

ST IVES ROUTE UNDER THREAT

The Cambridge to St Ives railway faces a perilous future following the decision by Railfreight to abandon the line. Sand trains from Fen Drayton ceased in the spring of this year and discussions between Railfreight and ARC appear to have concluded that a future return of this traffic is unlikely.

The line has now been offered to Cambridge County Council. How long price negotiations will take is unknown, but they had not begun by mid-October. If no agreement can be reached between BR and the Council then the line could be sold in sections and the track bed built upon. Such action might well make reintroduction of passenger services impossible. The County Council Transportation Department have already expressed their preference for converting some of the route to a busway!

The Branch has written to local MPs expressing concern and asking them to ensure that the line is not sold off. We are grateful to MP's Sir Anthony Grant, James Paice and Anne Campbell for vigorously taking up the issue with BR and the Department of Transport. All the MPs have been reported in the local press on the matter. James Paice ended his letter by saying that he hoped that the County Council would "object violently to any intention to dispose of the line". We agree, and trust that our MPs will join in the objecting.

To help in this the Branch has produced a new leaflet which explains the need for the restoration of passenger rail services to St Ives, under the heading "Why do we ignore this valuable asset"? The leaflet will be launched at our Cambridge meeting on the 21st November 1992 and copies will be sent to the local media and all County Councillors.

INTERCITY TO NORWICH ?

A number of papers in the region have reported that InterCity are planning to abandon the Liverpool Street to Norwich route and hand over operation to Network SouthEast. The press reports expressed fears that the unpopular Class 321 units would run to Norwich replacing the existing InterCity coaches. All of which was strongly denied by InterCity Anglia supremo, Andy Cooper, in a long, candid interview in the Eastern Daily Press. As our recent Rail Strategy document stated that we would like to see Network SouthEast manage all of our region's railways, the press naturally turned to us for an explanation and to ask if we approved.

As mentioned in the last Rail East, the Branch does not consider the Class 321 units suitable for the Clacton and Ipswich services, thus considering it even less suitable for the journey to Norwich, which is nearly twice as far. But from where does the route get new trains?

Commercially, InterCity is most unlikely to be interested in buying a small, dedicated fleet, and with investment on hold the prospect of cascaded 'second-hand' trains is equally remote. From which one can only conclude that, under InterCity, Norwich passengers have a grim future. Which leaves us with Network SouthEast - and their unfulfilled design for ThamesLink 2000 trains!

BRANCH MEETING AT COLCHESTER, 6 JUNE 1992

About 30 members assembled at the Wilson Centre, within sight and sound of trains going in and out of Colchester Town station (formerly S. Botolph's). Privatisation was a major item, with considerable doubt that the government has the mandate to proceed. There were no obvious advantages in the scheme, and fears were expressed that the much-vaunted "competition" would lead to closures and fragmentation, and a return to ticketing difficulties and change-ridden journeys for those travelling long distances.

We also heard with dismay about the Code of Practice issued by the government in April, whereby a suspension for six months could short-circuit objections to closures. The following motion was carried unanimously: "That this branch views with grave concern a Code of Practice issued by the Department of Transport on 10th April 1992 which would apparently allow BR to suspend a service as a preliminary to closing it; and that we are totally opposed to any weakening of the legal procedure which must be followed by BR and the government if a line or station is proposed for closure."

The second part of the meeting was a talk by Mr Michael Stanbury, Chairman of the East Anglian Railway Museum at Chappel and Earls Colne station. We heard the early history of the museum, born out of the closure of the Cambridge-Colchester line, its triumphs and difficulties - eg. the imposition by BR of a steam ban in 1974, then found to be incorrect; and the formulation of a Code of Practice. Formerly the Stour Valley Railway Preservation Society, in 1986 it became the EARM, a limited company and thus a legal entity, in 1991 it achieved charitable status. Being officially a Railway Museum means that there has to be a Collection Policy, and they are now actively seeking formal museum status. Mr Stanbury felt that there was a great future ahead for EARM, with possible expansion into a 'Railway Experience' at Marks Tey. Members were warmly invited to make frequent visits to the Museum.

BRANCH MEETING AT NORWICH, 19 SEPTEMBER 1992

Our Norwich meeting produced a lively debate on the future of rail services in Norfolk. The guest speaker was Mr Leslie Mogford, Chairman of the Norfolk Rail Policy Group. Mr Mogford who said that he was not an expert in, or even interested in railways, explained that the Group's Mission Statement set a series of objectives for the County's rail services.

Although noting that the railways would be needed in the future as our road network became more congested, he none the less did not believe that the railway should be supported by taxpayers money, a view with which nearly all in the audience disagreed. It was pointed out that the County spent money on roads, so why not rail? Mr Mogford's view is difficult to accept especially as he agrees that more roads will not solve our traffic problem. In addition the money spent on our railways can be offset by saving in road expenditure, reductions in accidents and pollution.

Mr Mogford criticised Regional Railways for their often negative approach to services. For example BR claim that unless six people get on or off a train at a station, it is uneconomical to stop. So, rather than promote the service to gain more business, BR cuts out the stop altogether. He concluded by saying that the aims of the Rail Policy Group and the RDS were generally the same, in that both wanted to see better use of the rail system, the differences came in how this might be achieved.

CAMBRIDGE Another stimulating speaker is lined up for the Cambridge meeting on Saturday 21 November when Mr Barry Flaxman, Chairman of TUCC for Eastern England, is our guest. With extensive experience of 'the thinking' in the upper reaches of BR, the Department of Transport and the Treasury, Mr Flaxman can be relied upon to talk with insight as well as humour. Don't miss him, 2pm, Little St. Mary's Church Hall, Trumpington Street.

LINCOLNSHIRE Knowing that many of you are interested in Lincolnshire's rail scene, John Saunders has very kindly provided a detailed report from which the following, all too brief, extracts are taken.

Recently, after much lobbying by the RDS and others, a £3m scheme to upgrade the line from Peterborough through Lincoln to Doncaster has been given the go-ahead. Included in this project are two new stations plus an extension of the hourly service beyond Spalding to Doncaster.

Encouraged by the Kings Lynn electrification scheme, East Midlands Electricity Company has proposed 'wiring-up' between Peterborough and Spalding. The RDS have given this a qualified welcome as they are worried by the implications for services beyond Spalding.

Motivated by the success of recent pro-rail campaigns in the area, the RDS in Lincolnshire intend to publish a 'strategy leaflet' setting out further ideas for development.

LOWESTOFT Associated British Ports wish to buy the land at the station with a view to expanding their operations. Also, they have persuaded British Rail to canvas customer opinion on their proposal to re-locate the station. RDS action alerted the local press to these developments which resulted in front page coverage. Subsequent letters to the Lowestoft Journal indicated a 4-1 majority against moving the station.

MISTA BUSINESS AGM Guest Speaker was Mr Geoff Butterwick of Suffolk County Council Transport Department whose talk revealed positive aspirations to electrifying the route through Bury St Edmunds thereby producing a through service to London via both Ipswich and Cambridge. Also, despite receiving no money from government for public transport, S.C.C. were currently spending £100,00 a year on bus and rail promotion. In addition bids have been invited from consultants to undertake a county rail study. We await the outcome with great interest.

EAST SUFFOLK Passenger traffic is on the increase following the introduction of Sprinter trains to the route, further proof, if any were needed, that new investment stimulates new business. The line is also benefiting from improved radio signalling and raised speed limits at certain level crossings. Mike Farahar is now the acting Secretary of ESTA and his address is 6 Whinfield Court, Martlesham Heath, Ipswich, IP5 7TQ. For those of you unable to journey to Cambridge on November 21, ESTA is holding its own meeting, at which the Guest Speaker will be Regional Railways Manager, Norwich, Barrie Thomas. It starts at 2.30pm, and the venue is St Mary's Church Hall, Woodbridge.

BIKE BUSINESS BR's latest ruse against bicycles -on-trains is that they are a hazard during loading and from November NSE are imposing a bike-ban on all rush-hour trains. It must be said that examples of bike-loading accidents do not spring to mind.

RETIREMENT RDS and the Fen Line User Group combined on October 10 to make a presentation to recently retired member of West Anglia management, David Rooks. This was in thanks for his successful efforts to foster good relations between BR and rail users.

BRITISH RAIL CALLED TO ACCOUNT

During the summer Radio 4 arranged a series of programmes in which the chairman of some of our service industries faced customer's questions. In the last of the series it was the turn of British Rail Chairman Sir Bob Reid to answer passenger's questions in a programme broadcast live from Peterborough. Also on the panel were Major-General Lennox Napier, Chairman of the Central Transport Consultative Committee and Jenny Kirkpatrick, a director of a venture capital firm.

Nicholas Hammond, a RDS member, asked a question about the future of our railways following privatisation. In his reply, Sir Bob pointed out the importance of retaining a national network and expressed concern about the potentially large bureaucracy that will be needed to sort out the conflicts between the various companies. Lennox Napier agreed with this and added that the CTCCT had a list of 17 points that they were going to discuss with the Minister.

Other questions asked were about the Fenchurch Street to Southend line where the lack of investment was highlighted, the lack of cycle space on trains, problems for disabled passengers and threats of line closures on South Humberside. Unlike certain other Chairmen in the series, Sir Bob Reid answered the questions in a sympathetic way and in some cases gave a firm promise to improve matters. Perhaps a second, follow up programme is needed in a few months time to see what progress has been made.

Fears that the programme would be another "lets bash BR session" proved to be unfounded; the audience of about 100 clearly wanted BR to improve matters for the disabled, but they showed very little enthusiasm for privatisation.

FUTURE EVENTS

Saturday 21 November 1992 RDS meeting Cambridge 2 pm, as above.

Monday 1 February 1993 Next issue of Rail East is published; deadline 20 January 1993!

Saturday 27 February 1993 Branch AGM, Bury St. Edmunds Library at 1.30.

FINAL THOUGHT

Does the good publicity received by BR from the Kings Lynn electrification and the improvements to the East Suffolk Line suggest that its Press office has got its act together? Or will the BR spokesman, talking about the "wrong kind of snow", make a coldly received come-back this winter?

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