

# BRING BACK OUR TRACKS

The rail cuts begun in the 1950s and 1960s removed many towns and villages from the network. Large numbers of people suffered inconvenience and difficulties. Road congestion and pollution increased as productive land was lost to the motor-car. Since the early 1970s, however, over 250 stations have been opened, re-opened or relocated to meet changing needs. Over 150 miles of freight-only lines have been restored to the passenger network and several miles of new track built. Much of this has been achieved on the initiative of local authorities and rail users' groups.

Yet the present network still has huge, often strategic gaps. Many areas of fast growing population still lack good rail access. The Railway Development Society believes that some of the gaps can be filled, and some important towns brought back on to the network, by rebuilding old routes and, in a few cases, providing entirely new stretches of line. We consider that 200 miles of new and rebuilt route would make an immense difference to the network. We suggest 10 routes which should have priority for safeguarding of their trackbeds as a first step to restoration. Finance for the programme should be provided by local authorities, central government and other sources. The costs are a minute fraction of what is currently spent on roads. We believe the success of these lines will prove the case for more.

*This leaflet deals with routes where track is to be built, rather than with the restoration of passenger services on freight-only routes. The completion of a route to the north of London from Braintree through Stansted, Cambridge and Bedford to Oxford is included, to match the southern route from Reading to Ashford. Developments within this circle are excluded.*



## **1. Bedford - Sandy / Huntingdon - St. Ives - Fen Drayton**

Reinstating 8½ miles of track between Bedford and Sandy, and 7 miles between Huntingdon and Fen Drayton would make it possible for many new services to run cross country between East Anglia and the West. The reinstated track would link up with the Oxford - Bicester and Bletchley - Bedford passenger lines, the Bicester - Bletchley freight line, and the recently closed Fen Drayton - Cambridge freight line. Trains could thus run Oxford - Bicester - Bedford - Sandy - Huntingdon - Cambridge, providing an east-west route which avoids London. At present, no such route exists for 70 miles north of the capital. The new route would thus be of great strategic importance.

To protect the route near Bedford, RDS has argued that a bridge should be provided on the proposed Bedford Southern Bypass to carry the bypass over the track-bed. Minor realignments to the original route would be needed for a few hundred yards, notably at Blunham (near Sandy), at Sandy, and between Huntingdon and St. Ives.

The route would join areas of high population growth including Milton Keynes and East Anglia. Considerable freight could be carried, thereby relieving traffic on east - west roads such as the A422 and A428. New local services could relieve the severe traffic congestion around Bedford and Cambridge. Other new services would be possible, for example, a new Cambridge - Peterborough route via Huntingdon, 10 miles shorter than via Ely.



## 2. Walsall - Brownhills

Walsall is the 13th largest town in the Country, with a population of 264,000. Brownhills, just 5 miles away, is one of the largest towns (population 87,000) without passenger rail services. The track between them was lifted in 1985. All bridges are in position, and there are no physical impediments to re-opening.

Reinstatement of the track would make it possible to run new cross-country routes via Wolverhampton - Walsall - Brownhills - Derby. Trains would use existing freight lines from Wolverhampton to Walsall (used already for diversions) and from Brownhills to Lichfield. The new routes would serve 1.2 million people, more than served by the recently successfully restored Coventry - Leicester - Nottingham route.

New local services would also be possible, from Brownhills to Stourbridge Junction via Walsall and Dudley, itself isolated from the network with a population of 187,000, using the currently freight-only line from Stourbridge Junction to Walsall.

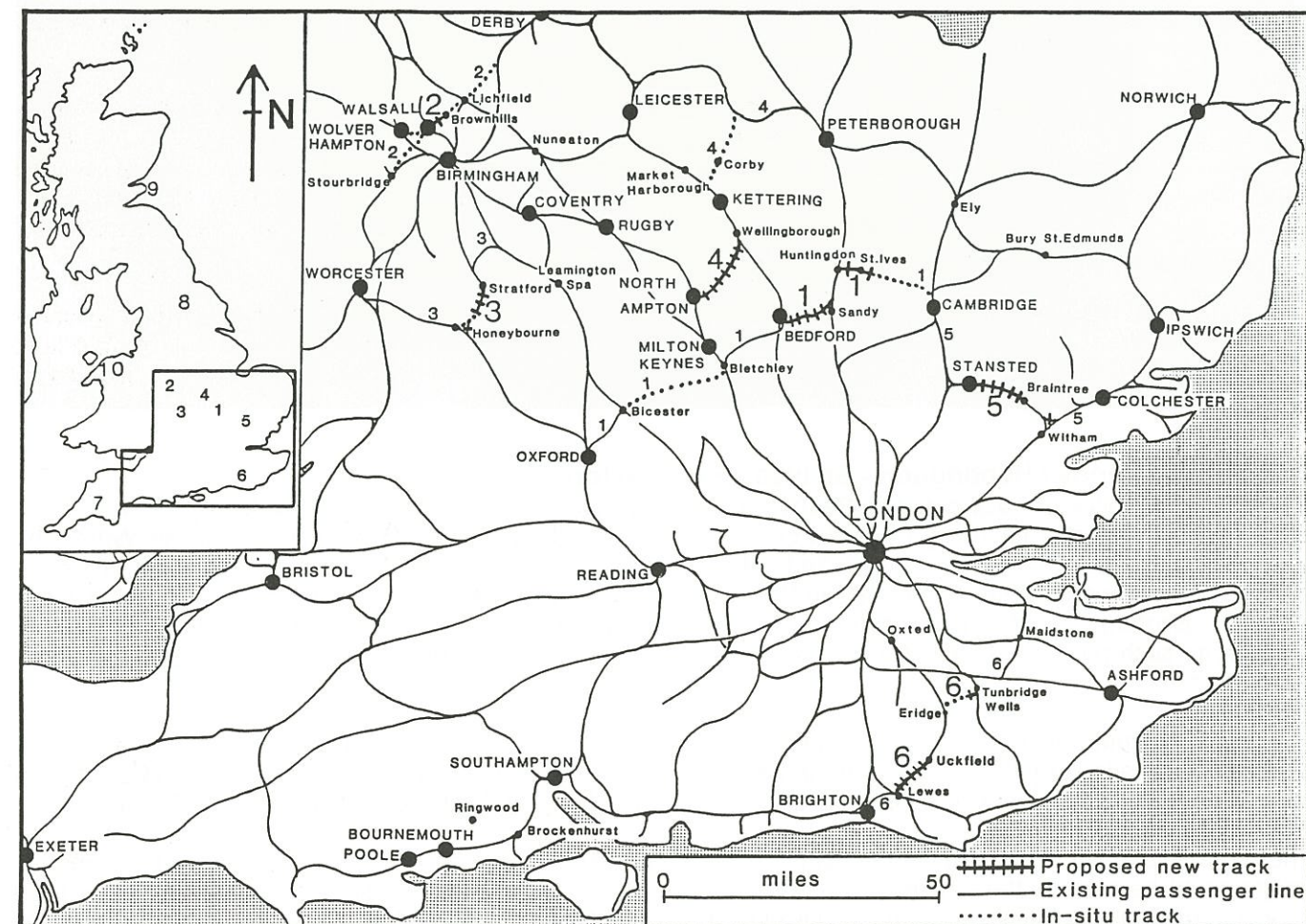
The link would also shorten freight journeys from Walsall to Lichfield, which at present run via Sutton Park, by 15 miles. Walsall - Brownhills is thus a valuable strategic link.

## 3. Stratford - Honeybourne

Stratford-upon-Avon is an important centre for business and popular with foreign tourists. It is poorly served by rail, with no southern or western links. Journeys to London and the south require travelling in a loop first north and then east to Leamington Spa. Journeys to places immediately south or west of Stratford are impossible. The missing strategic link could be provided by re-opening the Stratford - Honeybourne line, closed to passengers in 1968.

This would require laying 6 miles of track south of Stratford Station, to connect with the 2 mile Long Marston - Honeybourne freight line. Some realignment of the original route would be necessary around an industrial estate near Long Marston and notably for ¼ mile in Stratford where the original track-bed is occupied by a relief road. Although there are plans to extend the relief road northwards along the track-bed towards the station, the re-opening has strong local support and objections to the road scheme are being submitted by local action groups.

With the re-opened route, journeys to Oxford and Thames Valley would be 14 miles shorter. New local journeys to stations in the Cotswolds would become possible. Traffic congestion at Stratford would be greatly eased; a station could be opened on the new line adjoining Stratford Racecourse. The new link would also make it possible to travel west of Stratford to the West of England and South Wales via Worcester, itself then only 28 miles away.



## 4. Northampton - Midland Main Line

Northampton (population 186,000) is one of England's largest towns. Once six railway routes radiated from it. Now it is only possible to travel north-west or south-east. Travel to the East Midlands or Peterborough requires a prolonged detour via Nuneaton or via Bletchley and Bedford.

Reinstating a connection between Northampton and the Midland main line would provide a very necessary strategic link. Several possibilities exist: restoring the Market Harborough - Northampton line, the Northampton - Bedford line or the Northampton - Wellingborough line. RDS favours re-opening the shortest, Northampton - Wellingborough, by relaying 12 miles of track. The first two miles of the route from Northampton exist as a freight siding; at the Wellingborough end some new construction will be required to negotiate the A45 dual carriageway. The line could then take a new route under the Midland main line using the old Northampton route to Oundle and curving northwards to Wellingborough Station.

The new route would link over 100,000 people in the Kettering/Wellingborough area to their county town. Journeys to Corby and Peterborough would be possible with a re-opened freight-only line from Kettering to Manton Junction (west of Peterborough) and could be further shortened by a direct link from south of Manton to the Peterborough - Stamford line.

## 5. Braintree - Stansted

RDS remained neutral on the need for development at Stansted Airport, but argued that if it went ahead, the new air terminal should be served by rail. At the request of the British Airports Authority, evidence was put forward by the RDS at the official enquiry.

In March 1991, the new rail link was opened, connecting Stansted Airport via a triangular junction to the main line between Cambridge and Bishop's Stortford. A strategic missing link between Cambridgeshire and parts of Essex can now be provided by extending the Stansted line eastwards to join up with the Braintree - Witham line. This would involve reinstating 14 miles of track on the Bishop's Stortford - Braintree line. This closed to passengers in 1952, depriving Great Dunmow (population 6,000) of its passenger services.

A short chord should also be built north of Witham enabling trains to travel from Braintree to Colchester without reversing. The new route will give access to the airport from Suffolk and eastern Essex and reduce local traffic congestion around the airport. New through services from the Colchester area will be possible. The Cambridge - Colchester journey, now 73 miles via Bury St. Edmunds and Ipswich, will be reduced by 17 miles!

## 6. Tunbridge Wells - Eridge / Uckfield - Lewes

Reinstating the 5 mile Tunbridge Wells - Eridge line together with the 7 mile Uckfield - Lewes line would provide a very necessary strategic link between Tonbridge and Brighton.

Passenger services between Tunbridge Wells and Eridge ceased in 1986. One mile of track was lifted between Tunbridge Wells Central and Tunbridge Wells West. To reinstate this section would require the line to run alongside the Sainsbury's Supermarket, built on ex-railway land at Tunbridge Wells West station. The remaining 4 miles between Tunbridge Wells West and Eridge were left derelict and a local preservation society are now attempting to re-open this track. The Uckfield-Lewes line was lifted in 1969; the track bed has been protected from development and Network SouthEast have expressed real interest in re-opening the line.

The two re-openings would provide an alternative route between London and Brighton and the south coast. It would be possible to travel from Brighton to mid-Kent via Tunbridge Wells, changing at Tonbridge for Maidstone and the Medway Towns. The new route would provide access to the South Coast from Uckfield (population 12,000) and towns such as Oxted (11,000).

## 7. Bere Alston - Tavistock (- Okehampton)

Once there were nearly thirty railway stations in or within a mile or two of Dartmoor. Now there is just one. Access to Dartmoor can be greatly improved by relaying track on the derelict Bere Alston - Okehampton route for 6 miles to Tavistock from the Plymouth - Bere Alston - Gunnislake branch. This would open up Dartmoor to tourists without causing road congestion and restore services to Tavistock (population 10,000) thus providing an important commuter route into Plymouth. This would ease the severe traffic congestion in Plymouth and on the busy A386 Plymouth - Tavistock road. Whilst the old Tavistock station site has been built on, RDS has identified possible new sites.

A longer term objective would be to reinstate a further 14 miles to connect with the existing freight line from Yeoford at Meldon Quarry near Okehampton. This would restore passenger trains to Okehampton (population 5,000) and provide a useful inland diversionary route between Plymouth and Exeter. The route could provide an important social service in an area isolated from the rail network.



## **8. Harrogate - Ripon (- Northallerton)**

Reinstating the 25 mile line between Harrogate and Northallerton would enable the cathedral city of Ripon, (population 15,000) to regain its rail services, and provide an important direct link from Lancashire and West Yorkshire to the North-East.

Some realignments of the original route may be required; there are proposals to use parts of the original track-bed for road schemes, notably a one mile relief road for Ripon, which will be the subject of a public inquiry. However, even if the road schemes take place, the railway could run alongside, and a local society has been formed to press the case for the re-opening. Services would benefit both commuters and tourists as well as act as a cutoff for journeys to the North. Journeys from Leeds to Northallerton (and points north) would be reduced by 13 miles (43 miles compared with the present 56 miles via York). Journeys from Harrogate to Northallerton would be reduced by 26 miles compared with 51 miles at present via York.

## **9. St. Andrews - Leuchars**

St. Andrews is a university town and an important golfing and tourist centre with a cathedral and a castle. It is one of the larger Scottish towns to be isolated from the network, with a population of 14,000 and a large number of students. No major engineering problems exist with re-opening the 5 mile line to Leuchars. Two possible station sites have been identified and a local action group, Starlink, are putting the case for the line. Scotrail have shown an interest, and a local authority is financing a study. Trains could run to Dundee or Edinburgh.

## **10. Bangor - Caernarfon**

Caernarfon lies 8½ miles south-west of Bangor, the nearest railhead. Caernarfon, population 10,000, is the administrative centre of the County and the District. Caernarfon Castle with its environs is a major tourist attraction drawing visitors from across the world.

In 1989 RDS put forward plans to re-connect Caernarfon to the rail network. While some of the track-bed has since been utilised by a major road scheme at Felinheli (Port Dinorwic), reinstatement of a rail link is still possible. Such a link would ease the severe traffic problems around Caernarfon and help revitalise the local economy. An hourly service to Crewe, taking an hour and a half at 90 mph, would be possible using Express Sprinters. A rebuilt line from Bangor to Caernarfon could also provide interchange at a joint station in Castle Square with a rebuilt Welsh Highland railway (for which a Light Railway order is being sought) from Caernarfon to Porthmadog.

## **More Possibilities**

### **Brockenhurst - Ringwood**

The line from Brockenhurst to Ringwood once ran to Poole, running via West Moors and Wimborne Minster. It is an example of a line that should never have been closed. Since closure in 1964, the towns along the route have almost merged into a single conurbation. Road building and urban sprawl have obliterated thousands of acres of heathland. The population has increased fourfold.

The route between Poole and West Moors is blocked at several places by buildings. To reinstate it would require major new construction with new alignments to avoid new housing, road and other developments. From Ringwood to Brockenhurst, however, the track-bed is practically intact with only minor reconstruction needed. Could a rebuilt 10 mile branch from Ringwood (pop. 13,000) to the Bournemouth - Southampton main line relieve traffic congestion? Studies should be made of the demand for rail travel from this area to Southampton and London.

### **Penrith - Keswick**

At one time there were several branch lines running into the Lake District. Today, only the Windermere branch remains. Further rail access is badly needed if the Lake District is not to be overrun with cars. Keswick (population 5,600) is an important town and a good centre for exploring the north of the district. Serious study should be made of the practicalities of reinstating 18 miles of track from the West Coast Main Line to Keswick. The track-bed is mainly intact, although some new construction will be required to cross the A66 near Keswick. (West of Keswick, the track-bed has been obliterated by the widened A66.) Restoration of rail services with integrated bus links would relieve the pressure on local roads.

## **VIEW FROM THE GUARD'S VAN**

Some may say this is not an ideal time to put forward our proposals with the current plans for privatisation. RDS believe that our railway network needs a national strategic plan for expansion, not dismemberment.

*The Railway Development Society, which has issued this leaflet, is the national, independent, non-party, voluntary body for rail users. We campaign for the modernisation and expansion of the rail network for environmental, social and economic reasons. You can find out more about RDS by writing to: The Railway Development Society, 48 The Park, Great Bookham, Leatherhead, Surrey KT23 3LS*