
REPORTS BY CHAIRMAN, MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY, COMMITTEES AND SUB COMMITTEES**CHAIRMAN****Mike Crowhurst**

2008 was a volatile year politically and economically. Inevitably this was reflected in rail policy. The climate began to shift radically during the year. Previously taboo subjects such as electrification and even high-speed lines began to be discussed seriously. Politicians on all sides suddenly started making encouraging statements. Having met rail minister Tom Harris for the second time early in the year, the policy resolutions passed at the AGM prompted a useful dialogue with him during the summer. This came to an abrupt end with the autumn reshuffle, which also saw Secretary of State Ruth Kelly depart, only weeks after her Damascus-Road conversion to electrification. Harris's replacement Lord Adonis and his shadow Theresa Villiers are both sending encouraging signals, so we will be seeking meetings with them in the New Year. Let us hope they remain in place long enough to achieve some impact.

As the economic situation deteriorated in the autumn, the implications for railways were unclear. On one hand there was talk of bringing forward spending plans - notably some new rolling stock - while on the other hand it was widely suggested that some investment plans might need to be deferred, especially if passenger loadings fall. An unencouraging pointer at the year end was some excessively high fare increases, including over 10% on notoriously overcrowded Cross Country. If such a policy of pricing off demand was applied to aviation, would we still need a third runway at Heathrow? One has to wonder. Meantime the steady stream of consultation documents and Route Utilisation Strategies continues unabated and keeps us all busy.

Our own programme during 2008 featured several highly successful conferences. In March we were actively represented at the European Passenger Federation's AGM in London. Our own AGM was in Coventry in May. July saw us in Salisbury for a users' and campaigners' conference, for which all credit goes to Wessex branch chairman John Friedberger and his wife. Finally in November in London we heard about the longer term prospects from several senior speakers. In 2009 we shall be in Yorkshire twice - in Leeds in May for the AGM and in Northallerton in July for a conference on the role of the independent sector, jointly with the Wensleydale Railway. At the time of writing the 2009 autumn conference remains to be decided.

On the domestic front, we have had to make further changes to personnel, and part company with treasurer Bob Imrie, following late production of Annual Reports and Accounts over the last two years, incurring the displeasure of both Companies House and HM Revenue & Customs. Remedial measures have involved Vice Chairman Jerry Alderson being appointed Director of Finance, and a redistribution of financial, membership and administrative tasks between David Harby, Deltic Design and company secretary Colin Lingard. We are confident that these problems are now behind us, so by the time you read this the 2008 documentation should be in order.

MEMBERSHIP**David Harby**

Membership at the end of 2008 was 2376 with 116 family members counted as two (31.12.2007 = 2472). Over the past 10 years the annual loss has been consistently close to 10% of the membership every year. I now write to all members who fail to renew asking them to tell us why. During 2008 around a third decided to renew when they received this letter, another third had either died or were seriously ill and several more indicated financial reasons as the main factor in their choice to resign.

In 2008 we ran an advertising campaign and distributed a targeted leaflet to Tourist venues. This has had some success but the best recruitment sources we have are our website followed by personal contact from existing members. The website is undergoing a revamp but we cannot rely on this alone. I would strongly urge all members to try to recruit a friend. After all if everyone did this our membership would double.

To finish I would like to thank those branch membership and other officers who have been proactive and helpful to me in 2008.

INTERNATIONAL & EU COMMITTEE**Andrew MacFarlane**

The International & EU Committee met three times in 2008, in Leicester, Derby and again in Leicester. In addition a number of members of the committee helped with the arrangements for the March 2008 European Passengers' Federation (EPF) AGM.

A significant victory was achieved during the year in that Eurostar agreed to stop some Brussels services (one each way per day) at Ashford. This was supposed to have happened from the December 2008 timetable change. However Eurostar used the fire in the Channel Tunnel as an excuse not to introduce the stops from that date. At the time of writing (late January 2009) it is hoped that the Brussels service will be provided to and from Ashford as from 23rd February.

It has been pleasing to see the healthy increase in Eurostar's passenger numbers since the completion of High Speed One and the opening of St Pancras International station. It has also been encouraging to see the increase in through bookings from the regions of the UK through to the Continent via Eurostar. *Railfuture* had a large response to its questionnaire to Eurostar users between December 2007 and March 2008 and the results were forwarded to all interested parties. The top three suggestions were: 1. More trains to call at Ashford, in particular the restoration of the Brussels service; 2 Cheaper fares or a simpler fares structure; 3 Through services to more destinations (e.g. Cologne, Amsterdam, Switzerland, South of France).

The committee has sent a questionnaire to the three main political parties ahead of the 2009 European elections. So far only the Liberal Democrats have responded. The committee is also planning to compile a report on surface access to airports in the UK by both bus and rail. This should help to identify good practice and also areas where there is scope for improvement.

Regular meetings are held with ATOC with a view to improving through ticketing between the UK and the Continent. There has been some progress on this front but much remains to be done. Many TOCs make no mention of Eurostar in any of their publicity and the availability of tickets to "London International (CIV)" is largely a closely guarded secret. The creation of Railteam is a step forward but its effectiveness is currently hampered by a lack of resources..

NETWORK DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**Ian McDonald**

A considerable amount of time has been devoted by committee members on the production of our long-awaited paper on Electrification. This is now available on the website or upon request to committee members. Copies have been sent to politicians, the DfT and other relevant organisations. We hope members will see this as a useful first step. If the political climate grows in our favour we will re-issue it with more ambitious proposals.

The other major task has been the revival of the dormant project to update the book "Britain's Growing Railway (A-Z of Re-openings)" last published in 1998, and much missed both within and outside *railfuture* as an encyclopaedia of past rail station and line re-openings, with a list of those that we would particularly favour re-opening. Publication is anticipated in mid-2009.

The committee continue to campaign for High Speed Lines in the UK in conjunction with the group "Greengauge 21". The politicians seem to be grasping the nettle of this concept at last, after so many other European countries have left us behind.

We have also campaigned in support of several rail lines and new stations in the media. Financial support continues to be available from the "Fighting Fund", to branches to assist with any local worthwhile campaigns.

We look forward to some hard persuasive work in 2009, when Government funding for most infrastructure projects is under a black cloud with little private finance currently available. We will do our best however.

WELSH ASSEMBLY**Rowland Pittard**

The three Welsh branches use the title *railfuture* Wales when responding collectively to national consultations. *Railfuture* Wales maintains contact with Welsh Assembly Government, four regional transport consortia, four train operating companies, Passenger Focus, Network Rail and rail user groups. It meets with decision makers in Wales including an annual meeting with the Deputy First Minister who is also responsible for transport.

There was a high level of consultation in 2007 and this led to the publication in 2008 of three major documents that will influence rail transport developments in Wales in future years.

'The Wales Transport Strategy - Connecting the Nation' was published in May 2008 after the draft was modified to take into account the aspirations of the coalition and measures to cut carbon emissions. The strategy has five strategic priorities - reducing CO₂ emissions and environmental impacts, integrating local transport, improving links between key settlements, enhancing international conductivity and increasing safety and security. *Railfuture* Wales participated in the workshops and consultation prior to the Strategy being published.

'The Wales Freight Strategy' followed in July 2008 with sections covering road, rail, air, sea and pipeline with the greatest emphasis on road but with indications that the Government wishes to make more use of rail and coastal shipping. *Railfuture* Wales is a member of the Welsh Assembly Government's Freight Group and contributed to the formulation of the Strategy.

Network Rail issued its draft Wales Route Utilisation Strategy in June. The final RUS was published in November and contained reference to *railfuture* Wales and its policies - *railfuture* was the only voluntary organization to be referred to in the RUS.

The over arching strategy for Wales, the 'Wales Spatial Plan - People, Places, Futures' is now being revised. The plan divides Wales into six areas - North West Wales, North East Wales, Central Wales, Pembrokeshire, Swansea Bay and South East Wales with the transport requirements stated in the plan. *Railfuture* Wales is monitoring the transport requirements of the plan.

The four transport consortia SEWTA, SWWITCH, TAITH and TRACC published their draft Regional Transport Plans in July with consultation lasting until September. These plans will form part of each consortia's bid for transport grant for 2009. *Railfuture* Wales was effectively involved in the workshops and consultation associated with the publishing of these draft plans.

These plans will in turn inform the 'Wales National Transport Plan' that is expected to be published in draft form in 2009. This will be a single document with five chapters to mirror the five strategic priorities described in the 'Wales Transport Strategy'.

Railfuture Wales maintains contact with other voluntary organisations in Wales that have a transport remit, including Sustrans, Welsh Council for Voluntary Action, Wales Environment Link, Ramblers' Association and the Campaign for National Parks.

FREIGHT SERVICE & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**Gary Tinsey**

This report is an overview of the voluntary activities undertaken within the previous year and explains our work stream going forward. The panel committee members met on three occasions at Peterborough, Sheffield and Birmingham. Our meeting agendas and e-mail group discussions subsequently generated a number of actions including; lobbying third parties; writing letters; attending forums and conference events; or responding to consultations.

This was supported by collating topical information from a number of regional and national sources, with particular emphasis on a network of corresponding activists who provide items for our comments and furtherance. In addition, a dialogue is maintained with like minded bodies such as receptive companies and operators, local authorities and the Freight-on-Rail consortium alongside traditional links with The Rail Freight Group.

We are pleased to see continued public and private investments in the domestic railway infrastructure to accommodate heavier, longer, larger and wider freight trains. One example of this is the upgrading of the Hull Docks branch, allowing for the passage of increased bulk traffics. Other useful schemes completed, in progress or under preparation encompass an enhanced cross country link between the Port of Felixstowe, Ipswich and Nuneaton; London environs and orbital lines; Southampton trunk and diversionary routes; plus access to Liverpool docks.

These will ultimately form part of a countrywide Strategic Freight Network, providing enhanced capacity, route availability and gauge dimensions, either as singular or combination projects to upgrade and modernise rail corridors. Ongoing plans to develop rail-served terminals remain in place, despite a number of high profile planning setbacks. Examples of new facilities may be seen at Aberdeen, Sheffield, Telford and West Thurrock. We will press for direct rail connections, locating in close proximity to intermodal facilities, and at the very least passive provision in any large scale proposals.

The immediate trials of much bigger lorries on the roads have subsided, although this has worryingly gained momentum in European Union policy circles. Notwithstanding this threat and challenging economic conditions, we firmly believe positive rail freight announcements are likely in several key markets.

POLICY LOBBY AND CAMPAIGNS COMMITTEE & TRANSPORT ACTIVISTS ROUNDTABLES**Norman Bradbury**

Committee activities followed the established pattern throughout the year, meeting in February, June and, a little later than previously, in early November. The Committee was represented by Norman Bradbury at five Core TAR and three Regional TAR meetings. TAR meetings had been reduced due to funding constraints. *Railfuture* had increased its annual contribution to the TAR budget to assist ongoing activities of this important group.

Lobby meetings took place with Stephen Hammond MP (Conservative Shadow Rail Minister), Torn Harris MP (Under Secretary of State for Transport), Norman Baker MP (Lib Dem Shadow Transport Secretary) and with ATOC to discuss reopenings amongst other matters. All of these meetings were considered to have been useful. Once again, it was noted how closely the Lib Dem transport policy aligns with *railfuture's* aspirations,

The Committee was represented by Norman Bradbury at the Railway Forum annual Sustainability Conference in April. Norman also attended the All Party Parliamentary Climate Change Group (APPCC) meetings in April and October.

Meetings with the new Transport Ministers will be sought in the new year and a meeting with Theresa Villiers and/or Stephen Hammond will be sought in view of the Conservative's recent pro-rail transport policy announcements.

PASSENGER COMMITTEE**Howard Thomas**

During 2008, the Passenger Committee has continued to monitor the threats to passenger services in different parts of the country arising from: fares; fare increases; refranchising; rail utilization studies; rail closures and micro-management of the railway by the Department for Transport (DfT). 2008 saw DfT's continued micro-management of the railway in matters such as timetabling and refranchising, and now they are working on the design and procurement of new InterCity trains and rolling stock. Passenger Committee members have been involved in meetings with Tom Harris, ATOC and Passenger Focus. Three members were also invited to meet with civil servants who were involved with the design and procurement of new InterCity trains. What was encouraging from all these was that *railfuture's* work is valued and respected in official and railway circles. The challenge for *railfuture* in general and the Passenger Committee in particular is to maintain and build on this reputation.

However, those attending the meetings were still not reassured that ATOC or the Government was listening to users' concerns. The playing field is still not level, and we note with regret that there was no prior consultation on the simplified fare structure. It is still the case that proposed improvements to rail are too easily dismissed as just another railway project by an unwilling Government, and fare rises above inflation, often twice per year, still seem to go on relentlessly. We believe that the policy of raising rail fares each year by RPI + 1% should be challenged. Assuming an RPI of 3%, in a control period of five years fares would go up 26.5% against an increase in RPI of 19.4%. This represents an increase in rail fares of 36.6% more than RPI.

The Committee welcomes the change of heart that has been shown by Government and the railway industry on electrification and awaits proposals due in summer 2009. With the deepening financial crisis, a programme of electrification could be the necessary public works and investment necessary to help get the UK out of recession. Our concern is that the economic climate will be used as an excuse not to invest in electrification. However, the pace of electrification we have seen in Western European countries suggests that periodic economic downturns have not prevented this process. We note that electrification has not been pencilled in for Control Period 4 making the project vulnerable. Modern Railways, in an editorial in the December 2008 issue, says of electrification and other projects: 'yet these are the very projects that will allow the railway industry to do its bit to combat climate change . . . It is important they be defended in the teeth of the economic storm.'

We will continue to pursue these issues in 2009. Let us once again remind ourselves that it is Parliament, Government and their officials who let us have the railways we now have.

PUBLICITY TEAM**Trevor Garrod**

We produced and distributed thousands of copies of a special leaflet aimed at visitors to heritage railways and tourist attractions within easy reach of rail stations. Scores of replies were received and *railfuture* membership packs sent out. Useful contacts were also made in the heritage railway and tourist industry.

Help to Branches and specialist committees has been a key part of our work. We produced a campaign leaflet template for them to use to react quickly to local issues and a 36-page Guide to Corporate Communications. Our offer to help fund Branch advertising, linked to specific local issues, was not taken up by any Branches but remains open. However, one Branch requested financial help with a local campaign leaflet and this was agreed.

The team considered carefully in which national publications to advertise and as a result placed adverts in "Walk" and "Private Eye" in the late autumn. Progress has also been made compiling a Powerpoint presentation on *railfuture* work and policies.

We also endeavoured to co-ordinate and bring to a successful conclusion the work on the fifth edition of "Britain's Growing Railways (A to Z of Reopenings)" and this important publication is due to appear during 2009.

The Publicity Team managed to do its work with just one meeting during 2008. Provided that meetings are well prepared and make decisions, which members then implement, much of our work can then be done by phone, e-mail and letter.

RAILWATCH**Ray King**

The first two issues of Railwatch in 2008 included eight pages of colour in each issue. The October and December issues, however, included colour on every page. This was achieved with no increase in cost thanks to excellent co-operation from our printer, Print-Out of Histon, Cambridge. Overall production costs have been held steady during 2008.

In 2008, the editorial board met four times in London and included Jerry Alderson, Lloyd Butler, Alan Cocker, John Barfield, Laurence Fryer, Ray King, Graham Morrison and Robert Stevens. It is also helped by John Davison, who edits Railondon, and the email discussion group. For content, we are dependent on committed *railfuture* members who ensure that we have knowledgeable and thoughtful reports and pictures from all round Britain. Thanks to all of our correspondents. Distribution continued to be carried out efficiently by the professional firm, Mailhandlers of London E2. They have provided excellent service throughout 2008.

Several hundred copies of Railwatch continue to be sent to MPs, peers, rail passenger committees, rail-orientated companies, local authorities and the media, as part of our campaign to keep opinion formers properly informed on rail issues.

Increasing numbers of wheelchair users and others with disabilities are using trains, and I have not been contacted about problems. I am however concerned about those with lesser mobility problems or with small children or much luggage. Fining trains for minute delays can mean inadequate time to board or alight from a train. Ticket barriers can stop a non-travelling escort helping such people.

Passenger Focus have published a "mystery shop" survey by disabled rail travellers including getting information and station access. Overall satisfaction was only around 75%. It is good that Passenger Focus take disability issues seriously. But they also did a survey (on South-West Trains) to find out why many people don't like ticket machines, the implication being that Passenger Focus, like the rail industry, believe that ticket machines replacing humans are the way to the future. The problems machines present to disabled, especially blind, people seem to have been missed. What about joined-up thinking?

My main concern this year was the refusal of planning permission for the long promised lift at Ipswich station — an interchange station which has only a steep bridge connecting platforms. Wheelchair users have to book help to be taken across the line. The reason for the refusal was that this is a listed building. I helped to alert several Users' Groups who are conducting a campaign which will hopefully soon lead to an acceptable alternative. We are also monitoring that the bridge which is to replace level crossings at Stowmarket is accessible.

Very gradually the modest amount of cash allocated for station improvements is leading to more stations being made accessible when being refurbished. New rail vehicles have to fulfill access criteria published in the UK some years ago. Since then the EU has introduced its somewhat different PRM TSI (European Technical Specification re Persons with Reduced Mobility). What happens if vehicles in the pipeline do not fulfill this?

I am concerned at poor legibility for those with minor visual impairment (a large part of the ageing population) on important documents, labels etc. due to small print and the increasingly popular coloured backgrounds. I would remind *railfuture* activists to bear this in mind when preparing leaflets, given the age profile of our membership.

Organisers of meetings must bear in mind not only how disabled people can access the venue but how they could escape in case of fire. Lifts cannot be used and if no other provision is provided, such people have to be carried down any stairs. The organiser of the meeting attended by a mobility impaired person is responsible for designating, in advance, some able-bodied people who could carry that person down the escape stairs. Given the age distribution of those attending many of our meetings, this could pose a serious problem, and could necessitate avoiding upstairs venues. The chances of need for escape are slender but lives are at stake in case of fire.

CHAIRMAN'S NOTICE – Use of *railfuture* logo and letterhead

It has come to the notice of Directors that the Society's letterhead has been used without proper authority on a number of recent occasions, either by officers of affiliated User Groups or by ordinary members. Worse, the letterhead used has often been of a home-made variety, not conforming with the Society's corporate style.

The Society letterhead should be used only by the Chairman, other national officers, Directors acting on a mandate from the Board, Committee Chairmen, and Chairmen of branches or other branch officers acting with their chairman's authority. Other members may only write on the Society's behalf if specifically authorised by the national chairman or the appropriate branch or committee chairman.

All correspondence must be on the approved corporate letterhead, including the registered office etc. if going to external recipients. This is a legal requirement. If copying or faxing, the monochrome version should be used. Local variations, such as the bilingual version in Wales, are acceptable if first approved by the Board. Homemade versions may only be used internally (eg committee agendas etc).

Mike Crowhurst

HOW MEMBERS CAN HELP *RAILFUTURE*

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

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

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

Try to attend one of *railfuture*'s national events. The AGM will be held at Leeds Methodist Mission, Oxford Place, Leeds LS1 3AX on Saturday 9th May 2009. There will be a national conference at Countv Hall, Northallerton DL7 8AD on Saturday 4th July 2009 and a further autumn conference is being planned.

Join the *railfuture* Lottery. 50% of receipts are paid out as prizes each month. The remainder of the income, after deduction of expenses, is allocated to our Campaigns Fund. Details from Lloyd Butler, Railfuture Lottery Organiser, 24 Chedworth Place, Tatingstone, Suffolk IP9 2ND.

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

***RAILFUTURE*'s MISSION STATEMENT**

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