

Railwatch

AN INDEPENDENT VOICE FOR RAIL USERS

No 95

April 2003

£1.20

Chris Henderson Photography



Bridge to the future

These massive bridges were lifted and shifted into place over the Midland main line near London St Pancras over Christmas, an important step towards linking the Midlands and the North of England into the European high-speed network.

The 1,500-tonne bridge on the left will carry Channel Tunnel trains from St Pancras to the West Coast main line.

The 1,000-tonne bridge on the right will form a link from the East Coast main line to the North London line.

The Channel Tunnel rail link project was rescued by deputy prime minister John Prescott when Labour came into power in 1997 and when the rail industry was preparing to abandon it.

Transport Minister John Spellar has already hailed Britain's first high-speed line as a "British success story". Last year Germany

opened its fourth high-speed line and is building two more.

Not only are we falling behind other major European countries with major rail schemes, but now less ambitious schemes also have been put on hold.

Even the Thameslink 2000 scheme, which years ago Railtrack confidently said would be easy to implement, has been halted.

The cash crisis in the industry which has been created by a mixture of greed and incompetence has forced the Strategic Rail Authority to freeze spending on many other desirable projects.

But can you really believe all the claims being made? First Great Eastern claims in a letter to a rail user group that it will cost £20,000 to include Cambridge Heath station on the ticket machines at London Liverpool Street (1.5 miles away). Strategic Rail

Authority chairman Richard Bowker has urged rail campaigners to be "more constructive" and seek to influence from within. There have been so many petty-minded and short-sighted decisions - coupled with inertia and inaction - from the industry in the past few years that often the only sensible comments have come from rail campaigners. In many cases, they can claim to have more understanding of the railways than the supposed professionals.

Railfuture has yet to hear a convincing argument, in public or private, for the removal of Bristol-Oxford trains in the SRA's much-vaunted capacity utilisation programme.

And there will be real justification for withdrawing the only through trains between West Yorkshire and Glasgow, (via Settle-Carlisle) as it is planning to do. Mean and stupid, yes. Constructive, no.