

Thames Valley

By Chris Wright
and David Eldridge

Chriswrightmk@aol.com
david7pr@btinternet.com

■ ■ Evergreen project

The East West Rail Link has taken a major step forward with the publication by Chiltern Railways of the draft Transport Works Act Order to improve the Oxford-Bicester line to provide a new service to Marylebone in 2013. The order specifies the work to be undertaken including the link between Chiltern and Oxford lines, with 100mph double track for most of the line, new stations at Bicester Town, Islip, Water Eaton Parkway (near Kidlington) and facilities at Oxford. A twice an hour service is proposed. Outline plans of station layouts are included. The Department for Transport has extended Chiltern's franchise as a result. Railfuture and user groups have welcomed the proposals. The proposals allow for further work for the EWRL when funding has been acquired.

Oxford station will gain an extra platform, south of the existing station. The Oxon an Bucks Rail Action Committee is looking forward to the range of new journey opportunities and increased capacity for the Thames Valley and Oxford area. There is speculation that Chiltern could extend its services from Aylesbury north to Milton Keynes and possibly even Rugby. Campaigners hope these two moves would represent major steps on the way to restoring the strategic East West Rail Link.

It is to be hoped that the Department for Transport and the East West Rail consortium will include their works at the same time to avoid further disruption and extra costs. Ideally East-West and CrossCountry services could be specified as part of the service provision. It is hoped that any change of government will not affect the recognition that EWRL has gained so far. Estate agents in north Buckinghamshire are already predicting that the "proposed EWRL between Milton Keynes and Oxford will undoubtedly have a positive bearing on house prices".



BETTER THAN ANY BUSWAY: A computer-generated image of what Edinburgh's trams will look like when they take to the streets in 2012

More info: www.edinburghtrams.com/

especially with half-life refurbishment of rolling stock."

But there are still "experts" claiming that busways are cheap. Bring on the white elephants!

Independent experts who attended the "public information" meetings held in Dunstable and Central Bedfordshire were unhappy with the quality of the information.

Maps and diagrams were said to be inaccurate, not reflecting the recent abandonment of the "Luton East" housing expansion, nor the diversion on to normal road to Kimpton Road and up to the airport.

Junctions of the busway with the road network were less than clear.

However, the Association of Train Operators' recent *Connecting Communities* report supported reopening the line as a railway.

And Andrew Selous, the Tory MP for South West Bedfordshire, has said that in the event of an incoming Conservative government, the busway will be cancelled.

Meanwhile in Edinburgh, a much more attractive transport option is taking shape – the tram.

Railfuture Scotland secretary Mike Harrison said: "It's quite exciting being in Edinburgh at the moment, as the whole thing is beginning to take shape."

"There's still lots to do, but we seem to be past the long periods of stagnation that seemed to occur during the diversion of services."

Railfuture campaigners will not be surprised to learn that major transport spending decisions across England may be made using analysis from computer models that are not fit for purpose.

That was the conclusion of an audit of regional and sub-regional models released by the Department for Transport in February.

The review, led by respected modelling expert Denvil Coombe, examined 30 models and concluded that 21 were either unsuitable or doubtful.

transport disaster

was much higher than the busway. Much of these false claims came in county council glossy leaflets and propaganda.

The complete busway may never become financially viable and cracked guideway beams may not remain serviceable for the 30-year life of the project. Other defects remain to be corrected.

Concrete piling would not have been necessary to keep the railway operational for both passengers and freight.

The railway could and should have been used to transport millions of tons of aggregate and other material for the construction of the A14 and Northstowe.

The Government and Network Rail ignored this potential and dis-

posed of valuable assets to allow an inferior system to be built against overwhelming public opinion.

Its agreement with the county council has seriously inconvenienced rail passengers, train operators and compromised the long overdue Cambridge station upgrade. This is indeed a public transport disaster!

■ Mike Mason is a South Cambridgeshire district councillor for Histon and Impington and represented the parish councils at the guided bus public inquiry in 2004. He was formerly a BR traction engineer working in the Eastern and London Midland regions and also served as a deputy traffic commissioner for the Cambridge area in the 1970s.

The opinions expressed do not necessarily represent the authority on which he serves as a member.



OXFORD GREEN FAIR: Railfuture's Hugh Jaeger at the Railfuture Thames Valley stand in December

■ ■ Main line speed-up

Upgrade work for higher speeds between Marylebone and Banbury started in March and should be finished by spring next year but faster journey times will start to show from the December timetable change this year.

■ ■ Reading station upgrade

Network Rail's Tony Walker met Railfuture in January and outlined features of the £851 million plan to remodel Reading station. There will be four new northern platforms and new passenger overbridge as well as a new northern entrance to the station. There will also be lengthening of the Southern platforms, reopening of the Southern tunnel and a new depot. There will have to be signalling enabling work at Didcot involving a line closure for 10 days over Christmas this year, followed by similar closures at Christmas 2012 and 2013.

■ ■ Extra off-peak trains

Milton Keynes Rail User Group has welcomed the provision of extra off-peak Virgin Train stops but continues to press for a wider range of destinations to be offered. They hope to meet Transport Secretary Lord Adonis to present their proposals.

Picture: RICHARD STOW