

Rail for the 21st century

By Trevor Garrod

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After Namur, Leipzig, Strasbourg, Maastricht and Munich, this year the European Passengers' Federation held its annual conference in London.

The venue was chosen partly because our capital is now closer to continental Europe with the completion of the high-speed rail link from the Channel Tunnel to St Pancras International; and partly in recognition of London's progress and plans to develop better public transport.

Sustainable Urban Transport in Europe was the conference theme, with European Transport Commissioner Jacques Barrot as keynote speaker.

He wants to achieve a reduction in carbon dioxide pollution of 20%, a 50% reduction in road accidents and environmental action to "clear up the skies".

He explained the European Commission's process of asking questions in a Green Paper to which hundreds of bodies, including EPF, had responded.

In the autumn, after the analysis of these replies, an action plan should be produced.

The 70 delegates from 12 European countries who came to London for the event also heard speakers from Eurostar, Transport for London, London Rail and Passenger Focus.

Presentations and discussion ranged over topics from modal shift to regeneration, from high speed rail to measuring customer satisfaction.

A nine-page report of the conference is available free of charge from Trevor Garrod, 15 Clapham Road South, Lowestoft, NR32 1RQ or by email.

Next year's EPF conference will be in Berne, Switzerland, on 14 March. Details will be given on www.epf.eu and in future issues of *Railwatch*.

Public interest

The then TfL vice-chair Dave Wetzel reminded people that the only reason the huge Canary Wharf development in London had been a success was that the Government invested money in the public transport infrastructure.

Now 6,000 people every day are able to access the area and the Government had accepted the principle that, to pay for Crossrail, there should be a property tax.

Mr Wetzel urged that a proper land value tax should be introduced, following the lead of 30 cities in north America.

Mr Wetzel also urged more transport operators to recognise the importance of London's Oyster card.

He called for a compatible card which could be used to travel on railways and buses all over Britain



European Passengers Federation Conference Canary Wharf, London, 15 March 2008

and even all over the world. He also called for public ownership of landing slots at airports.

He said the money raised by selling the slots could be used to build better railways across Europe.

Growth

But Ian Brown warned that it takes 10 years to provide new rail infrastructure and the railways are dependent on proper long-term planning.

And Mr Brown, who is managing director of London Rail, said the Government has no interest in developing inner London rail services.

Transport for London however wants to "grow" the inner London system by 100%, and increase the existing railway's capacity by 40% by introducing longer trains and better signalling.

He added: "It's a waste of time trying to justify transport investment purely on transport grounds. You always have to take the wider economic benefits into account."

Putting up rail fares by 30% would wreck the wider economy and he added: "We will all die if we wait for the private sector to buy the trains we need."

£135million bonus

Nick Mercer of Eurostar said the successful launch of St Pancras International had been estimated to be worth around £135million in public relations terms.

"Rail is now seen as the 21st century mode of transport, not road and not air," he said. "But most people did not think that way before St Pancras International. Everything is playing into rail's favour at the moment."

He admitted there were still ticketing problems using Eurostar to get to some destinations in Europe but promised a new system by next year which will give the cheapest price by "combining individual journeys and can be booked in one component."

Monopolies

Anthony Smith of Passenger Focus said research is very important because the Government will not listen to generalisations.

He said: "Railways have got a very bright future but they must be passenger-oriented."

But he said the rail companies in Britain were largely monopolies and were not interested enough in change as long as the money keeps rolling in.

LOCAL ACTION

North East

By Peter Kenyon

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■ ■ Grand Central Railway

Continuing its policy of liaison with train operators, Railfuture North East held a well-attended branch meeting at Sunderland Civic Centre in March. Tom Clift, managing director of Grand Central, talked about the launch of the thrice-daily Sunderland-King's Cross service and plans for the future. The first priority was the introduction of a fourth daily train as soon as a Class 180 set can be hired. Coastliners and the Saltburn Users' Group were invited to suggest improvements in the connections with Northern Rail at Hartlepool and Eaglescliffe. The fares structure was to be reviewed, but the over-arching principle of equal pricing between pre-booked and walk-on fares would be retained. The availability of reasonably priced walk-on fares makes the journey attractive to travellers from other parts of the region who are able to reach Sunderland by Metro and can accommodate the longer journey time to King's Cross. Unfortunately difficulties with the refurbished power cars in mid May resulted in a much-reduced service.

■ ■ Arriva CrossCountry

The readiness of Grand Central Railway to meet rail user groups and discuss the train service contrasts with the attitude of Arriva. Apparently the latter has declined to meet Northumberland County Council and user group representatives. At Morpeth the number of trains calling has been reduced from four to three and one of the remaining services is very close to that of another operator. However the weekend service will be improved.

■ ■ Leamside

Railfuture North East has been campaigning since 1992 to save the infrastructure and promote the potential of this 21-mile double-track line, which runs from Pelaw and joins the East Coast route at Ferryhill. In February the feasibility study commissioned by Nexus (Tyne and Wear PTE) advised that reinstatement would bring "wide economic benefit to the North East region". The study estimated that the cost of reinstating the whole line for passenger and freight use would be £60million.

Railfuture North East continues to emphasise the operational and environmental benefits of a reopened Leamside. These include the opportunity to introduce a link to trainless Washington New Town, connection with the park-and-ride service for Durham at Belmont and a useful freight diversionary route for part of the East Coast main line. We are delighted that our views have been vindicated by independent transport consultants Faber Maunsell in the PTE study. However, though the recently published East Coast main line rail utilisation study tacitly acknowledges the value of the line as a diversionary route to relieve the double-tracked main line through County Durham, action is deemed unnecessary until "after 2019".

This is yet another example of the "too little and too late" attitude which prevails nationally when necessary rail improvements are considered. Existing and potential rail users will not be impressed.

MULTIMODAL 2008 Vice president George Boyle showed the flag for Railfuture at Multimodal 2008 at the NEC, Birmingham, in April. Exhibitors included railfreight operators and road-based companies such as Stobart, WH Malcolm and JG Russell who are increasingly turning to rail. Speaking to several company reps, George was pleased to learn other companies, who are currently 100% road based, are preparing to start rail trunking. The Department for Transport also produced an excellent document on multimodal solutions. Multimodal 2009 is already being planned.