

Bad news for wimp motorists

All of us in RDS are accustomed to the financial bad news about BR operations as shown on the stark front page of the last Railwatch.

The really bad news, however, is that all forms of powered transport cost a lot of money and have to be paid for. It just happens that rail and air transport are costed out in total and the profit or loss made public.

Don't tell me, I know it's all been said before but isn't it high time RDS set up a permanent working party to analyse and publish the annual accounts for road transport?

It would be a formidable task, researching the records of the Department of Transport, police, motor industry, local authorities, insurance and other "service" industries to mention just a few, but the very act of carrying out the operation would in itself be political strength to our arm.

A final REAL cost per tonne kilometre or car kilometre for each year would remove much of the hear-say and opinion about the true cost of travel. I suspect (but of course can't prove at the moment), it would be one in the eye for the whimpering motorist.

I'm a motorist too — but I don't whimper. I just have a guilty conscience!

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Beached — by BR

For some years I have, from time to time, used the morning train from Newcastle to Chathill for the purpose of coastal walking in Northumberland, the station being approximately four miles from Beadnell and Seahouses.

From July, this train has been withdrawn, leaving only one at 1720 Monday to Saturday. Thus the only way I can use this service is to travel on the 1720 and come back 47 minutes later (except on Saturdays when I would have 91 minutes).

Alternatively I could stay overnight and return on the 0707 the next morning. I find neither of these choices feasible.

So I join Graham Larkbey in asking: What kind of service is this?

To all intents and purposes, Chathill station is now closed as far as I am concerned but because during the course of a week, 18 trains stop there, I am not considered as having grounds for submitting an objection to this situation.

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Dreams and reality

Railwatch and RDS is in danger of losing credibility with the regular publication of grandiose high-cost new rail schemes.

Do the authors not realise the realities of rail investment? Do they not read Railwatch and understand that services are being cut, investment deferred, renewal work held up, and that BR only plans 60 new miles of line in 10 years.

As an active campaigner, I have experienced the frustration of seeing the potential of the Peterborough — Swindon service established yet, due to the lack of £3 million and stock, the scheme being put on ice.

Similarly modernisation of the Bedford - Bletchley line sinks ever nearer to the end of the decade.

The campaign for Bedford - Sandy found it difficult to gain support from the authorities.

Proposals for services from my home area to Brighton or East Anglia, while no doubt highly desirable, are unable to be funded.

Development needs to be realistic within the potential resources available. Railwatch and RDS

is otherwise likely to be seen as a load of unrealistic rail buffs and idealistic dreamers.

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General Secretary Trevor Garrod writes: RDS policy on this issue is that up to 450 miles of route should be added to the BR network (in addition to the Channel Tunnel High Speed line). These include freight-only lines to be reopened to passengers, abandoned lines to be relaid and totally new railways to be built.

Our books A to Z of Rail Reopenings and Rail for the Future go into the issue in some detail. A modest programme of new strategic links and key feeders would open up many new journey possibilities and benefit the existing network. This programme was agreed after lengthy study and discussion by RDS branches and committees.

We do not claim it as the last word on the matter, and are prepared to consider other suggestions from members. There must, however, be priority schemes on which we concentrate more effort than on others - and clearly Bicester - Bletchley is a high priority.

The stamp of unreliability

I must take issue with the claim that the transfer of Royal Mail business from rail to road was "inevitable" following the series of one-day ASLEF/NUR strikes in the late 1970s.

The disruption caused by the strikes is minuscule compared to the disruption every single day from congestion, roadworks and accidents on the roads, roads on which the Royal Mail is becoming more and more reliant.

The rail disputes have been used as an excuse to transfer business away from the railways. Where mail is carried by rail, the contracts have contained clauses which impose penalties on BR if it does not meet deadlines. That is a very good deal — one the Royal Mail does not offer its own customers. The best you can expect is five pence refund if your first class letter does not arrive next day!

Over the coming years, the Royal Mail service will become more and more unreliable as road congestion worsens. The only answer will be to transfer business back to the railways.

It is unfortunate that we live in an era when it has become fashionable to blame trade unions and state industries for all the country's problems.

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Bury this poor service

Many through passengers now have to change at Bury because BR managers are attempting to run down the Cambridge - Ipswich line. From July BR reduced the number of through trains to four a day each way. Connecting services are poor. This is bound to prove unpopular and many passengers will switch to roads at a time when the Government wants more people to travel by train.

Instead of attempting to discourage travel on this line, BR should develop it. A through Cambridge - Colchester service via Ipswich every two hours would only require the same number of units as are used at present.

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An idea to adopt

The idea of adopting a station, suggested in the last Railwatch, is highly commendable but not really novel. A number of the stations on the Central Wales line are adopted and cared for by various local groups. For example Llanwrtyd Wells and Llanwrda are tended by the ladies of the local Women's Institute, Llandebie is looked after

by the pupils of the primary school, their teachers and parents while at Dolau, the action group has won a BR Best Kept station award.

To my mind, this sort of involvement goes far deeper than the mere tidy appearance of the local station. It fosters interest in the railway itself, encourages travel by train and helps towards keeping the line open.

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Let's go electric

I am a long-standing member of RDS and a former station master. As chairman of the Welsh Railways Action Committee, I pledge our full support to RDS in its campaign to boost the North Wales main line to Holyhead. In our opinion there is a strong case for electrification and development of the Holyhead route for Irish passengers and freight traffic to the Channel Tunnel, and we welcome the Irish Government Transport Minister Mr Seamus Brennan's positive support for electrifying the line.

The European Community Commissioner Karel van Miert has also recognised the importance of this "land bridge" rail link from Dublin to mainland Europe especially when the Channel Tunnel is completed and EC barriers are lowered.

Holyhead provides the fastest rail/sea route between Ireland and the Continent and would be speedier if connections were tighter. Electrification would attract a higher share of passenger traffic to the Holyhead line. The combination of local and Irish sea traffic provides a sufficient basis for investment in long-distance trains.

There is scope for development of package tours by rail and sea. The North Wales route serves a range of tourist attractions in its own right. There is scope also for an attractive land bridge sleeper train providing that boat timings are suitable. There is scope too for a motorail train.

115,000 passengers are forecast to use the Holyhead line to and from the Channel Tunnel in 1993. In the summer, this could represent around 200 passengers a day in each direction.

With regard to freight, new freight container terminals should be located at Holyhead and revamped section 8 grants should be approved to help industrialists make full use of rail freight services.

It is vital that Wales is fully connected with a modern electrified rail system by the 1992/3 when the single European market is in operation and the Channel Tunnel is open.

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Home truths

It seems the newly formed Great Eastern Railway company will eventually run trains as far as Fakenham and even to Wells next the Sea. House building in Fakenham has blocked the route. And since 1982, a ten and a quarter inch gauge steam railway has run from Wells to Walsingham, operating regular trains from Easter to the end of September. It provides an excellent service between the two towns.

D M Smith 124 The Rowans Milton Cambs

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