

REPORTS BY CHAIRMAN, MEMBERSHIP ADMINISTRATOR, COMMITTEES AND SUB COMMITTEES

CHAIRMAN

Mike Crowhurst

If 2008 was an unusually interesting year, 2009 was even more so. The promotion of Lord Adonis from Minister to Secretary of State shortly after our meeting with him, was the first encouraging development. Here at last was a minister who not only believed in railways as something more than just another unwelcome drain on Treasury coffers, but actually knew something about them and what's more was prepared to go out and about and see them in operation in practice. The mandarins must love him! Indeed when encountered on his travels, he was even willing to talk to real passengers including some of our branch officers. And his one-man PR job for the All-line Rover made up for decades of neglect by BR and the TOCs!

The practical effects as the year progressed were impressive. At last a serious electrification scheme authorised. Indeed the biggest - Great Western all the way to Swansea, as well as some infill in the North West (subsequently increased). Envious cries from users of the Midland, although as I write there are signs that this and some other small schemes may not be too far behind. Let's hope so! Encouraging too was some serious work on High Speed proposals. Rival schemes were thick as autumn leaves, and the definitive report from HS2 Ltd is still awaited, but Network Rail's contribution to the debate was particularly illuminating. Be that as it may, any construction is inevitably some way off, and investment in the present network must not be neglected in the meantime. The Chancellor's autumn statement was reassuring that major schemes like Crossrail are not at risk in the ongoing recession, but urgently needed rolling stock builds have been thrown into turmoil ironically by the electrification decisions. This needs sorting out as soon as possible.

The recession did however contribute to yet another franchise collapse on that once-proud flagship route, the East Coast main line. Calls for permanent restoration of state ownership went predictably unheeded, and reletting is due in 2011, but the fiasco on what should be the most profitable route in the system puts the whole franchising system in question. At grassroots level Network Rail's programme of consultation with stakeholders over Route Utilisation Strategies continues apace. Such documents are heavy on detail and sometimes take some digesting, but responses (mainly by branches) have been submitted to all, and the opportunities for informal contacts are perhaps even more valuable.

As the year ended, the conference in Copenhagen demonstrated that whilst the issues of climate change are now widely recognised, solutions are by no means universally accepted. Nevertheless we continue to press the case for rail (electrified and powered from renewable sources) to play a major part in meeting transport needs sustainably, especially in the developed world. At home the Elephant in the room is of course the Election, due around the time of our AGM and less predictable than any since 1992. This makes Lord Adonis' political life-expectation highly uncertain, so we must press for as many schemes as possible to be authorised before the election. Meantime (as detailed in Norman Bradbury's report) we maintain contacts with all opposition transport spokespersons, and hope that any new incumbent will follow the good Lord's admirable example.

On the domestic front, the combination of mostly good news on the railways and hard times economically in general has meant that the slow decline in our membership has continued. Our constitutional changes have come into effect and the Board has already benefited from some new blood. Our programme of conferences has continued, with the Leeds AGM being followed by the gathering in Northallerton to hear from representatives of the Independent sector, and the autumn conference reverting to the reopenings theme in Corby. Work by ATOC on this and related themes ("Connecting Communities") published during the year indicates that this too is now seriously on the Agenda - and not just in Scotland and Wales! Our plans for 2010 include the AGM in Wrexham and conferences in Taunton and London, and the long-awaited publication of our updated A - Z record of "Britain's Growing Railway".

NETWORK DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Ian McDonald

The Network Development Committee met three times in 2009, twice in London and once in Peterborough (and most recently in January 2010 in London). Our most recent two meetings were held jointly with the Publicity Committee to assist with production of publications. Consultation on campaigning work and document production continued between meetings of course. Colin Lingard has resigned as Secretary because of his work commitments, and we thank him for his work for us. We are currently seeking a replacement from our Committee's numbers.

A substantial part of our work has revolved around the continued task of updating the book *A-Z of Rail Re-openings*, last published in 1998 and now well overdue for re-issue. This task has taken longer than envisaged, due primarily to withdrawal of the first two editors allotted this mammoth task, and the normal daily workload of the third editor, but now Volume I of the series *Britain's Growing Railway* has been published. Volume II will follow later in 2010 and, due to the significantly increased support recently for new stations, and for closed lines to be re-opened, there will be much more information in the two volumes than in the previous edition.

We have also decided to update our paper on Electrification published late in 2008 because of newly discovered Government enthusiasm not expected previously, and *railfuture* cannot afford to be left behind.

We are currently considering what *railfuture's* approach should be to the various proposals for High Speed 2, and whether we would wish to support any of the specific routes suggested so far.

Financial support to branches and established campaign groups through the Fighting Fund continues to be available where a project achieves support of the *railfuture* Board as a worthwhile and realistic venture, subject to approval of costs in advance.

Members who would like to be considered to be on our Committee and are prepared to commit time to analysing documents, can write to *railfuture's* Chairman, Mike Crowhurst, stating how they can help us.

The International & EU Committee met three times in 2009, in London, Derby and again in London. The committee's report on its "mystery shopper" exercise to check whether UK Train Operating Companies (TOCs) were able to provide information about through journeys to the Continent via Eurostar by phone or on their websites was widely circulated to industry bodies and politicians in May 2009. Two TOCs asked for further details and there was a positive reply from Eurostar. The committee plans to repeat the exercise, probably in a couple of years' time.

There were elections to the European Parliament in June 2009. We drew up questions for the political parties and had dialogue with some UK Euro MPs. We plan to step up these contacts during 2010. Our report into surface access to UK airports by public transport was published in early 2010. We thank the many local *railfuture* members and Branch representatives who contributed information about links to their local airports. The committee's next project will be a report on ferry services between the UK and both Ireland and mainland Europe. Our intention is to highlight good practice in terms of easy access between train and boat at each end and in allowing foot passengers on all sailings. At the moment things are moving in the wrong direction (for example Stena Line is transferring its sailings from rail-served Stranraer Harbour to non-rail served Cairnryan). However we welcome Stena's commitment to continuing to serve Dun Laoghaire with its good rail connection to the centre of Dublin.

Turning to Eurostar, we continue to lobby for an improved service from Ashford and we fully support the efforts of the indefatigable Ashford-based campaigner Edith Robson and others to increase the number of Eurostar services calling there, particularly to and from Brussels. Eurostar's response to the problems caused by snow before Christmas was clearly wholly unacceptable. Two issues need to be addressed on an urgent basis – the issue of having a rescue facility for Eurostar trains when things go wrong (e.g. locomotives on standby) and secondly the appalling customer care (or lack of it) which always seems to be an issue on such occasions. The committee has contributed to evidence provided by EPF (the European Passengers' Federation) to the independent inquiry into the débâcle, which is being chaired by ex-Eurotunnel and GNER man Christopher Garnett. Incidentally for those members who want to know more about EPF's work, the organisation has a website at www.epf.eu.

The committee was very disappointed to hear that Railteam had seemingly given up on the idea of a "one stop shop" for through ticketing and reservations on high-speed services across Europe. We shall be seeking direct dialogue with them via EPF. It is however worth noting that DB (German Railways) already offers through ticketing across Europe. We will continue to lobby Euro MPs on a number of fronts during the year ahead. If you have any issues which you would like the committee to discuss please do not hesitate to contact me.

FREIGHT SERVICE & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**Gary Tinsey**

Firstly, I would like to thank our members for their sterling efforts in a difficult period. With the backdrop of recession our activists have seen a number of important bulk, container and automotive rail freight services curtailed, stopped or run at much reduced frequency. This has been compounded by the administration and subsequent collapse of a niche Freight Operating Company, the rationalisation of staff and assets at the largest provider and the selective trimming of equipment and operations at the others.

On a more positive note, some industrial customers have resumed normal traffic patterns, such as valuable steel coil loads from South Wales, whilst the construction industry, buoyed by the demand for aggregates and cement to the Olympics site in east London, has remained busy, offsetting lower demand elsewhere. The intermodal sector has largely come through intact; albeit still facing challenging pricing from the road haulage sector to retain existing and attract new maritime clients on key route corridors from the deep and short-sea ports to inland terminals.

The committee panel met on four occasions at Birmingham, Peterborough, Middlesbrough and Corby. The penultimate gathering was courtesy of P D Ports who provided a guided tour of their facilities at Tees Dock. Our final date had an interesting presentation from the EFR consortium showing an ambitious project to construct a dedicated rail-freight route to enhanced loading dimensions.

In general terms, meeting agendas and e-mail group discussions have covered our standing orders, supported by numerous topics absorbed from a network of regional correspondents and regular bodies, alongside other third parties. These were noted in the relevant minutes, debated on the day and, where recorded, taken further.

We added The Strategic Freight Network to our campaign priorities to enable better monitoring of rail schemes in progress, under preparation or longer term plans for the key trunk and diversionary routes, countrywide.

Ongoing, the study of planning, interchanges and terminals development, the threat of bigger commercial vehicles on the roads and the potential of The Channel Tunnel remains integral to our lobbying,

RAILWATCH**Ray King**

Four issues of Railwatch were produced in 2009. Since November 2008, Railwatch has been produced with colour on all 20 pages at no extra cost. We held production costs steady throughout 2009.

Printing has continued to be in the hands of Print-Out at Histon, Cambridgeshire, throughout the year. The firm has provided excellent service to *railfuture* for more than 20 years now.

In 2009, the editorial board included Jerry Alderson, Lloyd Butler, Alan Cocker, John Barfield, Laurence Fryer, Ray King, Graham Morrison and Robert Stevens. The board is also helped by Railondon editor and email discussion group moderator John Davison. Thanks to all those correspondents who contributed branch news reports, articles and letters.

Distribution of Railwatch continues to be carried out efficiently by the professional firm, Mailhandlers, based in East London. Several hundred copies of Railwatch are sent to MPs, peers, rail-orientated companies, local authorities and the media, as part of our campaign to keep opinion-formers properly informed on rail issues. The list of those who receive Railwatch free is maintained by Lloyd Butler. The editorial board meets four times a year in London.

As usual the committee met on three occasions. These were in Birmingham in February and October and in London for the May meeting.

Lobby meetings: These were held with Andrew Adonis (then as Minister for Transport), Norman Baker and Stephen Hammond, both opposition transport spokesman. All these meetings were considered to have been worthwhile.

Consultations: Responses were submitted to the Transport Select Committee 'Future of Aviation' inquiry, the NAO 'Obstacles to Rail Investment' inquiry and the Select Committee 'Priorities for Rail Investment' inquiry.

Campaigning work: This centred on preparation of a Rail Manifesto to be ready prior to the general election in 2010.

During the year, the committee was also represented at three Core TAR meetings, two Transport Taxation Group meetings and three All Party Parliamentary Climate Change Group (APPCCG) meetings. Relevant reports on these meetings were circulated. The final meeting of the Transport Taxation Group was scheduled for December 15/12/09 having been deferred. The committee will as usual be represented by me.

Conferences: The committee was also represented at the 'Sustainable Railways' conference in London in May and the CBT 'High Speed Raji' seminar in June.

PASSENGER COMMITTEE**Howard Thomas**

The Passenger Committee met four times in 2009 alternating between Birmingham and London venues. During the year, there were also valuable meetings with Lord Adonis (attended by three committee members) in May, and Passenger Focus in June (also attended by three committee members). As usual, a wide range of rail issues was discussed at both meetings. Once again, it was encouraging to note from these meetings that the work of *railfuture* is both valued and respected in official and railway circles.

It was generally accepted that overcrowding continues to be a problem on many services. Whilst a certain amount of overcrowding would be expected on commuter services into and out of major cities in the peaks, fares should not be used to moderate this. Specifically, we do not believe that pricing people off trains should have any place in the operations of a public service railway.

The issue of fares continues to make headlines in the national press. Once again, despite the recession, 2009 saw unregulated fares rise by significantly more than the rate of inflation, further distorting what is now a totally disordered and unstructured system. The year also saw the imposition of yet more restrictions on the use of off-peak tickets in the afternoon peak where none existed before. There is now no consistency in the way that peak-hour restrictions are applied. The committee is particularly concerned with the blanket restrictions imposed on afternoon peak trains operated by Cross Country last year, despite the fact that many passengers are travelling contra-peak to the regional cities at this time of day. Overall, one wonders whether fare setting should be left totally in the hands of the TOCs, and if maximization of profit should even apply to a public service railway.

The January 2010 round of fare increases promises to be unusual since there will be a small fall in regulated fares. At the time of writing, the Committee is aware that London Midland will be banning off-peak tickets from evening peak services from four central Birmingham stations between 16:35 and 18:00. The Committee expects to see further restrictions in the use of off-peak tickets. However, the news that First Great Western has decided to charge single fares at half the price of a return on their priced flows in future is a very welcome change.

There is now some urgency in providing additional rolling stock in almost every region. The programme for delivering 1,300 new carriages should now be accelerated. It is pleasing to note, however, that rolling stock transfers have resulted in NXEA being able to lengthen a number of trains by four coaches. In the case of new rolling stock, the Committee is concerned that there is little real consultation with passengers groups on design, and there is continued unwillingness of designers to align seats with windows. A classic case of what happens with not consulting passenger groups has resulted in the construction of class 378 emus for London Overground with longitudinal seats only. This issue appeared to strike a chord with Lord Adonis when we met him in May.

Towards the end of the year, the report by Chris Green and Peter Hall entitled Better Rail Stations was published (October 2009). The report sets out detailed standards for the facilities that passengers should expect to be provided at all 2,500 stations on the national network according to type. Although it will take 5 to 10 years for the necessary improvement works to be done, the report is nevertheless the most significant step forward in setting standards for passengers since the SRA was disbanded.

We will continue to pursue these and other issues in 2010. Let us once again remind ourselves that it is Parliament, Government and their officials who let us have the railways we now have; and note that we are expecting a General Election early in 2010.

MEMBERSHIP**Lloyd Butler**

Membership at the end of 2009 was 2330 with 118 family members counted as two (31.12.2008 = 2376). Over the past 10 years the annual loss has been consistently close to 10% of the membership every year. I write to all members who fail to renew asking them to tell us why. During 2009 many cited financial reasons for their failure to renew, perhaps unsurprising in the current economic climate.

Unlike last year, the best recruitment sources in 2009 were from Branches or personal introductions, accounting for over a third of all new members – keep up the good work! The website was second, but plans are in place to allow people to join and pay for membership by PayPal, which may make the web the strongest recruiting medium once more.

PUBLICITY TEAM**Trevor Garrod**

Much of our work in 2009 involved preparations for the launch of *railfuture's* first major publication for ten years, the book *Britain's Growing Railway*. We had to start from scratch in drawing up lists of sales outlets and outside bodies to whom it should be sent, negotiate with printers and arrange storage and distribution.

However, we also distributed most of the remaining stocks of the 2008 leaflet "A moment of your time", aimed at visitors to heritage railways and other tourist attractions. Over 50 useful replies were received and analysed and some of these respondents also joined *railfuture*.

Advertising was placed in the TSSA journal, Midlands Focus and Private Eye but only a few new members joined directly from these. It is important to promote our name and website as widely and often as possible, however - some potential members will then google us and be persuaded to join when they read more about us online.

For 2010, we decided to concentrate on local and regional media advertising. For example, we have paid for adverts in the Railway Herald, an electronic magazine, to promote an East Anglian Branch campaign and are willing to give similar help to other Branches. We are also working on an advert template for Branches to use and we shall part-fund such adverts.

The Publicity Team helped pay for a recruitment leaflet for the West Midlands Branch and offered to help branches to purchase display boards and produce material for these. Only a minority of Branches accepted the offer, but our door remains open.

Our national press officer Bruce Williamson has emailed regular news releases to the media and he and other officers have been quoted and interviewed in a range of publications and broadcasts.

OFFICER FOR DISABLED TRAVELLERS**Clara Zilahi**

It appears that the long-standing saga over a lift at Ipswich station is at last coming to a satisfactory conclusion. A new design has received planning approval and the lift should be in place by end of 2010. This date coincides with the proposed withdrawal of through services from Peterborough and Lowestoft to Liverpool Street, thus necessitating a change of train, and sometimes platform, at Ipswich. The completion date is therefore critical for all who cannot manage the steep footbridge. The East Anglian Branch and local User Groups are stressing this in the consultations.

In spite of the obligations imposed by disability legislation there still seems to be an assumption that disabled people are likely to travel only once or twice a year on holiday, when increased journey length does not matter too much. So they can be made to proceed to a station beyond their destination and wait for a return train if one station does not allow them step free access to cross the line. That they may wish to commute to work, make day trips, attend meetings etc is not allowed for. There is plenty here to campaign about locally, though we must accept that financial constraints are genuine, and station improvements may only be feasible when other work is carried out.

Early last year the DfT published a new Code of Practice on Accessible Train and Station Design, which however seems to deal only with stations rather than trains.

Our greatest fear is the continuing attempts to reduce staff. For those with disabilities, as well as for many others, ticket machines may not be a satisfactory alternative to a booking clerk, and where these are flat screen they are totally unusable for anyone with a visual handicap. And of course some people need physical help to board or leave the train. At some stations staff reduction can be justified by a supposedly reduced footfall, which however may be spurious and due to the introduction of zonal fares rather than actual counts. In such cases the actual footfall counts carried out by Branches or User Groups can provide invaluable evidence, and are one of the most useful activities carried out by members.

TfL started a trial of issuing cards to travellers with "hidden disabilities" which they can show and obtain help (provided there is a member of staff to give it). Clearly good staff training is needed here as elsewhere, to obtain this benefit.

Finally I have to remind members who organise meetings, whether of *railfuture* or User Groups, that these should be accessible to people with disabilities and that arrangements must be in place to allow evacuation in case of fire of those unable to use normal safety exits. This applies particularly in the case of AGMs as it is a legal right of every member of an organisation to attend these.

HOW MEMBERS CAN HELP RAILFUTURE

Nearly all *railfuture* campaigning is funded by our members. As well as making a donation with your subscription there are other ways of helping *railfuture*.

Can you recruit a new member? Membership leaflets can be downloaded from the www.railfuture.org.uk web site ("Join Us") or by contacting the Membership Secretary, 6 Carral Close, Brant Road, Lincoln LN5 9BD. Please consider some of the ideas suggested in the "Time for Action" section in Railwatch.

Why not volunteer to take an active role in National and local branch activities?

Try to attend one of *railfuture's* national events. The AGM will be held at Wrexham Football Club, The Racecourse Ground, Mold Road, Wrexham LL11 2AH on Saturday 8th May 2010. There will be a summer conference in Taunton on Saturday 3rd July 2010 and a further autumn conference in London is being planned.

Join the *railfuture* Lottery. 50% of the net receipts are paid out as prizes each month, with the remainder allocated to our Campaigns Fund. Details from Railfuture Lottery Organiser, 24 Chedworth Place, Tatingstone, Suffolk IP9 2ND or visit www.railfuture.org.uk/lottery/.

Consider making the Society a beneficiary of your will. Please consult your solicitor for advice on how to do this.

RAILFUTURE'S MISSION STATEMENT

To be the number one advocate for the railway and rail users
