

Too late, now they are listening

At last it appears that we are winning the safety battle but it has been at a terrible cost. In 1993 I was part of a group of ex-railway officers who produced a paper on the impact of the new 1993 Railways Bill. A press conference was held. The result? I was labelled a scaremonger.

I maintained then the railway was the safest form of public transport but in the light of the new legislation it would be more difficult to maintain that safety. What are my feelings now?

First, sadness. In spite of years of fighting for Sir Anthony Hidden's recommendations after the Clapham accident to be implemented – mainly Number 50, which required that commercial considerations should not compromise safety, and that Automatic Train Protection



Rayner's review

should be installed – it has taken the Ladbroke Grove disaster for people to listen. Second, relief. Now people are listening, although having heard official statements

following the Clapham crash, I hope the commitment to spend money is for real. I am worried we might still go for the option of the Train Protection Warning System because it can be implemented more quickly and is of course cheaper. Remember TPWS would not have prevented the Watford, or the Southall accident, or before then the Cannon Street accident, all of which involved fatalities.

The nation deserves a Rolls-Royce system given the profits of the rolling stock companies and of Railtrack and given the vast public subsidy going into the industry, giving the appearance of being laundered to come out as profits. We must not let them sell us an inferior signalling system.

Third, anger. Having had the privilege of examining the documentation of the trials concerning the Watford and

Southall accidents I can now see how the system managed to stop the investment. Clearly those that sought to rubbish ATP, arguing that it was not cost effective will now have the opportunity to justify those views. Finally with the Government listening to us, my main feeling is one of a resolve to continue to provide the detail that will enable investment in railways to be properly directed towards safety. It will be so easy as the memories of this tragedy fade to find new financial reasons, or new technology so as not to proceed.

The statement "All it needs for evil to succeed is for good men to do nothing" – attributed to Edmund Burke a century ago – is never more true than now.

Peter Rayner

■ Peter Rayner is a former BR operations and safety manager and author of *On and Off the Rails*.

Alternative view of the Central Railway

By Martin Smith

While I fully support the principle of reopening the Great Central Railway and the line through Woodhead Tunnel as a freight route for Continental piggyback traffic, I have serious doubts about Central Railway Plc's proposal to route their line through London.

It proposes to take over the Chiltern Railway, then make use of the West London Line to Earls Court where its line will go underground through a 10-mile tunnel to Streatham, and then run alongside the Brighton line as far as Redhill.

Chiltern Railway is already planning track enhancements to increase their services, and will not have the capacity to take Continental freight traffic.

The West London Line needs extra capacity for more frequent cross-London services, in addition to existing freight and mail traffic and Eurostar trains to North Pole junction.

Central Railway says that its tunnel could be used for West London cross-rail passenger services, but as it will not have an underground station at Clapham Junction, that will not be of much use.

As for running alongside existing tracks between Streatham and Redhill, this would require an enormous uptake of expensive land in built-up areas and demolition of numerous buildings, reconstruction of dozens of bridges (how will it get its line through East Croydon?), and cause tremendous environmental disturbance during construction.

For more than 10 years, RDS Thames Valley branch has been advocating the use of the Redhill-Reading-Oxford-Banbury route for North of London Continental freight traffic.

It would be much cheaper to upgrade this route, with flyovers at Redhill and Shalford

Junction and a new tunnel through Guildford, and to quadruple the congested Didcot-Oxford section.

I am very worried to learn from Roger Skilton's article that Central Railway will quote our support in its publicity material, when we only support them in principle. When the Central Railway applies for powers to drive its line through South London, which will raise as much opposition as building a new motorway, it will be able to say: "But we have the support of the Railway Development Society."

News in brief

New watchdog

A new transport watchdog with robust powers should be set up to take over responsibility for air, sea, road and rail safety, the Commons transport select committee recommended in November.

It should take over the safety role of the Railway Inspectorate, the Civil Aviation Authority, Marine Accident Investigation Branch, and even the British Transport Police. It could also take over responsibility for road safety. The recommendation came in the committee's review of the Railways Bill which will officially set up the Strategic Rail Authority. The MPs said the SRA should publish reports on the performance and investment record of the train operators.

Global threat

People going on holiday to Spain may be at risk of contracting malaria within 20 years because of global warming (caused by road traffic), according to research by University of East Anglia scientists. The Alpine ski season will be shortened and many exotic holiday locations such as the Maldives may

have completely disappeared under water within 100 years.

Tangled Tube

Tory shadow environment spokesman John Redwood has criticised the Government's partial privatisation of the Tube. He says a Conservative government would privatise the entire Tube network.

New treasurer

Tony Sheward has volunteered to take over as RDS treasurer. He takes over from general secretary Trevor Garrod who has been acting treasurer for several months.

Hidden Dangers

Hidden Dangers (Railway Safety in the Era of Privatisation).

A new book by Stanley Hall, published by Ian Allan, to follow Mr Hall's highly successful books *Danger Signals* and *Danger on the Line*. Comprehensive and controversial in its coverage, *Hidden Dangers* is an essential read for anyone interested in the nature of the modern railway and how it will cope with railway safety in the private sector.

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