

RAIL EAST

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Free to
members

The newsletter of the East Anglian Branch of the Railway Development Society

NO VAT ON RAIL FARES

The Government's intervention on rail fares probably has less to do with warm feelings for the traveller, and rather more with the possibility of the forthcoming budget adding VAT to ticket prices. Certainly the Chancellor has not ruled this out for his budget on November 30th. If imposed, at the full rate of 17.5%, the result would be devastating in the following ways:

FOR PASSENGERS - Higher fares. Any increase would not just include VAT, but also the cost of its administration

THE OPERATOR - Profit margins would be affected, reducing the already small private sector interest in our railways even further.

FOR RAIL WORKERS - Higher fares means fewer passengers, means less trains, means fewer employees.

THE ENVIRONMENT - Higher fares will encourage greater use of cars with all that this implies for congestion and pollution.

THE TREASURY - Revenue, at best, will be re-cycled as increased short term rail subsidy, higher unemployment benefit and increased road expenditure. All stemming from lower rail traffic levels.

In other words, VAT on fares would produce losers all round:

In the long term VAT on fares may be acceptable as part of an overall restructuring of transport finance, but is not acceptable as a knee-jerk reaction to the Governments present financial problems.

Please, please, write to your MP on this issue - NOW!

PRIVATISATION: KEY ISSUES STILL UNCERTAIN

The Branch has received a letter from Transport Secretary John MacGregor via the Prime Minister which casts doubt on Government assurances regarding train service levels. The letter states that "the starting point for each initial franchise will be the BR timetable immediately prior to franchising. No subsequent alteration to the minimum levels of service specified in the franchise agreement will be permissible unless approved by the Franchising director."

The Branch fears that this could place great pressure on the Franchising Director to accept cuts reflecting increased costs stemming from privatisation and the need to cut Government subsidy. The RDS believe that the franchise agreement specifying the minimum service level must be binding otherwise the franchise documents will become worthless. A further problem may result from pressure on BR to reduce service levels before routes are put out to tender.

Equally important, is the inter-availability of tickets. Take Colchester for example: here there is a fast train to London every 30 minutes provided jointly by InterCity and Network SouthEast. Franchising could lead to an effective halving of the train service if tickets from one operator cannot be used on another operator's trains. Supporters of privatisation emphasise the provision of choice of operators, but for most rail users the choice of when to travel is more important.

The level of private sector investment in the railways is another great unknown within the privatisation debate. Since British Telecom was privatised investment has increased by one billion pounds a year. Clearly if something similar were to happen to our railways, there would be a lot of extremely pleased people. The truth is, that unlike BT, British Rail is a being split up, the bulk still dependent on Government money, and the rest subject to short term franchises. These factors will combine to make the railways far less attractive to investors.

When the Government recently announced plans to sell off some key stations, British Airport Authority (BAA) said they were not interested as these stations only made an 8% return on investment. This figure is significant, as it is the minimum rate of return currently required for rail investment projects such as electrification. Given that most rail projects have to be slimmed down to meet this requirement, the scope for private sector investment on purely railway terms appears small. The Government is keen to pass responsibility for rail investment onto the private sector. This is fine in principle, but MPs need to check that the private sector is willing to take up the challenge.

The future role of County Councils in rail transport is also uncertain. At present, the Franchising Director has to keep them informed, but has no obligation to take their views into account. Many, including the RDS feel it is essential that they should have an effective input into the franchise process. A further omission in the Railways Bill is that train services supported by the County Councils cannot be included within the franchise specification. Councils will have to agree these separately with the successful train operator. It is unlikely that any financial benefits from competition will be passed on to the local authority.

These points were discussed when the Branch, along with rail user groups, Suffolk County Council, and the Transport Users Consultative Committee (TUCC) met to lobby Suffolk MPs at the House of Commons. It was disappointing that this most constructive discussion was joined by only one MP, Jamie Cann from Ipswich. However this MP did agree to raise these points if called to speak in the commons debate.

NORWICH NEWS

The change of power following the May local elections to a Labour/Liberal Democrat coalition has led to a more positive attitude towards public transport. The Branch along with other members of the Norwich Environmental Transport Group have met both parties to discuss transport issues and the group hopes to meet the Conservatives shortly. It is hoped that some of the more controversial road schemes proposed for the city will be dropped in favour of more investment in public transport.

An important County Council meeting involving members of both the transport and planning committees took place at the end of October. The purpose was to discuss the future of transport in Norwich. Six new roads within Norwich plus a northern bypass were the main proposals. The Branch wrote to the Committee Chairman Dick Phelan suggesting that improvements to the local rail system, such as increased frequency of service and the re-opening of the Dereham line would be a more effective alternative.

The branch continues to get extensive coverage on both local radio and in the press on subjects such as privatisation and comments on local train services.

RDS NORWICH MEETING 25 SEPTEMBER

Forty members attended our Norwich meeting to discuss local rail services, privatisation and to hear a highly entertaining talk by Rail magazine Editor Murray Brown.

BRANCH QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire is designed to complement the National RDS survey issued last year. It has three main functions: to find out what members think of our current activities; to establish priorities for future action; and to compile a list of helpers so that our growing workload can be more evenly distributed.

One idea on which we would like your views, concerns the setting up of local groups within the Branch. These groups are NOT intended to compete with established Rail User Groups. The idea is to form them in areas where there are no Branch meetings, such as Peterborough, or to discuss the re-opening of a local station or line. Meetings would be less formal and more social than our present meetings. If you are interested please indicate below.

MEETINGS

Q1 Which of our public meetings do you usually attend.

Bury St Edmunds	----	Cambridge	----	Colchester	----
Ely	----	Ipswich	----	Norwich	----
None of above	----				

Q2 If meetings were to be held on a weekday evening instead of a Saturday would this be:

More convenient ---- Less convenient ---- No difference ----

Q3 Are you interested in attending a local group meeting in your area? Yes ---- No ----

HELPERS LIST

Q4 Would you be willing to help with the following:

- a) Writing to your MP ---- Name of MP
- b) Design of posters/leaflets/exhibitions etc. ----
- c) Deliver leaflets in your area ----
- d) Help on the Branch Sales stand ----
- e) Providing news and/or articles for RDS in East Anglia ----
- f) Join the Branch committee ----
- g) Other skills you feel may be useful
(eg computer skills, video)

RAIL EAST

Q5 How would you like to see Rail East improved? Comments on spelling, punctuation etc. are already noted!

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE.

QUESTIONNAIRE SHEET 2

FUTURE ACTIVITIES

Q6 The National survey showed that rail privatisation and defending services were members main focus of concern. In addition to these items which of the following local issues should the Branch give priority to. For each item, please show the level of importance from (1) not important to (5) very important.

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a) Re-opening St Ives line | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| b) Wisbech re-opening | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| c) Soham re-opening | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| d) East - West rail link via Bedford | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| e) Providing train information in areas with no user groups. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| f) Improvements to branch line infrastructure to reduce operating costs | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Please use the space below for any other comments

Name Telephone No. (optional).....

Address

Please bring any completed forms to the Cambridge meeting on 20 November or post to Nick Dibben, 24 Bure Close, St Ives, Huntingdon, Cambs PE17 4FR.

The results will be discussed at the Branch AGM in February.

Mr Brown considers himself a failed railway worker rather than a professional journalist as he had worked for BR for many years. When redundancy loomed, he left BR to become editor of Rail. He claimed his new employers could not resist a bargain after he unwisely divulged the modesty of his BR salary. Let us hope it is a good deal healthier these days, reflecting the fact that, under his guidance, Rail now has the largest circulation of any rail based magazine. In his role as editor, he has many dealings with other sections of the media, not only to fulfill requests for serious comment on the latest BR events, but also to offer enlightenment to those who genuinely wonder why anyone should be interested in railways in the first place!

He managed to embarrass our own General Secretary Trevor Garrod, by citing him as among the few consistently reliable providers of material for Rail.

Following his talk there was some lively discussion about the often inaccurate and sensational way in which the national media dealt with railway issues.

RDS MEETING CAMBRIDGE 20 NOVEMBER 1993

Our next Branch meeting will be on 20 November at the Little St Mary's Church Hall, Trumpington Street, Cambridge starting at 2pm. The agenda will be:

1. Chairman's welcome
2. Minutes of the meeting held in Norwich on 25 September
3. Treasurer's report
4. RDS National report
5. Privatisation update
6. St Ives line update
7. VAT on fares

After a short break there will be a talk by Ken Bird, Director of Network SouthEast's Great Northern and West Anglia Division. There should be plenty to discuss as next year's timetable should see the introduction of a half-hourly fast service between Cambridge and Kings Cross. The stopping service between Cambridge and Royston and will also increase to half-hourly. The final bit of good news for the route is that the Government has recently given approval for 25 new Networker trains for the Peterborough and Kings Lynn lines. As these units are dual voltage, they herald the future extension of Thameslink to Cambridge and Peterborough.

The meeting should finish around 5pm.

The Branch Committee will meet in the Hall at 11am. If members have any items they would like discussed, please can they contact Nick Dibben as soon as possible.

ST IVES LINE LIVES ON

Councillors on Cambridgeshire's Transport Committee have voted unanimously to continue with studies into re-opening the Cambridge to St Ives line. The vote follows the issue of a preliminary report on the line which suggested that the route would carry around 1300 passengers a day and could cost 22 million to re-open, an extension to Huntingdon would cost around 11 million, but this figure excludes a connection with the main line. The report confirmed that electrification would be cheaper than buying new diesel trains but concluded that the line would not be economic to run. These figures have been questioned by both councillors and the RDS.

In our detailed comments on the report sent to councillors and MPs the Branch noted that the costs were high when compared with other re-opening schemes and suggested a number of ways to reduce the cost. These included: re-using the existing track, omitting the station at Chesterton until the area was developed, and reviewing the need for a new sub-station as the existing one at Milton

had spare capacity. These items could reduce the cost by around 50%.

The computer model used to predict the number of users is still under development and it is not clear whether all the potential traffic flows have been included. For example Council Officials say that school traffic could add 10-15% to the total. Final figures will be known early next year.

The Branch's comments have been extensively reported on local radio and in the press, our main concern being the need to stop the track from being removed.

For the latest news on the line please come to our meeting in Cambridge on November 20!

ALSO IN CAMBRIDGESHIRE... East Cambridgeshire District Council are looking at the possibility of re-opening the station at Soham. If there is sufficient demand, the Council will approach the County Council and British Rail to negotiate a development package.

The Branch has suggested that the scheme could be combined with the re-opening of the March to Wisbech line and the rebuilding of the west curve at Newmarket. This will enable trains to run from Wisbech via Soham to Cambridge. The branch has applied to RDS nationally for some money to help pay for a leaflet to promote this scheme.

As mentioned in the last Rail East, Cambridgeshire is supporting Sunday trains for the first time. The Council has distributed many leaflets to promote the 2 hourly service between Cambridge and Letchworth and 4 services between Cambridge and Bury St Edmunds. Both sets of services are jointly supported with the adjacent county councils.

IN BRIEF

TREK FROM THE TRAIN: A new book called Discovering North Norfolk and the Broads has been published which details 17 walks mainly from railway stations. Regional Railways, who have contributed to the funding of the book, hope that it will help promote the railways in the area. The book is published by Leading Edge and costs 6.99.

The RDS have also produced a new book to promote environmentally friendly transport. Called "Life beyond cars", it details several case histories of people who have reduced their dependence on cars by using the train for many journeys. The book will be on sale at our Cambridge meeting.

IPSWICH PLANS: The branch has made detailed comments to the Ipswich Local Plan. We welcomed Ipswich Borough Council's recognition of the role in which public transport can help improve the quality of life and ask that all new developments should be located next to the railway. The Council were asked to consider possible new stations in the area and to ensure that bus services from the railway station would not be affected if a new bus station was built.

REWARD: InterCity Anglia has received a Chartermark award. These awards are part of the citizens charter and are given to those public services which meet their performance targets.

REJECTED: Plans to modify the Bedford southern by-pass to include a bridge for a future rail link between Bedford and Sandy have been rejected. Although many county councils has shown interest in the rail link, lack of support from Bedfordshire County Council was a key factor in the decision.

1994 AGM

The Branch's AGM next year will be held at the Ely Makings on Saturday 26 February starting at 2pm. Mark Causebrook Director of Regional Railways Central has been invited to address the meeting.

John Page, our Press Officer, wishes to stand down from the post due to other commitments. We would like to thank John for all his hard work during the past few years and wish him well with his exams next year.

The role of Press Officer involves issuing press releases and Rail East to the local media. The draft for the press release is usually produced by one of the other Officers who will also deal with any press questions. The main requirement is to have access to a typewriter and word processor.

If anybody is interested in becoming Press Officer or would like to join the Branch Committee, please contact Peter Wakefield. The Committee meets 4 times a year, on the same day as our public meetings. A profound understanding of railway matters is not mandatory, much more important is a willingness to contribute ideas and help out.

FREIGHT PROSPECTS?

A recent British Rail decision to transfer former coal sector locomotives to Ipswich might well prove good news for the Ipswich to Peterborough line. Currently, most Freightliner traffic travels via London using electric locomotives. The replacement diesel locomotives will allow a choice of route and enable trains to avoid the congested lines around London. The displaced electric traction is needed for Channel Tunnel traffic.

TRAINS TO HUNSTANTON?

West Norfolk District Council intend to protect Kings Lynn to Hunstanton track bed and devote serious consideration to the re-opening of the line which closed in 1969. The Council hope that a new rail link will boost tourism in the area and help solve traffic congestion in Kings Lynn. The actor Bill Pertwee is among many people who support the scheme.

However, understandable opposition has already arisen from those people who live in the former station buildings along the route. The old route also passes close to the Royal Sandringham estates, and the Queen is reported to be concerned about the new line. Studies have shown that variations to the original route are possible.

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The next Rail East will be issued in February 1994. Contributions please to Nick Dibben by the 15 January. Thanks to Ken Burton, ESTA (both species), Peter Lawrence, Peter Wakefield, and Clara Zilahi for their contributions, and press cuttings.

DONT FORGET:
CAMBRIDGE MEETING, 20 NOVEMBER
WRITE TO YOUR MP REGARDING VAT ON FARES
SEND US YOUR COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRE

BRANCH OFFICERS

CHAIRMAN: Peter Wakefield

43 High Street, Oakington, Cambridge CB4 5AG

SECRETARY: Nick Dibben

24 Bure Close, St Ives, Huntingdon, Cambs PE17 4FR

TREASURER: Lewis Buckingham

25 Drury Lane, Colchester, Essex CO2 7UY

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY: Clara Zilahi

31 Wimbotsham Road, Downham Market, Norfolk PE38 9PE

SALES OFFICER: Chris Milnes

25 Thetford Way, South Wootton, Kings Lynn PE30 3TG