

railfuture

**RAIL USERS CONFERENCE
REPORT 2007**

**Held at The Maltings, Ely
on November 3, 2007**

railfuture

is the campaigning name of the Railway Development Society, formed to help the improvement of the United Kingdom's rail network.

The society holds conferences around the country on a regular basis, and the Rail Users Conference for 2007 was held in Ely on November 3.

Other conferences held are Re-opening Conferences, of which the 2007 event took place in Glasgow, while a third conference is held to coincide with the society's Annual General Meeting.

Look out for more news of our planned conferences for 2008, including our summer conference at The Guildhall, Salisbury on Saturday July 5 and a high speed conference in November to coincide with the first anniversary of the opening of St Pancras International and High Speed 1.

For the latest news, check the www.railfuture.org.uk website.

The 2007 Rail User Conference was organised by the East Anglia branch of Railfuture, which covers Cambridgeshire, Norfolk, Suffolk, parts of Essex and Hertfordshire. The branch has helped campaigns such as the reopening of the St. Ives branch, electrification of East Anglian mainlines, Cambridge - Norwich through services as part of East West Rail Link, hourly services on all local routes, and holds meetings four times a year throughout the area.

CONTENTS

Introduction	2
Things ARE getting better	3
<i>Bob Breakwell, First Great Western director</i>	
Station restoration	9
<i>Cyril Brown, Friends of Brandon Station</i>	
A new way to fund new rail schemes	10
<i>Dave Wetzel, Transport for London vice-chair</i>	
Ten steps to user group success	14
<i>Derek Potter, chair of Cotswold Line Promotion Group</i>	
Restoring the missing link	16
<i>Andy Shackleton, SELRAP</i>	
Different structure, similar problems	20
<i>Jean-Paul Jacquot and Simone Bigorgne</i>	
Premium payments, but no premium service	23
<i>Andrew Long, Bedford Commuters Association</i>	
Saving the train at Melksham	24
<i>Graham Ellis</i>	
Stopping the buffers going up	26
<i>Robert Stripe, Fen Line Rail Users Association</i>	
What attendees thought	27
Join Railfuture	28
Questions and Answers	29
Conference summing-up	31
<i>Guy Dangerfield, Passenger Focus</i>	
Acknowledgements	32



Mr Breakwell feels that Britain can learn from Japanese Shinkansen operations

ICE and Shinkansen services abroad. The Kent high speed domestic services will not give much benefit except to small towns such as Deal and Dover and, therefore, I feel the CTRL does not give much real benefit to the rail network.

"On this history, you can understand why politicians are not particularly enamoured of rail."

He felt that longer trains, better signalling and sleek operating practices can be the answer to overcrowding.

Although the Paris-Lyon high-speed route is full to capacity with an 18-coach double decker train passing

through every three minutes, he felt that Germany coped very well with large numbers of passengers.

But he was most impressed watching the operation of trains on the high-speed route between Tokyo and Osaka.

"When people say there is no capacity on our railways, then I say rubbish!

"When I travelled on the Shinkansen service, there were trains going through all the time with fast and semi-fast services looped to allow a 170 mph train to speed through on what was basically a double track

main line. And what have we got? 158s and Voyagers!"

Mr Breakwell recognised that there are down sides too, pointing out that consultants had recently charged £500,000 for a study into introducing 12-coach services from London to Cambridge – when he had introduced them in 1991!

"However, there is good news – £15billion of investment over 25 years," he continued. "The High Level Output Statement includes 1,300 extra coaches, a lot being spent on schemes such as the Felixstowe-Peterborough-Nuneaton route for freight; Thameslink is 99.5% there; the Clacton line resignalling will soon be completed – bidirectional signalling between Mark's Tey and Colchester is the last piece of the jigsaw.

"There will be a lull for the Olympics, but then further schemes will reach fruition – such as London Bridge.

"Another big scheme is the London-Stansted service, where we are looking beyond 12-car trains. We are now looking at a fourth platform at Stansted – a Public Enquiry is being held at the moment – as well as signalling infrastructure improvements. But for the 12-car trains, Cheshunt and Broxbourne can't take them – and these are expensive problems to correct.

"Stratford is being upgraded with a new platform 10a but it will require a massive new bridge to allow more peak hour trains to call."

He had outlined plans in the Anglia

region but said that similar schemes were planned elsewhere, and all the words he heard from the industry were that 'Things are going well' – Network Rail are co-operating with the Department for Transport, the Treasury, and the Office of Rail Regulation.

"If you hear Network Rail saying there is not enough money, they are just up to their usual tricks. Don't worry about it – it is simply part of the process. There will be definite plans in place by Spring 2008 – not as in the past where you got rhubarb-plan-bin, rhubarb-plan-bin – this is exciting and real.

"The key point, I feel, will come with Control Period 4 when the Rail Regulator tells NR how much it has for maintenance and how much for investment – everyone is optimistic.

"In conclusion, I feel there are reasons to be hopeful. The TOCs will continue to improve. They are not perfect – Connex was rightly extinguished, and Northern Spirit went bankrupt – and that was good. Occasionally TOCs will go bust – that is part of the design of the structure. TOCs have to have the discipline – they have got to give customers good service or they will go bankrupt.

"First Capital Connect has very good punctuality – in fact they have achieved their best results on the King's Cross route lately, which I feel is commendable given the restrictions of two tracks over Welwyn viaduct.

"Thameslink's delays are mainly



The SRA prescribed horrible timetable cuts in Cornwall, Devon and South Wales. Our picture shows a local service running during engineering works

due to Network Rail. We are focussing absolutely on reliability – and this should bring about a significant improvement. TOC delays are going down, while NR delays are plateauing.

"I agree, the assessments of the transport media were correct – Network Rail must do better. With FGW, the majority of delays are down to NR and this is unsatisfactory. There are numerous challenges at the moment – there are new staff on both teams and they are now working comprehensively together. But it will take time.

"The new timetable promises an improvement. When we tendered for the franchise, the Strategic Rail Authority prescribed the timetable, and it was pretty horrible, with

massive cuts to Devon, Cornwall and South Wales. When then-Transport Secretary Alastair Darling – normally a placid man – heard of this he went berserk!

"We listened to the local groups but, unfortunately, only the loudest were heard. If there is no talk, there is no action. But then – all hell broke loose! The new timetable will improve the service, but it will not improve reliability."

He admitted that the Cotswold line was the most challenging in the country and is in a mess at the moment, but concluded: "My final assessment is that everything is rolling forward constructively – all the parties are working together – it's absolutely marvellous!"

Question & Answer Session

Julie Boston of the Friends of Severn Beach Railway said: "We can't trust FGW. Locally, we were promised a half-hour service on our local line but FGW say they can't do it until May. There are constant cancellations. The RMT want the railways back in public ownership."

Mr Breakwell replied: "The Minister told us we could hire whatever trains we wanted – we didn't need Department for Transport approval. Yet the DfT vetoed our plans. The DfT also vetoed a deal to get rid of Pacers in Cornwall. We have submitted further plans – we are still awaiting approval.

"Despite what people think, it is not a free market and everyone suffers as a result. We have a franchise agreement – we cannot have a bilateral agreement with a RoSCo without DfT approval and that's what we are suffering from.

"Cardiff Canton has the worst record for train maintenance anywhere on the network. We were right to get out of Canton. But then we had another problem – the contractor for our new depot in Bristol went bust! We have finally got a new one in place and are on schedule for completion in May 2008.

"I feel the RMT is a bigoted left-wing organisation. Privatisation was not a success - I agree 100 per cent. But re-nationalisation? There is no money. What is the solution? All I

can say is that, despite the criticism, BR was a fine organisation.

"But I feel that, over a period of time, things will improve."

Q&A

John Sully, a contributor to *Modern Railways*, praised the East London Line scheme – "it is brilliant – and London is so fortunate". But what about leasing costs? Under BR, for instance, the Pacers would have been written off by now.

Mr Breakwell responded that people often forget that the leasing cost includes such things as a heavy overhaul, which does not come cheap. But the Government believed that leasing costs were too high – it would all come out with the Monopolies Commission investigation.

Q&A

George Scott asked for an explanation of the 75 minute rule for cancellations.

Mr Breakwell replied that he lived on a branch line so had experience of the problems. He said: "It depends entirely on the company. In my experience, it can often be difficult to hire buses at such short notice.

"But the rail service is unique in this respect – you don't get a penny's compensation for a late bus or aeroplane."

Q&A

Chris Burden suggested that one serious problem faced by FGW was that, when things went wrong, there was no information available to passengers. Mr Breakwell agreed, saying: "Information during disruption is a top requirement. On Great Eastern, we invested lots of money to address this problem and FGW are still investing.

"A lot of effort is going into the system of control in the event of a disruption and a system to get information out of control, into the IT department and out to the customer. But I agree, it is a serious problem."

Q&A

Graham Ellis asked why, in the new timetables, stopping services were lost. Passengers had been promised that something would be done – are we not being flannelled by the operators?

Mr Breakwell responded: "If an operator can make money on a service, then they will run it. If the service would make a loss, the operator would ask the DfT to subsidise it . . . but then, the DfT want to screw us on costs."

Q&A

A Cornishman now living in Cambridge asked why Pacers, rejected in Cornwall, were being re-introduced in his area. And what is the current situation with the Class

180 trains? Mr Breakwell responded that FGW's original agreement with the RoSCos did not include Pacers, but the DfT vetoed the agreement. So they were left with the choice of buses, no service – or Pacers.

"With regard to the Class 180s," he continued, "in terms of reliability and design – both mechanical and electrical – they are probably the worst units in the country. When the company's fleet of HSTs is back in commission, we will be rid of them."

Q&A

Rowland Pittard felt there was a complete lack of consultation from FGW regarding South Wales services. They wouldn't consult the Welsh Assembly Government or local councils. Why did they refuse to listen?

Mr Breakwell said the operating franchise was prescribed – it specified, for example, one service to Cardiff – FGW run two. "FGW offered improved services if the Parliament would pay for it – but we were told 'No chance – you won't get a penny from us'.

"Internal services within Wales are not our responsibility and the Welsh Assembly has to realise that."

Q&A

This concluded the Q&A session, and Nick Dibben thanked Bob Breakwell, who said he particularly enjoyed the Q&A session.



Brandon station – on the Ely to Norwich route – has become the object of real community action.

Cyril Brown and others have joined forces to brighten up this time-worn station as part of a plan to put Brandon more effectively on the railway map and to give it an ever-improving future through community awareness and action.

Cyril told the conference: "We have just got funding to rent the station for three years, which will give us time to develop our plans.

"We have also received a bursary which will help fund such things as business plans for the development of the station."

The major lesson he had learned was that nobody will ever make a

CYRIL BROWN

Friends of Brandon station

decision – they don't know who to ask. "At least," he said, "Network Rail are better than Railtrack in this respect.

"Network Rail own the station, but have undertaken to let Brandon Communities Partnership, helped by Friends of Brandon Station, take over the lease at a nominal charge as long as we can find a sustainable use for it."

To find out more, or to become a Friend of Brandon Station, visit their website:

www.brandonstationfriends.com

A new way to fund

Dave Wetzel began his presentation by recalling the last time he had spoken at a Railfuture conference – “Last time I spoke, it was RDS and I was chair of London Transport Committee. We initiated the Docklands Light Railway, of which I am very proud.”

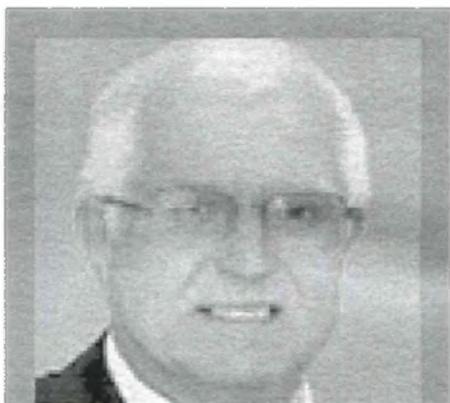
He said the DLR line to City Airport was already carrying as much traffic as that predicted for 2010.

This was not the only area where the GLC was keen to work with BR – Thameslink was one result (see panel on page 13) and Fares Fair was an example which Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher scuppered. “Thatcher warned British Rail that for every £1 they accepted from the GLC, she would deduct £1 from BR’s grant.”

He also complained about another scheme that didn’t work out: “We subsidised the Jazz train but BR stole the crews to work the North London Line!”

But Mr Wetzel disagreed completely with Bob Breakwell’s opinion on the RMT – he referred to ‘his mate’ Bob Crow and said: “I know which union I would join.”

Mr Wetzel then turned his attention to his current role as vice-chair of Transport for London and the problems of the Public Private Partnership, saying: “There isn’t a week that goes by without another PPP restriction coming up – the sooner we get Metronet into public ownership, the better.



DAVE WETZEL

Vice-Chair of Transport for London, Chair of Health and Safety Executive Committee. Fellow of Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport. Especially active in land reform legislation in relation to transport and Chair of Labour Land Reform Group

Every successful city needs good transport. The new station at City Airport is a huge success. The Congestion Charge scheme sees that time savings are shared between road vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists. We want to make more use of the river too, even for freight.”

Mr Wetzel spoke proudly of having new Electrostar trains built for the London Overground, saying: “We want to run it as a modern Metro. There will be frequent services,

new rail schemes

including early morning and late night, and stations with staff all the operating hours. We want more railway lines. We want to run the whole of the London suburban railway as a Metro.

"But we are pleased with what we are doing on the London Underground. After decades of neglect, it is a building site – and will remain so for some years to come. But the question to ask is not *Why is the service so bad?* – rather, *How do you achieve the miracle of keeping it going?*"

He outlined how money from the increased value of land should be used to fund rail projects.

"In all transport expansion planning, good land use planning is essential – but that is not enough. In 1903, Ebenezer Howard came up with the idea of Land Value Capture in his plans for Letchworth Garden City.

"You keep the land and use the increasing rental value to provide public services.

"Just think of one example – Canary Wharf. Before its redevelopment, the land was virtually worthless and very difficult to get to. Now, 60,000 people get to work there via the Docklands Light Railway – they get there on the transport infrastructure *you* spent *your* money on.

"Just imagine what the land is worth now!"

"A recent study showed that the value of land around the Jubilee Line

extension stations had risen by £18bn – and yet the line cost the taxpayer only £3.5bn (Don Riley, in his book *Taken for a ride – Trains, Taxpayers and the Treasury*).

"Agglomeration is the key – the City of London and Docklands is the latest example. You take the rents, go to the Bank, get a mortgage and pay it back via the rental income. This is the principle – an incentive on land value.

"So – do we need to go to central government to fund transport expansion plans? I believe all schemes can be paid for by land value tax – if the economics of the scheme don't add

WHO SAID?

"Roads are made, streets are made, services are improved, electric light turns night into day, water is brought from reservoirs a hundred miles off in the mountains – and all the while the landlord sits still . . . to not one of those improvements does the land monopolist, as a land monopolist, contribute. He renders no service to the community, he contributes nothing to the general welfare, he contributes nothing to the process from which his own enrichment is derived."

Answer on page 13

A NEW WAY TO FUND NEW RAIL SCHEMES

up, then the scheme is not worth pursuing.”

The Government has partially accepted the idea with a levy on business to pay for a third of the cost of Crossrail.

If Leeds needs a super tram it should be able to make a levy on landowners who will benefit from the line. All major schemes could pay for themselves in this way.

But the Government is turning down scheme after scheme based on flawed cost-benefit analyses when just the rise in land values could pay for the investment.

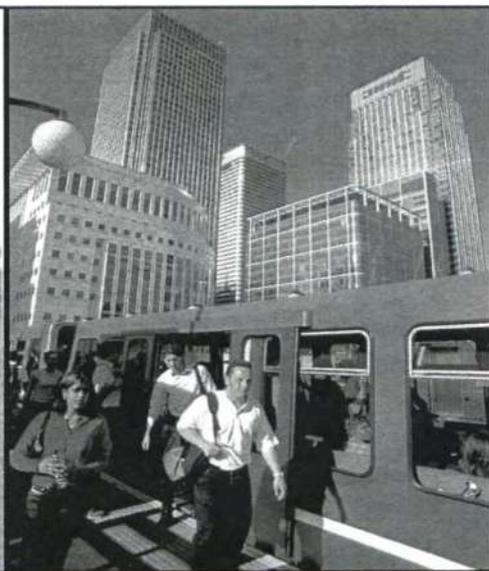
“Buyers who can predict new road and rail links can make a fortune.

“Travelling times to London drive

property prices. Houses are being built in Cambridge so people can commute into London – those houses should be built for people who live and work in Cambridge.

“We should have an annual land value tax on empty sites. Many other countries have introduced the land value tax and enjoyed the benefits.

“Empty buildings deny local people jobs, homes, shops and leisure activities. Yet the owner of a factory can sack 200 workers and smash the roof of his building – making it uninhabitable – and therefore avoid paying business rates! But people who invest in property where a new road or railway line is to be built can make a fortune! An annual land value tax



The transformation of Canary Wharf owes much to the Docklands Light Railway, which was paid for by taxpayers

would apply even to empty properties, so it will increase supply of land and prices will fall. Business-startup would be cheaper, work would be closer to home, urban sprawl would be avoided and environmental damage through CO₂ would be reduced.

Mass transit would become more efficient (Frank Pick to Barlow Commission in 1938).

"There are several overseas examples of the success of this scheme – for instance, Harrisburg, the capital of Pennsylvania, was rated the worst city in the USA before its introduction – now it is rated top. Crime rate has more than halved and 85% of empty sites are now in use. And the Mayor, Stephen Reed, who was elected in 1982, is still there!

"Income from land value tax would not only be used to finance transport schemes – it could also reduce other damaging taxes such as income tax and VAT, which discourage business.

"And you won't be able to avoid land value tax by going to the Cayman Islands!

"Land is a natural resource, its value is created by communities and transport, owners do not create land values – but they take the profits, rather than these financing public services.

More info: www.LabourLand.org

WHO SAID?

Winston Churchill, then president of the Board of Trade, in 1909.

From Black Hole to Thameslink!

DAVE WETZEL revealed the origins of the Thameslink scheme, when he was chair of the London transport committee. He said: "We used to get thousands of letters from the public with suggestions. Among those was one gem, suggesting that Snow Hill tunnel, then used for stabling empty stock, could be reopened, thus allowing journeys such as from Luton to Gatwick.

"We went to British Rail Southern Region and they said 'No, we don't want trains coming from Midland Region – we have enough trouble with our own.' Midland Region said it would be like a black hole – 'We'll send them down and they would not come back.'

"In essence, BR said it would be a waste of money."

Undeterred, the GLC decided to carry out their own study, and discovered that a previous cost estimate for restoring Snow Hill Tunnel actually included the entire cost of electrifying the Bedford-St Pancras line – which had by then been completed!

"Our study cleared the way not just for Thameslink, but also for the West London line reopening."

Ten steps to user

Derek Potter's group covers the Oxford to Hereford line via Worcester and was formed in 1978 to prevent the 10-trains a day service from getting any worse.

"Two-thirds of the 86 route miles had been singled," he told the Conference, "and when the group formed, rail was not considered as a transport mode of the future – hence our fears.

"In 1970, there were 10 trains a day on the line, but the decision was made to save money on maintenance by single-tracking.

"During the 70s, the service became two high-speed trains a day in each direction, with DMUs operating at other times.

"Then, in 1978 there was lots of talk of railways closing. The question was asked: 'Why not close the expensive bits?' We held a public meeting at Moreton-in-Marsh to try to stop the service getting any worse – our aspirations were an hourly service to Oxford and a two hourly service to Worcester.

"Our membership grew to a peak of around 2,000 in the year 2000, although now it numbers around 1,700."

His present experience of the service on the line can be summed up: "When FGW is bad, the Cotswold line is awful."

Mr Potter then went on to tell the

DEREK POTTER

Chair of Cotswold Line Promotion Group since 2001 and actively involved since it started in 1978. Reckoned to be largest user group after Friends of the Settle and Carlisle and, with many 'high flyers' as members, is highly influential.

conference of his 10-point plan on how to be an effective Rail User Group.

1 KNOW YOUR LINE at least as well as your TOC and Network Rail do – you may cultivate a local manager, but then they get whisked off to be replaced by someone who may know nothing about railways. You may, for instance, need to identify where infrastructure needs reinstating.

2 KNOW YOUR PASSENGERS and their existing and potential patterns of travel. Recognise special interest groups such as commuters and students, but represent users of the line at all times of day and avoid being taken over by groups, such as commuters, who are interested in only one aspect of the service.

3 WORK WITH LOCAL AUTHORITIES at all levels, but especially those people who have specific transport responsibilities and access to funds.

group success

4 WORK WITH SCHOOLS, colleges, significant local businesses plus leisure facilities – their publicity leaflets often do not include railway services. We created the Cotswold and Malvern Transport Partnership, inviting businesses and local authorities to join.

5 GIVE YOUR MEMBERS VALUE for their subscription – the RUG's effectiveness depends on them, so they need to be cultivated and rewarded with interesting and relevant newsletters (including information on, for instance, good value travel opportunities), social events, film shows and particularly group travel or charter trains – people love to have trips organised for them and you can offer members a discount – £2 off a trip when it is only £4 to join the RUG is a particularly good incentive!

6 IDENTIFY LIMITING FACTORS on your timetable and fare aspirations – it may seem obvious to run a train to match an evening theatre performance, however the TOC may also have identified this but issues such as shift patterns and signal box opening hours may prevent its introduction.

7 CONSIDER YOUR OWN LINE APPRAISAL and development plan, using your own knowledge and expertise rather than using a consultant. Assess the present state and use

of stock and stations and identify their potential for growth – such as platform lengths, car and bike parking space. You only need consultants to calculate things like net asset value. Do as much of the spadework as possible yourselves. You need someone good on timetables and someone good on fares.

8 OFFER FEEDBACK to TOCs and other interested parties. The local manager might claim to know such things as train loadings, time-keeping or cleanliness, but quite often does not! You need to tell managers what is going wrong. We have lousy information systems.

9 CHECK EFFECTIVENESS of first contact for occasional or new passengers. Does internet and telephone information match that at the station – especially in times of disruption, such as engineering work or on Bank Holidays. We also publish timetables and fare information.

10 WIN THE RESPECT of the key players within your TOC(s) and Network Rail. We spend most of our time talking to these people and have found that time spent with staff at grass roots level is never wasted – senior staff may move on with frustrating regularity, but they tend to come back, often with even more power and influence to bring about the success we are all seeking.

Restoring the

Andy Shackleton began with a warning to new user groups – be careful about your name!

"We first thought of the name *Skipton to Colne Rail Action Partnership* - but then we realised it spelt SCRAP! Needless to say, we came up with an alternative – SELRAP.

"The seven mile Colne line is one of the most desperate lines in the country – yet just 11.5 miles separate it from Skipton in what would otherwise be the lowest level trans-Pennine rail route between the Humber and West Coast ports, between Preston and the West Coast Main Line and Leeds and the cities of Yorkshire."

Mr Shackleton continued: "Community rail designation gives us a five-year window of opportunity – and a new study by JMP Consulting, to be launched on November 30, looks likely to give us a Benefit-Cost Ratio of over two."

(In fact the study – part-financed by Railfuture, came up with a Benefit-Cost Ratio as high as 2.43).

So how has the partnership achieved such impressive results in so short a time?

Mr Shackleton outlined the arguments used to garner the widespread support the group currently enjoys.

"Road congestion is estimated to cost UK businesses around £20bn each year – that works out at £330

ANDY SHACKLETON

The liaison officer of the Skipton East Lancashire Rail Action Partnership (SELRAP), whose aim is the reinstatement of the Colne to Skipton line as a trans-Pennine route. With a first-rate website and much activity, SELRAP is certainly spreading its message.

each! Employees arrive late for work, freight companies are forced to allow for longer and unpredictable journey times, and more.

"Then there is the £470m cost of road accidents to the NHS – and around £8bn to the economy – another £150 each!

"Fact: Over half the population live within walking distance of a station, and a similar proportion currently use trains. In the past 10 years rail travel has increased by 40%.

"More than a billion passengers now travel by rail each year – higher than at any time since 1959. There are similar statistics for freight services too.

"Traffic is concentrated on to a network less than half the size it was at its zenith, and some of this has been singled. Result? Despite demand being kept artificially low by some of the world's highest rail fares, much of the infrastructure is at or near capacity.

"The changing demographics of

missing link

employment and leisure activity are making unprecedented and unforeseen demands on transport infrastructure.

"It is now clear that, had some lines survived lean times, they would now be making a valuable contribution to the communities they once served.

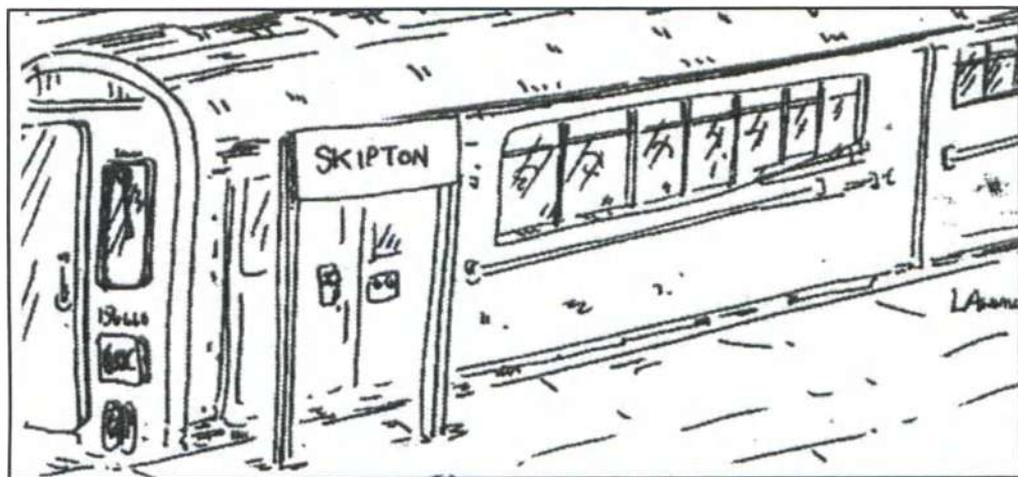
"The motorway and bypass culture has only created further demand – with predictable outcomes. Yet it is now accepted that new rail projects do more for the economy."

Mr Shackleton pointed out the possibilities of the following line re-instatements: Malton-Pickering, Harrogate-Ripon, Penrith-Keswick, Skipton-Colne – plus plans to bolt services on to heritage lines, which currently operate 300

miles of track and 130 stations. He then turned to the history and make-up of the organisation.

"SELRAP was formed in 2001 and is managed by a small volunteer executive committee, with task-specific officers, elected from its members. Membership is open to individuals, businesses, local authorities and NGOs.

"Its core activities are funded by a small membership fee and donations, with the addition of occasional grant support from larger community bodies. For key projects, additional funding and assistance in kind has been provided by local authorities, private charitable foundations and donations from individ-



*"We apologise for the 37 year delay to the Colne train.
This was caused by vandals removing 11 miles of track"*

ual members and the business community.

"The initial aim of the group was the preservation of the trackbed from development that would prevent its re-use as a railway. The immediate danger was that the A56 bypass was planned to cover over part of the trackbed – and this was both County and Borough policy."

Fortunately, although the proposal remained on the radar, it became less favoured as the rail scheme was increasingly well-received.

In January 2002, the first public meeting held in Colne attracted 100 people, and this was followed in May by a second packed public meeting in Skipton, where the Mayor and Deputy Leader of Craven District Council declared full support for the scheme.

2003 saw Craven DC introduce formal protection for the trackbed and leading transport consultants Steer, Davies, Gleave produced a feasibility study which concluded that reinstating the Skipton-Colne line was technically feasible and that it had a long term future as a strategic trans-Pennine route.

The SRA acknowledged that "the scheme could find a place in future versions of its Strategic Plan, subject to factors such as value for money, the merits of the scheme, availability of resources, etc."

In 2004 Lancashire CC's Joint Structure Plan saw the corridor protected for transport. The bypass scheme remained in the frame, but it

must not jeopardise future re-instatement of the railway. Within North Yorkshire, the preferred route proposals no longer used the trackbed.

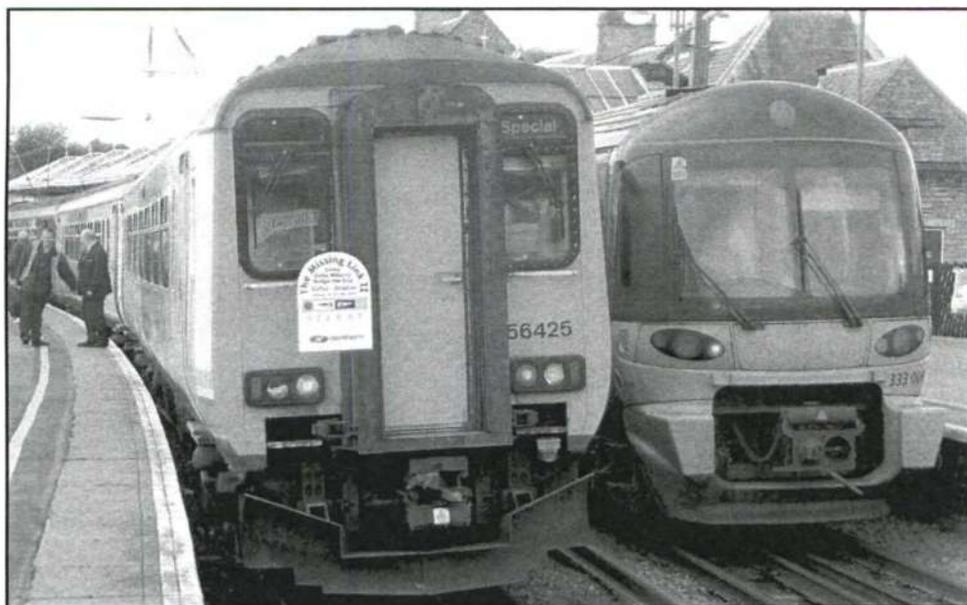
Local Labour MP Gordon Prentice and two Liberal Democrat MEPs (Chris Davies for North West England and Diana Wallis for Yorkshire and Humberside) agreed to be patrons, joining David Curry (Con. Skipton and Ripon) and Nigel Evans (Con. Ribbles Valley).

SELRAP's first conference – attended by North Yorkshire, Lancashire, Craven, Skipton, Pendle and parish councillors, along with Railfuture, East Lancashire Partnership, Transport 2000, The Countryside Agency and CPRE – recognised the continued non-viability of the Colne branch unless it was improved and extended back to its natural terminus in Skipton.

The Community Rail initiative enabled a fresh look at the way certain local and rural lines were presented, marketed, maintained and operated – the Colne branch was one of the 11 selected, so was safe . . . for now.

In 2005 the issues of existing line capacity between Manchester and Leeds, and the need for a sharp increase of workers in both conurbations came into sharp focus – with the economically deprived East Lancashire midway between the two.

MPs David Curry (Con. Skipton and Ripon) and Gordon Prentice (Lab. Pendle District) met and shook hands over a twined ribbon of red and white



placed across the trackbed of the former route.

In 2006 both Lancashire and North Yorkshire Councils supported the re-opening, and the Missing Link – the first Colne-Skipton train in 37 years – was run this year.

Support continues to grow with 82 MPs, 25 MEPs, 20 members of the House of Lords, 30 NGOs, together with parish, local and county councillors offering support for SELRAP's campaign, and Network Rail making positive noises about the Route Utilisation Study.

"Who knows," added Mr Shackleton, "perhaps in 2012 we will be celebrating the reconnection of Colne and Skipton."

www.selrap.org.uk

The Missing Link II at Skipton in October – having taken an hour and three-quarters to cover what could be an 11-mile trip. The Class 156 unit followed the East Lancashire line to Blackburn then, after reversal, the Ribble Valley route to Hellifield. After travelling north to Settle Junction for a second reversal, the train headed for Skipton. This service returned via the Aire valley line to Leeds, where a third reversal found it heading for Bradford Interchange. There, after a fourth reversal, it travelled over the Calder Valley line through Halifax and Hebden Bridge. Hallroyd Junction took it on to the Copy Pit line to Rosegrove. Finally, after a fifth reversal, it arrived back in Colne a little over two hours after leaving Skipton.

TREVOR GARROD, chairman of the European Passengers' Federation (a group formed in 1992 and which currently represents 26 organisations from 15 European countries) introduced Jean-Paul Jacquot and Simone Bigorgne from France.

France has 22 régions (such as Ile de France). Within the régions there are about 100 départements, and within the départements, 36,000 communes.

Communes are grouped into communautés des communes.

Co-ordination between different authorities in France is very difficult.

The régions are responsible for railways, and the départements for buses. The communautés des communes tend to manage urban public transport. As a result, there are problems such as competition between bus and rail routes. FNAUT feels that the régions should have overall responsibility for co-ordination.

The Régions have a directly elected regional council. Because many of the Régions tend to be under left-of-centre political control, the national (currently right-of-centre) government doesn't fund them very generously.

Régions have a role in rail planning. Until recently, regional rail services in France were in poor shape, mainly because of insufficient central government funding.

In 1997 an experiment was introduced to give régions power over local railways. This was successful and in 2002 it was decided that all

Different - similar

**JEAN-PAUL JACQUOT
and
SIMONE BIGORGNE**

Both are leading members of the French rail user group Federation Nationale des Associations d'Usagers des Transports

regional rail responsibilities would be transferred to the régions.

Régions negotiate a 'contract' directly with SNCF. They have invested €4.5bn (£3bn) in new rolling stock, and additional services have been introduced. Regional railways (TeR) represent a significant element of regional budgets, up to as much as 27%. In 2007 the actual expenditure levels per inhabitant ranged from €24 to €92 (the latter being in Picardy). Passenger numbers on regional services rose by 12% in 2005, 9% in 2006 and 6% in 2007. In Lorraine, passenger-km over the three years 2004-2007 rose by 29% between Metz and Nancy, and 69% between Metz and Luxembourg. Success has led, for example, to proposals for additional stations.

There are outstanding infrastructure issues, particularly concerning the poor state of the track in some places. Historically, the 'classic' railway net-

structure problems

work has been neglected in favour of investment in the TGV. There are numerous speed restrictions to 60km/h and some even to 30km/h. Because RFF, the infrastructure company, is short of funds, some Régions have invested directly in track.

Contracts between SNCF and the régions vary. In Lorraine, the contract is for 5 years; in other regions it is for 10 years. Bonuses may be paid to

SNCF according to punctuality, cleanliness, etc. Conversely, SNCF has had to pay a penalty of €600,000 to Nord Pas de Calais and €2.9m to Rhone-Alpes.

Operations are overseen by regional committees that include passenger representatives.

On average, 70% of the cost of regional railways is met from public funds with only 30% coming from fares.

Trains have to compete with cars that don't pay their full costs through taxation; for example in terms of the impact of CO₂ emissions and other externalities. In Lorraine, fares have



The French have concentrated on building the TGV network, to the detriment of the 'classic' lines

been deliberately kept low to attract passengers on to the trains. However, on the whole, quality of service seems more important than fare levels in attracting passengers.

Railways also play an important role in concentrating land uses around stations and reducing the costs that would be imposed by greater dispersal of development. "Transport is a major factor in the way society structures itself."

Simone Bigorgne's report on the Ile de France region was then presented to the Conference. This Région has eight départements, includes the capital Paris and while it covers only 2.2% of the area of France, it houses 18.7% of the population and produces 27.8% of the Gross National Product.

So the Région mirrors the rest of France in the imbalance between rural and urban population and transport demands. Furthermore, two of its départements have the majority of employment so there is a big migration of workers every day.

The growth in usage is causing problems to which there are currently no solutions. The road network is free and maintained by public money but the entire transport network is a bottleneck in the mornings.

The state traditionally simply wanted to build more motorways, but have said this will change. The Régions are opposed to this, preferring to encourage public transport usage by expedients such as reducing the

availability of car parking spaces. The public transport system currently carries over 11 million people per day at a cost of €7billion per annum – 16% of which goes to investment with 84% spent on operating costs. This cost is covered 44% by employers (with such taxes as 2% on salaries) and 25% by employees with the remainder funded by State, Régions and départements. Fares are low compared to other European countries, with subsidies in particular for low-income people.

New resources – such as further tax on fuel – should be found to develop the rail network, which is totally saturated at peak periods. The main problem is inter-suburb connections, with 80% of journeys going into the city. However a fully automated outer-circle metro train is planned, though this will not come into operation until at least 2019.

Other plans include the introduction of bus lanes, which will also benefit taxis and cyclists; increased bus frequencies; and the re-introduction of all-night buses. There is an increasing number of passengers using surface transport due to the saturation of the Metro.

In conclusion public transport must change in the near future, due to three major factors – it cannot cope with the planned building of 60,000 new homes; the European Union ruling on ownership will have an effect; and the issue of climate change must be addressed.

Premium payments, but no premium service

Andrew Long made the very valid point that the two TOCs who serve his station pay premiums on their franchises – this means his members subsidise other rail services to the tune of £3m per week. “But we don’t get what we pay for.”

He recommended the use of the internet. He said: “It is brilliant – very quick and saves on postage and other costs too.”

He felt the group needed feedback from its members, and that things had become more difficult since the old rail support system had been dismantled.

He gave an excellent example of liaising with the local MPs. The Thameslink station box at St Pancras would not have been opening this year if it had not been for this.

The group wrote to the Department for Transport about the St Pancras box and were told that this was part of the Thameslink 2000 scheme. “We told our MP, who felt this was not on. Another MP discovered that fitting out the station would cost the same as just one mile of M1 widening.

“The MP put down an early day motion – and it was supported cross-party by every MP on the route.

“We feel this must have contributed to the announcement that the station would be fitted out and opened.”

Despite this, Mr Long felt that

ANDREW LONG

Represents the Bedford Commuters Association and therefore the daily grind of getting to work on a route bedevilled with severe overcrowding. In some ways utterly different from Melksham (overleaf) and SELRAP (page 16) but as always, focusing on the relationship between management and the customer.

Bedfordshire Council were pretty useless for rail. “The Conservatives control the council while Labour are in Government – and they seem to be determined not to co-operate.”

Mr Long pointed out the vagaries of the franchising system – Stagecoach are taking over the Midlands franchise and will cause headaches for First Capital Connect – first, by not stopping InterCity trains at Bedford, and second by running a fifth train an hour, which will take a fast-line path away from FCC services, thus slowing them further.

One major problem was the shortage of Class 319 units and therefore the use of four-coach trains. This led to the TOC suppressing demand but also maximising revenue.

“Network Rail says that the TOCs are their customers – we say we need a voice because we are paying the premium.”

Saving the train

Graham Ellis gave an energetic and highly amusing presentation on the campaign to restore a reasonable service between Swindon, Chippenham, Melksham, Trowbridge and Salisbury.

The campaign began in 2005 when he read a letter in the local newspaper informing him he had missed the consultation period for 2007 services. There had been no signs on the trains or at stations and no notices in the press.

He later discovered that the consultation period occurred after the franchise specification had been sent out!

So Melksham – a station that had seen a compound growth rate of over 35% in ticket sales over five years – was left with a service of just two trains each way daily – southbound at 06:19 and 18:42 and northbound at 07:17 and 19:50.

This service pattern has meant that the bus is the only option for more realistic arrival times, but has extended the journey time by public transport from Trowbridge (the County town) to Swindon (largest urban area) from 35 minutes (train) to 95 minutes ("express" bus).

So Graham set up a web site – www.savethetrain.org.uk – to campaign for the restoration of an appropriate train service connecting the five major population centres of

GRAHAM ELLIS

Graham has put his considerable computer language skills to effective use promoting Melksham Station and the railway line which serves it. His reward, for helping to increase passengers numbers – threatened cuts by the Department for Transport!

Wiltshire. The campaign is mainly web-based and he states that it is an effective medium: "We've used the internet because it's a darned good tool and because it's a technology that many of our key members are in to." Apart from web pages, the campaign also uses:

- Forums – where anyone can discuss topics
- Blogs – diaries kept by individuals, including a FGW blog compendium
- Wiki – where a whole group of trusted editors can update information pages
- Live feeds – where they will replay a history of the latest train running
- Email updates – for those who don't visit too often
- Emailing key decision makers
- Emailing useful questions and cases to the TOC, DfT and others

He listed the campaign's objectives, with the following results:

"The first objective, to get the cam-

at Melksham

paign known, has been achieved, from just two sentences in a 100-page SRA report.

"The second objective, for the case to be looked at, has been achieved. From an initial reaction which verged on the 'don't be silly and ask for more than two trains a day' we moved forward to a very serious proposal for five a day from this December – DfT, County Council and First were all on board, as confirmed thanks to the Freedom of Information Act. And the County Council concluded that an appropriate level of service would be hourly each way."

Unfortunately, the third objective, to have the new service implemented, has not been achieved. "The detailed proposals that we were almost promised ('just needs to be signed off by Network Rail') at a public meeting in May disappeared from the draft timetable from this coming December; for reasons not totally clear.

"We strongly suspect that in August 2006, when the service was withdrawn for 10 days, it would have returned as a bus, contrary to our fourth objective, retention of the current service and lesser goals. However, publicity and activities including a gathering of VIPs on the station before six in the morning resulted in the appearance of a smarter-than-normal service!

"A new southbound service, operated

on a commercial basis by First Great Western, starts early on a Sunday evening in December. It's just one train a week, but it's at a time that plugs a real hole and it's significant in demonstrating goodwill and being commercial."

Train cancellations remain a serious issue (to the extent that First have installed a special bus stop labelled "Rail Replacement services" at Trowbridge station).

"Early morning buses from Melksham, and evening buses back, now make calls at the railway station in Chippenham. After an unbelievably hard struggle, the bus stop at the station now carries the times of those buses.

"They are clearly used, judging by the complaints from Chippenham taxi drivers that fares to Melksham have dried up!"

One idea Mr Ellis would like to try is to run special trains to crowd the station: "Everybody I talk to believes that it is a good idea."

He finished by giving other campaigns advice on what to avoid: "Don't ask for too much; Don't exaggerate; Don't knock other campaigns; Don't be afraid to say "no"; Don't be a Luddite; Don't try to fix it for everyone; Don't tell a railwayman how to plan or run a railway; Don't be an anorak; Don't waste people's time."

Stopping the buffers

Robert Stripe told the conference: "You are sitting within a mile of where the buffers might have gone up in 1985. We were told then that a bus could do it better from Ely to King's Lynn."

He added: "At Ely we have now more train movements than at Crewe. This is the Crewe of the East."

The success of the campaign is plain to see with today's services, and Mr Stripe outlined his thoughts on why it has been so successful: first, to have clear aims and objectives; secondly reasonable and attainable aspirations.

"You need knowledge of the line and its environs, you don't need to worry about politics – one government is much the same as another when it comes to the railways and you need to listen to what Network Rail has to say.

"You have to remember that the TOC is not its own boss – Network Rail is. And NR is not its own boss – the Government is. It seems almost to be expected that TOCs will go bust.

"Advertise well – publish a newsletter (ours, *The Fenman*, is published four times a year) and add an extra insert for members only.

"Send the newsletter to the rail industry and other interested parties – we produce an extra 100 to send to Network Rail, DfT, Councils, MPs and MEPs.

ROBERT STRIPE

Until recently the chair of the Fen Line Rail Users Association (FLUA), Robert and his team have worked most effectively to improve many things on the line between Cambridge and King's Lynn. One of a few user group chairs who have generated enough action and all round goodwill to have had a train named after them.

"Plus we have noticeboards at every station in our area.

"Meet the manager – we have meetings with the managing director of First Capital Connect twice a year, meetings with people from ONE railway and Central. Also, get to know other managers – arrange meetings and ensure TOCs, Network Rail, County Councils, Town Councils, and Parish Councils are all involved.

"The Passenger Councils are here to help, but they do not always know about local aspects of the service, so they should be kept informed.

"If you ask for something and the answer is No, then ask Why? If the answer is satisfactory, then don't ask again – but if it isn't then ask again later – the answer may not be the same.

"Do not forget that the Rail User Group is there to help both the TOC and Network Rail – but in all commu-

going up

nications, always be polite. Be careful what you ask for. We asked for more trains and more car parks – but the power supply between Cambridge and King's Lynn can manage only five trains, so can we sacrifice a stopping train for an extra fast train? And would we want a multi-storey car park if there is no extra land available?"

When the Association was formed there were just five through trains a day from King's Lynn to London – now there are 23 a day, with 63 trains in one direction alone.

But they are not satisfied with that: "We want better facilities on unstaffed stations, and bigger car parks. There is no space at Ely station after 7.30 in the morning.

"We want longer trains and improvements to the infrastructure – the single line sections and the constraints at Cambridge, Hitchin, Welwyn and the station throat at King's Cross. King's Lynn to London will be a regional express railway when Thameslink 2000 comes to fruition."

Mr Stripe left us to think about a salutary lesson he learned at one meeting. He first asked the passengers what they would do as managers of the rail service, then asked the managers what they would do as passengers – he was greeted with a deathly silence!

What attendees said

Attendees were asked to complete a conference feedback form and more than 60 were received. Here are some of the comments:

"One of the very best Railfuture events I've ever been to! Excellent range of speakers and topics. Very re-energising."

"Another enjoyable day and an excellent chance to network and catch up with other groups and members."

"Excellent conference."

"Questions must be brief and this needs to be enforced by the chair."

"A very informative, worthwhile occasion."

"Some of the speakers went on too long. Quite understandable though, considering their undeniable enthusiasm for the topic."

"Dave Wetzel was good but said too little about railways."

"An academic speaker who makes the economic/social/environmental case for rail could be useful for a future conference."

"Organisation and venue both to a high standard."

"Can't fault – congratulations to the organisers."

"Ely is a very attractive location, easily reached by train!"

"Location excellent."

Ratings between 1 (very poor) and 5 (excellent) were 4.43 for venue/facilities and 3.97 for speakers/presentations.

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Questions and Answers

Simon Norton from Cambridge began the session by asking whether the devolving of powers to regional government would benefit rail users. He felt the DfT Rail Group were running our railways.

Andy Shackleton, from SELRAP, was the first to respond, saying: "Transport keeps the economy afloat, yet we have to keep badgering the Government to do something about it. The message is to keep at it – and get high profile names to support you. But I find it sad that volunteers – unpaid members of the public – have to go to these lengths just to keep trains running. Politicians simply put railways too low on the agenda."

Guy Dangerfield, manager of Passenger Focus, said: "It really depends on the funding mechanism. Funding would have to be devolved for there to be any effect – if money is devolved with the powers, it must be a good thing." Graham Ellis, from

THE PANEL

The Question and Answer panel consisted of Guy Dangerfield, Jean-Paul Jacquot, Simone Bigorgne, Graham Ellis, Robert Stripe, Nick Dibben, Andy Shackleton and Mike Crowhurst

Melksham, added: "We have too many layers of government – all pointing at each other. An extra level? No thank you! And, whatever you do, there will always be an issue over boundaries."

Q&A

Another member of the audience suggested that public transport in the West Midlands has lost out completely in terms of investment when compared to London – there is too much reliance on buses.

Mike Crowhurst, chairman of Railfuture, answered: "It really is a



The panel (from left to right): Jean-Paul Jacquot, Simone Bigorgne, Graham Ellis, Robert Stripe, Nick Dibben, Guy Dangerfield, Andy Shackleton and Mike Crowhurst

question of what is a better balance - after all, investment in London does benefit the rest of the country." Jean-Paul Jacquot observed: "The Government in France is spending less and less on public transport overall."

Q&A

David Redgwell reported that on-train catering had been removed from East Midlands on Aberdeen-Penzance services. And FCC had removed trolleys on orders from the DfT.

Dangerfield said: "It is a big disappointment that catering has been downscaled. TOCs may feel that it drives revenue rather than being a profit-maker itself. We argue that the offer should be there in the franchise for catering, but we shouldn't be too prescriptive."

Robert Stripe, of the Fen Line Users Association, responded: "We had a trolley service on King's Lynn to London trains, but it didn't board until Cambridge when the train was far too crowded!"

"Elaine Holt (of FCC) was adamant that she would not have them back, and our Association relented, seeing her point of view, but there should always be trolleys on long-distance trains."

Q&A

Another questioner asked the panel: "How do you go about appealing to a younger generation - the 30 and 40-year-olds. Is it essential to

have email and a web presence?" Mr Shackleton said: "SELRAP is kept afloat by pensioners, but email and our website play an essential role. We must get out and encourage younger people - we visit colleges and schools to discuss our campaign."

Mr Jacquot said: "Most of us are grey-haired!", while Mr Ellis responded: "We are mostly web-based and have a young and vibrant membership, who get involved in the discussion groups. And don't forget, most of our members are commuters, so are not retired."

Q&A

The next question concerned the end of publication of the National Rail Timetable. "There seems to be no discussion about its passing - should we campaign to relaunch it?"

Mr Dangerfield said: "Personally, I miss it, but I believe there are two or three publishers looking at producing a national timetable."

Conference chair Nick Dibben asked: "What about the local timetable leaflet available at stations?"

Mr Dangerfield replied: "Connections can make the timetables far too complicated - evidence on what customers want is too patchy."

Trevor Garrod reported: "We tried to get TOCs to mention Eurostar connections - but some are incredibly parochial. Timetables should show connection possibilities - at the very least, there should be a box on the timetable to indicate other services."

Another member of the audience suggested that timetables are an important part of marketing.

Q&A

Chris Precey asked the panel: "Would it not be better if TOC premium payments went towards infrastructure improvements rather than the Treasury?"

Mr Dangerfield responded: "The reality is that franchise premiums come nowhere near what the DfT give Network Rail. There needs to be more transparency. For instance, do TOC

premium payments match the expense of infrastructure? I think all TOCs would require a subsidy if all the costs were included."

Q&A

An attendee from Grantham suggested: "When franchises change, would it not be cheaper if the branding did not?"

Mr Crowhurst replied: "Franchising is generally acknowledged as a complete waste of rail management time – but it would help if we could get civil servants out of the loop."

SUMMING UP

Guy Dangerfield introduced Passenger Focus as a consumer watchdog, with the mission to get the best deal for passengers.

Summing up, he felt that the Conference had been varied and interesting: "Bob Breakwell had left the impression that we are doing very well, with the Government writing big cheques at the moment. It was all positive news, but by no means perfect: the TOCs had a lot to do in customer service areas; the DfT were too prescriptive in their desire to cut costs, the 75 minute rule is clearly a problem for the industry and disruption management left a lot to be desired."

He felt that Dave Wetzel's presentation was thought-provoking, whereas Derek Potter highlighted the key points of knowing your line and passengers, as well as the importance of links with stakeholders, not just councils.

He felt the French presentation indicated a significant change in structure as well as a growth in patronage – the debate will come as to whether passengers are paying enough. Graham Ellis' Melksham campaign illustrated the use of new media, including blogs, which was not something he had heard of before in User Groups, while SELRAP showed how important it was to get key bodies on your side – as well as the need for a proper business case – otherwise you were not at the party.

Mr Dangerfield finally said that Network Rail were beginning to recognise that passengers and freight shippers were their customers, not the TOCs and freight operating companies.

He signed off by saying that the latest research showed that the priority that passengers gave to improvements was: 1 Value for money; 2 Sufficient and convenient trains; 3 Punctuality; 4 Being able to get a seat; and 5 Information on delays.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

PETER WAKEFIELD, chair of the East Anglian branch of Railfuture, thanks all the Branch and other members who helped put the conference together in a great team effort. He writes:

On the day of the conference, thanks to the wonderful registration team of Peter Bayless, Shirley Dex, Nigel Holland, Anthony Stanton, Ben Walsh, Eileen Wakefield and Clara Zilahi.

Nick Dibben put in hours of photocopying, writing letters and of course chaired the day admirably.

Chris Burton relentlessly pursued speakers to great effect and a very frustrating process it often was too. He kept the IT side of things running smoothly on the day, and put together some very nice pictures of trains for you all to look at – priceless.

Trevor Garrod liaised with the delegation from FNAUT.

Chris Milne, our sales person, arranged an excellent display of goods to sell.

Ray King, Philip Bisatt and Lloyd Butler put these notes together, and Maggie King did a very comprehensive job of checking for errors.

Thanks to all who came to what seemed like endless planning meetings at the drop of a hat.

Thank you also to that band of enthusiastic speakers who came to tell their stories so well. I wonder if there is any other industry in the UK where so many give their time so freely to help move it on: Simone Bigorgne, Bob Breakwell, Cyril Brown, Guy Dangerfield, Graham Ellis, Jean-Paul Jacquot, Andy Long, Derek Potter, Andy Shackleton, Robert Stripe and Dave Wetzel.

Again, thank you to you all for attending as delegates!

PICTURE CREDITS

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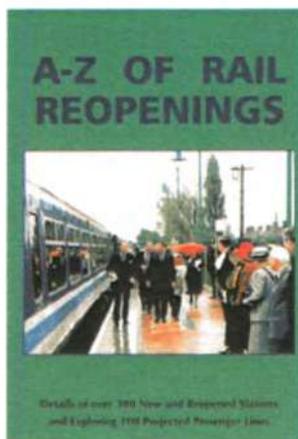
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