profit the Commission to press on with the modernisation of all remaining branch lines, which in this way could be turned to account as stimulators of more rail traffic of all kinds.

Third: but mere dieselisation is not enough.

WHAT ELSE SHOULD BE DONE ?

Move the stations to the people: Since the railways were built, many new centres of population have grown up. Often these have developed much nearer a railway than a station. It would be easy enough, in most of these cases, to construct a halt to serve such new centres: Yet since the war this has been done in very few instances, but where it has been done, it has met with success.

Harness road traffic for the railway: Much more could be done to encourage road users to use the railways. Buses should be co-ordinated with trains, and parking facilities at stations should be more extensive and much cheaper.

Fares and freight charges should be made really flexible: Stationmasters should be given authority to quote cheap rates to local schools, firms etc., for party travel and for freight.

Gateless level crossings: In country districts a bell and light warning system would be quite adequate. Many other elaborate safety precautions could be relaxed without danger on most branch lines.

Other economies should include the reduction of far more stations to the status of halts, a wider extension of selling tickets on the train, and the greater combining of staff duties.

Above all more propaganda is needed: Railway advertising, especially in country districts, should be displayed where people will see it. Posters about rail travel should not only be on the stations.

WHY WE BELIEVE IN BRANCH LINES

Branch line closure pushes traffic on to the roads, which makes them still more congested, and still more dangerous than they are now.

Buses are an inadequate substitute. They take more time, you can't take luggage on them easily, and they are less reliable than a rail service, especially in districts where winter weather is liable to be severe.

Branch lines can act as feeders to the main lines. People living where there is no local railway tend to travel less, and when they do travel they go by road all the way.

But above all, we believe in a co-ordinated transport system which will make the best use of available resources. We feel sure that the Railway Branch Lines have a vital part to play in such a system. We do not think railways should be maintained regardless of cost or need, but we do believe that the provision of railways should be determined by other than purely balance sheet considerations.

WHAT WE DO

We encourage the use of railways in general, and branch lines in particular.

We urge the Transport Authorities to provide adequate, modernised, rural rail services.

We oppose the closure, where reasonable, and we prevent closures, where possible, of branch lines and rural stations.

We provide a means whereby those who use branch lines, or those who see the need for them, may make their views known on a wider and more forceful scale.

HOW WE DO IT

We prepare and present cases for the retention of threatened branch lines when they are being considered by the Transport Users' Consultative Committees. We try to do this in close collaboration with the local authorities concerned.

Insofar as our membership allows, we keep a constant check on station announcements, maps and timetables. Where branch lines get adverse treatment, we press for improvements.

We try to keep M.P.'s interested in the branch line question.

In co-operation with local authorities, we distribute posters to advertise branch lines in the districts served by them.

We organise Reinvigoration Parties—summer excursions on branch lines that need boosting. This is always attended by publicity in the press.

We have winter meetings on branch line topics.

We co-operate with other organisations, with aims similar to our own.

SRUBLUK, or the Branch Line Reinvigoration Society, was formally constituted as the Society for the Reinvigoration of Unremunerative Branch Lines in the United Kingdom on April 24th, 1954. It was brought into existence to provide a medium for the collective expression of opinions of those who believe that rural rail services should be augmented, rather than abandoned.

If *You* feel that it is important to keep a check on the branch line policy of the Transport Commission, and if you feel that it is important to improve rural rail services, then you should join SRUBLUK now.

The more members we have, the more likely it is that the ideas we advocate will be heeded by the people who matter.

MEMBERSHIP is unrestricted—but we especially welcome those who are interested in, and are prepared to work actively for the cause of the Society.

The Subscriptions are as follows :—

10/6 per annum from 1st January;

6/- per annum under age 21;

6/- for half year from 1st July,

and should be sent to the Membership Secretary, ~~68 Mayfield Avenue, Orpington, Kent.~~