

REPORTS BY CHAIRMAN, MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY, COMMITTEES AND SUB COMMITTEES

CHAIRMAN

Mike Crowhurst

My second year as Chairman, like the first, has been dominated by internal problems, in particular the loss of two key lieutenants: Treasurer Tony Sheward and Admin Officer John Lee. Both have served five years or more and will be sorely missed. At the time of writing no replacement for either is yet in view, though three potential Treasurers have offered then withdrawn.

Meanwhile I must pay tribute to the work done by several other Directors, notably Membership Secretary David Harby who seems ever willing to step in to fill some need, and newcomer Jerry Alderson, who has not only taken on the Business Plan and chairmanship of Network Development Committee, but has taken the lead in a review of travel expenses and next summer's conference.

Mention should also be made of other solid workers such as Andrew MacFarlane, International Committee Chairman and the person mainly responsible for this year's Rail Users' Conference; Norman Bradbury, Policy Secretary and our representative on the Transport Activists' Roundtables and elsewhere; Railwatch Editor Ray King; Trevor Garrod newly returned to the Board and our link with the European Passengers' Federation; and others no longer on the Board: Passenger Committee Chairman Howard Thomas and London Branch Chairman Keith Dyall, as well as President and media contact Peter Lawrence.

A second committee, Network Development, is now under new management and I am confident that all our specialist committees are now in capable hands, although Freight has suffered the loss of secretary Eric Layfield owing to illness during the year. As for Branches, the new arrangements in the East Midlands are now in place, but my hopes of progress in Northern Ireland sadly did not materialise. Issues remain to be addressed in North Wales, the West Country and parts of the South East, but my aim is to bring our Branch structure gradually into line with recognised government regions so far as this is consistent with railway geography.

Our usual three national gatherings were all well attended in 2005: the AGM in Peterborough in May, the Reopenings Conference in Barry, South Wales in July and the Rail Users' Conference in Manchester in November. Thanks are due to all who were instrumental in each of these.

Our London office finally closed during the year. Whilst an office (probably outside London) remains a future option, it would depend on three things: a clear purpose, reliable volunteers nearby to staff it regularly, and secure long term funding in place.

Key members at both national and local level have been kept busy during the year with franchise renewals, Stakeholder Meetings and Route Utilisation Strategies to monitor. The industry has undergone further structural change with the demise of the (sadly little mourned) Strategic Rail Authority and the transfer of most of its functions back to government.

More worryingly, the Rail Passenger Council and Committees have undergone "streamlining" and loss of most regional presence. This has given rise to considerable apprehension about their ability to handle even routine business, let alone any serious closure proposals such as have been rumored during the year. Meetings with both the Department for Transport and Rail Passengers Council finally took place in Christmas week (following repeated postponement), but we are finding it increasingly difficult to see each rail minister before he is replaced by the next one.

Meantime we have created a new Fighting Fund, replacing the Rail Defence Fund, into which the profits from the Annual Draw and monthly Lottery will be paid, along with major donations. This fund will be available for both resisting cuts and closures, and campaigning for new or reopened routes or stations. Awards will be made on the recommendation of the Passenger and Network Development Committees as before. Clearly there is going to be much work to do in coming years, and like the railway industry we must get our internal organisation in good order but not allow ourselves to be distracted from the real tasks by internal problems.

MEMBERSHIP

David Harby

Membership at the end of 2005 was 2780, including 145 family members counted as two.

The year saw major changes in the duties carried out by the Membership Secretary. Following closure of the London office, I now do all aspects of membership, including receiving subscription payments and monitoring records. The Board acknowledged that this would give me less time to promote membership and resolved to set up a Membership Promotion & Fundraising Group to assist with this task. Owing to a lack of volunteers, there has been a delay in starting this Group, but it is hoped to be underway in early 2006.

Members inevitably fall by the wayside, mainly due to age and infirmity or simply moving house without giving us a forwarding address. We are recruiting enough members to replace these but we need to do more if membership is to grow substantially.

Our website is now our most fruitful source of new members. Of almost equal importance are Railfuture leaflets placed in a wide variety of locations ranging from local libraries to heritage railways. I am grateful to the few individual members who regularly ask me for leaflets to distribute. We could be much more successful if many more followed their example.

May I conclude with grateful thanks to Elisabeth Jordan for her assistance in transferring all standing order payers on to new bank mandates. This task would have been much less time consuming if the banking industry had not made so many mistakes when processing the new mandates:

RAILWATCH

Ray King

Four issues of Railwatch - with eight pages of colour in each issue were produced in 2005. Thanks to all our contributors. On the production side we have held costs steady in 2005 but postage costs have risen and will probably go up again in 2006.

The Editorial Board includes Lloyd Butler, Alan Cocker, John Barfield, Laurence Fryer, Ray King, Graham Morrison, Robert Stevens, Jerry Alderson and Michael Weinberg. It is also helped by Railondon and e-mail discussion group editor, John Davison.

Railwatch continues to be printed by Print-Out in Histon, Cambridge, but during 2005 we switched the distribution system from volunteers to a professional firm, Mailhandlers. We shall be monitoring the costs carefully but so far, it seems to be working well.

Several hundred copies of Railwatch are sent to MP's, Peers, rail passenger committees, rail-orientated companies, local authorities and the media, as part of our campaign to keep opinion formers properly briefed on rail issues. In December these also received a letter inviting them to join.

The Editorial Board meets four times a year in London.

FREIGHT SERVICE & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Gary Tinsey

We have met on five occasions, Birmingham thrice, Doncaster and Ely, the last as a site visit to the Potter Group road and rail terminal, where our host provided an accompanied tour of the facilities and briefed those present on their latest developments in the transfer of freight on to the railway and combined mode services.

Our agenda business has been varied, including discussion and wherever practicable, action on the following: labour issues, land use planning, infrastructure standards, operations, market growth, new leads and lobby of third parties.

Notable success has been recorded in the opposition to the trial of larger goods vehicles, whilst other behind the scenes engagement is not documented, due primarily to commercial confidentiality reasons.

Close association with the Rail Freight Group and all internal committee bodies has been maintained.

It is pleasing to note our attendance at a demonstration of the Freight multiple unit (FMU) concept loading timber and participation in the Association of Community Rail Partnerships conference on Freight and the Community Rail Strategy. This aimed to facilitate innovative approaches to freight on rural and urban railways and was attended by industry, local and regional authorities and other key stakeholders.

Thanks go to all panel members and corresponding activists for their voluntary efforts throughout the year and commitment towards the new campaign year.

The Committee will provide guidance on rail freight and associated issues when requested and, in doing so, pronounce the social, economic and environmental benefit of integrating rail within a commodities or product supply chain.

POLICY LOBBY AND CAMPAIGNS COMMITTEE Norman Bradbury

The Committee met in February, June and October. Concern about Government proposals for rail cuts and bustitution was discussed, as was the Department for Transport appraisal of proposals for 60 tonne lorries.

Committee members met Transport Minister Tony McNulty in February and pressed for rail capacity improvements, an Optimum Bias review and, in view of escalating oil fuel problems, electrification, amongst other topics.

DfT Rail replaced the SRA and early indications of its policy indicate cost cutting through service cuts. However, some encouragement is included in the new SWT franchise specification which puts Airtrack link to Heathrow Airport on the agenda.

During the year, Norman Bradbury attended 10 Transport Activists Round Table meetings and 3 Transport Taxation Group meetings on behalf of the Committee. Topics including climate change "Growing the Railways" campaign and road user charging. A TAR delegation met the Rod Eddington team at the DfT in November and the Policy Committee prepared a submission to it.

The Committee signed up for Associate Membership of the Parliamentary Climate Change Group and Norman Bradbury attended three of its meetings.

Mike Crowhurst, Dr. Michael Caton, Peter Lawrence and Norman Bradbury met Rail Minister Derek Twigg to discuss road and rail costs, Optimism Bias, substitution proposals, cost of cancelling tram projects, cycles by rail, growing energy crisis and need for electrification and rail costs related to bridge strengthening for heavier lorries.

The meeting was considered constructive and the Minister expressed a wish to work with us with two meetings per year.

NETWORK DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Jerry Alderson

This committee was originally called the Reopenings Committee. Its current name reflects a lack of new stations and lines in England plus the need to campaign for infrastructure improvements such as passing loops, new curves, flyovers and higher line speeds.

The Committee had been largely inactive for some time, partly because of a lack of new people with a strong knowledge of railways who can dedicate time to vetting rail schemes and proposing innovative solutions. I should like to hear from members with business skills and an understanding of how the Government assesses value for money. Involvement with the rail industry would be useful.

I chaired my first meeting in October 2005 and hope we shall evolve into a group providing expertise to Branches campaigning for infrastructure enhancements, new stations and routes. Additionally we need to look at the national picture such as a high-speed line, which Graham Nalty has investigated, and the East/West Rail Link, which united several Branches of Railfuture and affiliated groups.

We have started to update A to Z of Rail Reopenings which was last produced in 1998 and is available at £2.50 inc. P&P. We shall put some of the material on our website before printing a new edition. We are looking for one or more sponsors to help with printing costs. We also intend to produce a paper on electrification in 2006.

We are responsible for the Reopenings Conference and have helped organise the Campaigners' Conference in Stoke-on-Trent for 2006. A flyer for this event was sent with Railwatch 106.

INTERNATIONAL & EU COMMITTEE

Andrew MacFarlane

The Committee met three times in 2005, in Birmingham, London and Derby. We were sorry to lose long-standing member Richard Macqueen during the year.

We welcomed the announcement that Waterloo International station is to be retained for rail use after Eurostar is diverted to St Pancras in 2007. Our favoured future use is as a terminal for services to Heathrow Airport. We were also encouraged by the growing consensus on the need for a network of high-speed lines in the UK. Branches were consulted on the issue of improving rail links to airports.

We continued to lobby for North of London Eurostar and availability of through tickets between the UK and the Continent. We shall continue to keep up pressure on both fronts and have now switched our attention to TOCs whom we would like to see taking more interest in the through ticketing issue.

At the suggestion of the European Passengers' Federation (of which Railfuture is a founding member) we wrote to the Secretary of State for Transport on the issue of Passengers' Rights. We called for compensation to include connecting domestic trains as well as international ones. We also highlighted the need for through ticketing for journeys involving more than one operator and for operators to provide information about others' services. The reply indicated that the forthcoming EC Regulation would contain obligations on both issues. It also provides for the implementation of a common European ticketing and information system which should encourage the development of a greater range of through ticket offers.

PASSENGER COMMITTEE

Howard Thomas

The year saw the passing of the Railways Act 2005, much of which was concerned with "modifications to the network", seen as reductions in capacity and even closure. The concept of rail closure is still very much part of UK transport policy strategy and thinking at ministerial and DfT level. What is worrying is the greater ease with which the authorities will be able to shut down and reduce services, sometimes under the least pretext.

Much of this Committee's work during the year has therefore been to ascertain what threats there are to passenger services in different parts of the country.

Etruria station closed in September. The heavy rail service between Newcastle and Sunderland has been reduced. Other threatened reductions and closures have not yet taken place, with service still more or less the same in the 11 December 2005 timetable as they were before. Members and Branches will have their work cut out for them in the coming years, both to ensure that another "Beeching" does not happen and to tackle local problems that RPC does not seem constituted to handle.

2005 also saw the Transport Select Committee start to investigate fares, prompted by the perception that many, especially "open" fares, are considerably higher than their equivalent in near Continental Europe. The Committee submitted a paper on fares to the Select Committee. The issue will also be one of the first major pieces of investigation by the new RPC, to which we hope to contribute fully.

We will continue to pursue the issues of service reduction, closures and fares in 2006. Let us in the meantime remember that it is Parliament, Government and their officials who let us have the railways we now have.

OFFICER FOR DISABLED TRAVELLERS Clara Zilahi

In March 2005 I attended an RPC meeting with the morning devoted to disabled travel and speakers from the rail industry and disability groups. A matter needing urgent resolution is the impending end of exemption from access requirements under the Disability Discrimination Act which still applies to rail vehicles. Unless modified this could mean the law would require perfectly good units to be scrapped because they are not wheelchair accessible, even though a wheelchair user could access them but only with human help. Given the cost considerations, this would mean reduced services.

I drew attention to the fact that the 2004 version of the Rail Map for People with Reduced Mobility contained numerous errors. I was assured that it was updated quarterly by email, annually on paper. Indeed, the 2005 version seems largely free of errors. Branches are advised to report any errors they find on the map, now available at many stations. Contact details: Paula Bailey, ATOC, Third Floor, 40 Bernard Street, London, WC1N 1BY (email: disability@atoc.org)

South West Trains provide a "scooter card", if personal and scooter details are filled in, allowing these to be taken on units which have the required space. Other TOCs please copy, as the present situation is confusing.

Lastly, our Branches must be careful to provide accessible venues for public meetings (or a makeshift ramp etc). We also slipped up over the AGM flyer where some were black on red and brought a complaint from a visually handicapped member.

CYCLING SUB-GROUP

Chris Hyomes

2005 was, I feel sure, a turning point for cyclists wishing to take their bikes by train. The latter half of 2004 was spent developing contacts within the TOCs and, while the sub-group cannot take all the credit for the changing attitude in some TOCs, I believe the way in which we have developed our working relationship has certainly helped.

It is a pleasure to report again positive moves by First ScotRail and First Great Western, this time for installing secure cycle parking for over 200 bikes at a number of their stations.

GNER launched a new page for cyclists on their website. It has to be the most comprehensive page yet, listing everything from an on-line booking form, leaving your bike at a station, boarding and leaving a train, station access and much more.

December 13th saw the first meeting of the Cycling Forum launched by TOC Northern, If the forum is a success, the subgroup will look at persuading other TOCs to follow.

In 2006 we shall continue to work closely with TOCs and develop a working relationship with local councils and other cycling groups.

Reports edited by Trevor Garrod

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 each edition of 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 STEAM in Swindon on Saturday 6th May 2006. There will be a Campaigners' Conference in Stoke-on-Trent (near to the railway) on Saturday 1st July 2006. The annual Rail Users' Conference will be held in November 2006.

Join the *railfuture* Lottery. 50% of receipts are paid out as prizes each month. The remainder of the income, after deduction of expenses, is allocated to our Campaigns Fund. Details from Elisabeth Jordan, Railfuture Lottery Organiser, 13 Arnhill Road, Gretton, Corby, Northants NN17 3DN.

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.