

HOW TO FIGHT A RAIL CUT



BRITISH RAILWAYS BOARD

TRANSPORT ACT, 1962

PUBLIC NOTICE

PASSENGER SERVICE

MAIDEN NEWTON - BRIDPORT

The Secretary of State for the Environment has given his consent to the withdrawal of the railway passenger service between Maiden Newton and Bridport on condition that the service is not withdrawn before 1 May 1971. The consent was conveyed in a letter dated 30 December 1970, addressed to the British Railways Board, a copy of which is reproduced hereunder.

Department of the Environment
1 Marsham Street London SW1

MAIDEN NEWTON BRIDPORT PASSENGER SERVICE

The following information is provided for the purpose of enabling interested parties to make representations to the Secretary of State for the Environment in connection with the proposed withdrawal of the railway passenger service between Maiden Newton and Bridport.

The proposed withdrawal of the service is subject to the consent of the Secretary of State for the Environment. The consent is given on condition that the service is not withdrawn before 1 May 1971. The consent was conveyed in a letter dated 30 December 1970, addressed to the British Railways Board, a copy of which is reproduced hereunder.

Interested parties may make representations to the Secretary of State for the Environment in connection with the proposed withdrawal of the service. Representations should be made in writing and should be sent to the Secretary of State for the Environment, 1 Marsham Street, London SW1.

Representations should be made as soon as possible and should be received by the Secretary of State for the Environment not later than 15 days before the date on which the service is proposed to be withdrawn.

The Secretary of State for the Environment will consider all representations received and will decide whether or not to give his consent to the withdrawal of the service.

The Secretary of State for the Environment will also consider any representations received from interested parties in connection with the proposed withdrawal of the service.

The Secretary of State for the Environment will publish a notice in the London Gazette stating the date on which the service is proposed to be withdrawn and the date on which the service will actually be withdrawn.

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20p

RAILWAY DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY

HOW TO FIGHT A RAIL CUT

This booklet has been compiled by two members of the National Committee of the Railway Development Society:

J. W. BARFIELD

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and is based on their personal experiences, and the experiences of several other RDS members and members of rail users' groups, at the relatively few rail closure inquiries which have taken place during the last few years.

Much of the material on earlier TUCC inquiries; the history of the Consultative Committees and the statutory framework under which they now operate has been drawn from FIGHTING FOR THE RAILWAYS, J.M.Barfield, 1978 (A history of the Railway Invigoration Society)

This booklet is intended to be a companion to the Society's earlier publication, A GUIDE FOR RAIL USERS' GROUPS (3rd Edition, May 1981), details of which, together with other publications referred to in the text, are contained inside the back cover.

The compilers are also grateful to Mr D.F.Ogilvy, for suggestions concerning the text; Mr F.S.Mayman, Hon. Secretary of the North Warwick Line Defence Committee, for giving us the benefit of their experience; to Mr A.Poole for the cover design; and to the many rail users, whether RDS members or not, who have fought against rail cuts and closures in all parts of the country, and without whose resistance and experience we would have lost more of the network.

Railway Development Society
RM-RDS,
London, WC1N 6XX

October 1982

*RDS, where accompanied by an asterisk in the text, shall be construed as including its former constituent bodies, the Railway Invigoration Society and Railway Development Association, both of which were founded in the early 1950s, and amalgamated in 1978 to form the Railway Development Society.

HOW TO FIGHT A RAIL CUT

WHY CUTS?

During the 1970s, Britain's rail network experienced a period of relative stability, with very few closures and even some reopenings, mainly of stations. This situation was in welcome contrast to that in the 1960s and indeed earlier decades, which had been characterized by a steady cutting of the network.

Recent trends, however, indicate a gradual return to the old pattern; the yearly mileage of lines closed (both passenger and freight) rising from 33 in 1977 to 140 in 1981; and on August 19th 1982, British Rail was given permission to close the 19½-mile March - Spalding line, the longest passenger closure proposal for several years. The British Railways Board have indeed warned repeatedly that, with steadily declining levels of investment since 1975 to replace ageing rolling stock, and a growing backlog of track maintenance, some 3,000 miles of route may have to be closed within the next few years.

PREVENTION IS BETTER THAN CURE

Adequate investment can make a line prosper and lessen the threat of cuts in services or total closure. So can increased usage. Therefore, many line users' groups have been formed - often on the initiative of RDS - to campaign for improvements and greater usage; and to work with RDS in pressing nationally for Government financial support for railways in this country comparable to that in most European countries.

The RDE publication GUIDE FOR RAIL USERS' GROUPS (3rd edition, 1981) explains how to form such a group and gives many examples of what groups can do, and have done, to make lines more prosperous.

One of the main aims of RDS is to see such a users' group on every line that is supported by public funds - and most secondary routes are, since the 1968 Transport Act recognized that they should not be expected to make a profit in the narrowest sense, but that Central Government (and in some cases local authorities) should contribute towards their upkeep.

However, the recent trend of public spending cuts has raised a large question mark over the future of many such lines and, even if services are improving and traffic is increasing on some of them (thanks to the efforts of enterprising local BR management and local user groups), BR may still in the end find itself in a position where closure is forced upon it, viz. the threat to Tunbridge Wells - Hastings. In such cases, the users' group must obviously spearhead the fight to save the line. If there is no users' group, then one must be formed urgently.

HOW A CLOSURE IS EFFECTED

If BR wish to close a line or station completely to passengers, they must announce this under a procedure set down in sections 54 and 56 of the 1962 Transport Act. If, however, they merely wish to reduce the number of trains, but keep the line or station open (albeit to a bare minimum), then as the law stands at present there appears to be no formal means by which users can prevent it.

The main official organisation concerned in safeguarding the interest of rail consumers in the Central Transport Consultative Committee and its various area Transport Users' Consultative Committees. Details of their addresses and areas covered are displayed at stations and are listed on p55 of the current BR Passenger Timetable. The CTCC itself is at 3/4 Great Marlborough Street, London, W1V 2EA (Tel:01-734 0056).

WHAT POWERS DO TUCCs HAVE?

When set up under section 6 of the Transport Act 1947, at the time of nationalisation, the TUCCs had much wider powers than today, to consider both the quality of services provided by the then Railway Executive of the British Transport Commission and their case for withdrawal of any rail service

The TUCCs were, and are, appointed by the Minister, to represent local interests; any organisation, council etc. being able to nominate candidates for consideration.

The British Transport Commission was normally obliged to lay its proposals before the area TUCC, who would then examine the current position taking all relevant matters into consideration. Then their decision would go before the Central Committee for further consideration. The CTCC would then make recommendations to the Minister of Transport, whose decision would invariably reflect their conclusions.

In 1961, however, Ernest Marples peremptorily overruled the recommendations of the CTCC that the Westerham branch in Kent should remain open - an omen of what was to come!

Therefore the CTCC's main function was to satisfy itself that users had been given a full opportunity to present their submissions to the area TUCC, and that that committee, before reaching its conclusions, had given proper consideration to all of the matters brought before it, and that its recommendations were fair and reasonable. A far cry from what was to follow after 1962!!

The way in which the Committee was to (and largely still does) conduct its consideration of rail closures was summed up in the 1953 Annual Report of the CTCC as follows:

"If those representing users were to insist upon treating the Consultative Committees as Courts of Inquiry, the Commission would find it difficult to adhere to their present policy of not being legally represented, a policy which they are, in our opinion rightly, most reluctant to abandon. We are of the opinion that if the Consultative Committee are treated as Courts of Inquiry, much of their value would disappear as the spirit of free and frank discussion between all the parties with the object of finding a businesslike solution will be difficult to maintain."

Whether they were ever able to be so "free and frank" after the constraints placed upon them by the Transport Act 1962 is open to doubt, but this description largely explains the sort of creature they still are and undoubtedly will be of guidance to anyone who has to put a case to them.

CLIPPING THE TUCCS' WINGS - THE TRANSPORT ACT 1962

Despite considerable pressure over the years by RDS* upon the Government to restore to the TUCCs the wide powers they originally possessed, the procedure which now governs the consideration of rail closure proposals is still that contained in sections 54 and 56 of the Transport Act 1962, which effectively "clipped their wings!"

Firstly, as the former Railway Inauguration Society discovered when it studied Mr Marples' infamous Transport Bill (of 1961), in future there would be no preliminary enquiry by the Area Committee. All BR had to do was to serve the necessary six weeks' notice under section 56(7). Then objections had to be lodged with the TUCC within the six week period.

Thus if no objections were lodged, the closure could be implemented immediately this period expired. This position still obtains.

Therefore from 1962 onwards there was no longer any obligation to give objectors a hearing or for BR to produce a written statement of their case for closure. As a matter of general practice, however, BR do produce what they call "Heads of Information". Because of the constraints imposed by the 1962 Act, these give only basic costings and relate mainly to the means of relieving "hardship". The TUCCs can hear objectors if they feel it appropriate, in which case hearings must be held in public.

The main change made by the new Act was that contained in section 56(9): the TUCC report was only required to deal with "hardship" which would be caused to users by the proposed closure, and by implication objections can still be lodged only on these grounds.

Under the terms of the Act, however, there is nothing to prevent a TUCC considering a line before a closure proposal is published; and schemes for improving local services and reducing their cost of operation can be prepared and submitted to BR and the TUCO any time.

It remains a fact, however, that the facilities for opposing rail closures were greatly reduced in 1962 and the public's right of objection drastically curtailed - and this remains the case today.

One concession which is not obligatory (section 24) enables the Board to publish advance notice of intended closure if the Minister so requires; and in latter years (of the Beeching era) this became an accepted procedure.

Since 1962 the TUCOs have no longer been required to concern themselves with the social implications of a closure. Nor have they had power to deal with the closure of freight-only lines or freight depots. Therefore power is now concentrated in the hands of the Minister who can, if he chooses (and on many occasions he has) completely ignore the recommendations of the TUCOs.

The TUCOs are not subject to the Council on Tribunals and so far as is known the extent to which the rail closure procedure is covered by the normal principles of Administrative Law has never been tested in the Courts. The nearest it ever reached that stage was in the case of the Manchester - Buxton closure proposal (1964), where the National Council on Inland Transport retained Sam Silkin QC, to test the extent to which objectors could challenge figures presented by BR. In the event, the Minister rejected the closure proposal even before the hearing had been concluded. One wonders why?

WHAT CAN BE DONE: BEFORE THE INQUIRY

During the period between the announcement of closure and the final date for objections, as many people and bodies as possible must be persuaded to send in written objections.

People who object should be users of the service; or, if it is a body objecting (e.g. a trade union, chamber of trade, women's organisation, political party or amenity group), it should object on behalf of those of its members who use the service or are affected by it.

You will not be asked to produce concrete evidence that you use the service. Nevertheless, if you can give details of journeys on it (e.g. when you last used it; how often you use it; for what purpose you use it), this will obviously lend weight to your objection.

Your letter of objection does not have to be very long; since you may, if you wish, attend the subsequent inquiry and give full details orally. On the other hand, objectors do not have to attend the inquiry.

Because of the constraints of the 1962 Act, your objection should concentrate on hardship and inconvenience that would be caused if the line or station closes. "Hardship" may be interpreted narrowly (e.g. longer journey times; more changes of train; greater expense; even loss of income) or broadly (e.g. fewer leisure journeys, leading to deterioration in quality of life; less personal choice and freedom; more traffic on local roads leading to more congestion etc).

If a replacement bus service is offered (and this will probably be mentioned in the notice of closure or "Heads of Information"), it will probably be inferior to the rail service, and so you can make this point in your objection also. The best book to refer to, and maybe quote in evidence, is CAN BUS REPLACE TRAIN? - OR WILL THEY NEVER LEARN? (published by RDS in 1977, 45p inc postage)

A users' group fighting a closure should issue a leaflet and call at least one public meeting; and in general gain as much publicity as possible. The local press, local radio and television will usually be keen to publicise you. A pile of leaflets encouraging members of the public to object were strategically placed at Broad Street station by the North London Line Committee and no doubt helped to ensure that over 200 objections to the station's closure were received by the TUCO.

The leaflet should put the case against closure, clearly and succinctly, and encourage people to object. It should contain the address of the area TUCC, to whom objections must be sent, and give the deadline. As many people may be reluctant to sit down and compose letters to a seemingly official and distant body like a TUCC, the leaflet could contain either a simple pro-forma for them to fill in and send off; or a model letter which they could either just sign or copy out and forward to the Committee.

Alternatively, the leaflet could encourage its readers to write to the local users' group, asking the group to represent them and put any points they may wish to make. This would be particularly useful for someone who might find it difficult either to get time off work or to attend the TUCC Inquiry for any other reason - of which more anon!

Apart from distribution at stations (if local ER staff permit), leaflets could also be handed out on trains (if the guard has no objection) or outside stations (not actually on ER property); but door-to-door distribution is clearly the best way of ensuring the widest publicity. Usually libraries will be prepared to display leaflets; as will some shops, schools, colleges, council offices, citizens' advice bureaux etc.

It is also important to write to your local council - at Parish, District and County level - asking it to object. Many councils do lodge objections as a matter of course, and a considerable number of lines have been saved partly because of this Councils often put clauses in their Local, District or Structure Plans, promising to resist closure of any service in their area - and certainly any users' group should take the opportunity to urge this when any Plan goes through its consultation stage.

However, RDS representatives have also been told by one council that it did not object to a closure in its area, but that it might have done so if members of the public had written asking it to do so!

A users' group should also enlist the support of neighbouring groups. Indeed those who attended the RDS Second National Conference of Rail Users' Groups in Derby on 25th October 1980 unanimously resolved "to assist each other in the event of a closure proposal being made for any line covered by them." This promise of solidarity was put into effect when the March - Spalding line was proposed for closure in January 1981 and no fewer than ten rail users' organisations in Eastern England lodged objections, particularly because of the strategic nature of the route.

Remember that with most, if not all, lines and stations proposed for closure, users will come from more than just the immediate area of the line or station. In the case of the Broad Street closure, not only did the London & Home Counties Branch of RDS appear at the inquiry; but so did the Chairman of the Society's East Anglian Branch. For although Broad Street is not in East Anglia, people from that region use it because of its proximity to Liverpool Street, and therefore its convenience if one is travelling from East Anglia to various North and West London suburbs.

WHAT CAN BE DONE: AT THE INQUIRY

When objections to a closure are received, a sticker will be posted across the closure notice on stations announcing that closure has been deferred pending an inquiry and objectors will be notified where and when a hearing is to be held.

Do not think that the main hurdles are over, however. In the case of the March - Spalding inquiry, despite the fact that the majority of objectors came from the southern end of the line, the TUCC decided to hold the inquiry at Spalding, at the northern end, and on 31st July in the middle of the holiday season! To add insult to injury, it was discovered that the hearing was due to commence at 10.00 a.m., yet the first train to Spalding along the threatened line from March did not arrive till 10.23 a.m. The Society therefore had great difficulty in dismissing the notion that this was merely a device to limit the number of objectors who could appear; and was not alone in writing to the TUCC to complain of the unfairness of the arrangements, which drew wide publicity.

In the event, the Tucc agreed to defer the starting time to 11.00 a.m, but not to alter the venue or date of the inquiry.

Therefore, attention should be paid to matters of detail such as these if objectors are to get a fair deal, and representations made to the Tucc, and indeed the CTCC, if necessary.

As the Tuccs (since 1962) have been constrained to hearing evidence of "hardship" only at the inquiry, it has long been the practice of RDS and associated organisations to mount a three-pronged attack in relation to closure proposals. Criticisms of railway finances and suggestions for economies and publicity have long been considered to be management matters (and outside the scope of the hearing). Such matters should have been put to local ER management and the Tucc long before a closure proposal is announced; but there is no harm in reiterating them if it is considered relevant to the case being put; and/or if management have not given satisfactory answers.

Think how you may be able to exploit the venue of the inquiry. The one at Spalding was held in the South Holland Centre which, as well as having a large hall suitable for such gatherings, also has smaller rooms and a lobby that can be hired. RDS therefore hired space in the entrance lobby and mounted an exhibition for the day of the hearing. This exhibition put political points against closures in general and for more rail investment; and contrasted extravagant road expenditure with insufficient spending on railways. It also demonstrated how lines elsewhere in the Eastern Region were being improved, particularly thanks to the efforts of users' groups, and indicated the scope for similar improvements on March - Spalding.

The purpose of the exhibition was to inform other objectors and to enable the Tucc members to see the issues in a wider context. As they have probably been fully briefed by ER and taken for a trip along the line, no reason is seen why they should not be separately briefed in this or other ways. Their names and addresses are not state secrets and so should be readily available from the Secretary of the Tucc on request, should you wish to contact them before or after the inquiry.

On the actual day of the hearing, you may feel it appropriate to raise points of order if you are dissatisfied with the arrangements of the inadequacy of ER's Heads of Information. At an Inquiry in Sudbury (Suffolk) in August 1965 (once again during the height of the holiday season), the anger of objectors boiled over and severe disruption occurred because they were not satisfied as to the impartiality of the Chairman of the hearing - who was later found to be the Managing Director of a road haulage firm.

However, assuming that arrangements are reasonable, the Inquiry then becomes your opportunity to put your case over more forcefully, usually to the whole membership of the Tucc.

The Chairman will generally first read a formal statement and then ask ER to put its case. Objectors will then be called, especially if they have indicated beforehand that they wish to speak. At the end of the Inquiry, ER will be given the right to reply. The first objectors to be called will usually be representatives of local authorities; personal objectors will then be called, probably in the order in which their written objections were received.

PRESENTING YOUR CASE

When it comes to your turn to speak, this will be your chance to make your points directly to the members of the Tucc. ER officials will also be listening, as will the local media. Try to be clear, concise and informative - don't just read out what you have submitted in written evidence, particularly if the point has been made already by previous objectors. There is nothing more likely to send the Tucc to sleep. If you have any additional points to make, you may like to have a brief written summary available. This will be of considerable help to shorthand writers and to the members of the Committee.

More attention will be paid to a key issue, suitably punctuated by one or two memorable turns of phrase or slogans, than by 45 minutes of droning on. Do not feel that you must restrict yourself to evidence of hardship or inconvenience. If you wish to talk about other issues related to the particular case, do so. If challenged by the Chairman, you could always point out that you are losing a day's pay (inquiries are always held in working hours) to be there and feel strongly on this issue - strongly enough for you to ask the Committee to stress it in their report to the Secretary of State. Don't be repetitive; though by all means state briefly that you support points made by earlier speakers.

You need not, of course, just speak yourself; you may also call as witnesses people who have not personally submitted objections (possibly because they missed the deadline), provided that these are relevant to the point you are trying to make. At the Broad Street Inquiry, the two RDS representatives probably spoke for not more than 8 minutes between them, but by concentrating on one or two key issues were able to have much greater impact. This tactic can also ease your voice and make the presentation of your case more interesting. Use visuals (maps, photos, graphs etc) if you want to and ask for these to be displayed throughout the inquiry or handed round.

If you feel you need to ask questions of the BR officials present, do so. The Chairman may seek to put off these answers until the end of the hearing, but if they may affect the points you wish to make, insist on answers there and then. However, you can still come back when BR exercise their right of reply, if you are not satisfied with the answers. Several objectors did so at the Spalding Inquiry, at the end of which one BR official was heard to say to a TUCC member, "We've lost this one, haven't we?" and the Committee did indeed conclude that such hardship would be caused by the closure.

The financial information contained in BR's Heads of Information is usually scanty and, as we have seen, has often been challenged by objectors - especially if no adequate breakdown is given of operating costs. This is a point which objectors should press most forcefully, as the press will normally be quick to pick up the issue. You could, for example, ask for the hearing to be adjourned until figures are produced.

The same applies to revenue information. At Spalding, the only figures given were for passengers buying tickets at March station to travel to Spalding (and vice versa) which gave only a fraction of the true picture. For the majority of passengers used the line for such longer journeys (e.g. Norwich - Spalding; March - Lincoln), the figures for which were not shown. Local BR employees can often fill in such gaps, if known, although they will usually wish to remain anonymous.

Finally, objectors at public inquiries generally - not just into rail closures - are often advised to go dressed with a reasonable degree of formality. There is nothing to stop you going in sandals, striped socks, faded denim shorts, a bright red T-shirt, shoulder length hair and a straw hat - but on the whole it is best not to give the impression of excessive eccentricity or carelessness.

WHAT CAN BE DONE: AFTER THE INQUIRY

Don't just sit back and wait. You may have a long wait. There may be a change of Minister, even a change of Government. Keep the issue alive. What you do after the inquiry could well be just as influential as all that has gone before.

Considerations other than hardship may be taken into account by the Secretary of State for Transport when coming to a decision re closure. Indeed, section 54 of the Transport Act 1968 specifically requires him (or her) to take into account any social or economic considerations when doing so.

The TUCC's role, after hearing all the evidence, will be to submit a report to the Secretary of State, probably within 2-3 months of the hearing. Therefore, you may consider it desirable to write direct to him, especially if you feel there were points which were not adequately brought out at the inquiry; or relevant developments that have taken place since - but more importantly because the Secretary of State can (and should) consider much wider issues.

If your MP is sympathetic to your cause, he or she may even be prevailed

upon to tackle the Secretary of State on the matter and get across the strength of local feeling - more so if he or she is of the same party as the Government of the day. NB: All-party back-bench opposition to heavier lorries.

The Secretary of State took ten months to reach a decision on the March - Spalding closure, after receiving the TUC's report. When he agreed to the proposal, RDS promptly argued against its reasonableness, in a press release, and gained widespread media publicity. The same Secretary of State took even longer in the case of the Sheffield - Penistone - Huddersfield line and its associated Clayton West branch. The inquiry was held in April 1981 and the decision did not come until September 1982.

If consent to closure is refused, then there is cause for rejoicing - but this does not mean that the battle is over. All local users' groups with threatened lines must keep up pressure for improvements to, and promotion of, the service. Otherwise traffic may drop and another proposal be submitted by BR in a year or two.

Furthermore, the Secretary of State's refusal of consent will not solve the problems of finance, as has been discovered in the case of Epping - Ongar, where a battle is still raging between the Greater London Council - who at present control the activities of London Transport, which runs the service - and Essex County Council, which has adamantly refused financial support for the section of line (wholly within its area) and so the GLC is making further threatening noises about closure.

Looking further ahead, anniversaries of reprieves are also occasions for rejoicing. In 1981, the East Suffolk Travellers' Association celebrated the 15th anniversary of the saving of its line (Ipswich - Lowestoft) from the beeching axe, with a special fete.

FIGHT ON!

If the Secretary of State does agree to closure (as the present incumbent has done in at least three cases), certain other courses of action are open to objectors:

1 Challenge in the Courts: This could be done to test the validity of the decision. It is fairly virgin territory as far as case law is concerned, but territory which could be of increasing interest in the coming months, if pending litigation on another issue comes to Court, and upon which RDS may well undertake further research.

There is one useful example of a local users' group going to the Courts to halt a closure: the North Warwick Line. This line in the West Midlands, from Birmingham to Stratford-on-Avon via Henley-in-Arden, was proposed for closure in the late 1960s, the normal TUC hearing took place and it was found that the closure would cause considerable hardship. Despite all the objections, the Minister of the day eventually gave his consent to closure, but stipulated that three specific bus services should be provided before the service ceased.

BR went ahead with arrangements to close the line in May 1969 and asked Midland Red to provide the necessary bus services. Despite very great reluctance on the part of Midland Red (who were short on buses and repair facilities and told the Minister they did not want any more loss-making services put upon them), they applied to the local Traffic Commissioner for stage carriage licences, which again were granted with some criticism concerning unsuitable roads etc. Midland Red then prepared schedules and were due to provide the replacement buses when BR closed the line.

It seemed that, unbeknown to BR, the 1968 Traffic Act Amendment allows responsible local road authorities to oppose the granting of a stage carriage licence which they consider undesirable for road safety and other reasons, and the licence cannot be exercised before the appeal to the Minister has been heard and determined.

Despite all this, BR announced the closure date and replacement bus services. Consequently, members of the North Warwick Line Defence Committee, including their solicitor, who was also acting for the Local Authority, immediately applied for an injunction as their appeal against the stage carriage licence had not been heard and therefore BR had been in breach of the Minister's requirements for closure.

The case was heard at the end of April. The judge refused to grant an injunction on certain grounds but allowed appeal; the appeal being subsequently heard before the Master of the Rolls and two other justices on the Friday before the line was due to close.

An injunction was granted against BR, with very considerable criticism of their actions, and they were required to run the normal service thereafter until such time as the necessary procedures concerning stage carriage licences had been gone through. They have provided the service ever since and the injunction has never been lifted.

The majority of the line has since become the responsibility of the West Midlands Passenger Transport Executive, it has been upgraded and is not under any immediate threat. However, the North Warwick Line Defence Committee has continued to exist and to act as a passenger watchdog and a body for promoting the line.

2 Appeal to the EEC: Again, this is an area which has not been probed in much depth, but which is worth probing - as the pro-road lobby certainly do! For about three years, the European Economic Community has been working on the establishment of a Transport Infrastructure Fund, which would grant moneys to enable member states to improve their links with each other. Such links could include port and airport facilities, road and rail links to the ports, and indeed new fixed links between the states.

For this reason, the Chairman of the RDS East Anglian Branch wrote in September 1982 to the EEC Commissioner for Transport, asking him to consider the case of the March - Spalding route, which is part of a rail link for freight (and some passengers) from the East Anglian ports (with their growing continental trade) to the North Midlands and North of England.

The present Transport Commissioner is Mr Contogeorgis, EEC Commission, 200 rue de la Loi, 1049 Brussels, Belgium. If contacting him, you are also advised to inform your own Member of the European Parliament (MEP), who can be contacted at European Parliament, Plateau du Kirchberg, Boite postale 1601, Luxembourg.

If your line could not conceivably be regarded as part of a link to the ports or airports, it may still be possible to interest the EEC, especially if your area is one that could qualify for assisted status. Therefore, as well as interesting your Westminster MP in your case, you should also attempt to interest your MEP.

3 Industrial Action: This may also be a possible avenue to be explored if all else fails. It is certainly worth considering if the line is closed and BR then propose to rip up the track. The initiative of the rail unions in "black-ing" demolition trains delayed the premature ripping up of track between Cheltenham and Honeybourne and between Swavesey and St Ives (Cambs) in the early 1980s; although this can be regarded only as at best a "holding operation" (see also below, Freight Line Closures).

Even if a line eventually closes, pressure can still be brought on BR to retain the track - or one track of a double-track route - by an arrangement with the local authority. Such a holding operation is currently taking place with the Spen Valley Line in West Yorkshire. Unfortunately, however, in its present financial state, BR probably counts every mile of decent track as a valuable asset which could be used elsewhere.

It is perhaps just as important to retain the "right of way" for possible reopening - a point to be dealt with, inter alia, in a new book which RDS has compiled, Bring Back The Trains, to be published early in 1983. Here the co-operation of the local authorities is vital, as often they have first refusal from BR on disposal and quite often are interested in the formation for use as a footpath or bridleway. On the other hand, it is sometimes their keenness to see the implementation of some road improvement scheme which has softened their opposition to come rail closure proposals in the past, viz Lewes - Uckfield in Sussex.

FREIGHT LINE CLOSURES

As we have seen, since 1962 there has been no formal procedure for objecting to the closure of freight-only lines, though RDS* has always argued that there should be, and will continue to do so. All that BR has to do is to give one month's notice of any proposed closure in the local press.

However little can be done, these closures should not go ahead without protest and the Society's book RAILFREIGHT OR JUGGERNAUT (1980) gives much useful information on the issue of rail or road freight. It recounts how local authority pressure (prompted by RDS and one of its local affiliated groups) brought a 2-year stay of execution to the section of line between Ryburgh and Fakenham in Norfolk.

Our 4-page leaflet, STOP THIS HIGHWAY ROBBERY NOW! also contains some ammunition that can be employed in the argument over the relative merits of road and rail freight.

Indeed, closure of the Woodhead freight route across the Pennines between Sheffield and Manchester in 1981 brought widespread protests, and even short-lived industrial action (principally non-collection of fares and non-inspection of tickets) by local rail unions. So much so that BR eventually agreed to give evidence at an Independent Inquiry (organised by the unions) and closure was postponed. Many, including RDS, however felt that the inquiry was unsatisfactory and its results inconclusive, leaving too many loose ends; but whilst the line is now closed, the track is still in situ along the main Woodhead route - so all is not lost!

In certain cases, it may well be that a local authority would be prepared to pay for a line to be kept in situ, to ensure that railfreight continued to operate through an environmentally sensitive area; and indeed, to keep the options open for the eventual restoration of a passenger service, either by BR or by a private company. The action of Somerset County Council in helping retain the Minehead branch so that the West Somerset Railway Company could operate over it, may be of relevance here. So too may the action of Angus District Council in Scotland, in giving financial help to ensure the retention of the Brechin freight branch.

CONCLUSION

RDS is a voluntary organisation with no paid officials or substantial financial backers. It is, however, much larger than the two constituent bodies which merged to form it four years ago, and now has a growing number of local rail users' groups, and rail reopening campaigns, affiliated to it.

It will use its best endeavours to oppose all closures which are likely to threaten the prosperity and quality of life of the communities served.

But RDS cannot fight effectively alone, and in the event of a mass outbreak of closures occurring (which seems possible in view of the present precarious state of BR finances and lack of Government action), it will be especially important for local users' groups in the areas served to bear the brunt of the battle. The main purpose of this booklet is therefore to give them a quick guide to the more important issues to which they should address themselves.

RDS has established an Anti-Closure Fund, which in early October 1982, after less than six months in existence, had passed £200, and to which further donations are always welcome. These should be sent to our National Treasurer, Mr A R Macqueen, 20 Culgaith Gardens, Enfield, Middlesex, EN2 7PE.

In the event of local lines or stations being threatened with closure, the relevant users' groups (or possibly individuals) will be able to seek grants from the fund to assist them with their campaign. Applications should be addressed to the General Secretary, Mr R.J.P. Townend, St Julians, Sevenoaks, Kent.

The Society also has a certain amount of exhibition material, and a wide range of books and leaflets which may be purchased from the General Secretary, some of which are referred to in the text and summarised on the back cover. It can also supply speakers for any local campaign meetings which may be organised, so that local groups may learn from the wealth of experience which

