

Fast forward to rail future

Major civil engineering work for the Channel Tunnel rail link tunnels under London was completed in October, seven months after the completion of the boring work.

Our front page picture shows the view towards St Pancras, with the incline down towards the Graham Road ventilation shaft at Hackney.

The entire concrete paving job for the 20 miles of tunnels took 225 days to complete and used 98,000 cubic metres of concrete.

The CTRL London Tunnels run between King's Cross and Dagenham. Two parallel tunnels each carry a single track on which trains will run at up to 143 mph.

Special paving machines were used to extrude the concrete to the required shape and profile.

Now track, overhead power, signalling and communications systems and electrical and mechanical equipment has to be installed.

Once the entire CTRL is open in 2007, fastest London-Paris Eurostar journey times will be reduced to 2 hours 20 minutes and London-Brussels to just 2 hours 5 minutes, and new high-speed domestic services from Kent to St Pancras will be able to operate.

More info at www.ctrl.co.uk

King-size challenge

Railwatch writer Peter Rayner, who was often responsible for the royal train when he worked for British Rail, is leading an appeal to raise £45,000 to restore a coach that was once a favourite with members of the royal family – and was used by cabinet ministers in the Second World War.

Coach number 45000 is now "in a sad state of repair" after being taken over by the National Railway Museum in 1993 but then stored outside at an army depot.

Last year the coach was given to the Princess Royal Class Locomotive Trust, which says that storage out of doors has meant the external fabric of the coach "has deteriorated to a situation where it has almost reached the point of no return".

But the deterioration has been halted since the trust has had charge of it and moved it, thanks to the generosity of Alstom, to covered accommodation in Wolverton workshops where it was built in 1920.

The trust says coach 45000 "has a most interesting, rare and, in our view, important history. On this basis we believe it must be restored to the quality of finish it retained through its royal train service years."

Restoration is estimated to cost £45,000 – "so it's £45,000 for 45000", says the trust. Mr Rayner who, as chief operating manager of BR's London Midland region, was frequently "officer in charge" of the royal train, explained: "This vehicle gave 70 years of service. It was built in 1920 when British craftsmanship



The royal coach as it was in 1970 as part of the royal train at Preston, above, and, left, as it looked when it arrived at Wolverton works last year

was the world leader and the quality of work in the vehicle is exquisite. I travelled many hundreds of miles in this coach on royal train journeys and it means something very special to me, which is why I agreed to front this appeal."

He also admits another attachment to 45000. "You will see in photographs a patch in the sofa – caused, I am ashamed to say, by ash from my pipe. So I owe the vehicle something!" said Mr Rayner, now a non smoker. He has written to former colleagues who also acted as "officers in charge" – as well as to major companies in the present railway industry and to members of the

Let's have a sensible freight policy now

By Nicholas Dibben
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The completion of works to Ipswich rail tunnel during the summer, will allow for the passage of 9ft 6in containers on standard wagons.

At present expensive special wagons are needed which reduce the number of containers that can be carried on each train.

A 24-wagon train of standard wagons can carry 72 20ft containers compared with 48 if the special pocket wagons have to be used.

The scheme marked the end of the project of gauge enhancement from Felixstowe via London to the West Coast main line serving the Midlands, North West and Glasgow.

Shippers are increasingly using the larger containers and unless the rail loading gauge is increased, rail's share of the market for moving containers will decline.

Following the completion of the works, rail freight companies have already announced plans to run additional services from Felixstowe.

At present, rail carries around 21% of containers from Felixstowe on 21 trains each way per day. This

amounts to 290,000 containers each year, up from 180,000 in 1996.

The main destinations for the containers are Liverpool-Manchester 37%, Yorkshire 24% and Birmingham 21%.

Also during the summer, a public inquiry will be held on plans to develop a container terminal near Harwich at Bathside Bay.

Initially the Strategic Rail Authority had expressed concerns over track capacity, but later agreed a position statement that indicates how extra freight trains may be fitted on to the network.

For Bathside Bay, 228,000 containers would be handled in 2007 rising to 1,277,000 by 2023. A rail modal share of 22.5% has been assumed but higher figures of 25% and 30% have also been considered.

Initially nine trains per day would be required to serve the new terminal. To cope with this traffic, the SRA has identified the freight capacity of the Great Eastern main line at 24 trains per day in each direction and the cross-country route to Peterborough as 13 trains per day. It concluded there is enough capacity

to cope with Bathside Bay providing gauge enhancements are carried out on the Ipswich to Peterborough route and along the East Coast main line.

The SRA says the port has agreed to contribute to the cost of these works which should be complete by 2008. Since these rail routes will be running at near capacity, providing train paths for other freight or passenger services will be difficult.

In fact from December this year, the number of off-peak passenger trains between Ipswich and London will be cut from four to three each hour.

The SRA has also looked at possible expansion at Felixstowe with the port shipping over 3million containers each year. It concluded that a minimum of 34 train paths would be needed at Felixstowe up to 44 if the modal share increased to 30%.

This would require a major upgrade of the branch line to Felixstowe and also at Ipswich yard to take additional and longer trains.

Any extra traffic would have to go via Peterborough and this line would quickly run out of capacity.

Nineteen trains along this route would be needed compared with a present capacity of only 13. Resignalling and restoring the double track at Soham would provide some extra capacity, but there would still be problems once trains reached Peterborough.

Much of the traffic would head towards Birmingham and the North West, however the existing Peterborough-Nuneaton line is not suitable for container traffic due to the very limited clearance through tunnels near Oakham and at Leicester.

It is also worth noting that these numbers of trains exclude any traffic to the Alconbury road-rail site near Huntingdon and growth at the North Thameside ports.

No solutions to these capacity issues were given by the SRA. The Government seems happy to provide extra capacity on the roads and airports, but not rail, which would be both popular and sensible.

For this traffic, it has a choice. It can allow more freight on the roads, carry out major work on the existing rail network or, dare it be mentioned, create a new East-West rail link!