

ALL CHANGE...AGAIN!

Britain's railways face yet more reorganisation

Following much leaking, the Government recently published its white paper 'The Future of Rail' – a process it says is designed to strip out bureaucracy and run-away costs in the railways.

Confirmed to be abolished are the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE)'s responsibility for safety on the railways. Network Rail on the other hand is to have more influence over Britain's railways.

Getting rid of the SRA is a worry. Government said that it wasn't that the SRA was doing a bad job, rather that it didn't have all the powers it needed, to be fully effective. If someone is generally doing a good job, but needs more power to do an even better job, surely the right thing to do is to give them those powers – not to sack them and give the job to someone with little or no experience?

The Department for Transport will now be directly responsible for the strategic direction and management of the railways, including awarding of franchises. The main reason for all this? Money of course. The Treasury has been forced by the Rail Regulator to cough up nearly £5 billion for each of the next 5 years, as he decided that this is what Network Rail and the SRA need to run the railways. The Government is not currently allowed to refuse what the Rail Regulator decrees as his position is independent of government and legally binding. This infuriates the Treasury (perhaps somewhat

rightly so, given the way the costs of running Britain's railways have rocketed astronomically since the days of British Rail).

The demise of the HSE in the running of the railways will not be mourned by many! They have consistently meddled in the running of the railways to such a degree that many ordinary operations now contribute significantly to the rise in costs of running our railways. One only has to look at the opening of new stations – today it costs around £3-4 million for a simple unstaffed one coach platformed station to be built (eg Beaulieu near Inverness) compared with around £200,000 at the end of the BR era. Their role is to be integrated into the Office of the Rail Regulator (ORR).

Network Rail (NR) is to have much more direct influence over the day to day running of the railways. It will have sole responsibility for planning timetables (in consultation with the Train Operating Companies (TOCs)). NR will also be able to reduce the number of services on routes where it believes they are causing delays.

Change will not be immediately apparent. Train operators and services will generally remain the same. What is less certain is the future of some of the SRA's policies and projects. Government has said it will honour existing commitments (and it is sounding *very* enthusiastic about CRP), but beyond this, nothing is secure and everything will be 'cost sensitive'.
Ian Hibbert

COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIP

The most exciting thing to happen to ABFLY since its inception continues to develop. There have been numerous meetings, conferences and visits to other existing Community Rail Partnerships (CRPs) by members of your committee. Here are details of some of these meetings and where we are going from here...

CRP Consultation – ABFLY had to respond to the SRA by 31st May 2004. We have had very favourable reactions to our response. Here are a few points made by the SRA :

- Microfranchising is unlikely for the Abbey line
- Aim to provide 30min frequency (possible 20min in peak)
- No through Euston trains (but nothing done to preclude)
- More integrated ticketing
- Branch to remain electrified & using current trains
- Later evening trains & Sunday trains (currently not included in terms of the franchise) to be considered.

Essex & South Suffolk CRP - founded by a steering group of eight funding partners, primarily led by Essex County Council and including other local authorities along the branch lines, the TOC, SRA and Network Rail. On 15th June 2004, your committee members John Webster, Chris Currell and Sanjay Kulkarni visited the CRP team in Chelmsford on a fact finding mission about CRP. Our visit included a presentation about the CRP branch lines and activities, followed by a tour of the CRP office at Mistley station, a visit to Wrabness station to see initiatives such as railway station gardens, platform murals and innovative level crossing solutions.

'Major projects' include station beautification, car park and security improvements, signage, customer access and marketing. Funding for major projects is from TOC, Network Rail and SRA. Overheads and marketing costs, primarily for brochures is met by Essex County Council, as the fund holder for the CRP.
Sanjay Kulkarni

Bittern Line (Norwich to Sheringham) & Wherry Lines (Norwich to Great Yarmouth & Lowestoft) CRPs – On 18th June 2004, your committee members Sanjay Kulkarni and John Webster

visited these CRPs. We travelled to Great Yarmouth via Berney Arms to look at the station and car park proposals. These were to improve bus/train interchange facilities and the drop off area for cars. Back at Norwich we were joined by Clive Morris, ONE's Director of Rural Services, for a question and answer session on a TOC's perspective of the CRP. In the afternoon we travelled to West Runton, where we saw a woodland garden, which had been created by the local WI to enhance the station.
John Webster

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

After 7 years I would like to stand down as Membership Secretary and wonder if there is any member who would like to take over? Most of the information is entered on a database (unless members have specifically requested otherwise) so someone with a computer would be able to take over that file - but don't let that put off anyone who does not have one as 'hard' copies are held as well. Anyone who would like to volunteer please contact me for more details on 01727 872036 or e-mail at xfo28@dial.pipex.com
Tricia Jennings

HOLD THAT TRAIN!

Silverlink has given us its official policy on holding the 'Flyer' when an incoming connecting train is delayed. The 'Flyer' will only be held if the delayed train is 'in sight' (ie between Watford and the next station). In practice this will probably mean the train being held for no longer than 3 or 4 minutes.

!! STOP PRESS !!

We have just learnt of MORE Sunday closures of the Abbey line.

Bus replacement services will operate on these dates.

Please make a note of them :

Sundays 3,10,24 October – Skid pan training!

Saturday 23 October from 8pm onwards

TIMETABLE CHANGES

The September timetable change is the most significant for many years. In terms of the Abbey flyer itself, times have generally not changed very much – the main differences are in connection times and stopping patterns. *Please* read your pocket timetable carefully – there are changes to many services, including commuter timed trains. Please note the following M-F trains from Euston which all leave (and arrive St Albans) later: 1654, 1740, 1824, 1904.

The reason for all of this are the first fruits (some of them *very* rotten) of the West Coast – the line from Euston to Glasgow – Route Modernisation.

Here is a summary of a some typical journey times :

M-F	Abbey to Euston	many around 15mins slower
Sat	Abbey to Euston	all 7-16mins slower
Sun	Abbey to Euston	many 19mins faster
M-F	Euston to Abbey	most unchanged, some 10mins faster
Sat	Euston to Abbey	alternately 6mins faster or 7mins slower
Sun	Euston to Abbey	many 39-54mins faster
M-F	Abbey to MK	some 10mins faster, many 19mins slower
Sat	Abbey to MK	alternately 9mins faster or 14mins slower
Sun	Abbey to MK	too many buses to tell!
M-F	MK to Abbey	some 14mins faster, some 6mins slower
Sat	MK to Abbey	most 8mins slower
Sun	MK to Abbey	too many buses to tell!

There are winners *and* losers – mostly depending on when and where you're travelling. Peak journeys are not too badly affected (although some are longer) and indeed a few are shorter! Off-peak journeys however are in many cases much worse, especially St Albans to Euston of which all but one journey used to be under 50mins; now many are over an hour.

Further upheaval is inevitable with the speeding up of the entire route to Glasgow from now until 2008. There are no doubt more changes to come... but the passing loop could solve many of these problems!

DEVELOPMENTS ALONG THE LINE



New foot crossing at St Albans

The foot crossing of the line near the Abbey Station has recently been renewed. New galvanised security fencing was erected all around the crossing, new black painted railings around the actual railway, new white painted gates and a resurfaced path across. Goodness knows what it all cost, but if the Abbey line benefits from it then all to the good!

After much pressure from your committee, Silverlink finally reinstated one (but not both) poster display board outside the Abbey station which had recently been removed. Timetable information has

been placed in the replaced display board.

St Albans City & District Council recently placed two recycling bins outside the Abbey station. Anything that helps to improve the cleanliness and appearance of stations along the line is welcome.

WATFORD JUNCTION REDEVELOPMENT

There has been much coverage in local press of a proposed development on and around the site of Watford Junction station. Developers, Blackfriars Investments have already purchased Iveco House (the tower block above the ticket office) and propose to build a 'mini town' of over 2,400 flats on railway sidings and car parks over the next decade. Little is known as yet of the impact this will have on the Abbey line itself, except that at worst it could be moved eastwards away from the Junction station and at best the line could be slewed to run into platform 10. This would be a good outcome for us as not only would passengers arrive more in the heart of the station but it would also enable through running to Euston. Committee is seeking to meet with Blackfriars.

PLEASE HELP US !!

I am sure you have noticed, as have members of your committee, the unacceptable number of weekend closures this year when the Abbey line has been closed ostensibly for 'engineering works'. It has been noted on the majority of these weekends that in fact no work of any kind has been taking place at any point along the line. After much investigation and quizzing of both Silverlink and Network Rail, it appears that the reason for the closures and wholly inappropriate bus replacement services are the ongoing mainline West Coast Route Modernisation works at Watford Junction. Apparently, power has to be switched off on the overhead wires at Watford, also affecting the Abbey line. The committee did ask why a diesel replacement could not be procured for such occasions (as was the case during April this year when work at Watford sidings required overhead power to be switched off). Work at Watford also restricts access to the Abbey line on Saturday evenings when a diesel would have to be brought onto the line. Be assured this is being taken further – action is in hand and we are not going to countenance the virtual abandonment of the Sunday service.

We need your help though! We would like ANY user of the Abbey Flyer who notices anything unusual to get in touch with a member of committee to report it. Here's a list of typical problems that we really want to know about so that we can take these matters up with Silverlink and Network Rail: Late running of trains & reasons (if known), missed connections, dirtiness (or cleanliness!) of interior or exterior of trains, vandalism of trains AND stations, overgrown vegetation hitting the train en route, and any other developments along the line (e.g. foot crossing renewal at St Albans, repainting of stations or improvement in facilities. See the 'Contact us @' box at the bottom of this page. Thank you!

MEMBERS' MEETING 9th NOVEMBER

Representatives from Silverlink, SRA & Network Rail have been invited to speak and answer questions

Bricket Wood Parish Centre, 7.30pm for *prompt* 7.45pm start
Tea, Coffee and Biscuits will be provided

Non-members welcome to join on the door –
minimum donation £3.00

CONTACT US @

John Webster (Acting Chairman)	john.w.webster@ntlworld.com
John Cadisch (Treasurer)	john.cadisch@ntlworld.com
Tim White (Secretary)	twhite@manganesec.com
Sanjay Kulkarni (Technical matters)	srkulkarni1@yahoo.co.uk
Ian Hibbert (Newsletter Editor)	ianhibbert@hotmail.com
or text message Ian Hibbert 07753 824992 (no voice calls please)	