

# Labour still frozen in car headlights

How sad it is to hear train operating companies proudly announce: "We will be running a normal service this weekend".

Obviously an unusual occurrence or they would not need to shout about it. In the years following privatisation, signs saying "buses on rail replacement services" have become all too common at many railway stations.

A railway that can only offer a bus shows the depths the system has sunk to.

Managers who are content to offer this level of service are unlikely to listen to lectures on what they are doing wrong and what they could and should be achieving.

Offering advice to members of the establishment is always difficult because they are reluctant to admit they are ever wrong.

Although sometimes, when they think you have forgotten, they do quietly change their minds.

This at least provides justification enough to press ahead with constructive criticism.

All the detail we have provided, all the warnings about safety, and all the lists of lines that need reopening, electrifying and modernising have been well publicised now not only on the Railfuture website but in articles in *Railnews*, editorial comment in *Railnews* and a lengthy article in *Modern Railways* by my colleague Bob Poynter.

I cooperated with Bob along with other senior railwaymen on the paper given at the Railfuture conference in Salisbury this summer.

The whole issue has also been discussed in an article in *Rail Professional*.

What response will we get from this government? None is my view.

Anyway we now have three more ministers to succeed Ruth Kelly, Rosie Winterton and Tom Harris at the Department for Transport.

I am tempted to say: "Same circus different clowns". We have yet another Secretary of State in Geoff Hoon who proudly boasts his father was a railwayman.

So too was John Prescott's and a fat lot of good that did us.

So far the words of Mr Hoon are not very promising and I quote: "I am passionate about developing practical plans for further electrification on key routes and about assessing the scope for new lines, including high speed ones." Cliché after cliché after cliché.

But let us give him a chance to deliver, although judging from history I do not suppose he will be there long.

Mr Hoon also talked of reducing transport-related greenhouse gas emissions saying: "That is why I

am today accelerating plans to make better use of Britain's motorways and why I am also earmarking a further £300million to remove bottlenecks and increase capacity on road links to key airports and ports."

It seems to me he is facing both ways.

Politicians have all consistently failed the rail industry. Be they Conservatives or Labour, they have promoted road and air travel because they think voters prefer motor car ownership, cheap petrol and cheap air fares on short-haul routes to a sensible public transport system.

Rather than go over the things they should be doing again, I thought I would pick out a few examples of the position that exists now.

■ First, remember the rolling stock companies have made a combined pre-tax profit of almost £2billion. Where did they get their assets from? They paid a knockdown price at the time of privatisation. What has the Labour government done to reverse that Conservative error? Answer: Nothing.

■ Second, remember it is the proud boast of railway companies



## Rayner's Review

that never before have so many people been travelling by train.

That is a result of the steady state of the economy these past 10 years and has little to do with privatisation.

The congestion is made worse by the use of too many small trains and because there is about half the network of lines there was when last this number of people travelled. Lines have been closed by a succession of politicians of both parties for many years.

We need, time and again, to highlight the potential of lines that it is possible to reopen, which we discussed in Salisbury in July.

■ Third, public subsidy is now three times larger than it was under British Rail. What is Government's response? Put up fares so the Government can claw back some of the money.

What our society is crying out for is lower fares, opening of lines, and electrification – exactly the recipe Railfuture has set out time and time again.

Recessions can be a time to spend to create employment. If at the end there is a national asset in new infrastructure be it railways, schools or hospitals, then society

benefits. But the Government's obsession with public-private funding makes delivery of projects more difficult and more expensive.

Look at the Metrolink farce and ask yourself: Do they really know what they are doing and are they likely to listen? The answer again is: No.

■ Fourth, I believe when things have gone quiet the Government will announce the extra runway at Heathrow along with lavish rhetoric about high-speed rail connections northward.

Again, when no one notices, the rail option can eventually be dropped at the first sign of the next financial crisis.

Remember there are over a hundred flights a day to destinations like Edinburgh, Glasgow, Manchester and Leeds which ought to be rail journeys.

If those journeys were switched to rail, there would be no need for an extra runway.

Let me finish this Christmas-time message by telling you that I have just read twice *Transport Revolutions* by Richard Gilbert and Anthony Perl and leave you with four more, what are to me, shocking facts.

■ The most important fact about oil availability is that the peak of discovery of new oil is long past and the rate of worldwide consumption is now three or four times the rate of discovery.

■ The peak production of petroleum liquids will occur in or soon after 2012.

■ It is hard to avoid the conclusion that much reporting of oil reserves may be for political or other reasons and may not reflect closely what could be made available.

■ Oil used for transport represents 58% of all end uses for oil products.

Having read the book, I deduce that personal travel is the key user of this declining resource and that is mainly by car use.

Since most large conurbations are traffic locked, it is all the more amazing that all the tram schemes which would use electricity have been done away with.

Hooray for the internal combustion engine, it pollutes and it is going to run out of fuel as the world oil price escalates and its availability diminishes.

We have to keep fighting and they had better listen to us or our children's children will suffer in the future.

■ Peter Rayner is a former British Rail operations and safety manager.

■ *Transport Revolutions* by Richard Gilbert and Anthony Perl was published by Earthscan, London, in 2008. ISBN 978-1-84407-248-4

## Why be an East Midlands sardine?



### Join the passenger fight back

The TrainSardine.org campaign is run by passengers who are sick of the poor service offered by East Midlands Trains on the troubled Liverpool to Norwich line. We are sick of the excuses given to explain the shortage of carriages and overcrowding at rush hour. We are frustrated with the inability of anyone to sort the problem, poor communication, and lack of respect. We intend to discover who is behind the chaos and give them the recognition they deserve.

Join the campaign at [www.TrainSardine.org](http://www.TrainSardine.org)

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© Campaign by East Midlands passengers for a better service on the troubled Liverpool to Norwich line

**OVERCROWDING: Passengers are beginning to rebel**