

Future is bright for rail

RDS vice-president Peter Snape told the RDS rail users conference that the Tories' rail privatisation was botched and had given us the worst of all worlds.

Speaking 10 days before the Paddington crash, Mr Snape warned that there was no real prospect of renationalisation even though some of his fellow Labour MPs were still calling for it.

Mr Snape, co-founder of the all-party rail group and a former railway signalman, said he was now also chair of a bus company, the biggest urban bus company in Britain.

But he was keen to see the railways prosper and was convinced that deputy Prime Minister John Prescott was committed to public transport and was passionate about improving it.

He praised RDS for putting pressure on Railtrack to embark on improvement schemes like the one at Birmingham New Street.

He said gauge enhancement was needed and it was not enough just to build for today's railways.

"We must prepare for a greater volume of rail traffic," he said.

Channel Tunnel rail traffic had not prospered partly because of over-rigorous Customs checks which, if applied to lorries on the Eurotunnel shuttle trains, would bring collapse.

In a similar way, there was rigging of the transport market so that lorries did not pay their true track costs.

In spite of all the handicaps put in their way, railways had a bright future and RDS should have a big part in that future.

But the following speaker Tory transport spokesman Shaun Woodward said the Government had let down the country on transport.

Particularly on the London Underground, the service had got worse.

He added: "The Tories will make a commitment to public transport and to the railways. But people should be able to choose to use public transport not be forced into it."

He added: "We are not anti-motorist and over-taxation of motorists is an issue."

He said that one of the benefits of privatisation was that the taxpayer is contributing less to the railways and three train operators were paying money into the Treasury. Anthony Smith of the Central Rail Users Consultative Council said one of the Government's resent aims was



Volunteer Robert Stephen, national executive member Ken Cropley and campaigns director Alix Stredwick, pictured above left to right, are making good use of the new RDS office.

We have an office largely thanks to several months of serious effort by Paul Krebs.

The office will be the London base for Alix who will normally work there on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Volunteers led by national executive member Ken Cropley will staff the office for the rest of the week. We are still looking for volunteers to help with administration for perhaps one or two days a week. If you can help, contact Paul Krebs: 020 7727 8872.

Paid for by an appeal to members last year, the office will effect another step change for RDS. The address is RDS, Roman House, 9/10 College Terrace, London E3 5AN. Tel: 020 8981 2992. Fax: 020 8981 2994. Email: alix.stredwick@rds.freewire.co.uk

But please remember that RDS is still made up of volunteers who continue to carry out many tasks from their homes. We hope the office will enable volunteers to be more effective in future. But to be more effective and to keep that office open, we also need more members and more money. Please do all you can to recruit extra members. It is membership fees and donations which keep us going. We are already taking action nationally to promote membership and further action is in the pipeline.

RDS has recently benefited from the estate of our late member Peter Hollingsworth. Other members might like to consider remembering RDS in their wills.

for "strategic re-integration" of the railways. He added: "We need a period of sustained investment and one aim for it would have to be to cut fares."

The high cost of rail fares was the first big deterrent to people using the railways, said Kristine Beuret, director of Social Research Associates and inconvenience and the perception of personal safety were ranked second and third by most people.

She urged action to make trains and stations more accessible. Making them more attractive for disabled people had important spin-offs for other people.

"Lots of things could be done without major expenditure," she said. "When you arrive late at night at stations, you need information about where to call a taxi and you need a phone to call one."

RDS group travel

Spring Millennium Visit to Berlin 10-16 April

Midday departure from London Waterloo,

back early afternoon.

£350 approximately.

Travel by Eurostar and InterCity Express. One night in Cologne in each direction.

For full details, send an SAE to Trevor Garrod, 15 Clapham Road, Lowestoft, Suffolk NR32 1RQ.

Booking forms and full details will be sent out early January.

In association with Travel Cannon Ltd, Saxmundham Station, Suffolk. Fax: 01728 603199