

Mail by rail at risk

By Alan Crowhurst

There are very few truly integrated transport systems in this country despite the Government's stated aims.

The commission entrusted with such developments appears to talk not about the integration of bus and rail but issues such as the introduction of 44-tonne lorries. It is not clear that our high-way bridges can accept even 41-tonne vehicles nor whether the weight limits will be enforced.

One excellent truly integrated system is already in existence carrying not passengers but our letters. It is operated by the Post Office whose services in this country are as good as or better than any in the world.

The Post Office has developed a purpose built system of terminals in major centres.

These new sorting centres are served by a strictly timetabled service of dedicated trains.

As readers will know, the rail freight company EWS added to its major order for freight locomotives a number of express diesel locomotives based on the original design and developed to be capable of travel in excess of 100 mph. These are now taking over from the earlier power units.

The question now arises as to how many years these services will be operated in the light of the latest ruling by the European Commission. This will see the Post Office losing some of its first class mail to one or perhaps a multiplicity of competitors.

No competitor is likely to be able to copy the Post Office rail system. More trucks may appear on our roads in a similar way to the expansion of parcels carriers and their fleets of trucks and vans.

I believe such new firms will find it uneconomic to deliver single letters here in the South Shropshire countryside let alone into the Highlands of Scotland.

Why therefore does not this Government take steps to support its own policies for transport and why does it not fully support such excellent institutions as our Post Office?

Are there not European organisations that might be more suitable subjects for the commission to ascertain whether they are truly open to competition – railways across the Channel perhaps?

Safety improving?

By Alan Marshall

Michael Bailey is wrong in his view that the train protection and warning system reduces "to almost nil" the risk of almost any of the fatal collisions of the past 10 years being repeated (*Railwatch* 84).

A report to last year's Southall Inquiry by AEA Technology (formerly BR Research) made it clear that of all fatal train accidents between 1990 and 1999, only one (at Newton) would have been prevented by TPWS.

The report also said that the signal passed at danger leading to the Cowden collision would have been prevented by TPWS.

However, there were strong suspicions that the AWS was switched off at Cowden (as it was at Southall) but the train was too badly wrecked to establish the position of the AWS isolation switch.

This concern was reflected in the Railway Inspectorate's Cowden inquiry recommendation that AWS switch-offs should in future be reported immediately they occur.

This recommendation was not implemented by Railtrack before the Southall collision.

TPWS would not have prevented the Southall collision, because the AWS was switched off and TPWS is an "add-on" so only works when the AWS is working. In earlier incidents in the 1990s, TPWS would not have prevented the Cannon

Street collision, because the present system does not monitor the approach to buffer stops.

Nor would TPWS have prevented the Watford Junction collision because the safety "overlap" was shorter than required by group standards.

The Watford incident is also a reminder that TPWS does not stop trains before they pass a red signal, but endeavours to halt them in the 200 yard overlap beyond red signals.

On the other hand, Automatic Train Protection is designed to halt trains before red signals, and even the older AWS (if a warning is not acknowledged by the driver) halts a train before the red signal.

So, of all the major accidents in the decade prior to Ladbroke Grove, only Newton would, and Cowden might have been prevented by TPWS, saving only nine lives and 34 injuries, at best, out of a total of 19 dead and 863 injuries – well below the 70% claimed for TPWS by Railtrack – in accidents which ATP would have prevented.

After Ladbroke Grove the HSE stated that TPWS was "likely" to have prevented the accident, but had the Thames Turbo been fitted with ATP there "would not" have been a collision, said HSE.

Moreover, we now know from Lord Cullen's inquiry, that there is a possibility that the AWS on the Thames Turbo malfunctioned,

due to a track fault alongside the AWS magnet probably causing a "wrong side" failure. In these circumstances TPWS would not have helped.

Finally, *Railwatch* 84 carried a glossy colour photograph of the first of the 125-mph class 180 high-speed diesels for First Great Western.

The report said that these "should provide a train every 30 minutes between London and Cardiff by May next year".

It was not explained, however, that introduction of these trains at speeds above 100 mph will not be possible until they are fitted with ATP, and until the safety issues concerning passenger accommodation in the leading car have been resolved.

Since the Ladbroke Grove disaster, and the pressure from the Health and Safety Executive's Chief Railway Inspector, First Great Western has accepted that its trains can only operate if they have functional ATP (which was not included in the original specification for the Class 180 trains by the earlier Great Western Trains company).

And seating of passengers in driving trailer cars at speeds above 100 mph has been "outlawed" by the HSE since the collision at Polmont almost 20 years ago.

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Starlink fights on for rail link

Campaigners calling for the reconnection of St Andrews with the rail network have expressed severe reservations about the standard of the recent study into its feasibility, claiming the methodology was flawed and that the report is full of inaccuracies.

The study formed part of the Fife Council-led Fife & South Tayside Rail Study and was carried out by Scott Wilson Railways. It concluded that there was no case for a St Andrews railway and that all that was required was an enhanced bus service to and from Leuchars.

STARLINK convenor Jane Ann Liston, who is also a Liberal Democrat Fife councillor, said: "I have read the full report and am very concerned about several aspects."

Ms Liston is most concerned about the method used to ascertain demand.

The study states "although a station at St Andrews would generate useful revenue, much of this would be abstracted from that generated at Leuchars", yet the only way of ascertaining any demand for such a service was the one-day questioning of passengers at Leuchars; i.e. those already using the railway.

"No attempt appears to have been made to identify any other potential passengers. Ms

Liston said: "The consultants also failed to question 35% of alighting passengers at Leuchars (perhaps they had underestimated the numbers) which leaves quite a hole in their data." She said she was sorry the consultants had not tried to quantify the extra passengers which would undoubtedly be generated.

"It has not been at all unusual for the rail authorities to underestimate usage of new services; Bathgate is used by three times as many passengers as BR thought.

"Of course identifying potential passengers who are not using trains at all is hard, but that is why consultants are paid large fees.

"There are some welcome facets of the study; for example they have identified a completely new route pointing south, with a chord to facilitate northbound travel, and they propose that the service be direct Edinburgh-St Andrews rather than requiring passengers to change to a shuttle from the main line to the town.

"We are certain that with a proper study a case for a St Andrews railway can be made. The sooner St Andrews is reconnected to the rail network the better."

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