

BUS CO. WILL TRY TO

REPLACE TRAINS

S.N.C.
3/1/1964

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Traffic Manager's Assurance

GROWING OBJECTION TO RAIL CLOSURES

THE Bristol Omnibus Company's traffic manager, Mr. C. R. Buckley, gave an assurance this week that the company will do its best to meet the needs of the displaced rail passengers if local stations and halts are closed.

"It is our job to see that the people's needs are met, and to relieve any hardship which may ensue", said Mr. Buckley.

Following the announcement of the British Railways Board's proposals to discontinue all passenger services from four stations and eight halts on the Swindon-Gloucester central section of line, objections have been pouring in.

STATIONS INVOLVED

The local stations involved are Chalford and Brimscombe, as well as the halts at St. Mary's, Brimscombe Bridge, Ham Mill, Bowbridge, Downfield, Cashes Green and Ebley.

This is the Railways Board's second attempt to end the Gloucester to Chalford railcars. Objectors won a reprieve for the railcar at a public inquiry in May, 1962 when the South Western Area Transport Users' Consultative Committee decided that there would be hardship, and that the alternative transport was inadequate.

The question of hardship is the only consideration which the Consultative Committee is empowered to deal with.

The extent to which the alternative transport services—mainly by bus—will go to relieve the hardship to trainless passengers will be the factor uppermost in the minds of the Committee members, before they make their report to the Minister of Transport.

The ultimate decision rests with the Minister, according to the procedure laid down in the Transport Act, 1962.

HARDSHIP PROVED

There is no doubt that hardship will be proved, as it was when the railcar was threatened nearly two years ago.

With this in mind, the Railways Board has again asked the Bristol Omnibus Company to submit details of the services they can offer to meet the needs of passengers in the event of the withdrawal of local rail passenger services.

Mr. Buckley, the traffic manager, told the "News and Journal" this week that his company's proposals could not be made public at this stage, but would be incorporated in a report to the Consultative Committee.

"I can say that there is now a question of adjusting the times of one or two buses to meet peak hour trade," said Mr. Buckley.

Presumably this would be done to suit the convenience of workers travelling by train, as the times

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RAIL CLOSURE

of the buses are at the moment either too early or too late.

EXTRA BUSES POSSIBLE

Mr. Buckley stressed, as he has done at previous inquiries, that where there is a need, the company is prepared to put on extra buses. It was difficult, however, to meet the needs of everybody, he said.

If there are adequate buses instead of the railways, there are other considerations regarding the question of hardship.

In many instances the cost of travelling by rail is cheaper than by bus. The day return from Stroud to Gloucester, by railcar or train, is 2/7, but the return journey by bus costs 3/2. Many people prefer the comfort of the train and, in winter, there is often the possibility of buses being taken off because of road conditions.

From many aspects, the latest rail closure proposal is the biggest blow to our local public transport system in the history of travel.

Local authorities, organisations of all kinds, and individual passengers will be protesting.

UDC WILL PROTEST

On Wednesday Stroud Urban District Council agreed to submit an objection.

In a report to the council, the clerk (Mr. W. D. Wilson) recalled the representations he made on the council's behalf at the railcar inquiry on May 9, 1962.

"I anticipate," said the clerk, "that one of the grounds on which the Board are now basing their renewed proposal is that the reduction of fares has had no affect whatsoever and they will no doubt submit up-to-date figures which one can only assume will tend to support the withdrawal of the services."

One of the criticisms of the procedure over rail closures is that, at the public inquiries, facts and figures given by the Railways Board cannot be disputed. At a recent inquiry into the proposed closure of stations on the Bristol/Gloucester/Worcester line, including Stonehouse (Bristol Road) objectors who started to dispute figures, or criticise the Board, were ruled "out of order."

The Stroud Urban Council clerk agreed in his report on Wednesday that while the railcar inquiry was conducted in a very fair manner, he felt that there was some dissatisfaction due to the fact that it was not possible to "get at grips" with the representatives of the Railways Board.

"It was necessary to accept any statement by the Board as

fact and it was apparent that a number of objectors who seemed to have a considerable amount of knowledge so far as the railways were concerned, disputed certain of the figures quoted by the Board. Unfortunately they had no opportunity of disproving the Board's case," said Mr. Wilson.

BIGGER BUS DEPOT

The clerk also reported that Bristol Omnibus Co. have intimated that they have purchased Brick House in London Road, as it is required in connection with the "Long term proposals which the Company are formulating to counteract the hardship which will be caused by the proposed closure of local railway stations and services."

NOT UNANIMOUS

The Stroud council decision to object was not unanimous.

There was no logical reason to defend the railcar service which was said to be losing some £17,000 a year when the last inquiry was held, said Mr. D. A. V. Harper.

It was more than likely that, since then, losses had increased and the number of passengers decreased. Vice chairman, Mr. G. H. Bullock, also said he could not defend the service because of the losses involved.

Mr. J. Hillier argued the proposal should be fought "tooth and nail".