

Yorkshire Rail Campaigner

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railfuture Yorkshire

President: Gerald Egan; Vice-President: Alan Whitehouse

Cross-Bradford Rail Link Scheme back on the Agenda!

by Graham Collett and James Vasey

A new proposal for a cross-Bradford rail link was announced by businessmen **Andrew Mason and John Pennington on May 21st**. It would involve replacing the current Interchange and Forster Square stations with a new glass-sided four-track central station on a new viaduct across Leeds Road, linking into the planned Westfield retail mall. The estimated cost is £100million.

The idea of linking the two separate rail systems north and south of Bradford is not new. It has been advocated by Railfuture Yorkshire, and rail users' across the area for many years. If coupled to electrification of the Halifax – Bradford – Leeds route, this would offer significant savings in operating costs and release valuable development land at both the existing stations.

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Bradford Forster Square Station, which could be replaced by a new central station linked to the planned Westfield retail mall, under the new proposals (photo

Gregory Deryckère, courtesy Creative Commons Attribution ShareAlike 3.0 Licence)

Forthcoming Events

Saturday 5th June: **Hull & East Riding Rail Users Association AGM 14.00 Wilberforce House Learning Centre, adjacent to the Streetlife Museum of Transport, High Street Hull** with *Guest Speaker George McManus, Chairman of the Minsters' Rail Campaign* <http://www.minstersrail.org.uk/>

Saturday 19th June: **Railfuture Yorkshire Branch Meeting in Doncaster** with *Guest Speaker Tom Clift, MD of Grand Central Railway* – see page 4 for details

Saturday 3rd July: **Railfuture Summer Conference in Taunton** (details at <http://www.railfuture.org.uk/tiki-index.php?page=Taunton+conference> or see Railwatch)

Saturday 18 September: **Railfuture Branch Meeting in Saltaire**

Saturday 13 November: **Railfuture Rail Reopenings Conference in London** (details at <http://www.railfuture.org.uk/tiki-index.php?page=London+2010+conference> or see Railwatch)

Press Date for September 2010 issue

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Pontefract & District Rail Services – the World ends at Knottingley!

by Peter Cookson & Graham Collett



There are plenty of passengers waiting for this north-bound train to York as it rolls into Pontefract Baghill station in the early 1980s (photo P Cookson)



The first direct train to London for many years (the 1321 to Kings Cross) pulls out of Pontefract Monkhill station on May 23rd 2010 (photo P Cookson)

There is not a shadow of doubt that Pontefract Line services are the Achilles' heel of West Yorkshire services as a whole and fall well below the standard of the others. A glance at the West Yorkshire rail network map clearly shows only two services described euphemistically as "limited" - Leeds-Goole beyond Knottingley and Sheffield-Pontefract-York. These are the only ones that have got steadily worse over the last two decades while all others have got significantly better. **It is as if the world ends at Knottingley and direct travel from the Pontefract/Knottingley area to the North, East and South, is effectively impossible.**

The reason for this sad state of affairs relates to the re-drawing of the West Yorkshire boundary in 1974. The unnatural bulge of North Yorkshire into former West Yorkshire territory in the Selby district has left a complex series of boundary intersections in the area east of Knottingley and this has had a disastrous effect on rail services. But this is not all. The service from Wakefield Kirkgate to Knottingley is unique as there is no other service on Metro that is so short and runs between two such inconsequential end-points. All other services have logical end-points such as a major city, an important railhead or a market town. Kirkgate to Knottingley is merely a segment of service, which has been in existence for 18 years without improvement, even though the original intention was to run from Leeds to Knottingley via Wakefield giving the Pontefract/Knottingley area a half-hourly service to Leeds alternately via Castleford and Wakefield.

Before the re-building of Leeds station, the reason for not fully implementing the scheme was given as congestion at Leeds west end; but on completion of this work the reason then given was shortage of stock. Even the main service of Leeds to Knottingley via Castleford did not become hourly until the opening of Glasshoughton station in 2002. **At the present time there is the longest gap in service in the evening peak (1hr 16min) of any Metro service, leading to severe congestion.**

It will always be claimed that there are other priorities and a scarcity of resources but that has not prevented considerable improvements of services elsewhere in West Yorkshire. With much of the funding for rail services coming from general taxation **it cannot be right that good services in affluent areas should be underwritten by second-rate services in poorer areas** recovering from the loss of heavy industry with the consequent need for regeneration.

There is nothing inherently unsustainable about the Goole and York services; they were deliberately sabotaged in the 1980s to provide stock for other services, but leaving a rump so as to avoid the need for a legal closure. Leeds-Selby and Leeds-Goole make an interesting comparison. **Goole and Selby are roughly equivalent market towns of about the same size and yet Selby enjoys a service of two trains per hour while Goole is only served by one train a day!** Bearing in mind that there is a greater population along the Goole line, this obviously cannot be right but it does not need a series of expensive consultative reports to establish what should be perfectly plain. (continued on page 4)

Congratulations to Halifax & District Rail Action Group on their 25th Anniversary - celebrated in Brighouse on 15th May. This was also the 10th Anniversary of Brighouse station being reopened!

Stop Press: Our best wishes go to Northern, who have had their franchise extended by 2 years. It will now run to 15th September 2013. Well done all!

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Chairman's Column by Chris Hyomes

Some questions and answers for you

Q Last year when torrential rain destroyed two road bridges, splitting Workington in two and sadly killing a police officer, did it make headline news that the railway came to the rescue of local people so quickly? **A** No, and in fact on the BBC iNews the night before the temporary road bridge opened, they implied that the two halves of Workington were being rejoined for the first time since the devastating rain several months early. No mention was made of the key role the railway had played in Workington over the last few months.

Q When Euro Star trains broke down in the Channel Tunnel due to the extreme weather conditions in northern France did we hear about it? **A** Yes - it was headline news for days!

Q When snow brought the roads of Yorkshire to a standstill in the New Year did it make the news that the trains had kept running? **A** No

Q When the cloud of volcanic ash brought European airports to a standstill did the media tell us that railway services in Britain came to the rescue of stranded passengers? **A** No, all that was shown on national TV was queues of people trying to get home via Eurostar, giving the impression that the Eurostar service was inadequate as it could not handle the volume of passengers' wishing to travel.

I don't think it takes a genius to work out the common thread here indeed as Alan Whitehouse said in his talk at our March AGM, good news does not make the headlines! It is a fact that the way in which news is reported can influence the decisions we make in our lives. Therefore if the press will not report good news stories, then every time rail succeeds over other modes of transport we - the members of Railfuture Yorkshire - must and I repeat must, press home the advantages of rail. MPs, councillors and all key decision makers must be made aware of the advantages of rail - it is no good just telling them when things go wrong!

Finally, I hope to see you all in Doncaster on June 19th.

Cross-Bradford Rail Link (continued from page 1)

The new station would also be more central for the city centre and the planned new offices and shops and is just what is needed to aid the city's continued recovery from the recession.

James Vasey, Chairman of Bradford Rail Users' Group (BRUG), said: "We hope that WYITA/Metro will give strong consideration to the scheme and take it forward to Government. We will be lobbying our Councillors and MPs hard to ensure that investment comes to the whole of West Yorkshire, and that this scheme provides a catalyst across the county." BRUG are currently developing a website for Bradford cross-rail which will be accessible from their own site at <http://www.brug.org.uk> BRUG point out that the proposed rail-link would occupy half the width of the existing cross-Bradford road link. (our thanks to BRUG and the Bradford Telegraph & Argus <http://www.thetelegraphandargus.co.uk>)

Railfuture Yorkshire Summer Meeting - Saturday 19th June
Priory Place Methodist Church Printing Office Street Doncaster DN1 1TR
<http://www.priorymethodistchurch.org.uk/> starting at 2pm

Guest Speaker:

Tom Clift
Managing Director
Grand Central Railway



Grand Central's new West Riding service started on 23rd May. Branch Chair Chris Hyomes and Peter Cookson (Pontefract & District Rail Users) were on the platform at Pontefract to see the first train leave. Three services a day will run from Bradford Interchange to London, calling at Halifax, Brighouse, Wakefield Kirkgate, Pontefract Monkhill and Doncaster (for details see their website at: <http://www.grandcentralrail.co.uk/west-riding-timetable.html>)

Directions for getting to the meeting: Turn left out of Doncaster station into the Frenchgate Centre. Walk through the centre and leave by the St Sepulchre Gate exit. Turn right into St Sepulchre Gate and continue south. Turn left into Printing Office Street and the Church is on the right opposite the end of Priory Place.

Everyone welcome

Pontefract and Knottingley Rail Services (continued from page 2)

The Pontefract & District Rail Action Group (PDRAG) is well aware of the difficulties faced by Metro and Northern Rail but these have not prevented significant service improvements on other Metro routes. A first step could be to extend the Knottingley-Wakefield service to Leeds via Westgate. **This would bring enormous benefit in creating a half-hourly Leeds service from the Pontefract area, while greatly improving journey opportunities from Featherstone and Streethouse.** It would also rationalize the western terminus of the service and avoid the need for providing an extra platform at Westgate.

We understand that Network Rail has objected to increasing the number of trains between Wakefield Westgate and Leeds there are currently only five per hour on a line generally free from freight traffic. In the view of a number of professional railwaymen this could be increased and, if necessary, the Knottingley train could run non-stop from Westgate to Leeds.

This move would not address the unnatural termination of services at Knottingley but PDRAG has recently put out a consultation paper showing how the problem could be solved to provide **much better journey opportunities to such destinations as York, Goole (for Humberside) and Doncaster** (copies are available from p.cookson@talktalk.net)

The Five Towns corridor from Castleford, Glasshoughton and Pontefract to Knottingley has a population of nearly 100,000 and includes one of the largest leisure destinations in the North of England. The lack of direct rail communication to the North, South and East is a major handicap to regeneration and needs to be tackled. Visitors to Xscape, for example, from all these directions have to travel by road, which only increases congestion at Junction 32. The station at Glasshoughton is ideally placed to serve the leisure complex but is used only by an hourly Leeds-Knottingley local service. **The PDRAG paper addresses these issues.**

The problems associated with the Sheffield-Pontefract-York line are of a different kind, as this is not a Leeds-based commuter route, but the section south of Moorthorpe is served by the Leeds-Sheffield local service. The present derisory service fails to meet even basic needs, but a 2-hourly service, including early and late trains, would allow most needs to be met including onward connection at York and Sheffield.

As part of speeding up and rationalizing Cross Country services, there is probably a good case to be made out for a **new core service between York and Birmingham designed to service smaller population centres,** which would permit an acceleration of main flows serving only major centres. Such a service could make a stop at Pontefract for the Five Towns.

But on May 23rd, Pontefract Monkhill was suddenly back on the "Inter-City" map as London-bound trains returned - see above! Let us hope that this will lead to better services in the area for ALL rail users.