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modernrailways@keypublishing.com



The Editor, Modern Railways, Key Publishing,
PO Box 100, Stamford, Lincolnshire PE9 1XP

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PASSENGERS DETEST REPLACEMENT BUSES

I wholeheartedly agree with Alan Williams (p98, April issue) that 'rail passengers would much prefer to stay on a diverted train, even if the journey took longer'.

As Timetable Strategy Manager (now retired) for Great Western Railway, I was seconded to the Reading remodelling project to plan the alterations to train services at each stage of the work. My remit was to keep passengers on the trains for as much of their journeys as possible, even if the diversionary routes used resulted in longer train journeys.

For one of the earlier major stages of the work, Reading station was completely closed to all trains (except on the Waterloo route), so my inter-city train plan was this: Paddington to Bristol and South Wales services diverted via High Wycombe, Banbury (reverse), Oxford (call), Foxhall Junction, then booked route; Paddington to West of England services started from Waterloo and were routed via Basingstoke (picking up Reading passengers, by bus), Salisbury, Westbury (reverse), then booked route. Connecting trains ran from Oxford to Worcester and from Swindon to Cheltenham.

These two routes, with their connections, provided most long-distance passengers with through trains. However, to make this plan work involved co-operation with other train operators, Network Rail's willingness to arrange route clearance for the HSTs, route familiarisation for our train crews over the Waterloo route, and the use of freight drivers to pilot our trains over the High Wycombe route was needed. Once it was proven to work, this was used as the base plan when further closures took place.

Of course, for many journeys, the use of bus replacements was necessary, but these were kept to a minimum. As an example, when the route west from Reading to Southcote Junction was closed, an easy option would have been bus replacement between Reading and Newbury. But, with the co-operation of Network Rail, a temporary platform was built alongside the freight line at Theale, from where West of England services

were started, resulting in a much shorter bus journey between Reading and Theale. Incidentally, this platform is still in place and has occasional use.

It is disappointing that Network Rail so often takes the 'easy' route, expecting train operators to bus passengers over long distances, rather than considering innovative options to reduce this need. I agree that more use should be made of single line working (which does not require bi-directional signalling, just the use of a pilotman over the affected section). I was heartened that recently, here in Cornwall, during the replacement of the Up span of a bridge at Lostwithiel, single line working was instituted between there and Par for the two weeks of the work. This allowed an hourly through train service to operate, albeit with some additional journey time.

It would be of so much benefit to rail passengers if there could be co-operation (as happened during the Reading project) between all those involved. Perhaps that may be possible going forward, as the national rail system has, in effect, been renationalised!

DAVID MATHIESON
Camborne

WITNEY SCHEME MAY NOT BE IN STAGES

We welcome your report about plans to reinstate rail services between Oxford, Eynsham, Witney and Carterton (p12, April issue), but our focus on a bid to the Government's Restoring your Railway fund meant our website had not kept pace, resulting in your coverage not being able to reflect our latest thinking, as the website does now.

While a staged approach to reopening a rail link between Oxford and Carterton/RAF Brize Norton via Eynsham/Salt Cross Garden Village and Witney remains a possibility, we are not advocating that as the only or even the preferred way forward. It is for the DfT's Ideas Fund-backed studies to help us move towards identifying the most efficient means to realise the socioeconomic and environmental as well as conventional transport benefits of recreating such a rail link, to serve the long-term needs of a steadily growing but



Successful blockade in Cornwall: on 7 March 2021 GWR's No 802106 working the 10.18 Penzance to Paddington passes the track renewal site at Tregarne near Probus; a temporary speed restriction (TSR) of 50mph was in place over the new track. Craig Munday

heavily car-dependent catchment already exceeding 50,000 people.

In the immediate future, we're exercised by the need to ensure the committed upgrade of the A40 from Witney to Oxford does not jeopardise the prospects for a new rail link in the same corridor. Meanwhile, we await the white smoke appearing above Great Minster House, and live in hope!

CHARLIE MAYNARD
Chair, Witney Oxford Transport Group

WILL FOCs USE UPGRADES?

Julian Worth's article about infill electrification for freight (p75, April issue) makes very interesting reading and all his proposals make sound operating and consequently economic sense. One

point he doesn't raise is if all these simple and quick win enhancements are executed, will they be used by the freight operating companies?

An interesting situation currently exists where the Scottish Government funded the electrification of the freight-only line from Fouldubs Junction to Grangemouth as part of the Stirling-Alloa-Dunblane scheme. Principal trains on this electrified line are from the Ineos refinery at Grangemouth, operated by Colas, to non-electrified destinations, and the container trains, operated by DB Cargo, to and from the Grangemouth Tdg terminal. These container trains run to either Daventry or Mossend, and the corridor they traverse is wired from departure point to destination, yet these trains use diesel