

The Thinking Woman's Railway
Centre of the Campaign for Real Railways
Home of the Camping Vans, TOAD & TADPOLE

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The Editor,
Railnews,
P.O. Box 7779,
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NN8 9HU

RAILWAY RECONSTRUCTION

Dear Editor,

In "Unbundling Beeching" (March) you were critical of Campaign for Better Transport's "Priority Two" suggestions for reconstruction in *The case for expanding the rail network*.

Faced with ever more madcap road schemes, justified increasingly not only to alleviate today's traffic but, in the words of the small print, "to unlock development sites" or "allow housing to be delivered," there are still many in the railway camp who seem to delight in saying that there were lines that should never have been built. This is exceeded now by claimed proponents of rail being the first to say which lines should not be reopened.

As the crow flies, Exeter to Newton Abbot is 14 miles. The main line between the two places is 20 miles. The Teign Valley and Moretonhampstead branches route was 20¾ miles, yet you dismiss it as "meandering."

The fact is that even in Network Rail's 2014 back-of-the-envelope appraisal, which ridiculously had a new double track along the Teign Valley, this was the cheapest by far of the diversionary routes, having a B.C.R. of 0.3. The *Borders*, I believe, was at one stage founded on 0.5.

If anything might cause ministers to take fright, it is the continued clamouring for a £3-billion Dawlish Avoiding Line.

Devon County Council is embarked upon a £30-million widening of the A382 which parallels the freight-only rump of the Moreton Branch between Newton Abbot and Heathfield. There has not been so much as a glance at an alternative means of transport and naturally no initiative has been shown by the rail industry.

The same 2014 "study" of the *Southern* route to Plymouth actually omitted the provision of a train service because this would reduce an already crippling B.C.R. *Railnews* backs this route – and so do I – but Jacobs's 2016 report to the county council found that rebuilding Okehampton to Tavistock would be poor value for money and that 25,700 houses would have to be built along the route for it to reach "break-even" on operating costs.

If, instead of sneering at some examples put forward for reopening, you had said, "it would be wonderful to see a great part of the British

railway system reinstated but we think this is perhaps overly ambitious to consider," I could have forgiven you.

Incidentally, Portishead to Clevedon is listed on C.B.T's. web pages but not in its recently published report. In any case, it is possible that Yatton to Clevedon was meant, a worthy contender in my view.

Yours sincerely,

Colin Burges

Encl.