

# New style lobbying

**Paul Krebs reports on how the Parliamentary Liaison Committee is evolving into a new RDS Policy and Lobbying Group**

Over the summer an ad hoc group of active members reviewed the effectiveness of our Parliamentary Liaison Committee to see how it was meeting the needs of the society.

Do we need something different to have successful national campaigns?

In September the national executive approved the recommendation to set up of a new policy and lobbying group.

The group had its first meeting in October. The main

functions of the new group are to lobby UK government, Parliament(s) and statutory authorities, to support branches and specialist groups. The leaders are Michael Caton and Peter Lawrence. Keith Dyall is the Conservative Party contact, Simon Martin Labour, and we need a person from the Liberal Democrats to join the parliamentary group.

We are also looking for contacts for the Scottish and Welsh parliaments, probably on a corresponding basis.

We also want to develop national campaigns with other environmental groups to support branches and specialist groups with Simon Martin as the leader.

This will mean working

through the TAR (transport activists) network which is gradually extending to the whole country. We want to develop RDS (national) transport and planning policies, to support campaigns and lobbying by specialist groups and branches. The leader is Mike Crowhurst with support from Richard Pout as transport policy and planning specialist.

We want to keep abreast of the emerging regional and local government structures and issues to support campaigns and lobbying by branches. The leader is David Redgewell, with support from Richard Pout and Stuart McNair as specialists.

We appreciate that improving communications within RDS is a priority. So we are feeding back progress reports via the monthly internal and campaigns bulletins as well as through *Railwatch* itself.

Alix Stredwick, the campaigns director, is working closely with us and activists from groups and branches are welcome to contact the appropriate member of the group, as mentioned above, to raise national campaigning or policy issues.

## Multi-modal studies could be the Trojan horse for road building

Following the freeze on new road building schemes, the Government is carrying out multi-modal studies to see how a transport policy rather than a roads policy can be developed.

Rail campaigners throughout Britain must find a way to get their say on these studies, which can easily be fiddled to prove that "there is no alternative" to road building.

Rail should get a boost. One of the corridors under study is Cambridge-Huntingdon. Any objective study would recommend rebuilding the Cambridge-St Ives line and extending it to Huntingdon to link up with the East Coast main line but already there are any number of crackpot busway type schemes which will literally not deliver the goods.

Once the busways have failed, it will be an easy task for them to be converted to roads.

The other corridors are West Midlands to NW conurbation, London orbital, access to Hastings, Tyneside, West Midlands area, South and West Yorkshire motorway box, London to SW and South Wales, north-south movements in East Midlands, SE Manchester, A453 (M1-Nottingham).

### Road lobby should belt up

Prescribing more traffic lanes to fight traffic problems is like prescribing big-

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I was recently at a meeting at which a member asked: "Why does RDS have an international committee?"

The reasons are several. Since 1994 our railways have been physically a part of the European network. For a quarter of a century, our country has been part of what is now the European Union. Our trains are used by international travellers to and from airports and seaports. There are like minded organisations abroad with whom we can campaign and exchange experiences. It is estimated that 80% of our environmental legislation now originates in Europe. A considerable amount of that legislation may affect rail, directly or indirectly. We need to have channels of communication with the European Union.

Our international committee has been invited to meet the new Transport Commissioner in Brussels, and contact is maintained with many MEPs on matters affecting our country. Since the early 1990s, we have built up links to a greater or lesser extent with like-minded bodies in eight other EU countries and two non-member states. Sometimes these enable us to initiate bilateral campaigns. For example, we are seeking, with our French counterparts, to improve connections in and out of Eurostar at Calais-Fréthun and exploring the possibility of a passenger service between Kent and the Nord/Pas de Calais region. Meanwhile, our international committee takes every opportunity to press for North of London Eurostars - something which many of our Continental colleagues will

## TREVOR GARROD'S VIEW



also be pleased to see. Earlier this year, RDS was invited to an international conference of rail users in Zurich. Illness prevented our delegate from attending; but we now have the conference report, and I will send a translation to any member, on receipt of a SAE.

Briefly, it is proposed to form a European Passengers Union which would lobby for a degree of common standards throughout Europe. Some of the suggested standards are on similar lines to our own *Easy Rail Travel* proposals. For example, there should be a common policy on holding connections, luggage in advance and consultation over future timetabling. It is also argued that a passenger should be able to buy a ticket to his or her final destination, rather than having to re-book en route.

The proposals go further, in calling for standard nomenclature of trains (inter-city can mean different things in different countries) and pointing out anomalies over telephone information services and

compensation rules. We in RDS have something to contribute, and something to learn, in these discussions, which will hopefully culminate in a further conference and report next spring. Our Continental Ticketing Survey, on which International Committee members John Barfield and Bill Collins are working, also shows that rail, unlike road, has not yet achieved easy seamless travel across European frontiers. We shall be putting forward ideas to improve matters.

Finally, rail freight comes into its own over the longer distances possible since the opening of the Channel Tunnel - but, as one speaker at our recent rail users' conference pointed out, it is not reaching its full potential. We need to work with our Continental friends to identify problems and opportunities. If we can do business with them in their native tongues, that also helps. So our international committee maintains a database of members with language skills, and John Barfield will be pleased to add to it.

## Fast links

to fellow

travellers