

Welcome to this edition of Rail User Express.

Hopefully by now you've all noted my new postal and email addresses!!! – see foot of bulletin.

We begin with a roundup of news from rail user groups around the UK.

Thanks to RUGs that send me their magazines and bulletins (too many to include in my roundup below – apologies to those I've omitted).

Please note: I'm happy to receive items by email to save postage.

As always, feel free to forward this message to a colleague, or to reproduce items in your own newsletter (quoting sources).

+++ GUEST RAIL USER GROUP OF THE MONTH : The Portishead Railway Group +++

The Portishead Railway Group, formed in 2005 by the merger of the Portishead Railway Action Group and the Portishead Heritage Rail Project, is campaigning for the Portishead to Bristol railway line to be re-opened as soon as possible. Portishead's population will have doubled by 2010 when the current house building programme is complete. The group says that the best business case can be made by integrating the Severn Beach and Portishead branches to the benefit of both lines; the same rolling stock could then run continuously between Severn Beach and Portishead via Bristol Temple Meads, enhancing transport for a large part of the Bristol area. It was announced last month that Network Rail is to be commissioned to carry out a technical evaluation on the potential for re-opening the line; the study which will cost £164,000, will be funded from a section 106 developer contribution. PRG's next project review meeting will be held on Tues 19 May 2009 from 7:30 pm in the Folk Hall, High Street, Portishead. For details, see www.portisheadrailwaygroup.org

... and now news from our regular contributors ...

Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways has been calling on supporters to back their campaign to get three major rail schemes included in the South West's Regional Funding Allocation. "We want to make it clear that the public supports rail above other more expensive road based schemes," said a FoSBR spokesman. The three rail projects are: Portishead to Bristol Temple Meads reopening, Greater Bristol Metro project (improvements on the Yate to Weston line) and Swindon to Kemble track re-dualling. Rail campaigners are asked to send letters and emails in support of these rail schemes to Executive Members of the SW Regional Assembly and others involved in the decision-making process. Further details of the campaign are on the FoSBR website: <http://www.fosbr.org.uk/>

Each of the English regions is getting ready to submit its wish-list of transport schemes to the Government. The Campaign for Better Transport thinks the wish-lists are worrying: "Although all regions have chosen some public transport schemes, they are all determined to build unnecessary and polluting roads." CfBT has drawn up a list of schemes for each region and has tips on how we can influence the decision-making process; take a look at <http://www.bettertransport.org.uk/node/1508>

"Perhaps the best news received during the last 30 years" is how the **Cotswold Line Promotion Group** describes the announcement that double track is to be reinstated on two stretches of its line. The main aim of the scheme, due for completion by the autumn of 2010, is to improve reliability, but the hope is that there will be extra trains and perhaps a combination of limited-stop and all-station trains. The group sees ministerial changes at the Department for Transport as being quite positive: they anticipate that Geoff Hoon, as a regular rail user, will want to get things moving as soon as possible ... and they recall that Andrew (now Lord) Adonis was a CLPG committee member back in the 1980s! As one of the largest rail user groups in Britain, the CLPG is able to draw on its considerable resources – the latest example of largesse being a grant of £1000 for tree-planting and landscaping at Evesham station (part of the money goes towards gardening equipment for ongoing maintenance). Even so, the group is concerned that its membership has fallen from a peak of over 2100 to below 1700, and so they are asking active members to help hand out copies of a new recruitment leaflet at stations this spring.

Anyone wishing to learn from an exemplary rail-link bus scheme connecting villages to railway stations would do well to look at bus services running to Cotswold Line stations which the CLPG helps to promote; details at www.railbus.co.uk

The **Bedford Commuters Association** deplores the recent above-inflation fares hike, especially by First Capital Connect in view of the service they provide. The BCA notes that owners of more fuel-efficient cars pay less road tax and wonders if the same principle could be applied to train fares, especially as the next generation Thameslink rolling stock will be lighter, have regenerative braking and be more energy efficient. The BCA is actively involved with consultations about the design of the new Thameslink vehicles, and about the proposed regeneration of Bedford Station Quarter (they are “pleasantly surprised” by the revised proposals and by how many of their suggestions had been taken on board by the station project team). In the meantime, the group has major concerns about the new East Midlands Trains timetable and also about the shortage of rolling stock and poor performance.

The **Lichfield Rail Promotion Group** is pleased that Chase Line services were significantly enhanced in December with the off-peak service becoming half-hourly from Birmingham to Rugeley. Local members of the Railway Development Society had campaigned to reopen this line in the 1980s and the seven reopened stations north of Walsall now contribute over 450,000 passenger journeys per year to the local rail network. LRPG is optimistic that the case for electrifying the busy Chase Line from Walsall to Rugeley will justify funding within the next five years.

After nearly folding up, the **Stourbridge Line User Group** has been “re-launched, re-activated and hopefully, revitalised.” Their ongoing campaign to reopen the Stourbridge to Dudley railway line for passengers has recently gained momentum: tram/train track sharing, as under evaluation in Sheffield, may be an option and it is understood that there are ambitions to use the line for freight. The Group also intends to pursue a campaign to make Smethwick Galton Bridge interchange a more passenger-friendly station.

Forewarned that there would be several timetable changes for Dec 08 in the Cheshire area, the **Mid Cheshire Rail Users' Association** organised passenger counts both before and after the changes: “We know that Northern and GMPTE have found these very useful, and indeed Northern have worked closely with us helping us to produce these”. A major concern is overcrowding on some trains and there is little prospect of the situation improving. The Middlewich Line reopening campaign takes another step forward this month with the publication of a feasibility study; also the campaign to open a station at Withenshawe is gaining support – there’s a dedicated website where you can sign an on-line petition: <http://www.wythenshawerailway.blogspot.com>. Following successful trials in 2008, six music trains are planned for Summer 2009, 4 from Chester and 2 from Manchester. MCRUA has launched a new website which will eventually allow on-line payment of membership and on-line booking of MCRUA’s popular excursions; take a look at www.mcrua.org.uk

A Shoppers’ Special operated on Sunday 7 Dec by the **Ormskirk, Preston & Southport Travellers' Association** was hailed a great success, with nearly 300 journeys taken: “ample proof of the demand for a regular service on the line!” Currently, OPSTA is consulting its membership about the draft Merseyside Route Utilisation Strategy document and will be submitting comments by the due date: 20 Feb. An ambitious project for 2009 is the provision of a Welcome board at each station on the Ormskirk-Preston line, and the group plans to recruit local people to help make it work. Early spring sees an Eco-festival at the local Martin Mere nature reserve and OTSTA will be there with its stall promoting the environmental benefits of rail.

The award to Windermere of “best small station, 2008” in the European Station-of-the-Year competition gives the **Lakes Line Rail User Group** much cause for celebration, especially as the group can claim to have had some part in this – community involvement had been a factor in winning the award. Elsewhere in the group’s Winter newsletter, a few brickbats are hurled at Virgin Trains: (i) VT’s leaflet about Oxemholme station failed to mention the Lakes Line at all, and the branch was missing from one of the maps! (ii) VT’s printed timetable for the new service in December came out less than 2 weeks in advance of the changes, whereas TransPennine’s was available a full four weeks before the start. Celebrations this year for LLRUG’s 25th anniversary will be focused on Community Rail Month in May/June. We’re invited to take a look at the group’s improved website at www.lakeslinrailusers.org.uk

The **Furness Line Action Group** urges travellers to obtain timetables from both Northern and Transpennine Express to see the complete Cumbrian Coast service, adding “we are concerned that people who obtain only one timetable will think the service south of Barrow has reduced”. Another disappointment for Furness line users at non-TPE stations is the loss of journey opportunities because of trains not stopping. The real “shocker” for the group, however, is the deterioration in the service pattern for Sundays; “we’re still light years away from the 7 days a week service enjoyed by our Continental neighbours”. FLAG remain very concerned about the dangers at level crossings to the extent that they’ve obtained a supply of relevant safety leaflets from Network Rail with a view to distributing them to local post offices etc.

In his front-page report, the Chairman of the **Aire Valley Rail Users' Group** wonders if job losses, especially at the

Bradford & Bingley headquarters near Crossflatts, will affect passenger numbers on the line. Elsewhere he refers to the series of problems with overhead wires on the West Coast Main Line and is left feeling grateful for the high quality of equipment on the Aire Valley line when it was modernised “back in the bad old days before privatisation”. The group’s very detailed response to the Yorks & Humberside Route Utilisation Strategy is set out in the newsletter. Among the concerns listed are: no consideration of service provision outside peak hours, failure to consider the possible higher growth in passenger numbers in the Airedale corridor, and the wider issue of how the railway might be developed to provide an alternative to road. Towards the end of the newsletter, we read that the AVRUG’s vice chairman has been appointed to the National Independent Advisory Group of the British Transport Police and will thus be able to represent rail users during discussions about community policing.

... news from Railfuture Branches and Committees ...

The “Yorkshire Rail Campaigner” from the **Yorkshire Branch** takes the form of an expertly-produced, 4-page brochure, devoid of jargon, that can be handed out to decision-makers and the general public. The lead article summarises the Branch response to the Yorks & Humberside RUS and stresses that only rail, with its independent routes direct to city centres such as Leeds, can meet the challenge of a growing demand for commuting on already-congested corridors. Mentioned on page 2 is the group’s successful visit to Neville Hill Train Care Depot, and on page 3 the Chairman expresses his opinion that the widened remit for Passenger Focus, as it takes on bus and tram issues, leaves Railfuture as “the one true voice of the rail passenger”.

To keep up the pressure for rail investment, Railfuture’s **Network Development** committee has issued a press release calling for a 100mph Oxford - Cambridge rail link. The statement continues: “Fast train services would connect Oxford to Cambridge via Bicester, Aylesbury, Milton Keynes and Bedford, and go beyond to connect Ipswich and Norwich to Swindon. The plan involves a combination of existing, upgraded and reopened lines to complete the link. ... In Wales and Scotland miles of new railway are being built. Why not in England? We’re calling on the East of England Assembly and Development Agency to work with their colleagues in the South East and continue to press for this strategic rail link”. Railfuture has produced a leaflet on the scheme which can be downloaded from www.railfuture.org.uk/Ox-Cam

David Eldridge, Secretary of **Railfuture Thames Valley**, had a letter published in the Oxford Times pointing out that the plan to link Oxford and Heathrow by rail in 10 years time via a £4.5 billion station north of the airport is very short on detail. He went on to say “Remember the Oxford-Milton Keynes rail link? Over the past 20 years, 26 consultancies costing £millions have recommended reopening this existing line – enough money to have restarted the trains!”

Correspondents writing in Rail Wales, the newsletter of the **Welsh Branches of Railfuture**, give us much food for thought. A Coryton line resident argues that the Passenger Service Requirement (as devised in the run-up to privatisation) for his and similar lines is now hopelessly out of date, locking in a “never on Sunday” mentality whereas Sundays are now very popular for shopping, sport and entertainment. David Watts analyses the patronage figures for S Wales stations that have trains every 2 hours, an hourly service, and 2 or more trains per hour – his comparative table shows that those with the higher frequencies have many times higher the annual number of passengers – ratios of 10:1 or more in some cases. Finally, Guy Hardy reflects on the roll-out of ticket barriers across the network and whether this will have the long-term effect of deterring rail travel: -are yesterday’s trainspotters or those greeting friends the rail users of today? -then what of tomorrow?

A member of Railfuture’s **Passenger Committee** attended the first briefing on the West Coast Main Line Rail Utilisation Strategy. Comments were submitted by the committee on the DfT’s “Minor Modifications” proposals to the effect that moving a station was contentious and that even a minor change to the main access point could result in passengers having a longer walk to the entrance. At the committee meeting in December, various issues affecting disabled passenger were discussed at length, including small print size on timetable leaflets and late announcement of the next station on trains. Meetings with Passenger Focus and the Conservative Shadow Transport Minister, Theresa Villiers, were being sought.

Convenient station access is also the theme of other communications received recently...

1 Gating entrances to Sheffield station caused a row last year as habitual walking routes were cut off, and now an angry rail user has contacted Peter Dawson (of the **Oldham-Rochdale-Manchester** group) to say that the same thing is about to happen at York: “Gates will prevent anyone without a ticket getting to the ticket office from the National Railway Museum or just getting across the station between the NRM and the hotel. They could also enforce detours to/from car parks.”

2 Railfuture's Wessex Branch chairman received this from a rail professional: "I think it was back in the 1960s/70s when Derby Rail Research did a study on how revenue was affected by station access. Unfortunately I no longer have any copies of the series of reports (do any RUFEX readers recall this report? — *Ed*). I do remember that opening up a station so that access could be achieved from both sides made a surprising increase of 10% in revenue. Farnborough used to have unofficial access from a park, and cutting this off many years ago lost about 3% of revenue!"

...and now the rest of the news...

LONG-TERM FUNDING FOR LOCAL-AUTHORITY-SPONSORED RAIL SCHEMES

Secretary of State for Transport, Geoff Hoon, announced on 5 Feb the Government's intention to fund (in the period 2014-2019) new or enhanced rail services promoted by local authorities which have rail industry support. He went on to say that it is important for the promoter to demonstrate that a rail scheme is the best way to address regional and local transport issues; hence promoters would be expected to fund a new or enhanced service for the first three years to demonstrate its commitment to the service and show that it delivers value for money. Schemes which the Department would consider funding in this way would be subject to a number of conditions, details of which will be made available on the Department for Transport's website. Initiatives might include new or improved services during weekends or late at night, or more frequent off-peak services in rural or semi-rural areas. For example, it is known that Blackburn and Darwen councils would like to get a new, off-peak Blackburn to Manchester service running under a proposal being developed with Network Rail and Northern Rail. If services like this prove successful, they could be funded in the longer term through franchise agreements.

TRANSPORT COMMITTEE LOOKS INTO RAIL FARES AND FRANCHISES

The House of Commons Transport Committee is holding two public evidence sessions on rail fares and franchises this month. The Committee will hear from rail operating companies, passenger groups and unions before questioning the minister. They will look at the recent increases in rail fares, implemented in January 2009, and will also examine the implications of the recession on rail franchises. Some rail companies are considering reductions in staff numbers or the number of train carriages, and amendments to franchise agreements, in order to reduce costs. — *Transcom press release*

COMPENSATION POLL

Passenger Focus is currently running a poll on their website to find out if you claim compensation when your train is significantly delayed. To take part please follow this link <http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/research/polls-and-surveys/?dsid=2094>

REGULATED FARES MAY HAVE TO FALL

The serious impact on passenger train operating companies of the continuing economic downturn has been highlighted by the latest economic forecast by the Confederation of British Industry. The CBI now expects economic growth to fall by 3.3 per cent during 2009, resulting in rising deflation (negative inflation) during the year. Under the Department for Transport's formula for calculating increases in regulated rail passenger fares, applied each January, one per cent is added to the RPI recorded in the previous July. So if deflation results, as the CBI is forecasting, in a figure of minus 3.6 per cent by the start of the third quarter of 2009 — followed by minus 4.4 per cent in the third quarter — train operators would be forced to cut all regulated fares by at least 2.6 per cent next January. — *Railnews*

"PATRONAGE MUCH HIGHER THAN PREDICTED" SHOCK

1) The number of passengers using the reopened Alloa railway station is more than double estimates prior to the opening, according to a survey by the South East of Scotland Transport Partnership. SEStran's survey of patronage during the 12 weeks after the station opened in May 2008 suggests that during a year the station will be used by more than 400,000 passengers compared to predicted usage of 155,000 people. — *Transport Briefing*

2) On the first anniversary of the reopening of the Ebbw Vale line, it was reported that 573,000 people had used the trains. This compares to the scheme's projected usage of 150,000 in the first year and 453,000 after 4 years. So the 4-year target has been exceeded by 26% after only one year! But this gross underestimation of demand is bringing problems, with further complaints of overcrowding and intending passengers being unable to board Cardiff-bound trains at Risca and Rogerstone. — *RailWales*

SCHEME UPDATES

- Rail engineers have begun clearing railway land in preparation for the redoubling of part of the **Waterloo-Exeter** Line. The £20m project to dual a 3 mile stretch of track through Axminster station in Devon will create a passing loop that will allow train frequencies to be raised to hourly in each direction by the end of this year. Axminster will gain a second platform, footbridge and lifts as part of the scheme.
- Around 20 kilometres of disused railway line between Bletchley and Claydon Junction stations in Buckinghamshire will be cleared of scrub, brambles and overgrown vegetation so that survey and investigation work can be carried out for the design development phase of the **East-West Rail project**.
- East Midlands Airport started operating a dedicated shuttle bus between the new **East Midlands Parkway** station and the Airport from 26 January – the station's opening day. The 'Railink' service will run every 30 mins, seven days a week from 0700 to 2330, using low floor vehicles supplied by Nottingham City Council. The new dedicated shuttle service will complement the existing Skylink bus services which connect the Airport to Nottingham, Derby, Leicester and Loughborough.
- Engineering work has begun on a £326m project to upgrade the **North London Line** in time for the 2012 Olympic Games. The long awaited scheme, which is being made possible by cash from the 2012 budget, will double passenger capacity to support up to eight services an hour each way and extend platform lengths at stations on the North London Line, which is part of the London Overground network.
- Plans to extend the heritage Peak Rail track into the mainline **Matlock** station have at last been approved by Network Rail after eight years of negotiations. Work, set to begin in the spring, should be completed in 2010.
- Almost 7km of new track is to be laid between Kettering and Harrowden on the **Midland Main Line** thereby boosting capacity and enabling trains to pass through the area more quickly. The £11.5m project is due for completion late spring.

MORE TRAINS FOR YORKSHIRE COAST

Northern Rail has submitted plans to run more services between Hull and Scarborough from December 2009. The new timetable would mean an improved weekday timetable after 3pm and the extension of the current summer Sunday services to year round. These will more than double the number of Northern Rail services on Sundays, the biggest improvement for over 10 years. Northern Rail has been working closely with Community Rail Humber and East Riding of Yorkshire and North Yorkshire County Councils to understand the transport needs of the region and develop a timetable that will help meet these requirements. -*Rail Technology Magazine*

NEW MEN AT THE TOP

- David Middleton, head of the Scotland Office, has been appointed as the new chief executive of Transport Scotland. He will succeed Dr Malcom Reed who retires in February.
- Network Rail has chosen former Invensys boss, Rick Haythornthwaite, to be the company's new chairman. Haythornthwaite will succeed existing chairman Ian McAllister, who announced in October 2008 that he would step down from Network Rail's Board following the company's AGM in July 2009.

ITAs ARE THE NEW PTAs

England's six metropolitan passenger transport authorities became integrated transport authorities on 9 Feb under a wave of reforms triggered by the Local Transport Act 2008. As well as a change of name for the transport policy bodies in Manchester, Merseyside, South Yorkshire, Tyne and Wear, West Midlands and West Yorkshire, the creation of ITAs will see them taking on a wider transport remit as part of the government's attempt to give greater powers for delivering transport improvements to the England city regions outside London. – *Transport Briefing*

DERBY DAY RATE

Railfuture activist, Peter Cousins, writes: "For those who may be interested in such things, it now costs £10 per day to

park at Derby station. However I have discovered that East Midlands Trains actually list the parking fees at all their stations on their website. Do any other train operators do this?

ADOPT AN EAST MIDLANDS STATION

Volunteers are being asked to adopt a railway station and become its eyes and ears. East Midlands Trains has just launched a scheme urging the community to get involved in volunteering to care for and take pride in their local railway station, including regular checks of the station's cleanliness and condition of equipment. A spokesman for EMT said "we already have around 15 people or groups that have successfully adopted a station but with 88 stations, we still have a fair number that could benefit". For more information, visit www.eastmidlandstrains.co.uk – *Northants Evening Telegraph*

SUICIDE PHOTOGRAPHERS

Police are using anti-terrorism laws to prevent rail enthusiasts taking pictures at railway stations. Figures obtained by the Liberal Democrats show that nearly 160,000 people were stopped by police officers on railway property in the year between October 2007 and September 2008. – *Rail Professional*

PLASTIC SLEEPERS

Everyday waste could form part of the railway of the future as Network Rail trials a new form of rail sleeper made from recycled plastic. The trial will see around 20 tonnes of waste material recycled to form the new sleepers which will replace timber ones along some of the rural lines on the network. The sleepers are being supplied by i-plas, a plastic waste recycling company based in Halifax. – *Rail Technology Magazine*

UPDATED FRANCHISE MAP

The National Rail Passenger Operators' map 11th edition is now available online. It includes all changes up to December 2008 although some do not take effect until Jan/Feb 2009. It can be viewed at <http://www.barrydoe.co.uk> but check copyright restrictions regarding hardcopy printouts. – *thanks to Peter Dawson for this*

SCOOP UP SOME LANDFILL CASH

The Biffaward 2009 Small Grants Scheme is now accepting applications. The scheme offers grants of between £250 and £5,000 to support improvements and access to local amenities such as a community building, nature reserve, cycle path, cultural facility or outdoor space. The project site must be within 10 miles of a Biffa operation, and within 10 miles of a landfill site (owned by any company). For more information please see: www.biffaward.org . If rail user groups don't apply, Friends of Brock the Badger will scoop the lot!

HOW TO GET HERE...

With Easter fast approaching, now is a good time to check up on the website of major tourist attractions in your area. Do they give any helpful advice on how to reach their premises by public transport? Is the information up to date?

...AND HOW TO GET LOST...

I recently stumbled across the travel information provided for army recruits on the website of Bovington Camp and found that, despite the camp being just about walkable from Wool station on the Waterloo-Weymouth line, the only rail company shown was the Swanage (Steam) Railway! And bus information was no better. It appears the Tavistock-based(!) webmaster had attempted to get round the problem of keeping his information up to date by merely supplying links to data in the online Thomson directory - but of course major transport operators rarely advertise in Thomson's! Apparently, my feedback (basically: "bah!") was the first complaint he'd received in six years!

EVENTS +++ EVENTS +++ EVENTS

Sat 7 Mar TravelWatch South West meeting at Somerset Arts College, Taunton from 11am – by confirmed invitation

only. Speakers will include Ben Bradshaw MP, and Mark Hopwood, the Managing Director of First Great Western.
Details: www.travelwatchesouthwest.org

Thu 12 Mar Talk entitled “From Strathfillan to Strathspey” organised by the Glasgow Branch of the West Highland Line. All Branch meetings are held in Room 10, Partick Burgh Halls, Burgh Hall Street, Glasgow (nr Partick Station) starting at 19.30.

Sat 14 Mar 7th Annual General Meeting and Conference of the European Passengers' Federation in Berne, Switzerland. The conference theme is “Integrated transport for passengers”. Details and booking form on the EPF website <http://www.epf.eu/>

Wed 25 Mar Transport Times conference entitled “Time for High Speed Rail?” conference at the CBI Conference Centre in London with guest speaker Lord Andrew Adonis, Minister of State for Transport. Details from Jane Wilson at Transport Times Events on 0131 556 1500, or log on to www.transporttimes.co.uk

Sat 4 Apr (provisional date – check with d.h.mawdsley@btinternet.com) Inaugural meeting of a rail users' group for the North Wales Coast Line, 2pm, Flint Town Hall which is adjacent to the railway station.

Wed 22 Apr Passenger Focus annual conference at the British Library in London, 1000-1600; the conference will see the launch of Passenger Focus's new bus, coach and tram passenger representation role, and will explore key passenger issues. Details on the PF website: www.passengerfocus.org.uk

Sat 9 May The Railway Development Society Ltd 2009 AGM in Leeds.

15 May – 12 Jun Community Rail Day seems to have grown into Community Rail *Month!*

Tues 2 Jun Barking-Gospel Oak Line User Group public meeting and AGM, Barking Town Hall from 19:15 hours.

This bulletin has been sent by Tony Smale, Railfuture Rail User Group Liaison Officer

Postal address: 63 Church Lane, Wool, Wareham, Dorset BH20 6DD

New email address: ruglink@railfuture.org.uk

On behalf of:

The Railway Development Society Ltd, 12 Home Close, Bracebridge Heath, Lincoln LN4 2LP

Website: www.railfuture.org.uk

Please support Britain's number one advocate for the railways and rail users!

For details about group affiliation to Railfuture, contact: david.harby@ntlworld.com

Messages scanned by Norton Anti-Virus software.

Please say if you would rather not receive these messages or if another person in your organisation would like to be included in the distribution list.