



ABFLY newsletter

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EDITOR'S PIECE

Having waited since March for the next newsletter, this month's is unashamedly a 'bumper issue'! The prolonged interlude was deliberate. Save for the small matter of a general election in June, nothing much 'reportable' happened during the summer months, but all of a sudden in September, things started happening.

Early on in the new parliament, and with the lobbying of Richard Harrington (MP for Watford) and Dorothy Thornhill (Mayor of Watford), the government confirmed its support for the Abbey Line tram scheme. This is great news, considering the uncertainty surrounding just about every other government project. The scheme has done tremendously well to survive both a change of government, a change of transport minister and not least the Comprehensive Spending Review. This is a tribute to all involved at HCC, the DfT and our local politicians. Thanks to them for pulling together and making the case for the Abbey Line.

Since the election the project has been moving forward. We've had a shortlist of bidders announced (see article below) and the long-awaited consultation report (detailed below). There are also changes afoot at the Community Rail Partnership, and developments on the railfreight terminal front.

We won't be holding a Members' Meeting this autumn, on account of poor attendance last year, but hopefully by the time of the AGM next April / May we should have a preferred bidder for the tram scheme announced and therefore much more detail to get our teeth into. Watch this space. So apologies for the high word count of this newsletter, but I hope you will find it interesting and informative!

SANTA SPECIALS 2010

We are pleased to announce that London Midland will be supporting our popular Santa Specials again this year, which will be taking place on **Saturday 18th December**. Precise timings will not be available until the new timetable is published on the 13th December, but as usual the trains will run in the morning. Look out for posters at stations for further details.

RAILFREIGHT TERMINAL

Property developer Helioslough has said it will launch legal action at the High Court following the decision by Eric Pickles, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, to refuse permission for the development of a rail freight terminal at the former Radlett Aerodrome. A hearing is expected to be set for some time in January or February 2011.

GOODBYE AND THANKS

ABFLY would like to record our appreciation and thanks to Charlie Johnston, formerly group station manager of Watford Junction and the Abbey Line, who has taken voluntary redundancy from London Midland. Charlie was a long-time friend and supporter of the Abbey Line, doing much to help us and the CRP in the cause of promoting and bettering the service. Charlie's thick Scottish accent laced with a wry sense of humour will be missed!

LEAF FALL TIMETABLE

Reminder: the 'leaf fall' timetable is in force until Saturday 11th December. The new winter timetable will come into force on the 12th December.



Above: passengers and supporters of the Abbey Line braved the torrential rain on 1st October to celebrate 100 years of Watford North, or 'Callowland' as it was originally known. A short (but damp) ceremony was held at the station, followed by a ride on the train down to Watford Junction and back, during which a commemorative cake was cut and distributed to somewhat surprised passengers! Thanks to everybody who turned out.

A RAILWAY MISCELLANY

Friend of the Abbey Line Murray Eckett is promoting his new book, called "Signals; A Railway Miscellany", a collection of essays about railways in the counties of Herts, Bed and Bucks, one of which is the Abbey Flyer. It is an A5-sized, soft back publication, 280 pages in length, and fully illustrated throughout. The RRP is £10.99 and it can be purchased through the Amazon website.

CHANGE ON THE HORIZON FOR CRP?

One of the changes that has occurred since the last newsletter is the departure of the Abbey Line Community Rail Partnership (ALCRP) officer, John Gunner, who resigned from the post in July 2010. We thank John for his contribution to the line and wish him well for the future.

John was the third ALCRP officer, following Maria Cutler and Alissa Ede, who both went on in succession to take up the more wide-ranging role of 'Rail Officer' at Hertfordshire County Council (HCC). Indeed, Alissa is still closely involved with the line, being both the Rail Officer and, on secondment, project manager for the tram scheme. The role of ALCRP officer is, for the time being, temporarily covered by Christian Hoskins and his team at HCC.

The future of the ALCRP is now being discussed in light of the forthcoming conversion to tramway operation, budgetary pressures following the Comprehensive Spending Review, and the government's 'Big Society' agenda. A discussion paper has been prepared by Andy Gipson, who spent five years with the Passenger Transport Unit of HCC before retirement in 2008. He now practises as a transport consultant and was asked by HCC to write the paper in order to outline the various options on the table. Andy should be congratulated for producing a paper which is positive in tone, acknowledging the successes of the ALCRP since 2005 and advocating that the main aims and objectives of the CRP should be perpetuated "whether or not" the light rail scheme comes to fruition. However, the paper acknowledges that the time may have come to consider a new structure for the ALCRP, less reliant on HCC, in terms of both funding and resources.

The most favoured solution, according to the paper, and that which is recommended by the Association of Community Rail Partnerships, is to set up the ALCRP on the 'incorporated body with constitution' model. Their view is that where considerable funding to CRPs is made by local authorities, the use of this funding will be secure and be used for the intention of both the authority and the CRP's objectives. At the same time, the CRP can function independently without direct interference from the local authority.

ABFLY have been invited to comment on the discussion paper and as such, we have decided to circulate the paper, verbatim, to all of our members, please find enclosed. If you wish to make a comment please contact John Webster, our chairman, on 01727 752613, or 07889 273333, e-mail john.w.webster@ntlworld.com or send a letter to 17 Faircross Way St Albans, AL1 4RT. If you wish to comment on this, please make your feelings known by the end of November.

FILMING ON THE ABBEY LINE

The Abbey station now has a peculiar claim to fame, in that it was used in August for the filming of a '118118' commercial (118118 is a directory enquiries service, amongst other things). As part of the commercial, the station, perhaps a little unfairly renamed 'Nowear Junction', was visited by the famous two 'droopy moustache' men in their trademark running outfits. This isn't the first time that the Abbey Line has been used for filming of course. Back in 1937, Bricket Wood was used for filming of *Victoria the Great*, which, remarkably, given the rural nature of Bricket Wood, called for a recreation of Euston in the 1840s! For this purpose, the veteran 1838 0-4-2 steam locomotive *Lion*, which was built for the Liverpool and Manchester Railway, was brought out of retirement (on a plinth at Liverpool Lime Street station) and brought down to Bricket Wood. Thought to be the oldest working steam locomotive in the world, *Lion* was a near-contemporary of Stephenson's *Rocket*, and its role in *Victoria the Great* provoked much local interest. Incidentally, *Lion* was also one of the locomotives to appear in the 1957 film *The Titfield Thunderbolt*. Incredibly, she continued to steam, on an off, until 1989, a mere 151 years after she was built. *Lion* will soon appear in the new Museum of Liverpool.



Above left and centre: filming for the 118118 advert at 'Nowear Junction'. **Right:** *Lion*, from a painting by Jim Petrie.

TRAM SCHEME MOVES AHEAD

Back in January the Department for Transport (DfT), in partnership with Hertfordshire County Council (HCC), published a consultation document entitled 'The Future of the Abbey Line'. The document set out plans to convert the line to light rail operation. ABFLY submitted their response to this consultation in March and on 26th October the government's response to the consultation was finally published.

First some statistics. 172 responses were received, of which 66% were in favour of the proposals, 20% were opposed and 14% were unclear or did not express an opinion either way. Of those people who indicated in their response that they were regular users of the line, 52 were in favour (66%) and 22 (29%) were opposed.

The report provides an interesting read and does indeed answer some of the questions posed by ABFLY, particularly with regards to statutory protection of the railway in the event of the tram scheme failing, or of HCC wanting to give it up. Nobody is suggesting that these scenarios will ever become a reality but it was important to clarify where we stand.

Further information was requested by ABFLY about the 'alternative closure regime' which would be put in place by the draft Statutory Instrument (SI). The question was also asked about whether these proposals would make it easier to close the line completely in the future, perhaps as a result of local political or budgetary pressures. In a similar vein, others asked what would happen should the tram scheme fail.

The response was that both DfT and HCC are committed to the continuation of passenger services on the Abbey Line. However, because they propose to change the services from heavy rail to tram, they need to first stop the franchised rail services and then to put in place an appropriate mechanism for the line once it is operating with the new rolling stock.

The draft SI applies the alternative closure procedure which is set out in section 25 of the Railways Act 2005. The alternative closure procedure means that the line cannot be closed outright by either HCC or the operator; it would first need to be proposed by the operator to the national authority. The national authority (in this case the Secretary of State for Transport) must then hold a public consultation to consider any objections if it supported a proposal from the operator to close the line. The operator could not discontinue the services unless the Office of Rail Regulation (ORR) had issued a "closure ratification notice" as set out in section 32 of that Act. The ORR would only ratify a closure if it was satisfied that the criteria set out in the relevant part of the closures guidance were met.

However, there is no statutory duty on the national authority to secure the continued provision of the services in the event that the ORR does not ratify the closure. In plain English, this means that the line could be 'mothballed' indefinitely even if closure has not been ratified by the ORR. This would place the line in a similar situation to the old Croxley Green branch, which lost its services in 1996 but remained officially 'open' until the mid-2000s when closure proceedings were finally enacted. However, the risk of this happening will be no greater than it is now, with the Abbey Line as a heavy rail service.

In terms of the tram operator going out of business, HCC will have the ability to step in, if appropriate, to continue running services. Where funding is concerned, DfT and HCC intend to agree a 'Grant Determination', which will set out clearly the amount of funding that HCC can expect to receive from DfT for each year of the contract period. This is intended to give HCC sufficient comfort over long term funding so that it can enter into a contract with the operator. Conversely, it should also give potential operators comfort that HCC has a guaranteed long-term stream of funding available to support delivery of the scheme.

The grant from DfT to HCC will be ring fenced so it can only be spent on matters relating to the Abbey Line. The amount of the grant will be determined in due course, but will be equivalent to the saving which DfT makes from taking the Abbey Line out of franchised rail services.

HCC will let a contract with an operator for up to 22.5 years to cover the design, build, maintenance and operation of services on the Abbey Line. The Abbey Line service will continue to operate as a commercial service, as it does now, the difference being that HCC will hold the contract with the operator instead of DfT. The intention is to use only funding that is currently spent on the Abbey Line to provide the new service. There is no intention to use council tax.

In terms of safety, the line will still be regulated by the ORR. By their nature, light rail vehicles such as trams are different from trains, which is why the new regime will be different in some ways from that currently in place. However, the exact standards which will apply will depend on the rolling stock used.

Many questions were asked about the type of rolling stock to be used, its capacity, whether bikes will be carried, how noisy it would be, quality, cleanliness, accessibility, reliability etc. Perhaps understandably, the consultation report is a bit more coy on this subject. The general response to these kind of questions was that the tender will be 'output based', and will not therefore specify in detail the design of the rolling stock. However, it will ask operators to indicate which type of vehicle will be used. The tender will also indicate the current number of passengers who currently use the line. The argument put forward is that in a commercial operation, the operator will want to maximise revenue by ensuring that there is sufficient capacity to carry all of the passengers expected to use the line. How to provide a suitable level of capacity, e.g. in the peak hours, is an issue which bidders will need to consider in responding to the Invitation To Tender.

TRAM SCHEME continued....

The report does however make clear that through-ticketing will be available, and also of note is that HCC will regulate some fares on the Abbey Line, the idea being to balance the commercial operation with the needs of passengers. It is claimed that this will actually give a greater degree of local control for fare setting than exists at the moment; something to be welcomed. Fares for routes beyond the Abbey Line (such as into London) will continue to be regulated under the current arrangements. The precise plans for fares and ticketing along the line are being developed and will be set out in due course, once an operator has been selected.

Finally, many people took the opportunity to suggest that the scheme should be expanded to include on-street running into St Albans or Watford, an extension to Hatfield, and new stations. The response was that, whilst the scope of the present scheme is limited only to replacement of the existing heavy rail service with a more frequent light rail service, future extensions or new stations may be possible, subject to the success of the line, local support, feasibility and any necessary funding being available. The operator could also make a business case on its own terms to suggest changes.

The full consultation report is available to download at <http://www.dft.gov.uk/consultations/closed/2010-05/>.

Four potential operators for the scheme have now been shortlisted. They are:

- Arriva Abbey Line Limited
- Construcciones y Auxiliar de Ferrocarriles, SA
- National Express Group plc
- Transdev/Bombardier

To date, National Express Group is the only operator to have approached ABFLY with a view to meeting up to discuss our aspirations. They do have some experience of the line, having been the owners of the old Silverlink Trains for over 10 years. We hope the other operators will follow suit and arrange to meet with us in due course.

If you would like to be kept informed about developments with this project you may wish to subscribe to the Abbey Line e-mail newsletter. You can do this by e-mailing lightrail@hertscc.gov.uk with the word 'subscribe' in the subject line.

PHOTO COMPETITION

With light rail services expected to start in 2012, this will be the end, perhaps forever, of 154 years of continuous heavy-rail operation on the line and it would be shame if the last months of 'heavy' trains could not be recorded for posterity.

As such, ABFLY is launching a little photo competition. The Abbey Line may not be the most photogenic railway line in the country, or have the most interesting trains, but even so, there must be some interesting shots to be had out there!

We are looking for a set of 10 photographs. A prize of £30 will be awarded to the photographer who can best capture the 'true essence' of the Abbey Line as a Community Rail Operation.

So we're not looking for dull shots of 'just the trains' or the stations. We want something imaginative, creative, something which illustrates the line, the people and the community it serves. It can be in colour or in black and white. Hint: think of the 'progressive' railway photography of Colin Gifford (look him up on Google....).

Send your photographs either by e-mail to dave_horton@btinternet.com or by post to Dave Horton, 8 Leighton Way, Belper, Derbyshire, DE56 1SX.

Closing date for entries is Monday 28th February. Entries will be judged by the ABFLY committee and the winner will be announced in March.

The winning photographs will be used to illustrate the Abbeyline website, which will be revamped in the spring.



Above right: In the 1960s, Colin Gifford was famous for his progressive photography of 'trains in the landscape' as the last days of steam were played out on British Railways. Does this inspire you? Could you do something similar for the Abbey Line in its last months of heavy rail operation?