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BRING BACK THE TRAINS



The Case for Railway Reopenings

Railway
Development
Society

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This book has been compiled as the result of studies by the Reopenings Sub-committee of the Railway Development Society:

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The book is intended to launch a nationwide debate on rail reopenings and the Society will be pleased to hear reactions to it. The Reopenings Sub-committee all support the basic arguments, although each member of the above team does not necessarily endorse each individual proposal referring to individual lines and stations.

The Sub-committee would like to thank Mr. A. Poole for the cover design; and the following individual and corporate members of the Railway Development Society for their valuable help and advice:

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JOIN THE RAILWAY DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY

The Society is a national voluntary, independent body, formed in 1978 by the amalgamation of the Railway Invigoration Society and Railway Development Association, both of which were formed in the early 1950s.

Its aims are the retention, modernisation and greater usage of rail transport, for both passengers and freight. Affiliated to RDS are many local rail users' groups and reopening campaigns around the country; and RDS, together with these affiliated groups, aims to provide a voice for rail users.

General enquiries about RDS should be addressed to the General Secretary, RDS, BM/RDS, London WC1N 3XX (Tel: 01-405 0463).

Membership is open to all who are in general agreement with the aims of the Society and current subscriptions are:

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Families	£5 plus £1 for each member of household

Subscriptions should be sent to the Membership Secretary,
Mr. H. G. M. Rogers, 64 Cowper Road, London W7 1EJ.

APPENDIX B

TRANSPORT ACT 1962
(Amendment) Act 1981
1981 Chapter 32

An Act to make provision with respect to experimental railway passenger services.
(2nd July 1981)

Be it enacted by the Queen's most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:—

1—(1) The following section is inserted in the Transport Act 1962 after section 56 —
“Experimental reopening of lines for railway passenger services

56A — (1) Where the Railways Board propose to discontinue all railway passenger services on a line or from a station and —

- (a) all those services were being provided on an experimental basis; and
- (b) no other railway passenger services were, immediately before the first of these services was begun, being provided on that line or from that station; then, section 56(7) above shall not apply but the Railways Board shall give due notice of their proposal under this section.

(2) For the purpose of this section railway passenger services shall be taken to be provided on an experimental basis only if due notice of the proposal to start providing those services on that basis has been given by the Railways Board.

(3) For the purposes of this section due notice of any proposal shall be taken to have been given if, not less than six weeks before giving effect to the proposal the Railways Board have published in two successive weeks in two local newspapers circulating in the area affected, and in such other manner as may have appeared to them appropriate, a notice giving details of the proposal.”

(2) In section 56(7) of the Act of 1962 (procedure in relation to proposed closures) after the words “they shall” there are inserted the words “subject to section 56A below.”

Short title: (1) This Act may be cited as the Transport Act 1962 (Amendment) Act 1981.

(2) This Act comes into force on the expiry of the period of one month beginning with the day in which it is passed.

BRING BACK THE TRAINS

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BRING BACK THE TRAINS
CHAPTER I
CLOSURES — WHERE, WHEN AND WHY?

Since Britain has only a few railway lines which have been closed since 1962 and 1963, it is not surprising that the Railways Board have not yet been asked to close any lines.

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FOREWORD

by the Member of Parliament for North Devon

If you live in the West Country, one has to travel by road even if there is still good mileage of railway line available.

As a brand new MP, it was my privilege (and surprise) to actually get a Private Member's Bill through both Houses of Parliament in 1981 making it possible to re-open to passenger traffic, on a trial basis, lines that are being used for freight only. Parliament has agreed to support trains and my own belief is that if we do not seek to expand the network it will inevitably contract more and more until only Inter-City is left to remind us of what was once the most efficient rail network in the world.

Railways are not just for commuters, or "addicts" who take more pleasure in dreaming of the past than in carrying passengers in the future. Railways are for the public to use and politicians to encourage because they are the most efficient and least polluting way to carry people and goods.

"Bring back the trains" — Yes, please!

Tony Speller MP

Kingsknowe 1-2-71
Alness 7-5-73
Duncraig 3-5-76

Western Region:
Penally 28-2-72
Feniton 3-5-71

Finnieston 5-11-79
Glasgow Central Low Level 5-11-79

Falmouth 5-5-75
Honeybourne 25-5-81



Honeybourne re-opening on Worcester — Oxford Line

Photo: Eric Barber

APPENDIX A

NEW AND REOPENED STATIONS ON BRITISH RAIL

NEW STATIONS

Eastern Region:

New Pudsey 6-3-67
 Tees-Side Airport 3-10-71
 Alles West 4-10-71
 Basildon 25-11-74
 Gypsy Lane 3-5-76

Newton Aycliffe 1-1-78
 British Steel Redcar 19-6-78
 West Ham 14-5-79
 Hackney Wick 12-5-80
 Hackney Central 12-5-80
 Fitzwilliam 1-3-82

London Midland Region:

Garston (Herts) 7-2-66
 Alfreton & Mansfield Parkway 7-2-73
 Birmingham International 26-1-76
 Sinfon Central 4-10-76
 Sinfon North 4-10-76
 Brinnington 12-12-77

Hattersley 8-5-78
 Moorfields 3-1-78
 Liverpool Lime Street Low Level 3-1-78
 University 8-5-78
 Milton Keynes Central 17-5-82
 Birchwood 6-10-80

Western Region:

The Dell 7-12-70
 Bristol Parkway 1-5-72

Lympstone Commando 3-5-76
 Lelant Saltings 14-5-79

Scottish Region:

Branchton 5-6-67

Argyle Street 5-11-79

Southern Region:

Southampton Airport -4-66

Moulsecomb 12-5-80

REOPENED STATIONS

Eastern Region:

Needham Market 6-12-71
 Baildon 5-1-73
 Magdalen Road 5-5-75
 Ruskington 5-5-75
 Metheringham 6-10-75

Dronfield 5-1-81
 Wetheral 5-10-81
 Watton-at-Stone 17-5-82
 Crossflats 17-5-82
 Deighton 16-4-82

London Midland Region:

Dolgarrog 14-6-65
 Narborough 5-1-70
 Glan Conway 4-5-70
 Matlock Bath 27-5-72
 Shotton Low Level 21-8-72
 Llanfair Pwll 7-5-73
 Peartree 4-10-76

Aigburth 3-1-78
 Cressington 3-1-78
 Garston (Merseyside) 3-1-78
 St. Michaels 3-1-78
 Five Ways 8-5-78
 Longbridge 8-5-78
 Valley 1-6-81

Scottish Region:

Lochside 27-6-66
 Dunlop 5-6-67
 Stewarton 5-6-67

Muir of Ord 4-10-76
 Anderston 5-11-79
 Dalmarnock 5-11-79

BRING BACK THE TRAINS

CHAPTER I

CLOSURES – WHERE, WHEN AND WHY?

Great Britain has over 11,000 miles of railway open for passenger and freight traffic. At one time there was almost twice as much. The network was at its greatest extent between about 1910 and 1930, when almost every town of 2,000 population or more was rail-served.

The first wave of closures occurred around 1930, when places such as Hadleigh (Suffolk), Cawood (Yorks), Dyserth (Clwyd), Old Meldrum (Grampian), Stoke Ferry (Norfolk), Fort Augustus (Inverness-shire) and Knott End (Lancs) lost their services. Quite often in those days it was only passenger trains which were withdrawn and the line stayed open for freight.

Despite the closures of the 1930s and 1940s, however, some 20,000 route-miles of track remained to be taken over by the newly-created British Railways at nationalisation in 1948.

In subsequent years, considerable numbers of rural branches were axed – their slow, antiquated steam trains frequently offering an unattractive alternative to bus transport which, at that time, could be said to be at its zenith. From the mid-1950s, the introduction of diesel multiple unit trains or railcars (referred to in this book as DMUs) helped many local services to survive – but still a steady trickle of closures continued.

Furthermore, some closures – such as the former Midland & Great Northern system from Bourne (Lincs) to Yarmouth in 1959 – were of routes over which express trains ran, rather than of small branch lines.

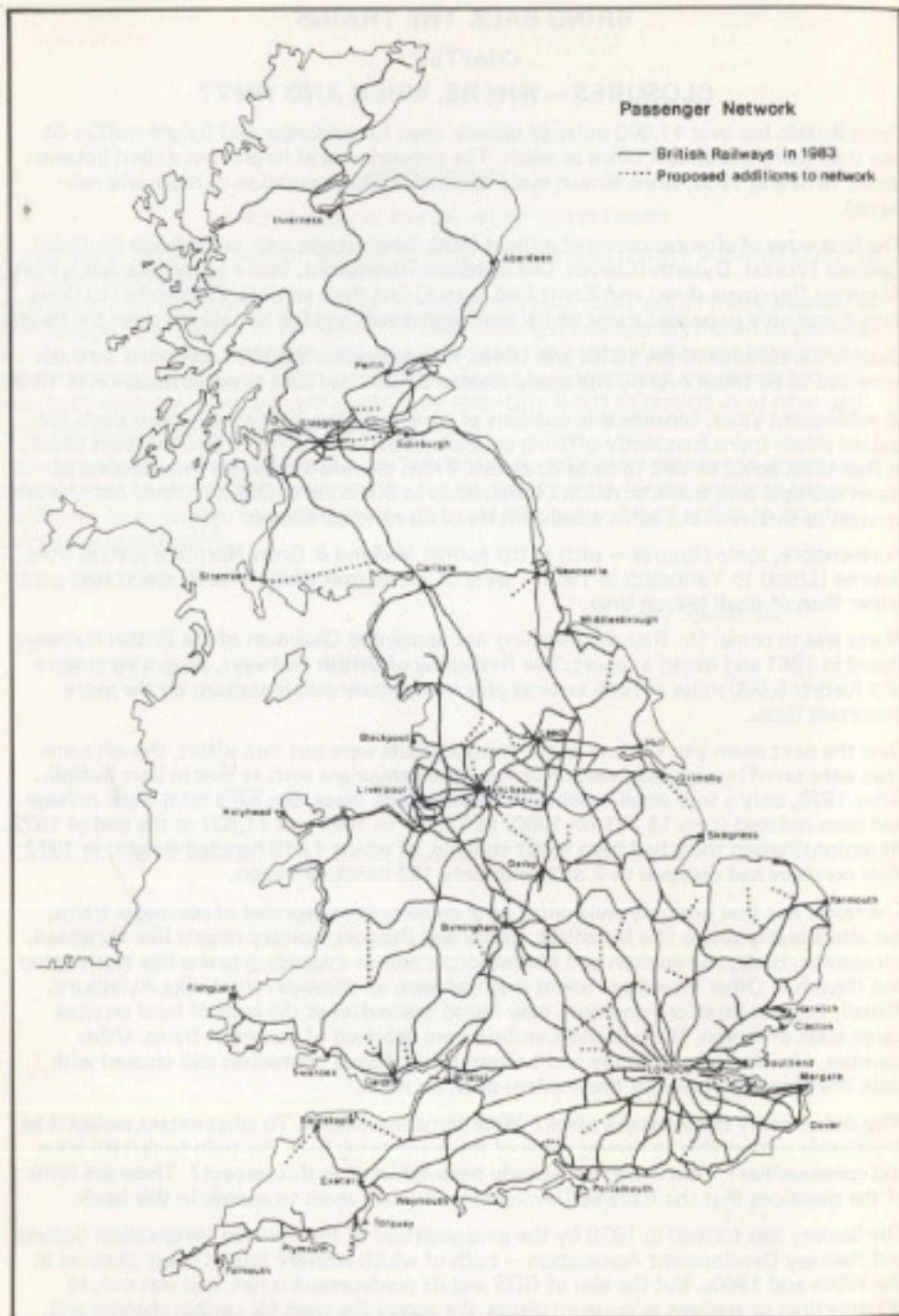
Worse was to come. Dr. Richard Beeching was appointed Chairman of the British Railways Board in 1961 and issued a report, *The Reshaping of British Railways*, proposing closure of a further 5,000 miles of rural services plus many intermediate stations on the more important lines.

Over the next seven years, many of the Beeching cuts were put into effect, though some lines were saved by vigorous, well-organised local campaigns such as that in East Suffolk. After 1970, only a very small number of closures took place, but BR's total track mileage had been reduced from 18,771 (in 1960) to 13,261 in 1969 and 11,537 at the end of 1972. At nationalisation there had been 6,701 stations, of which 4,815 handled freight; in 1972 their numbers had dropped to 2,362, with only 182 handling freight.

The result was that not only were small rural communities deprived of passenger trains; but also sizeable towns like Mansfield, Corby and Gosport; holiday resorts like Minehead, Ilfracombe, Bude, Hunstanton and Mablethorpe; new or expanding towns like Washington and Haverhill. Other important towns that had been on through routes, like Aylesbury, Walsall, Bury or Stratford-on-Avon, now found themselves at the ends of local services. Large areas of Devon, Norfolk and Cumbria were deprived of passenger trains. Other counties, like Northamptonshire and Leicestershire, found themselves still crossed with main lines but with precious few stations open on them.

Why did so many closures take place? Were some inevitable? To what extent would it be practicable or desirable to reverse some of them and bring back the train to certain areas and communities? How much has already been achieved in this respect? These are some of the questions that the Railway Development Society seeks to answer in this book.

The Society was formed in 1978 by the amalgamation of the Railway Invigoration Society and Railway Development Association – both of which actively fought many closures in the 1950s and 1960s. But the aim of RDS and its predecessors is not, and was not, to preserve lines or stations as museum pieces. We accept the need for certain changes and



in Appendix A). With rail restoration on a larger scale however they have been less successful, though in several cases the use of a line for excursion traffic has been established. With feeder services (and to a lesser extent strategic routes) the existence of a strong local pressure group could well have a profound influence on rail restoration schemes. Furthermore, such a pressure group should, if a line were restored, later transform itself into a local users' group to further promote it, act as a channel for complaints and suggestions, and thus perform the role carried out with considerable effect by so many of the local users' groups which exist on lines still open. This principle is equally valid for groups concerned merely with station re-openings.

The proposals contained in this book are not, however, intended as a definitive list. Certain of them may prove to have less support than anticipated; whilst others which have not been brought to our attention may need to be added to the list. Such a process of selection will nevertheless be assisted by agreement on the part of the Department of Transport and British Rail to conduct some experiments.

Even at a time when there are renewed threats of further rail closures, it is not too late to admit that past policies could have been wrong; that continual paring of the railway network is not the answer to the problems of British Rail; and no amount of proposals for transferring rail traffic on to already overcrowded roads will ever prevent rail replacement buses from being held up by other traffic.

The Railway Development Society, within its resources of time and manpower as a voluntary body, will do all that it can to assist such a process to "Bring Back the Trains" lest, as our fellow travellers in North America have learnt to their cost, we may one day find that we have to "re-invent the wheel" — (of the steel on steel variety).

relevant in all cases. This experiment should be closely monitored, but we believe it would prove beneficial to the communities served (and to the network as a whole) and would probably lead to pressure for more such re-openings.

The selection could include about 6 feeder routes (in various parts of the country) but with differing catchment areas. For instance some could be in rural areas whilst others in more densely populated parts. Similarly two or three "strategic" routes — of varying lengths — (and in different areas) could be restored on the same experimental basis.

These re-openings would however, have to be paid for and some local authorities, as we have seen, have shown a commendable attitude to public transport by paying for re-openings — usually of stations — and other improvements. Whether Central Government will be similarly co-operative (with regard to grant aid to them) and encourage others who have done little or nothing for rail travellers, to mend their ways is open to doubt. It is, nevertheless, unfair that the full burden should fall on local councils — who, after all, were not responsible for the closure of the lines in the first place, and whose ratepayers may not be the only ones to benefit from particular re-openings. It is for this reason that we believe a clear initiative should come from the Department of Transport, backed by the necessary funds, similar to that which it has been so keen to give to trial areas for de-licensing of buses.

The Government has voiced its encouragement for such road-based public transport experiments (including car-sharing and community mini-buses). Why should it not do the same for rail (unless of course its dislike for railways as a nationalised industry is so entrenched as to be irreversible)? Money could be made available to local authorities to enable them to re-introduce feeder services, the Department of Transport paying half the capital cost of re-opening, and possibly part of the cost of any subsidy. Alternatively the Department could pay the total capital cost and the local authority agree to underwrite any operating loss for a specific period. In such cases the length of time should at least be sufficient to give people the chance to change their regular travelling habits — say, two years.

As an alternative the Department could give B.R. a supplement to its Public Service Obligation grant — specifically earmarked for new services. B.R. should nevertheless still be required to consult with the local authorities and its preference for new services would doubtless be influenced by whether or not the authority (or any other local body) were prepared to make a contribution towards it.

With strategic routes, on the other hand, the role of local authorities would be somewhat reduced. For example many of the users of a restored Oxford — Bletchley — Bedford service could well originate beyond the borders of the two counties through which it runs (viz. Bucks. and Oxfordshire) which may therefore feel reluctant to subsidise it in its entirety although a restored rail link could well result in less wear and tear on the two counties roads. In cases such as these it would be reasonable to ask B.R. to make a contribution, much as it does towards the Peterborough rail-link buses (which are commercial ventures, not covered by P.S.O. Grant). As with the feeder services, however, the Department of Transport should be expected to pay a substantial amount towards strategic rail routes — which, per mile, would cost much less than trunk roads of comparable length.

In this book we have also drawn attention to the role of Parish and District Councils (and also voluntary bodies) in raising money for station re-openings and the measure of such support should be used by B.R. and the County Councils as an indicator of local public interest, NOT as an excuse for failing to contribute any money themselves. After all, no-one expects voluntary bodies, for instance, to raise part (let alone all) of the money required for road improvements!

This brings us finally to the role of pressure groups, which have undoubtedly had success in securing the re-opening of a considerable number of the stations referred to above (and

indeed have argued strongly for them. We did not necessarily oppose every single closure in the Beeching era or before but we defended many services and argued for investment and imagination to improve them and develop their full potential in an attractive public transport network.

WHY DID LINES CLOSE?

An analysis of the reasons for closures helps us to determine which services were inevitable candidates for the axe; which should have been retained; and which, indeed, can reasonably be restored.

Apart from the comparatively small number of lines and stations closed for diversionary purposes (the Selby coalfield being one example) or rationalisation (the merging of Peterborough North and East services in one station being another example), there is only one reason why lines and stations were closed — namely because they did not make a profit; or at least — and this is the important point — because it was thought that they did not make a profit.

In many cases the reasons for this lack of profitability were, in retrospect, clear:—

(a) Lines were sometimes built between the same places by rival companies, such as between Leicester and Rugby (Midland and Great Central) or Glasgow and Edinburgh (North British and Caledonian). North of Nottingham, the lines of three companies intertwined through Bulwell, Hucknall and Kirby-in-Ashfield. In Lancashire, the Great Central Railway built lines to St. Helens and Wigan — which were already well-served by the London & North Western. Uxbridge had three termini where one through station would have been more sensible.

Thus it was not surprising that some routes which duplicated each other should be closed. Similarly with stations: Peterborough, Lincoln, Leeds, Sheffield, Windsor, Reading, Oxford, Gloucester and Dundee were just some of the many places with two stations, owned by rival companies, built close to each other; but in some cases it was subsequently possible to close one and run all trains into the other. In others, such as Lincoln, construction of a short piece of new line would make such rationalisation possible, and indeed make things more convenient for the passenger.

On rare occasions private companies did co-operate (Carlisle station was shared by seven companies), but all too often the nationalised railway inherited the legacy of private rivalries.

(b) Sometimes lines were built for speculative reasons and the hoped-for traffic never materialised — or not in sufficient quantities to justify a railway. It was, for example, hoped that Allhallows (Kent) and Mundesley (Norfolk) would develop into important seaside resorts — but such development as did come was not enough to make the rail infrastructure worthwhile (a double track line in the case of Allhallows; a 4-platform station at Mundesley) and the lines closed in the 1960s.

(c) Some lines ran through very sparsely populated areas, of the Pennines, Welsh Mountains or Scottish Highlands, for example, where the local traffic on offer was very light. The Mid Suffolk Light Railway served nowhere with a population of as much as 1,000 in its 19 miles; its terminus, Laxfield, being in a mere village of 600 people. Sometimes such a line could survive if it linked important places at either end; but branches to small settlements like Hopeman or Fochabers (Morayshire), The Dyke (Sussex) or Kerry (Montgomeryshire) had disappeared by the beginning of the Second World War.

(d) Stations in very rural areas could be considerable distances from the places which they served (such as Raunds in Northants; Kimbolton in Hunts; those on the Hawkhurst branch in Kent; or Hatherleigh, Devon). In such cases, much of the fairly light traffic on offer was lost to bus transport as that grew from the 1930s onwards.

Ironically, however, the distance of a station from settlements need not be such a handicap nowadays, with a growth in car ownership and the encouragement of "park and ride", especially if redundant station goods yards are used for car parks. If a station has reasonable road access, and there is a sizeable traffic flow into London or another large city, where car parking is difficult and expensive, then "park and ride" can be successfully exploited.

(e) Although some of the above problems were not the railways' own fault — at least not that of the nationalised system — let us not forget that there were also instances of inefficient or short-sighted management; and cases where productivity could have been improved.

Branch lines were often worked with antiquated stock. If lightweight, clean, attractive diesel railcars had been introduced earlier, and indeed if electrification had been more widespread, patronage could have been boosted. The de-staffing of stations and introduction of paytrains did not start on a large scale until the late 1960s. Some of the lines to be proposed for reopening later in this book were heavily staffed when they closed.

Connections from branches at junctions were not always as good as they could have been; and there were instances of services being deliberately run down in the years preceding withdrawal, the Lowestoft — Yarmouth line being a case in point.

Shortsightedness, or at least lack of liaison between BR and planning authorities, meant that new towns, or expanding overspill towns, quite often lost their passenger services in the 1960s. Instances include Haverhill (Suffolk), Washington (Co. Durham), Skelmersdale (Lancs) and Corby (Northants); while the closure of the Oxford — Bletchley link was illogical in view of the planned expansion of the new city of Milton Keynes at the eastern end of it.

(f) There was another important reason, namely the high cost of repairing a major engineering feature, which could sometimes cause a line to close. One could cite the Severn Bridge between Sharpness and Lydney (Glos.) as an example; or the bridge which carried the Magdalen Road — Wisbech — March line over the River Ouse — the cost of repairs to this bridge being one factor that led to Wisbech losing its passenger link. War damage hastened the demise of the Poplar — Dalston service in East London in 1944. At the time of writing, maintenance and repair costs on the Settle — Carlisle line are putting its future in jeopardy.

The reason stated in (f) above leads very obviously to the whole question of railway financing. The point has to be stressed that, in some respects, it has been unfair compared with road financing. The bus operator, for instance, does not have to pay for policing, lighting or signalling; his bus stops are cheaper to erect and maintain than even the most modest railway stations. Bus operators also received, until recently, a grant towards the cost of new buses.

BR, on the other hand, provides its own policing and signalling; every stretch of line is fenced, level crossings are provided at BR's expense to protect road users. This costs at least £8,000 a year if the crossing is manned — and on some lines in East Anglia and Lincolnshire there is a crossing virtually every mile. Every rail accident has to be the subject of a full inquiry, with a published report — a very different situation from that on the roads.

It can be argued that standards of protection are unnecessarily high on secondary rail routes, especially as far as level crossings, fencing and platforms are concerned. Continental practice often involves more modest stations, ungated crossings, no fencing. Maybe Government regulations are too strict in this country when applied to secondary lines, and a more modest infrastructure would have ensured the survival of many more of them. Certainly, this factor must be borne in mind when reopening schemes are proposed.

proper over periods of adverse trade" but when extended over a decade "as nothing less than pawning the future of the railways." B.R. therefore needed £72m. a year to replace its assets and in each year between 1981 and 1990; £36m. for electrification; £92m. to maintain an acceptable London & South East Network and £51m. for a Channel Tunnel.

Is it any wonder then that by 1982 the Trade Union movement's attitude had hardened to the state where demands for "productivity" in return for investment were greeted with derision by railway workers who had been promised a brave new world if they made sacrifices left, right and centre by Governments (of all political persuasions) who had consistently failed to deliver the goods?

Instead of giving a firm commitment to investment, the Government adopted the well-worn policy of setting up an Inquiry (under Sir David Serpell) to look into the long term future of the railways, the results of which were so inconclusive and divisive that the N.U.R. described it as a disaster and the Report fit only for the dustbin. Not only did it not reach any firm conclusions but the members of the Inquiry team could not even agree amongst themselves — Mr. Alfred Goldstein issuing a Minority Report. The only good point the authors of this book could discover — from a quick reading of the Report at the time of going to press — was the recommendation (in Para. 8.12) that B.R. should greatly increase the £4m. a year it spends on level crossing modernisation. This largely supports our arguments in Chapter III and proves that such investment can pay for itself in 2–4 years (not 10 years as stated therein).

Apart from hackneyed arguments on bus/rail substitution and a recommendation that the T.U.C.s' powers over rail closures should remain largely unchanged it does prove that only by cutting the railway system to a level which would be politically unacceptable (a mere 1,630 route miles) can it be run at a profit, so the time has surely come to wash away all those silly ideas once and for all. Serpell virtually excludes any substantial increase in investment in B.R. but rather harps on the ways in which it can cut expenditure by for example reducing the standard of track maintenance (and the need for Government support) even further.

The Report is certainly not the answer to the accumulated years of capital starvation summarised in these pages which serve to explain why the railways are on the verge of collapse, and it will be useful to recall that the Society in its evidence to Serpell emphasised the need for urgent capital investment to (inter-alia):

- (a) finance the renewal of life-expired equipment;
- (b) install hardware which can bring about improved efficiency; and — as this book aims to do; —
- (c) support the re-opening of lines and stations where a good case for this can be made out.

Our suggestions for additional feeder lines would involve restoring (at the most) 200 miles to the passenger network, all but about 5 miles of which are still in situ and most used for freight. The proposals for more through routes amount to a maximum of 140 miles (over existing track) and 150 where it would have to be relaid but, compared with the accumulated renewals on existing lines this could easily be lost in the vast re-building which will be necessary if B.R. is to have anything like an assured future. This latter category includes sections where the rail "formation" is still intact as well as sections which would have to be restored or new "deviations" or "spurs" constructed.

It will be seen from earlier Chapters that some of these reopenings are needed more urgently than others, and as a start we consider work should be put in hand as soon as possible to re-open on an experimental basis a selection with the aid of the Amendment to the 1962 Transport Act (contained in Appendix B) although this may not be entirely

In the event B.R. was required to operate within a cash limit for grant reduced by £15m. for 1977 and in his evidence to a Parliamentary Select Committee early in that year he stressed that this could create serious problems in the future through accumulated arrears of maintenance and that declining standards of safety and reliability could drive traffic away and lead to the eventual closure of many lines. B.R. would, in his words literally "Freeze to death".

In its Annual Report for 1977 (published in 1978) B.R. re-iterated the need for greater investment to replace worn out equipment, particularly as past constraints had already resulted in the accumulation of arrears of replacement, more so as much of the equipment purchased in the late 50s and early 60s was coming to the end of its useful life. To meet these needs investment would have to rise by up to 30% in the next 10 years assuming a start could be made in 1981/2, and this would have to continue for some years into the 1990s.

This view was echoed in a subsequent Report issued by the Central Transport Consultative Committee which stressed that a massive withdrawal of Britain's cross-country rail services would become inevitable in the late 1980s unless the Government sharply increased investment funds for new rolling stock, and to prevent such "closures by default" its Chairman, Frank Higgins, considered that an additional £25-30 million a year would be needed for this purpose or many cross-country services (not just Branch Lines) would simply disappear.

Yet in 1979 the new Conservative Government in its first Budget slashed £15m. from the Railways Board's cash limits on external finance whilst only £10m. had to be found from savings in the Road Programme. This had the effect of further reducing B.R.'s 1979/80 spending limits from £730m. to £715m. Furthermore in 1980 the Cabinet imposed a £22m. reduction in B.R.'s passenger subsidies on top of the cut of £20m. made by the previous Government.

The problem was therefore highlighted once again in B.R.'s Annual Report for 1979 where Sir Peter Parker stated that unless investment levels were raised by 30%, just to replace worn-out assets the consequences would be: lower standards of speed; frequency, comfort and reliability. Even so in 1979 the total passenger/miles travelled on B.R. (estimated at 19,990m.) exceeded the 1962 pre-Beeching total of 19,772m. despite a subsequent reduction in passenger route miles so what would it have been with a much less truncated network and therefore increased journey prospects?

From the foregoing it will be seen that since 1975 B.R. has been forced to peg the level of support to passenger services which cannot be justified on commercial grounds to the level of that year in real terms (through P.S.O. Grant) which in 1979 came to £530m. out of a possible total of £544m. The amount of underspending since 1976 had therefore amounted to £147m. ⅓ of which had been kept by the Government whilst even the remaining ⅓ transferred to its reserves could not, under Treasury and Transport Department Regulations be used to finance urgent investment needs, a fact which prompted Sir Peter Parker to tell delegates to the N.U.R.'s Annual Conference "we have got to get these rules sensibly changed but while we have got them we have to live by them."

By late 1980 the situation had reached the stage where B.R. launched its "Branches on the Brink" campaign to impress on local communities the extent of the "crumbling edges" of the railways resulting from the many years of under-investment.

Even 18 months ago the Board & Unions were urging the Government to extend the annual cash limit of £920m. by at least £100m. just to keep the services ticking over and pressing for an early commitment to a 20 year electrification programme costing £775m. As a result B.R. was forced to introduce 500 speed restrictions by the end of 1981 (compared with 193 in 1980) and Vice-Chairman, Ian Campbell, described the curbs in investment as "very

The whole principle of railway financing must indeed take some blame for closures. Hardly any national rail system in the world pays its way; most European governments recognise this and give grants to enable secondary routes to continue operating. In Britain such grants started under the 1968 Transport Act and have developed into the Public Service Obligation grant paid by central government to BR today.

The 1968 Act accepted what bodies like the predecessors of the Railway Development Society had been saying for years: branch lines could not in themselves be expected to make a profit but were socially necessary, and should therefore be grant-aided by the community. Within three years of this Act coming into force, the flood of closures had dried to a trickle. Indeed, had the Act been passed two or three years earlier, we might well still have many of the services that were lost in the late 1960s — all the more reason for pressing for some of them to be restored.

Branch finances were all too often treated in isolation. The cost of the branch was considered to include terminal and overhead expenses which would still have to be paid, even after it closed. For example, it was pointed out that, by the logic of this system, the Chairman of BR should take a cut in salary every time a line closed! Revenue figures were also distorted — usually by omitting contributory revenue. Thus no account might be taken of fares paid at stations elsewhere on the system, for journeys terminating on the threatened branch; or of the main line portion of fares for long-distance journeys starting on the branch. We shall return to this issue when dealing with feeder service reopenings.

Suffice it to say at this stage that the formula quoted so often in the 1960s to determine whether lines were losing money was challenged by objectors at inquiry after inquiry, was often proven to be misleading and is now totally discredited.

There is a final point to be brought into the equation — a point which is certainly high on the list of today's considerations and which, had it been brought into consideration in previous decades could well have stopped many of the past closures, resulting in a much greater rail network today. That point is, of course, the problem of future energy needs, which were not widely acknowledged in the 1960s. Indeed, in some circles, people who ventured to suggest that oil reserves might not last for ever were dismissed as cranks. The planners of the 1960s assumed all too often that in future everyone would travel by car — the most extravagant form of surface transport in terms of fuel consumption per passenger mile.

Rail transport uses fuel more wisely and, unlike road, can be easily electrified, reducing our reliance on one type of fuel. The 1970s brought a growing awareness that we must be more careful in our use of fuel; and an awareness in many countries, of the advantage of railways, especially electric ones, in this respect. (The bicycle has seen a distinct revival, for similar reasons). The fuel-saving argument is therefore a strong one when we examine the case for an expansion of our rail system; alongside the need to avoid some of the mistakes of the past and, in some areas at least, to endeavour to put these right.

CHAPTER II EFFECTS OF CLOSURES

Loss of rail services has been most noticeable in rural areas. These are areas which have seen a great decline in local amenities of all kinds — the village shop, the sub-post office, the village school. With public transport also suffering from cutbacks, people in rural areas are faced with increasing isolation while at the same time losing all sorts of facilities. Those who suffer most are the non-car-owning families (often the poorer members of the community); the elderly who are unable to drive; and the young who are below driving age. In one-car families, if one member needs the car to travel to work, the rest of the family may be isolated.

In 1980, a Policy Studies Institute report on *The Social Consequences of Rail Closures* revealed the negative effects of ten rail closures in different parts of Britain. It was found that no more than half the former rail users sampled the replacement buses. Many bought cars for the first time. One quarter of optional activities ceased with the closure of the railway, and a further third were enjoyed less frequently.

As the report put it, "closures resulted not only in the obligatory change of travel method but also in a change of life-style; many people travelled less after closure and some former activities were curtailed altogether." It concluded, "Our findings point strongly to a degree of hardship and inconvenience that does not appear to be widely appreciated by people involved in making decisions affecting rural transport."

A Sunday Times review of the report commented that it indicated "that all those anti-Beeching protestors, whose voices were heard at hundreds of inquiries up and down the country, were absolutely right."

Did the closures improve BR's finances, as anticipated? It seems again that Dr. Beeching was wrong, and they did not. The method of "costing out" an individual service without looking at its effects on the remainder of the network was shown to be short-sighted, to put it mildly. Many of the closed lines had fed into the main system. When branch trains were withdrawn, many of their users ceased to make rail journeys at all — anywhere. This affected the loadings and revenue on other lines.

A study of possible closure of the Exeter — Barnstaple line revealed that closure would lose more in contributory revenue to the rest of the network than would have been "saved" in operating costs by not running trains to Barnstaple. The PSI report took as an example the Haltwhistle — Alston branch of the Newcastle — Carlisle route. Before closure of the branch, a third of its users used to travel on to the main network at least once a month. After closure only one per cent of these people did so. Pious hopes that they might travel by bus to the railhead at Haltwhistle and continue their journeys by train proved largely misplaced.

Replacement bus services provided at the time of a rail closure have usually seen declining patronage and have themselves been pruned in many cases. In 1977, a South West Transport Users' Consultative Committee report revealed a cutback of over 60% in rail replacement services over a period of 8 years since their introduction.

Although buses were usually routed to terminate at stations left open, connections with trains were often poor. Bus-rail co-ordination leaves much to be desired in this country. If a bus is late, the trains are not normally held up to wait for it; and vice versa when the train is late.

Bus journeys are almost always slower than train and follow more tortuous routes. Dorchester to Powerstock (on the former Bridport branch) was a 25 minute trip by train; the replacement bus takes 57 minutes. Penrith to Keswick took 35 minutes by train, but 55 by bus. This difference is not only experienced on rural routes, but also on inter-urban

CHAPTER VIII THE WAY FORWARD

In this short book we have endeavoured to show why some of the many rail closures of the 1950s and 60s were wrong and should be reversed but why, it may be asked, is R.D.S. proposing the re-opening of lines and stations at a time when British Rail is having difficulty even holding on to what it has?

The answer we would give is quite simple. B.R. is either expanding or contracting — it cannot stand still — and, as we have seen, until the early 1970s it was generally considered that closures were the solution to its financial ills. This myth was, however, scotched once and for all when Richard Marsh (then Chairman of the B.R.B.) in a lecture to the Royal Society of Arts on 23rd February 1972 stated:

"It used to be believed that all you had to do to make the railways more profitable was to make them smaller . . . That is being totally disproved. One of the most expensive railway networks we have looked at, was one of the smallest, because the inescapable costs that you cannot get out from under are such that they swallow can up the benefits that you receive from the reduced operating costs."

As we have seen in Chapter II the method of "costing out" individual services without looking at their effect on the rest of the system, which was popular between the Transport Act 1968 and the Railways Act 1974, was short sighted and no real savings were in fact achieved. In addition many of the lines closed during the Beeching era and after could now be operated more economically, as outlined in Chapter III, and with over 70 new stations having been opened since 1965 (See Chapter III and Appendix A) there is clearly considerable latent potential for expansion — not further contraction.

If, however, this potential is to be exploited fully British Rail must first lift itself out of the mire into which at least two successive Governments have dragged it in the space of nearly a decade. Let us therefore briefly consider the extent of under-investment which has brought it almost to its knees.

This can be traced back to at least 1975 when, with the provisions of the 1974 Act hardly in effect, Government economy measures forced B.R. to cut back on recruitment; reduce the extent of the track-laying programme; mothball 60 of its locomotives; withdraw 30,000 of its freight vehicles and 6-700 passenger coaches and generally cut freight and passenger train services. At that time the two former constituent bodies of RDS (and the National Council on Inland Transport) pointed out the inequity of the Government's cuts in transport expenditure as part of its economy drive. Concern was also expressed over the intention to limit the amount of cash to B.R. in 1976 to £330m., whereas under the terms of the Railways Act 1974 their compensation entitlement (not subsidy) was estimated to be at least £565m. representing a 42% reduction in financial support.

Such cash limits were strongly condemned by the former RIS in its reply to the Government's "Transport Consultation Document" in April 1976 when it stressed that much of the deficit attributable to secondary routes could be traced to the failure of successive governments to provide them with an assured future by firm long term investment. The Society saw further closures in an already drastically truncated system as totally unacceptable and pressed for a clearly defined policy to be formulated for secondary services at the same time giving attention to the reinstatement of key routes (many of which have been highlighted in Chapter V above), where bus alternatives had failed.

The present Chairman of British Rail (Sir Peter Parker) when he took over from Sir Richard (now Lord) Marsh in September of that year was not unaware of this when he stated:-

"It is my first hope that we will get at long last a long term policy for the railways related to the critical area of investment to give the quality of service people deserve."

Unfortunately, the momentum created by this successful reaction to local demand was cut short by the closure of the line to freight early in 1981. Meanwhile, the Grimsby — Louth Railway Preservation Society, as it was now called, grew to over 500 members and formed a company to negotiate with BR to buy the track. It could well be, therefore, that the Grimsby — Louth line in future could fulfil a dual role of providing steam trips for tourists and enthusiasts and offering an all-year service into Grimsby, and the rest of the rail network, from this rather isolated part of East Lincolnshire.

BURY — RAWTENSTALL

The former Bury — Bacup line in East Lancashire was cut back to Rawtenstall, and then this town of 21,000 lost its passenger service in the early 1970s. The fact that it serves a sizeable population, however, and that it was one of the last lines to close, indicates that it should have potential as a feeder route, possibly even as a northward continuation of a restored Rochdale — Bury service, with interchange facilities at Bury with the electric trains to Manchester.

In 1982, the East Lancashire Railway Preservation Society and its associated company became established on part of the route and began catering for the enthusiast market.

SWANAGE

The resort of Swanage is situated on a peninsula with only one main and one minor road linking it to the rest of Dorset. Most of the branch line to this town of 8,000 people was lifted after its closure to passengers, but a preservation society has been formed and now operates a steam centre at the Swanage end. RDS has supported its efforts (which have included objecting to a road scheme that would have taken part of the trackbed at Corfe Castle — the main intermediate place with 1,500 population). If the preservation society succeeds in reaching Wareham on the main line, it could provide a useful feeder service.

ones (where congestion can also be more of a problem): thus Wrexham — Chester takes between 18 and 22 minutes by train but 45 by bus. The trend towards one-man-operated buses makes journeys even slower; for, in contrast to the paytrain, fares have to be collected while the vehicle is stationary.

The major advantage of the bus is its ability to go through the centre of villages, and on to housing estates, picking up and setting down at frequent intervals — but this lengthens journey time appreciably for passengers travelling, say, ten or more miles. Re-siting of some stations closer to the centres of communities they were meant to serve would be possible in some places, and has recently been done, for example, at Chapeltown in South Yorks. If more modest platform standards were acceptable (see chapter 3), such a trend would be encouraged.

Many people find bus travel for any appreciable distance unattractive. Some suffer from travel sickness, especially if poor quality roads give them a rough ride. It is less easy to read or write on a bus than on a train. Luggage space is very limited. Bicycles cannot be carried. There are no toilets (other than on a minority of long-distance coaches). One does not have the freedom to move about on a bus that one has on a train. There is little or no protection against the weather at a lot of bus stops. Reliability of the service is suspect owing to traffic jams, bad weather or accidents. Indeed, statistics show that one's chances of being involved in an accident are 200 times greater on a road journey than on a rail journey.

Therefore it should come as no surprise that, when buses replaced trains, no more than half, and often as little as a fifth, of former rail passengers used them. Most either turned to the car or ceased to make the journeys previously made.

Another factor not properly discussed when lines were closed was the cost to the community of extra car use. While it would be difficult to decide what proportion of such costs to allocate to increased car usage as a result of a rail closure, part of the cost of congestion, accidents, road improvements and car parking must be attributable to it. In Northamptonshire, for example, £967,000 was spent in subsidising car parks in 1981, as against only £349,000 for public transport subsidies. Another interesting statistic is that the county only has five railway stations still open!

One could go on to look at the cost of road accidents. They cost the public purse more than £11,500,000 in Cambridgeshire alone in 1981. Their cost to the National Health Service is estimated at over £50,000,000 a year; and to the community as a whole, nearly £2 billion per annum. How much of this could be avoided by even a modest switch from road to rail?

Such a switch applies to freight as well as passengers, of course. Passenger closures in the Beeching era attracted much attention, but of the 6,114 goods depots open in 1956, 5,500 had closed by 1970, as had many miles of freight-only line. This wave of cuts was one of the major reasons for the growth in lorry traffic over the past 20 years. In 1976, however, BR indicated in their reply to the Green Paper on Transport that one third of the heavy freight carried by lorries for distances over 100 km was suitable for rail. With a larger rail network, the proportion could reasonably be expected to be even greater.

Confronted with evidence of the bad effects of previous rail closures, some people argue that past mistakes can be avoided in future. Instead of rail replacement buses we could have "rail link buses." Three such services have indeed been introduced recently: Kettering — Corby — Peterborough; Peterborough — Wisbech — Kings Lynn; and Mansfield — Southwell — Newark. These do connect with trains and there is interavailability of tickets. However, painting a bus in BR livery does not stop it from getting caught in traffic jams!

There is as yet no evidence that the Kings Lynn link has attracted any significant new business for BR; though it is claimed that about one third of the passengers on the Kettering link starting or finishing their journeys by rail are newly-generated. When one of the authors of this book used it, however, the numbers travelling on it never reached double figures. Promises of better buses as an alternative to rail reopenings must therefore be viewed with some scepticism.

A final effect of rail closures is that they can be said to have led to more extravagant use of fuel. Not only that, but they have also narrowed the range of options for energy in the future. Railways can be electrified, enabling them to make use of power generated from coal, oil, water power or even nuclear power; whereas road transport over anything more than the shortest distance is dependent on oil and therefore subject to problems that have become clear over the last decade.

Thus it can be seen that the effects of rail closures go well beyond the mere question of hardship to line users, and must cause anyone with an open and unbiased mind to pose the question: what about rail reopenings?

DART VALLEY

Since 1969, the Dart Valley Railway has been running a steam service from Totnes to Buckfastleigh — a pleasant run but suffering from the disadvantage of no physical access at Totnes. As Buckfastleigh has a population of just 2,800, the line's potential as a feeder would be somewhat limited.

There is greater potential on the DVR's other line, from Paignton to Kingswear, which enjoys a daily service for 4 months of the year from a station adjacent to the BR one at Paignton, which itself is served by more than twice as many trains at Totnes. The heaviest traffic is understandably in summer; but there could be potential feeder traffic from Dartmouth (pop 5,700) with its Royal Naval College and the southern part of Torbay (Churston, pop 1,500 and Brixham 12,000). After all, BR themselves still ran a DMU service on the line up to the early 1970s.

WORTH VALLEY

The 5-mile branch from Keighley to Oxenhope in West Yorkshire, with five stations serving a string of communities in the Worth Valley, fell under the Beeching axe in 1961. There was an immediate response from local people when moves were subsequently made to form a Preservation Society. This experienced a steady net increase in members to around 1,600 in 1968, when the line was reopened by its associated operating company.

Since then, a weekend service has been run throughout the year, catering for the local shoppers' as well as the leisure market. Trains aimed at the local market are mostly diesel-hauled. A daily service is run during the peak season.

The company is fortunate in being able to run its trains into its own platforms at Keighley station (BR), and these have clear potential as a feeder service.

NORTH YORK MOORS

The 18-mile line from Grosmont to Pickering is operated by the North York Moors Historical Railway Trust and provides a popular service through this scenic area from May to October. It has easy interchange with BR at Grosmont, but unfortunately only serves one town, Pickering (pop 4,800). Its role as a feeder is therefore limited, other than for Pickering folk wishing to go to Tees-side or the resort of Whitby.

If it were possible to re-lay southwards from Pickering for some 6 miles to the York — Scarborough line, and run trains through to Malton (pop. with adjacent Norton, nearly 8,000), this would provide a strategic link. At the moment, the only link between the northern and southern parts of Yorkshire is the East Coast Main Line; and Whitby (pop 14,000) can only be reached from the south by a lengthy diversion via Darlington and Middlesbrough.

GRIMSBY — LOUTH

Louth (pop 12,000) lost its passenger trains in 1970, when the main part of the East Lincolnshire Line closed. A major reason for the closure of the line was its high incidence of level crossings which led to heavy operating costs. However, the 15 miles from Grimsby to Louth were retained, though singled, for freight, and in 1979 a campaign was started to press for a restored passenger service.

The Action Group which was set up was able to charter a special train to York in March 1980, which carried 400 local people. This was followed by a trip to Keighley and a shuttle to Grimsby for Christmas shopping.



The first public excursion train to depart from Bridgnorth since closure in 1963. St. John's R.C. Primary School's "Severn Valley Crusader" to Paddington, SVR locos 7819 "Hinton Manor" and 46521 on Saturday March 14th 1981.
 Photo: Andy Derby

MID HANTS

The Winchester — Alton line closed as late as 1973 (one of the last passenger service withdrawals) thus isolating from the rail network the Hampshire town of Alresford (pop 5,000) and a considerable rural area. The closure also left the town of Alton (pop 14,700) with no direct service to anywhere other than London.

The track was lifted in 1976, but a preservation society was formed and is now re-laying it between Ropley (pop 1,400) and Alton; and running a weekend steam service on the 3 miles between Ropley and Alresford. Medstead is almost reached and re-laying to Alton should be complete in 1984.

When the line is complete, serious consideration could be given to running a service to feed into trains to London. In the long term, if the track is relaid westwards to Winchester, the line could play a role as a strategic route; but its initial importance will be as a feeder.

CHAPTER III THE CASE FOR REOPENING

The effects of closures described in the previous chapter must provide the prime reasons to press for selective reopenings. Such reopenings fall into three categories: stations on existing lines, passenger services on freight-only lines and re-laying tracks for passengers and freight.

Overcoming Problems

There are certainly problems in reopening a railway that has been out of use for many years, with the track lifted and the bed possibly overgrown, obstructed or even sold to farmers. Therefore, in each case, the physical problems associated with reactivation, and consequently the cost, must be weighed alongside the traffic potential. Such potential may be more difficult to forecast than actual re-building cost, for once a neighbourhood has adjusted to its new life without a railway, local people may not realise that "the age of the train" could apply to them, either for local transport needs or for feeding into the national network (a station on the doorstep, even on the quietest of rural lines, serving as an open invitation to the entire network).

Where a former passenger line has been retained for freight (and there are many hundreds of miles of these), the reopening cost is obviously less. It mainly involves upgrading track, stations and other installations to passenger status and possibly providing new rolling stock (though more intensive diagramming of existing stock can sometimes overcome this problem). Residents in the catchment area can be re-introduced to the attractions and potentialities of rail travel through organisations chartering excursion trains. RDS and some of its associated bodies have done just this (see Chapter VI) and been able to assess the extent of local interest.

Although the cost of re-laying track, rebuilding a bridge or just repairing a long-neglected station should be relatively easy to assess, many apparently inflated figures (or "guesstimates"?) have been put forward by a railway administration reluctant to take on new commitments or a local authority biased in favour of roads, in an attempt perhaps to deter those who wish to see progress. Six-figure quotations have been offered to repair, paint and provide access to disused stations with existing platforms. As there is no statutory requirement for the basis of such calculations to be made available to interested parties, one is bound to wonder if there is sometimes deliberate obstruction.

In most cases, BR is prepared to provide a facility if someone else will pay the capital cost and, sometimes, underwrite operating losses that may be incurred. That "somebody" usually means a local authority. Fortunately, some of these have been willing to do so (see chapter IV). Some are sufficiently forward in their planning to realise that railways can play an increasing role in future transport patterns.

While many closures were based on economic shortsightedness, in some cases population movement must be considered. Although an area that has suffered extensive depopulation may not justify continued or renewed rail access, possibly such a facility might have halted or reduced that decline. Leiston (Suffolk) and Wisbech (Cambs) experienced slight population decline after the closure of their passenger services.

The argument of population increase is a strong one for station and line reopening, as will be seen in later chapters. If local authorities are looking for sites for new housing or industrial development, then sites that are or could be rail-served should be looked at very seriously.

The elaborate new station at Milton Keynes Central is a prime example of bringing rail services to new communities; while at Zoetermeer, in the Netherlands a completely new line has been constructed to serve new estates on the outskirts of The Hague.

Operating Changes

Since the large-scale closures of the 1960s, operating changes within BR have enabled many secondary routes to be run more economically. Most far-reaching has been the extensive use of the paytrain, on which the traditional guard's duties are combined with those of a conductor, selling tickets on the train, leaving many formerly-staffed stations as unstaffed halts. Out of nearly 2,400 stations on BR, more than a quarter are totally unmanned, while a certain number of others are only manned for part of the time.

Such a system has its disadvantages, with premises open to vandalism, a greater possibility of fare evasion and the chance of people being left stranded without knowledge when trains are delayed or cancelled. However, some of these shortcomings can be alleviated with more frequent checks by travelling ticket inspectors (being introduced more now with the "open station" concept anyway) and where appropriate installing a public address system with messages relayed from the nearest staffed station or signal box. Such a tannoy system connects the unstaffed Newmarket station with Chippenham Junction signal box, over a mile away, for instance. On the Tyne & Wear Metro, a high degree of automation has been achieved with public address systems and closed circuit television.

The introduction of diesel multiple units enabled a start to be made on cost-cutting. While a few trains were equipped for push-pull working in steam days, most needed facilities for the locomotive to run round at each terminal. This operation with uncoupling, coupling, points and signal manipulations, required at least ten minutes. With a DMU, the driver merely has to walk from one end to the other, enabling a turn-round to be timetabled for as few as two minutes. More importantly, from the cost angle, the run-round facilities could be eliminated, leaving many a modern branch terminus with neither signals nor points — and a branch like that to Sudbury (Suffolk) or Gunnislake (Cornwall) could be operated cheaply as an elongated siding.

Reopened lines can therefore start with this operating bonus that may not have existed or been widespread when they closed. Newer developments can also help cut costs. Possibly the most noteworthy is the design and production of lightweight rail vehicles.

The conventional DMU has a relatively heavily-constructed body and bogies that are fairly expensive and unnecessarily elaborate for use on some low-density services. Among replacement units now at the development stages are a single-car vehicle based on the Leyland bus body (the LEV) and a two-car variation of the same theme (class 141).

Recent research into existing line usage shows that only about half-a-dozen routes in Britain can be operated satisfactorily throughout the day with a single vehicle; so, because of peak and off-peak fluctuations, the 2-car version may become the norm on many secondary routes in the mid-80s and beyond. The important points in this context are the relative cheapness of a train based on bus technology (less than half the purchase price of a conventional unit of similar capacity) and the improved performance in miles per gallon for a train of low tare weight. Such a 2-car unit is expected to cost £300,000 and the first production model could be in service in late 1983.

Other applications of bus technology to a rail environment include the BREL — Leyland Railbus, the Wickham Railbus and the Road-Railer: further discussion of such vehicles is contained in our booklet *Your Local Trains in the 80s*.

Some branches operate with only one train, thus eliminating the need for expensive signalling, and an acceptable frequency could be maintained on some short routes suitable for reopening. An existing line on which this applies is Watford — St. Albans Abbey, 6½ miles long, on which a minimum interval of 40 minutes is possible.

On longer routes, where trains need to pass one another, radio control is likely to be used increasingly, eliminating conventional signalling. Already this has effected savings on much of the single-track route from Inverness to Wick (161½ miles with 12 crossing places). It

Ideally, WSR's role should be two-fold: providing a basic service for local communities throughout the year (for which a small full-time staff would seem essential, and perhaps a modest subsidy from public funds); and serving a leisure market in which volunteers play the major role and which may help subsidise the all-year service. In both respects, its continued and expanded operation can benefit the BR network as well as the local community.

MATLOCK — BUXTON

A main line ran through the Derbyshire Peak District, linking Derby with Manchester and served by express trains from St. Pancras, until 1968 when, despite tremendous local protests, the section north of Matlock was closed and lifted. Matlock itself became the terminus of a paytrain branch.

In 1976, the Peak Railway Society was formed to purchase the 16 miles of trackbed from Matlock to Peak Forest Junction, re-lay the track and ultimately run a passenger service over the re-laid line and onwards to Buxton.

Peakrail would be one of the longest private railways in Britain and would be unique in having a BR link at both ends, thus enabling it to be not only a feeder but also a strategic link. Its plan envisages a community rail service between Buxton and Matlock, serving 6 intermediate stations, throughout the year. At weekends and during the tourist season this would be supplemented by steam trains, enabling visitors to see and enjoy this very scenic area without crowding its roads with cars. A further environmental service would be provided by the company — Peak Rail Operations — in the form of freight trains.

Clearly this reopening project is one of the most significant among the private schemes; and, like the West Somerset, its completion would also bring considerable benefits to BR. As it is, Buxton and Matlock receive excursion trains from time to time — indeed, RDS ran two specials to Matlock in May 1982, — and the existence of steam trains will generate more such traffic and help secure the future of the grant-aided Matlock and Buxton branches.

Progress so far is encouraging. Full outline planning permission has been received (subject in certain instances to conditions) for re-laying the whole of the line; over £40,000 was raised by a loan stock appeal in the autumn of 1981 and shortly afterwards some modest track re-laying began at Matlock. It is hoped to reach Rowsley within two years; work is also in hand on terminal facilities at Buxton; some rolling stock has arrived; and detailed planning permission has been given for a steam centre at Buxton.

An early report by Peak Rail referred to theirs as "a line for all seasons". As well as summing up their aim, this title is also a reminder of the value and relative reliability of rail transport in a rugged area such as this during bad winter weather.

SEVERN VALLEY

The Shropshire town of Bridgnorth (pop 11,000) lost its passenger service in 1965, with the closure of the Kidderminster — Shrewsbury route. A preservation society was formed two years later, however, and by 1970 was operating enthusiast steam trains over 4½ miles of track. In subsequent years this was extended a further 8 miles to Bewdley, and at certain times BR operate a DMU shuttle between that station and their own at Kidderminster.

Bridgnorth people once again had trains to the outside world in 1981, when St. Johns RC Primary School and its parents' association chartered excursions to London. After this successful venture, a similar through train was due to run from Bridgnorth to York in October 1982. Thus the reopened Severn Valley Railway has become, in a modest way, a feeder route into BR as well as an enthusiast and tourist attraction — and this new function could well be exploited further in the future.

Peakrail, Mid Hants and North York Moors could also have a role as strategic links. The narrow-gauge Ffestiniog Railway, as we have seen, also now has a role as a strategic link, following its extension to Blaenau Ffestiniog, and also co-operates with BR in the carriage of parcels.

We should not ignore the role of such preserved lines in stimulating business on the BR routes leading to them. For example, the North Norfolk Railway to Weybourne brings some extra business to BR's Norwich — Sheringham service during the summer. Yet a feeder service into Sheringham from Weybourne would certainly not be viable. Equally, the Nene Valley Railway would find no significant traffic into Peterborough from its Wansford terminus; but has generated enough business from the BR network to make it worthwhile for BR to reopen the Fletton Loop to passengers at peak times and run a connecting DMU service over it. The Nene Valley is also one of a very small number of private lines which also interchange freight with BR.

WEST SOMERSET

The 22½ mile branch to the seaside resort of Minehead (pop 8500) was one of the last to close — in January 1971. Within a few months, the West Somerset Railway Company was formed, on local initiative, to run what is now the longest private railway in the country.

A purchase price for the line was agreed with BR, in January 1973. Somerset County Council purchased the line and arranged to lease it back to the Company, which would operate a passenger service on it. Three years later, trains started running again from Minehead and in subsequent years the line has been gradually brought back into use for nearly 20 miles to Bishops Lydeard.

As well as catering for the leisure market with steam trains, the WSR has also seen its role, right from the start, as providing a service for local people with a basic all-year timetable of a morning and evening return DMU trip. It also has plans to carry bulk freight to and from Watchet harbour — an activity which had been discouraged during the last few years of BR operation.

Clearly the WSR has been fortunate in having County Council support; and attractive country with great tourist potential, which can help underpin day-to-day business.

Problems have, however, beset the line. One was its inability to run into Taunton and therefore feed into and out of the main BR system — passengers having to travel by special bus between Bishops Lydeard and Taunton stations. The reason for this was "blacking" by local NUR members who included some Western National bus drivers. RDS considered this to be a short-sighted attitude. BR would undoubtedly benefit from re-connection of the WSR, and this would ultimately mean more work for railwaymen. In 1981, BR estimated that £250,000 of extra business would be generated by such a move.

In autumn 1982, the NUR lifted its blacking, but the WSR then found itself unable to meet the price being asked by BR to safeguard the extension into Taunton, RDS feels that, even if it is not possible to run WSR trains into Taunton and/or BR trains into Minehead in the immediate future, no obstacles should be placed in the way of this, the most useful strategy to secure the line's long-term prosperity.

A further problem came in the summer of 1981 with a 25% drop in the number of holiday-makers in Somerset and a 12% drop in WSR passengers. Three full-time staff were made redundant, leaving just five, and the Monday — Friday winter service was suspended. Much more reliance is now placed on volunteers. (Previously the WSR had had a considerably higher proportion of paid staff than comparable preserved lines). A further £35,000 rights issue raised working capital to help bring the railway back from the brink of financial disaster.

was introduced hurriedly after storms had destroyed many miles of lineside cabling (costing £8000 a mile) but other routes are being selected for similar treatment and suitable cab equipment is being developed. Here the driver will have an electronically generated visual display and the cab installation will include an electronic token block for ensuring that his section of line is clear of all other traffic.

Level crossings have caused many problems in railway operating costs, for the traditional gated type requires protective signalling and a crossing keeper — on shifts in many cases. Alternatives are being developed, including full barriers that descend across a road; half-barriers; and schemes that rely wholly on unmistakable aural and visual signals for road users. All these can be time-controlled by wheel-to-rail contact and can save staff costs. The capital costs of automating the many crossings on the East Suffolk line could pay for itself in reduced operating costs over ten years.

The simplest of all these systems, with no barriers, could make very satisfactory crossing facilities on minor roads, especially for rail routes at places where train speeds are low. A good example is at Winchelsea (Sussex), where the Ashford — Hastings line crosses an unclassified road at the end of a single platform, at which all but one up and three down trains stop every day. The protecting lights and sounds are generous and should be sufficient in their intensity to remove the worries of all who feel that only solid wooden gates will do.

Although considerable sums have been spent on standardising platform heights as part of the overall railway modernisation programme, do they need to be standardised on all secondary routes? On a few stations, small sets of mobile steps are provided to place between the train doors and lower-than-standard platforms; but where only minor amenities are needed to serve a small community, imaginative use of steps lowered from the train almost to rail level can avoid the need for anything more than a safe, firm piece of flat ground. This facility could and should be integrated into all new designs of rolling stock intended for low-density areas.

It could be argued that too many halts would make journeys unattractive for longer-distance passengers. But lightweight vehicles have greater acceleration than many traditional types; and some halts could be request stops only, as on the Central Wales Line.

Consideration could also be given to experimental halts, with short platforms that could be removed and erected elsewhere if demand is shown to be insufficient, or only of a seasonal nature. A wooden platform could be erected to serve a coastal camping or caravan site in the summer; but moved to serve a football stadium in the winter. The wooden platforms at Ruskington and Metheringham (Lincs), erected in the mid-70s at a cost of £5,600 for each two-platform station, were in fact designed so that they could be dismantled and re-erected elsewhere if unsuccessful.

Potential Usage

When many lines were closed, misleading figures for revenue and expenditure were quoted, as has been mentioned in chapter I, and no account was apparently taken of freight usage. Clearly there are mutual benefits in the sharing of overheads when a route can be used for both passengers and freight. Apart from obvious track maintenance costs, and signalling, a freight train can make faster progress if level crossings are automated for a passenger service on a previously freight-only line. The crew no longer have to open and shut each gate. This makes rail freight working somewhat cheaper and faster — the latter point being especially relevant in these days of fast Speedlink freight, running to a strict timetable. The freight service to Wisbech (Cams), for example, is timed to connect with Speedlink at March — but the crew need to spend at least 20 minutes of their time on the branch opening and shutting gates!

A line that has been relaid for passenger use can be readily available for goods traffic at a later date as long-haul road services become progressively less economic. Already some

hauliers have supported the development of strategic rail-road interchange depots, using rail for journeys in excess of 150 miles and lorries for distribution within a 50-mile radius. Such examples may be found at Romford and Welwyn Garden City in the London area and near Leeds.

Under section 8 of the Railways Act 1974, the Government will provide grants of up to half the cost of a rail freight facility for a private company if it can prove that this will offer environmental benefits by reducing lorry traffic in sensitive areas. This grant can be available for any size of project from tracks, trucks and shunting locomotives to short lengths of new line.

Potential usage must also be favourably affected by marketing changes in BR over the last few years. The growth of railcards, for example, has opened up rail travel to sections of the population who previously often found it too expensive. There are now railcards for students, senior citizens, families, under 24s and even members of the armed forces and their dependents. Raising the upper age for children to travel at half fare (from 13 to 15) and the upper age limit for free travel (from 2 to 4) has meant a certain reduction of rail fares in real terms.

Since 1977, cycles have been carried free of charge on BR. This has proved very popular especially in flatter rural areas. Cycling has grown in popularity since the Beeching era, and bicycle sales more than doubled between 1972 and 1979. The combination of train and cycle for commuting and leisure has become more attractive.

Potential usage of a reopened station or line can also be gauged by how hard local people are prepared to fight for it — and even whether they are prepared to pay part of the cost — a point to which we shall return in chapters IV and VIII.

Not all minor branches are realistic candidates for reactivation, but where a restorable route exists (or preferably, is still in use for freight), existing public transport is inadequate or unattractive, and the size of the surrounding population is more than meagre, initial investigation into the possibility of reopening is worth carrying out.

There is no one set way of tackling this task. It may be undertaken by an energetic and determined individual, a group of people, a local authority or a company that would benefit from easier access for staff if they could travel to and from work by train. A campaign for a line reopening may be a long and arduous job, but eventual success could have worthwhile benefits for a substantial area; on the other hand, while a new or reopened station may provide only localised rewards, the work is more easily sustained and the number of successes over the last decade should be an encouragement to all who wish to see rail as a new travel option within reach of their homes.

CHAPTER VII

A ROLE FOR PRIVATE RAILWAYS?

Some of the many lines which were closed by BR in the 1950s and 1960s have since been reopened by preservation societies or private companies associated with them. There are 22 such lines now featured in the national BR timetable, operating 161½ miles of track, of which 101¼ are ex-BR standard gauge track; the remainder being mainly narrow-gauge. In addition, there are several groups operating steam centres, usually consisting of sidings and a depot or museum, and certain of these have ambitions to operate over longer sections of line if they can acquire them in the future.

Where closed lines have been bought from BR by Preservation Societies, the aim has usually been to reopen as a tourist attraction, using steam locomotives and running mainly in the summer months at the time of day which attracts the leisure market.

Although most of these lines are run and maintained by volunteer labour, with at most a skeleton staff of full-timers, the cost of operating steam locomotives is such that fares are much higher than BR's "Awayday" rates. While several railways do provide a public service, albeit in the summer only, many others currently run between points with little demand for a passenger service. Even where they own trackbed with a view to future track extensions, they still would not necessarily eventually link places capable of generating sizeable public traffic.

So much for the negative side; now let us see to what extent it would be possible to build on the achievements of private railways so that they also contribute to the national network.

Most important of the limitations on such a role are the over-riding wishes of the active owners and operators, who usually prefer to offer entertainment (and amuse themselves in the process) rather than provide a public service. Over the timescale we envisage, however, such attitudes could change.

We are not trying to decide or influence the future of the preservation movements, but only indicating a part that some of these railways could play if that is their owners' wish.

With increasing leisure coupled with a tendency towards small-scale businesses, public passenger transport by rail could in marginal cases be provided by a development of today's preservation societies. Some lines which could not justify a subsidy above the average Public Service Obligation level might become politically acceptable if an average subsidy were coupled with volunteer involvement. This would not encroach on the work of professional railwaymen, as only those lines which might not be acceptable on a fully-paid staff basis would be run on such a shoestring. In a certain limited number of cases, volunteer staffing could bridge the gap between failure and viability.

Most such lines would be feeder branches, and it is important that they make convenient connection with the main line for their potential to be exploited.

Such feeder services could conceivably be provided by the following lines:

Worth Valley	North York Moors
Torbay & Torbay	West Somerset *
Dart Valley *	Severn Valley *
Mid Hants *	East Lancashire *
Peakrail *	

In the case of those asterisked, they will only become feeders if they are extended to the junction. This could also possibly apply to the Bluebell if extended to East Grinstead and to the Kent & East Sussex if extended to Robertsbridge — though the population size of the catchment area for each of these is less than most of those above.

Other British cities in which Metro or light rail schemes could play a useful role are Bristol and Edinburgh, and possibly Cardiff. Plans do in fact exist for an Avon Metro for the Bristol area, including some underground sections, adaptation of some existing routes and re-laying of some abandoned routes.

NEW FREIGHT LINES

The movement of freight would clearly benefit from the re-laying of certain strategic links suggested in this book; and, while we have concentrated on passenger reopenings, it must also be remembered that increased freight traffic and revenue improves the prospect of a better passenger network.

Since the 1974 Railways Act, many firms have applied for grants for new private sidings, rolling stock and equipment, to enable them to send goods by rail that would otherwise have gone by road. RDS has supported many firms in this endeavour.

One of the more ambitious new freight links is a 1½ mile line, opened in January 1980, from the Barry – Bridgend line in South Wales to the Ford plant near Bridgend. The line runs on embankment for much of its length, with two substantial bridges and a level crossing, and is designed to eventually carry 170,000 tonnes a year.

Consideration should be given to similar projects, to serve large factories or major industrial estates. Two examples of the latter may be found in the Wimbledon area. The Morden estate could be served by re-laying part of the Merton Abbey line which runs alongside it; while at the Durnsford Road estate, an existing siding could be extended into the factory area without much difficulty.

Planning authorities should also be encouraged to choose those options for industrial, commercial and mining sites which have rail access, or potential rail access, wherever possible.



Kentish Town West reopened by G.L.C. in 1981 following fire in 1971, after BR sought permanent closure
Photo: W. L. Freitag

CHAPTER IV STATIONS AND LINES REOPENED

Nearly 80 new or reopened stations have been added to the BR network since 1965 (see Appendix B).

Many of these have been reopened following population growth in the area since they closed, for example Feniton (Devon), Ruskington and Metheringham (Lincs) and Alness (Scotland). On this basis, similar candidates for new or reopened stations could include Cornard (south of Sudbury, Suffolk), Yate (between Bristol and Gloucester) Midge Hall and Moss Side (Lancs).

In a few cases, brand new Inter-City stations have been opened by BR using commercial criteria. These are Birmingham International (especially for the exhibition centre and airport), Mansfield & Alfreton Parkway, Bristol Parkway (well-sited for motorways) and Milton Keynes Central. The last of these was financed by the new town Development Corporation – as was the new halt for Newton Aycliffe in Co. Durham.

Dronfield station (North Derbyshire) was reopened as an emergency measure in bad winter weather in 1979 – a move which prompted its permanent reopening, at a cost of £150,000 and appropriate reorganisation of local bus services, in January 1981. RDS would like to see the same thing happen at two other places in that area: Wadsley Bridge (also reopened temporarily) and Stocksbridge on the Sheffield – Penistone route. A local pressure group is also campaigning for the reopening of the main line platform at Dore, encouraged by the successful reopening of Dronfield.

One station, Falmouth, was actually reopened after demand proved too great for the modest halt built to replace it at The Dell!

Sometimes a station has been opened where none existed previously, to cater for a nearby town no longer rail-served – an example being Gypsy Lane (Cleveland) to which a bus link runs from Guisborough. Lelant Saltings was opened in 1979 with a large car-park alongside, to encourage motorists to park there and take the train into St. Ives (Cornwall), thus easing congestion in the resort.

Sometimes a large factory may justify its own halt – such as British Steel Redcar. Stations have also been opened to serve airports at Southampton and Tees Side – a practice that is becoming increasingly common abroad, where Frankfurt, Zurich, Barcelona, Amsterdam and Vienna airports are among those that have been provided with rail services in recent years. RDS has supported proposals for a rail link to Stansted Airport, if it is expanded. Proposals have also been made for a loop to serve Ringway Airport, Manchester.

The same idea can be applied to a port. In 1980, there were plans for a halt to be called Felixstowe Maritime, in the docks complex of this growing port. A start was even made, but work then stopped because, it was said, the Docks Company had cash-flow problems.

Passenger Transport Executives often have a good record in opening or reopening stations. West Yorkshire has reopened Crossflats, Slaithwaite, Fitzwilliam and Deighton. The last two of these cost £76,000 and £65,000 respectively, for two platforms, lighting and shelters. The PTE plans to continue this process at the rate of about three a year. West Midlands has opened three new stations on the Longbridge – Four Oaks route in 1978. This increased access to the line, coupled with a more intensive service and some bus reorganisation boosted passenger usage from 11,000 each weekday in 1977 to 35,000 – nearly a third of whom could have made their journeys by car but chose the trains instead.

Electric trains have faster acceleration than diesels and can be used more intensively, with less time out of operation for maintenance and none for fuelling. This usually enables a more intensive service to be provided when a line is electrified, which in turn makes it easier to re-introduce stopping trains on main lines.

There are, for example, only five intermediate stations on the Colchester – Norwich main line, 63½ miles long and due for electrification by 1987. There were thirteen other stations, mostly closed in the 1960s. These would not justify Inter-City services, but certain of them (e.g. Ardleigh, Bentley, Bramford, Claydon, Haughley, Mellis and Fornsett) could justify a stopping electric multiple unit service. Similar examples may be found on other main lines ripe for electrification, such as Bedford – Sheffield (see below) and the Hitchin – Huntingdon section of the East Coast Main Line, where there has been some local interest in the reopening of Arlesey.

Many stations that have been satisfactorily reopened as unstaffed halts had been fully staffed at the time of closure. This must be borne in mind when considering other candidates also. A prime example is Lostock Hall, south of Preston, fully staffed when closed in 1969 as paytrains had not then been introduced. Yet pressure for its reopening started in 1975, at a time when the population in its vicinity was steadily increasing. A further advantage for this station is that, following changes in the railway layout south of Preston, its site is now passed by 33 trains a day compared with 18 at the time when it closed.

Another closed station serving a growing residential area is Chandlers Ford, Hants. where the population is now over 7,000. Here, rather the reverse has happened to the Lostock Hall situation, for changes in train routing has meant that only two regular daily passenger trains pass through the station site. However, the town of Romsey (pop. 12,000) would benefit from a direct service to the London main line at Eastleigh, and RDS has therefore pressed for a DMU service to be re-introduced on this route, either as a shuttle or as part of a circular route serving Southampton as well.

Who pays and how?

It is beyond the scope of this book to give a comprehensive list of every station that could possibly be reopened – indeed, in some cases this would depend on the planning and land-use policies of local authorities and trends in local economics. However, by quoting various examples, and suggesting others, we hope that we have shown the scope for further such action.

How can such action be brought about? Who pays? In the majority of cases it has been the local authority, at County and sometimes District level. A few other special cases are noteworthy – the reopening of Matlock Bath was assisted by the Chamber of Commerce and Lymington Commando by the Ministry of Defence. Wetheral, near Carlisle, was reopened on the initiative of Cumbria County Council, but the process was eased by also being a job creation scheme. A similar scheme has made possible the refurbishment of stations between Wrexham and Shotton, in Clwyd, and the role of the Manpower Services Commission in giving practical help with reopenings could certainly be further exploited.

Magdalen Road, near Kings Lynn, was reopened in 1975 largely because a local pressure group conducted a survey of potential usage, raised over £700 and did some of the work (painting and tidying the station). Fortunately it was not a major project as the station buildings and platforms were intact but suffering from 7 years of disuse.

Villagers at Watton-at-Stone (Herts) had a bigger problem, as their station had been demolished. Yet the self-help principle was again involved. The Parish Council contributed £2,000 towards the reconstruction through the raising of a 1p rate. A further £3,000 came from voluntary contributions – including a national appeal launched by RDS and a contribution from the local Branch of the Society, which worked closely with the Parish Council. Such action encouraged Herts. County Council and BR to meet the main part of

rather specialised instance at Blackpool). Continental cities like Amsterdam, Gothenburg and Vienna have shown that a modern tramway system can offer fast, convenient, pollution free methods of moving large numbers of people.



Station on Tyne-side Metro

Although only three French towns still have trams, plans were announced in 1982 for twelve towns and cities to build new tramlines, including Nantes (whose system should open in 1984), Grenoble, Strasbourg, Toulouse, Bordeaux and the northern outskirts of Paris.

There are two light rail, or tramway, schemes in East London which merit consideration. One is the trackbed of the former Great Northern Railway branch from Finsbury Park to Muswell Hill via Highgate. Haringey Council and London Transport have shown an interest in the scheme, and a local pressure group has been formed to arouse public interest and gain support for it. The capital cost has been quoted as £16 million, though this could be an overestimate. Nevertheless, that sum, for little over 4 miles of light railway, would only buy three miles of motorway in a rural area and much less in an urban area!

A similar scheme is also being studied for the Docklands area, running from Cubitt Town, on the Isle of Dogs, to Mile End Underground station and Minories. Such a line would, at £65 million, be much less costly than an eastward extension of the Jubilee Line but, with vehicles travelling at up to 50 mph, be more attractive than buses.

Such light railways need not follow abandoned trackbeds all the way, but could where appropriate also be laid in roadways, rather like bus lanes, and even in the central reservation of dual carriageway roads.

Wider advantages are that such a route could also become a "shop window" for light rapid transit technology and hardware, particularly with an eye to the export market.

It would be advisable for such routes to be laid in standard, rather than metre gauge, so that if traffic levels demanded they could more easily be replaced by heavy rails in the future. Production of rolling stock and equipment would also be cheaper if a decision were taken, at Governmental level, to impose a high degree of standardisation on such schemes.

via Snow Hill and the tunnel and out to Leamington and Stratford-upon-Avon, thus forming a cross-city line to complement the existing one.

Such a link would offer more reliable and speedy journeys from the Stourbridge line into the city centre; save on costly road improvement schemes and revitalise commerce and industry in several parts of the city.

RDS has also put the case for a 1 3/4 mile extension of the Longbridge route to Frankley, where it would serve a new estate of 12,000 residents. In 1978, the cost of such an extension was estimated at £3 1/2 million, including re-laying a single track and building a new station.

IMPROVING THE WREXHAM – BIRKENHEAD LINE

Some modest reopenings could improve the usefulness of this line. Indeed, some success has already been achieved, as the low-level station at Shotton was reopened in 1972, making easy interchange possible between western parts of the Wirral and the North Wales Coast Line.

The opening of a similar halt at Prenton/Woodchurch, where the line crosses the A552 near exit 3 of the M53 motorway, would give access not only to nearby housing estates, but to the new hospital complex at Arrowse Park. It could also serve a leisure complex, three large supermarkets and the West Cheshire Industrial Estate. RDS' corporate member, the Wrexham – Birkenhead Rail Users' Association, has campaigned since its formation in 1980 for such a halt.

In the longer term two freight-only lines could be restored to the passenger network. Part of the route from Dee Marsh North Junction to Mickle Trafford could, by means of a short connecting line at Chester, give the Western Wirral direct access to Chester and the lines radiating from it. Clwyd's county town of Mold is at the end of a short freight-only branch of the Shotton – Wrexham section. An experimental bus link from Mold to the intermediate station of Buckley was not very successful and was withdrawn early in 1982; but a DMU service through to Wrexham General, for connections onward to the Midlands, London and South Wales, might prove more attractive.

BRISTOL – PORTISHEAD

The town of Portishead is still linked to Bristol by a freight-only line and consideration could be given to re-introducing a DMU service similar to that on the Severn Beach branch. In the mid-1970s, a cost of just £20,000 was quoted to bring the line up to passenger standard, though it is understood to have deteriorated considerably in recent years.

A restored passenger service would feed passengers from Portishead and Pill (a sizeable intermediate village with a well-sited station) into the many Inter-City trains serving Bristol Temple Meads, and could also provide more frequent trains for the existing stations at Bedminster and Parson Street.

It would however, probably be less attractive as a commuter route because of the rather circuitous journey to Temple Meads station which is itself not well-sited for the city centre. However, if the Avon Metro scheme becomes a reality, the Portishead branch could certainly become part of it, and should therefore be retained for that reason at least.

LIGHT RAIL?

Mention of the Avon Metro brings us to the need to consider alternatives to a conventional and relatively high-cost railway, which may not always be the best reopening option.

The Tyne & Wear Metro has shown that a system of light vehicles, similar to tramcars, could be cheaper but still attractive. Indeed, Britain is almost alone among major European countries in having written off the tram for urban and suburban transport (apart from the



Possible site for Arlesey Station

Photo: W. L. Freitag



View looking north of the new station at Watton-at-Stone. (Reopened with local support May 1982.

Photo: W. L. Freitag

the £150,000 bill. That total sum is higher than would be required for many reopenings, as it was said that the platforms would have to be long enough for 6-car trains; and a ticket office, lighting, seats, cycle racks etc. all had to be erected from scratch.

One other station reopening strategy worthy of note is Dales Rail. Most stations on the Settle — Carlisle line were closed in 1970, but occasional ramblers' excursions still used them; and in 1975 the Yorkshire Dales National Park Committee undertook to finance the rehabilitation of four stations. £5,000 proved to be adequate for this, as the Railways Inspectorate of the Department of Transport agreed to accept less stringent standards than would be required for stations in regular use.

The National Park Committee then chartered trains from BR to run to these stations on selected weekends; and also on the Blackburn — Hellifield and Northallerton — Redmire routes. This was principally to give walkers access to the area without congesting it with cars; but also in some cases providing a shopping service for Dales folk back into the towns.

Line reopenings

Two lines have been reopened for Inter-City business. Coventry — Leamington (see also below) was reopened in the mid 1970s to enable trains from the south of England and parts of the Western Region to serve Coventry and Birmingham International. Perth — Ladybank was reopened to give a shorter journey from Edinburgh to Perth and Inverness.

The Peterborough — Spalding line was closed in 1970, as was most of the East Lincs. route of which it was the southernmost part; but it was retained as a diversionary route. This left the town of Spalding, with some 16,000 population, served by only three regular trains in each direction on the March — Doncaster line and a 1-hour bus journey into the nearest big centre, Peterborough. A restored rail service would cover the trip in just 20 minutes, and so the District and County Councils agreed to subsidise a morning and evening shuttle. By the mid-1970s, a mid-day train had been added, and by 1982 there were 7 trains a day between Spalding and Peterborough.

Central Glasgow is a far cry from the windswept horizons of the Fens — but, like this area, it too has a reopened line. One of the city's underground routes was electrified and reopened as the Argyle Line in 1979.

A short length of line that used to run from Derby to the Leicestershire coalfield was reopened with County Council support in 1976, with two completely new halts, Sinfon North and Central, to serve local factories. Unfortunately, Sinfon did not attract as much business as predicted, and is now reduced to a peak-hour service only. One reason was insufficient co-ordination between trains and work times; another was that new halts in the residential area north of Derby, which should have been part of the same scheme, were not built.

The long-closed Ponteland branch, north-west of Newcastle, has been partially reopened to passengers as part of the Tyne & Wear Metro, largely as a result of housing developments in the area. It could well be extended from its present Bankfoot terminus to serve Newcastle Airport. The line is interesting in that, as well as Metro, it is still used for BR freight trains; and, despite having an intensive service, it also boasts a level crossing protected just by flashing lights.

2. **Luton — Dunstable:** Dunstable (pop.31,000) lost its passenger trains in 1965, when they were infrequent and steam-hauled. The line is still open for freight, however, and runs parallel to the busy A505. Trains could not physically run into Luton Midland station, but a platform could be built alongside it, where the line runs between it and the bus station. Halts could be constructed on the sites of Dunstable's two former stations, both of which have easy road access and are adjacent to residential areas; or a new halt could be built near the Civic Centre. Our Society first suggested such a restored service in comments on the Bedfordshire Structure Plan in 1976, when we pointed out that buses between Luton and Dunstable take twice as long as the trains used to; and that one advantage of the line was the absence of level crossings on it.
3. **Thame:** The Oxfordshire town of Thame is at the end of a 6-mile freight branch from Princes Risborough. Its population of 7,000 could be served by a DMU shuttle on the branch, or an extension of the DMU service from Marylebone particularly if the Princes Risborough — Aylesbury line were served solely by a new strategic link as described in Chapter V. Two platforms and a passing loop remain at Thame, and the station was reasonably sited for the eastern part of the town. Alternatively, a new halt could be built at the present end of the line, 200 yards closer to the town centre. Instead of reopening this line, Thame could be served by a reopened station at Haddenham, 2 miles away on the existing Marylebone — Banbury line, to which it could also be linked by the Oxford — Aylesbury bus. Ludgershall, further along the same line, is another possible candidate for reopening; as is South Aylesbury Halt on the Aylesbury — Princes Risborough line.



Thame, a station, a line which locals want re-opened

Photo: W. L. Freitag

WEST MIDLAND FEEDERS

The success of the cross-Birmingham Four Oaks — Longbridge service (see Chapter IV) has encouraged local pressure groups, including RDS, to press for track to be relaid to the site of the former Snow Hill station (presently used as a car park) and onwards through the disused tunnel to Moor Street. A total of four miles of track would have to be relaid, following which it would be possible to run trains from West Bromwich and Stourbridge

link to Manton should be maintained to passenger standards for excursion traffic; and options left open for a curve at Manton to allow direct running from Corby to Stamford and Peterborough on a possible future strategic link.

MANSFIELD AND EREWASH VALLEY

The town of Mansfield (pop 59,000) was once served by several lines, but has been isolated from the rail passenger network since the closure of the last of these in the late 1960s. Freight trains still run through the town, however, serving it and the Nottinghamshire coalfield.

A small move towards putting Mansfield back on the passenger map came with the opening of Alfreton & Mansfield Parkway station in May 1973. This new station was on the site of the closed Alfreton & South Normanton station on the Midland Main Line up the Erewash Valley, 8 miles west of the town and linked to it by bus. Then, in May 1982, a rail link coach was introduced from Mansfield in the other direction, some 20 miles to Newark Northgate, taking 52 minutes for the journey.

However, while Mansfield has road connections to two stations, from each of which it is possible to catch trains to London or the North, one would expect that many local people wish to go to Nottingham, the county town and nearest large centre. A passenger service there would be possible, using the freight-only line via Kirby-in-Ashfield and Pinxton to the Erewash Valley Main Line, then via reopened stations at Eastwood and Ilkeston into Nottingham. Thus, as well as serving Mansfield, a restored passenger service could also be accessible to a sizeable population through which Inter-City trains now flash on their way between Sheffield and St. Pancras.

SOUTH WALES

The South Wales valleys were once seamed with close on thirty routes or branches built primarily to transport coal down to the ports and on to the main lines to serve the rest of the country. Many passenger services also operated, of course, down from the valleys to Cardiff, Newport and Swansea. Most have now gone. Only the Rhymney, Merthyr and Treherbert lines still have passenger trains in the valley proper, plus the Newport — Hereford and Swansea — Shrewsbury routes on the edges.

Whilst it is understandable that pit closures and duplication of routes made some rail closures inevitable, it is also remarkable that towns the size of Aberdare (38,000) and Ebbw Vale (20,000) should be left without passenger trains. The freight-only lines serving both towns are still in use, and serious consideration should be given to linking them back into the main centres of Cardiff and Newport and thereby into the Inter-City network.

Aberdare and Mountain Ash could be served by a fast DMU link from Cardiff, which could divide at Abercynon, the other half going to Merthyr. Some excursions were run from the Aberdare line in the 1970s.

The County Council has also shown some interest in a restored passenger service on the Vale of Glamorgan Line between Barry and Bridgend; but this passes through a less heavily populated area and its passenger potential is rather less.

SOUTH EAST FEEDERS

Three short lines in the South East could be reopened to feed passengers into the commuter and Inter-City network:

1. **Isle of Grain:** An investigation was carried out in 1978 into a possible restored passenger service on the main section of the Gravesend — Grain route, serving the Hoo Peninsula in North Kent, with the District Council showing an interest. The line closed in steam days, since when there has been considerable development in the area.

THE CASE FOR REOPENING THROUGH ROUTES

STRATEGIC LINKS

The widespread feeling of those in authority in the 1960s that everybody needing to travel at all regularly would soon have a motor vehicle led to an assumption that the rest of the population — mainly the old, young and disabled — could be catered for by bus and coach services and a meagre rail network linking large population centres only.

The network would have radiated from London, with the removal of even some of the radial lines, supplemented by an extremely small number of cross-country links. It was argued that the time of non-motorists was of little value in cost-benefit terms, and so they could afford to spend a long time on cross-country journeys. They could either use roundabout routes or travel via London using two radial lines and often the London Underground. Users of the direct Oxford — Cambridge line, it was said, could still travel via London; the fact that the journey would take half as long again, and cost half as much again, plus the inconvenience of two changes in London, was not regarded as of consequence.

Intermediate travellers on such routes could use "express" buses — which were often so much less popular than the trains they replaced that they in turn disappeared. Those who owned cars could drive over reasonably parallel roads — but this situation is likely to change if they have to rely on the limited-mileage battery-operated car (which could well be the mode of private transport of the future) and the restoration of strategic cross-country rail lines will become increasingly an economic necessity.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Some of the cross-country services followed routes which are still open for freight in trainloads; while others have been retained in part to serve a major customer such as a colliery or power station. Here restoration of a passenger service, and possibly re-laying of short sections or building of new spurs, could be done relatively easily.

Where the whole track has been lifted and part or all of the trackbed sold, it is important to convince planners of the long-term desirability of restoring the rail link. Such long-term decisions should be taken now, to prevent obstruction of the right of way which would be expensive to remedy. What is essentially a holding operation must be undertaken as soon as possible.

Re-introduction of passenger services on existing freight lines could start in the very near future, however. In 1981, a year of recession, rail passenger miles travelled were 5% up on 1976. This increase was mainly in longer journeys, such as those of which cross-country strategic links could form a part.

Cross-country routes currently used by fast block trains with a high axle loading are eminently suitable for express DMU operation, with very little extra track or other infrastructure costs. In such cases, passenger revenue should make a substantial contribution to movement costs, especially when the service has become established. Indeed, a modest contribution from Local Authorities through whose territory the route lies could also be justifiable, particularly if the cost of roadworks could be avoided or lessened.

Where tracks have been lifted, the emphasis must be on making it possible to reopen in the future by safeguarding routes, trackbeds, station sites, viaducts, tunnels, major embankments etc. The use of abandoned routes for footpaths, cycleways etc. need not be opposed — in some cases, where there was previously a double-track line, a single track only may be needed, and so there would still be room for cyclists or pedestrians. See: "Study of Disused Railways in England and Wales — Potential Cycle Routes", John Grimshaw &

Associates, HMSO 1982 paras. 2.5.4, 4.6, 5.15 and Annex A4. Road improvements using rail formations should also be laid out so that railway restoration is not prejudiced. What should be avoided where possible is the building of houses on the trackbed; and selling it off piecemeal for a variety of uses

There should be a conscious political decision to define the eventual network now. The bodies most suitable for assessing the nature and extent of the network would be British Rail, the Departments of Transport and the Environment and the County Planning Departments, using public consultation procedures (as was done, for example, in the late 1970s for railway electrification) and they should get to work as soon as possible.

One final word of warning: the routes of closed or abandoned lines need not be followed slavishly. In some cases they could be cut and spliced into the radial Inter-City lines instead of being restored in their entirety. In certain cases, cutting and splicing parts of two closed routes serving the same area could offer a better service. In others, the construction of a relatively short length of completely new line could enhance the value of a restored railway. There is even a case for following the course of a canal instead of reinstating a steeply graded and tortuous railway if this would give the same end-result.

In the rest of this chapter (and to some extent in Chapter VII) we shall examine strategic routes whose restoration should be given serious and urgent consideration.

EAST LANCASHIRE

East Lancashire is something of a rail cul-de-sac. From the industrial towns of Blackburn and Burnley, Accrington, Nelson and Colne (combined population of well over 200,000) there is a service westwards to Preston; and from Blackburn one southwards to Manchester; but nothing northwards or eastwards. Indeed, reaching the area from the eastern side of the Pennines entails a lengthy detour via Manchester, in some cases changing stations and often awkward connections. Yet there were three routes north and east from this area, and two of them are still in situ.

1. The Blackburn — Hellifield freight line is still sometimes used as a diversionary route. It has also been used, in recent years, by excursion trains from Clitheroe — a town which, with 13,000 population, would surely support a feeder service into Blackburn. East Lancs. could be linked to Yorkshire by this route, but it would be as circuitous as via Manchester. As a through route its main uses would be for diversionary purposes when engineering work takes place on the West Coast Main Line and for access to the Dales for schemes such as Dales-rail (q.v.)
2. The Copypit Line from Rose Grove to Todmorden is still used by a few summer holiday trains from Yorkshire to Blackpool. It provides the most direct link from the Leeds — Bradford conurbation to Burnley, Blackburn and Preston. A regular passenger service from, say, Blackburn to Bradford, could also connect at Low Moor with a restored Spen Valley service (q.v.), making possibly a journey from East Lancs. to Sheffield with only one change of train. Accrington could also be catered for by such a service; while at Burnley the closed Manchester Road station could be reopened. Occasional charter trains have been operated over this line by the local rail users' group, Support the East Lancs. Line Association.
3. Colne — Skipton was not closed until 1970, but has since been lifted and some building has taken place over the trackbed. It could be an alternative to Copypit for Bradford and Leeds, but could not serve Halifax or the Spen Valley and the heavy cost of reinstating it might be deemed less worthwhile than using Copypit, which is still there.

In conclusion, then, we believe that in principle there should be a strategic link between East Lancs. and West Yorks, and that Copypit, on balance, would be the best route, although no single solution is perfect. Another priority should be a feeder service into Blackburn from Clitheroe, also serving Whalley and possibly new halts at Billington and Henthorne. Indeed, the local authorities have at times shown an interest in such a service.

major Scottish cities. A restored passenger service on the 6½ mile branch from the main line at Stirling could therefore perform a useful feeder role.

The line is used for freight, and its continuation eastwards to Kincardine, Culross and the main line at Dunfermline is still in situ though disused. It could, however, be reopened for coal traffic if NCB plans to develop the Hurst coal seam go ahead.

The line was closed to passengers in 1969; but a decade later local people set up an Alloa Rail Action Committee to press for a restored passenger link to Stirling. Central Regional Council produced a report in August 1980 which came out against reopening — but the study was felt in some quarters to be insufficiently objective or imaginative.

ARAC therefore commissioned a second study, which was carried out by a senior lecturer at Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh. This study, issued in February 1982, concluded that there was indeed a sound case for a train service to Alloa, and that there was a more economical form of operation.

The study pointed out that Alloa station was close to the town centre and bus station, making short bus feeders from the rest of Clackmannanshire an attractive possibility. It also showed Alloa could be served by reorganising the existing DMU service from Edinburgh and Glasgow to Stirling and Dunblane. Such reorganisation would make for increased utilisation of rolling stock and give Alloa a pattern of services to Stirling and in some cases through to Glasgow or Edinburgh, throughout the day. Slightly fewer DMU trains would serve Dunblane as a result, but certain of the Glasgow — Aberdeen Inter-City trains could call there instead.

CORBY AND THE MIDLAND MAIN LINE

The 1960s saw a spate of draconian closures of stations in Northamptonshire, leaving only two, Kettering and Wellingborough, on the section of the Midland Main Line (St. Pancras — Sheffield) that passes through the county; and leaving Corby, with a population of over 50,000 as one of the largest towns in the country without passenger trains.

There is scope for selective reopening of stations on the main line, especially if they could be served by fast-accelerating multiple unit trains. Priority should be given to Desborough, where the line runs past this town of 5,500 population and a reopened station could also serve Rothwell, a town of similar size 2 miles away. Wigston, serving the southern suburbs of Leicester and Kibworth are further possibilities; as is a new station at Sharnbrook with park-and-ride facilities for a wide area of north Bedfordshire and the Rushden area of Northants.

Such new stations could be served by Inter-City type DMUs, which could largely replace the ageing stock on the locomotive-hauled stopping trains currently serving Kettering and Wellingborough, though these two towns should justify some stops in longer-distance Inter-City trains as well. In the longer term, electrification should be extended northwards from Bedford and the EMUs could then serve East Northants as effectively as they do the western part of the county.

Corby could be served by a shuttle to Kettering, though more business would be attracted if the town were the terminus of a longer-distance service. This could mean a link southwards to Bedford and London; or via the Bedford — Bletchley route to Oxford. (with connections to London at Bedford). The Rail Link Bus from Peterborough might also become more popular if it terminated at Corby and linked with southbound trains.

In September 1982, plans were unveiled for a leisure centre at Corby catering for 5 million visitors a year, from a wide area, from 1985 onwards. If this project comes to fruition, it should attract additional business for a restored rail link.

There is less of a case for a regular passenger service northwards from Corby, though the

catering for students from many parts of Britain and overseas, would also generate sizeable inward traffic.

The County Council's officers spent a year studying the survey and then came out against reopening, and suggested a better bus service instead — despite the fact that respondents to the survey had voted 6 to 1 in favour of a rail link rather than improved buses. In fact councillors voted to take no further action, despite being briefed by RDS and the local action committee with answers to the officers' points; and none was prepared to debate the issue with us.

However, this was not the end of the campaign. Further meetings were held locally, every opportunity was taken to raise the question — in Structure Plan and Public Transport Plan consultations for example — and in September 1978, RDS and the action committee chartered a 4-car diesel train to run from Wisbech to Cambridge and filled it with local people. Since then, four more specials have been run — two to Cambridge and one each to Lowestoft and Felixstowe — and well over a thousand local people have used the line on these occasions.



R.D.S. Special from Wisbech to Felixstowe on Sunday June 27th 1982 takes on passengers from the platform in Wisbech Goods Depot. (The passenger station was demolished shortly after closure). Photo: Peter Sumner

In May 1982, BR introduced a Rail Link Bus from Peterborough to Kings Lynn, serving Wisbech. This move could be interpreted as recognition that Wisbech should not have been cut out of the rail network in the first place! It remains to be seen how attractive this bus will be to local people, however, and in any case it runs on an east-west route, whereas the railway runs north-south — so the two could be said to be catering for different markets.

STIRLING — ALLOA

The town of Alloa has a population of 14,000 and a catchment area of 50,000; yet is 8 miles from the nearest railhead, at Stirling, from where it is possible to catch trains to most

BURY — ROCHDALE

One of the last of the Beeching-inspired closures, the route from Bury to Rochdale via Heywood, lost its passenger trains (which had continued on to Bolton) in October 1970. Local residents protested but were largely unorganised, and some heat was taken out of the protests by PTE promises of alternative buses.

However, these buses have since been reduced in frequency and are subject to much delay. Meanwhile, increasing affluence and demand for lower-density housing has led to a considerable increase in commuting from the Heywood area.

Therefore, the Greater Manchester Structure Plan Transportation Study in 1975 suggested a "re-assessment" of rail services in areas with "growth potential may be realistic".

In 1979, a local RDS member organised a 700-name petition calling for a feasibility study of reopening the line. This led, the following year, to the formation of STORM (Support The Oldham — Rochdale — Manchester Line Association) which combined the functions of a users' group for the line through Oldham and a reopening campaign for Rochdale — Bury.

By coincidence, at this time BR suddenly decided to divert a freight contract from the line and carry coal for part of its journey by road. They intended to pull the tracks up within a few weeks.

After much publicity, and support of local Borough Councils, the track has been retained, and indeed Pedigree Petfoods have requested a section 8 grant for new rail sidings on to the line.

MANCHESTER — SHEFFIELD via WOODHEAD

Passenger trains on the Manchester — Sheffield via Woodhead route, 42 miles long, were withdrawn despite tremendous public opposition and three TUCC inquiries in 1970; not because they were making a loss, but to enable BR to develop the line for Trans-Pennine freight. This left only the more southerly Hope Valley line for Manchester — Sheffield trains, and deteriorating tunnels mean that this is frequently closed for engineering work.

The Woodhead Tunnel, on the other hand, was not opened until 1954 and is the most modern under the Pennines. The route, furthermore, is the only electrified one under the backbone of England.

There was, not surprisingly, widespread opposition when BR proposed closing entirely the central 15 miles of this route, including the tunnel itself. In 1981 RDS, in conjunction with two other bodies, organised public meetings at either end; local authorities protested and in some cases railwaymen took limited industrial action. The NUR sponsored its own inquiry, which resulted in a postponement of the closure — but it went ahead in July 1981. The track is still there at the time of writing, however; and our Society, and other bodies, have urged that the route should not only be retained for freight but that it can, and should, also accommodate a restored passenger service.

To facilitate this, it would be desirable to build a new curve at Sheffield, to avoid reversal at Nunnery Junction, at a cost of £2,500,000. The obsolete 1500v DC system would need to be converted to BR's standard 250v AC — for which BR gave an estimate of £24,000,000 which was considered in many quarters to be inflated. Be that as it may, with no need to start from scratch, electrification costs per mile would be less than on any other Trans-Pennine line.

What of the potential business? Electrification of Sheffield — Bedford (to which BR gives high priority) would allow fast all-electric journeys from Manchester to the East Midlands and a variety of other Trans-Pennine journeys would be made more attractive. With greater clearances on the Woodhead route, it is also suited to heavy freight traffic. Nor must local

business be forgotten — the line's catchment area includes Tameside, Glossop, Penistone and Stocksbridge, with a combined population of 250,000 but at present a lack of attractive Inter-City services; and, in the case of Penistone unattractive (and Stocksbridge, no) local services into Sheffield.

SOUTH MANCHESTER LINKS

The southern half of Greater Manchester is served by six radial routes from Piccadilly station but, apart from the Stockport — Stalybridge line on its eastern edge, it lacks an orbital route. Stockport is a major centre in its own right, with a population of 280,000; yet for journeys like Romiley — Stockport or Altrincham — Stockport it is necessary to travel into Manchester first.

A line still exists from Woodley to Glazebrook via Stockport Tiviot Dale, and local pressure has been mounted for a restored passenger service, initially from Woodley (or Romiley) to Tiviot Dale and then on to Altrincham and possibly Warrington. The Community Councils of Romiley, Marple and Woodley are backing this proposal, as is the local Area Representative of RDS.

In the summer of 1982, BR indicated their intention to close permanently the section between Portwood sidings and Cheadle Junction. The M63 extension in the vicinity was routed carefully to avoid the rail line, and the local Community Councils are pressing for the line to be "mothballed" if BR have no immediate use for it, rather than abandoned.

Manchester sorely needs a North — South link as well, and the City planners continue to favour the "Picc-Vic" Tunnel, between Piccadilly and Victoria stations. BR has made proposals for a Castlefield Curve and then Windsor Link to the west of the city centre — either of which would obviously be cheaper than the tunnel, but less direct and less comprehensive in the range of destinations which it would serve.

Greater Manchester Council are proposing that the route out of the city from Chorlton through Didsbury and beyond (the former Midland Main Line) should be used currently as a "walkway" while retaining the option of using the alignment for a rapid transit system. The RDS Representative is pressing the case for this route to be eventually developed as a conventional railway so that it can link in with the existing system, probably at Cornbrook Junction.

SPEN VALLEY

At one time, West Yorkshire could be said to be overloaded with railways, when half a dozen companies built competing lines which formed a rather straggling unco-ordinated web over the area. Many of these lines, and many individual stations, were closed in a piecemeal fashion before and during the Beeching era, leaving considerable residential areas with no connection to each other, and some with no rail links at all.

Dewsbury (pop 52,000) for example has a link to Leeds and Huddersfield but no direct link to Bradford, Wakefield or Halifax. Its only reasonable link southwards to Sheffield and London involves going northwards to Leeds, or westwards to Huddersfield first, and changing. To the northwest of Dewsbury, the towns of Cleckheaton (pop 6,000) and Heckmondwike (pop 9,500) have no passenger service, though a 6½ mile freight-only line, maintained to passenger standard, passes through them, and a catchment area of some 30,000, from Thornhill to Low Moor. This is normally referred to as the Spen Valley Line.

A service could be provided from Bradford to Wakefield via this route; or alternatively from Bradford to Barnsley and Sheffield, interchanging at Thornhill with the Huddersfield — Wakefield service. It would feed into Inter-City services at Sheffield, and should be operated by Inter-City standard DMUs or hauled stock, to offer an attractive and comfortable alternative to the M1.

running a successful charter train in 1977, carrying 250 people and two similar trains in subsequent years. A seaside special to Yarmouth was also run, with 350 passengers, in 1980; and a local school chartered a train from Aylsham to Ely.

Suspension of the freight service has meant that no passenger specials could run in 1982, though ADRAC and RDS consider that there is now a proven market for these.

As the line has very few level crossings, and 4 of the 5 stations are intact, we consider that a lightweight railbus service into Norwich would be feasible, though — unlike the excursions — it would almost certainly need a subsidy.

CAMBRIDGE — ST. IVES

This 14-mile line was East Anglia's last passenger closure, but has remained open to sand traffic from pits between Swavesey and St. Ives and spasmodic traffic from a jam factory at Histon. A capital cost of £110,000 was quoted for reopening it in 1973 when, following pressure by the then Chesterton Rural District Council and local individuals, BR showed an interest in reopening provided that Cambridgeshire County Council paid the bill. The Council undertook a somewhat limited feasibility study but the majority of councillors voted against providing any money.

In January 1980 the track was cut back about a mile from St. Ives, after the exhausting of local gravel pits, though the trackbed is still there and RDS has made representations to the planning authorities for its protection. The St. Ives by-pass now runs over the old station site, but a halt could be built alongside it.

The line was closed at a time when the population in its catchment area, and particularly in St. Ives itself, was rising. The town had just over 5000 residents in the mid-1960s but had expanded to 12,000 by the early 1980s. The combined population of the four villages with stations on the line was 6,000 in 1967 and is now 10,600. If one or more halts were provided between Histon and Cambridge, the catchment area would be even larger, since considerable residential development has taken place, or been proposed, for that area.

As it is, nearly 1,400 return journeys were made on four special trains chartered by RDS on the line between March 1979 and April 1981. The vast majority of these were by local people using the train for trips to Cambridge, London or Stevenage. A seaside special was also chartered in 1980 by the Combined Churches of Histon and Impington. Another body which has shown an interest in the line is the local Ecology Party, which put forward a scheme for an experimental Road-Railer vehicle to use the track between Cambridge and Swavesey and then continue as a bus over local roads for the last few miles to St. Ives and Huntingdon.

In summer 1981, the state of rotting sleepers caused BR engineers to suspend the running of special passenger trains and impose severe speed restrictions on the freight. Some replacement work has now been carried out, however, and we believe that a restored excursion service, and ultimately a regular passenger service, are again worthy of consideration.

MARCH — WISBECH

Wisbech, Capital of the Fens, is the largest East Anglian town without passenger trains, having lost the second of its two former services in 1968, partly because of the high cost of repairing a bridge on the section that is now abandoned. On the remaining section, from March, the freight prospers and pressure for a restored passenger service started when our Society called a 70-strong public meeting in Wisbech in 1974.

The action committee that was subsequently formed undertook a detailed survey of potential usage, indicating that a daily total of 926 journeys would be made by local people over the 7½ mile line. The presence in Wisbech of a large college of further education,

to London, York and Matlock. Most have run from Dereham, but three have also served the northern part of the line, and all have been chartered by RDS and one or both of its two local affiliated groups — resulting in close on 4000 return journeys on the line.

Although the running of the special trains has been the activity that has kept this campaign most in the public eye, it has also spent considerable time on research and well-documented representations to the various authorities, putting the case for reopening. Both RDS and WyDFRAC were invited to participate in the hearings into the Norfolk Structure Plan, which chose Dereham and Fakenham as two of the six market towns in the county earmarked for growth.



Passengers wait at Kimberley Park for the RDS/WyDFRAC special from Dereham to Felixstowe, which draws in on Sunday August 22nd 1982

Photo: Peter Sumner

WROXHAM — AYLISHAM — REEPHAM

The Norfolk market towns of Aylsham and Reepham lost their passenger services on the route from Wroxham and Norwich in 1952, when trains were slow and steam-hauled and stations fully staffed.

They subsequently lost their stations on the Midland & Great Northern network in 1959 and Reepham (pop 1800) had by the mid 1970s also lost most of its bus services; while Aylsham's buses are less than direct and subject to congestion in Norwich.

Our Society therefore put the case for a restored passenger service on the 15 miles of line and formed the Aylsham & District Rail Action Committee in 1975. After two years of campaigning, during which it built up a membership of over 200, ADRAC succeeded in

Park-and-ride should also be encouraged. It is rare to find motorists persuaded to park and ride by bus — but the concept has proved successful when applied to the train, and elsewhere some "Parkway" stations have been opened specifically to cater for this (see Chapter IV). On a reopened Spen Valley route, there could be a "Calderdale Parkway" station at Low Moor and "Kirklees Parkway" at Thornhill, in addition to reopened stations at Cleckheaton and Heckmondwyke. This would encourage motorists to park and go by train into the centre of Bradford or Sheffield. Calderdale Parkway could also serve as an interchange station for trains to and from Halifax. Kirklees Parkway would be about 1½ miles from the centre of Dewsbury, but there is a frequent bus service to this site.

The line was closed to passengers in 1965, at a time when its stations were fully staffed — which they would not be under the reopening proposal. It closed to freight in May 1980, but West Yorks. County Council are paying a retainer to BR to prevent them from recovering redundant assets.

Restoration of this short strategic link in the passenger network should therefore be pursued with some urgency. It would open up many journeys which are at present only possible by lengthy diversions and haphazard connections — if at all — and feed new business into longer-distance Inter-City trains.

LEAMINGTON — COVENTRY — NUNEATON

The major city of Coventry had until 1977 no regular rail services northwards or southwards. For any journey other than towards London it was necessary to travel into Birmingham first.

The reopening of the Leamington — Coventry line for use by Inter-City trains from Paddington to Birmingham, and from the South Coast, has improved matters somewhat; but as one of the ten largest cities in the country, with a population of 340,000, Coventry still has a very limited range of destinations that can be reached directly by rail.

The 9-mile Coventry — Nuneaton line is occasionally used by passenger trains as a diversionary route, and should be brought back into the regular passenger network. It would then be possible to run a DMU service from Stratford-on-Avon to Leicester calling at Leamington, Kenilworth, Coventry, Nuneaton, Hinckley and Narborough.

Apart from improving Coventry's links, especially to the East Midlands and East Coast, it would also make Stratford-on-Avon, one of England's top tourist attractions, more easily accessible from the North and East. The university town of Warwick (pop 18,000) would also benefit, as would Kenilworth (pop 20,000), whose station on the Coventry — Leamington section could be reopened. Narborough station could be served by this service only, thereby speeding up some of the long-distance trains on the Birmingham — Leicester route.

As reversals would be necessary at Leamington and Nuneaton, the new service should be DMU-operated. There is no problem at Leamington, since a bay exists for Stratford trains. If there is any lay-out or signalling problem in reversing at Nuneaton, trains could serve the station, continue on to the goods loop and reverse over that towards Hinckley.

In 1979, the Central Transport Consultative Committee suggested that this route could support at least a peak-hour DMU service; and in approving the Warwick Structure Plan the Secretary of State asked for a fresh study of its reopening prospects.

WALSALL

The industrial town of Walsall (pop 185,000) has a suburban service into Birmingham but no rail passenger link to anywhere else. The restoration of passenger trains on two short lines would give it direct access to the North and West.

A shuttle service could be provided to and from Wolverhampton via Willenhall with one train, feeding into services to Telford, Shrewsbury and Central Wales. There is support for this scheme from local councillors.

A service could also be provided on the Walsall — Rugeley line, calling at Cannock and Hednesford. Indeed, consideration could be given to electrifying the line and diverting Birmingham — Stoke — Manchester trains over it.

The Midlands Branch of RDS has for several years been campaigning, in co-operation with a local pressure group, for Walsall to have links in other directions; and as part of this campaign ran a special train from Birmingham via Walsall to Matlock in May 1982.

NORTHAMPTON — MARKET HARBOROUGH

Northamptonshire has been particularly severely affected by rail closures (see section on Corby, Chap. VI). As a result Northampton has rail services only to the south-east and north-west, along the West Coast Main Line. Particularly in view of the recent development of Northampton, the line from Northampton to Market Harborough, for many years used for freight and special passenger trains, but recently closed, would provide a most useful link between stations from London to Northampton on the West Coast Main Line to Market Harborough, Leicester and the East Midlands and Yorkshire, avoiding the circuitous route via Rugby and Nuneaton (with a change at the latter) as well as providing a diversionary route in case of obstruction of the Midland Main Line south of Market Harborough. Some of these functions could also be provided by running the Bletchley — Bedford service into Bedford Midland station; but the reopening of the Northampton — Market Harborough link would benefit Northampton, whereas the other link would not. A Welland Valley Railway Revival Group was formed in 1981 to restore this link, appealing to the enthusiast market. Such a group, if successful, could find scope for co-operation with BR.

SOUTH MIDLANDS LINK

A glance at the current railway map shows a large area to the North and West of London crossed by half a dozen lines radiating from the capital with little or nothing connecting them to each other. East-west journeys by rail between East Anglia, the South Midlands and the West are impossible unless one travels via London or ventures round the circuitous route by Peterborough, Melton Mowbray, Leicester, Nuneaton and Birmingham.

This is a problem not only for passengers but also for freight. It is, for example, not possible to put a direct rail alternative to the proposed A1 — M1 link road — part of the multi-million pound "Birmingham — Düsseldorf High Street" of which the road lobby so fondly talks.

Yet such a rail route did exist. It was the Oxford — Bletchley — Cambridge line, 77 miles in length, all but about 5 miles of it double track, linking 6 main lines and enabling passengers to travel between the two university cities in a couple of hours. Significantly, the route was not a closure candidate in the original Beeching Plan — indeed, there were proposals to increase its freight role.

Lack of co-ordination between the three BR Regions through which it ran could be said to be one of the reasons for its fragmentation, however; and any study of restoring it must examine each of those sections.

From Oxford to Bletchley the line is intact, though part is singled, and used for freight. Some of the stations and halts on it were isolated and lightly-used; but Bicester and Winslow could be reopened, with possibly one or two others, and served by a semi-fast service to Bedford or Milton Keynes Central or even Northampton. At Winslow, the platforms are intact, there is ample parking space and new housing estates have grown up within easy walking distance of the old station.

The success of the Metro in revitalising public transport has spurred on the active members of DRAG (over 40 of them), as has the knowledge that the area has one of the lowest car ownership ratios in the country. The Action Group has mounted a publicity stall in the centre of Consett and other towns, published badges and calendars, organised sponsored walks. It has also campaigned for bus improvements, one of its successes being the retention of the Crookhall — Consett service.

Its most ambitious project to date is the writing of a detailed study of the line and the case for reopening, to be presented to local politicians. Durham County Council has shown that it has a more open mind towards such projects than some of its counterparts elsewhere, and BR has not been unsympathetic. Uncertainty about future freight traffic, however, now that the steelworks has gone, lends some urgency to this campaign for the line to be used once again for passenger trains. RDS has constantly supported DRAG and has given a small donation towards the cost of printing its report.

Although the line has not so far enjoyed any public excursions, BRB Chairman Sir Peter Parker used it as far as Beamish in September 1982, for a visit to the museum; and on December 3rd 1982, the royal train travelled the length of the line, bringing HRH Prince of Wales and his party on a visit to Consett.

WYMONDHAM — DEREHAM — FAKENHAM

The Norfolk town of Dereham (pop 10,000) became the largest in that county to be without passenger trains when it lost its DMU service to Wymondham and Norwich in October 1969; having lost its links to Wells-next-the-Sea (via Fakenham) and Kings Lynn (via Swaffham) during the previous five years. As in so many comparable areas, the so-called replacement bus services soon withered away.

Our Society initiated a reopening campaign for the now freight-only line as far as Fakenham in 1974 and found a ready response among local people, who set up the Wymondham, Dereham & Fakenham Rail Action Committee (WyDFRAC). Together RDS and WyDFRAC put the arguments for a restored passenger service — initially only to Dereham perhaps, but ultimately to Fakenham — capital cost of which, in 1974, was estimated at £246,000. A large part of this cost would be taken up in automation or simplification of some 15 level crossings. Manning these could be expensive in the days of passenger trains; with the current freight services, gates were opened and shut by the train crew. Clearly the latter mode of operation would be unsuitable for an attractive, regular passenger service. A BR/DTp report, Level Crossing Protection (1978) indicated that continental type level crossings could and should be introduced in this country on existing secondary passenger routes — and reopening campaigns like WyDFRAC were quick to point out that this method could also cut the cost of restoring freight-only routes to passenger standard.

WyDFRAC therefore launched a Passenger Service Reopening Fund, which swelled to nearly £1,000, as a step towards automating crossings on the branch. After giving the matter some consideration, BR replied that they could only accept financial help for such work if it involved all crossings on the line. (However, one crossing was replaced by flashing lights in connection with road remodelling as part of the Dereham by-pass scheme.)

Meanwhile, freight facilities were withdrawn from the last 2½ miles to Fakenham in 1979, and the track lifted — despite the efforts of RDS, WyDFRAC and the Fakenham & Dereham Railway Society, the last of which hopes to buy part, and ultimately all, of the track north of Dereham and run a private service. Such a scheme would not be incompatible with a BR passenger service from Norwich to Dereham, which remains WyDFRAC's aim.

Despite some of the problems and setbacks, we have now established the idea of opening the branch for excursion traffic, as has also happened at Bideford. Special trains have been run on twelve occasions since 1978, ranging from shuttles between Dereham and Norwich catering primarily for shoppers; seaside specials to five different resorts; to hauled trains

the Exeter — Barnstaple — Bideford line, which gave four daily trains to Bideford and two on Sundays, without the need for any extra train units. At this stage the County Council offered a £10,000 subsidy and asked the District Councils for further contributions. The operating costs of the extension of the service to Bideford were put at £1,600 per week. Capital costs amounted to £32,700 for station alterations and additions at Barnstaple, £1,900 for work at Bideford (station signs etc) and £1,300 for a catchpoint at Bideford.

Although BR's terms were more attractive than previously, the County Council still decided in June 1982, not to go ahead with the project; and not to run an express bus service from Bideford to Barnstaple station either. In the autumn BR announced the termination of their freight service to Meeth because of the state of the track.

Further excursions ran on the line in 1982, however, not only for the benefit of local people but also bringing inward traffic during the holiday season; and the line remains one of those which should be high on the list of priorities for experimental reopening, ideally with central government financial support.

NEWCASTLE — CONSETT

Consett lost its passenger trains on the route from Newcastle via Chester-le-Street and Stanley in the 1950s, when they were slow, infrequent and steam-hauled. Indeed, the line was more important for freight, serving Consett's giant steel works. When these closed in 1981, it became even more desirable that the town of Consett (pop 40,000) should have attractive public transport links.

In 1980 a Derwentside Rail Action Group was set up, to press for a restored rail passenger service on this 14-mile line, with local bus services integrated with it. Such a rail service would, in turn, feed into the Tyne & Wear Metro and Inter-City services at Newcastle. Trains would also serve the substantial centre of Annfield Plain (for superstore) and Beamish Industrial Museum. Three stations could have good park-and-ride facilities; five could be served by buses.



Prince Charles' visit to Consett

Photo: Consett Guardian

The Marylebone — Aylesbury service could also possibly be extended up to Calvert, where the former Great Central Main Line joins the Oxford — Bletchley route, and on to Milton Keynes (in which case trains from Oxford might interconnect and run onwards to Bedford). The town of Aylesbury (pop 40,000) at present has no direct rail links to anywhere other than towards London. A further improvement of Aylesbury's links could be provided by re-laying the abandoned 5 miles from Bourne End to High Wycombe and operating a service from Slough, on the Western Region Main Line, to High Wycombe, Princes Risborough, Aylesbury and then northwards to Milton Keynes. Such a service could also benefit the steam centre at Quainton Road, to which BR run an occasional DMU shuttle from Aylesbury.

Some alteration to trackwork at Bletchley would be necessary if a passenger service were restored on the line from Oxford; or else a platform could be provided on the flyover. Such a link would also be an asset to the new city of Milton Keynes, whose new station opened in May 1982 and whose population is destined to grow to 250,000. At present, its only long-distance rail service is on the West Coast Main Line.

In the mid 1970s, some study was made by the Milton Keynes Development Corporation, in co-operation with the then Railway Development Association, into the possibility of a restored passenger service to Oxford. The RDA was also active in fighting to save the Bedford — Bletchley service; and in 1980 the RDS established the Bedford — Bletchley Rail Users' Association, which is actively working for the future prosperity of the local service on this section. Ultimately, BBRUA hopes to see this service extended to Bedford Midland Road station, where it will then become more useful as a link in longer journeys.

Thus 47 miles of this former 77-mile route are still there. The eastern section has been almost totally abandoned and in many cases the trackbed sold. However, the importance of establishing such a link means that very serious consideration should be given to rebuilding the 8½ miles between Bedford and Sandy as a strategic link. Where it is not possible to use the old trackbed, a suitable new alignment should be investigated. In fact, virtually the whole of the old trackbed is unobstructed.

On reaching the East Coast Main Line at Sandy, trains could run northwards to Peterborough and then on to East Anglia; or southwards via Hitchin and perhaps a new curve. Such a route would be more circuitous than via St. Ives or Lords Bridge, but either of the latter would involve expensive reconstruction; and it must also be borne in mind that much of the traffic would be heading for places further east than Cambridge anyway. The most important fact is that construction of 8½ miles of track in fairly easy, open country would provide a strategic link across the South Midlands and make many journeys more feasible.

ST. ALBANS LINK

The Watford Junction — St. Albans Abbey branch could have an added role as a through route if it were linked with the Midland Main Line. At present, rail travellers from Watford and adjacent parts of North West London wishing to go to Luton or points north must walk over a mile from St. Albans Abbey to St. Albans City station. — and the numbers who therefore use rail for such trips are negligible.

Yet the trackbed of the former St. Albans Abbey — Hatfield route is still unobstructed and could be used for a single track line, as far as London Road, climbing then on a new curve to join the Midland Main Line. DMU trains could reverse in and out of Abbey station

RDS put this point at an inquiry into the District Plan at St. Albans in 1982 and considers that, while this link is not of such high priority as that between the two Bedford stations, and would be more expensive than that scheme, it should be an option for the future.

A less expensive, but temporary, solution could be to reopen the old St. Albans London

Road station, as from there the walk to City station would only be about 500 yards. Also, this would provide added custom on the branch, originating from a well-populated area of the city.



Watford N. on Watford Junction to St. Albans Abbey. Station reopened by Watford Borough
Photo: W. L. Freitag

LONDON ORBITAL LINES: CROSS TOWN LINK LINE

The 3 miles of line from Dalston Junction to Stratford were closed to passengers as part of a wider withdrawal of services between Broad Street and the East End of London in 1944, following war damage.

This had left a gap in the London rail network, between the northern and eastern parts of the city, and various bodies (including our Society) pressed for it to be plugged. One campaign, for "Ring Rail" in 1973, pressed for a complete orbital route for the capital similar to the "Ceinture" in Paris or the two "Ringbahnen" in Berlin (one of which is now severed by the Wall).

In 1979, a step towards plugging this gap was made when BR reopened the Stratford Low Level - Dalston West Junction route, extending the North Woolwich - Stratford trains over it and on to Camden Road. A half-hourly service of DMUs was provided, connecting with North London Line electrics at three stations and with the Underground at Stratford and Highbury & Islington. Two new stations on the reopened line came into being the following year, at Hackney Central and Hackney Wick.

However, the new service has been beset with problems. The DMUs are ageing and not too comfortable; there were no weekend trains; staff shortages caused many cancellations, so that the service could not be relied upon. In March 1981, the London & Home Counties Branch of RDS published the results of a survey of local opinion on the line, drawing attention to complaints such as these and suggesting improvements.

CHAPTER VI

THE CASE FOR REOPENING FEEDER ROUTES

In Chapter II we showed how branch lines not only serve local needs but also feed traffic into the main line system. Reopening of the links suggested in Chapter V would enable towns such as Kenilworth, Cannock, Bathgate, Cleckheaton and Winslow to feed business back into the Inter-City trains.

A number of other sizeable towns are the terminal, or potential termini of freight-only lines which could be reopened to passengers, linking them back into the system at their nearest junction or a larger centre. In several such cases, local reopening campaigns have sprung up since the mid 1970s.

BARNSTAPLE - BIDEFORD

The North Devon Line passenger service runs for 39 miles from Exeter to Barnstaple. Bideford, 9 miles beyond Barnstaple on the freight line to Meeth, lost its passenger trains in 1965. The town has a population of 12,000, though its urban area, including Appledore and Westward Ho! contains nearly 20,000 (as opposed to about 17,000 in Barnstaple) and this is of course swollen by summer visitors.

To estimate likely demand for a Bideford train service, it seemed best to local campaigners to examine existing passenger use on the Exeter - Barnstaple line. An excellent survey was available, published by the Polytechnic of Central London Transport Studies Group in 1976. From the data for the use of Barnstaple station, it was concluded that a Bideford service would have the best chance of success if it catered primarily for long-distance travellers. The campaign to reopen the station therefore concentrated on the need for a fast Inter-City feeder service to Exeter - something very different from the unsuccessful slow branch trains withdrawn in 1965.

It took about 18 months of negotiations to organise the first special passenger train from Bideford in 1977. A certain initial reluctance on BR's part because of the practicalities involved were overcome, and in the event nearly 600 passengers filled the train for an excursion to London.

Further excursions and other charter trains followed - about 30 in all - run not only by the reopening campaigners but also by a local school, a Round Table, Pickfords Travel, Crookham Travel, Ellerman lines and in some cases BR themselves. These have included trains from London to Bideford for ship launching parties at Appledore shipyard.

In 1979, the extent of this traffic was causing local politicians to take an interest; and in the General Election of that year, the railway became the subject of manifesto commitments. One such was from Tony Speller, who said that, if elected to Parliament, he would endeavour to reopen the line. Increased interest in rail travel in general in the area also led to the formation of the North Devon Railway Line Development Group, primarily as a users' group for the existing service.

Meanwhile, in response to a request from the County Council, BR produced a quotation for reopening. The price, based (correctly if unimaginatively) on the normal PTE costing formula for an extra train, was sky-high for a Shire County. It amounted to about a quarter of the annual bus subsidy for all routes in Devon and was rejected by the Council.

A further complication was the discovery that, should the new service fail to attract adequate support, it could not be withdrawn until the full and lengthy closure procedure had run its course. A suggestion from the South West Transport Users' Consultative Committee, however, led to Tony Speller's Bill (see Appendix) which became law in 1981 with all-party support.

As a result of the new legislation, the County's financial risk is much lower, and they started fresh negotiations with BR; who produced an imaginative timetable for the whole of

track was lifted two years later, but almost all the formation, including the principal viaducts, is intact.

Boat trains to Stranraer, for the shortest sea crossing to Northern Ireland, now have to travel 133 miles from Dumfries to the port, via Ayr, rather than 74 miles via the direct route. Furthermore, when the latter was closed, there was also a steamer service from Heysham to Belfast, but this was withdrawn in 1975, thus funnelling more traffic via Stranraer. The troubles in Northern Ireland have also led to an increase in traffic. In fact the number of passengers on the short sea route to Northern Ireland jumped from 651,652 in 1974 to 1,250,662 in 1978. Ferry traffic has also expanded, from 21,000 in 1967 to 160,000 in 1977 and this has produced a vast increase in traffic on the A75 between Stranraer and Dumfries, with a big rise in road accidents and environmental disturbance.

In 1976 the Scottish Association for Public Transport issued a paper which investigated transport opinions for this part of South West Scotland and favoured the long-term re-opening of the direct line. Locally, the Galloway Railway Reinstatement Group was formed to press for it. During 1982, efforts have been made by several bodies, including RDS, to press for the protection of the trackbed to be included in the Dumfries & Galloway Structure Plan.

Schemes have been mooted to improve the A75 road — in November 1981, these were estimated to cost over £2,500,000. British Rail have also been gaining new business on the longer, Ayr, route, as a result of the upsurge in travel to Northern Ireland. Since 1977 the Stranraer — London overnight train has been supplemented by an extra one in summer as far as Carlisle; while a haulage firm has established a rail freight depot at Stranraer, taking advantage of the grants available under the 1974 Railways Act. So how much more business could the railways capture with a more direct route, saving at least 90 minutes on journey time?

Looking further ahead, there have been plans discussed for a tunnel under the North Channel between Scotland and Northern Ireland. Such a scheme, like the more famous Channel Tunnel between England and France, would, if rail-served, have far-reaching implications for the network in Britain and Ireland. The change of gauge necessary on arrival in Ireland could be coped with relatively easily once the major engineering feats of reinstatement of the Galloway line and building of the Tunnel have been completed.

Such a scheme could well qualify for support under the Transport Infrastructure Fund being proposed by the EEC to ease communication bottlenecks between member countries.

AIRDRIE — EDINBURGH

The towns of Airdrie (pop 37,000) and Coatbridge (52,000) have a good service into Glasgow; but journeys into Edinburgh and other places in eastern Scotland involve an indirect trip with at least one change of train. Yet a continuation of the Glasgow — Airdrie route still exists, through Bathgate to Ratho, where it joins the Glasgow — Edinburgh main line. Part of the track is still in use, but that between Airdrie and Bathgate was lifted in summer 1982.

Re-laying of this track, and a restored passenger service over the route would not only give Coatbridge and Airdrie an eastern outlet; it would also serve Bathgate (pop 14,000) where the station is well-sited in relation to the town, and could provide access for Livingston New Town.



Hackney Wick Station reopened with G.L.C. funding on Woolwich — Camden Road Line
Photo: W. L. Freitag

In summer 1982, the Greater London Council announced its willingness to provide a £9,100,000 grant to meet the cost of electrifying the entire route from Dalston to North Woolwich and modernising the signalling. Provided that a satisfactory link into the City at Broad Street/Liverpool Street is maintained, such a move should make the Cross-Town Link more attractive and help it fulfil its potential.

RING-RAIL — AN ANSWER TO SOME OF LONDON'S PROBLEMS?

Having made a start on orbital services round London, would BR also be well-advised to establish a complete route round the city? This would ease the way for freight, excursion traffic, movement between the various suburbs and a certain amount of long-distance passengers. For as well as being a strategic link, such an orbital route could also become a feeder. For example, if main line trains stopped at West Hampstead, passengers from places such as Acton and Richmond could join them there, by using the North London Line, rather than travelling into the centre of London first.

If the Channel Tunnel is built, it is even more important that the extra freight traffic thereby generated is enabled to avoid London. Routes like Tonbridge — Guildford — Reading will obviously have a role to play here; but so too could a more cohesive orbital route through the London suburbs.

Using existing routes, with additional spurs and tracks where necessary, would be much less costly than a multi-million pound main-line tunnel under Central London (though this should not be ruled out at some stage in the future); and, of course, much cheaper than the M25 orbital motorway which was to cost over £500,000,000 at 1978 prices.



Proposed Welham Green Station site on G. N. main line

Photo: W. L. Freitag



W. Brompton District Line with W. London Line running parallel

Photo: Eric Barbery

The "Ring Rail" concept certainly merits an up-to-date investigation. It would make use of the existing North London and South London lines; the West London Extension which is mainly used for freight; and certain other associated routes; the main new engineering feature being a tunnel under the Thames in East London.

BOURNEMOUTH AND DORSET

The major resort of Bournemouth (pop 153,000) has only one passenger route through it in an East – West direction. A cross-country journey from Bristol entails a 106 mile safari via Southampton, with a change of trains, taking 2 hours 40 minutes minimum.

In the rest of Dorset, the remaining passenger lines hardly form a co-ordinated system, with no ease of interchange. A Bournemouth – Exeter journey, for example, requires two changes of train and walks between stations at Dorchester and Yeovil.

It is tempting to suggest reinstatement of at least the Broadstone – Cole section of the former Somerset & Dorset Railway, with an interchange at Temple Combe and a spur on to the main line at Bruton, as giving more direct access to Bournemouth. However, the Blandford viaduct has been demolished and so the need to reinstate this and possibly other major engineering works would probably put the cost out of all proportion to the usefulness of the line.

Building a new station at Dorchester Junction, and proper integration of the services meeting there, would provide a far cheaper, though lengthier, alternative.

A Bournemouth – Exeter service could also be considered (or at least reorganisation of existing trains with handy connections), using a new Dorchester station and the link line between Yeovil's two surviving stations – also giving that town's 25,000 inhabitants better access to the main line.

SOUTH – MID WALES

The reopening of the Ffestiniog Railway through to Blaenau Ffestiniog has made it possible, at least in summer, to travel by rail between North and Mid Wales once more. The Ffestiniog itself enjoyed a 15% increase in traffic after the link was completed. Journeys between the central and southern parts of the Principality, however, are only possible with a time-consuming trek via Shrewsbury and Hereford.

One way of providing a more direct route would be to reinstate the 56 miles of track between Carmarthen and Aberystwyth – but this would not provide direct access to the Cambrian Coast Line, and has no intermediate places of any importance except Lampeter. A rail link coach might possibly be considered here.

A shorter alternative could be provided by reinstating just 33 miles from Moat Lane (Shrewsbury – Aberystwyth line) to Builth Road (Central Wales Line). Dovey Junction, for both Aberystwyth and the Cambrian Coast, could thus be reached in about the same 190 minutes as the fastest feasible times via the former Carmarthen route, the junction at Moat Lane being remodelled so that it faced towards Caersws.

A possible extension of this route could be to Abergavenny (Shrewsbury – Newport line), by re-laying southwards from Builth Road to Talybont and then following the route of the canal to Abergavenny, allowing faster journeys to Gwent and possibly Cardiff.

The trackbed should be retained pending investigation of the cost and feasibility of such a link in Central Wales.

GALLOWAY LINK

In the teeth of fierce local opposition, the direct line from Dumfries to Challock Junction via Castle Douglas and Newton Stewart in south west Scotland was closed in 1965. The