



London Liverpool Street

Conference sponsors:



Programme sponsor:



The illustration above shows the cover of the programme for the rail users conference. The picture is a reminder to train operators that passengers often have children and large amounts of luggage to cope with as well as tickets and timetables. Sometimes train operators give the impression that they cannot be bothered to cater for other than the city gent with a small briefcase and an umbrella.

## Conference in brief:

Network Rail has more chance of succeeding than Railtrack ever had, said Anthony Smith, national director of the Rail Passengers Council. It still has to make a profit but the profit would be re-invested.

The Strategic Rail Authority was also starting to take decisions, although some might not like what it was doing. One of the biggest issues is fare levels.

Regulation to keep fare rises just below the retail price index was bringing in the passengers but filling up the network.

The European Union was beginning to take action to ensure that railways contributed to the free passage of people and goods in Europe. It was looking for a big improvement in rail services across

national boundaries. It wanted national rail companies to begin thinking of cross-Europe services.

The European Commission was keen to see the new European Passengers Federation be effective at putting forward the passengers' views.

Railfuture president Michael Caton said the atmosphere was more promising but he warned that the problem of costs escalating on rail projects was such a serious one that rail expansion plans were going on the backburner while the Strategic Rail Authority determinedly got a grip on the issue.

But Dr Caton had a question for the politicians: If money can be found to build new roads, why not new railways?

# The best ever

By Peter Lawrence  
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Our best conference ever. Yes, that seemed to be the conclusion from the 160 participants who came to the 24th National Rail Users' Conference on Saturday 5 October 2002 in London.

We were of course grateful for the sponsorship from Virgin Trains, National Express's London Lines and South West Trains who helped to make the day successful.

There were three top-line speakers, Chris Green, chief executive of Virgin Trains, Anthony Smith, national director of the Rail Passenger Council and Steve Thompson, London Lines director of consumer development.

We had a very lively and extremely interesting question and answer session.

Four workshops were also run:

Dr Michael Caton helped to explain how Railfuture can help rail user groups.

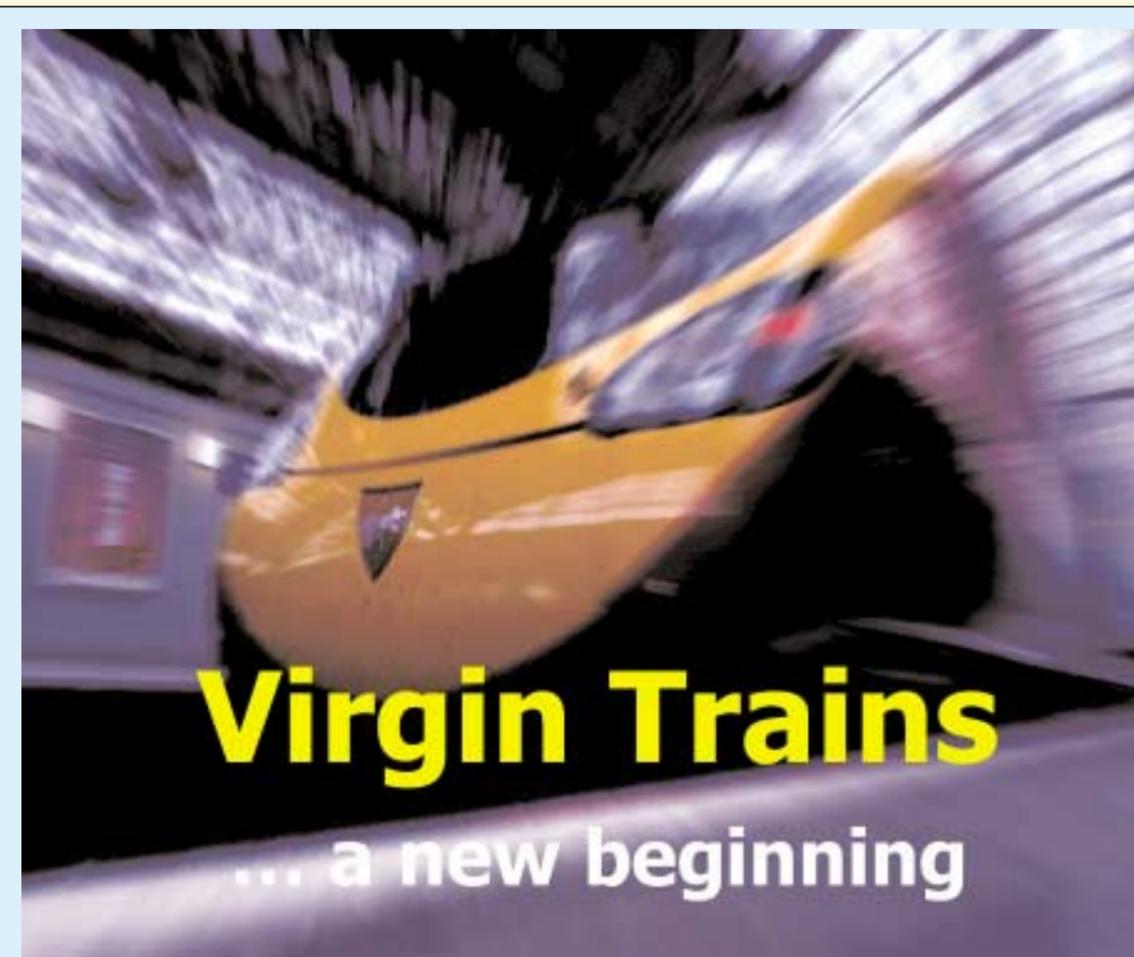
David Croot led a discussion about marketing rail. John Smock from Walton on the Naze, Frinton-on-Sea and Kirby Cross rail users helped to unravel the complexities of business cases. Tom Bogdanowicz of the cycle campaigning group CTC dealt with the topic of cycles and trains.

I think everyone came away with the feeling that the conference catered for all interests in rail and we learnt from our speakers and gathered much new information from the workshops. This will prove useful.

Anthony Smith was very complimentary towards Trevor Garrod who with the Railfuture international committee have been working hard on setting up the European Passengers Federation.

A BBC Business unit turned up at the conference in the morning and were in and out of the building all day. Chris Green, Anthony Smith and myself were interviewed on News 24 TV direct from the conference and Chris Green was also interviewed live on BBC Radio 4.

A full report on the conference will be available soon from John Lee. Please send an SAE to John at The Birches, Eye Lane, East Rudham, Norfolk PE31 8RH



By Trevor Jones

A new era was dawning for rail passengers, promised Virgin Trains chief executive Chris Green. He said the launch of Network Rail - with no shareholders - was the right approach. He also had high respect for Richard Bowker the new chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority.

Virgin now ran 40% of the inter-city services in Britain and major improvements were happening now.

CrossCountry was equipped with a brand-new set of trains and was operating a much-improved timetable. Under BR, it would have had to wait for old trains from the West Coast main line to be cascaded.

The new Voyagers had the fastest acceleration of any train in the UK and by 2003, 66% of the routes would be running at between 100 and 125 miles per hour.

There would be 215 trains a day serving 115 towns and cities while the West Coast main line served only 30 centres.

The basis of the new approach was fast, frequent services with Birmingham as a hub where a CrossCountry train would leave on average once every seven minutes.

The aim was to carry twice as many passengers, up from 15million to 30million. The West Coast main line meanwhile would be a 125-mph tilting-train railway by September 2004.

The new signalling at Euston and Birmingham was reaching Japanese standards of reliability.

Crewe-Stoke was being electrified to allow diversions in 2004 while Crewe-Colwich was upgraded.

The first raft of 110mph non-tilting eight-coach Pendolinos would be introduced in February on the quietest trains to avoid overcrowding problems. But there would be an immediate pay-off because older trains would be released. As the cost of leasing these old trains was £1million per year, money would become available for investing elsewhere.

Virgin is already recruiting 400 staff this year.

Mr Green was proud that CrossCountry had been able to accommodate eight cycles on each Pendolino although only four could be taken on each Voyager. He agreed that a cycle logo was needed so cyclists could identify where to load their bikes.

Space was tight, particularly when the £1million cost of each coach was taken into account.

## Bikes and trains

In a single week at around Easter, 50,000 cyclists were despatched from London Waterloo station.

That was in 1898 - in the days of steam and the odd penny farthing.

Today some train operators seem to have lost the plot and there is scope for a massive increase in provision for bikes on trains.

In theory the Government and the Strategic Rail Authority support bikes and trains but the weasel words in its policy which allow poor service are "so far as reasonably practicable and subject to the availability of appropriate space".

The problems were raised at the rail users conference where Tom Bogdanowicz of the CTC was impressed by the lively discussion and the well-informed comment, with many examples of problems with cycle carriage.

A key issue workshop participants focused on was the lack of accurate information provided by rail operators.

One had been sold a through ticket with a bike reservation but hadn't been told that the connection across London was by underground, where bikes are restricted.

Another person recommended that passengers with bikes should have seat reservations next to the bike space to prevent delays when getting off.

Yet another complained about a lack of warning about short platforms forcing her to stay on the train.

Participants favoured clear signs indicating designated bike space on trains. One participant praised Silverlink for providing a van service for bikes, alongside a coach service for passengers, while there was construction on the Hemel Hempstead-Milton Keynes route.

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