



The Institution of
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Operating at full capacity

John Glover reports on a debate one IRO branch had about improving train services

How do you operate at full capacity? This was the subject of a timely debate by the IRO's South East branch. It got off to a good start with a declaration that there are three essentials. 'You need a reliable fleet, good drivers, and a good timetable. Without those, you are lost!'

Discussion focused on the optimisation of the system that presently exists, noting that Network Rail had been funded for replacement, rather than enhancement. A longer term strategy for future growth is also needed.

TRACK LAYOUTS

One important aspect of system capacity is the time required to make the different movements. The popular assumption is that gains come from faster point-to-point times, such as shaving a couple of minutes off the running time between, say, King's Cross and Doncaster.

However, although real, this affects relatively few trains. Thus before the recent remodelling, the west end of Leeds station was notorious for conflicting movements and the time allowances needed. Saving two minutes for each train arriving and each train departing from Leeds would be a far more effective use of investment monies.

It also made the service more attractive for passengers and gave

operators a more productive use of resources. There are other possibilities. Up passenger trains calling at Doncaster and proceeding towards Sheffield must use platform 3b on the up slow – the junction arrangements give no other choice.

Given the volume of Cross Country services, that effectively restricts London-bound trains to the up platform loop and its curvaceous approaches. Discussion produced many similar examples of restrictions caused by track layouts, amongst which were:

- The renewal of the down-fast to down-slow crossover at Potters Bar with a 30mph crossover needing approach control, rather than 70mph;
- The highly restrictive exit from Willesden yard, which uses a 20mph crossover, despite capable new locos hauling longer 1,500 tonne trains that therefore take excessively long to clear; and

- The value of providing extended loops at stations where not all trains call, which are long enough to allow the stopping service to decelerate clear of the main line. This will be done at Milton Keynes Central.

STATION TIMES

Dwell times at stations depend, to a large extent, on how long passengers take to board and alight. Attention was drawn to the often considerable discrepancies between platform height and that of rolling stock floors. On the Docklands Light Railway and Tyne & Wear Metro, access is virtually level.

Although this is seen primarily as a benefit for pushchairs and wheelchairs, the reality is that everybody gets on and off faster.

London Underground has given considerable attention to the effect of performance and capacity issues on station dwell times, and how these can be managed. Hence the

appearance of station staff with batons, who are also told where to stand, and even what to say.

LEAP OF FAITH

Step heights are one issue; another is the train-to-platform gap. A cautionary tale invoked the law of unintended consequences. The replacement of 20m with 23m vehicles might generally be something to be welcomed, but there can be drawbacks.

One such drawback becomes apparent on curved platforms, where the curve may be concave or convex. At Birmingham New Street, Platform 11, used by the CrossCity line services, can require a jump of Olympic standards to or from the Class 323s.

At the very least, such matters need to be considered before the introduction of longer stock, which will exacerbate any difficult situations.

TRAIN LOADING

The *Edinburgh Evening News* recently ran a piece in which a passenger had debunked complaints about a suburban service being overcrowded by asserting that the back coach on that same train was virtually empty.

Across the network, there are many trains which meet formal targets in relation to the proportion of standing to seated passengers, but not on a vehicle-by-vehicle basis.

Such apparent capacity shortages reflect the common situation at termini where the nearer the front you are, the quicker you leave the station. Discussion considered possible gains from the re-siting of station entrances/exits, and the



The Midland Area of the IRO had its annual summer visit to the Midland Railway Centre, Butterley on 16 June. Members and their families enjoyed an absorbing day on the railway, including a guided tour of the exhibition signal box, a trip up the line and a visit to the workshops of the Golden Valley narrow gauge railway.

DIARY OF EVENTS

SCOTTISH AND IRISH AREA

Tuesday 11 September: Talk by Duncan Sooman, territory engineer (civils) Network Rail Scotland – The 2030 Railway: A Scotland Perspective. Network Rail Boardroom, Buchanan House, Glasgow, 17:15 for 17:30 start. For information on Scottish Area events please contact Chris Owen on 01506 854537 or email: scottish@railwayoperators.org

SOUTH EAST AREA

Monday 10 September: Andy Barr, London Underground, will be speaking about major asset recovery following a serious incident.

Monday 12 November: High Speed 1 – speakers TBA
All South East Area meetings take place at the Union Jack

Club, Sandell Street, opposite Waterloo East Station. Doors open at 18:00 for an 18:30 start. For information on the South East Area contact: southeast@railwayoperators.org

SOUTH WEST AREA

For information on all South West events and matters, contact Lawrie Hall on 01453 822150 or email southwest@railwayoperators.org

NORTH EAST AREA

15 September: AGM and visit to North York Moors Railway. There will be a talk by Philip Benham, general manager, on the extension on the NYMR's Operators Licence and the safety case for service to Whitby. This will be followed by a trip on the NYMR to view operation

of the railway first hand. Transport will be provided from York to/from Pickering. Families welcome. Pickering, Yorks. The event lasts all day

6 November Visit to see refurbishment of GNER's HSTs. The trip, during the daytime, is to Wabtec in Doncaster to see GNER's Mallard HST sets.

For information on all North East Area events please contact Chris Prior on 07801 905204 or email: northeast@railwayoperators.org

NORTH WEST AREA

For all North West Area events please contact: northwest@railwayoperators.org.

MIDLANDS AREA

For all Midlands events contact Julia Stanyard 0121 345 3833 or

email: midlands@railwayoperators.org

YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

2 August: IROYPs Summer Get-Together. We have booked a restaurant on Bankside and will be meeting at 18:30 at a pub called the Anchor, Park Street, London, SE1 9EF. Nearest tube London Bridge.

Informal networking: We are taking a break from our informal networking sessions over the summer, so our next session will be on Thursday 6 September at the fixed venue of the Euston Flyer, between Kings Cross St Pancras and Euston. For all events contact us at: comms@iroyoungprofessionals.org.uk or check out our website at www.iroyoungprofessionals.org.uk

positioning of footbridges.

The country end of Waterloo East platforms has a subway link to the Jubilee Line's Southwark station, which has reduced numbers travelling through to Charing Cross.

Should we rerun the idea of flexitime to cope with peaks? Not a political vote winner was the response. 'People don't want to be flexed out of bed at 06:00.'

TRAIN FORMATIONS

The formation of trains also came in for criticism. You may devise ways of running more trains, but are each of those you have carrying as many as they could?

There were thought to be far too many services with two to three-car formations, while Voyagers were only four to five cars, particularly in provincial centres. Twelve-car trains everywhere would make a huge difference in the capacity offered.

One problem is the incremental cost. Thus, an extra Class 153 unit costs £150k pa to lease, plus running costs of £100k pa. When

applied to the overcrowded two-car 07:54 Exmouth to Exeter, the fares charged had no hope of covering such costs.

However, the inability of on-train fare collection to cope under crowded conditions also risks considerable non-payment.

In the view of many, the cost of running railways has to be brought down.

CONCLUSIONS

There are many other influences on capacity such as traction power, the traffic mix, headway determinants, the signalling system and performance requirements being just a few. All need to be addressed.

System and line capacity, it was said, is a problem to be solved by professional railwaymen, perhaps

in dialogue with government.

'It is up to us to provide solutions, not just to pose more problems. If anybody can solve it, we can.'

The debate was organised for IRO South East by council members Gary Mewis and Richard Eastman, and chaired by Tim Shoveller. It took place on 9 July.

MEMBERS' NEWS

The following employers operate a corporate membership scheme, by paying a one-off annual fee that covers all their employees' affiliate or associate membership subscriptions:

Network Rail ● Eurostar UK Ltd ● First ScotRail ● First Great Western ● One ● Railnews ● Iarnród Éireann (Irish Rail) ● EWS Railway ● Northern Ireland Railways ● Central Trains ● First Transpennine Express ● First Capital Connect ● Atoc ● Southern ● London Underground Ltd ● Docklands Light Railway ● Transport for London ● South West Trains ● Sheffield Supertram ● Arriva Trains Wales ● Parsons Brinckerhoff ● Southeastern Railway ● Virgin Trains ● London Lines ● Silverlink Trains ● c2c Rail ● Gatwick Express ● RWA Rail ● Midland Mainline.

Those with full membership will continue to pay their subscription personally, irrespective of whether they can subsequently claim it back. Please note that, as the IRO's subscriptions are tax-deductible, a receipt will be issued for all payments – whether by cheque, standing order or internet payment.

If your company would like to explore the benefits of corporate membership of the institution, please contact us. We welcome applications from all industry companies, suppliers and associations – please contact Chris Daughton on 01444 248931 or admin@railwayoperators.org