

FIGHTING FOR THE RAILWAYS

THE STORY OF THE RAILWAY INVIGORATION SOCIETY

formerly the Society for the Reinvigoration
of Unremunerative Branch Lines in the United Kingdom



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General Secretary 1961-1968

originally written for
THE RAILWAY INVIGORATION SOCIETY, LONDON 1978

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Preface

When Railway Invigoration Society chairman Rowland Banks suggested a history of the society to celebrate its 21st anniversary, ideas for this book were already in embryo. It only needed a slight nudge and a suitable deadline to start things rolling. That it has taken a year, longer than originally intended, merely serves to indicate the author's relative inexperience in these realms. Nevertheless we hope that the work which follows will interest the reader.

Much has been written about the economics of railways during the 150 years of their existence and it is not proposed to add to it, neither is it intended to evaluate in technical terms the changes which have taken place in the organisation and operation of British Rail during the 21 years covered by this book. There have been many books on this subject, too numerous to mention, although we have tried to summarise those of more particular significance in the bibliography on page 255

During more than two decades of Railway Invigoration Society activity, many changes have taken place on Britain's railways, not the least of which in the size of the system and the scope of activities. There was much turmoil in the earlier years in the field of management structure. Although this has been reasonably stable in recent times, a continuing uncertainty has remained as to the proper role of the railways in the national transport system. Some would even suggest that they no longer have an effective role at all, other than in certain specialised fields.

The society was founded by those who considered that the closure of financially unremunerative rail services which nevertheless served a significant social need was contrary to the public interest. Such a need was acknowledged, albeit belatedly, in the relevant provisions of the Transport Act 1968, and it goes a long way to confirm that members are not cranks and sentimentalists as many would have had it in the 1950s and 1960s when the motor vehicle was considered the "be all and end all" of transport.

While this work cannot be regarded as a complete review of rail closures over the past 20 years, it does cover a large cross-section of those with which SRUBLUK has been closely associated. It also deals with a number of specific subjects in detail relevant to the railways and their future in the transport system, together with the changes in legislation which have taken place during this period.

I am considerably indebted to those members of the society who responded to the appeal for historical material relating to the early days and in particular to Nigel Watt, a founder member, for his advice and encouragement. I have received much support and encouragement from Dr Michael Caton, Roland Banks and other principal officers of the society in addition to valued advice on more technical matters from friends in British Rail. I am particularly grateful to Klaus Meyer and Dr Arthur Daniel of the Railway Development Association for guiding me through some of the pitfalls in the section on freight and parcels handling.

I must also express my thanks for the continuous advice and assistance received from Louis Hipperson on matters of referencing and general presentation and in checking the text, and to Janice Morphet for advice on town planning matters.

Author's note

As is inevitable with a work of this nature, since the text was finalised a number of the views expressed have been overtaken by events, in particular those in Chapter 6 on the future of Freightliners were echoed in evidence to the Select Committee on Nationalised Industries which in its First Report (1) came out strongly in favour of their return to the control of British Rail and this was subsequently provided for in the Transport Act 1978 and has since been implemented.

On the assessment of road schemes and the accuracy of the traffic forecasts, the outcome has been even more dramatic with the decision in the 1977 Transport White Paper (Command 6836) to limit spending on road building and concentrate on the improvement of public transport, particularly in rural areas. The Report of the Leitch Committee (2) set up by the Department of Transport because of increasing public disquiet over the conduct of motorway inquiries and in particular the evidence submitted to them, has gone a long way to vindicate the arguments contained in Chapter 7 (pages xxxx-xxxx) finding that the actual traffic flows of some completed schemes have been as low as half the rates predicted by the Transport and Road Research Laboratory.

[The Road Research Laboratory was set up in 1933, became the Transport and Road Research Laboratory in 1972, became an agency of the Department of Transport in 1992 and was privatised in 1996]

As to the future administrative framework for transport in the United Kingdom, the idea of a National Transport Council, contained in the 1976 Green Paper, was rapidly overtaken by the setting up of a separate Department of Transport, in the autumn of that year, with its own minister of cabinet rank. The position of the railways themselves has, however, improved with the development of new methods of freight transit which combined with a new dynamic leader in Sir Peter Parker (British Rail chairman 1976-1983) and increased pressure on the road haulage industry from European Economic Community rules and regulations has led to a situation where freight traffic, as it is now required to do, could well make a profit in 1978. The introduction of the first High Speed Trains in the autumn of 1976 and their gradual extension to the London-Edinburgh run should also do much to project a forward looking image for BR in the late 1970s and with the Advanced Passenger Train not far behind, the prospects for the 1980s look even better. More significantly the railways are in a better position to cope with the problems which are likely to arise when world oil supplies go into decline, an event which may be nearer than we think.

Finally not wishing to give away the whole of the plot – if indeed there be one – we will leave it to the reader to trace the events which have led to the present state of transport thinking. It is also most encouraging to be able to report that in April 1978 the Railway Invigoration Society and the Railway Development Association resolved to wind up their separate activities and to form a new onward looking organisation, to be known as the Railway Development Society, to strengthen the voice of those campaigning for the retention, modernisation and greater use of rail transport and this came formally into existence on 1 October 1978.

November 1978

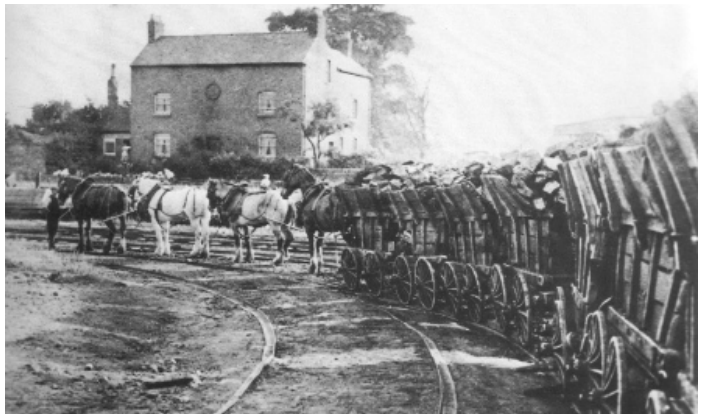
(1) First Report from the Select Committee on Nationalised Industries. Session 1976-1977. HMSO. May 1977 para 271-6

(2) Report of the Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment. HMSO 1977

Historical introduction

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the advent of the industrial revolution had brought in its wake the desire and necessity to move goods in ever-increasing amounts at a faster rate. Up to that time most bulk traffic had been carried by the extensive system of canals which had been built up during the latter part of the eighteenth century. Roads at the time were little more than cart tracks and were to remain so well into the century due to the fragmented nature of road administration, at parish level and through the turnpike trusts. Even though Thomas Telford and John McAdam were to pioneer improved methods of road construction early in the century it was not until the Local Government Act of 1894, which consolidated responsibility for the maintenance of highways, and made the newly formed county councils (1888), responsible for the main through roads, that any significant progress was to be made in that direction. (1) In the meantime the rapid growth of the railways in the early decades of the century largely ousted road and water transport as the principal means of inland conveyance.

The first railways, as such, developed from the wagonways which were used in the sixteenth century to carry coal from the mines in Northumberland and Durham to the staithes or waterside loading depots, mainly on the River Tyne, with the long-distance bulk haul undertaken by sailing vessels or coasters or by canal barge. These wagonways were made from wooden beams or shaped stone tracks, where such material was readily available as in the Haytor Granite Tramway on the edge of Dartmoor. Later, iron plates were used to protect the wood, and L-shaped rails came into use for guiding the wagon wheels. Flanged wheels and I-shaped rails of wood, later metal, were also used. A third form of railway using flat rails and guided by a peg in a central slot was also



Picture: WIKIPEDIA

End of the line for wagonways: Benjamin Outram's Little Eaton Gangway in 1908 when the last train of loaded coal wagons arrived and the gangway closed. It was built in 1795 by Outram who built canals and other tramways. The gangway was built as a six km feeder line from collieries such as Denby Hall to Derby Canal. Some people believed the word "tramway" derived from Outram's surname but others say the word comes from the Low German word "traam" meaning "a beam" (of a wheelbarrow). Outram always referred to tramways as railways. Outram used flanged rails with which his name has become associated. More than 60 years after his death, his company produced the ironwork for London's St Pancras station

tried but was not used extensively. In the case of I-shaped rails, guidance was by the flange on the wagon wheel. With L-shaped rails, the wheels were flangeless and guidance was afforded by the rail and by this means the wagon could also be used on a road. (2) These plateways or tramways spread to South Wales and it was there in 1804, that a Cornishman, Richard Trevithick, produced a steam locomotive capable of hauling a 20-ton load.

Also developing the steam locomotive was George Stephenson who persuaded the owners of a railway between Stockton and Darlington that steam power would be a better means than horses to pull the trucks and, in 1825, drove the first train behind Locomotion No 1, an engine of his own design. [Locomotion No 1 has been on show at Darlington station for 160 years and appears on the town's coat of arms]. In 1826, after much

opposition, mainly from the canals and landowners but also from the road lobby, Parliament agreed to the building of a railway between Liverpool and Manchester. The railway directors wanted the trains to be pulled by fixed engines hauling on wires but Stephenson persuaded them to give locomotives a trial. They held a competition on the line at Rainhill in Lancashire with a prize of £500 for the best engine. It was won by Stephenson's locomotive Rocket and the railway opened in 1830, using eight of Stephenson's locomotives. Stationary engines were, however, used on many short lines such as the London and Blackwall Railway of 1836, 3.5 miles in length, but it was the

Locomotion remained in service on the Stockton & Darlington Railway for 25 years. But in 1828 its boiler exploded, killing its driver John Cree. It was rebuilt by Timothy Hackworth who set up the Soho works at Shildon and who remained resident engineer until 1840. This picture shows how it was turned out for the 100-year birthday celebrations of the railway in 1925. Since March 2021, Locomotion has been on show at the railway museum at Shildon which was expanded in 2004. The museum has also been renamed Locomotion. The museum is home to several locomotives from the National Collection, including a replica of Timothy Hackworth's Sans Pareil which took part in the Rainhill Trials in 1929 on the Liverpool and Manchester Railway which opened the next year .



Picture: NATIONAL RAILWAY MUSEUM

free-running locomotives which were to set the seal for the future of the railways as we know them today.

It was notable that the neurotic nature of the road lobby's opposition was to echo events in our own time. On the third reading of the Bill for the Liverpool and Manchester Railway in the House of Commons an effort was made to postpone the reading by six months. Sir Isaac Coffin, seconding a wrecking motion, said: "What was to be done with those who had advanced money in making and repairing turnpike roads? What was to become of coach makers and harness makers, coach masters and coachmen, inn keepers, horse breeders, and horse dealers? Was the House aware of the smoke and the noise, the hiss and the whirl, which locomotives passing at the rate of 10 or 12 miles an hour, would occasion. Neither the cattle ploughing in the fields or grazing in the meadows could behold them without dismay. Iron would be raised in price 100% or more or probably be exhausted altogether! It would be the greatest nuisance, »the most complete disturbance of quiet and comfort in all parts of the kingdom, that the ingenuity of man could invent!" (3)

Despite opposition from Sir Isaac, the Liverpool and Manchester Railway, 30 miles long, was started in 1826, the year after the opening of the Stockton and Darlington but while the latter was still basically a colliery railway, whose main purpose was to transport coal from the mines to the wharf, the Liverpool and Manchester was the world's first line intended to form the principal link for all classes of traffic between two large cities. Although the lines were about the same length, the Liverpool and Manchester was built on a substantial scale with heavier engineering and with double track throughout and there was never any question of using



One of the early enemies of the railways was Sir Isaac Coffin. He seconded a wrecking amendment to the Liverpool and Manchester railway bill in 1826. He opposed the ending of flogging in the Royal Navy and scoffed at the notion of slavery abolition.

Sir Isaac who was born in Boston, Massachusetts, retired from Parliament in 1826 and spent most of the rest of his life in America.

He had served in the Royal Navy until 1794 and was described as a "strange old madcap", treating his wife "abominably".

horses to pull the trains.

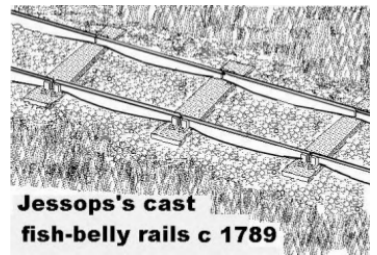
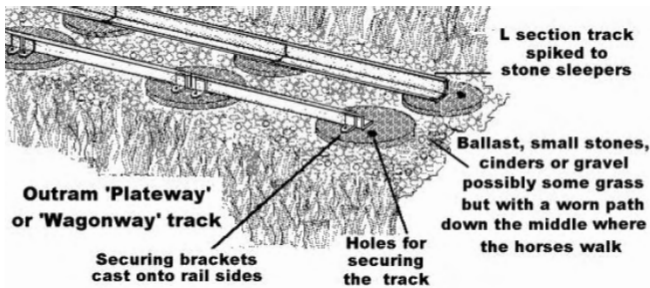
The earliest line in southern England was between Canterbury and Whitstable, opened in 1830. It included the world's first railway tunnel, but since much of the line was uphill the trains were hauled up the slopes by cables attached to a fixed winding engine, similar to the example quoted earlier. Locomotives were also used and Invicta which hauled the first passenger train on the railway can still be seen at Canterbury. [Since 2019, in Whitstable Community Museum and Gallery].

The type of track used on the earlier railways had also developed due to the increased weight of the steam locomotives. The period of popularity of the L-shaped rails had not lasted long, probably about 100 years. The I-shaped rail and flanged wheel reasserted itself, mainly because it was more practical at level crossings and point work, while also offering less rolling resistance. The early rails were only about three-feet long, of cast iron with a fish belly, supported at the joints and carried on stone or timber sleepers. These were soon replaced by wrought iron and subsequently by mild steel for longer life and easier production. Development of rails, fixing and trackbed have continued to this day and new methods are still being tested for ease of production and maintenance.



Picture: Whitstable Community Museum and Gallery

The Invicta steam locomotive was built by George and Robert Stephenson for the world's first steam locomotive passenger railway. The line ran from Whitstable to Canterbury and opened on the 3 May 1830, four months before the Liverpool to Manchester line

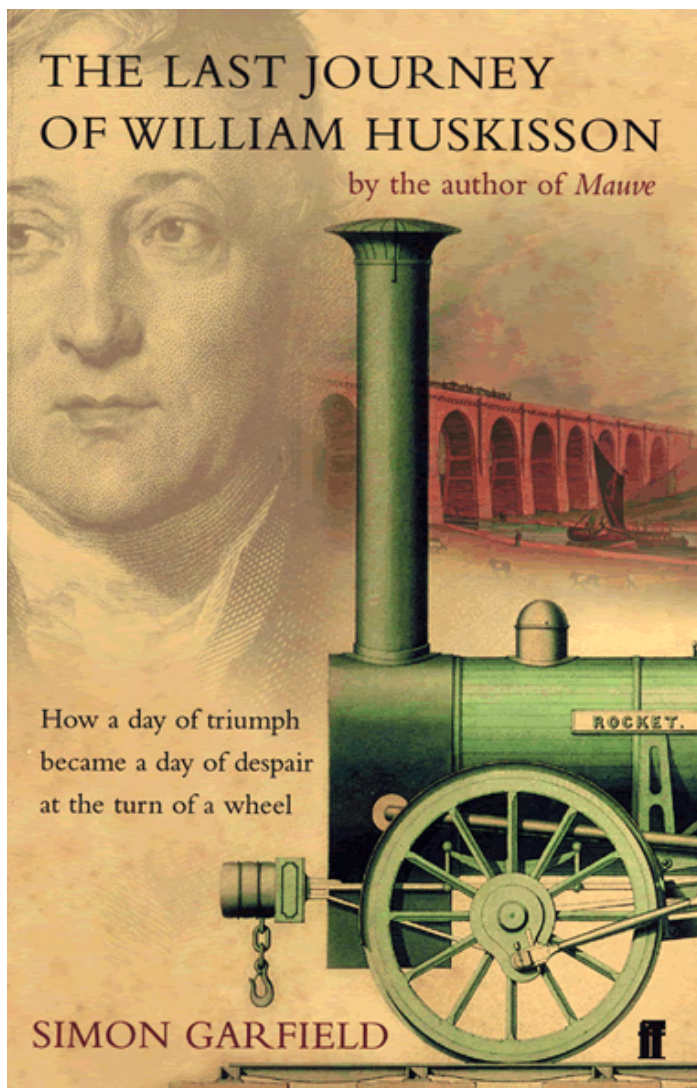


Pictures: WWW.IGG.ORG

Signalling

The next most important development in railways was signalling. When the first railways were built, it was on the basis that the line would be open to any one who could provide an engine and carriages or wagons, paying a toll for the use of the track, similar to the canals and turnpike roads. However, it soon became obvious that this principle was unworkable, particularly with the need for increasing overall control by the operating company in the interests of safety and efficiency.

The first recorded railway accident involved MP William Huskisson who was knocked down and killed by the engine Northumbrian on the day the Liverpool and Manchester Railway opened in September 1830. In the early days, engine braking systems were very primitive and in an emergency the driver quite often had to reverse his engine to stop the train. It therefore became obvious that some form of signalling was necessary if accidents were to be avoided. At first this was carried out by "policemen" who were stationed at intervals along the track and controlled the passage of trains by flags, lanterns or by hand and arm



Simon Garfield's 2003 book tells the story of the tragedy which coincided with the dawning of the railway age. The first notable railway accident took place on the Liverpool and Manchester Railway when accident-prone statesman William Huskisson was killed by Robert Stephenson's Rocket at the Rainhill trials of 1830. Huskisson died with a speech in his pocket celebrating steam engine pioneer James Watt and the "glory" of technological progress

signals, which were based on the time which had elapsed since the passing of the previous train.

As the speed of trains increased it was found that signals by a man with a flag or lantern, standing at track level, were not easily detected in time to prevent an accident by the driver of an approaching train and it was found necessary to resort to a more prominent mechanical means of signalling. At first, this was effected by rotatable masts with shaped boards and the Liverpool and Manchester Railway installed rotating disc signals within four years of its opening in 1830. On the London and South Western Railway, disc signals were introduced in 1840. The boards were not always disc-shaped as the design varied with the different companies, but this description is useful to distinguish them from the semaphore which came later.

An alternative, which appeared in 1840, but did not catch on was to use a ball which, when hoisted to the top of a mast, indicated that the line was clear. In North America this method was used for many years and the word Highball still means All Clear on American railways.

After a time, disc signals were gradually superseded by semaphore signals of the type which can still be seen on lines which have not been converted to colour light signalling, the first semaphore having been installed by C H Gregory on the London and Croydon Railway in 1841.

By the time the electric telegraph was invented, signalmen were invariably positioned in huts or "boxes" controlling a number of signals by wires from a frame and this new technology made possible a much better system of communication between them. As traffic speeds increased further, the time-interval system was also gradually abandoned in favour of block signalling whereby not more than one train could be in a block section, between two signal boxes on the same track at any one time.

A number of different systems of block telegraph were introduced, mainly the "single needle telegraph" and the "single stroke bell", the latter being preferred due to the high incidence of illiteracy among staff, and the ease with which the bell code could be understood. The two systems were later to be used together, the needle telegraph being an ideal system for broadcasting information without unduly distracting the signalman, which was to survive into the era of the all-electric area control cabin.

By the 1870s it became common for signal and point levers to be combined in one frame so that they could be interlocked to prevent the signalman displaying signals which conflicted with the position of the points. In the early days the two functions had been separate with signalmen in cabins and points men at levers beside the track.

As the railways developed so did the pressure for greater regulation of operation in the interests of safety. As is all too often the case, it took a number of serious accidents before any measures were taken. The first statutory control was contained in the Regulation of Railways Act of 1840 which sanctioned the appointment of inspectors by the Board of Trade, the

government department for many years responsible for railway matters. In the early days of its operation the scheme provided for the inspectors to examine the works before they were open to traffic and for the railway companies to submit periodic returns including the number of accidents which had occurred which involved personal injury.

It soon became apparent that this scheme was not effective as there was nothing to prevent a line being opened which was not entirely to the satisfaction of the board inspectors. The rules were tightened up in the 1842 Act which made it mandatory for Board of Trade approval to have been obtained and adequate safety measures provided before a line could be opened. (4) Further railway development was accompanied by greater control over operating safety but it was not until the Regulation of Railways Act of 1889 that most of the safety measures that we know today, such as block signalling and continuous braking became mandatory. (5)

The strict controls which were applied in Britain were not however universally adopted in other parts of the world even where similar traffic conditions prevailed and in many instances the control of the block sections between stations is the responsibility of the station master whilst the points and signals are under the control of an official in another office. A typical scene on a local station in northern France as recently as the 1950s was the sight of the station master's wife operating the signals from a ground frame at the end of the platform or within the station building, a far cry from the large signal box high on its plinth way out in the wilds at the end of the platform.

In general though outside Britain, the same intensive operating conditions did not exist and simpler forms of signalling could be used with reasonable safety. Nevertheless with the strict rules regarding fencing, bridges, level crossings and the British tendency for full-height platforms and quite elaborate stations, combined with the difficulties of compulsory acquisition, which will be dealt with in more detail later, our railways were probably the most expensive to build, averaging £42,486 per mile during the period up to 1884, when compared with other systems of the period. (6)

It has been necessary to dwell on this aspect of railway development in some detail as, in no small measure, it contributed to the financial ailments besetting the railways in latter years. Other aspects will be touched upon at appropriate points.

Returning to the early development of the railways during the 1830s, the nucleus of the main line inter-city network was laid down commencing with the London and Birmingham Railway. By 1841 it was possible to travel by train from London to Brighton, Southampton, Bristol and Birmingham whilst branching or extending from the London and Birmingham Railway were lines to Liverpool and Manchester, Leeds, Derby and York. These lines had not been in operation for more than a few years but they soon proved two things to the nation. First of all, they gave a useful and convenient service for passengers and freight which was also of great advantage to the districts they served in opening up new markets for their produce. Secondly, as we shall see later, the early railway companies were profitable, and paid a very reasonable return on the money invested in them. (7)



This cartoon of a Railway Map of England (A Prophecy) was published around 1845 in Punch magazine in response to the rapid growth of the railway network and specifically Charles Pearson's proposal for a subterranean railway from London King's Cross to Farringdon. Pearson lived just long enough to see the first test trains rumble through the Metropolitan line tunnels in the 1860s. His ideas came at a time when dozens of proposals for new lines, both subterranean and conventional, were before Parliament. The Punch map was intended as a parody but it included the Channel Tunnel which became a reality about 150 years later – in 1994.

By 1841 there were 1,500 miles of railway in operation in Britain. For the next couple of years there was rapid but fairly steady growth. The Government was to maintain some control over the development of new schemes both by careful debate in Parliament and by requiring them to be approved in draft by a commission set up for the purpose, which had to consider both the public need for any new railway and also its effect on existing lines. This commission was, however, short-lived and was abolished in 1851 by the Government, as an economy measure. (8) Its formation had in many ways been prompted by the railway mania of 1844-1847 which had overshadowed in its magnitude the boom of 10 years earlier.

During this period the public had caught on to the idea of a national grid of railways which *Punch* magazine ridiculed by publishing a satirical map of the future, with lines in all directions, but which 50 years later, came to look fairly accurate.

Combined with the actions of politicians and economists there had also crept in an element of greed. Many of the schemes put forward in 1845 were ill-considered and in some cases downright fraudulent. Many lines were, however, built in the full knowledge that they would not be profitable. One example was Scotland's Far North Line promoted by the third Duke of Sutherland. The profit came from the land appreciation not the railway. Some land owners, of course, induced people to invest in railways which would benefit themselves and not the investor but it should be borne in mind that most of these lines served a solid social purpose and considered as a network, were viable.

For a time it was possible to enrol as a subscriber to a railway scheme, receiving shares for a nominal payment, which could then be re-sold at a substantial profit so eager was the throng of speculators. The mania reached its peak during the 1845-46 session of Parliament when it became necessary to set a deadline for the submission of schemes and a near riot followed, with special trains and stage coaches bringing promoters from all parts of the country with their boxes of papers and rolls of plans. Porters struggled to close the doors of the Board of Trade offices against the crush. For a time the country went completely mad (not unlike the motorway mania) and quite a few smooth operators made substantial fortunes. Other people were not so lucky and lost all. At its peak in 1846, 4,540 miles of railway were sanctioned but not all of these were constructed.



Pictures: WIKIPEDIA

The third Duke of Sutherland came up with the idea of building a line through miles of largely deserted lanscape, from Dingwall to Thurso and Wick in the Far North of Scotland. Completed in the 1870s it was absorbed into the Highland Railway in 1884



Dunrobin Castle station was built in 1870 to serve the the 3rd Duke of Sutherland's home. Originally a private station, it was closed in 1965 but reopened in 1985. The castle is the most popular tourist destination in the area and in 2018, more than 100,000 people visited it. Only a small percentage, however, arrive by rail



This picture of a Parliamentary Train shows the interior of a third class carriage in 1859, 15 years after the Railway Regulation Act was passed by Sir Robert Peel's Conservative government, requiring train companies to provide cheap tickets. The act demanded that at least one cheap train service per day be run on every railway route in the UK. A cheap ticket was defined as not more than one penny a mile. Railway companies reluctantly complied with the law.

During the 1840s Parliament had also laid down the broad legal framework for the railway system which was to remain largely unaltered for the rest of the century. A department had been set up at the Board of Trade with powers to regulate railway safety, as described earlier. Minimum standards of service were laid down, such as the requirement that each line should run at least one train a day, at an average speed of at least 12 mph, carrying passengers at a fare of not more than a penny a mile – the Parliamentary train – and the state was empowered to control or reduce the charges of any company which paid unduly large dividends. (9)

Legislation on company law and minimum legal requirements were codified in the manner described earlier but otherwise, the companies were allowed to operate without undue state interference. There was no strategic plan for development of routes and provided promoters could raise enough money railways could be built anywhere. By 1850 there were some 6,500 miles of line open and the railway was not unlike today's main line network. Thus, from the Liverpool and Manchester had sprung the London and Birmingham in 1838, the first long-distance main line. These railways were united in 1846 to form the London and North Western

Railway, which later spread to the Scottish border at Carlisle and to the Welsh port of Holyhead, whence steamers provided a connecting service to Ireland. It spread westwards to Hereford and Swansea and eastwards to Huddersfield, Leeds, Peterborough and Cambridge.

The Great Western Railway ran from London to Bristol, stretching to Exeter, Plymouth and Penzance and also through Birmingham and Worcester to Chester and Birkenhead. The engineer of the Great Western was the famous Isambard Kingdom Brunel who, to permit high speeds, adopted a broad gauge of 7ft between the running rails instead of the 4ft 8ins chosen by George and Robert Stephenson. This latter gauge was the distance between the rails on the old wagonways and there is archeological evidence to suggest that it was also the distance between the wheels on the ancient Roman chariots.

However in the "Battle of the Gauges", the Stephenson gauge won the day, probably by the sheer mileage of it and in 1892, the GWR was adapted to the standard 4ft 8ins. There are still people in railway circles who believe that Brunel was right and that everyone else was wrong but that is all now a matter of history.

In southern England, there was the London and South Western Railway running to Southampton, Exeter and Plymouth and also the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway. The Kent coast was served by the South Eastern and the London, Chatham and Dover Railway Companies, each of which had its cross-channel steamboat service to France, but which were merged early in the 20th century to form the South Eastern and Chatham Railway.

In eastern England, the Great Eastern Railway linked London with Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk and Cambridgeshire and the Great Northern formed a second main line between London and the North of England as far as Doncaster. The North Eastern Railway continued from Doncaster to the Scottish border at Berwick-upon-Tweed and served surrounding areas.

North of the border services were run by the North British Railway from Berwick, through Edinburgh and Dundee to Aberdeen and through Glasgow to Mallaig in the West Highlands. The Highland Main Line was less extensive than the North British and ran northwards from Perth to Inverness and Wick.

The Midland Railway fanned out from Derby to York, London, Bournemouth, Swansea and Carlisle, where it linked with the Glasgow and South Western. From Carlisle, the Caledonian Railway formed the northern part of the route to Glasgow, Edinburgh, Perth and Aberdeen.

The Great Central Railway was the last main line to be built (and was the first to close). This line was a descendent of the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway which was part of the Watkin "empire". Watkin was also chairman of the Metropolitan and the South Eastern Railways and the construction of this line was the final fling in Sir Edward's ambition to have a line of railway from Manchester to the Channel coast. The line's name was changed to the Great Central once the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway extension southwards to its new London terminus at Marylebone was completed in 1899.

Compulsory purchase and railway finance

The subjects of compulsory purchase and railway finance are inescapably linked as the methods of acquisition open to the railway companies materially affected the level of funds required to promote a scheme.

In the early days one of the attractions of railway investment had been the high returns on capital which were obtained by investors - in the region of 9½% in the case of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway in 1830. (10) Statutory companies like railways canals, harbour and water companies were, for the first half or more, of the nineteenth century the sole place, apart from land, where the middle classes could invest money with any security.

Until the first Limited Liability Act in 1855 investors in other than statutory companies could be held liable for its debts in the event of insolvency.

Whilst in smaller schemes it might have been possible to acquire lands for the works voluntarily, the construction of a railway invariably required a large degree of compulsion and the only method by which authority could be obtained was by means of a special act of Parliament, which also authorised the raising of the necessary capital. In the great age of canal building from say 1770-1830 and latterly with regard to the railways from 1830 onwards, many

hundreds of such acts were passed authorising private companies to construct and run canals or railways and authorising them to acquire for this purpose the specified lands. Prior to 1845, each such act was a complete code of compulsory purchase but the obvious inconvenience of passing such lengthy acts for



each compulsory acquisition led Parliament to pass the Lands Clauses Consolidation Act 1845. This act did not authorise compulsory purchase but merely laid down a standard code which could be incorporated, by reference, in every special act passed after that date. This need for a special act of Parliament was the reason so many firms of engineers and surveyors set up their offices in Westminster so as to be near Parliament.

Like motorway building in the 20th century there was much controversy over the construction of railways. Many agreed it was a good idea but did not want the railway running near or through their land. It was for this reason and the opposition of landowners that many lines and stations are some distance from the places they serve and in some cases take illogical and circuitous routes.

Railway acts also contained provision for "accommodation works". that is works carried out for the benefit and convenience of owners of land adjoining the undertaking with a view to reducing the injury suffered by such owners in consequence of construction of the railway.

In the case of private acts authorising the taking of land for railway purposes and incorporating the Railway Clauses Consolidation Act 1845, the railway company had to provide:-

1 Such gates, bridges, arches, culverts and passages over, under by the sides of or leading to or from the railway as might be necessary for the purpose of making good any interruptions caused by the railway to the use of lands on either side of it.

2 Sufficient posts, rails, hedges, ditches, mounds or other fences for separating the land taken for the use of the railway from the adjoining lands not taken, and for protecting such lands from trespass, or the cattle of the owners or occupiers thereof from straying, together with all necessary gates and stiles.

3 Such arches, tunnels, culverts, drains or other passages, either over or under or by the sides of the railway as might be sufficient at all times to convey the water from the lands lying near or affected by the railway.

4 Proper watering places for cattle of any occupier of lands lying near the railway if the cattle would be deprived of access to their former watering places.

But promoters could not be required to make accommodation works in such a manner as would prevent or obstruct the working or use of the railway, and owners or occupiers might agree to accept compensation in lieu of accommodation works.

In other than railway cases there was, and still is, no obligation on an acquiring body to undertake the making of accommodation works unless the special act expressly so provides but in many cases at the present time local authorities and other public bodies, particularly in connection with road works, do carry out "accommodation works" or "works of reinstatement" in the shape of new fences and hedges, new boundary walls, gates etc. There are also provisions in the Land Compensation Act 1973 for local authorities to pay for the double glazing of properties which might be affected by noise nuisance from new roads, (11)

Provision is also made in the Railway Clauses Consolidation Act as to rights to minerals under the land, which normally remain the property of the original owners, but with conditions as to working to safeguard the formation of the railway.

Provision as to reversion in the case of abandonment is also contained in railway acts and it has often been necessary to look back to the original enabling acts to discover who has the right to lands when lines have been closed and the land declared surplus to operational requirements. The position has, however, been clarified in the British Railways Act 1968, which abolished rights of reversion. The manner in which the British Railways Board obtained this act has, nevertheless, been severely criticised by the Law Lords but its validity would appear to be unimpeached. (12)

A typical example of the obstacles which had to be overcome is contained in Charles Mowat's account of the Golden Valley Railway in Herefordshire. Whilst this is a somewhat latterday example (1876) the legal principles are no less valid.

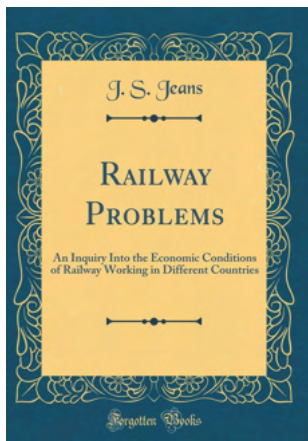
"Before the scheme could be implemented, a petition for a bill and an estimate of expenses had to be presented and the Standing Orders of both Houses of Parliament for railway bills complied with by giving notice in the *London Gazette* and in local newspapers and the deposit of detailed plans and sections with the clerks of the peace and the town clerks of counties and boroughs through which the railway would pass; the clerks of the parishes which it would traverse, and the deposit with the Accountant General on behalf of the Supreme Court of Judicature of a sum equal to 5% of the estimated costs of the works."

These formalities help to explain the heavy legal and parliamentary costs which any railway, large or small was put to before it could start construction. If there was opposition to the bill the costs soared, because then the promoters and opponents, represented by counsel

instructed by solicitors had, after the second reading to put their case before a Select Committee of both Houses of Parliament. Professor Mowat concludes: "It is an artificial and expensive, if inevitable way of discovering the merits and objections to a railway scheme." (13) The final parliamentary expenses of the first section of the line from Pontrilas to Dorstone, a distance of just over 10 miles came to £4,743 as against £5,636 for most of the land and £47,084 for the construction. (14)

Because of the limited parliamentary control over railway promotion much abortive expense was incurred by rival schemes. In the case of the London to Brighton railway, where there were five different proposals, £180,000 was spent in arguing the merits of each. In order to obtain its act in 1845/6 the Great Northern Railway and its allies were forced to spend £433,000 steering the Bill through Parliament. Allowing for the costs of its opponents about half a million pounds had to be spent before even the first sod of earth could be cut. (15) J. S. Jeans estimated that up to 1882 about £16 million had been spent by the railways in securing parliamentary powers, an average of 2% of the companies' capital outlay. (16)

On the wider question of land costs, as compulsory purchase law and principles of compensation were only in their formative stages landowners in many cases held railway companies to ransom before they would part with their property, and prices were paid well in excess of the true value of the land. Before the days of the Lands Tribunal disputed claims were referred to a jury and in one instance, in the case of the London & Croydon Railway, a claim of £4,500 for 14 acres of land was reduced to £2,6650. On the other hand as has been explained earlier some landowners quickly appreciated that a railway near at hand could increase rather than lower the value of their property and were willing to settle with the railway company for a reasonable amount.



A number of estimates have been made of the costs of land as a proportion of the railways' total costs. In 1887 J. S. Jeans estimated that, at an average costs of £4,000 per mile, the railways paid about £76 million, representing about a tenth of their total capital expenditure, on acquiring some 235,000 acres of land. In 1952, after examining the finances of a sample of 27 companies, Harold Pollins found that they had spent 13.9% of their capital in purchasing land. (17)

Moving to constructional costs the estimates for these were in many cases wildly over-optimistic. In the case of the North York Moors Railway in the 1830s George Stephenson's estimate of £48,000 for the line between Whitby and Pickering was to be completely overshadowed by the actual cost of £105,000, leaving the company with an intractable debt. (18)

It has already been mentioned that the costs of construction of Britain's railways were very high and the following comparison highlights the issue. At an average cost of £42,486 per mile, up to the end of 1884, as against £36,508 in Belgium, £27,704 in France, £21,236 in Germany and £11,000 in the U.S.A. it would appear that the British system was expensively and extravagantly built. (19)

Whilst the return on shares in the early days of the railways had been quite attractive, in the later years of the railway mania between 1845-7 it declined sharply, mainly as a result of the extravagant promotion of many uneconomic railways and excessive levels of competition. The

average dividend on share capital which had been 5.48% in 1845 fell to 3.3% in 1850. (20) Consequently investors were no longer eager to subscribe to ordinary shares and demanded the greater security offered by preference shares and debentures. This, like many other expedients used by railway companies during their early history was an expensive way of raising money. When the Golden Valley decided to raise £20,000 in 1878 by this means, it had to pay 6% per annum for seven years.(21)

Many of the later lines such as the Metropolitan, the London, Chatham and Dover and others were built with substantial bank credit and the contractors who had built the earlier lines began to take a greater financial interest in their construction. In the heyday of railway building they had built up vast armies of men and equipment and when the boom was over were reluctant to disperse these resources so painstakingly assembled. As many railway companies were short of funds and investors were becoming more reluctant to risk their money in that quarter a bargain was struck between the contractors and the companies and the use of Lloyds Bonds became a not unusual method of payment for work.(22) Once the necessary parliamentary approval had been obtained for a line the contractors would be guaranteed continued employment provided they were willing to accept payment by way of mortgage bonds or by shares in the company. (23) The Golden Valley was just such a line and the extension from Dorstone to Hay would never have been built without the help of Chambers, the contractor, who put up money for the parliamentary deposit of Bills and allowed the directors to pledge debentures issued to him as security for temporary loans raised by them. (24)

The estimated incomes from many of the lines were also quite often as erroneous as those for constructional costs. In the early days of the Whitby-Pickering line about 4,000 people used it each month but in the early 1840s passenger income for a time plummeted to a calamitous £1 per week, the lowest in the country.

The Golden Valley some 40 years later was no exception. In its first prospectus it anticipated receipts of £10 per mile per week which would have sufficed to pay a dividend of 4%; even £8 a mile would have produced 3%. In the event the line never earned more than £2-10 per mile per week, a fair figure for such a line. (26)

It could be argued that some of these latterday lines should not have been built but their precarious existence was in many ways a direct result of their isolated entity rather than as part of a wider network where economies of scale could have been achieved.

Nevertheless where, as in the case of the Golden Valley, the lines were built with considerable local capital it must be conceded that if local people chose to spend their money on this type of enterprise, however unprofitable, they had every right to do so and had a far greater say in transport matters than is often the case today.

With small, if any, profits the raising of further capital by railway companies became an increasing problem between the late 1870s and the First World War, particularly with the enormous growth of Britain's overseas investment and the many other secure outlets for surplus funds which became available with the introduction of limited liability companies. In these circumstances it was much more difficult to finance the necessary modernisation and improvement of the system desirable for improved efficiency. Nevertheless prior to 1914 the railway companies never found it necessary to call for government help in raising capital.

At the time when the railways were built Britain was one of the most developed industrial countries in the world and the heavy cost of railway construction was not considered too high

a price to pay for the substantial economies in transport costs the railways made possible. The fact that this part of the capital expenditure of the railways was some 16% (13.9% in respect of land and 2% on parliamentary costs) and could with added government control have been much less is of no small consequence. At the turn of the century Britain's position as an industrial power was being ousted by Germany and the U.S.A. and its share of the market reduced by the cheaper products of these countries. (27) The increased costs of conveyance due to the British railway companies' need to recoup their high capital costs were reflected in these higher prices. Had less money been required to cover these capital expenses more would have been available for the improvements in technology referred to earlier which could have gone a long way to improve their competitive position when their monopoly was eroded by the development of road transport.

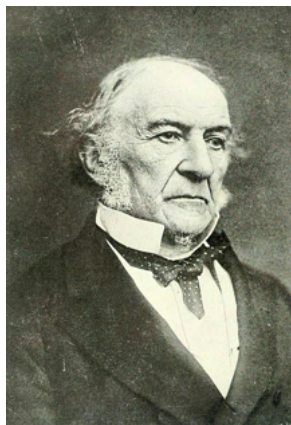
Government Control - (or lack of it)

As we have already seen state control of railway building in Britain was minimal and lines were built on a laissez faire basis with private capital and without an overall strategic plan. In many other countries the development of railways was more rigorously supervised, as in Belgium where in 1834 it was enacted that main lines should be built and operated by the state. In France a railway law of 1842 decreed that the routes of new railways would be decided by government engineers and that private companies would only be granted leases to work lines on a contract basis.(28) In Canada for instance the construction of the railway was an event of historic importance. At the start of the railway age British North America was merely a collection of widely separated colonies. Only the railway could bind these settlements together into the country which was to call itself Canada. In fact certain of the colonies only consented to become provinces of a united Canada on condition that a railway was built to link them with the industries and markets of the centre. The Canadian Pacific Railway was British Columbia's price for joining the confederation.(29)

Apart from the process of obtaining parliamentary approval, railway companies in Britain were free to run their own affairs subject only to the statutory controls on safety which were to become an increasing and, in the case of many rural lines, a burdensome feature of their operation. As we have seen, the only period of significant control over the promotion of schemes was that exercised by the Government in the 1840s which lasted, at the most, seven years. Whilst in the early days it had been intended that lines should be open to all carriers, by

1839 it was clear that this was impracticable. Thereafter each company eventually obtained a monopoly over its particular route but the principle of competition was still maintained. The high capital cost of building competing lines was however an inherent deterrent to its operation in practice and as smaller lines were gradually merged to form larger companies with extensive networks in a particular area, the monopoly position increased. One solution to the problem put forward by Gladstone,

William Gladstone proposed nationalising the railways in 1844 (more than 20 years before he became prime minister) but the Railway Act was watered down after opposition from railway companies



President of the Board of Trade in 1844, would have led to the eventual nationalisation of the railway system but, whilst the necessary powers were obtained in the Railways Act of that year the original provisions of the Bill were watered down as a result of considerable opposition from the railway interests. In any event its powers were not retrospective and the 2,000 miles of line already open to traffic would have remained outside its scope. By 1854 what vestiges there were of government control had been largely eroded and efforts were subsequently concentrated on minimising the more undesirable effects of the companies' monopoly position.

This largely manifested itself in the form of controls over the railways' level of charges and restrictions on the giving of undue preference to particular customers. The Railway & Canal Traffic Act of 1854 laid down obligations on the companies as common carriers making it mandatory to accept all traffic offered to them. The Railway and Canal Traffic Act of 1873 established the commission to ensure compliance with these obligations and by 1888 a similar Act had been passed which consolidated the provisions requiring the companies to publish their rates and charges for all traffics and made provision for statutorily agreed maxima.

One body which was to be of considerable assistance in implementing these requirements was the Railway Clearing House. Set up in 1842 this was not a Government-sponsored organisation but was intended to perform a similar function to the banker's Clearing House once the various local railways had spread to form the nucleus of an overall network. It assisted in the apportionment of receipts for through traffic in carriages and wagons between the various companies over whose lines they travelled. It was able to provide a neutral ground upon which these costs could be fairly assessed and also a useful forum for the discussion of matters of mutual interest.⁽³⁰⁾ Membership, or otherwise, of this body could in many cases materially affect the prospects of a particular line as the experiences of the Golden Valley were to show. ⁽³¹⁾ The Clearing House's ability to achieve standardisation of operating methods and in technical matters such as braking systems was not exploited to the extent that would have been desirable. ⁽³²⁾

Because of the increasing monopoly position of the railways public attitudes hardened and by 1894 restrictions on the raising of rates were so severe that it became impossible for the companies to operate with any degree of commercial freedom, a situation which was to remain until as recently as 1962. ⁽³³⁾ These restrictions were to be a continual burden on the railways and severely limited their ability to compete when the challenge of road transport emerged in the early 1900s. State intervention therefore gradually increased and by the time of the Railways Act 1921 finance was becoming an important consideration.

The construction and operation of railways up to 1914 was very capital-intensive and no less labour-intensive; an aspect of railway management which was to make a profound impression on David Lloyd George, prime minister during the crucial period when the second scheme for the nationalisation of the railways was mooted.

In his opinion operation of the railways prior to the Great War had been wasteful because of the outdated principles of competition which had been perpetuated by successive governments.

In some areas services were duplicated or even tripled while in others a barely adequate service was provided by one company. The debate over the appropriate size of a national railway system goes back at least as far as 1854 ⁽³⁴⁾ but the American transportation expert A.

M. Wellington proved in 1887 that the doubling of the mileage of British railways between 1855 and 1875 (from 8,335 to 16,658 miles) was accompanied by an increase in passenger journeys from 118.6 million to 507 million, more than fourfold. Receipts more than doubled from \$104.6 million to \$286.3 million, whilst working expenses in the era before strict legislation only increased from 47% of receipts in 1860 to 54% in 1875. (35)

One feature which was to increase the operating costs of the railway companies in the early decades of the present century was the concept of the eight-hour day. This developed from the increasing pressure of the emerging railway unions over the conditions of work of their members and, not unnaturally, excessive working hours was one of the first abuses to be tackled. From 1887 therefore this subject was to receive increasing attention from the legislature and the Railway Regulation Act of 1893 made the first provision to curb these excesses. Once the status of the railway unions had been recognised by the companies and the position of the Conciliation Boards consolidated after the first national railway strike in 1911 the eight-hour day became an established feature of railway operating practice.

It was formally accepted by agreements reached between the companies and the unions between 1918 and 1920 and provisions relating to these matters were written into the Railways Act 1921. It did not preclude railway workers from exceeding an eight hour shift but they were not obliged to do so and thereafter overtime rates applied. (36)

Meanwhile the number of competing companies had gradually declined and by 1907, less than 14 with a combined mileage of 14,022 owned 88% of the total as against 16 in 1872 with a route mileage of 9,522. (37) Whilst this trend continued creating a more unified railway system the advent of the war accelerated the process of consolidation of railway management and also led to government control over canals and coastal shipping.

During the period of hostilities the Government took possession of the 123 railway companies which operated under the direction of a Railway Executive Committee consisting of the managers of the principal concerns under the chairmanship of the President of the Board of Trade. Whilst under government control the companies were guaranteed a net revenue which approximated to that received in 1913, a good year so far as the railways were concerned. However the wear and tear on railway equipment was exceptionally heavy and in 1915 it was agreed that the companies should receive an additional allowance for repairs and renewals. It was also agreed that all railway capital would be guaranteed at 1913 levels. In fulfillment of these promises the Treasury paid out £95 million between August 1914 and December 1918 in addition to payments for the movements of troops and military supplies. (38)

Needless to say railway traffic during this period was very heavy and freight carryings increased by up to 50%. A large number of the extra passengers were soldiers and sailors on the way to the front or coming home on leave. Many railway staff had also enlisted for war service and thousands of wagons and hundreds of locomotives were commandeered for use in France. The whole operation was therefore conducted with considerably fewer staff and less equipment than had previously been available and as a result much more efficient use had to be made of what stocks there were enabling the companies to effect considerable operating economies.

After the war, and in view of the tentative steps already taken in that direction, it was accepted that the railways could not return to the same level of competition as before and all companies were informed by the Board of Trade that government control would continue for a further two years. By this time the impact of the motor vehicle was being felt, over 100,000 f

which had been used by the army in France. During 1917-1919* the coalition government had been considering the formation of a Department of State to take overall control of the transport sector of industry and at the end of 1918 Lloyd George entrusted Eric Geddes with the task of drafting a Bill for a Ministry of Ways and Communications using the two-year extension of control by the Railway Executive Committee to work out the new policy.

Under the Bill, as originally drafted, all government functions relating to railways, light railways, roads (including traffic control), canals, docks, harbours and shipping, electric power, tramways and road vehicles were to be taken over by the new department, and provision was also made for eventual state ownership of the railways. However, as on the previous occasion when this had been mooted, these far-reaching proposals were thwarted by strenuous opposition in Parliament and many of the Bill's provisions were subsequently watered down. On this occasion it was the shipping interests and the sectional rivalries of other government departments whose transport powers were to be eroded that were most vociferous. There was also a fear by road interests and by municipal tramway undertakers that the new ministry would be dominated by the railway companies. In the long run, however, it was to be the road lobby which was to fulfill this role and their influence was to be made increasingly felt after their spokesman, Sir William Joynson-Hicks, announced in Parliament that 280 MPs had joined a private committee "to promote the use and development of roads in Great Britain", fearing that road transport would be put under railway control. (39) The Federation of British Industries (founded in 1916) also expressed opposition to the railways being nationalised.

The co-ordination of transport to ensure the carriage of traffic by that means whose real economic cost is lowest, has generally been accepted as a worthwhile objective but on this occasion, as on many others to come, the one important means of achieving it was jettisoned. The new Ministry of Transport over which Eric Geddes presided as first Minister in 1919 was therefore a profoundly different organisation from that originally envisaged.

Parliament subsequently drifted into a piecemeal approach to the problems of the various sectors of transport dealing with them when they became sufficiently acute to require attention. For the second time in history, therefore, nationalisation of the railways was defeated by parliamentary pressure. Instead, in 1920 a White Paper was issued which proposed that the existing railway companies should be merged to form more viable units. (40) Under the Railways Act 1921, almost the whole railway system was divided, from 1923 onwards, between four large companies. These were the Southern, with 2,156 route miles; the Great Western (3,737 miles); the London & North Eastern (6,334 miles) and the London, Midland and Scottish with 6,780 route miles.

These mergers were implemented on the assumption that the resultant companies would become more profitable but too little account was taken of the growing effects of road competition. Furthermore some of the assumptions which had prompted the merger of companies such as the North Eastern, with its



Picture: WIKIPEDIA

Road lobby: Sir William Joynson-Hicks became chairman of the Motor Union, and presided over the merger with The Automobile Association in 1911. He became Viscount Brentford in 1919

profitable freight traffic, with the Great Eastern and its less profitable rural lines were negated by shifts in population and the decline in industrial activity as a result of the depression. The railways were also still viewed as transport monopolies with obligations as "common carrier" and were still legally obliged to publish details of their rates and charges. The Railway Rates Tribunal set up under the 1921 Act, was expected to approve standard charges for all classes of traffic with a minimum of exceptions or "special rates". These were to be the actual charges made by the companies and not the "maxima" laid down after 1873 by the Railway & Canal Commission.

In contrast the road transport operator was not obliged to accept all types of traffic or to operate over routes which were unprofitable. Neither was he obliged to publish his rates. Furthermore the working conditions of railwaymen were protected by legislation whereas those of road transport workers were not. Until the strength of the Transport and General Workers Union was to redress the balance, road haulage costs and charges were inevitably far below those of the railways. These circumstances made it relatively simple for the road operator to undercut the railway charges for any traffic which was attractive to him.



A Carter Paterson lorry in Fleet Street, London, in the 1920s. The firm was founded in 1860 and was one of the first delivery companies to change from horse power to steam lorries in 1904. It was taken over by the big four railway companies and in 1948 became part of British Road Services

When the railway mergers were first planned substantial working economies were predicted from the grouping of the pre-war companies. Savings of up to £20 million a year were forecast as a result of the standardisation of equipment and avoidance of wasteful competition, but little incentive was given to achieve this end. With a multitude of different types of wagon, many in private hands, standardisation became a daunting task and it was only after much deliberation that standard specifications were agreed. Even then, many of the cranes and lifting equipment were unsuitable for their use. (41)

Not unexpectedly, by the beginning of the 1930s the railways were losing out to the bus, trolley bus and private car for the shorter distance journeys and were relying, all too often, on cut-price fares to retain custom, whilst the road hauliers were attracting increasing quantities of traffic for distances of up to 75 miles. At the same time carriage of coal and other bulky goods, the railways staple diet, was in decline due to the depressed state of industrial activity. The operating costs of road transport had also declined considerably with the increased efficiency of motor vehicles brought about by improvements in technology. Added to this, the railways had the burden of maintaining their own route, track and signalling, a facility for which the road haulier was not directly charged.

In 1927, in order to redress the balance the railways, attempted to increase the total network of services offered by expanding into road transport. After some opposition they obtained the necessary powers in July 1928 and utilised them by buying interests in bus

companies and such cartage enterprises as Carter Paterson and Pickfords. In 1929 the Government also agreed to ease their financial burden by abolishing passenger duty, a charge to which they had been, liable since the days of the stage coach, and the Local Government Act of that year provided for 75% derating of railway property in return for the granting of concessions on some classes of freight traffic. (42)

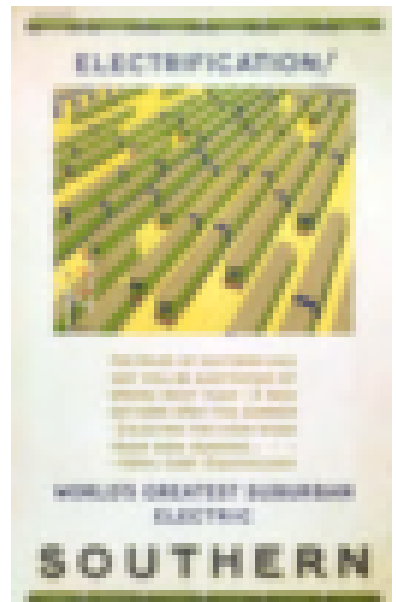
Extensive electrification plans were proposed by the Weir Committee in 1931 (43) as a possible means of providing employment during a period of acute industrial depression but the response of the railway companies was lukewarm. In the case of the L.M.S. the reasons were made plain by Lord Stamp, its chairman and general manager, who considered that the rate of return required by the Government in the prevailing economic conditions would have placed an unfair burden upon both users and shareholders. He also pointed out that in contrast, road investment was accepted as a charge on the rates whether it was commercially justified or not. (44) (See also Chapter 4 p.CHECK)

Despite the railways meagre returns and the continuing restrictions on their charges, the groups nevertheless paid their way after 1923 and managed to spend £123 million on additional works and improvements. Some economies were also made by the abandonment of surplus infrastructure and lands and assets no longer required were sold realising about £23 million. In addition £330 million was spent on replacing worn-out assets. During this period 240 miles of track and 350 stations were closed to all traffic and 1,000 miles of track and 380 stations closed to passenger traffic. (45)

By the mid 1930s, however, the first large-scale borrowing from the Government became necessary because of the effects of the depression. £14 million of the £32 million lent to the railway companies in 1935 was spent by the Southern Railway in electrifying more than a quarter of its system with the beneficial effects in reliability and frequency which have invariably led to a substantial increase in passenger carryings. Nevertheless whilst gross investment accounted for £283 million between 1920 and 1938, this was insufficient to cover proper depreciation and replacement and the seriousness of the situation only became apparent in 1944 when to this underinvestment was added the effects of wartime patchwork measures. (46)

Like the railways, road transport had developed unhindered in its early days. The first problems appeared in London with the vast increase in motor traffic after the Great War which, combined with the appearance of the "pirate bus", led to the creation of the London Passenger Transport Board in 1933 to control the operation of all buses, trams and the underground railways in the general interests of travellers of the metropolis. The constitution of this body is of some consequence as it was in many ways the first generation of nationalised industry. Unlike subsequent creations, however, it was not answerable to a government minister for the conduct of its policy and its members were independently appointed.

Furthermore, being the product of a Conservative, Labour and subsequently National Government, it was not subject to the degree of party political interference which was to plague the railways after nationalisation. (47)

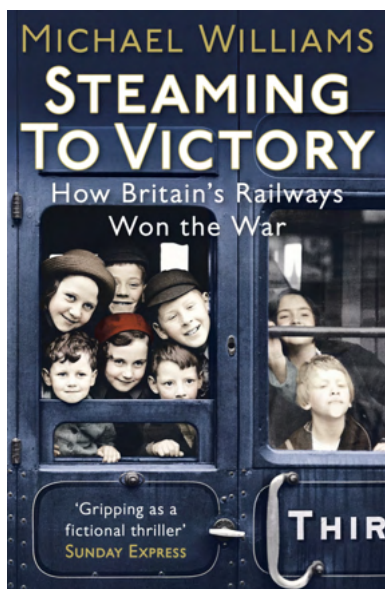


Picture: NATIONAL RAILWAY MUSEUM

In 1928 the Government had appointed a Royal Commission to consider the problems raised by the growth of road transport and the consequent alarming increase in the number of road accidents. From the Road Traffic Act 1930, which followed, came greater control over both public and private transport, including provisions for driving licences, public service vehicle licences, for driving tests, more rational speed limits and other aspects of road safety. One important provision was the appointment of Traffic Commissioners who, amongst other things were empowered to decide on the suitability of routes and the necessity and demand for particular bus services before granting Road Service Licences, and also to prevent unnecessary duplication, unlike the frantic competition of the railway age. It was not until 1933, however, that Parliament was to extend the system of licensing and control to road hauliers and the Road and Rail Traffic Act of that year introduced different classes of licences (A, B or C) depending upon the degree of public use to which owners vehicles were put. This Act also made better provision for taxation to cover road wear and tear and fair wages were a condition precedent to the grant of a licence.

The Royal Commission had also been instructed to investigate more efficient measures for transport co-ordination but in its final report, issued in 1931, the most it could recommend was the setting up of a Transport Advisory Council with co-ordination as one of its terms of reference. The council which was set up in 1934, recommended in 1937 that steps should be taken to iron out some of the inconsistencies in the operation of road and rail, particularly with regard to uniformity of wages and the control of road transport rates similar to those of rail; only then, in its opinion, would proper co-ordination be possible. By 1938, however, nothing had been done to implement these recommendations and the railway companies increased their pressure on the government through the "Square Deal" campaign, to permit a greater freedom in their pricing policy, but war intervened and it was not until 1962 that their demands were effectively met, by which time they had long ceased to exist. (48)

When war was declared in 1939, similar arrangements were made to control the railways through a Railway Executive Committee, under the overall control of the Minister of Transport, as had been the case in 1914, but here the similarity ended. Whilst consideration had been



given to the part motor transport should play in the war effort, in the early years activities were concentrated on the railways; but as no strategic new lines had been built they were unable to cope with the unnatural flows of traffic which were being experienced and for which the system had never been designed to cater. As a result greater reliance had to be placed on road transport and wholesale takeovers of large haulage companies became the order of the day under the Ministry of War Transport, between 1942 and 1943, with strict control on the routing of goods. These events were to go a long way to mar the prospects of the railways when the challenge of road transport was renewed in 1945.

Added to this were the financial provisions which were geared more to the interests of the railway shareholders, who received some £9 million a year more than they had in peace time, whilst the Government benefited to the tune of £143 million (Nett) over the years 1941-6. The

Coalition Government also made depreciation allowances to the railways on the basis of historic cost rather than replacement cost. As a result the vast sums of money obtained from the railways were not ploughed back into the business but were used largely to relieve taxation. As in 1914-18 locomotives and rolling stock were utilised to breaking point with increases of 50% and 68% in passenger and freight traffic respectively. At the peak period of wartime movements, in 1944, the railways with nearly 142 million tons carried over 64% of the traffic; road transport, with approximately 45 million tons, carried 20%; coastal shipping's share was 25 million tons (10%) with the canals carrying only 11 million tons, or just under 5% of the total.(49) '

As Stewart Joy summed up the position "it can fairly be said that the railways did Britain proud ... but the methods of financing railway operations through the war meant that no adequate reward went to the companies for this fortuitous providence." As a result, by the end of hostilities most of the equipment was fit only for the scrap heap. In these circumstances the railways' competitors were in a better position to re-equip themselves to peace time standards far quicker than the run-down railways. (50)

With a decisive Labour victory at the 1945 general election it was only to be expected that the railways would not be allowed to return to their former status, particularly as the party was already committed to large-scale nationalisation in its policies prepared prior to the war. The Transport Act 1947, therefore, provided for all railways, canals, docks and some long-distance road haulage undertakings to be taken over by the state through the British Transport Commission. The existing railway shareholders were compensated by the issue of £1,065 million of British Transport 3% stock, redeemable by 1988 and arrangements were also made to take over long-distance road haulage concerns over a period.



The Bill did not, however, reach the statute book unscathed, even though the Government of 1947 finally succeeded where Gladstone and Geddes had failed in 1844 and 1919 respectively. One provision which was the subject of strenuous parliamentary pressure, through the medium of the road lobby and other road haulage interests including the Co-operative movement, related to the restrictions to be placed on C licence operators (i.e, those who used their vehicles to carry only their own goods) who were to have been limited to a sphere of operation not more than 40 miles from their base. As a result this clause was subsequently dropped which seriously weakened the ability of the commission to achieve a properly integrated system, particularly as the number of C licence vehicles was nearly two and a half times the number with A and B licences. (51)

The workings of the commission and its effectiveness in dealing with the many sectors of transport under its wing will be dealt with in the following chapter as will the effects of political interference which in the early 1950s made it virtually impossible for it to pay its way, taking one year with another.

It has been necessary to deal with the historical aspects of the railways, and their rivals, at some length in order to provide a clear background to the events which led to the formation of the Railway Invigoration Society in 1954.

Notes to chapter one

- (1) P S Bagwell. The Transport Revolution from 1770. 1974 p40 & p49
- (2) M J T Lewis. Early Wooden Railways. 1970
- (3) Samuel Smiles. The Story of the Life of George Stephenson. 1864
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- (6) J S Jeans. Railway Problems. 1887. p32
- (7) Bagwell, op cit, p92
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- 9) *ibid* p 57
- (10) Bagwell, op cit, p 92
- (11) Whilst not strictly accommodation works these were intended to mitigate the injurious effects of the new road. L C A 1973. Part 11. Sec 20
- (12) "Spectrum" Sunday Times. 26/5/74. p 15
- (13) C L Mowat The Golden Valley Railway. 1964. p 12-13
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- (21) Howat, op cit, p 23
- (22) Lloyds Bonds were "an acknowledgement under seal" for payment which enabled a contractor to obtain a bank advance to finance works until funds were available from a company
- (23) Bagwell, op cit, p 98
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“Beware of the Plan”

British Transport Commission (1948-1962)

On 1 January 1948 the assets of the four main line railway companies (including their steamships, hotels, and other ancillary undertakings) together with all privately owned railway wagons, canals, and many ports, road haulage and passenger transport operators, were taken over by the British Transport Commission under the Transport Act 1947. Section 3(1) provided that “It shall be the general duty of the Commission so to exercise their powers under this Act as to provide, or secure or promote the provision of, an efficient* adequate, economical*, and properly integrated system of public inland transport and port facilities within Great Britain.”

* My underlining

While the commission was the overall policy making body, separate Executives were appointed to undertake the day to day running of the various sectors of transport committed to its charge, whose members were appointed, not by the Commission, but by the Minister of Transport; a state of affairs which severely undermined the Commission’s ability to exercise adequate control over its activities. Despite increasing competition from road transport, albeit under the control of the commission, many of the outdated notions of the railways as a monopoly were maintained, including its obligations as “common carrier”. The control of fares and freight charges formerly administered by the Railway Rates Tribunal, were transferred to the Transport Tribunal but with overall power of Ministerial veto which was to be used all too often.

Nevertheless the fact that a large portion of road transport, in the form of C licence operators was “outside the commission’s control effectively precluded road and rail competing on equal

terms and seriously impaired the ability of the Railway Executive to run the railway’s on a sound commercial basis.

There has been much argument as to the degree to which the railways were to be run as a social service, both under the 1921 Act and under the Act of 1947, but the implications of Section 3(1) – outlined above – are certainly that the whole of the Commission’s activities were to be financially viable. (1) The railways were taken over virtually as an entity whereas acquisition of the road transport interests was to be a continuing process extending over a

number of years due to their extensive and fragmented nature.

Having finally created a state monopoly on the railways it was deemed expedient to provide a Public Watchdog in the form of the Central Transport Consultative Committee and its area transport users’ consultative committees, to which complaints and suggestions by railway users could be made. In its early days this committee wielded considerable influence over the withdrawal of unremunerative rail services but in the Transport Act 1962 the powers of the TUCs were severely curtailed.

The rapid changeover on the railways required by the Act was by no means a bed of roses as right up to the last days many of the railway interests were violently opposed to



Picture: GWRA.co.uk

nationalisation and went to extreme measures to prevent it. They warned that political interference would adversely affect the railways' commercial operation and some prominent railwaymen, such as Sir James Milne of the GWR, refused to serve under the new organisation and retired from the scene. In many ways they were to be proved right. (2)

The trade unions on the other hand saw nationalisation as a means of securing improved pay and working conditions for their members and were in any event politically committed to its achievement. (3)

However inevitable nationalisation may have been at the time from a financial viewpoint, which is debateable, there is no doubt that much commercial initiative was lost and, more importantly, the possibility of effective parliamentary pressure, other than through the unions, thereafter denied to this sector of the transport industry.

It has generally been accepted that the organisation of the Railway Executive, with its highly functional management, was too centralised and it has also been argued that the railways were too inward looking because of the manner of training of their senior staff.(4) The Executive, consisting mainly of former railway officers, also saw themselves as the heirs and successors to the managers of the former railway companies and resented any interference by the British Transport Commission in its affairs using many ingenious devices to circumvent its directions.(5) While the commission was investigating the relative merits of diesel traction and further electrification the Railway Executive was pressing ahead with the design and construction of



a complete new breed of steam locomotive to satisfy the personal ambitions of their chief mechanical engineer to follow in the footsteps of Stephenson, Gresley and Stanier. (6)

Nevertheless in the early days the commission's financial position was fairly healthy and in its first six years made a working surplus. (7) Considerable working economies were also achieved by the Railway Executive through amalgamation of the activities of the four former companies to the tune of £15 million a year. (8) By 1952, with 40,000 fewer employees, 1,500 fewer locomotives and 10,000 less wagons, the railways carried 12 million more tons of freight than in 1948. Greater efficiency in the utilisation of locomotives had also been achieved and much progress made in the standardisation of equipment, although not necessarily in the right direction. (9)

Even so they suffered severe restrictions on the replacement of rolling stock and equipment notwithstanding the fact that much of it was well beyond the end of its working life. This arose mainly from the vacuum left by the demise of any effective railway pressure groups and the fact that much of the limited supply of steel available in the early 1950s was going to the motor industry because of the emphasis placed on its export potential. Because of this failure to acquire new equipment in sufficient quantities at a time when low rates of interest were prevalent the potential of a properly modernised railway was lost, possibly for all time. Despite these constraints up to 1955 the railways were substantially in balance in their working results although only in 1952 were they able to make an overall surplus after payment of the commission's central charges. (10)

One factor which was to be a leading cause of the railways' rapidly escalating deficits was the consistent failure of successive governments to approve increases in charges promptly enough to keep up with increases in costs. On many occasions a direct block was placed on

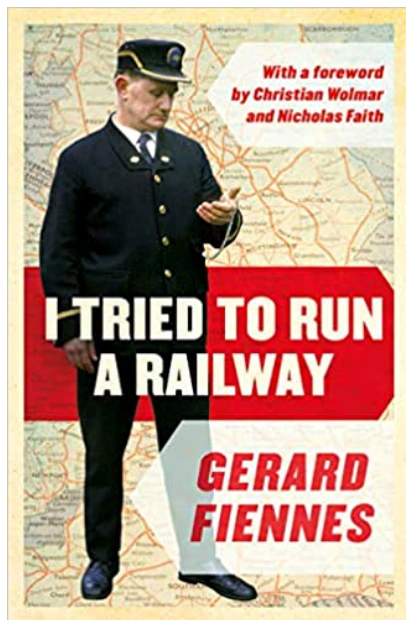
such increases when they had been approved by the Transport Tribunal and the result of such action by a Conservative Minister in 1952 was to lead to a loss to the railways of between £1.9 million and £6.5 million. (II)

However a far more significant consequence of the change of government in 1951 was the decision of the new Conservative administration to hive off the road haulage sector of the commission's activities and to relax the restrictions placed on A and B licence operators. This was effected in the Transport Act 1953 which also provided for a reorganisation in the workings of the commission. By the early 1950s it had become clear that the organisation was not achieving the level of integration which had been expected of it and the Conservatives finally broke the deadlock between the BTC and the RE by abolishing the latter and transferring the running of the railways to the commission itself. There was also an increasing awareness that long term changes were needed if the railways as a form of transport were to survive and it was at this time that plans were prepared to gradually abandon local traffic, both passenger and freight.

The wisdom of this move, in terms of the railways role in the transport system and of its financial viability, will be considered in greater depth later; in particular the policy, greatly accelerated during the Beeching era, of disposing of surplus track and equipment, almost as frantically as many of the earlier railways were originally built. Whatever else it did the Transport Act 1953 certainly freed the commission from its responsibility to publish special rates agreed with traders and from its obligation to avoid undue preferences so far as rail traffic was concerned but the railways' obligations as common carrier were to remain until the Transport Act 1962.

The effects of the denationalisation of road transport cannot be overemphasised and the reorganisation of railway management has been a process which has continued, on and off, for the past 21 years and about which this book is in no small way concerned. Had railway management been less preoccupied in reorganising itself more time could have been spent on the vital tasks of improving the railways' technical and operational efficiency. Gerard Fiennes sums up the situation in his autobiography as follows, "I reflect how that prewar the LNER set up an organisation in 1923. It stood the test of time, give or take a little, until 1947. Since then I have been re-organised in 1948-9, 1953, 1955, 1956-7, 1960, 1962, 1964, 1966-7." (12) Regrettably this trend continues and a further major reorganisation has only recently been shelved.

The two events brought about by the 1953 Act were carried out in somewhat indecent haste, mainly to satisfy party doctrine so far as the road haulage side was concerned. Disposal of a large portion of the commission's road fleet was effected between January 1954 and September 1956 when the remaining 10,000 vehicles were allocated to the five specialist companies remaining under the state controlled British Road Services. (13) Nevertheless there was, as A J Pearson puts it, "little justification for the denationalisation measure; it was a purely political act," even though the



organisation which was left at the end of the exercise was undoubtedly more efficient. (14) So far as the reorganisation of the railways was concerned this was intended to break down the highly functional centralised structure of the Railway Executive and give greater commercial initiative to the railway regional managements which were to be separate identifiable businesses with only a limited degree of central control on strategic matters. This too was carried out somewhat hurriedly and with little or no consultation with the commission, the Minister finally taking the initiative with the BTC Executive Order 1953, which abolished all of the executives with the exception of that for London Transport. (15) From 1 October 1953 until the commission was itself abolished by the Transport Act 1962, the railways were run by the six regional railway boards, which virtually had autonomous powers over their areas. They were the Western, Southern, Eastern, Midland, North Eastern and Scottish Regions and, if anything, the pendulum had swung too far in the opposite direction leading to some of the operational problems reminiscent of the former railway companies, or worse. Even the railway workshops were controlled by the regions making standardisation of equipment more difficult.

By this time the railways were becoming a serious drain on the commission's resources, a situation which sprang from the long years of underinvestment both during the 1930s and in the war years. Because of the considerable influence of the road lobby in Parliament, road development was also receiving a proportionately larger share of public investment. For example in the years 1955 and 1960 road investment was at the rate of approximately £580 million and £950 million respectively whereas investment in the railways was only to the tune of £80 million and £180 million. (16)

Not until the Railway Modernisation Plan of 1955 was any significant investment made in the renewal of railway infrastructure and then only to the tune of £1,240 million over 15 years, although in 1957 this was revised to £1,660 million. (17) The plan also provided for the first major withdrawals of unremunerative rail services from which it was expected to make savings of about £3 million a year. In the event a figure of about £4 million annually was achieved but this became quite irrelevant when by 1958 the commission's overall deficit had reached £105 million. (18)

It has been argued that the plan tried to spread the investment too thinly over the system by replacing what there was rather than what the railways needed; also that it was nothing more than a hotchpotch of ideas that were already in the pipeline. (19) A J Pearson is probably nearer the mark when he asserts that, like the Beeching plan less than 10 years later, too much

faith was placed in it as a means of solving the railways' ills. (20) We shall not dwell on it any further as it is dealt with extensively in other works and will be touched upon later in the context of specific events. It certainly suffered as a result of the railways' declining finances in the years that followed but the basic problem was rapid inflation combined with the continual failure to secure prompt increases in charges due to ministerial intervention.

In the late 1950s this was exacerbated by a decline in the carryings of coal, coke and



PROGRESS

Every week British Railways Modernisation Plan goes further ahead

other mineral traffic – its biggest revenue earner – due to depression in the heavy industries and changes in the nation's economy towards lighter industry more orientated to road transport. By 1959 the net ton miles of goods traffic carried had fallen to the lowest level since nationalisation. By 1956 railway receipts failed to cover working expenses and in 1958 there was a fall for the first time in the railways' gross receipts due to the decline in freight traffic. (21)

A major cause of the railways' massive debts in the period under review was the heavy burden of interest payments. In addition to the contribution to the commission's central charges, mainly the interest on the British Transport 3% stock, there was also the obligation to pay high rates of interest on the money borrowed for modernisation. The situation reached ridiculous proportions in the latter years, so much so that the railways had to borrow money to pay interest on the money they had borrowed. Between 1956 and 1962 interest charges amounted to an equivalent of two thirds of the BTC's total deficit. The policy of paying grants for socially necessary but unremunerative rail services, common in most European countries at the time, was not adopted in Britain until 1968. (22)

After the General Election of October 1959 when the Conservatives were returned for another term a Special Advisory Group under the chairmanship of Sir Ivan Stedeford was appointed to examine, once again, the organisation of the BTC. The White Paper *Reorganisation of the Nationalised Transport Undertakings* (Command 1248) was the first nail in the coffin and the Transport Act 1962 subsequently made provision for the abolition of the BTC and the transfer of its assets to separate independent boards.

This Act together with the Report *The Reshaping of British Railways* will be the subject of a separate chapter.

Rail closures

Once the fervour of railway building had tailed off in the early decades of the 20th century and the competition of road transport emerged, some of the more speculative railway lines, particularly in rural areas, became a burden on the railway companies.



Sir Ivan Stedeford was invited in 1960 by Prime Minister Harold Macmillan to become chairman of an advisory group on the state of British transport, which became known as the Stedeford Committee. Also on the committee was Dr Richard Beeching, and the two men clashed over Beeching's proposals to reduce drastically the rail infrastructure of Great Britain.

In spite of questions in Parliament, Sir Ivan's report was not published at the time. A set of proposals for the future of the railways that came to be known as the Beeching Plan was adopted by the Government, resulting in the closure of a third of the rail network and the scrapping of a third of a million freight wagons, much as Stedeford had foreseen and fought against.

Having been built largely in Victorian times when road transport was no match for the railways, many lines linked only small towns and villages where the level of traffic was barely enough to cover working expenses even at a time when the horse and cart predominated.

As there had been no strategic plan for railway building much duplication had occurred and some of the superfluous lines were the first to go. From as early as 1915 limited line closures were the order of the day. Nevertheless after nationalisation in 1947 the opportunity was taken to rationalise the railway network and in 1953 the mileage approved for closure as unremunerative was 241, bringing the total closed since 1948 to 1,778 and the total route mileage in use down to 19,222 miles. During that year 76 BR passenger stations and four motive power depots were closed, making 5,866 stations and 388 motive power depots in use. (23)

Nevertheless much of the impetus for the closure of rural branch lines came from the muddled theories of academic economists who had not prepared their definitions with sufficient care. The close relationship between the economists of both the BTC and the RB and the London School of Economics is of significance when considering how the mistaken policy gained momentum. For example G J Ponsonby in *What is an Unremunerative Transport Service* (24) defines it as: "A service, or part of service, the resulting revenues from which are known (or definitely expected) to be insufficient to cover those costs which but for its provision would not have been incurred, either directly or indirectly, in the short or long run."

As far as it goes Ponsonby's definition is impeccable but the real issue has been ducked to date by virtually all economists, of how one defines cross-subsidisation in a systems context. A railway is more than the mere sum of its component parts. As the Queensland Bureau of Economics commented as far back as May 1931 equal mileage revenue allocation, which is what Ponsonby's definition when clumsily handled can lead to serious distorting effects.

"The main objection to the allocation of revenue is that they exaggerate the earnings of sections carrying through traffic and understate the earnings of others. Main lines benefit

whilst branches and extensions lose. In some circumstances the crudity of the method of equal allocation per mile of line destroys the utility of the statistics altogether. For example, for goods sent 20 miles on a branch line and 80 miles on other lines, to a trading centre 100 miles distant, the branch line is credited with having earned only one fifth of the revenue contributed, and this applies to traffic both ways." (25)

Up to 1953 there had been little public reaction to branch line railway cuts but as closures bit deeper into



The Kent and East Sussex Railway (K&ESR) is in 2022 a historical private railway company, as well as a heritage railway running on part of the route of the historical company

the railway network opposition increased and it was in that year that they became a parliamentary issue and people started to question the wisdom of these moves. In fact it was the closure of the Kent and East Sussex Railway that had prompted a vigorous protest by the MP for Hastings shortly before the summer recess. He claimed that the BTC attitude towards branch lines was altogether wrong and that the wholesale withdrawal of passenger services in rural areas adversely affected the national economy by making country life less attractive. (26)

At that time there was not, as such, a railway lobby in Parliament, the railway interests having been largely abandoned after the state takeover of the companies in 1948. The provisions contained in the 1953 Act, removing restrictions on private road haulage, had been a triumph for the road lobby which, since the 1920s, had gradually overtaken them in its influence on transport policy. The British Road Federation, the Road Haulage Association and other motor-industry organisations had waged a steadily intensified campaign for the removal of such restrictions and the Act had been a major victory for them. However they were not to have the field to themselves for much longer. In 1954 Ian Allan Ltd introduced a new feature, *Society Column* into its magazine *Trains Illustrated*. By the end of the year two names began to stand out as being different from the general run of historical and enthusiast railway societies, namely the Railway Development Association and SRUBLUK. The following item appeared in the August issue:

“The Society for the Reinvigoration of Unremunerative Branch Lines in the United Kingdom (known as SRUBLUK or the Branch Line Reinvigoration Society) has the general aim of encouraging the use of branch lines in this country. This will be done by surveying selected lines, making suggestions to the British Transport Commission and publicising in the areas concerned. Assistance has already been given to certain local Chambers of Commerce etc. At a later date, when sufficient support has been obtained, it is hoped to acquire a standard gauge branch line to be operated as a “demonstration piece”. Other activities include publication of literature and cooperation with other societies of similar interests. The BBC has recorded a programme entitled *The SRUBLUK Story* for relaying to North America.” (27)

The society had been formed in embryo in March 1952 by Adam Kendon and Nigel Watt at the Friends School, Saffron Walden, Essex, on the occasion of their planning a tour of branch lines in the Home Counties. The impending closure of the Kent and East Sussex Railway had prompted their action by letters to the press seeking support to preserve the line, not as a museum, but as an efficient diesel operated branch line. An informal committee was formed from among those who had responded to the appeal which continued until the first annual general meeting in April 1954 which was in fact the inaugural meeting.

In its early days, as the above clearly indicates, it had been the primary intention to acquire and run a closed railway and also to draw attention to the problems of branch railways. A number of lines had been investigated, including the Kent and East Sussex, but in view of the many difficulties which had been encountered little further progress was made.

At about the same time the Railway Development Association had been founded by O Humberstone Prosser, and was primarily active in Birmingham although there was also a committee in London. It was mainly concerned with the restoration and improvement of railway services in general with particular emphasis on technical development, rather than with closures. Nevertheless it had found it necessary to take an interest in and to oppose such closures, if its aims were to be achieved. The activities of the two organisations have been inescapably connected over the years and the question of merger actively pursued on at least



Sir Arthur Hallam Rice Elton (1906-73), was a pioneer of the British documentary film industry.

Educated at Marlborough College and Jesus College, Cambridge, he was a schoolfriend of John Betjeman.

During the Second World War he became supervisor of films at the Ministry of Information.

Inheriting the Elton baronetcy title in 1951, he restored Clevedon Court and donated it to the National Trust in lieu of death duties.

He became chairman of the printing company which produced the local paper. He was also prominent in the campaign to restore Clevedon Pier.

On his death, his collection of material relating to British industrial development (valued at £250,000) was given to the Ironbridge Museum.

two occasions but their roles have been largely complementary rather than adverse.

The society's first major event was a public meeting held at the Fred Tallant Hall, Euston, London on 5 February 1955, when the president, Sir Arthur Elton, gave an address on the subject of *Branch Lines in the Modern Age*. The *Birmingham Mail* reported the meeting as follows:-

“Many a society with an equally unwieldy name has achieved great things in our annals; and so may this, for it is very much in earnest about the unnecessary closing of branch railway lines. It is high time someone was. All manner of at present “unremunerative” branch lines, linking isolated communities are being closed arbitrarily up and down the country; their stations uprooted, their signalling dismantled. Yet the coming of widespread electric and diesel traction will alter the whole picture within a few years.

“It is quite possible that the same short sighted officials who are now all for shutting the railway byways will live to shout for their economic revival 10 or 15 years hence. There never was much justification for it as a policy, in a country whose roads are so overcrowded. Sir Arthur Elton, the president of the Reinvigoration Society, said at the weekend meeting 120 strong, that these lesser lines are “being sloughed off” because often, it would be more troublesome to keep them up and overhaul their working, than simply to close them. He sees the process continuing unless some open investigation is forced on the railway authorities; one which will reveal by what underhand methods closures are “smuggled” through and “bogus” figures are produced to support the plea of public loss.” (28)

This meeting was followed shortly after by the society's second annual general meeting on 25 April 1955.

During the previous 12 months some important

developments had taken place in connection with the procedures for considering rail closures by the TUCCs. In the case of closures on the Isle of Wight, in the Midlands and in Wales it had been established that reasonable information, including details of the finances of a line, should be made available to objectors. The Welsh TUCC had also established the right to report direct to the Minister.

This latter situation arose mainly from the provisions in the Transport Act 1953 which brought about a number of changes in the responsibilities and functions of the consultative committees. Section 29 of the Act provided that copies of the minutes and recommendations of the Scottish and Welsh committees should be sent to the Minister as well as to the British Transport Commission and Central Transport Consultative Committee. It also extended the Minister's powers of direction to matters dealt with in recommendations from these two consultative committees.

In its report for 1953 the CTCC had drawn attention to these changes which also extended the powers of the committees (section 18) to enable them to consider the adequacy of alternative bus services when a line was proposed for closure, but only where such services were provided by a body directly or indirectly controlled by the commission,

The way in which the committees operated was clearly outlined in the report as follows:-

“Now that the area committees are well established most of the submissions received from users are, in the first instance made to these committees. Much of the work of the central committee is to satisfy themselves that users have been given a full opportunity of presenting their submissions to the area committee, and that the committee before reaching their conclusion have given proper consideration to all of the matters brought before them, and that their recommendations are fair and reasonable. When so satisfied our duty is to advise you (the Minister of Transport) and the commission upon the conclusions reached by us.”

The manner in which the consultative committees conducted their proceedings was also seen to be becoming less informal and the central committee found it necessary to comment on these developments in the following terms:

“If those representing the 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 committees are treated as courts of inquiry much of their value will disappear as the spirit of free and frank discussion between all parties with the object of finding a businesslike solution will be difficult to maintain.”

The status of these committees has often been the subject of lengthy debate but on this occasion the conclusion reached (at least by the CTCC) was that the formal procedures of a court of inquiry were not envisaged by Section 6 of the Transport Act 1947. (29)

In its report for 1961 – at a time when the future of the whole procedure was under review – it emphasised that under the 1947 Act the commission were under no statutory obligation to submit their plans for pruning the railways to the consultative committees, but with the Minister's approval this practice had become customary – at least from 1950 onwards. (30)

Returning to the early 1950s the CTCC had also made some abrasive comments in its 1953 report that the consultative committees were being ignored on many important issues or their recommendations not given due consideration. (31)



Freshwater (above) was painted by C Hamilton Ellis. Cuthbert (Chip) Hamilton Ellis (1909-87) was a railway writer and painter. He published the first of his 36 books at the age of 21. His best-known is *The Trains we Loved* (Allen & Unwin, 1947).

So far as the society was concerned the second year was quite an eventful one. During the year (1955-56) there had been a significant increase in public discussion on the branch line problem. This discussion had culminated in Parliamentary debates in December on the second reading of a Rural Transport Improvement Bill and a motion of concern at the closure of branch lines.

The TUCs were also seen to be changing their approach and the East Midlands committee had recommended that there should be a full enquiry into rural transport in Britain. The central committee, which had hinted in its 1954 report that it was not unmindful of the effect of too many rail closures had recommended that the commission should be more ready to experiment with lightweight rail buses on branch lines, operating as light railways. (32)

A meeting between representatives of the society and the British Transport Commission took place on 12 May 1955. This informal discussion had given the society a better understanding of the commission's problems but had otherwise made little impression.

A public meeting was held on 25 February 1956 when the society's new policy statement was released. The meeting was addressed by two MPs, Mr Rupert Speir and Mr Peter Kirk, together with Mr C Hamilton Ellis, and was attended by nearly 100 people. A motion was passed that the Government should review rural transport with a view to reversing the trend of branch line policy.

During its early days the society had investigated the operation of many branch lines, in

particular with a view to taking one over, and one important aspect of its work had been patronisation research, to ascertain just how many people used particular stations or lines so that the true facts could be established. The society had also introduced the policy of holding reinvigoration parties and a visit by about 20 members to the Cambridge-Mildenhall branch took place on 25 June 1955. Other lines being dealt with at the time included Hull-South Howden, Watlington-Princes Risborough and Lewes-East Grinstead which was closed for the first time in June 1955, but more of that anon. The society was also in contact with a firm called Isle of Wight Travel Ltd, in connection with the Newport-Sandown line which closed on 6 February 1956. At the time the company was attempting to obtain an injunction against the BTC to prevent the lifting of the track and the disposal of other assets, pending takeover by that company of all of the island's railways. The society was also issuing periodic *Progress Reports* to members but its activities are best summed up in its second printed manifesto, issued in 1955 which is summarised below:

Beware of the Plan

On January 25 1955 the plan for the modernisation and reequipment of British Railways was published by the British Transport Commission. This is an event which is to be welcomed but not without some serious misgivings. Examination reveals that this is a plan for the benefit of the great urban agglomerations and the suburban dormitories. By carefully guarded statements the Transport Commission make it clear that many rural and stopping train services are to be withdrawn. By 1970 "although the total annual train mileage will be only slightly reduced there will be a marked reduction in the stopping and branch line services, to counterbalance an increase in fast and suburban traffics" (paragraph 124 in the Modernisation Plan).

The argument advanced in defence of this policy is that stretches of line dealt with are losing money and that they hold assets that could more profitably be used elsewhere. Further, the volume of traffic on such lines as have been closed was so small, say the railway authorities, that the facilities provided by them were no longer required by the public. The traffic which originally justified the existence of these lines had fallen, either because of a shift in the population, or – and this is the more usual reason – because such traffic as there was had been largely diverted to the roads. Clearly a service no longer required by the public does not justify its maintenance.

Already since 1948, over 1,500 miles of railway and nearly 300 stations have been closed. We are now promised further reductions, with the transfer to road of stopping and branch line services "carried on at proportionately high costs" (para 10) and where the prospect of attracting more passengers through the use of multiple unit diesel railcars is "not reasonable". But how do the railway authorities ascertain that a particular service is no longer required by the travelling public? They do this by laying their proposals for closure before the area transport users' consultative committee, a body composed largely of representatives of local interests, who examine the current position taking into account all relevant matters. Their decision then goes before the Central Transport Consultative Committee for further consideration who present their recommendations to the Minister of Transport who takes the final decision. These committees are consultative only and are appointed on Government authority. The decisions they take are supposed to be independent of the British Transport Commission, but recent experience has suggested that this is not always the case.

When a line is closed an alternative bus service is normally provided. The public is coming to learn, however, that in many ways this is but a poor substitute for a train. But what, besides the examination of the contemporary state of a branch line, is undertaken?

The pattern of events in the decline and fall of a branch line is characteristic. The usage of the line drops off with the railway authorities arguing that reduced usage can be satisfied with reduced service, so they cut the number of trains they run on the line. This means that travel on the line is even less convenient than it was before and so the demand falls still further. The volume of traffic falls below the economically justifiable level, and the line is closed. Yet frequently no effort is made to attract traffic back to the line. Cheap rate fares are often not available on minor lines (although they have been very successful where issued in conjunction with a suitable service), and rare is the occasion when a service is augmented on a branch line instead of being curtailed. The BTC tells us that before a line is closed they do their utmost to see that the minimum of inconvenience is afforded to the people in the district. But they never seem to examine ways of making local railways "more convenient" for the people they serve.

We believe that this policy of closing a line down when it seems to be not "paying its way" is basically mistaken, for the following reasons:

1 The alternative service when it is offered – always a motor bus service – is an inadequate substitute. The passenger capacity of a bus is more limited than that of a train and luggage such as bicycles, large cases and prams cannot be taken at all.

2 The closure of a railway means that such traffic as there was must now go by road. To travel by road is to travel dangerously, whereas to travel by rail is to travel in the safest possible way. The roads are very much congested and it is, surely, more in the national interest to attract people back to the railways than to prevent them travelling on them.

3 The policy of closing branch lines is unenterprising. It makes the public resentful of British Railways as a whole and will inevitably have the result of turning away potential passengers.

4 Further, the closure of branch lines creates resentment among the workers who feel that the necessity for this action indicates that theirs is a diminishing and regressive industry.

5 The perpetuation of "suitably modernised" country rail services is likely to discourage the drift from country to town. The closure of country branch lines and stations makes life in the country less convenient.

6 Finally people who live in a district without a local railway tend to make the whole of their journeys by road.

If YOU feel that it important to fight this defeatist attitude of British Railways, and if YOU are prepared to do something active in helping to improve the minor railways of Britain, join the Branch Line Reinvigoration Society today.

The society was formally constituted as the Society for the Reinvigoration of Unremunerative Branch Lines in the United Kingdom (SRUBLUK) on 24 April 1954, and already has an extensive membership. It was brought into existence to provide a medium for the collective expression of the opinion of those who believe that the closure of branch lines is a retrograde and detrimental policy.

Our principal aims are:

- 1 To encourage travellers to make all possible use of the railways in general and branch, lines in particular.
- 2 To urge the transport authorities to provide and to maintain adequate modernised rural rail services.
- 3 To oppose the closure, where this is reasonable and to prevent, wherever possible the threatened closure of branch lines.
- 4 To provide a means whereby those who use branch lines may make their views known on a wider and more forceful scale.

At a later stage we hope to acquire a standard gauge branch line that has been closed to the public. This is under frequent review by the committee.

We urge the following moves to improve branch line working:

- The use of lightweight rail cars which can be stopped along the line by a passenger hailing the vehicle.
- Reduction of many stations to the status of halts.
- Combining staff duties, to conserve manpower.
- The replanning of timetables to give better connections.

Activities of the society include:

- The distribution of posters advertising branch lines in these districts whose railways are threatened with closure. This is being done with the cooperation of local government authorities.
- To keep a constant check (in so far as our membership allows) on station announcements, railway maps and timetables and bring to the notice of the authorities instances where branch lines are treated adversely.
- Patronisation research: Collection of data on the use of branch lines all over the country.
- Summer excursions on branch lines (reinvigoration parties) and winter lectures and meetings on all topics connected with branch railways.

Membership is unrestricted but we especially welcome those who feel they are prepared to work actively for the cause of the society.

Branch lines

At this stage, having outlined the main aims and activities of the society when it was originally formed, it will be useful to survey, briefly, some of the problems and constraints which have been encountered in the operation of Branch Railways, and the extent to which some of the suggestions made by the society at the time have been or could be adopted by the railway management.

Most railway branch lines, with rare exceptions, were provided with the full facilities of main lines, such as full height platforms, station buildings, continuous fencing, block signalling and gated level crossings and in the case of many of these items were legally bound to do so. This situation arose from the increasing regulatory control exercised by the Railway Department of the Board of Trade which, as we have seen in Chapter 1, was to wield greater and greater influence over the safety of railway operation after its inception in 1840.

The manner in which it achieved this was through its power to postpone the opening of new

lines after 1842, rather than through any specific statutory obligations. Contrary to popular belief, in the early days, as Henry Parris points out “the powers of the Board of Trade over railways were few and weak. Much of its achievement was the result of persuasion rather than legal power”. With its “requirements” for the opening of new lines, the first edition of which appeared in 1858, it was to pioneer the forms of subordinate delegated legislation which have today, in the form of by-laws, regulations, codes of practice etc, become a common method of providing statutory controls which can easily be altered in the light of changing circumstances. (33)

Nevertheless as the board’s power and influence increased some of the requirements became quite onerous, particularly in rural areas and at least one projected line, namely that to Ullapool in the north of Scotland was never built because the stringent safety requirements would have made it totally uneconomic. (34) Similarly because of the board's requirements many stretches of line were built as double track when the level of service only warranted single line operation. As a result in 1900 the mileage of double track in Great Britain, as against single line were 11,252 miles and 10,603 miles respectively, considerably more than was really necessary. (35) However, contrary to received opinion in many quarters, some branch line trains carried very heavy loads indeed. For instance five double decker buses in convoy were said to have been necessary to deal with the remaining school traffic on the western section of the erstwhile Midland & Great Northern line in the years after its closure in 1958.

Unlike many rural railways on the continent very few branch lines were operated as light railways which permitted a lower standard of infrastructure, including ungated level crossings and simplified signalling but imposed additional restrictions, particularly on speed. Such rare exceptions as there were closed fairly early in their existence but lines such as the Wisbech & Upwell Tramway, the Mid Suffolk Light Railway and the line from Fraserburgh to St Combs in the county of Aberdeen, lasted well into the era of nationalisation, the last named closing as recently as 1965.

In cases where lines were single track, passing loops were provided at appropriate intervals to allow the working of freight trains or additional passenger units where traffic warranted. On these lines the block signalling was augmented with staff or token working to prevent head-on collisions. With only one staff for each section as authority to proceed it was technically impossible for more than one train to occupy any stretch of single line at any one time. The system however proved inflexible because it assumed that trains would pass alternately in

each direction, but this was not always the case. To cope with this the divisible staff and the staff and ticket systems were evolved. In the case of the latter only the last train in a series carried the staff, the passage of the preceding trains being authorised by tickets issued on sight of the staff on which the key to the ticket box was held.

Many single lines were later provided with electric staff instruments to permit interlocking or with the related tablet and key token system. By means of the electric circuits provided only one staff could be taken out of either instrument at any one time thus ensuring the security of the



Examples of single line tokens: Tablet on left, key token on right

single line. The token block instruments worked on a similar principle but utilised a key or token which was usually conveyed in a leather pouch. A familiar sight on branch lines was the skillful exchange of the pouches as the train slowed down past the signal box to pass into the next section, except on the odd occasion when the guard missed and had to stop the train to retrieve it.

In more sparsely populated countries, however, operating practices have been less strict. In Canada, for instance, where single line working predominates control is by train order. Under this system the engineer and conductor of a train receive written instructions before departure and fresh orders are telegraphed to stations en route. The order will specify where trains are to pass or where additional cars are to be picked up. Because of the average size of Canadian trains, up to 80 freight cars, most passing loops are at least three miles long. CTC has been installed on some busier lines to permit meets, as they are called, to be fixed more accurately. (36)

The Australians have, however, managed to run their railways economically with mostly British methods. The radio block system used in Germany and Holland combines the advantages of the American standard code's cheapness and flexibility with British absolute block's near, absolute safety. (37)

Economy measures in British operating practice have nevertheless been slow to develop and even in latter years manual points could only be operated no more than 150 yards further from signal boxes than hitherto making for many such boxes on branch lines. British Railways were also slow to adopt even simple electric points worked by hand generators. (38)

A major impediment to the economical operation of many branch lines has been the level crossing and in all too frequent cases the high incidence of these, with their attendant costs, has been the main reason a line has had to close, particularly in the flat country of East Anglia and Lincolnshire. At the present time there are about 2,300 public level crossings on British Railways and nearly four times that number of accommodation crossings, (for private use). See Chapter 1 page 7). A Highways Act as early as 1839 dealt with railway level crossings, requiring the railway companies to erect and maintain gates at junctions with public highways, the gates to be kept normally closed against road traffic and to be operated by a "suitable person" appointed by the company. (39)

Various items of legislation over the years have modified the original statutory provisions, or rationalised them, such as the Railway Clauses Consolidation Act of 1845, but it was not until the Road Traffic Act of 1933 that a clean sweep was made authorising the gates to be kept closed against rail traffic.

However the onerous obligations remained on the railways. These included the celebrated Rule 99 which stipulated that "Unless special authority be given to the contrary, the gates at level crossings must be kept closed across the roadway, except when required to be opened to allow the line to be crossed". (40) Obviously under such a rule road traffic would be quickly brought



Picture: Derby signalling.org.uk

Half-barrier level crossings such as this one at Spath, near Uttoxeter, could have saved branch lines that were closed because of high operating costs

to a stand. For special authority to be granted the crossing generally had to be protected by fixed signals which implied a fully fledged crossing signal box and a staff of signalmen around the clock. In fact in a number of instances railway managers succeeded in mitigating the effects of this rule on their own authority. The Colne Valley Railway, a minor East Anglian line, led the way in this respect as the motor car developed in the early 1900s. But the Ministry of Transport in the late 1950s once again began to insist on the strict control of level crossings. Unfortunately the roads were never charged with the additional costs so imposed on the railways and rail users. These costs were not confined to the crossing itself but affected whole lines, as once signal boxes were tied to crossing gates it was difficult to switch out intermediate boxes at weekends. This severely affected weekend excursion traffic on many cross-country lines. The East Lincolnshire line – closed in 1970 – is an example of a line literally wiped off the map by antiquated laws and an insensitive London based bureaucracy. By contrast an identical rural route down the western side of Jutland serving towns smaller than those of Lincolnshire operates a normal main line service to this day by a mixture of simple electric signals, barriers and traffic lights.

One critic of the onerous requirements in Britain relating to level crossings and railway operation generally was the American Marshall M Kirkman who in a series *The Science of Railways* published early in the 20th century stated that “fewer people are killed and injured by the railroads, relatively in England than elsewhere. There, however, carriers have gone to the other extreme in adopting precautionary measures, with the result that great sums have been sunk in safety appliances which should have been used to provide facilities for handling traffic.” He summed up the position as follows: “A man may travel in America fifty millions of miles without being killed, or twelve million miles without being injured. This risk, small as it is is greater than in England or Germany, but it is much less than the risks incurred in the streets of a city. (41)

By the 1950s British Railways were finding it difficult to man level crossings where there was no adjacent signal box to control the gates. The cost of providing attendants had risen sharply and apart from the problem of finding such staff it was often operationally inconvenient with the increasing trend towards concentration of control in centres of population. When the principle of gated level crossings was introduced it was mainly to stop horse drawn vehicles but with the development of cars and lorries their effectiveness diminished.

By 1954 powers had been obtained to “unfence” lines at level crossings and steps were taken to adopt less costly protective measures which were easier to operate by power and would lend themselves to remote control and automatic operation if necessary. Experiments were therefore carried out with lifting barriers and flashing lights. In 1956 British Railways and the Ministry of Transport sent a working party to the continent to study the methods of operation used in other European countries which recommended that further tests should be made of systems for the automatic and remote control of lifting barriers at selected crossings. (42)

The type of half barrier equipment which developed from these experiments was operated by a track circuit on the approach to the crossing which activated the warning lights and caused the barrier to be lowered on the approach of a train, the normal sequence being completed about eight seconds before the train reached the crossing. These actions were also accompanied by an electric bell warning to pedestrians. Similar equipment activated the barriers after the train had passed or kept them lowered if the approach of a further train had been detected. (43)

The first of these half barriers was installed at Spath, near Uttoxeter, in 1961, and a programme



1968 level crossing crash at Hixon on the West Coast main line in Staffordshire. The consequences affected the progress of rail modernisation plans for years afterwards

of conversion gradually got under way. Because of their novelty special publicity had to be undertaken to warn the public that they themselves were responsible for their safe operation by obeying the rules. Eventually an item on their operation appeared in the Highway Code. By 1967, over 200 automatic half barrier crossings had been installed and the way seemed clear for steady expansion. Needless to say these moves were welcomed by the society but by this time many of the unremunerative lines on which they could most usefully have been adopted, including a vast number of those closed under the Beeching Plan (see later), had already gone. Had this type of crossing been introduced 10 years earlier the position may well have been profoundly different.

A major setback, however occurred on 6 January 1968, when an accident took place at Hixon, Staffordshire, which changed the whole course of events and even threw into doubt the future of the automatic half barrier itself. It was by no means a normal situation which led to this disaster but it brought into sharp focus a major deficiency in the principles of their operation. No-one had foreseen what would happen with a very large vehicle travelling at a slow speed. The accident arose from a 120 ton transformer being moved over the crossing on

a transporter vehicle 148 feet long.

Nobody concerned with the operation thought of using the telephone at the crossing to find out if a train was due, and after the police escort had checked the clearance under the electric wires and other obstructions the transporter followed at about two mph. At about this time the 11.30 express from Manchester to London was approaching the crossing at a speed of about 75 mph. By the time the automatic warnings began it was too late to move the vast load either backwards or forwards out of the path of the oncoming train. The force of the impact flung the transformer aside and wrecked the locomotive, killing the three man crew. Eight passengers on the train were killed and 48 injured.

At the public enquiry which followed a searching appraisal was made of the defects in the system and its recommendations have affected the operation of all automatic half barriers in various ways. Its main conclusion related to the telephones fixed at all such crossings and it is now a legal requirement that drivers of certain classes of vehicle must obtain permission by telephone, from the signalman before starting to cross the line. These instructions are clearly indicated on the approach roads and back up telephones are also provided as a long stop. Changes have also been implemented in the sequence of operation of the barriers and flashing lights to make the system foolproof.

Apart from the delay this caused to the programme of conversion many of the existing crossings had to be altered to bring them up to the new standard and the cost of these modifications considerably increased their capital cost, thereby neutralising some of the savings it was intended to effect. As a result the present cost of such crossings is in the region of £25,000. (44)

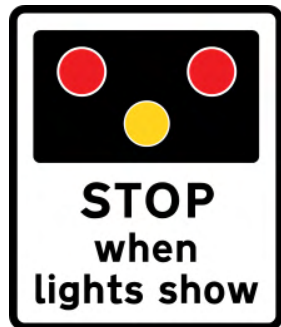


It is likely that many crossings which, but for Hixon, would have been automated will now be controlled remotely by a signalman, who will view the crossing by closed circuit television. The conversion programme for the East Suffolk line (Ipswich-Lowestoft) was one of those affected by the incident and most of its crossings are still operated in the traditional manner. As a result, to comply with the provisions of the Offices, Shops and Railway Premises Act 1963 it has been necessary to spend up to £1,000 on each crossing to provide adequate toilet facilities for

the crossing keepers.

The first of the higher standard of crossings for more important locations was installed in July 1971 at St Dunstons crossing in Canterbury and three examples have been installed in East Anglia within the last few years or so on main roads at Chettisham, Foxton, and Six Mile Bottom. These crossings have full barriers and the examples quoted are at present operated from adjoining signal boxes. Nevertheless they have greatly speeded up the time taken for operation and cut road delays to a minimum the barriers rising and falling in a matter of seconds after the initial warnings.

Returning to the realms of branch line operation, one isolated example of ungated crossings is of significance, namely that adopted for a short period of 18 months on the King's Lynn-Hunstanton line in Norfolk until it finally closed in May 1969. So



far as is known this was an isolated experiment and the crossings were all adjacent to a station on relatively minor roads leading to the beach. The crossings were merely fitted with warning signs and bells which were operated from push buttons on the platform of the unstaffed halts and operated by the guard.

Level crossings still pose a major problem to the operation of rural lines and under contemporary British legislation and bureaucratic attitudes also inhibit the possibility of reopening many freight only lines to passenger traffic. So far as the operation of branch lines is concerned very little effort was made by the railway companies to operate them more economically, and most if not all of them were grossly overstaffed.

Only within the last 10 years have any serious attempts been made to rectify this by the introduction of paytrain services with conductor guards and unstaffed halts, as recommended by the society. The Great Western Railway did, however, operate auto-trains on its rural branch lines where the engine, usually specially designed for the purpose, worked in conjunction with a specially equipped coach from which the train could be controlled thus permitting it to run on a push-pull basis without the need for runround facilities.

In 1903 the North Eastern Railway introduced a 53'6" long rail bus which seated 52 passengers, run by a four cylinder Wolseley petrol motor of 80 hp driving an electric generator which supplied current to four traction motors, for each axle. This car was tried extensively on NER branch lines but nothing seems to have come of the experiment. Later the LNER introduced a series of sentinel steam railcars. These were mostly successful and were to have been followed in the company's post war modernisation programme by a series of diesel cars, but nationalisation intervened and the plan was never implemented. At least one LNER district operating superintendent has stated that had these vehicles been introduced in time frequent diesel trains would have catered for the post war public transport traffic increase in East Anglia and not the bus.

The development of the diesel engine had in fact made railcars more reliable and cheaper to operate and the GWR came to the conclusion that branch line passenger work might be carried on more economically with diesel railcars having simple mechanical transmission, and put this idea to the test in 1934. A railcar of this type was built for branch services and also two 480 hp 40 seat cars with small buffets, lavatories and luggage space, the latter for operation between Birmingham and Cardiff. After this start branch line cars of 210 to 240 hp with seating for 48-70 people were built until their total reached 36 units while in 1941 two 420 hp cars were turned out for main line work, capable of hauling between them a 70'0" coach.

An example of the enterprise of that company may still be seen in the Stroud Valley, which is long and narrow with built up areas spread along its length, and with the railway running along one side. The GWR built a number of halts on the line. They were of reinforced concrete and about one coach in length and some still exist. The company ran a railmotor from



Picture: LNER.info

North Eastern Railway's rail motor bus operated a number of bus services in the Durham area from 1912. One of the buses was converted to rail use in 1922

Right: Park Royal
two-car set No.
HS0395/54/130
[P. J. Sharpe]

Centre: Metropolitan
Cammell two-car set
No. E79059/792/75
[P. J. Sharpe]

Bottom: Wickham
two-car set
[F. Church]



A selection of early diesel multiple units in the 1959 Ian Allan ABC trainspotters book

transmission by Walker Bros of Wigan. A pioneer unit by AEC was already in use and was utilised for a time on the Chalfont-Chesham branch of London Transport in addition to the Harrow-Stanmore, Gravesend-Allhallows and a number of other BR lines. The first of the new units were introduced on services in the West Riding of Yorkshire and in West Cumberland and by 1953 over £2 million was committed to the extension of their use to Lincolnshire, East Anglia and also for inter-city work between Edinburgh and Glasgow. (45)

Nevertheless in the BTC annual report for 1953 the section on DMUs was of significance. In this it stated that it had decided to make a substantial investment in these types of trains because "modernisation by this means could be achieved more quickly than by electrification in present circumstances." It also stated that "the original conception of a diesel railcar as a branch line bus on rails has been discarded, because even a diesel would not stimulate adequate traffic on most rural lines threatened with closure"; a view with which both the society and the Central Transport Consultative Committee were unable to agree. (46)

Early in 1955, it was reported that most satisfactory results had been achieved after the first three months operation of the diesels in the West Riding. Coupled with the introduction of

Gloucester to Chalford calling at these halts which survived into the era of nationalisation but was finally withdrawn in November 1964.

After 1948, apart from limited experiments with main line diesel locomotives and the continued production of diesel shunters of a very successful design, little further progress was made with diesel power for local work until well into the 1950s. Because of the clash of aims between the Railway Executive and the British Transport Commission developments which could have been extremely beneficial to many of the unremunerative branch lines which were axed both before and during the Beeching era, did not materialise until it was too late.

However in November 1952 it was announced that the Railway Executive was investing £500,000 in multiple unit diesel trains, being the first step in a new policy of employing lightweight diesel units wherever suitable either to reinforce or to replace steam services. The new units consisted of two coaches either one or both, powered by two 125 hp under floor "bus engines". The power equipment for the first 16 units were of Leyland manufacture, with mechanical

more frequent services, the new units had drummed up an additional 80,000 passengers between Leeds and Bradford with an increase in takings of £4,558. A similar improvement had also been effected between Leeds and Harrogate and so successful had the scheme been that net receipts in the area of operation had increased by £10,500 from 14 June-30 Sept 1954 and passengers carried by 125,000. (47)

Notwithstanding the pronouncements of the 1953 report, the commission in 1957 ordered 22 lightweight railbuses with 112-150 hp underfloor engines providing a maximum speed of about 55 mph and with seating capacity for between 46 and 54 passengers, for use on rural branch lines. Like other mistaken policies in the early days of diesel traction under the BTC (48) orders were spread about among a number of firms. Two were built by Bristol Commercial Vehicles Ltd and five each by Park Royal Vehicles Ltd. A C Cars Ltd, D Wickham & Co Ltd and five from as far away as Germany – Waggon & Maschinenbau. (49)

Because of their varied manufacture, problems were encountered with maintenance and above all they were not popular with the operating department by reason of their failure to activate track circuits properly, causing signalling problems when they were outside their normal sphere of local operation, although the North Eastern Railway had overcome this problem in earlier days by the use of brushes to maintain adequate contact with the running rails.

Nevertheless the main reason for their lack of success under BR operation was the failure to exploit the savings achieved on the traction unit by commensurate savings in staff, signalling and manning on the lines upon which they were placed. No steps were ever taken to adopt a holistic synergistic approach to branch line problems until it was too late and none even now take account of the potential for freight and parcels traffic.

Returning to the development of the society, its third year (1956-57) was less eventful than the previous one, largely as a result of financial and administrative difficulties. A visit was, however, made to the St Margarets-Buntingford line in June 1956 and during the year a working party was set up to facilitate closer cooperation between the society and the Railway Development Association and the Branch Line Society with the long term aim of a merger with the former.

Already some members were beginning to question the suitability of the society's name and an extraordinary general meeting was held in December 1956 to discuss the matter and to consider a change of emphasis in the society's work; but no decisive action was taken.

Two public meetings were held early in 1957, one in Leeds on 16 February and the other in London on 10 March. The Leeds meeting was addressed by two MPs, Mr George Craddock and Mr Charles Hobson, Members for Bradford South and Keighley, respectively. At the same meeting the Rev E W S Packard, vicar of East Witton, gave a lively address on the problems created by the closure of the Wensleydale line. (50) At the London meeting Mr Robert Aickman, co-founder of the Inland Waterways Association, gave some advice on how the society could further its aims, based on his own experience.

During the year a letter had been sent to all MPs, by the president concerning the procedure for closing branch lines and in November 1956 a branch of the society had been set up in



Blue plaque at 11 Gower Street, London

Northern Ireland, under the title of Northern Ireland Branch Railways Society, an autonomous body with similar aims to the society.

The following year (1957-58) was more active, particularly as there was a considerable number of new members on the committee who were able to give more time to the work of the society. The annual public meeting was held in London on 22 February 1958 and was addressed by Mr Charles Rowe of the Railway Development Association on "London Branch Lines" and by Mr White of the Festiniog Railway Company who gave a most entertaining account of the history of that narrow gauge line in Wales.

The major event of significance was undoubtedly a visit to the Lewes-East Grinstead (Bluebell) line the following day, described by *The Star* newspaper as "A Pilgrimage of Protest". (51) The party were both accompanied on the journey and met on location at Newick & Chailey station by a BBC television team including Alan Whicker who interviewed Miss Bessemer and others for the Tonight programme screened on 27 February. It will be recalled that Miss Bessemer had dug up an old Act of Parliament which proved that the BTC had closed the line illegally and forced the railways to restore the minimum statutory service.

During the year considerable work had been carried out in opposing the closure of the Totnes-Ashburton line in Devon, including a petition to the TUC. Also, in the north of England a local sub-committee had been set up with a campaign to reopen the Weardale and/or Rothbury branches from Bishop Auckland. Negotiations to effect a merger between the society and the RDA had reached an impasse and were abandoned at least for the time being but it was agreed to maintain a working relationship to prevent duplication of effort. Similar arrangements were made with the Branch Line Society, a mainly historical body, and with the London & Home Counties Electric Traction Society.

One criticism which had been levelled at the committee by members during the year was the lack of regular communication and so in order to curb a high turnover of members which had been experienced it was agreed to issue regular *Progress Reports*. Previously they had only been issued when some matter of significance had arisen.

At the beginning of the society's fifth year (1958-59) there were ominous developments arising from a pay award following the railway strike and stringent economy measures by the BTC to counter this were forecast including an escalation in the withdrawal of unremunerative rail services. At the same time there were rumours that a streamlining of the TUC procedure was imminent as the authorities were perturbed at the time it was taking to get rail closures approved. Nevertheless it was not until the Transport Act 1962 that this was finally achieved.

A further successful reinvigoration party took place on 23 August when a group of members paid a visit to the Witham-Maldon branch in Essex and, escorted by the stationmaster, crossed the river bridge to inspect the disused Maldon West station.

Autumn 1958 saw the beginnings of the railway preservation movement with a proposal to form a Steam Locomotive and Railway Society to take over lines threatened with closure and run them privately but it was not until the spring of 1959 that the first moves in that direction were successful when the Bluebell Railway Preservation Society was set up to run





The East Anglian railway network was shattered by the Beeching cuts. Little remains

the Lewes-East Grinstead line. Even then they were only able to obtain the section between Sheffield Park and Horsted Keynes and would only be running a tourist attraction and not a regular public service. The society's policy towards the preservation movement remained fluid for the next few years and only finally emerged with the advent of Beeching. In the early days it had been opposed to the running of lines privately; ironical in view of its own intention to acquire and run a line. At the 1959 AGM there was considerable discussion on the subject and as a result a referendum was taken of the membership to determine the matter.

The outcome was a decisive vote in favour of full reciprocation with the societies concerned which in addition to the Bluebell included the South Devon Railway Preservation Society which hoped to reopen the Newton Abbott-Moretonhampstead and Heathfield-Exeter (St Thomas) lines – and the Midland & Great Northern Railway Preservation Society whose aim was to reopen the Yarmouth Beach-North Walsham section of that line which had been closed by BR on 28 February 1959.

Returning to the events of 1958, in the autumn the first of the regular *Progress Reports* appeared and by the beginning of 1960 were being issued at almost monthly intervals, although this was later reduced to bi-monthly due to the considerable costs involved.

By the beginning of 1959 things were looking pretty gloomy as despite the best endeavours of the society, both the Totnes-Ashburton line and West Wycombe station had closed, from 3 November 1958. Nevertheless there had been some encouraging moves by BR insofar as an increasing number of unstaffed halts were beginning to appear and, following representations by the society, were also provided on the Crieff branch in Scotland. However this was no compensation for the fact that whole lines such as the M&GN from the Midlands to East Anglia had been axed and worse was, of course, to come. The annual public meeting had to be deferred indefinitely due to difficulty in finding a speaker, and the AGM which was held on a weekday, as an experiment, had brought a disappointing response.

1959-60 was, however, a year of some significance for me, being the first year of my active involvement in running the affairs of the society, even if a little green at the start. In July the original policy statement "Beware of the Plan" was updated and reissued to members and on

18 July a further successful reinvigoration party took place with a visit to the Bletchley-Buckingham-Banbury line. The latter section of the line from Buckingham to Banbury (Merton Street) was to be of continuing interest to the society in the years to come and a few aspects of its operation are relevant at this stage.

Although threatened with closure, the line had been operated by a diesel railbus – of the kind described earlier – since 1956 as a result of which the number of passengers had increased significantly. The line had a number of unstaffed halts and the society made representations to the TUCC, regarding its retention and also suggesting that the two most recently built halts could be made more attractive if supplied with shelters; that Farthingoe should be opened as such a halt and, more importantly, that it would be more equitable for the cost of resleepering the line to be spread over several years rather than the prevailing practice of charging it to one year only.

In the autumn the line was visited by members of the TUCC including its chairman, Professor Peers, who was most indignant at the poor patronage of the trains he travelled on in view of the measures which had been taken. In January 1960 it was reported that the line was to close although in the meantime some serious discrepancies had been brought to light over the costs attributed to its operation which were found to include for the steam operated Buckingham-Bletchley section. While the increase in receipts had been significant it appeared that BR were looking to an improvement of between 15 and 20%, to make the exercise worthwhile. Closure was, however, deferred due to the inability of the bus company to provide an alternative service because of financial difficulties, and this situation continued until 2 January 1961 when the rail service was finally withdrawn.



The southern end of the Haltwhistle-Alston line is in 2022 operated by the heritage South Tynedale Railway with a 2 ft (610 mm) narrow gauge five-mile line from Alston to Slaggyford. The standard gauge branch line was closed by British Rail in 1976. The track bed is mostly intact, except at Lambley, and near Haltwhistle, where construction of the A69 Haltwhistle bypass road severed the trackbed. The preservation society hopes eventually reopen the remaining 10 miles to Haltwhistle

Other lines which had received the society's attention during the year were Newbury-Lambourn and Newbury-Winchester together with the Keighley-Oxenhope and Cheltenham-Honeybourne lines.

In the case of the Lambourn line the society's investigations had revealed it to be grossly overstaffed and despite the fact that it could have been made to pay, with appropriate economies, it was closed on 2 January 1960. The closure of the Keighley-Oxenhope line was however deferred due to the strong case put up by the local authorities, assisted by the society, and the service was not finally withdrawn until January 1962. Passenger services on the Cheltenham-Honeybourne line were withdrawn on 5 March 1960 but the line remained open for freight traffic and for the passage of through trains from the Midlands to South Wales.

One other line upon which the society had been working was that from Haltwhistle to Alston, closure of which had been deferred, it having been converted to diesel operation.

This line must surely hold the record for having withstood closure the longest as, only after many attempts over the years was this finally achieved by the authorities in 1976. It has certainly received considerable attention from the society during this period.

In December 1959 news had been received from the Northern Ireland Branch Railways Society that it had decided to change its emphasis and been reconstituted as the Northern Ireland Road and Rail Development Association, as there were so few branch Lines left and they proposed to devote their energies to the task of coordinating road and rail transport. The major event of the year (1959-60) was undoubtedly the public meeting held in London on 27 January, when our member Mr J Roll gave a talk entitled "On opposing the closure of a railway from local to Ministerial level", namely the Midland & Great Northern line.

Mr Roll explained that from the beginning of its operation by the LNER in 1936 there had been a strong desire to eliminate it. The first nail in the coffin had been the 1933 pooling of receipts by the Big Four. This meant that whatever the fortunes of any line, the rake-off to the companies was in proportion. Therefore there was no incentive. Had the line been transferred to the LMS in 1946, as had been intended, events may have been different but nationalisation intervened and it remained with the Eastern Region of BR.

In June 1958 the closure proposal had been announced and because consideration of the case had to be dealt with by two TUCs the policy of "divide and conquer" had prevailed, but not before a Parliamentary delegation had been seen by the Minister. As part of his campaign Mr Roll had produced his *Twenty Awkward Questions* for the benefit of the British Transport Commission. In response to the oft-repeated line that the M&GN had never paid its way he had obtained from the Board of Trade some typical accounts for the line. From these it was seen that in the six years prior to 1933 (the year that the pooling arrangements came into force), excepting that of the depression, a total profit of £177,000 had been earned.

When the TUC hearings came, these bodies scored heavily by insisting on dealing with objections only in the areas in which objectors lived (i.e. East Anglia or East Midlands). An example of this treatment was amply shown at the enquiry in Norwich where Mr Roll's objection had been promptly cut short once it was known that he was not a resident in the Eastern TUC area. Similar treatment had been handed out to a man who began by saying that he was in the British Legion at Murrow. A man who grew mushrooms at Martham was brushed aside curtly by being asked "Why do you think British Railways should run trains just for your benefit, why not grow your mushrooms nearer to Yarmouth?"

Objectors received more sympathetic treatment at the hands of the chairman of the East Midlands TUC at Bourne where Professor Peers was impressed by the M&GN case, but the outcome was the same dreary old tale - there was nothing that they could



Crowds greet the final journey of the push-pull Burton Jinnie from Tutbury in 1960, after 112 years of operation. The closure caused "considerable hardship"

do, so it was obvious that things were cut and dried before the hearing began. (52)

The early part of 1960 also saw severe criticism of the TUCC procedure by the MP for Burton-on-Trent in connection with the closure of the Tutbury-Burton line. It would, however, have been interesting to have received his views some two years later when the powers of the TUCCs had been watered down by the 1962 Transport Act.

On a more domestic note, in the early spring the society's committee was forced to find a new meeting place due to the untimely death of Mr Betton, proprietor of the cafe in Half Moon Crescent, Islington, where they had met regularly since December 1957. Prior to that, meetings had been held either in Cambridge, St John's Wood or West London or wherever a mutually convenient place could be found. Thereafter meetings were held at my home in Finsbury Square, that is until the demolition men moved in in the spring of 1963.

By the AGM of 1960 it was obvious that major changes were ahead. In July 1959 the BTC's *Reappraisal of the Modernisation Plan* had been issued as a White Paper. (53) Although the Reappraisal envisaged by 1963 a more compact railway system than the original 1955 document foresaw by 1970, Sir Brian (later Lord) Robertson, BTC chairman, had told a press conference on 23 July 1959 that he rejected any suggestion of a drastic surgical operation on a dying industry. He did, however, forecast the closure of the Great Central line after 1963. In the interim it would be used to carry a great deal of freight while the London Euston-Crewe main line was being electrified.

The Settle-Carlisle line was also earmarked for closure but is still with us which is more than can be said of the Great Central. Between the end of 1954 and the end of 1958, the report stated: "500 route miles of BR were closed, but a far bigger reduction of some 10% on the present total of about 18,850 route miles is anticipated between now and 1963; closure of passenger and goods stations will be proportionally higher in view of the extensive proposals affecting lines that will remain open for through traffic."

The Reappraisal went on to summarise the proposals of the various regions as follows: "The LMR proposals embrace a complete shutdown of 14 secondary and branch lines totalling nearly 200 route miles, the withdrawal of passenger services from a further 500 miles of line and the closure of 200 stations elsewhere in the region.

The Western Region aims to save six million passenger train miles a year by shutting down over 500 route miles of track and 500 halts and wayside stations; goods facilities may be withdrawn from 500 depots, as part of a large scale plan for concentration of freight traffic on modern railhead and terminal depots. The North Eastern Region is likely to close about 100 more stations to passenger traffic before 1963, by which time it may be operating passenger services over a third less route mileage than in 1950." (54)

Apart from many other proposals,



Bletchley flyover was opened in 1959 to allow freight trains on the Oxford-Cambridge line to avoid the West Coast main line. In 2022 it is being rebuilt as part of the East West Rail project

which incidentally included very few immediate plans for electrification, the flyover at Bletchley was a creature of this plan. The writing was, however, on the wall and it will be interesting to compare these proposals with those of the Beeching Plan in the following chapter.

By the spring of 1960 it will be recalled the railways capital debt had reached astronomic proportions and in the Budget of that year, Chancellor Derick Heathcoat Amory announced: "The deficits of the commission have, since the passing of the Transport (Railway Finance) Act 1957, been financed by advances from the Exchequer. These have been on the basis that the commission would eventually make profits out of which it could pay interest on the advances and repay the capital ... It has become apparent that the prospects of the railways and the commission are not now such as to justify the continued financing of the deficit by repayable advances." (55)

At long last the Government had realised the foolishness of the situation and in future the money placed at the disposal of the commission would not be regarded as a loan but as a direct charge on taxation. This apparent acceptance of the railways as a public service and not a profit making concern was deceptive as subsequent events will show.

By the society's AGM in April 1960 the Guillebaud Report on the Railways had also been published and was in favour of "better pay and working conditions for railwaymen" together with criticism of "antiquated and over complex clerical work in railway offices." (56) With the Reappraisal (53) it would undoubtedly lead to a further escalation of rail closures in view of the money which would be required to implement its recommendations.

At the annual general meeting the future role of the society was again questioned as a proposal had been received from a member that it should cease to be a pressure group but become a coordinating body for the many preservation societies which were being set up at the time to run lines under private enterprise. This proposal was put to members in a further referendum which came out decisively against such a move and so the gradual parting of the ways with the preservation movement began. Another matter raised at the meeting was the recent call by the chairman of BOAC (British Overseas Airways Corporation) for a rail link to London Airport (Heathrow) and even the Channel Tunnel was being mooted once again at this time.

The society submitted observations to the special advisory group which had been set up to consider the future of the railways and which paved the way for the changes which were to take place in the years ahead.

Lines threatened with closure at the time were those from Gravesend to Allhallows and Grain in north Kent and from Paddock Wood and Dunton Green to Hawkhurst and Westerham respectively. The society therefore decided to hold a reinvigoration party to visit all of these with the exception of Allhallows, which took place on 10 September 1960 and was most successful. The press met the party at Gravesend and Paddock Wood and accompanied members to Grain and Hawkhurst. Some of the regular passengers on the latter line were also met and future action to oppose closure was discussed.

Returning to the preservation movement for a moment, the Bluebell line which BR had finally managed to close was, nevertheless, reopened between Sheffield Park and Horsted Keynes on 7 August and paved the way for many more private schemes in the years to come.

In this connection it should be noted that the society has always given most support to those societies which aim to provide a regular public service.

In the annual report of the CTCC for 1959 a welcome item was the recommendation that where the economic hardship caused to users of a line exceeded the financial savings achieved by closure they would recommend that the line should remain open. (57) At about the same time the Jack Committee which was studying the adequacy of rural bus services came to the not unexpected conclusion that very few of these paid either, so exploding the myth of buses as a suitable alternative to unremunerative railways. In the case of one company it was found that up to 60% of its rural services were being subsidised by the remaining profitable ones and using the criterion which had been adopted by the Government for railways it would not have been long before the rural bus was as extinct as the rural railway. (58)

Towards the end of the summer, attempts to

effect a merger between the society and the Branch Line Society were abandoned due to the divergence of aims although that body has continued to provide us with much useful historical information on branch lines for many years.

Other lines dealt with by the society during 1960-61 included those from West Drayton to both Staines West and Uxbridge (Vine Street) and a special sub-committee kept the running of these lines under surveillance and made representations to BR on a number of deficiencies in their operation, including a notable lack of nameboards and direction signs at many of the stations.

In the autumn came the news that local passenger traffic was to be withdrawn from the Great Central line between Nottingham and Sheffield and also an indication that the M&SWJ line (Midland and South Western Junction Railway) from Cheltenham to Andover was to be closed, including the service to Marlborough.

At this time an independent six-man committee was set up under the chairmanship of David St John Thomas to enquire into the Lake District Railways and to consider their future. The society duly submitted observations to the committee recommending their retention to safeguard the amenities of the national park.

During the course of the average year, many railtours are run by different societies and organisations but one which was of considerable interest to the committee took place on 20 November 1960 when a special electric train visited Harlow, Hertford East and Chingford, run by the London & Home Counties Electric Traction Society, the day prior to the introduction of regular electric working on these Great Eastern suburban lines. Of particular interest was one of the first lifting-barrier level crossings at Ware and the party was also able to travel over a line which had been closed for some 40 years, namely that from Lower Edmonton to Chesunt via Turkey Street, which had been reopened as part of the scheme.

Of the lines visited on the autumn reinvigoration party that from Paddock Wood to Hawkhurst (regrettably closed on 12 June 1961) but, because of the concerted opposition to the

Picture: WIKIPEDIA



Little remains of the Great Central Railway in 2022

Westerham closure and doubts expressed by London Transport of their ability to deal with the traffic during the summer months by an alternative bus service, this proposal was rejected by the TUCC and the line remained open, at least for the time being. Strong opposition had also been encountered by the BTC to the closure of the Grain and Allhallows lines and these proposals were subsequently dropped until early in 1961.

Another threatened line of considerable importance was that from Penrith to Barnard Castle. In May 1960 the TUCC had asked the commission to keep the line open for a further 18 months during which time it was expected to find other ways to reduce the alleged loss of £103,000, but after much deliberation they finally agreed to its closure early in 1962. Since closure tourists have been deprived of a valuable link between the cathedral city of Durham and the Lake District with incalculable consequences on this country's ability to earn foreign currency by rail based tourism.

By the autumn of 1960 closures were coming thick and fast and yet another line threatened at the time was the Colne Valley from Chappel and Wakes Colne to Haverhill. A line which had however been reprieved was that from Saxmundham to Aldeburgh and the TUCC for East Anglia, on 13 September recommended that closure should be deferred for at least five years in view of the increased traffic expected from the opening of the atomic power station at Sizewell, near Leiston, and this line survived well into the Beeching era.

Early in 1961 the society decided to hold a further reinvigoration party in view of the difficulty which had been encountered in finding a speaker for the usual public meeting and this took place on 25 February with a visit to the Hatfield-Luton, Luton-Leighton Buzzard, Northampton-Bedford and Bedford-Hitchin lines. Incidentally it is significant that one of the speakers who had declined to speak at a public meeting was the secretary of the consultative committee, Mr Chambers, whose reason had been that the future of the consultative committees was under review by the Government; an omen of what was to come. At the time it was, however, common practice for the TUCCs to recommend when approving closures that the track should be left intact for at least a year in case there were moves to reopen a line as Government policy was rather fluid. Nevertheless it was not to be very long before this became all too clear.

The reinvigoration party was well attended and was a considerable success, notwithstanding the time of the year and adverse weather conditions. A meeting was held at Leighton Buzzard with representatives of the Leighton Buzzard and Linslade joint transport committee which represented a number of local authorities and was concerned about the future of the line to Dunstable. A useful and interesting discussion took place and it was suggested by the society that a more frequent service should be provided with through trains from Bletchley to Dunstable. Reporters from local papers were met at Dunstable and also at Bedford and the society received a good write-up, including a group photograph of a number of those taking part.

At the time, proposals had also been submitted to close the Chester-Denbigh-Ruthin line in North Wales and the local train users' association received considerable assistance from the society in the coming year. Nevertheless the chief activity of 1961 was the campaign to oppose the closure of the Colne Valley line and the society put forward a case to the TUCC, in cooperation with the local chamber of trade. The consultative committee subsequently made a recommendation that the closure should be deferred until such time as the main line from Colchester had been electrified. Another reason was that government policy had not been clarified as to the closure of unremunerative lines which served an existing or potential need.

The central committee was, however, unable to accept this recommendation and, despite representations to the Minister the line finally closed on 1 January 1962.

Activity on the line in fact culminated in a further reinvigoration party which took place on 10 June 1961 with visits to both the Stour (Cambridge to Sudbury via Haverhill) and Colne Valley lines. After travelling to Colchester the party took the diesel railcar via the Stour Valley line to Haverhill where a meeting was held with the chairman of the urban district council which had opposed the closure and was anxious that the service should be retained. After lunch at Haverhill the tour continued via the Colne Valley line to Halstead where the party was welcomed at the station by representatives of the chamber of trade. An interesting and informative discussion took place on the need for the line's retention before the party completed its journey to Colchester. A reporter from the *East Anglian Daily Times* accompanied the party and as result an excellent account of the day's proceeding appeared the following Monday.

By this time the holding of reinvigoration parties had become such a regular event that early in 1961 the society appointed a tour secretary to deal specifically with these trips.

Other lines dealt with in 1961 were those from Rugby to Leicester (Midland) and from Cheltenham to Kingham. In each case a special sub-committee was set up to investigate the running of the lines which duly submitted reports to the committee with suggestions for improvements.

Nevertheless at the society's AGM in April of that year Mr Manley, at what was to be his last meeting as chairman, referred to the work of the Stedeford Committee set up by Minister of Transport Ernest Marples, and also the Government White Paper on future railway policy (59) and in particular to Dr Richard (later Lord) Beeching, one of its members. It was Dr Beeching who had recently been appointed to manage the railways for the next five years, and who had been brought in from the board of Imperial Chemical Industries to serve as chairman of the BTC in what were to be its closing months. Dr Beeching took over from Sir Brian Robertson on 1 June 1961 and further developments both of the society and the railways are therefore more appropriately the subject of the following chapter.

Notes to chapter 2

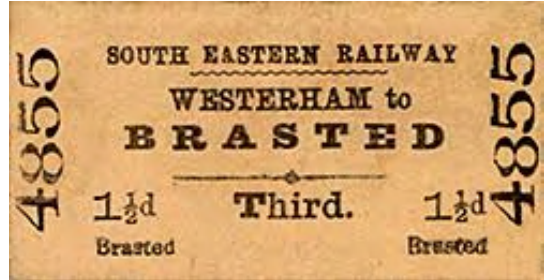
- (1) Stewart Joy. The Train that Ran Away. 1973. p25
A J Pearson. The Railways and the Nation. 1964. p17
- (2) Pearson. op cit p57 & 58.
- (3) ibid p48
- (4) Joy. op cit p33
- (5) M R Bonavia. The Organisation of British Railways. 1971 p53-4
- (6) Joy. op cit p37
- (7) P S Bagwell. The Transport Revolution from 1770. 1974 p310
- (8) Pearson. op cit p66.
- (9) Bagwell. op cit p310-3
- (10) ibid. p.310j Pearson, op cit p65
- (11) Pearson. op cit p66
- (12) G F Fiennes. I tried to run a Railway. 1967 p74
- (13) Bagwell. op cit p331-2
- (14) Pearson. op cit p80
- (15) Bagwell. op cit p330
- (16) ibid. Figures derived from Fig 26, p316 and are only approximate
- (17) British Transport Commission. Modernisation and Re-equipment of British Railways. 1955 Joy. op cit p43
- (18) Bagwell. op cit p.335
- (19) Joy. op cit p44. Pearson. op cit p82
- (20) Pearson. op cit p83.
- (21) Bagwell. op cit p333. Pearson. op cit p83
- (22) Bagwell, op cit p336
- (23) BTC. Annual Report for 1953 as reported in Trains Illustrated Vol 7, No 11. Nov 1954. p499
- (24) Institute of Transport Journal. March 1963.
- (25) Railway Economics. Queensland Bureau of Economics and Statistics. May 1931. Appendix A, p.8-9
- (26) Hansard. H of C.28/7/53 Vols 1254-6. (Mr. E.M.Cooper-Key in opening an adjournment debate on "railway branch lines (closures)
- (27) Trains Illustrated. Vol 7 No 8 August 1954. p354
- (28) Birmingham Mail. Monday 7 Feb 1955. Article entitled "Titfield Echoes"
- (29) Central Transport Consultative Committee. Annual Report for 1953. HMSO. March 1954. p4-5, paras 13 & 15
- (30) ibid. Annual Report for 1961. HMSO. March 1962 p4-6
- (31) 1953 Report, op.cit, p. 6 & 7
- (32) CTCC Annual Report for 1955. HMSO. June 1956 p7-8
- (33) Henry Parris. Government and the Railways in the Nineteenth Century. 1965. p34 & 182

- (34) W M Acworth. Railways of Scotland 1890. p148
- (35) Whitakers Almanack for 1900 p741 and 1905 p720
- (36) Trains Illustrated. Vol 12. No 132. Oct 1959 p500
- (37) Netherlands Railways publication cf 201/F. Centrale Radio Verkeersleiding. (Sauwerd-Roodeschool) Dienstreglement Afdeling II. Utrecht. 1967
- (38) Great Western Progress.1835-1935 GWR 1935 p98-9
- (39) The requirement for an attendant was contained in an Act of 1845
- (40) Rules for observance by Employees. LNER 1/1/33 p92
- (41) M M Kirkman. Operating Trains. Chicago. 1911. p128-9
- (42) Trains Illustrated. Vol10. No106. July 1957. p361
- (43) ibid. Vol14. No151. April 1961 p195-6
- (44) Cambs CC. Report on the reopening of the Wisbech-March Railway Line. Sept 1975 p7 (Costed at 1974 prices)
- (45) Trains Illustrated. Vol 6. No1. January 1953 p3 and Vol 7 No 4. April 1954 p134
- (46) British Transport Commission. Sixth Annual Report and statistics for the year ended 31 December 1953. Oct 1954. 2 Vols. (HC 1953-54, 268) Vol 1; Report p35 paras 193-4
- (47) Trains Illustrated. Vol 8. No 2. February 1955 p47
- (48) Joy. op cit p50-1
- (49) Trains Illustrated. Vol10. No106. July 1957. p337
- (50) The reverend gentleman also wrote an amusing alphabetical verse defending the Wensleydale line which remains in the Society's archives.
- (51) The Star. 22 Feb 1958 p3
- (52) SRUBLUK Progress Report. Feb 1960 p 1-5
- (53) British Transport Commission. Re-appraisal of the plan for the modernisation and re-equipment of British Railways (Cmnd 813) HMSO. June 1959
- (54) Trains Illustrated. Vol12. No 131. Sept 1959 p406
- (55) Hansard. H of C. 4 April 1960 cols 48-9. Included in the budget statement of Mr Derick Heathcoat Amory
- (56) Railway Pay Committee of Enquiry Report. Special Joint Committee on Machinery of Negotiation for Railway Staff. March 1960. (Chairman C W Guillebaud)
- (57) CTCC Report for 1959. HMSO. May 1960 p5 para 7
- (58) Ministry of Transport Committee on Rural Bus Services. Report. HMSO. March 1961 (chairman DT Jack)
- (59) Ministry of Transport. Reorganisation of the Nationalised Transport Undertakings. (Cmnd 1248). HMSO. December 1960.

Railways under Threat

During the early months of Dr Beeching's tenure as chairman of the British Transport Commission there were no dramatic moves but his many pronouncements left no room for doubt that drastic action was contemplated to solve the railways financial problems.

In the meantime Mr Marples had shown his teeth by telling the commission quite categorically that it could close the Westerham line any time it liked. This was an event of considerable significance as it was the first time a minister of transport had refused to accept the recommendation of the Central Transport Consultative Committee that a line should remain open. The Westerham line (from Dunton Green) finally closed on 30 October 1961.



If the CTCC were now to be overruled by the minister on the rare occasions when it recommended the retention of a service it was obvious that the prospect of any line being reprieved in future would be very remote. However with the publication of the Transport Bill and its effect on the TUCC procedure the significance of this event moved into its proper perspective.

The beginning of the Beeching era saw a closing of the ranks among the various organisations opposed to the road lobby. In the summer of 1961 a joint committee had been set up between the Railway Invigoration Society and the Railway Development Association to coordinate joint action and to effect a merger of the two organisations. Although this committee was short lived it did achieve one of its aims, namely the organisation of a joint public meeting early in 1962, from which this chapter takes its title, and which had profound consequences for the future of the two organisations and for the public transport movement as a whole.

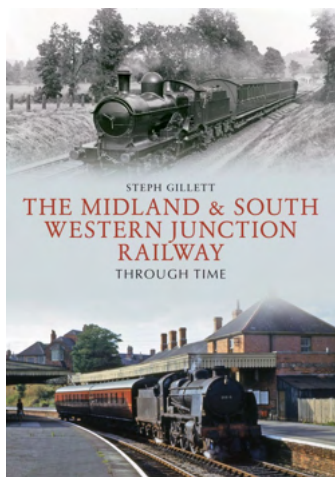
Meanwhile SRUBLUK had organised yet another reinvigoration party which took place on 2 September 1961 and visited the Abingdon, Fairford and Thame branches of the Western Region. The tour began at Paddington and proceeded to Radley for the Abingdon line. At Abingdon the party was received by the town clerk and subsequently held a meeting with the mayor at the Guildhall regarding the future of the line which at the time was not under immediate threat. A single unit railcar had recently been introduced on the line.

The next line to be visited was Oxford-Witney-Fairford, the closure of which was still being considered by the CTCC. During the journey on the line meetings were held with the clerk to the parish council at Lechlade, a representative of Fairford Parish Council and the chairman of Witney Urban District Council, all of whom were very concerned about the future of the line. It was agreed that there had been no attempt to make the line pay and considerable dissatisfaction was expressed at the disgraceful way in which the public hearing had been conducted by the TUCC, as proper consideration had not been given to a number of points

raised by objectors.

The tour continued from Oxford to Thame where the party was met by one of SRUBLUK's local members and an interesting discussion took place on the future of the branch. While the stations were well sited in relation to the centres they served, most of the traffic from the area to Oxford was carried by the more frequent bus service. It appeared that the main flow from the line was in the direction of London, via Princes Risborough and it was agreed that efforts should be made to encourage this, perhaps by extending the Marylebone to Princes Risborough diesel service to Thame, or by restoring the through London to Oxford service. Reports of the trip appeared in the local and national press.

The SRUBLUK campaign on the Chester-Denbigh-Ruthin line had also continued. The BTC memorandum on the closure had been examined and suggestions made for improving the service and making it more economic. These included reducing stations to unstaffed halts, the reduction to single track of the Mold Junction to Bodfari section, and replacement of the steam service by diesel units with appropriate recasting of the timetable. The line carried considerable traffic and the very great hardship which would be caused if it closed was stressed by the users association. Many residents in the area would be unable to reach their place of work and be forced to give up their jobs or to move away from the area.



The pace of closures, however, continued at an ever-increasing rate and most of the cross country Cheltenham-Swindon-Andover-Southampton line (the Midland & South Western Junction Railway) closed on 11 September 1961.

At about this time the report of the Lake District Enquiry was published. This contained a full account of the survey and both road and rail transport were considered in great detail. The Coniston (from Foxfield) and Keswick lines were given special consideration, in particular their economics. In the case of the Keswick-Penrith branch it was considered that the deficit could be reduced by half. Road and rail cooperation was also discussed. (1)

Another line which finally fell to the axe was Keighley-Oxenhope which closed on 1 January 1962 but remained open to freight for some time after. Passenger services were

however subsequently restored by a preservation society, of which more anon.

Another major campaign was also being mounted by the Great Central Association against the closure of the main line between Aylesbury and Sheffield. So many and so widespread were the objections that the TUCC had to hold a series of hearings. The first took place on 9 January to hear objections to the closure of the section between Sheffield and East Leake (south of Nottingham).

More cheerful, however, was the news that the Kent & East Sussex Preservation Society was making good progress, having obtained Tenterden Town station as its headquarters and permission to organise working parties to carry out certain routine maintenance on the line. The offer of at least one locomotive was also imminent.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the respite on the Allhallows and Grain lines in North Kent was short lived and the BTC put forward further closure proposals early in 1961 which

were subsequently approved. Passenger services on the Allhallows line ceased from 4 December 1961 while the remainder of the route remained open to freight including the line to Grain.

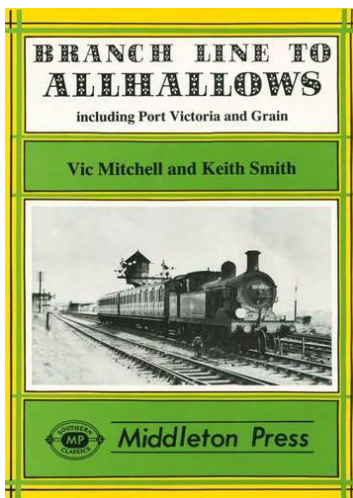
While the joint committee of SRUBLUK and the RDA was only to last a matter of months, a further example of its work was the joint statement on the Transport Bill, issued in the form of a letter to selected MPs in November 1961. This representation drew attention to the fact that the Bill would enable the railway authorities to withdraw train services without the need for a preliminary enquiry by the TUCC at which objectors could present their case against the proposal. This was considered an unfair provision which would not ensure that justice would be done. The two societies recommended that the Bill should be amended to require the railway authorities to provide a written statement of their case to any person likely to be affected by the proposal for consideration by the appropriate TUCC.

Under the Bill, the only notice of closure which the railways board would be required to give would be publication of the proposal on two successive weeks in any two local newspapers circulating in the area affected, not less than six weeks before carrying it into effect. This was not considered adequate and our representation recommended that in addition a similar notice should be provided in a prominent position at all stations which would be affected. The joint representation also asked for consideration to be given to subsidising unremunerative railway passenger services where such services were considered necessary to the public interest so as to avoid undue hardship. The parliamentary select committee had in fact recommended that those services which the railways were required to provide on grounds of national interest or social need should be subsidised but such proposals were not palatable to the government of the day and were subsequently pigeonholed. (2) By the time the Transport Act 1968 eventually introduced this principle much of the system which it could have aided had disappeared.

Two events which provided SRUBLUK with useful publicity at this time were a lecture by the society's chairman Dr Michael Caton to the Young Peoples' Fellowship at Cuffley, Hertfordshire, and a society stand at the Norbury Travel and Transport Exhibition. At Cuffley, Dr Caton gave an account of SRUBLUK's work and aims, illustrated with colour slides provided by a local member of the RDA. At Norbury, copies of SRUBLUK's Manifesto and the Progress Report were distributed and a photographic display also showed the working of branch lines before and after modernisation.

Another example of the close cooperation which existed between SRUBLUK and the RDA was the special sub-committee set up in 1961 to study the railway situation in the Hertford area and to press for improvements. This committee's principal aim was restoring the local passenger service between Hertford North and Stevenage which had been withdrawn in September 1939. The reopening became a reality on 5 March 1962 when BR reinstated the service with five down and four up trains on Mondays to Fridays and with six trains each way on Saturdays.

Other lines being dealt with at the time included Plymouth-Tavistock-Launceston where an



official objection had been lodged by SRUBLUK with the TUCC. The objection pointed out that, whilst only a moderate number of passengers were carried there were sufficient to justify retaining the service. Some of the passengers would have no alternative transport of any kind and this applied in particular to the area north of Tavistock. The objection also pointed out that much additional revenue could be obtained on the line from tourist traffic and it was unfortunate that little had been done in recent years to encourage this. The line offered an excellent means of reaching the fine scenery of the Dartmoor National Park but a majority of the vast number of holidaymakers visiting Devon were probably unaware of this. With adequate publicity much tourist traffic could have been developed,

Despite the considerable efforts of SRUBLUK and local users the Chester-Denbigh-Ruthin line was closed on 30 April 1962 as was the line between Bedford and Northampton (visited on a recent reinvigoration party) from 5 March 1962.

Nevertheless the most successful venture of the year 1961-2 was undoubtedly the joint public meeting held on 2 April at the Caxton Hall, sponsored by SRUBLUK, the RDA and the Pedestrians Association for Road Safety, chaired by the late Lord Stonham (formerly Victor Collins MP), who was chairman of the Road and Rail Association. I added some spice to the proceedings by secretly inviting Brigadier Thomas Ifan Lloyd and representatives of the Railway Conversion League who were dedicated to turning railways into roads.

The hall, seating more than 100, was full and standing. The three excellent addresses were followed by a lively discussion and interest was such that the proceedings could have continued for considerably longer than the appointed time.

The presence of Brigadier Lloyd also stimulated the discussion and most people stayed to the end when the following resolution was put to the meeting and carried by an overwhelming majority:

“This public meeting of transport users declares that an efficient and comprehensive railway system is essential to the future wellbeing of the nation and that, in planning its future development, the needs of the community should be the overriding consideration.”

Unfortunately I spent much of the proceedings ministering to the needs of one of the speakers, Mr G J Ponsonby (Sir Ernest Cassel reader in commerce at the University of London) who was taken ill at the beginning of the meeting and whose address *The Role of the Railways in the National Transport System* was subsequently read by Lord Stonham.

The first speaker was in fact David St John Thomas who by that time was already a leading authority on rural transport problems and spoke on *Rural Transport in the Light of the Transport Bill*, Mr Thomas's talk was so germane to the problems of branch lines at the time that it is summarised below:-

He first stressed that the title of the meeting *Railways under Threat – A Crisis in Transport* might have seemed far fetched a few months earlier, but there was nothing exaggerated about it by the time the meeting took place. The threat was extremely serious and he felt that unless there was a rapid change of heart, no less than half of the prevailing passenger mileage would



be closed within the following five or six years and large parts of rural Britain would be left without any bus connections with the remaining rail services. He considered that the damage had accumulated over a long period and the seriousness of the situation was only then being realised. The country was in fact paying the price for drifting in the 1950s and while there had undoubtedly been some appalling waste, as we have seen, combined with bad management the fault lay primarily with the government's transport policy which had utterly failed to provide a lead on several important issues. Above all it had never made it clear whether the railways should be run as a strictly commercial organisation or whether it should shoulder social transport liabilities. Railway managers, always hoping that the solution to their troubles lay round the corner, had on the one hand proposed the closure of hundreds of unprofitable services and on the other not introduced economies which might have put these services on a sounder footing.

The day of reckoning had come as not only had passenger losses assumed astronomical proportions but (as we have seen in chapter 2), there had also been a fall in the mineral traffic which had hitherto made it less urgent for the passenger side to pay its way.

It was possible, however, that with determination and enterprise a really national transport system might be saved but this called for positive measures and not merely the closure of services. The CTTC, which was not over-ready to enter upon controversy, had pointed out in its recent report that the policy of closure could not be the full answer. (3) Certainly the Transport Bill did not seem to give the answer and while it did several useful things it did not come to grips with the main issues and threatened to prolong the expensive compromise, which in the long run might be disastrous, of running the railway neither as a business nor as a social service.

Despite all the closures being put forward at the time, it was most unlikely that British Railways would take the economy to its logical conclusion. So much of the system would have to be closed that some of the rolling stock built under the Modernisation Plan would be unemployed and contracts with railway workshops have to be broken. Also, a far larger proportion of railway workshop capacity would have to be closed than previously envisaged. Thousands of railway men would be made redundant. BR was far too heavily committed to policies of providing services suddenly to turn itself into a strictly business enterprise. If pruning was the sole remedy, it would have to be utterly ruthless and such a policy was likely to be sabotaged wherever possible by senior railway officials who still believed it to be their duty to hold on to as much as possible for as long as possible in the faith that sooner or later the justice of the railway claims would be acknowledged.

The Transport Bill made one particular blunder that, except in London, no machinery whatever was suggested for road-rail cooperation. On the contrary, British Railways' interests in omnibus companies were to be transferred to a transport holding company and the railways would also be forbidden to enter into any agreements for the provision of road passenger services, except with the consent of the minister.

Opposition to closures had been much greater than might otherwise have been as no adequate alternative bus services had been proposed and in nearly all of the cases that Mr Thomas had investigated those that had been provided had proved no alternative at all and had attracted, at the most only a third of the railways' former passenger traffic. Had the railway authorities been empowered to run their own bus services it might have been possible to have closed some of the more grossly unremunerative lines without any undue hardship to the public. Such buses would have connected with trains, through tickets could have been

issued and luggage carried.

He continued with the contention that whatever Dr Beeching and the government decided – no matter how much inconvenience would be caused – BR would still be unable to reduce their size to a profitable unit rapidly enough. While closures were delayed, losses would mount and, starved of capital, much of what was left would also cease to be profitable. The government would also not face up to the issue of subsidising essential services which ran at a loss.

Some years previously he had been the first person to put forward the idea of specific subsidies for individual services which lost money but whose closure might merely transfer greater losses to the education authority, commerce and the general public. At first there had been little enthusiasm but many backbench MPs were coming to support it and it was a pity there was no provision for it in the Bill. Ideally an independent committee with a research team at its command should make recommendations to the minister before a closure was even considered and traffic thus begin to decline. There should, however, be some safeguards to ensure that the public received value for money.

Under the Bill, the area TUCC was no longer required to concern itself with the social implications and the Central TCC was also to be robbed of its advisory importance. Power was concentrated in the hands of the minister who, it was feared, would not err on the sympathetic side.

The government's answer was of course that so many people owned cars that public services were no longer required in many areas, but research had shown that this was not so. There were still many men who could not afford or were unfit to drive a car. Very few women owned cars or had the use of one and young people had to rely on public services. Mr Thomas's view was that if services were properly and economically run, by far the majority of the electorate would be prepared to contribute towards a substantial subsidy to maintain the passenger network at something like its current size. For a variety of reasons, many people found road transport more convenient for most of their journeys but that did not lessen reliance on the railways. Trains still provided the most convenient if not the only practical transport for a minority of essential purposes and having the only really national network (at least at the time) therefore bore a



Ernest Marples, minister of transport from 1959 to 1964. He was not expected to be sympathetic to calls for branch lines to be relieved.

BR chairman Dr Richard Beeching published *The Reshaping of British Railways* in 1963 and identified 2,363 stations and 5,000 miles of railway line for closure, amounting to 55% of stations and 30% of route miles.

Dr Beeching was chairman of BR from 1961 to 1965. He is said to have left by "mutual agreement" although it was also reported (denied by Beeching) that he was sacked by the incoming Labour transport minister Tom Fraser.

host of unremunerative obligations. People who never travelled by rail themselves relied on trains to send their children to boarding school or to bring ailing aunts for a visit. Two families would squeeze into one car when going on holiday because their luggage could be sent by train. Many provincial businessmen travelled by car for most shorter journeys but used trains to reach London or further afield.

People travelled how they pleased but still expected the public services to be available when required. Was it therefore rational to expect BR to pay its way? It might have been less absurd to pay half the cost of transport out of taxation.

Looking to the future, Mr Thomas forecast that branch lines would be closed more rapidly than hitherto; that the fiction would continue that alternative bus services were adequate and that little effort would be made either to cut costs or to improve revenue on the remaining branches. In many cases the savings from closure would be small and a far greater burden would be placed on the economy with no real saving to the nation. More country people would be forced to buy motor vehicles; those unable would suffer inconvenience or positive hardship and villages would tend to lose their young people more rapidly.

While the Transport Bill had some good points, it was in his opinion, likely to go down in history as a missed opportunity – perhaps the last opportunity – to make the best use of a priceless heritage. There were, of course, signs of growing public indignation and a more enlightened policy; perhaps with a new and more sympathetic minister of transport confidence might be restored. Meanwhile it was up to those people who had faith in the railways to point out wasted opportunities whenever they could, but with caution to avoid an extremist approach.

Mr Ponsonby's comments, read by Lord Stonham, were of interest when compared with the subsequent contents of the 1963 Beeching Report *The Reshaping of British Railways*. Firstly he expressed "a belief that there was, or should be a great future in Britain for rail transport, and that the railways were capable of providing services, both passenger and freight, at prices which the public would pay and which would bring in sufficient revenue to cover all relevant costs incurred. If they could not, then they should be axed. He also believed that, with adequate pruning, the new tree would be very much stronger and with greater survival value than it then appeared to have. The problem was not just one of closing a few more branch lines; it was more a matter of perceiving and finding out all those spheres for which rail transport was superior, and then going for them.

Before cutting out a passenger service every possible alternative or rail service, including different prices, should be considered, if not tried out. Where separable or practicable, the right to operate should be offered to any willing outsider, commercial or voluntary. If a local authority wanted an unprofitable rail service to be retained it should be given the opportunity to pay for its maintenance. Also the traffic commissioners should not be allowed to place anything in the way of road operators, passenger or freight, to fill gaps left by rail closures.

When planning the future shape and pattern of the railways, Dr Beeching's supreme task would be to find out what flows of traffic could be carried by rail on more attractive terms than by other forms of transport.

While Mr Ponsonby's address was primarily concerned with freight he nevertheless saw potential for substantial development of passenger traffic on the London-Brighton run with reductions in journey time to, say 45 minutes. Development of residential and office complexes at respective ends of the line within close proximity to the two stations would

exploit this potential. Some long-distance trunk routes lent themselves to “sunlight” expresses at fares below the norm to secure the custom of the less well off. (4)

He saw the freight side as the aspect of the railways which lent itself to the biggest changes, with better wagon loading and, in the long run, bigger wagons. Quick turnaround of railway wagons could transform the cost picture overnight. The small wagon with the high ratio of tare to payload was a more limiting factor than had been generally realised and Mr Ponsonby expounded this theme. He also pointed out that the carrying unit for containers should be a long wagon, which need be little more than a frame, capable of carrying permutations of containers of varying capacity.

He referred to the need for more drastic price differentials in favour of good loading traffic and pointed out that low cost and absolute dependability of service was better than high costs and, at times, a too costly frequency of service. Better train loads were needed and there should be block train workings between large centres with larger freight stations which had easy access for road vehicles,

With better wagon loading, bigger train loads and block train working, rail charges and services would be so superior to any other form of transport that railway termini would become magnets for road borne traffic with large hinterlands or catchment areas.

Such termini would require redesigning and would attract “bulked” traffic from British Road Services, private carriers and even “C” licence vehicles.

These ideas were quite revolutionary at the time and the extent to which they have been taken up since, allowed to operate effectively and some of the problems encountered at their introduction will be dealt with in more detail later in this and subsequent chapters.

The final speaker at the meeting was Mr T C Foley, secretary of the Pedestrians’ Association who spoke on *The Problem and Safety*. He made, quite forcefully the point that, while some

people could orbit the earth at 20,000 miles an hour, (although possibly not by choice) those living in some parts of the country had less means of communication than in the pre-motor age.

Train accidents were so few that one serious accident made nonsense of statistics and over the five years 1955-59 an annual average of only 30 passengers had been killed, together with 70 seriously injured. The contrast with road accidents was sufficient to show the great contribution to safety which would result if more traffic were to be carried on the railways since road accidents in 1960 alone had totalled 7,000 persons killed and 84,000 injured. Road accidents at the time were costing the nation £230 million per annum. Talking of economics, Mr Foley pointed out that transport minister Mr Marples did not seem to realise that the same firm was paying for the electrification of a railway line and the building of a motorway

7,985 deaths

The 1960s were a perfect motoring storm: new motorways, no speed limits, no seatbelts, no central barriers, no restrictions on drivers’ hours and no restrictions on alcohol. Then there were faster cars which were still primitively constructed, increasingly heavy lorries, a new breed of travelling salesmen and no roadside medical help whatsoever. The heaviest peacetime death toll on Britain’s roads was in 1966, when 7,985 were killed – a third of whom died on their journey from the scene to hospital. In 2018, there were 1,770 deaths on British roads
Northern Echo January 2019

alongside. What would be thought of a business that manufactured a product and then invested its resources in another product in direct competition with the first one?

He emphasised that road transport should be complementary to rail transport and not in competition with it. America was currently learning from the mistakes of the past and was beginning to realise that railways were necessary for the future of that country. Britain should learn from these experiences and not blindly follow with the same mistakes. (5)

The SRUBLUK annual general meeting took place shortly after the public meeting, on 11 April, and the new chairman, Dr Michael Caton, in his first annual report reiterated many of the points made by the three speakers earlier in the month. It was not merely the loss of rural branch lines which had to be faced but much of the railway system as a whole was under threat. Almost every railway in central Wales was under review and in Scotland the future of every line north of Perth was in doubt. Very severe hardship would be caused by such closures. Public reaction was, however, strong and many regional protest groups were being formed.

The annual report of the CTC, in which it had pointed out that closure of 19% of the railway route mileage since 1950, had achieved annual economies of only 7% of the railway working deficit for 1960, was of considerable significance. (6)

Dr Caton pointed out that it was proposed to expand SRUBLUK's work by the formation of local sub-committees and the progress of these will be reviewed later in the chapter.

The proposed merger with the RDA was also dealt with in some detail at the meeting and the preparation of a new manifesto was to be pursued in the light of developments, both of SRUBLUK and railway policy in the following months.

On the heels of the AGM came a further reinvigoration party which visited the Carlisle area on 5 May which, while poorly supported, was a considerable success. After visiting the Alston and Silloth branches members returned to Carlisle where an interview was



held with the press. The party then proceeded to Langholm where it was met by a local member, Colonel Armstrong, and his wife together with the provost. Colonel Armstrong was chairman of the Dumfries and Galloway Development Association which was very concerned about the future of public transport in the area.

Members then travelled to Dumfries and were joined by the local representative of the GDA who accompanied the party to Kirkcudbright. Members were received by the station master who was also the local provost and a discussion took place regarding the future of rail services in the area.

Not only was SRUBLUK holding day trips but in the summer of 1962 a party of members spent a fortnight touring threatened lines in Scotland including, the Far North Line (Inverness-Wick-Thurso), Dingwall-Kyle of Lochalsh and the West Highland line (Fort William-Mallaig).

The tour, held during the last two weeks of June, was a great success and those who participated, including me, were unanimous in agreeing that SRUBLUK had been successful in arousing greater interest in transport matters among those organisations and individuals who had been met. Also many of the suggestions and comments had been warmly welcomed. It would, however, have been dangerous to have attempted to draw any detailed conclusions about the probable future of the railways in Scotland at the time as the party had covered a large area in a short time and had only been able to make one, or sometimes two journeys over most of the lines visited.

As we have seen, earlier rumours had been circulating widely that there was unlikely to be any railways left north of Perth in a few years time, a situation which arose mainly from the traffic surveys which were being conducted by Dr Beeching. From the results of these he had been instructed to classify lines into three groups:

1 Those which paid their way.

2 Those which did not do so at the time but might be made to do so with a little effort.

3 Those which he considered were never likely to pay for themselves.

The doctor had been instructed to close all lines in the last category by the end of the year, or as soon as possible thereafter, subject only to the approval of transport minister Ernest Marples. It was expected that not many lines (if any) in the north of Scotland were likely to fall into the first category and the majority were almost certain to be in the last. The main reason for this was that the number of potential passengers per mile of railway was far less in the Highlands than in the rest of Britain or, indeed, the rest of Scotland. Geographical and climatic features also adversely affected the economics of railway operation in the area.

It was obvious that in many areas severe hardship would be caused if railway facilities were withdrawn and continued depopulation of rural districts would be accompanied by the rapid decay of many of the smaller towns in the north. Even the larger towns would suffer greatly, particularly where adequate road services were not available. If freight services were withdrawn, not only would it become more difficult to attract new industry to the Highlands but existing industries would be forced to move to places where transport was more plentiful.

During the course of the tour, every opportunity was taken to put forward suggestions for attracting more traffic to the railways and reducing operating costs. Meetings were held with representatives of the county councils of Fife, Sutherland and Ross & Cromarty and from the local authorities at the following places visited:-Kirkcaldy, St Andrews, Tayport, Newport-on-

Tay, Dundee, Macduff, Banff, Thurso, Inverness, North Lorn (Ballachulish), Oban, Port William and Beith. During the tour discussions were also held with members of the Scottish Railway Development Association, which had assisted in arranging many of the meetings with local authorities.

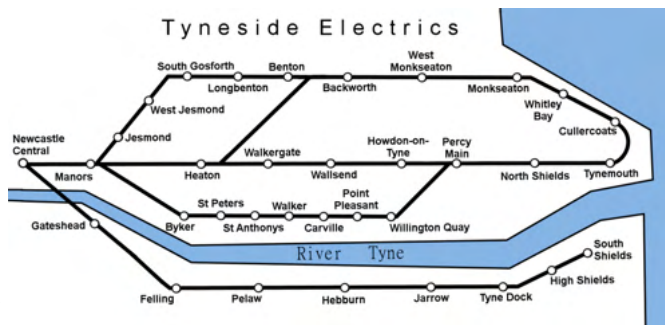
At local level SRUBLUK activities were given added impetus by Dr Beeching's implementation of the government's massive closure programme referred to earlier, the effects of which were already beginning to be felt even though the final report *The Reshaping of British Railways* was not to be published until early the following year and merely confirmed the scale of the closures which were already being carried out.

The west of England was particularly vulnerable and SRUBLUK had appointed a local representative who cooperated with a local schoolmaster in conducting a vigorous campaign to keep open the Exe Valley line (Exeter-Tiverton-Dulverton). A number of public meetings were held in Tiverton and Bampton during the summer organised jointly by SRUBLUK, the local council and the Tiverton Railways Action Committee, at which speakers included the MP for Tiverton, a member of the South Western TUC and SRUBLUK chairman Michael Caton.

Jointly these bodies submitted proposals to BR for an interregional diesel service covering the Yeovil-Taunton-Dulverton-Barnstaple Junction-Ilfracombe-Bideford/Torrington-Yeoford-Exe Valley-Exeter-Exmouth lines, similar to the successful diesel service which was operating on the Southern Region in the Southampton area.

When the inevitable happened and the closure of the Exe Valley line was announced in the autumn it achieved national distinction by having the greatest number of objections lodged for any closure proposal in the British Isles at the time, 411 in all, representing well over 600 persons were received by the TUC including one prepared by SRUBLUK local representative and the Tiverton Railways Action Committee.

Another area where a local organisation had been set up was on Tyneside following Dr Beeching's statement that the Newcastle Suburban Electric services might have to be closed. This sub-committee of SRUBLUK consisted also of representatives of the RDA and attended a meeting of local authorities and other interested bodies in Newcastle on 8 June when a resolution was passed condemning the widespread closure of railway lines and pressing for a deputation to



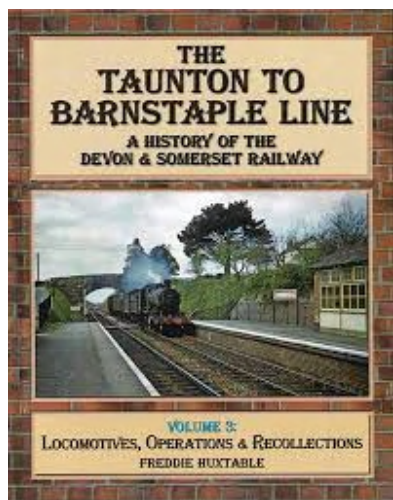
The Tyneside Electrics were the suburban railways on Tyneside that the North Eastern Railway and the London and North Eastern Railway electrified using the third rail system. The North Tyneside Loop was electrified from 1904 onwards and formed one of the earliest suburban electric networks. The South Tyneside line to South Shields via Pelaw was electrified in March 1938. British Railways converted these lines to diesel operation in the 1960s. The electrical supply infrastructure (which dated from 1935) and the rolling stock (which dated from 1937) had become "life expired". In the late 1970s much of the former network was modified and incorporated into the Tyne and Wear Metro

seek a meeting with the Minister of Transport to discuss the situation. The services were believed to be running at a substantial loss but it would have been practically impossible to provide alternative transport for the peak-hour users.

Yet another line upon which SRUBLUK had been working was that between Princes Risborough-Thame-Oxford, visited on an earlier reinvigoration party. A comprehensive memorandum was submitted to the TUCC drawing attention to the poor connections with the main line at Princes Risborough and the notable lack of publicity for the services which, combined with poor timekeeping, had severely detracted from their usefulness. Economies were also suggested to reduce the operating deficit.

At the TUCC hearing on 8 May where SRUBLUK was represented, it was stated that the annual loss was £26,000 and that the number of passengers using the line was minimal. SRUBLUK, however, pointed out that the alternative bus service proposed between Thame and Princes Risborough would be highly unsatisfactory, involving a trip via Aylesbury, and submitted that the retention of that section of the line should at least be considered to prevent undue hardship. BR estimated that the retention of the Thame-Princes Risborough section would cost £9,600 but conceded that it would have to be maintained to a high standard to cater for the remaining freight traffic.

The TUCC was, however, unable to accept even this suggestion and passenger services from the entire line were subsequently withdrawn from 7 January 1963.



Returning to the West Country for a moment; as a result of much public pressure a joint meeting of Devon and Somerset county councils was held at Taunton on 8 June to consider the many threatened lines and associated rural transport problems in the area. All MPs for the local constituencies affected were invited to attend together with representatives from all borough, urban and rural councils. All of the invited MPs were present.'

The meeting lasted all day and the whole problem was fully discussed with special emphasis on hardship and the increased road congestion which would be an inevitable result of further rail closures. At the end a strongly worded resolution was passed calling on the government to halt all further closures in the West

Country for a period of three years so that the problem could be thoroughly investigated and not dealt with piecemeal as was the practice at the time.

The various MPs present, who incidentally represented all three major political parties, were so concerned by the facts revealed that they resolved to sponsor an amendment to the Transport Bill requiring that the period allowed for the submission of objections to closures should be increased from six weeks to three months.

Another local line which was receiving attention was the Cheddar Valley (Yatton-Wells-Witham) and detailed proposals for its reinvigoration at the time included a new timetable designed (a) to improve the connections at the Witham end with fast trains to and from London Paddington at Westbury, (b) to use more economical methods of traction, (c) to

attract more through passengers and (d) to improve the line's overall economic position. It was not to be long, however, before closure proposals were announced and SRUBLUK lodged a detailed objection listing the above measures to reduce the financial loss, and submitted that they should be given a fair trial before closure was implemented.

Earlier in the year the East Midlands TUCC had made its recommendation on the Great Central line and had approved the withdrawal of passenger services between Nottingham and Sheffield and of Sunday services between Aylesbury and Nottingham and these took effect from 4 March 1963. Passenger services also ceased, from 18 June 1962 on the Oxford-Fairford and Cambridge-Mildenhall lines, both of which had been visited by reinvigoration parties.

Later in the same year (from 5 November) the Lugton-Beith Town line, visited on the Scottish study tour, also lost its passenger services.

Another successful reinvigoration party was held on 25 August with visits to lines in Sussex and Surrey. The party travelled to East Grinstead, via Three Bridges where chairman Michael Caton remained behind for a discussion with a local councillor and press reporters. Meanwhile the party continued to Tunbridge Wells where further interviews were held with the press and local authority representatives. The trip then continued via Hailsham to Polegate and Brighton, the chairman having travelled via Uckfield to rejoin the party at Lewes. At Brighton a further meeting with the press took place before members set off for Horsham.

Here a newspaper reporter joined the group and travelled with it to Guildford where yet another press representative was waiting. The party returned to Waterloo via the electrified Cobham loop line. The various discussions which had ensued had provided an excellent opportunity to consider local transport problems and during these interviews it had been possible to point out the greatly accelerated closure procedure which would result from the passing of the new Act.

Transport Act 1962

So it was that by the autumn of 1962 the Transport Bill was on the statute book and substantially completed the dismantling of the British Transport Commission's organisation which had been partly eroded by the Transport Act 1953. Instead of one overall authority controlling the principal sector, of inland transport there would be in its place, a number of independent boards for British Railways, London Transport, British Transport Docks and Inland Waterways (Section 1). Road transport, hotel and other similar concerns would be taken over by a transport holding company (Section 29).

The principal change from the organisation set up under the 1947 Act was the absence of any unifying authority. The National Transport Advisory Council (Section 55) could only make recommendations to the minister on coordination; the only statutory duty to coordinate being that placed upon the London Board with regard to the bus and underground services and those run by British Rail within its area and even here failure to do so was not actionable (Section 7 (9))

A large measure of independence was given to the various boards including responsibility for capital debt and efficient performance. Section 15 stated: "Each of the boards shall so conduct their business as to secure that their revenue is not less than sufficient for making provision for the meeting of charges properly chargeable to revenue, taking one year with another."

In the case of the railways, however, Section 22 provided that: "The minister may, with the approval of the Treasury, out of money provided by Parliament make grants to the Railways

Board to meet any deficit on their revenue account arising during the period of five years beginning with the vesting date”, thus giving the railways a breathing space to put their house in order, although it was made quite clear that this time would be reduced if the minister felt it appropriate.

The boards were also given power to use any surplus land in their possession for commercial development (Sec.11) (2) with a residual power of compulsory purchase (Section 15) to facilitate development of such land, in an attempt to boost income and exploit latent commercial assets. Competition with outside industry was, however, forbidden by Section 13 and while the boards could, “construct, manufacture, produce, purchase, maintain, and repair anything required for the purpose of their business” they were not permitted to do so for any other purpose and Section 13(6) also specified the fields in which they could not operate, a provision which was not entirely new.

The financial arrangements made by the government upon abolition of the British Transport Commission are summarised by Professor Bagwell as follows:-

	Millions
British Transport Commission	
Capital Debt 1962	£2,450
Capital Debt written off	<u>£475</u>
Capital Debt remaining	£1,975
Railways Debt	£1,575
Other Public Transport Undertakings	£400
Railway Debt made up of Interest Bearing Capital	£900
Debt carried in suspense	£675

The Treasury was made responsible for the debt written off (Section 38) and under Section 36 also took over liability for the transport stock issued under Section 89 of the Transport Act 1947. The £900 million of interest-bearing capital was the cost of new equipment since Modernisation; the £675 million left in suspense represented the government’s optimistic hope that at least some of these written-down book assets of the pre-1956 railways might some day earn interest. (Section 40). (7)

The section of the Act which were of particular interest to SRUBLUK were 54 and 56 as they dealt with the functions of the TUCCs and rail closures. Despite the many representations made during its passage through Parliament, the provisions contained in the Transport Bill remained basically unchanged. Thus, as we have seen, the board was (and still is) only required to give six weeks notice of closure, to be published on two consecutive weeks in two local newspapers circulating in the area affected. The notice to give the date and particulars of the proposed closure and details of any alternative services which it appeared to the Railways Board would be available, together with any proposals for providing or augmenting those services. The notice to state also that objections to the proposed closure should be lodged within six weeks of the date specified, which would be the date on which the notice was last published in a local newspaper.

Objections could be lodged by any users of the service or body representing such users, in writing, with the appropriate area Transport Users Consultative Committee. In such cases, the

area committee would inform the Minister of Transport and the board and closure could not proceed until the committee had reported to the minister and he/she had given consent. If no objections were lodged, the closure could be implemented at the expiration of the six week period. Generally there would be no hearing and the railways would no longer be required to produce a written statement of their case for withdrawal of the service.

The TUCCs would present their report direct to the minister but the board and the Central Transport Consultative Committee would be sent copies. They would only hear objections if they felt it was appropriate, in which case such hearings would have to be held in public. Their report was only required to deal with the hardship which in the committee's opinion would be caused by the proposed closure and, by implication, objections could only be lodged on these grounds; but the committee could submit proposals for alleviating such hardship. If the minister considered that a report had been unreasonably delayed, he might, after consulting the area committee concerned and after making such enquiries considered fit, consent to the closure without awaiting the report.

Under the terms of the Act, however, there was nothing to prevent a TUCC considering a proposal for a line before a closure was published. Schemes for improving local services and reducing the cost of operation of a line could therefore be prepared and submitted to a TUCC at any time. Nevertheless the facilities for opposing rail closures were greatly reduced and the public's right of objection drastically curtailed. One concession, which was not obligatory, (Section 54) enabled the board to publish advance notice of intended closure if the minister so required and in latter years this became an accepted procedure.

The scene was therefore set for the onslaught which was to follow and which to all intents and purposes was already under way.

Before leaving the Transport Act 1962, one provision which was to be of considerable importance and which altered "the entire body of the law of railway charges (except with regard to fares in the London area)" was contained in Section 43. This stated quite categorically (Section 43(6) that "None of the boards shall be regarded as common carriers by rail or inland waterways" and Section 43(4) listed all of the enactments (some dating back to 1845) from which the board's commercial activities were freed.

At last the government had accepted that the railways were no longer in a monopoly position and given them the freedom to refuse what they considered to be unremunerative traffic. "The law which prevented them from doing so was considered as an obstacle to the achievement of a surplus of revenue over expenditure." (8)

Returning to the affairs of SRUBLUK, during the summer of 1962 negotiations had been proceeding to effect a merger with the Railway Development Association. By the autumn, however, it had become apparent that the organisation of the two societies was not compatible with such a move; the RDA being composed of self-contained areas, co-ordinated only by periodic inter-area meetings. Without a permanent central council and treasury it would not have been possible to amalgamate. The matter was therefore held in abeyance as it was considered that the efforts of the two organisations should be concentrated in opposing the many rail closures which were imminent.

In the interim the advent of these large-scale closures of lines and stations together with the wider implications of the Transport Act 1962 had brought many other organisations into the field and one of the unforeseen consequences of the public meeting which had been



Sir Alec Douglas-Home who was Prime Minister from 1963 to 1964. He disclaimed his peerage to become an MP – and Prime Minister



Lord Stonham was born Victor Collins in Whitechapel, east London. He was Labour MP for Taunton in 1945 and for Shoreditch and Finsbury from 1954-58

organised by the two societies earlier in the year was to bring together a number of people who between them were to form a much larger organisation with wider aims which was to provide an eminently suitable umbrella for the coordination of the activities of the two societies, together with the many other bodies which were to become associated with its aims.

The initiative had been taken by the Pedestrians' Association which, in the summer had organised a joint meeting on road and rail traffic problems which had prepared a comprehensive memorandum on the subject which was presented to the Prime Minister (Sir Alec Douglas-Home) on 25 September. The chairman of the body which was to emerge was Lord Stonham (with secretary T C Foley) and it was initially known as the National Standing Joint Council on Road and Rail Traffic Problems.

The memorandum was made public at a press conference on 27 September at which speakers included Jeremy Thorpe MP, and Tudor Watkins MP. Copies had been despatched to all MPs and to 285 peers. It emphasised that, while roads were grossly overloaded and congested, causing economic burdens and social misery – notably through the toll of accidents – the railways were increasingly being neglected. Moreover the findings of Dr Beeching foreshadowed a drastic truncation of the existing railway system to the extent that large parts of Great Britain would be left without any rail transport at all.

Strategic considerations were also emphasised since in the event of imported oil supplies being cut off or mass evacuation being called for, the nation would be paralysed if all of the rail closures foreshadowed were carried out. In every industrialised country the government decided the balance between road and rail but in Great Britain, policy had been directed to the diversion of traffic from the railways to the roads. It was dishonest to pretend that there was free competition between the two modes when the railways were handicapped and the roads enjoyed substantial hidden subsidies.

Besides discussing the passenger problems, the



The start of things to come: A Midland Red coach on the original section of the M1 in rural Bedfordshire in 1960. Midland Red was a bus company that operated from 1905 until 1981. It was one of the largest English bus companies, operating over a large area between Gloucester and Derbyshire, and from Northampton to the Welsh border. Midland Red started express coach services in 1921. In 1969 the company became the largest subsidiary of the National Bus Company. In 1981, Midland Red was split into five separate companies which were then privatised in 1987

memorandum also dealt, at some length, with the effects of closure on goods and parcels traffic which would have equally disastrous social and economic consequences in the areas affected. At the time Her Majesty's mails were carried by rail to every part of the United Kingdom but if the large-scale closures which were forecast became effective, many towns and villages would be up to 100 miles from the nearest railhead. The cost of conveying mails and parcels by road, prohibitive though it might be, would have to be met by the Post Office and, as postal charges were uniform throughout the country, this would necessitate all-round increases in the charges for letters and parcels and a consequent increase in industrial costs. In effect, it would be a device for transferring the losses from the railways to the Post Office and thence to the public. There would be no net national saving.

If the closure of railway lines and the expansion of road transport was accepted as a national policy it would be necessary to construct many more roads at enormous cost, involving the destruction of homes and to large-scale diversion of building industry resources at a time when many thousands were homeless. Roads were apparently being constructed without regard for the existing facilities provided by the railways. Reference was made in the memorandum to the comparatively small financial savings which had resulted, to date, from

rail closures and it was pointed out that the real problems of the railways, would not be solved by these means. No estimate was available of the relative proportion of wear and tear on roads which was made by the various types of vehicles. Research on the subject had been undertaken in the United States and it was regarded at the time as a reasonable assumption that 90% of the wear and tear was caused by heavy vehicles.

The need for greater efficiency in the operation of the railways was also explained. At the same time it was considered that a more aggressive sales policy was needed to make known the advantages of rail transport.

Finally the memorandum recommended that the government should draw up a plan for coordinating all forms of public freight and passenger transport so that each could perform the functions which it was best fitted to discharge, and complement the others. A full investigation into the true costs of roads should be made and the viability of the railways assessed in a similar manner, excluding track costs which road transport had ready provided for it. Only when all alternative means of financing unremunerative lines had been investigated and all possible operating economies implemented, should a line be considered for closure, and should not be finally closed until a satisfactory alternative had been arranged. Also track should be retained for a period to permit reopening if circumstances changed.

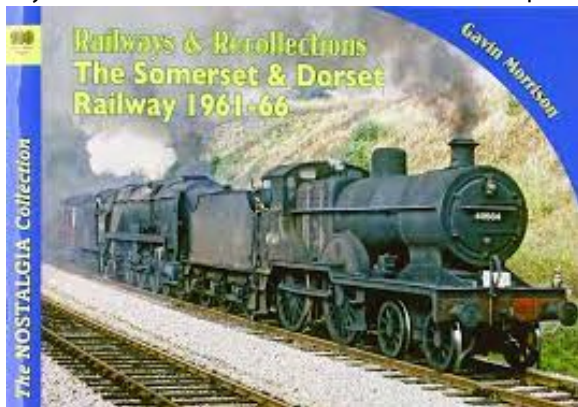
The Prime Minister replied to the memorandum, which he said he found interesting, but pointed out that the main question was "What transport policy would be right for the economy as a whole" and said it was difficult to pass final judgement until the results of Dr Beeching's traffic studies were known. (9)

In the meantime the council, unlike SRUBLUK, had lost no time in discarding its long and unwieldy title and was formally constituted as *The National Council on Inland Transport*, its aims and objects being: "To promote

- (a) the development of an integrated inland transport system and
- (b) the recognition of the real costs and social values in assessing the comparative advantages of the various forms of transport."

A further press conference was held in February 1963 when the NCIT's answer to Mr Marples' detailed reply to the memorandum was issued. Thereafter the NCIT and its constituent bodies, which in the words of Lord Stonham represented over 12 million people, continued to campaign vigorously against the rail closure proposals, which were to be spelt out in detail in the subsequent Beeching Plan, and has provided a useful forum ever since for those opposed to a transport system dominated by the many vested sectional interests of the Road Transport Lobby. (10) To some extent the actions of the NCIT were also to take the heat off the rail closure programme, but only for a while.

The SRUBLUK's main activity in 1962-63, apart from the publication of a new manifesto during the winter of 1962, was a concerted campaign on the Somerset and Dorset Line (Bath-Bournemouth). Proposals were formulated for the line's rehabilitation which were published in the form of a



booklet, early in 1963. Public meetings were also organised in Shepton Mallet, Bath, Templecombe and a press conference in February 1963 at Bath when SRUBLUK proposals were launched. These included:

- 1 The introduction of an entirely new timetable to be operated by diesel multiple units.
- 2 The closure of the Highbridge branch to passenger traffic between Glastonbury and Highbridge.
- 3 The construction of a new link between the S.& D« and Western Region lines near Bath and the closure of the line between Midford and Bath (Green Park), including the latter station.
- 4 The downgrading of a number of stations to the status of unstaffed halts and the appointment of a line manager.

A publicity leaflet about the line was also issued and an essay competition held, on the subject of improving the line's viability.

At about the same time, an important change in the organisation of West Country lines took place, when on 1 January 1963, all Southern Region lines in the area from Salisbury westwards, with the exception of the Weymouth-Castle Cary line were transferred to the Western Region, a price which appeared to be a very high one. In exchange for what was already admitted to be the least-paying part of the Southern Region, it had to relinquish to the London Midland Region one of its more profitable routes, from High Wycombe through Birmingham to Chester and Birkenhead. The result was that the tempo of closures, already alarmingly high, had to be stepped up if, as required by the new Transport Act, the new unit was to pay its way..

Early in 1963 SRUBLUK held a further reinvigoration party to lines in Bedfordshire and North Buckinghamshire when, on 5 January, despite illness and severe weather conditions a party of 15 members visited the Bletchley-Bedford, Buckingham and Newport Pagnell branches. The Mayor of Buckingham met the party at the station and at Newport Pagnell the party was met by four members of the Urban District Council. A press reporter was also present at Wolverton. Because of the weather, the party was not however able to meet any regular users of the Oxford-Cambridge line.

By the beginning of 1963 SRUBLUK's activities had reached as far as the United States where a number of members had been enrolled and one such member (Mr Bowman) had sent a detailed summary of the plight of the railways in that country. A few examples will suffice:

In recent years the railroads of the United States have been allowed to go downhill badly, particularly as to passenger services. The blame lies principally with the government's policy of almost unlimited spending for superhighways and airports and subsidies to airlines, while doing nothing for the railroads.

Passenger closures in recent years include the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad's service from Baltimore to New York City and the Pennsylvania Railroad's service from New York City to Detroit, Michigan. Also, all passenger services have been withdrawn from the entire state of Maine, north of Portland (which is in the extreme south east part of the state). A serious result of the wholesale abandonment of passenger services and the consequent scrapping of passenger coaches is that when some emergency or other need for mass transit arises, there will be no equipment available.

There has been much talk about subsidizing commuter railroads in the vicinity of large cities, but so far very little had been done for the commuters, and nothing at all for long-distance passengers. The City of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and one or two neighbouring counties are subsidizing commuter lines enabling them to increase services and reduce fares. This effort seems to be succeeding, as the subsidized lines all report a considerable increase in patronage. The city feels that it can save money by doing this as it reduces the number of automobiles and the need for new highways, and also reduces congestion in the downtown business district and places downtown business in a better position to compete with the new suburban shopping centres.

Some main lines have fairly adequate passenger service, but it is getting less all the time. As railroad lines depend on each other for connecting services the poor or non-existent service on some lines deprives connecting lines of business which they would otherwise have.

The Minister of Transport's view (Mr Marples) that road building will eliminate traffic is wrong. In the United States, road building has created traffic problems by diverting traffic from the railroads. Our traffic problems continue to grow worse. (11)

Returning to Britain, another line with which SRUBLUK had been dealing was that from Ipswich to Lowestoft and Yarmouth (the East Suffolk line). In the autumn, Southwold Town Council had expressed great concern over the possibility that the line might be closed and a local campaign was started. The secretary of the campaign had pointed out that if the expected closure proposals were carried out, there would be no direct service even between Yarmouth or Lowestoft and Norwich. The only line remaining in the area would be the main line from Norwich to London.

The SRUBLUK proposals for the line were detailed in a memorandum, copies of which were sent to the minister of transport, British Rail, the East Anglian TUCC and to MPs, local authorities and chambers of commerce in the area, as well as to the local press.

The memorandum included suggestions for various economies which might be made to effect financial savings and pointed out that the line was an important route for summer holiday traffic and for certain freight traffic and was of strategic importance.

In a detailed reply to the memorandum, the assistant general manager said: "The key to viability lies in more support from our freight customers and I should be grateful for any help your society can give in attracting more freight traffic to the line." (12)

Not only rural lines were under threat, as in London there was much public concern as a result

Philadelphia

The Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority was created in 1965 to prevent passenger railroads from disappearing in the Philadelphia area because of the huge growth in automobile use over the previous 30 years. In 2021, SEPTA had 13 branches and more than 150 active stations in Philadelphia, its suburbs and satellite towns and cities and is the busiest outside the New York and Chicago metropolitan areas. SEPTA aims to create more metro-like regional rail lines, upgraded tracks and new trains in a expansion plan stretching to 2045.

of the curtailment of passenger services and rumours of possible closure of the Broad Street-Richmond line and a representative of SRUBLUK addressed a meeting sponsored by Willesden Borough Council to mobilise local opinion.

On Tyneside, however, the threat to the Newcastle suburban electric services had receded and in the

autumn of 1962 a more attractive fare structure had been introduced. Early in 1963 the electric service between Newcastle and South Shields was replaced by diesel multiple unit trains and for most of the day, a 20-minute interval service provided in place of the previous half-hourly frequency.

In the West Country the public enquiry into the closure of the Exe Valley line had been held on 27 September, had been extremely well attended by the public and also received coverage by both BBC and Westward Television. The enquiry into the Cheddar Valley line (Yatton-Wells) was held shortly afterwards on 8 November and SRUBLUK was also represented and presented a case against closure to the TUCC.

The Plymouth-Tavistock-Launceston line was, however, closed on 29 December with crowded last trains, despite the intense cold and snow. The blizzard in fact came before the end of the service and the last train distinguished itself, and indeed found itself a place in history by taking nine hours to cover the 16 miles from Tavistock South to Plymouth, a normal journey of 40 minutes.

Bus services were unable to operate for a considerable time but in Devon as a whole, and in the Exe Valley and North Devon in particular, the railways proved that they were undoubtedly the only transport service which could cope with such conditions and many people who previously had been, if anything, indifferent to further rail closures declared themselves wholeheartedly in favour of the Exe Valley and North Devon lines.

Early in 1963 it was reported that the minister had deferred further consideration of the closure proposals for the Exe Valley line together with the Brent-Kingsbridge and Cheddar Valley lines until the Beeching Plan had been fully studied, published and debated in Parliament. In the case of the Exe Valley it appeared that definite consideration was being given by BR to the through working of trains to Exeter Central Station.

Attention was also focussed by SRUBLUK on lines in Central Wales, including Crewe and Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth, Ruabon-Bala-Barmouth and Machynlleth-Pwllheli. A circular letter was sent to the local authorities, MPs, newspapers and universities in the area seeking support for a campaign to secure the retention and development of these lines. The number of replies received was quite encouraging and a bi-lingual (English/Welsh) leaflet was also produced to give publicity to the campaign.



THE BIG FREEZE 1962-63: Clearing snow at Tavistock North on 30 December 1962
Bernard Mills collection

A welcome development by British Rail at this time was the introduction of "Ghost Trains", namely the conversion of stations into unstaffed halts with tickets issued by guards on the trains. A pilot scheme was introduced by the Southern Region on the Tonbridge-Hastings/Bexhill lines, as a means of reducing operating costs; a measure which had been advocated by SRUBLUK for many years.

Nevertheless SRUBLUK annual general meeting in March 1963 was dominated by the impending Beeching master plan for the railways which had been presented to the minister of transport and was published a few days after on 27 March. (13)

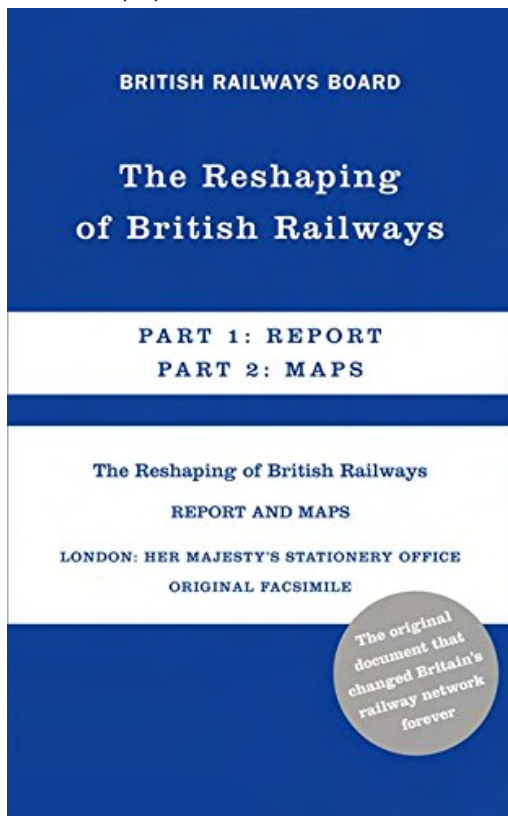
The Reshaping of British Railways

The Beeching Report, as it became known, was based on a traffic costing survey carried out in great detail during the week ending 23 April 1961. It was an investigation with the limited aim of finding out which parts of the railway system were profitable and which were not. Dr Beeching pointed out in the early part of the report that: "Ever since major amalgamations (of railway companies) started, the business of the railways has been, from a financial point of view, a mixture of good, bad, and indifferent routes, services and traffics.

"The circumstances which obtained throughout the major period of railway history in Britain - conditions of near monopoly, obligations to carry and statutory fixing of rates without relationship to costs - all tended to cause accountancy to be limited to global accounts for each of the independent railway companies." This position continued virtually unchanged with nationalisation.

"While these conditions existed, and while the railways were able to make a profit on their business as a whole, the unknown degree of cross subsidisation involved in carrying bad traffic on the back of the financially good traffic was very largely ignored. Now, however, after the post war growth of competition from road transport, it was no longer socially necessary for the railways to cover such a preponderant part of the total variety of internal transport services as they did in the past, and it is certainly not possible for them to operate profitably if they do so." This was an assertion with which SRUBLUK could not wholly agree.

The report laid great emphasis on the fact that one third of the route mileage carried only 1% of the total passenger miles and that the same proportion carried only 1% of the freight ton miles; also that the lightly used part of the system included most of the single track branch lines of which there were 5,900 miles, 2,700 of which were open to freight traffic only. It went



one stage further and added that half of the total route mileage carried only of the total passenger miles and only about 5% of the total freight ton miles and that the revenue of that half was £20 million and the estimated cost of providing the track and signalling in the order of £40 million. In comparison, the other half of the system had earnings which covered its route costs more than six times.

Stations and depots were also analysed in a similar manner and similar conclusions reached. From a detailed survey of passenger traffic it was concluded that internal air services were not competitive for inter city distances of less than 200 miles which therefore gave credence to the need to improve the railways longer distance services by electrification.

Rationalisation of competitive rail routes was considered necessary and the report also concluded that seasonal peaks of traffic created unremunerative obligations upon the railways in terms of reserve capacity of coaching stock, and resolved to price them out of the market and dispose of the surplus stock.

Stopping passenger services were also considered to be unremunerative as it was argued that increasing car ownership made them unnecessary. In financial terms lines carrying less than 6,000 passengers per week earned insufficient to cover movement costs and where there was no other traffic (i.e. freight) up to 17,000 passengers per week barely paid their way.

The report discounted any possibility of making these services pay by operating economies and concluded that where passenger carrying' was less than 10,000 passengers per week the service should be withdrawn, accounting for an annual train mileage of 68 million and a route mileage of about 5,000. The savings expected to be made by these measures was £33 million per annum, with a loss of revenue of £15 million per annum, yielding a nett improvement of £18 million per annum, excluding track and signalling. The report also made it quite clear that if these measures were found to be ineffective, the closure of further lines would-be considered.

On the question of hardship, the cornerstone in the consideration of closures by the TUCCs under the 1962 Act, the report discounted any major problems. "With the exception of northern Scotland and parts-of central Wales, most areas of the country are already served by a network of bus services more dense than the network of rail services which will be withdrawn, and in the majority of cases these buses already carry the major proportion of local traffic." The report also enlarged upon the role which public transport road opeatoors would take in dealing with this displaced traffic.

Naturally SRUBLUK main pre-occupation was with these provisions of the report and its response will be summarised later.

The report, however, dealt with many other aspects of the railways operations, including the unprofitable nature of rush hour peaks on suburban services, particularly in London, and the fact that most commuters travelled at sub-normal fares; a pronouncement which did not endear the doctor to the many thousands of rush hour travellers, many being of the bowler hat and briefcase brigade. He was not, however, naive enough to countenance the withdrawal of these services, as the report emphasised. With regard to suburban services outside London; he stressed that coordination of bus and rail was desirable if these were to continue and considered that a greater financial interest should be taken by local authorities, by way of subsidy, if they considered that their retention was desirable in the local interest.

The report also dealt with mail and parcels services and in particular with the methods of handling freight. In the past most of the traffic had been dealt with by the wagon load, being

forwarded to its destination in stages, via marshalling yards, and two paragraphs in the report summarise the position succinctly:

Our railways were developed to their fullest extent at a time when the horse and cart were the only means of feeding to and distributing from them. Therefore, as the railways grew, because of the deficiencies of horse transport on poor roads, the main network of routes was extended by an even closer network of branches, with close spacing of stations over the whole system, in order to reduce road movement to a minimum. Because of this penetration of rail movement so far into the stages of collection and delivery, and the associated multiplicity of stations and depots, a great deal of traffic originated and terminated in single wagon load consignments.

The average turn-round time between loading and unloading for British Railways wagons is 11.9 working days. The average loaded transit time is about 1½ - 2 days, with an average journey length of 67 miles, but individual transit times are bound to vary over a wide range, not merely because of variations in distance but also because of variations in route and in marshalling delays.

The various classes of freight traffic were then analysed and the scope for transferring many of the flows to through block train working, particularly coal, considered. Dr Beeching was particularly critical of the use of wagons for storage space by customers and considered that this was one reason why the wagon fleet was excessively large; the charges for demurrage were considered to be too low and an increase was considered essential to curb this practice.

The problems encountered by the railways in dealing with coal traffic and the introduction of merry-go-round block trains direct from the collieries to the power stations are fully described in Gerard Fiennes' autobiography, as he was chief operating officer of the British Railways Board at the time. (1 4)

The disposal of surplus capacity in terms of route, track and equipment was a prevailing theme throughout the Beeching era.

One aspect of freight traffic which was dealt with in detail in the Beeching Report was terminal conditions. In this respect, only siding to siding traffic was found to be remunerative and road/road traffic, via stations and depots, highly unremunerative.

Having been relieved of its obligations as common carrier under the 1962 Act it was therefore possible for the railway to decide which traffics it wished to carry and to reject those which were unprofitable. On this basis it was decided that freight services to many of the smaller stations and depots should be withdrawn in conjunction with the associated passenger services, so justifying the complete closure of the stations and in many cases the associated lines. Only where particularly profitable freight traffic existed or could be developed should a line be retained for this purpose, in which case a lower standard of maintenance and signalling could be introduced.



BR standard plywood body van with steel ends. There were some shock-absorbing vans built and I believe all these ply bodied vans were vacuum filled.



Plywood BR Banana van. These had no end ventilators, on some the vent had been removed from a standard steel end, others had steel ends with no vent and ribbing all the way up. Note extra straps on doors.



Plywood body, steel end, ventilated van ordered by LMS but delivered to BR in 1949.



BR Plywood 'trull' van, has additional air-scope along the lower sides on slates. The later 'house' style of lettering.

One more positive part of the plan was the survey of traffic not carried by rail and of the 223 million tons examined, 93 million was found to be potentially suitable for rail haulage, distances of less than 50 miles being considered generally unsuitable for rail haulage. The ultimate revolution in freight carrying, however, was the concept of the Liner Train, the establishment of a fixed network of depots in the principal traffic centres from which regularly scheduled block trains of container wagons would carry the loads formally conveyed in conventional wagons, and thus reducing the delays experienced by the traditional wagon staging method.



British Railways container

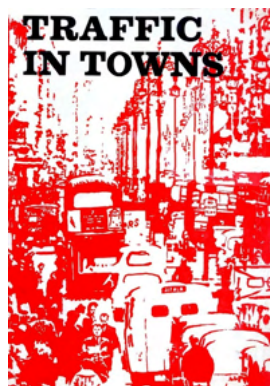
This principle, expounded by Mr Ponsonby at the joint public meeting early in 1962, would have as its basic unit of conveyance the then standard 8ft x 8ft container in modules of 10ft, 20ft and 30ft, rather than the standard wagon. By this means it would be possible to exploit the most profitable flows of rail traffic and also attract some 16 million tons of road borne traffic which could be moved more cheaply by Liner Train.

The success of this revolutionary concept, together with some of the pitfalls encountered will be reviewed in Chapter 6.

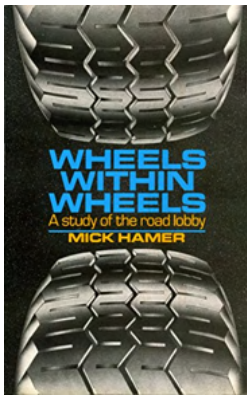
Finally on the question of freight sundries (consignments of less than a wagon load), it was concluded that the number of depots should be reduced to 100, similar to other schemes for coal and freight concentration. By these measures in the freight field it would be possible to scrap at least 348,000 wagons over the following three years and achieve a subsequent annual saving of between £10 million and £12 million.

The remainder of the report dealt with operating and administrative economies which could be implemented on the basis of a rationalised railway system, including reductions in manpower and in the railway workshops, improved maintenance techniques, mechanical handling, and of course the abandonment of steam traction in favour of diesel and electric trains.

However, the stringent costing exercise which was applied to the railways was not applied to other forms of transport, in particular the effect on the community of greater road congestion by heavy commercial vehicles. The Buchanan Report (15) issued at about the same time did, albeit reluctantly, conclude that there should be a measure of car restraint in cities but in the main concentrated on the need to build more urban roads and to re-design towns so that pedestrians and traffic would be segregated, a measure which would have cost far more than any savings which might be achieved by the Beeching Plan. As Mick Hamer points out in his in-depth survey of the road lobby (16): "Just as the Buchanan Report set the tone for government road policy for the next 10 years so did the Beeching Report for the railways."



The Buchanan report



**Mick Hamer's
expose of the road
lobby was
published in 1974**

He also stresses that in the same year (1963) the Hall Report (17) pointed out that a 1960 report by the Road Research Laboratory had shown a similar distribution for the road network, 50% of which carried only 5% of the traffic. In fact these distributions of traffic are an inevitable result of the country's geography and the distribution of population. The Hall Report also expressed the view that towns which had rail transport should not lightly discard it, and adopted a moderate line towards road improvements, traffic restraint and railway closures.

It is a tribute to the influence of the lobby (roads) that the Hall Report remains in obscurity - although its tenets are now current thinking - while the outmoded Beeching and Buchanan Reports are still household names. (16)

The impact of the Beeching Report with its massive programme of closures was also to shake public confidence in the future of the railways as a means of transport, particularly in the freight field, and as A J Pearson clearly shows, much traffic was undoubtedly lost

overnight because of the uncertainty it created. (18)

Nevertheless SRUBLUK was not slow to react to its proposals and, on 22 April 1963, issued a memorandum giving its comments, copies of which were sent to some 450 MPs, the press and a selection of local authorities. It welcomed the proposals in the report to increase rail traffic but condemned the plans to abandon a considerable portion of the railway network, which, if implemented, would cause widespread hardship and inconvenience. It was, in SRUBLUK view, totally unrealistic to consider rail transport in isolation and pressed for a detailed study of the full costs of road transport to be carried out before any more of the railway system was cut.

Until this was done, it would be impossible to determine what functions each form of transport was best able to carry out.

Attention was drawn to the fact that the proposed closures – amounting to as much as 25% of the railway system – were only expected to yield a saving of £34-£41 million a year, compared with a current annual deficit of £150 million. Closures even on that massive scale were only expected to play a relatively small part in solving the railways financial problems. Furthermore, allowance had to be made for the additional transport costs, which, as a result of the closures, would fall on other public bodies such as education authorities and the Post Office and for additional expenditure which would be required for the construction and improvement of roads over and above what was required to cater for the prevailing level of traffic. These costs would be passed on to the public and thus cancel direct savings to the taxpayer from rail closures.

The memorandum challenged the figures used by the board in calculation of the economics of a typical line and pointed out that substantial economies would result from reducing stations to unstaffed halts, simplification of signalling and the introduction of automatic lifting barriers and considered that there was still scope for increasing traffic on many lines.

The memorandum also dealt at length with the effects of widespread closures on the travelling public, and exploded the myth of buses as a replacement to railway services. (A subject which was to be dealt with in more detail in a subsequent publication). (19)

Only 122 miles of railway, according to the Beeching Report, were not already paralleled by

bus services, but no mention was made by Dr Beeching of the frequency of some of these which was often totally inadequate, some consisting of only two or three journeys a week.

It was also considered that the report had too lightly discounted the usefulness of railbuses, the capital cost of which had been high because, being experimental, they had only been obtained in small numbers.

SRUBLUK stressed the dependence of large sections of the community on public transport. Car ownership was in 1963 only 11.7 per 100 of the population and even families owning a vehicle still had to depend on public transport since the car was often unable to meet the transport needs of the whole family simultaneously.

Those supporting the closure of uneconomic lines at the time had done much to convey the impression that they were no longer required by the travelling public.

However, the proposals to close lines carrying 10,000 passengers per week and some carrying 50,000 and over, made it clear that many people would be affected, the lesser traffic carried by some lines being often a simple function of the population density. In fact, residents in the remoter parts of the country were in some ways more dependent on adequate communications than those in the main cities.

On the subject of holiday traffic it was pointed out that many of the visitors to the resorts from which the railways intended to withdraw rail facilities would be likely to transfer their custom to other resorts which still possessed rail services, rather than put up with the inconvenience of transferring to and from road vehicles at the nearest rail head, in some cases a considerable distance away.

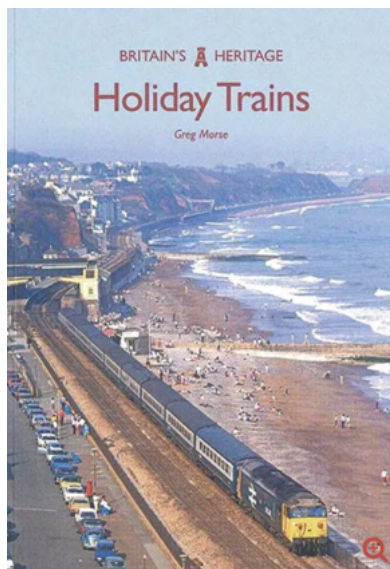
The loss of custom to many of the resorts would have serious economic consequences with resulting unemployment. The seasonal nature of the tourist industry was something that had to be accepted; it was just as uneconomic to build and improve roads to cater for seasonal peaks as it was to maintain railways for the same purpose. Also, if railways to resorts were closed, in some cases large fleets of buses would be needed to convey the traffic to and from the rail head, and it would be just as uneconomic to maintain these for use only on summer Saturdays as it would to provide railway coaches for the same purpose. The roads to many resorts were, in any case, already overcrowded and incapable of taking the extra traffic.

In many areas where rail closures were proposed there was considerable need to attract new industry but if there was no railway, industrialists would be very reluctant to set up in business.

Considerable stress was laid on the paragraph in the BRB's report which made it clear that, in addition to the closures listed, other services would also be closed if subsequently found to be uneconomic, taking the exercise to a point yet undetermined.

The memorandum concluded with the recommendations that:

- With a few minor exceptions, no further rail closures should be carried out until a full



Excursion trains carried thousands of people to seaside resorts, mainly using semi-retired rolling stock

costing of road transport had been undertaken.

● The nett saving to the nation from the proposed rail closures would not be as great as expected – and might be even less – when allowance had been made for the additional expenditure from public funds which would be required for the provision of alternative transport. Instead of closing lines, financial savings should be achieved by the introduction of economies in railway operation wherever possible and by greater efforts to increase traffic.

● Closure of lines on the scale proposed would lead to widespread hardship and inconvenience and, in many areas, unemployment and depopulation would result.

The memorandum also included an appendix which gave some of the grounds for retention of a selection of services proposed for closure.

Several of the points in the memorandum were brought up during the debate in Parliament on the Beeching plan which took place during the week commencing 29 April 1963. Jeremy Thorpe warned that if the minister of transport was to follow up the report and “decide railway policy in isolation from transport problems generally it would be like a judge making up his mind on the evidence of only one expert witness”. (20) While the plan was passed the Government's majority was reduced by the abstention of a number of its supporters.

Apart from the Beeching report, the other main item dealt with at the 1963 AGM was the adoption of SRUBLUK's first formal constitution, draft copies of which had been circulated to members.

By this time SRUBLUK had also enrolled a large number of corporate members, organisations and local authorities, as a result of its many campaigns throughout the country.

Shortly after the AGM a further reinvigoration party was held on 20 April when the Lyme Regis, Seaton, Sidmouth and Exmouth lines in Devon were visited. At Lyme Regis the party was met by the deputy mayor and the clerk of the council, and a short discussion on the future of the line ensued. At Seaton Junction the party was met by three representatives of the Seaton Urban District Council who travelled with the party to Seaton and back. From this meeting it was learned that the council was attempting to attract a number of light industries to the town but would be quite unable to succeed if the railway service were withdrawn.

Tipton St Johns to Exmouth was the least-used section of the lines visited although there was a small amount of daily travel to Exeter from Budleigh Salterton and Littleham, in addition to seasonal tourist



The Seaton branch line closed in 1966. In 1970 the Seaton Tramway was opened on part of the trackbed, operating a 2ft 9in gauge (two thirds scale) electric tramway between Seaton and Colyford. 2017 picture

traffic. By contrast the Exeter to Exmouth line was particularly well used, conveying about 1,000 season ticket holders in addition to shopping and holiday traffic. It was hard to imagine how the already heavily congested roads would cope with the additional burden which would be thrown on them if the line were to be closed. If closure could be averted it was hoped that diesel railcars would be introduced on the line.

During the tour the party were met by representatives of the local press and two television companies and reports of the tour greatly assisted SRUBLUK's publicity effort.

After its approval by Parliament, British Railways lost little time in making a start with the closure programme contained in the Beeching report and by mid June, closure proposals were being issued at the rate of several per day. Needless to say SRUBLUK was hard pressed to deal with this flood but tackled as many as resources to hand permitted.

One of the first proposals for which notices were issued in June, was the Somerset and Dorset line and the campaign which SRUBLUK had already launched was intensified. An objection was duly lodged and SRUBLUK was subsequently represented at the hearings before the TUCC at Blandford and Shepton Mallet in October. In addition a further booklet was issued on the financial aspects of this and the associated Salisbury-West Moors and Brockenhurst-Broadstone lines. (21)

In the late summer the minister announced his decision on the Kingsbridge, Hemyock and Cheddar Valley lines, deferred pending publication of the Beeching report, and the services were withdrawn in the autumn. Despite the many protestations the Exe Valley line suffered a similar fate and closed on 7 October although there was strong criticism of the way in which Mr Marples had handled the matter, particularly as in the last year of operation passenger carrying had considerably increased to the extent that complaints of overloading of trains had become quite a frequent occurrence. Promises made by the minister at the time the Transport Act was being debated had been consistently broken.

One closure proposal which had been outstanding for some time was finally decided, namely the Alston-Haltwhistle line which was reprieved due to the severe conditions in winter and the inability of the roads to deal with the traffic in these circumstances. This was in fact the first of a number of occasions when closure was refused.

SRUBLUK campaign on the East Suffolk line continued, as it was also on the "Beeching List". In response to the request by BR SRUBLUK sent a questionnaire to a number of chambers of commerce and firms in the area enquiring what improvements could be made to attract more freight to the line. As an experiment SRUBLUK also issued a series of timetable leaflets for distribution in the vicinity of Woodbridge, Halesworth, Beccles and Brampton in an attempt to increase passenger usage of the line, public meetings were arranged in Woodbridge and later in the year in Halesworth when speakers included James Prior MP. By that time, in order to effect economies in maintenance, the speed limit on the East Suffolk line had been reduced from 70 to 45 mph. However, this only applied to locomotive-hauled trains, the lighter diesel railcars, which operated the majority of the services remaining unaffected. In addition to SRUBLUK activities, a working party of the local authorities had been formed together with a local action



**James Prior MP
represented Lowestoft
from 1959 to 1987**

committee in the Halesworth area.

Other threatened lines dealt with in the summer of 1963 were Romford-Upminster, on the outskirts of London, and Liverpool-Southport, both in predominantly urban areas.

In the case of Romford-Upminster SRUBLUK called a meeting early in July which was attended by representatives of local authorities and other interested organisations and individuals, to discuss ways of opposing closure and a local users association was subsequently set up. Later in the month a public meeting in Hornchurch was attended by about 150 people and left no doubt of the extent of public feeling. Questionnaires were distributed to assess the hardship which would be caused if the line closed and in August, a sub committee of SRUBLUK met the district operating superintendent to discuss ways in which it could be made more profitable. 3,000 timetable leaflets publicising the line were distributed in the autumn by which time both the Romford and Hornchurch councils had given the campaign their official backing.

On the Liverpool-Southport line, SRUBLUK appointed a local representative and prepared a memorandum which was well received by the press and one local paper distributed questionnaires in the area to enquire into the effect of the proposed closure upon people living and working in the Southport area. British Rail also carried out a number of operating economies on lines suggested by SRUBLUK.

In June 1963 SRUBLUK held a further reinvigoration party which visited lines in the Thames Valley, namely High Wycombe-Maidenhead, Twyford-Henley-on-Thames, Bourne End-Marlow, Slough-Windsor and West Drayton-Staines West, including a river trip between Henley and Marlow. While the trip was greatly enjoyed by those who participated the usefulness of the tour as a medium for press publicity and contact with local authorities was limited. The decline in popularity of these trips caused SRUBLUK to review its policy and this was the last one to be held for some time to come.

The SRUBLUK campaign in Central Wales had also proved to be somewhat disappointing, as

while timetable leaflets had been distributed on lines in this area too, response had been insufficient to enable it to continue on the scale originally intended, mainly due to the sparse nature of the population. An objection was, however, lodged to the closure of the Ruabon-Bala-Barmouth and Bangor-Afon Wen lines and memoranda on financial aspects sent to the minister of transport.

By the autumn, closure proposals for a large number of the lines listed in the Beeching report had been issued but, in addition, a number of further lines and stations were also added to the list, a practice which was to continue until the early Seventies.

The SRUBLUK had found the volume of work so great that consideration was being given to the formation of a sub committee to deal with specific items to relieve the burden of the national committee and the need for it to meet so frequently, sometimes as often as twice a month.

The list of publications produced by SRUBLUK had by this time reached quite large proportions and, in addition to those already mentioned a study had been made of the Inverness-



The 1963 pamphlet *Can Bus replace Train?* became a booklet published in 1988 by the Railway Development Society as *Bustitution*



Wick/Thurso lines and a memorandum circulated widely to authorities in the area. In particular a detailed commentary on the adequacy of buses as an alternative to threatened railways had been produced entitled *Can Bus replace Train?* which sought to answer the question posed by its title. (22) It concluded that, whereas there were certainly a few railway lines – and stations which could be dispensed with if a really adequate road service were provided as a substitute, in the case of a large number of the closures proposed under the Beeching plan, no adequate substitute for the railway service could be provided in the foreseeable future. Copies of the report were sent to the TUCCs, BRB, the minister and the press and received publicity in at least two national newspapers.

In Northern Ireland, the Government-sponsored *Benson Report* had been published in late July and was in fact a mini-Beeching so far as Northern Ireland was concerned. It proposed the withdrawal of all railborne freight services and the closure of all lines except Belfast-Larne, Bangor and Portadown – which would continue to have a commuter service – and Portadown to the border, which would only be used by prestige expresses to Dublin. As a result of the report, the Northern Ireland Road and Rail Development Association launched an anti-closure campaign the success of which will be dealt with later.

The SRUBLUK approach to the rail closure problem in the rest of Great Britain continued to be a two-fold one. On the one hand, efforts were made to see that as much as possible of the hardship evidence was brought before the TUCCs, thus making the best use of the limited scope for objection laid down in the Transport Act 1962. On the other, attention was being drawn to the financial aspects of closures and suggestions made for reducing the losses on the lines concerned. It was encouraging to note that at least three regions of British Railways were making attempts to cut operating costs on some of their lines listed for closure in the Beeching report.

Returning to local issues, on the North London line (Broad Street-Richmond) a local campaign had been started during the summer as it was included in the Beeching report, and a Local

Railways across Northern Ireland were shut down almost as soon as the Ulster Transport Authority was set up in 1948. Its ethos was that railways would decline and buses develop as “kings of public transport”.

On May Day 1963, English accountant Sir Henry Benson took his lead from Beeching and recommended further widescale rail closures.

Northern Ireland railways were run down, with track in poor condition, dilapidated stations and elderly trains.

Authorities Action Group set up. A further public meeting had been held, on 17 July at Hampstead Town Hall. Late in 1963, it was reported that BR had given instructions that all stations on the line were to be reviewed to ensure that there was suitable publicity advertising the facilities offered and, early in 1964, it was reported that BR had deferred their decision on its future until June.

In south-east England, closure proposals had been issued for the Three Bridges-East Grinstead-Groombridge and Eridge-Hailsham lines and SRUBLUK submitted objections to the TUCC. A memorandum on the former line was also prepared for submission to the minister. SRUBLUK also lodged an objection to the closure of East Brixton station in south London.

By the new year, the continued flow of closures seemed never ending but a further suburban line, that between Woodside and Selsdon, had been reprieved, albeit for a trial period of three years. Meanwhile it appeared that the minister was going slow in approving closure applications by the BRB, some of which had been in his hands for several months, and two – the Pyle to Porthcawl line (summer service) and the Shrewsbury to Swansea (Central Wales) – had been before him for well over a year.

Early in the new year, SRUBLUK published a *Four Point Plan for Future Action*. Up to that time SRUBLUK efforts had been concentrated on opposing individual railway closure proposals and organising general resistance to the more destructive facets of the Beeching plan. The plan for much wider action was as follows:

- To investigate more economic ways of providing train services on secondary lines with particular reference to the relevance of the Light Railway Acts, to present needs, the possible development of battery-electric traction and the legal, safety and operating problems involved in the conversion of manned level crossings to automatic or ungated crossings.
- To press for the coordination of train and bus services, involving close study of two selected areas– one predominantly rural and the other mainly urban and an approach to rail and road transport operators with suggestions for improvements.
- To oppose the closure of threatened railway lines and stations where appropriate and assist local authorities with their objections, at the same time seeking a realistic assessment of the cost of providing alternative services and facilities.
- To examine the social, economic and traffic consequences of rail closures which have already taken place, again choosing for detailed study one rural and one urban area.

The extent to which SRUBLUK was able to implement this plan will be dealt with later. In the meantime it had appointed a much-needed press and publicity officer who, in the person of Mr Roland Banks, has done much to publicise the aims and activities of SRUBLUK ever since. Lines dealt with, by SRUBLUK during 1964 included Oxford-Cambridge and Gloucester-Hereford.

The Sunday passenger service on the Oxford-Bedford-Cambridge line was withdrawn after 3 November 1963. A month later, British Rail gave notice that it proposed to transfer the line from those listed in the Beeching report for modified passenger services to those listed for closure. SRUBLUK prepared and circulated a memorandum on the line to local authorities and other interested parties in the area and duly lodged an objection. The SRUBLUK chairman addressed the inaugural meeting of the South Midlands Passengers Association in Oxford on 1 February 1964. This association was set up to study passenger services in the area and dealt

initially with the threatened service between Oxford and Bletchley and Moreton-in-the-Marsh.

The proposal to withdraw passenger services on this cross-country line was singularly inappropriate in view of the subsequent recommendation of the study carried out following the Government White Paper on the future of Development in the South East (23) that one of the proposed new cities should be at Bletchley and that Bedford should be expanded.

Nevertheless the West Midlands TUC held a meeting at Bletchley on 21 July to consider objections to the closure of the Oxford-Woburn Sands section and SRUBLUK issued a commentary on the BRB's heads of information for the line; mainly on the adequacy of the alternative bus services proposed. The BRB's reply to

objectors for the eastern section (Woburn Sands-Cambridge) proposed the Peterborough-Leicester line as an alternative for journeys between many West Midlands towns and Cambridge, even though this line was also proposed for closure.

Events on the Gloucester-Hereford line moved more rapidly. In the first instance SRUBLUK issued a memorandum on the line which was submitted to the minister, local authorities, British Rail and other interested bodies and drew attention to the hardship which would result if the lines closed and contained suggestions for reducing the financial loss on the line. At the subsequent hearing, the West Midlands TUC decided in favour of the section within its area and reported that much hardship could be substantially alleviated by re-routing bus services to serve areas relying on trains; but also recognised that some hardship would remain to a minority of travellers. The line subsequently closed on 2 November 1964.

By March 1964, a year after publication of the Beeching report, while a large number of the closure proposals contained therein had been issued, only half a dozen had actually taken place; 30 had been approved by the minister but three reprieved. The fate of the majority was therefore still undetermined. Nevertheless British Railways, through greater efficiency and economies achieved financial savings to the extent of £32 million. This saving, which was largely the result of such measures as conversion from steam to diesel traction, increased workshop efficiency and reduction in the wagon fleet, was considerably greater than the £18 million which it had been claimed would be the annual saving from all of the Beeching plan passengers put together. Moreover this was the result of only one year's economy drive and there was still ample scope for further improvements in the year to come.

At the SRUBLUK AGM on 18 April 1964 the chairman was able to report that no less than eight lines had been reprieved by the minister, the most notable being Inverness-Wick/Thurso and Dingwall-Kyle of Lochalsh. The memorandum produced by SRUBLUK on the former line had



The city of Milton Keynes (above) reached a population of 230,000 by 2011. The site which included Bletchley was chosen in 1967 as equidistant from London, Birmingham, Leicester, Oxford, and Cambridge. Yet the Government was simultaneously dismantling the Oxford-Cambridge railway. Only the Bedford-Bletchley section survived with a passenger service after 1968. In 2022, the East West Railway is being reconstructed, with a new E-W station being built at Bletchley.

also been submitted to the TUCC and SRUBLUK was represented at the subsequent hearings in Inverness on 9 and 10 March. The minister's decision against these closures was announced shortly after the hearings where overwhelming evidence of hardship had been proved.

Nevertheless the most significant event of 1964 was the holding of a special general meeting on the same day as the AGM when members finally dispensed with its name (the Society for the Reinvigoration of Unremunerative Branch Lines in the United Kingdom), a long and cumbersome title which had, on occasions, led to amusement and even provoked ridicule by the press, local authorities and other responsible bodies and individuals whom the society was seeking to influence. Furthermore the title no longer adequately described the society's aims, which, with the advent of Beeching, had moved into a far wider field.

The Railway Invigoration Society title was decided upon after much careful consideration having regard to its past achievements, and it was significant that this should have taken place in the tenth anniversary year.

After the annual general meeting, the committee met to discuss the new-style organisation which had been under consideration during the winter and appointed a number of sub-committees to deal with specific issues such as finance, publicity and, in particular the development of the society's activities at local level including the appointment of further representatives and the formation of local branches.

Nevertheless the main preoccupation was still with closures and an area which received much attention during 1964 was the North York Moors. Attention was first drawn to the closure of the three lines to Whitby (Middleshough-Battersby-Whitby Town, Malton-Pickering-Whitby Town and Whitby Town-Scarborough Central) by a notice in the national press inserted by the local council appealing for visitors to the town to help them in the fight to preserve their railway services by sending objections, stating grounds of hardship to the local TUCC. This was an extremely far-sighted move by the council of this seaside resort and indicated clearly the inadequacy of Section 56 of the Transport Act 1962, which only required notices to be posted in the locality. Users who were resident in a different part of the country might be unaware of

the situation until it was too late to place an objection. This situation was particularly relevant to seaside resorts where a major proportion of the traffic was of people who only resided in the area when on holiday.

The society duly lodged an objection to these closures reiterating the above points and stressing that the many visitors who arrived by rail could not be adequately catered for by alternative transport. It was also explained that the smaller communities served by these lines would suffer hardship because of the



Passenger trains were withdrawn from Pickering and Grosmont in 1965 but by 1973 trains on the heritage North Yorkshire Moors Railway were running again. In 2008, Grosmont was visited by three ex-LNER A4 locomotives: 60009 Union of South Africa, 60007 Sir Nigel Gresley and 60019 Bittern.

difficulty of providing alternative transport, roads being steeply graded and in places impossible for buses to use especially in winter.

The TUC hearing into the proposal took place on 7-8 July and the minister subsequently decided to reprove the line from Middlesbrough but approved the closure of the Scarborough-Whitby and the passenger service from Malton to Whitby via Pickering..

Earlier in the year, Mr Marples had made an announcement that railway services to the many holiday resorts threatened by the Beeching plan would not be withdrawn before 1 October 1964 at the earliest. This did not, however, apply to lines for which closure proposals had been published before 1 February; but the news came too late to be of any help to people who had made their holiday arrangements the previous autumn.

The society continued to keep a close watch on developments on the East Suffolk line in conjunction with the several organisations which had been set up to counter any further moves to close it. In addition, an objection was lodged to the closure of eight of the intermediate stations between Ipswich and Norwich and to the closure of Felixstowe Beach station. A further local newsletter was issued with proposals for the formation of a local branch of the society in the area.

On the Romford-Upminster line, the local users association continued its efforts to publicise the line in the hope that greater use might help to avert closure. However, the campaign was greatly intensified following the issue of closure notices on 28 August. On 11 September, a public meeting in Hornchurch was attended by nearly 200 people. Newsletters were also distributed to users of the line explaining how objections should be lodged and what kind of evidence should be presented. The subsequent hearing and outcome will be dealt with in the following chapter.

Other London lines claiming the society's attention included Barking-Kentish Town from which passenger services were also to be withdrawn and a local action group was set up which produced a very useful bookmark/timetable for the line. On the Broad Street-Richmond line, the society continued to press for better publicity and a representative was among 400 people who went to the House of Commons on 13 May to lobby against the threatened closure, at which event a petition containing 57,000 signatures was presented to the minister of transport. The Save the Broad Street Line (Hampstead) Committee also published an excellent report which included a section explaining the cost to the community if the line were closed.

In its objection to the closure of East Brixton Station, the society drew attention to the hardship that would be caused but suggested an alternative by utilising the extra platforms at Brixton station in an attempt to afford economies. In their subsequent report to the



Railfuture

Despite being threatened with closure in the 1960s, the line from Gospel Oak (near Kentish Town) to Barking was extended to Barking Riverside(above) in 2022 and a new station was built to serve an area where more than 10,000 homes are planned.

Minister the Tucc saw no way in which the hardship which would be caused to the many peak-hour users could be alleviated and closure was refused.

In south-east England, the society prepared a memorandum on the Eridge-Hailsham line, similar to that already prepared for Three Bridges-Tunbridge Wells, which was also sent to the minister after the Tucc hearing on 21-22 May. These memoranda suggested ways in which the services could be improved and the deficit reduced; particularly by the introduction of light-controlled crossings and the introduction of diesel in place of steam traction.

Rationalisation of the two stations at Tunbridge Wells was also recommended and the provision of more car parking at the station which would remain.

On 21 May, BR announced that the closure of the Ashford-Rye-Hastings line would be delayed in view of the plan for the Channel Tunnel and the report of the South East Study Group but this did not prevent a concerted attempt to close the line in the late 1960s of which more anon.

On the Isle of Wight, by proposing that withdrawal of the service from Ryde to Yentnor and Cowes should take effect from 12 October, British Rail had repudiated a promise made some time earlier that at least five years notice would be given of the closure of the remaining island lines.

Returning to the more urban scene, on the Liverpool-Southport line. BR had introduced a revised peak-hour service early in 1964 to improve stock and staff utilisation, which revisions met with general public approval. BR, however, announced that they still intended to proceed with the eventual withdrawal of the service.

On Tyneside, closure proposals included South Shields-Sunderland (diesel) and the electric service between Tynemouth and Newcastle via the Riverside line. Following the conversion of the South Tyneside electric lines to diesel traction in January 1963 it was learnt that the North Tyneside lines were to be similarly dealt with in 1965. Later in the year, it was reported that closure of the Riverside line, which carried large numbers of workmen, had been deferred.

Another semi-urban service which caused much controversy in 1964 was Manchester/Stockport-Buxton. The proposal to close both lines was in fact published in November 1963 and provoked exceptionally strong and well organised opposition by the 3,000 people who used Buxton station each day and by the local authorities and amenity organisations throughout the area. As a result, the Tucc allocated two days (27-28 May) for the public hearing at Buxton and the minister announced that he had rejected the proposal to close the line to Manchester even before the hearing had been concluded. (24)

None of the intermediate stations were to be closed and BR agreed to consider the various ideas which had been put forward to reduce the deficit on the line.

Early in 1964 notices had been posted for the withdrawal of a large number of services in Lincolnshire including the Peterborough-Spalding-Boston-Grimsby



Buxton station survived 1960s threats and in 2022 had a diesel service every half hour to Manchester Piccadilly

line and a local action committee was set up with which the society actively cooperated.

In the middle of the year, Dr Beeching made a number of pronouncements which were fraught with inconsistency. On the one hand, in the board's report to the Committee on Road Haulage Licensing, he claimed that the road freight transport operator paid no more than one third to one half of the true costs of using the trunk road system and said, at a subsequent press conference: "We have said consistently that we want to shape the railways to do their right job as part of transport as a whole. We ought to base decisions on a proper appreciation of the true cost by road and rail." (25) Shortly afterwards at a press conference in Scotland, he severely criticised objectors who had secured the reprieve for the lines north of Inverness and advocated the development of a proper road system in the Highlands, hardly appropriate for the head of the BRB.

Further support for the conversion of stations to unstaffed halts, as advocated by the society, came from the Central Transport Consultative Committee in its annual report for 1963. This commented on reasons which had been put forward by British Rail in opposition to unstaffed halts and suggested ways in which they could be overcome. One objection had been on the grounds of safety. However as we have seen from Chapter 2 (p31), the danger to passengers at an unstaffed halt was negligible compared with that at any bus stop at a main road. (26)

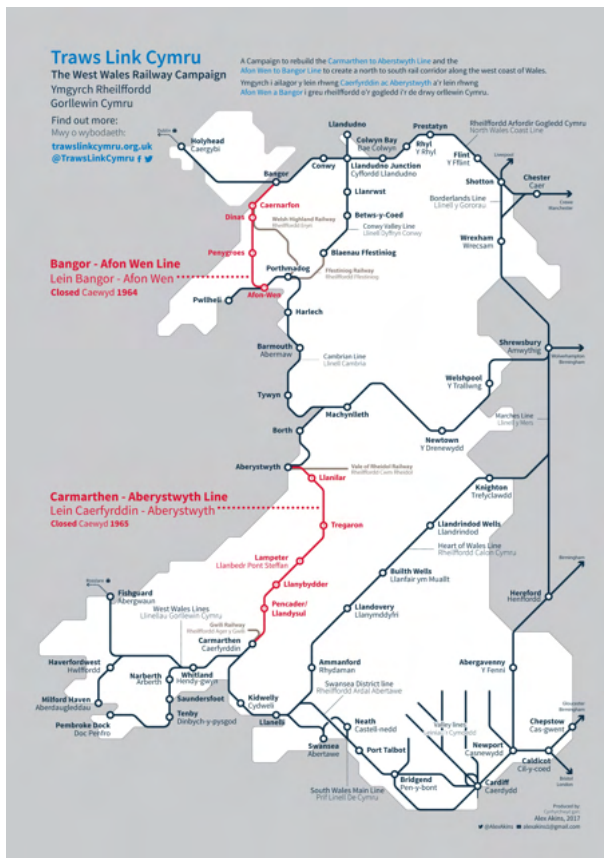
At about the same time, it was reported that the BRB had applied to the minister of transport for permission to operate sparsely loaded services as light railways in accordance with the 1896 Light Railways Act, a measure advocated in the society's Four Point Plan. Negotiations for the conversion of about 80 miles of the Central Wales line (now called the Heart of Wales line), between Shrewsbury and Llanelli into a light railway were understood to have reached an advanced stage.

In November 1962, the Tucc had reported that it could see no way of alleviating much of the hardship which would have been caused by closure of the line and in March 1964, the minister decided that the rail service should be retained over the Shrewsbury-Pontardulais section and be diverted at the latter point to run to Llanelli and Swansea (High Street), thereby enabling the Pontardulais-Swansea (Victoria) section to be closed. The scheme proposed by BR involved reducing stations to unstaffed halts, the use of open or automatic level crossings, the closure of signal boxes and the drastic reduction of maintenance costs by the use of an automatic tamper about twice a year. These measures, it was claimed, would reduce the loss on the line from £176,000 a year to £30,000. However, some years were to elapse before all or most of these measures were implemented.

Notwithstanding disappointing results during 1963, the society continued its campaign on the Cambrian lines. At the Tucc hearing at Dolgellau on 17 March into the closure of the Ruabon-Barmouth line, the society's representative stressed the inadequacy of the alternative bus services and the poor state of the roads in the area. The Merioneth county surveyor also stated that to bring the roads up to the necessary standard would involve expenditure of



The Heart of Wales line survived the Beeching threat, possibly because it passed through six marginal parliamentary constituencies. In 2022 the line is largely single track and the Shrewsbury-Swansea services have operated under a Light Railway Order since 1972.



In 2022, the Welsh Government is being urged to rebuild the rail links through west Wales, including the Caernarfon-Afon Wen line, which lost its passenger service in 1964

section of the line from Bangor. The Bangor-Caernarfon section was, however, reprieved as was the Conway Valley line to Blaenau Ffestiniog, although the stations at Glan Conway and Dolgarrog were to be closed. In approving these closures the minister specified that the alternative bus services were to be considerably more extensive than had been proposed by British Rail. In particular there was to be a through bus service five times each weekday between Wrexham and Barmouth and a number of buses from the Pwllheli and Criccieth directions were to work through to the railway station in Caernarvon.

Later in the year, a three-page Cambrian Newsletter was distributed in mid and central Wales in an effort to arouse support for the formation of a local branch of the society there. "

Although it was one of the first closure proposals under the Beeching plan, no decision had been announced regarding the Somerset and Dorset line which was understood to be safe until the end of the year. The society therefore prepared timetable leaflets for distribution in the areas served by Blandford, Sturminster, Wincanton and Glastonbury stations in an attempt to increase the traffic carried on the line and also wrote to the minister asking for a full enquiry

£4,410,000. After Easter, the society produced a further memorandum on the Bangor-Afon Wen line which contained an appendix showing in detail proposals for a revised timetable and operating arrangements. Professor C L Mowat represented the society at the Tucc enquiry into the closure of this latter line on 8 April in Caernarvon.

On 5 May, the Tucc announced that closure of the through line during the holiday season would cause substantial hardship to those engaged in the tourist and holiday industry in Caernarvon and South Caernarvonshire and that a certain amount of local and off-season hardship would also arise. On the same day, the Tucc informed the minister that it "was not satisfied that the bus service proposed by the Railways Board was the answer to the problems which would be created by closure of the long section of through railway between Ruabon and Barmouth, especially during the summer holiday period".

The minister subsequently announced his approval to the closure of the Ruabon-Barmouth line and the Caernarvon-Afon Wen

to be held into the proposal for this and the Salisbury/ Brockenhurst-Ringwood-Bournemouth services under Section 90 of the Transport Act 1962 so that the wider implications of the proposals could be considered. This was, however, refused and the minister subsequently approved closure of the latter lines as from 4 May 1964 although both were to remain open for freight traffic.

Early in 1964, concern was expressed about the future of the Salisbury-Exeter line and a special meeting of the County Councils Joint Standing (coordination) Committee was held to discuss the matter. The circumstances surrounding the retention of this route, albeit as a secondary line, are also dealt with extensively by G F Fiennes in his autobiography as by this time he was general manager of the Western Region. (27)

Ever since the appointment of its first area representative in Devon in 1962, the society had maintained a high level of activity in the West Country and the lines dealt with are too numerous to recount in detail. Objections were, however, lodged to the closure of the Okehampton-Bude and Halwill-Wadebridge lines. The TUC hearings for the Torrington and Okehampton-Halwill-Bude lines took place on 2 September and the society was duly represented.

For the Barnstaple-Torrington enquiry, the society was represented by its press officer who complained that many tourists who were users of the line had been unable to object as the proposals had not been advertised outside the district, again underlining the inadequacy of the 1962 Act provisions.



Visitors to the seaside resorts of Sidmouth, Seaton, Lyme Regis, Bridport and West Bay now need to travel by road

Although covered by the promise that no service to a seaside resort would be withdrawn before October, it was not long before closure proposals for the Lyme Regis, Seaton, Sidmouth and Tipton St Johns-Exmouth lines were issued. The Exeter-Exmouth line was, however, reprieved.

Late in 1964, the inevitable decision of the Northern Ireland Transport Tribunal confirmed closure of the Portadown-Londonderry and Goraghwood-Warrenpoint lines of the former Great Northern Railway to both passengers and freight and approval was also given to the termination of general goods services over the rest of the Ulster Transport Authority rail system. After this, little further was heard of the activities of the society's associated organisation in Ulster.

Efforts to form local branches in Great Britain were intensified after the 1964 AGM, and the committee issued guidance notes to assist branch secretaries in furthering these aims. Although considerable activity had been taking place on the East Suffolk line with this end in mind it was to be in the three counties of Gloucestershire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire

where the scheme first got off the ground. On 3 October 1964, RIS chairman Dr Caton presided at a meeting of local members in the Friends Meeting House, Gloucester, and inaugurated the Three Counties branch of the society. An extensive and enthusiastic discussion followed on railway matters with particular reference to those in the area of the branch. A local committee of five members was formed and the proceedings received good press coverage and reports appeared in several local newspapers including the *Birmingham Post*, *Gloucester Citizen*, *Gloucestershire Echo*, *Tewkesbury Register* and *Worcester Evening News*. The branch issued its first newsletter shortly afterwards to local members giving details of the meeting and outlining its future aims.

Nevertheless the society's principal concern at this time was the impending general election which took place on 15 October and was to bring to an end the Government which had planned and implemented the Beeching Plan and which had held office since the Labour Party defeat in 1951.

The society had sent a questionnaire to all candidates in selected constituencies:

- Asking whether rail transport should operate as a public service or as a purely commercial concern
- Asking that a proper comparison should be made between road and rail before further closures were implemented
- Asking that the scope of the TUCCs should be widened to permit consideration to be given to all matters relevant to rail closures
- Pointing out that BR had plans to close some main lines in addition to those already under threat.

Of the 307 candidates circularised, 88 replied, 78 of whom were generally in support of the society's views and the remainder either uncertain or against.

Notwithstanding their vehement opposition to the Beeching plan, we shall review in the next chapter the extent to which effective steps were taken by the new administration to reverse the trend.

Notes to chapter 3

- (1) David St John Thomas. Lake District Transport Report; the findings of the Lake District Transport Inquiry. David & Charles, 1961 .
- (2) Select Committee on Nationalised Industries Report. British. Railways. HMSO. July 1960. p65 paras 422-5.
- (3) Central Transport Consultative Committee for Great Britain. Annual Report for 1961, HMSO. March 1962. p5.
- (4) BR was at about this time running cheap overnight *Starlight Specials* with minimal facilities from such places as Marylebone to Edinburgh which were proving very popular.
- (5) SRUBLUK Progress Report No 42 April/May 1962 (hereinafter referred to as PR with No and date)
- (6) CTCC Report. op.cit, p5.
- (7) P S Bagwell. *The Transport Revolution from 1770*. 1974. p339-40.
- (8) Otto Kahn-Freund. *The Law of Carriage by Inland Transport*. 4th ed. Stevens 1965. p66-79.
- (9) PR No 45 Oct/Nov 1962. p3.
- (10) Mick Hamer. *Wheels within Wheels*; a study of the road lobby. Friends of the Earth Ltd 1974.
- (11) PR No 46 Dec.62/Jan 1963. p2-4.
- (12) PR No 47 Feb/Mar 1963 p4.
- (13) British Railways Board. *The Reshaping of British Railways* (by Dr Richard Beeching) HMSO March 1963. 2 Vols.
- (14) G F Fiennes. *I Tried to Run a Railway*. 1967 p80-31.
- (15) Ministry of Transport. Steering Group and Working Group on the Study of Long Term Problems of Traffic in Towns. Traffic in towns: a study of the long term problems of traffic in urban areas.HMSO Nov 1963 (Chairman of Steering Group: Sir Geoffrey Crowther; Chairman of Working Group: Colin Buchanan)
- (16) Hamer, op.cit, p43-4.
- (17) Ministry of Transport. The transport needs of Great Britain in the next twenty years. HMSO, Mar 1963. (Chairman: Sir Robert Hall)
- (18) A J Pearson. *The Railways and the Nation*. 1964. p.104.
- (19) Branch Line Reinvigoration Society. Can bus replace train? A commentary on railway replacement omnibus services. Aug. 1963.
- (20) Hansard. Hof C. 30/4/63. col 963.
- (21) Branch Line Reinvigoration Society. Unprofitable Lines? A financial study of certain railway passenger services in Somerset, Dorset and Hampshire. Oct. 1963.
- (22) Can bus replace train? op. cit.
- (23) Board of Trade and others. South East England. HMSO March 1964 (Cmnd.2308) Ministry of Housing and Local Government. The South East Study. 1961-1981. HMSO, March 1964. p.73 expansion of Bedford recommended, p.73-4 recommendation of a new city at Bletchley.

(24) It is significant that this was the line chosen by the National Council on Inland Transport as a test case to ascertain the extent to which objectors could challenge the figures presented by BR and it could be that the line was rapidly reprieved to avert the court proceedings threatened by the council. See: Roger Calvert. *Transport Disintegrated*. 1973. Ch.6.

(25) *The Times*. 24 June 1964. p.8. col a & b: summary of the British Railways Board evidence to the Committee on Road Carriers Licensing; p.12, col a: Lord Beeching's statement p.13: col.b: leading article.

(26) C-.T.C.C. Report for 1963. HMSO, June 1964.

(27) Fiennes, *op.cit*, p.100-102.

As You Were

After the Labour Party's success in the general election of October 1964 its policy on rail closures was outlined by the new minister of transport, Mr Tom Fraser, in a statement to the House of Commons on 4 November. "While regional transport plans were being drawn up," he stated, "consent would not be given to any major withdrawals, i.e. closures likely to conflict with such plans." He further stated that "all closure proposals would be considered against the, background of future economic and population trends and even in cases where consent was given the track would be retained for the time being unless he (the minister), agreed otherwise". (1)

He emphasised, however, that he had no power under the 1962 Transport Act to withdraw consent already given to closures by his predecessor but conceded that he could add to the conditions under

which consent had been given, in addition to asking for the track to be retained. Furthermore in the case of new closure proposals by the BRB he had asked for these to be submitted to him before publication so that they could be examined in consultation with the other ministers concerned. He would then inform the BRB if the proposal was obviously unacceptable, in which case the BRB would defer publication.

Unfortunately, many closures which should have been suspended for the above reasons had already taken place but now at least in such cases, the track would have to be retained. The society wrote to Mr Fraser supporting the proposals but asked for an assurance that station buildings and other equipment which might be required for the restoration of a service at a later date would also be safeguarded. Attention was also drawn to specific lines where it was considered that a particularly strong case existed for imposition of these conditions and the society stressed the need for "immediate" action to prevent British Railways from disposing of the equipment.

Because of the minister's assertion that he had no power to reverse the acts of the previous administration, the society duly prepared a draft Bill, amending the 1962 Act, to give the



Labour transport minister Tom Fraser introduced the 70mph speed limit on British roads in 1965 but he also approved the closure of 1,071 miles of railway.

The former miner replaced Ernest Marples who had approved 991 miles of railway closures.

Around 8,000 people were killed on the roads that year and the numbers fell year by year after that.

The total killed in 2020 was around 1,500 people.



Sir Alexander Spearman
Conservative MP for
Scarborough and Whitby

minister power to revoke rail closure consents and it was submitted to the minister. In reply, however, he stated that he was not convinced that such powers were required. (2)

As the Government was not prepared to support this measure, the society, through Sir Alexander Spearman, MP for Scarborough and Whitby, presented the Bill in the House of Commons on 9 February 1965. Although the first reading was successful, there were objections at attempts at a second reading on both 19 February and 5 March and the Bill was subsequently withdrawn. Unfortunately its introduction had not prevented the closure, on 8 March, of the Malton-Whitby and Scarborough-Whitby services, and by their actions (or inaction) the Government had failed to honour the pre-election pledge made by Harold Wilson that these lines would be covered by the party's plans to halt major rail closures.

In view of the unsuccessful attempts to progress the "Railway Closures Bill" through the House of Commons, it was subsequently introduced in the House of Lords by the Earl of

Kinnoull on 27 May, but was again defeated on its second reading, even though more speakers in the debate had been in favour than against. (3) It was obvious that the Government had firmly made up its mind to oppose the Bill and therefore denied itself the opportunity to honour the pledges made by many of its candidates that lines approved for closure by Mr Marples would stay open if Labour came to power. (4) Instead it preferred to rely on a vague possibility that BR might have second thoughts on some of its closure proposals.

It should be pointed out at this stage that one of the results of the change of government had been the loss of Lord Stonham as president and chairman of the National Council on Inland Transport following his acceptance of an appointment as under-secretary of state at the Home Office. Mr T C Foley, formerly secretary of the Pedestrians Association, took over as chairman and the Earl of Kinnoull as president, a post which the latter held for several years.

Another matter upon which the society had tackled the new Government was the cost of retaining threatened lines. On a number of occasions, memoranda had been sent to the former minister of transport giving suggestions how lines, proposed for closure, could be operated more economically. A reply from the minister to one on the Eridge-Hailsham line had left some doubt as to whether he had in fact considered the possibility that lines could be operated more cheaply before coming to a final decision to permit closures to proceed. The matter was taken up with the new minister but no conclusive reply was received.

Early in 1965, one of the symptoms of the Beeching plan to be felt was a severe shortage of wagons. In dealing with passenger closures, the society had often contended that while a closure might result in a saving to British Railways, it would mean extra expenditure for other state-owned authorities, commercial concerns and individuals, in some cases resulting in a nett loss to the nation.

In the first category came such bodies as highway authorities, the ministries of health and education and the Post Office.

The matter had been brought to light quite forcibly on 21 December 1964 when Lord Robens had disclosed that the National Coal Board had incurred additional costs of up to £2 million

during the winter in hiring lorries and stacking coal near the pit heads because of the BRB's inability to deliver due to an acute shortage of mineral wagons. Dr Beeching, in his studies, had decided that there were too many wagons and introduced a campaign to secure a rapid reduction. The problems and differences which existed between the two boards have been well documented by others (5) but in addition, the new coal concentration depots had added to the difficulties due to the increased distances over which coal had to be carted by road for delivery and the slowdown in the turnround of rail wagons when the road vehicles were delayed by traffic congestion or icy roads. Shortages of equipment also extended to locomotives and many other types of goods wagons, notably of covered vans, which had seriously inconvenienced many traders, particularly those whose trade was largely seasonal.

There had also been an alarming deterioration in the availability of certain types of diesel locomotives and this, coupled with a deliberate rundown in the remaining fleet of steam locomotives had resulted in the daily cancellation of freight trains. In November 1964 British Railways had made a bid for a greater share of the traffic in seed potatoes from Angus and Perthshire to England by offering more competitive rates but later the same month they had to reply to protests about congestion at forwarding stations by admitting that they did not have enough wagons to carry all the traffic. The scrapping of vehicles which had only completed about half of their intended life span was hardly economical in the long run but no doubt showed a handsome credit in the Doctor's books in what was to be his last year of office. (6)

The society also pressed the new minister, in view of his earlier pronouncements, for an assurance that steps taken to safeguard the track where lines were closed would also include station buildings and other equipment which might be required for restoration of a service at a later date. In his reply, the minister, stating that the understanding applied to the essential running lines only, pointed out that much of the other equipment was liable to suffer from vandalism and in many cases looting, but that it could easily be restored if at some time it was decided that a service should be reinstated. Later, in a further letter, he assured the society that until such time as they applied for and secured his agreement to dispose of the track and formation, the BRB would not enter into any commitments for the disposal of station sites, or of access to them, which would in any way prevent the restoration of an effective service. (7)

In the autumn of 1984, it had been reported that a further report by Dr Beeching was imminent and the events leading up to "Beeching 11" are graphically described by Gerard Fiennes. (8) *The Development of the Major Trunk Routes* (9) was not in fact published until February 1985, by which time of course there had been a change of government.

The report concerned the 7,500 route miles which were the main rail arteries and was based on what traffic would be available in 1984, according to estimates prepared by the British Railways Board. The object of the report was a critical examination of the trunk routes in order to establish how the through-route system could best be developed to match the future pattern of rail demand in the 20-year period ahead. Consideration of other parts of the railway system, such as commuter services and feeder



lines, which could be dealt with as separate or subsidiary issues, was omitted.

The principal conclusion reached was that, while a considerable increase in traffic could be expected, it was demonstrably practicable to channel the through movement over a reduced network of main lines amounting to some 3,000 miles, rather than over the 7,500 miles then available. By making more intensive use of a few lines in that way, the cost of providing track and signalling per unit of traffic passing over it could be reduced to a level which would enable services to be provided on a competitive basis.

The report was, however, careful to be non-committal on the future of the routes not proposed for development, pointing out that the purpose of the study was to select routes for future intensive use, not to select lines for closure. Nevertheless, the proposals in the report could have had very little meaning unless they were intended to lead to further large-scale closures. Merely transferring traffic from one route to another was unlikely to achieve any great saving unless many of the non-favoured routes were dispensed with entirely. Had this have happened, the results would have been disastrous. The so-called duplicate routes between major centres nearly all served entirely different intermediate places and their closure would have robbed countless towns and cities of all rail services and rendered rail travel between others impossible or so devious as to be useless. Any financial savings which would have accrued to British Railways would have paled into insignificance when compared with the disastrous consequences for the nation as a whole.

On publication of the report, the society sent the following telegram to the minister of transport:

“ The Railway Invigoration Society earnestly requests you to consider all ‘Beeching’ proposals, past and present, in the context of social cost and the true costs of other forms of transport before running down very high capital assets in railway installations especially in view of future regional planning.

The report, however, proved to be Dr Beeching’s swan song as early in 1965, it was announced that (having no doubt seen the writing on the wall), he had decided not to sit out his five- year term of office but to return to ICI. He would not, therefore, be carrying out the studies of transport coordination planned by the Government, as had been suggested, which task fell to Lord Hinton. Dr Beeching was succeeded after 1 June 1965 by Stanley Raymond, at the time a vice-chairman of the BRB and formerly general manager of the Western Region (before Gerard Fiennes).



Sir Stanley Raymond was chairman of the British Railways Board from 1965-67, succeeding Dr Beeching

Dr Beeching’s task had been to make the railways pay and while the railway deficit had been cut considerably there was, by the time he left, no evidence that passenger closures had made more than a small contribution to this. Most savings had been achieved by more positive measures such as more economic working and greater efficiency, although some steps in that direction, such as rolling stock reductions had been carried too far with the unfortunate results already referred to. Some valuable traffic had been won, particularly on the freight side and important contracts signed, for example, with the electricity boards, the

major oil companies and the Post Office. Unfortunately in the early days, the Liner Train scheme, designed greatly to improve the railways' competitive position for freight traffic, had been thwarted by union opposition.

Nevertheless, even after his departure there was, despite the Government's election promises, no dramatic end to the closure programme which continued unabated until the early 1970s.

Turning to the closures themselves, in the summer of 1964, Woodhead station, on the electrified Manchester Piccadilly-Sheffield Victoria line had

been closed and the withdrawal of the suburban service from Manchester to Glossop and Hadfield was considered by the TUC in the autumn. In December, the general manager of the Eastern Region officially announced BR's intention to close Sheffield Victoria and, as very few trains, apart from the Manchester-Sheffield electrics used this station, there was a strong fear that this service – the first example of main line overhead electrification in the country – would be closed to all passenger traffic in a year or two, even though the alternative route between the two cities (via Chinley and the Hope Valley) was also on the closure list.

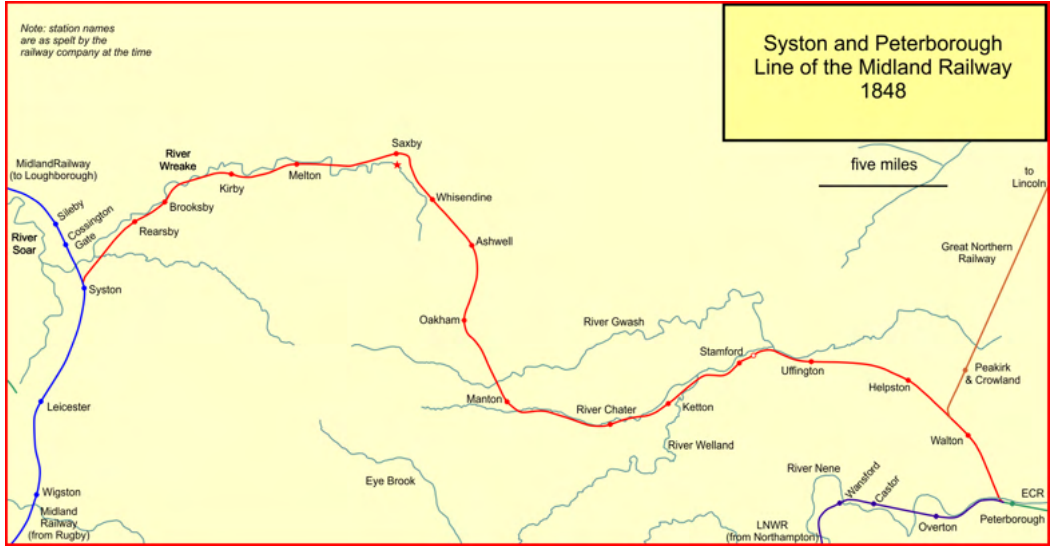
A more encouraging announcement at this time, however, was that the minister of transport had, at long last, approved the Southern Region's plans to electrify the Southampton and Bournemouth lines, together with the extension of the Glasgow overhead system to Paisley, Gourock and Wemyss Bay. The history and effects of electrification on the BR network, its progress and the failure of successive governments to maintain a consistent and rolling programme will be dealt with more specifically later in this chapter.

While on the subject of Scottish lines, late in 1964, the society had been represented at the TUC hearing into the closure of the Glasgow-Stirling-Oban line, a resort which had been visited during the study tour in the summer of 1962. Special reference was made at the enquiry to the failure of the British Railways Board to advertise this closure outside the immediate area served by the stations to be closed, despite the fact that it would involve the complete withdrawal of London-Oban through coaches. The society, therefore, wrote to the minister of transport asking him to direct British Railways to continue their provision, even if he gave approval to the closure of the Stirling-Crianlarich section of the line; the service to be diverted via the alternative route to Oban. Under the BRB's proposals passengers would have had to make their own way between Central and Queen Street stations in Glasgow. Consent to the closure was subsequently granted but arrangements maintained for the through coaches to Oban.

Towards the close of the year, British Railways also announced withdrawal of the Peterborough-Rugby and Stamford-Seaton services and the replacement of the Peterborough-Leicester and Leicester-Birmingham local services by a new through Ely-Birmingham semi-fast service. This was a distinct improvement upon the Beching plan



Sheffield Victoria closed in 1970. The station buildings were demolished in 1989.



The Peterborough-Leicester line survived. In 2022, typical weekday services run hourly between Stansted Airport or Cambridge and Birmingham. The Syston and Peterborough Railway was an early railway, opened between 1846 and 1848, despite efforts by Robert Sherard, 6th Earl of Harborough to obstructed both surveyors and builders.

proposal which envisaged the complete withdrawal of passenger trains on all three lines radiating westward from Peterborough. The service proposed by BR offered five westbound and four eastbound trains each weekday over- the Peterborough-Leicester section, of which only two were to run to and from Birmingham and only one each way to call at Nuneaton Trent Valley.

While the society decided not to press its objection to the closure of the Peterborough East-Rugby and Luffenham-Seaton sections, it did, however, press for a more frequent service over the Ely-Peterborough-Leicester-Birmingham route, operating on a regular-interval basis with improved connections at both termini and at intermediate stations, including Nuneaton at which all trains would call. The latter provision would go a long way to make up for the loss of the Rugby service by providing an alternative connecting point with the electrified main line from Euston.

The society subsequently published its proposals in a memorandum which met with encouraging support from local authorities and the press. At the TUC hearing in Market Harborough on 2 March 1965, the society's representative pointed out that, if all other known proposals for the closure of cross-country lines were effected the Peterborough-Leicester line would be the only means of rail communication between East Anglia and the Midlands. The limited service over this route proposed by BR would be quite inadequate, hence submission of the society's proposals. Upon directing the committee's attention to the failure of the BRB to advertise the proposed closures and reductions in service at places in East Anglia served by through trains to the Leicester and Rugby lines, the society's representative was ruled out of order by the chairman who contended that his committee was not required to consider hardship occasioned to travellers or tourist interests in places not in the immediate vicinity of the lines under review.

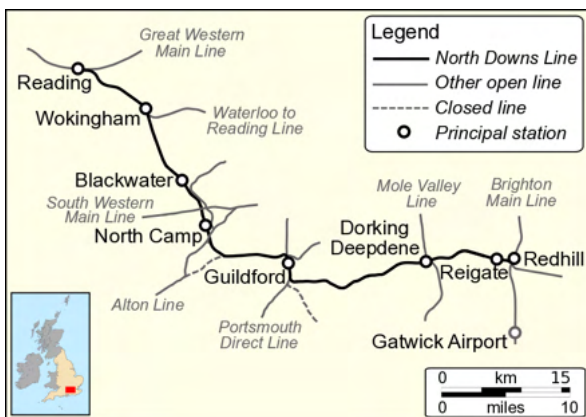
Another line dealt with at the turn of the year was Tonbridge-Redhill-Guildford-Reading and a special sub-committee was set up, late in November, to consider its position as the line was likely to lose practically all passenger train services under the Reshaping plan. Only a few days later, however, British Railways announced that diesel multiple units would replace steam trains on an improved timetable on and from 4 January 1965. In its publicity, BR stated: "The decision to retain and modernise this through cross-country link can only be justified if more people use it."

The society, therefore, wrote to the general manager of the Southern Region complimenting him and his staff on the vast improvement which had been made in the operation of the line, with suggestions concerning the map and pamphlet issued to advertise the service. In particular it was suggested that the special return fare facility available between Guildford and Reading should be extended to other stations including those just outside the area of the line, such as Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells. It was also suggested that the service should be fully publicised in these nearby towns in addition to those actually on the route, to induce more passengers to use the line.

British Rail, in its reply, was, however, unable to accept the society's suggestions regarding the timetable and connections, but agreed to look into many of the cheap fare anomalies, not only on the line itself but on the rest of the Southern Region.

The society's campaign on the Cambrian lines continued with further correspondence with the new minister of transport in a last desperate effort to secure a reprieve for the Ruabon-Barmouth line. Much confusion, however, arose regarding the closure of this and the Caernarvon-Afon Wen line as neither the Transport Users Consultative Committee nor British Railways are required to notify objectors of the actual date on which closure will take place. The lines were to have closed on 23 November but in the event, services were not finally withdrawn until the following dates:

Ruabon-Barmouth (18/1/65) and Caernarvon-Afon Wen (7/12/64)



Redhill-Guildford is part of North Downs line services in 2022, with hourly semi-fast services from Reading to Gatwick Airport. Until 1994, some rail services continued to Tonbridge, but the line between Redhill and Tonbridge was electrified in 1993. Trains on this section are now operated as a shuttle service between Redhill and Tonbridge only.





This is Ty Croes station in 2021. The Railway Invigoration Society objected to the closure of 11 stations on the Chester-Holyhead line. Some closed but three threatened stations on the isle of Anglesey (Ty Croes, Rhosneigr and Bodorgan) survived. In 2022, there is a two-hourly weekday service in each direction.

Early in 1965, it was announced that single unit railcars were to replace the two-car units in use on the reprieved Conway Valley line to Blaenau Ffestiniog. Also in North Wales, the society lodged an objection to the closure of 11 of the 13 threatened stations between Chester and Holyhead and to the reduction in the number of trains serving most of the remaining stations. The society was particularly concerned to ensure the provision of adequate communications with Manchester and Merseyside and with the West Coast main line at Crewe, and of holiday services from other areas to the many resorts along the North Wales coast. A memorandum, containing the society's case together with suggestions for a revised timetable was subsequently sent to

the minister of transport. Later in the year, the TUC for Wales, in reporting on these closures, considered that hardship in Anglesey would result from the inability to run a bus service comparable with rail to serve Rhosneigr, Ty Croes and Bodorgan. This was most satisfactory and it was also encouraging to note that the stations where the TUC found the greatest hardship were those on which the society's objection had been concentrated. The minister subsequently granted a reprieve to these and three other stations on the line.

On the Central Wales line, a member travelling in the spring had noted that the trains made early arrival at intermediate stations which in total amounted to 27 minutes – nearly one seventh of the scheduled time for the journey. The society brought the matter to the notice of BR which later stated that with the introduction of diesel multiple units (the line having also been reprieved) the schedules were to be speeded up and from September 1965 journey times were cut by up to half an hour and the timetable recast to improve connections with other services. In addition a further nine intermediate stations were converted to unstaffed halts.

In Eastern England, the TUC had reported on 17 December 1964 that closure of the Peterborough-Boston-Grimsby line and the Skegness and Mablethorpe branches would "inflict intensive hardship upon various categories of persons in the seaside resorts and upon those normally taking their holidays in those places who would not be able to travel otherwise than by train" and would also cause hardship to many living and working in the country areas and market towns served by the line. The committee was unable to suggest any means of alleviating the hardship and early in 1965 the minister announced that he would not grant consent for the closure, at least for the time being.

In north-east England, the minister had also refused to allow closure of the Darlington-Richmond line, which was to receive considerable attention from the society in later years.

Following the successful inauguration of the society's Three Counties branch in the autumn of 1964, the national committee continued in its endeavours to form further branches in areas where there was sufficient support. Where this was not feasible, it appointed further area representatives and by the autumn of 1965 had done so for northern Scotland, north Wales, Lancashire, east Midlands, Birmingham, Dorset and west Hants, and north Devon.

One of the Three Counties branch's first acts was to lodge an objection to the closure of the Birmingham-Redditch line and to prepare a memorandum on its future. Although the branch was unable to be represented at the TUCC hearing on 16 March 1965, its views were presented by the local Redditch Passengers Action Committee. At the hearing, the TUCC dismissed the development of Redditch new town as irrelevant since it was a matter for the minister of transport's working party and would be considered by it. It did, however, conclude that very considerable hardship would be caused by closure and in the autumn, the minister decided that it, together with the Birmingham-Worcester local services should be retained.

In addition to the Redditch closure, the branch was also concerned about the proposal to close two of the stations in Cheltenham, namely St James and Malvern Road, all traffic to be diverted to the remaining station (Lansdown). Considerable anxiety and distress was caused in the town by this scheme particularly as it had been put forward as an established fact. The branch contended that the wrong choice had been made as Lansdown, situated on the southern edge of the town was very difficult to reach, cramped and a very badly designed station. BR subsequently posted closure notices and a further branch newsletter was issued. An objection was lodged with the South Western Area TUCC and a memorandum issued giving the branch's reasons why the closures should not take place. The branch also gave assistance to the passengers association which was subsequently formed.

In the first instance, the town council was generally in favour of the retention of Lansdown as the only station but following a storm of criticism, a formal objection was submitted asking that the two stations should remain open until improvements were made to Lansdown. The principle of non-central rail facilities favoured by the council was not largely affected by this action, which had no great bearing on the efforts of actual users of the other stations to retain central facilities.

The TUCC hearing took place on 10 June 1965 and the society was represented by the branch secretary who spoke against the proposals and received a degree of support from other objectors for the suggestion that main line trains should be re-routed through Malvern Road, with St James station retained as a central terminus and "feeder", any economies to be made by closure of Lansdown. The TUCC, however, came out in favour of the board's proposals but recommended that the threatened stations should not close until the remaining station had been much improved. They also stressed the need for close collaboration between road, rail and the local authorities to ensure the minimum of inconvenience and delay to users of St James and Malvern Road. Despite considerable efforts to avert closure, including a petition with over 600 signatures, the minister gave permission for its implementation from 3 January 1966. In the meantime the lavish development proposed for Lansdown had been refused by the local planning authority but lengthening of platforms and other improvements were subsequently carried out.

However, the society board's main activity at national level in 1965 centred around the Government's plans to study transport coordination. On 8 February 1965, the minister, Tom Fraser, had announced the setting up of a committee under Lord Hinton to look into the means whereby, and the extent to which, the transport of goods and passengers could best

be co-ordinated and developed in the national interest. Particular attention was to be paid to the pattern of long-distance services likely to be required with special reference to the coordination of investment policies for highways and railways and how problems of operational coordination between the different forms could be overcome. Efforts would also be made to get as near as possible to the truth regarding the cost of providing lorries with trunk roads. The committee hoped to complete its findings by the end of the year but would not report publicly, only to the minister as its work proceeded; as a result of which some proposals might be put to Parliament before it had finished.

The society set up a sub-committee which prepared a memorandum for submission to Lord Hinton which was published on 31 July 1965 and distributed to the press and other interested parties. The memorandum was divided under three headings: Costs of different forms of transport, their advantages and disadvantages and finally, the possibilities for coordination between them giving detailed consideration to each topic.

In the autumn, it was learned that Lord Hinton had completed his studies and relinquished his post as a temporary civil servant. In the meantime, the memorandum had been sent to MPs, together with a letter stating that the society was deeply disturbed that consent to rail closures had continued, including such important trunk routes as Oxford-Cambridge and Bristol-Bournemouth, before a full costing of road transport had been carried out. Accordingly, the society put forward a number of proposals to the MPs concerned asking for their support namely:

- 1 That as a matter of urgency, a full costing of road transport should be completed, and road users required to pay the full costs to which they gave rise on the same basis as rail users.
- 2 That all proposals for rail closures should be accompanied by financial information relating to the cheapest practicable method of operating the service in question, and that the TUCC and the minister should be required to consider this, together with any known social costs which might reasonably be expected to arise as a result of closure, before a decision on the proposal was reached.
- 3 That the TUCC procedure be amended to permit objectors to make representations on all matters relevant to rail closures.
- 4 That with true regard to the inherent advantages of each, every possible consideration should be given to coordinating all forms of transport as far as this was practicable.

These proposals were subsequently taken up with the chairman of the BRB and the next minister of transport, Mrs Barbara Castle who had taken over from Mr Fraser on 22 December 1965, but little support was forthcoming. The society had also sent Mrs Castle a telegram expressing the hope that she would stop the disastrous policy of rail closures which had continued without respite and fallen a long way short of what had been expected from Labour's pre-election pledges.

The other major exercise in 1965 had been surveys of post-closure hardship in selected areas. In the first instance, the society had intended to deal with the Ruabon-Bala-Barmouth line as the replacement buses in January had soon experienced difficulty. The severe weather at the beginning of March had seriously restricted services and on 4 March 1965, Bala had been without any public transport for the first time in living memory.

Merioneth County Council also conducted a post-closure survey of hardship within its area.

The proposal featured in the discussion which followed the society's AGM on 3 April 1965 and during the debate in the House of Lords on the Railway Closures Bill, Lord Lindgren announced on 27 May 1965 that the minister of transport had decided to carry out a sample survey to test the effect on travellers of rail passenger closures. The surveys, which began on 29 May 1965, consisted of interviews with the passengers who were users of trains on three services which were withdrawn on 14 June 1965: Eridge-Hailsham; Bradford-Huddersfield and Stranraer-Dumfries.

Passengers had been invited to give their names and addresses to interviewers with a view to a follow-up a month or two after closure to find out what alternative transport they were using and how their journeys compared with those they had been making before the closures took place. The society wrote to Lord Lindgren asking for the results of the surveys to be announced earlier than proposed (before 1966), and for further closures to be postponed until they were available.

Meanwhile the society proceeded to carry out its own surveys.

While some work was carried out on the Ruabon-Barmouth line, the main effort was concentrated on the former Gloucester-Chalford railcar service in the Stroud Valley. The work was undertaken jointly by the Three Counties branch and members of the national committee. Survey forms were distributed to as many as possible of the former users of the service, a preliminary survey having been carried out on 4 September 1965. Announcements of the survey had already been given prominence in the local press and some of the objectors to the original closure living in the Stroud Valley offered their assistance in completing the survey forms and many letters with hardship details were also received. Chalford Parish Council too offered assistance and complained of poor transport services following the closure. By the end of October 1965, after withdrawal of the service, the work was complete and the results were published early in 1966.

The findings revealed that a degree of hardship and considerable inconvenience had been caused to a large number of former railcar users. Altogether details of just under 300 cases of hardship were collected and a high percentage of former users considered that the substitute road services were unsatisfactory. They found them to be slower, more expensive, less convenient for luggage and shopping, often overcrowded and frequently late, due to traffic conditions.

Heavy emphasis was laid on the inconvenience and delay involved in using connecting bus services to Gloucester from Stroud; timing and coordination being very poor. Older travellers stressed the difficulties of mounting the steps and the hill from Stroud bus depot to the town centre, particularly in bad weather conditions and when burdened with luggage, if making for the railway station.

Many former rail users said that they had been forced to buy their own forms of road transport, adding to the traffic congestion in the area, as a direct result of losing local rail services.

Restoring Stranraer - Dumfries rail line back on Scottish Government's agenda – Alastair Dalton

The Dumfries - Stranraer route is being considered for re-opening 55 years after its closure in the latest symbol of railway optimism which is even seeping into ScotRail's performance.

The Scotsman 31 January 2020

Others had drastically reduced the frequency and length of their journeys, and over 70% said that they now used other railway services much less frequently. Some unfortunate daily commuters had to catch as many as three separate buses to substitute for a single rail journey, adding considerably to the time they were forced to waste each day in travelling.

95% of rail users wanted their trains back and said they would use them

When asked if they would welcome the return of the rail service even if only in a limited form, and if they would use it again if the opportunity offered, 95% of former rail users interviewed replied in the affirmative.

A summary of the society's findings arising from the survey appeared in *Railway Review* of 11 March 1966. (10)

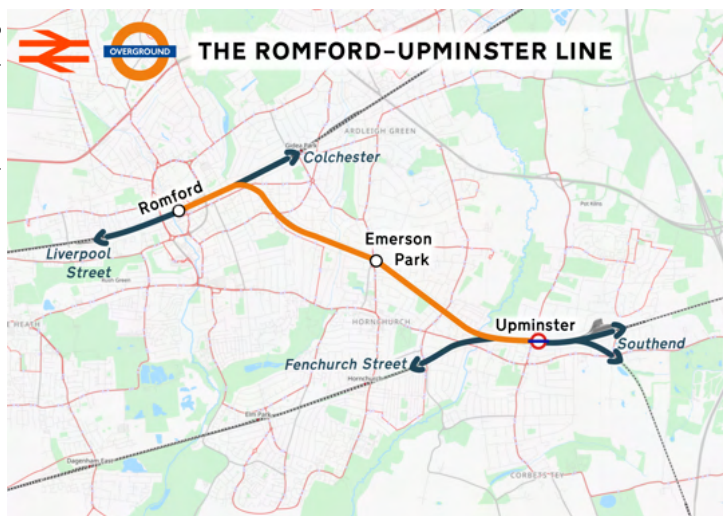
Of the many closures dealt with by the society in 1965, the campaign by the Romford & Upminster Rail Users Association was prominent. Over 400 objections were received by the London TUCC and those by the society and the association drew attention to the hardship in the form of increased journey time and increased travel costs which would be suffered by users of the line.

At the TUCC hearing on 14 January 1965, the society was represented by its chairman, Dr Michael Caton who, in addition to the above, emphasised the ever-increasing road congestion which was being experienced in the area. A representative from London Transport, which was to operate the replacement bus service, stated that LT had taken out a test bus and driven it round one of the most congested road junctions with ease, but it transpired that this had been done at an off-peak time.

A particularly thorny issue raised at the enquiry concerned the costs of the line as there was much confusion between the "Heads of Information" issued by BR and another document circulated to railway staff, but not to objectors, which gave the savings by closure as £2,027 against £13,900 in the "Heads of Information".

It also came to light that the costings had been based on the use of a three-car unit whereas a

two-car set had subsequently been found quite adequate for the traffic, reducing the saving to £5,500. Even accepting these higher figures, after allowing for a subsidy of £3,800 to LT for the replacement bus service and for loss of contributory revenue it was found that closure would, in fact, entail a loss to BR of about £100. (11) The society therefore emphasised that if the



original figures had not been challenged, and the additional information come to light, the TUCC, and probably the minister, would have been led to believe that closure of the line was fully justified. In the autumn, the minister conceded the case and refused consent for closure. The society together with the association put forward proposals to secure the line's future by developing traffic. The service continues to this day.

Other major closure proposals dealt with in 1965 were in East Anglia. Early in the year, it was learned that Felixstowe Beach, the closure of which the society had opposed, would remain open for a further 12 months. Then on 1 January 1966, staff were consulted about threats to the East Suffolk Line. The society issued a further local newsletter in its continued attempt to form a local branch.

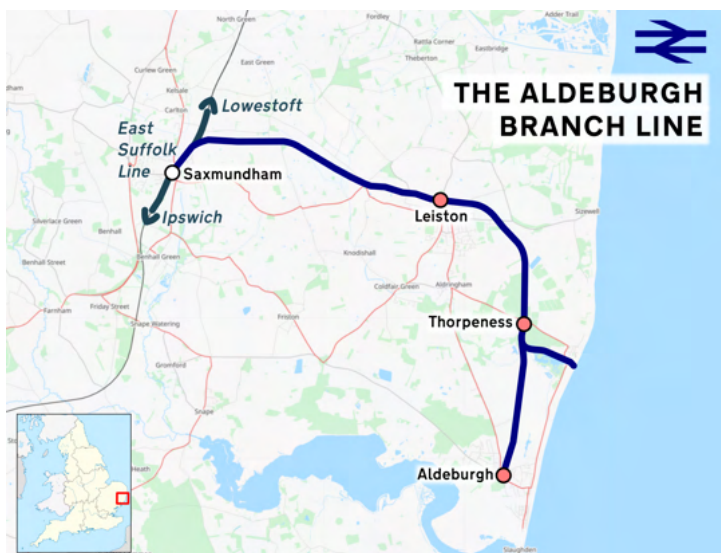
On 23 April 1965, the worst was confirmed with the posting of notices for the withdrawal of passenger services between Ipswich and Lowestoft Central and the branch line from Saxmundham to Aldeburgh. Concurrently notices appeared for the 40-mile-long Stour Valley line (Shelford-Marks Tey) which provided a through service between Colchester and Cambridge*

In lodging objections, the society pointed out that the Stour Valley line, besides providing the shortest route between Colchester and Cambridge, also served the growing towns of Sudbury and Haverhill in addition to numerous other smaller centres of population. The fact that this was a rapidly developing area, a trend likely to continue, was given prominence. A population of 50,000 was planned for Haverhill, while Sudbury was to accept 2,300 overspill families from Greater London.

At the end of the 1965 summer, the society published a ten page history of the East Suffolk Line (12) and also issued a supplementary objection to the closure proposals on receipt of BR's Heads of Information. The first objection had been restricted to hardship but the follow-up document embraced wider issues such as finance and the adequacy of alternative bus schedules. Amongst proposals to enable the line to continue it was suggested that no double track systems should be closed if it could be shown, upon investigation, that by singling the track a satisfactory service could be operated remuneratively.

A total of 1,914 objections were received by the TUCC although BR claimed that "many of t]ace protests were couched in general terms and did not instance the writers' own use of the train services".

At the Stour Valley line hearing in Sudbury Town Hall on 10 August 1965, the near pandemonium conditions at the meeting (the chairman threatened



to call the police to quieten the crowd) received prominent publicity in the Suffolk Free Press and Haverhill Echo. As the society's own representative was

able to vouch for, the meeting was overcrowded and many objectors were unable to get into the hall. Early in the proceedings, the chairman of the TUCC was interrupted and asked to declare his interest in road transport. This he refused to do but it was rumoured he was managing director of a road haulage firm. Questions were also asked as to how members of the committee were appointed but again no acceptable answer was forthcoming.(13)

Two representatives of the society also attended the East Suffolk Line enquiry at Saxmundham on 28 September 1965 at which the Aldeburgh branch line was also considered. Even at the end of the two days allotted to the meeting, many individuals had not been called to speak and present their evidence of hardship. While sympathetic to granting an extension of the enquiry, the chairman nevertheless considered this unnecessary in view of the overwhelming evidence of hardship already received.

Later in 1965, at a meeting at Saxmundham on 6 November, the society finally succeeded in setting up a local branch, the second to be formed. Of the members elected to the branch committee, five were local authority representatives of corporate members*

Following the turbulent public enquiry on 10 August 1965, the East Anglian TUCC reported to the minister on the withdrawal of passenger services on the Stour Valley line, but was unable to suggest any way of alleviating the severe hardship which would be caused to commuters between Sudbury and London. They therefore recommended retention of the 11¾ mile

section between Sudbury and Marks Tey.

The TUCC also reported that severe hardship would result if the East Suffolk line between Ipswich and Lowestoft were closed to passenger traffic and could see no way in which this

could be alleviated. In the case of the Aldeburgh branch line, however, it was considered that augmentation of the existing bus service would be sufficient.

Early in 1966, Barbara Castle (appointed transport minister in December 1965) stated that she would not make a decision on the future of the line until she had received the report of the East Anglian Economic Planning Council. All relevant factors would be considered, including the effect on roads and road traffic. After touring the line on 11 February 1966, Mr Gerald Fiennes, the Eastern Region general manager, was reported to have spoken confidently of its potential but to have stated that its future would depend on cooperation between the local authorities and British Rail, together with the people of East Suffolk generally. This aspect is also dealt with in detail in his memoirs as by this time, as a resident of Aldeburgh, his interest was more than just managerial. His most profound and probably oft-quoted pronouncement on rural railways contained in this chapter of his book

“In 1962 the Marples/Beeching axis began to define their territorial ambitions about rural railways. They laid it down in general that rural railways did not pay,

which was true; and could never pay; which was false. They did not, therefore, require more than the most elementary arithmetic on the losses either in general or in particular. They took no account of the new techniques either coming into operation, like diesel traction, or just round the corner like automatic level crossings, mechanised track maintenance, tokenless block signalling and bus stop operation which can cut the cost of rural railways by more than half.” (14)

It was, therefore, not until 1967 that the society’s many suggestions for more economic running of rural lines were to be publicly vindicated by which time the bulk of the Beeching closures had been implemented.

The Central Transport Consultative Committee in its report for 1964, published on 5 May 1965, had however noted the more consistent policy of the BRB. in the introduction of unstaffed halts as an alternative to closure of lines and stations and “also noted that some of the reasons previously advanced to them by the railways, which were unfavourable to the creation of unstaffed halts, were unlikely to apply where there was a good financial case of them.”(15)

In the autumn of 1965, the society had again taken up with the minister the extent to which consideration was given to the possibility of more economic methods of operation of a line before a decision was reached on closure and had been informed in correspondence relating to the Somerset and Dorset line that the minister was concerned with the possibilities open to the railways board of reducing the loss being incurred in the service in cases where he considered there were good grounds for its retention, a somewhat ambiguous reply.

Nevertheless from these beginnings developed the “basic railway” and a closer understanding and cooperation between the society and the railway management which has been most notably effective in East Anglia. These developments also foreshadowed the new relationship which was to emerge between local authorities and the railways made more effective by the subsequent provisions of the Transport Act 1968.

Returning to the scene of the action, the minister subsequently refused consent for the closure of the East Suffolk line but approved that of the Aldeburgh branch subject to the provision of replacement buses. Rail services on the latter ceased on 11 September 1966.

Early in 1966, it was also announced that the minister had agreed to the closure of the



afterbrunel

Green: The Somerset and Dorset Railway in 1890

Rugby-Peterborough and Seaton-Stamford lines, but this was subject to the running of 4-5 trains in each direction on weekdays on the remaining lines between Peterborough and Leicester via Stamford and Melton Mowbray which was some improvement on BR's original proposals and also went some way to meet the society's own objections.

The summer of 1965 had, however, seen no let up in the closure programme and a massive list of passenger service withdrawals had been given ministerial approval leaving little doubt that Labour's more sympathetic attitude towards rail closures had come to an end. Moreover, these consents had been accompanied by a fresh batch of closure proposals from the railways board. Marples and Beeching had gone but the business of closures appeared to carry on as usual.

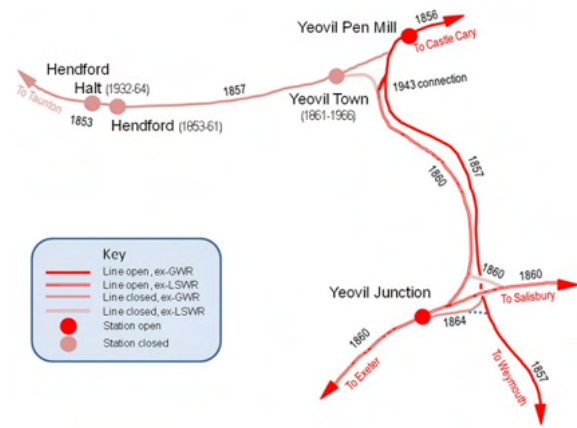
Although it had been almost two years since the Tucc hearing into the proposed closure of the Somerset and Dorset line, the minister's decision on the line's future had still not been issued and as we have seen, the society had pressed for its more economic operation. In the autumn, however, its closure was finally confirmed and the stations at Bournemouth West and Bascomb closed on 4 October 1965. The decision gave rise to deep resentment in the areas affected and the society organised a protest which was sent to prime minister Harold Wilson with the signatures of approximately 2,300 persons drawn from every walk of life. The protest, which received considerable publicity in the press and on radio, was accompanied by a letter informing the prime minister that it had been sent to him, rather than the minister of transport, not only as head of the government but as leader of the party that had given an undertaking that no further major rail closures would be permitted until the whole position of road and rail transport had been fully investigated.

The protest, however, failed to secure any reconsideration of the case and the closure date was later announced as 3 January 1966, although due to difficulties in obtaining approval from the traffic commissioners for the replacement bus services, this was not effected until 5 March. In the interim, an emergency rail service of eight out of the former 12 trains a day was run pending their introduction which was considerably less than the requirements issued by the minister as a condition of closure, causing further resentment among those affected.

In the west of England, the society's activities had continued and a representative attended the hearing in Yeovil on 12 January 1965 into the withdrawal of the Yeovil Town-Yeovil Junction and the associated Town-Pen Mill services. At about the same time, it was announced that Tom Fraser (appointed transport minister in October 1964), had approved closure of the

Halwill Junction-Wadebridge line. choosing for his first closure what was probably the most uncontroversial proposal in the whole of the Beeching plan.

The final chapter of the closures in East Devon, Somerset and Dorset came before the Tucc on 25 March 1965, namely the closure of many of the stations between Salisbury and Exeter, on the former Southern Railway main line. The society was represented at the enquiry where there were strong complaints that the relative timetables of



proposed alternative buses had not been supplied to objectors until only eight days before, and that some had not received them at all.

It was also clear that inadequate thought had been given to the proposals, as the alternative route between Templecombe and Gillingham had proved to be impossible as the road suggested was shown to be impracticable for buses. Finally in the early autumn, it was reported that the minister had agreed to the closure of the Axminster-Lyme Regis, Seaton Junction-Seaton branches together with the stations referred to above, with the exception of Sidmouth Junction, on which a decision was deferred. It was also confirmed that the Barnstaple-Torrington line would close on 4 October 1965.

Meanwhile, there had been some interesting developments on the more urban scene. While some important suburban lines were included in the Beeching Report, the basic network of such lines serving several of the major cities had been left largely intact. Towards the end of 1965, however, the number them added to the Beeching list had reached the stage where one was left wondering how many would survive outside the London area. Attention was drawn in an article in the *Railway Gazette* to figures for the maximum capacity of different methods of urban and suburban transport, compiled by the vice-chairman of the French Transport Council and the honorary general manager of the Paris Transport Authority. Adopting a 1.7 person occupation factor for private vehicles, a one-lane public highway equipped with traffic lights was capable of giving passage to 1,200 passengers an hour in one direction, a one-lane urban motorway 2,500, a bus route on a public highway 3,000 and a modern underground or surface railway between 50,000 and 70,000, hardly justification for dispensing with large numbers of urban railways. (16)

Early in 1965, BR announced that it had decided not to proceed, for the time being, with plans to withdraw the Liverpool-Southport electric services, representing a major victory for the society, local authorities and the many thousands of regular users of the service. This decision was however not final as it was conditional upon the results of the land-use survey which was being carried out of the Merseyside area. The local authorities action committee therefore remained in being to monitor the situation. Later it was reported that a high speed, electrified, circular suburban service was being planned for Liverpool using existing railway rights of way. The city planning officer also said that a key element in the city's transport system would be the conversion of the existing railways into a rapid transit system. The addition of an outer rail loop encircling the city, together with the proposed terminal loop on: the Mersey Railway, would provide a fully integrated rail system in the city. The figure required for the 19 mile route was estimated at only £6 million, the amount required at the time to build only one mile of urban motorway. (17)

The steering committee of Merseyside local authorities later decided that the terminal loop of the Mersey Railway, to link the four main stations in Liverpool should be given preference over a third Mersey Tunnel. A second road tunnel between Liverpool and Wallasey was then under construction. De-electrification of the Liverpool-Southport line

Road

1,200 passengers per hour

Urban motorway

2,500 passengers per hour

Bus

3,000 passengers per hour

Train

50,000 + passengers per hour

was, however, also under consideration.

In the south-east on England, the study published by the Government in March 1964 had envisaged the creation of new cities at or near Bletchley, Newbury and Portsmouth-Southampton while the same month, British Rail had put forward proposals to withdraw the Cambridge-Bletchley-Oxford passenger service, followed in July by the closure to freight traffic of the Didcot, Newbury and Southampton line, measures which were to sabotage a potentially valuable outer ring rail route serving many of the development areas referred to. The society, therefore, associated itself with attempts by Newbury residents to prevent the lifting of the track between Newbury and Winchester.

Nevertheless, on 8 July 1965, the minister announced that he had agreed to the withdrawal of all passenger train services on the Cambridge-Bedford-Bletchley-Oxford route, completely ignoring the above plans. Even more serious was the intention to close the Cambridge-Potton section completely. The intended date of closure was 3 January 1966, but again difficulty in providing the substitute buses caused it to be deferred until 1 January 1968. Even then, it was agreed that the Bletchley-Bedford section should remain open to passengers to cater for the large number of users in that area.

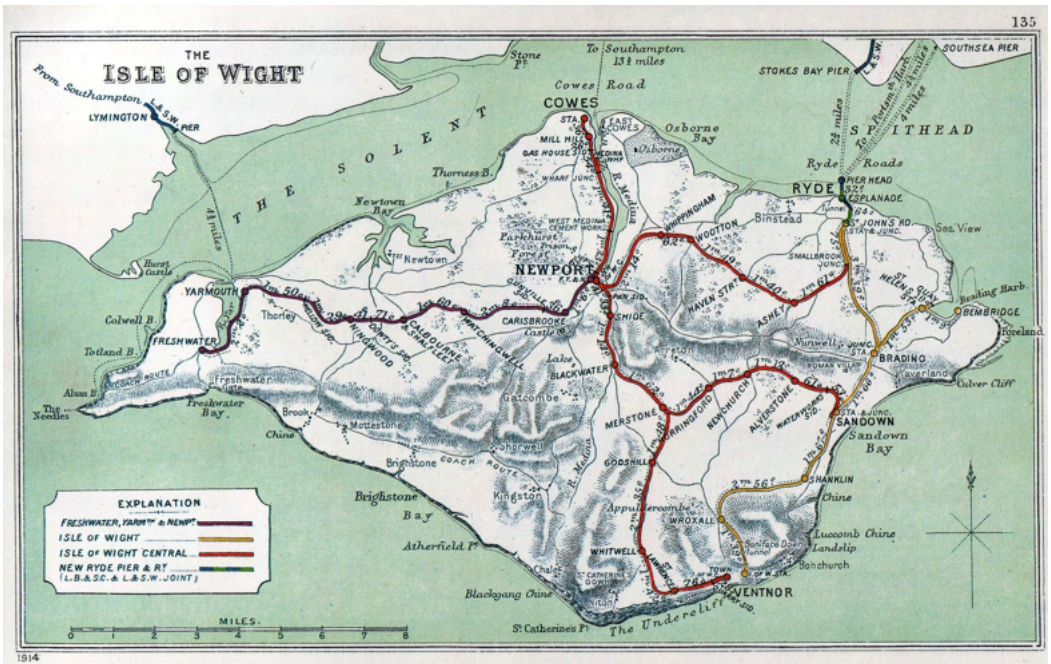
In London, British Rail had announced in the summer of 1965 that it had officially withdrawn the Broad Street-Richmond line from the closure list as it was unlikely that any minister would deliberately throw thousands more daily travellers on to the roads of north London by consenting to its closure and the announcement therefore avoided the costly and time-consuming TUC procedure. Earlier in the year, London Midland region had announced plans to avert closure of the Watford Junction-St Albans Abbey line by economies in equipment and operating costs. To halve the alleged deficit of £24,000 per annum they had adopted many ideas long advocated by the society; reduction in track and signalling equipment; conversion of all five stations into unstaffed halts with tickets issued by the train guards, and revised timetables to enable all workings to be covered by one railcar set.

In south-east England, however, the minister had approved the closure of the Eridge-Hailsham line and the society failed to obtain an assurance from him that its proposals for the more economical operation of the line would be considered. This line, together with the Horsham-Guildford line therefore closed on 14 June 1965. On the Isle of Wight, the threatened closure in 1964 had been deferred and, to counter fears that the lines were already closed, hotels and boarding houses had sent their clients leaflets, issued by the Isle of Wight County Council, drawing attention to the continued existence of the railway facilities. However, in the autumn of 1965 the minister finally decided that the Ryde-Shanklin section should remain open but that the Shanklin -Ventnor and Newport-Cowes section should close from 4 October. The retention of the Ryde-Shanklin section was regarded by many as a substantial victory but in



Geoffrey Skelsey

Liverpool-Southport electrics
This is a Derby-built 1940s class 502 train but the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway began operating electric trains between Liverpool Exchange and Southport as far back as 1904.



The impressive railway network on the Isle of Wight in 1914, wrecked in 1966

practical terms it was the worst possible decision from the point of view of Ventnor, Newport and Cowes as it made it virtually impossible for the disconnected Shanklin-Ventnor and Smallbrook Junction-Cowes to be operated by private or municipal enterprise, as later events will show. The closures here not however finally effected until 21 February 1966 (Ryde-Newport-Cowes) and 18 April (Shanklin-Ventnor). Thus, the Isle of Wight railways which, in 1951 boasted 55½ route miles of track, 32 stations, one private station and two halts and carried well over 3,000,000 passengers a year, had, by successive closures, been reduced to an eight-mile line between Ryde Pier Head and Shanklin with only six stations. Further significant aspects of these closures will be dealt with at a later stage.

One other issue which arose in 1965 concerned the summer-only Saturday train service on the between Shirebrook and Lincoln. Originating from the Sheffield, Manchester and Nottingham areas, these trains called at Shirebrook, Warsop, Ollerton and Edwinstowe on their way to and from Mablethorpe, Scarborough, Skegness and Yarmouth. When the summer 1965 timetable appeared, no trace of these services could be found and further enquiries confirmed that the "Dukeries Route" as it was often called, was not to be used that year and that the four stations on it would have no train service. As no notices had been seen, it appeared that the service had been withdrawn without going through the required procedure under the 1962 Transport Act, a matter of some concern to the society. The matter was therefore taken up with the East Midlands area TUC which consulted, through the Central TUC, the railways board and the minister.

As a result, the board decided, in order to remove doubt in the minds of the public and to allow users to make representations to the TUC, to publish proposals in the normal manner. This, however, came too late to permit restoration of the service for the 1965 season. Finally, in the autumn, news was received from the society's north of Scotland representative that

vigorous attempts were being made by BR to reduce the cost of operating the Highland lines, reprieved by Mr Marples. This included the singling of the double-track sections, the fitting of locomotives with powerful headlights which would permit abolition of keepers at level crossings which would be open with a flashing light, where necessary, to warn road users. At the same time, it was also reported that the minister had refused consent to the withdrawal of local trains between Fort William and Mallaig and to the closure of the stations at Banavie, Locheilside and Beasdale.

Similar economies to those on the Highland lines were also being tried on the Alston-Haltwhistle line in north-east England by the experimental use of a four-wheeled railbus.

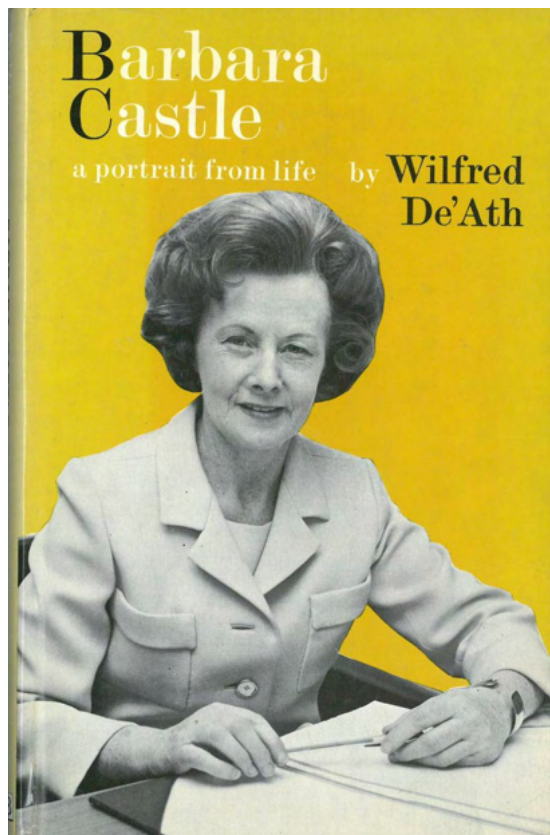
Towards the end of 1965, the society set up a sub-committee to deal specifically with branch and area matters which, early in the following year, produced a memorandum explaining ways in which branch and area representatives could further the aims of the society by promoting the retention and development of railway lines in their areas.

Nevertheless, the appointment of Mrs Barbara Castle as minister of transport at the turn of the year, in place of Mr Fraser, combined with a further general election not long afterwards which was to return a Labour government with a more workable majority, paved the way for yet another overhaul of transport policy. In the first instance, Mrs Castle set up, within the ministry, a new economic planning department which was to be closely involved in the studies of investment priorities for various forms of transport within the framework of the Government's integration plans. The society sent a copy of its memorandum on the cost,

development and coordination of inland transport to Mr Christopher Foster, director of the new department, together with a second memorandum, which had just been completed, on transport costs, which gave details of the subsidies paid to road and air transport and presented the case for urgent action to redress the imbalance whereby the railways were subjected to unfair competition. Copies of the coordination memorandum (which had been sent initially to Lord Hinton) were subsequently sent to the regional economic planning councils which were studying transport requirements for their respective areas for incorporation in a national transport plan.

At the general election, the society again contacted candidates and put to them similar questions to those which had been asked of selected MPs in the autumn of 1965 namely:

1 Do you agree that road transport should be subjected to a thorough costing and road users required to pay the full costs to which



they give rise in a similar manner to users of the railways.

2 Implied in British Rail's trunk route concentration plans is the closure of many main line and cross-country routes. Will you give general support to the retention of these routes to provide essential rail services to the many important towns and cities which would otherwise be denied vital transport facilities?

3 The present narrow terms of reference given to the transport users' consultative committees is causing increasing public disquiet and no satisfactory assurance has been given that such important items as social costs and the possibility of operating rail services by cheaper methods has been considered in all cases before a decision on a proposed closure has been reached by the minister. Do you agree that the TUCC procedure should be amended to permit objectors to make representations on all matters relevant to rail closures, instead of being limited to questions of hardship as at present, so that justice may be seen to be done?

Over 50 replies were received to the circular containing the above questions, and the majority of the candidates agreed with the need to widen the powers of the TUCCs.

By the spring, there were signs of a new outlook and it appeared that the "close until they pay" attitude which had dominated railway policy for so long was undergoing considerable modification. In a speech to the Institute of Transport, BRB chairman Sir Stanley Raymond had expressed the view that it was clear that substantial sections of the nation were not ready to face up to the consequences of streamlining the railways to the full extent required by the Transport Act 1962 to enable the railways to eliminate their deficit. He considered that a total of 12,000 route miles of track and feeder lines should be retained, which was much greater than the 8,000 route miles at one time in mind. This would still mean, however, the closure of another 2,000 or so route miles at present open for passenger services but earmarked for closure, together with a further 1,500 miles of freight-only lines. (18)

With the possibility of a breather from closures inherent in the above statement, the society turned its attention to the formulation of proposals to change the law in view of the likelihood of a new Transport Act and among resolutions passed at the annual general meeting on 16 April 1966 were suggestions:

a To extend the "powers of the TUCCs on the lines described in (3) above, including the consideration of financial matters.

b To give power to the minister to reopen closed lines

c To restore ministerial power over freight policy

d To make the TUCCs subject to the Committee on Tribunals

The above resolutions were sent to the minister but in the meantime the Earl of Kinnoull had made further attempts to secure amending legislation to deal with (a) although this was rejected. (19)

The main event in the railway scene in 1966 was, however, the completion of the electrification of the main line between London and Manchester/Liverpool and it will be useful at this stage to deal briefly with the historical events leading up to this accomplishment.

Electrification

The utilisation of electric power to propel trains on the early railways was largely governed by the development of electricity itself.

As early as 1825, the year the Stockton & Darlington Railway opened, the first practical electro-magnet had been exhibited in London by William Sturgeon but it was Michael Faraday's research into electro magnetism which was to make electric traction possible after 1831.

J F Daniell had, by 1836, developed a primary cell or battery which provided a stronger and more reliable means of energising electro-magnets but it was not until 1842 that an electric battery locomotive was demonstrated by Robert Davidson on the Edinburgh and Glasgow Railway.

By the end of the 1870s, the basic requirements for an electric railway obtaining power from a stationary generator was available and the first public appearance of such a railway took place at the Berlin Exhibition of 1879 when the firm of Siemens and Halske presented a 3hp locomotive, designed by Werner von Siemens, which hauled trains on a track 300 yards long. Power was supplied to a central live rail at 150 Volts , collected by copper brushes on the locomotive and returned to the generator through the running rails.

A basic, electrical generator operating on the principle discovered by Faraday, however, provides alternating current, whereas an electric motor suitable for a locomotive requires direct current to provide adequate starting torque. Automatic switches to convert alternating current (AC) into direct current (DC) were quickly developed which enabled the problem to be largely overcome and Siemens and Halske later equipped a short, electric line at Berlin Lichterfelde in 1881 which was one of the first to provide a passenger service.

One of the first electric railways in Britain was that along the sea front at Brighton, opened by Magnus Volk in 1883. Meanwhile there had been much development and experiment with electric traction in America during the 1880s and between 1890 and 1910, much of this was to rub off in Britain with the aid of American ideas and capital.

In December 1890, the first three miles of the City and South London Railway from Stockwell to the City was opened, using electric traction from the start, operating on 500 V DC generated from the railway's own power station at Stockwell. Some electrified sections of tramway had

been built but the City and South London was the first really full-scale electrified underground line in the world.

Notable developments also took place in Liverpool with the opening of the elevated Liverpool Overhead Railway on 6 March 1893 , the conversion of the steam operated Mersey Railway lines in 1903 and the Lancashire and Yorkshire's Liverpool-Southport line in 1904. In the same year, the North Eastern Railway also electrified a number of its suburban lines in the Newcastle area.

Most of these early lines were third rail



**The first electric streetcar at Lichterfelde, Berlin.
Canadian Illustrated News 1881**

DC and while the driver's control equipment carried the full motor current, only two or three coaches could be operated in this manner. Developments in the USA by the inventor F J Sprague had, however, enabled low voltage controls to be utilised and these together with their associated switchgear provided the means for multiple unit control, which was later introduced, and also removed the danger to the driver of high voltages virtually at his fingertips.

In Switzerland in 1889, the Burgdorf-Thun line had been electrified by the Swiss firm of Brown Boveri to demonstrate three-phase electric traction and this form was found most suitable for steeply graded lines although, where overhead equipment was used to collect the current, this necessitated a rather complicated duplication of wires which was somewhat cumbersome.

In south-east England, extensive electrification of its main and suburban lines was carried out by the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway in the early 1900s, utilising single phase AC, but because it lacked the starting torque of DC or three-phase AC, acceleration was little better than steam trains. As late as 1923, however, GEC was supplying 1,000 hp 6,700V AC locomotives for the elevated lines of South London but after grouping these were converted to 650V DC third rail to accord with the rest of Sir Herbert Walker's Southern Railway system. On the South London line as recently as 1954, former LBSC units, with their attenuated cabs, which formerly carried the overhead current collection equipment could be observed.

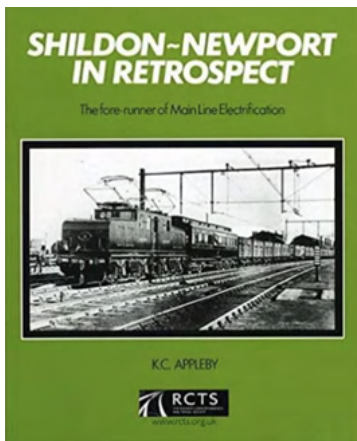
The North Eastern Railway also utilised overhead 1,500V DC supply for some of its heavily used freight lines such as Newport-Shildon which was electrified by EE-AEI in 1915.

From the early days of electrification, a number of distinctive trends developed – third or fourth rail DC supply at 600 or 750 Volts; contact wire supply at 1,500 or 3,000 Volts DC; single phase AC at 15,000 or 25,000 Volts and three phase AC at 3,000 Volts.

The last named was, however, discarded because of the extensive wiring which it required. The five-mile Bury-Holcombe Brook line was electrified by the L&Y Railway at 3,600V DC in 1912 – the world's first high-voltage electrified line – but this was later reduced to 1,200V to conform with the Manchester-Bury line, one of the few remaining high-voltage third-rail lines in the country. [In 1991 the Manchester-Bury route was absorbed into Manchester Metrolink].

Over the first half of the 20th century, the DC and AC systems pursued their separate ways but, at least so far as Great Britain is concerned, the DC system generally prevailed.

In 1931, the Weir Committee recommended (in a 60-page report) a major extension of main line electrification by this means (20) and one of the routes considered was the LMS main line. The railways' share of the capital cost was estimated at £260 million, the rest to be provided by the Central Electricity Generating Board. It was also estimated that £17½ million would be saved in operating and maintenance expenses and that the project would yield a profit of seven per cent. (21) However, Lord Stamp of the LMS did not consider the proposals would be viable and the matter was shelved. Even at that time, complaints were being made about the inequity of road and rail investment as, had the scheme gone ahead, the railways would have



had to recover the cost out of earnings whereas road expenditure was a direct charge on taxation. (22)

The Southern Railway, on the other hand, invested nearly £14 million in electrifying over a quarter of its rail network and the first dramatic effects of electrification became apparent. Here, as in other areas where such measures had been implemented, a considerable increase in passenger traffic resulted, accompanied by greater reliability and the capacity to run more frequent services. (23)

The LNER also showed greater inclination to electrification and by the outbreak of the Second World War, two schemes were at an advanced stage. These were the heavily used freight line between Manchester and Sheffield and the equally heavy-trafficked suburban line between London Liverpool Street and Shenfield. The latter was implemented shortly after the war and was the first overhead electrification scheme since the LBSC lines nearly 50 years before.

The Manchester-Sheffield was not, however, completed until well into nationalisation due to the need to provide a new double-track Woodhead Tunnel through the Pennines to replace the two single-track bores built between 1838 and 1852. The boring of the tunnel was commenced in February 1949 and was necessitated by the serious deterioration of the linings of the old tunnels and their general incompatibility with the overhead electrification, combined with the need to maintain the very heavy freight services on the route while the work was in progress. The construction of the new tunnel was a major feat and was not completed until October 1953. The first electric trains on the new line were the



Bill Davies

1979: An electric train loaded with south Yorkshire coal for Fiddlers Ferry power station, Warrington, passes through Hadfield on the Woodhead route which was electrified in 1953. In 1981, two years after Mrs Thatcher came to power, the line was shut, despite its obvious strategic value as a fast cross-Pennine route



Railwatch

2019: Wasted asset. The abandoned rail tunnels at Woodhead with the track removed. In 2014, the Daily Mail had recognised the value of Woodhead. It said: "Buried in a tunnel under the Pennines at Woodhead are the remains of what, in the post-war era, was the most modern trunk railway in Britain. Surely it was crazy that the newly electrified Manchester to Sheffield line through the three-mile Woodhead Tunnel, constructed at huge expense not many years before, was shut completely in 1981."

Manchester-Glossop suburban services which commenced on 14 June 1954. The full Manchester-Sheffield services were introduced later in the year on 14 September 1954. (24)

The next major electrification proposals were contained in the BTC's Modernisation Plan published in January 1955 when it was proposed to deal with both the King's Cross-Doncaster-Leeds/York and Euston-Manchester/Liverpool and Birmingham lines together with further extensions to existing electrified lines, both third rail and overhead. By this time, the Liverpool Street electrification was already being extended to Chelmsford and Southend (Victoria) at a cost of £2½ million. The Fenchurch Street-Tilbury-Southend-Shoeburyness scheme was also programmed, but work was less advanced.

Work on the Great Eastern main line was completed with the services to Chelmsford on 11 June 1956. (25)

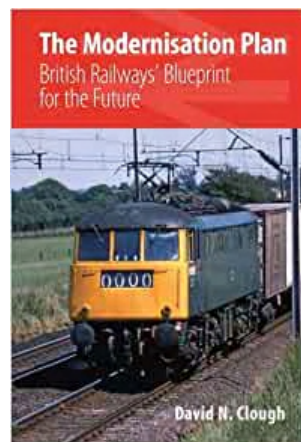
So far as the Modernisation Plan was concerned, it was estimated that the three main line schemes, including the Great Eastern lines, would cost about £120 million. for fixed installations and that about £60 million would be required for a stud of 1,100 electric locomotives; the plan to be spread over 15 years. It was anticipated that the East Coast main line would be tackled first, as recommended by the BR planning committee (26) but, as will be seen, events turned out somewhat differently. (27)

Publication of the Modernisation Plan (formally known as *Modernisation and Re-Equipment of the British Railways*) coincided with the downturn in the BTC's financial position and, as the Ministry of Transport began to take a greater financial interest in its affairs, political interference increased. Another major delaying factor was the decision to adopt 25kV AC overhead electrification in view of new and promising developments in that field on the continent in place of 1,500V DC which already existed on the earlier overhead systems. In the first instance, the Manchester-Styal-Crewe line was electrified at 25kV as a testing ground.

Extension of the Southern Region electrification to the Kent Coast lines proceeded in the latter years of the 1950s and was completed a year ahead of schedule with the introduction of electric trains on the London-Ashford-Dover main line in the autumn of 1961. The remainder of the Southern proposals, such as the East Grinstead and Mid-Sussex lines, were, however, shelved and many of these lines were to fall to the Beeching axe.

Extension of the electrified Great Eastern lines to Colchester and Clacton together with the Lee Valley lines was also implemented, as were the Glasgow suburban lines. In the case of the Great Eastern main line, the works also entailed conversion of the existing 1,500V DC. sections between Liverpool Street and Southend/Chelmsford to 25kV AC, involving not only the lineside equipment but much of the rolling stock, although in the inner areas and on the Southend line it was necessary to utilise a lower voltage of 6.25kV AC. The remaining proposals in the 1955 plan were, however, shelved, including the Great Northern suburban services which subsequently electrified in the 1970s.

Nevertheless, it was the controversy over the main line electrification which generated the most heat. Professor Philip Bagwell, in his far-reaching survey of the transport scene, asserts:



The 1955 Modernisation Plan is still discussed. David Clough's book was published in 2014



London Midland electrification between Liverpool and Crewe as depicted in British Railways poster artwork produced by John Greene who was active 1957-65

“The London Midland electrification was held back for some years after 1961 because of Mr Marples’ reluctance to authorise the additional expenditure” (29). A J Pearson’s descriptions of Mr Marples’ strange sleeping habits while on railway inspection tours hardly gives the impression of someone with any great enthusiasm for railway matters. His term of office was noted more for the progress of motorway construction and the general abandonment of railway facilities.

However the parliamentary select committee of 1960 had been generally in favour of the Midland Region electrification scheme despite the increased costs and the work eventually went ahead. (31)

By the beginning of 1966, the work had been largely completed and from 3 January, all passenger trains arriving at Euston were hauled by electric power and serving Birmingham, Crewe, Manchester and Liverpool. The full electric train services came into operation on 18 April and the new timetable, the culmination of over 10 years planning and hard work, provided frequent, high speed trains and all the other benefits of a modernised electric trunk railway. At the same time, an imaginative fares structure was introduced with day and period return fares at much reduced rates, the whole scheme being backed up by a massive publicity effort with a view to attracting new traffic.

The different attitudes to investment in road and rail were, however, still prevalent and while the commercial profitability of the scheme was largely to determine whether or not electrification would be extended to other routes, investment in roads and the subsidisation of airport facilities continued virtually unquestioned, although Mrs Castle wasted little time in agreeing to the commencement of surveys for the extension of the electrification from Crewe to Glasgow. By the beginning of 1967, the electrification of the remaining Birmingham and North Staffordshire lines was complete and electric trains replaced diesel services on 2

January with the introduction of the new scheduled services on 6 March.

Not unexpectedly, the results of these measures was a dramatic increase in traffic. The Southern Region's Kent Coast electrification had produced an increase in passenger revenue well in excess of the 50-60% anticipated and with, the considerable increase in train speeds of up to 100 mph on the newly electrified lines, the upsurge in passenger receipts and passenger, journeys, was no less dramatic and included the recapture of some inter-city air traffic. (32) Within months of the introduction of the Liverpool-Birmingham services, BR announced that traffic had increased by 80%.

Later in the year, extension of the third rail electrification of the Southern Region services to Bournemouth was completed and some electric trains between Waterloo and Bournemouth commenced on 3 April, finally ousting steam from this its last Southern stronghold.

Nevertheless, introduction of the new electrified services and the implications of the second Beeching Report (33) concentrating flows of traffic on a few strategic routes, cast a shadow over those main lines which would lose traffic which they had been carrying while the work was in progress. What, for instance, would happen to the Paddington-Birmingham route which provided the only link to such important centres as Banbury, Leamington and Stratford-upon-Avon and what would become of the important cross-country route from Crewe via Shrewsbury and Hereford to Bristol if north to west of England trains were diverted via Birmingham?

The fate of the Great Central main line gave a clear warning of what could happen to other main lines. The withdrawal of through expresses had been followed in stages by the elimination of other services and eventually to the complete closure of the route.

Towards the end of the summer of 1965, BR had applied to withdraw most of the remaining passenger trains over the London Marylebone to Rugby-Leicester-Nottingham section and in the spring of 1966, the minister had agreed to the closure of the Aylesbury-Rugby, Nottingham-Woodhouse Junction, and Woodford Halse-Banbury sections of the line and this took effect from 5 September.

At the same time as she approved the above closures, Mrs Castle had stated that Birmingham Snow Hill station would probably be closed after the completion of the electrification to Birmingham New Street made it redundant.

Snow Hill closed in 1972 but a new station opened in 1987. [In 2016, nearly five million passengers used Snow Hill station].

The threat to the Manchester-Sheffield electric services reached a further stage on 4 October 1965 when it was announced that most trains using Sheffield Victoria would be diverted to Sheffield Midland. As no bus service was provided to link the two stations, many useful connections were severed and the Woodhead route starved of further traffic.

In the spring of 1966, however, it was announced that the Manchester-Hadfield and Glossop services had been reprieved but further steps to withdraw the Hadfield-



Birmingham Snow Hill station (pictured on a 1900s postcard) closed in 1972 and was demolished five years later. After 15 years of closure, a new Snow Hill station reopened in 1987

Sheffield trains were to be taken a year later including the complete closure of Sheffield Victoria.

POSSIBLE HEADING

In north & central Wales, RIS's activities continued and during the year 1966/7, a local representative was appointed for Central Wales to join that already appointed for North Wales. At the end of 1965, closure proposals had been issued for the New Brighton-Wrexham line and its branch to Chester Northgate. Opposition was considerable and RIS lodged a formal objection to the two TUCCs concerned, namely those for Wales and North West England. A memorandum giving RIS's views on the proposals was issued and was widely circulated.

After the two enquiries early in 1966 (17 February NW at Wallasey and the following week Wales at Connah's Quay) at which the RIS was represented, the TUCCs submitted their reports to the minister. Both agreed that closure would cause considerable hardship and neither were able to suggest any way in which it could be alleviated. The TUC for Wales stated that some of the hardship arising from closure of the Hawarden Bridge-Chester section could be mitigated by the retention of the train service over the main section and the introduction of extra workers' buses to and from Chester, but the RIS's area representative wrote to the committee to refute these assertions.

RIS had also written to the Welsh Economic Planning Council seeking its support for the reopening of the Ruabon-Barmouth, Caernarvon-Afon Wen and Carmarthen-Aberystwyth lines and enclosed a copy of its memorandum containing a scheme for the more economic operation of the first named. MPs and local authorities were also pressing for the restoration of a service on this line.

Towards the end of 1966, the results were announced of a further post-closure survey which had been carried out by RIS and the National Council on Inland Transport on the line. Like the society's earlier survey on the Gloucester-Chalford service, this revealed widespread evidence of hardship suffered by former users and general dissatisfaction with the replacement bus services. A considerable falling off of tourist traffic in the area was also apparent.

Despite this overwhelming evidence, the Government could not be prevailed upon to halt further closures and on 9 December, it was reported that Mrs Castle had given consent to the removal of sections of the line notwithstanding the recommendation of the Welsh Economic Planning Council that it should be retained. A similar decision was reached in respect of parts of the Carmarthen-Aberystwyth and Caernarvon-Afon Wen lines. In the spring of 1967, the minister gave permission for the sale of the formation of the Ruabon-Barmouth line, finally



Hawarden Bridge over the River Dee still (in 2022) carries the Wrexham to New Brighton railway over the river, and at one time used to swing open for tall shipping. There was strong resistance when BR wanted to close the line in 1965

ending any hope of a service being restored.

RIS had also taken up with the Ministry of Transport the question of the post-closure surveys which it had undertaken (announced by Lord Lindgren in May 1965). By October 1966, the results of these surveys had not been published and in view of the society's own findings, the minister was pressed for an answer. However, by the society's AGM in April 1967, the results had still not been announced.

On the Cambrian Coast line (Machynlleth-Pwllheli), concern had been expressed at the proposal by BR to close a number of stations, to halve the train service and abandon the carriage of the heavy school traffic carried on the route. Despite the offer by Merioneth and Caernarvonshire County Councils to pay BR

£22,000 a year to maintain the frequency of the service sufficient to cater for the schools traffic, this was drastically reduced to five trains a day each way as from 15 September 1966, although closure of the stations was deferred. Local authorities in the area subsequently held a meeting with officers of BR to discuss ways of improving service on the line.

Following the RIS's 1966 annual general meeting, a steering committee was appointed to overhaul the administration in order to make the most efficient use of the limited resources available and this sub-committee issued a memorandum, early in 1967. A similar sub-committee was set up to consider all aspects of British Rail's fares policy and this also issued a report some time later. In the meantime, activities at local level continued and further efforts were made to form local branches. As a first step, additional area representatives were appointed for Shropshire, West Suffolk, North Yorkshire, North-East England, plus Merseyside, Wirral and West Lancashire. A member of the national committee was also appointed to deal specifically with matters in the London Transport area.

One line dealt with by the national committee again in 1966 was the "Bakeries Route" from Shirebrook North to Lincoln from which the summer-Saturdays-only service had been withdrawn the previous year.

This action had not been considered by the TUCC but a case was submitted and considered at a hearing held on 20 July 1966. However, the service was not restored in 1966 even though the minister's decision had not been given. On Merseyside, consent to the closure of the Liverpool Exchange-Ormskirk line had been refused but the minister failed to reprieve another commuter line – Liverpool Central-Gateacre, even though the line was to be preserved for possible use as part of the proposed outer loop. Later in the year, BR announced plans to discontinue all passenger services from Birkenhead Woodside, Spital, Upton by Chester halt, Ince & Elton and Helsby, on the former Birkenhead Joint (LMWR & GWR) railway and to close the section of line between Rock Ferry and Birkenhead and between Stanhow & Thornton and Helsby to passenger traffic. Rock Ferry would become the terminus for Birkenhead and the off-peak service on the Hooton-Stanlow line would be withdrawn. The RIS subsequently issued a memorandum on these proposals.



Barmouth Bridge, probably the most significant piece of infrastructure on the Machynlleth-Pwllheli route, has been closed temporarily several times since 1967 to allow repairs which were still ongoing in 2022

In order to enable Liverpool Central to be closed, the service on the Gateacre line should have ceased on 5 September but it was later announced that it was to remain open as Liverpool Corporation could not guarantee the provision of extra buses at peak hours and, although a very reduced service operated, this situation continued into the early 1970s. At about the same time, it was announced that the minister had refused consent to the withdrawal of services on the section of the Liverpool Lime Street-Chester line between Runcorn and Frodsham, because of the hardship which would be caused to commuters and it was not until 4 May 1975 that passenger trains ceased to run between these two stations.

The TUCC hearing into the closure of the Ormskirk-Preston section of the Liverpool Exchange-Preston line was held on 12 January 1967 and the RIS area representative attended. A memorandum on the effects of closure, together with suggestions for possible economies in operation, was issued by RIS which considered that closure of the Ormskirk-Preston section would jeopardise the future of the remainder of the line, which had only recently been reprieved.

Early in 1966, in East Anglia, experimental methods of operating the King's Lynn-Hunstanton line were introduced, aimed at reducing expenditure and increasing revenue. (see Chapter 2, page 32) A reduction in services between the Midlands and East Anglia was effected by the closure of the line between Stamford and Seaton and between Peterborough East and Rugby on 6 June but, after a time, it was found that the new service between Leicester and Peterborough was working fairly well and that London traffic by the route was being steadily built up. Early in 1967, however, the death occurred of the RIS area representative, Leslie Roll, of M&GN fame, who had done so much to secure the provision of an adequate service on this route.

Meanwhile, the minister had reached a decision on the Stour Valley line, confirming the recommendation of the TUCC that only the Cambridge-Sudbury section should close, and this took place on 6 March 1967. At the same time, the minister agreed to the withdrawal of passenger services on the St Ives-March section of the Cambridge-March line, a decision which was to lead to the eventual closure to passengers of the entire line.

In the north of England, while two of the three lines to Whitby had closed to passengers early in 1965, a section from Grosmont to Goathland was reopened temporarily on 29 November for the conveyance of schoolchildren when the roads in the area were blocked by snow, thereby proving the railways' superiority in times of adverse weather conditions and the short sightedness of the policy of closure. From this, sprung the first attempts to restore rail services in the area and in the summer of 1966, moves were started to run a full-time public rail service

between Scarborough and Whitby. At about the same time, it was reported that the Keighley-Oxenhope line, five miles in length, closed to passengers in December 1961, was to be reopened by the Keighley and Worth Valley Railway Preservation society which aimed to introduce a daily commuter service.

Local activities in the North East were intensified in the autumn and the RIS opposed the closure of intermediate stations on the main line (Newcastle-Berwick) and on the line between Newcastle and Carlisle. In October, an RIS area representative was appointed and a local newsletter issued. Lines dealt with included Hull-Scarborough, Leeds-Bradford-Ilkley, Wakefield-Goole and Leeds-Knottingley. Early in 1967, it was reported that



Oakworth station on the heritage Worth Valley line which featured in The Railway Children, the famous 1970 film

BR intended to replace the North Tyneside electric trains with diesel multiple units and reducing the 20-minute interval service during the day to half hourly. A limited express service was also proposed. The RIS, through its local members, strenuously opposed these moves. On 11 March, events moved a step further with the formal constitution of a branch of the RIS to cover Northumberland, County Durham and the North Riding of Yorkshire.

Meanwhile, a report had been received that local authorities were considering subsidising the Whitby-Scarborough, Northallerton-Ripon-Harrogate lines, if reopened, and also the Hull-Scarborough line, provided it was operated as a "basic railway".

In south-east England, a line which had received considerable attention from the RIS in 1986 was that from Appledore to New Romney in Kent. Closure proposals had been announced towards the end of 1965 and the RIS assisted Lydd Borough Council, one of its corporate members, in opposing closure. At the TUCC hearing, the RIS was represented by its press officer who attempted to challenge BR's figures of revenue and expenditure for the line but was ruled out of order by the chairman. He also endeavoured, unsuccessfully, to ascertain the amount of the subsidy which would be required to operate the replacement bus service. The subsequent report of the TUCC was not, however, very favourable and the minister was later to approve withdrawal of the passenger services on the line, together with those between Groombridge and Three Bridges. The latter closed on 2 January 1967 but the New Romney services continued until 6 March 1967.

At the same time as ministerial approval was given to these closures, authority was given to BR to publish proposals for the Lewes-Hurst Green and Tonbridge-Eridge lines and, later in 1967, notices were posted for Ashford-Hastings and Polegate-Hailsham. The TUCC hearing into the first named was held in Tunbridge Wells on 26-28 April. Over 3,000 objections had been received and the large assembly hall at Tunbridge Wells was packed for the first days hearing. Significant points brought out in evidence were (a) that there was a steady growth in traffic on the line of about 25% a year (b) that the line was vital to the life of the area (c) that closure would divert large numbers of commuters on to the already overcrowded "punch-up Line" (Hastings-Tunbridge Wells-Charing Cross) and (d) that congestion in the area would preclude effective use of buses as an alternative. The subsequent report of the TUCC stated that hardship to the many users would not be alleviated other than by retaining the services.

On the Isle of Wight, closure of most of the remaining lines early in 1966 had been surrounded by considerable controversy as the Isle of Wight Railway Retention Association had come into possession of a BR document which proved that questionable figures had been used in presenting the case for closure. This was taken up by the local MP, and while BR agreed that their figures were erroneous and that the Shanklin-Ventnor line was making a 7% profit (also that the cost of road widening schemes would be greater than the cost of modernising the line) the minister of transport refused to reconsider the closure decision.

Steam trains on the remaining Ryde-Shanklin line were to continue to October when it would be closed to allow electrification to be carried out in time for the 1967 season, using ex-London Transport stock. According to the BR document referred to, the cost of the scheme



Anthony Zacharzewski

Hartfield station, East Sussex, on the Groombridge-Three Bridges line pictured in 2005

would be £680,000 (including £154,000 for signals and telecommunications). **But the service was completely withdrawn in October 1975.** The whole of the cost would therefore have to be written off in less than 10 years. The above revelation brought to light some disturbing aspects of rail closure practices. (34)

Closure of the Shanklin-Ventnor section proved disastrous to the town during the summer Season. Bookings were well down and many visitors stated that they would not visit the resort again because of the travelling difficulties. The last steam trains in fact ran on 31 December 1966, before the whole of the remaining system was closed down for electrification.

Meanwhile, the county council continued its negotiations with BR for the purchase of the Shanklin-Ventnor and Ryde-Cowes lines with a view to leasing them to a local firm, Sadler Vectrail Ltd. This company subsequently exhibited a prototype railcar for use on the line at the Isle of Wight Industries Fair at the end of June 1967. The electrified lines reopened to traffic on 20 March 1967.

In East Suffolk, with the reprieve of the Ipswich-Lowestoft line, the local branch of the RIS pursued its plans to secure the long-term retention of the line. The minister had decided that Felixstowe Beach station should remain open for a further 12 month trial period with a revised fare structure. Approval was, however, granted to the closure of all of the intermediate stations (in 1966) between Ipswich and Norwich on the East Anglia main line, with the exception of Stowmarket and Diss. Conductor guards were introduced on the Lowestoft-Yarmouth and Ipswich-Felixstowe lines as from 12 September, at which time intermediate stations became unstaffed halts.

Clarification of the new set-up on the East Suffolk line was obtained when the branch secretary met the Eastern Region general manager and divisional manager in the autumn of 1966 when it was explained that the railways' primary object was to cut costs and increase traffic by reducing fares to approximately two pence per mile. Most trains would be diesel multiple units and it was hoped to effect economies by the installation of automatic level crossings and the sale of obsolete station buildings. Conductor guards and unstaffed halts were later introduced on the line.

In the RIS Three Counties area, members were preoccupied with the post-closure surveys referred to earlier and the failure to retain sufficient key personnel to deal with the branch's affairs, combined with a reduction in the incidence of closures, led to a decline in activities which was to last a number of years.

In the summer, it had been announced that Cheltenham's only remaining station (Lansdown), long criticised for its decrepit condition, was to be completely rebuilt and that Eastgate station would be similarly dealt with in 1968. Early in 1967, however, the proposals were axed under an economy drive.

The RIS had also been active in the Birmingham area and lodged an objection to the withdrawal of passenger services on the Birmingham to Stratford-upon-Avon (via Henley) line. Mrs Castle had agreed to the publication of proposals for the withdrawal of passenger services



Tivetshall station in 1916. It was one of the stations on the Ipswich-Norwich main line axed in 1966

between Birmingham Snow Hill and Wolverhampton Low Level. Towards the end of the year, a new RIS area representative was appointed to deal with Birmingham and the Black Country. Early in 1967, the TUCC reported on the above lines that extreme hardship would be suffered if the services were withdrawn and the area representative prepared a memorandum outlining more economic methods of operation, combined with proposals to develop all the former GWR services from Snow Hill with third rail electrification.

At the same time, the West Midlands Transport Study had recommended use of the Wolverhampton-Knowle and Dorridge line as part of a rapid transit scheme. A year later, the minister decided against closure of Snow Hill station, at least for the time being, and that the Wolverhampton Low Level and Smethwick West services should continue.

An RIS area representative had also been appointed to deal with Devon and Cornwall but in the autumn, it was confirmed that closure of the Okehampton-Bude, Halwill-Wadebridge and Taunton-Barnstaple lines, which had been postponed in April, would take place on 3 October 1966. At the same time the minister gave permission for closure proposals to be issued for the Barnstaple-Ilfracombe line. Consent was, however, refused for the closure of the St Erth-St Ives and Liskeard-Looe branches in Cornwall on the grounds that existing roads were unsuitable for replacement buses unless large expenditure was incurred on them; and in any event, the buses would be unable to cope with the summer peak traffic. On the other hand, the minister agreed to the closure of the Bodmin Road-Padstow line, 17 miles long, thus depriving a large area of north Cornwall of its rail services. Despite action by the RIS and its corporate member, Padstow Urban District Council, and against the recommendation of the TUCC, the line closed on 28 January 1967.

Nevertheless, the RIS's optimistic view that official attitudes were moving away from the Beeching approach to railways had been borne out with the publication of the government white paper on transport in July 1966. (35) The general principle that the railways should pay their way was to continue but with the important difference that unremunerative but socially necessary services would receive a subsidy. The identification and costing of those services and facilities whose cost should properly be borne or aided by the community would be undertaken by a joint study between the government and the railways board. Government grants for improvements to urban transport, up to that time restricted to roads, would be extended to cover railways and any new forms of transport on reserved tracks which might be developed.

While the white paper foresaw a period of stability on the railways, it was still proposed to withdraw passenger services from a further 400 miles of the system. Since all of these proposals would have to go through the usual procedure, it would still therefore be many months, probably even years, before the desired stability could be achieved. However, the white paper indicated that it was the intention to establish an integrated transport system in which the railways would play a more prominent role than had been envisaged under the 1962 Transport Act and the appointment of regional committees to promote transport coordination, announced early in 1967, was a step in that direction.



Padstow station in 1965. Closed in 1967 against TUCC advice

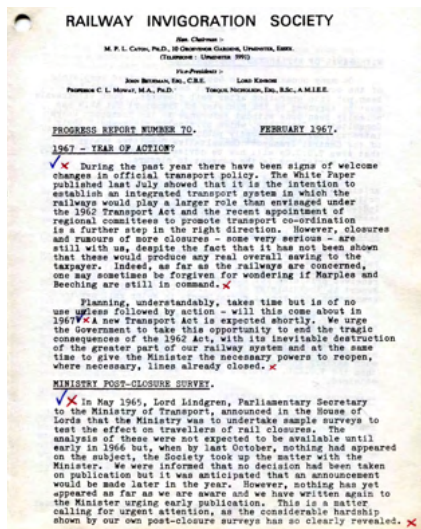
With a new Transport Act obviously in the pipeline, the RIS set up a special sub-committee which prepared a memorandum *Transport Policy in Britain*, the main conclusions of which were:

1 The announcement that the Ministry of Transport is carrying out research into the relative track costs of road and rail is to be welcomed but this does not go far enough. All costs arising out of the use of the roads should be assessed and as a basic requirement, users required to pay the costs to which they give rise on the same basis as for the railways.

2 Acceptance of the need to subsidise certain rail services is a valuable step towards bringing rail into line with road and air which already enjoy such financial support. Subsidies to transport should be paid for a specific purpose, not indefinitely to underwrite losses, and when this is done, equal consideration should be given to the merits of all forms of transport for the purpose in question.

3 A halt should be called to all rail closures for a period of at least three years. Meanwhile the social consequences of closures already implemented should be fully investigated and, where necessary, the services reinstated.

4 Consideration should be given to siting rail freight depots at more frequent intervals than at present, depending upon the condition of the local road system.



This statement on the government white paper was issued on 9 February 1967 and copies sent to all MPs and to a large number of other interested individuals and organisations.

At the same time, the RIS decided to adopt a new policy with regard to the bi-monthly *Progress Report* as the pace of closures had abated and there was less news to be conveyed to members. With the publication of the statement, a new printed format was adopted and *Progress Reports* thereafter issued at quarterly intervals.

Shortly before the RIS 1967 annual general meeting, another Beeching-type map appeared entitled *British Railways Network for Development*. On it, were shown black lines – to be developed – and grey and thin black lines, the future of which would be subject to review. (36) This anticipated a railway system of about 11,000 route miles, as forecast by Stanley Raymond in 1966, and while this was considerably more than the 8,000 miles contemplated in the Beeching Report, it would still involve the withdrawal of a further 2,000 miles of railway services (as against 400 in the white paper). (37)

It was made clear that the grey lines would not necessarily be closed but would be reviewed as quickly as possible. If, however, the board decided to publish closure proposals for any of these lines, the minister's prior approval would not be required but the usual closure procedure under the 1962 act would have to be followed.

The most disturbing aspect of these proposals was that a number of the lines shown in grey had not long been reprieved under the Beeching closure programme, and the prospects of having to go through the whole exercise again after such a short lapse of time prompted the

RIS to tackle the minister. Taking the Romford-Upminster line as an example the permanent secretary of the Ministry of Transport subsequently informed local MP Alan Lee Williams that, "if closure proposals were again put forward, the board would need to demonstrate to the minister's satisfaction that there had been a material change in circumstances". As this situation was unlikely to arise in the majority of cases where lines had been reprieved, it would have been better to have specified a minimum period within which closures could be republished, or to have placed them in the development category.

Developments in the concept of the "basic railway" had, in any case, totally altered the background to rural line closures and provided a formula whereby many such lines could be saved if action was taken quickly. Gerard Fiennes had made this clear in a newspaper article at the time when he stated that "railway managers will declare to any community what is the method of operation of a line at its lowest cost. The community may examine the railways' books, and if they so desire, can then subsidise the remaining deficit". (38) The Eastern Region had, by this means, cut losses on lines in East Anglia to a fraction of their original figure by the employment of measures described earlier and some local communities had already commenced negotiations with the railway management on these lines. Shortly after his resignation from the BRB, in November 1967, at a meeting organised by the National Council on Inland Transport, Mr Fiennes revealed that economies introduced to date had already saved over £600,000 a year in Norfolk and Suffolk.



Gerard Fiennes

Wikipedia

The RIS was, however, opposed to open-ended subsidies since the cost would often have to be met by communities least able to bear them. The society considered that if support for economy measures were backed up, if necessary, by a local subsidy, this approach was more likely to succeed in securing the retention of a service than if matters were allowed to proceed through the closure process with the hope of a ministerial reprieve. This policy was subsequently adopted in dealing with threatened lines and we shall see how far this succeeded in the following pages.

A further welcome development in tackling the problems of unremunerative railways was the government's decision, in the summer of 1967, to conduct a social cost benefit study of the Cambrian Coast line (Machynlleth-Pwllheli). This was carried out to assess the overall financial balance of keeping open a route which British Rail wanted to close in circumstances where abandonment would have set up complex social problems. It had been on the basis of such a study that approval had been given to the construction of the Victoria line in London. Meanwhile, the ministry had finally published the results of its survey into the effects of the withdrawal of three rail services: Bradford-Huddersfield, Stranraer-Dumfries and Eridge-Hailsham. Among the main conclusions of the surveys were the finding that most travellers making a rail trip five times a week before closure continued to undertake the same journey, but those doing the journey only once or twice a week, in many cases either ceased to make it or did so less often. It was found that "buses were more tiring and crowded and less comfortable than rail, although, for the majority of travellers, this was more inconvenience than hardship". (39)

The results of the surveys were also claimed to be, in general, consistent with the Tucc's advice on the probable effect of closure but with their narrow terms of reference, this took no account of wider issues such as increased road congestion and social costs. The interviewing was also undertaken only a short time before closure when many former users would have

turned to other forms of transport. The RIS's own surveys had, in many cases, revealed hardship to former users to have been much more severe.

Running up to the Transport Bill, published in December 1967, were no less than four further white papers on different aspects of transport. The one of principal concern to the RIS, *Railway Policy* (Command 3439) was published on 6 November 1967. It contained the report of the joint steering group set up under the chairmanship of John Morris MP, joint parliamentary secretary at the Ministry of Transport, and related to many of the issues already discussed, namely:

- 1 The intention to maintain a basic network of 11,000 miles (the black lines on Mrs Castle's map) compared with the 13,200 which remained at the time.
- 2 The intention to make grants for the retention of uneconomic but socially necessary lines. Financial estimates given, however, assumed that lines shown in grey would be closed by 1969 and although they would have to go through the TUCC procedure, their withdrawal appeared to be a foregone conclusion.
- 3 If the minister refused to pay a subsidy, closure would presumably follow, thus even the black lines were not secure.
- 4 Financial estimates for the subsidies assumed that lines concerned would be operated more economically – the basic railway.
- 5 Grants were also envisaged to enable the railways to introduce economies such as the removal of surplus track and signalling throughout the system.
- 6 The railways would be relieved, in part, of their obligation to maintain road bridges and level crossings, and thereby remove a hidden subsidy to road transport. (40)

The white paper had much to commend it, but as it envisaged around 70 more closures, it was little more than another "Beeching" in disguise; more serious for the fact that most of the services envisaged for closure were of greater social importance than those eliminated earlier. It is significant, at this stage, to note the progress which had been made, despite the change of government, in implementing the Beeching plan. On 20 December 1967, John Morris, on behalf of the minister of transport stated that 84% of the passenger train withdrawals and 72% of the station closures listed in the *Reshaping of British Railways* had been implemented. (41)

Nevertheless, the significant aspects of the Transport Bill were the items which were not included and the RIS pressed for the following items to be added:-

- 1 A clause to relieve BR of the need to subsidise other government departments in the form of concessions on fares, for example army personnel.
- 2 Provision whereby a proper land use transport survey and/or social cost/benefit study would be carried out as a matter of course in connection with any line closure and the report of the findings made available to the TUCC and objectors before an enquiry was held.
- 3 A clause to widen the powers of the TUCCs to allow consideration of all aspects of transport, and not just hardship, and for the TUCC hearings to be made subject to the committee on tribunals.
- 4 Provisions to give the minister powers to reverse previous closure decisions and to compel BR to reopen lines in appropriate circumstances.
- 5 A clause to prohibit the sale of formations (bridges, route beds, etc) of closed lines unless a public enquiry was held.

The RIS subsequently contacted sympathetic MPs with a view to the introduction of these clauses during the committee stages of the bill.

At the same time, the RIS was taking a greater interest in the urban scene and I, in what was to be my last year as general secretary, attended one of the regular symposia held by the Extra Mural Department of Manchester University, run by Mr Klaus Meyer of the Railway Development Association, the subject for discussion being the proposals for passenger transport authorities and other measures outlined in the white paper *Public Transport & Traffic* (Command 3481). This gathering of representatives from BR, government departments, transport undertakings, planning departments and consulting engineers, held in December 1967, gave a useful opportunity for all concerned to consider the future changes in the pattern of public transport in the major cities which would be necessary in the light of the government's future transport proposals and the integration of public passenger transport in these areas.

However, it was obvious that the extent to which BR's operations could be adequately incorporated into such a system would be limited by its character as a long-distance carrier, and the fact that many of its local services could not be physically separated, operationally, from them. It did, however, underline the need to develop, rather than abandon, railway services in the main centres of population.

The RIS's activities at local level during 1967/8 were more consolidation than expansion as, while a number of areas were suspended, new appointments were made to cover Mid-Hampshire and North & West Norfolk. Although the Beeching closures were largely dealt with, the threatened grey lines would also require attention.

In the Somerset and Dorset area, the Salisbury-Exeter line was to be retained, in addition to the Taunton-Exeter-Plymouth line, and the Torbay branch from Newton Abbot was safe as far as Paignton.

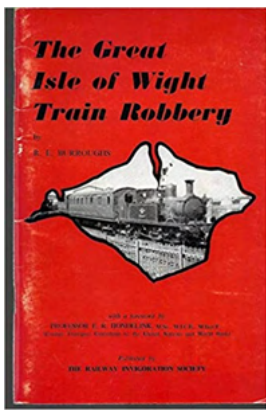
Although it had been removed from the Beeching list, the Exmouth branch was again in danger even though it carried considerable peak traffic. The Wareham-Swanage line was also shown in grey and closure notices appeared on 18 October 1967. In the meantime, the Maiden Newton-Bridport line had been reprieved. The first notices for the Swanage branch had appeared in the national press and were posted locally shortly afterwards. The RIS lodged an objection, together with nearly 1,000 other users, and the TUCC hearing was scheduled for early May.

Meanwhile, the saga of the Isle of Wight closures continued. Towards the middle of 1967, it was reported that Southern Region had offered to electrify and reopen the Shanklin-Ventnor line provided the local council would pay the cost of a booster station for the electricity supply. The total cost was given as £80,000 for the four-mile line. Later, it was reported that, despite



Afterburnel

The government tried to close the Swanage Railway in 1967 but passenger services survived until the beginning of 1972. In the same year the Swanage Railway Society was formed and in 2022 the line is a heritage railway, with a link back to the national network, and plans for a regular service



earlier misgivings, Ventnor Urban District Council had given unanimous support to the Isle of Wight County Council in its "last ditch" effort to get the line reopened, particularly as the area manager of BR had stated that the electrified Ryde-Shanklin line was making more money than the old steam service.

Numerous complaints from holidaymakers arising from the closure of the Ventnor section had been referred to the minister of transport. In the meantime Vectrail's attempts to secure the Ryde-Newport-Cowes section, through the county council, were being frustrated. BR had also refused access for the company to put the line on a "care and maintenance" basis to prevent deterioration, although other private companies had been granted this facility in other parts of the country.

On 27 May 1968, the RIS published a book on the whole sorry affair of the Isle of Wight closures, written by the area representative, as a grim warning to other people engaged in opposition to rail closures. This was entitled *The Great Isle of Wight Train Robbery* and sold nearly 4,000 copies in the following years. (42)

In the north of England, the railway cause had suffered a number of setbacks as de-electrification of the North Tyneside lines had been effected from 17 June 1967 and was followed by a rapid deterioration in service. Negotiations between BR and the local authorities regarding the reopening of the Whitby-Malton/Scarborough and Harrogate-Northallerton lines had failed, as BR had made financial demands beyond their resources. A local member of the RIS had, however, formed an organisation with a view to operating regular services on the Whitby-Malton line.

The RIS North Eastern branch organised a number of conferences during the year in Darlington in September and December to discuss proposals for improving services on the Darlington-Richmond line and in the Teesside area generally, with representatives of local authorities and other interested bodies.

Even though it had been reprieved under earlier proposals, BR subsequently posted notices for closure of the line. In January 1968 a meeting was held in Newcastle with representatives of the RDA and Scottish RDA on the need to improve Anglo-Scottish rail services and, in particular, on the future of the Leeds-Carlisle/Carnforth main line. A further meeting was also held with Whitehaven Borough Council on the future of the Whitehaven-Barrow line. At its annual meeting on 23 March, in view of its extended activities the name was changed to the North of England branch and, at a further conference in Darlington on 30 March, discussions were held with the local MPs, to oppose the closure of the Darlington-Richmond line. A further meeting was held in Hartlepool on 10 April on the need to improve rail services between Tyneside, Wearside and Teesside and a campaign was also launched to reopen the Harrogate-Ripon-Northallerton line. A number of local newsletters had been issued during the year giving details of the branch's activities."

In south-east England, the public hearing into the proposal to close the Ashford-Ore (Hastings) line was held on 6 September 1967 and, although not on the massive scale of the Hurst Green-Lewes-Tunbridge Wells enquiry, a very large number of users turned up. The TUCC had received 467 objections, including a poll from the Winchelsea Travel Association of 1,118 signatures. Once again, the principal objectors, including the local authorities, were

represented by counsel who had been briefed by the RIS honorary legal adviser Richard Pullen. Some considerable time was, however, to elapse before the line was finally rerieved. During December, the RIS, in cooperation with the West Kent branch of the Association of Supervising and Executive Engineers, sponsored a lecture in Tonbridge on the Channel Tunnel, which was again being mooted at the time.

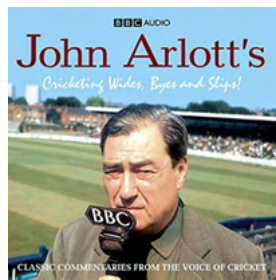
In mid-Hampshire, an area representative was appointed early in 1968, consequent upon the proposal by BR to close the Alton-Winchester line, and a joint committee of all interested local authorities was formed to fight the proposal. Among speakers at a public meeting in Alresford on 4 January was John Arlott who had published an article on the line entitled *Transport through the Looking Glass* which had appeared in the *Guardian* of 28 November. The seven-mile line connecting Eastleigh with Romsey was also under threat of closure.

In the London area, a branch was inaugurated on 11 October 1967 and one of the topics discussed had been the provision of a link between Willesden and Clapham Junction (thus forming an Outer Circle) and the need for improvements on both the north and south London lines. A further branch meeting, at which BR films were shown was held in May 1968.

In North Norfolk, despite the experimental methods which had been introduced on the King's Lynn-Hunstanton line, both it and the Norwich-Cromer-Sheringham lines were shown in grey on the BR map, even though they both carried heavy traffic. The March-Wisbech and Magdalen Road-Wisbech lines were also under threat of closure. Late in 1967, BR published closure proposals for the Cromer and Hunstanton lines, togetherwith part of the East Suffolk line from Yarmouth to Lowestoft. In the meantime, an area representative was appointed to deal with North and East Norfolk but was to be mainly concerned with the King's Lynn-Hunstanton line. A public meeting was arranged in Hunstanton on 13 January 1968 which was addressed by the RIS chairman. On 14 April, the TUCC hearing into the closure was held and the RIS representative spoke on behalf of some 80 objectors, but was not allowed to comment of the line's running costs. It was, however, quite forcibly pointed out that the line had not been given a fair time to prove itself as a basic railway.

On the East Suffolk line, there had been a notable increase in traffic following the introduction of reduced fares early in 1967 and the RIS local branch cooperated with BR by distributing copies of an improved pocket timetable, which had been issued for the line. The minister had, however, finally agreed to the closure of the line between the Beach and Town stations in Felixstowe, subject to improvements in the bus service. The public enquiry into the closure of the Great Yarmouth South Town-Lowestoft Central line, arranged for 12 March 1968, was subsequently postponed until September to enable the TUCC to study the traffic during the summer season. 169 objections had already been received. Although the East Suffolk line had been rerieved, the East Suffolk Standing Joint Committee and Conference continued in existence as a means of bringing the local authority representatives face to face with those of BR and the Eastern Counties Omnibus Company.

On Merseyside, the minister had agreed to the closure of Birkenhead Woodside station which ceased operation on 4 November 1967, but had refused consent to the closure of the remaining section between Stanlow & Thornton and Helsby, together with the other stations on the line. The RIS had lodged an objection to rationalisation proposals which would have



involved the complete closure to passengers of the Wigan-Atherton-Manchester and Southport -Wigan-Bolton-Manchester lines. At about the same time, the north-west area TUCC had reported to the minister that extreme hardship would be caused to regular passengers if services were withdrawn from the electric Manchester-Sheffield line via Woodhead.

Further developments on the Liverpool Central-Gateacre line concerned the proposal to redevelop the site and cut the service back from Central to St James (Parliament Street) station – closed in 1916 – with a bus link to the city centre, but this was being strongly resisted. Later, it was announced that Liverpool City Council had refused to meet the £80,000 deficit on the line but closure was still to be deferred for some considerable time.

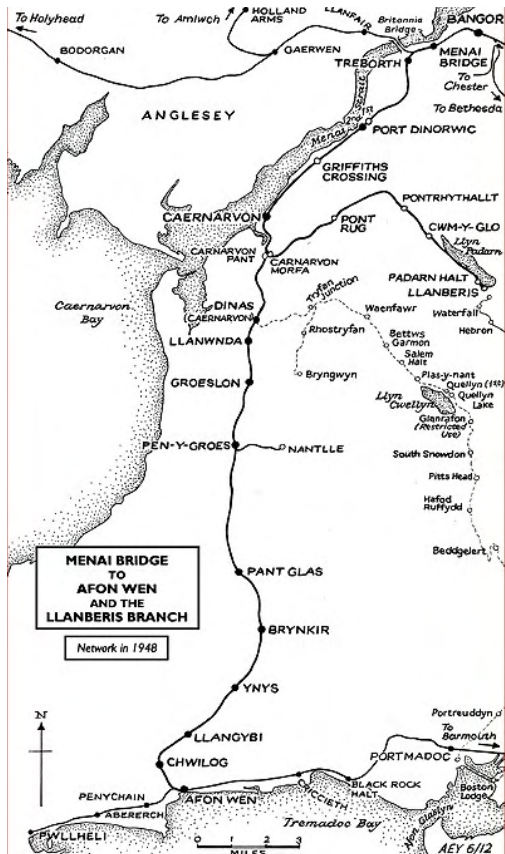
In North Wales, a decision on the future of three stations on the London-Holyhead main line – Rhosneigr, Ty Croes and Bodorgan – all on the Isle of Anglesey, was reached in the middle of 1968. Earlier, a decision had been deferred, but the minister finally concluded that they should remain open. The RIS had earlier submitted to the Ministry of Transport a memorandum urging the reopening of the line from Caernarvon to Afon Wen, with its operation principally as a continuation of the Cambrian Coast line.

Nevertheless, that line was also shown in grey on Mrs Castle's map and a liaison committee was set up, which held its first meeting at Dolgellau on 19 April 1967 when representatives of the local councils were addressed by the divisional manager of British Rail. After this meeting, it was stated that Caernarvonshire County Council might have to terminate its subsidy to BR for the conveyance of schoolchildren between Criccieth and Portmadoc if certain difficulties in the service could not be overcome. The matter was subsequently taken up by the local MPs and it was not long after that the proposed social cost benefit study was announced.

Late in 1967, the minister stated that she would offer no objection to the publication by BR of proposals to close the Craven Arms-Llanelli line and so, yet another line on which many economy measures had been carried out by BR, and which had been reprieved by Mr Marples in 1964 was once more under threat.

In the meantime, the first of the two surveys in connection with the Cambrian Coast line cost benefit study had been completed. Closure notices for the Central Wales line were subsequently issued and the public hearing set for 14-15 May 1968.

Earlier in the year, new life had returned to the Barnstaple-Torrington line in Devon (closed to passengers in October 1965) following collapse



Caernarvon-Afon Wen which closed to passengers in 1964. The Welsh Government in 2022 is in favour of reopening the line as part of a West Wales rail link from Bangor to Carmarthen

of part of the road bridge across the River Torridge at Bideford on 9 January. Using their own bridge across the river, BR had been able to run a shuttle service between their station at Bideford (east bank of the river) and that at Torrington, with a linking service to Bideford. Although this ceased once a footbridge had been erected at Bideford, local efforts were made to get passenger services permanently restored between Barnstaple Junction and Torrington. BR, however, subsequently informed Torrington Town Council that unless it was prepared to underwrite costs of approx £100 per week, the question could not be considered further.

In the north of Scotland, one of the lines not scheduled for development was that from Dingwall to Kyle of Lochalsh but it was stated in Parliament on 12 February 1968 that there was no immediate proposal to close it. However the observation cars, which had been used on the line, were withdrawn, as BR considered it uneconomic to replace them.

By the annual general meeting in April 1968, the Transport Bill was still undergoing the parliamentary process and the RIS was continuing in its endeavours to secure approval to the additional clauses referred to above. In its annual report, published at about the same time, the Central Transport Consultative Committee had itself recommended that the scope of the area TUCs should be widened. (43) The government, however, was not prepared to accept this view but, as we shall see, provision was made for the TUCs to consider some aspects of freight as well as their existing duties with regard to passenger traffic.

Although Mrs Castle had been the architect of the new transport policy, she was not to see the bill through its final stages, as Mr Richard Marsh was to succeed her as minister of transport in the summer of 1968. While some concessions were made in the bill, these were mainly to the road transport industry by the dropping of clauses which would have required extra dues from heavy road vehicles to cover the extra costs to which they gave rise, together with payment for the costs of moving wide and exceptional loads by road. Otherwise, the provisions went through largely unchanged and the bill received royal assent on 25 October.

Transport Act 1968

Unlike its predecessor in 1962, which had been mainly concerned with winding up the British Transport Commission, the fragmentation of its activities and the provision of a statutory basis for the implementation of the Beeching Plan, the Transport Act 1968 was the “first fundamental review of inland transport regulation since the Road Traffic Act of 1933”. (44) It was preceded by no less than six white papers and was, by no means, a hurried measure – a criticism which had been made of the act of 1947. In addition to the three already referred to,



Richard Marsh was minister of transport 1968-69. His most disastrous decision was his consent to close the entire 98-mile Waverley route from Edinburgh to Carlisle via Hawick, leaving the Borders without a rail service. Edinburgh-Tweedbank reopened in 2015 and in 2022 there is a campaign to reopen Hawick-Carlisle

there were *British Waterways* (Command 3401) of September 1967, *Transport of Freight* (Command 347Q) of November 1967 and *Transport in London* (Command 3686) which was not issued until 2 July 1968 and was, in fact, to lead to the Transport (London) Act 1969.

The provisions of the 1968 act, therefore, covered a wide range of activities and, while we are mainly concerned with the railway aspects, many other sections are inescapably relevant.

Those relating solely to the railways dealt with the capital reconstruction of the industry and the changes in management recommended by the Report of the Joint Steering Group, as contained in the white paper of November 1967.(45) The act (section 42) provided for the writing off of £1,262 million of the capital debt of the British Railways Board, including the £700 million or so of the debt held in suspense under Section 40 of the Transport Act 1962. (46) The provisions for deficit grant financing under section 22 of the 1962 act were, however, abolished (section 41.8) as recommended by the Joint Steering Group. Section 38 made provision for the abolition of the regional railway boards and one of the more important provisions was section 39, which provided for the payment of grants for the retention of unremunerative rail services. These grants could, however, only be made for periods of not more than three years and, as we shall see in chapter 5, a considerable element of uncertainty remained, and they failed to give the long-term security necessary to enable the railways board to develop the services with any confidence. Section 40 provided for the necessary



Transport Act 1968

1968 CHAPTER 73

PART II

[¹INTEGRATED TRANSPORT AREAS AND PASSENGER TRANSPORT AREAS]

grants, pending elimination of surplus track and signalling, on a reducing scale as the work proceeded. The restrictions on manufacture and sale imposed by section 13 of the act of 1962 were eased (section 48), as were those relating to the sale of surplus land. (section 49). The provisions relating to rail closures and the Transport Users' Consultative Committees remained largely unchanged although section 54 requires the minister to take into account any social or economic considerations, when considering closure proposals, in addition to hardship. Where the closure relates to a line in a passenger transport area and there is an agreement under section 20, notice of closure cannot be published without the consent of that authority. BR was, however, relieved by the act of the burden of payment for replacement bus services. (section 54.6). The Transport Users' Consultative Committees could, in addition to their existing powers, deal with matters arising from services provided by the freight corporation (section 55) but not the waterways board.

In addition, powers were given to local authorities and/or the minister to make grants towards capital expenditure for the improvement of public transport services (section 56), a measure which has been used to enable the reopening of closed lines.

Part 1 of the act (section 1) provided for the setting-up of a National Freight Corporation whose duties were:

1 To provide, or secure or promote the provision of properly integrated services for the carriage of goods within Great Britain by road and rail. **This was of considerable significance to the railways.**

2 To secure that, in the provision of those services, goods are carried by rail wherever such carriage is efficient and economic. **This was a two-edged sword if ever there was one.**

Section 6 also provided for the setting-up of a Freight Integration Council, an advisory body which can only make recommendations to the minister on matters referred to it. The FIC replaced the National Transport Advisory Council set up under Section 55 of the 1962 act, but there is still no overall power of direction with regard to integration of services similar to that which existed under the British Transport Commission.

Part II (section 9) provided for the setting-up of passenger transport areas within the major cities, as envisaged in the white paper *Public Transport and Traffic* (Command 3481) with the exception of Greater London. In effect, the minister could set up a passenger transport authority in any part of the country if considered desirable "for the purpose of securing the provision of a properly integrated said efficient system of public passenger transport to meet the needs of that area" but as we shall see later, this has been confined to the major conurbations.

The Passenger Transport Authority was to act as a coordinating body on behalf of the local authorities in the area and had to set up a Passenger Transport Executive to carry out the day-to-day functions and operation of the services, including road and water (section 10). The executive can make payments to the railways board for the operation of railway passenger services for the benefit of users up to 25 miles from its boundaries. Its initial purpose, however, was to integrate many of the bus undertakings which existed in the major cities in conjunction with the National Bus Company set up under section 24. The passenger transport authorities are funded by precept from the constituent local authorities (section 13) and section 18 imposed a duty on the PTA to prepare an overall transport plan for its area.

In areas where railways play a particularly significant role in local transport, the minister can, under section 20, require the authority to enter into an agreement with the railways board for the provision of such services, and to reimburse the board accordingly, and can also make grants for this purpose tapering off over a period of seven years.

Parts V and VI of the act contain the provisions relating to road transport operators, including the controversial provisions regarding "quantity licensing" which have never been implemented.

The only remaining sections of consequence are (116-124) which relieved the BRB of the financial obligations with regard to bridges and level crossings and enable local authorities to pay for the cost of lifting barriers etc.

With the prospect of the launching of the Channel Tunnel project, the act also made provision for the acquisition of land for the purposes of a terminal or rail link (but only by agreement) (section 142) and for the formation of a Channel Tunnel Planning Council to work out the means whereby such a rail link could be contracted and operated.

The passing of the Transport Act 1968 set a new order for transport in Great Britain and we shall see in the following chapters the extent to which its objects have been achieved, particularly so far as the railways are concerned.

Notes to chapter 4

- (1) Hansard. H of C 4/11/64 col 195-203.
- (2) RIS Progress Report No 58 Dec 64/Jan 65 p3 (hereinafter referred to as PR with No and date)
- (3) Hansard. H of L 27/5/65 col 964
- (4) Roger Calvert in his book *Transport Disintegrated* 1973 p 18 reproduces the actual election statement of the local Labour candidate regarding the Whitby closures.
- (5) G F Fiennes. *I tried to run a railway*. 1967 p 80-81
- (6) PR No 58 Dec 64/Jan 65 p 1 & 2
- (7) PR No 59 Feb/Mar 65 p 3
- (8) Fiennes, op cit p 101
- (9) British Railways Board Feb 1965
- (10) Magazine of the National Union of Railwayman
- (11) PR No 59 op cit p 3
- (12) Railway Invigoration Society. *The East Suffolk Railway Line; an historical outline* August 1965
- (13) PR No 62 Aug/Sep 65 p 5&6
- (14) Fiennes op cit p 113-9
- (15) CTCC Annual Report for 1964. HMSO. May 1965 p10
- (16) *Railway Gazette*. 120 (15) 7 August 1964, editorial note headed *Resurgence of suburban rail transport*
- (17) Liverpool City Planning Dept. Outer rail links feasibility study May 1965
- (18) British Railways: *Towards a solution and a modern railway*, by E S Raymond, in Institute of Transport Journal 10(31) May 1966 p363-9
- (19) Hansard. H of L 6/6/66, col 177-82 and 198-200
- (20) Report of the Committee on Main Line Railway Electrification. 1931
- (21) P S Bagwell. *The Transport Revolution from 1770* 1974 p 257
- (22) A J Pearson. *The Railways and the Nation* 1964 p32
- (23) Bagwell op cit p 225.
- (24) *Trains Illustrated* vol 7 No 9 Sept 1954 p 374-6, *ibid* vol 7, No 11 Nov 1954 p 479
- (25) *ibid* vol 8 No 3 March 1955 p97 and No 6 June 1955 p226
- (26) Pearson op cit p 82
- (27) *Trains Illustrated* vol 8 No 3 March 1955 p 98
- (28) Pearson op cit p 87
- (29) Bagwell op cit p 342
- (30) Pearson op cit p 27
- (31) *ibid* p 87
- (32) Bagwell op cit p 342
- (33) British Railways Board. *The Development of the Major Railway Trunk Routes* Feb 1965
- (34) PR No 66 April/May 1966 p 5

- (35) Ministry of Transport *Transport Policy* (Command 3057) HMSO July 1966
- (36) Ministry of Transport and British Railways Board. *British Railways Network for Development* March 1967
- (37) *Transport Policy* op cit p 5
- (38) *Yorkshire Post* 25/7/67 article entitled *Rural Railways: Time to Face the Facts*
- (39) Ministry of Transport July 1967
- (40) Ministry of Transport *Railway Policy* (Command 3439) HMSO Nov 1967
- (41) Bagwell op cit p 343
- (42) R E Burroughs *The Great Isle of Wight Train Robbery* RIS May 1968
- (43) CTCC Report for 1967 HMSO Feb 1968
- (44) Stewart Joy *The Train that Ran Away* 1973 p 10
- (45) *Railway Policy* op cit
- (46) Joy op cit p 8

Railways in the 1970s

While the government, in the 1968 Transport Act, finally accepted the principle, prevalent in European countries for many years, that the state should bear the cost of unremunerative, but socially necessary railway services, the white paper on railway policy had still, nevertheless, assumed that the withdrawal of passenger services from the 2,000 miles of grey and thin black lines shown on the Ministry of Transport-British Railways Board map of March 1967, would save £14 million per annum, despite the fact that implementation of over 80% of the Beeching closures had not produced the reduction in the railway deficit which had been predicted. CHECK WHAT THIS REFERS TO This worked out to the fantastic average of £7,000 per mile, and the Railway Invigoration Society's investigations into some of the early closures under the new policy, which were carried out in some depth and were based on the individual figures in documents sent to objectors, found that losses were considerably less than half of this figure. The majority, in fact, averaged £1,000 to £2,000 per mile and losses of £7,000 per mile were not realistic even if the passengers had been carried free.

The RIS had, for many years, been critical of the dubious figures presented to justify closure proposals which under the terms of the 1962 and 1968 acts remained beyond challenge by objectors because of the limited terms of reference of the TUCCs. The revelations of the Romford-Upminster and Isle of Wight closures had established this beyond doubt. The two major reasons why the figures grossly exaggerated the savings which would be achieved by closure were:-

- (a) the failure to reveal the amount of contributory revenue to other lines (which could be considerable)
- (b) the over-estimation of track costs which were based on an average for BR as a whole and not on the much cheaper maintenance rate appropriate on secondary lines run as "basic railways".

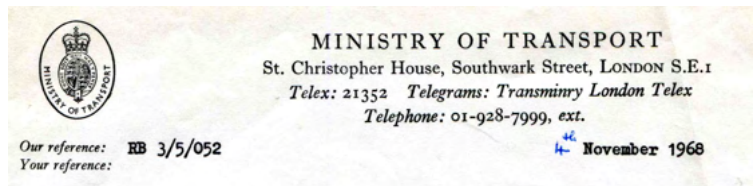
On taking the matter up with the Ministry of Transport in the middle of 1968, the RIS was

again given the stock answer that "the sole purpose of the financial information given to a TUCC, which is made public at the time of a closure hearing, is to give an idea of the saving in taxpayers' money which

could result from a proposed closure and against which the TUCC can set the magnitude of the hardship which they envisage the closure would cause. (1)

Thereafter, the RIS prepared its own costings based on professional advice and on figures which had been obtained from earlier hearings. (2)

At one such hearing, into the closure of the Yarmouth South Town-Lowestoft Central line, the town clerk of Lowestoft had stated publicly that he preferred the RIS's figures and hoped that the TUCC would ignore those provided by British Rail.



RIS campaigners tried to keep the ministry of transport informed but it did not always pay proper attention

The comparative figures are summarised below:-

Yarmouth-Lowestoft line

British Rail Costs (per annum) £44,000. Revenue £10,000

(Both BR and the Ministry of Transport refused to give a breakdown of these amounts)

RIS Track maintenance and renewal £6,660 (10¼ miles at £650 per mile, single track)

Crews, fuel, maintenance of one two-car diesel multiple unit £15,000

One staffed level crossing £1,500

Management £500

RIS total £23,660

The RIS maintained that if British Rail had taken into account contributory revenue many of the lines on which costings were carried out would have been found to be operating at a profit; a typical example being the 13-mile Ryde-Ventnor line on the Isle of Wight where BR had revealed the contributory revenue to be over £1 million per annum. (3)

On another line in East Anglia, namely that from King's Lynn to Hunstanton, the minister, on 23 December 1968, consented to the closure of a line which, in the RIS's opinion, was in fact running at a profit. The RIS, in a statement issued six weeks earlier to local authorities, MPs and the minister of transport had given the following comparative figures:-

King's Lynn-Hunstanton line

British Rail Costs (per annum) £60,300. Revenue: £22,000

RIS figures: Track maintenance and renewal £9,910

(15¼ miles at £650 per single-track mile)

Crews, fuel, maintenance of one two-car diesel multiple unit £15,000

Two staffed level crossings £3,000

Management £700

RIS total £28,610

On the earnings side, the RIS was given to understand that the line's contributory revenue was £20,000, which, when included with BR's earnings figure, gave total revenue of £42,000 per annum. Thus, on the RIS's costings and the total earnings figure, this line showed a profit of £13,390 per annum. (4)

The second matter upon which the RIS found it necessary to take issue with the government during the late 1960s and early 1970s concerned the grants for unremunerative railway services provided for under Section 39 of the 1968 act. This matter was dealt with in considerable detail in the Report of the Joint Steering Group (5) when, assuming that all the grey and thin black lines on the Ministry of Transport/BRB map of March 1967 would be withdrawn by 1969, it was estimated that the adjusted deficit on all loss-making services would be £52 million per annum and that total grants, excluding interest, which might be expected by the BRB in 1969 and 1974 would be not more than £40 million and £35 million respectively. (6)

In a written answer in the House of Commons on 15 November 1968, the minister of transport announced that financial aid to the nation's railways would be given on social and economic grounds, and that the total sum available for the purpose would be £62 million annually,

payable from 1 January 1969. Not only would many London commuter services benefit, but help would also be given to 135 services in the provinces which were in potential, danger of being closed down, or severely restricted. The minister, Richard Marsh, also stated that he expected to give grants for a further 56 services still under consideration. In only 12 cases had he decided not to make a grant. (7)

The RIS's main contention arose in connection with the costing procedure used by the ministry of transport when considering whether a service should be granted a subsidy. Instead of paying British Rail just sufficient to make good the actual saving that it would achieve from closure, a much larger sum, based on a total cost formula, recommended by the consultants to the Joint Steering Group was adopted; latterly known as the Carrington or Cooper Brothers formula. (8) The difference between the two methods of costing was enormous. For example, the King's Lynn-Hunstanton line, which on the face of it was running at a profit, was approved for closure because the ministry cost formula required a subsidy of £60,000 per annum for its retention, a sum which the taxpayers could not afford.

The government, when tackled on the matter was extremely sensitive about the formula and refused to publish details of it. Because of its narrow terms of reference, the matter could not be considered by the Transport Users Consultative Committee at any enquiry and all efforts to introduce legislation to widen the scope of the hearings to allow such matters to be raised had been firmly resisted.

The RIS was, however, pursuing the matter at a Parliamentary level and RIS Chairman, Dr Michael Caton, had held several discussions on the subject with Alan Lee Williams, the MP for Hornchurch. Through the efforts of Mr Williams, a group of five government MPs held a meeting at the House of Commons on 21 January 1969, at which Dr Caton was guest speaker, and passed the following resolution, which was later signed by over 50 MPs:



**Alan Lee Williams,
MP for Hornchurch**

“That this House, bearing in mind the importance of a railway network adequate to the social and economic needs of the country, calls on Her Majesty’s Government to make public the financial formula used by the Ministry of Transport to justify the closure of railway lines and to evaluate social subsidies where granted.”

These moves were, however, to prove unsuccessful.

Another case of closure which, in the RIS's opinion, involved a loss to BR was the line between Uckfield and Lewes. The East Sussex Travellers' Association claimed, in November 1968, that the loss would be in the region of £24,000 a year, instead of saving money if the line closed. The association also claimed that reconstruction of the Hamsey loop line, to join the Uckfield line with the Haywards Heath line just outside Lewes would dispose of the problems which had arisen because of the construction of the Lewes relief road and that the cost of these works should strictly be a charge against the road fund. Its estimate of the cost of reinstating the loop, prepared by an independent engineering consultant, was £120,000 and the association claimed that interest and depreciation charges would amount to £11,000 per annum. Even if the cost of reconstructing this section of line was charged to the railway it would still be uneconomic to close the Uckfield-Lewes section. (9)

The minister, however, agreed that passenger services should be withdrawn on this and the Ashurst-Groombridge line, but he deferred a decision on the Hurst Green-Tunbridge Wells-

Uckfield service, and the former lines closed on 16 April 1969.

Activities at local level during 1968-69 continued with further attempts to form branches of the RIS and, at an open meeting held in Liverpool on 25 May 1968, the Merseyside branch was inaugurated. At that time, Liverpool had been without Corporation buses from 11 March to 27 May, because of industrial action and many suburban rail services had proved their worth, particularly the Liverpool Central high level to Gateacre line which was earmarked for closure on 4 May. Early in 1969, it was reported that BR had been given grants of £60,000 each from the ministry of transport and Liverpool Corporation towards the cost of continuing the passenger service for another year.

Late in 1968, a Deeside local authority and RIS joint committee was set up to press for the reopening of Shotton Low Level station [It eventually reopened in 1972]. Meanwhile, BR had

proposed the withdrawal of stopping services on the Manchester Exchange-Liverpool Lime Street line via Tyldesley and via Patricroft, involving the closure of a number of intermediate stations. The RIS branch lodged an objection to these closures and also issued a questionnaire to passengers to ascertain the degree of hardship which would be caused. Consent to closure was, however, subsequently granted and the services discontinued from 5 May 1969.

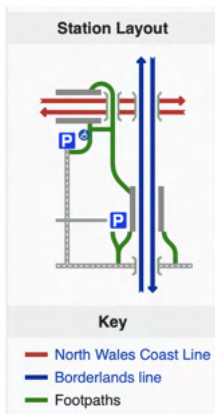
In northern England, the local RIS branch had, in June 1968, participated in a further meeting with representatives of the Railway Development Association and the Scottish Railway Development Association on the need for railway expansion in north-west England and south-west Scotland. In the meantime, transport minister Richard Marsh had approved the closure of the Waverley route (Carlisle-Hawick-Edinburgh) and the branch had issued a statement deploring the decision, which gained considerable support in both local and national press. Closure

was, however, effected from 6 January 1969.

On 26 October 1968, a meeting of RIS members was held in Darlington Town Hall when it was decided to continue the campaign for the reopening of Ferryhill station [Ferryhill had still not been reopened in 2022 but the campaign continues]. In the afternoon, RIS held a conference, primarily for the benefit of local authorities, to discuss rail development in the area, including the possibility of reopening and developing the Northallerton-Harrogate route.

The RIS branch had also submitted an objection to the closure of the Hull-Scarborough main line. As BR had admitted that its losses could be reduced to some extent, it was questioned whether it was complying with section 3 (1) of the Transport Act 1962. The TUCC subsequently reported that closure would cause considerable hardship, particularly during the summer, and the line was reprieved. RIS branch newsletters were issued in June and September 1968 and January and February 1969, together with a memorandum on the need to develop the Darlington-Richmond line. At the branch's AGM on 29 March 1969, it was resolved to support efforts to reopen the Waverley route under private enterprise and the hope was expressed that under the Tyneside Passenger Transport Authority, the best possible use would be made of rail transport in the area.

In the south of England, the London branch had been enlarged to cover the Home Counties, with a consequent increase in the scope of its activities. The RIS branch had also reintroduced the earlier practice of visits to threatened lines (reinvigoration parties) by a "meeting on rails"



Shotton layout

on 31 July 1968 which travelled from Moorgate (BR) to Hampstead, Broad Street, Liverpool Street, Romford, Upminster, Barking and Kentish Town.

The RIS branch noted with pleasure that the efforts of the former Tonbridge-Guildford-Reading sub-committee were bearing fruit, with a steady build-up of traffic on the line following a BR campaign. A joint meeting with the Railway Development Association on 1 October on "Cross London Links" was followed shortly afterwards on 10 October by a talk to members on the potential for development of a Channel Tunnel. The RIS continued to publicise the unadvertised rail service between Olympia and Clapham Junction in the hope of attracting wider patronage of this rush-hour service.

The RIS branch had lodged an objection to the closure of the Wembley Stadium branch and was again actively engaged in the fight to retain the Romford-Upminster line. At an RIS branch meeting on 16 April 1969, RIS chairman Michael Caton gave a talk on the "Cooper Brothers" formula for costing unremunerative rail services.

In East Suffolk, the main event was the not-unexpected finding of the TUCC enquiry that hardship would occur if the passenger service between Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft was withdrawn. In north and west Norfolk, the King's Lynn-Dereham lines closed from 9 September 1968, together with the line to Wisbech from both March and King's Lynn Magdalen Road, thus depriving Wisbech of all rail passenger services. The controversy over the King's Lynn-Hunstanton line has already been dealt with, but passenger services nevertheless ceased on 5 May 1969. On this occasion, the RIS area representative Michael Thomas laid a wreath at the front of the last train from Hunstanton but, as the matter was later referred to the Ombudsman, the track and equipment was retained for a time.

Before leaving East Anglian matters, it is significant that the area economic planning council in its first report, published in October 1968, had expressed concern about the withdrawal of

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LAST HUNSTANTON TRAIN DRAWS THE CROWDS

AT 10.29 p.m. ON SATURDAY 107 years of service on the Lynn-Hunstanton railway line came to an end when the last train pulled in to Lynn station to a welcome of cheers, waving handkerchiefs and popping flash bulbs.

The welcome came from a large crowd of well-wishers who had gathered on Platform Four to mourn the line's closure.

THE LAST TRAIN DID NOT SO MUCH ONE OF THE STATION AS OF HUNSTANTON. HAD STARTED AN HOUR AND A HALF EARLIER, THE TRAIN HAD LEFT THE SAME STATION FOR HUNSTANTON.

The 9.5 p.m. to Lynn station was normally an early-evening train, but this time it was an eight-coach train packed with more than 50 railway enthusiasts, photographers, and a few people who were acting as if it was a normal service.

Once the journey was over, the enthusiasts did not stop the train but continued to receive the train

TAPE RECORDER

On the way the enthusiasts



RIS wreath on front of the last train on the King's Lynn-Hunstanton line in 1969

passenger services in the region and laid great emphasis on the necessity to divert more freight from road to rail. The report also recommended that lines already under threat should be reconsidered in the light of the grant aid provisions of the 1968 Act. (10)

In mid-Hampshire, the hearing into the closure of the Alton-Winchester line was held in April 1968. The TUCC report, submitted in August, confirmed, as expected, that considerable hardship would be caused to travellers from the area and to those travelling from Aldershot and Alton to Eastleigh or Southampton by reason of additional travelling time. The TUCC also considered the closure premature in view of development envisaged in the South Hampshire Study. The RIS was also critical of the circumstances in which a census of users of the line had been carried out in October 1968 and, here again, the accuracy of the figures supplied to justify closure was questionable.

Early in 1969, it was announced that the line had been given a temporary grant and that a new census had been ordered after representations by the local MP. Following a meeting between local council and RIS representatives with the assistant secretary to the ministry of transport in January, a press statement was issued in which it was stressed that the "Cooper Brothers" formula (referred to earlier) was understood to operate particularly harshly against through routes such as the Mid-Hants, and that alternative methods of calculation could eliminate the deficit altogether. Suggestions were also made for operational savings on the line. The direct line between Eastleigh and Romsey closed to passengers from 5 May 1969.

Meanwhile, on the Isle of Wight, the protracted negotiations continued between the county council and BR to secure the reopening and electrification of the Shanklin-Ventnor line, but by the spring of 1969, the matter was still unresolved. In the interim, costs were escalating. As predicted in the RIS book, the Ryde Pier trams were withdrawn from service early in 1969, and the replacement shuttle service of electric trains was found to be far from satisfactory. (11)



Ryde pier trams were withdrawn in 1969

proposals to withdraw passenger services from the Taunton-Minehead line, despite an increase in use by visitors to Butlins Holiday Camp.

In Devon and Cornwall, the all-too-familiar process of closure continued. At the beginning of 1968, economies had been made on the Barnstaple-Ilfracombe line and these led people to believe that it might have a new lease of life but later in the year, closure notices appeared. An objection was duly lodged on behalf of the RIS and at the public inquiry on 9 October, considerable doubt was expressed as to the feasibility of providing an adequate replacement bus service because of traffic congestion in the area, most notably in the summer months. More encouraging news was the introduction of a regular "freightliner" service between Par (Cornwall) and London, mainly for the conveyance of china clay, followed early in 1969 by a new Freightliner terminal in Plymouth.

Further closures were, however, to follow including Paignton-Kingswear and Exeter-Okehampton for which objections were lodged on behalf of the RIS. A memorandum stating its case against closure of the former line was also issued by the RIS and independent costings prepared for the Barnstaple-Ilfracombe line.

In the Three Counties area, although the RIS branch was dormant, the national committee was studying proposals by BR to replace Central and Eastgate stations in Gloucester by a new station at Barnwood, an eastern suburb of the city. The RIS also issued memoranda with its own costings for the local services between Bristol Temple Meads and Bath Spa together with the following other lines, all based on the principles described at the beginning of the chapter:-

Cambridge-St Ives

Kidderminster Junction to Hartlebury Junction via Bewdley and Stourport-on-Severn

Paignton-Kingswear

Cowdenbeath-Perth

Meanwhile, there had been some encouraging developments in the realms of private enterprise with the introduction of regular services on Saturdays and Sundays, from 29 June 1968, on the Keighley and Worth Valley Line (Keighley-Oxenhope) and continuing negotiations with BR for the restoration of rail services between Grosmont and Pickering by the North York Moors Railway Preservation Society.

Further provisions of the 1968 Transport Act became operative in April 1969 with the setting up of the first passenger transport authorities (12):-

South East Lancashire & North East Cheshire (SELNEC), Greater Manchester

Tyneside

West Midlands

Merseyside

In 1969, as an experiment, the RIS annual general meeting was held outside London and took place on 26 April at Central Hall, Manchester. The chairman, in his address, attacked the

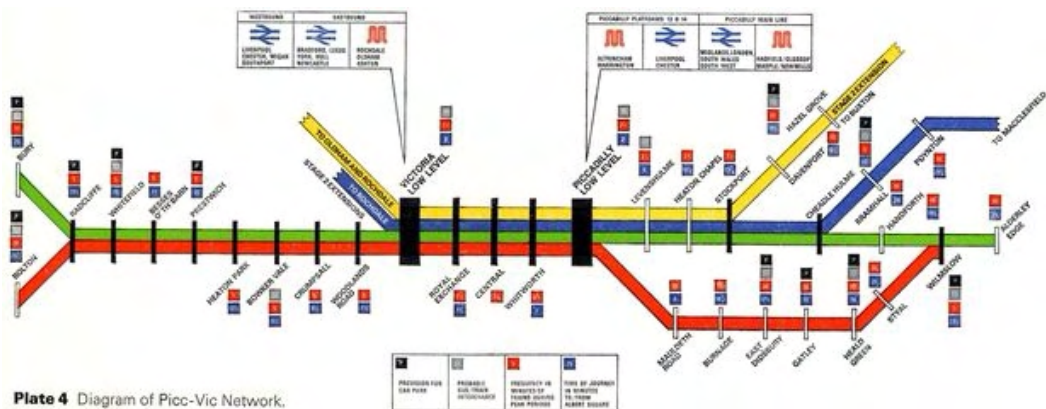


Plate 4 Diagram of Picc-Vic Network.

One of SELNEC's plans was for a Manchester Picc-Vicrail link. It never happened

continuing policy of closures and asked why, when it had been consistently applied for a number of years, some attempt had not been made to examine whether the desired objectives were being achieved.

In the early 1960s, Mr Marples and Dr Beeching had launched their programme of massive closures to play a major part in reducing the railway deficit which the nation was assured would be eliminated by 1970. At the end of 1968, when over 85% of the closures had been carried out, the deficit was larger than when the Beeching plan was launched. This was, to say the least, strong evidence that the policy had failed. The RIS had said this at the time, but in the eyes of many who ought to have known better, Beeching would do no wrong. The reason



Cheltenham Racecourse station, one of the 148 rail stations closed in 1968. It is now enjoying a new lease of life on the heritage Gloucester Warwickshire Railway

for the failure was not hard to find. Closures had led to erosion of traffic from the better paying parts of the system which in turn made more routes unprofitable and ripe for the axe, and so the process would continue. Nevertheless, the government was continuing the policy even further and the ministry costing formula was necessitating a level of subsidy to unremunerative services many times in excess of the amount BR would save if the line closed.

In the following year, the RIS continued to work for a more realistic approach to the dilemma whereby lines were faced with closure because it was considered that they could not justify the subsidy required by the Cooper Bros formula. At the enquiry held by the Tucc into the proposal to close the Romford-Upminster line, it was claimed that the service produced an annual loss of £40,500, an incredible amount for a railway of only 3½ miles of single track, run by one diesel set. The main reason for this was the substantial terminal and administrative costs which were debited to the line which would still have to be paid by BR if the service were withdrawn. The real saving from closure would have been a mere fraction of this figure (probably zero or even negative) when allowance was made for the £18,000 per annum required to subsidise the replacement bus service.

In accordance with the established practice, the chairman of the Tucc refused to allow discussion of the financial aspects of the closure or to consider them in any way and the RIS continued to pursue the question of widening the powers of the committees through the Railway Reform Group of MPs. The minister still, however, refused to publish the cost formula but the RIS was able to secure further details of the methods it entailed and obtained an independent chartered accountant's view which was severely critical of its use for assessing closures. It should be mentioned at this stage that the capabilities of the consultants to the joint steering group, which produced the formula, are also questioned by Stewart Joy, former chief economist to the British Railways Board (13) which may account for the reluctance of successive governments to expose their methods to too-close scrutiny.

Nevertheless, the RIS was not prepared to concede that these threatened lines should be

given up as lost. Closure could be prevented if local authorities were willing to take appropriate action. In this connection, it was noted that the ministry of transport was, in many cases, prepared to accept a lower level of subsidy, based on the amount BR would expect to save should a service be withdrawn, rather than on the total cost formula. It depended on the authorities concerned being prepared to make some contribution towards the cost of running a threatened service. The RIS, therefore, sought to persuade local authorities to cooperate more closely with BR to secure the future of local lines under the powers given them in the Transport Act 1968. (See chapter 4).

The RIS was also to extend the scope of these activities one stage further by encouraging the formation of local development groups to cooperate with the railway management in taking joint steps to develop individual rail services. The best means of achieving this was through its branches and areas and a memorandum *Hints for Members*, published towards the end of 1969, contained some suggestions for action by such groups as well as measures by which individual members could help to develop their local railway.

The Salisbury-Exeter line was selected as the first service for the formation of such a group as it had been given a social grant for three years and interested parties in the area were duly contacted. In the event the RIS actions were largely superseded by the initiative taken by the local authorities in setting up a joint committee to work for the retention of services on the line. The RIS gave its full support«

Early in 1970, RIS chairman Dr Caton had another meeting with Alan Lee Williams, chairman of the House of Commons Railway Reform Group, and a memorandum summarising the RIS policy on railways was circulated to members of the group. This outlined the part a properly developed rail system could play in rescuing the environment from the consequences of excessive road development. It stressed that future investment in railways should be based on social grounds and cost-benefit studies, not on the unrealistic concept of profitability of railways taken in isolation. Reasons were given for the failure of the closure policy to reduce the railways deficit. Attention was drawn to the misleading impression of individual rail losses given by the grant formula. The RIS efforts to enlist public support in the setting up of development groups was put forward as a positive contribution to ensuring the future of many cross-country and feeder lines.

In the meantime, Richard Marsh had been succeeded as minister of transport by Fred Mulley. The RIS congratulated Mr Mulley on his appointment and stressed the need to develop the railway network for both freight and passenger, thereby assisting the country's economy by the use of an existing asset to halt the destruction of the environment by a disastrous increase in road traffic, particularly heavy lorries.

Shortly afterwards, on 18 December 1969, came what was to become an annual event, namely the announcement by the minister of the social grant allocations for unremunerative rail services. The grants for various periods covered 120 services, including those forming the London commuter network. These allocations were in addition to the services for which undertakings supported from 1970, and in some cases from 1971, were already in force. Total expenditure on all these services in 1970 was likely to be in the region of £58 million. A list of grants included in the answer, reported in *Hansard* (14), indicated that 45 would receive aid for 1970, 1971 and 1972, (three years), 42 for two years and 26 for 1970 only. Mr Mulley also gave details of seven services for which he did not consider grant aid should be given for more than two years, unless in the meantime consent to closure had been refused.

From this, it was quite obvious that the future of the following lines was at risk:

Keswick-Carlisle

Bury-Rawtenstall

Haltwhistle-Alston

Watford-Croxley Green

Inverness-Kyle of Lochalsh

Huddersfield-Wakefield

The Oldham-Rochdale section of the Manchester-Rochdale line.

As a service to members, the RIS issued a complete list of grant-aided services, as announced by the minister and this was to become an annual practice. The RIS also, from December 1969, issued a *Supplement* to the *Progress Report* containing information primarily of interest to members only. A continental sub-committee was also set up to deal with European matters with particular reference to planning for the Channel Tunnel.

During 1969-70, the RIS made no major progress in the development of branches and areas but the activities of the London and Home Counties Branch were further consolidated. The Society's objection to the closure of the Wembley Stadium branch was overruled by the TUCC but the saga of the Lewes-Uckfield line continued with a report in the summer of 1969 that the circumstances of closure were to be investigated by the Ombudsman, mainly as a result of the pressure exerted by the local passengers' association. The minister, in 1969, also gave consent to the closure of the Ashford-Hastings line although this was deferred due to refusal by the Traffic Commissioners to grant licences for the replacement buses. The main reason was that it would take at least two years to make the roads in the area suitable for the operation of buses.



TIME RUNNING OUT: A London Transport Board clock. The LTB existed from 1963-1970 when its powers were taken over by the Greater London Council. The LTB was preceded by the London Passenger Transport Board (1933-1948) and the London Transport Executive (1948-1963)

Late in 1969, in its report to the minister, the TUCC for London concluded that closure of the Romford-Upminster line would, if implemented, lead to a degree of hardship which could not be satisfactorily alleviated by an alternative bus service and the line was, once more, reprieved. The RIS branch continued its campaign for restoration of services on the West London line (Willesden-Clapham Junction) and also began to take a closer interest in the affairs of London Transport which, by the Transport (London) Act 1969, became the overall responsibility of the Greater London Council with the abolition of the London Transport Board (as from 1 January 1970). Early in that year, the RIS branch held a successful meeting addressed by a member of the executive council of ASLEF. The beginning of the year, however, saw moves to withdraw services on the Epping-Ongar section of the Central Line.

In northern England, the RIS branch was taking an increasing interest in transport within the conurbations of West Yorkshire and Tyneside, particularly as the latter was covered by a passenger transport executive set up under the 1968 Act. The West Yorkshire Transportation Study was

published during the summer of 1969 and the RIS branch made a study of it to examine its implications so far as railways were concerned. Of particular interest in the area, was the proposed coordinated rail-road complex to be constructed in Bradford. RIS chairman Dr Caton was also guest speaker at a meeting of Leeds University Union Railway and Transport Society on 6 March 1970 when he outlined the RIS policy on railways and explained the scope of its activities at both national and local level.

The RIS branch also made representations regarding the closure of the Colne-Skipton line and the withdrawal of local services on the Skipton-Carlisle line. The minister of transport, however, subsequently approved these proposals thereby reducing the potential for development of recreational travel in the Yorkshire Dales. The Colne-Skipton line which had only been under threat since November 1968, closed on 2 February 1970. In 1967, the route had been included in *British Railways Network for Development*.

In February 1970, the minister of transport announced his approval to the extension of electrification over the West Coast main line from Crewe to Glasgow via Carlisle, While this would do much to boost services on the west coast and would greatly benefit Cumberland and Westmorland, the RIS branch was concerned that the need for other local services should not be overlooked. The RIS branch held its third annual general meeting in Newcastle on 23 March and while concern was expressed about the lack of improvements to loss-making services in the North East, it was pleased to note that a number of improvements in the Inter-City services on the East Coast main line would become operative from 4 May.

On another, but not so bright, aspect of electrification the RIS branch deeply regretted the withdrawal of Inter-City passenger services over the Manchester-Sheffield route via Woodhead which had only been electrified in the 1950s (see chapter 4). On 5 January 1970, the electric service was replaced by two separate diesel services from Sheffield to Manchester and Peinstone, with the Inter-City services being transferred to the ex-Midland Hope Valley route. The main argument in favour of this course of action was the heavy level of freight traffic on the Woodhead route. The suburban service, however, continued to operate between Manchester-Hadfield and Glossop. From 5 January, both Dunford Bridge and Sheffield Victoria were also closed.

The RIS branch objected to the withdrawal of passenger services on the Bolton-Bury-Rochdale line and was represented at the TUCC hearing on 12 June 1969. The minister's decision against closure of the Ormskirk-Preston local passenger services was a cause of satisfaction to the RIS branch in view of its effort. A modified service was introduced on the line from 6 October 1969. The future of the Liverpool Central-Gateacre line also looked brighter with the announcement that the ministry of transport and Liverpool Corporation had again agreed to make a grant of £53,000 each towards keeping the passenger service going for another year (1970). BR was also considering plans to reduce the cost of running the line.

RIS activities in the area were, however, to be seriously curtailed by the lack of active members



Skipton-Colne reopening is the aim in 2023 of the Skipton East Lancashire Rail Action Partnership. SELRAP considers that the route could be open for passengers within seven years of the start of the engineering studies

and early in 1970 the branch was wound up.

In Greater Manchester, a local representative had been appointed in August 1969 and the RIS continued to press for the retention of the Bury-Rawtenstall and Oldham-Rochdale lines, particularly in view of the minister's statement on 18 December 1969. The local press was also showing an interest in RIS activities related to the future of rail services in East Lancashire – Blackburn, Accrington, Burnley, Nelson and Colne.

The activities of the new passenger transport authorities and their executives were also becoming apparent at the time. Towards the end of the summer of 1969, it was, however, announced that the proposed, rapid transit scheme in Manchester had been postponed pending further study of transport needs in the conurbation, although BR was to spend £1 million on modernising the Manchester-Altrincham electric line, a heavily used commuter route.

On Merseyside, the passenger transport authority had decided to go ahead immediately with the preparation of plans and trial borings for its "Inner Loop" scheme and: other measures to increase the capacity of the city's suburban rail services. At the end of April 1970, the Tyne-Wear Transportation Study, which was completely independent of the PTA, put forward two schemes aimed at improving transport in the Newcastle and Sunderland areas, the first recommending railway development on a large scale.

Meanwhile new developments had been taking place in the West Midlands area with the formation of a joint committee of the RIS, the Railway Development Association and other interested bodies to discuss the development of a new rapid transit artery through the conurbation. Monthly meetings of the West Midlands Rapid Transit Joint Committee, as it became known, were held from September 1969. Its activities centred around proposals to restore services between the defunct Snow Hill station and Shirley, along the North Warwickshire line and to Solihull along the Banbury line. These proposals, and others formed the basis of a pamphlet *Speedrail; a low cost rapid transit system* which was subsequently

published as an illustrated booklet in 1970. (15)

In north and central Wales, an area representative had been appointed during the year although in the early stages events were discouraging with ministerial approval to the withdrawal of passenger services on the Bangor-Caernarvon line from 5 January 1970, subject to the running of extra buses. The Central Wales line (Craven Arms-Llanelli) was, however, once more reprieved, and improvements were noted on the Conway Valley line following the formation of a local action committee led by the RIS's corporate member,



Birmingham Snow Hill station in 1957 with the 0730 Shrewsbury-Paddington express is arriving, headed by a GWR King class loco. The station closed in 1972 and was demolished in 1977. A new Snow Hill station opened in 1987

Nant Conway Rural District Council. January 1970 also saw publication of the first report of the ministry of transport special unit for the study of unremunerative rail services, which was effectively a social cost-benefit study of the Cambrian Coast Line. (16) This study concluded that generally the costs of retaining the service outweighed the benefits and while the ministry had given a social grant for two years, a local action group was set up by local authorities in the area to secure its long-term retention.

The RIS decided to prepare a memorandum on the study, as further surveys were contemplated on other lines, and it was considered important that general observations on the methods used by the ministry in this pilot scheme should be issued to enable improvements to be made in the costing techniques in future cases.

In east Suffolk, although permission had been given to close the Yarmouth-Lowestoft line, it was conditional upon alternative buses being provided. As many of the existing services in East Anglia were only being maintained-by crews working extensive overtime, the provision of the replacement buses was likely to lead to cuts on other routes in the area.

Notwithstanding this situation, rail services were withdrawn from 4 May 1970. The closure was, however, slightly compensated for by the reopening of a short spur line to improve freight access to Felixstowe Docks. Early in 1970, steps were taken which were to revive the activities of the East

Suffolk Travellers' Association, which had been suspended in 1967.

In north Norfolk, the minister had reprieved the Norwich-Cromer-Sheringham line, but its long-term future still appeared to be in doubt. As the considerable freight traffic on the line had been a deciding factor, the RIS took steps to set up a local development group.

The Ombudsman had, however, rejected the appeal against closure

of the King's Lynn-Hunstanton line, and the minister had also approved closure to passengers of the Cambridge-St. Ives line, one of the many for which a cost memorandum had been produced.

In mid-Hampshire, the fight continued for the Alton-Winchester line with considerable emphasis on the costs alleged by BR to justify closure. As a result, the matter was referred back to the TUCC for reconsideration. A revised passenger census was also carried out.

On the Isle of Wight after three years of negotiations, a decision was finally reached, towards the end of 1969, against reopening of the Shanklin-Ventnor line. The cost had, in the



Port of Felixstowe

In 2023, the Port of Felixstowe is Britain's largest international rail facility with record-breaking throughput

meantime, rocketed from £80,000 to £264,000, a figure quite beyond the local authorities' means. The RIS, therefore, moved its efforts to supporting the Vectrail Society to reopen the Ryde-Cowes line and to prevent the planned closure of the Ryde-Shanklin line in 1975. Complaints were prevalent of the deteriorating rail replacement bus services on the Island.

In the Somerset and Dorset area, closure of the Wareham-Swanage line had been referred to the Ombudsman. Closure was, however, delayed due to consistent objections by local authorities and others to the granting of licences for the replacement buses and while a number of closure dates were announced the trains were still running in the summer of 1970. Proposals were also being formulated to run the line privately. The most significant aspect of the reference of the case to the Ombudsman was the inflated figures supplied by BR upon which the case had been considered by the TUCC. (17)

In Devon and Cornwall, opposition to the various closure proposals continued. After the hearing on 6 March 1969 into the Paignton-Kingswear line, the TUCC decided that the replacement buses would largely alleviate any hardship which might be caused by closure of the line. In North Devon, there was considerable pressure to restore services on the Barnstaple Junction-Torrington line due to the gross inadequacies of the replacement buses to Bideford and lack of coordination with existing BR services. Early in 1970 however, it was rumoured that the remaining clay traffic on the line might also be withdrawn as BR were not prepared to replace the life-expired steam cranes used for loading export consignments into ships at Fremington.

The TUCC hearing for the Exeter-Okehampton line was held on 18 September 1969 when it was pointed out that if the passenger service was withdrawn, continuation of the freight service to Meldon Quarry might also be in jeopardy and the future of the quarry itself. The track between Okehampton and Bere Alston was also being lifted in spite of attempts to

retain as part of an alternative route between Exeter and Plymouth for use when storm damage closed the South Devon line in the Dawlish and Teignmouth areas. On the private enterprise side, since its reopening in April 1969, the Dart Valley Railway (Buckfastleigh-Totnes) had by the end of the year attracted more than 300,000 passenger journeys.

The other major closure in the area was Barnstaple Junction-Ilfracombe. Despite the problems of running an alternative bus service, ministerial approval was granted but closure was deferred to cater for the



Church bells rang out in 2021 for rail reopening day at Okehampton – and the regular service to Exeter. The route from Exeter to Okehampton was the first line to reopen under the government Restoring Your Railway programme which was launched in 2020. The Department for Transport said more lines and stations would reopen in future. Public service trains returned to the Exeter-Okehampton route after a gap of 49½ years since the 1972 closure, and 150 years since the original opening of the railway

summer holiday traffic in 1970.

At the annual general meeting in 1970, RIS chairman Dr Caton was able to report that the past year (1969-70) had been unique in its 16-year history as it was possible to congratulate BR on making a profit, largely due to the capital reconstruction provided for under the 1968 Act. There had also been a surge in freight and passenger business indicating that modern railways were capable of holding their own in the fiercely competitive market of the time. In 1969, 127 express trains daily were averaging over 75 mph which was a greater number than were averaging 60 mph in 1939. (18) Also in 1969, the number of route miles of line rerieved by the minister exceeded the number approved; a welcome change from the Marples/Beeching era.

One of the resolutions passed at the meeting was that, since the ministry of transport had assessed the value of human life at £9,800 to offset against the cost of new motorway construction, the same figure should be adopted when considering the cost of maintaining or reopening a rail service. At the same meeting it was decided that in future, as a general rule, the RIS AGM should be held outside London to give a wider cross section of the membership the opportunity to attend.

In the autumn came the general election and the RIS sent a questionnaire to candidates in accordance with its established practice. On this occasion, the subjects covered were:-

- a. The need for greater investment in railways, particularly electrification.**
- b. The failure of the closure programme as a remedy to the railways financial problems**
- c. The need to retain grant aid for unremunerative but socially necessary rail services.**

The response, once more, was favourable and of the 207 who replied, 55 were elected and of these 15-25 were obviously pro-rail. The result of the election was, however, a swing to the Conservatives who regained power and two of the principal officers of the Railway Reform Group of MPs, Ronald Atkins (Lab, Preston North) and Alan Lee Williams (Lab, Hornchurch), lost their seats. The RIS had, in the meantime, made contact with the Conservative spokesman on railways, Edward Taylor MP, and following the election efforts were made to re-form the group from among the MPs who had replied favourably to the questionnaire.

At the election, the Conservative party gave an assurance in its manifesto that investment in British Railways, which had been reduced in recent years, would be restored to a level which would permit an adequate modernisation programme to be maintained. Shortly after his appointment as minister of transport, however, John Peyton expressed strong misgivings towards this course of action. RIS chairman Dr Caton had pursued the matter during the election campaign with Michael Heseltine MP, who became parliamentary secretary to the ministry of transport and the RIS continued to press its views in that quarter.

October 1970 saw the reorganisation of the ministries of housing and local government, transport and public building and works into the unified Department of the Environment under its new supremo Peter Walker. The status of the former ministers was slightly adjusted.



BBC

RAILWAY CHAMPION: Ronald Atkins who died in 2020, aged 104. He was MP for Preston North twice, 1966-70 and 1974-79

John Peyton, however, continued as minister for transport industries.

The RIS had repeatedly warned that the high level of grants paid for socially necessary rail services would be a sitting target for any Chancellor wishing to make cuts in public expenditure, and with the new government's mini-budget, late in the year, this became a reality although, in the early stages, grant withdrawals were confined to the London area. This brought the dilemma of the Cooper Bros formula to the fore once more.

On 14 January 1971, the minister made the annual announcement of grant allocations and one of the six services for which grant aid was refused was Liverpool Lime Street-Southport.

Early in 1970, the RIS held a competition for a new corporate symbol, the results of which were announced in the summer. The symbol was first introduced with the *Progress Report* of March 1971, and in the same edition an *In Parliament* section was introduced containing a selection of relevant parliamentary questions and answers on railway matters from the Official Reports (Hansard) for both the House of Commons and the House of Lords. Since the introduction of the *Members Only Supplement* in December 1969, the RIS published periodically an up-to-date list of its branch and area representatives for the information of members.



At about the same time as the announcement of the symbol competition, further news was received from one of our few members in the United States where the general trend of the railroad companies was the abandonment of passenger services, except in one or two of the major cities, such as Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Chicago, where there had been a revitalisation of rail commuter services with government help at local, state and even federal level. Generally this was the exception and in most smaller US cities, rail services had long been abandoned. However the formation of the National Association of Railroad Passengers, with which the RIS has been associated for a number of years, had done much to reverse the trend and the activities of AMTRAK (a federal agency for the operation of passenger services) were also leading to the rationalisation of many services for the greater benefit of passengers rather than freight operations. The Inter State Commerce Commission was also showing a greater reluctance to authorise abandonment of passenger services.

As in Britain, rail remained the safest means of travel, according to the US Department of Transportation. In 1969, the fatality rate on US railways was 0.07 for each 100 million passenger miles; commercial aircraft were next with a rate of 0.13; the bus rate was 0.22 while automobiles and taxis were as high as 2.30. Actual fatalities were: rail 9, air 131, bus 150 and automobiles and taxi 37,200. (19)

On a more personal note, 1970 saw the death of one of the vice-presidents of the RIS, Professor C L Mowat who had even for a time been area representative for North Wales while head of the history department of the University College at Bangor.

1970 also saw publication of a report proposing the integration of public transport in Wessex. From initial contacts with the authors of the report (20) sprang the formation of the RIS Wessex branch at a meeting in Southampton on 21 November 1970. The new RIS branch completely absorbed the former areas of mid Hampshire, the Isle of Wight and the eastern half of the Somerset and Dorset area. However, it inherited the existing problems of rail closures.

In mid Hampshire, the TUCC held a further public enquiry into the closure of the Alton-Winchester line on 3 July 1970, in the light of the revised passenger census and replacement bus timetables. The committee, however, reported no lessening of the hardship which would

be caused if rail services were withdrawn and expressed doubts as to the ability of the local bus company to provide extra buses, due to staff shortages. Further development in the area was also likely to lead to increased traffic on the line.

By the autumn of 1970, there was still no news of the minister's decision on the appeal by local authorities against the granting of licences for replacement bus services for the Wareham-Swanage line. Passenger services were due to be withdrawn from the Taunton-Minehead line on 5 October but again this was deferred for similar reasons, A body was subsequently formed with the object of operating the latter line privately.

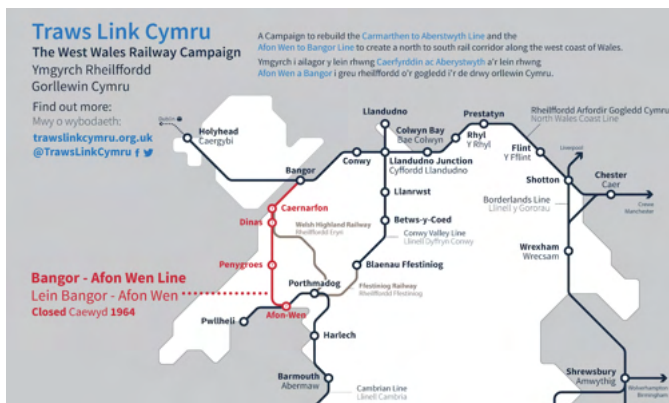
An activity of more than just local significance was the memorandum prepared by the RIS area representative on the report of the social cost-benefit analysis carried out by the ministry of transport on the Cambrian Coast line. Observations on the report had already been submitted to the ministry of transport and the department of the environment by the National Council on Inland Transport and the purpose of the RIS memorandum was to provide additional comment in the light of

dialogue which had taken place between the minister and the council. It contained a detailed critical appraisal of the methods used in carrying out the surveys and also criticised the fact that no consideration had been given to the possible effects of reopening the link between Bangor and Afon Wen. While agreeing that the concept of a cost-benefit study of a social asset, such as a railway line, was a good one, the memorandum stated that to be of any use, it had to

consider a wide cross-section of alternative future strategies. In the RIS opinion, the surveys by the ministry had not done this. The methodological inadequacies of the report (21) were touched upon in the final part of the memorandum (22) which concentrated upon three problems. Detailed analysis of these were omitted from the report. The problem areas were::

- 1. Measurement of the elasticity of demand for passenger traffic in various travel markets;**
- 2. Allocation of contributory revenue;**
- 3. Connectivity and the relationship of the Cambrian Coast system to the utility of British Railways as a whole.**

Trains which were run on the Cambrian Coast Line and the Central Wales line on Sundays from 5 July to 6 September 1970 had been well patronised, but the connections provided at Machynlleth were very awkward. Early in 1971, as had been expected, BR published proposals to withdraw passenger services on the coast line (Machynlleth-Pwllheli) although the draft Sunday services to operate during the summer of 1971 showed a considerable improvement in the connections at Machynlleth and Dovey Junction, as compared with those of the



CRUCIAL LINK: Bangor to Afon Wen is essential in 2023 to reopening a north-south rail link for west Wales

previous year.

The RIS area representative was later to resign, when he moved away from the area, but it is significant to note what had been achieved during his short term of office. In addition to the action on the Cambrian Coast line the RIS was also represented at a meeting between local authorities and the railway management to consider improvements on the north Wales coast line.

In the north of Scotland, proposals had also been published for the withdrawal of passenger services between Inverness and Kyle of Lochalsh, the second proposal for the line within seven years. The RIS local representative worked in close association with the Scottish Railway Development Association in opposing closure and was represented at the Tucc hearing on 17 February 1971. The line had considerable tourist and scenic potential and one of the RIS vice-

presidents, Torquil Nicolson, who was also a councillor for Plockton, near Kyle, became chairman of an action group to fight for its retention.

In northern England, closure proposals for the Keswick-Penrith line were announced in the summer of 1970 and the RIS branch immediately contacted a number of local bodies in the area. Sixteen local authorities, and others, (including the RIS branch), together with 32 individuals, objected to the



BEAUTY: The Railway Invigoration Society fought the closure threat to the Inverness-Kyle of Lochalsh line in 1971. In 2023 it is recognised as one of Britain's most beautiful rail routes with regular special trains as well as the essential normal service trains. This is 4305 in April 2012 beside Loch Carron at Plockton

proposal, the enquiry for which was held in September. Later in the year the Haltwhistle-Alston line was, yet again, threatened with closure and the RIS branch supported the formation of a local action committee. In its objection to the Tucc, it stressed that the alternative road facilities would be totally unsatisfactory at the best of times and that the position would be even worse during periods of severe weather, when roads in the area were frequently blocked by snow and rendered impassable.

The Tucc hearing took place on 17 February 1971 at Alston when the RIS branch was duly represented. The Tucc subsequently reported to the minister that severe hardship would be caused to the regular users of the line and to people in the holiday trade, and also accepted the inability of the roads to cope with the traffic in winter weather. More encouraging

however, was the introduction, from 5 October 1970, of an improved service of trains between Newcastle and the coast, including a new facility of all-night trains The RIS branch congratulated BR on such bold action in promoting its services and expressed the hope that similar steps would be taken in connection with the many other services in need of development.

Towards the end of 1970, concern was expressed by a number of the RIS branch and area representatives regarding the operation of the passenger transport executives set up under Part 2 of the 1968 Act, and a special meeting was therefore held in Birmingham on 5 December when the matter was discussed at length. This meeting was also attended by representatives of the local Rapid Transit Joint Committee who explained their plans for revitalising lines in the area. (23) It was reported that the West Midlands Passenger Transport Executive was strongly supporting the closure of the North Warwickshire line and also the permanent closure of Snow Hill tunnel. The withdrawal of grant aid had also been responsible for the threatened withdrawal of other services in the area.

The main conclusions of the meeting were that passenger transport executives at the time were largely preoccupied with taking over the former municipal bus undertakings. The Cooper Bros formula was also seen as a stumbling block to the operation of local rail services by the passenger transport executives. Nevertheless there had been some encouraging developments in some areas. A technical team, which for the past five years had been studying transport problems in the Greater Manchester area, had recommended construction of an underground railway under the centre of the city. A working party had also been set up to produce plans for public transport in Merseyside following the report of the Land Use and Transportation Study. Work had already started on the Loop Line in the centre of Liverpool as a first step towards a rail subway system under the city. It was also pointed out by the members from London that the Greater London Council in its booklet *The Future of London Transport* was beginning to realise the benefits of rapid transit.

Returning to developments at local level, notices for the withdrawal of passenger services between Bury and Rawtenstall, north of Manchester, were posted in the summer of 1970 and local members were active in distributing pamphlets encouraging users to object to the Transport Users Consultative Committee. The RIS and its corporate member, Summerseat Action Committee, were represented at the subsequent enquiry. Passenger services on the Bolton-Rochdale line were, however, withdrawn from 5 October 1970. Work had, in the meantime, commenced on the conversion of the Manchester Oxford Road-Altrincham line from 1,500V DC. to 25KV AC. to enable through running from the Crewe line, with consequent updating of rolling stock and withdrawal of the ageing 1,500V trains. Finally in 1971, it was announced that plans for a Manchester Piccadilly-Victoria underground link (referred



Ray King

HERITAGE POTENTIAL: The Bury-Rawtenstall line closed and in 2023 is the East Lancashire Railway. This is steam engine Sapper at Ramsbottom station in 2012. In 2023, there are hopes that commuter trains could once again operate for residents of Rossendale, Ramsbottom, Bury and Heywood

to above) would be deposited in the next session of Parliament. This scheme would afford through running from Stockport, in the south, to the Bury line, in the north.

In Merseyside, a major setback had been the decision by the passenger transport executive, in September 1970, not to object to closure of the former Cheshire Lines Committee line through Gateacre and Knotty Ash but to provide alternative buses. In view of the RIS's reservations on the executive's capacity to deal with the displaced traffic, the local representative wrote to the director general of the PTE on the issue. The TUCC, however, announced that it wished to present new evidence to the minister of transport and requested BR to publish a fresh closure notice so that a further enquiry could be held in view of the time which had elapsed since the minister's decision in 1966. The RIS duly lodged an objection and by early February, over 1,400 others had been received by the TUCC including one from Liverpool Corporation.

Despite its action with regard to the Gateacre line, the director general of the PTE was indicating that a rail-orientated system of passenger transport for Merseyside would be the most efficient and fastest, and that less would have to be spent on building new roads and flyovers.

In London and the Home Counties, the year 1970-71 had seen an intensification of RIS branch activities, particularly with regard to meetings and visits. In June 1970, eight members paid a very interesting visit to the depot and control room of the new London Transport Victoria line which had been opened by Queen Elizabeth in 1969.

On 25 January 1971, the RIS branch held a meeting which was addressed by Hornchurch MP Alan Lee Williams, former secretary of the House of Commons Railway Reform Group (he lost his parliamentary seat between 1970 and 1974).

On 24 March, members were addressed by a representative of Deutsche Bahn who gave a talk on the development of German Railways in the post-war years.

The Greater London Council had, in the meantime, authorised construction of the first stage of the Fleet line (Baker Street-Strand) and the extension of the Piccadilly line from Hounslow West to Heathrow Airport.

In Sussex, a local action committee had been formed to press for reopening of the Lewes-Uckfield line [The battle for reopening this line was continuing in 2023]. The future of London



MAJOR SETBACK: Merseyside PTE did not object to closure of the line through Gateacre and Knotty Ash when it was threatened in 1970

Transport was also under review in the discussion paper referred to earlier, to which the RIS branch submitted observations. One of the more significant provisions of the Transport (London) Act 1969 was section 14 which set up a users consultative committee for London Transport. It emerged as the London Transport Passengers Committee. Closures were still, however, a matter for the TUCC for London and towards the end of 1970, proposals were published by London Transport for the closure of the Epping-Ongar section of the Central line. The RIS lodged an objection and was represented at a public meeting held in Ongar attended by over 700 people. Local authorities had, in the meantime, formed a steering group to fight the proposal. The public enquiry was held on 20 January 1971 and objectors were disturbed to learn that London Transport proposed no additional bus services to cope with displaced rush-hour travellers. The TUCC subsequently reported to the minister that unalleviable hardship would arise if the service were withdrawn.

Fifty miles north of London, closure proposals had also been issued by BR for the withdrawal of passenger services from the Bletchley-Bedford section of the former Oxford-Cambridge line, again as a result of the withdrawal of grant aid in the London area. The RIS was subsequently associated with moves to restore passenger services on the Oxford-Bicester section of the line. The branch also renewed co-operation with the Committee for the Barking-Kentish Town line.

In East Suffolk revival of the East Suffolk Travellers' Association, mainly as a result of the closure of the Yarmouth-Lowestoft section, led to closer cooperation with BR and the running of experimental late night trains on the remainder of the line. A close watch was also being kept on the rapidly deteriorating service of local buses, particularly those replacing recently closed lines. Following the Minister of transport's consent to closure of the Cambridge-St Ives line, the RIS approached local authorities in the area to suggest that they should consider granting a subsidy, particularly in view of the changing attitude of the Department of Environment and BR towards application of the Cooper Bros formula. Following interest by local authorities, BR were asked to suspend closure, due to take place on 5 October 1970, but closure proceeded.

The year 1971 saw the start of experiments for the ill-fated "Hovertrain" on a test track along a stretch of the New Bedford River between Sutton and Earith, Cambridgeshire.

In Devon and Cornwall, the all-too-familiar process of closure continued and despite efforts by the local MP and the possibility of reference to the Ombudsman, the Barnstaple Junction-Ilfracombe line closed on 3 October 1970. The future of the Plymouth/Par freightliner service was also in some doubt and the Secretary of State for the Environment was also to approve closure of the Exeter-Okehampton line. One encouraging development was the reopening, following local pressure, on 3 May 1971, of Sidmouth Junction station (renamed Feniton).

Another disturbing development in the realms of rural transport, although not



PRESERVED: All that remains of the Tracked Hovercraft test system, the RTV 31 test vehicle and a single portion of its guideway preserved at Railworld, Peterborough

wholly unexpected by the RIS in view of the findings of the Jack Committee (24) was the announcement, late in 1970, of a directive by the National Bus Company (set up under the 1968 Act) to its subsidiaries that unprofitable bus services could only be kept going if local authorities agreed to subsidise them, as they were empowered to do under the 1968 Act. In the absence of subsidies many of the major bus undertakings proposed to withdraw the relevant services, a large number of which were rail replacements and therefore of particular concern to the RIS. Discussions between the councils and the bus executives were to cause the latter, in many cases, to drastically revise their estimated annual losses. A local newspaper in a leading article on rural bus services rightly stated: "It seems a pity that there is no similar contact and discussion between local government officers and railway managers about branch lines. Long, windy and futile arguments before transport users consultative committees, who start on the assumption that the railway costings are incontrovertible, so serve no such purpose as these apparently fruitful private discussions with the bus company (25).

Shortly afterwards, came the news that the government was to carry out a study into the problems of rural transport in two areas, West Suffolk and Devon. The action was, however, very much a case of shutting the stable door after the horse had bolted. Even in the pre-Beeching era, problems of rural transport existed, such as infrequent trains along rural branch lines, awkward connections at railway junctions and lack of adequate road-rail integration.

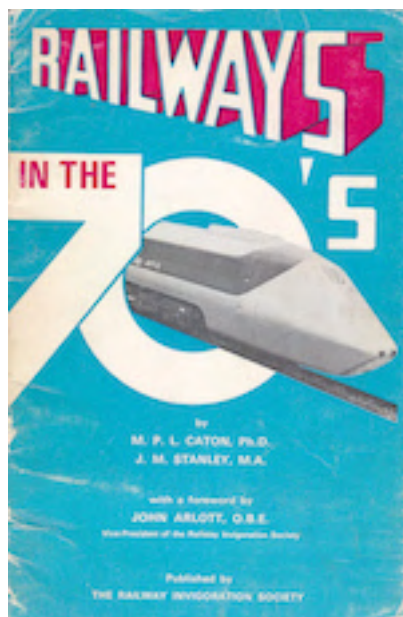
At a press conference prior to the RIS annual general meeting in Birmingham on 24 April 1971, a new policy statement was issued entitled *Railways in the Seventies*, from which this chapter takes its title. The press conference produced reports in several newspapers and RIS chairman Dr Michael Caton was interviewed for radio.

Copies of the statement were subsequently sent to the prime minister, the secretary of state for the environment, the minister of transport Industries, the chairman of the Railways Board and to those MPs known to have an interest in railways. The covering letter emphasised the need to increase national investment in railways, which was at the time, grossly inadequate and very small compared to expenditure on road transport.

The statement was also circulated to a number of local authorities with a letter urging the formation of local groups to work with BR to develop individual rail services.

The RIS believed the major factor responsible for the imbalance in inland transport in Britain was the size and strength of the road lobby, the scope of which has already been explained. (26)

Since nationalisation and the winding up of the Railway Companies Association in 1948, the railway industry had been without any significant voice in Parliament. As Dr Michael Bonavia points out, "its influence at Westminster was far from negligible and the association was able



to provide MPs with briefs upon which to speak whenever railway matters were under discussion in Parliament. It represented a lobby or pressure group which was reasonably effective. (27)

RIS contact with MPs clearly revealed that the railways would never be given a fair deal until an effective group could again be built up in Parliament which was able to bring continuous and effective pressure on governments to provide the railways with a substantially greater share of national transport investment. The RIS, therefore, continued its efforts to re-form the Railway Reform Group of MPs and this was achieved in 1972 through Robert Adley, MP for Bristol North East.

The RIS was also pursuing its aims at BRB level as, in contrast with the Beeching days, its objectives were largely in accord with the policies of British Rail. Towards the end of 1971, Richard Marsh had succeeded Sir Henry Johnson as chairman of the board and in writing to congratulate him the RIS chairman Dr Caton expressed the hope that under his leadership, not only would the inter-city rail services continue to gain traffic but that grant-aided routes would be developed and abandoned lines restored, especially where alternative transport had failed to provide an acceptable solution.

Late in 1971, fears that the government intended to initiate a wholesale slaughter of the railway system, as a result of the withdrawal of grant aid, were allayed by a press report that a compromise solution seemed likely and that only some 15 services, mainly in rural areas, would be added to the closure list. However, past events had shown that one compromise plan could readily lead to another, and the only solution in the RIS view was to call a halt to all further closures except in very exceptional cases.

In the event, grant aid to rail services outside the London area was continued with the announcement, early in 1972 that all grants which expired at the end of 1971 would be extended for a further one or two years, except in eight cases, seven of which were services already under consideration for closure. The failure to renew any grant for more than two years, however, meant that these services were facing nothing better than a hand-to-mouth existence, and BR had little or no incentive to exploit any growth potential. The RIS believed grant aid should not just prop up ailing railways in the short term, but to encourage the long-term provision of the best possible services. In this way, benefit could be provided to the travelling public as well as an easement to the problems of environmental deterioration arising from the increased use of roads.

This situation prompted the National Council on Inland Transport to launch a *Save our Services* campaign on 1 January 1972, with support from the RIS, the Railway Development Association and other members of the council. The aim of the campaign was to press for grant aid to be given for from five to 10 years so that the future of the services might be assured. In furtherance of these aims, meetings would be held throughout the country to bring together for discussion of joint action organisations and individuals, including local authorities, who



One of the 10 books written by MP Robert Adley who helped to re-form the Railway Reform Group

were concerned about the threat of further cuts in the railway system.

One of the aims of the formation of local development groups by the RIS was to encourage communities to take joint action with British Railways to develop rail traffic. Groups already in existence were assisting with publicity campaigns and by making known local travel requirements, so that trains could be run in a manner most likely to attract business. One such group, the South Eastern Public Transport Development Group, was formed at a meeting held in Tonbridge on 10 September 1971 and comprised Ashford & Hastings Rail Users' Association, Brighton & Area Commuters Association, East Sussex Travellers' Association and Hastings, Bexhill & District Season Ticket Holders Association, Lewes-Uckfield Joint Rail Committee, Oxted & District Railway Travellers Association, Surrey & Kent Rail Travellers Association, Tonbridge & District Railway Travellers Association, and Tunbridge Wells & District Railway Travellers Association. Apart from campaigning for a comprehensive rail system, integrated with other forms of transport, its first aim was to secure the retention of the Ashford-Hastings line.

The RIS had for some time been pressing local authorities to give financial support to their local rail services, under the provisions of the 1968 Act and, late in 1971, came the welcome news that the Spalding-Peterborough line was to be reopened for peak hour passenger services by this means.

At local level, attempts had been made during the year to consolidate RIS activities in East Anglia and this led to the formation of a branch to cover the wider area, at a meeting, held in Norwich on 12 February 1972. The new branch included the former East Suffolk branch and the North Norfolk area but, owing to the size of the territory served and the sparsity of communications, contact between members had to be concentrated through a local newsletter, the first edition of which was issued in February 1972. It was, however, hoped to hold at least three meetings a year in various parts of the branch area. An early boost to its activities had been the news that Needham Market station (between Ipswich and Stowmarket) had been reopened from 6 December 1971, as a result of a subsidy from the local authority. An action group had also been formed at Newmarket to campaign for the retention of the town's rail links with Cambridge and Bury St Edmunds.

Following the appointment of an area representative for Greater Manchester, in August 1969 and the winding up of the Merseyside branch early in 1970, attempts had been made to consolidate RIS activities in north west England. At a meeting in Wigan on 18 September 1971, the two areas were merged to cover the wider area, as an interim move towards that end. At about the same



2018: The station at Needham Market, Suffolk, was built in 1846 to the designs of Frederick Barnes. His grand battlemented offices are no longer used by the railway so entrance to the platform is through the arch on the right
Picture by Geof Sheppard

time, the activities of the Northern England branch had seriously declined, again due to lack of personnel to fill the key positions, and at its AGM on 2 October 1971, it was resolved that the branch would have to be wound up from 1 January 1972, if no suitable branch officers could be found. Regretfully this course of action became necessary.

On Merseyside, the second public enquiry into the withdrawal of the Liverpool Central-Gateacre services had been held on 10 June and a similar enquiry into the Liverpool Lime Street-Southport service was held on 26 July. The RIS was represented at both. In the meantime, the station buildings at Central were being demolished prior to site operations in connection with the Inner Loop. Although withdrawal of the Lime Street-Southport services was subsequently approved, closure was deferred as Merseyside PTE agreed to subsidise the line until the Inner Loop was completed, The Liverpool Central-Gateacre line was to receive less generous treatment. Despite having been reconsidered by the TUCC which reported that "withdrawal of the train service would cause inconvenience to a large number of passengers", ministerial approval was also granted and the last trains ran on 15 April 1972. The fate of this service was largely determined by the attitude of the PTE and the fact that its continued operation would have impeded other rail developments proposed by BR and the PTE. In the spring of 1972, proposals were also published for the withdrawal of passenger services on the Runcorn-Helsby-Chester line.

In Greater Manchester, one of the RIS corporate members, the High Peak Railway Passengers Association, was continuing its work in publicising the Buxton and Hope Valley lines, a good example of work by a local development group. As a result improved passengers services between Manchester and Sheffield, via the Hope Valley, were introduced in May 1972. In the spring of that year, the passenger transport executive had raised no objection to proposals by BR to withdraw passenger services between Stockport and Stalybridge but it considered that the Oldham-Rochdale line should remain open for at least another year to enable its future



2023: The Trans Pennine Trail was created from former rail lines, including the CLC line through Gateacre and Knotty Ash, where the last trains ran in 1972. The trail is a 215-mile route for walkers and cyclists to travel from Hornsea on the Yorkshire coast to Southport on the Lancashire coast

potential to be considered in detail. Closure of the Bury-Rawtenstall line had, however, been approved but was deferred pending the consideration of possible private operation.

While on the subject of passenger transport areas, the RIS held a further meeting of its branch and area representatives to discuss developments on 18 March 1972, again in Birmingham. The general conclusions of the meeting were that while the PTEs had taken over responsibility for local rail services from 1 January 1972, they were still generally road biased, the GLC's policy towards the "Ringways" in London being a case in point. Long-term planning in particular areas was, however, more encouraging.

On Tyneside, while the PTE was luke warm to the existing BR services, they had plans for a new "underground" railway which would require a tremendous capital outlay. Its attitude to the existing services became more apparent early in 1972 when it was announced that the Riverside branch (Heaton to Percy Main) would be closed within a year.

The main reason stated by the passenger transport executive was that the cost of the line open was too great in proportion to the traffic it carried and that alternative transport services could be provided at much less cost.

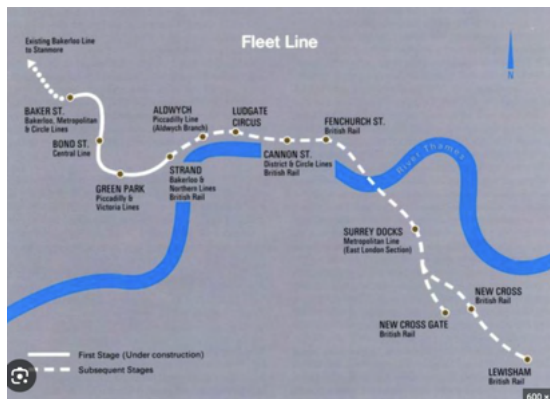
The figure quoted for the losses on the line was £40,000 per annum. Shipyard workers who would be affected by the closure subsequently submitted a petition, supported by a number of local MPs. It was, however, stressed by the PTE that this was a special case, and that its attitude to other lines was more favourable. It expected to have its rapid transit rail system operational by 1980 and by the summer of 1972 experimental borings had already commenced.

On Merseyside, BR was making a determined effort to boost local rail services with a new corporate image. The "Merseyrail" campaign included improvements to summer Sunday and weekday off-peak trains. The PTE published its report for the future development of a passenger transport system in the area in March 1972 – as required by the 1968 Act – the first by a PTE to appear. More than 20 new stations on local commuter lines were envisaged! One of the first proposals to be investigated would be the re-electrification of the line between Aintree (on the Liverpool Exchange-Ormskirk line) and Bootle New Strand (on the Liverpool Exchange-Southport line, with a new station called Giro to serve the National Giro bank building at Bootle. In addition to work on the Inner Loop, work had already started on a burrowing junction to expedite traffic flow at Hamilton Square station in Birkenhead.

(28)

In London, despite the prevailing attitude of the GLC, a 75% government grant was made towards the infrastructure of Stage 1 (Baker Street-Strand) of the Fleet underground line which was proposed to link Stanmore to Lewisham. A similar grant was made towards the cost of electrifying the BR suburban services from King's Cross and Moorgate to Royston via Welwyn Garden City and Hertford North.

Construction of the first part of the 3.4 mile London Heathrow Airport extension



1971 plans for London Underground Fleet line
London Transport Museum image

of the Piccadilly line had begun and the final section of London Transport's Victoria line between Victoria and Brixton was opened on 23 July 1971.

In Birmingham, consultants commissioned jointly by the city council and the department of the environment had recommended a £50 million scheme for a rail rapid transit system between Four Oaks and Longbridge. This would be a third-rail electric, 17 miles in length, line which would follow a new tunnel under the city centre and utilise existing lines to the north and south. Other similar lines were planned in the West Midlands conurbation. (29)

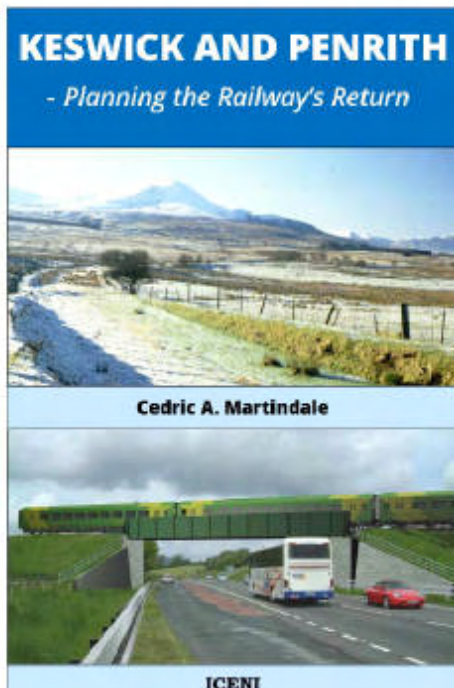
When the Greater Manchester passenger transport executive took over responsibility for local rail services, the *Manchester Evening News* printed a number of articles on railway themes including statements by the director of the passenger transport executive which gave cause to expect that railways would be allowed to play their full part in the transport organisation of the city. The new service on the Altrincham line was, however, giving cause for considerable criticism, particularly due to insufficient train capacity at peak periods.

The decision to suspend the activities of the RIS North of England branch, early in 1972, coincided with further disappointing news of closures. The Penrith-Keswick services were withdrawn on 5 March and while the TUCC had again reported that extreme hardship would be experienced if the Alston-Haltwhistle line closed there was strong evidence that the minister would in the end agree, a view which was to be proved correct.

In the north of Scotland, the TUCC had recommended in its report on the Dingwall-Kyle of Lochalsh line that closure should not take place until the proposed Ullapool-Stornaway vehicle ferry was ready for operation when the position would be re-examined.

In 1971, the line had experienced its heaviest summer season for many years and many privately chartered trains from various parts, both of Scotland and England, had used the line and were well patronised. Nevertheless consent was subsequently granted by the secretary of state for the environment, but only on the condition that closure would not be implemented before 1 January 1974. Torquil Nicolson, chairman of the Kyle Line Defence Committee later told the press: "We have now got two years grace in which to publicise this line as a tourist attraction and to modify its timetable to suit local and tourist means. (30) The RIS and the Scottish Railway Development Association united in an effort to convince British Rail that the line could be made to pay.

In north and central Wales, the enquiry into withdrawal of passenger services from the Cambrian Coast line had been held on 22-23 June 1971 and the RIS together with the RDA had submitted a joint objection. The TUCC subsequently recommended that the line should



**For information on the campaign to
reopen the line in 2023:
www.keswickrailway.com**

be retained and considered that widespread hardship would result if the service ceased and further was unable to suggest any alternative. On 9 February 1972, the matter was reopened with a further hearing to consider proposals for an alternative bus service which had been submitted by Crosville Motor Services Ltd. Following the second enquiry, the TUC reported that it could still see no alternative to alleviate hardship than to retain the rail service, a conclusion which was to lead to the subsequent reprieve of the line. While the RIS no longer had any formal representation in the area, a local action group had been formed to press for the retention of rail services on the Cambrian Coast line to which the RIS has given active support.

In North Wales, the RIS joint committee with the local authorities was to succeed in securing the reopening of Shotton Low Level station on the Chester-Holyhead line with the announcement late in 1971 that the department of the environment had agreed to make a 75% grant towards the £8,000 cost of the works, provided the local authorities produced the rest, and this was effected on 21 August 1972. The restored interchange between the Wrexham-New Brighton/Birkenhead North line and the North Wales main line provided shorter and cheaper journeys between many Wirral stations and holiday resorts west of the Dee. The reopening was particularly welcomed by users of stations between Shotton and Wrexham who, for the past years, had been denied convenient rail access to their nearest seaside towns.

In Devon and Cornwall, attempts were being made to restore a passenger service on the Barnstaple-Ilfracombe line under private operation. In the meantime, the secretary of state for the environment had approved closure of the Paignton-Kingswear line but the service was to remain in operation with a temporary subsidy from the county council and Torbay county borough council pending its takeover by the Dart Valley Light Railway Company.

While RIS activities in the north of England and the more outlying areas had suffered a sharp decline in recent years, a more welcome situation existed in the south. In Wessex, the new branch was actively dealing with its threatened lines, namely Alton-Winchester and Wareham-Swanage, and was holding regular meetings for the benefit of members including the issue of a local newsletter.

Despite these efforts, services on the Wareham-Swanage line were finally withdrawn on 2 January 1972. After two TUC enquiries and two recommendations that the service should be retained, the minister nevertheless approved closure of the Alton-Winchester line subject to provision of alternative buses. The deputy clerk to Winchester Rural District Council tried to meet the minister with a deputation on the issue but was refused an interview. The closure decision caused much local resentment because of the dubious figures presented by BR and the lack of consideration which it gave to a 144% increase in passengers. Pleas for the



Shotton low level station, reopened 1972, connects with the Borderlands line
Map: Wrexham-Bidston Rail Users Association

retention of the line on the grounds that the track at either end were electrified, that the Mid-Hants route would be a secondary link to the South Hampshire zone, that the travelling time of a replacement bus service would be twice that of the train and nowhere as attractive to customers, were all ignored by the minister.

BR had also issued notice of its intention to close the Maiden Newton-Bridport line in Dorset, The RIS branch subsequently published proposals for new services on the Weymouth-Westbury-Bristol line (including the Bridport branch) combined with a bus integration scheme which were submitted to the South West Economic Planning Council and received good publicity. Nevertheless, efforts were also made to oppose closure and an objection was submitted to the TUCC, the enquiry for which was held in March 1972. However, the RIS intended to oppose any road proposals which might preclude restoration of rail services on the Swanage line, and the local council was keeping a close watch on the effects of the closure during the holiday months, particularly as regards road traffic congestion and loss of patronage to Weymouth.

In London and the Home Counties, RIS activities continued with local meetings and visits, together with action on local transport issues, not the least of which were threatened lines. Two small parties of members visited the power signal box at Willesden Junction in May 1971 and in November, members were entertained to an evening of films by the German National Tourist Office, on a mainly railway theme. A very successful members slide evening was also held in February 1972.

Early in June 1971, a public meeting had been held by the London Passenger Action Confederation, a federation of transport users in Greater London, founded in March 1970, which was to lead to close cooperation with the RIS. Its initial interest was with the future of the Broad Street-Richmond line, about which the meeting was principally concerned. Local committees were subsequently set up in each of the boroughs served by the line to campaign for the retention and improvement of the services, the RIS branch being principally associated with the Islington committee. Early in 1972, a representative of the RIS was also appointed to Islington's railway panel.

In addition to the North London line, the federation was also active in a campaign for the Epping-Ongar line and, as a result of considerable opposition to the proposal, the minister later refused consent for closure, owing to the inadequacy of buses to deal with the displaced traffic. Following representations from the RIS, the policy and resources committee of



London's Broad Street station which closed in 1986. It was demolished and replaced by Broadgate, an office and retail complex.
Picture: Ben Brooksbank

the Greater London Council changed its mind regarding the Romford-Upminster line, and advised the minister that it should be retained until the road situation had been clarified and/or major maintenance was required. It was still, however, not prepared to make any financial contribution to the line's continued operation.

In the meantime, the campaign for the Ashford-Hastings line had continued and in a letter to *The Times* of 1 November 1971, the mayors of Rye and Winchelsea had pointed out that "one of its significant attributes was that it formed part of the only direct route between the Channel ports and the south coast holiday resorts from Hastings to Brighton and beyond" and would form a significant link to the Channel Tunnel.

The campaign by the East Sussex Travellers' Association also continued with a meeting with representatives of BR to discuss the possible reopening of the Lewes-Uckfield line. The TUCC enquiry into the closure of the Bletchley-Bedford line had been held on 28 July 1971 and considerable opposition had been encountered. BR had also confirmed its intention to withdraw passenger services from the East Croydon-Mitcham-Wimbledon line.

More positive developments were the announcement, both in connection with new towns, that a station was to be provided on the Upminster-Southend line to serve Basildon, and that the station at Stevenage, on the Great Northern suburban line, was to be rebuilt in a more convenient location, both at the expense of the respective development corporations.


The RIS had also been attempting to revive interest in the Three Counties area – its oldest branch – by the issue of a local newsletter, a move which was to lead to its eventual restoration.

Late in 1971, the RIS continental sub committee had been reorganised and merged with the fares subcommittee to form a new fares and facilities sub committee but this still concentrated on connections with European services. With the prospect of Britain's entry into the European Economic Community, the sub committee was directed to investigate the possible effects on the country's railway system and of the construction of a Channel Tunnel. In support of the latter project, the RIS, on 10 May 1972, held a joint meeting with the Railway Development Association at which Dr Michael Bonavia, at the time BR officer in charge of Channel Tunnel matters, gave a talk entitled *Main Line into Europe*. The meeting was very well attended and, in his talk, Dr Bonavia dealt with the impact of the tunnel on the railway network, particularly in the south-east of England.

He also stated that if the tunnel were built, the London terminus would probably be at White City. However, because of the restricted loading gauge in Britain, through running of European rolling stock to the remainder of the system would be severely inhibited. A detailed report of the meeting appeared in the *Railway Review* of 26 May 1972. (31)

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Advertisement in *The Times* 1972

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referred to earlier, the Rural District Councils Association held a conference in London on 19 October 1971, at which the RIS was represented. Among the speakers was Eldon Griffiths MP, parliamentary under-secretary of state for the environment, who made a number of misleading statements regarding the costs of subsidising rural rail services. These were refuted by the RIS in a subsequent press statement. (32) The proceedings of the conference were also published by the RDCA, together with other useful information on rural transport services. (33)

In accordance with agreed practice, the RIS 1972 AGM was held outside London and took place in Yeovil, Somerset, on 15 April. The meeting was organised by the RIS Wessex branch and the venue was of significance, being the constituency of MP John Peyton, the minister of transport industries.

RIS chairman Michael Caton, in his address, was able to report that the success of railway modernisation had been demonstrated beyond doubt, especially by the highly successful inter-city services which continued to attract new business in the face of fierce competition. Plans by British Rail were well advanced for the introduction of trains to run at 125-150 mph, compared with which 70 mph on a motorway would seem like a trip back into the nineteenth century. Furthermore, this was being achieved using existing assets without the destruction of the environment inherent in motorway construction.

At the meeting, it was also agreed that the RIS national committee should meet less often and that RIS affairs should be run by an executive committee. It was agreed that, as far as possible, the boundaries of the RIS branches and areas should be adjusted to conform with these of the projected territories of BR.

Two of the resolutions passed at the meeting were significant as an indication of changing public attitudes to transport in Britain. One resolution pressing for legislation to require the fitting of programmed fuel injection devices to road and rail vehicles used for public transport, was an indication of increasing public awareness of the effects of environmental pollution. A second resolution, calling on BR to harmonise its operations with those of continental countries, was a direct result of Britain's impending entry into the EEC and the proposed building of a Channel Tunnel. A number of the resolutions were subsequently brought to the government's attention by MP Robert Adley.

Following prolonged negotiations in settling the railwaymen's pay claim, the *Economist* had published in its issue of 6 May 1972 an article entitled *The Unnecessary Railways* which advocated the closure of much of the railway system and its replacement by express buses. The society was quick to counter these assertions and this was to be the beginning of what was to become a protracted correspondence with its editor over its consistently anti-rail attitude.



The Economist: Hostile to rail

Earlier, Richard Marsh, chairman of the British Railways Board, had stated in a lecture at the Royal Society of Arts on 23 February: "It used to be believed that all you had to do to make the railways more profitable was to make them smaller" (a theory propounded by Dr Stewart Joy in the latter part of his book *The Train the Ran Away*).

"That is being totally disproved. One of the most expensive railway networks we have looked at was one of the smallest, because the inescapable costs that you cannot get out from under

are such that they can swallow up the benefits that you receive from the reduced operating costs." (34)

Towards the end of 1972, however, came evidence of a further threat to the railways, with the disclosure by the *Sunday Times* of the contents of a "Blue Book" which was a confidential report prepared by the Department of the Environment which appeared to be a re-hash of Beeching II.

The disclosure of the report, advocating closure of some 40% of the railway system caused public outcry. Sole justification for the measures was the net annual saving of £9 million, after social costs had been deducted. To produce these savings, the travelling public in all parts of the country would have had to be subjected to severe hardship on an excessive scale and in the circumstances which prevailed no government was likely to have implemented it. Was the leak possibly to soften public criticism for a compromise plan to be issued later?

The society wasted no time in mobilising the assistance of sympathetic MPs and the minister's reply to Dafydd Elystan-Morgan (Cardiganshire) in the House of Commons on 17 October is of interest:-

Mr Peyton: "The document to which the *Sunday Times* drew attention on 8 October is merely one of a series of studies undertaken by officials of my department and by British Rail themselves. This process which is not yet complete is made necessary by the financial position of the board. Future policy will not be decided before there has been the most careful consideration of the alternatives and costs attaching to each. Meanwhile I am sure that the House will wish to avoid premature conclusions about the results of these studies and will have in mind the grants and loans already made by the government to the railways – £110 million in 1971 and estimated £160 million in 1972. These figures include for the first time grants for 75% of the cost of new rolling stock and signalling in urban areas. I regret very much that this confidential working document should have been disclosed and that its publication out of context should have given rise to widespread and unnecessary anxiety." (35)



**Dafydd Elystan-Morgan
MP for Cardiganshire
Picture by Godfrey
Argent**

Gerard Fiennes summed up the position in a magazine article as follows: "Democracy, so it seems, is still alive in this country, and kicking. For, be sure, it has been public opinion and not the sheiks or the boffins of the ministers who have turned policy back to front. The sheiks came in after-the event. The boffins produced a plan, prematurely leaked, which out-axed Beeching. The ministers did not pronounce until in very large numbers we, the Great British Public, had had our say." (36)

Meanwhile the SOS Campaign had continued to press for a fairer deal for grant-aided services and at a delegate conference held in London on 21 September 1972, the following resolution was passed:

"This meeting, representing the organisations listed below, calls on the government to stop

further rail closures, both passenger and freight, because of the mounting threat to the quality of life of increasing road traffic and also because previous closures have in fact failed to benefit British Rail's finances. It further urges the government to renew forthwith all present grants for unremunerative but socially necessary lines and services for at least three years, and to extend the future grant period to a minimum of five years, which alone will enable British Rail to operate and effect the necessary improvements in these services in conditions of stability and not under the threat of withdrawal of grant aid at short notice. It also urges the government to separate major capital expenditures on these lines from annual grant costs and to pay such expenditures as infrastructure grants as and when needed."

The resolution, to which the RIS was a signatory, was forwarded to the Department of the Environment and a copy sent to 200 MPs, with a covering letter. A further meeting was held, on 5 December to press for the renewal of all grants for the following year and for longer periods. At the meeting, a large number of speakers advocated complete electrification of the present system as the most successful way of attracting new business to the railways. Opposition to the road "juggernauts" was becoming more widespread.

Lord Kinnoull expressed his confidence that railways were on the threshold of a revival. Never had there been such a good case for turning to the railways to relieve our overcrowded cities. Most important of all was public opinion on this issue.

Finally, late in 1972, after a long campaign by the Romford-Upminster Rail Users' Association, assisted by the RIS, came the news that- the Secretary of State for the Environment had refused consent to the closure of the line. RIS chairman Michael Caton, who was also chairman of the Romford association, was interviewed by BBC Radio London on the day that the decision was announced. This was, in fact, the second occasion on which consent to closure had been refused; the previous being in 1965. The Department of the Environment had reported that earnings had increased substantially since 1970 and there was scope for further increase. The department also suggested more economical methods of working the line. This news was of considerable encouragement to the vigorous campaign with BR to publicise the Romford-Upminster line.

During 1972, Great Britain acceded to the Treaty of Rome and became a member of the European Economic Community on 1 January 1973. The years to follow were to see some marked changes in-government policy towards the railways, many of which were due to entirely outside influences. The extent to which membership of the EEC was to be responsible for these will be dealt with in the following chapter.

Notes to Chapter 5

- (1) Text of letter from the ministry of transport to RIS chairman dated 24 July 1968.
- (2) The RIS costings were checked by its consultants but were based generally on the figures given in G F Fiennes' book *I tried to run a railway*. 1967 p 115.
- (3) R E Burroughs *The Great Isle of Wight Train Robbery*. 1968. p 23.
- (4) Roger Calvert in *Transport Disintegrated*. 1973. P 63-67 provides numerous examples of the shortcomings of the costings prepared by British Railways for many of the services closed under the Beeching Plan and also questions the extent to which they complied with the recommendations of Sir William Carrington in his report to the Minister of Transport in 1963. Ibid p.69.
- (5) Ministry of transport. *Railway Policy* (Cmnd 3439) HMSO. November 1967. Para 2.12 and Appendix D.
- (6) Ibid. Para 2.14. p 19.
- (7) Hansard. House of Commons 15 November 1968. Col172-80 (written answer)
- (8) Railway policy, op cit Sec 3 p 25. It will, however, be seen from Calvert, op cit p 69. Table 33 that "Carrington" and "Cooper Bros" were in fact two distinct methods and that the latter merely served to accentuate the alleged losses even further.
- (9) Kent & Sussex Courier. 15 November 1968.
- (10) East Anglian Economic Planning Council. *East Anglia; a study*. HMSO. October 1968.
- (11) Burroughs, op cit p 40.
- (12) Under Part 11. Sec 9 of the Act.
- (13) Stewart Joy. *The Train that Ran Away*. 1973. p 95, para 3
- (14) Hansard. House of Commons. 18 December 1970. col 395-401 (written answer).
- (15) Light Railway Transport League. *The Way Ahead - with Speedrail*. 1970
- (16) Ministry of Transport. *The Cambrian Coast Line - A Cost/Benefit Analysis*. HMSO. 1969.
- (17) RIS *Progress Report* No 81. December 1989. p10.
- (18) P S Bagwell. *The Transport Revolution from 1770*. 1974. p343
- (19) Newsletter of the National Association of Railroad Passengers. July 1970.
- (20) N P C Madsen and J C Honeysett. *Towards 1990 - An Independent Proposal for the Integration of Public Transport in Wessex*. 1970.
- (21) Cambrian Coast Report, op cit
- (22) Memorandum to the Ministry of Transport on the Cambrian Coast Survey. RIS. February 1971.
- (23) As contained in *The Way Ahead with Speedrail* op cit
- (24) Ministry of Transport. Committee on Rural Bus Services. Report. HMSO. March 1961
- (25) *Eastern Daily Press*. 11 November 1970.
- (26) Mick Hamer. *Wheels within Wheels: a study of the road lobby*. 1974.
- (27) M R Bonavia. *The Organisation of British Railways*. 1971. p 33-4.
- (28) Merseyside Passenger Transport Authority and Merseyside Passenger Transport Executive. *A Transport Plan for Merseyside*. March 1972.

- (29) Report by De Leuw, Chadwick & Oh Eocha. May 1971.
- (30) *Progress Report* no 90. March 1972. p15.
- (31) Magazine of the National Union of Railwaymen.
- (32) *Daily Telegraph*. 28 October 1971.
- (33) Rural District Councils Association. *Rural Transport - What Future Now?* November 1971.
- (34) Journal of the Royal Society of Arts. *The Future of British Railways*. May 1972. p 379.
- (35) Hansard. House of Commons. 17 October 1972. col 47.
- (36) *Trains and Railways*. New English Library. Vol 2. No 5. p 169.

Changing Directions

By the beginning of 1973, the environmental movement was well established with such organisations as Friends of the Earth (founded 1970) and the Conservation Society (1966). There was an increasing public awareness of the effects of environmental pollution.

In 1971, the technical adviser to the RIS Wessex branch, Mr J A Butler, had prepared a number of papers on the subject *Diesel fumes; an increasing hazard to health* and *The diesel engine pollutionwise* which he had issued in pamphlet form for distribution from a stand which he mounted at the Environmental Pollution Control Exhibition held at Olympia that year.

A letter which he sent to the editor of the RIS *Progress Report* which was published in the September 1972 edition, also served to throw further light on the subject:

It is my belief, from talking to a number of rail passengers and others, that public feeling about the objectionableness of diesel fume concentrations on the railways has reached a point where it is causing passengers to choose road travel as an alternative, because the latter has less concentrated fumes. This is even though virtually none of them know the extent of the hidden danger from residual carcinogenic hydrocarbon particles. These collect particularly in enclosed premises, like on railways, and even in the rolling stock itself; and remain virulent indefinitely. This collection in rail premises is many times worse than it need be; if only independently driven air brake compressors were provided so that main engines could be switched off in stations and at all stops of any duration. The railways have shown themselves unwilling to entertain, so far, fume reducing modifications to these engines, such as programme injection. The aggregate fuel saving would be a big contribution to the reduction of the railways deficit, as a diesel idling, burns about 25% of maximum fuel per revolution.

In the United States, increasing emphasis was also being placed on the finite resources of the world's fuel supplies and the relative merits of the different means of transport in their demands for energy. In the magazine of the RIS American counterpart it was reported that Professor Richard A Rice of Pittsburgh's Carnegie-Mellon University had devised an index of transport efficiency which indicated that a 10-car double-decker suburban railroad train was the most efficient people mover available. Such a train could haul 200 persons one mile on a gallon of fuel. Buses handled 120 passenger miles per gallon but the automobile was far down the ladder of efficiency at 30 passenger miles per gallon.(1)

An article of similar relevance also appeared in the January 1972 issue of *The Ecologist* under the title of *Blueprint for Survival*. Of special interest was a section which dealt with the relative merits of road and rail. The argument was definitely in favour of rail, for it was stated that "the power requirements for transporting freight by road are five to six times greater than by rail and the pollution is correspondingly higher. The energy outlay for the cement and steel required to build a motorway is three to four times greater than that required to build a railway, and the land area necessary for the former is estimated to be four times more than for the latter." (2)

Sir Richard Way, at the time chairman of the London Transport Executive, summed up the

situation in a speech at the Common Market capital cities conference in 1973 when he stated: "If 700 people wanted to come to London, they would fill 500 cars, 14 buses, or one train. (3) In 1971, the Department of the Environment published the reports of its two pilot studies of rural transport, in Devon and in West Suffolk (referred to in Chapter 5). In each report, it was stated that trips by public transport "tended to cost somewhat more than the cost of petrol to the person travelling by private transport." (4) The RIS press officer pointed out to the Department that "this implied that the journeys surveyed were cheaper by private car than by public transport, which was in fact totally untrue, because the cost of running a private car included many other 'on cost'".

The average cost at the time, according to figures released by the Automobile Association was in fact between £8 and £9 a week. (5)

The department replied that it was "very well aware ... of the difference between the total costs of motoring ... and the perceived costs of a motorist once he had a car," but went on to say that "in practice it confused the motorists who were completing the questionnaire to do it in any other way." The RIS responded that, by carrying out the surveys in this manner, the department was clouding the issue and that the true costs of motoring were being obscured.

In March 1973, it was reported that the Ecological Foundation had set up an independent commission, under the chairmanship of the Bishop of Kingston and including Sir John Betjeman, a vice-president of the RIS to examine the present use of and plans for all forms of transport in the United Kingdom, domestic and international; to establish criteria for a national transport policy; and to make specific recommendations. Its subsequent report (from which this chapter takes its title) will be dealt with later.

In the meantime the RIS's interest in the development of passenger transport authorities had intensified and two further meetings of branch and area representatives from these areas had been held in Birmingham on 25 November 1972 and in Manchester on 17 February 1973. The conclusion reached at the latter meeting was that while adverse trends in urban transport policy appeared to have been halted at least for the time being, the matter needed to be kept under close review.

In the areas themselves, the technical team carrying out the Greater Manchester Transportation Study had published its report in March 1972 and stated that a railway tunnel under the centre of Manchester would be environmentally advantageous, as it would reduce the number of car trips made in the central area and would enable a decrease to be made in the number of buses required to distribute passengers within the city centre. (6) By the end of the year the necessary parliamentary powers had been obtained in the Selnecc (Manchester Central area Railway etc) Act 1972, which sanctioned a new electrified railway system, the chief feature of which included a new tunnel from Higher Ardwick

ELIZABETH II



1972 CHAPTER XLIV

An Act to empower the South East Lancashire and North East Cheshire Passenger Transport Executive and the British Railways Board to construct works and to acquire lands; and for other purposes.

[9th August 1972]

(south-east of Piccadilly) to Queen's Road (north-east of Victoria) 2.5 miles long and at a maximum depth of 80 feet together with new low-level stations at Piccadilly, Whitworth Street/Princes Street, St Peters Square/Albert Square, Market Street/Cross Street and Victoria. The passenger transport executive had also announced at the end of November its development plan – as required by the Transport Act 1968 – the main feature of which included a system of improved rail services fed by buses, a new fast-transport system of 20 miles in the central area (estimated cost £100 million) and possibly a second underground railway, in addition to that already planned and for which borehole trials had been made. The total cost of the plan was put at £200 million. (7)

On Merseyside, tunnelling for the Liverpool "Inner Loop" had made considerable progress and the bulk of the excavation was due to be completed by the middle of 1973. On 1 August 1972, it had been announced that the Department of the Environment was to pay a 75% grant towards the cost of building an Exchange-Central rail link (estimated at £11,250,000). This would provide a route for electric trains from Wigan Wallgate to Hough Green (near Widnes). British Rail had also applied for a 75% grant towards the cost of electrifying the line between Rock Ferry and Chester.

Meanwhile on Tyneside, the ambitious project for a rapid transit system was coming under increasing fire from local councillors, mainly on the question of cost. Despite these pressures, which also emanated from people whose property would be affected, the director general of the passenger transport executive stated, towards the end of 1972, that only eight houses and four shops would have to be demolished. Faced with these doubts, the passenger transport executive urged Mr Peyton (minister for transport Industries) to give early approval for the £65 million plan. Ominously the authority had said that if approval was not given, the only alternative that it could foresee was the complete withdrawal of Tyneside's rail services and their replacement by buses. At the same time, it emphasised that the £65 million required would only build six miles of urban motorway.

By March 1973, the plans had been approved by the government which had agreed to make a grant of £49 million towards the cost. There were still, however, some snags to be overcome, particularly the siting of a large bus-rail terminal at Heworth. The old Newcastle-Ponteland line was to be used as far as Kenton Bank Foot, 1.5 miles from Newcastle but the Northumberland parliamentary committee was pressing for the line to run to the airport as well.

The West Midlands Passenger Transport Authority had published its development plan on the same day as the Manchester PTA. The West Midlands proposals would cost £15 million and consist mainly of improving the railways south of Birmingham and developing the bus routes to the north. There were no firm proposals for fast public transport in the central area. It was however planned to develop the Birmingham-Coventry train service in time for the opening of the National Exhibition Centre in 1976 and to build up the Birmingham-Redditch train



John Peyton, minister for transport industries. He was made Baron Peyton of Yeovil in 1983 after standing unsuccessfully against Mrs Thatcher in a 1975 contest to lead the Conservative party. Picture: NPG

service to serve Redditch New Town. New stations were planned at Longbridge and Birmingham University and it was proposed to restore the station at Five Ways. (8)

At local level RIS attempts to revive the activities of the former Three Counties branch had proved successful. Interest had been renewed mainly because of the threat to the Cheltenham to Stratford-upon-Avon (via Honeybourne) line. Late in 1972 it was announced that the remaining freight services on the line would be transferred to other routes but this was later denied. In the spring of 1973, following representations from RIS, BR announced that it had decided not to close the line as it would be required as an alternative route for slower moving freight trains consequent upon introduction of high speed services between South Wales and Birmingham. The line had also featured in proposals put forward by RIS for the future of railways in Cheltenham, the adoption of which would have been of minimal cost to BR. These were in direct contrast to those produced by the consultants to Cheltenham Town Council which would have caused massive disruption and severance of the line for a new road between Lansdown Junction and Cheltenham Racecourse. As a result of BR's decision, the council was forced to change its ideas with greater emphasis on traffic restriction and the more effective use of public transport. This revised policy was to go a long way to preserve the essential character of Cheltenham as an outstanding example of a planned Regency town. Prior to the announcement, RIS had been in negotiation with BR for a weekend service for passengers between Gloucester and Stratford and a trial run, using a chartered three car diesel multiple unit was run on Sunday 13 May 1973. RIS had also been prominent in opposing the threatened closure of Stonehouse (Burdett Road) station on the Stroud Valley line between Swindon and Gloucester.

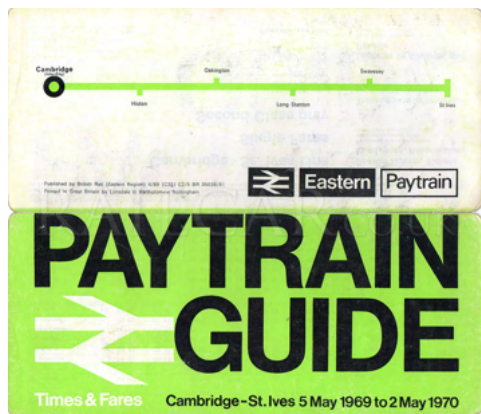
The activities of RIS's newly formed East Anglian branch had been consolidated with meetings in Bury St Edmunds on 17 June 1972 and in Ipswich on 7 October. At the latter meeting, members had been addressed by Mr M Muncie, Norwich divisional commercial manager of BR on the future potential for freight and parcels traffic in the area. At the same time, he had announced that the division's inter-city trains were to be speeded up and the pay train fare structure reorganised.

RIS was actively cooperating with the Newmarket and District Rail Travellers' Association and the East Suffolk Travellers' Association, branches of which had been formed at Lowestoft and Felixstowe.

The RIS branch AGM was held in Norwich on 27 January 1973 and was followed by a public meeting when Dr T R Gourvish, of the School of Social Studies at the University of East Anglia, spoke on the need for a strong rail lobby, the problems of grant aid and the ways in which public transport – and consequently the environment – could be improved.

Meanwhile negotiations had been continuing for the restoration of a passenger service on the Cambridge-St Ives line which had closed on 5 October 1970. Six local j187

authorities were taking an active interest in the scheme to run pay trains on the 14-mile line, the estimated cost of reopening being



£110,000. There were also proposals to reopen Higham station on the Cambridge-Ipswich line, between Newmarket and Bury St Edmunds. During its first year the RIS branch had achieved a 40% increase in membership and issued a newsletter at quarterly intervals to supplement the information contained in the national *Progress Report*.

In London and the Home Counties, increasing opposition was being encountered to the proposed orbital "Ringway" roads which formed a major element of the Greater London Development Plan. In the summer of 1972, members of the RIS branch committee, together with RIS chairman Dr Michael Caton, took part in a BBC Radio London phone-in programme in the *Platform* series in which the British Road Federation was attempting to justify the Ringway motorway proposals. Public response to the road building plan was particularly hostile and Dr Caton was able to reply to some of the points raised suggesting an alternative strategy for transport in London.

The year 1972 had also seen the reprieve of the Romford-Upminster line but at the same time consent had been granted to closure of the Bletchley-Bedford and Colchester-Sudbury lines, although as we shall see later their deferred closure date was to lead to eventual reprieve. Consent to closure of the Watford-Croxley Green line, was however refused.

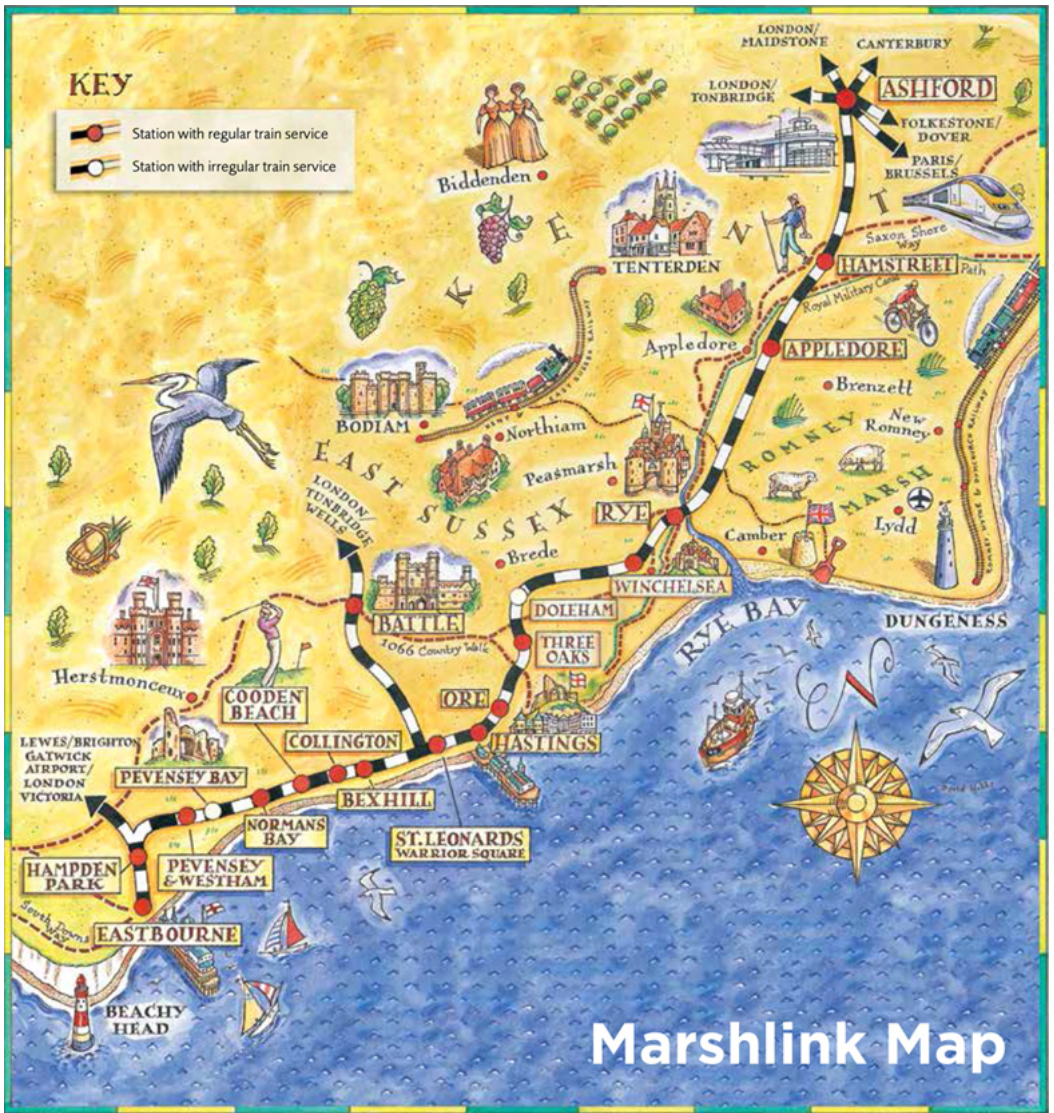
Meanwhile, the Ashford-Hastings line had become something of a cause celebre. In December 1972, the Secretary of State for the Environment had, once again, agreed to closure subject to the traffic commissioners granting licences for substitute buses. The local rail users association had, however, in a statement pointed out that in 1967 the TUCC had declared that closure would cause severe hardship and that in 1970 the traffic commissioners had rejected a previous application for bus licences. Moreover, according to the rail users, "it was obvious that the National Bus Company had no wish to operate the services... Since 1970, bus services between Rye and Ashford had collapsed from 76 to 2 journeys per week. The majority of substitute buses would be withdrawn as soon as possible (after two years)... leaving the area with no effective public transport."

Among other points made by the rail users were that "the line could be of considerable regional strategic value; was part of a potentially vital substitute coastal rail route which would save the attractive coastal towns of East Sussex from being wrecked by heavy lorries and other traffic to and from the continent", "about half a million journeys were made on the line each year" and "the route carried much freight traffic. (9)

A fresh hearing before the traffic commissioners had been fixed for 3-6 April 1973 but was subsequently postponed indefinitely at the request of the local authorities, and after pressure by many other groups including the RIS, the rail users' association and the National Council on Inland Transport. In a circular letter supporting the statement made by the rail users, the council stated that "the fight for the line was in the nature of a test case, the outcome of which could affect future policy on rail closures, everywhere." Meanwhile, the local authorities were negotiating with BR with a view to providing financial assistance for retention of the line.

RIS branch activities included an evening railtour, using scheduled services over lines in north and east London early in 1972 and an illustrated lecture in February 1973 when John Ogilvie C Eng, MIMech E, explained his revolutionary "Keyhole Plan" for rationalising railway services south of the Thames in a way which could increase commuter capacity by 100% and enable more freight and parcels traffic to be conveyed during off-peak periods.

While a closure date of 30 December 1972 had been announced for the Bletchley-Bedford line, an appeal by local authorities against licences for the replacement buses led to indefinite



Ashford-Hastings was threatened with closure in 1972. It is part of the Marshlink route which in 2024 is supported by the Southeast Communities Rail Partnership

postponement. [In 2024, the line is still operating and is at the heart of the rebuilt East West Railway] On another encouraging note, Southern Region was taking further active steps – by seeking the help of local authorities – to boost traffic on the cross-country Reading-Redhill-Tonbridge line.

In the spring of 1973, British Rail announced its plans for the electrification of lines over the following ten to twenty years.

In London and the Home Counties, it was hoped to extend third rail to East Grinstead and Uckfield and the Marylebone-Aylesbury lines (via Amersham and High Wycombe); 25kV overhead electrification was also proposed for the Paddington-Reading-Oxford, Bishops

Stortford-Cambridge and St Pancras-Bedford lines. Meanwhile, good progress was being made with electrification of the Great Northern suburban lines, and it was hoped to have full inner suburban services (Moorgate-Welwyn Garden City/Hertford) operational by the spring of 1976 with the extension to Royston to be completed the following year. To enable this work to be carried out, the Northern City Line (Moorgate-Drayton Park) would have to be closed for a time. A further much-needed improvement within this system was the subsequent opening of the new station at Stevenage on 23 July 1973.

A more strategic appraisal of rail transport in the area was heralded by the announcement, in the spring of 1973 of the appointment of a study team jointly by the Department of the Environment, the Greater London Council, London Transport and BR under the chairmanship of Sir David Barran, to provide a sound basis for planning the future of London's railway services.

In Wessex, the RIS branch had turned its attention to opposing the Portswood Link motorway proposals in Southampton but was also concentrating on the improvement of local rail services. Those from Alton to Winchester were, however, withdrawn on 5 February 1973 despite efforts by the local authorities to provide financial support for their retention. It was nevertheless hoped that running powers into the island platform at Alton would be secured by the Mid-Hants Railway, which planned to run a railcar service – steam at weekends – between Alton and Alresford. The RIS branch was also associated with the South Hampshire Transport Campaign, formed in December 1972, to coordinate the activities of local environmental groups, unions and railway societies with the aim of securing an integrated public transport system in the South Hampshire basin and industrial hinterland.

Further west, the Bridport branch had had a stay of execution for three months and at the time, it appeared it might survive through the summer of 1973. There was also ministerial optimism over the future of the Salisbury-Exeter line and BR had also launched a campaign to increase patronage on the Bournemouth-Weymouth line. In the case of the latter the RIS distributed 10,000 pro-rail leaflets in the Bournemouth area pointing out the financial advantages of travel by rail.

Meanwhile in the north of Scotland, the campaign continued to prevent closure of the Inverness-Kyle of Lochalsh line, due to be implemented on 1 January 1974 and the following points were put forward in support of the line's retention:-

- That road improvements were not scheduled to be completed until 1974-7
- That there were proposals to set up a torpedo testing range off Wester Boss.
- The possible development of oil drilling operations off the west coast of Scotland.

In 1972 there had been an increase in passenger use of the line of 33%, as compared with 1971, itself a record year. There was also a hope that Ross and Cromarty County Council might provide financial assistance to continue the passenger



Kyle line map by Cnrb (Wikipedia)

service after the end of 1973 provided other local authorities were prepared to pay a share of the cost.

On the Inverness-Wick/Thurso line, a welcome development was the reopening as an unstaffed halt of Alness station – between Dingwall and Invergordon – on 7 May 1973. Since its closure in June 1970, circumstances had changed with the construction of a new British Aluminium smelter at Invergordon and the construction of a dry dock at Nigg for the assembly of North Sea oil rigs. As a result, Alness had developed into a dormitory town. At the same time, the Scottish Railwat Development Association had been pressing for better connections between buses and trains in the Highlands and had also, in September 1972, changed its name to the Scottish Association for Public Transport.

In north-east England, while the RIS local branch had been disbanded, its former secretary continued to keep the RIS committee informed of developments in the area and initiated action where appropriate. By the autumn of 1972, the threat to the Riverside branch of the North Tyneside lines had intensified with the posting of closure notices and the RIS was among the objectors. In an effort to defend the proposal, the Tyneside passenger transport executive stressed that economies had to be made and claimed that its local rail services had lost about £1 million in 1971 and that by June 1972 these had already reached £1.5 million. The inquiry into the proposal was held on 28 September 1972 but, apart from the RIS representative, only 10 others were present. One objector did, however, submit a petition with over 400 signatures. Unlike the earlier occasion when the line had been threatened, no local authority objection was received.

The TUCC subsequently reported to the Secretary of State (Environment) that hardship would be limited to about 50 users, mostly of St Peters and Walker stations, but that they were unable to suggest any practicable means of alleviating it. Nevertheless, the minister approved the closure but not before 20 July 1973 to allow sufficient time for road service licences to be obtained for the augmented bus services.

In the meantime, the minister had finally consented to closure of the Alston-Haltwhistle line but again, not until May 1975, to give time for improvement of the road system in the area, a project which it was estimated would cost the government at least £300,000. Northumberland County Council had studied 10 potential routes for a new road costing between £306,000 and £577,000. In its opinion, the cheaper schemes were non starters because of their vulnerability to blockage by snow. On the evidence available, the council was still strongly opposed to the line's closure and accordingly commenced negotiations to purchase it, a move which was strongly supported by Haltwhistle and Alstonrural district councils together with the Northumbria Tourist Board. The South Tynedale Railway Preservation Society was subsequently set up with a view to running the line.

In north-west England, the RIS had lodged an objection to the withdrawal of passenger services between Stockport and Stalybridge, the enquiry for which was held on 19 September 1972. In the RIS's opinion, the service had considerable value as a connecting link between trains from Crewe and the South and TransPennine trains to Yorkshire and north-east England. On these grounds, there was a strong case for its retention, at least until Manchester's Pic-Vic tunnel could be completed, a view which was to be largely accepted by the minister in his subsequent reprieve of the line.

Meanwhile, RIS corporate member, the High Peak Railway Passengers' Association, was assisting a joint committee of local authorities set up as a result of doubts over the future of

grant aid for the Manchester-Buxton line. A cost/benefit survey of the line was subsequently carried out by a team from Manchester University, assisted by members of the association, in July and October 1972. There was strong local feeling in favour of its retention and also pressure for the line to be electrified.

Despite attempts to retain a service under private enterprise, passenger trains between Bury and Rawtenstall were withdrawn from 5 June 1972. [In 2024, the route is part of the heritage East Lancashire Railway]

Members of the RIS had also been in contact with the Chester-Runcorn Rail Users' Association which had prepared an excellent case against the line's closure at the TUC enquiry on 28 September 1972. The TUC, however, reached the conclusion that hardship would be restricted to schoolchildren and a number of commuters and reported to the minister that introduction of a special bus service would in their opinion meet their needs "provided the opening of Sutton Weaver swing bridge was restricted to periods outside the morning and evening peak hours".

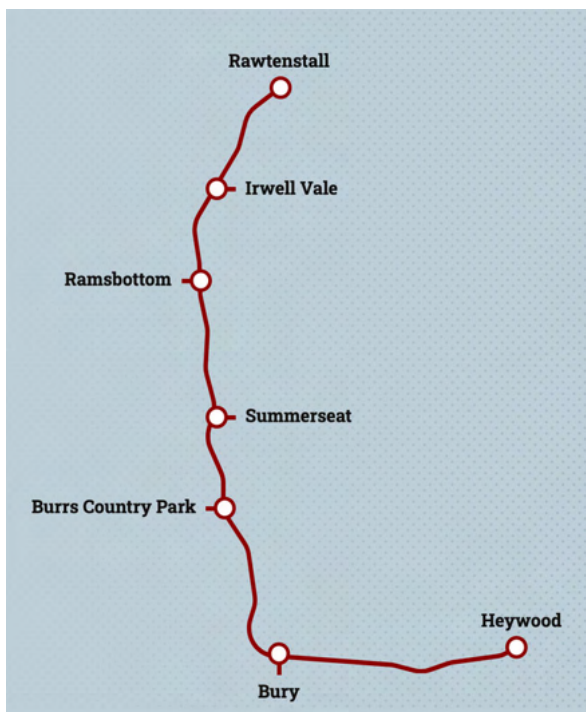
Just over the border in North Wales a spokesman for BR had stated, late in 1972, that the number of people using Shotton low level station in Flintshire, (reopened as a result of joint action by the RIS and local authorities) had exceeded all expectations.

In support of the campaign for retention of the Machynlleth-Pwllheli line, members of the RIS had joined members of the Cambrian Coast Line Action Group when they came to London on 18 November 1972 and marched to 10 Downing Street to present a memorandum to the Prime Minister with a plea for the line's retention and development.

Finally in March 1973, in furtherance of its activities at local level the RIS appointed an area representative for Oxford and the surrounding area.

Meanwhile, plans had been made to publish in illustrated booklet form the RIS Policy Statement issued at the 1971 annual general meeting and this was launched at a press conference held in London early in February 1973. In his foreword to the booklet, John Arlott OBE, one of the society's vice-presidents, commented: "There can be no doubt of Britain's need for a Railway Invigoration Society." (10) At about the same time, a bibliography on *Railway Economics* was published by the society and this has been updated and forms the basis of the appendix to this work.

At the annual general meeting held in Ely, Cambridgeshire, on 14 April 1973, the RIS chairman was able to express some satisfaction that the government was showing considerable caution



East Lancashire Railway in 2024

in granting consent to the withdrawal of railway services but also stressed the need for further investment in rail development. By this time, the number of rail closures awaiting ministerial approval could be counted on the fingers of one hand and while a number of other lines had already been approved, these and the bulk of those remaining were subsequently reprieved. Nevertheless, it was taking noticeably longer to obtain consent and BR was having to wait years, rather than months in some cases, for a decision to be given.

Another subject which was receiving greater attention from the society at the time was freight. In its early days it had been primarily concerned with rural lines but with the Beeching era and the subsequent provisions of the Transport Act 1968, increasing interest was taken in the urban scene and the extension to freight services was a natural progression. Indeed one of the items dealt with in the report of the RIS technical sub-committee, presented to the AGM in 1973 concerned shunting and wagon load traffic. It is therefore appropriate to deal with this subject at this juncture.

Freight and parcels traffic

Some aspects of freight have already been dealt with in the review of the Beeching Report, in Chapter 3. Nevertheless, it is significant that, while American rail freight carryings have more than doubled since the second world war and the increases in France and Germany have been no less dramatic, Britain is now more backward in this field than either Turkey or Ireland. (11)

It has generally been accepted that investment in large numbers of short wheelbase wagons under the 1955 Modernisation Plan was misguided from an operational point of view and to this extent it is possible to agree with Stewart Joy's criticism of the BTC for spending money in replacing what it had, rather than what it needed. (12)

This would, however, be an over-simplification of the issue as the retention of small, loose coupled, wagons resulted largely from customer resistance to the more efficient, larger, fully braked designs prevalent on the continent and in North America, a situation which was clearly appreciated by the authors of the Plan, (13) and which was further elaborated by Dr A W T Daniel in a subsequent paper on the subject. (14) In many ways, this particular conflict -- of customer preference versus operating convenience -- has undoubtedly been the prime cause of the inherent desire of railway managers to seek its elimination. However, the bland dismissal of wagonload traffic after Beeching, as a relic of the past to be dispensed with as soon as possible, combined with over-optimism by BR in the future of the freightliner concept has been a prime case of putting all the eggs in one basket and has been responsible for the loss of much private siding traffic.

As witnessed at the beginning of Chapter 4, the massive rundown in the wagon stock was to have serious consequences in the years after 1963 and, as we shall see later, some of the symptoms are still prevalent. It



The 16 ton mineral wagon was once one of the most numerous wagons operated by British Railways. Over a quarter of a million were built to carry coal, minerals and scrap metal. This one is preserved by the Middleton Railway Trust

is interesting to note that the 1955 Plan predicted a wagon fleet of 752,000 by 1974 (15) whereas the 1973 *Review of Rail Policy* considered the 1981 requirements would be met by a mere 100,000. (16) Because of the fall off in rail freight traffic, the actual 1974 figure was 241,000. (17)

In the early 1960s, however, the container revolution was gaining momentum and by the end of 1966, the number carried on the new liner trains had increased from 350, in January, to 4,600 by the end of December with 27,000 having been carried during the year. (18) Nevertheless, the Central Transport Consultative Committee in its annual report for that year expressed some reservations on the extent to which the new concept was being exploited, even though by June 1966, it had been found necessary to introduce a second train on the London-Glasgow service – inaugurated in November 1965. Services on further routes were to be introduced as follows:

London-Manchester (28 February 1966); London-Liverpool (13 June 1966), Liverpool-Glasgow (5 September 1966), Manchester-Glasgow (12 September 1966) and Glasgow-Aberdeen (31 October 1966). (19)

In the following year, carryings by the Freightliner system continued to increase rapidly and new services were introduced on 13 routes, bringing the network to 21. London was linked with South Wales; Heysham (for Belfast); Sheffield; Newcastle; Leeds; Cardiff and Stockton. Birmingham with Glasgow; Newcastle and Stockton. Glasgow with Leeds and Sheffield and Cardiff with Manchester; Liverpool and Sheffield. In addition the London-Liverpool; London-Manchester and London-Glasgow services were augmented with more trains. A Freightliner service for steel direct from the works in South Wales to London was introduced in January 1967 and considerable interest was also being shown by customers in the use of privately owned containers and demountable tanks for bulk liquids and powders, a trend which was to be encouraged by the BRB. (20)

In the early days of the container revolution, some problems of standardisation were experienced between road, rail and shipping, as Gerard Fiennes was to describe so graphically in his memoirs. (21)

The International Standards Organisation had settled for the 8ft 0ins x 8ft 0ins container (as described in Chapter 3) but under pressure from the shipping interests and from firms in America where containers were well-established the height was later increased to 8ft 6ins. By the early 1970s, so many of this height were entering Britain that many railway routes had to be adjusted, mainly by lowering the road bed, to clear the additional six inches, although little difficulty was experienced on the continent which had the larger Berne loading gauge. The road haulage industry has also been plagued with this problem as the extra six inches can at times be critical when negotiating low bridges, A common solution is to use low loaders.

Meanwhile, with the success of freightliners, the railway management were showing less interest in wagonload traffic. Even so, in 1966 about 120 million tons of traffic – coal, other minerals and general merchandise – were handled as wagon loads, by the traditional marshalling process, yielding a revenue to the BRB of about £130 million. (22) The process of rationalising this part of the business into through train loads, however, continued and while the tonnage of coal class traffic fell by 7% in 1967 – mainly as a result of general industrial recession – further progress was made with the establishment of semi-permanently coupled merry-go-round trains between collieries and power stations capable of unloading 1,000 tons of coal an hour into the power station bunkers. Nevertheless in that year, 83,980 wagons,

3,786 containers and 1,882 freight 'brake vans of the older, less useful, types were scrapped. (23)

On the parcels side, small consignments carried by freight and passenger train in 1966 yielded a revenue of nearly £52 million which was about £0.5 million less than in 1965, partly as a result of the decline in traffic due to the national economic situation. Up to that time, the activities of British Rail and British Road Services had operated in isolation and were largely competitive, but in December 1966 a freight sundries division was created as a step towards the provision of a joint BR/BRS service for carrying small consignments.

The combined organisation envisaged was to ensure that the total business previously handled by the two separate bodies would be trunked by road or rail, as appropriate, to avoid unnecessary duplication. (24) However, much traffic in this field had already been lost because of the extensive closure of branch and secondary lines. Cromer crabs for instance, would in future have to go by road because the parcels service had been withdrawn.

The government had also, in July 1966, issued a white paper on transport policy which contained details of a national freight plan to integrate the activities of the various publicly owned freight carrying agencies, combined with a review of policy towards private freight transport. The white paper pointed out that the BRB and Transport Holding Company owned a substantial part of the country's road/rail freight system which together accounted for approximately one half of the total ton mileage carried by the railways and public road hauliers, and that the two largely duplicated each other. As a result the nation's transport resources, particularly the railway network, were not being put to the best use and the ability of the public sector to offer an efficient door to door service seriously impaired. (25)

The general outcome was the provisions contained in the 1968 Transport Act (described in Chapter 4) for the setting up of the National Freight Corporation. The Freightliner services which had previously been operated by BR as a separate division, controlled directly from headquarters, were transferred to the NFC by way of a subsidiary company (Freightliners Ltd) owned 51% by the NFC and 49% by BR; Freightliner taking over from BR all its assets, in the form of depots, cranes, sidings etc, other than the trains themselves, the company being responsible for selling space on the trains both to the NFC and to other hauliers. The principle of operation was that the NFC would assume contractual responsibility for all rail traffic originating from road collection while BR retained responsibility for all traffic from rail sources, such as private sidings, whether wagonload or company train. (26)

Needless to say, this proposal caused considerable ill feeling in BR which saw the child of its creation and one of its more promising enterprises handed over to its road competitor. It has been suggested by at least one economist that the main reason for this move was the nagging doubts in the minds of the politicians and civil servants of the capability of the BR management to run the business profitably in view of its past performance in the freight sector, with a high incidence of under-pricing of traffic to the detriment of the overall financial position. (27) This view which is not shared by the RIS.

Whether or not the NFC has been any more competent is open to debate. The Freightliner company broke-even on its operating account for the first time in 1971 during which period it



BRS existed from 1948 to 1969

carried 505,000 containers; (the annual turnover in 1978 is 600,000). (28) The economics of the company are, however, difficult to assess as nearly half of its costs are the charges made by British Rail for trunk haul of containers. Nevertheless the RIS shares the reservations expressed in the Huckfield report, towards the attitude of the NFC to its obligation to send as much of its traffic as possible by rail (see end of Chapter 4) and the conflicting need to maintain the profitability of its road haulage fleet. (29)

At the time of writing, the freightliner system is running at about 70% capacity but to the outsider, with little knowledge of operating practice, the sight of large numbers of lightly loaded trains is discouraging while recognising it is not always possible to secure a backload to every transit. While it could be argued that the potential market of 40 million tons by 1973 predicted in the Beeching report was over-optimistic, the fact that the total railborne container traffic carried in 1973 and 1974 was only in the region of 7.7 million tons, leaves the position open to doubt. (30) Furthermore, predictions by Sir Richard Marsh that container movements would rise to over 750,000 in the 1980s (ie taking the best assumption of 20% over five years, does not represent a dramatic increase. (31)

The decision to develop and exploit freightliners is connected in many people's minds with Dr Beeching but the concept was in fact based on studies carried out into the use of large containers by BR's London Midland Region in 1959. Dr Beeching merely latched on to it and had it written into his 1963 report, to the exclusion of almost all else. Roger Calvert in *Transport Disintegrated* has clearly shown how its development within the narrow scope of collection and delivery by road has stunted its growth and played into the hands of the road haulage interests. (32)

The freightliner concept is certainly not a cheap solution to the problem of moving freight, as the average depot costs in the region of £1,000,000 and the crane alone over £250,000. Some smaller terminals have been built, such as the one at Par in Cornwall, for China clay traffic, where smaller, more conventional cranes have been utilised costing only about £8,000. Many other lighter transfer techniques were being tried out at the time freightliner was in its infancy such as the Penvan Ramp and the DAF system, used in Holland for a time. The "transfer car" could also haul trains on a main line as well as transfer loads at stations, provided tracks were the correct distance apart. No reason is seen why some of the civil engineers department cranes could not be used for freight handling, provided they are not on call for emergencies.

However, as the economist George A Hughes has indicated in his book *Company Freight Management* (33) one of the problems is that Freightliners have often to compete by hauling traffic back towards a railhead. Under such conditions, railways must be free to adjust cartage prices so that the overall rate remains competitive with the direct, but economically inefficient throughout – one driver and vehicle – road movement. Cartage and transfer arrangements must also be improved so that more than the one trip per day described by Calvert is made by its lorries. (34) Overall incorporation within the main railway organisation, (not as a road transport subsidiary as the 1968 Act made it) as well as a new approach to driver payment and rostering will probably be necessary if it is to have any viable future.

On shorter routes and through low-volume terminals, capital investment in the type of equipment required for freightliners cannot be justified but because of the dogmatic approach to the problems of the railways prevalent in the early 1960s, any prospect of developing concepts other than freightliner was ignored and there was a general attitude that wagonload traffic should be shed as quickly as possible for the reasons mentioned above. Failure to develop local collection and delivery by rail with economic use of staff and

equipment, clearly seen to be viable as demonstrated by German and American experience (35) and the apparent apathy towards private siding traffic, has proved to be the prime recipe for a declining railway system. That it can be achieved successfully within these islands is amply demonstrated by the results obtained by the Derwent Valley Light Railway where a dividend to shareholders of 4% has been the general order of the day ever since 1941. (38)

A key factor in the success of this type of operation is wagon turnround and, as we have seen in our investigation of the Beeching report, the performance of BR in this respect was pretty poor, because of customers insistence on the use of wagons for their own storage purposes. One of the main reasons for this was the low level of demurrage which the railways had been forced to maintain as Doctor Beeching was not slow to observe. (37) The use of larger wagons would to some extent mitigate this and also drastically reduce the cost of shunting because of the lower average number of wagons in any one train and consequent lower number of shunting movements. The type of equipment available for loading and unloading wagons is also important. Good turnround also depends on frequent servicing of sidings and it is all too often the case that these type of trips are the first to be cancelled in times of staff shortage. The unreliable nature of BR's operations has been one of the prime causes of desertion by customers to other means of conveyance. There is therefore considerable need for further basic operational research into shunting and the design of yard points. The use of automatic couplings and robot shunting locomotives are also means of reducing the costs and increasing the efficiency of this type of operation. The achievement of a healthy compromise between the desire of the customer for free storage facilities and the railway's need for vehicles compatible with high speed running is however critical.

The introduction of TOPS (Total Operations Processing System) has gone a long way to improve the situation by computerised monitoring of wagon movements throughout the country. It was in use over almost half of the rail system in 1974 and extended to all regions by October 1975. By this means, an 8% improvement in wagon turnround has been achieved to date with consequent saving in stock requirements. (38) The possibility of using pre paid wagon labels, as in Uruguay, to cut costs or the Dutch system of multipart combined consignment note and invoice linked to the computer, which also records the departure and arrival of the wagon, should be considered.

These developments are of considerable importance especially as there is increasing opposition to the environmental effects of large lorries. British Rail is already considering the use of 15ft and other smaller containers in an attempt to capture traffic over shorter distances, For these reasons, the RIS consistently opposed the over-



The TOPS system kept track of freight train and loco movements through a central computer system from 1973. It was the subject of an online lecture for the Newcomen Society in 2022 by Jonathan Aylen.

TOPS was based on SAGE software used by the US military to give early warning of Soviet bomber attacks.

zealous abandonment of this particular type of traffic and the too-rapid rundown in the wagon fleet. Nevertheless in July 1975, there were still 124,829 without power brakes and only 140,000 allowed a maximum of 45 mph. (39) Investment in modern wagons with up to a 25 ton payload, good loading characteristics and capable of running at 75 mph is clearly called for.

Early in 1973, the RIS East Anglian branch expressed concern over BR's refusal of a number of large freight orders. Five grain shipments from Lowestoft, averaging 700 tons each, were refused because a total of 180 wagons would have been needed and that number was not available. In another case, reported from King's Lynn, lack of rolling stock made it necessary for imported steel to be conveyed by road. From BR's own statements on the matter it was apparently a case of over-economising rather than a deliberate embargo. (40)

In Wessex too, the environmentalists and unions were successful in preventing the withdrawal of wagonload freight traffic from Southampton Docks, but the RIS, in its annual report for 1973, pressed for further steps to be taken to exploit this traffic by the provision of more sets of modern, long wheelbase, wagons (CovAB and Ferry) and the installation of rail sidings at the New Covent Garden Market site at Nine Elms. While this has not so far been implemented, the market authority received the backing of the government in purchasing the land on the north side of the main line for the provision of a railhead, thereby strengthening the RIS's hand in pressing for the additional provision to be made for trains to run from Southampton Docks for the transport of perishables.



A BR continental ferry wagon
Picture: Wikimedia (Oxyman)

An encouraging development has been an experiment pioneered by Dower Wood, a Newmarket firm of grain merchants, which could revolutionise the transport of grain within the Common Market. Instead of the usual costly method of importing grain by road and boat, the firm is now receiving it by rail and is exporting malting barley by the same method.

Despite these encouraging developments there are some types of traffic which have been completely lost to rail. Cattle and livestock are a typical example. Even before the Beeching report was published, they had been increasingly neglected by the railways and are hardly mentioned therein. Most beef cattle has to be moved around the country to be fattened up. Railways such as the LSWR in Devon, used to organise the local cattle markets. The railways should have taken the initiative and organised modern livestock liner trains of bogie cars, taking a leaf out of the book of the Swiss, who concentrate their cattle trains at the beginning of the week when the demand for the movement of merchandise is less; but again Dr Beeching's aversion to stock lying idle for any length of time effectively precluded this. The National Farmers Union accepted the need for motorways because railway rates were too high.

The position with regard to racehorse traffic is even more curious. One may ask why a former turf accountant was to take away the railways' right to send traffic throughout by road when it

was more convenient to do so (section 4 of the Transport Act 1962), a move which was to lead to the eventual demise of most of this traffic by rail, so vividly recounted by Gerard Fiennes. (41)

While price has to some extent been an influence in driving traffic away from rail, reliability, (or lack of it) has, as we have seen, undoubtedly been the prime cause. In short, the railways have provided a poor quality service at a poor quality price. This has clearly been shown by two reports in recent years:-

Integration of Freight Transport – A Survey of Users' Attitudes (42)

and

Industrial Demand for Transport by B T Bayliss and S L Edwards. (43)

Though politically motivated, the former gives a true picture of deplorable service given by BR's rail sundries division but really could be read as a case for the renovation of parcels services throughout the country. Because the latter is by academics of high repute, there is a risk of its importance being exaggerated.

In fact, this empirical study is a snapshot of the state of play in only five industries (food, chemicals, iron and steel, electronic equipment and paper) Though a guide and spur to transport marketing methods, no prognosis of future modal split or the advantages of railways as carriers of freight can be drawn from it because Bayliss and Edwards, being economists and not transport innovators or entrepreneurs, are probably unaware of railway potential.

On the parcels side, more specifically it was intended that the National Freight Corporation should take over the combined operations of the BR sundries division and BRS Parcels Ltd as a further step in the government's plan. While BR received considerable income from this traffic, it was nowhere near enough to cover its operating expenses and in 1967 lost £26 million, although this was reduced to £25 million the following year. At its inception £60 million was earmarked for subsidising National Carriers (the railways parcels service) for the first five years of its life but in the event only £42.7 million was required. During this period, BRS Parcels was consistently profitable. (44)

Nevertheless, the Huckfield report was very critical of the progress which had been made integrating the activities of the three public sector organisations in this field – namely the Post Office, the NFC and BRS Parcels. Huckfield proposed a national parcels corporation as a means of achieving this end. The necessity of good modern parcels and railway letter offices at main terminal stations has been consistently ignored by the railways. Such innovations as prepaid parcels stamps and self delivery could be tried and in the case of "owners rick" traffic, the signature could be on the parcels stamp as practised in the Australia's state of Victoria.

BR therefore needs an aggressive commercial policy as adopted by Deutsche Bahn (German Federal Railways) so clearly shown in *Verkehrsmarkt der Bahn*. (45) A correct commercial approach would suggest that a high volume, low-rate policy should be adopted until a high throughput is obtained by the system as a whole. A selective discriminatory pricing policy may



**A British Road Services Parcels van
Picture: Classics World**

then be introduced to cover outstanding overhead charges, depreciation and amortisation.

Note: A discriminatory pricing policy is not as inequitable as some economists with the road lobby have argued since in its absence certain movements could no longer occur. Utilities of place and production opportunities would be lost and the wealth generating power of the railways reduced to the detriment of the general welfare.

Like the Derwent Valley Light Railway, British Rail should pay staff to get traffic. In the past, many a highly uneconomic railway has been turned into an outstanding success through the payment of commission. The most significant example was the Rhenish Railway where shares were raised in value from 0 in 1860 to £24 per £20 share in 1890 (46) by the extensive payment of commission to goods agents and station masters. BR could follow the example of the Transport Holding Company where failure by a manager to obtain a 15% overall increase in traffic in consecutive years is said to result in instant dismissal.

However, due to the assertions of what might best be described as the “rock-bum” school of transport economists, who argue implicitly or explicitly that railways should be confined to the operation of inter-city express passenger services and the haulage of rocks on isolated fragments of industrial light railways to ports or power stations, much contemporary literature on the failings of railways cannot be taken at face value. Despite the prevalence of this school, it is significant that no steps were taken by BR to employ a geologist to seek out favourable sources for the latter traffic. As a result, many lines closed under Beeching could have been usefully employed in dealing with new sources of such materials, particularly roadstone, which are now being exploited and for which some lines are having to be relaid.

Nevertheless, it is apparent that the Department of the Environment is still strongly influenced by this school of economists and it is open to doubt whether British Rail will have any freight business left at all in a few years time if recent government pronouncements are anything to go by. In fact, short-term economies could well lead to long-term loss of traffic, possibly for all time.

In furtherance of its activities in the field of freight transport, the RIS arranged a public meeting in London on 24 October 1973 when one of its honorary members, John Ogilvie, gave an illustrated lecture entitled *Why can't it go by rail?* in which he outlined the limitations of road transport, particularly in environmental terms, with reference to the juggernaut lorries which he said were becoming the centre of opposition from many quarters. The problem basically evolved around the international container sizes (as previously explained) which were considered too large by many customers and resulted in vehicles which have proved unwieldy in many town centres.

Mr Ogilvie continued by expounding some revolutionary and novel proposals for future methods of parcels and freight handling by British Rail which included the use of smaller sized containers, more easily handled by fork lift trucks without the need for vast cranes and freightliner depots. The provision of a regular timetable of freight and parcels trains would produce a more attractive and competitive service to the customer. With improved rolling stock, staff and plant utilisation, including the use of multiple units instead of loco-hauled trains, this service could be simpler to integrate with passenger services, avoiding operational problems due to the speed restrictions inherent in hand braked, short wheelbase wagons.

According to Mr Ogilvie, an advanced merchandise train travelling at speeds of up to 100 mph could operate like buses over 300 routes serving 25 areas of Britain. They would be integrated with local transport at neighbouring railway stations and could offer door-to-door delivery

over distances as short as 50 miles, with an average transit time of between 7 and 16 hours. Such a scheme would be costly, but a first instalment costing £110 million (at 1973 prices) could double the amount of freight moved by rail and a second, costing £80 million could provide a fourfold increase in traffic. The first trains could be running in 18 months and a national system, employing 600 trains, completed in three years. What was needed was a complete new approach to freight handling with greater emphasis on wagonload traffic as freightliner services had only a limited market.

Returning to the general transport scene, February 1973 had seen the emergence of Transport 2000, a national federation for the promotion of railways, launched through the initiative of the National Union of Railwaymen to bring together groups opposed to further closures and in favour of development of the railway system. The RIS has given support to this organisation and is represented on its executive committee and on the committees of many of its local branches.

One of the main issues to be emphasised by the movement in its early days was the importance of structure plans which, under local government reorganisation, each new County Council had to draw up for its area* In particular the Plan, which embraced all aspects of planning had to contain a section on local transport, including railways* With the increased emphasis on public participation in planning a new opportunity had been given to local communities to have a say in the preparation of such plans and consequently in the future transport provision for their areas.(47)

In support of these aims, the RIS East Anglian branch was well represented at a conference held by Transport 2000 in Ely on 28 July 1973 attended by over 50 people, which was addressed by Mr G O B Clarke, divisional manager of BR and Mr D E Sayburn, transport coordinating officer for Cambridgeshire County Council.

Another more crucial issue on people's minds at this time, in view of the prevailing unrest in the Middle East, was the dwindling supplies of oil and the urgent need for the industrialised nations to rethink their energy policies. Petrol rationing was becoming a distinct possibility, particularly in the United States and the need to develop and exploit means of transport less reliant upon this source of fuel was becoming increasingly urgent. The cost of running a car was likely to rise steeply, as events have proved, and the development of an electric car would only provide relief if nuclear power could be made pollution free and perfected quickly enough.

An important document to emerge on this subject was produced by Cambridge University Conservation Society in the autumn, which warned against over-reliance on North Sea Oil as a means of solving the country's energy crisis, because of the short peak of oil production predicted, which was expected to span at the most 30 years before economically convertible supplies were exhausted and the fact that demand was increasing at an ever-accelerating rate. For this reason, it was considered essential to develop alternative strategies to the uncontrolled growth of the car, which had an extremely poor energy efficiency but had been allowed to dominate people's lives and determine the pattern of increasingly dispersed development. The report said: "If a long-term transport policy is begun now, there will be no need for the relentless persecution of the private motorist, although major changes will be



Transport 2000 launched in 1973 and renamed the Campaign for Better Transport in 2006

required in the kind of car we drive and when and where we can use it." (48)

This point of view was echoed by Alfred Wood, latterly chief planning officer at the West Midlands Metropolitan County Council, speaking at the opening session of the annual conference of the Council for the Protection of Rural England at the University of Warwick in September 1973 when he said: **"Britain is coming to the end of its love affair with the car, but the parting will be painful and expensive. The nation must now attempt to distinguish between liberty and licence – liberty for many people to use their cars or licence for them to destroy our civilisation."** The paradise of universal car ownership was unattainable. (49) The report of the Independent Commission on Transport was also to deal with this subject in some depth, as we shall see later. In the meantime, the RIS had submitted to the Bishop of Kingston's committee a report on a number of railways matters including information on:-

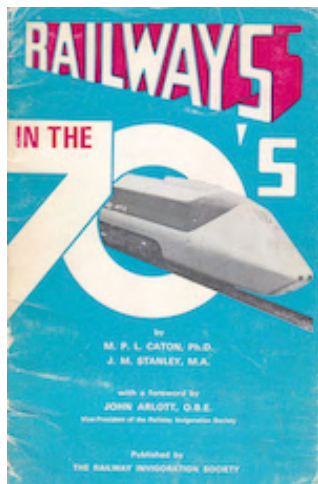
- Lines on which expensive methods of operation had been continued
- The cost of abandoned lines;
- Freight traffic refused by British Rail;
- The possibility of transferring freight from road to rail;
- The problems which would be encountered if it became necessary to reverse the policy of freight concentration
- Specific proposals to bring back into use the Midland and South Western Junction Railway. (Cheltenham to Andover)

In June 1973, the British Railways Board had sent to the government a major policy document advocating retention of the railway system at about its present size of 11,500 route miles, which was followed by a statement in July by John Peyton, minister for transport industries, that draconian cuts were not the answer to British Rail's difficulties. This ended the speculation caused by the leak of the Blue Book proposals that more closures of Beeching proportions were on the way. The retention plan did, however, envisage a reduction in freight business because of a drastic drop in wagonload traffic – cause or effect? – a trend which the RIS has long resisted for the reasons already enumerated. (50)

The RIS subsequently issued a press statement supporting the BRB's proposals, as outlined in the report, and calling on the government to give urgent consideration to the restoration of

key routes which had already been closed, in order to provide more communities with direct access to the inter-city network and also to determine what steps could be taken to transfer a substantial proportion of heavy freight traffic from road to rail in order to reduce road accidents and damage to the environment. At the same time, copies of a reprint of the RIS book *Railways in the Seventies* were sent to selected MPs with a covering letter expressing the need to effect a substantial development of the railways.

On 28 November, however, the minister announced in the House of Commons that "in the government's view, the right course is to maintain the railway network at roughly the present size and to improve it. Unremunerative passenger services should be kept in being as long as they are justified on social and economic grounds."



The minister also went on to say that “the government broadly accepts the strategy accepted by the board.” This would mean a substantially higher investment in railways which would be met by “a switch of resources within the transport sector from urban road to rail.” (51) It remains to be seen whether the much-needed shift in investment towards rail will be fully realised.

The autumn also saw further developments in the controversy over the Cooper Brothers, formula when a statement by the Ombudsman on complaints about the closure of the Alton-Winchester line suggested that the department of the environment was considering the possibility of publishing a full summary of the financial detail relating to future closure proposals, but despite pressure from the RIS and many MPs, this has remained in obscurity. In the mean time the Winchester and Alton Railway Ltd had been formed through a consortium of a private company and local authorities including the Mid-Hants Railway. While Hampshire County Council was not prepared to provide financial assistance, it had given the new company a free hand to negotiate with British Rail for the purchase of the line.

By the spring of 1974, pressure for the reopening of closed lines and stations, because of the energy crisis, was gaining momentum. In north-east England, local authorities were pressing for the reopening of Fourstones station on the Newcastle-Carlisle line because of the poor transport services in the area. In north and central Wales there was local agitation for the reopening to passengers of the Gaerwen-Amlwch, line because of the potential traffic from the Shell Oil terminal to be built at Amlwch. Cheddar Rural District Council, British Rail and Staffordshire planning and development department were exploring the possibility of reopening to passengers the four-mile Cheddar branch which joins the Stoke-Uttoxeter line at Cresswell. There was also a possibility of a section of the Cheddar Valley line, between Yatton and Sandford, being reopened for stone traffic.

In the summer, further proposals came from Stoke Parish Council (Kent) which was seeking the support of Medway District Council to obtain the restoration of passenger services from Hoo Junction on to the Isle of Grain, using the line which was still open for oil trains to the BP refinery.

Many proposals in East Anglia were being pursued by the RIS branch, as we shall see later, and in West Yorkshire, Penistone Urban District Council had (before it ceased to exist) been pressing for the restoration of the electrified passenger service between Manchester and Sheffield via the Woodhead tunnel. There was also a move for the reopening as an unstaffed halt of Arthington on the Leeds-Harrogate line, because of the lack of evening buses in the area. A member of the RIS had organised a petition to Lancashire County Council asking it to subsidise the reopening of the Colne-Skipton line or alternatively the provision of a stopping passenger service between Rose Grove and Todmorden. A proposal by the local MP that the Radley-Abingdon line should be reopened was, however, turned down as BR intended to use Radley as the railhead for Abingdon by increasing the number of stopping trains there.

One of the reopenings which the RIS had been pressing for some time was the line from Lewes to Uckfield and, in July 1973, a meeting organised by East Sussex County Council had been held in Lewes to discuss a report on the proposal, prepared by the county surveyor and the county planning officer. In the report, it was stated that BR required up to £2,000,000 for its reinstatement if intermediate stations were to be reopened but the general consensus at the meeting was that the line should be rebuilt, either via the Hamsey Loop or another route from Isfield. Later a further report was sent to the new county council which was to take over responsibility on 1 April 1974.

In the meantime, East Sussex County Council had announced that it was prepared to subsidise the Ashford-Hastings line, but only if Kent County Council agreed to meet half the cost. The total initial cost was estimated at £450,000 and the subsequent annual cost at £200,000. Apart from the effects of the energy crisis, there were other factors which favoured its retention. Among these was the likelihood that it would be used as a test bed for Channel Tunnel rolling stock should Ashford railway works secure the contract.

Another consideration was the go-ahead for Dungeness C power station, which would necessitate the use of Appledore-Lydd, a branch off the Ashford-Hastings line, for construction material over a number of years in addition to the existing power station traffic.

At a public meeting on the Channel Tunnel, organised by the Weald of Kent Preservation Society, on 18 January 1975, Mr John Peyton, minister for transport Industries, stated that **the line was in no immediate danger and that this applied to all threatened lines whether consent had been granted or not.** (52)

As a further step in the Channel Tunnel project, the two governments of Britain and France had, at separate ceremonies on 17 November 1973, signed parallel agreements with the English and French Channel Tunnel companies and, on the same day, signed a treaty to authorise the works. British Rail had also published its case for a rail link, costing £120 million between White City (London) and Cheriton (near Folkestone) to be built if the government gave the final go-ahead for the project.

Following concern over the future of developments in passenger transport areas, arising from the government's refusal to finance the Piccadilly-Victoria tunnel in Manchester, a further meeting of the RIS local representatives was hastily convened and took place in Hoylake on 17



Issued by Sainec PTE, October 1971

A 1971 publicity image for the planned Picc-Vic tunnel in Manchester for which the government refused to provide the cash

November 1973. The government's decision had arisen largely from the prevailing financial situation but, nevertheless, still represented a serious blow to the improvement of transport in Greater Manchester and, in particular, to the possibility of reinvigorating the lesser-used local lines by an integrated cross-town network. The general conclusion reached by the meeting was that, despite the setback in Manchester and the doubtful position of the Tyneside local services, the trend in urban transport was still improving. The government, in refusing the grant had indicated that if support for the tunnel were given, funds would not be available until 1975/6 at the earliest. Attempts were made to persuade the government to think again, as the scheme was the linch pin of railway development in Greater Manchester. The passenger transport executive had kept open a large number of heavily subsidised lines in the hope that extra traffic would be generated by the new rail tunnel, but if government support was not to be forthcoming for at least two years, there was a possibility that such lines would have to be closed. Moreover, there was a fear that if left in abeyance for too long the scheme might be scrapped entirely. In 1974, however, the department of the environment

approved restarting design work for the tunnel.

On Merseyside, tunnelling for the Liverpool inner loop had been completed on 8 October 1973 and the new service was planned to start early in 1976. By June 1975, excavation for the tunnels between Exchange and Central stations was more than half complete and this link was expected to be finished late in 1976. Plans were also going ahead for a spur from Liverpool Central to Edge Hill to provide an electrified service to link the city centre, via the university and Pighue Lane (near Edge Hill) with St Helens.

Electrification of the route between Central and Hough Green was to start in May 1975 and of the Walton Junction-Wigan line in December. In September 1976, work would then start on electrifying the line between Rock Ferry and Hooton (possibly also to Chester) and from Bootle to Aintree.

On Tyneside, work had commenced on the tunnels for the new rapid transit system in the centre of Newcastle which would be operated by super-trams when it commenced operation in 1979. It was hoped that these would operate to Killingworth New Town, Newcastle Airport and the Team Valley Trading Estate (Gateshead), in addition to proposals already agreed and, in conjunction with buses, provide a top class public transport service which would eliminate the need to build more urban motorways.

In London, the newly elected Labour-controlled Greater London Council had scrapped the motorway proposals of its Conservative predecessors in favour of a more public transport orientated policy.

In its discussion paper *London, the future and you* was a proposal to complete the existing orbital lines by the construction of a railway tunnel under the Thames from Charlton to Canning Town and thus create an orbital railway, a proposal which has appeared in various forms in the ensuing period. (53) Ringrail is one example. (54).

Although work on the first stage of the Fleet line from Baker Street to Charing Cross was well advanced, a major setback in 1973 had been the postponement of a decision on its extension to Fenchurch Street and from there to south-east London; an impasse which is still to be resolved. In connection with these works, Strand station closed from 16 June but was expected to be reopened in 1976 after being joined to Trafalgar Square and renamed Charing Cross. The existing station of that name to revert to its original name of Embankment which more appropriately described its location. The Fleet line itself was due to be operating by 1977. By the summer of 1974, progress on the Piccadilly Line extension to Heathrow Airport was also well advanced and the Hounslow-Hatton Cross section due to open in July 1975.

Meanwhile in the West Midlands, the trend towards a more rail-orientated transport system had continued with proposals for a £160,000 transit interchange at



BLIGHT: A vast area of east London has been blighted by one section of the motorway box which was built: The East Cross route at Hackney Wick
Picture: Mike Faherty (Wikipedia)

Stourbridge Junction (Worcestershire) and the granting of planning permission for a redevelopment scheme at Snow Hill station (Birmingham) which would include a four-platform rail station to be served by trains through the tunnel to ease congestion at New Street. Various proposals for providing the city with an underground railway were under consideration by the passenger transport executive, including a line from Aston to Five Ways, with provision for an interchange at deep level under Snow Hill-Colmore Row. In addition to Snow Hill, the passenger transport executive had agreed to the reopening of Moor Street tunnel to a through service between Stourbridge and Solihull.

Nevertheless, the mainstay of the RIS continued to be its activities at local level and, in the autumn of 1973, an area representative was appointed for West Yorkshire, an area formerly administered by the defunct northern England branch, but which was soon to achieve its own status as a branch following a meeting of members held in Bradford on 14 December. A passenger transport executive had been set up for the area in accordance with the Local Government Act 1972 and the new branch awaited with interest a statement from the executive of its intentions for local railways, particularly Leeds/Bradford to Ilkley and Keighley. BR's campaign to boost traffic in the West Riding, which had been launched in 1972, had increased business on almost every line. The Eastern Region management had also set up a study team to produce ideas for improving local rail services in the Sheffield and Rotherham areas, including the possible reopening of closed lines and stations.

In the remainder of the former RIS northern England area, Percy Main lost its passenger services on the Riverside branch of the North Tyneside lines on 23 July 1973 but, while part of the line was to be retained for freight and the remainder on a "care and maintenance" basis, the line was used for passenger diversions for a short period in March 1974. Since then, there



Percy Main is served in 2024 by the Newcastle Metro
Picture: Honestly Helen

has been chaos in Tyneside's shipyard complex, served by the line, caused by an inadequate and unreliable bus service and even reports of an unofficial train service being restored. Meanwhile, confusion reigned over the various attempts to prevent closure of the Alston-Haltwhistle line in May 1975. The South Tynedale Railway Preservation Society hoped to buy the line but was presented with a bill of £200,000 – nearly twice what it expected to pay. It would only be able to run a service in the summer as a tourist attraction but this would at least preserve it for use in the winter should an emergency rail service be required.

In the early stages, the local authorities had been pressing for the line to be retained under BR control, financed by the money required by the "all weather" road, but this was refused by the department of the environment. Latterly, objections were concentrated on the less desirable aspects of the road proposals and by the summer of 1974, there was hope that at least two years would elapse before closure could be implemented, as a public enquiry was considered necessary to iron out the objections. By this time, Geoffrey Rippon MP was among those asking for the May 1975 closure date to be extended. Also, for the first time the line was being used for regular summer specials.

In the north of Scotland, similar steps were being taken to avert closure of the Inverness to Kyle of Lochalsh line. A feasibility test had been made of the proposed alternative bus in August but this took four hours 35 minutes, compared with the expected schedule of three hours 25 minutes. The existing train took about three hours.

On 2 November, Mr Keith Speed, under secretary of state for the environment, announced in Parliament that the line would stay open throughout 1974, while its future was determined in the light of oil developments on the West Coast. (55) Application had also been made to Parliament for a provisional order authorising 440 yards of new track from just west of Duirnish station towards the shore at Port Cam to serve the proposed off-shore oil platform construction site at Drumbuie.

In the Three Counties area, the RIS branch attempt to promote a regular summer weekend service between Gloucester and Stratford-upon-Avon had met with little success due to lack of public support. The trial service on 13 May 1973 would, but for the generosity of its sponsors, have been a financial disaster.

The decision of the secretary of state for the environment to consent to the closure of Stonehouse (Burdett Road) station on the Stroud Valley line also came as no surprise. A date of 1 October 1973 had been announced but action by the RIS and local councils caused this to be deferred and with changes in government policy, it was later reprieved. The authorities, principally Stonehouse Parish Council, eventually agreed to pay towards the £16,000 needed for its restoration, and BR to increase the number of trains calling there, representing a major victory for the RIS and the authorities, and an example for similar action in other areas.

Other successful developments in the area included Bristol Parkway, a park and ride station which had been opened by BR in May 1972 as an experiment but which, by the end of 1973, had warranted the expenditure of £76,000 to make it a permanent feature.

BR had also dropped its plans to replace the two existing stations in Gloucester by a new one at Barnwood on the outskirts of the city but instead to build a new station at Gloucester Central and eventually demolish Gloucester Eastgate.

In Wessex, activities centred on the plans to restore a service on the Alton-Winchester line but efforts were also being made to establish a privately operated service on the Swanage branch, which had closed on 2 January 1972. In order to leave this option open, the county surveyor for Dorset had been asked to look at alternative routes for a road bypass at Corfe Castle which would not impinge on the formation of the line. The RIS had also been pressing for an improved service on the Bristol-Portsmouth line and some improvements were introduced with the new timetable on 7 May 1973.

In Southampton, opposition to the Portswood Link motorway, and its subsequent abandonment had led to greater public participation in future transport proposals for the area. The RIS had also made representations on the South Hampshire structure plan which was to show greater emphasis on public transport.

In Oxfordshire, one of the subjects being dealt with by the newly appointed RIS area representative was the possible reopening to passengers of the Oxford-Bicester line, from



REPRIEVED: Stonehouse Burdett Road in 2019 after being renamed Stonehouse
Picture: Wikipedia (Celuici)

which services were withdrawn in 1968. To this end, Oxfordshire County Council was opposing plans by BR to reduce the line to single track which might inhibit the restoration of a passenger service on what was still a heavily used freight line.

In East Anglia, the branch was actively engaged with plans to restore services on closed lines and the reopening of stations and broke new ground on 23 June 1973 by holding a public meeting in March, Cambridgeshire, when one of the items discussed was the reopening to passengers of the line to Wisbech. A year later, on 18 May 1974, a further meeting was held at Wisbech which led to the formation of the Wisbech and March Rail Action Committee. Among those present at the meeting was the local MP, Clement Freud, who gave qualified support to the proposal. A campaign had also been started by a local member, Mr Ron Callaby, to restore the station at Magdalen Road on the main line between Downham and King's Lynn and a meeting to promote the idea was held in King's Lynn on 9 February 1974. At a further meeting on 21 March at Watlington St Mary Magdalen from which the station takes its name, an ad hoc committee was appointed to carry out a census to ascertain possible patronage of a restored service.

The campaign to restore passenger services on the Cambridge-St Ives line was given a further boost towards the end of 1973 by the formation of the Cambridge Rail Action Group. In the meantime, the long-awaited BR campaign to boost local pay-train patronage had been launched on 10 June with a distinctive identity for the various lines, similar to the West Riding



£180 million of taxpayers' money was provided to build a controversial 'white elephant' busway which began operation in 2011 on the former Cambridge-St Ives rail line
Picture: Wikipedia (Keith Edkins)

scheme. A novel proposal was the provision for books of travel stamps which could be purchased with a discount of 10% off their face value. Several other bargains were also introduced to make family travel more attractive. A further improvement was effected to the Norwich-Birmingham service from 6 May 1974 with slightly more trains and a reduction in journey time.

On a more general note, the branch held a freight forum in Ipswich on 3 November 1973 at which the principal speakers were Gordon Clarke, Norwich divisional manager of British Rail and John Ogilvie (whose ideas on freight have already been explained). The meeting was well attended and a lively discussion followed on ways of getting more freight from road to rail, the more so when a former general manager of the Eastern Region of British Rail attempted to run the meeting from the floor. The branch AGM was held in Norwich on 26 January 1974 and was followed by a public meeting on the prevailing state of rail services in East Anglia together with ways then could be improved.

A press statement had been issued in December 1973 calling for the reopening of four lines and eight stations (most of which have already been covered) in the area which attracted considerable interest and the progress made in implementing

these proposals will be dealt with at the close of the chapter.

Finally in London and the Home Counties, the RIS had organised a railtour of Southern Region lines by scheduled services on 5 July 1973 which included the forgotten electric line between Woodside and Sanderstead, restricted mainly to peak hour trains, and the closure threatened Wimbledon-West Croydon line. On 23 January 1974, members attended an evening of British Transport Films and, shortly after, on 12 March, supported a joint meeting with the Railway Development Association and the National Council on Inland Transport when further aspects of the energy crisis were discussed. In addition to the lines referred to earlier, action was also being taken to restore passenger services on the Guildford-Horsham line.

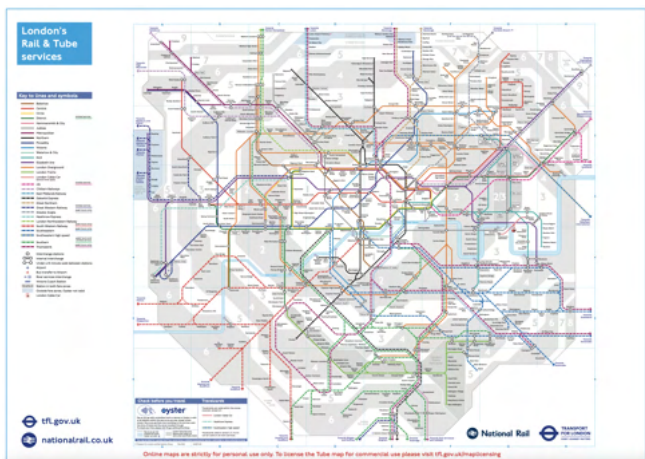
Representations were made to BR and London Transport on various matters including the advertising of weekend engineering works and the future of the London Transport Underground Guide. The RIS also welcomed publication of the long-awaited map of all London area BR and London Transport lines in June 1973 but continued to press for improved interchange facilities between many parts of the two systems, particularly at West Hampstead.

Encouraging developments in Essex were the provision of an improved service on the Wickford-Southminster line, mainly as a result of new development, and the issue of a local timetable for the Witham-Braintree line jointly by the local action committee and British Rail. Less encouraging was the news that while the government would not permit London Transport to close the Epping-Ongar line, it had refused grant aid to cover the losses.

Electrification of the line between South Croydon-Oxted-East

Grinstead/Uckfield had also been deferred until 1979. In May 1974, however, BR introduced its first experimental all-night inter-city interval service between London and Brighton, as an extension of the London- Gatwick airport service. At the general election on 28 February 1974, the RIS had again sent a questionnaire and policy statement to candidates of the three main parties. The result of the election was a return to a Labour administration.

At the RIS AGM in Gloucester on 27 April, the chairman stated that, with the oil crisis, it would be necessary to re-think national energy and consequently transport policies. Transport planning would have to be seen in terms of energy consumption with the greatest emphasis being placed on transport modes less dependent on oil. The way ahead, therefore, should be in no doubt: maximum use of the railways which could either use electric traction derived from other fuels or at least make the most economical use of the limited oil which would be available. Government plans had so far only scratched the surface of the problem and there was a need for further extensive railway electrification.



The London Connections map has been renamed and, in 2024, is called the London Rail and Tube map. It is a welcome sight on rail stations

Railways Act 1974

On 31 July 1974, the last day on which Parliament sat before it dispersed for the summer recess, the Railways Bill received the Royal Assent and became the Railways Act. The Act is almost entirely concerned with finance and its main purpose was to bring the operation of British Railways into line with membership of the European Economic Community. EEC regulations 1191/69 and 1192/69 require each member country of the EEC to ensure that an adequate railway passenger service is provided in its territory and that railway undertakings are compensated for operating unprofitable passenger services which are retained for social or economic reasons. One important aspect of the Act was that it was non-partisan, having been started by a Conservative government and subsequently taken over by its Labour successor.

Section 3 of the Act provided for the secretary of state for the environment to be the competent authority for the purpose of the regulations. Section 3 (7) made provision for a new method of reimbursing British Rail for unremunerative rail services. The powers under Section 39 of the 1968 Act (for which grants for 1973 and 1974 had amounted to £81 million) would be superseded. In future, Britain's railways would receive a block grant, limited to £900 million over a period of five years. Subject to House of Commons approval, this amount could be increased to £1,500 million.

The regulations deal comprehensively with many obligations, the cost of which fall on railway revenue and including track, signalling and allied matters but which, in the case of road transport, are borne by national funds. The main effect of these provisions is that the railway passenger system must be of a size approved by the secretary of state, and must be operated in a manner subject to his approval. This in itself at the time was likely to require a subsidy probably similar in amount to the Section 39 grants under the 1968 Act, but the payments for the cost of track renewal and maintenance could be considerably more.

At this stage, it should be mentioned that much of the financial information relating to the Act was contained in a three-page explanatory and financial memorandum which did not, on the face of it, have the force of law. The National Council on Inland Transport was to find it necessary to enter into detailed correspondence with the department of the environment to iron out the anomaly created by this situation. In the Act, the sums referred to were given no time limit, only in the Memorandum. From 1975 onwards, British Railways could therefore reasonably expect a subsidy of up to £300 million per annum, although the amount would not be binding on the secretary of state.

Another interesting aspect of the Act, brought out in the correspondence between the NCIT and the DoE was that compensation to BR is solely concerned with passenger traffic and not freight but the effect of compensating the BRB for track costs is that the passenger revenue need only cover its operating costs, including rolling stock. Since the track is paid for by the passenger grant, any freight service which may be operated on the line automatically benefits.

Section 8 of the Act does, however, deal with freight in a roundabout way by providing for the payment of capital grants towards the provision of railway sidings, access roads and equipment (but not to BR itself) only to outside firms and organisations. Nevertheless, these provisions should go some way to encourage the transfer of freight back to rail even though the annual amount anticipated in the explanatory memorandum was not expected to exceed £5 million in the first instance.

Section 1 provided for further re-capitalisation by reducing the BRB liabilities from £439

million to £250 million and Section 2 raised BRB borrowing powers from a possible £700 million to a possible £900 million but no provision was made for a programme of capital expenditure which would, it appeared, still have to be covered by the provisions of Section 58 of the 1968 Act.

Sections 5, 6 and 7 brought the BRB pension scheme into line with EEC regulations.

The provisions of the Act therefore largely removed the problems of allocating costs for individual, grants, as required by the Cooper Brothers formula, which had proved so unsatisfactory since 1988 but the problem still remains in passenger transport areas as the provisions of Section 20 of the 1968 Act are still in force at the time of writing. Grants from passenger transport executives for local passenger services in 1974 amounted to £10 million and so far as can be ascertained will continue to be assessed on this basis.

On the question of rail closures, the position still remains unsatisfactory insofar as these are still covered by Sections 54 and 58 of the 1962 Act and Sections 54 of the 1968 Act. The NCIT, in its correspondence, was able to ascertain that only the "actual savings" would in future be considered and not the inflated amounts obtained by the formula. (56)

In pursuance of Section 3 of the Act, the secretary of state for the environment, on 6 December 1974, issued a direction to the British Railways Board to continue to operate a passenger service from 1 January 1975, comparable generally with that previously provided, and for which the BRB's claim for compensation in 1975 amounted to £341 million. (57)

Meanwhile on the day the Act had become law, the minister, Fred Mulley, had taken the unprecedented step of reprieving the bulk of the remaining threatened lines namely:

Machynlleth-Pwllheli

Inverness-Kyie of Lochalsh

Ashford-Hastings

Bletchley-Bedford

Wimbledon-West Croydon

Stockport-Stalybridge.

The fate of the Colchester-Sudbury, Maiden Newton-Bridport and Runcorn-Helsby-Chester lines was still, however, in doubt as were the stations at Gloucester (Eastgate) and East Brixton.

The minister stated that the action had been taken in the public interest and that the services would be covered by the first obligation to operate a passenger service under Section 3 of the Railways Act 1974. (58) This must surely be one of the first occasions when a government has acted on a piece of legislation before the ink of royal approval is even dry, except in the case of indemnity Acts.

It is also interesting to note that three of the lines reprieved by the minister on 31 July 1974 had already received consent to closure by a previous minister and a fourth had conditional consent. This is a far cry from the events of the first Wilson administration in 1964 when it was stated that a minister's decision was irreversible. In the case of the Ashford-Hastings line, only the day before a press conference had been held in the Town Hall at Rye, Sussex, under the auspices of British Rail, the local authorities and the Ashford-Hastings Rail Users' Association, with support from the RIS, to launch a publicity drive for its future development.

BR was also pointing out more forcefully the usefulness of its loss-making suburban services



QUICK ACTION:
Fred Mulley
Picture Eric Koch

which completely justified their existence because of savings to the community in other directions, for example, avoidance of road congestion, longer journey times, higher vehicle operating costs and road accidents.

In a report, published in 1974, based on a study by Christopher Foster, figures were produced which proved that **the net social benefits of keeping the Manchester-Glossop/New Mills lines open were higher than the subsidies required.** (59)

At about the same time, figures were produced which indicated that a car could cost “more to run than a mortgage on a new home. At the time, an average sized new family car cost £874 a year to run as against £686 at the same time the previous year, representing a rise in 12 months of almost £200. (60)

It would be appropriate, at this stage to consider the relative merits of buses and trains.

Buses and trains

While the RIS had originally been concerned primarily with rural railways it was not long before it became clear that one system of transport could not be viewed in isolation and by October 1958, efforts were being made to improve road/rail coordination, an aim which was subsequently embodied in its first formal constitution adopted in April 1964. Even before that date, the RIS had produced its commentary on the adequacy of buses as a substitute for rural rail services. (61) Its post-closure surveys, carried out in 1965 and 1966, had also reinforced the view that buses were no substitute for an adequate railway and that many former rail users were forced to buy their own means of transport when such services ceased. With the obligation placed on British Rail to subsidise the replacement bus services (at least until the passing of the 1968 Act) the savings obtained by closure were in many cases marginal.

Provisions not dealt with in our earlier review of the 1968 Transport Act are those contained in Part 111 with regard to the setting up of the National Bus Company. This was basically an exercise in nationalisation of the many local bus operators, some of which provided services on a wide scale and, to this day, maintain an element of their identity. There was a general feeling at the time that the resulting organisation would provide a useful means to facilitate the mass marketing of the products of British Leyland with the provisions relating to new bus grants (Section 32) and the subsequent production by that company of the National Bus.

Whether or not this has been of mutual benefit to the two organisations is open to debate. What is certain is that there now exists a nationalised branch of the road transport industry with strong British Road Federation backing, (62) running in direct competition with British Rail on the major trunk routes yet, at the same time, holding the community to ransom on the rural unprofitable routes where in the view of at least one politician it is the most appropriate means of transport. (63) Whether this duplication of investment and resources can be justified in the present economic climate is open to doubt.



The Leyland National was made in large quantities between 1972 and 1985 at Lillyhall, Workington. It was a joint project between the National Bus Company and British Leyland
Picture: James T M Towill

It has been argued that the provisions contained in the 1968 Act (Section 34) for the payment of grants for rural bus services have not been properly utilised and that, in many cases, attitudes to the NBC have been coloured by party political prejudice, leading to the confrontations referred to in the foregoing paragraph. (64) The NBC has, however, been forced to resort to these provisions not only for rural loss-making services generally but also for help with the rail replacement services – where these still exist – now that BR is no longer required to underwrite them. Having taken on the role in local transport which was formally undertaken by the unremunerative rail lines, the NBC, not unnaturally, finds itself in financial difficulties, finally exploding the Beeching-myth of buses as an alternative to rail. In fact, it is rapidly moving into the same situation as the railways in the Beeching era, where the capital expenditure necessary to continue the business is having to be financed partially by the sale of assets. (65)

The National Bus Company is therefore in serious financial difficulties and estimates that it will have to spend over £20 million (at 1974 prices) on infrastructure investment alone between 1974 and 1978 if it is to maintain a proper organisation and services and requires a cash injection of £10 million over the next two years, or up to £25 million if it is to re-equip its fleet. Like the railways, only on its express bus inter-urban services is it profitable, having a turnover of some £12 million a year and profits of about £750,000. (66) Nevertheless there are still many proponents of the bus as a solution to all public transport problems, and we are constantly being told that railways are no longer necessary. When one considers that a director of the National Bus Company is also a prominent official of the British Road Federation, the reasons are not hard to find. (62)

Assertions in *The Economist* that buses are a cheaper means of providing public transport, especially if some old railway lines are converted into reserved bus tracks, are totally misleading. Bus travel is only cheaper because operators pay less than their share of road costs when compared with operators of freight lorries of similar weight. If the buses were run on reserved tracks, far from enjoying the use of roads paid for largely by other users, they would be in essentially the same situation as the railways and would be required to carry the full cost of track construction and maintenance, signalling and administration. Moreover, under these conditions, buses would be physically incapable of affording anything like the standard of speed and comfort inherent in rail travel. They would, no doubt, be largely deserted by the travelling public as have many of the rail replacement services introduced after the Beeching cuts.

Much of this misleading argument has been based on a report prepared by the US Department of Transportation in October 1973 (67) which according to the Motor Vehicle Manufacturers Association found buses more cost effective than rail transit. (68) From our own contacts with the US, we would suggest that the findings of this report are illusory and that in the words of one reviewer: "One has to question the validity of any of the conclusions of this report in view of the uncritical acceptance of assumptions based on average costs of existing properties." (69)

In 1974, the RIS fostered further connections with the US when Britain-by-Rail Tours, an American organisation held its First Class rail tour of England, Scotland and Wales with visits to Plymouth, Bristol, Shrewsbury, North Wales, the BR Technical Centre at Derby, York, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Inverness, Dover and London. The leader of the party was Otto Janssen, executive vice-president of PTJ Publishing Inc and a director of the National Association of Railroad Passengers. At the end of the tour, Mr Janssen met representatives of the RIS and the

chairman gave an interview for the American magazine *Passenger Train Journal*.

Mr Janssen also gave a dreadful warning of what attrition of rail services and emphasis on highway transport have done in the United States.

"More than \$400 million a week is spent on the upkeep and construction of roads and highways, (USDOT) and highway accidents took 54,800 lives in 1970, caused 4,983,000 injuries and resulted in an economic loss of \$16.5 billion. Costs per mile of new highways and freeways run as high as \$50 million and more.

"Many areas of the country that once were green and tranquil are now littered with motor inns, hot-dog stands, bowling alleys and other assorted emporia, attracted there by what our highway lobbyists like to describe as our 'magnificent' interstate highways. This 40,000 mile system, much of it redundant and unwanted, costs the taxpayer some \$6 billion a year. Greeted as a blessing when the construction program began under the Eisenhower administration, it is now being resisted by citizen's groups in many parts of the country as the bulldozers plough through parks, forests, quiet villages and densely populated urban areas."

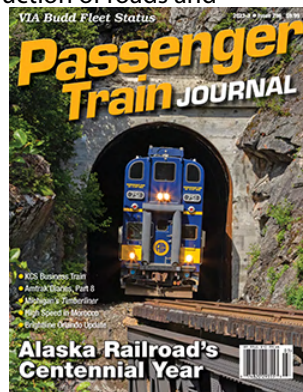
"We urge that those favoring even a partial dismantling of Britain's envied rail system should make a visit to the United States first. They should not count too much on travelling by rail, however, since our 20,000 daily trains have now been reduced to around 200.(70)

A further body with which the RIS has recently been in contact in the USA is the Committee for Better Transit Inc, a like-minded organisation with the aim of improving public transport facilities in the New York area.

Back on the home front, a delegation from Transport 2000, which included Mr R V Banks (later to become RIS chairman) met Mr Fred Mulley, minister for transport, on 31 July 1974. The delegates were heartened to discover the development of a genuine pro-rail feeling in government circles.

Nevertheless at local level, there was still a noticeable antipathy towards railway development. While the Local Government Act 1972 had imposed a duty on councils to promote a coordinated and efficient public transport system in presenting their transport policies and programmes, many merely rehashed much of their road building proposals. In Oxfordshire, for example, the proposals for 1975 set aside over 96% for roads and car parks, while only 4% was intended for public transport. (71)

On the urban scene, things were a little more encouraging as, at a meeting of the RIS branch and area representatives from Metropolitan areas held in Leeds on 1 March 1975, it was noted that after a recent visit by the minister for transport to Greater Manchester, there was renewed hope for construction of the Picc-Vic tunnel, as Mr Mulley had said that he hoped that the money might be available for it to be started later in the year. In the meantime Greater Manchester Transport Action Group had published a study advocating the scrapping of grandiose motorway schemes and the substitution of public transport developments, including the above rail link. (72) An experimental bus link had, in fact, been introduced between Piccadilly and Victoria stations by the passenger transport executive on 1 July 1974, and in the first month of operation had been patronised much better than transport officials



**2023 edition of
Passenger Train Journal**

had expected. By the middle of 1975, work had started on rebuilding Altrincham station to provide a bus/rail interchange, the first in the area of the passenger transport executive. By the end of 1974, in Liverpool, work on the construction of the inner loop line had fallen behind schedule and BR announced that in the middle of 1975 it might, for a time, be necessary to terminate trains from the Wirral at James Street, instead of Central. On 9 January 1975, all passengers using the latter station were asked to complete a brief questionnaire the results of which would be used to examine the need for alternative public transport services if it became necessary to implement the closure to enable the delay in construction of the loop line to be overcome. On 28 July 1975, Central station was closed to enable the work to proceed. Meanwhile Merseyside Metropolitan County Council had adopted a report on transport policy which recognised that as 50% of families did not possess a car, public transport would be the chief means of movement for the majority of the population. The report also pointed out that 200 people were killed, over 2,000 seriously injured and about 7,000 slightly injured in road accidents on Merseyside each year, at an annual cost to the community of £12 million. (73)

In Tyne and Wear, as it was to become known, the rapid transit scheme was being pressed ahead although the British Road Federation was campaigning against 70% of the transport committee's budget being spent on public transport. The scheme was, however, facing the perennial problem of inflation. Originally costed at £65 million by the autumn of 1974, the figure was expected to rise to as high as £95 million and there were doubts as to the extent the government would meet these increases. Plans to provide a test track were being met by local opposition and there was also much controversy over the amount of traffic chaos which would be caused by the work for the underground stations in the centre of Newcastle.

On 17 March 1975, members in the London area attended an informative illustrated lecture on the project, given by David FO Howard, director of planning of the passenger transport executive.

In London itself, bus and tube fares which had been held down since the autumn of 1972, were finally raised on 23 March because of the losses that had been incurred in 1973. The granting of an office development permit to British Rail also set the scene for the joint rebuilding of Liverpool Street and Broad Street stations at an estimated cost of £120 million and a public exhibition of the scheme was held in July 1975. The new station, if built, would cater for existing services, future growth and the transfer of the remaining Broad Street services via a new curve at Hackney, with the existing route from Dalston to Broad Street to be abandoned. The development, if approved, would be carried out in stages over a period of 10 years, include an integrated bus station, parcels handling area, improved car access



London's Liverpool Street station in 1985 and, on the right, the now demolished Broad Street station which made way for the Broadgate development

and better circulation and access to the Underground. The scheme was later much modified and a planning inquiry held at the end of 1976 when considerable opposition was encountered to demolition of the "listed" train sheds, the need for which was strongly challenged, and in view of recent financial difficulties, its implementation appears doubtful.

By the end of 1975, the West Midlands passenger transport executive was planning to revive local rail services. Among improvements to be made were more frequent services on the suburban lines from Solihull and North Warwickshire to Birmingham Moor Street, reconstruction of a branch from the main Birmingham-Bristol line to Frankley for a new overspill housing scheme, restoration of the 4.5 mile branchline from Barnt Green to Redditch and greatly improved services on the electrified line between Birmingham and Coventry.

In South Yorkshire, which had only latterly been brought into the passenger transport executive system, a provisional plan for Sheffield and Rotherham had been prepared by the land use and transportation study team. The main features incorporated ideas for an improved public transport system including railways. A loop line, partly underground and with four stations, has been suggested for **Sheffield city centre**. Among the teams conclusions were:

It is uneconomic to build new roads, especially for motorists in the rush hours unless public transport is helped

Present public transport is inadequate, especially in the outer areas where people will live in the future (74)

Finally in West Yorkshire, passengers using a new shuttle service of 104 trains daily between Leeds and Bradford travelled free on the first day (5 May 1975). Some of the trains on this service were newly refurbished with both the BR and passenger transport executive logo.

Early in 1975, pressure for the reopening of closed lines and stations reached parliamentary level. On 15 January, Mr Mulley, minister for transport, stated that two lines had been reopened in 1970, one in 1972 and three in 1973, all as light railways, and that BR had also restored a service for passengers on the Peterborough-Spalding line in 1971. Two other proposals were under review. (75) There was also much criticism of the disposal of formations, buildings and other infrastructure on lines which might be required for future reopening but the minister largely avoided the issue, leaving the onus on British Railways. (76)

The two most notable successes in 1975 were undoubtedly the Settle-Carlisle line and Magdalen Road station. By the autumn of 1974 the campaign for Magdalen Road had reached the stage where enough money had been raised by local people to effect its reopening. A survey, held in May, had been answered by 700 people, of whom 188 said they would use the station daily and 240 weekly. Even allowing for this being an optimistic estimate, there was obviously enough potential to make reopening worthwhile. After much deliberation with BR and agreement to the necessary renovations, the station was reopened to traffic on 5 May 1975.



Magdalen Road station reopened in 1975. It was renamed Watlington in 1989

The Settle-Carlisle project was a far greater success even though the reopened stations are not open on a regular basis (at least at the moment). Initial approaches were made by BR in the autumn of 1974 to the Yorkshire Dales national park committee for cooperation in the restoration of the local passenger service between Skipton and Carlisle, which had been withdrawn in 1970, as the line was still being used for freight traffic and for express and special passenger trains. Earlier in the year, in June, a train chartered by the Ramblers' Association for a special to Garsdale, Kirkby Stephen and Appleby had been fully booked with 500 passengers more than two months in advance. Much of this activity centred around the centenary of the line, for which Settle Civic Society organised a series of events leading up to 1 May 1976, the actual centenary of the passenger service.

By the summer of 1975, arrangements had been made for five stations on the line to be open at weekends, initially 3/4 May, 31 May/1 June, and 5/6 July. The stations were Horton-in-Ribblesdale, Ribblesdale, Dent, Garsdale and Kirkby Stephen. The service was run by special trains chartered by the Yorkshire Dales national park committee, stopping at Bradford Forster Square, Shipley, Bingley, Keighley, Skipton and Settle and serving the stations referred to above. In addition, on a Saturday, a return run was available to take people from the Dales stations into Bradford and Leeds for shopping, and back in the evening. Only one return trip was made on a Sunday, North Yorkshire and Cumbria county councils shared the cost (about £3,600) of repairing platforms at the reopened stations, while the national park committee paid £5,000 for such work as rebuilding gates and handrails, repairing lavatories and putting up DalesRail station signs decorated with the park symbol, a black faced Swaledale Ram. On the first weekend, the trains were full and by mid-summer the project was seen to be an absolute success with fully booked trains extended to the autumn and secured financially by the Countryside Commission for subsequent years.



Ruskington station, between Lincoln and Sleaford, was also reopened from 5 May, for normal passenger services for an experimental period of 12 months as a result of a grant made by the county council. Metheringham station was similarly reopened on 6 October. Information gained from the experiments would be used to decide whether other stations in the area should be reopened.

At a meeting held in Spalding on 14 June 1975 under the auspices of the East Anglian RIS branch to consider the development of rail services in the area, a representative of the county council explained the thinking behind the experiments and the council was congratulated on its far-sighted approach to the problem of local transport. In the remainder of East Anglia, the RIS campaign for the restoration of services on other lines continued. Following the successful public meeting in Wisbech on 18 May 1974 and the formation of the Wisbech and March Rail Action Committee, a survey of potential users of a restored service was carried out in the autumn. This was a massive operation, whereby questionnaires were sent to all households in the area, and revealed that there would be 926 daily journeys on average on the line. Of those questioned, the supporters of a restored rail link outnumbered the opponents by 12 to one. The report was subsequently sent to Cambridgeshire County Council and British Rail. While the county council had accepted in principle the idea of reopening the line and discussed with BR the likely cost, it was somewhat tardy in pursuing the matter any further. In the autumn of 1975, however, the county surveyor issued a detailed report which concluded that

an improved express bus service would be a better proposition than a reopened railway, a decision which was to be challenged both by the RIS and the local action committee.

Meanwhile, the RIS had been pursuing the possibility of the restoration of a passenger service on the Wymondham-Dereham-Fakenham and Wroxham-Aylsham lines and initial discussions were held with Dereham Town Council on 16 July 1974. Reports *By rail to Fakenham* and *By rail to Aylsham* were issued in August. This was followed by a public meeting in East Dereham on 19 October and after an informative and constructive discussion, the meeting agreed to set up a Wymondham, Dereham and Fakenham Rail Action Committee which was to hold regular monthly meetings and launch an energetic publicity campaign. By the beginning of 1975, the action committee had issued its first newsletter but was seriously questioning some of the figures quoted by Norfolk County Council in a partial breakdown of the costs of reopening the line. The MP for south-west Norfolk had also taken up with the DoE the question of level crossings of which the line had many.

Less encouraging was the news on the Cambridge-St Ives line, where the local authorities had decided not to support financially the restoration of passenger services. The highways and transportation committee of the county council, however, agreed to keep the options open if circumstances changed. The Cambridge Rail Action Group was therefore to continue its campaign and efforts were also to be made to attract further freight traffic to the line to halt the decay in its installations and make less costly an eventual reopening for passengers. The matter was also discussed at a branch meeting held in Cambridge on 17 May 1975 and in evidence submitted to hearings into the proposed Cambridge northern bypass, the RIS stressed the importance of studying the rail alternatives to further expensive road building schemes.

BR's extensive publicity campaign had by July 1974 resulted in a 12% increase in passengers on East Anglia paytrains since its launch a year earlier. Prior to these moves, there had been an average 5% drop in patronage each year. These results therefore created an even stronger case for retaining and even reopening closed lines.

The RIS branch AGM was held in Ipswich on 18 January 1975 and was followed by a public meeting when considerable emphasis was placed on the advantages of extending electrification on the Anglian main line from Colchester to Ipswich, Felixstowe and Norwich. The meeting held in Spalding on 14 June 1975 – referred to above – had been called mainly to consider the future of the Peterborough-Spalding line. The county and district councils had been subsidising the passenger service to the tune of £23,000 per annum and with the change in the law (Railway Act 1974), its future now depended on whether the minister would include it in a public service order. The limited service provided was in any case a stumbling block to any substantial development of its passenger potential and the representative of the county council at the meeting stated that BR had already given the necessary six months notice to terminate its operation. The RIS branch, however, saw its future in the context of an integrated Peterborough-Spalding-Sleaford service but so far as was known the necessary public service order had not been made and the service would presumably cease.

In West Yorkshire, the new RIS branch had, by the summer of 1975, been extended to cover Humberside and its activities greatly increased. At the branch AGM in Leeds on 19 May, the acting secretary reported that permission had been granted for the RIS branch to participate in the West Yorkshire structure plan and land use and transportation study. Among other matters discussed were the promotion of tourist traffic on freight lines and the possibility of reopening the Malton-Pickering line to complete the link from the south via the North York

Moors Railway to Whitby. The West Yorkshire passenger transport executive had also been considering the reopening of certain lines and the provision of new bus/rail interchanges. At an inquiry into the proposed bypass at Otley on 25 June 1974, it had been suggested that the scheme should allow room for the relaying of a single track railway alongside the bypass between Otley and Menston to restore the rail link between Otley and Leeds/Bradford which had been withdrawn in 1965. The RIS branch was additionally considering connectional excursion facilities to Windermere from West Yorkshire and taken an active interest in the DalesRail project.



2009: This overgrown stone bridge once spanned a twin-track section of the former railway branch line connecting Otley and Pool in Wharfedale to Arthington, Burley and Menston
Picture: Wikipedia (T J Blackwell)

In the North East, the secretary of state for the environment (Mr Anthony Crosland) had confirmed that the Haltwhistle-Alston-line could be closed when alternative bus services and an improved road had been provided and by the end of 1974 the government had also approved the £500,000 road scheme. Cumbria County Council was still unable to accept the decision to close as final and following a cost/benefit analysis by its planning department, asked the DoE to reconsider the matter. By the spring of 1975, work on the new road had not started and it was anticipated that the rail service would continue, at least until the middle of 1976. Cumbria County Council's appeal was, however, turned down but the local action group continued its fight for the retention of the rail service.

Apart from its activities in Northern Scotland, early in 1975 the RIS appointed an area representative for southern Scotland who as secretary of the Scottish Association for Public Transport would be in a unique position to coordinate the activities of the two organisations.

In North West England, the transport committee of Greater Manchester Metropolitan Council, had, early in 1974, agreed to keep open the Rochdale-Oldham line for a further year at a cost of £70-80,000. The Stockport-Stalybridge service was also one of those reprieved by the minister on 31 July 1974.

The RIS lodged an objection with the TUCC to the withdrawal by BR Shipping of its ferry services between Heysham and Belfast, the enquiry for which was held on 29 October 1974. The main grounds for objection were that the alternative service from Stranraer to Larne, with its circuitous rail connection via Ayr, could not be considered as a wholly satisfactory alternative for passengers from England. It was also clear that withdrawal of the shipping services would be accompanied by a similar withdrawal of rail facilities from Carnforth and Morecambe to Heysham, together with the long-distance services from London, Manchester and Leeds while also placing in doubt the future of the Hellifield-Carnforth line as well as the Leeds-Morecambe and Lancaster-Morecambe rail services. After approval of the proposal, BR indeed published closure notices for the passenger service between Morecambe and Heysham which eventually closed on 6 October 1975. The minister had also approved withdrawal of the Runcorn-Helsby-Chester service which ceased on 3rd May 1975.

Representations had been made about the standard of service on the Windermere branch, particularly the lack of facilities for excursion traffic and the lack of a Sunday service. The latter was subsequently restored during the season but with completion of the electrification of the West Coast main line, the obvious solution would have been to extend the system to rationalise the operation of this useful connection. Proposals have also been made for a tramway system in the Lake District as an alternative to large scale highway investment. (77)

In the Three Counties area, the RIS continued its policy of actively supporting local demands for the restoration and improvement of railway services. At Stonehouse, as a result of strenuous efforts by the parish council, supported by the RIS branch, not only was closure averted but an improved service was introduced as a result of which revenue collected there doubled. Action was also taken to support the reopening of Charfield and Ashchurch stations and to secure an improved service of trains to Pershore.

In Wessex, the secretary of state for the environment granted approval to closure of the Maiden Newton-Bridport branch and despite a campaign by the Bridport Rail Action Group, train services ceased on 3 May 1975.

Meanwhile, on 7 January 1975, Dorset County Council planning and transportation committee had recommended that Swanage Railway Society should be granted a licence to use the railway land between Furzbrook and Northbrook Road Bridge to run a scheduled passenger service. This was subsequently approved by the full council on condition that the SRS runs a weekday service of not less than four trips daily in each direction between Swanage and Wareham. The target date for achieving this is 1980.

The RIS continued to make representations on the South Hants structure plan and in particular that the Plan failed to mention the advantages of third rail electrification. The Hampshire County Council transport policies and programme was, however, to earmark the Alton-Winchester line for possible reopening and the trackbed of the Gosport-Fareham line was to be retained for possible future use as part of a South Hampshire local rapid transit system. (78)

In Oxfordshire, the RIS was one of many bodies pressing for the provision of a re-sited station at Kidlington on the Oxford-Banbury line, which now seems a distinct possibility and for the reopening to passenger traffic of the Oxford-Bletchley line.

A meeting arranged by the local group of Transport 2000 and the Milton Keynes Transport Users Group was held in Bicester in January 1975 and Oxford District Council also decided to support the reopening proposals.

The main events of note in 1975 were undoubtedly those in London and the South East, with which we shall end this narrative, the most notorious being the decision to abandon the Channel Tunnel.

In the meantime, the RIS branch had organised a railtour based on the use of the Southern Awayday Rail Rover ticket which took place on 6 July 1974 and included the Wimbledon-West Croydon line and also visited Guildford, Redhill, Edenbridge and Tonbridge.

The RIS branch AGM in September was followed by an interesting discussion on BR timetables which resulted in the views of members throughout the country being sought. In November, Mr Percy Danks of the LMR public relations office gave a talk on the organisation of Merry-maker excursions. The RIS branch also took further steps to restore the Guildford-Horsham line. Local support was received, including a favourable editorial in the *Surrey Advertiser* and the RIS indicated to Surrey County Council that it would oppose any proposals

to use the trackbed for road building. The campaign was led by a member of Surrey County Council who believed there was a substantial number of commuters living in the Cranleigh area (where the old route had been blocked by a shopping development) to warrant its restoration to that point. Surrey County Council, while expressing interest doubted whether a financial case for reopening could be made.

The RIS branch committee wrote to the Greater London Council with its views on the consultation paper *Fare deal – your choice* in which it was estimated that London Transport costs would rise from £145 million in 1973 to £365 million in 1977 and suggested three strategies: nil, 30% or 4.5% fares increases, the balance to be provided in each case by increases in the general rate. The committee suggested that an intermediate fare increase of 15-20%, with a rate increase of about 18-20p per week would be a better compromise.

Further encouraging rail developments in the area were the opening of a new station to serve Basildon on the London Fenchurch Street-Southend line, on 25 November 1974, and a statement that BR intended to electrify the six-mile branch to Braintree, Essex, from the main line at Witham. Initially, one through train a day to and from Liverpool Street would be included in the branch timetable.

Nevertheless, by the autumn of 1974 the RIS branch committee was concerned over the delay in publication of the report of the London Rail Study. The study, set up nearly two years earlier under the chairmanship of Sir David Barran, was expected to be completed within a year, although, not surprisingly, this had proved to be too optimistic. Part 1 of the Report was eventually published on 28 November 1974 and the more comprehensive Part 11 early in 1975.

Its recommendations gave the highest priority to station modernisation, including improved interchange facilities and car parks, and electrification of all remaining diesel-operated radial commuter services into London. The report did not recommend the introduction of Ring Rail at least in the early stages, but considered improvements to existing non-radial routes in North London worthwhile, including a service from Clapham Junction to Willesden Junction. It suggested that the Fleet Line should be extended to Thamesmead, via Docklands (where redevelopment should be integrated with the railway) and Woolwich (to provide relief to British Rail's North Kent services). It also recommended an early feasibility study on the CrossRail proposals to link Paddington with Bethnal Green and Victoria with London Bridge and an increase in the frequency of the off-peak suburban services wherever this could be justified, but particularly on the Bakerloo line north of Queens Park. An important recommendation was for the setting up of a permanent coordinating committee for London rail services, both BR and London Transport, a proposal which the RIS strongly supported. (79)

In anticipation of publication of the report a special subcommittee had been set up by the RIS and its observations, after considering subsequent public transport proposals for Docklands, (80) were sent to the department of the environment, Greater London Council, operating authorities and issued to the press in June 1975. An RIS branch meeting had also been held on



Basildon station in 2007
Picture: Julianne Savage

11 March at the House of Commons, when Nigel Spearing MP had given a talk on aspects of London railways. Encouraging as these proposals were, in the prevailing financial situation, there was considerable doubt whether funds would be forthcoming for all or any of these projects? Even the redevelopment of Docklands itself was in the melting pot and the department of the environment subsequently made it clear that extension of the Fleet line from Charing Cross to Fenchurch Street could only be justified in the context of its extension to Docklands.

The Channel Tunnel and Maplin Airport projects were also to be victims of the rapidly declining financial situation which faced the country at the time. The first sign of dissent over the tunnel came with the publication of details of the high speed rail link. At the same time, however, the concept of the tunnel as a rolling motorway was coming under increasing attack and with the change of government early in 1974, the secretary of state for the environment (Mr Anthony Crosland) announced in the House of Commons on 3 April that the government had decided that a full and searching reassessment of the project should be carried out before any decision is taken to embark on the main works. He said: "I shall examine with the French government and the railways board the need to orient the project much more strongly towards through rail services" (81) a decision which was in fact to sound its death knell. The government did, however, agree to go ahead with reintroduction of the necessary legislation but Mr Crosland made it clear that the review of the project would not be complete until the summer of 1975. (82)

The main opposition to the Channel Tunnel in its current form came from the Defenders of Kent whose aim was to protect their towns, villages and countryside from the damaging effects which a concentrated road terminal at Cheriton would undoubtedly have created. However, as the RIS vice-chairman, Mr R V Banks, was to point out to the local press, "because of its proximity to the continent, there would be a growing volume of freight and passenger traffic through the South East and through Kent in particular, and the traffic would grow whether the tunnel was built or not. The only way to minimise the problem would be by transferring as much of the traffic as possible to the railways and if a better, though more costly, link was shown to be feasible the local authorities should be prepared to help financially as, without such a link the cost of new access roads to the tunnel would be colossal and far more people would suffer environmental disturbance." (83) Opposition to the rail link was not only confined to Kent but was also prevalent in Surrey and in London itself. Towards the end of the summer, British Rail sent to the department of the environment a report which proposed a continuous tunnel from Chelsea Basin to South Croydon in order to avoid difficulties which could arise in the building of a surface route. However, opposition even to this proposal arose at Balham and Clapham because the tunnel would have only been 60 ft deep in some places and property owners feared damage through vibration from passing trains.

As we have seen earlier, British Rail's proposal was for a rail terminal at White City to facilitate



Labour environment minister Anthony Crosland's decision delayed work on the Channel Tunnel by 13 years
Picture: NPG

onward passage of traffic to the remainder of the rail system. While the RIS was generally in agreement with such a scheme, proposals put forward by the RDA and National Council on Inland Transport for an alternative link via Blackfriars and Paddington were not without their merits. (84) Nevertheless, the crunch came on 20 January 1975 when the secretary of state for the environment announced that the government had decided to abandon the Channel Tunnel, allegedly on the grounds of rapidly increasing costs of the high speed rail link and the fact that a second general election in 1974 had delayed passage of the necessary legislation. Because of this delay, it was not possible to ratify the treaty with the French government or the agreements with the companies by the deadline of 1 January 1975 and the companies had reluctantly felt obliged to take advantage of their escape clauses rather than wait for further reassessment of the project, in the interest of their shareholders. (85) It is however debatable whether with sufficient will on the part of all concerned the operation could not have been salvaged. In the event, those interests which stood to lose most by a rail-orientated tunnel, into which the project was rapidly turning, were to have their worst fears averted. The minister did assure the country that nothing would be done which would prejudice the possibility of its future implementation but by then the financial situation had reached a stage where any major project was likely to be doomed. Only Concorde appears to have survived, an elitest venture if ever there was one.

The RIS issued a statement deploring the unilateral decision not to proceed, taken before the reassessment studies had even been completed and stressed that the short-sighted decision would inevitably increase damage to the environment in the South East, increase juggernaut traffic and lead to further accidents and waste of energy resources. It would also deprive the country of a physical link with the continent which would have greatly assisted the declared intention to divert as much traffic as possible from road to rail.

In the meantime, the RIS had submitted evidence to the Cairncross committee set up to reassess the scheme, criticising its costing as an isolated transport project rather than as part of an integrated European rail network. It also made the point that while much criticism had been levelled at the accelerating cost of the project, due to inflation, if no tunnel were built the costs of alternative transport would also escalate and would have to be continually replaced whereas the tunnel, once built, would be permanent and require only routine maintenance. The construction of a rail-only tunnel, built to Berne gauge and the scrapping of the roll-on, roll-off complex at Cheriton could reduce the overall cost dramatically and, by providing for wider dispersal of traffic throughout the country, allay most of the fears of the local population and environmentalists.

Despite this setback, the RIS went ahead with a



The Channel Tunnel eventually opened in 1993. Author John Barfield is pictured with a Eurostar train at Waterloo International two years later on his way to the European Commission at Brussels for talks with officials and politicians

public meeting in London on 30 January when John Ogilvie gave an illustrated lecture entitled *Southern into Europe* in which he reviewed the circumstances which had led to the government's decision. He was very critical of British Rail's handling of the plans for the rail link, not only as regards route and proposed method of operation, but also from the public relations point of view. In his opinion, the whole project had been too narrow in its outlook and too ambitious in its scale. The treaty with France had also been unnecessarily restricted in the options open. What was needed was a Roskill-type commission to consider all aspects of transport between Britain and Europe. The alternative proposals he put forward would form part of a composite development plan for British Rail in the 1980s. Full-power passenger trains of normal dimensions would operate without overhead wires at an absolute maximum speed of over 125 mph (200 kph). Road traffic would not be drawn into East Kent and motorways would not need to be extended beyond their present limits. (86)

Dr A W T Daniel, chairman of the National Council on Inland Transport, summed up the meeting by saying that the environmental consequences of the tunnel and rail link had been grossly overstated. The result of not building the tunnel would be far worse than if it proceeded. Politics had bedevilled the issue which had become unnecessarily bound up with the issue of Britain's continued membership of the EEC. Europe would not go away if Britain were to withdraw and people would still want to travel to and from the continent. The matter was purely one of communication.

It has since been suggested that Kent will inevitably become the "loading bay for Europe" and when it is considered that from official figures roll-on, roll-off lorry traffic through Dover harbour has increased from 10,556 in 1966 to 252,505 in 1974 and if the trend continues could well be over 13.5 million by 1984 (over 50 times the 1974 figure) the prospects for south-east England are indeed grim. It would certainly be in their best interests for the people of Kent to press for the project to be resurrected in the form of a rail-only tunnel to safeguard the environment of south-east England from the increasing influx of roadborne traffic. A very substantial saving would accrue, both for the construction and maintenance of roads, if traffic were diverted from road to rail. (87)

This chapter would be incomplete without reference to the findings of the Independent Commission on Transport set up by the Rt Rev Hugh Montefiore, Bishop of Kingston-on-Thames, late in 1972 which held its first plenary session in February 1973. The report (88) appeared in June 1974 and was one of the most outstanding on the problems of transport in Britain – both public and private – that has ever been published. For the first time, an independent body had examined in depth all modes of transport in all their aspects, economic, environmental, in their use of land, energy and other resources and, in particular, social justice. The members of the commission covered a wide range of professional disciplines, they argued from known facts and from little-known statistics. The strength of their case was that so many arguments pointed in the same direction and, having no vested interest in any one mode of transport, were indeed able to speak objectively and independently.

In the introductory chapter of the report, it was stressed that people were becoming increasingly concerned about transport and the way it affected their lives and the piecemeal way in which it was being dealt. Transport was taking over and policies were being introduced without the public having any effective say in what was happening to them. The commission aimed at an unbiased look at the transport scene without any preconceived ideas as to the best solution. Transport affected everyone's standards of living and way of life and it hoped to

find out whether people were worse or better off as a result of the policies which had been pursued to date. Firstly it was necessary to consider how transport decisions were made and in this respect, it felt that radical changes were necessary. It admitted, however, that time precluded a detailed assessment of all aspects of transport and some topics, such as international travel, were omitted.

The commission found that transport already consumed roughly one fifth of the nation's total output, one fifth of its supplies of useful energy and nearly a quarter of its oil throughput. In 12 years, its spread of concrete and construction had swallowed up an area the size of Oxfordshire and one million people had been killed or seriously injured on the roads. The commission recognised the advantages of the motor car in so far as it could confer personal mobility, a freedom and ease of movement and wealth of opportunity. Holidays, recreation and social life could depend on it. Similarly, commercial firms often preferred the flexibility of a private lorry to the railway system. These were facts of life but at the same time the advantages had been purchased at a huge sacrifice of the riches of life for some people and even of life itself. It also questioned whether the motor industry was as essential to the future of the country as was made out and the extent to which new technology might change the situation. The true costs were, in the commission's view, seldom counted.

The commission was helped in its work by a large number of individuals and both public and private organisations, including the Railway Inigation Society.

In the two decades surveyed in this book we have seen how the four main line railway companies were finally brought together under public ownership through the British Transport Commission and how the resulting organisation was found to be too unwieldy and day-to-day management subsequently transferred to the regions to form more workable units. However, the size of the organisation at the top still nevertheless grew, until by the time of Dr Beeching many staff were employed, not to run the railways but to plan its destruction.

At the same time, increasing bureaucratic interference from the ministry of transport, through its regulatory powers, was leading to unnecessarily costly methods of operating branch and local railways. While many lines were undoubtedly overstaffed in relation to the traffic carried, it was easier for the management to close them down than to run them more economically. The ministry of transport was becoming clearly a ministry of roads, a far cry from the all-embracing ministry of ways and communications envisaged by Eric Geddes in 1919. As their financial position deteriorated in the late 1950s, largely as a result of the free run given to road transport, the railways became in the eyes of the uninitiated and largely unsympathetic civil servants a burden to be shed as soon as possible. Reinforced in this view by the academic economists and accountants, the government, who were in any case biased against the railways as a nationalised undertaking, embarked upon a massive closure programme which in itself did more damage to the railways future prospects than the actual closures because of the uncertainty in which it left industrialists and traders. It is no wonder that they turned to road transport which was then in vogue as an organ of free enterprise.

By the time a Labour government came to power in 1964, confidence in the railways had been so seriously eroded that despite a pledge that future closures would be halted, the Beeching pill had become so addictive that they found themselves powerless to stop the momentum. Because of the long term nature of the inter-urban road programme and the financial

commitment which had been made to it and the aspirations of a car-owning majority this trend too was found to be irreversible. It was not in fact until 1966 that the closure programme reached its peak with the withdrawal of rail services on 1,127 route miles of line. Even when it had become quite clear that this policy was totally ineffective in solving the railways financial ills and that buses were no substitute for rail in rural areas, as measured by public response, the policy nevertheless continued until by 1974 the number of route miles closed had dwindled to 61. (89)

Meanwhile, the management had been too preoccupied in reorganising itself to spend sufficient time to effect the changes necessary to provide an efficient and modern railway system. A problem with which few of the continental countries had been faced having to start virtually from scratch after the war. Only Gerard Fiennes really got to grips with the problems of the basic railway in the middle 1960s by which time it was too late to be of any significant effect and was largely negated by the inflated costing formula adopted for the subsidisation of unremunerative rail services under the 1968 Act.

In 1961, British Rail had 4,709 passenger stations and 2,459 freight stations open to traffic. By 1972, these had been reduced to 2,362 and 568 respectively. Concentration of freight and passenger facilities on this scale left a system which was too disconnected and fragmented to compete effectively in either market other than on the trunk routes, as recent studies have shown. (90)

By 1971, investment in road and rail had also become completely disproportionate. While British Rail spent a mere £26 million on maintaining or renewing the permanent way no less than £687 million was spent on the roads. (91) While the railway system was underutilised, the roads were choked with the ever-increasing demand for capacity from cars and lorries, an inherent feature of the Inter-urban road programme which has involved the expenditure of £3 billion in road construction between 1962 and 1972 with the additional cost of over four million people killed and injured on the roads. This is even before allowance is made for the costs of pollution, congestion, lighting, policing and the provision of off-street parking facilities. We are now promised a further 2,000 miles of motorway by a minister who has publicly stated he considers himself minister of roads, at an average cost of £3 million per mile. A subsidy of £430 million per annum is however considered too high a price to pay for a railway system.

We have seen in the work of Hamer (92) how the road lobby wields its influence and in the independent commission report how by 1980, over two thirds of the population are likely to be adversely affected by objectionable traffic noise if present trends continue. (93) The railways in Parliament have, since nationalisation been largely unrepresented, other than through the unions while, through its influence, the road lobby has been able to secure many hours of the time of both politicians and civil servants with the all too obvious outcome. There has been no consistent policy on transport generally only in roads policy. The Independent commission has argued that too much emphasis has been placed on the importance of the motor industry in the British economy and with recent developments in that field, it could well go the way of the railways, the Post Office and the ground nuts scheme. What then?

We have seen how the Railway Invigoration Society and the Railway Development Association were to court each other in the 1950s without effect (we are just good friends) but that the result of this liaison was the formation of the National Council on Inland Transport, a child of which it can be justly proud, for its achievements in the 1960s. Events have now taken a further turn with the railway industry and the unions also entering the arena with the

conservationists and environmentalists. Does this represent a breakthrough?

It has often been argued that the weakness of the pro-rail organisations has been their multiplicity but this could well be their strength.. A study of the road lobby reveals no less of a diversity of effort and it could well be that road and rail are now matched on even terms. Only time will tell.

Further comment is, however, more appropriate to the final chapter where we shall briefly discuss the future of British Rail.

Notes on chapter six

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- (65) Huckfield Report op cit p 45
- (66) ibid p 45-6
- (67) U S Dept of Transportation Evaluation of rail rapid transit and express bus services in the urban commuter market October 1973
- (68) Automotive Information M V M A of the US Vol 11 No 9
- (69) A cursory review of (67) by Thomas B Deen, a well-known US transport consultant
- (70) PR No 100 Sept 1974 p 5
- (71) Oxfordshire County Council T P P 1975-1984
- (72) Greater Manchester Transport Action Group Transportation Planning and Greater Manchester by Ken Child and Rita Oughton 1974
- (73) Merseyside County Council report No (JTU/I/75) as reported in Liverpool Daily Post 4/I/75 "Blue print boosts public transport"
- (74) Based on LUTS Report for South Yorks 1975
- (75) Hansard House of Commons 15/1/75 col 435-6 (question by GWilym Roberts MP)
- (78) Hansard House of Commons 15/1/75 col 438 (question by Bruce Grocott MP)
- (77) Could a tramway help to save Lakeland? by K R Johnson in Town and Country Planning Dec 1974
- (78) Hampshire County Council TPP 1975-1984
- (79) Greater London Council and Department of the Environment London Rail Study - Report: Part 1 G L C November 1974
- (80) Docklands Joint Committee The Docklands Spine – Tube Bus or Tram? (Docks 56) April 1975
- (81) Hansard House of Commons 2/4/74 col 1267-78 Ministerial Statement
- (82) ibid col 1268-9 Reply to Mrs Margaret Thatcher M P
- (83) Letter published in Kent Messenger 28/6/74
- (84) Calvert op cit p 131-2
- (85) Hansard House of Commons 20/1/75 col 1021-34 Ministerial Statement
- (86) An expanded version of these proposals appeared in the August and September 1975 issues of Modern Railways Vol 32 p 320-3 and 370-4
- (87) Figures supplied by Dover Harbour Board
- (88) Independent Commission Report op cit
- (89) Hansard House of Commons 7/8/75 col 35-8-9 (question by David Knox MP)
- (90) Huckfield Report op cit p 38
- (91) J P S Bagwall The Transport Revolution from 1770 1974 p 380
- (92) Hamer op cit
- (93) Independent Commission Report op ci t P 74-75 -

British Railways - What Future Now?

Doubts about the future of the railways as a means of mass transit have often been expressed as a direct result of industrial action, irrespective of the merits of the railwaymen's case and recent attacks in the media have been no exception. In this case, however, cutbacks in road building because of the financial situation, combined with more vocal opposition to motorway schemes has, as will be seen later, prompted the road lobby to attempt a takeover of the railway system itself as a means of obtaining a whole new road network on the cheap.

The works of Snell (1) and Hamer (2) have shown quite clearly how the automotive interests have combined to influence both government and public opinion in favour of road development in the United States and Great Britain. The former reveals the intricate means by which General Motors were able, over a period of 30 years, to suppress rail transit in America and electric traction in particular, as a means of enlarging the market for its most profitable products, namely motor cars and lorries. Even the Greyhound Bus Corporation was its creation. Mr Snell's report presents ample evidence that the quality of urban transport has been deliberately diminished in the interests of selling motor cars and that the elimination of railways has been the primary aim of all concerned. (3) It would be naive to pretend that similar influences are not at work in Britain too.



Assuming that the road lobby's aim is to achieve a monopoly of inland transport in Great Britain by the end of the century, a situation could well arise not dissimilar to that which existed at the end of the last century when the railways had achieved just such a monopoly. As we have seen in chapter 1, public reaction was distinctly hostile leading to excessive statutory control of railway pricing and commercial freedom followed by stagnation and lack of capital to finance innovation and new development. At the present time, public reaction to excessive reliance upon and the environmental effects of road transport is already being felt, even though a monopoly situation has not yet been reached. The likelihood of it occurring therefore becomes more remote. In these circumstances, abandonment of an effective and more energy-efficient alternative, less destructive to the environment, would be an act of gross irresponsibility on the part of any government, but there are signs that the present administration is set on just such a course. (4)

Recent studies have clearly shown that, once the balance of transport is upset, the disadvantages of over or under provision of any one mode become more apparent for example, too many cars and lorries and too few buses and trains) leading to a vicious circle of service reductions and fare rises on the latter and increasing congestion and demands for more and more road space to cope with the former. (5)

The Independent Commission Report also seriously questioned the efficacy of the inter-urban road programme which is still based largely on the proposals drawn up in 1969 and which formed the basis of the white paper *Roads for the Future* (Command 4369) (6).

In particular, the independent commission cast considerable doubt upon the forecasts of

traffic growth which form the sole justification for *Roads for the Future*. These forecasts were based on population trends and the Transport and Road Research Laboratory estimated that the increase in demand would slacken off to saturation point of approximately 0.45 cars per head by 2010, most of the increase being achieved by 1985. In the event, this trend has not been followed and the increase has been less than predicted. The main reason for this over-estimation is that the study was a statistical exercise unrelated to causal or behavioural connections between car ownership and other things. It also assumed that too much would remain the same (for instance, that road building would continue to meet demand and that there would be no resistance to this trend.) The commission therefore found that forecasts of future car travel and ownership had been generally overstated. (7) The figures for the past 20 years are in fact so scattered and erratic that no simple law of growth can be formed, and the method of forecasting the position in future is of doubtful, validity and has been severely criticised on technical, grounds.(8)

It is, therefore, encouraging to note from the government's recent transport consultation document that "in present circumstances, and given the inevitable uncertainty about energy supplies in the long term, it seems right to take a cautious view of the growth of traffic and to accept the risk of under-providing for the future." (9) Of greater significance, however, is the proposal to seek an independent assessment to comment on and recommend any necessary changes in the department's appraisal of road schemes, including the traffic forecasts and the weights given to economic and environmental factors. (10) The document does, nevertheless, indicate areas where the original programme has been eroded in the light of changed circumstances (11) but admits that in the past, urban roads were over designed and that most new roads in urban areas merely generate extra traffic to fill them. (12)

This therefore leads on to the anomaly of the treatment of spare capacity on road and rail. In paragraph 9.11 of the document, it is acknowledged that roads are normally designed for the traffic expected 15 years after they have been completed as it would be uneconomic to build them without some initial spare capacity. In order to be consistent, the same principle should have been adopted towards railway spare capacity but, as we have seen at the end of chapter 4, specific provision was made in the 1968 Act (section 40) for its elimination. Will the same approach be adopted to the roads which have been over designed? In the case of the railways, however, extensive traffic growth in a number of areas, particularly Scotland, has made it necessary to restore some of the spare capacity which was eliminated and a recent grant for this purpose on the Perth-Inverness line amounted to £3.7 million.

The road haulage Industry, like the railways in their early years, was relatively unencumbered, giving it the edge over its rail competitor, but is now becoming increasingly regulated. However, operating as it does outside the bounds of a fixed network it is by its very nature less amenable to such regulation. The roads, be they country lane or motorway, are free for all to use. Where restrictions do exist, it is open to the individual driver to avoid them if he can and in the case of less reputable firms, this becomes a normal part of operating practice. If it were not so, it would not be necessary to invoke overnight parking bans and similar measures.

Many organised carriers, some dating from the days of the horse and cart, operate in a responsible manner and the influence of the road transport unions has invariably made it impossible for them to do otherwise. Nevertheless, with a large number of one man firms, some owning only one vehicle, it is the cowboy operator who lets the side down with indiscriminate parking, cut price and dangerous operating practices, tax evasion, use of the highway and other public parking places for garaging and maintenance of vehicles and in

very extreme cases trespass, not to mention the use of land contrary to planning law. Ask any municipal engineer or planning enforcement officer.

This situation is clearly acknowledged in the Huckfield report although use of the National Freight Corporation as a means of taking over and eliminating the disreputable operator, while punitive we find difficult to take seriously. (13) It is therefore a fact of life that the road transport industry, if it chooses to, can avoid almost any restriction which might be imposed upon it as clearly shown in the work, of Bayliss where the many ingenious means of circumnavigating the road licensing regulations are enumerated in detail. (14) A further example of this is the sign which was erected in 1975 on the south-west corner of Mare Street and Graham Road, Hackney, indicating that the left turn is unsuitable for heavy goods vehicles. The sign is almost universally ignored. For this reason, it is considered that the proposals in the consultation document to provide "an adequate system of lorry routes to take heavy traffic away from unsuitable roads and residential areas" are in the words of the authors "alas, a pipe dream". (15)

The prevalent attitude of the industry, as promulgated in *Living with the Lorry* (16) is that RIS must learn to live with its disadvantages if general living standards in terms of consumer goods and food prices are to be kept at a reasonable level. Also, industry can no longer survive without the services it provides. This situation, however, only arises because industry has been encouraged to become so dependent on road transport that it cannot easily adapt to other modes. Apart from the hidden subsidies already referred to, the government consultation document confirmed what the RIS has suspected for some time – that heavy lorries, particularly those over 3.5 tons have not, in recent years been paying their full costs. (17)



It has since been calculated that 32-ton four-axle articulated lorries (juggernauts) have by this means received such a subsidy in the last year of about £1,710 each. This represents the excess in road building and maintenance charges attributable to their use over the amount contributed in taxes. With a total of 41,000 in this class, this represents support to the road transport industry of £71 million – £5 million more than the freight subsidy to British Rail. (18) As long ago as 1953 in France, it was discovered that light goods vehicles paid more in taxation than the track costs they incurred while heavy vehicles paid substantially less (19) and the same situation is clearly apparent in Britain today. While it is intended to rectify this situation, it is certainly inequitable to require BR to achieve viability for rail freight until the above tax anomalies have been removed. (20)

An attempt was made in the Railways Act 1974 (section 8) to encourage the installation of private sidings in an effort to reverse this trend, but with the general gloomy future predicted for the railways in recent years, many companies have been reluctant to take advantage of the grant aid available for this purpose. In some cases, there has even been evidence of opposition by the Transport and General Workers Union with threats to black all the company's goods if it went ahead with the installation of such facilities. (21) As the RIS

chairman commented in his address at the annual general meeting in York: "Does Mr Jack Jones approve of this blackmail by his union? We would be interested to know." (22) Despite a slow start, however, by the middle of 1976, over £1 million had been committed by the government to finance 7 schemes approved by the DoE and the secretary of state for Scotland. (23) Nevertheless, the prospects of transferring any significant quantities of traffic back to rail by this means still appears remote.

The road lobby, although noticeably rattled by events in the last few years, still regard present trends only as a minor setback and will undoubtedly endeavour to manipulate public opinion in their favour by the means described by Hamer. (24) To reinforce this view, it is significant that while rail schemes are invariably dropped in times of financial crisis, road schemes are as a rule merely deferred. (25) The former minister for transport clearly expressed his support for the road lobby's opposition to the fitting of tachograph's in lorries as required by EEC regulations. (26)

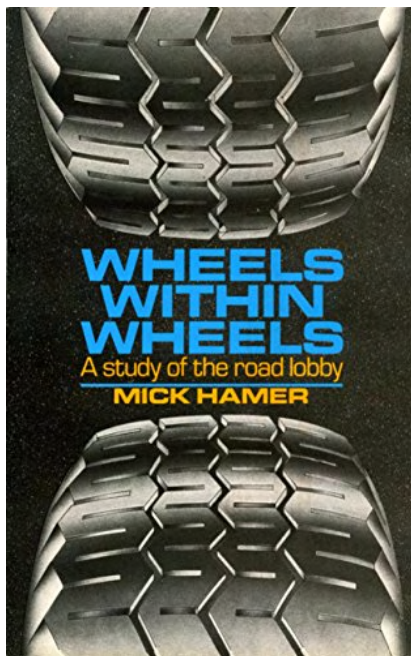
The prospects for the long-term future of the railways in these circumstances are therefore questionable.

Like most industries in recent years, the railways' financial position has been aggravated by the effects of rapid inflation and as all too often in the past by government intervention with regard to fares and charges. The railways board emphasised this point in its 1974 annual report as follows:-

"In 1972 costs rose by 10%; we were allowed to increase prices by 8%. In 1973 costs rose by 6%; we were allowed to increase prices by 3%. In 1974, the present chancellor, in his November Budget, gave the railways freedom to price up, but by that time the price base was so low that the market could not take the increase needed. The result: costs rose by 33% and we were enabled to increase prices by 16%."

As a consequence, the railways made an operating loss of £96 million. in 1974, after government grants totalling £154 million. While the industrial recession had caused a loss of freight traffic, in common with every other railway in the EEC, British Rail was, nevertheless, able to report improved passenger business to the tune of 700 million passenger miles. Receipts were up 10% on 1973 at £329 million, with traffic at its highest level since 1964. (27)

However, by the summer of 1975 it was clear that some of the misgivings which had been expressed by BR over the revised financial arrangements provided for in the Railways Act 1974 were proving to be well-founded. (28) It will be recalled from chapter 6 that the Act was drafted to bring support for British Railways into line with the appropriate regulations of the EEC. These were generally favourable to BR, insofar as they provided for the railways to be reimbursed for financial obligations which, in the case of road are met by national funds, provision of track, signalling and other things, so that the two modes could compete on equal terms. In the meantime the EEC commission has issued a consultation document, no doubt as



a result of pressure from the road lobby, which proposes that the railways should be rationalised so as to pay their way and that grant aid for their networks should be withdrawn. (29) With the provisions for a block grant to BR in lieu of the individual grants for unremunerative rail services under section 39 of the 1968 Act, however unsatisfactory their costing may have been, the railways have become more vulnerable to adverse criticism over the extent of their losses and the level of government support.

The situation was summed up by the late Anthony Crosland, then secretary of state for the environment, in a parliamentary reply on 30 June 1975 in the following terms:-

“Last year we provided £1,500 million in the Railways Act 1974 for support to the railways passenger business. We also took powers to support railway pensions. It was then thought that the £1,500 million might last for five years or so. But the steep increases in the railway wage bill through two consecutive large settlements mean that the money will run out much sooner unless strong counter measures are taken to increase revenue and reduce costs.

“The board now needs total support of about £480 million a year. Of this about £90 million is attributable to the pension payments referred to above. I anticipate that state and local authority support for the passenger system will provide about £330 million of the balance. There remains a gap of about £60 million attributable to losses on freight which the 1974 Act does not cover.

“With my agreement, the board is therefore considering urgently how it can reduce its dependence on exchequer support. In the short term, relief must come mainly from higher fares and charges. The board has already applied to the Price Commission for an increase of 15% from 7 September in passenger fares and charges. Substantial increases in freight and parcels charges are also in prospect.

“Next, the board has already taken action to reduce working expenses. It has also instituted urgent studies of its passenger and freight businesses aimed at identifying more precisely the worst loss makers and securing economies. The studies will cover questions of productivity, manning and the level and extent of services. The trade unions will, of course be consulted.

“For my part, I have set the board a short-term target of limiting passenger support payment for 1976 to no more than the present level in real terms. For the long term, I propose to set ceilings for the total level of support and borrowing within which the board will have to manage the railways.

“On freight services, the government view most seriously deficits for which there is no statutory provision. I have therefore requested the board to examine urgently ways and means by which these can be eliminated. I shall be making a further announcement as soon as possible.” (30)



Labour environment minister Anthony Crosland
Picture: NPG

These figures have, however, been adjusted in the light of later information, principally the

government white paper on public expenditure to 1979-80 (command 6393). (31) Comparing BR's annual accounts for 1975-6, the first complete year under the new Act, with the forecasts for 1979-80 the position is as follows:-

British Rail	1975-6	1979-80	
Central government capital expenditure	£156m	£177m	
Track etc as per sec 3 of Railways Act 1974	£86m	£89m	
Local government expenditure (inc PTE)	£30m	£50m.	
Total capital expenditure	£272m	£316m	
Central government annual expenditure			
Passenger subsidies	£168m	£164m	
Freight grant	£69m	-	
Pensions	£65m	£60m	
	£302m	£224m	
Local government annual subsidies	£24m	£25m	
Total annual subsidies	£326m	£249m	(32)

This therefore makes a total of £598 million in capital and annual support for BR in the year 1975/6. One reason for the apparent anomaly in the figures is that BR annual accounts run from January to December while those for the exchequer run from 5 April to 4 April in the following year and Mr Crosland was presumably aware that his figures would be subject to revision.

One other point which needs to be stressed at this stage is that under section 3 of the 1974 Act, track, electrification and signalling are now treated as a running cost, instead of capital, ostensibly to put them on the same footing as road, but this has the effect of boosting the loss by nearly £100 million increasing the railways' vulnerability to criticism as described earlier.

Returning to the events of 1975, the necessary economy measures were outlined by BRB chairman Richard Marsh, shortly afterwards in the form of a seven point plan involving a cutback on recruitment, reduction in the tracklaying programme, mothballing of 60 locomotives, withdrawal of 30,000 freight vehicles, withdrawal of 600 or 700 passenger coaches, cuts in freight train mileage by 6% and a slimming of passenger train services. (33)

Inevitably these ingredients made the railways less attractive to the travelling public and less able to compete in the field of freight transport. The plans also included the closure of some rail depots, a reduction of up to 40% of services on some commuter lines and the axing of many inter-city trains, and were sufficient to prompt 40 Labour MPs to sign a House of Commons motion expressing alarm at their effect on peak-hour suburban services. Not unexpectedly, the proposed cuts brought a strong reaction from the railway unions which, like the Railway Invigoration Society, were determined to see that economies to achieve short term savings would not prejudice the railways long term commercial prospects. As a result,

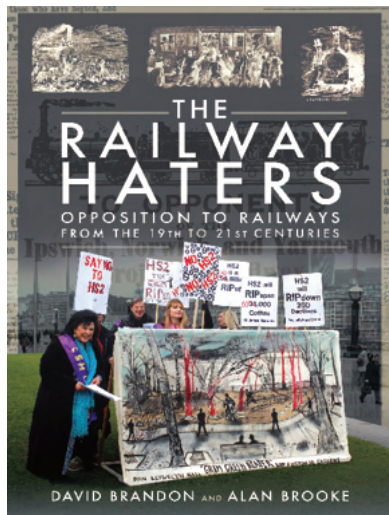
many of the cuts were deferred until the necessary consultations with the unions had taken place.

Nevertheless the attacks on the railways in the press and the media continued with renewed pressure from the road lobby for more cuts in the system. Roger Calvert's researches have, however, cast considerable doubt upon the credibility of the costings and the build-up of figures used to justify rail closures, both under the Beeching plan and subsequently (34) and it has generally been accepted that such measures are not a solution to the railways financial problems, if anything the reverse. Notwithstanding, towards the end of 1975 evidence came to light that the DoE was in fact working on just such a programme which would have entailed a cutback in the system to a mere 4,000 miles.

This prompted the railway unions to launch a *No Rail Cuts* campaign which was unveiled at a mass meeting and lobby of MPs at Westminster on 16 December 1975 and has continued with events throughout the country, including a mass write-in protest to the minister. The unions also closed ranks with the BRB in an attempt to thrash out with the government a mutually acceptable solution to the railway cash crisis and after one such meeting, the minister, Mr Gilbert, assured them that there would be a continuing need for a substantial railway system but added that railway costs had been increasing rapidly and in the prevailing financial situation there was a limit to the amount of government support which could be forthcoming. Mr Crosland had also described proposals for wholesale cuts in the system as "a load of codswallop". (35)

The non-appearance of the promised statement on transport policy was, however, having a serious effect on railway morale. Concern was also expressed by the RIS, the RDA and the National Council on Inland Transport in a joint letter to the minister in December 1975 over, the intention to limit the amount of cash to BR to £330 million whereas under the terms of the Railways Act 1974 the compensation entitlement was estimated to be at least £565 million., representing a 42% reduction in financial support. By contrast, local government grants included a sum of £285 million for transport supplementary grant, an increase of about 5% compared with the previous allocation of £270 million. As much of this would be spent on roads, there was a clear bias against the railways. Furthermore if, as it appeared, revenue support under transport supplementary grant, was also to be cut, fares would have to rise steeply or services abandoned altogether. This would lead to much reduced public transport in the Greater London Council area and the metropolitan counties and bring about the disappearance of public transport from vast regions of rural Britain.

The three rail-supporting societies therefore pressed the government to give a firm commitment for a rolling programme of capital investment for 7-10 years, as the railways could not be expected to run on a short-term basis. Furthermore repeated changes and cancellations in investment programmes had increased railway costs enormously. Unless this programme was implemented, the possibilities of reducing these costs by economies of scale,



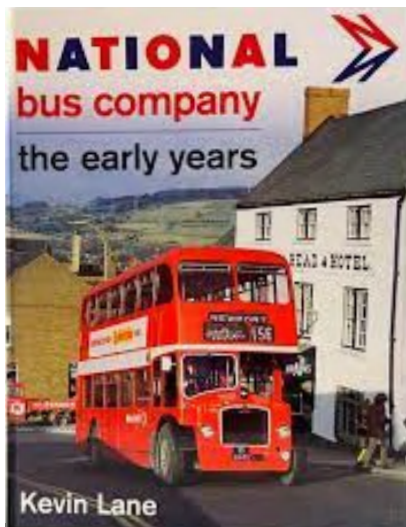
**Book published in 2019
exposing the opponents
of the railway over the years**

streamlining of administration and better utilisation of manufacturing capacity could not be realised. These uncertainties were also having a demoralising effect throughout BR which was being increasingly reflected in poor performance. To counter this the three societies expressed the hope that the greater inter-union cooperation which was being experienced could be linked to a clear direction from the government to the railways to streamline their administration and for the BRB to concentrate on increasing its revenue by attracting new sources of both freight and passenger traffic and by increased productivity and reliability of its services. (36)

In his reply, the minister denied that the cuts were as drastic as submitted and merely harked back to the statement made by Mr Crosland on 30 June 1975. (37) There is, however, mounting evidence that the increases in fares and charges since implemented, have failed to stem financial losses on some inter-city routes despite the accompanying economy cuts. In the long-awaited transport consultation document, which finally materialised in April 1976, the authors were at pains to point out that a 50% rise in fares in 1975 had resulted in only a 5% drop in passenger journeys. (38) Sir Richard Marsh, however, in evidence to the select committee on nationalised Industries, put the loss nearer 17%, somewhat higher, and undoubtedly based on more up to- date information. (39) For this reason, the RIS was unable to agree with the contention in the document that the point of diminishing returns had not yet been reached. (40) Sidney Weighell, general secretary of the National Union of Railwaymen, in evidence at a later meeting of the select committee was to put the losses on the London Midland Region as high as 20% and on the West Coast main line even higher at 30%. (41) and it is significant where this traffic is going.

The National Bus Company believes it is now attracting business passengers who can no longer afford the train fares and there is also evidence that rail commuters are not such a captive traffic as Sir Richard Marsh would like to think, with alternative bus and coach services being offered by such organisations as Commuter Charter Club. It has been stated that ticket sales at the Euston travel centre have dropped 22% in the past year and, when a comparison is made between the NBC day return ticket to Birmingham of £2.20 (at 1976 prices) and the £5.20 of BR, it is not difficult to understand why. Such are the anomalies created by the 1968 Act which provided two competing nationalised transport undertakings in the passenger field. For these reasons, the announcement by Sir Richard on 19 May that current fare levels would be frozen at least until the end of the year was timely and the proposal to encourage cheap fare travel, despite its lukewarm reception in the consultation document, a further encouraging step. (43)

While the government is reluctant to give financial support to the railways, it is quite prepared to prop up strike-ridden and grossly under-productive motor manufacturing concerns, ostensibly to avert unemployment, and it has been estimated that £1,800 million of the taxpayers money has been allocated for British Leyland in the next eight years.



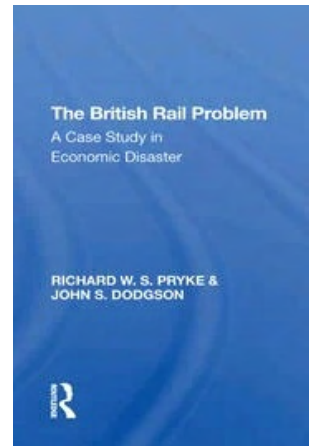
The National Bus Company existed from 1969 to 1988

With regard to future railway development, doubts have been cast on the viability of the advanced passenger train in view of the possible need for extensive resignalling if it is to travel at its optimum speed of 155 mph, particularly with the marginal difference between the rail and air fares on the London-Glasgow run and when account is taken of the air extras such as free meals. The Huckfield report, however, takes a contrary view and points out that domestic air services gain by the provision of a subsidised infrastructure, that the rate of taxation on aviation spirit is only one penny a gallon (1/36th of what the motorist pays) and that air lines impose greater social costs in terms of noise and air pollution for which they are not appropriately charged. The proposals contained in the report, for a more realistic level of charges and taxation would, if implemented, have a profound influence in favour of APT. (44)

The problems which have arisen over the operation and manning of the Tyneside Metro have nevertheless brought into clear perspective some of the outmoded concepts of the railways in their traditional form, where authority (in the form of the Board of Trade/Ministry of Transport/DoE) has attempted to make an inherently safe method of transport the ultimate in safety while the very same authorities have, by comparison, left the roads (an inherently unsafe mode) relatively unencumbered. It is acknowledged in the transport green paper (consultation document) that "there never will be a complete solution to the problem of road safety" and while there is still scope for improving the engineering of roads and vehicles ... the law of diminishing returns is beginning to operate. (45)

According to the document, nearly 20 people are killed on the roads every day and over 200 seriously injured, costing about £850 million a year in police and hospital expenses and in lost production. (46) By comparison during the past 12 months, there were two railway accidents, in which five passengers lost their lives. This represents less than a millionth of one per cent of all accidents. (48) In the circumstances, should we not be looking towards increased use of heavily trafficked routes, a method used by most private railway companies but apparently shunned by BR? This is certainly a nettle which both the BRB and the unions will need to grasp. Pryke and Dodgson in their recent review of the *Railway Problem* (49) have made much of overmanning which can be attributed to the traditional methods of operation. In the past 12-13 years, however, the railway labour force has been reduced, not by no less than 61% but further reductions cannot be achieved without further investment, so a cutback in rail spending is not necessarily the answer. (50) The green paper accepts this but sees further scope for changes in working practices to improve productivity. (51) If, as Pryke and Dodgson suggest, railway manpower must be reduced from 240,000 in 1971 to 153,000 in 1981, considerable investment will be involved and their proposals also ignore the realities of industrial relations in the present economic climate. An end to open-ended subsidies would not be challenged by the RIS but their conclusion that the railways could and should be made self-financing, resting as it does on the premise of further fragmentation of its activities, cannot be accepted. The contention that there is no potential for growth in traffic is a most serious weakness even though justification is seen for only minor further fragmentation of its activities, cannot be accepted.

contention that there is no potential for growth in traffic is a



1976 book: Asking the wrong questions

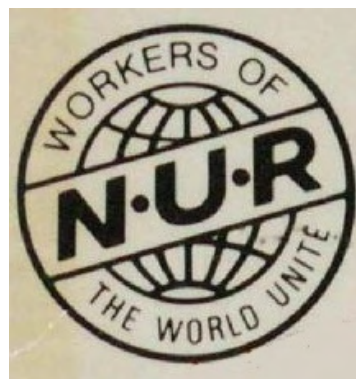
reductions in the route mileage, mostly in the more rural areas, with an ultimate 9-10,000 miles as its aim (as compared with the present 11,000). The book has also been criticised for concentrating too specifically on the railways' problems in isolation from other modes. (52) Nevertheless much of this thinking also appears in the green paper and we shall discuss the implications in the concluding pages of this work.

A somewhat contrary view to Pryke and Dodgson was expressed by Alan Dodds of the National Union of Railwaymen at a meeting held by the RIS in February 1976. His union saw the railways primarily as a service to the public with profit – or lack of it – as an inappropriate measure of their worth; a view apparently shared by Richard Marsh in 1975 when he affirmed: "It is wrong to judge BR's performance by usual commercial yardsticks. Why is road finance on a different basis from rail? For all one knows it might be just as economic to close the M1." (53) Public opinion had, according to Mr Dodds, largely accepted the public service approach in the early 1970s, but the recent economic crisis had led to a renewed demand for cutbacks in rail services. He emphasised that to invest only £238

million annually in BR from 1976 to 1981, as the government intended, would lead either directly to widespread closures, or to a seriously under-capitalised system capable of providing only a second class service. This would then lead to reduced demand and hence ultimately to further closures. (54) This situation of capital starvation was also criticised by Sir Richard Marsh in an address to the Chartered Institute of Transport on 12 January 1976. While the interim strategy prepared by the BRB in 1972/3 (55) had been largely accepted by the government of the day, the present administration had neither confirmed or denied its validity, or for that matter produced, to date, a longer term national transport plan. Investment to implement this strategy had nevertheless been cut by 35%. The BRB was therefore undertaking an exercise to identify the basic railway (not in the Fiennes sense) but in terms of those activities which the public had generally accepted as their appropriate role; namely in the field of heavy, long-haul freight and financially attractive inter-city services. While not viable in commercial terms, there was little argument about its future (except perhaps from Brigadier Lloyd et al) but it was likely to represent little more than half of the present system; an omen, if ever there was one. He implied that other lines would only remain open if considered within similar criteria to those adopted under section 39 of the 1968 Act. (56)

The relevance of the 1974 Act provisions is, therefore, clearly in doubt and their replacement under the government's transport review almost inevitable. Whether any significant improvement on the 1968 Act will result only time will tell.

Returning to the motorways for a moment, recent legislation, in particular the Land Compensation Act 1973, has had significant effect on the viability of the unter-urban roads programme by virtue of the additional compensation now payable (not only in respect of land taken but in respect of nuisance caused by the use of the new road to adjoining owners). Coupled with this has been more effective opposition by conservationists and environmentalists to particular road schemes. A turning point was undoubtedly the Aire Valley trunk road in Yorkshire where the DoE was finally forced to abandon any further attempt to



The NUR believed railways were a public service

hold a local inquiry at Shipley. Events in that quarter have since led to the whole procedure for considering road schemes and the rights of objectors to be called into question and John Tyme of the Conservation Society, a lecturer in environmental studies at Sheffield Polytechnic, has emerged as the anti-motorway lobby's most vociferous spokesman. Even earlier, at the M16 inquiry at Epping in 1975, aided by George Dobry QC (of town planning fame), he had successfully challenged the legal basis for such inquiries and the issues considered (or not considered to be more precise). The stage has now been reached where the Lord Chancellor, Lord Elwyn-Jones, has announced that the rules for such inquiries will probably have to be changed. This is confirmed in the consultation document where it is also conceded that a wider view of the effects of motorway construction and the rights of objectors should be taken. (57)

The principal contention at the Yorkshire inquiry was that the secretary of state for the environment had flouted the provisions of the Highways Act 1959 by failing to give proper notice of the proceedings. It was also maintained that canals had been ignored and that insufficient information about the proposed road had been provided for people to make up their minds. Mr Tyme also pointed out that only once in the history of such proceedings had an inspector rejected a proposal as environmentally destructive and that recommendation had been overruled by the secretary of state. With the increasing use of experts and counsel, the DoE is sometimes having difficulty in steamrolling their motorways over people's homes. (58)

This situation could well account for the renewed activities in the field of railway conversion by Brigadier Lloyd and his associates, the first hints of which came in an article in the *Economist* in August 1975 which advocated the paring down of road standards to permit limited access routes of 7.3 metres width, with a hard strip each side of one metre, equivalent to the average 7-9 metres of a railway right-of-way. No reference was made to the fuel efficiency of such a system but it was made clear that the presence of pedestrians was an impediment. (59)

A report subsequently commissioned by the DoE was described in *Modern Railways* as "railways into dodgems". (60) The independent commission expressed a number of reservations towards the application of cost/benefit techniques (61) and this particular study certainly confirms the doubts it expressed. As a civil engineering exercise, it is possibly of interest, provided one does not take the costings too seriously but, in practical operating terms, it is beyond the bounds of credibility, particularly with buses leaving Liverpool Street station for Southend/Colchester/Clacton and other destinations during the peak at seven second intervals. That the DoE should have been associated with it certainly raises some questions as to the compatibility of its various functions, a road building agency and an administrator of safety standards. In the latter role the proposals are definitely a non-starter.

The views expressed in the green paper (62) reinforce this opinion and the exercise proves conclusively that there is no financial justification for the conversion of railways into roads for buses alone – or for the construction of busways as the heavy incidence of damage to the



The M16 motorway was the designation planned in the 1960s and 1970s for use on Ringway 3, a new motorway planned as part of the London Ringways Plan for a circular route around London

road pavement experienced at Runcorn has shown. Only by allowing lorries and general purpose traffic on to the busways can they be justified, largely negating the purpose of their operation. The reservations expressed by the DoE are not surprising but it is difficult to see why the department should consider it sensible to allocate further sums of public money on such researches.

The green paper also confirms the assertion in chapter 6 that buses and coaches, in addition to heavy lorries, are paying less than their full costs (63) and this factor needs to be taken into consideration when comparing the relative merits of road and rail on the lighter-used and less profitable services referred to below.

So far as the green paper itself is concerned, the principle of consultation with the public prior to the formulation of policy is a most welcome innovation but as much of the policy appears to be cut and dried and the key decisions on the level of transport expenditure already taken, prior to its publication in the annual white paper on public expenditure (Cmnd, 6393) the whole exercise develops a somewhat hollow ring.

The class-conscious overtones of the Huckfield Report are also perpetuated in the assertion that railways are now used mainly by the "better off", a point which is pursued almost ad nauseam.

With the increases in charges previously referred to, this is probably only to be expected. However, the middle and upper classes tend to travel more and longer distances by any mode, be it bus, car, rail or air, and are therefore more likely to travel by rail (or car for that matter). Furthermore the use of bus and rail has to be viewed in relation to the density and extent of the relative networks, the railways having been cut back considerably in the last 20 years. Many people do not travel by rail because there is simply no rail service to travel on – mostly in the poorer areas – but they may have some vestige of a bus service. The arguments on this score are therefore emotive, circular and perverse. (64)

More surprising, however, is the suggestion that lightly used and heavily subsidised rail services could more economically, be replaced with buses in certain instances (65) despite the clear failure of such services to adequately meet passenger needs as witnessed by high levels of abandonment in favour of the private car or as we have seen in earlier chapters, by the journeys simply not being made. The evidence already discussed in the section on "Buses and Trains" (chapter 6) makes further comment superfluous except to add that it has now been generally accepted that only 20% of the traffic from closed lines is transferred to the replacement bus services, a fact which was confirmed by the representative of the local bus company at the Inquiry into the closure of the Ashford-Hastings line in March 1972.

Even more surprising still is the assertion that "the present TUCC procedure ensures that the wider implications of rail closures are fully considered." It would be interesting to hear the views of the many communities who have lost their rail services since the 1962 Transport Act made these once very useful bodies virtually impotent. The role of the consultative committees should therefore be reviewed in the light of the views expressed in relation to consumer bodies (66) and their powers to consider the withdrawal of freight services also restored. A notable omission is the complete lack of any reference in the document's 90 or so pages to land use and transportation studies as an instrument of transport planning. (67)

The document's attitude to fare rises has already been discussed and again with regard to commuter services it is argued that subsidies to rail tend to benefit the "better off" and should be phased out. It does, however, accept that some changes in living and working habits will

result from the proposal for long distance commuter services to meet their full allocated costs by 1981 (68) but here again no account has been taken of the trade-off between housing and transport costs which has in the past prompted increasing numbers of families to opt for a house "out of town".

Nevertheless, the most misleading statements in the document relate to the potential for the transfer of freight from road to rail. Firstly it is claimed that no large-scale shift of such traffic is practicable and then proceeds with the well-worn argument that, if all freight movements of over 100 miles were transferred to rail, total traffic would only be reduced by 2-4%; also that a 50% increase in rail freight would reduce total road traffic by only 2% and goods traffic by under 8%.(69) By presenting the statistics in this way and lumping heavy lorries with such things as milk floats and delivery vans, the arguments have been weighted in favour of road transport.

The Railway Development Association, however, by refining the statistics contained in part 2 of the green paper (70) and applying them more scientifically has proved conclusively that if 40,000 million ton/kilometre of freight were transferred from road to rail, total road traffic would be reduced by 8%; but freight traffic would be reduced by nearly 45%. Furthermore, the transfer of all freight movements by lorries over a certain unladen weight (say 3.5 tons for the reasons enumerated earlier) would be even more beneficial than the transfer, of all movements over 100 miles. Even if consideration were confined to the latter this would increase rail freight by 180%, with a consequent increase in revenue to BR of £450 million per annum, hardly to be sniffed at.

However, it is the transfer of the more environmentally damaging traffic which has been largely responsible for the need to build six-lane dual rather than four-lane dual motorways in many cases, that would reap the most beneficial results.(71)

The arguments in the document regarding the environmental damage which might be caused by the dispersal of loads from long freight trains (72) are equally fatuous when considered in the light of the DoE's consultation paper *Routes for Heavy Lorries* where the problems of transshipment are found to be just as acute.(73) It is only because of the over-concentration in large depots arising from implementation of the Beeching Plan that this problem has arisen at all with the larger concentration of larger lorries becoming more noticeable and damaging in terms of noise, pollution, vibration etc. The National Council on Inland Transport sums up the situation: "It is the ability of one train to move as much freight as 40 lorries which is being used as an argument against the train.(74)

Finally there has been much recent debate over the position of the government and the civil service in relation to the railways. The Huckfield Report recommended the setting up of a National Transport Authority which would be less prone to government changes and could exercise a coordinating role at national level to complement that of the local authorities with regard to local transport services. While such an authority certainly has its merits, some aspects of the organisation envisaged are likely to be too totalitarian to be publicly acceptable. (75)

It has been suggested on more than one occasion that the railways should be run as a government department, answerable to a minister (76) but a civil service background is not considered appropriate to the running of a national transport enterprise and such a move would require a completely new approach to the management of the nationalised industries as a whole. The RIS would favour the appointment of a government minister with special

responsibilities for railways and public transport to ensure that rail receives a fair share of available resources. (77)

The green paper, however, rejected both these proposals in favour of a national transport council, chaired by a minister and on which all the main interest groups would be represented – management and the trade unions, the industries, both public and private, local government and consumers. (78) Whether it will be any more effective than similar bodies set up in the past is open to doubt as much will depend upon the personality and attitude of the minister in charge.

In conclusion, it seems inevitable that by the time this work is published we shall be well on the way to yet another transport Act. The key to the railways future, however, lies in investment, a point made by not a few of the witnesses to the select committee on nationalised Industries. NUR leader Sidney Weighell laid great stress on this point and added that his members had cooperated, with the government's Rail Policy Review in 1974 when Mr Peyton was minister, with the assurance of investment rising from £206 million to £294 million in 1977. Investment of only £200 million for the next five years (at mid 1975 prices) as proposed by the government was just not on and the railways would literally grind to a halt within the next two years. Investment would need to rise to at least £300 million by the end of 1977 if this situation was to be averted. (79) Peter Parker who took over from Sir Richard Marsh as chairman of the BRB in the autumn of 1976 told the committee that if more investment was not forthcoming the railways would literally "freeze to death". (80)

A number of witnesses also stressed the need to utilise the railways' capacity to the full as transport throughput was necessary for good productivity. The point has also been made that the unions, which in the past have agreed to many labour-saving innovations in railway operation, would be even more cooperative if they could be assured that their industry was expanding and not being throttled. (81)

Considerable increases in freight carryings are essential if the railways are to have an assured future and further electrification can exploit not only their hidden potential but also provide a good home development market for the £10,000 million worth of export orders for railway equipment which it has been estimated are available. (82)

Nevertheless, the railways of Britain need to be considered in the light of proposals which have been formulated for Europe as a whole (83) but without the construction of a Channel Tunnel this is clearly impracticable, a situation which will severely limit their future potential and lead to inevitable decline. For nearly a quarter of a century the Railway Invigoration Society has fought for the retention and development of Britain's railways. In the early days, we fought virtually alone but as we conclude this final chapter, it is encouraging to know that public opinion has swung very much over to our way of thinking and many powerful voices are joined with ours in the struggle for civilised transport.

Ad finum ferro

Notes on chapter seven

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- (10) *ibid* para - 9.22 "
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- (13) Transport Policy: Report of the Study Group (chairman Les -Huckfield MP) in *Socialist Commentary* April 1975 p 23 26
- (14) B T Bayliss *European Transport* 1965 p 80-88
- (15) Transport Policy op cit - para 3.11-2
- (16) Clifford Sharp *Living with the Lorry* Department of Economics University of Leicester 1974
- (17) Transport Policy op cit para 5.6
- (18) *Sunday Times* 23/5/76 Article by John Wardroper
- (19) Bayliss op cit p 43
- (20) In Transport Policy op ext para 5.9, it is suggested that any tax increases for heavy lorries should be phased over an unspecified period. Yet question 1, at the end of chapter 7 p59, asks whether rail freight should achieve viability as soon as possible
- (21) British Rail and the green paper in *Modern Railways* June 1976 p215-220
- (22) Statement by RIS chairman at AGM 1976 as reported in P R No 107 July 1976 p 6
- (23) Hansard H of C 4/5/76 col 324 (question by Mr Stephen Ross) (written answer)
- (24) Hamer op cit chapter 4
- (25) Independent Commission Report op cit p 230
- (26) Department of the Environment press notice No 1080 10/11/75
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- (29) *The future operation of the Goods Transport Markets in the community* EEC ref V11/149/75 - E March 1975
- (30) Hansard H of C 30/6/75 col 291-2 (question by Mr H G Lambourn)
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- (32) *ibid* abstracted from Tables 2.5 (p48-49) and 2.6 (p 58-59) by Dr A W T Daniel (assumed at 1975 constant prices)
- (33) P R No 105 Dec 1975 p1
- (34) Roger Calvert *Transport Disintegrated* 1973 p 62-71
- (35) Financial Times 31/10/75 Article entitled *No promise that BR will survive* and Lancashire Evening Post 16/12/75 *Crosland denies rail cut rumours*
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- (39) Statement by Mike Harris Transport 2000 in interview with Douglas Stewart BBC Radio 4 (13/4/76)
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- (60) Peter Hall & Edward Smith *Better Use of Railways* (Geographical Papers No43) University of Reading Jan 1976
- (61) Independent Commission Report op cit p r170-8
- (62) Transport Policy op cit para 6.46
- (63) *ibid* Part 11 Paper 6 Table 5 p115
- (64) *ibid* Part 1 par a 3.6 & p20 para 3

- (65) *ibid* para 6.8
- (66) *ibid* para 3.25^o
- (67) There is however a passing reference to such studies in Part 11 Paper 5 para 5.26
- (68) *ibid* Part 1 para 7.52
- (69) *ibid* para 3.12
- (70) Figures extracted from Part 11 Paper 1 Figures 2, 9, 13
- (71) Observations by National Council on Inland Transport to Department of the Environment para 9
- (72) Transport Policy, *op cit*, para 3.13,
- (73) HMSO July 1974, para 14,
- (74) NCIT Observations, *op ,cit*, para 14
- (75) Huckfield Report *op cit* p59-63
- (76) Pryke & Dodgson, *op cit*, p 260. A J Pearson *TheRailways and the Nation* 1964 p13-15
- (77) RIS press statement (policy) Jan 1976
- (78) Transport Policy, *op cit* para 13.9
- (79) SCNI (Railway sub-committee) *op cit* 15/4/76
- (80) *ibid* ,15/2/77
- (81) Statement by RIS chairman at AGM 1976 as reported in PR 107 July 1976 p5
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- (83) RGI November 1973 p429 (article entitled *UIC drafts its Master Plan for Europe*)

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It is also an attempt to update and widen the scope of the *Bibliography on Railway Economics* published by the RIS in November 1972.

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