

## JOB DONE!

## PROBUS — BURNGULLOW: ON TIME AND ON BUDGET



*Final checks are carried out on the new double line at Burngullow on Sunday 21 November before opening the following day*

The reinstated double track between Probus and Burngullow was completed on Sunday 21 November and re-opened to trains the following day. The £14 million project was completed on time and within budget. £3 million was funded by European Regional Development Fund grant.

Sadly the continued fragmentation of the rail network meant that there were few timetable benefits to rail users in Cornwall and this is unlikely to change until the new Greater Western franchise is in place in 2006.

However the scheme removes one of the major barriers to having a clock face

timetable on the Cornish mainline and it is hoped that whoever wins the franchise will look carefully at introducing such a timetable.

In the meantime, passengers on late running trains in Cornwall will no longer have their train journey further delayed waiting for trains coming off the single line in the opposite direction.

The formal opening ceremony took place at Truro station on Tuesday November 30. Transport Minister Tony McNulty flew into the County to open the line. He travelled on a special train hauled by GWR 3700 Class steam locomotive 'City of Truro' from Par. The train was photographed from the air as it passed an empty Virgin Voyager set on the other track sent down empty especially for the event.

At Truro, the Minister re-named a First Great Western HST power car 'City of Truro' and welcomed the re-doubling of the line. He said that this had been a good week for transport in Cornwall with the news of the new A30 dual carriageway road around Goss Moor and planned new air links from Newquay Airport to Bristol and Leeds/Bradford. Unfortunately he had no news of any new train services in the County.

Before he left the Minister was given a copy of Railfuture Devon and Cornwall's aspirations for the Greater Western Franchise. It was hoped he would have time to read it on the flight back.

## GOVERNMENT REFUSES TO SUPPORT FALMOUTH AND NEWQUAY BRANCH LINE IMPROVEMENT SCHEMES

In two recent announcements the Government has decided not to support the diversion of the Newquay branch to St Austell and the installation of a passing loop on the Falmouth Branch. The decisions mean that Cornwall County Council will either have to fund the schemes itself or that the schemes will not go ahead.

Railfuture had hoped that the diversion of the Newquay branch to St Austell would take place as part of the upgrade of the A30 across Goss Moor. However the Highways Agency wanted to build a new dual carriageway road to the north as they said this would be cheaper and more environmentally friendly than diverting the railway line and building the second road

carriageway on the redundant track bed. Railfuture Devon and Cornwall countered by questioning whether a dual carriageway was necessary. The branch suggested a cheaper scheme diverting the railway without dualling the road. The troublesome low bridge, often bashed by lorry drivers ignoring warning signs, could be removed.

Unfortunately the Highways Agency thought that a dual carriageway was necessary to meet predicted increases in road traffic. This was supported by local authorities, business representatives and local MP Paul Tyler. After a public inquiry the Government announced that the new dual carriageway will go ahead.

In a separate development, The Government Office for the South West (GOSW) has declined to support the County Council's Local Transport Plan bid to install a passing loop on the Falmouth Branch. This is because the SRA will not support the proposal and will not confirm that additional train services would use the branch. The SRA will not support the scheme unless there is robust evidence of future levels of patronage. The County Council now faces having to fund the scheme itself and making its own application for Objective 1 grant. GOSW has however given provisional approval for the Camelford by-pass and a new link road from the A30 to the Eden project. The Highways Agency are also planning further expansion of the A30 in Cornwall.

## CORNISH STATION IMPROVEMENTS COMPLETED



*Refurbished Liskeard station with its new station buffet overlooking the platforms.*

The Riviera Project partnership between local authorities, the rail industry and the Rail Heritage Trust continues to improve rail station facilities in Cornwall with the completion of schemes at Liskeard and St Ives.

The Liskeard scheme involved the complete internal re-building of the main station with new ticket office facilities, toilets and a buffet. On the Looe branch line platform, the wooden buildings have been restored with part opened out to provide a waiting shelter and provision for a shop. The scheme was undertaken by Robert Allen Architects and Midas Construction.

At St Ives, two new 'vandal-proof' stainless steel shelters have been installed together with a new 'entrance and exit' system to deal with the summer crowds. This is part of a scheme to improve stations on the line. Other work done included cutting back vegetation at Carbis Bay and a part-tarmac surface on the Lelant Saltings park and ride station.

Liskeard station was formally opened on 22 November with high-profile press coverage and a visit to the line by the local school. The St Ives scheme was opened by the Mayor of St Ives on 11 December. Friends of St Ives Branch Line with the assistance of Wessex Trains managers and Penzance train crews arranged for Santa Claus to travel on the branch line that morning.



*Mayor of St Ives Harry Isaacs opens the new shelters at St Ives station. As can be seen he has his train fare ready.*

## SRA STARTS BIDDING FOR GREATER WESTERN

The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) has commenced the Greater Western franchise process by asking for expressions of interest from potential bidders. The franchise will merge the operations currently undertaken by Wessex Trains, First Great Western and First Great Western Link from April 2006.

Potential bidders will need to submit a Franchise Letting Process Agreement, Accreditation Questionnaire and Quality Management submission by 12 noon on 2 February 2005. Potential applicants will be informed by 31 March if they have pre-qualified and formal invitations to tender will be issued in June. Bids must be submitted during September 2005 and selection of the Preferred Bidder will be made in winter 2005/06.

National Express Group (current operator of Wessex Trains) First Group and the Chiltern Trains/GNER joint venture London and Western Railway have all confirmed they will be bidding. So far there has been no announcements from the other major transport groups.

Unfortunately the franchise will only last 10 years, with the last three conditional on the operator achieving performance targets. Thus there will be little incentive for infrastructure improvements similar to that undertaken by the Chiltern Trains 20 year franchise.

The Pre-qualification process document is not very specific about what the SRA expects potential bidders to achieve in Cornwall and Devon. Of the requirements listed only the following relate to our region:

- Integrate existing operations to generate cost reduction synergies and improve the overall train service specification....between Bristol and the West of England
- Review the strategy for service provision on branch lines west of Bristol including options for developing community rail
- Develop a timetable to optimise service provision on the main lines including measures to address overnight travel and seasonal fluctuations in demand
- Assess options for improved access to airports....exploring opportunities for connections to Heathrow from the west....
- Maintain a strong regional orientation, responsive to the needs and aspirations of local stakeholders.

There is nothing specific mentioned about replacing the 1970s built Intercity 125 trains, only an objective to 'co-operate with the development and implementation of longer term rolling

stock strategies'.

In anticipation of the bidding process, Railfuture Devon and Cornwall has published *Cornwall and Devon's Railways—The Next ten years*. This document lists the improvements we think could be achieved by the new franchise holder within the next ten years.

Inevitably there are few major infrastructure projects included in our list. Instead we suggest a targeted programme of incremental improvements to the West of England main line, to allow faster line speeds around curves and through junctions. In addition we suggest:

- Replacement of Cornish mechanical signalling with Multiple Aspect signalling or removal of long block signalling sections
- Automation of Eggesford and Salmon Pool crossings on the North Devon Line
- Extension of double track section on Exmouth branch to allow a 15 minute frequency Exeter to Topsham and passing loop on the Falmouth Branch to allow an approximate 30 minute interval service.

On train services we suggest that the Intercity 125 sets—that will be approaching their fortieth birthday during the franchise period—should be replaced. For the West of England we are suggesting a fleet of 4 or 5 car 'Adelante style' trains with gangway connections so they can work in multiple. These trains could provide an hourly service from Paddington to Penzance, running fast as 9 car sets to Plymouth then detaching 4 or 5 cars to run through Cornwall calling at most intermediate stations. This would run on clock face timings and replace the present haphazard service provided by some Paddington trains and Wessex two car sprinters. The new Adelante Style trains could also displace the two car trains currently operating from Plymouth to South Wales.

There would also be the 'flagship' Golden Hind service with full restaurant facilities on Mondays to Fridays. This could be operated by the proposed 'HST2' trains that will be required to run services from Paddington to Bristol and South Wales.

We are also suggesting an hourly semi-fast service from Paddington to Paignton serving main stations between Reading and Exeter then Dawlish and all stations to Paignton.

If anyone would like a copy of *Cornwall and Devon's Railways—The Next 10 Years*, an electronic or paper copy can be sent by contacting the addresses on the front page of this news sheet.



## DATE FOR YOUR DIARY

The Railfuture Devon and Cornwall Annual General Meeting is planned to be held on 12 March 2005, although this depends on the availability of potential speakers, not confirmed at the time of writing.

As in previous years the event is expected to be held in Plymouth. Further details will be sent with the next News sheet.



## FASTER TO PADDINGTON; SLOWER TO WATERLOO

The second Winter Timetable of the year started on 12 December with the announcement of some accelerated First Great Western trains to Paddington, but deceleration of some Exeter to Waterloo services.

FGW has achieved a three hour Plymouth to Paddington journey time for some of their services—0600 from Plymouth and 1005 and 1408 from Penzance. From Paddington the 1005 and 1205 to Penzance also get to Plymouth in 3 hours. The faster timing has been achieved by running non stop between Plymouth and Exeter and Exeter and Reading.

There are also additional semi-fast 'Adelante' trains from Exeter serving Castle Cary, Westbury, Pewsey Hungerford, Newbury, Thatcham and Theale. Despite this connections for the Weymouth and Portsmouth lines still leave a lot to be desired.

South West Trains primary function as a London and South East commuter operator has resulted in changes to its Exeter services to fit in with a new clock-face timetable at Waterloo. Unfortunately this has meant that some trains now have extended journey times. For example the 0641 from Exeter St Davids now arrives 15 minutes later at Waterloo. Connections on Sundays at Axminster with the Lyme Regis and Bridport bus link remain awful with waits of up to 60 minutes.

Cornwall has seen severe cuts in the mainline frequency on Saturday afternoons with the service reduced from hourly to two hourly. Incredibly there are no trains from Truro to Penzance between 1642 and 1836 at a time when many shoppers and shop workers would wish to go home. Passengers travelling later in the evening are over provided for. Starting with the 1902 from Truro there are trains almost 20

## Voyager By The Seaside

This was the scene at Dawlish during the October storms with a stranded Virgin Voyager under attack from the waves. Not as destructive as Boxing Day's Asian Tsunami, but enough to block the line between Newton Abbot and Exeter for several days. As a number of Virgin's Voyagers were trapped west of Newton Abbot, Virgin had to cancel many of its services between Bristol and Exeter and advised passengers not to travel into the Westcountry.

There were knock-on effects into the following week as the Voyagers trapped at Plymouth were unable to have their major maintenance work at Central Rivers depot near Burton on Trent. Virgin had to reduce Birmingham to Manchester services to cope.

Despite this, our calls to have Okehampton—Bere Alston re-opened to provide a diversionary route has not received much support from within the rail industry.

*Photo: Courtesy of Virgin Trains*

minutes apart to Penzance until 2131.

The Saturday morning 0512 Penzance to Paddington service has also been withdrawn between Penzance and Plymouth. The earliest time of arrival in London from Cornwall on a Saturday now is at 1200 instead of 1015.

The St Ives branch has also lost all but two of its through trains to Penzance.

The European timetable change dates will cause confusion in May. The Monday to Friday times continue to apply until 10 June, but a new timetable will be published for weekends only from 22 May. Bearing in mind that the rail industry is clearly not following European timetable change dates for weekend services, would it not have been better to change the whole timetable from 22 May?

## MORE ENGINEERING WORK

Network Rail Engineering blockades continue to affect the Branch and main Lines. Amongst others, the Exmouth branch is closed for the week up to and including Good Friday (25 March) and incredibly for a major tourist destination, the St Ives Branch will be closed on Bank Holiday Monday 2 May for two weeks (excluding Saturdays). It now seems that two week Monday to Friday daytime

engineering blockades on our branch lines will be the norm. Railfuture has seen plans for this up to December 2005. Is this a way of avoiding expensive overnight maintenance costs?

Full dates of closure for engineering work are as follows. Buses replace trains when the lines are closed. Information is correct at time of writing but may change so please check before travelling.

### Plymouth to Par

All day Saturdays and Sundays 8/9, 15/16, 22/23, 29/30 January 2005

### Exeter to Waterloo

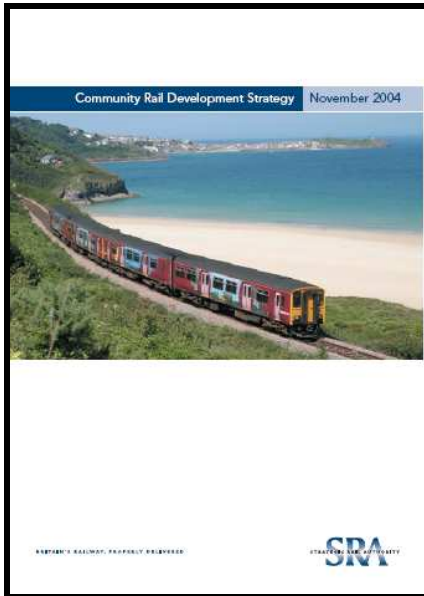
Saturdays and Sundays 8 January to 6 February - work between Weybridge and Surbiton will mean extended journey times and earlier departures from Waterloo.

### Exeter to Waterloo and Exeter to Castle Cary

Sunday 6 February - First Great Western Paddington services will be diverted via Yeovil Junction and not serve Tiverton Parkway or Taunton. Some South West Trains Services will not run between Yeovil and Exeter, passengers change at Yeovil Junction for First Great Western services which will call at stations between Yeovil and Exeter instead.

*(continued on back page)*

## COMMUNITY RAIL STRATEGY PUBLISHED



The St Ives branch line appears on the cover of the latest SRA publication, and not just because of the view. The branch is confirmed as one of the pilots for the SRA's *Community Rail Development Strategy*, published in November.

The document is mainly a list of ideas for developing community involvement with 'community rail lines' which are defined as typically local or rural routes with a single passenger operator but also freight (if less than 500 trains per annum). They are not lines forming part of the Trans European Network, lines with more than 2 tracks, lines with a speed in excess of 75mph nor form part of radial commuting networks to principal cities. All of Cornwall and Devon's branch lines meet this definition.

Despite reports in the press—and possibly comments made by the Secretary of State for Transport—the document does not propose closure of these lines. In fact the possibility of closure is not mentioned at all, the document pointing out that savings from closure would be very small.

Compared with some other rail routes, Cornwall and Devon's branch lines are already very efficient. Most have 'one engine in steam' token operation and virtually no signalling at all except at the start of the branch. The trains are mainly 1980s built single and two car sprinter trains and virtually all stations (except Barnstaple and Exmouth) are un-staffed.

In his introduction, Chairman of the SRA David Quarumby says that there are "... too many empty seats running up and down Britain's branch lines safely and reliably...but expensively". But in fact the largest increases in the rail industry's costs have affected major routes such as the West Coast Main Line and these costs will still be there whether the

branch lines are closed or not.

Nevertheless the aim of the Strategy is to reduce subsidy levels (which the document admits it cannot precisely identify) by one third and halve the subsidy per passenger within the next 5 years. Given that infrastructure maintenance and running costs for our branches are already very low and that the £250,000 annual lease cost for the trains appears to be 'non-negotiable', for Cornwall and Devon's branch lines the only likely way of doing this is to:

- persuade more local people to use the railway in the hope of 'boosting low winter patronage,
- reduce winter service frequencies—perhaps replacing lightly used trains with buses
- apply above inflation increases in fares during the peak holiday season

The last two of which would clearly be areas Railfuture would find difficult to support.

Interestingly the document makes a case for attributing more revenue to the branch line from through tickets to main line destinations. It notes that currently only £1 of a St Ives to London ticket is allocated to the branch line operator. Perhaps more accurate accounting methods may help achieve the goal of reducing the perceived subsidy per passenger.

### DEVON'S TRANSPORT PLAN REPORT SHOWS STALLED RAIL SCHEMES

Devon County Council's annual progress report on its 2001 local Transport Plan, published last July, has identified a number of areas where progress on rail related schemes has been stalled.

The proposed train/bus interchange at Newton Abbot rail station was delayed because of the 'potentially conflicting' Network Rail proposal to increase line capacity between Plymouth and Exeter—although the report does not explain what the conflict was. Apparently now resolved, the interchange is expected to be completed by April 2005.

Also delayed is the Heathfield rail freight facility, a joint scheme with Teignbridge District Council. Described as 'in progress' this proposal will be reflected in the Teignbridge 2005 draft development plan.

The ongoing saga concerning improvements to Exeter Central station forecourt was described as 'unforseen' and blamed on the need to reach agreement with Wessex Trains and Network Rail to relocate parking for existing tenants of the station. As is often the case with other town centre traffic management schemes, shops and businesses often object to loss of car

parking spaces in front of their premises.

The successes in the plan mainly relate to road and bus schemes. Highlighted in particular is the controversial Barnstaple Western Bypass scheme and the Kingskerswell bypass.

On a more positive note, The Government has thus rated Devon County Council's transport performance for 2003/04 as 'Above Average' when compared with other local authorities in England. Possibly as a result, Devon County Council has been selected as one of 17 local transport authorities to apply for 'Centre of Excellence (COE) in Local Transport Delivery' status. Devon will need to give a 'good account' of its contribution to LTP success and to commit to sharing its expertise with others. If successful, Devon's designation as a COE will be announced in February. A condition will be that Devon has to report back on its activities, how effective they have been and demonstrate value for money. Railfuture will be looking carefully at the rail initiatives included in this process.

Meanwhile the County Council has undertaken a round of consultation meetings in preparation for its next 5 year LTP. This included 'hearings' from various transport groups. As part of this process our branch chairman Gerard Duddridge made a presentation at Barnstaple for both Railfuture and the South West Passenger Transport Users Forum.

### ENGINEERING WORK DATES

*(continued from page 3)*

#### Newton Abbot to Paignton

Monday to Friday 14 to 18 February 2005

#### Exeter to Barnstaple

Mondays to Fridays 21 February to 4 March 2005 (trains run Saturdays and Sundays)

#### Plymouth to Gunnislake

Mondays to Fridays 7 to 19 March 2005 (trains run Saturdays and Sundays)

#### Exeter to Exmouth

Monday to Friday 21 to 25 March 2005

#### Liskeard to Looe

Mondays to Fridays 4 to 15 April 2005 (trains run Saturdays)

#### Par to Newquay

Mondays to Fridays 18 to 29 April 2005 (trains run Saturdays)

#### St Erth to St Ives

Mondays to Fridays 2 to 13 May 2005 (trains run Saturdays)

#### Truro to Falmouth Docks

Mondays to Fridays 16 to 27 May 2005 (trains run Saturdays and Sundays)