

# Now is the time to electrify

A full electric service is now in operation on the East Coast main line between London King's Cross and Edinburgh.

North Berwick - Edinburgh local services have already begun operation and the wires are still going up for Birmingham's Cross-City trains.

By contrast the Airedale and Wharfedale scheme is facing an uncertain future as a result of the complexities of local government finance and BR's cash problems.

Though the infrastructure investment has been approved, it is still unclear how the trains will be paid for. West Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive will have to wait until the next financial year before it learns whether it will be allowed to buy or lease new units.

At one time it looked as though this hiatus might scupper the project completely, but train makers Hunslet who are already building Birmingham Cross-City units have agreed to wait.

RDS wants to make sure that other lines are electrified as soon as possible without this unsatisfactory and unnecessary shilly-shallying.

East Midlands branch has been running a well-organised campaign to persuade BR and the Government to extend the 25kV wires north of Bedford. One of the great bonuses of this scheme would be for through trains from the Continent to run via the Channel Tunnel to the Midlands.

It would give Leicester, Sheffield, Nottingham and

Derby electric links to London St Pancras but would also put them among the first-rank cities of Europe.

The society's national executive has also been considering a new offensive in putting the case for electrifying the North Wales line from Crewe to Holyhead. This is already a truly international link, giving Ireland a railway window to Europe.

The European Community is keen to develop it but so far the British Government has spent billions on the parallel road while starving the railway of cash.

The break-up of BR into sectors may also be working against upgrading because the line is now largely a Regional Railways responsibility rather than InterCity.

Our new book *Switch on the Trains* is intended to show how we can approach problems like this and to show what can be learned from previously successful campaigns for electrification and how to answer our opponents.

The benefits of electrification are enormous to passengers and to the wider world in reducing the enormous pollution caused by road transport.

Electric trains are the only form of transport capable of providing mass transit over InterCity distances at minimal environmental costs. They are cleaner, quieter, give a smoother ride and are more reliable. The improvement in quality brings more passengers which helps to maintain a high level of service and reduce road traffic. They are cheaper to run, need less maintenance and last longer. Danish

Railways reckon they cut energy consumption by 20 per cent.

They can be powered by whichever primary fuel is cheapest at any given time.

In 1981 the British Government was told that main line electrification was financially worthwhile and the bigger the schemes, the better was the return.

Since then of course a string of politicians have walked in and out of the Department of Transport. By the time they have discovered the facts of life, their limousines have whisked them away.

Britain has 30 per cent of its network electrified. Switzerland has 99 per cent, the Dutch have 70 per cent. West Germany has 90 per cent of its inter-city routes electric. Even in the poverty stricken East, many lines are to be electrified, including the creation of a new high-speed route from Hanover to Berlin.

It seems obvious that we in Britain should have a strategy to electrify the remaining InterCity corridors, the remainder of Network SouthEast, local lines in the West Midlands, Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Strathclyde and selected Regional Railways routes, such as Edinburgh - Aberdeen, North Wales and North Trans-Pennine.

*Switch on the Trains, compiled by Mike Crowhurst, explains our policy in greater detail. It costs £2.50 post free from sales officer Alan Harwood (address back page).*

## Limousines for London Transport

T's head office is only a quarter of a mile away from Parliament. But London Transport chiefs arrived by limousine at the Houses of Parliament when they appeared to give evidence before the Commons Transport Committee in July.

Chairman Mr Wilfrid Newton and the Tube's managing director Denis Tunncliffe explained why they needed £10 billion for upgrading the system and building new lines.

Mr Newton said: "We need an improved Underground system because it has been allowed to deteriorate over 30 years."

Mr Tunncliffe said the Monopolies and Mergers report had identified underspending over decades by governments of both complexions as being largely responsible for the poor existing service.

The MPs however were keen to spell out the deficiencies. Sir Robert McCrindle (Tory MP for Brentford and Ongar) said the Circle line was nothing short of a scandal and was little more than a "slum line".

Mr Newton said he had travelled on the line and was "ashamed" by the service.

Mr Tunncliffe said trains had been withdrawn for repair and it was discovered that the "worst track on the system" had damaged the bogies.

One Tory MP, Terry Dicks (Hayes and Harlington), even criticised LT for the "beautiful" glossy booklets which it produced for its Statement of Strategy 1991-4 and its Annual Business Plan 1991-2.

Questioned about the lack of adequate information on the Tube, Mr Tunncliffe said the dot matrix station boards were three to four years old but were now "old technology".

And Tube planning director David Bayliss warned that in future the Travelcard, which has done more than anything else to make life better for Londoners on the move, would probably become a

"premium product" in future! Two weeks earlier BR chairman Sir Bob Reid faced the committee to explain why there was an "obvious demand" for railway investment.

Sir Robert McCrindle asked then: "Is the Government deluding itself by allowing you to borrow more money? Should it think about giving you more grant?"

Sir Bob said: "Some projects do require the application of social cost benefit analysis. The Treasury can best put the money in and get a social return. Ordinary banks can't."

When asked about the arbitrary closure of the Bedford - Bletchley line last Christmas, BR chief executive John Welsby dismissed it as a "lightly used line used mainly by schoolchildren".

Both Sir Bob and Mr Welsby also gave unpromising answers to questions about cycle carriage, saying on the one hand that "we make provision for them" and in the next breath insisting: "There is limited accommodation for them."

RoadRailer: A new overnight door-to-door freight service between England and Scotland is planned for the new year. Trains will run between London Cricklewood and Glasgow Hillington with lorry trailers carried piggyback as well as the new bimodal RoadRailer vehicles.

Charterail which already runs an intermodal service from Melton Mowbray plans pick-ups and deliveries within the M25 or in the Edinburgh, Dundee and Glasgow area. The trains will leave at 8pm to guarantee delivery next morning.

Railfreight Distribution also launched an intermodal service between Aberdeen and Glasgow Coatbridge in July.

With luck these new initiatives will help to reverse the switch of traffic from rail to road which has been the norm for the last 30 years.

"The Government's policy of insisting on a high

profit level by BR has led to the steady decline in tonnage carried by rail," Private Wagon Federation chairman Mr P J Graham has warned. "This is in sharp contrast to the actions of other European governments."

*Rogue lorries:* 12 vehicles carrying hazardous cargoes were ordered off the road when the Health and Safety Executive set up spot checks in the North West in July, examining vehicles carrying chemical, explosive, radioactive, and other dangerous loads.

*Very handy:* Both Railwatch and RDS get a mention in the Rail Freight Handbook 91-92, produced by Clarke and Company in Oxford. The £35 290-page book describes BR personnel and departments but also gives classified lists of private operators, terminals, manufacturers as well as providing interesting articles. It is packed with information which will help firms to find expert technical help in switching more freight to rail. It is obtainable from Clarke and Company, 6 Squitchey Lane, Oxford OX 7LD. Tel: 0865 54680

*Show time:* A major railway equipment show and conference is being planned for London in 1993. Called Railtex 93, it will cover freight and passenger equipment and incorporate the Light Rail 93 exhibition. Details from Judy Aspdon 0707 275641

### Video offer

*British Scenic Rail Journeys Through Central Highlands and the Kyle Line (30 mins).*

£9.95 including post and packing from RDS sales officer, 139 Harrowdene Gardens, Teddington, Middx TW11 0DN. Cheques payable to Railway Development Society.

Offer closes on 18 November.