

# Freight fights back

*Eric Layfield attended a conference in London on 8 July to discuss the provision of new railfreight terminals, particularly in the South and Midlands. Developers, freight customers and local authorities were represented as well as railfreight companies and terminal operators.*

The rejection last year of the planning application for the London International Freight Exchange (LIFE) at Colnbrook, near Heathrow airport, was a severe blow to the railfreight industry.

Despite the gloom, insiders believe there are still reasons to be optimistic about railfreight.

There is still some way to go before rail can match the flexibility and competitiveness of road.

Some local authorities are very pro-active where railfreight is concerned.

Obstacles to growth remain to be surmounted, however, not the least of which is the lack of firm commitment by the Government.

But life goes on after LIFE and the railfreight industry must adapt to the new conditions.

LIFE developers Argent spent five years and £10million on the project, and without this sort of development there is little hope of railfreight achieving the 80% growth called for in the Government's 10-year plan.

Apart from the fact that part of it infringed the Green Belt, it was suggested by speakers that LIFE failed because the case presented gave the impression that the rail element was secondary to the warehousing provided – only 25% of goods inward and 8% of goods outward were by rail.

Therefore the effect on pollution and congestion was minimal, and there was some lack of clarity in future development of the site. Hopefully, lessons have been learnt, and it is accepted that it is essential for developers to co-operate fully with one another, and with Network Rail, the Strategic Rail Authority and local authorities.

Several speakers contributed to a list of criteria necessary for a successful terminal. Apart from the obvious, such as adequate access to the road and rail network, it is necessary to avoid close proximity to housing, schools and hospitals, since most terminals now require 24

## Mail battle goes on

Railfuture member Philip Mason was determined not to sit back and do nothing when the Post Office announced it was axing mail by rail.

Like many other Railfuture members he took action. But whereas they mainly wrote letters of complaint and attended protest meetings, Phil put his design skills to work.

He designed a MOVE MAIL ON RAIL sticker which he provided free to people who wanted to campaign for a change of attitude.

He said: "I produced some small self-adhesive labels approximately 49 x 19mm, suitable for sticking on envelopes, etc.

"The initial batch was my donation to Railfuture and a supply of 50 (weight for first class stamp) has been sent to members as requested on receipt of a SAE. "I've since supplied a few larger batches of 1,000 for £9.78 including VAT and postage.

"To help with my costs I shall be pleased to supply further batches of 50s on receipt of a SAE plus a couple of separate first class stamps.

"I'm now producing a Mark II version using die-cut labels which are easier to apply, but are a little more costly."

So help the campaign. Make sure that every letter you send has a sticker on it.

Contact Philip at Fast Track Print Service, Cottesmore Press, Elton Street, Grantham, Lincolnshire NG31 6DQ.

Email: [fastrack@cottesmorepress.fsbusiness.co.uk](mailto:fastrack@cottesmorepress.fsbusiness.co.uk)

David Redgewell told the Railfuture national executive on 13 September 2003 that a meeting was planned with the Prime Minister with the aim of stopping the transfer of mail from rail to road and air. Over 140 MPs have signed an early day motion, protesting against the move. David advised Railfuture members to keep up the pressure.



hour operation. A flat, well drained terrain is essential, with space available for future expansion. Since profit margins are small, maximum capacity is essential. London and the South East require three or four such terminals to satisfy future demand and projected growth in railfreight.

Despite the need to facilitate the transfer of freight from road to rail, one or two speakers referred to the barriers to this process.

These were given as uncertainties over funding as seen by the recent suspension of freight grants, lack of stability in the freight market, mixed messages from the government, Network Rail's costs and unwillingness to accept any risk and the poor state of the network (633 temporary speed restrictions on that date – 100 more than in January this year). Until these difficulties have been overcome growth in railfreight will be handicapped.

Reference was made to the forthcoming change in planning

procedures, with Regional Planning Guidance being replaced by Regional Spatial Strategies, which should take effect from April 2004.

This will be a simpler system and will be assisted by the proposed regional government authorities being set up in some areas, based on European Union practice.

In practical terms, several speakers gave an account of their experience in setting up railfreight terminals. The Potter Group representative said their experience was generally favourable, with only 11 late trains at their Knowsley terminal in two years.

Each train was turned round on the same day. The speaker from Norfolk County Council referred to their survey of disused track beds, and their struggle to prevent train operators' desire to convert potentially useful sidings into station car parks!

This speaker also referred to the

amount of money being spent to strengthen bridges to permit use by a small number of heavy goods vehicles and to the extent to which local authorities were, in effect, subsidising the use of roads by these vehicles.

■ Eric F Layfield is secretary of Railfuture's freight committee.

## Rail users conference

Don't miss your chance to book up for the national Rail Users Conference which takes place on Saturday 1 November 2003.

Railfuture chairman Peter Lawrence has asked branches to use the event to show off what they are doing.

John Lee, Tony Smale and Kate Tudor-Pole have also been working hard to make the conference a success.

The conference takes place at Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1H 9BD (off Euston Road) on Saturday 1 November, starting at 11.00. There should be a separate booking form with this copy of *Railwatch*.

## German sell-off

The German railway company Deutsche Bundesbahn has decided to sell the now closed line from the main line at Weinheim to the town of Viernheim in the state of Hesse which is halfway between Mannheim and Heidelberg, reports Keith Dyll.

The line has not had passenger services for many years but has had seasonal freight traffic and DB has now decided to sell the line as it "does not make money".

A cursory inspection indicates that the line appears to be in good working order. There is a narrow gauge tramway between Mannheim and Heidelberg which does appear well used so there may not be much potential for passenger traffic but if anyone does feel like running trains I am sure that German railways will appreciate your offer.

In Britain the line would probably have been torn up for scrap and the land sold off for building.