
REPORTS BY CHAIRMAN, MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY, COMMITTEES AND SUB COMMITTEES

CHAIRMAN**Mike Crowhurst**

The defining moment of 2007 came, as so often, in July with the publication of the Government's White Paper "Towards a Sustainable Railway" and accompanying financial statements. This did indeed contain some encouraging decisions such as green lights for major schemes in Birmingham, Reading and Thameslink, and subsequently also Crossrail, but the inclusion in the title of the word 'sustainable' was not reflected in the contents, which notably omitted any commitment either to electrification or even to protecting selected closed routes let alone actually reopening any or building any new lines. There was also a worrying reliance on fare revenues to fund improvements. If revenue fails to grow due either to economic recession or to sheer lack of capacity to carry more passengers, fare increases may well be the result. For a fuller review of the White Paper see my article in Railwatch 113. We responded along these lines both to the Minister and to the Select Committee, and a further meeting with the Minister is planned in February 2008. Meantime regular contacts have been maintained with both opposition parties and with all parts of the industry including ATOC, the Railway Forum and Passenger Focus, and at local level with TOCs around the country and Network Rail.

The year end saw a period of major change with no fewer than five new franchises coming on stream in November just before the December timetable changes and the January fare increases. Whether or not these bring improvements remains to be seen, but one very welcome development at the same time was the completion of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link and of the new St.Pancras station. This was accompanied by much discussion about further construction of new lines, but without any lead from government, for now "HS1" remains High Speed One-&-only! The May timetable did, however, bring one long promised improvement - a half-hourly Leeds-London service, albeit only five days a week. May also saw the last appearance of the printed national rail timetable in its old format.

Internally 2007 has been a year of consolidation without major changes, although the new constitutional and electoral arrangements agreed at the AGM in Preston will no doubt take some time to bed in as they come into effect during 2008. Many of the tasks previously carried out by John Lee have been outsourced, Lloyd Butler will be taking over the Lottery from Elisabeth Jordan, but media and sales roles remain to be filled. Our Summer conference took us north of the border (but nevertheless attracted as many English as Scottish members!) to hear about developments in the more favourable climate now prevailing in Scotland with at least two major routes in the process of restoration, other new links and serious electrification in prospect. Sadly the weather failed to live up to the standard of the previous year, but made up for it at Ely in November when an impressive turnout of over 130 heard from a succession of local campaigners from all parts of the country on campaigns in progress.

In March 2008 we will be hosting in London the AGM of the European Passengers' Federation, and in May our AGM returns to the Midlands, but to Coventry rather than Birmingham. At the time of writing there are plans in gestation for a conference in Salisbury on 5th July and another in November in London on high-speed plans, hopefully at "St.Pancras one year on". AcoRP's Railfest is also likely to be on the south coast for the second year running, so we will need to ensure that the north of England gets an opportunity to host events in 2009.

MEMBERSHIP**David Harby**

Membership at the end of 2007 was 2472 with 116 family members counted as two. (31.12.2006 = 2541)

Over the past 15 years the annual loss has been consistently close to 10% of the membership every year. I now write to all members who fail to renew asking them to tell us why. During 2007 around a third decided to renew when they received this letter and another third had either died or were seriously ill. This is in addition to about the same number where the family had already notified me of a death. Taking all this into account I doubt if there is much more we can do to reduce losses. *We cannot fight the Grim Reaper.*

We are recruiting new members but not enough to replace those we are losing. Websites are now our most fruitful source of new members but we cannot rely on these alone. The next best recruitment method is something that has always been with us - personal contact by existing members. These are also the new members who tend to stay with us over the long term. I therefore urge all members to try to recruit a friend.

To finish I would like to thank those branch membership and other officers who have been proactive and helpful to me in 2007.

RAILWATCH**Ray King**

Four issues of Railwatch - with eight pages of colour in each issue - were produced in 2007, thanks to contributions from *railfuture* members. We have held production costs steady throughout 2007.

In 2007, the editorial board included Jerry Alderson, Lloyd Butler, Alan Cocker, John Barfield, Laurence Fryer, Ray King, Graham Morrison and Robert Stevens. It is also helped by Railondon and email discussion group editor John Davison.

Distribution continued to be carried out efficiently by the professional firm, Mailhandlers. They have provided excellent service throughout 2007 although their prices increased substantially during the year.

Several hundred copies of Railwatch continue to be sent to MPs, peers, rail passenger committees, rail-orientated companies, local authorities and the media, as part of our campaign to keep opinion formers properly informed on rail issues. The list of those who receive Railwatch free is maintained by David Harby. The editorial board meets four times a year in London.

We have met on four occasions, at Peterborough twice, and once each at Derby and Hull respectively. The latter was an interesting site visit courtesy of Associated British Ports, where our host provided an accompanied tour of their maritime facilities. This complex features a fully enclosed and integrated steel-handling warehouse for direct ship to rail and road haulage loading.

Whenever possible, we have submitted detailed and/or synopsis papers in response to relevant consultations from The Office for Rail Regulation, House of Commons Select Committee and Government including the devolved Welsh Assembly administration. Notable outputs have also included the publication of a comprehensive report to demonstrate opposition for trials of Longer Heavier Vehicles. The consultants TRL who are working on behalf of The Department for Transport have acknowledged our document for inclusion in their research. Meanwhile we have written to The Secretary of State for Transport and Members of Parliament on this emotive subject matter.

Mention should also be made of our close ties with the Freight on Rail collective. This influential lobby organisation maintains regular communications with us on topical and often urgent items for consideration.

We attended a Rail Freight Group conference in London, where our delegate made some useful contacts on the day, and a pre-public enquiry meeting held in Ipswich where the promoters outlined their planned improvements to a yard and branch line that connects the main container port of Felixstowe with the national rail system.

We have established a number of principal campaign priorities to better target our efforts. Central to these is our renewed focus on land use and planning with the proactive lobbying for rail connections or passive provision to be incorporated in large scale refurbishment or new build construction developments. This is a vital area to safeguard disused sites, influence decision makers and push for rail connectivity at bulk, general goods and interchange traffic generators.

Going forward, we will continue to press for the maximum use of rail for bulk and long-distance freight transit and where appropriate over intermediate and short distances to reduce the reliance on heavy commercial vehicles other than those engaged in last mile combined logistics services.

POLICY LOBBY AND CAMPAIGNS COMMITTEE & TRANSPORT ACTIVISTS ROUNDTABLES**Norman Bradbury**

As usual the committee met in February, June and October during 2007. Secretary Norman Bradbury represented the committee at some seven Core TAR and four Regional TAR (Transport Activists' Roundtable) meetings, as well as two with the Transport Taxation group and two with the All-Party Parliamentary Climate Change group, to which we are affiliated. In addition Norman represented the committee on the Core TAR delegation that met Sir Rod Eddington and his team at the Dept for Transport in April 2007. The meeting was felt to be a constructive one.

Norman also attended two conferences on sustainability on the committee's behalf - organised by the Railway Forum and by the Rail Safety & Standards Board.

Lobby meetings were held during the year with then LibDem Transport spokesman Alistair Carmichael in March and with his successor Susan Kramer in November. Both these meetings were felt to have been useful and it is clear that LibDem transport policy aligns closely with ours.

Following the Rail White Paper, Chairman Mike Crowhurst requested a further meeting with Rail Minister Tom Harris (the last was in December 2006), and this is planned for February 2008. In the meantime the Minister has been sent our comments on the White Paper and has acknowledged receipt of these.

For the Conservatives, committee member Keith Dyall (London & South East Branch Chairman) has requested a meeting with new Shadow Transport Secretary Theresa Villiers but was offered a meeting with her junior, Rail spokesman Stephen Hammond instead. This took place in January 2008.

NETWORK DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**Jerry Alderson**

The Network Development Committee met three times in 2007 with other work being done outside the meetings.

The new larger version of the A-Z of Reopenings book, which will be called Britain's Growing Railway, is progressing well. Completely revised since the 1998 edition, the historical openings have been brought up-to-date whilst Nick Dibben has been working on a section explaining the process to follow to get new stations opened. Nick Lewis is co-ordinating the photographic content, and he would appreciate photos of new and reopened stations that show the railway in a good light. At the moment it is not possible to give a publication date as the committee is still searching for someone to project manage the editing, publishing and publicity.

The committee has conducted much research on the future of electric trains in the UK and thankfully the industry, if not the DfT, have put it back on the agenda. We intend to issue a six-page glossy paper on electrification during 2008. It is important that we focus on multiple solutions to enable electric trains to operate on the whole network, for example exploiting the emerging battery-assisted technology where appropriate, rather than limit our campaign to just the mainlines and feeder routes where expensive continuous electric infrastructure can be justified. A mock-up of the paper has been produced and is now being refined. Committee members have also written articles for *Railwatch*, whilst others have been actively promoting enhancements to the network. One notable success is David Bill, who has finally won agreement from Network Rail to reinstate the level crossing at Sheringham.

We have processed three Fighting Fund applications, vetting the proposals and bidders to ensure that profits from the Annual Draw and members' donations are properly used. All were successful. The largest award was £500 to SELRAP towards their professional reopening study by JMP consulting. We look forward to receiving more applications in the 2008. Forms can be downloaded from the *railfuture* web-site.

The International & EU Committee met three times in 2007, in London, Derby and again in London. The year saw the opening of the second and final stage of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL) or "High Speed One" as it has become known, and the transfer of Eurostar services from Waterloo to St Pancras. There was much media coverage of the opening of St Pancras International, which helped to publicise the new, faster services between London and the Continent. However, Eurostar stubbornly persisted with their misguided plan to withdraw the Brussels service from Ashford and to transfer the stops to the new station at Ebbsfleet, which currently has no direct rail connections.

The committee will continue to lobby for the reintroduction of a Brussels service from Ashford and we praise the tireless efforts of Edith Robson and others in keeping this issue prominent in the public domain. The opening of St Pancras International saw the very welcome introduction of through ticketing from many UK stations to Paris, Lille and Brussels although initially these were only available by phone to Eurostar's call centre and not from the actual station booking offices. Such madness could only happen under the UK's ludicrous fragmented rail structure. The committee was consulted on a questionnaire produced by the European Passengers' Federation (EPF), which was aimed at Eurostar users so that they could provide feedback on the changes to Eurostar services with the opening of St Pancras International and High Speed One. The findings from the questionnaire are to be incorporated into a glossy report, which should be published in 2008. On Eurotunnel, we were pleased that a new charging regime was agreed for through freight trains and this will hopefully boost traffic levels from the dismal level reached in 2007.

Railfuture is affiliated to both EPF and AEDTF and below International & EU Committee member Mark Booker gives a report on the activities of AEDTF in 2007:

AEDTF (European Association for the Development of Rail Transport) will celebrate its 20th anniversary in 2008 as a pan-European organisation concerned with the promotion of all aspects of railway transport. In 2007 one of its major achievements was in mediating an acceptable new route for the Lyon-Turin TGV line through the Italian Alps, overcoming strong environmental opposition to the previous official line of route. 2007 also saw the entry into service of the new French TGV Est line with services provided both by the SNCF and DB following campaigning by AEDTF for through services to German destinations such as Stuttgart, Frankfurt and Munich. The TGV Est also allows new faster transits to Switzerland via Strasbourg. AEDTF continued to expand its very comprehensive website and information links on railway timetables, facilities and other matters of railway interest across Europe. The site may be accessed at www.aedtf.org.

AEDTF continued to encourage new open access freight services in Europe in a bid to reverse the serious decline in freight traffic under the old monopoly operators such as SNCF. Expansion of membership continued into Eastern and Central Europe with the recruitment of Romanian Railways as a new member. Taking up the suggestions made to it by *railfuture*'s International & EU Committee, the next AEDTF AGM will carry specific reports on the three main strands of its activity during the year, namely European railway infrastructure development, railway passenger issues and railway freight issues, a structure which *railfuture* parallels at a national level.

PASSENGER COMMITTEE**Howard Thomas**

During the year, the Passenger Committee has continued to monitor the threats to passenger services in different parts of the country arising from: fares; fare increases; refranchising; rail utilisation studies; rail closures and micro-management of the railway by the Department for Transport (DfT). 2007 also saw the publication of the Government's White Paper on Rail - Delivering a Sustainable Railway: a 30-year strategy for the railways? (CM7176), and a major shake-up in the franchising of train operating companies. 2007 also saw DfT's continued involvement in micro-managing the railway in matters such as timetabling and refranchising.

The Passenger Committee was particularly disappointed with the White Paper. The commitment not to close any rural or regional routes "in this plan period", and to continue support for community railways is welcome, as far as it goes. However, in spite of widespread support for a number of schemes such as Cambridge-Oxford, Colne-Skipton and Lewes-Uckfield, the White Paper does not foresee the reopening of previously closed lines. The committee was also concerned that the White Paper appears to effectively rule out the safeguarding of disused rail alignments. Ruling out the possibility of safeguarding these alignments seems to the committee to be symptomatic of Government's failure to consider the longer-term aspects of delivering a holistic transport policy.

The White Paper contains some welcome commitments to deal with longstanding "pinch" points in the network at places such as Birmingham and Reading, and to go ahead with the long-delayed Crossrail project. It is also pleasing to note that the long-delayed Thameslink project has cleared yet another hurdle, despite it being at least another decade before completion. There is, however, a number of other worthwhile projects that are just not considered at all (eg: the approaches to Manchester Piccadilly). The commitment to procure 1,300 new passenger coaches is welcome.

As ever, the committee is concerned that there is no coherent policy for electrification, and that the DfT appears to be finding excuses not to electrify. Symptomatic of this is the unwillingness of the Government to consider electrification of the Barking to Gospel Oak line, a potentially important freight route bypassing Stratford. The recent fiascos on the West Coast and Great Eastern main lines when Christmas blockades overran were a result of this short sightedness.

The White Paper proposes to pay for investment through fare increases. As users, *railfuture* members are naturally concerned that this will hit the passenger in the pocket. The idea that rail customers should pay for investment through higher fares comes at a time when airlines have rejected a similar notion for recovering investment in new aircraft, air traffic control, and airports through higher fares. The committee knows of no other industry or sector in which it is normal to expect the customer to pay for investment through higher charges. Indeed, it is neither normal nor good business practice to source major capital expenditure from revenue. Passengers are not shareholders, and do not receive dividends. More seriously, we are concerned that this demonstrates that pricing off surplus demand is once again official policy at a time when Government should be encouraging people to transfer from road and air transport to rail.

During the year, meetings involving members of the passenger committee took place with ATOC, the Minister for Rail (who disagreed that DfT was micro-managing the railway), and Passenger Focus. These meetings covered most of the issues mentioned above. However, those attending the meetings were not reassured that ATOC or the Government was listening to users' concerns. The playing field is still not level. Proposed improvements to rail are too easily dismissed as just another railway project by an unwilling Government, and fare rises above inflation, often twice per year, seem to go on relentlessly.

The Committee has been slowly collecting information on a wide variety of local concessionary rail fares schemes which are already in operation in England. In addition to the well-known PTE schemes, many district and unitary authorities also offer discounted local rail travel, or in some cases a discount on the purchase of a Senior Railcard. It remains to be seen how many of these schemes will continue to be funded once the National Free Bus Travel scheme comes into force.

We will continue in 2008 to pursue the issues of fares, refranchising, rail utilisation studies, rail closures and the extent to which rail can provide a service to spectators travelling to all the Olympic venues. Let us once again remind ourselves that it is Parliament, Government and their officials who let us have the railways we now have.

OFFICER FOR DISABLED TRAVELLERS

Clara Zilahi

Disability issues are continuing to have an increasingly large profile in the railway scene, as in other spheres. New facilities, now including railway units, are required to be "accessible". We are concerned that some still serviceable units could be required to be scrapped to comply with the law, which, given the existing shortage, would hit services hard, and be of no benefit to people with disabilities. Given adequate human help (which could mean requiring a member of staff to be available) the so-called "inaccessible" units could be accessed by wheelchairs. Replacement buses are also supposed to be accessible, which is a practical impossibility for wheelchairs, with high step coaches, and the only alternative in case of bus replacement is for a taxi to be provided. Only heritage and charter trains, if substituted by buses, are exempt from this requirement.

Booking facilities are gradually being adapted, normally when being refurbished, to allow wheelchair access, install induction loops etc. Facilities for both visual and auditory information are provided increasingly both at stations and on-train. As an experimental gesture, Arriva trains introduced a scheme whereby a space is reserved for assistant dogs when help is being booked.

Pre-booked help is mostly satisfactory, but there are the occasional failures when complaints have to be made. I have had very few complaints come to me. Unfortunately some of those that did reach me, usually by telephone, did not provide adequate information. If something has gone wrong, such as promised help not turning up, it is essential that the complaint should state full details of service, date and time. In one or two cases my request to the complainants (who were not visually handicapped) for further information, in writing, brought no response and I was not able to follow up the complaint.

The ongoing problem of trains refusing to take powered wheelchairs seems closer to a solution. It is now clear that a genuine wheelchair user must be allowed to take a powered chair provided that it is within the size limits specified for wheelchairs (thus excluding some very obese people from the privilege), provided there is adequate space on the unit. For a powered chair this must include turn-around space and users would be well-advised to check this when advance booking. The problem of access to trains (and seating elsewhere) is being increasingly extended to involve those not actually disabled, but either temporarily handicapped by luggage or small children in tow, and those not fitting into the standard measurements. New units should allow for increasing average height and girth, either in all seating, or by having some seats with more leg space and wider single seats.

CYCLING SUB-GROUP

Chris Hyomes

2007 has been spent developing contacts within the new Train Operating Companies following the many franchise changes throughout 2007. The new TOCs are keen to work with the cycling sub group, but it's going to be a long hard struggle to improve on what we already have.

May saw the launch of Northern Trains' cycling policy document and the Northern cycling forum continues to meet on a regular basis. Persuading other TOCs to form cycling forums is a priority of the sub group for 2008. Other priorities are to keep up the pressure for safe, secure cycle parking at stations and improved access for cyclists.

HOW MEMBERS CAN HELP RAILFUTURE

Nearly all *railfuture* campaigning is funded by our members. As well as making a donation with your subscription there are other ways of helping *railfuture*.

Can you recruit a new member? Membership leaflets can be downloaded from the www.railfuture.org.uk web-site ("Join Us") or by contacting the Membership Secretary, 6 Carral Close, Brant Road, Lincoln LN5 9BD. Please consider some of the ideas suggested in the "Time for Action" section in each edition of Railwatch. Why not volunteer to take an active role in National and local branch activities?

Try to attend one of *railfuture*'s national events. The AGM will be held at Warwick Road Church Centre, 14 Warwick Row, Coventry. CV1 1EX on Saturday 10th May 2008. There will be a national conference at Salisbury Guildhall on Saturday 5th July 2008 and a High Speed Conference is being planned for November 2008. Join the *railfuture* Lottery. 50% of receipts are paid out as prizes each month. The remainder of the income, after deduction of expenses, is allocated to our Campaigns Fund. Details from Lloyd Butler, Railfuture Lottery Organiser, 24 Chedworth Place, Tattingsstone, Suffolk IP9 2ND.

Consider making the Society a beneficiary of your will. Please consult your solicitor for advice on how to do this.

RAILFUTURE'S MISSION STATEMENT

To be the number one advocate for the railway and rail users