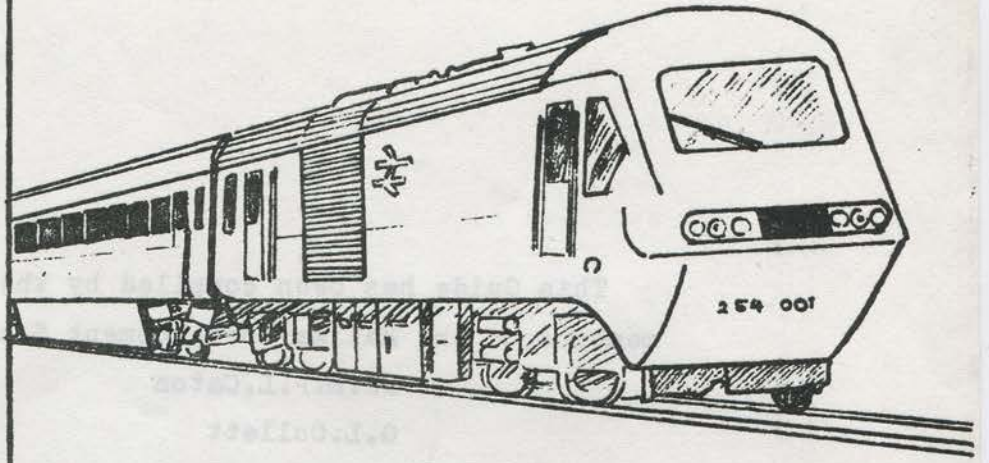
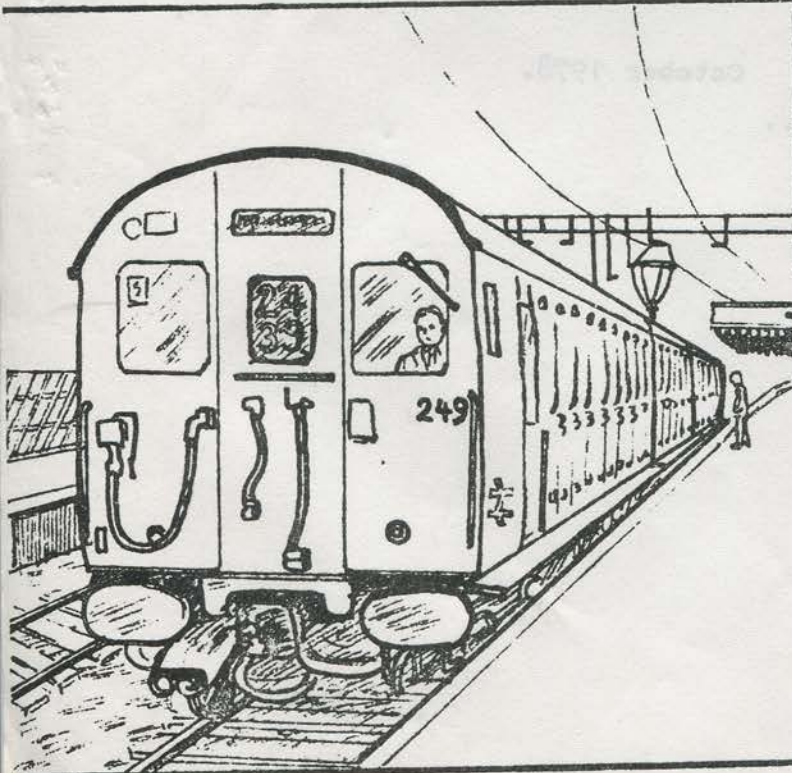


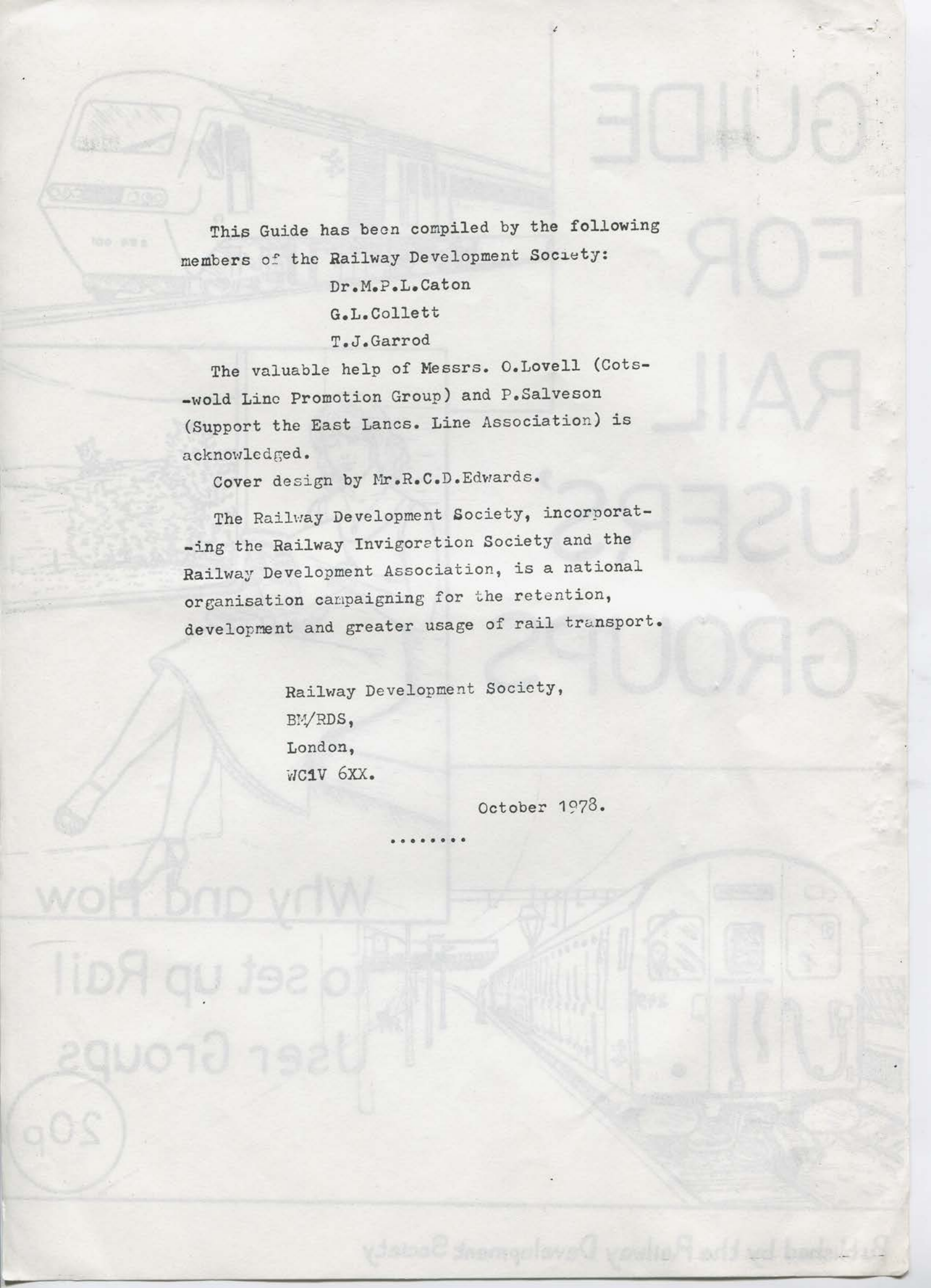
GUIDE FOR RAIL USERS' GROUPS



Why and How
to set up Rail
User Groups

20p





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The Railway Development Society, incorporating the Railway Invigoration Society and the Railway Development Association, is a national organisation campaigning for the retention, development and greater usage of rail transport.

Railway Development Society,
BM/RDS,
London,
WC1V 6XX.

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RAILWAY DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY

A GUIDE FOR RAIL USERS' GROUPS

1. INTRODUCTION

Many secondary routes on British Rail suffer for lack of investment and from inadequate publicity. This has come about largely because the limited resources available have been concentrated on principal Inter-City services - a policy which is understandable because these are the routes where such resources can be expected to produce the greatest returns.

The secondary route network, nevertheless, plays a vital rôle both in providing for the transport needs of the areas concerned and in feeding passengers into the Inter-City services; and in many respects is an under-utilised asset, with considerable development potential.

Urgent steps are needed to revitalise many of these lines if they are to be given an assured future and to adequately fulfil the rôle of which they are technically capable.

We suggest that much could be achieved in this direction by means of a collaborative effort between British Rail and the local communities served, and to this end we strongly recommend the setting up of rail users' groups or committees.

By means of such bodies the various parties can work together to explore and implement measures to promote and develop the lines in question. Such groups are already in existence in several areas, e.g. in Wales, East Anglia, the North West, parts of Lincolnshire, the Cotswolds and the Home Counties. The lines covered include commuter routes, pay-train lines, services to holiday resorts and even the "Inter-City" Oxford - Worcester line.

The aim of this Guide is to give advice on the formation and running of such groups.

The advice is based on the wide-ranging experience of various local rail users' groups. While it is not necessarily possible or desirable to impose a stereotyped organisation on every line, because local conditions vary; we nevertheless believe that both existing groups and those people interested in forming new groups can learn at least something from this Guide.

2. SETTING UP THE GROUP

(a) Calling an Inaugural Meeting

Probably the easiest way to set up the group is to get a few interested people together and then call an initial meeting to which the local press, relevant local organisations (trades councils, chambers of commerce, amenity groups, ratepayers' and residents' groups, conservationists, Women's Institutes, the Tourist Board(s) in the area etc.), the rail unions, representatives of the local authorities, British Rail bus operators and voluntary bodies would be invited.

Long speeches are not necessary at a meeting of this type, but experience has shown that two or three short talks (say, 15 minutes each) go down well.

Try for a permutation of two or three of the following:

(i) A member of British Rail Area or Divisional Management, to speak on the services and facilities offered at present on the line, problems of promotion, operation etc., and what they would like to see happen.

(ii) A representative of an existing rail users' group, to describe their experiences and achievements.

(iii) A representative of the Railway Development Society, to explain the work of the national organisation with which, hopefully, the local users' group would find it useful to work.

(iv) A well-known local figure interested in retaining and developing the line. This could be the local Member of Parliament, or a local County or District Councillor; possibly a prospective parliamentary candidate of the Chairman of the County Council's Transport Committee.

One of these people could chair the meeting; or another individual could - but, if at all possible, the chairman should be a local person.

A suggested Agenda is as follows:

1. Chairman's welcome.
2. Apologies for Absence.
3. Speakers.
4. Questions and Discussion.
5. Motion: "That this meeting agree to set up a users' association."
6. Consideration of Constitution (A sample constitution is attached as Annex A.)
7. Election of officers and committee.
8. Motion: "That the minimum annual subscription be (50p) for individual members and (£1) for organisations."
9. Future activities.
10. Any other business.

(b) Preparing for the Meeting

Prior to holding the meeting it is a good idea to evoke local interest by conducting a survey of local opinion by distribution of a questionnaire to organisations in the line's catchment area. This proved very useful in the setting up of both the North East Norfolk Travellers' Association and the South East Lincolnshire Travellers' Association. A sample questionnaire is attached as Annex B.

Other possibilities include leaflets at stations, letters to the press or an exhibition in the local library. (The RDS East Anglian Branch is willing to lend its exhibition to interested people elsewhere.)

Local railwaymen should also be approached, as they often take a keen interest in the running of their local line.

If you know one or more regular commuters on the line, they should be asked if they would be prepared to circulate leaflets on the train.

(c) Subscriptions

Some groups operate as a committee and therefore do not admit individual members. However, it is the RDS' view that as many people as possible should be encouraged to take an interest in their local rail service(s). Therefore, unless there is a wealthy benefactor willing to fund most of the group's activities, it is advisable to have a subscription, which should be kept fairly low. It is better to have 100 members paying, say, 50p each, than only 50 paying £1 each. Many of these members need not be expected to play an active part; but it is important for a group to show that it represents a sizeable body of people. In addition, several groups have received financial contributions from local authorities and/or local businesses.

3. GROUP ORGANISATION AND ACTIVITIES

Most of the Group's activities will be arranged by its committee, which should meet at regular intervals. Representatives of British Rail and the local bus operators can either be invited to attend all committee meetings, or meetings can be held with them as and when required. (Most existing Groups favour the latter system).

The following are some ways in which a Group might achieve its aims of developing the rail service in question:

(a) Publicity

This is probably the most important immediate aim. Possible media are:

(i) Display of posters advertising the rail service, in suitable locations in the area. Local authorities can help here by arranging for their display in libraries, council offices etc., as well as on council notice-boards at suitable roadside locations. Traders and interested individuals can also display them on their property. This is of particular importance in towns or villages where the railway station is not centrally situated and so posters on display on the station building or platforms may be largely "preaching to the converted."

The Romford - Upminster Line Group in Essex, for example, prepared a poster of their own, which was modified by British Rail to suit their requirements and is now produced by them in two sizes - a large one for notice-boards and a smaller one for use in the libraries etc. The Sudbury - Marks Tey Rail Users' Association has produced an attractive illustrated poster to advertise itself and its local line (urging "Use it - don't lose it."), and displays this, together with a leaflet dispenser, in libraries, offices, shops and similar places.

Another possible site is on British Rail land where, for example, a line crosses a major road, or even a minor urban road, but where there is no station. Sometimes British Rail may be willing for the users' Group to maintain the board themselves, renewing the posters where appropriate.

(b) Distribution of timetable leaflets in the line's catchment area. These could either be produced by the Group, or the Group could distribute leaflets produced by British Rail (possibly with some assistance from the Group). The Wickford - Southminster line group in Essex has found that they can be conveniently distributed to households by enclosing them with the local rate demand. In tourist areas, hotels, restaurants etc. are the obvious places for their display. The local Tourist Board may be able to assist in this respect.

If the line has a distinctive name (e.g. "Esk Valley" between Middlesbrough and Whitby; "Breckland" between Norwich, Ely and Cambridge), this should be prominent in the publicity. If not, the users' Group itself may like to suggest one to British Rail, or even run a competition to find one.

It is also a good idea to include a map of the line, especially if the service ends at a different place to where it did 10 or 20 years ago. For instance, trains going east from Sleaford (Lincolnshire) used to terminate at Boston; now, most of them continue to Skegness; trains going east from Blackburn no longer run through the Pennines to Skipton, but terminate at Colne; in the South West, Gunnislake is now the terminus of a local service from Plymouth, whereas formerly it was an intermediate station on a branch from Bere Alston to Callington.

(c) A regular (at least twice-yearly) newsletter, giving details of train and connecting bus services, facilities, bargains etc. is produced by most Groups and distributed in up to 7,000 copies per issue, via stations, local libraries, post offices, village shops etc. Citizen's Advice Bureaux are often willing to take copies; and in some instances local signmen may take a supply for their signal box, for distribution to the

public at unstaffed stations, where they often act as a kind of "information officer" for British Rail. Door-to-door leafletting can also be very effective. As it would be costly - in terms of money and manpower - to leaflet every house in a particular town, a selected area could be leafletted with one newsletter; followed by a different area with the next newsletter, six months later.

Some Groups also produce members' bulletins from time to time, giving more background information, e.g. on why certain trains are run the way they are, and acting as a forum for members' views.

(iv) Local organisations, such as ratepayers' associations, social clubs etc. can do much to help by drawing attention to the possibilities of rail travel in their circulars to members, which often attain a substantial readership. Steps should be taken to ensure that the railway receives adequate mention in holiday guides. Organisers of special events likely to attract large numbers of people - e.g. sporting fixtures, agricultural shows, fairs and fêtes - should be encouraged, in their advertising, to mention rail services to the venue, where these exist. Adverts usually mention that there is car-parking space; but a rail and / or bus link is suitable for transporting large numbers of people, and so should also be advertised where appropriate.

(v) Local schools could become more involved, e.g. by designing posters; doing project work on the history and current rôle of the line etc. In some areas there are younger children who have rarely or never been on a train - their interest should be stimulated.

British Rail themselves sometimes provide speakers and films to schools, and organise some attractive schools special trains to places like York. A local rail users' Group could well work in co-operation with the local BR management in this respect.

(vi) A Group which has good local contacts and local influence can do much "behind the scenes" to encourage the use of their rail service for purposes for which it is not considered at present, particularly through MPs, local councillors etc. Councils themselves can assist by making use of the railway wherever possible for the transport of employees (even to the extent of timing meetings to fit in with the trains). Firms and schools can also be encouraged to make use of rail for the transport of employees and pupils. Clubs and societies can be encouraged to use rail for outings.

(vii) The chartering of special trains for shopping, football, seaside trips etc. can also be undertaken. It can, if carefully organised, be both profitable and a way of getting people who have not travelled by train for a long time back into the "rail habit."

(viii) Large shops and other businesses may be willing to act as "sponsors" of local rail services by placing advertisements in local newspapers which include details of rail times, fares, excursions etc. to towns where they have a department store etc., in order to promote their wares. In the Christmas shopping period in 1977, one Nottingham firm placed eye-catching advertisements of this type in the Sleaford, Boston and Skegness local papers, helping to promote the train service from that area to Nottingham.

(b) Bus feeder services

A second and very important topic for a Group is that of bus feeders. Bus companies (including many small private operators who are often not well-known to British Rail) need encouragement to operate their services in connection with rail.

Long bus journeys in themselves are often unacceptable because of the long journey time and inadequate comfort as well as the frequent delays caused by traffic congestion, particularly in urban areas. (The Railway

Invigoration Society - one of the two predecessors of the RDS - has already drawn attention to the disadvantages of buses compared with trains in "Can Bus Replace Train?" published in Autumn 1977 price 30p). A much more attractive overall service can, in some areas, be provided by combining a shorter bus journey with a rail service. This idea has proved a success on the Whitby - Middlesbrough line with a bus feeder from Guisborough to Nunthorpe station. There is ample scope for connections of this kind from rail-less towns to the British Rail network, especially where only a short road journey - say, up to 5 miles - is involved. Since this should stimulate the use of public transport, the bus operator should, in the right circumstances, also find the idea attractive.

Bus feeders are especially important in rural areas where both bus and rail services are often operated at irregular and infrequent intervals and use of a local bus, in conjunction with a longer distance train, may be the only practicable way of reaching a place by public transport.

Ideally, buses should be timed to connect with trains (and vice versa) and should start from, or stop outside, the station. Where possible, connections should be shown in both bus and rail timetables. Bus information boards should be provided at rail stations and vice versa.

The Cotswold Line Promotion Group (for the Oxford - Worcester line) has held meetings with local independent bus operators and British Rail in order to improve bus/rail connections at Moreton-in-Marsh and has asked for the provision of a bus information board at Moreton station.

Bus information boards are common at stations in East Anglia, but connections are not always as good as they might be. The North East Norfolk Travellers' Association and the RIS were instrumental in pressing for, and getting, improved bus connections at Cromer railway station in 1976.

(c) CAR PARKING

Much traffic can be attracted to rail by encouraging the practice of "park and ride", the providing parking facilities at railheads. A large part of the success achieved by the Braintree / Witham Railway Campaign Committee has resulted from the cheap parking facilities provided at Braintree station, thus encouraging commuters to take the train from there rather than driving to a point nearer London. (Indeed, this committee must take much of the credit for transforming the Braintree line from one which Dr. Beeching wanted to axe, into one that now has an electric service, including some through trains to London. It is a glowing example of railway invigoration and development.)

Local authorities can have a major influence on car-parking, by providing parking space at railheads, preferably free or at least at a lower cost than that available in the town centres to which motorists would normally drive.

The "park and ride" scheme introduced this summer at St. Ives (Cornwall) is an excellent example of co-operation between the local authorities and British Rail, that should be considered wherever possible for other places in the South West and indeed the rest of the country. This type of scheme should also be considered for large towns where heavy traffic congestion is unlikely to be solved by road improvements alone.

(d) New / Re-opened Stations

Some Groups have identified sites where new stations might be built, in order to tap new sources of traffic. Surveys have been carried out to assess potential use.

Sometimes the co-operation of British Rail and/or the County Council can be enlisted in the carrying out of such surveys. It must certainly be

emphasised that any Group advocating a re-opening must be well-prepared with figures to indicate potential usage; and that the more local people are prepared to fight for a re-opening, or a new station, the more they are likely to make good use of it if successful.

This also applies to the reopening of freight-only lines to passengers. In such cases, an Action Committee or Campaign ought to be set up specifically to campaign for the reopening; but it should co-operate where appropriate with users' Groups on adjacent lines, as a reopening would affect their lines, probably leading to a greater volume of traffic etc.

An action group was successful in campaigning for the reopening of Magdalen Road station in Norfolk and five other such bodies are pressing for station or line re-openings in East Anglia. The Action Committee campaigning for the reopening of the Wymondham - Dereham - Fakenham line recently carried over 550 people on two special trains which it chartered between Norwich and Dereham; while its counterpart on the March - Wisbech line conducted a very detailed survey of potential usage of a restored passenger service.

STELLA ("Support the East Lancashire Line Association") ran a very successful train to Leeds using the virtually freight-only link line from Rose Grove to Todmorden, to demonstrate the need for a regular passenger service from East Lancashire to Yorkshire.

When a line reopening campaign achieves its aim, it ought then to transform itself into a line users' association, to help ensure that its achievement is a lasting one.

(e) Passing on Users' Complaints / Ideas to British Rail

There are in existence eleven regional Transport Users' Consultative Committees, whose terms of reference say that they "may consider and make recommendations to the Secretary of State for Transport and the Secretary of State for Prices and Consumer Protection on any matter affecting services and facilities currently provided by the British Railways Board, excluding fares and charges." Their powers are limited, but rail users can approach them directly.

However, a local users' Group can often act as a "filter" for the more unreasonable complaints and unrealistic suggestions. Equally, a complaint or suggestion is likely to carry more weight if it comes from a representative Group rather than from an individual. Many people are also more likely to complain to a local person whom they know is in the local users' Group, than to a more distant body like the TUCC.

It is, however, useful for a users' Group to inform the regional TUCC when it has a complaint. A Group may also consider nominating one of its members to serve on the TUCC. (TUCC members are selected by the Secretary of State for Prices & Consumer Protection, from nominations sent in.)

(f) Longer Term Planning

A Group can influence longer term planning by encouraging the relevant local authorities to give adequate consideration to the presence of the railway when considering future development. Particular account should be taken on the position of local railway lines when planning the locations of new housing estates, industrial zones etc.

A rail users' Group can also put its views to County Councils in their Structure Plans, Transport Policies & Programmes, Local Plans etc.

4. FURTHER INFORMATION

The Railway Development Society will be pleased to provide any advice or assistance to anyone who would like to establish a rail users' Group in their area. Write or phone:

Railway Development Society,
BM/RDS,
London,
WC1V 6XX
01-405 0463

Other useful information and addresses:

British Railways Board, 222, Marylebone Road, London, NW1 6JJ.
(BR is divided into five Regions - Eastern, London Midland, Scottish, Southern and Western - each of which has its own General Manager. The Regions each contain several Divisions, which themselves are sub-divided into Areas.)

Names and addresses of bus companies - both National Bus Company subsidiaries and many private operators - can be found in the official British Rail timetable, published in May each year; as can the addresses of the Transport Users' Consultative Committees.

Department of Transport, 2, Marsham Street, London, SW1P 3EB.

A wide range of railway and other transport films can be hired from: Transport & Travel Film Library, Melbury House, Melbury Terrace, London, NW1 6LP.

The East Anglian Branch of the RDS has a film (with taped commentary) of the special trains from Norwich to Dereham on 8.4.78, which can be hired; and exhibition material which can be borrowed in total or in part. Contact Mr. T.J. Garrod, 15, Clapham Rd., Lowestoft, NR32 1RQ.

Details of County and District Councils are obtainable from the Municipal Yearbook; and details of local press from Willings' Press Guide. Both of these reference books should be available in public libraries. For Parish Councils, it is a good idea to contact the Association of Parish Councils at the County Council headquarters, as they can normally supply a list of all Parish Councils in the county.

Many public libraries also keep a register of local organisations. Sometimes this is in the form of a file or card-index; sometimes it is available for sale in booklet form. A rail users' Group should ensure that it is on the list, by informing the librarian of its aims, officers and subscriptions.

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ANNEX A - SAMPLE CONSTITUTION

1. Name: Breckland Line Users' Association.
2. Aims: The retention, improvement and greater usage of the Norwich - Ely - Cambridge rail link, and of local bus services, which should be integrated with it wherever possible.
3. Membership: Membership shall be open to all persons and bodies in agreement with these aims, on payment of a minimum annual subscription of 30p (individuals) or 50p (corporate members).
4. Government: The Association shall be governed by a Committee consisting of the following:
 - Chairman
 - Secretary
 - Treasurer
 - 7 other members

These shall be elected at an Annual General Meeting to be held in the autumn of each year. Members shall receive a minimum of two weeks' notice of the Annual General Meeting, and of any other General Meeting that may be called from time to time.

The Committee may co-opt members to replace any who may resign during the course of a year; and may also co-opt up to 3 additional members during any 12-month period between AGMs.

The Railway Invigoration Society* shall be entitled to nominate one member of the Committee, with voting rights.

The Committee may appoint, from within its ranks, any additional officers that may be deemed necessary, e.g. Vice Chairman, Membership Secretary, Publicity Officer.

5. Amendments etc.: Any amendments to the constitution shall be made at a properly convened General Meeting of members; as shall any decision to suspend or disband the association and dispose of any funds that may be left.

* now Railway Development Society.

ANNEX B - SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE

70 copies were sent out in the summer of 1976, and 30 replies received.

THE RAILWAY INVIGORATION SOCIETY
for the retention and modernisation of rail services

EAST ANGLIAN BRANCH

Branch Chairman: Mr. P. R. Lawrence, 75, Marlpit Lane, Norwich, NR5 8XN.
(Phone 743446)

The Society would welcome your views regarding the
MARKS TEY - SUDBURY RAILWAY.

We hope to issue a report on the line, indicating whether usage of it could be increased, and if so, how. We successfully completed a similar survey on the Norwich - Cromer - Sheringham line last year, and our East Midlands Area is conducting one on the Grantham - Skegness line.

The report will be sent to British Rail, the county councils and other interested bodies.

We thank you for your anticipated help in completing this questionnaire. Please state if you wish any of your views to remain confidential.

Please return the completed questionnaire to the Chairman (address above) as soon as is convenient, and preferably by the end of September 1976.

NAME OF ORGANISATION :

* Delete as appropriate.

1. Is the present number of trains on this line
(a) ENOUGH? (b) NOT ENOUGH? (c) TOO MANY? *
2. If you agree with (b) or (c), what changes do you think should be made?

3. Do you think connections at Marks Tey and/or Colchester are satisfactory? YES / NO *
If NO, how could they be improved?

4. Should there be any through trains, running beyond Colchester of Marks Tey? YES / NO *
If YES, where to?

5. Are there any other facilities you would like to see introduced?
YES / NO *

If YES, please specify:

6. Could the train service be publicised more? YES / NO *
If YES, please specify: (Tick and comment as you think necessary)
 - (a) By noticeboards in centres of towns and villages.
 - (b) By local councils.
 - (c) Via local libraries.
 - (d) Via local Post Offices.
 - (e) Via local shops.
 - (f) Via local business firms (e.g. on Staff Notice Boards)
 - (g) Through the local press.
 - (h) Any other way. (Please give details).

7. Could freight be encouraged to use the line? YES / NO *

If YES, are there any particular companies which you think might be approached?

8. Could bus / rail co-ordination be improved? YES / NO *

If YES, please give example(s):

9. Is there a case for establishing new halts on the line? YES / NO *

If YES, where?

10. Would you support a line users' Association, like the Newmarket & District Rail Users' Association, or the East Suffolk Travellers' Association elsewhere in East Anglia? These local bodies aim to encourage rail travel and further the interests of rail users, and indeed public transport users in general. Many are corporate members of the Railway Invigoration Society.

YES / NO *

If YES, could you suggest a suitable name for an association for this line?

11. Please give any further information of comments that you think could be helpful.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CO-OPERATION.

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The main points arising from the replies to this questionnaire were the bad state of Sudbury station and the possibility of re-siting it; the need for a halt at Cornard; the need for better bus/rail co-ordination; and improved connections at Colchester for points north.

Copies of the 2-page report produced by the RIS were sent not only to BR, the County Councils and the TUCC, but also to the local press and to all bodies who completed the questionnaire.

Since then, the Sudbury - Marks Tey Rail Users' Association has been formed and is currently working hard to promote off-peak travel on the line; and Suffolk County Council has produced a combined bus / rail timetable for the area.

Problems like the resiting of Sudbury station are being actively pursued by the RDS and SMTRUA.

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