

County backs rail for St Ives line

Councillors on the Transportation Committee of Cambridgeshire County Council have voted in favour of the rail option for the St Ives route rather than a guided busway. Comparison of the two schemes showed that the railway was cheaper to build but had much higher operating costs. The latest figures show the annual running costs at £2.2m nearly double those published in 1994, evidence that rail privatisation has increased costs on the railways. It was claimed that more people would use the busway. However, this would be unlikely as the St Ives - Cambridge journey time of 40 minutes would be longer than the existing bus times.

Branch meeting

The Central Trains PSR will be among the subjects discussed at our Norwich meeting on Saturday 21 September at the St Giles Hall, St Giles Street Norwich starting at 2pm. A main speaker is still being arranged. The road is on the right hand side of the City Hall when viewed from the Market Square. The hall is on the right, about 100m along.

John French who could not come to our Ipswich meeting will be at our Cambridge meeting in November.

A RDS petition signed by nearly 2000 local people in support of the rail scheme was presented to the Council at the start of the meeting. Further support came from a poll of 1100 people by the Friends of the Earth in which around 95% wanted a railway, compared with just a handful in favour of a busway or some other use for the route.

The County Council will now put both schemes to the Department of Transport, but with a clear preference for the railway. A formal reply from the Department is not expected for several months.

The problem of increasing costs for rail reopenings is one of great concern to the RDS.

Lowestoft-Norwich 150th anniversary

Plans are well underway to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Norwich to Lowestoft line in May 1997. The RDS intends to publish a commemorative book on the route similar to the one produced on the Great Yarmouth line a few years ago. Contributions to the book in the form of black and white photos and amusing stories are most welcome. Please send items to Trevor Garrod, 15 Clapham Road, Lowestoft NR32 1RQ by the middle of October.

Success

The Passenger Service Requirement (PSR) proposed for the Anglia franchise by the Office for Passenger Rail Franchising (OPRAF) did not include a requirement for trains to stop at Manningtree, a station that is principally served by trains operated by Great Eastern. The existing timetable includes Anglia-operated commuter trains in the morning and evening peak periods as well as some direct evening services.

A vigorous campaign, based on careful research, to have these trains included was launched by the RDS affiliated Manningtree Rail Users Association. OPRAF has now included most of the trains in the revised PSR.

Sales success

The Branch sales stand has had a busy summer with highly successful days at Huntingdon, Histon and two days at Ipswich as part of the town's 150th railway anniversary events. The sales total exceeded £250, providing valuable funds to help with our campaign work. In addition to RDS publications, we also sold cakes, plants and secondhand books and tapes. Many thanks to all those who helped on the stands. If you have any suggestions for events that we could attend, please contact the Branch Sales Officer Chris Milnes.

Great Eastern and WAGN PSRs

The Franchise Director, Roger Salmon, has issued the draft passenger service requirements (PSR) for two more train operators in the region: Great Eastern and West Anglia Great Northern (WAGN).

The contents of the Great Eastern PSR were discussed in detail at our Ipswich public meeting in June. The main concern was the need to ensure that direct trains continued to run between London Liverpool Street and Colchester Town. Other points raised were the need to maintain connections from the Sudbury and Braintree branches to Colchester, the retention of direct Harwich to Ipswich services. The proposed extended journey times were adversely commented on. One section of the PSR, which covered Colchester to Walton was considered a total mess and a complete rewrite was proposed. The problem was that many important local services which run to Clacton rather than Walton had not been included.

The WAGN PSR contained fewer surprises with most exist-

ing services being specified. Our two main concerns were the need to protect non-London commuter services and late night services from London. Existing early morning services into Cambridge, Peterborough and Kings Lynn need to be protected. For the benefit of those wishing to spend an evening in London, the last departure should be around 23.30. Currently, early Sunday trains on the Huntingdon route are affected by engineering work. We had assumed that this would not continue through the seven years of the franchise allowing earlier trains to be run in the future. Our comments also included a "wish list" which we hoped a future operator would consider. This included new stations at Addenbrookes Hospital and the reopening of the St Ives line, new rolling stock, new services between Stansted Airport and Cambridge and a half hourly service between Huntingdon and Peterborough.

Many thanks to all those members who submitted comments on the PSRs.

RDS Publications

Revised editions of two RDS publications have recently been issued. "Life Beyond Cars 2", costing £1.95, details the experiences of people who have reduced their dependence on the motor car. "Off the Rails?" (£1.50) is a commentary on some of the aspects of rail privatisation. Both publications will be available at our Norwich meeting in September.

Norwich

A proposal for the use of the vacant land adjacent to Norwich station includes the closure of Riverside road and the construction of shops, houses and leisure facilities. The station will benefit from a new bus interchange, improved landscaping and easier access for cyclists and pedestrians from new bridges across the Wensum.

Felixstowe line

In the recently published annual report of the Central Users' Consultative Committee, the Ipswich to Felixstowe line was the line with the worst time keeping record in the country. A significant number of trains are cancelled on this route; for the regular passenger, this is causing considerable inconvenience. The branch is single track for a substantial part of its length and carries many heavy trains of containers in that are in transit to and from the Docks.

At about the same time it was revealed that the road between Felixstowe and the north west is to be designated a part of the Trans European Network. There is to be no corresponding designation of the railway route. This means that many containers that are crossing the country en route to and from Ireland will be on the roads. This route is generally considered to meet the criteria for distance for the economic transport of containers by rail. Investment in the Felixstowe branch (which would improve the reliability of passenger services) is being denied but the docks continue to expand both in terms of the number of berths and throughput of containers.

For example, a recent report quotes P&O as having obtained a new flow of 30 containers a week through the port and going onto the Toyota factory in Derbyshire. The report did not indicate whether the containers would be moved by road or rail.

Anglia have recently stated that timekeeping has been improved.

Expansion halted

A new report by the RDS has compared plans by the new train operators to open new stations with the schemes carried out by the old BR. For the last few years an average of 10 new stations have opened each year. However, so far the new private operators have pledged just one definite new station in the next seven years! A number of operators have been looking at possible sites for new stations but many commented that rail privatisation had made things more difficult. Firstly, Railtrack are giving substantially increased estimates of costs. Secondly, there is uncertainty as to whether the Franchise Director will support new stations and lines. Senior members of the RDS have met the Minister and OPRAF to try and clarify the situation. It should be noted that, although the Government has spent £450m on various private consultants, the way to expand the network remains unclear.

Land sales

A list of 97 strategic sites to be protected for future rail freight development have been identified. There are fears that Railtrack might sell off the land to boost profits rather than keep the land for rail use. The sites identified in East Anglia are: Bury St Edmunds, Colchester (Hythe), Hoveton and Wroxham and Whittlesea. The RDS considers that it is important that no land of railway importance is sold off by Railtrack and, further, that proceeds from any sales of other land is reinvested in the rail network.

Braintree

Work is due to start soon on a £1½ million upgrade at Braintree station. The work will include a complete refurbishment of the station building, improved car parking and a rail/bus interchange. Concern has been expressed over the cost of the work, which is now twice that given two years ago.

Special trains

For a special day out, why not try one of the special trains being operated from the region in the next few months?

"The Sparkle Express" runs on Saturday 28th September from Kings Cross and stations to Peterborough then to Carlisle with an optional Lake District tour. The adult fare is £27.50 and tickets will also be valid on connecting services from Cambridge to Hitchin. Details from Peter Adds, 2 Masefield, Hitchin, Herts SG4 0QB. Tel: 01462 433364.

"The Boulby Ghost" on Saturday October 26th from Norwich and stations to Peterborough via Ipswich to York, Redcar and the very scenic line to Boulby. The adult fare is £38.75 (York), £46.75 to Redcar and Boulby. Details from NENTA Train Tours, Tel 01692 406152.

NENTA Train Tours, in conjunction with Anglia Railways, also run day Eurostar trips and Premier Days Out to London.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Saturday 21st September: RDS East Anglian Branch meeting in Norwich

Saturday 28th September: RDS National Conference of Rail Users, at the Camden Centre, London. The main speaker will be Brian Scott, Director of Great Western Trains. Tickets cost £7.00 plus £5.50 for a buffet lunch. Bookings should be sent to David Soames, 158 Atherstone Ave, Peterborough PE3 9UN.

Saturday 23rd November: RDS East Anglian Branch meeting in Cambridge

Saturday 16th November: Fen Line users AGM, Ely Maltings.

Saturday 30th November: RDS Extraordinary General Meeting.

Saturday 3rd May 1997: RDS National AGM will be held at the Maid's Head Hotel, Norwich.

RDS EGM

On Saturday 30th November 1996, there will be an Extraordinary General Meeting of the RDS at the Friend's Meeting House, London to discuss important changes to the RDS constitution, including the employment of full time staff and the creation of a Rail Development Trust.

More details will be published in the next edition of Railwatch. Members are urged to try and attend this important meeting.

Cherry Hinton

A number of local residents in Cherry Hinton are looking at ways of blocking Cambridgeshire County Council's plans to build a new station. Their main concerns are the increased road traffic where they live and the cost of the project.

Since there would be only limited parking for the disabled, the County Council insist that the station is for local users only. People would either walk or cycle, and additional motor traffic would not increase. Those who want to take advantage of park and ride would be directed to one of the main "park and ride" sites around Cambridge where there is more parking and a more frequent service into the City. The resident's first concern would therefore appear to be invalid.

Their second argument is of more concern. As has already been noted on the St Ives line, costs of new stations have greatly increased since rail privatisation. The increasing interest in railways by local authorities is very welcome, but will not continue unless Railtrack is seen to be giving good value for money.

Developer proposes new stations

A plan to redevelop land currently used by Anglia Water and Railtrack's Chesterton Sidings in northern Cambridge includes a new station on the Cambridge to Ely line. The scheme, which is undergoing a public consultation exercise, involves a mixed development of retail, housing, office, hotel and leisure facilities. The existing rail-served Redland stone terminal would continue in use, and could see additional traffic during the construction period. The project could take between 10 and 15 years to complete, however the new station is promised as part of phase one.

The developers have stated that they are also looking at possible funding for the St Ives route which forms the southern boundary of the site. This might suggest a station at the junction of the Ely and St Ives routes. As this site is over a 1km (3/4 mile) from the centre of the development people would be deterred from using the station. The alternative is for two stations: one on the Ely line, as proposed, which is adjacent to the retail and leisure facilities; the other on the St Ives line at Milton Road which would serve both the new development and the existing Science Park area.

Blitz on lorries

A number of county councils have been carrying out checks on lorries in an operation to improve road safety. The results from Cambridgeshire suggest that there is a great deal of work to be done. The 58 lorries inspected produced a total of 42 offences including 8 lorries which were in such a bad condition that they were not allowed to continue their journey. Similar results have been

achieved in other areas.

One of the key elements of RDS campaigns is for a "level playing field" between all modes of transport. This must include safety. It is not surprising that many companies say that road is cheaper when some haulage firms are allowed to cut costs in this way. With the election approaching, why not write to your local MP and ask if they support, and would provide funds for, a large increase in the number of inspections. The Department of Transport puts the value of a life at just under £1m, a sum that would pay for a lot of inspections.

Rail East

The next Rail East will appear in November. Contributions to Nick Dibben by the end of September please.

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 Zillahl
31 Wimbotsham Road, DOWNHAM MARKET, PE38 9PE
Sales: Chris Milnes
25 Thetford Way, South Wootton, KINGS LYNN, PE30 3TG
Press Officer: Ken Burton
23 Abbeygate, THETFORD, Norfolk