

Railwatch

AN INDEPENDENT VOICE FOR RAIL USERS

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Euro way forward

Railways must be made much more efficient throughout Europe as a way of preventing traffic congestion choking back economic growth.

That is the view of European transport commissioner Loyola de Palacio.

"We have to confront new challenges in transport," she said. "If we are unable to meet them, we will have problems not only in the environment but also in the economy."

It should also be remembered that 40,000 people die on Europe's roads every year and an incalculable number have their lives blighted by pollution from road traffic.

Ms de Palacio has drawn up a policy paper for presentation to EU transport ministers in June.

The paper recommends greater investment in transport generally and tax systems to encourage a shift away from road transport as well as a tax on aviation fuel for flights within the European Union.

But the transport commissioner said that even if there was a 40% rise in both rail and waterways by 2010, there would still be a massive increase in car and lorry use.

The EU plan should mean that private car journeys increase by 20% rather than the projected 24%.

In addition, the plan could halve the number of road deaths in Europe.

In Britain more people are becoming aware of the intolerable loss of life and degradation of life quality caused by roads.

In spite of the continued highlighting of rail safety problems in the media, passenger numbers have recovered following the Hatfield and Selby train crashes.

While Railtrack is still working on improving the track, passengers see that, with all its faults, the rail system is a far superior way of travelling than by car or bus.

Overall passenger levels in April were 2.3% higher than the previous year and in the London area commuter traffic was up by 4.5%.

Intercity routes were still struggling to attract all their old passengers back and in May there were still an estimated 700 speed restrictions left on the network.

Throughout the election campaign, both Labour and Tory appeared to conspire to bury transport as a major issue.

Only the Green party pointed out that the country would benefit if Labour's £60billion



This new locomotive for German Railways is one sign of progress in bringing the railways of Europe together. Makers Adtranz describe it as the first truly European locomotive, being able to operate on 15kV and 25kV systems, through the use of different pantographs.

German, Swedish, Norwegian, Swiss and Austrian railways use 15kV while 25kV is normal in France, Denmark, Luxembourg, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. But power supply is just one problem preventing train operation across national borders.

The range of incompatible signalling, electrical supply, train protection systems and telecommunications are a major obstacle to trans-European rail traffic. In most cases, a train must stop at national borders and exchange locomotives and crew which leads to inconvenience for passengers and cost increases for freight. The DB class 185 includes the ability to operate with the European Rail Traffic Management System and the European Train Control System and the displays in the locomotive can be programmed to use different languages, but there is an increasing use of pictograms to reduce the amount of language confusion.

"We are proud that the class 185 is able to take on a pioneering role in European cross-border freight operations," said Jurgen Lochmann of Adtranz Hennigsdorf which is now part of the Bombardier group.

10-year roads plan – which includes 100 new "bypasses" and 365 miles of motorway and trunk road construction – were to be scrapped.

The Government can claim credit for getting building work started on the Channel Tunnel fast link – Britain's first high speed line – but the French underlined their supe-

riority this month by opening the high-speed route from Paris to Marseilles, cutting the journey time by 1.5 hours.

France now has 1,000 miles of high-speed railway and is still intent on building more. High-speed rail makes good economic sense for a country like Britain too. Why do we have to wait so long for it?