

# RAILWAY DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY, SOUTH WEST BRANCH NEWSLETTER.

Number 18, September 1999.

Editor: Gerard Duddridge



The Exeter to Barnstaple Railway at Yeoford. RDS Vision for a thriving main line.

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## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Several times a day a high speed (TGV) service links Paris to Lausanne in Switzerland, but after leaving the high speed line and calling at Dijon there is a substantial 60 mile section of mainly single line between the towns of Dole and Vallorbe. Yet without the through trains little passenger business would be retained. Some would use other rail routes, a few would not travel and most would go by air. Similarly if Paddington to Penzance trains terminated at Plymouth many existing rail customers would disappear to the more direct and heavily upgraded A30 road. In the Cornish case it is the combination of through trains, branch line feeder services and mostly double line that make the railway from Penzance to Plymouth recognisable as a main line.

In comparison it is the absence of good quality trains, through services, feeder services and single track that make the Exeter to Barnstaple railway recognisable to so many as a rural branch line. It need not be so. We cannot transform the line over night, but there is no reason why the line should not start to enjoy a level and quality of service more analogous to that operating on the Cornish main line.

Standing on the road overbridge at Yeoford it is not too difficult to imagine that the gently curved double track line is already restored to our main line railway network. However, in place of the 2-car class 150 sprinter and single car 153 units we should be looking for at least some trains to be formed of more suitable rolling stock. Though by no means perfect the Class 159 would reflect more closely the standard to be found on long distance connecting services from Exeter. We should be seeking 2 plus 2 seating rather than 3 + 2, tables, carpeting, air conditioning (working of course), some 1st class seats to attract business users and trolley catering for all or part of the journey.

The railway needs to be reintegrated with the operation of the main network to give a range of through services to London Waterloo, if not destinations on the Great Western main line beyond Taunton as well. On some sections of the route as at Yeoford it would not be unreasonable for some trains to be running at 85mph with suitably renewed track so as to improve overall journey times. However, the number of stops at stations such as Yeoford should not be reduced, but rather the number of trains on the line should be increased to a minimum hourly level so as to give a balance of stopping and semi-fast trains. In keeping with a main line a 40 minute mile a minute average journey time from Exeter to Barnstaple, with just two intermediate stops should be an objective. Its possible!

However, if the rural branch line concept is perpetuated then this is what it will remain. One author on rural railways has recently advocated devolved management as a way forward for the Cornish branch lines as well as Exeter to Barnstaple. This may or may not be a good thing for the Cornish lines, but North Devon services need to be integrated with trains from Exeter to Waterloo, if not Bristol as well. Lets campaign for quality.

### **RDS South West Branch Officers**

**Chairman:** Gerard Duddridge, 67. Higher Exwick Hill, Exwick, Exeter. EX4 2AW

**Secretary:** Stuart Walker, 149. Polwithen Drive, Carbis Bay, St. Ives, Cornwall. TR26 2SW.

**RDS PUBLIC MEETING**  
**CORNWALL TRANSPORT**  
**MEETING**

*at*

The Royal Cornwall Museum and Art Gallery,  
River Street, Truro

*on*

Saturday 16 October 1999  
1:00PM

**Speakers will include,**

**Brian James** of First Western National,

**David Rabey** of Truronian,

**Gerald Taylor**, Service Manager South  
West with First Great Western,

**Richard Wills** of Cornwall County  
Council's Transportation and Estates  
Department and

**Bob Houghton** of Wales and West (TOC).

**Report of the 1999 AGM**

The South West Branch's Annual General Meeting was held at Exeter Central Station conference room on 27 March.

The Committee was elected as follows:

Chairman: Gerard Duddridge  
Secretary: Stuart Walker  
Committee: Derek Buttivant  
Donald Duckworth  
Donald Keene  
Andrew McKenzie  
Peter Mulley  
George Palin

Tim Naylor was thanked for the work he has done over the last few years as the South West Branch treasurer. The position has not been filled and branch finances are being dealt with by the Secretary.

The Guest speaker was Philip Dominey, South West Trains manager based at Salisbury. He led a constructive debate about South West Trains services between Exeter and Waterloo. A summary follows.

He explained that he had responsibility east as far as Basingstoke and west to Pinhoe, but in addition did audits on stations used by South West Trains (SWT) at places such as Exeter Central, Newton Abbot and Paignton.

They were improving their targets for train performance using initiatives such as monitoring of the arrival of train crews and creating a 'divisional league table' for stations. Regarding actual train performance the then recent 'Period 11' to March 6th showed that 61.9% of trains ran to right time, 89.1% within 0 to 5 minutes, 95.6 within 0 to 10, 98.8 within 0 to 20 and 99.7 within 99.7%.

A range of new fares were being promoted to include Daypex, new 1st class Apex and SuperAdvance and the extension of the Apex and SuperAdvance fares beyond Exeter to include Paignton, Barnstaple plus intermediate stations to and from Waterloo (see page 6).

In addition to CCTV security was being improved with the installation of 'Help Points' linked to the SWT control centre at Southampton. For emergencies a connection would be made to the British Transport Police if an answer was not made within 30 seconds. Planning

applications had been submitted for car park extensions at Gillingham and Andover, cycle storage improved with new loops on station platforms and new bus links introduced. An example was the much improved First Southern National service now running hourly between Axminster and Dorchester South railway stations via Lyme Regis and Bridport.

The Class 159 fleet are to see the air conditioning improved, repainting and refurbishment of their interiors.

Other issues raised by Members at the meeting included the down stream bridge at Barnstaple which will block access to the station from the north as well as scupper re-opening to Bideford. The new rural bus services were also discussed, in particular the wide variations in the use of the rural bus money and difficulties in obtaining information about them. Devon has a policy of not enhancing evening and Sunday services whilst Dorset and Cornwall do, leading to gaps in links to rail stations. The Branch Secretary pleaded for more to use the Cornish Branch lines. He said he was finding it difficult to argue against the recent cuts in services when some passenger numbers, especially in the winter months, could be counted on the fingers of one hand.

### **The Eclipse**

Although predictions of the number travelling leading up to the Eclipse seemed more equivalent to Hell on Earth rather than an event of cosmic significance, in fact the number of additional visitors to the region was barely one third of the forecasts. As a result, the road network was not subject to the anticipated gridlock. Overheard on one of the Eclipse specials as it drew alongside the A30, "Where are all

the cars? We thought we were being clever taking the train but we could have driven after all".

As many drivers staggered their journey into Cornwall, there was little congestion before the eclipse, but afterwards there were long queues as those same drivers decided to leave at the same time.

So what did the Train Operators do to assist this mass movement of people?

**First Great Western** did the most. They reduced their Paddington to Bristol and South Wales services during Eclipse week to free up additional trains to run extra services to Cornwall. This included a relief seating only train for the Night Riviera on 9 and 10 August, and a very early morning service on 11 August leaving Paddington at 03:42. Unfortunately, their published timetables managed to show two services to Penzance departing Truro at 16:04 and 16:06 - a physical impossibility unless the Driver of the second train ignored red signals! In fact the 16:06 ran some 12 to 15 minutes later than advertised. In the event virtually all of First GW's trains were fully booked up.

**Virgin Trains** had no pre-Eclipse publicity about it's altered services, despite the fact that they intended running an additional Newcastle - Penzance service. In fact this train did not run as the stock required for it was impounded by the Police following a death in North Wales!

**Wales and West** again had no pre-Eclipse publicity concerning it's timetable alterations, but that company was not running any additional trains. Instead, Wales and West were adding additional 'sprinter' coaches to its existing services. On the St Ives branch, a five coach train

was in operation. Crowd control barriers were erected at Truro and St Erth stations, and a queuing system introduced for the Falmouth branch as this was expected to be very busy. In the event, the numbers travelling to Falmouth were less than the Tall Ships race last July.

One casualty was Ivybridge. As the 06:50 Exeter to Penzance service which forms a morning peak service into Plymouth, was to be replaced by a Great Western service during Eclipse week, it could not call at Ivybridge as the train was too long for the platform. A replacement bus was provided instead!

Wales and West lost a considerable amount of custom on the Looe Valley line the Sunday before the eclipse when all services before 16:00 were replaced by buses due to staff shortages. Many tourists who turned up for the ride decided not to take the replacement bus.

Wales and West also arranged for station lights to be on all day on 11 August.

**English Welsh and Scottish Railway** were running some additional freight services to bring supplies to the region that might otherwise have been caught in road traffic jams. This included a train load of bottled water. However, much of it was returned unused after the Eclipse. Other 'less essential' freight services, principally for ECC, were to be withdrawn for the week.

Perhaps of greatest concern was the complete lack of any comprehensive timetable publication showing alterations of all operator's services during the period. Only Great Western had produced a leaflet, which was not readily on display at all

stations. If you wanted comprehensive details, National Rail Enquiries or the computerised Railplanner software was the only source of information. In the event, only one mishap caused a problem when children dropped a sheet of metal in front of a train at Wellington in Somerset. The train had to be terminated at Taunton.

Meanwhile, First Western National were running a normal bus service during the week, along with a publicity campaign urging travellers to beat the jams and use the bus. What happens if the bus got caught in the traffic jams was conveniently ignored by the adverts!

And what was the Government doing to help alleviate the congestion? In a blaze of publicity, Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott opened a section of the controversial A30 Honiton - Exeter scheme earlier than expected, and visited the Eclipse traffic control centre. It was reported that he drove to Exeter for the day. Many residents are now complaining of loss of trade and the noise disturbance resulting from the new road. Are these the same residents who campaigned for the road to be built?

### **Bugle Station Gets Facelift at Last**

Once described as the worst station in the country, Bugle has had a facelift with the erection of a glass shelter, iron railing fencing and an information display. There is even a 'brown' tourism sign at the entrance. Unfortunately the Vandals have visited the station since, breaking the shelter glass and destroying the information display. One hopes that local residents who may have seen these vandal's activities will pass information on to the police, or in confidence to the Crimestoppers number.

## **Freight Future?**

EWS continues to obtain short-term contracts of new freight flows. The most recent was the transport of scrap metal from St Erth Metal and Car Spares to Liverpool. This involved loading a set of scrap wagons at the one remaining freight siding at St Erth station. The wagons were then attached to the daily Long Rock to Tavistock Junction diesel fuel train. Although this lasted for two or three weeks, the traffic now appears to have ceased.

The re-opening plans to Wenford Bridge appear to have been halted again for a different reason. ECC have now been reported as considering a pipeline alternative from their Wenford Bridge site. Presumably this would deliver clay slurry to dries elsewhere which must bring into doubt the future of the Wenford Dries. Everyone is waiting for ECC to decide what it intends to do before proceeding with the scheme.

With the departure of Ed Burkhardt, it remains to be seen whether his policy of going after as much freight traffic as possible continues. Up to now, you could guarantee that EWS would provide a quote for any potential new freight flow. Whether EWS's new bosses will continue this policy has been the subject of much debate in the recent railway press.

## **SW Trains New North Devon Fares**

South West Trains has introduced new cheap through tickets from Barnstaple and North Devon line stations to its Waterloo services changing at Exeter. Fares are only valid on services from Barnstaple which connect with SWT services on the Exeter to Waterloo line. They cannot be used on First Great Western's service to

Paddington. There are two fare types, Apex which must be booked at least 7 days in advance of outward journey, and the Super Advance which must be booked by 6pm the day before travel. As with most advance booking tickets, they are subject to seating quotas which means that they may be sold out well before the deadline for booking. In addition, you are restricted to the individual trains and dates you have reserved seats for, and any change in travel plans incurs a significant penalty.

Fares from Barnstaple to Waterloo are £22.00 single and £22.50 return for the Apex and £31.50 single and £32.50 return for the Super Advance. Fares of £25.00 single, £25.50 return (Apex) £34.50 single and £35.50 return (Super Advance) are also available to many other stations in the Greater London Area, including cross London travel by underground.

## **Objection to the Barnstaple Western Bypass Planning Application**

RDS South West wrote to Devon County Council on 21 May 1999 over the matter of the Barnstaple Western Bypass,

*"There are three aspects to our objection, all of which need to be addressed if the existing Exeter to Barnstaple railway is to realise its full potential to serve the economic and social needs of North Devon and Torridge Districts. The RDS objects to the blockage of the Bideford line trackbed, the arrangements for pedestrian access to Barnstaple railway station and the lack of protection for a new alignment on to the Ilfracombe line.*

*Firstly we note that the road will block the Bideford line trackbed for some 250 meters and we ask that the County revises its plan to allow the formation to be kept free for*

rail use. Reopening to Bideford is a project that the Society considers to be of utmost urgency.

Secondly the plans for the pedestrian/bus underpass access to Barnstaple Railway station from the Sticklepath Hill area will produce an insecure area for rail users walking to or from the station at night. This aspect of the plan should be modified so that the access road crosses the bypass on the level with traffic lights and a pedestrian crossing. Alternatively the current Sticklepath Terrace overbridge, leading from Sticklepath Hill, should be retained for buses and pedestrians, leaving the new road to pass underneath at the level of the adjacent and existing railway. In the latter case RDS would recognise that the Bideford line trackbed may need to be realigned as the road would then need to climb westward to pass over the Bideford railway trackbed.

Thirdly RDS wish to see an alignment protected for the possible future restoration of the Ilfracombe line towards Braunton. The site of the downstream road bridge occupies one of the possible sites for a rail bridge and the road plans should take this into account. This could mean building the bridge piers to allow a single track railway line to be added alongside at a later date.

The RDS is disappointed by the lack of consultation on this matter to date, especially given our long standing interest on this matter. The Railway Development Society has been actively calling for the reopening of the Barnstaple to Bideford line for over 4 years now, although it has always been our policy that this line should be restored. The line was included

in our campaign leaflet 'Bring Back Our Tracks' in 1996, the A to Z of Rail reopenings, in our submission to the South West Regional Planning Conference last year and on numerous occasions to Devon County Council as outlined below:"

22/5/95, Transport Policies & Programme,  
10/95, County Structure Plan First Review,  
5/6/96, Transport Policies & Programme,  
19/12/96, Structure Plan First Review,  
10/97, Structure Plan First Review,  
27/5/98, Transport Policies & Programme.

### **Project Inform's Teething Troubles**

With Wales and West's new passenger information system virtually fully implemented, only some of the branch line systems are awaiting completion, it is clear that the system is not coping with major break downs in service within Cornwall. At Truro, the system relies entirely on information provided by signal boxes. This means that the system will only show train delays at Par for west bound services. On occasion, a train caught in the single line section before Probus can be delayed without the system knowing. This has meant that the train 'disappears' from the system when its time was due, when in fact it had not yet arrived at Truro!

When a branch line service has been cancelled, the system simply states the fact and advises of the next service. In practice there may be a bus replacement, but the system does not make any mention of this.

Where a train to Cornwall is so late that it is behind the train that it should have preceded, it has been common practice to 'speed-up' one of the services by allowing

it to depart earlier from Plymouth, thus reducing further delays to the late running train. The system does not recognise trains running early, so it sometimes announces a train after it has left!

The recent derailment at Carn Brea resulting from Cattle on the line, was also not well handled by the system. The 17:40 from Truro to Penzance was described as 'delayed' without any indication of why or for how long. the following 18:09 arrival from Dundee was described as 'Cancelled'. Again no details were given about any road transport alternatives or retimings. These were clearly available as the local radio station gave details. Perhaps the operator of Wales and West's system in Cardiff should have been informed as well.

#### **Motorail Returns - At a Price**

The long promised return of Motorail to the South West took place with an official launch for the press at Paddington in July. However, full service did not start until August 15. The service runs on the back of the Night Riviera sleeper service from Paddington to Penzance and return, two parcels vans having been converted to take road vehicles. The vans are loaded from the side at Paddington and Penzance by rail staff. The driver and passengers then travel in the sleeper compartments.

First Great Western have also promised a day time service over the Christmas and Easter holiday periods, leaving Penzance at 12:49 and Paddington 14:28 Mondays to Fridays, and Penzance 11:31, Paddington 12:42 Saturdays.

Booking is up to 3 days before departure, but with only 6 cars per train, accommodation is limited. Bookings are

handled at Plymouth by telephoning 0845 601 0847.

Many may find the fares a major disincentive to let someone else do the driving. In the summer peak, a return for car and driver is £390 with a further £110 for each additional adult and £70 for each child sharing a cabin. Thus a family of two adults and two children would have to fork out £640, excluding the cost of any hotel accommodation once they have arrived at their destination. It is unlikely that 'Mondeo-man' will be willing to pay this much for the journey to Cornwall, Rolls Royce and Range Rover drivers are the most likely candidates for this service!

#### **Summer 1999 Timetable Analysis**

Despite a number of promises that the timetable introduced on 30 May heralded a new era of co-operation between train operators, there was unfortunately little evidence of such co-ordination in the results.

In Cornwall, it did appear that Virgin, First Great Western and Wales and West had worked together to provide a 30 minute interval service from Penzance to Plymouth between 06:30 and 08:50. However, new long gaps have appeared in the evening service from Plymouth to Penzance, particularly at Truro, where the only service from there to Penzance in the evening peak is at 16:06, 17:40 and the Dundee service at 18:09. Wales and West tell us that they cannot plug the long gap with their own services as the trains are not available at Plymouth.

A similar lack of care and attention has been applied to some of the Cornish branch line connections where some very long waits have opened up simply because the



main line service has been retimed to run a few minutes earlier than previously, and the branch now misses the previous connection. Falmouth and St Ives have been particularly badly affected by this.

As was widely publicised, Falmouth lost one return service and Looe two, resulting in no train from Looe to Liskeard between 14:40 and 17:27, Mondays to Thursdays, and 14:40 and 17:58 (over 3 hours!) on Fridays. St Ives has also lost two return services, and had its through trains to Penzance significantly reduced. The remaining connections to Penzance are in some cases so poor, that the Western National bus service offers a significantly quicker (as well as cheaper in the Summer) alternative. On Sundays, there is no service for Park and Riders at Lelant Saltings between 11:55 and 13:52, an almost two hour gap.

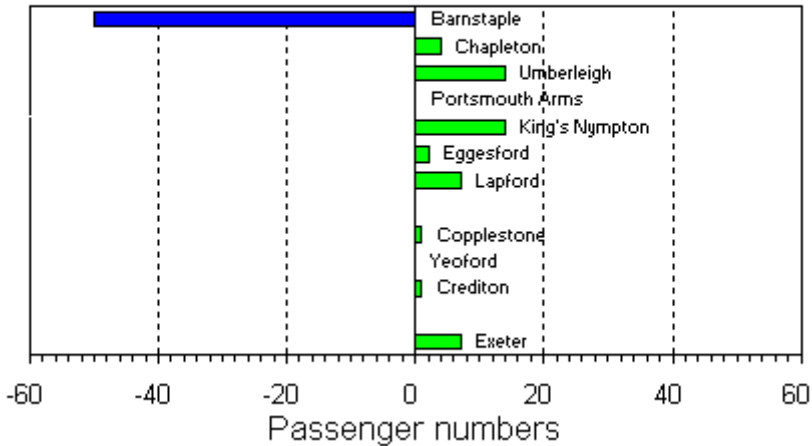
On the plus side, First Great Western have introduced their promised extra weekday train from Paddington to Penzance, and the last train of the day from Paddington to Cornwall is now later at 18:03 (19:03 on Fridays), but Saver Tickets can still not be used. As a result the train is full to Reading, but often half empty for the rest of the journey. The last train before the sleeper from Penzance to Paddington is now one hour later at 17:30. Unfortunately

this train no longer calls at Lostwithiel. The Cornish Riviera has been speeded up to take 4 hours 55 minutes. This is done at the expense of the Camborne and St Erth stops, which have been withdrawn, and St Ives passengers who now face a much longer journey via Penzance.

Wales and West, continuing it's policy of expanding long distance services at the expense of it's local branch lines, has extended the 07:50 Penzance - Exeter service to Portsmouth. This is done by coupling the train to an existing Cardiff - Portsmouth service at Westbury. There is a balancing return working in the afternoon. Unfortunately, this train is not always an 'Alphaline' set, but the considerably less comfortable Class 150 sprinters which are more suited to short distance work. Early indications are that the service is proving a success, regularly carrying 60 'long distance' passengers per day. Bearing in mind the obvious allegiances between RNAS Culdrose, Devonport and Portsmouth, this is hardly surprising! Newquay also sees one of its four trains per day running through from Plymouth at 17:53. Unfortunately, re-timing of the Cornish Riviera to London now means that the morning London connection from Newquay no longer applies.

# Exeter to Barnstaple

07:02 on 06/01/98



*Use of North Devon main line stations on 06 January 1998.*

In Devon, the expected cuts on the Barnstaple line have been introduced, and it is understood that the timetable changes have resulted in the loss of some daily college students travelling to and from Barnstaple. The 08:28 arrival in Barnstaple is now rather too early at 08:07, although as the train was formerly held at Eggesford there are no changes in intermediate timings from Exeter, CREDITON, Coppelstone and Lapford. In the afternoon the return service at 16:34 now runs at 16:15 from Barnstaple. An RDS survey on one day in January 1998 on the 07:02 from Exeter St. Davids, showed most of the intermediate stations being used so it is vital that the timings of the service are satisfactory for college users.

Good news is that First Great Western have introduced two new Paddington to

Plymouth services each way, and a return service to Paignton. The Night Riviera service now serves Bristol Temple Meads and Swindon, and the 21:11 Plymouth to Exeter service now runs 4 minutes later offering a connection out of Virgin's Penzance to Plymouth service. Unfortunately one casualty is the through ticketing arrangements between Penzance and Porthleven. This has been dropped due to a complete lack of support by passengers. Bearing in mind the lack of any publicity for this scheme on First Western National bus services (safeguarding their National Express contracts and commission perhaps?) this is not surprising. Will more cuts in this scheme follow?

Dear Mr Prescott,

19 June 1999

### **Rail Service Reductions in Cornwall and Devon.**

The main aim of the 'New Deal for Transport' White Paper, is to: *improving the alternatives [to car travel] and to secure mobility that is sustainable in the long term*". This is a sound intention that was welcomed by this branch of the Society when the White Paper was published. Unfortunately, recent events affecting rail services in Cornwall and Devon appear to support the opposite view.

There has been a significant increase in petrol and diesel duty affecting road users, sold on the understanding that this is a part of the strategy to persuade car users to transfer to public transport. However, with the new rail timetable commencing on 30 May, there were significant cuts in Wales and West Passenger Trains Ltd's services on the Cornish branch lines and on the Exeter - Barnstaple North Devon line. Less significant cuts have also been made to the Newton Abbot - Paignton line, and there has been a significant deterioration in connecting times between some main and branch line services. In addition, there are now long gaps in the service to West Cornwall in the evening peak. The attached statement shows the level of cuts that have been applied.

We also understand that when Virgin Trains introduces its new rolling stock in 2002, they will reduce the number of through trains into Cornwall by 1 train each way per day. The smaller trains will also mean a reduction in seating capacity between Plymouth and Penzance to below that required by the PSR.

In the light of the White Paper's intentions for "more and better buses and trains" (page 16), the South West Branch Committee is very concerned about the recent cut backs, and the Government's lack of action to stop them. In a recent visit to Cornwall, you blamed the previous administration for the current situation. It is always easy to blame predecessors for current shortcomings, but that will not solve the problem. You are now the Government and therefore in a situation to do something about it, or does private industry now run the country instead of Her Majesty's Government?

Together with the Chairman of CRUCC, you state that the current contracts prevent you from stopping these cuts. This is untrue. No contract is cut in stone and improvements can usually be negotiated, albeit sometimes with a price. Funding has been made available to local councils to introduce limited additional bus services, despite recent evidence that the bus is the transport alternative of last resort for most people. Some of these buses were introduced to compete with existing train services. Why could this money and the proceeds from increased petrol tax not be used to help safeguard the existing train service instead?

In a reply to Cornwall County Council concerning the cuts, Glenda Jackson MP states that new instructions to the Franchising Director make it his principal aim to win more passengers onto the railway and secure improvements in quality. Why is he therefore being allowed to cut services in our region which will drive away existing passengers rather than encourage new ones?

A shadow Strategic Rail Authority has now been created, with a well paid management and administrative structure. We have yet to hear any comment from the Chairman, Sir Alistair Morton about the recent cuts. Surely it is a part of his job to comment on this issue and hopefully reassure us that he will put it right?

As a bare minimum, we would like to see a basic hourly service on all lines. We therefore share the aspiration of Devon County Council for a minimum of hourly services between Exeter and Barnstaple, and Exeter and Waterloo. This minimum should be applied to Cornwall as well.

Until these questions are addressed, it is difficult for the South West Branch Committee to believe that the increase in petrol tax was intended as an incentive to use public transport. The recent cuts in the alternative has forced car users to simply pay more tax for using their cars rather than transfer to public transport. We are minded to believe, as do the local press, that this was nothing more than a 'smoke screen' to increase indirect taxation to pay for the recent cuts in income tax.

Mr. James Watson, Head of Secretariat, OPRAF replied to our letter on 16 July, ref. DC99/0127.

Thank you for your letter of 19 June to the Deputy Prime Minister about rail reductions in Devon and Cornwall. I have been asked to reply.

I appreciate your concerns about timetable cuts on a number of branchlines in Devon and Cornwall but as you may know the services to which you refer were all additional to the Passenger Service Requirements (PSRs) concerned. Their provision is, therefore, a matter for the train operator to decide on a commercial judgement of demand and costs. The minimum level of service which a train operator must provide as set out in the PSR which is a key part of the franchise agreement. The Franchising Director was required to base PSRs on the services which were being operated by British Rail at the time of franchising. The PSRs are part of legally binding franchise agreements. They can only be changed unilaterally at no net loss to the Train Operating Company. Any change which caused a net loss would require to be underpinned by additional subsidy. When renegotiations occur or when franchises are relet, the Shadow Strategic Rail Authority will consult stakeholders on possible outcomes; the tightening and enhancement of PSRs so that they more closely reflect the needs of passengers could be one of many outcomes to be considered.

The Government is committed to encouraging more people to travel by rail and to see more investment in the rail network. That is why they have made available additional funding for a new Rail Passenger Partnership (RPP) scheme, launched on 24 May, and aimed specifically at providing support for locally sponsored services that are not commercially viable. Applications for funding will be assessed on planning criteria which take wider social benefits into account. Guidance has been issued to local authorities on how to bid for funds under this scheme. Proposals for RPP support can be submitted by various bodies, including Local Authorities, PTEs/PTAs, and Train Operating Companies, either as individuals or consortia. Local authorities and others are encouraged to come forward with proposals. Formal bids will be appraised to ensure they are consistent with OPRAF's Planning. Criteria and the Franchising Director's Objectives, Instructions and Guidance. Bids will have to demonstrate the achievement of value for money in the delivery of the scheme. Copies of the RPP Bidding Guidance and Planning Criteria have already been sent to all local authorities.

I am not aware of any plans by Virgin Trains to reduce the number of through services to Cornwall from 2002. Any change to the PSR would require the approval of the Franchising Director. All train operators have a general obligation to avoid excessive overcrowding and it is not in their commercial interest to allow overcrowding which will discourage passengers from travelling.

Something seems to be wrong here as the Franchising Director states that the Passenger Service Requirement (PSR) was 'broadly in line' with the previous service operated by BR. For Cornwall it is necessary to go back to 1987 to find today's PSR level of service in operation. On the Barnstaple line 12 trains operated eachway in 1994 and 1995 and 11 in the following year when the PSR was set at the astonishingly low level of 7 train eachway. As we pointed out at the time, the PSR was below current service levels, and may lead to cuts. It gives us no pleasure in saying we told you so.

### **Virgin's New Trains But Cuts on the Cards in Cornwall?**

Virgin, well known for its 'hip' product names has decided to call its new trains Virgin Voyager, with the tilting version called Super Voyager. Virgin's cross country services will require 34 four car non-tilting trains and 32 five car tilting trains. The non-tilting trains will start delivery in 2001 taking over from the current Intercity 125s in 2002. The tilting trains in 2003. The main benefit of tilting trains will be felt north of Exeter where Virgin are arranging for track speeds to be increased to between 115 and 120 mph. West of Exeter the trains will run at 'normal line speeds' which presumably means that despite the tilt there will be no gain in journey time west of Exeter. This could all change when (and if) Railtrack implement the results of the TENS study or Objective 1 cash is used in Cornwall.

Timetable proposals for Devon seem encouraging, with Virgin running a more frequent service to compensate for the reduced length of their trains. A sample

2003 timetable published in Modern Railways recently had trains leaving Birmingham New Street 22 minutes past the hour to Paignton from the North East, and 52 minutes past the hour to Plymouth from the North West. No examples were shown for Penzance, and here there is some controversy. According to Cornwall County Council, the numbers of through trains into Cornwall will be reduced from three to two each way per day. In addition, the number of coaches will be reduced which the County Council fears will lead to over crowding in the evening peak from Plymouth. Virgin's Ian Davies has said that the timetable is at an early stage and is still subject to discussion and may well change.

### **Shadow SRA Questionnaire on Future Service Levels Condemned**

There was widespread condemnation of the Shadow Strategic Rail Authority's questionnaire on future Passenger Service Levels by the Western RUCC. The questionnaire was described as 'poorly designed'. Many Train operators were concerned that they had not been consulted at all despite 'banging on doors' - perhaps they now know how the RDS feels when it is excluded from their timetable plans! Virgin Trains' Ian Davies condemned the questionnaire as a 'multiple choice O Level paper'.

### **Network Management Statement Promises Little for the Westcountry**

The 1999 Statement of Railtrack's plan for maintaining and improving the network was published in March. It is worth printing in full Railtrack's 'vision' for the Paddington to Penzance route and branches:

“Our vision is for a world-class rail transportation network for the South West. This vision was developed with the South West Government Office, regional development authority and local authorities together with our industry partners. We will reduce the peripherality of the South West through shortened journey times and enhanced freight capability.

We will improve performance through initiatives such as continuing sea defence works at Dawlish, and reinstating the middle platform at Taunton.

We will work with our partners to deliver reduced journey times. We will do this by agreeing a revenue-sharing framework and a package of infrastructure enhancements to maximise the benefits from our partners’ existing and proposed rolling stock fleets.

We expect this to deliver journey times of 2 hours 39 minutes London to Plymouth (19 minute improvement) and 4 hours 20 minutes London to Penzance (37 minute improvement).

We aspire to increase the public transport market share through the provision of a more integrated transport system. We aim to improve branch line connections and to increase the quality of environment at key interchange locations.

We look forward to working with Cornwall County Council to prepare the objective 1 bid to enhance further the county’s transport capabilities.

We are considering increasing the gauge for freight trains on this route west of

Bristol to connect with new terminal sites in Devon and Cornwall. We would do this by working in partnership with the Government office of the South West local authorities and our customers to agree a viable funding package”.

Some very laudable aims are included in this statement, although one might ask what measure Railtrack would use to identify a ‘World Class Railway’ . Unfortunately, the detailed proposals are not particularly significant. They include:

- a study of options for single line sections in Cornwall;
- ‘working with’ customers local, regional national and European government and others to secure funding for the TENS project, as insufficient revenue would be available from ticket sales to cover the capital costs;
- seeking external funding for freight loading-gauge enhancements;
- sites identified at Exeter Airport, Plymouth Tavistock Junction Yard, and ‘mid Cornwall’ (probably Roche) for future intermodal freight terminals;
- Menheniot and Kingskerswell park and ride stations, ‘subject to adequate funding’;
- A new station building at St Austell, again ‘depending on funding’ and ‘listed building consent’;
- improvements at Stafford Bridge to reduce flooding (but presumably not eliminate the problem!).

A number of these schemes are dependent on external funding resources, Railtrack often sees little ‘business case’ to invest

entirely its own money in the West of England.

Perhaps most worrying is the complacent view that “Analysis shows that there is sufficient capacity for all the identified existing and future services” in the period of the Network Management Statement (until 2009?). This view is at variance with Torbay Council who see the present lack of capacity between Exeter and Newton Abbot as a problem for expanding regular interval services. Likewise, the single track section between St Austell and Truro is a major bar to introducing the regular interval services we would like to see in Cornwall.

### **Objective 1 Plans**

A list of possible rail improvement projects was given by Cornwall County Surveyor Peter Stethridge at the Rail Users Consultative Committee meeting in Truro. Mr Stethridge said the prime candidate would be matched funding for the Trans European Network study into up-grading the Paddington - Penzance line. However, upgrading work in Cornwall could only be funded this way.

Other possible schemes include:

- Increasing the ‘loading gauge’ for freight wagons in West Cornwall,
- Line speed improvements,
- Signalling improvements to increase line capacity in West Cornwall,
- Re-doubling Probus to Burngullow,
- Truro bus/rail interchange improvements,
- Freight terminal at Roche,
- Renewing/Replacing St Austell station building,

- A new station at Carn Brea,
- Newquay line diversion to St Austell.

Some additional information was requested from Railtrack, but it was hoped that the Single Programme Document which may include some of these schemes, would be sent at the end of July.

Mr Stethridge also warned that Objective 1 money was only available for five years, and that it was important that Railtrack’s investment programme fits in with this. Bearing in mind Railtrack’s rather lacklustre performance in implementing major infrastructure projects elsewhere in Britain, this warning was timely.

Further discussions between the RDS and Railtrack representatives revealed that breaking up the long ‘block’ section between Truro and Roskear (Camborne) into sections would cost around £1 million!

### **Exeter Local Plan First Review**

The Exeter Local Plan currently runs to 2001 and is to be extended to cover the period to 2011. RDS South West was invited to participate in the consultation document of June 1999. Our main observations related to policies E1, KP2, KP4 and KP7:

**E1.** *The Devon Structure plan recognises the need for an inter modal freight depot in the Exeter/East Devon area, but this will still leave distribution vehicles on the local roads. However, the greatest environmental benefits are gained when rail freight can serve industry directly from private sidings and the employment development sites at Grace Road and Prince Charles Road are ideal for this. The Local Plan cannot determine the transport modes used by industry, but it should*

*protect the access rail lines and land to enable this potential to be realised. This will help the rail freight industry to compete for business against road haulage.*

**KP2.** *Ideally bus and rail stations should be located together, but RDS recognise that in Exeter it would be difficult to reconcile such a site with suitable access roads as well as maintaining comparable access to the shops and offices for the majority of bus passengers. An alternative strategy is for the rural bus routes to be linked across Exeter to maximise access to the railway stations, whilst minimising road movements, e.g. Tiverton to Sidmouth via Exeter St. Davids station and Exeter Bus Station. Therefore the design of a new bus station and associated roads needs to be able to accommodate such through workings.*

**KP4.** *More bus routes pass Exeter St Thomas station than Exeter St. Davids and there is potential to develop the station as a local bus/rail interchange station. This will mean stopping more local trains at the station, providing lifts for disabled access, staffing and general refurbishment. Easier pedestrian access from the Fore Street and Quay Area is also needed. For this role St. Thomas station needs to be one of the focal points of the redevelopment of the Exe Bridges area.*

**KP7.** *The Newcourt development for either housing or employment development would benefit from a new railway station on the adjacent Exeter to Exmouth railway. There is space to provide a new platform on existing railway land, but the line is too steeply graded at 1 in 82 to 105 and would therefore require regrading work or HSE dispensation. The stopping of trains would*

*increase journey times for other passengers on the Exmouth line, but there may be a case for introducing an entirely new local train service from Topsham to Exeter St. Davids and Taunton. This would serve both existing stations such as Digby, but new ones as well such as Newcourt and Cullompton.*

### **Teignbridge Local Plan Issues Report**

The consultation required a series of questions to be answered, not all by any means relating to the railways. In summary we highlighted Exminster and Bishopsteignton for new stations, the Heathfield line for rail freight and a summer Sunday passenger service similar to that at Okehampton and the protection of land for railway development that might not necessarily take place within the Local Plan period which would run to 2011. The short Heathfield to Bovey Tracey Pottery Roundabout trackbed should be protected and that for a second Exeter to Newton Abbot line (either a new inland Dawlish avoiding line or the Teign Valley line).

### **South West Rail Strategy**

RDS South West has produced a rail strategy document. Using funds from the RDS draw award and some other sources it is intended to distribute a number of free copies to Local Authorities and the rail industry. However, for financial reasons only a limited number of additional copies can be produced for speculative sale. If you would like a personal copy printed please contact the South West branch Secretary (address on page 2). The exact cost is not yet determined, but a figure of around £15 to £20 is anticipated.