

# Ally in fight for freight

By Tara Garnett

I have recently been appointed as the campaigner for Freight on Rail, a new campaign working to get goods off roads and on to rail as an important step in developing a more sustainable distribution system.

Bringing together trades unions, the rail industry, the Rail Freight Group and Transport 2000, Freight on Rail promotes the benefits of rail freight both nationally and locally, advocates policy changes that support the shift to rail, provides information and help on freight related issues, and campaigns more broadly for a distribution system that makes social and

environmental as well as economic sense. Over the next few months I shall be working with local authorities to encourage them to promote rail freight through their local transport plans.

I'll also be working with local transport and environmental groups both to promote the benefits of rail freight and to raise the quality of rail freight terminals and sites; to ensure communities gain from such schemes. If you want to know more, or have information you think could be of help, please get in touch. I can be contacted at Freight on Rail, c/o Transport 2000, 12-18 Hoxton Street, London N1 6NG. Tel: 0207 713 5109.

Email: Tara@transport2000.demon.co.uk.

## RDS freight information officer

Eric Layfield has agreed to be RDS freight information officer. Through RDS branch chairmen, Eric will co-ordinate approaches to the freight companies.

If you have ideas about freight traffic which could or should go by rail, Eric will pass on your ideas.

The basic requirement for putting freight traffic on rail is a regular flow and, unless a private siding is being suggested, good road access is necessary, with some hard standing.

Information should be sent, via your branch chairman, to Eric Layfield, 61 Moor Street, Spondon, Derby DE21 7EB.

Email: eric@layfield7eb.freeserve.co.uk

## Tame the drivers

A thousand white lilies were placed on a black car on 1 March to remind the Government it should be taking more action to protect people from drivers who kill. The demonstration was organised by campaign groups RoadPeace and the Slower Speeds Initiative.

# Euro ministers 'aid' railfreight

Britain played a key role in getting European Transport Ministers to agree a deal which they say should help shift international freight off roads and on to rail.

It is a step towards opening up national rail networks to allow trains from other European Union countries to work through freights.

"This deal provides the right framework for international freight train operators to co-operate with one another or operate individually across borders," said Lord Macdonald.

"Operators will be subject to a community licence to endure that standards, especially safety, are maintained. As in Britain, member states will each have to establish at national level an independent regulatory body to oversee track charges and deal with complaints.

"Freight customers will have more choice. There should be less pressure on roads. This package will help reverse the decline in rail's share of the market.

"This is a significant package that will give European rail freight a much-needed boost. It will widen the freedom to provide services in the rail sector, an objective which we strongly support."

Unfortunately the deal does nothing to make road hauliers responsible for their true "track costs", the real reason for rail freight's decline. Despite the fine words, it is unlikely that there will be any noticeable reduction in the number of foreign juggernauts on our roads.

## Bring back the trains

Railway campaigners are still fighting against plans to convert existing or former lines into busways.

The Government has given a clear signal to Hertfordshire County Council to drop plans to convert the Watford-St Albans line but Luton Council is still pressing on, against fierce local opposition, with its plans to rip up the tracks of the Luton-Dunstable line. The fight goes on.

And the Cambridge-St Ives line which is an obvious case for a two-stage reopening to Huntingdon is subjected yet again to a busway proposal. The SSRA and the Government should get some steel backbone into their plans - proper railway services.

Nearly two decades ago, Steve Wilkinson and I ridiculed the then transport users' consultative committees for arranging a public hearing into the proposed closure of the March-Spalding line at a place and time that were impossible for users of the line.

We have come a long way since then. The rail users' consultative committees, successors of the TUCCs, are now among the official bodies with whom RDS has constructive dialogue. Several members of RDS and affiliated local rail users' groups were invited to the recent 50th anniversary conference of the Central Rail Users' Consultative Committee. This was a useful event, at which we were able to discuss passenger issues with RUCC members and professionals within the railway industry.

RDS campaigns director Alix Stredwick, president Michael Caton and I then had a very useful meeting with CRUCC national director Anthony Smith and outgoing chairman David Bertram.

We want to work together, taking advantage of our respective strengths. As the Government-appointed body, the CRUCC and its eight regional committees has a statutory right to be consulted, and more resources for staff and premises than RDS has. As a voluntary membership organisation, RDS has direct contact with thousands of ordinary rail users and are able to criticise operators and politicians.

Already we have voiced our concern to the CRUCC over the lack of Boxing Day train services - an issue on which, in the early

## TREVOR GARROD'S VIEW



Working

with

RUCCs

1999s, we attempted with some success to enlist support from the retail, entertainment and sporting sectors. We hope to work together with the CRUCC on this issue over the coming year.

Some RDS Branches (such as Yorkshire) already put considerable effort into monitoring local train performance. Certain of our affiliated local users' associations (like Witham-Braintree and East Suffolk) conduct regular surveys on such matters. We have discussed with the CRUCC how we can pool our resources on data collection, spreading good practice and plugging gaps. This may include forming some new users' groups or reviving any dormant ones.

The CRUCC has shown great interest in RDS suggestions, in our *Easy Rail* report, on common standards of customer care and service quality across the rail network. Some RUCCs have ordered extra copies for their members. We plan to co-operate closely on such questions in the franchise renegotiation process - or, in plain English,

who should run our trains and how. The CRUCC has started a regular newsletter reporting on issues it is tackling with the operators. This is being sent to the secretaries of RDS Branches and local users' groups and should help them in their work. Railwatch is already sent to all RUCCs.

Finally, there is clear agreement between us on the need to promote rail as a mode of transport. At present, each train operating company, understandably, promotes its own services. Sometimes, indeed, two of them co-operate. But who is promoting rail travel throughout the UK and beyond? Should it be the Association of Train Operating Companies, the Strategic Rail Authority or some other body? Can we learn from the effectiveness of ABTA in pulling together a diverse body of travel agents? Could the National Rail Enquiry Service be enhanced and used for selling tickets as well as giving information? This is a whole area which we in the voluntary sector can explore with the RUCCs.

■ Trevor Garrod is general secretary of RDS.