

RAIL BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE

A RAILWAY GAZETTE NEWSLETTER

www.railwaygazette.com

NO 263 FEBRUARY 9 2006

POINTERS

★ Look for DfT Rail to contest SWT's request for a second extension to the exemption of the Class 458 from Section 13(7) of the Rail Vehicle Accessibility Regulations, which is currently due to expire on July 31. Section 13(7) specifies the height of characters on internal passenger information displays at 35 mm compared with 32 mm on the Class 458.

★ Industry insiders report that EWS has told one scrapyard that it will receive no further business should it allow former postal vehicles or their components to be sold on to other freight operators. The Rail Regulator had earlier ruled that EWS was obliged to dispose of redundant locomotives in a fair and equitable manner.

★ WCML operators have expressed concern to Network Rail over the 50 temporary and emergency speed restrictions in force, around 10% of the national total. Industry insiders expect ORR to take a tougher line with NR under Condition 7 of its network licence, covering stewardship.

★ Yorkshire Forward is providing £8.7m towards the £15.7m cost of six extra two-car Class 158 DMUs until the end of the Northern Rail franchise in 2013. They will work the Leeds – Sheffield service, releasing other units to increase capacity on the Leeds – Harrogate and Leeds – Bradford – Halifax routes by 6%.

★ FirstGroup is concerned about the Thameslink/Great Northern track access contract due to start on April 1. This was negotiated directly with Network Rail by DfT Rail, and industry insiders report that NR took the opportunity to introduce changes rejected by the incumbent operators, including some extended journey times.

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Darling sets up closure framework

In a written statement made to the House of Commons on January 26, Transport Secretary Alistair Darling announced the publication of a consultation document that is likely to be of crucial importance. Concerning the 'network modification provisions' of the Railways Act 2005, the document has been published on the DfT website and responses are due by April 21.

At present, applications to close lines and stations under the Railways Act 1993 are administered by the Strategic Rail Authority, but the final decision is taken to the Secretary of State. The regional Rail Passengers Committees were responsible for conducting public hearings into closure proposals, but they were abolished last year under the Railways Act. Darling's statement explains that from March 31 until the new guidance on closures is laid before Parliament, this will be the SRA's sole remaining task requiring 'a minimal number of staff'.

The Railways Act 2005 lays down different procedures for the closure of a station, passenger service or line and minor modifications such as removal of signalling or relocation of station platforms. The consultation document says that 'because of the changes made by the Act, for the first time statutory closure guidance is to be published.' In other words, this is sec-

Soundbite

'The draft procedures will strip away even the flimsy safeguards that have been in place, such as the statutory responsibility of the Rail Passengers Council to report on the hardship likely to be caused by closures, and there will also be no requirement to hold public hearings into proposed cuts ... In the coming weeks we will be campaigning hard alongside our parliamentary colleagues to ensure that proper, joined-up safeguards are written into these guidelines when they return to Parliament for endorsement.'

RMT General Secretary Bob Crow
January 30 2006

ondary legislation and applicants for a closure are obliged by law to calculate the consequent costs and benefits according to very detailed and precise rules (p8) which have the force of law.

The application must then be submitted to ORR, which 'must determine whether the proposal meets the criteria set out in the published guidance'. To take just one example, in assessing loss of access to employment opportunities in an urban area, ORR would ensure that the applicant had restricted the count to non-car-owning households less than 800 m from a station where there is no alternative bus service.

Within a narrow range, it does

appear that applicants (but not ORR) are permitted to exercise some limited judgement on the merits of the case for closure, but it is the independent ORR that must issue the final Closure Ratification Notice, leaving the Secretary of State's hands clean.

Whether or not this happens depends almost entirely on the benefit:cost ratio that is calculated. If this is more than 1.5, the closure is refused. If it is below 1.0 closure is very likely. In between, 'benefits that are not quantifiable in monetary terms must also be quantified and considered'.

Closures can be initiated by a Rail Funding Authority, a train operator or Network Rail. The Act defines RFAs as the Transport Secretary, Scottish Ministers, the National Assembly for Wales, the six English PTAs and the Mayor of London.

Financial pressures on the RFA are certainly coming, whether through over-optimistic franchise bids or the CP4 settlement of Network Rail's income from April 2009. On February 6 DfT Rail's Director of Strategy & Finance Mark Lambirth issued a sharp reminder to IMechE's Railway Division that 'in terms of the total share of the Department's budget, Network Rail, I mean, is way out of kilter with the 8% [which] is rail's modal share.' ■

Costs and benefits - p8

Grand Central wins ECML paths

Grand Central Railway Company Ltd appears to have won the intense and sometimes bitter competition for additional paths on the East Coast Main Line between Doncaster and King's Cross. ORR also intends to extend until 2010 the temporary access rights enjoyed by Hull Trains to operate six round trips on weekdays, but franchised ECML operator GNER stands to get nothing at all.

ORR announced on January 27 that it was 'minded' to approve access rights for three Grand Central trains a day to Sunderland, but not to Bradford, and invited comments on its proposed decision. A tight deadline of February 6 was

Printbite

'It should also be noted that we have received an unusually high level of support for Grand Central's proposals from MPs, local authorities, regional stakeholders, chambers of commerce, local businessmen and members of the public. We have also received some support for GNER's proposals.'

Office of Rail Regulation's Proposed Decision on Applications for the Track Access Rights Necessary to Operate Additional Passenger Services on the East Coast Main Line
January 27 2006

set in order for ORR's final conclusions to be fed into the process for drawing up the December 2006 timetable, which gets underway

later this month, but after protests from the parties most affected this was extended to February 13.

ORR said it was also minded 'to require the inclusion of modification provisions' in track access contracts that it expected to approve between Network Rail and Central Trains, the new Thameslink/GN franchise, Midland Main Line and GNER. This would allow NR to 'identify suitable paths' for Grand Central with 'minimum disruption to the services of other operators.'

The text of the proposed decision makes it clear that it is 'the present pattern and pattern of utilisation' of the Doncaster – Leeds
Continued on page 7 ⇐

High Court fails to save Merseytram

Any hope that trams would once again run through the streets of Liverpool appeared to have died on February 1 when Mr Justice Sullivan rejected in the High Court all three grounds for Merseyside PTA's appeal against Transport Secretary Alistair Darling's decision to withhold a £170m grant promised in December 2002.

Although the judge also refused the PTA leave to appeal against his decision, Merseytravel Chief Executive & Director General Neil Scales said 'we will be taking it to the Court of Appeal – it is worth one last throw of the dice for a £311m transport and regeneration scheme.'

He made it clear that 'there is an important point of law at stake, which affects not just Merseytravel but every PTA in the country. For this reason alone we must appeal'. The legal arguments were summarised in RBI261 (p6).

The judicial ruling leaves Merseytravel with a £56m bill for development of the project and preliminary works, which has been totally wasted. Merseytram was an integral part of the Local Transport Plan. Scales told the *Liverpool Daily Post* 'many of our plans and goals were tram-related, things like Edge Hill and Hall Lane were relying on it being in place, so we will have to reset things quickly and that is very difficult to do.' ■

RMT to ballot LU membership

Citing attempts by management to impose changes in attendance, disciplinary and harassment procedures, RMT announced on February 6 that it was to ballot all 5 000 members at London Underground for industrial action. The ballot is due to close on February 23. 'For all its fine talk about industrial relations, LUL is ignoring its own procedures and trying to impose changes and bypass its established negotiation machinery', said RMT General Secretary Bob Crow.

In an existing dispute, RMT and ASLEF were due to announce on February 9 if drivers at LU had voted in favour of strike action over a range of issues including SPAD policy, health and safety, 'harassment, denial of representation rights and imposition of excessive punishments'.

On January 27 RMT said LU station staff had voted 'by seven to one' in favour of a revised agree-

Greengauge21 backs high speed

Launching a 'manifesto' to promote a high-speed rail network, Jim Steer of Steer Davies Gleave said on January 27 that 'we believe that the time for high-speed rail in Britain has come'. Dubbed Greengauge21, the initiative is supported by a board of trustees (p8) that includes Railway Forum Chairman Chris Green and former SRA Chief Executive Richard Bowker.

Greengauge21 is intended to stimulate a debate and help create a body of support for a high-speed network. 'We want to see a proper public debate', emphasised Steer, adding that high-speed rail 'cannot happen unless politicians can see this is a no-brainer'.

Explaining the rationale, Steer said it was 'bedded in thoughts about economic growth' and pointed to the economic challenge of 'a north/south divide'. 'A highly successful world-class city region' in the south contrasted with a weaker economy in the Midlands, northern England and Scotland, and high-speed rail would address this by providing better access to the core major cities.

According to the Greengauge21 manifesto, this would lead to 'an accessibility transformation' for the regions, 'providing the necessary stimulus to local and regional economic regeneration'. In hoping to provide 'a way forward that government will find attractive', Steer said the project was 'do-able in phases'. This makes the funding challenge 'a lot more manageable', as 'this is not all or nothing'.

Soundbite

'How can this country afford not to do this? It is an economic imperative.'

Jim Steer

Director, Greengauge 21
January 27 2006

A London – Birmingham route is seen as 'a candidate first phase', on the grounds that 'the West Midlands economy has been under-performing' and would benefit from better business links. In addition, 'there are largely existing unused surface rail corridors into both the centre of Birmingham and London' and 'it will take some pressure off the southeast'. Also favouring this route is the existence of motorways for a possible alignment to follow, as with parts of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link.

Using updated data from a report prepared by Atkins for the SRA in January 2004, the manifesto suggests that the capital cost of a London – Staffordshire high-speed line would be £8.6bn (below), giving a net present value of £13.3bn. Other options mentioned in the manifesto are also drawn from the Atkins report. All three options in the table show benefit:cost ratios greater than 2:1 after the government's requirement for 'optimism bias' to be taken into

account, so passing 'this crucial government expenditure test'. Steer said that 'a high-speed line in itself would produce a huge profit', but the corollary was that it would take 'a lot of quite profitable business off the existing network'.

Steer considered it essential for a high-speed network to serve major airports, and Heathrow in particular. The manifesto says that 'creating a direct route for high-speed rail services from the north into Heathrow would create the wider direct rail access to the airport many regions have long sought'. Steer also made it clear that construction of high-speed lines would benefit the rail freight business as it would free up capacity on existing main lines for expansion of services.

A study of the impact of high-speed rail on air travel is to be published in the near future. This was commissioned by Transport 2000 and has been sponsored by GNER and Eurostar. Another study is planned into the impact of high-speed rail services in Europe on economic development. ■

Discounted HSR costs and benefits, £bn

London to	Northwest (Staffordshire)	Northeast (Yorkshire)	Edinburgh/ Glasgow
Net revenue	4.9	8.5	20.6
Total benefits	29.6	44.5	89.8
Capital costs	8.6	10.6	27.7
Net operating costs	5.7	8.3	20.5
Total costs	15.8	18.9	48.2
Net present value	13.3	27.3	40.9
Benefit:cost ratio	2.07:1	2.59:1	2.04:1

Source: Atkins report to SRA, January 2004

Minister confused on PR2008

A written answer given in the House of Commons last month suggests that DfT is confused over the precise sequence of events under the new Access Charge Review process introduced by the Railways Act 2005.

Conservative transport spokesman Chris Grayling MP had asked what assessment had been made of the risk to Network Rail's financial position and its ability to service its debts if the government should decide to reduce the level of activity it purchases from the rail network.

Transport Minister Derek Twigg replied that 'the total income required by Network Rail and the outputs it has to deliver for that income for a five-year period is determined by the Office of Rail Regulation in Access Charge Reviews. The Secretary of State must in turn provide ORR with details of the high-level outputs he

wants the railway to deliver and the public funding available for this. ORR also takes full account of the costs of servicing Network Rail's existing debts and its overall financial position. These arrangements should ensure that Network Rail has sufficient income to meet all its obligations'.

In fact, the minister has reversed the new process. It is for the Secretary of State to provide ORR with the details of what the railway has to deliver in the High Level Output Specification, as well as a Statement of Funds Available. Under the new process ORR then costs HLOS and compares the result with SoFA.

If there is a funding shortfall, ORR will indicate the implications of adhering to SoFA. In the absence of either increased funding or a reduced HLOS, it will scale back the outputs required in its determination for the next Control Period. ■

Stations policy under fire

In its report on maintaining and improving Britain's railway stations, published on February 2, the Committee of Public Accounts of the House of Commons has been highly critical of the poor quality of station facilities on the national network. This is attributed to the assumption by the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising when letting the original franchises that TOCs would go beyond the basic requirements in their agreements and invest in improvements in response to commercial incentives. The assumption proved flawed, says the committee.

Insufficient attention has been given to the quality of stations over recent years, with little reference to passengers' requirements for stations to be safe and secure, with staff and good-quality information available. The committee points out that passenger satisfaction remains low for medium-sized and small stations and poor accessibility is also highlighted.

The report sees DfT Rail as playing a major role in improving stations henceforth. With a third of larger stations in England and Wales lacking waiting rooms and 15% without toilet facilities, DfT Rail, the industry and the Rail Passengers Council are called on to

assess the gap between reasonable passenger expectations and existing facilities, and agree common standards linked to existing and potential patronage levels. The committee says that DfT Rail should seek to accelerate the £370m Access for All programme (RBI243 p7), but no reference is made to increasing spending.

There is strong criticism of Network Rail acting as 'a barrier to station improvement through unduly complicated and inflexible procedures, an unwillingness to share risks associated with improvement projects and a lack of targets for developing franchised sites'. The committee recommends that ORR undertakes 'an early review' of the impact of the Stations Code to be introduced in April, to make sure the changes anticipated to tackle these barriers are delivered.

TOCs are also criticised for the low level of representation on national schemes to reduce crime and improve personal safety at stations. The committee refers to research suggesting that that introducing additional security measures can increase patronage by up to 11%. It recommends that DfT Rail should work with ATOC and the British Transport Police to promote national schemes with station oper-

ators and passengers. DfT Rail should also consider making participation a franchise requirement.

Another task proposed for DfT Rail is the independent assessment of station quality using mystery shopper techniques and passenger representatives. Stations could be rated on a points system, with the results published to encourage TOCs to enhance station quality.

To overcome the current fragmented approach to station maintenance and enhancement, which lacks 'overall leadership and strategic focus', the committee proposes that DfT Rail should identify investment priorities across the network, set out a coherent approach for attracting private funding and set out 'clearly' how anticipated capacity pressures, particularly at major stations, are to be met over the next 10 years.

Finally, the report endorses the 'portfolio' approach to station redevelopment. This involves property and retail companies developing schemes to improve stations which are packaged together as clusters along particular routes. DfT Rail is also asked to consider setting up station companies with responsibility for the management, repair, maintenance and improvement of groups of stations. ■

Container capacity to double at Felixstowe

Transport Minister Derek Twigg announced on February 1 that the government had approved major expansion at the Port of Felixstowe. The Felixstowe South project will almost double the flow of deep sea containers that the port is capable of handling.

The decision will allow Hutchison Ports UK to reconfigure the Landguard terminal so that close to 1 000 m of additional quay is made available. On the same day, planning permission for landward works was granted by the Office of

the Deputy Prime Minister.

Throughput at Felixstowe is expected to rise from the present 2 million TEU/year to well over 3.5 million. As a condition of consent, Hutchison has undertaken to double 4.2 miles of the Felixstowe branch west of Trimley. It applied in December for a Transport & Works Order (RBI261 p3).

Felixstowe South is the first of the four new container ports proposed in the southeast to receive full planning approval. Dibden Bay on Southampton Water was reject-

ed in April 2004, but ministers said in July 2005 they were 'minded' to approve the conversion of Shellhaven in the Thames Estuary. 'Minded approval' was also granted for Bathside Bay at Harwich opposite Felixstowe last December.

This latest decision will add confidence to predictions of substantial additional freight traffic to be carried on both the West and East Coast main lines, although Network Rail maintains that additional freight capacity on the ECML is extremely limited. ■

RPC becomes Passenger Focus

The Rail Passengers Council rebranded itself as Passenger Focus on January 25. Describing itself as 'the new independent consumer body representing rail passengers in Great Britain', Passenger Focus called for a 'national debate' on fares. Despite the former RPC's considerable body of work, Passenger Focus will be starting with a series of focus groups to establish the level of public concern.

There are still 'lots of questions to be asked', according to Chairman Colin Foxall. 'Fares are per-

ceived as too high and tickets too complicated, yet some passengers can find their way through the system. And despite some eye-watering fares trains are running full.'

With GNER leading the call for the cap on Saver fares to be abolished (RBI262 p6), Foxall defended the 'affordable, regulated, turn-up and go railway'. However, he emphasised that Passenger Focus was not campaigning to 'save the Saver'. Passenger Focus has started a research study on fares and will be discussing the issue with gov-

ernment and stakeholders. Based on this work, it hopes to publish a possible new fares structure in the summer.

★ National Rail is significantly worse than other modes in terms of perceived value for money, according to the results of the autumn 2005 National Passenger Survey, also announced on January 25. Based on a sample of over 25 000 travellers, this found that 80% of passengers were 'very' or 'fairly satisfied' overall, up from 77% in the spring survey. Questioned on the value for money of rail fares, 33% of respondents were 'dissatisfied'. ■

IN BRIEF

★ Network Rail is understood to have appointed Ernst & Young to oversee its planned £4bn station redevelopment programme and encourage private investment in related property development. NR has now received 13 expressions of interest for its Euston project (RBI261 p4), including one from Sydney & London Properties, which owns the existing office blocks and piazza buildings.

★ Ford has awarded EWS and STVA a contract to move new cars from Dagenham Dock to Garston in Liverpool. A train capable of carrying up to 250 cars has been running six days a week since January 16.

★ The Track Maintenance Division of EWS has won a contract to maintain the substantial track layout within the boundaries of Drax power station.

★ The Class 185 Desiro DMU is due to enter service at TransPennine Express on March 14 when a six-car formation will work the 06.21 Manchester Piccadilly - Hull service. The remainder of the fleet will be introduced progressively with all 51 sets to be in operation by the end of 2006.

★ Network Rail has awarded Gleeson MCL a £1m contract to extend the signalling control centre at Edinburgh Waverley by the end of July.

★ OFT has referred to the Competition Commission the acquisition of Marcroft Holdings by EWS subsidiary Railway Investments Ltd, because of concerns about the effect on the market for 'in-field' day-to-day wagon maintenance. The Commission is expected to report by July 24.

★ Blue Diamond has acquired Wesurail, the York-based manufacturer of train washing equipment.

★ On February 2 Arriva Trains Wales returned to service the first of 13 Class 150/2 DMUs which Cardiff Canton is fitting with new seats, panelling, flooring, disabled priority seating and modernised toilets. The sets will enter service every two weeks.

★ Corus has supplied Network Rail with the first batch of steel sleepers rolled at Scunthorpe. The steelmaker's Commercial Director, UK, Geoff Sutor described the delivery as 'a major milestone in bringing UK rail production to Scunthorpe' later this year.

★ Having completed preliminary planning, JMP Consulting is carrying out detailed design of the projected Sheffield International Rail Freight Terminal, which is being developed at Tinsley as a joint venture of Network Rail and Helioslough. Construction is expected to begin this spring.

★ An alliance of Thales and EWS has been awarded a five-year contract to operate the National Rail Communications Centre, the body which manages and distributes live information on train service alterations, engineering works and TOC products and promotions to NRES and the media.

★ On January 27 Stagecoach unveiled the first 'refreshed' Sheffield Supertram at Nunery depot, where a three-year modernisation of the 25-car fleet is being carried out for £2m.

Brighton RUS to downgrade Gatwick Express

The Brighton Main Line Route Utilisation Strategy published by the Department for Transport on February 3 confirms that BAA's campaign to preserve Gatwick Express as a non-stop dedicated link to Victoria has failed. The draft RUS issued by SRA in September 2004 argued that it was wasting peak-hour capacity because the eight-car trains were lightly loaded.

Exactly when the changes proposed in the RUS are likely to happen is unclear. The Gatwick Express franchise was let for 15 years and does not expire until May 2011, which is only just within the time-frame for the RUS. It has also consistently paid a premium.

The RUS suggests that Gatwick Express might survive in some form, as one of three proposed 'flows of traffic' on the Brighton Main Line. The existing Class 460 fleet which has 2+2 seating and generous luggage racks could be used to improve local access to the airport for staff

DfT's proposed Gatwick traffic flow

'Trains for passengers travelling to and from the 'wider Gatwick area' – Horsham, Crawley, Gatwick, Redhill – to Victoria, incorporating service levels designed to meet many air travel requirements. Some of these trains may start from the south coast, providing services on the Arundel – Crawley route.'

Brighton Main Line RUS

DfT Rail

February 3 2006

by turning back at Crawley after stopping at Redhill, Horley and Three Bridges as well as the airport. To do this the trains would have to use the Slow lines from Stoats Nest Junction south of Purley.

This would avoid the present disruption caused by Gatwick Express services blocking all tracks north of Gatwick Airport station to enter Platforms 1 or 2, which they then occupy for 20 min to ensure

that incoming air passengers can always board a waiting train.

Air passengers would, however, be encouraged to use the frequent Fast line services to and from the South Coast, which mostly call at East Croydon, as these would be faster. In these circumstances the higher fares charged by Gatwick Express would become untenable.

In justifying the loss of a dedicated service, DfT points to loading counts taken on every train for 12 weeks in the autumn of 2004. These revealed that the average load factor in the morning peak hour was 51% and even the busiest train at 08.20 from Gatwick carried 220 passengers. As 12-car commuter trains sharing the Up Fast track carry over 700 in the peak, DfT sees each Gatwick Express path as 'a wasted opportunity to provide seats for some 480 people.'

BAA's argument has been that many visitors to Britain simply cannot cope with the complexities of

Southern and Thameslink services, but are happy to use the dedicated airport trains from Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted, although the last does make intermediate stops. The RUS points out that Gatwick's market is changing as low-cost airlines move in.

Only 57% of Gatwick Express passengers are in fact air travellers. The rest are mainly airport workers, or commuters railheading to Gatwick by car. The proposed changes, it is hoped, will encourage some of these people to join trains at Crawley or Three Bridges.

★ The foreword to the Brighton Main Line RUS explains that DfT took on the task of publication in June 2005 when SRA surrendered its responsibilities for strategic planning. Network Rail is now responsible for the RUS programme, although 'matters that are of strategic importance, or relate to passenger rail franchising, will be addressed by DfT Rail'. ■

Boarding cards buy free rides

An imaginative promotion of Virgin West Coast services between the northwest and London allows air passengers on flights between Manchester and the capital to exchange their used boarding card for a free first class return by train.

The offer lasts until March 31, but free tickets can be issued for travel in either direction up to August 31. The offer is not limited to Manchester Piccadilly; it also applies to journeys to or from Stockport, Macclesfield, Wilmslow, Liverpool, Preston, Crewe, Chester, Runcorn, Wigan and Warrington.

Plane Relief is aimed at what Virgin Trains calls 'the dwindling number of air travellers between London and Manchester'. Between September 2004 and October 2005, rail's share of the rail+air market rose from 40.2% to 58.4%, and the number of rail journeys increased by 96% to 221 783.

Between February and October 2005, says Virgin, 82% of trains between Manchester and London were less than 10 min late, while BA managed to get only 69% of its flights between Manchester and Heathrow or Gatwick to their destination within 15 min.

VWC Managing Director Charles Belcher said 'millions more passengers are now using our trains compared to a year ago.' Plane Relief 'underlines our confidence that once customers try us they will stay with us'. ■

Hastings trains to end

In addition to downgrading Gatwick Express, the RUS sets out a number of changes intended to increase peak capacity and boost reliability on this intensively-used route. An important objective is reducing the number of Fast/Slow crossing movements.

The most critical section is the 6 miles of double track between Balcombe Tunnel Junction and Copyhold Junction. In a typical hour between the peaks, nine trains are currently scheduled in the Up direction: two fast from Brighton to Victoria, four Thameslink, one Brighton – Watford, and two trains consisting of portions starting alternately from Eastbourne/Hastings and Littlehampton/Southampton which join at Haywards Heath.

DfT intends to end this practice, increasing the number of trains

through the Balcombe bottleneck from 9 to 11. While the RUS sets 10 as the maximum to be permitted off-peak, it does not identify specifically which service is to be sacrificed.

It is, in fact, the hourly Brighton – Watford service that is to be truncated. Having started as a Rugby – Brighton service specifically aimed at serving Gatwick Airport, it is now destined to become a Watford Junction – Clapham Junction shuttle. The principal reason given is to eliminate Fast/Slow crossings at Balham and free up Fast line paths south of that point.

Another decision in the RUS is to end the long-standing hourly train to Hastings from Victoria, depriving Bexhill of its direct trains to the capital. However, it is likely that Eastbourne will still keep the same half-hourly service to London that Worthing and Hove now enjoy.

Good chance, says BAA

Responding to the publication of the RUS on February 3, the airport operator said that DfT 'has listened to the arguments of BAA and others in favour of the Gatwick Express'.

In a joint submission with franchisee National Express last month, BAA proposed altering departure times from Gatwick, where dwell times would be reduced, as well as starting and terminating all peak-hour services at Three Bridges.

BAA feels 'there is a very good chance of saving the Gatwick Express' if it continues to advocate its case alongside 'other interested stakeholders' including airlines and passengers. With its proposed amendments, Gatwick Express 'would still be a very good service for air passengers and would provide the necessary flexibility to allow more trains for commuters'. ■

One cuts West Anglia inner-suburban services

Drastic cuts to inner-suburban services linking Chingford, Enfield Town and Hertford East with London Liverpool Street were implemented by One on February 6.

Saturday services on these routes are to be halved from February 11, and Sunday services will also be halved from March 12. Train cancellations in and out of Liverpool Street have been a regular feature since the December 2005 timetable was introduced, mainly because of a shortage of drivers.

One had announced on January 27 that it would be making 'changes' to the West Anglia timetable which reflected experience of 'the initial operation of the new timetable during the first few

weeks and customer feedback received'. According to the TOC, 'the changes will apply until further notice and are designed to provide for a robust and consistently-deliverable service, which maintain the key passenger benefits.'

A One spokesperson confirmed that the number of trains to inner suburban destinations had been reduced because 'we have issues with the drivers'. She also confirmed that the new timetable had been approved by the Department for Transport.

From this week, 41 trains have been withdrawn on Mondays to Fridays and 58 will no longer run on Saturdays; a small number of changes have been made to stops

by other trains. Sunday cancellations next month see 60 out of 120 services withdrawn.

London TravelWatch Chairman Brian Cooke said 'it is pretty disgraceful that One ever got into this situation and passengers are suffering as a result. It was badly planned, badly executed and badly handled'. He added 'One has accepted that getting to a stable position for now is the priority, but it is of deep regret that the agreed timetable for December 2005 will not be fully implemented until December 2006. We do, however, accept that it is better that a new operable timetable is put in place, so at least passengers can have the reliability of service they need'. ■

Open access to Wrexham?

Renaissance Trains Ltd, the team of three former British Rail managers that created Hull Trains, has joined up with Chiltern Railways' parent company Laing Rail to launch a similar open-access joint venture under the banner of the Wrexham, Shropshire & Marylebone Railway Co.

The initiative was announced on February 1 after the two parties signed a memorandum of understanding. The aim is to start five Wrexham – London round trips a day next year. Hull Trains is the UK's only open-access scheduled passenger operator so far, and WSMR expects to be second – unless Grand Central gets there first (p1).

The project is being led by John Nelson, one-time Managing Director of BR's Network SouthEast business and now a director of several rail companies including Laing Rail. Mike Jones, another member

of the original Renaissance Trains trio, is also closely involved.

Nelson told RBI that their preference was to acquire three or four three-car DMUs, with the Class 170 a likely candidate. There would be a first class section with at-seat refreshments, and a crew of four to ensure quality service in both classes. Seats would be reservable.

The DMUs would be maintained at Chiltern's new Wembley depot, with basic servicing provided at sidings at Wrexham (although there are 'security issues' here). Pending further discussions with local interest groups, it is possible that the service would only run between London and Shrewsbury.

Abstraction of traffic from franchised TOCs is a key issue for ORR, which has to grant an operating licence and approve the request for paths. Assuming WSMR does go

to Wrexham, intermediate stops are expected to be Ruabon, Chirk, Gobowen, Shrewsbury, Telford Central, Cosford and Wolverhampton. Trains would then run non-stop to Marylebone via Birmingham New Street, Solihull and Bicester North, which Nelson believes can be covered in 2 h at an average speed of 63 mile/h.

Cosford serves what is destined to become the RAF's major training centre, and the RAF has extended a welcome to WSMR. Substantial amounts of land are also available for car parking close to the station.

Asked about the wisdom of not calling at Birmingham New Street, Nelson stressed the importance of not abstracting revenue from Chiltern. 'But we could set down and pick up only, to avoid competing in the Birmingham – London market', he suggested. ■

Competition Commission clears Greater Western

The Competition Commission announced on February 2 that it had provisionally cleared First-Group's acquisition of the Greater Western franchise (RBI260 p1), having concluded that it may not be expected to result in 'a substantial lessening of competition' in the supply of passenger transport services in the GW franchise area.

Chaired by Diana Guy, the commission's inquiry group concentrated on overlapping First-

Group rail and bus services in South Wales, Cornwall and the Bristol area, as well as the Truro – Penzance, Plymouth – Paignton, Bridgwater – Taunton and Great Malvern – Worcester routes.

'In most of the areas we have looked at, bus and train services have different characteristics and the passengers using them have different requirements', she said. 'Even in those areas where there was some potential for competi-

tion, we found the profit incentive was very small for an operator of both bus and train services to take advantage of its position to shift passengers from bus to rail by raising fares or altering services'.

Interested parties have been invited to submit their responses to the decision by February 22. The Competition Commission is required to publish its final report on the Greater Western inquiry by March 16. ■

Now it's Adelantes to Holyhead

Virgin West Coast has proposed the 14 five-car Class 180 Adelante DMUs, to be released by Greater Western in December (RBI262 p8), as more suitable to operate VWC services to Holyhead than the dedicated subfleet of Super Voyagers as proposed by DfT Rail, reports Tony Miles. Leasing Class 180s would allow Virgin CrossCountry to retain its full Voyager fleet.

VWC currently runs two Pendolinos to Holyhead each day, hauled by Class 57 diesels to and

from Crewe. According to Virgin Rail Chief Executive Tony Collins, 'you have a £14m monster that gets you to Crewe 20 min earlier and then it sits at Crewe for 20 min while the diesel is attached. It was always a crazy idea and we were always against it'.

Critical of DfT's preferred solution, Collins noted that the Adelantes 'are probably better equipped to do something with in terms of modifications'. The Adelantes would be off-lease during

the modification programme while the Super Voyagers would have to be taken out of service.

Despite DfT Rail's insistence that only 125 mile/h DMUs with tilt can keep to time on the WCML, Collins believes that once the Trent Valley quadrupling is completed, Meridians or Adelantes would be able to keep to time. 'We've worked with Network Rail on this, and there are ways and means that non-tilt trains can do the job', he said. ■

Engine problems solved?

The failures experienced by overhauled Cummins QSK-19 engines powering Voyager and Super Voyager DEMUs have been attributed to incorrect installation of a small bush controlling the oil flow into the engine's rocker gear, according to Virgin insiders. When fitted the wrong way round during overhaul, it reduced the flow of oil to the engine block by 90%.

Starved of oil, the rocker arm pivots overheated, with the result that the valves touched the pistons, causing significant damage. Virgin has discov-

ered that DB in Germany uses the same engine, but undertakes its own engine overhauls and has not experienced similar problems.

Bombardier and Alstom have concluded that recent traction motor problems were the result of trains running with engines isolated, which put excessive demands on the motors. A rectification programme has been agreed with Bombardier which should see 70 sets available each day from June, enabling VCC to run pairs of units on its busiest services and deploy stand-by sets at strategic points.

Eurotunnel signs 'understanding' with creditors

In the final hours before the waiver that it had secured from creditors last year expired on January 31, the Eurotunnel board 'validated' a memorandum of understanding 'concerning the outline of the restructuring of Eurotunnel's debt' with the ad hoc committee of creditors. The waiver was a necessary condition under the 1998 deal agreed by debt-holders for any future negotiations on debt restructuring to take place.

According to information given to shareholders in 2005, the deal should have been in place last month. Eurotunnel admitted in a statement on February 1 that it was seeking 'a further period of waiver until the end of March 2006'. This would enable it to 'continue finalising the outline of the restructuring' by presenting the memorandum, under the terms of a confidentiality agreement, to the creditors not represented by the ad hoc committee.

The structure of Eurotunnel's £6.3bn debt is complex, but creditors are basically divided into two groups: those who hold Senior debt, and 'co-financiers' who hold Junior debt, Fourth Tranche and Tier 1A. Support for a further waiver is needed from a qualified majority of all these groups. The ad hoc committee comprises MBIA, EIB, Franklin Mutual Advisers, certain funds represented by Oaktree Capital Management and Ambrac. Between them, they represent 73% of debt held by the co-financiers, 21% of the Senior debt, and more than 50% of the total debt.

Standard & Poor's said Eurotunnel SA's BBB senior secured bank loan rating remained on CreditWatch, with 'negative implications'. Despite the accord, S&P reiterated its 'concern about whether a global agreement on the debt restructuring will be possible.' ■

SHAREWATCH

	3/1/06	9/1/06	16/1/06	23/1/06	30/1/06	6/2/06
Eurotunnel	18	17.5	21.75	24.75	24.5	31
Arriva	582.5	585.5	569	557	565	588.5
FirstGroup	401.75	415.25	411.5	406.75	407.25	403.5
Go Ahead	1 630	1 653	1 672	1 718	1 771	1 783
Laing	332	328	333	328.75	322.75	319
National Express	860.5	882.5	888	860	858.5	876.5
Sea Containers	730	740	729	799	774	782
Serco	314.25	313.75	307	297	324.25	317.25
Stagecoach	115.5	115.5	113.5	113.75	113.75	113.25
TOC Index	4 967	5 033	5 023	5 080	5 137	5 183
AEA Technology	112.5	121	117.5	111.5	114.5	128
AMEC	343.5	343.5	351.75	374.5	378	383.5
WS Atkins	740.5	739	722	718	744	741
Balfour Beatty	356	369.5	360.75	362.75	367.25	381.5
Carillion	306	319.75	302.5	303	316.5	318.5
Jarvis	92	89	87.75	89.5	89.25	84.25

Chinese DMUs move forward

A pilot order for 50 diesel multiple-unit vehicles could be placed with Chinese manufacturer CSR Ziyang Locomotive Works later this year. Replacement of Pacer DMUs in the Northern fleet was proposed by Serco/NedRail in 2004 (RBI230 p1), but in the event, the acquisition of replacement units was not made a franchise commitment. However, procurement has continued, sponsored by Yorkshire Forward.

According to industry insiders, due diligence is due to start in the second or third week of February. Assuming this is satisfactory, heads of agreement could be agreed by the end of March with the contract placed in the second quarter of this year. A pre-series unit could start trial running at the end of 2007.

When RBI revealed the option for Chinese DMUs in September 2004, ROSCOs had been asked for proposals to fund a fleet of up to 200 vehicles. Subsequently the quantity fell to 140 vehicles. This would have been sufficient to replace the 158 Class 142 vehicles owned by Angel Trains, Northern's oldest Pacers.

To make the financial case a maximum price of £650 000 per vehicle was required. This aspiration was even below prices from manufacturers in South Korea.

Rather than reduced maintenance costs, the Pacer replacement is now being justified on the basis of improved reliability (below). The initial quantity has fallen to 50 vehicles, although project insiders suggest that 60 would be a more realistic figure commercially. ■

Reliability drives Pacer replacement plans

In 1985 a new Class 142 cost £170 000 per vehicle, equivalent to £350 000 at today's prices. This reflects the basic bus-like nature of the trains.

Lease rentals are divided into capital and non-capital elements. Capital rentals have fallen by 25% or more in recent years, and the current Pacer rental is around £17 000 per vehicle per year. The non-capital element is essentially overhaul and other engineering costs, which are largely determined by the vehicle age. Non-capital rental for a Class 142 is typically £36 000 per vehicle per year but should reduce as the vehicles approach scrapping, reducing the need for major overhauls.

To this must be added maintenance costs. While Pacers are maintenance-intensive, the work is simple and largely electro-mechanical.

Uncertainty surrounds revised disability regulations

Pending the resolution of an emerging conflict between domestic and European accessibility legislation, owners and operators of passenger rolling stock remain uncertain over the future of vehicles introduced before privatisation and which have many years of useful life remaining.

Under the revised Disability Discrimination Act, which received Royal Assent on April 7 2005, all passenger trains on the network must comply with the Rail Vehicle Accessibility Regulations from 2020. However, the European Directive on Conventional Interoperability, which will take precedence over national legislation, includes the Persons of Reduced Mobility Technical Specification for Interoperability, which covers similar provisions to the rail sections of DDA and RVAR.

Significantly, the PRM TSI does not include an end date. But the

interoperability regulations apply only to new projects and major renewals and upgrades.

Britain has made a substantial input to the PRM TSI, drawing on experience with RVAR. For example, terms such as 'colour contrast' and 'rounded surfaces' which are left open to subjective interpretation in RVAR are closely defined in the TSI, resulting in pass/fail decisions. In general, the TSI is not so prescriptive as the UK regulations.

The PRM TSI is currently being transposed into UK legislation and should come into effect in the autumn. When it is in force, and assuming the 2020 end date is implemented, owners of long-life fleets (below) could have an alternative to the expected choice of either funding full RVAR compliance or scrapping. A major upgrade would require compliance with the PRM TSI but could be less expensive than the RVAR option.

In a number of areas the upgraded train might still not be RVAR-compliant and would be exempt from the end date. While the differences between RVAR and the PRM TSI are minor, in the case of dimensions involving the vehicle

Printbite

'When major strategic change is made to infrastructure and rolling stock that is part of or operates on the TEN rail system, whether it is newly built, upgraded or renewed, those parts of the rail system will have to comply with the Regulations.'

DfT guidance on draft Interoperability Regulations

structure the difference could represent a significant saving or avoid the need for scrapping.

A key issue will be the definition of 'major upgrade', where discussions between the various parties involved are ongoing. This is likely to be linked to the number of vehicles involved rather than the cost. It is expected that the TSI will provide a menu approach, similar to that adopted for SRA's code of practice on vehicle refurbishment.

Given the hardening line on granting extensions to exemptions (p1), industry insiders expect a challenge to the supremacy of the PRM TSI from DfT Rail and the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee. Early signs are that the railway industry may resist the disability bodies on this issue. ■

Printbite

'Setting 2020 as the end date for RVAR compliance would incur an unjustifiable level of costs.'

Letter from Angel Trains to DfT
January 26 2004

Long-life EMU fleets

Class	Operator	Build date	Life-expiry date	No of vehicles	No of units
365	WAGN	1994-95	2032	164	41
323	Central, Northern	1992-93	2027-30	129	43
465	South Eastern	1991-94	2029	588	147
466	South Eastern	1993-94	2029	86	43

Compliance will be no easy matter

Altering the internal layout of a rail vehicle to comply with disability regulations can result in significant effects on the vehicle's dynamics. A case in point was the modification of the Class 465 to create the Class 465/9 operated by South Eastern Trains, including the addition of a wheelchair space.

When not occupied by a wheelchair, this space provides additional high-density standing room. The effect has been to introduce more passengers and thus more mass, but also creating a higher centre of gravity than with seated passengers. This combination has had an effect on the sideways movement of the vehicle on its suspension ('sway').

When the Class 465 was built for Kent inner suburban services, the vehicles were designed to maximise interior space within the restricted loading gauge of some tunnels. This was approved by HMRI on the basis that the train bodies were built to a dimensional accuracy of ±5 mm and the ballast was 'glued' to ensure that the rails remained in their designed position relative to the tunnel vault.

These concessions were linked to the train's dynamics with normal and maximum loads. However, the additional standing passengers in the Class 465/9 has affected the original parameters, requiring further changes.

Thameslink/GN premium profile

DfT Rail released the premium profile for the Thameslink/Great Northern franchise (RBI260 p1) on January 23. Analysis shows that FirstGroup won the franchise with the constant-rate premium growth approach used for its successful bid for Greater Western and also by Sea Containers for the replacement InterCity East Coast franchise.

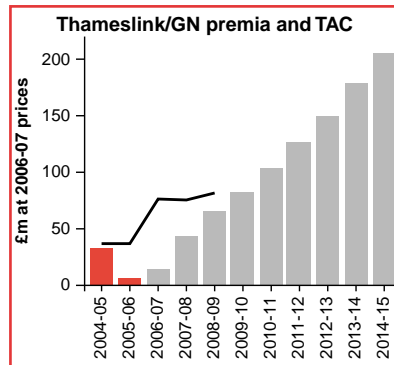
Thameslink/GN has a maximum nine-year term. At the end of the fourth year, the franchise will automatically continue for two further years if performance improvement targets are met. Subject to DfT Rail's agreement, the franchise can then continue for up to three more years.

According to DfT Rail, this flexibility is needed to facilitate work on the Thameslink 2000 programme. The reconvened public inquiry under the Transport & Works Act closed last December (RBI260 p8) and was expected to report 'early' this year. Note that the straight-line premium growth does not reflect

these key points. Nor does the introduction of cap and collar in Year 4 have any effect.

To put the profile in context, RBI has calculated the equivalent premia for the current Thameslink and WAGN franchises for the two years leading up to the start of Thameslink/GN on April 1 2006. This is complicated by the fact that the Thameslink premium was due to halve in 2005-06 due to what the SRA called 'regulatory adjustments'. However, the adjusted premium correlates broadly with FirstGroup's premium profile (Table I).

But what this simple comparison does not reveal is the impact of the change in track access charges from April 1 2006. Following the 2003 Access Charge Review, DfT agreed with the Rail Regulator that payment of access charges in Control Period 3 (2004-05 to 2008-09) should be restructured with an increased proportion paid as a direct



grant to Network Rail, reprofiled to reduce TOC payments to NR in the first two years. This means that for franchises starting this year, subsidy or premia include allowance for the increase in charges.

In our graph, we have overlaid the track access charges for CP3 on top of the Thameslink/GN premium profile. Readers should note the increase in access charges which coincides with the step-up in premium payments.

Table I. Thameslink/GN premium profile, £m at 2006-07 prices

	04-05	05-06	06-07	07-08	08-09	09-10	10-11	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15
Thameslink/GN premium	-	-	14.1	43.9	65.2	82.7	103.4	126.4	149.8	178.4	205.1
Thameslink & WAGN premia	32.9	5.8	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
NPV of nominal payments	-	-	13.7	42.0	60.7	74.7	90.5	106.9	122.4	140.7	156.1

Grand Central wins ECML paths

Continued from page 1

route that led ORR to reject GNER's proposal for a half-hourly service to Leeds all day. ORR also saw 'no reason to disagree' with NR's rejection of Grand Central's proposal to join and split its Sunderland and Bradford services at Doncaster, 'especially in view of the distance that the separate portions of joining services would have to travel before reaching Doncaster.'

It should also be noted that the proposed allocation of paths is specifically linked to the December 2006 timetable. ORR accepts that NR's forthcoming ECML Route Utilisation Strategy could lead to a recast timetable that released

significantly more capacity for both passengers and freight. NR is urged 'to give development of this RUS, including the Doncaster to Leeds route, particular priority within its overall programme.' It is relevant that GNER's plan to electrify the 15 miles between Hambleton South Junction and Neville Hill depot to create the 'Leeds horseshoe' is driven

by congestion between Doncaster and Leeds. This aspect will doubtless be analysed in the RUS.

While accepting that the extra paths afforded to Grand Central 'would necessarily limit the room for freight growth to a small extent', ORR considers 'that adequate headroom will still remain prior to the RUS', probably with a need to loop trains on the ECML north of Stoke Tunnel.

Sunderland in 2007?

In a statement issued on January 27 welcoming ORR's proposed decision, Grand Central said that its open-access Sunderland services 'are expected to commence in 2007'. As well as Sunderland, Grand Central expects to serve Hartlepool, Eaglescliffe, Northallerton, Thirsk, York, Doncaster, Retford, Newark North Gate, Grantham, Peterborough, Stevenage and King's Cross.

Despite calling at all ECML stations between Northallerton and Peterborough, ORR has assessed the ratio of generated (new-to-rail) business to revenue abstracted from existing operators by Grand Central as being 'towards the middle to lower end of the range estimated for previous Hull Trains services, and so pass the "not primarily abstractive" test.'

The three paths each way between Sunderland and King's Cross that Grand Central now expects to secure

still have to be negotiated in detail with Network Rail, and much depends on how close Grand Central can get to the morning and evening peaks.

Its failure to secure access rights for its Bradford service at this stage must weaken the business case. Overheads such as marketing are spread over fewer train services, and while two Class 222 DEMUs similar to those used by Hull Trains could theoretically cover three round trips a day, a spare unit could have been shared with the Bradford service.

Hull Trains began with three daily trips to and from London, and ORR points out that 'both the Sunderland and Bradford services would provide a larger population with new direct services, indicating that revenue generation could be higher than Hull Trains'. However, GNER already provides faster and more frequent services from Newcastle, Durham and Darlington, which are much closer to Sunderland and Hartlepool than Hull is to Doncaster.

GNER funds station works

On January 24 GNER outlined the station enhancement and other investment projects that will be funded through what it terms a 'unique financing facility' worth £32.5m (RBI262 p7), which was arranged by the Transport & Logistics team at Barclays Bank.

The facility will pay for 900 extra parking spaces and covered storage for 400 bicycles at GNER stations; the former will generate revenue from parking charges, and both should see extra tickets sold.

Lifts are to be installed at Grantham and Newark North Gate. Signage and information screens will be improved. In a move that could be copied with advantage elsewhere, train running information will be made available at Central Station on the Tyne & Wear Metro, Doncaster's new bus interchange and the Queensgate shopping centre in Peterborough. Newcastle, Durham and Peterborough are to be equipped with ticket gates by 2009, and 50 more self-service ticket machines will be installed.

The facility will also finance a new wheel lathe and bogie drop, and GNER is planning to acquire four simulators for driver training.

According to Finance Director Shaun Mills, 'we set out some very demanding specifications, tailored specifically to meet the demands of GNER's new franchise over its full term. These included flexible draw-down patterns, low interest charges driven off the structural aspects of the deal, and long availability and repayment periods'. The most important structural aspect is in fact a loan guarantee from the government.

GNER is 'disappointed'

In response to ORR's announcement (left), GNER said on January 27 it was 'genuinely surprised and disappointed', pointing out that its 10-year franchise awarded last year 'includes a commitment to increase services between Leeds and London from 53 to 65 per weekday by December 2007 or earlier, subject to ORR approval'.

GNER said Leeds - London is 'the biggest and fastest-growing long-distance rail market in Britain, yet has fewer trains than comparable routes', citing Manchester with 68 trains per day and Newcastle with 61.

In a challenge to NR's stance that very little scope exists to path more trains between King's Cross and Doncaster, GNER said it may be forced to abandon plans to electrify the 15 miles between Hambleton South Junction on the ECML and Neville Hill, which 'could have acted as a catalyst for other electrification schemes between Leeds and York'.

Soundbite

'We are of course disappointed that we are not to be granted the rights to offer trains to Bradford and Halifax at this time, but will continue to work hard to ensure the forthcoming Route Utilisation Study offers up opportunities for these important markets. We have no intention of abandoning West Yorkshire, and will maintain an important profile in the area.'

Ian Yeowart

Managing Director,
Grand Central Railway Company
January 27 2006

With effect from February 5, **Ian Buchan** has been appointed to the board of Network Rail as a non-executive Director. He is a former Chief Executive of the Trains Division at National Express Group (RBI214 p8).

Midland Main Line Managing Director **Paul Bunting** took up the post of Chief Executive of the Coach Division at National Express Group on February 1. He succeeds **Denis Wormwell** who is now Chief Executive of NEG's Bus Division.

Tim Shakerley has been promoted to the post of Engineering Director at Freightliner Group Ltd. He was Group Head of Engineering.

Airport Express has appointed **David Maddison** as International Airline Account Manager. He joins

the sales and marketing alliance from Neeter Outsourced Solutions.

Emyr Williams has been appointed Communications Manager at Arriva Trains Wales. He joins the TOC from the British Heart Foundation where he was Marketing & Communications Manager.

Andrew Greenwood has been appointed Finance Director at AEA Technology Rail. He joins the company from Equant, the international data communications subsidiary of France Telecom.

Ben Blackwall has been appointed Business Manager for the Transport Division at Praxis High-Integrity Systems. He was an Account Manager at AEA Technology.

Go-Ahead Rail Group Human Res-

ources Director **Nick Mitchell** has been appointed to the board of GoSkills, the sector skills council for the passenger transport industry.

Former Virgin Trains Chief Executive **Chris Green** is Chair of the Board of Trustees of Greengauge21, the not-for-profit organisation formed to promote a high-speed rail network for the UK (p2). The other trustees are: Greengauge21 Founder and Director **Jim Steer**, a Director of Steer Davies Gleave; ITV news presenter **Nicholas Owen**; CBI Director-General **Sir Digby Jones**; **Sir Peter Hall**, Professor of Planning & Regeneration at the Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London; **Lord Faulkner of Worcester**, Treasurer of the All-Party Parliamentary Rail Group; and former SRA Chairman & Chief Executive **Richard Bowker**.

DIARY

February 16, London:
'Smarter Living through Transport Smartcards'.
The Centre for Transport Policy, The Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen.
Tel: 01224 263134
www.abs.ac.uk/cftp

February 23, London:
'Transportation Human Factors: Sharing Lessons, Research & Experience Across the Modes'.
The Ergonomics Society.
Tel: 01509 234904
www.ergonomics.org.uk

March 7, London:
'Delivering the 2012 Olympics'.
The Centre for Transport Policy, The Robert Gordon University (above).

March 9, London:
'Newer, Cleaner, Cheaper Energy for Today's Rail System'.
Institution of Mechanical Engineers.
Tel: 020 7973 1258
t_churcher@imeche.org.uk

March 16 – 17, London:
'Aspect 2006: Quality of Service through Signalling and Communications'.
Institution of Railway Signal Engineers.
Tel: 020 8941 8727
info@irse-aspect.org

March 24, Huddersfield:
'Community Rail Development Strategy'.
Association of Community Rail Partnerships.
Tel: 01484 847790
www.acorp.uk.com

April 25 – 26, London:
'Fleet Reliability 2006'.
Centaur Conferences.
Tel: 020 7970 4770
www.theengineerconferences.com

April 26, Perth:
'Scottish Rail Freight Conference'.
Rail Freight Group.
Tel: 020 7233 3177
www.rfg.org.uk

May 8, London:
'High-Speed Rail in the UK'.
Institution of Civil Engineers/Railway Forum.
Tel: 020 7665 2313
www.iceconferences.com

The costs and benefits of closure

The process of making a case for a railway closure (p1) starts with the applicant reviewing ways of reducing costs or increasing revenue. The next stage is to assess alternative public transport. This is normally a bus, but where long-distance travel might be affected, 'domestic air services may also be a relevant alternative', suggesting a much wider canvas than PTE-supported services and rural branches.

In the case of PTEs, the Railways Act 2005 'gives new powers for quality contracts to be used for the provision of bus services in the event of closure of rail services'. This provides for a degree of bus re-regulation which PTEs are likely to find attractive, although bus operators do not. The Act 'also provides powers for the Secretary of State or Scottish Ministers to secure substitute road services' to replace trains.

The applicant must go through the same benefit:cost analysis as required to justify a new road – or more relevantly, perhaps, a new light rail line – discounting costs and benefits over several years using the rules in the Treasury's Green Book. This must include as a benefit, for example, any cash that NR might raise from selling the land.

DfT proposes that appraisal of rail closures 'should be carried out on the basis of operating costs and benefits, with the appraisal period defined as the period until the next piece of infrastructure will need to be renewed.' Retention of the rail service is reduced to one of a number of possible options, with costs and benefits that can readily be quantified in money terms taking precedence over social and environmental factors. If freight uses the line – as on the Settle – Carlisle

Soundbite

'I have said time and time again that I am happy to support rural railway lines. The community development partnerships that we announced a couple of years ago are designed to give lines that are in the last-chance saloon a chance to continue, and they have been quite successful. It beggars belief that we should reach a point at which no-one is using a train or a station, and say that nothing can ever be done about it.'

Alistair Darling MP

Secretary of State for Transport
Speaking in the House of Commons
February 1 2006

Printbite

'Although increasing patronage and revenue is one of the aims of community rail partnerships, we are not aware that any long-term evidence in demand and revenue terms exists of their efficacy in this respect.'

Consultation on the implementation of the Railways Act 2005 provisions on closures and minor modifications
Appendix 1, Annex D, Paragraph 11
January 26 2006

route, for example – the number of new Sensitive Lorry-Miles generated must be calculated to assess the disbenefit of diversion to road. Furthermore, in the comparison the 'base case' has to be closure, so 'reinstating' the existing service is merely one of the options.

The fundamental problem is an underlying assumption that buses, which obviously incur negligible infrastructure costs, are in principle as good as the rail services they replace. The danger is that substitution will inevitably emerge as the cheapest option for a substantial proportion of the network as the financial noose tightens. ■

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ISSN 1472-5428

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Vertec Printing Services Ltd.

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