

YHTAR Focus

Newsletter of Yorkshire and the Humber Transport Activists' Roundtable

Issue 11, January 2003

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YHTAR Focus
is mailed to some 150
campaigners and 300
politicians and
officers around the
Y+H region.

Philip Ralph

Philip Ralph, Vice Chair of Transport 2000 West Yorkshire Group and Convenor of its Rail & Light Rail Subcommittee, spokesman on rail matters for the YHTAR and leading member of Rail Futures in our region, died from a heart attack on his way to a rail campaigning meeting on Thursday December 19th. He was 63.

Educated at Cambridge and Sussex Universities, Philip's professional career was in adult education, being a tutor-organiser for the WEA in Leeds for over 30 years. His gentle manner disguised an individual with a remarkable grasp of the wider issues relating to the causes he believed in, most notably both the social and environmental dimensions of transport. He worked tirelessly to help bring about change towards more sustainable transport policies in our region, and, since his retirement from the WEA, was a

tower of strength not only in Transport 2000 and Rail Futures, but in helping to establish lively local action groups, for example in campaigning to establish a Harrogate rail users group and to put Otley back onto the rail map. He was not only a capable chairman of meetings, but could produce minutes which were models of clarity and conciseness. His premature loss to campaigning in our region is incalculable; we have lost a great colleague, supporter and friend. But for his family, especially his only sister Jill, his untimely death - barely a year after the death of their mother - can only be described as a tragic loss, and to her and to her family we can only offer our deepest condolences.

Colin Speakman
Chairman, West Yorkshire Transport 2000
Vice Chairman, YHTAR

All Change at YHTAR Focus

Steve Broadbent has recently taken a new job within the rail industry, and is therefore sadly unable to continue his excellent work as editor. I have taken over the job on a trial basis, and hope to be able to keep you updated with news on all YHTAR's campaigns and other topical items. The newsletter has a slightly new look, as different software is being used, but I hope to be able to include more photographs in the next issue.

Contributions of photographs or articles would be most welcome - see contact details on the back cover.

Paul Chattwood



ARRIVA

YHTAR is most grateful to Arriva plc for its sponsorship of this newsletter, which enables us to distribute YHTAR Focus to a wide audience.

From the Chair

I should like to begin by sending my best wishes for a happy and stress-free 2003 to all TAR members and transport activists.

I also wish for an untroubled time for the planet over the coming year and some reversal of the desperate trend towards unsustainability which we have experienced, including in transport terms, over the last decade.

I think that 2002 was a terrible year for all environmental campaigners and particularly so for transport campaigners. Apart from the sad loss of one of our most active local campaigners, Philip Ralph, we have seen a definite withdrawal of commitment to transport on the part of Government. Ministers have come and gone without making their mark on the problems we face and the re-creation of a separate ministry for transport has not yet had any impact.

The integrated transport strategy is in tatters and instead Ministers have stated their commitment to not upset the poor motorist. The Strategic Rail Authority's 10 year investment plan included nothing for the north of England and the recent announcement of massive investment in aviation compounded the government's disastrous attitude towards sustainability. Perhaps most cynical of all was the announcement of motorway widenings in the supposed £2.6 billion investment in transport. This money was another classic example of the Government seeming to be announcing new additional funding, when in fact all that was being done was announcing the Local Transport Plan settlements plus a few £million of proposals for motorway widening over the next ten years. I feel most sorry for the people of North West England who will experience the closure of the West Coast Main Line for four months this year plus, no doubt, chaos on the M6 as work begins to widen the section between Birmingham and Manchester. At the end of the work, like all rubbish bins in public places, the motorways will be full again.

For me as a cycle campaigner the £2 million Cycling Projects Fund was derisory. Most successful projects were very small schemes to install cycle

parking or changing facilities for cyclists in schools and workplaces. All these schemes should have been happening anyway through safe routes to school or through workplace travel planning.

The fact that the NHS received money to do what it had a responsibility to do shows that you can set a really bad example (on health promoting travel) and still get paid. As Keith Bingham reports in the current *Cycling Weekly* magazine "The £2 million for small cycling projects is £98 million short of the annual sum needed to put cycling on a par with Continental development, based on 1996 costs." The same can be said for walking. In my view it is a ludicrous situation where a walking strategy is produced which is all about encouragement and not about duty or responsibility. We still have a situation where local Highway Authorities can get away with doing nothing to make the most common form of transport safe and attractive.

Finally – ***no doubt you have all noticed it is raining!*** It rained nearly every day in November and many days in December. Here in Yorkshire we are relatively free of actual floods but the situation nationally is grim. Rain affects transport directly, as in flooded railway lines, damaged power-lines and landslides. It also acts as a disincentive to cycling to all but the most committed. As a manifestation of climate change it will have a severe, long-term detrimental effect on our lives and those of our children.

Transport is the major contributor now to the production of greenhouse gases and as 85% of all trips in the UK are now made by car (it's official) so it follows to anyone with a few neurones to make a synapse with, that the reversal of climate change depends on putting in place mechanisms to cut car trips. If the process is started now some beneficial effect may be felt in 50 years. I know that this particular audience is well aware of this but the failure of government to act suggests that they are either unaware of the severity of the situation or they are denying its importance. I know the second is true as there have been expert reports to government making the situation clear.

We must continue to use our combined expertise to get the message home.

Pam Ashton

New Year – New TAR! - an update from Pam Ashton

There have been some recent changes in the way Yorkshire and the Humber Transport Activists' Roundtable operates.

Sadly the number of people leading on areas of work such as rail, bus, etc has declined. We have already reported the sad death of Philip Ralph, our recently appointed rail "lead". We must also report that Jim Burton, our regionalisation expert, will no longer be so active on the TAR. On behalf of everyone I should like to pay tribute to Jim for all the work he has done over many years to fight for a decent countryside and decent transport. I know we will all miss him.

Following Steve Broadbent's departure from the post of co-ordinator a small group of "leads" met to discuss how to manage the work. I am very pleased to report that we came up with a solution that is now being put into practice.

Ray Wilkes will carry out most of the duties of co-ordinator backed

up by me. He will manage the membership records and all communications. He has already shown himself to be a good press release composer so will carry on with that good work. A user-friendly database for Ray is being designed at this very minute! The trips to London for national TAR meetings will be shared and I will continue to do the quarterly reports. I have also enjoyed working with our local Countryside Agency contacts on a few responses to consultations.

Graham Collett is a great source of help both to me and to the TAR. He does far more than a treasurer is normally expected to do and it is of great benefit to us all that he is such an active TAR member.

Colin Speakman and Simon Geller continue to play a very active part. Anthony Rae, in addition to full time campaigning on behalf of the TAR and FoE has taken on an important new role. He is now the TAR regional aviation co-ordinator, meaning that he co-ordinates the

work of all the TARs on aviation. It is a great tribute to Anthony that he was selected for this role and it will be of great benefit to us here in Yorkshire.

This newsletter is also a first. Paul Chattwood has kindly offered to edit *YHTAR Focus* for us on a trial basis. It is up to us to ensure that we all help him as much as possible.

So thanks to everyone for all your work so far and your efforts in the coming year and remember everyone else – this is a true roundtable and anyone, from whatever interest, can be actively involved. We need active members even more as we slide ever further into transport chaos, but we also need members to support the agencies when they do good work – such as the developments on the buses reported by Ray, and respond to all consultations so that the interests of everyone, not just car drivers are represented.

The TAR – A Regional Body?

This year the Regional Transport Strategy will be re-written by the Regional Assembly and its subgroups. In preparation for the re-writing the Assembly consulted on possible structures and membership for subgroups to oversee the actual work. As I had already written to the Chair of the Assembly requesting a place on the Robust Infrastructure Group I was consulted about the sub-groups. My email said "As a group the YHTAR is funded by the Countryside Agency to liaise with key agencies and people in the region developing transport strategy and to input to that strategy. Nationally TARs are asked to play a part in the development of the RTSs and this is the best way. I shall also be making contact with Dave Merrett to follow up on the useful discussions on involvement that he had with Dorian Speakman when he was TAR facilitator". Several TAR members helped with my response which requested four places on the new Regional Transport Group, saying: "there are not enough voluntary sector activists on the Regional Planning Committee (RPC) or the Regional Transport Forum (RTF). (other TARs have asked for 4 reps.) These reps should include FoE, T2000, CPRE and the TAR. It is inadequate to give Anthony Rae (who actually represents FoE) the sole responsibility for representing and communicating with the entire voluntary sector. RPCs DO NOT adequately represent those interested in transport issues and the RTF could have even more representatives of users than the RPC "

I have never received any notification of the structures that were established and have never been invited to nominate a TAR representative. The entire process of revising the RTS continues without direct input from the body that represents all sustainable transport campaigners in this region. *Pam Ashton*

Pedestrians or Motorists – Who should get Priority?

At the national Annual General Meeting of Transport 2000 held in London in November, a key issue debated was that of the so-called traffic “gyratory” systems which now dominate so many of our larger towns and cities – Leeds, Sheffield, Hull, Huddersfield, Doncaster.

Put simply a gyratory system – such as the Leeds Inner Loop – is a one way central area road system, linked to major radial roads, motorway links and multi-storey car parks, designed to allow maximum volumes of traffic to move at maximum speed, so that car commuters can get to and from town and city centres at highest convenience. Such projects have dominated highway engineers’ thinking over the last 30 years and have helped establish car commuting as the dominant mode of daily travel into our cities, at the price of walking, cycling or using public transport.

A key element in such inner city loop systems is the control of movement of pedestrians, sometimes by physical measures in the form of metal “safety” barriers forcing pedestrians down threatening underground tunnels (Bradford and Doncaster have especially horrific example of this), sometimes by pelican crossings that are timed to give huge priority to traffic. For example, a pedestrian coming out of Leeds City Station and heading for the Town Hall area has to wait for two long cycles of red lights, during which cars are given three times as much time (45 seconds) compared with a miserly 15 seconds for those on foot or cycle wanting to cross the Loop system. At peak times traffic can be gridlocked with pedestrians having to dart around between vehicles, but at off-peak times the speed of traffic coming off the motorway network is a physically threatening, environmental blight.

The 1960s Buchanan Report aimed to segregate cars and pedestrians in cities. Clearly what has happened over the last 30 years is the very opposite - our towns and cities have been adapted, often quite brutally, for the car, with central pedestrian areas as mere islands surrounded by physical barriers of high speed, high capacity trunk roads. This makes it physically difficult and even dangerous for anyone wanting to walk into or across town or city centres on foot. Until recently, pedestrians crossing Hall Ings, outside St George’s Hall, Bradford were warned to obey the lights with a list of recent casualty figures whilst drivers could

race past the lights at speeds of up to 60mph with impunity – a classic example of victims being blamed for the violence inflicted on them.

Britain faces a growing crisis of an overweight, car dependent population. Obesity, largely caused by lack of basic exercise such as walking to a bus stop, is now reaching epidemic proportions with catastrophic impacts on our health. Doctors are realising that our love affair with the car is literally killing us, not only from increasing accidents and pollution, but through degenerative illness as we become a nation of couch and car potatoes. Yet with a few notable exceptions, such as the City of York which takes such matters more seriously, the needs of walkers in all towns and cities of our region are largely ignored.

The Department of Transport is, belatedly, urging local authorities to adopt Local Walking Strategies in their Local Transport Plans. But these are clearly intended to be half-hearted affairs, offering at best some non controversial cosmetics. Current advisory notes intended for local authorities suggest a four point strategy, nothing of which can one disagree with:

- Improve infrastructure (which ought to mean more paths and pedestrian priority areas)
- Improve safety and security – which includes better lighting
- Promote walking
- Involve local business and interest groups.

However what is really needed is a much more radical approach. Instead of always giving cars priority at crossings, why not provide at least 50-50 equality of timings in town and city centres, or pedestrian sensitive Puffin systems which will give people on foot a better chance? Why not 20mph zones and shared road space to remove the city centre race tracks, with all their pollution, danger and anti-pedestrian, anti-cyclist ambience? Why not high priority for developing new footpath routes both in urban and rural areas as an alternative to the car for short commuter and shopping trips, as well as leisure and health use? Why not wider pavements to offer people on foot safer, pleasanter environments? Why not real priority for public transport, whether bus or Supertram, at road

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Travel Information

A perennial issue that Transport 2000's West Yorkshire Bus Group has to deal with is poor travel information, especially at bus stops. We invited Michael Keane, from Metro, to talk to us, as he has responsibility for timetables across West Yorkshire.

The problems experienced by the group's members are many, but some do stand out and can be amusing. Recently a new bus shelter was erected in Beeston, South Leeds, complete with the timetable from its old location, advertising services direct to Hebden Bridge, Ilkley, Skipton and Colne amongst others. In this case clearly wrong, but in the more subtle cases very confusing. Take the number 1 timetable in Park Row, Leeds, where it stated all evening services continued beyond Beeston to Cottingley. But not all services listed in the evening block did so, the bus group got this corrected, well almost, the new version is still not strictly right! All this leads to a lack of confidence.

So what did Michael say? Well some of the key points were:-

- The PTE has a duty to provide information and charge operators as necessary under the Transport Act of 2000. We have since learned that operators are to be charged after the sixth change in a year.
- Metro find the on street information the most difficult to provide, it only being available at 3,000 out of 14,000 bus stops. This is not made easy as changes occur weekly. The display cases used are to be rationalised in size and all information is to be renewed over the next year to improve the situation.
- There is an IT project to collect data specific to each stop. Real time information is an aspiration and there is a project for this too, along with South Yorkshire PTE. Initially 1,000 buses will be equipped and passengers may have to phone to get the details to begin with. Bus station displays will become real time.
- Operators have to give 56 days notice of any changes. But Metro has to map out the route on computer, input timetables for each route and create composite timetables. They then have to produce timetable leaflets and timetables tailored for stop displays which are unique for each stop. The outdoor team who erect timetables is under pressure and funding is tight.
- The planners check each others' work, and the Metroline staff are asked to check also. Operators then check them but sometimes have last minute adjustments to make! Metro are working with the bus operators and are discouraging late changes. They are trying to set dates for timetable changes, for example quarterly, but they cannot enforce this and operators want to be free to react quickly to any competition.

The Information Technology solutions sound promising but will they work? One member recently went into Metro's website and asked about a journey from Bache to Moorfields - where you say? They are on the Mersey electrics. They were quickly connected to the correct site with the station names recognised and the times provided. But on checking the journey details in good graphics they had a shock. They were to travel past Moorfields station, alight at Liverpool Central and catch a train back - not only illogical but impossible as the Liverpool Wirral line is a one way loop under the city!

Do the professionals fare better in operating the new technology? This member enquired about a trip from Leeds to Chester using National Rail enquiries, the Sunday return being affected by engineering. The times involved a change at Crewe, a walk across Manchester and a long journey time. On double checking himself on the internet he wiped 45 minutes off the journey and eliminated the change at Crewe! When do you trust your own efforts on the internet and when do you trust the professionals?

Transport 2000's latest talk was by Giles Fearnley from Blazefield's buses (see report on page 7). It was interesting to note that his concerns over new technology and real time displays were to ensure that his staff could master the system fully before it went live.

Whenever things are going smoothly we can get excellent information. The outward trip to Chester was on time with the conductor on the first train to Manchester advising our member of the platform number and an alternative train for his connection to Chester. On the Chester train he was advised his ticket also covered the bus connection into the shopping area of the city. (The fact it does not go near the bus exchange makes it as useful as a chocolate teapot for some though!) But on the

(Continued on page 6)

On the Buses in Harrogate

Alan Sutcliffe gives an update on recent developments

First of all is the excellent news that Harrogate & District Travel have been declared “Bus Operator of the Year” at the National Bus Awards in London. The company are to be congratulated on their well-deserved success.

Harrogate Bus Station is now fully operational. In response to my comment in the last *YHTAR Focus* regarding protection for waiting passengers in wet weather Blazefield Chairman Giles Fearnley has kindly written to advise of plans for glass screening on the Station Parade side. Hopefully installation work will have started by the time these notes appear in print.

As forecast in the previous issue, three new schools contracts have been won by Harrogate & District, bringing the total to 11. To cater for this and other new services the company’s vehicle allowance has been increased from 60 to 70 - an encouraging sign.

The new Travelinks bus services: X59 Harrogate—Skipton and 60 Otley—Pateley Bridge, with an interchange at Kettlesing Head commenced on 4th November. On Saturday afternoons one



service 60 journey is extended to How Stean Gorge.

Another success for Harrogate & District is the award of a contract for all year Sunday buses on service 24 between Harrogate and Pateley Bridge. The service is the result of successful campaigning by the Yorkshire Dales Public Transport Users Group over the last two years. The service is funded by the Countryside Agency through the Harrogate Rural Local Transport Partnership. It consists of 5 journeys each way, starting with the 0905 from Harrogate, with the last journey at 1920 from Pateley Bridge. Most journeys have good

connections with service 36 to and from Leeds, and even on the first day of operation there were a few passengers on most trips.

To combat delays arising from traffic congestion on service 103 between Harrogate and Jennyfield, running times are being increased and a

third vehicle added, which has enabled the daytime frequency to be increased from every 15 minutes to every 12 minutes.

(Travel Information - continued from page 5)

Sunday return journey affected by engineering, was such advice prevalent? No, of course not. For example, Metrolink was not mentioned for the trip across Manchester from Piccadilly to Victoria. (The member did use the tram system - he walked following the tracks to Victoria, they being the quickest route!) So we cannot have confidence in information, because when things go wrong it dries up.

The Bus Group’s main concern is the sloppy provision of information, the large number of errors and the lack of effective quality assurance. We are left to double check all the details we are given for critical journeys. It is probably fair to say we have to expect some errors from time to time. If we

consider our own performance at work or elsewhere, we all make mistakes. But the number of mistakes is currently unacceptable.

There is a role here for such as Transport 2000’s Bus Group, in acting as a mystery passenger and alerting Metro to these problems. But we are increasingly unhappy in Metro’s reliance on us and the public to put right its errors. Let’s hope the message is getting across, not just to Metro, but also to some of the operators who are also at fault, and we begin to see improvements. We wish Michael Keane well in his endeavours to improve the situation.

The Transport 2000 West Yorkshire Bus Group can be contacted on 0113 226 3327.

An Evening with Giles Fearnley by Alan Sutcliffe

At the December meeting of Transport 2000 we had a most interesting and informative address by Giles Fearnley, Chairman of Blazefield Holdings Ltd, on current and future developments in the Group.

Giles began by explaining the origins of the Group, which date back to shortly after the privatisation of the former West Yorkshire Road Car Co, of which he was the last managing director. West Yorkshire RCC was sold to the AJS Group, who had property interests. They created the Harrogate & District, Keighley & District and Yorkshire Coastliner companies, and subsequently sold the Leeds, Bradford, Otley and York operations of West Yorkshire to the Rider Group, now part of First Group.

It was not long before AJS sold their remaining bus interests to the newly created Blazefield Holdings. The company name is based on the name of the North Yorkshire village where Giles lived at the time, and he has been Company Chairman ever since.

After referring to operations outside Yorkshire, including Cambridge Coach Services (since sold to National Express), Sovereign Bus and Coach (in Hertfordshire), London Sovereign (recently sold to Transdev) and Huntingdon & District, Giles moved on to talk about developments in Yorkshire.

Recent achievements include the development of new bus stations, including Harrogate, Ripon and Keighley, and significant investment in new buses giving the group one of the youngest fleets in Britain (see below).

In 2001 the Group acquired the operations of Stagecoach in Burnley, where the staff were delighted to see the restoration of the Burnley & Pendle name, and in Blackburn, Hyndburn and Bolton, where the Lancashire United name is now used. The Bolton operations have subsequently passed to Blue Bus of Horwich. The Lancashire operations have also benefited from the introduction of large numbers of new buses, including high-profile Plaxton President double deckers on the X43 service from Burnley into the heart of Manchester. The Group is also working closely with Lancashire County Council, as part of Quality Partnerships on the Burnley "Mainline" and Hyndburn Circular routes.

One hears much about a slow decline in bus use outside London, but the year on year increases in business in the five northern Blazefield companies quoted by Giles certainly buck the trend, with Yorkshire Coastliner showing 2%pa, Harrogate & District 3-6%, and the two Lancashire companies an impressive 10-12% in the short time since the takeover from Stagecoach.

This was a heartening story to hear and the achievements truly reflect the high standards of customer service set by Giles and his team, and possible future developments referred to by Giles show much confidence in the Group, which hopefully will continue to stand out from the crowd.

Giles was warmly thanked for taking time to talk to us after a long day at a conference in London.

Blazefield Buses

Recent publicity from the Blazefield Group has highlighted the "youthfulness" of the three Yorkshire fleets, and makes interesting reading:

	No of Vehicles	Average Age
Harrogate & District	52	4.8 years
Keighley & District	66	5.4 years
Yorkshire Coastliner	20	2.0 years

The Harrogate and Keighley figures cover only vehicles used on regular services, and exclude those used solely on schools and works services, whilst the Coastliner figure includes the total fleet. All three companies are well below the national average age of 8.4 years and the government's target of 8 years.

First class fleet improvements in South Yorkshire

First in South Yorkshire has recently bolstered its fleet of buses and implemented route branding in its on-going drive to improve the service it provides. In total, 42 single-deck and 15 double-deck vehicles entered service in Autumn 2002, representing part of an £7m investment programme in South Yorkshire.

The 42 new single-deck Volvo B7Ls that have entered operational service around South Yorkshire form the majority of the fleet improvement in Sheffield. These buses are particularly special as they were part of the fleet of vehicles used to transport more than 5,000 athletes and officials between locations during the Commonwealth Games held earlier this year in Manchester. This means that passengers using First services in Sheffield could well be sat in the same seats as used by Commonwealth champions such as Paula Radcliffe, Ian Thorpe or Frankie Fredericks earlier this year.

The new buses provide quality improvements for passengers with features such as low-floor, easy access entrances and improved legroom. One particular group of passengers who will benefit from the improved access are those with young children or disabilities visiting hospitals along many of First's high frequency Overground routes.

In addition to the new single-deck buses, First has also introduced fifteen new double-deck Volvo B7TL buses with many of the same beneficial features as the single-deck models. The double-deck buses have been introduced in response to increasing passenger numbers on two high frequency Overground routes.

Gary Nolan, Managing Director of First in South Yorkshire commented: "We are delighted to be able to introduce all of these buses on routes across the city and we hope that the new features offered by these state-of-the-art vehicles will improve the quality of journey for our passengers."

Along with the improvements to the vehicles in its fleet, First has recently introduced route branding to its services in order to further enhance the quality of service provided to the local community. The route branding involves the application of colour-coded liveries, including Yellow, Red, Blue and Green, to vehicles that operate on Overground routes in the Sheffield area. Route branding in South Yorkshire is consistent with other First operations across the UK in order to provide a

familiar service to its customers.

Brandon Jones, Commercial Director of First in South Yorkshire said: "These colourful liveries communicate important information to our passengers and brighten up the roads around the Sheffield area."

The adoption of the coloured liveries, which correspond to the relevant Overground route colour, makes it easier for passengers to identify the bus that they need to catch. Regular passengers will also benefit from having the same familiar vehicles operating on the same services everyday. In addition, the route branded bus liveries present essential information on the service to infrequent passengers or visitors to the area. This information includes the frequency of the service and a summary of the route, both of which are prominently displayed on the exterior of the vehicle.



Sheffield City Council Leader Councillor Jan Wilson and Brandon Jones, Commercial Director of First in South Yorkshire, officially launched the branded vehicles outside Cutler's Hall, Sheffield City Centre on 14 November 2002.

The Highways Agency Consultation on Vulnerable User Road Crossings by Pam Ashton

Towards the end of November 2002 I became aware that the Highways Agency (HA) were consulting non-motorised user groups on proposals to improve key crossings of the motorway and trunk road network. This consultation has taken place all over England and has been carried out by various firms of consultants. I have seen the consultation for Area 16 which is about half of the area covered by YHTAR and includes the M1, M18, M62, M621, M606 and the A63. The original consultees had been the Ramblers Association and the British Horse Society, but after pressure on the Highways Agency the CTC (Cyclists Touring Club) were also included. At no time have the TAR been consulted by the Highways Agency.

The study consisted of a letter setting out terms of reference for the exercise and about 100 maps of road crossings such as footpaths on pedestrian bridges, bridleways in tunnels, minor roads over motorways and motorway junctions. User groups were asked to identify the crossings that are most important for improvement according to three criteria. That is they should be part of a national trail or local route or should prevent community severance. No map references were given and the maps were extremely poorly annotated such that the motorway in question itself was not always labelled and the entity crossing it was named as "Field Lane" (one ridiculous example of many). Responses were required by 16th December 2002. I wrote to the head of the Yorkshire and the Humber HA complaining about the timescale, the lack of information about the scope of the study and the poor maps. The matter was also taken up at regional and national level by the Countryside Agency who asked the TAR to help them make representation, and the CTC. To date I have had no reply from HA.

All campaigner consultees were contacted by Ray Wilkes or myself. We suggested that they might also like to complain and ask that no crossings should be closed.

There is a great deal of suspicion that the process of identifying priority crossings will, by default, identify crossings that may be rationalised (stopped up) in order to save costs. This was confirmed by a statement made – perhaps inadvertently – to a BHS colleague of mine and relayed to me.

Cycle campaigners all over England have, almost without exception, complained about the process and would generally be happy to work with horse riders to find priority crossings for improvement. Unfortunately some ramblers representatives seem to have considered only footpath crossings and have had some difficulty in understanding the benefits of working together. I say that as a member of the Ramblers and a collaborator with several extremely good local Ramblers campaigners. By sitting on the floor with the maps, the relevant O.S maps and some A to Zs I managed to identify about 40 crossings of use to cyclists and horse riders without upgrading! This formed the local CTC response but it also demanded no stopping up of any facility useful to any non-motorised user group.

We all now wait for the next stage of the process and I will stay in touch with the HA and the consultants on behalf of the TAR. Over the years motorway and trunk road development has always led to stopping up (rationalisation) of crossing points, usually justified in the interests of safety. As the distance between crossings increases the disincentive to walk or cycle becomes greater. I think this should form the basis of an important campaign for the TAR.

Diary Dates

26 February Healthy Travel Seminar, Halifax - details at www.sustrans.org.uk

26 April YHTAR AGM and Seminar - see page 11

19-23 May Walk to School Week - details from Living Streets 020 7820 1010

7-15 June Green Transport Week - see www.eta.co.uk

15-23 June Bike Week—see www.bikeweek.org.uk



The Railway Network in our Region after Railtrack - Growing Crisis or Exciting Change?

Colin Speakman reports on a recent talk by Chris Austin of the SRA

To what extent is rail travel in the UK, and in Yorkshire and the Humber in particular, getting worse since privatisation and the recent demise of Railtrack?

At a crowded meeting in Huddersfield of the Association of Community Rail Partnerships (ACORP) in December, Chris Austin, Director of Corporate Affairs at the Strategic Rail Authority, posed some interesting questions about what is currently happening in our rail industry and how, to some extent at least, our rail-hating press is part of the problem.

First the good news. Since the shake-up of the SRA with its new Chairman Richard Bowker, and the emergence of Network Rail, how the rail network is being managed has undergone a profound change, not all of which is immediately evident, and certainly not to a press devoted to knocking the rail industry. Chris described the new post-Railtrack railway system not as “renationalisation by stealth” (whatever that may mean) but more simply as:

“a Public Service, Publicly Specified but Privately Delivered.”

The SRA has a key role, as an arm of Government, to determine that specification and to ensure that specification is delivered. This is a long way from the “free enterprise” railway driven purely by the markets as originally envisaged by the Major government.

However he admitted there are big problems, most notably the dramatically escalating costs, a “black hole” which was now squeezing out investment. This rising “cost creep” which has now made many rail improvement schemes unaffordable, must not only be stopped, but reversed. The SRA is now examining each and every new project to see how waste and cost escalation can be eliminated. Cost control does not mean necessarily mean the kinds of 10-20% cuts in service as trumpeted in the press, though hard decisions may have to be taken in a few areas where there are serious capacity problems with local services taking up scarce paths.

Chris Austin also emphasised how the new Rail Franchises such as Trans Pennine and Northern Train would embody much greater hands-on

involvement by the SRA.

What is sure to bring relief to many transport campaigners in our region were three clear indications of current SRA policy:

- Line closures are not on the agenda because they save very little money and create huge political backlash and administration costs
- There will be no cutting of safety standards
- There is no direct link between reducing operating costs and service cuts; indeed service enhancements by using units more efficiently to bring in more income could be on the agenda.

Chris went on to point out that for all the scare stories and gloom in the press, what is actually happening on the ground is very different. Despite the problems of recent months (and we all have horror stories to report) there is a huge growth in rail travel in most of the UK, including within our own region. He highlighted just some of the huge improvements in Yorkshire & Humber which doom merchants have ignored:

- Leeds has a new world class railway station
- Huge success of the Airedale/Wharfedale electrification and 333 rolling stock, with a surge in new business
- Dramatic improvement of West Yorkshire-London services with the White Rose Eurostars giving a 30 minute headway for much of the day.
- Virgin’s Operation Princess linking York, Leeds, Sheffield, Doncaster with the Midlands, West Country and Scotland with a fleet of new Voyagers, which will be the best Cross Country rail services ever when the teething troubles and severe overcrowding (resulting from an unbelievable 40% current growth) are ironed out.

However, there are tough challenges ahead. The Government is demanding better value for money from our rail network, and the SRA is in business to get it – tougher franchises would secure that. There is now a closer working relationship between

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Government and the rail industry than ever before, but the case for railway investment has to be made against competing claims for roads and airports.

Treasury hawks have to be convinced that the rail industry can manage its own costs, not squander scarce resources. This has huge relevance to the rail element in Multi-modal studies such as SWYMMS and HMMS in our region. If the right business case can be made, Government - nationally and regionally - will listen, and investment funds prioritised, whether for schemes such as the Malton-Pickering reopening or the enhancement of the Leeds-Sheffield corridor. The SRA's Second Strategic Plan, out in January, will point the way forward, but the key date is 2004 when the major Transport Spending Review will be prepared by the Treasury, which will include spending plans on transport for the next decade.

The key message for transport campaigners in our region is this. Rather than believing - and letting our MPs and decisions makers believe - the defeatist scare stories in the press, we need to

highlight the very real rail success stories in our region which are there to see. We need to work with the rail industry, and with Local and Regional Government, to make the best possible case for rail investment - especially value for money schemes which can achieve much with cost-effective investment - to ensure Government listens to logic and reason. More road building can only ever deliver more congestion and pollution, and any relief from traffic, for example with road widening or a new by-pass, will be quickly wiped out by unsustainable traffic growth, much of it generated by new long distance commuters along that same new road. Demand management in the form of road charging is likely to meet huge opposition from the car lobby. Rail investment, for both passengers and freight, offers the best long term alternative to road congestion, and is less environmentally damaging and more socially inclusive than any road widening or new bypass scheme will ever be.

Priority for 2003 - let's get that message across to decisions makers both in the Yorkshire & Humber Region and in Whitehall and Westminster.

(Who Should Get Priority? Continued from page 4)

junctions, for example with automatically operated traffic lights that give real priority to bus lanes, recognising that walking and public transport are mutually dependent ?

The real reasons such things are not generally happening is because this would slow down car traffic and reduce road capacity. The car still takes absolute priority in the minds of most traffic planners, politicians and the local press, fuelled by an insular and selfish car lobby - generally middle aged and male. But as congestion worsens, and obesity-related illness reaches epidemic proportions (as it soon will, especially among younger people), there will have to be a fundamental rethink on how we manage traffic and transport in our region. Transport activists throughout our region should work together to start the long process of education, working with health professionals to impress local politicians that business as usual is

not an option, but there has to be a real cultural change at grass roots level. We need to target the next round of Local Transport Plans, not with an anti-car agenda (though any attempt to limit the total freedom of the driver will always provoke that predictable knee-jerk reaction), but with Walking (and Cycling) Strategies to ensure at least equality of treatment for sustainable transport - in terms of budgeting, planning and priorities for action.

At the moment what is going on is mere cosmetics, designed to mask a deep-seated malaise, which is allowing the short-term needs of vociferous car-commuters, supported by some business interests, to totally dominate the top of the agenda, with catastrophic consequences to drivers themselves. But all of us, at times in our lives, are drivers, or driver-dependents, as well as walkers. As our cities gridlock, and health problems worsen, it is all of us who will suffer, but the most car dependent who will suffer most of all.

YHTAR AGM

This year's Annual General Meeting will be held on Saturday 26th April at 2pm at the Guildhall in York. On the morning of the AGM a seminar entitled "Practical Routes to Safer Roads for Everyone" has been organised, starting at 10 a.m. This will be priced at £10 including lunch.

We hope that YHTAR Focus readers will take the opportunity to attend both events. Lunch will be available to attendees of either or both events. Further details will be circulated closer to the day, but in the meantime please note the date in your diary!

Yorkshire and the Humber Transport Activists' Roundtable

Executive Officers

Chair: Pam Ashton (Bradford Cycling Action Group/CTC)

Vice Chairman: Colin Speakman (Ilkley, Transport 2000)

Treasurer: Graham Collett (York, Railfuture)

Co-ordinator

Ray Wilkes, 29 Tower Road, Shipley BD18 4BP

T: 01274 403540 E: rwilkes@blueyonder.co.uk

Section Lead Officers

Aviation

Anthony Rae,
21 Chapel Avenue,
Hebden Bridge HX7 8DG
T: 01422 845061
E: ar@anthonyrae.com

Rail

Vacancy

Roads (temporary)

Anthony Rae,
21 Chapel Avenue,
Hebden Bridge HX7 8DG
T: 01422 845061
E: ar@anthonyrae.com

Buses

Ray Wilkes,
29 Tower Road,
Shipley
BD18 4BP
T: 01274 403540
E: rwilkes@blueyonder.co.uk

Cycling

Simon Geller,
Sheffield Cycling Campaign,
12 Carfield Avenue,
Sheffield
S8 9HY
T: 0114 258 8578
E: s.geller@blueyonder.co.uk

Walking (temporary)

Colin Speakman,
67 Grove Road,
Ilkley
LS29 9PQ
T: 01943 607868
F: 01943 816745
E: colin@countrygoer.org

www.yhtar.org.uk

The YHTAR website has recently been updated, why not take a look next time you're online?

If you spot any broken links or have any suggestions for new links,
please contact the Acting Editor at the address below.

YHTAR Focus

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or by post to:

Acting Editor, YHTAR, 29 Somerville, Peterborough, PE4 5BB

YHTAR Focus is currently available free of charge,

if you know of anyone who would be interested in receiving a copy please contact:

Ray Wilkes, 29 Tower Road, Shipley, Bradford, BD18 4BP

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