

Railwatch

AN INDEPENDENT VOICE FOR RAIL USERS

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Promises, promises

Eurostars will soon be cruising from London King's Cross to York in the colours of GNER.

This is good news for some passengers because it will result in GNER providing nine extra trains a day – an extra two million seats a year.

But by now those 186mph Eurostar trains – designed to run in three countries – should be running direct services through the Channel Tunnel to Paris or Brussels from Scotland, the north and Wales.

Instead the overcrowded and inadequate London Tube (all change please!) will now provide the link between King's Cross and Waterloo for Europe-bound rail travellers.

The promises, in section 40 of the Channel Tunnel Act, remain unfulfilled and for three years at least – the period of the lease arrangement with GNER – look like remaining unfulfilled.

The Government approved the lease arrangement after consultants Arthur D Little reported that running regional Eurostars will require a subsidy. The Government has now left it to the Strategic Rail Authority to devise a "strategy for international services".

There is no indication of when this strategy will be implemented and one of the options to be considered is not having a regional Eurostar service at all.

This is not the only aspect of Labour policy which has disappointed campaigners.

In 1995 – in opposition – Tony Blair said: "There will be a publicly owned and publicly accountable railway system under a Labour government."

In fact we still have public money being poured into the system only to be taken out in the shape of company profits.

Leicestershire County Council paid for new stations at Syston, Sileby and Barrow and subsidised phase one of the new Ivanhoe service to the tune of



This beautiful viaduct at Newbattle, out of use for 30 years, may soon see trains again following a report which says that at least part of the Waverley route could be reopened to serve the Scottish Borders. The viaduct, near Dalkeith, has survived but many other parts of the line have been blocked by roads or building of other sorts. If protection had been effective the whole line could have reopened. Report: Back page Picture: Scott Wilson

£200,000 with Leicester City Council paying £150,000. That money is swallowed up in leasing charges and Railtrack access charges.

Good for Railtrack shareholders but there is now a big question mark over phase two of the Ivanhoe project to Burton on Trent and Nuneaton. Should the council put up more money so that Railtrack can make more profits?

Despite sucking up large amounts of public money, Railtrack still likes to keep details of access charges secret. So much for involving the public in decisions.

The present set-up, now seemingly accepted by Labour, has not yet delivered the East-West rail project, Thameslink 2000, or London's CrossRail. With classic understatement, the London Regional Passengers Committee concluded: "Railtrack's access charging regime may not incentivise it to invest to expand the

overall capacity of the network." Many people would be happy to see the state paying for public transport investment.

And at last we are seeing some results from the SRA's Rail Passenger Partnership scheme.

Northern Spirit gets £2.2million to boost its **Sheffield-Doncaster-Goole-Hull** services to an hourly frequency.

Northern Spirit also wins £1million to run more trains between **Sunderland-Hartlepool** and **Sunderland-Newcastle**.

Anglia is awarded £2.8million for **cross-London services**.

Wales & West is granted £800,000 for more trains from **Bath to Filton Abbey Wood**.

Leeds benefits from £3.4million to boost commuter services from **Wharfedale and Airedale**.

The Government's love affair with buses appears to be cooling. Buses are still unreliable, unable to run to anything like a

timetable, blocked by car traffic not being restrained in any convincing way.

Improving bus services is impossible with a government fighting shy of traffic reduction, and now happy to encourage people to buy cars, ignoring the increased danger, pollution and gridlock that will result.

Even SRA chairman Alastair Morton wants the Government to build more roads, while Prism, which has got a reputation for bustitution, wants to run more buses if it gets a new the rail franchise for Wales!

British Airways and National Express want to monopolise airport trains when the need is for them to be better integrated into the national rail network.

Institutions the Government inherited and has itself created seem unable to grapple with the muddle and the Government appears ambivalent at the very least.