



Fifty years of rail success

16th March 2013

The 27th of March marks 50 years since Dr Richard Beeching published his report 'The Reshaping of British Railways', which led to the axing of almost one third of Britain's rail network.

Today, rail campaigners are celebrating numerous successes in reopening lines and stations, and a booming railway carrying more passengers than since the 1920s. "Back then, everyone thought railways were history" said Norman Bradbury from Railfuture, "the car was king and all that was needed was to manage the decline. That seems ludicrous now, when you look at the popularity of rail travel. We need more trains to cope with demand."

The Railway Development Society (RDS) has its roots in the campaigns against rail closures in the 1950s and 1960s. Campaigners fighting for rail came together to form two pressure groups – the Railway Invigoration Society and the Railway Development Association. These groups saw the need for a stronger pro-rail lobby and on 1 October 1978 merged to form the Railway Development Society, which in 2001 chose Railfuture as its campaigning name. Other groups were formed to protect particular lines and now constitute a vibrant array of local Rail User Groups, many of which affiliate to Railfuture.

Today, Railfuture can list a string of successes. "There have been 370 stations and 500 miles of line reopened over the past 50 years, all of which we pushed for" said Norman. So many, in fact, that Railfuture has filled a book with them, 'Britain's Growing Railway'. "There are plenty more positive developments in the pipeline too, such as the Waverley line, East West rail, and main line electrification. Almost without exception, reopened lines and stations have hugely exceeded forecasts" added Norman. "Ebbw valley traffic was more than five times what was forecast, and Stirling – Alloa hugely exceeded predictions too"

Railfuture believes that some closed lines and stations would be viable now if they had remained open. "Sadly, too many of them have disappeared under housing estates, roads and supermarkets. That's why it's important to protect suitable remaining disused lines and stations in order to keep our options open for the future"

But Beeching actually got a few things right. "Although he got a lot wrong, he also laid the foundations for the modern rail freight and inter-city passenger networks."

Notes to editors:

Railfuture is the UK's leading independent organisation campaigning for better rail services for both passengers and freight.

Railfuture's website can be found at: www.railfuture.org.uk

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