

Roads 0%: Railtrack 5.6% - is this fair?

A recent study by Railtrack has shown that bridge repair work is needed on the Cromer line to allow freight trains to continue to serve the oil depot at North Walsham. Under the current rules, Railtrack has to charge the customer the cost plus extra to enable them to make a 5.6% return on their assets. If the customer refuses to pay, this traffic will be transferred to the roads. Extra heavy lorries will increase the damage to local roads and the taxpayer foots the bill for the repairs. Of course, road users pay taxes, but it is doubtful that this money would be sufficient to enable a potential "Roadtrack" organisation to make a 5.6% rate of return.

Last year, a similar situation occurred at Kings Lynn Docks which resulted in the end of rail traffic. The Branch has asked the local authorities to identify any additional road maintenance costs.

Investigations into accidents at level crossings show that around 90% are caused by motorists. A recent campaign in the north west has resulted in 345 drivers being reported for prosecution for misusing level crossings. Each new safety rule is expensive to implement, and results in

higher fares for the rail passenger.

The Rail Regulator has already challenged these conditions as being unfair.

The Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution has recently issued a report which cast doubt on whether new roads either solve traffic congestion or create jobs. The two year study has confirmed what many people having been saying for some years: new roads lead to increased traffic. These reports should lead to calls for the current road building programme to be reduced and the money spent on public transport. Although extra money for the railways will be most welcome, simply throwing money at public transport is no substitute for a well thought out co-ordinated transport policy.

The starting point for such a policy must be based on people's transport needs and the creation of a "level playing field" between all forms of transport. This should cover areas such as investment, access charges and safety standards.

It will require pressure on the government to ensure much needed changes. A letter to your own MP drawing attention to these matters should help get things moving.

In brief...

Wisbech - Cambridgeshire Liberal Democrat Councillors are pressing for the re-opening of the line between March and Wisbech. The scheme, costed at £1.5m, would allow through services between Wisbech and Peterborough. Councillors hope that the newly appointed Railway Officer will be able to progress the project.

Sales - The Branch's sales stand has been at two environmental fairs. The first event in St Neots included a forum on reducing car dependency. At the second, in Huntingdon, we were able to update people on the progress in re-opening the St Ives

line. The branch is looking for further events to attend, suggestions to the Sales Officer, Chris Milnes please.

St Ives - The re-opening of the railway line could receive European Union funds as part of the trans-europe road network as this would divert local traffic from the A14 (formerly A604).

Named - A sprinter unit has been named Gerard Fienes by RDS National Secretary, Trevor Garrod. Trevor suggested the name of the former BR Manager and campaigner against closure of the East Suffolk line in a BBC competition.

Modernisation halted

The extensive remodelling and resignalling of the Liverpool Street to Colchester main line has been halted. The planned engineering works, between Bethnal Green and Maryland, including the renewal of the overhead line to give greater reliability. The complete closure of the line out as far as Ilford over the weekend of 19/20 November has also been scrapped.

The track and overhead line work had been planned for the Chelmsford area and near Forest Gate for 1995 may not go ahead.

The reason: Railtrack have run out money.

Rail user watchdog meetings

One of the provisions of the Railways Act 1993 was that meetings of the Rail Users Consultative Committee (RUCC) should be held in public. The first of these meetings took place near Cambridge in September with several RDS members present. Although the public are not formally allowed to speak at these meetings, it was useful to hear the plans and replies of various Railway Managers to the comments raised by the RUCC. The branch has written to the RUCC asking asking if we can make a formal presentation to the meeting on matters that concern us, especially the proposed minimum service levels.

It would be useful if someone from the Branch were to be present at future meetings to take notes. The dates and venues are:

Wednesday 14 December

Hotel Nelson, Norwich.

Wednesday 22 March

Posthouse Hotel, Brentwood.

Thursday 15 June 1995

Peterborough

venue to be confirmed.

Please contact the Branch Secretary if you would like to attend any of these meetings.

Rail fights back with free travel

Now that the damaging rail strike is finally over, the rail operating companies have announced details of special travel offers designed to bring back passengers. The InterCity companies started the ball rolling by giving away 25,000 free tickets for travel on the 8th and 9th November.

Anglia have launched a series of major travel offers to attract passengers back and to help promote local services. There will be a series of special "free travel" days on local lines with passengers qualifying for the offer by collecting coupons in the local press. In addition, extra discounts will be available on the London Day Out promotion during November and January. Some of the offers have already taken place, full

Slow progress

Three years ago, Rail East welcomed the decision by the Government to press ahead with the Crossrail project. The basis of the scheme was to link the lines running from Liverpool Street and Paddington via a new tunnel that would create new east-west rail journeys. As a new RDS leaflet shows, little progress has been made since. In fact the project is in danger of collapsing following a decision by an all party Transport Select Committee to veto funding. Members are asked to write to their MPs urging them to ensure that the project goes ahead.

There is better news however for the Thameslink 2000 project. A consortium of local authorities pressing for the scheme have been told that the Government have instructed Railtrack to make the £550m plan a top priority. At our Cambridge meeting in November a member of the Thameslink 2000 consortium will provide an update.

BRANCH OFFICERS

Chairman: Peter Wakefield
43 High Street, Oakington, CAMBRIDGE CB4 5AG
Vice Chairman: Peter Lawrence
75 Marl Pit Lane, NORWICH NR5 8XN
Secretary: Nick Dibben
24 Bure Close, ST IVES, Cambs, PE17 4FR
Treasurer: Lewis Buckingham
25 Drury Road, COLCHESTER, CO2 7UY
Membership: Clara Zillehi
31 Wimbotsham Road, DOWNHAM MARKET, PE38 9PE
Sales: Chris Milnes
25 Theford Way, South Wootton, KINGS LYNN,
PE30 3TG
Press Officer: Ken Burton

details of remaining the offers are detailed below. Please help promote these events by telling friends and neighbours about them.

Free travel days:

Saturday 5 November

Ipswich to Cambridge line

Saturday 12 November

Norwich to Lowestoft line

Saturday 26 November

Ipswich to Felixstowe line

Saturday 3 December

Norwich to Ipswich line

London Day Out:

Buy one get one for £2:

From stations in Suffolk:

Tuesday 8 to Sunday 20 November

From stations in Norfolk:

Tuesday 10 - Sunday 29 January 1995

RAIL EAST

Thank you to all those who have commented on the "new look" Rail East. Tony Albert is responsible for the final production and our thanks go to him for the excellent work.

The editor, Nick Dibben, would welcome contributions, comments and letters for possible inclusion in the future editions.

The next edition will be published in February which means that press day is early in the new year. This is your opportunity to put your views.

Branch meeting

Forty two people attended our meeting in Ipswich in September. Although the rail strike was upmost in people's minds, those present were reassured by the upbeat talk given by Railtrack East Anglia Director, Richard Middleton.

Clues to the positive nature of the talk were given when Richard Middleton and Branch Secretary Nick Dibben took part in an interview for Radio Suffolk on the Friday before the meeting.

During his talk, Mr Middleton, emphasised that Railtrack's role was to develop the railway and not to shut it down as some had feared. He highlighted the successful completion of the resignalling of Fenchurch Street station and ongoing signalling work to the Liverpool Street line as example of this commitment. He added that Railtrack were carrying out a study into ways of improving the track capacity to Felixstowe docks, noting that it was simply daft that one of the largest container ports in Europe is rail network by a 12 mile un-electrified single track branch line. The results of this study are due known in about six months time.

Railtrack were also looking at the return of freight traffic to Lowestoft docks so the unused railway land around Lowestoft station will not be sold off.

Dates for your diary

Fen line Users AGM - Saturday 12 November at 2 pm at the Ely Maltings.

Special Train - Saturday 3 December from stations in East Anglia to York, Leeds and Keighley. Details from NENTA Railtours, Tel 0692 406152

Breckland line user group meeting - Saturday 10 December at 2.30 pm at the Methodist Church Rooms, Attleborough. This is the first meeting of the recently reformed rail user group.

Branch AGM - Saturday 25 February 1995 at 1.30 pm Bury St Edmunds Library.

RDS East Anglian branch - public meeting

Our next meeting will be on Saturday November 19 at 2 pm at the Little St Mary's Church Hall, Trumpington Street, Cambridge. Nick Richardson from the Thameslink 2000 Consortium will be the guest speaker. The meeting will finish at 4.30pm.

Directions: The hall is about a mile from the station. At the end of Station Road turn right into Hills Road, Continue past the Church into Regent Street. Turn left into Downing Street, Continue into Pembroke Street. The Hall is on the left at the end of this road where it joins Trumpington Street.