The Light Rail Revolution
in this issue

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The Welfare State is the hallmark of a civilised society

12–15 Palestine – the struggle for justice

Tear gas fired by Israeli troops against a demonstration by Palestinian villagers, as witnessed by a TSSA delegation.
Welcome to the May edition of TSSA Journal. We’ve got a diverse issue covering everything from the ongoing mess of rail franchising (p4) and the disgraceful decision to re-privatise the East Coast route (p16-17) through to the better news about the growth of light rail (p18-20). We also look at how light rail is being put to more damaging uses – as part of Israel’s attempt to dominate the Palestinian West Bank, which it occupies (p12-15).

The news that the Department for Transport is extending most rail franchises by as much as four years now opens up the possibility discussed in this column several issues ago. Many franchises that would have been signed-off before the May 2015 election are now due to being settled well after it. This means that unless the Conservatives stage a major comeback, Labour will have a real chance to quite quickly reshape the industry. In what way they might do this we don’t yet know, but there are many positive signs coming from their policy review. We’ll be keeping the pressure up to ensure the best possible settlement for those working in the industry and to drive home the argument amongst the public to reinforce our party political work. We’ve got a range of plans in the run-up to the General Election which we need members to be part of – see pages 5 and 7 and get involved.

It’s not just elections on a national scale that will shape our future – several of TSSA’s own leadership positions are currently being voted on. Do return your ballot papers by Tuesday 30 April for your vote to count.

In a few weeks time we’ll also have delegates from across Britain and Ireland meeting in Glasgow for TSSA’s Annual Delegate Conference. Do check out the live blog that will be updated throughout each day of Conference (12-15 May) at www.tssa.org.uk/conferencelive to follow all the latest developments.

Ben Soffa, editor

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More cash for shareholders as franchises extended

**THE COST AND CHAOS** from the franchising debacle continues to grow, with ministers’ deciding to extend existing franchises by as much as four years. TOCs will be able to request highly favourable terms, with no alternative bids taking place. The previous franchising timetable has been all but ripped-up. For example, the Great Western route – for which bid were being taken last year when the scandal broke – will now not see any new company take over until 2016, despite FirstGroup previously having declined to take such an extension within the terms of their original franchise.

Virgin will now run the West Coast service until at least early 2017 – effectively winning a third of the 13 year franchise they’d originally been bidding for without going through any competitive process.

In further evidence of the total failure of the ‘market forces’ meant to force companies to perform or lose their contracts, London Midland, who had to delay or cancel almost 1,000 services in the final three months of last year due to driver shortages have been rewarded with a one year, nine month extension.

When asked about the London Midland disruption, attributed to the unattractive wages at the firm, the Prime Minister had specifically warned that ‘under the franchising system if there’s unacceptable service then action can be taken’ – in the event, their failure has been rewarded.

Greedy TOCs have been keen to use the ‘free’ extensions to win further concessions from the government. Knowing that if their demands aren’t met, the only other option for ministers will be to hand the franchise over to the publicly-owned Directly Operated Railways, many finance directors are said to feel they have the government over a barrel.

The seeming aversion to surpluses being reinvested in the railways rather than given to private shareholders is clear in the rush to re-privatise East Coast. Only three routes – Essex Thameside (c2c), Thameslink/Southern and East Coast are to be agreed before the next election, suggesting ministers want to end the existence of a commercially successful public-sector TOC as soon as possible. Labour, who had committed to keeping East Coast in public hands as a comparator, condemned the move. Maria Eagle, Labour’s Shadow Transport Secretary said ‘It is completely the wrong decision to focus obsessively on an unnecessary privatisation of InterCity services on the East Coast.’

The perverse priority on selling off the East Coast was underlined yet further in a new report by the Office of Rail Regulation. The ‘GB rail industry financial information’ document reveals that East Coast was the TOC least reliant on public funding – receiving just 0.2 per cent of the total. The TOC which has received the longest extension – South Eastern – receives 48 times as much.}

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**THE LATEST CHANGE TO THE DEPARTMENT FOR TRANSPORT’S FRANCHISING TIMETABLE. ESSEX THAMESIDE, THAMESLINK AND GREAT NORTHERN WILL RUN UNTIL LATE 2014. SOUTHERN RECEIVED NO EXTENSION AND WILL MERGE WITH THAMESLINK IN 2015. THERE IS NO CHANGE TO WALES AND BORDERS WHICH EXPIRES IN 2018.**

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**Exhibit:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Franchise</th>
<th>Existing Franchise</th>
<th>Extension</th>
<th>New Franchise</th>
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<tr>
<td>Northern</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>2015</td>
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<td>1 year, 10 months</td>
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<td>Great Western</td>
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<td>2 years, 9 months</td>
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<td>Greater Anglia</td>
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<td>2016</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2 years, 3 months</td>
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<tr>
<td>West Coast</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2016</td>
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<td>2 years, 4 months</td>
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<td>London Midland</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>2016</td>
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<td>1 year, 9 months</td>
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<td>East Midlands</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>2016</td>
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<td>2 years, 8 months</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Eastern</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2018</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4 years, 2 months</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>South West</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2016</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 years, 2 months</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cross Country</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2016</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>3 years, 7 months</td>
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THINK BACK TO 2003. Ten years ago things were a little different. ‘Where is the love?’ by the Black Eyed Peas was the biggest single of the year, topping the charts for six weeks running. Perhaps more importantly, the invasion of Iraq was underway and the Human Genome Project had just been completed.

And ‘Where is the love?’ is a question being asked by millions of rail passengers, for whom travel in 2003 was far cheaper than it is now. Rail fares have been hiked above the rate of inflation every year since then, with the cumulative impact revealed by a recent report showing the top-ten commutes where season ticket have risen most.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, they are all located in the South East. FareFail, the campaign against high rail fares backed by TSSA and others, swung into action. Throughout the spring we have visited each of these ten stations, alerting commuters to the shocking truth about the cost of their journey into work and back and explaining how public ownership could bring fares down.

At every station, we were greeted by members of the public angry at the government’s fares policy and supportive of our efforts. The response outside one station, was typical, says Chris Clark, a TSSA member who used his links with Labour Party members and others across the region to build support: ‘A woman walked past us and said ‘no thanks’ but once she’d bought her ticket, she was so outraged by the price, she came back and asked for one of our postcards!’

Our actions won positive media coverage across the region and highlighted the hypocritical stance of local MPs. Of the ten communities we visited, nine of their MPs had voted against a motion in Parliament in January opposing higher fares.

Chris added: ‘I’m proud to have been part of the FareFail campaign. It’s been fun as well as successful, and now we have a really good platform to build on. TSSA is doing the right thing, campaigning on issues like rising fares and cuts to station staffing that affect the public. It’s good for the public to see us trade unionists campaigning for something that’s good for them.

‘I think this kind of community campaigning is the way forward. It’s the best way for us to influence public opinion and win support for changes in policy on the railways.’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Station name</th>
<th>Fare rise %</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sevenoaks</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>£1,660</td>
<td>£3,112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashford International</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>£2,660</td>
<td>£4,780</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bracknell</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>£2,228</td>
<td>£3,960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canterbury</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>£2,700</td>
<td>£4,812</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tunbridge Wells</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>£2,412</td>
<td>£4,132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonbridge</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>£2,240</td>
<td>£3,768</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maidstone</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>£2,360</td>
<td>£3,960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gillingham</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>£2,204</td>
<td>£3,672</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hastings</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>£2,880</td>
<td>£4,584</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastbourne</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>£2,720</td>
<td>£4,304</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Get involved in campaigning for better transport

JOIN US ON Saturday 8 June for a day of learning and discussion on how to build winning movements for change. Practical sessions will include:
- Veteran community organiser from America and a former mentor of Barrack Obama, Arnie Graf, discussing how we can organise our communities.
- Workshops on building alliances, organising your community and ‘power mapping’
- A session by the New Economics Foundation exploring why the austerity agenda is self-defeating

The day will also see the launch of TSSA’s political and community strategy in the run up to the next election. For more details, see www.tssa.org.uk/politicalconference.
Tony Wheeler writes: A sentence of ‘death by 1,000 cuts’ was formerly a very unpleasant fate which originated in Imperial China as a slow form of execution before being banned in 1905. More than a century later it seems that Thomas Cook are intent on reintroducing this form of torture for their beleaguered employees.

SINCE TAKING RESPONSIBILITY for TSSA’s dealings with Thomas Cook in January 2011, I have never had the opportunity to discuss progressive changes for staff, although I am close to attaining my diploma in regressive contracts and shop closures.

A succession of corporate failures, many of them linked to previous CEO Manny Fontenla-Novoa’s misdirection of the firm, saw Thomas Cook’s share price fall to an all time low of 11 pence, creating a series of knock-on financial problems.

New chief executive Harriet Green, who incidentally is expected to receive two payments totalling around half a million pounds this year, has at least had the foresight to realise that if the way that Cook’s conduct business does not change, then the company will be a thing of the past. That said, I rather doubt I’d be paid half a million pounds simply for doing what I am contracted to do.

Nevertheless they have now taken the business decision to expand online, aspiring to become the leading online tour operator with a digital platform that will host a full portfolio of digital products and services.

What does this mean for the staff in Thomas Cook retail stores? Well you tell me. Despite repeatedly pressing company representatives, I usually receive a response that goes something along the line of ‘We can give no assurances about the future’.

As members in Thomas Cook are seeing their terms and conditions eroded to help cover the cost of the debt the business has taken on, I wonder to myself what the future holds. Further erosion of terms and conditions? Possible. Pay awards? Unlikely. So what will be the reward for high street staff for their part in helping the business turn around? We’ll be pushing hard, but on the company’s current plans, the bottom line is likely to be nothing.

Thomas Cook members must stick together. Members did not create this mess. If they are guilty of anything, it is working harder for less money under the auspices of worsening contracts and difficult performance targets designed to reward only the minority with the opportunity to achieve extraordinary results.

It is terrible that it’s not possible to give any great hope for the future, but members can rest assured that their trade union reps and the full-time staff are doing their best to make this as painless as possible. Sadly, we have to work on the basis that no position within Thomas Cook is entirely safe at this point in time.

On a final note, the real problem with death by 1,000 cuts is that you inevitably need a whole load of plasters to try to patch up the damage. Regrettably it is the Thomas Cook staff who will pay for the plasters and much more.

The TSSA’s voice is only as strong as its members. We have over 1,000 members in the firm today. If we were to double that figure, we’d have a stronger platform from which to protect members and defend against the assault on employees. Hand this article around the office and get your colleagues to join the TSSA online at www.tssa.org.uk/join.
WHilst CoNSer VATive MINISTERS have been celebrating the policies which brought misery to countless communities in the 1980s, their present-day cuts are getting deeper still. The bedroom tax, curbs on in-work benefits, the sell-off of large parts of the NHS, the list goes on and on.

At the same time, 13,000 millionaires are receiving a £100,000 tax break with the scrapping of the 50p top rate of tax. Osborne has also been arguing against a cap on bankers’ bonuses in meetings with European finance ministers. It’s clear where the government’s priorities lie. How they think they can get away with saying ‘we’re all in it together’ is a mystery.

But resistance is erupting. Thousands protested against the bedroom tax at the start of April. Huge demonstrations have been held to save local hospitals, occupations have sprung up to save libraries and there have been nationwide rallies against austerity.

Now we need to pull together all the community campaigns, trade unions, anti-cuts groups and the millions of individuals who are affected by austerity into a single united mass movement that can challenge the government’s austerity agenda.

Earlier this year trade union leaders, campaign groups, MPs, journalists and cultural figures put out a call for a ‘People’s Assembly Against Austerity’ to be held on Saturday 22 June at Westminster Central Hall. The signatories included Manuel Cortes, Len McCluskey, John Pilger, Ken Loach, Caroline Lucas MP, Owen Jones, Iain Banks and Tony Benn.

Since the initial call thousands of individuals and hundreds of trade union branches and organisations have pledged support. The event looks set to be the biggest conference of the labour movement for decades. Already over 1,400 people have registered, with still two months to go. Rallies are being organised in towns across the country, and the Assembly is bringing hundreds of new activists into activity.

The People’s Assembly is our opportunity to launch the kind of movement we need and set out an action plan that can mobilise millions, force an anti-austerity agenda into the mainstream and get rid of this vicious government. Join us there on 22 June.

For more information or to register for the People’s Assembly go to www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk.

Sam Fairbairn of the TSSA-backed People’s Assembly looks ahead to this summer’s major gathering of thousands of trade unionists and other campaigners working to oppose the government’s damaging austerity programme.

Pushing back against austerity: The People’s Assembly

WE ARE NOW two years out from the general election and preparations are well underway to maximise the impact that TSSA has on those elections.

We have a strategy to move our union’s policy forward – to secure a commitment to public ownership of rail – and to make sure it is delivered by an incoming government.

We’re also working to ensure we have MPs from a more diverse range of backgrounds, who support trade unions and indeed include TSSA members amongst their number.

As a smaller union, TSSA needs to be strategic. How do we deploy our resources? How do we shift the terms of debate? How do we demonstrate that Labour’s approach to public transport, workplace rights and the cost of rail fares can be decisive if they are to win in many of the marginal seats needed for them to win the election?

Currently we are undertaking a detailed analysis with the aim of drawing up a list of around ten seats where rail and public transport are key ‘on the ground’ issues, where there are significant numbers of commuters, where we have members, and where we have candidates that support our key policies. Our community organising team will then be building issue-based campaigns with members and supporters in the target seats we identify.

For more information or to get involved, contact TSSA’s political officer Sam Tarry via tarrys@tssa.org.uk or 020 7529 8019.
TUC Women’s conference backs TSSA call

This Year’s TUC Women’s conference covered many issues, from those arising in workplaces or society at large, to issues affecting women in their unions. Despite the membership of the trade union movement now being majority-female, the imbalance in many union structures, let alone wider society, means the event remains vital in the fight for equality.

TSSA’s motion on changes to employment law highlighted the latest attacks and planned attacks being carried out by the government. TSSA’s delegate, Rebecca Barnes, proposed the motion, which was seconded by ASLEF and passed unanimously. Rebecca also spoke in the debate on women and mental health. She told the TSSA Journal, ‘I shared my own experiences, particularly focusing on the stress issues that come with being the main carer of my four children as well as holding down a full-time job, working shifts, and dealing with post-natal mental illness.’

Rebecca was also invited to second the motion from TSSA’s maritime equivalent, Nautilus, on improving the representation of women in male dominated industries. She said, ‘I spoke on the important role of unions in these circumstances, where women are more likely to be subjected to gender bullying and harassment.’

Whilst there was general agreement on many issues, a debate on ‘the other side of domestic violence’ saw strong arguments both for and against women perpetrators being imprisoned rather than given some other form of rehabilitation, taking into account the effect this can have on children. Rebecca reports, ‘This was a very lively debate with great arguments on both sides. It was agreed that women in general are treated more harshly when found guilty of domestic violence than their male counterparts and very often this behaviour is out of character and is the result of years of suffering at the hands of an unreasonable partner.’

To find out more about TSSA’s work for gender equality, contact Women in Focus via www.tssa.org.uk/wif.

‘Fair Shop’ campaign for ethical trading

TSSA in Ireland is backing a campaign aiming to encourage the country’s 800,000 trade unionists and consumers in general to shop with retailers that respect their workers.

Initiated by the trade union Mandate, the scheme certified employers where workers have the basic right to join a union and where workplace representatives are given full collective bargaining rights.

Mandate’s general secretary, John Douglas, said, ‘The initial reaction to the campaign from a number of the major retailers has been fantastic. Already many Fair Shop – nominated employers – seeing the value in the initiative – have been talking to Mandate about developing brand awareness and promoting joint actions.’

To see the list of qualifying retailers, visit the website at www.fairshop.ie.
Reaching out to the community through learning

FOLLOWING ON FROM TSSA’s ‘Making Learning Work’ festival in Hackney, the union’s learning team is collaborating with the Workers’ Educational Association to set up more learning opportunities in the borough. The week-long festival, supported by the national Union Learning Fund, ran events, workshops and activities focused on personal and professional development for local workers, their friends and the wider community in Hackney. Supported by TSSA reps and activists, it received support from a wide-range of trade union members, community organisations and individuals.

‘It was a great week’, said Ngoma Bishop, a local poet and tutor who facilitated a creative writing session. From the launch event to the closing celebration I was really pleased to connect with others that were interested in lifelong learning.’

Over the course of a week some 200 people engaged in various forms of learning. Taster sessions, workshops and talks were wide-ranging: from African dance and drumming to literacy and numeracy classes, film-making to creative writing, and from Black history to ways parents can support their children’s education.

There was a strong desire for such learning opportunities to continue throughout the year, which is why TSSA Learning will continue to work with local learning providers and put on further events. The Learning Team is particularly looking for Community Learning Champions to help take this work forward. TSSA and WEA will help develop these volunteers, offering training and other support. To launch the initiative there will be an open meeting in Hackney for anyone (a TSSA member or not) interested in helping out.

Monica Gort, from the Workers’ Educational Association, said, ‘Community Learning Champions are a key part of the TSSA project and vital to ensuring that the learning offered is relevant and covers what people want! We are really looking forward to working with TSSA to extend educational provision throughout the local community.’

To find out more come to the free Community learning open evening on Wednesday 1 May at WEA, 96-100 Clifton Street, London, EC2A 4TP.

Aprender Español en Amey, Crawley
Learning Spanish at Amey, Crawley

TSSA LEARNING’S FIRST course at the Crawley Amey hub has been described as great fun and a tremendous success by course attendees.

Paul Messenger, Amey Lead Union Learning rep, conducted a survey at the company’s hubs at Gatwick, Chelmsford and Birmingham, with Spanish identified as a popular choice. Paul then organised the 10-week lunchtime Beginners Spanish course with support from TSSA’s London South East and Sussex and Gatwick branches.

The course covered basic greetings and essential holiday phrases. Amey consulting assistant engineer, Keweisha Hussey, said, ’I’ve found the course really interesting, covering lots of helpful material. Now I’d like to do Level 2 Spanish!’

Course tutor Claire Marsden added, ‘The course has proved a huge success. At the same time, we have a lot of fun and have made new friends and built cooperative working relationships with colleagues.’

Amey lead Union Learning rep, Paul Messenger, told the TSSA Journal, ‘The course has been a tremendous success and I plan to run further computer and language classes very soon.’

Would you like to run a similar course in your workplace? Contact TSSA national learning organiser Sal Morawetz via morawetzs@tssa.org.uk or 0207 529 8049.
Welsh Labour: clear red water between Wales and Westminster

ALTHOUGH UNSEASONAL BLIZZARDS wrought havoc with Welsh rail schedules, Alan Carter (Neath and Swansea Branch) and Paul Jeffries (Arriva Trains Wales (South) Branch) survived a seven-hour journey to represent TSSA in Llandudno for Welsh Labour Conference. Following tremendous successes in the 2011 Assembly election and 2012 council elections, delegates assembled in good spirits, reinforced by the speech from Carwyn Jones, the First Minister of the UK’s only Labour government. Carwyn reassured delegates that Wales would not only retain a fully public sector NHS and a comprehensive education system, but would continue to do everything possible to ameliorate the economic damage being inflicted by Westminster.

Speaking to the TSSA Journal, TSSA delegate Paul Jeffries said, ‘Edwina Hart AM – who had only just assumed responsibility for transport policy – highlighted the economic boost that rail electrification will bring to South Wales, whilst the Shadow Secretary of State, Owen Smith MP, talked of the growing momentum behind plans for a rail-based South East Wales Metro. It was also great to hear the First Minister confirm that a deal to nationalise Cardiff International Airport was close’.

Conference condemned further coalition attacks on employment rights, whilst overwhelmingly supporting the principles of ethical procurement and a Living Wage. Carwyn and Owen both referred to the importance of Welsh Labour’s links with affiliated unions – the roots of the Labour Party.

Delegates heard how the post-war consensus underlying the social security system was being dismantled, with Osborne’s so-called ‘welfare reforms’ acting as cover for a further programme of cuts, disproportionately affecting the weakest in society, whilst at the same time the richest were to receive a substantial tax cut. Conference unanimously passed a motion requiring Welsh Labour to co-ordinate action by local authorities and the trade unions to minimise their impacts on society.

Paul Jeffries added, ‘One other highlight was the visit of Ed Miliband, who – in a refreshing change from usual practice – didn’t make a speech, but simply took questions from the floor. Labour in the principality look determined to fulfil the promise of the conference’s theme – to be ‘Standing Up for Wales’’. 

Railway Employees Privilege Ticket Association

Available to all in the transport industries, TSSA members, family and retired staff. REPTA offers many free, discounted and special rates, listed in our 80 page Yearbook.

New for 2013: Membership discounts at National Railway Museum, free Personal Accident cover for travel on public transport. Discount cinema tickets and online rail ticket bookings continue.

£4.50 per year. Additional cards for family members £3. Send cheques/POs to REPTA, 4 Brackmills Close, Mansfield NG19 0PB. Tel: 01623 646789. Include name, address, email and date of birth for each + code ‘TSSA’ or join at www.repta.co.uk.
The Welfare State is the hallmark of a civilised society

I have to admit that I've been watching the war of words being waged against our Welfare State and those on benefits with increasing anger. I have to declare an interest. In the early 1990s, I was dismissed from the electronics industry for trying to organise a union within a US multinational. I then had, as they saw it, the temerity to go on television to expose the union-bashing practices they were engaged in. Of course, many of you will appreciate that this happened at a time when working people lacked a statutory right to union recognition, blacklisting was legal and independent union representation at disciplinary and grievance hearings was at the whim of employers. Thankfully, much of this landscape is now history, even though recently uncovered evidence suggests that illegal blacklisting continues to blight the livelihoods of many trade unionists and their families.

The long and short of this story is that having publicly exposed bad practices, I never returned to a job within that industry. I was dependent on benefits for a considerable period of time. I most certainly did not live a life of luxury. I shudder to think what it must be like now when so many on benefits have seen their payments dramatically cut.

I count myself incredibly fortunate – my union’s intervention saw me receive a settlement that eventually allowed me to go back to university, even if this took an awful long time to materialise. Thankfully, tuition fees back then were a tiny fraction of what people now have to pay to continue their education. You know, I have always seen our Welfare State as the hallmark of what makes us a civilised society – it should provide protection from the cradle to the grave. It is an act of solidarity between people of working age and the retired, between the able bodied and the disabled, between the healthy and the sick, between the rich and the poor and between those in work and the unemployed.

The Liberal politician William Beveridge rightly declared in the 1940s that there were five giants that we needed to defeat: poverty, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness. He proposed setting up a Welfare State with social security, a national health service, free education, council housing and full employment to conquer these ills. Of course, it was left to Labour’s Clement Atlee to make this vision a reality. Somehow I fear that Beveridge will be turning in his grave as he sees his Liberal successors march hand in hand with Tories to destroy many of the remaining vestiges of his legacy. To be fair, the Tories never wanted our Welfare State in the first place. The current economic crisis just provided them with excellent cover to hammer more nails into its coffin.

Unfortunately, myths about welfare spending abound – the reality is hardly ever told. For example, almost half of welfare spending (47 per cent) goes on pensions. A further 11 per cent is used up by housing benefit with a large chunk of this going (to landlords) to provide for people in work whose wages are too low. Reintroducing rent controls and a programme of council house building could significantly reduce this expenditure – never mind requiring companies to pay wages people can actually live on. Only 3 per cent of welfare spending goes on unemployment benefit, whilst a far larger amount is used to top-up the low incomes of millions in work – in effect a subsidy to the profits of employers.

Lastly, government figures show that only 0.7 per cent of the welfare budget is claimed fraudulently. Of course, we should have zero tolerance to this, but it reminds me that tens of billions are lost every year through tax dodging at the other end of the scale – and successive governments have been, shall we say, somewhat reluctant to do much about it. I for one will continue to defend the civilised values that our Welfare State underpins. I very much hope that you will join me in this!
Palestine

The denial of the basic rights of the Palestinian people – kept under military occupation for decades – has been described as a sore on the conscience of the world. Earlier this year, TSSA and Unite sent a joint delegation to Palestine – to observe, to offer solidarity and to develop ways in which people in Britain can help them achieve the freedom they have long sought.

Palestine – the urgent struggle for justice

There are freedoms many of us take for granted – to travel to nearby towns and cities, for our homes to be a place of safety or to be able to elect the government that controls our freedoms. Yet in Palestine, multiple generations have now grown up under Israeli domination, with almost every aspect of their lives restricted by military occupation, sieges, land seizures and discrimination.

65 years ago Israel came into being, with many Palestinians fleeing or being pushed from their homes into neighbouring countries and the areas which became known as the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Some Palestinians stayed and were eventually granted Israeli citizenship. Many who’d fled found themselves under Israeli military occupation after the 1967 Six Day War.
Palestine

in which Israel took control of the West Bank and Gaza.

For almost half a century now, the world has tolerated this situation, with the Palestinians being told for the last twenty years that they would ‘soon’ be granted an independent state of their own. In reality, as members of the delegation saw, the growth of Israeli settlements across much of the West Bank makes the chance of achieving a ‘two state solution’ harder by the day.

Assistant general secretary Frank Ward takes up the story. ‘We all knew we’d be asked questions when we flew into Tel Aviv, however we hadn’t realised that the security services would be using profiling to identify whether we posed a ‘risk’ before we arrived. One of the Unite delegates was detained for over two hours and was repeatedly questioned before being allowed in.’

The group first travelled around the ancient centre of Jerusalem and the eastern side of the city – occupied and annexed by Israel in 1967 – but which most of the world considers to be where a Palestinian capital should emerge. In a meeting with the PLO’s Negotiation Affairs Department, the delegation learnt that the number of Israeli settlers in East Jerusalem had almost tripled in the last twenty years, with settlements being strategically sited to cut off Jerusalem from Bethlehem and the rest of the West Bank.

Jacqui Hall told TSSA Journal, ‘Given this was our first full day, what really struck me was both the sheer beauty of the country, but also the enormous number of illegal settlements built in the Palestinian territories that everybody internationally is turning a blind eye to.’

Returning to the Jerusalem’s Old City, the delegation visited the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, where Jesus is said to have been buried and the Western Wall, the site holy to Judaism as the remains of the biblical Temple. ‘It was humbling to see people of different religions and none at all paying respects, but the whole experience was really overwhelmed by the security arrangements which ensured everywhere was surrounded by armed troops.’

Frank told TSSA Journal, ‘We also met with the United Nations Office for the Co-Ordination of Humanitarian Affairs who told us about the situation in Gaza.’ Whilst Israel withdrew its settlers several years ago, it continues to control Gaza’s airspace, its access to the sea, defines land near the Palestinian side of the border as ‘off limits’ and has imposed a near total closure of its border for several years.

The Gaza Strip is just 25 miles long by 5 miles wide, yet home to 1.7 million Palestinians. Commenting on the siege it has been placed under, even David Cameron has said ‘Gaza cannot and must not be allowed to remain a prison camp’. Since 2007 over 2,500 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza whilst 58 Israelis have also died.

Hebron – a city being strangled

The next day, the delegation visited Hebron, in the south of the West Bank. The city is home to 250,000 Palestinians and about 800 Israeli settlers who live right in the heart of the city in an area controlled by the Israeli military.

‘We walked through the shopping area of the city and saw many of the 500 or so Palestinian-owned businesses that have been closed by military order because they were near where settlers live. Many more have moved away because of the rubbish and excrement being thrown down into the street from the buildings above which have been taken over by settlers’ said Frank. Palestinians have placed cages over the street to try and provide some protection from their neighbours.

Jacqui added, ‘The occupation has really pulled Hebron apart, but it is amazing to see the sheer determination of the Palestinians not to be brow beaten and the dogged way they go about their daily business despite all the hurdles put in their way.’

The cage and sheets placed over the market in Hebron to try and protect shoppers from detritus thrown down by Israeli settlers who have taken over the upper floors of many buildings.
The delegation to boycott Israel
Underlining why this is not a conflict between religions or ethnic groups, the delegation then met some of the many Israeli Jews struggling for an end to the occupation and for a just solution. TSSA’s reps discussed the situation with ‘Boycott from Within’ – Israeli supporters of the Palestinian-initiated call for an international campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) against Israel, similar to those applied against apartheid South Africa.

The delegation later met the Palestinian BDS National Committee, which represents a coalition of hundreds of grass-roots groups. The meeting with the BNC was in many ways the most productive of the week as it involved a round table discussion with representatives of the various organisations genuinely engaged in an attempt to offer a peaceful solution that will ultimately force Israel to comply with international law and recognise Palestinian rights,” says Frank.

The TUC has called for members to boycott firms and organisations complicit with Israel’s illegal occupation, settlements and wall and for the UK government to ban the entry of all goods produced in illegal settlements. Evidence has repeatedly shown many settlement-produced goods are falsely labeled ‘Made in Israel’, so often such a distinction can be hard to make. Most supermarkets now don’t stock settlement goods, with the Co-Op refusing to trade with companies which base any of their operations in settlements. The BNC and many campaigners say that as the problem lies with Israel’s national government and not just the settlers, pressure for a just solution should be built through a comprehensive boycott of all Israeli products.

Participant Al Stoten agrees: ‘When you see the suffering of the Palestinian people first-hand, it is obvious that the world needs to wake up and pay attention. Make no mistake, apartheid is most definitely with our brothers and sisters in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. I would call on anyone with half an ounce of moral fibre to fully support the BDS movement in boycotting all products and companies that are profiting from the illegal violation of Palestinian freedom.’

The struggle of Palestinian workers
The delegation met with Shaher Saed, the General Secretary, PGFTU. Frank says, ‘He told us that the occupation severely limits the economy, meaning most Palestinians have to decide between working in Israel, living in poverty or emigrating. Unemployment and poverty are rife and workers are treated very badly at checkpoints with permits being arbitrarily destroyed.’

The group also met with the Arab Workers Union in Nazareth (northern Israel), who focus on the rights of the fifth of Israeli workers who are Palestinian citizens of the state. They said that as well as having to deal with the impact of globalisation and the normal attacks by government and employers, by far their greatest challenge was dealing with racism against the Palestinian minority within Israel. In one survey 81 per cent said they would not employ Palestinian workers.
Later in the week TSSA’s group visited the small village of Nabi Salih, home to around 600 Palestinians. Each Friday, for over three years now, the villagers have taken part in a demonstration to protest against the confiscation of their lands and the takeover of their spring by the nearby Israeli settlement. This involves a short march from the Mosque towards the spring until they are blocked by the Israeli army.

Frank reports, ‘The first thing we noticed when we arrived mid-morning was the smell of tear gas from the previous Friday. We watched as the Israeli Army attempted to disperse the villagers by using tear gas, rubber bullets, sound grenades and a vehicle spraying foul smelling skunk water hundreds of feet. Some of the Palestinian youths respond by hurling stones in a ritual reminiscent of a modern day David v Goliath – with a slightly different outcome.’

‘The visit to Nabi Salih will live long in the memory of the delegation, not simply because we were tear gassed and shot at, but also because of the strength and dignity of a villager we met. She had lost 16 members of her family to the Palestinian struggle, but when asked if she hated Israelis, she explained to us that there was a time in her life when she may well have hated her oppressors, however she had come to know and respect many Israelis in recent years who had shown solidarity with the Palestinian struggle and now considered them to be friends. What she now hated were the ideas that caused people to be oppressed.’

Taking action for Palestinian human rights
London Underground rep Doug Blundell recalls a quote from Nelson Mandela: ‘We know too well that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians’ and adds, ‘I kept on thinking about this quote during our visit and it was all too visible: the checkpoints which stopped Palestinians for hours, the mesh the Palestinians had to put up to stop the settlers’ waste dropping on them, the theft of land and homes; it is all reminiscent of the South African apartheid regime. And the world at large does nothing. Let’s be amongst the people who are trying to bring about a just peace.’

Britain and many other countries allowed the injustices of South African apartheid to continue for decades until mass popular pressure pushed them into action. Many Palestinians feel abandoned by governments who claim to defend universal human rights, but do little to bring about a solution which can deliver justice for the Palestinians and a lasting peace for Israelis. We need to be part of building that pressure on our own government.

TSSA encourages members and branches to join the Palestine Solidarity Campaign or to sign up to hear about all the latest campaigns at www.palestinecampaign.org or by calling 020 7700 6192.

PSC and their dozens of local branches arrange meetings, film showings, local and national demonstrations as well as campaigns to lobby Parliament and support the boycott of Israeli goods.

PSC can link TSSA branches with local campaigners for joint actions in support of Palestinian human rights, provide expert speakers and provide details of other ways to get involved.

Whereas we often talk about railways cementing links between places, this presumes they do so on the basis of equality. The flip side of this is the reshaping of areas by rail and other infrastructure as part of a plan to secure ownership of them.

TSSA members observed the operation of the Jerusalem Light Railway, which is just such a project. Specifically condemned by the UN Human Rights Council, the 9 mile line runs from West Jerusalem (in Israel) to illegal settlements in the north east of the city.

TSSA’s 2011 conference agreed to boycott the French multinational Veolia, which, due to international pressure, has been trying (unsuccessfully) to extricate itself from the operation of the line. Not only has the line’s placement been condemned, but the recruitment for ticket inspectors stated the requirement for Hebrew ‘at a mother tongue level’ and ‘full army service/civic service’, clearly discriminating against the recruitment from Palestinians whose communities the line runs through.
Christian Wolmar

With most franchise decisions being pushed back by years, Christian Wolmar questions the government’s rush to shuffle the pack yet again on the one publicly-operated route.

East Coast: punished for doing too well

Rail privatisation was supposed to have taken the politics out of the railways. Well, that was never going to happen, but the decision by Patrick McLoughlin, the Transport Secretary, to prioritise the refranchising of East Coast shows that for the government, political considerations still outweigh the efficient running of the railway.

There were numerous good reasons not to rush through the reprivatisation of East Coast, which has been run by the government-owned Directly Operated Railways since 2009. It was taken over by DOR because the previous incumbent, National Express, had thrown in the towel, having overbid and found itself caught up in the 2008 downturn (and incidentally, complaining that it was not getting enough in compensation because Network Rail was doing its job too well!) Although the then Transport Secretary Lord Adonis said this was only a temporary measure, the rebranding of the trains and the appointment of experienced rail managers suggested there would be no hurry to re-let the franchise.

Indeed, since the franchise has been well run – despite problems with the catenary that clearly are no fault of the operator – there was no urgent need to re-let it. There have been notable improvements. The first class service has been revamped and the food, as I found on a recent trip from Edinburgh to London, is better than the rather meagre fare on offer on Virgin. Passenger numbers have increased steadily and the company has proved popular with staff.

Secondly, DOR has performed well financially. Not only has it made a small profit (in truth a rather meaningless number since it is subsidised through the block payment made to Network Rail) which is reinvested into the railways, but it has paid more than £600m in premium payments in the past three years.

Moreover, there is an excellent reason to keep a franchise in the public sector, even for those extreme ideological neo-liberals. The cost of running trains is very difficult to ascertain and having one operator to use as a benchmark would be very helpful for the Department for Transport, especially in the light of its recent difficulties with the West Coast franchise.

When I confronted Simon Burns, the rail minister, on The Daily Politics Show with the point that this was being done for purely ideological reasons, he blustered that it was to give customers a better deal and that Directly Operated Railways (a name he could not actually remember as he kept getting it wrong) was not paying as much in premium payments as Great Western. That was the sort of nonsense that ministers are briefed with by their civil servants and repeat without understanding what they are saying. In fact, it was a silly.

There is an excellent reason to keep a franchise in the public sector, even for those extreme ideological neo-liberals: cost benchmarking.
The only conclusion is that ministers do not like seeing a successful state owned franchise.

comparison since GW has several times more passengers than East Coast and, indeed, has been in cap and collar arrangements for some time, meaning much of the premium has had to be paid back to the company. And, of course, GW did not go ahead with its three year extension because it would have required the payment of premiums it could not afford.

What makes the decision to rush through the East Coast deal all the more galling is the fact that the Department has no shortage of other franchises to contend with. The government’s announcement on franchising during March (see page 5) resulted in the postponement of most of the franchise bidding processes by several years – not just months – because the Department cannot cope with the workload, giving the existing operators extensions for which they will be in a strong position to negotiate good deals. There is a backlog that is having a damaging effect on the industry, creating uncertainty and stopping investment. Yet, instead of drawing the obvious conclusion and running franchise competitions in situations where the alternative is to reward incumbents with long extensions, regardless of their performance, what do they do? Rush ahead with the one franchise that is functioning fine and which requires no negotiation since all the money reverts to the Department.

Interestingly, a big hole has been blown in the argument about the government not being able to take back franchises permanently, an idea that hopefully Labour will adopt when it finally comes out with a new policy on franchising. At the time of the takeover of the franchise by DOR, Labour ministers were implying that it would have to be temporary because of EU rules. Then last year when the West Coast bidding process collapsed and Virgin was going to retain the franchise temporarily, at first ministers said there would have to be a temporary franchise of a year, followed by an interim franchise while the long term contract was prepared for the permanent one which would have been let, probably, after the general election.

Lo and behold, that crazy idea soon got forgotten and there proved to be no need for an interim franchise. Instead, Virgin were given an extension on West Coast until November 2014, but then in the announcement on the franchising timetable in late March, Virgin were given a further extension to April 2017. Therefore, rather than ending last December as it was supposed to, Virgin, without any competition, will have received an extra four and a half years – almost a third extra on their original deal signed back in 1997. No mention, here, of EU rules, tendering, competition, or accountability!

Indeed, the announcement on the new franchising timetable represents the most abject acceptance of the utter failure of the whole franchising concept since the system started in 1996. In fact, it seems to show that the rules are pretty much ‘make them up as you go along’. Let’s hope Maria Eagle, the opposition transport spokeswoman, is watching. There’s a lot Labour can learn from this callous disregard for the normal rules. They should be thinking: if they can do it, why can’t we? 

Christian Wolmar, who is seeking to be the Labour candidate for London mayor in the 2016 election would welcome invitations to come to speak at branch meetings and can be contacted through his website, www.wolmarforlondon.co.uk.
Trams and tram-trains look set to play a growing role in connecting many communities. Paul Salveson takes a look at how they’re being integrated into heavy rail networks in Europe and asks whether that could be mirrored in Britain.

The Light Rail revolution

Light rail is back in fashion, with a new system about to open in Edinburgh and major extensions forging ahead in several cities. Urban tram systems were among the greatest achievements of ‘municipal socialism’ before the First World War, with many local authorities investing in state-of-the-art electric tramways which acted as the arteries of urban expansion. It has to be said, however, that some of the early tram networks led to the decline of several urban ‘heavy rail’ networks which suffered from poor penetration into city centres, with dirty and unattractive steam traction. For a while, it was the publicly-owned entrepreneurial municipal tramways which saw off private, under-invested urban rail networks.

Yet by the 1950s, as tram networks came up for major renewal, all too many were scrapped in favour of buses. Most continental countries, even war-ravaged Germany, kept theirs and modernised them. It wasn’t until the late 1980s that Britain saw a revival of interest in ‘light rail’ with Manchester leading the way. Since then there has been an uneven expansion, with Sheffield, Nottingham, Birmingham, Croydon and Edinburgh developing entirely new networks. Good old Blackpool hung on to its trams and has recently renovated the system with new vehicles and improved infrastructure. The most exciting developments are taking place in the birthplace of Britain’s light rail renaissance, Manchester. Extensions are opening to Rochdale, Ashton-under-Lyne and south Manchester, with a link to the airport seen as a key objective for 2016. This will link in to the proposed HS2 station, which will be located about 2km beyond the existing airport station.

Paul Rowen, former Rochdale MP and board member of the Light Rail Transit Association is clear about the benefits. He told TSSA Journal ‘Trams are clean and green. At the same time trams bring about economic regeneration – walk along the main shopping area in Croydon: people now travel into the town to shop rather than go elsewhere. Just as importantly, trams are popular with the public who prefer using them to buses.’

Rochdale will be the appropriate venue for this year’s national conference of the Light Rail Transit Association, bringing light rail campaigners together to debate the future of what was once seen as ‘the humble tram’. My late friend Colin Ward had a far better term for them – ‘gondolas of the people’. What has this form of transport got to offer?

Light rail is in a sense the little sister of ‘heavy rail’ and some of the technology is shared – and we’ll look at hybrid ‘tram-trains’ later. It is not a ‘cheap’ option compared to other forms of urban transport and the last twenty years have seen a battle of ideas – and policy – over the claims of light rail versus guided busways or just conventional buses with some degree of enhanced traffic priority. It has been said that the Department for Transport has been innately hostile to light rail and that every pound won for light rail has been like drawing teeth.

There’s no doubt that light rail is, and
always has been, political. The early tram networks were largely developed by local authorities rather than private companies, the latter lacking the necessary capital to invest in major infrastructure projects that were essentially local. An additional benefit of local government leadership was that the tram networks could go where there was a wider strategic need, be it housing or industry. That same approach continued in post-war Germany, the Netherlands and Austria. Light rail was a tool of urban planning. Meanwhile in the UK, the very idea of public sector-led strategic urban planning had become politically unacceptable by the Thatcher era. Yet the revival of light rail did not come from thrusting private entrepreneurs, but from the same kind of bodies that promoted trams back in the 1890s – local authorities, mostly in the shape of passenger transport executives. Light rail still embodies public sector dynamism and local enterprise, which perhaps gives a clue as to why it isn’t always popular with some.

Ironically, a small number of some Conservatives have been enthusiastic backers of light rail at the local level – I should acknowledge the great contribution of the late Cllr Stanley King, staunch Conservative, tram fanatic and Bradford city councillor. Good public transport doesn’t have to be politically contentious. Usually, at the local level, it isn’t. And it has to be said that some early schemes such as Manchester and Croydon were approved by Conservative governments. Labour’s John Prescott had visionary plans for several schemes which Alistair Darling scrapped because of cost. Let’s not repeat the same mistakes next time.

Driving urban development
Light rail has the potential to act as a catalyst for major urban development and we have already seen this along the original Manchester ‘Metrolink’ corridor between Bury, Manchester city centre and Altrincham. Light rail can be a vital tool in traffic management, if it is used as the core element of wider strategies to minimise car access into city centres. Sheffield and Nottingham city centres have been transformed through intelligent traffic management strategies based around tram priority. Part and parcel of this is having good park-and-ride at outlying stations and good connectivity with the heavy rail network and bus services. And therein lies a problem. In most other countries where light rail has experienced a revival, there isn’t unbridled on-street competition. The economics of light rail in the UK suffers because a commercial bus operator can undercut tram prices and make the business case for light rail unviable. And as a result, the prospects for getting good quality urban transport, bringing wider economic and social benefits to towns and cities, also suffers.

Tram-trains and integration
If early trams undermined existing suburban steam railways, the experience in recent years has been more positive. HS2 will be fed by light rail routes at Manchester Airport and Toton (for Nottingham). In most major European cities the tram connects into longer distance and suburban rail networks at major termini, usually with integrated local ticketing systems making interchange even easier. Karlsruhe, Germany, took this approach a big step further by creating a hybrid between light and heavy rail: tram-train. Karlsruhe’s main station is about a mile from the city centre, served by several local lines. Anyone going into the city centre had to change. As some of the routes were becoming run-down there was an opportunity to better integrate them into the wider urban transport network. Some of the outlying branches were converted to tram operation, but using vehicles that could operate on conventional heavy-rail infrastructure as well as street trams. It has become a huge success and more and more routes have been converted for tram-train operation. An additional benefit has been to free up capacity at the main-line station for longer distance services. Similar schemes are now common across Europe.

The ‘tram-train’ concept has generated considerable interest in the UK and the last five years have seen the development of studies to test out the idea. That sounds long-winded, and it has been. The original idea of having a pilot on the Penistone Line between Huddersfield and Sheffield was eventually dropped. The Department for Transport, Network Rail and Northern are pursuing an alternative pilot based on the Rotherham – Sheffield corridor, allowing tram-trains to run directly onto the Sheffield ‘Supertram’ network. Part of the problem with the pilot project has been cost. The original Penistone scheme assumed a fleet of just five tram-tram sets which inevitably
made unit costs high. Yet tram-train has got potential in areas like Sheffield where the main station is distant from the city centre. Transport for Greater Manchester is exploring the potential of converting six heavy-rail lines to tram-train operation, allowing services from towns such as Glossop, Wigan and Marple to get easier and faster access into and across the city centre.

Tram-train isn't a universal panacea and up-front costs can be high, even compared to conventional tram schemes. Up to now, the Greater Manchester approach has been to convert existing heavy-rail lines to light rail operation using conventional trams, then using on-street alignments to connect the network or to go beyond the former railway into the heart of a town or city centre. Lines closed by Beeching, such as East Didsbury, are being brought back into service. The most recent extension, to Rochdale, has been along the former heavy rail ‘Oldham Loop’ from Manchester, with the final extension from Rochdale railway station into the town centre.

Edinburgh’s trams will finally start running this year whilst Nottingham is pushing ahead with extensions.

A growing network?
It’s clear that light rail is good for towns and cities and more tram networks are needed: London, Leeds, Cardiff, Glasgow, Liverpool, Bristol and even smaller cities could be suitable for light rail. Freiburg for example, with a population of just over 200,000, has an extensive modern tram network like other German towns of similar size. They don’t have a free-for-all with de-regulated buses offering ‘choice’ but they do have a fabulous integrated transport network. Some of the challenges we face are political and it is unnecessarily difficult to develop light rail schemes in the current environment. Maria Eagle’s proposals for ‘deregulation exemption zones’ would be ideal in cities where light rail is being developed, ensuring the best possible integration between bus, light rail and heavy rail. It’s right that light rail should be promoted at the local level by well-resourced transport authorities which are in the public sector.

But you also need a supportive national policy with dedicated resources within the Department for Transport which can provide positive assistance, rather than discouragement. We need to get away from each city doing its own thing and re-inventing wheels: the more standardisation in technology the better. This means closer working between PTEs and transport authorities, the DfT and devolved governments in Wales and Scotland. An incoming Labour Government should set up an ‘Urban Transport Challenge Fund’ which could fund new light rail schemes and other innovative projects which help regenerate our cities.

A rolling programme of light rail schemes across the UK will not just be good for urban connectivity and regeneration. It has the potential to be good for manufacturing. It’s mad that we have to buy all our equipment from abroad. A condition of procurement policies must be that a large element of the vehicle and infrastructure components should be manufactured and assembled in the UK.

Finally, whilst most light rail networks in the UK are publicly-owned, operation is largely contracted to private operators, though not in every case. Now that trams have returned to Rochdale, the birthplace of the modern co-operative movement, might we look to a co-operative tram company, owned by its workers and passengers, in the future? That would be real community transport.
IN 1834 SIX farm labourers from Tolpuddle, Dorset, were arrested for taking an ‘illegal oath’. The real offence was daring to form a trade union to defend their livelihoods. To immense popular outrage they were sentenced to seven years transportation to the penal colonies of Australia. A huge campaign won them pardons and the Martyrs returned home.

Once again TSSA will be celebrating this historic episode in the struggle for trade union rights at the 2013 Tolpuddle Festival and Rally, from Friday 19 July to Sunday 21 July. Known for its friendly atmosphere, the event will play host to a mixture of great music for all tastes (finishing off with Billy Bragg), political debates, a wide choice of food and drink and a kids’ area packed with fun. TSSA will be hosting a barbeque on the Saturday night with all members welcome.

HAVE YOU EVER looked at the latest festival line-ups and thought ‘I wish I could go, that looks awesome!’ but just not been able to afford it? Well FutureTSSA may just be able to help, with many festival places available for free!

FutureTSSA are looking for members who are 27 or under to come as volunteers to great festivals like Glastonbury, Latitude, Leeds and Reading. You’ll receive a free pick-up from one of several UK-wide locations, secure camping with showers, two free meals per day and a couple of beer tokens after every shift.

So what’s the catch? Well for all that, all you have to do is work a six hour shift behind a bar each day for the Workers Beer Company. The company – run by the Battersea and Wandsworth trades council – will make a payment for every hour worked to FutureTSSA, allowing us to boost the development of young members, fund training events and socials. The rest of the time is yours to do as you please.

Steven Neagle, a rep with East Coast told the TSSA Journal, ‘I did my first festival at 24 years old, volunteering through FutureTSSA at Latitude. I didn’t know what to expect but after meeting up with four other young members were taken directly by coach to the festival. The atmosphere was amazing! I enjoyed it so much I then volunteered for Leeds the same year – that was four years ago and I haven’t missed one since’.

For more information see www.tssa.org.uk/tolpuddle.

Correction
Due to a production error, the article in the March issue of TSSA Journal was incorrectly printed with lowercase renderings of ‘Gypsy’ and ‘Traveller’. As with other ethnic groups, the terms should have been capitalised. We apologise for any offence caused.
“Now I can look forward to the future with a better quality of life”

Stephen developed Pneumonia and had to be admitted to hospital. Ten days later he was discharged, despite feeling no better. “Initially the doctors were planning to carry out further tests – but these were never done. I wasn’t coping well at home and when I went back to the hospital, struggling to breathe, I was again discharged without treatment.”

Three weeks later Stephen collapsed at home. He was rushed to hospital and tests showed that he had suffered a severe stroke. Stephen nearly died, and as a result, he was left brain damaged and paralysed down his left side. If the initial tests had been undertaken when Stephen was first admitted to hospital, doctors would have discovered an infection on his heart which would have been easily treated. “I spent 11 months in various hospitals undergoing rehabilitation. The severity of my injuries left me dependent on others. I had to learn to walk again,” says Stephen. “We began to struggle at home. My wife did the best she could to care for me but we had very little help. The difficulty of living at home with inadequate support came to a head when I fell and fractured my hip as I was getting up from a chair one day. I spent another nine months in hospital. Any of the limited mobility I had so painstakingly worked to regain was lost – now I can only walk a few steps. My home was no longer suitable: there was not enough room for a wheelchair and I could not get upstairs. We had to rent accommodation.”

Stephen managed to return to work briefly, but had to eventually retire because of the severity of his brain injury. One of his colleagues suggested he contact TSSA’s legal experts, Morrish Solicitors, to bring about a medical negligence claim against the authority. “I was put in touch with Jane at Morrish Solicitors, who used my case notes and expert evidence to establish that I had a claim. At first the authority denied they were at fault and it was only after Jane filed Court Proceedings that they admitted they had been negligent.”

“Jane recovered substantial compensation for me, transforming our lives. It has enabled me to buy a new home adapted for disabled living. After my stroke I had to make weekly trips to a charitable centre for a bath – now I have the right equipment to shower safely at home and I have carers who can look after me. I have a wheelchair-adapted vehicle and I can go on holiday with my family again. These may seem like little things but they have made such a difference to my life.”

“I am very grateful to my Solicitor Jane who has fought for justice for me. I would not have known where to turn to get help. Thankfully TSSA has fantastic lawyers.”

Based on a real life case. Certain details have been altered to protect.

Morrish Solicitors LLP provides expert legal advice for medical negligence cases, accidents and injuries to TSSA members and their families. Call the legal advice helpline on 0800 093 0353. Morrish Solicitors is a Limited Liability Partnership and regulated by the Solicitors Regulation Authority.
Redundancy: forced into an alternative job?

Q. I am under redundancy consultation and have been told that I might need to apply for an alternative job that I don’t want. Is this correct? Can I refuse to apply?

A. Your company’s consultation process should be meaningful and there should be an agreed procedure by which the selection for redundancy takes place. The selection process must be fair, with criteria that aren’t subjective. Your employer should give everyone at risk of redundancy the chance to apply for suitable alternative work, if such posts exist. You can only refuse to take part if you have reasonable grounds to do so. If you unreasonably refuse to engage with the selection process or reject an offer of suitable alternative employment, you could jeopardise your entitlement to redundancy pay.

Whether or not an alternative job is suitable depends on the similarity to your current job in terms of pay, terms and conditions, status, hours of work, location, job description as well as the skills, abilities and experience needed to do the job. To refuse alternative work, you have to show there are sound justifiable reasons to do so.

There is no ‘one size fits all’ solution to this situation, as it will depend on both the suitability of the job you are being offered and your own personal circumstances. The more similarities a job has to your current one, the easier it would be for your employer to show that you are acting unreasonably by refusing it, while the fewer similarities a job has to your current one, the harder it would be.

There is a legal right to a four week trial period in which both you and your employer can gauge the suitability of the new post and you should ask your employer for this if you are unsure of the new role.

I would suggest that you ask your employer for as much information as you can about the job you are being asked to apply for. You should then seek further advice from your local rep or the Helpdesk on your options.

Pushed out because of illness?

Q. I have suffered a debilitating illness, but recently returned to work part-time. With the right job I could probably work full-time, but the company have said it is up to me to find a new job within a specified timeframe otherwise they will get rid of me on grounds of ill health. Is the period they are quoting correct?

A. It seems like they are putting unnecessary pressure on you, by placing the burden on you to find a new role internally, when the legislation clearly states it is their responsibility to make reasonable adjustments.

Your employer should start by looking at reasonable adjustments which would help you do your existing job on a full time basis or, if this is not possible, looking at redeployment options within the company. Your employer should be acting in a supportive way to reintroduce you to the workplace and definitely not adding to the already stressful situation by making you fearful of losing your job.

Your employer is also putting the cart before the horse here as ill health severance or ill health retirement should be the last resort after all attempts to make reasonable adjustments have failed and the possibility of redeployment fully explored.

There is no set time scale to this process, but your employer must take reasonable steps to explore adjustments and any redeployment options in order to comply with the Equality Act 2010. Failure to follow the correct process could result in a discrimination claim against the employer.
TSSA’S ANNUAL DELEGATE conference, which sets the union’s direction and holds the executive to account will take place between 12 and 15 May in Glasgow. Delegates from branches will gather for four days of debate and decision making.

Once again we’ll be ‘live blogging’ the event on the TSSA website, with text and photo updates throughout each day of debate. You’ll also be able to download the daily edition of TSSA Journal produced during conference.

The local reception committee have organised a full programme of social events each evening for delegates, showcasing a fine selection of Scottish culture – from haggis to Rod Stewart! For details of conference motions and the social programme, see www.tssa.org.uk/conference.

All TSSA members are invited to join the Disability Working Group’s mini-conference prior to TSSA annual conference.

The event aims to raise awareness of issues that affect people with disabilities in and outside the workplace.

Saturday 11 May 1.30pm-6pm and Sunday 12 May 9.30-1pm

Hilton Glasgow
1 William Street
Glasgow G3 8HT

Speakers include:
- Citizens’ advice bureau adviser on how to access your benefits
- Sarah Hughes – of TSSA’s neurodiversity team
- Paul Scholey – of Morrish Solicitors, on legal rights of disabled people
- Barbra Farmer – Scottish Disabled Workers Committee

Members are welcome on just one day if they can’t attend on both Saturday and Sunday. The venue is fully accessible. Refreshments will be available. Queries to tssadwg@yahoo.co.uk.

Your union – your choice: Use your vote for president and treasurer

Elections are under way for the positions of both president and treasurer of TSSA, with members in Scotland also choosing their Executive Committee member. Ballots were distributed in early April and you have until noon on Tuesday 30 April for it to be received by the Independent Scrutineer.

Return your vote by 30 April