

## EXPLANATION REQUIRED

First thing to say is that this 'suprise' format is merely a temporary aberation as our regular computer is out of action for a short period owing to building work at its 'home'. Normal service, as they say, will be resumed for edition 82!

## TOWARDS 2016

The Standing Conference of East Anglian Local Authorities, unsurprisingly abbreviated to SCEALA, represents the three County, and twenty District Councils within Cambridgeshire, Norfolk and Suffolk. In a recent strategy document it considers how the region might/should develop over the next twenty years with "Sustainable Development" being the principle objective.

Transport, with its current, clearly 'unsustainable', policy of more and more roads, has a key part to play. SCEALA, in recognising this, devoted most of its recent conference in Cromer to transport issues. The morning session covered the probable impact of the Channel Tunnel, and rail privatisation. To his credit, Public Transport Minister, Roger Freeman, travelled by train to Cromer to give his presentation.

After lunch outside organisations made their contributions. RDS Branch Secretary, Nick Dibben, welcoming current local authority interest in rail development, suggested ways in which this interest might be extended. He mentioned buying or leasing of rolling stock; ensuring tourist literature referred to local rail services; and protecting appropriate former rail routes for possible re-opening.

Barry Moore, of Suffolk Transport 2000, highlighted the need for East-West rail links, whilst Friends of the Earth's Denise Carlo challenged the concept that a vast increase in road traffic was unavoidable, citing ways in which traffic demand might be reduced. Unquestionably a stimulating and useful day!

## NORWICH RAIL WEEK

Thanks to Peter Lawrence, and his band of helpers, the RDS was effectively represented at this wide ranging exhibition in the Castle Museum. The organisers were especially pleased with our presence because of our primary concern with the future of railways in the area. Of the many visitors we spoke to, it was once again evident that privatisation had virtually no support.

## RDS MEETING IPSWICH 19 JUNE

Thirty people attended our Ipswich meeting to hear a very positive talk by John Dennis, from Railfreight Distribution, on their plans for freight traffic via the Channel Tunnel.

Mr Dennis started by noting that BR already carry about a million tonnes of freight a year to Europe using existing train ferries.

They therefore had a good traffic base upon which to build. When the Tunnel opens next year, an initial service of 11 freight trains a day is proposed each carrying around 1000 tonnes. It is hoped that business will produce up to 35 trains a day within a few years, representing a total load of 6.5 million tonnes annually.

Work to upgrade existing routes to carry this traffic is almost complete, with the construction of 9 regional freight terminals underway. In addition, there will be 60 smaller distribution centres, including the Potter Group at Ely, with direct access to Europe. It was emphasised that the long term potential of the Tunnel can only be exploited if new pathways are released by the building of the High-Speed Link.

#### RAILWAYS AND THE MEDIA

The spectre of rail privatisation allied to the imminent opening of the Channel Tunnel has triggered extensive coverage of rail issues in the media. But has this coverage been fair and accurate? And are specialist railway magazines able to influence thinking within government and BR? Answers to these and other questions might well be provided by Murray Brown, Editor of Rail magazine, in his role as guest speaker at our Norwich meeting on September 25. It promises to be a very lively meeting.

The venue is the Assembly House, Theatre Street, starting at 2pm.

The agenda will be:

1. Chairman's welcome
2. Minutes of the meeting held in Ipswich on 19 June.
3. RDS National report.
4. Privatisation update.
5. Cuts in Sunday train services.
6. Norwich area update.

Short break

7. Talk by Murry Brown on " Railways and the Media"
8. Questions and discussion.

The meeting should finish around 4.30pm.

The Branch committee will meet at the Assembly House at 11am. If members have any items they would like discussed, please could they contact Nick Dibben as soon as possible.

#### ST IVES LINE

Huntingdonshire District Council have made a contribution to the study being carried out by Cambridgeshire County Council into re-opening the line. The District Council would also like the study to include the possible re-opening of the line between St Ives and Huntingdon. Although much of the original route still exists, it would require the rebuilding of 6 bridges over the River Ouse within the space of 7 miles, an expensive business. The Branch has therefore suggested an alternative route that would run along side the A604 which will reduce the number of new bridges

required.

The results of the Council study are expected to be announced in October.

ARC Central have been given permission to extract up to 24 million tonnes of sand and gravel near St Ives. They claim that as this material is intended for "local" use it will be distributed by road. Consequently, whilst they do not propose to make a contribution to the re-opening of the line, they have offered to help pay for a new bypass for nearby Needingworth. This is to reduce the number of ARC lorries passing through the village. Just how far these loads of aggregate do eventually travel will surely be of great interest to many people.

#### CUTS IN SUNDAY SERVICES

Many stations in East Anglia will be without Sunday trains this winter as both Regional Railways and Network SouthEast are forced to make cuts to meet tougher financial targets.

A contribution from local authorities in Norfolk has enabled Sunday services to be retained on routes out of Norwich. On most of these, the signals and level crossing gates have to be operated manually by staff on double-time payment. This yet again confirms that the future of these routes rests upon cost-cutting investment, not inflated subsidy!

Network SouthEast, on the other hand, claim that stations between Royston and Cambridges are insufficiently used to justify a Sunday service, and that the resulting faster journey times will attract more customers between London and Cambridge. The Branch pointed out to NSE that some Local Authority finance might be available which, at the time of writing, has proved to be true. West Anglia Director, Ken Bird, has since confirmed this and hopes for some Sunday stopping services have risen substantially.

#### LOCAL TIMETABLES

Regional Railways is to review its policy on local pocket timetables. This follows a public outcry after many stations were left off the timetables issued last May. Local rail user groups, Suffolk County Council and local newspapers stepped in to produce their own versions after Regional Railways claimed lack of money prevented them doing likewise. The new October edition is awaited with interest.

#### IN BRIEF

**Level Crossings:** British Transport Police are cracking down on motorists who try to jump the lights at level crossings. This follows a worrying number of recent incidents where cars hit trains. In one check, at Roydon in Essex, eight drivers were caught in a period of two hours. Each offender was fined a modest £40.

**Valued Service:** For some years now member Laurie Horton of Stowmarket has diligently forwarded us press cuttings with railway interest, for which we have been most grateful. Sadly, owing to a recent illness, he feels unable to continue this valued service. Can anyone else oblige editor Nick Dibben,

especially with extracts from the East Anglian Daily Times?

**New Freight** - A new daily service ferrying cars from plants at Cowley and Longbridge to Harwich and the Potter Group Terminal at Ely started in June. This new traffic will remove at least 2500 annual lorry movements from the roads.

**New Trains** - The Government has made available £150m for the leasing of new trains, provoking intense competition between InterCity and Network SouthEast for the money. NSE favour a new, up-market version of their Networker train for use between Kings Cross, Peterborough, Cambridge and Kings Lynn. A mock-up was available for inspection recently at Cambridge station, and most impressive it was too. Indeed, the only disappointment of note was the 2+3 seating arrangement rather than the customer favoured 2+2 arrangement. With the Government desperately seeking successful franchising, may one presume NSE's proposal to be in 'pole position'?

#### PRIVATISATION UPDATE

On the 4 August Transport Secretary John Macgregor announced details of the proposed franchise for East Anglia. Essentially it states that "a company will provide both local and longer distance journeys to and from London". Following concern expressed by the RDS and others about through services to the Midlands and the North-West, these will form a separate franchise. A third franchise for the area concerns the West Anglia services from London to Peterborough and Kings Lynn.

Although the RDS does not agree with the concept of splitting up British Rail, the arrangement apparently ensures the retention of through services to Birmingham and Liverpool. It also preserves through ticketing from London to such places as Cromer and Great Yarmouth.

Careful writing of the franchise documents will be required to avoid other problems such as: the diversion of finance from impoverished lines to the prosperous routes within the same franchise. Rolling stock utilisation is also a concern: at present stock dedicated to long distance cross-country routes also 'fills-in' on local journeys. This efficient arrangement may cease when such services are split between two different companies. A wholly unavoidable disadvantage of fragmentation will be the consequent increase in running costs.

There is also the further expense of separate companies for services, track, and possibly rolling stock, each having to make a profit. Such charges would almost certainly offset benefits from improved productivity and competitive tendering. With additional Government finance unlikely, a 'scare' report in the Observer, alleging fares might have to rise by eight times the rate of inflation, becomes increasingly plausible.

The Government might well find this politically unacceptable leaving the railways with a serious problem. Faced with higher costs but unchanged income, fewer services will be run. Details about minimum service levels and how they might be changed are

urgently required. It is vital that such service levels are guaranteed throughout the period of a franchise.

A letter to the Prime Minister provoked the following response; "I am sorry that it is not yet possible for us to let you have a full reply. However, enquiries are being made...". As these are fundamental points the Railways Bill should not be passed finally until they have been fully discussed and resolved, in public.

Another factor hindering the passage of the Railways Bill is the recent amendment, passed by the House of Lords, allowing British Rail to bid for franchises. Whatever happens to this amendment British Rail will initially continue to run services as at present, except that they will be split up into the so called "shadow franchise areas". Government grants will then be paid direct to each franchise rather than the current lump-sum payment.

In effect this will form British Rail's bid for each service. When a service is put out to tender this bid will be compared with those received from the private sector. Roger Freeman has stated that the Franchising Director does not have to accept any of the external bids, and that, if BR proves to offer the cheapest bid, they will continue to run the service. The amendment, if passed, would enable BR to run a service for a few more years, avoiding the demoralising business of constantly facing new competitive tenders, and give the management far less excuse to provide an inadequate service.

#### EVENTS DIARY.

- Saturday 23 Oct. 1993 Rail Users Conf. Guest Speaker, Chris Green ex. InterCity, now of ScotRail. 11.00 until 16.30. Not to be missed.
- 17/18 November Privatisation Conference, Selfridge Hotel, London. Details. 071 779 8848
- Saturday 20 Nov. Branch meeting, Cambridge 2pm with Ken Bird of West Anglia as Guest Speaker. Venue to be Confirmed in next RailEast.

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#### BRANCH OFFICERS

Chairman: Peter Wakefield, 43 High St. Oakington, CB4 5AG  
Vice Chairman: Peter Lawrence, 75 Marl Pit Lane, Norwich. NR5  
8XN Secretary: Nick Dibben, 24 Bure Close, St Ives. PE17 4FR  
Treasurer: Lewis Buckingham, 25 Drury Rd, Colch. CO2 7YU  
Membership: Clara Zilahi, 31 Wimbotsham Rd,  
Downham Market, PE38 9P  
Sales Officer: Chris Milnes, 25 Thetford Way,  
South Wootton, PE30 3TG  
Press Officer: John Page, 5 Kingsway, Histon, CB4 4HB  
Nat. Secretary: Trevor Garrod, 15 Clapham Rd, Lowestoft, NR32  
1RG