

Railway Development News

Railway Development Society

A Voice for Rail Users

No. 17

JUNE 1983

ONLY PROFITABLE OPTION POLITICALLY UNACCEPTABLE

"Watershed Year" — "Make or Break Year". These are some of the phrases which have been coined to describe 1983 in the annals of British Rail. Significantly the Serpell Inquiry was instigated by the Board itself as a means of charting its financial future over the next 20 years and it is uncanny that the results should appear almost 20 years after another well-known report by one Richard Beeching. Whether the end product is as conclusive is open to doubt but it has certainly been received with no less hostility, particularly by the Trade Union Movement, and the views of members of both Houses of Parliament are well documented in the latest issue of "IN PARLIAMENT".

Representationally Beeching wins hands down and having now read Serpell from cover to cover this writer can find no reason to demur from the conclusion reached in the last Chapter of the Society's latest publication "Bring Back the Trains". Above all it is clear that only by cutting the railway system to a level which would be politically unacceptable (a mere 1,630 miles) can B.R. be run at a profit. The Society therefore, whilst welcoming the call (in the Minority Report) — at para. 5.33 — for a wider public debate on railway matters on an informed basis, endorses the call (by Serpell) for an early Government Policy Statement, now that the full range of possibilities have been spelled out in recent reports (taken together) as resort to further studies would merely be a device for procrastination.

RDS also calls upon both the Government and main opposition parties to make clear their policy on rail finance and investment as soon as possible, and in any event before the next General Election. We welcome reports that the Government has ruled out Option A, but call upon it to further repudiate Options B and C3 as not practical or acceptable to the rail using public and consider that financial policy for the future of the railways should be based upon the following points:-

- No major increase in commuter fares (in real terms) unless off-set by measures such as tax relief on season tickets;
- No reduction (in real terms) in the Public Service Obligation Grant — acknowledged as unrealistic in the Minority Report;
- Raising of the External Financing Limit to a realistic level as requested by the British Railways Board.

The Society further calls for early approval for the construction of a rail-based Channel Tunnel as a sure means of improving the financial position of BR in the long term and notes that (contrary to media reports) the Committee did not recommend against Main Line Electrification, but was instructed to exclude it from their brief. As however, the Committee considered that the Board would be unable to meet the present Government criteria for approval of a long term electrification programme the Society accordingly calls upon the Government to establish more realistic criteria comparable to those adopted for highway schemes, thus enabling early approval to be given to the East Coast Main Line Electrification (and other outstanding proposals).

We welcome the Committee's view that a bus service is rarely a satisfactory substitute for a withdrawn rail service — as outlined in the Society's publication "Can Bus Replace Train?" (Sep. 1977) @ and also the suggestion that minor routes could well be operated to less demanding (and therefore less costly) engineering standards, without jeopardising safety, but consider that any attempt to privatise significant parts of the network would lead to its fragmentation by further encouraging the tendency to operate certain areas (notably Southern Region) in isolation from the rest of the system.

BR's financial position will not be improved by hiving off the most profitable services (e.g. to Gatwick Airport), leaving BR to run the less profitable ones; and privatisation (if considered at all) should be confined to services that would otherwise close or that do not at present exist, i.e. as outlined in Chapter VI of "Bring Back the Trains" *

Finally the Society regrets the failure of the Committee in evolving the various options to take proper account of their effect on the most profitable flows of freight traffic.

(continued on page 2, Col. 1)

* Copies available from RDS Sales, 21, Norfolk Road, Sutton Coldfield, B75 6SQ price:- £1.60 (incl. p. & p.)

@ also available from RDS Sales, price 55p. (incl. p. & p.)

RAIL USERS OPPOSE SERPELL

The largest assembly of delegates, representing over 50 Rail Users' Groups (and Branches of the Society), since RDS inaugurated its first Conference in 1980, met at the University of London Union on Saturday 16th April.

After a short introduction and welcome by RDS National Chairman, Dr. Michael Caton, delegates were addressed by Mr. John Welsby, Director for Other Provincial Services at the B.R.B., who spoke on the future of the rail services in his sector. He first stressed the need for action, rather than debate, by Government to tackle B.R.'s financial problems. In the words of his Chairman, Sir Peter Parker, B.R. was suffering from "paralysis by analysis". Serpell added nothing to existing knowledge — what was needed was guidance on the aims and appropriate size of the network. B.R. was unlikely to be able to stabilise the finances of its Provincial Services, Government support for which had remained fixed in real terms since 1975 whilst running costs had increased considerably. The Board therefore maintained that its current objectives were inconsistent with the level of financial support.

He compared the unfair treatment B.R. received with the methods of financing buses and coaches and explained that tax concessions on company cars distorted the market against the use of public transport. He then described how B.R. was changing its practises to meet this challenge and the means by which it was able to maintain the same level of service with less of the now ageing diesel multiple units; "quite a creditable achievement" he thought. Investment in new stock, both "lightweight" for the rural services and "heavier" for the more densely trafficked urban routes was at last under way, 20 of the former now under construction, and a considerable proportion of the DMU fleet should be replaced by the end of the decade.

Investment in level-crossing modernisation, radio signalling and some singling coupled with initiatives to fill the considerable off-peak spare capacity on these lines should go a long way to secure their future but these measures all depended on access to funds and B.R. were only able to achieve them at the expense of arrears of "track renewal", a situation which would inevitably catch up with them in due course.

On the subject of rail re-openings he saw little prospect of these in the future unless the level of financial support was (continued on page 2, Col. 3)

Many of the above points will undoubtedly have been raised by our Chairman, Vice-Chairman and other officers when they met Under Secretary of State for Transport, Reginald Eyre, at his office on 11th May, the same day the NUR were due to hold their mass lobby of Parliament against Serpell, and a full report will appear in the next issue (of RDN or MEMBERS' BULLETIN). Our position will be further strengthened by the weight of support received for the Petition launched by RDS shortly after Serpell appeared, calling on the Government to provide adequate investment to restore Britain's run-down rail system. Response from members and supporters (such as Friends of the Earth, Transport 2000 and NUR) has been outstanding and at the time of writing forms are still flooding in. By the time we are able to present it to the Prime Minister (provided she does not steal a march on us by calling a General Election) we expect to have received well over 25,000 signatures, a large proportion generated by our newly formed Scottish Branch.

With a membership of well over a thousand capable of producing support on this scale the Society is clearly becoming a force to be reckoned with and we thank all those who have worked so hard to achieve this result. It is, however clear that we still have a hard struggle ahead if BR is to survive "Watershed Year" and the utterances of senior retired railway managers who have wasted no time in joining the Road Lobby, do not serve to make the task any easier.

JWB

WANTED! — NEW MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

Due to the recent retirement of the Society's Membership Secretary, who has given sterling service over a considerable number of years, this important post is now vacant.

At the present time we have over a thousand members particulars of whom are now largely computerised so the tasks involved would consist mainly of enrolment, receiving subscriptions and keeping the computerised records up to date.

If you feel you could meet the challenge of this important Society post please write NOW to the General Secretary, R. J. P. Townend, St. Julians, Sevenoaks, Kent.

INVEST IN RAIL NOW!

That was the final message to the Prime Minister delivered by RDS Chairman, Dr. M.P.L.Caton, in his address to the Society's A.G.M. held in Crewe on 23rd April.

Last year's train drivers strike and then the Serpell Report had, he said raised more questions about the future of the railways than at any time since the Beeching era of 20 years ago. The Government had taken the tough and uncompromising line that there would be no further investment in railway modernisation unless the rail unions agreed to single-manning of trains and other productivity measures. Both management and unions therefore had no option but to reach agreement on these changes in working practices and were to be congratulated on the major progress achieved albeit after a costly period of industrial unrest.

He stressed the importance of any measures which could significantly improve the efficiency of the railways but regretted that preoccupation with the merits of the various issues had deflected attention from the basic fact that the Railways financial problems stemmed from gross under-investment over a long period of time, with State support running at less than half that enjoyed by most other industrial nations in Europe, in terms of their gross national products.

British Rail was also being seriously penalised by the very different policy adopted towards road transport from which it faced tough competition. For whilst the case for new roads was assessed by methods which took into consideration social benefits delivered to travellers, such as time saving and reduction in accidents, investment in railways had been relatively limited, major schemes such as electrification being held back where they could not satisfy the strict commercial criteria imposed by the Department of Transport. Even during the recession, expensive road building had gone ahead, often in the same areas where strategic rail links were being threatened with closure due to serious arrears of maintenance.

Much publicity had been given to the upsurge in inter-city coach travel at B.R.'s expense following the deregulation of bus licences. This was not, however, necessarily due to any special virtues of the bus but simply a consequence of the fact that coach operators enjoyed the use of a motorway system built at vast public expense, whereas BR had to finance track improvements from hard-earned revenue. Furthermore, operators of the heaviest lorries, on the Government's own figures, were not paying their full track costs and company cars received massive state support through tax concessions.

Yet the Government solemnly declared that B.R.'s freight and inter-city passenger operations had to pay their way. A sound idea in principle but hardly justice against a background of "subsidised" competition (as described above); The time had come for a thorough re-appraisal by the Treasury and the Department of Transport of the way transport resources were allocated and adjustments made so that each could fill the role to which they were best suited.

It was ironical that it had taken hundreds of millions of pounds to create a motorway system on which road vehicles could now run at speeds achieved by the railways at the beginning of the present century. It was also probably true that cars, coaches and lorries were approaching the limit of their technical development and could go into a rapid decline if there was a sharp reduction of oil supplies. By contrast railways had a massive potential which no progressive nation could afford to ignore. The extremely

increased. B.R.'s biggest problem was keeping existing services intact. One possibility was the provision of coach links, run as part of the rail network, on lines which performed worse financially. There was doubt whether this could be done legally but public response might be tested by two or three controlled experiments which could be reversed if they proved unsuccessful. Such coach links were not seen as having sector-wide application, but potential in a small number of cases. Much would depend on the attitude of users and the T.U.C.s.

Subsequent debate inevitably centered on the bus/rail replacement issue and Mr. Welsby denied that lines such as Settle — Carlisle were being deliberately run down. "Park and Ride" to catch a replacement bus was seen as less likely than for a train but he felt the only way to prove it was to try it and see. Partial replacement of trains by coaches, during lightly loaded times, as practised in Germany, was seen as another possible solution. Further discussion was, however precluded by the clock and Mr. Welsby was thanked for providing a stimulating morning.

After Lunch discussion was led by Branches & Areas Committee Chairman Trevor Garrod, who explained how the Society and Groups could help each other, in particular the need to form more Groups to give comprehensive cover to all the secondary routes which might be candidates for closure. Peter Warner, (Secretary of E.N.T.A) then explained the valuable lessons which had been learned when his Group and Yarmouth Borough Council had challenged B.R. in the High Court over the allegedly "illegal" closure of the Wensum Curve which enabled through trains to by-pass Norwich. But for the delay, inevitable in raising local authority support for such a case, the action may have succeeded.

After John Barfield, National Petition Organiser, had thanked Groups, and supporting organisations for their help in raising over 20,000 Signatures against Serpell for more investment for B.R. Conference was addressed by G.L.C. Transport Chairman, Dave Wetzel who gave a talk on the future of public transport in urban areas. "Fares Fair" inevitably dominated the scene but he felt the whole episode had probably led to more media discussion on the future of public transport than in the last 15 years. He outlined what the Council was doing, with Government support, to promote Light Rail in London and to support B.R. local services. He stressed that sooner or later the nettle of car restraint in "Inner Cities" would have to be grasped and experiments such as "Fares Fair" needed time to prove themselves.

SUBSCRIPTIONS — If you have recently renewed your subscription to RDS a new Membership Card is enclosed. If your subscription is now due a GREEN RENEWAL FORM will be enclosed. ALL MEMBERSHIP ENQUIRIES FOR THE TIME BEING TO:- L.I.Elias (Acting Membership Secretary) 78, Rochford Gardens, Slough, SL2 5XT.

Delegates therefore departed after a further brisk afternoon's debate punctuated by Mr. Wetzel's breezy style but not before passing the following resolution:-

"This National Conference of Rail Users' Groups declares its total opposition to any of the rail closures referred to in the Serpell Report on Railway Finance and urges the Government to grant B.R. the major increase in investment necessary to develop the rail network to meet Britain's transport needs of the future. Road substitution is not an acceptable alternative."

..... STOP PRESS

Since our Leader was written Mrs. Thatcher has indeed called a General Election and by the time members receive this R.D.N. the outcome will be known. In the short time available during the run-up to the Election the Society issued 5,000 copies of a summary of points to be put to candidates which, with other material in 'Transport 2000', should have been distributed to members through Branches and Areas. We hope that as many as possible were able to tackle candidates in their area on the vital issue of more investment for B.R.

Before the dissolution it was however possible for three R.D.S. representatives to meet Reginald Eyre, on 11th May, as planned, to discuss matters of vital importance to the future of B.R. Our Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Dr. F.G. Tomlins spent almost an hour with him and obviously impressed the Minister with the depth of their knowledge of the subjects discussed. It also became apparent that the Government had been taken by surprise at the extent of opposition to Serpell.

We still hope to submit our Petition to the Prime Minister (of whatever Party) as soon as possible after assembly of the new Parliament but have drawn attention to the content of the response in the leaflet referred to above.

Meanwhile London & Home Counties Branch Members (and particularly those resident in Hertfordshire) have been alerted to a plan by their County Council to persuade B.R. to close the Watford - St. Albans (Abbey) line and this merely to effect economies in construction of the M.25 Motorway. Is this March - Spalding all over again in a different guise?

successful high speed trains now operating on B.R., at nearly twice motorway speeds, and the Speedlink system for wagon load traffic were just a foretaste of what a modern railway had to offer if given the chance.

Railways were ideally suited to take full advantage of computer technology; were three times more energy efficient than road transport and could be operated by electricity, generated from any available energy source. Most important of all, they had an excellent safety record whereas road accidents continued to leave an appalling toll of human suffering and misery. Surely that alone was sufficient to justify a massive shift from road to rail!

The rail unions had rightly been asked to abandon outdated practices but the New Age of the Train would only come when there was also a change in attitudes in Westminster and Whitehall to give B.R. a fair deal and a major injection of investment. This could not be left until after a General Election. It was urgent - very urgent. Our message to Mrs. Thatcher and her Cabinet was therefore loud and clear!

(Copies of the full Reports submitted to the Annual General Meeting - for those members unable to attend - can be obtained from the Circulation Manager by enclosing a stamped addressed envelope not less than 7" x 10" at 108, Berwick Road, London E16 3DS).

RAILWAY DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY

Says

BRING BACK THE TRAINS.

READ OUR NEW BOOK, putting the case for some closed stations to be re-opened, new stations to be built and 500 miles of lines to be restored to the passenger network.

Let us put right some of the mistakes of the past. Let us improve and expand our rail system instead of cutting it.

'BRING BACK THE TRAINS' is illustrated and costs £1.60 including postage.

ORDER NOW from:

RDS Sales, 21, Norfolk Road, Sutton Coldfield, B75 6SQ.



"Too much Government Bashing"

Dear Sir,

Your correspondent, T.D. Teague, of Newport I of W., appears to have had his feelings hurt by that brave lady, Mrs. Thatcher, being referred to as "Maggie". (RDN - Oct. 1982).

I was present at the meeting when our late Chairman/President committed this offence, and would like to assure Mr. Teague that the nickname was not spoken in a spirit of nastiness (which is more than can be said about many of her own speeches).

But I was amused by your juxtapositioning of quotations from two letters, one by Mrs. Thatcher herself, in which she said "I have not travelled by train since taking office". The other was by Prince Charles, and declared he had travelled 4,879 miles by rail in the previous year.

Perhaps Mrs. T. would consider it beneath her dignity to be found in such company.

Chas. E. Debney
Didsbury Park, Manchester.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Editor will consider for publication letters on matters of general interest (such as the above). Any opinions expressed, however, must not be taken as necessarily reflecting the official views and policies of the Society.

The Editor also reserves the right to make "cuts". Letters should normally be signed by the writer's real name. Only in exceptional circumstances, which must be clearly stated in a covering note, will a letter be accepted for publication under a "nom de plume".

ANTI-CLOSURE FUND - This still stands at about £200 even though £50 has been spent on the Settle - Carlisle Campaign, so further contributions will be welcome by the Treasurer:- Mr. M.J. Farahar, 35, Ashmere Grove, Ipswich, Suffolk IP4 2RE.

RDS LOTTERY - Result Sheets for the Draws which have taken place since February are enclosed to all Subscribers with this issue of R.D.N. and Prizewinners should similarly have been notified of their success. Participation is still much less than we would like to make the Prizes worth while so **SUPPORT THE LOTTERY NOW (OPEN TO RDS MEMBERS ONLY)** -

write for further details to:- I.G. Crighton, 19, Oakdale Avenue, Kenton, Harrow, Middx. HA3 00J. More income from the Lottery will both increase the value of prizes and provide a much needed regular income for the Society.

(The article below has been submitted by Mr. G.R. Tolliday, Chairman of the Wrexham - Birkenhead Rail Users' Association and is published in the hope that it may stimulate members' comments on these two important subjects.)

Issue No. 17 of "IN PARLIAMENT" quotes Mr. Robert Adley (PREVIEW) as saying to Jack Ellis . . . "There's virtually no rail lobby. The car is the most environmentally destructive thing ever invented."

Perhaps I may add my comments as follows:-

(a) **The Rail Lobby** - Apart from my own organisation (WBRUA), which is run on a shoestring by half a dozen dedicated amateurs, I also belong to Transport 2000 and various other Rail Users' Associations, such as BRAG, OPTA, CCLAG. I belong to the Wirral Railway Circle, and was a founder member of the North Wales Railway Circle (and one-time President thereof). I was on the Executive of the Wales Rail Action Group and am also a member of the Pedestrians Association.

(Mr. Tolliday has been a member of SRUBLUK, RIS and latterly RDS for over 20 years. Ed.)

WBRUA is perhaps unique in that its line - over 27½ miles long - joins two nations; three counties and is shared between Stoke-on-Trent, Liverpool, Chester and Wrexham. Thus we are the concern, theoretically of the T.U.C.C. for both Wales and North West England. The line also passes through the constituencies of 5 M.P.s and close to a sixth. None of the rail unions however appear to be actively concerned with our efforts to promote, develop or improve our line.

Surely there ought to be some way in which all these various bodies could be persuaded to co-ordinate their respective efforts and become together a powerful Rail Lobby? Joint Meetings and Joint Press Releases would perhaps help!

(b) **The Motor Car** - In March 1980 Granada TV did a programme on the true cost of road accidents, which they estimated as costing the taxpayer £2½ billion a year. It seems glaringly obvious that this figure is of the utmost importance and should be used constantly in our propaganda thus:- "Railways save money; for three recent consecutive years no passenger has been killed on BR, but our roads claim 6-7 thousand people every year at an annual cost of £2-3 million."

Governments appear to encourage private transport for both freight and passengers as the most economical way out for them, costing far less than a good public transport system. Of the enormous global sum of taxes on road vehicles (and their fuel) the Road Lobby are always telling us that only about ½ is directly spent on roads, the rest going into the general ex-

chequer, and, of course the starry-eyed private motorist is lulled by constant advertisements offering cars which are capable of travelling far in excess of any speed limits which appeals to their owner's baser instincts.

Many scientific research projects have demonstrated that electric trains with steel rails are one of the cheapest forms of transport, second only to transport on water. It will be no easy matter to persuade not only the present government, but also the general public that modernised electrified public transport is necessary. The scale of funding for BR has been lamentable since nationalisation, and the actions of some rail unions has not served to help the situation.

SNCF on the other hand have had no difficulty in securing the necessary funding from their government which has no inhibitions about the need for a good system. The amount spent on the superb TGV (Paris - Lyon) line exceeds BR's total annual budget, and the RER and Metro improvements in Paris again cost more than BR is permitted for its whole system. Yet the long suffering British taxpayer is forced willy-nilly to fork out £1,200 million to keep BL in existence and (through the Arts Council) £560 million to foster modern art and encourage esoteric branches of culture such as ballet and opera. Incidentally the great British Public also spends £1,200 million annually on gambling.

Is there not therefore something seriously wrong with our sense of values?

GRT

**N. U. R.
CAMPAIGN
LEAFLETS
ENCLOSED WITH
THIS ISSUE**



REGIONAL NOTES

LONDON & HOME COUNTIES

The two highly successful projects mounted by the Branch during Rail Development Week have led to increased activity in their respective fields. Firstly the round-trip to the Ashford - Hastings - Tunbridge Wells - Eridge lines was undertaken by 20 Branch members (and supporters) on 23rd October who, even before the trip was over, were asking when the next would be held. Good publicity was received for the Branch's Report on the Ashford - Hastings line (released the same day) but apart from a meeting with local Councillors response to the report has been somewhat disappointing. The opportunity was taken to emphasise the need for a speedy decision by the Minister on the package submitted by B.R. for the modernisation and electrification of the Tonbridge - Hastings line but alas the scheme is now being subjected to Serpell-cost paring investigations which can be compared to "fiddling while Rome burns."

It is now almost 6 months since the scheme was submitted to the Department of Transport and already one of the ageing diesel units has had to be reduced as one of its carriages has become beyond repair so will the scenario described in R.D.N. No. 14 (at p.4) soon become a reality? The time has surely come for local users to stand up and show they mean business if the line is not to slowly wither away and the Government to do the right thing by them.

The proposed closure of Tunbridge Wells - Eridge saw the Branch in action again at the T.U.C.C. Inquiry on 1st Feb. where convincing evidence of hardship was put forward by the Branch and associated Rail Users' Groups. So much so that the T.U.C.C. in a press statement, on 15th Feb., concluded that withdrawal of the train service would undoubtedly cause considerable hardship to commuters, occasional users, the elderly and the sick by reason of additional journey times and that the village of Groombridge, which would be isolated from the railway by closure, would suffer particular hardship.

The County Council does not see itself able to give financial priority to any replacement bus service and in the circumstances, the T.U.C.C. are strongly of the opinion that hardship to the users, and communities in the area, can only be avoided by the retention of the line and consider that thought should be given to improving the rail service to stimulate its use and improve its viability. The Branch is now preparing a memorandum on the wider aspects of the proposal for submission direct to the Minister of Transport.

One of the more interesting aspects of the meeting held at Hornsey Town Hall on 26th October to stimulate interest in a Light Rail link from Finsbury Park to

Muswell Hill, via the former "Ally Pally" Branch, was the concept of FLYDA unveiled by its inventor Mr. John Emmanuel. Almost silent driverless trains consisting of six-seater cars suspended on either side of a light metal space frame were demonstrated in model form. This novel light rail system was also the subject of a presentation to Fleet Street journalists on 22nd March when Mr. Emmanuel stressed that the system could use various kinds of motive power but that its principal merit was the use of conventional technology in a novel way.

The Branch has also been encouraged by the Government's approval of a £65 million L.R.T. scheme to help regenerate the re-development of London's Docklands, announced shortly before the meeting, and is now preparing detailed comments on the latest consultation paper on the scheme issued by the G.L.C. It is also continuing to press the case for the Muswell Hill scheme in conjunction with local Groups.

The Minister's agreement to the closure of Broad Street, to facilitate the Liverpool Street redevelopment, announced at the end of January - or more particularly the terms on which it was given - can be regarded as nothing less than a "sell-out" and the Branch has been working closely with the North London Line Committee and Hackney Public Transport Action Group to secure a much better deal for users of the North London Line than that proposed. In particular the retention of some form of high-level connection from Dalston Junction into a re-developed Liverpool Street. The G.L.C. is showing signs of giving active - and more importantly - financial support for such a scheme and talks were due to take place between Branch representatives and Transport Committee Chair, Dave Wetzel, following the highly stimulating talk he gave to delegates to the Rail Users' Conference (reported elsewhere in this issue) to discuss this and other aspects of rail development in London at the time R.D.N. went to press.

A further Branch visit to the Watford - St. Albans and Bletchley - Bedford lines is due to take place on 4th June and a Public Meeting in Bicester on 30th April to promote the Society's book "Bring Back the Trains."

WEST MIDLANDS

During the 12 days of the 1982 Motor Show at the N.E.C. a total of 202,353 people - nearly one third of those attending - travelled there by rail. From May, most Euston - Birmingham trains will operate as through services to/from Shrewsbury, North Wales or Blackpool.

Whilst it is intended to close the 2-car halt at New Hadley, 1½ miles west of Oakengates, British Rail has already embarked

on construction of a new Inter-City station next to Oldbury which will be named Dudley and Sandwell. Within the conurbation work is expected to start this year on a new 140 space car park for Bescot station costing £103,300; platform extensions at Blake Street and trackwork and other improvements will cost £710,000 whilst at Marston Green new bridges and station buildings will cost £235,000.

From May the junction station at Barnet Green is to have an increased service of 36 trains a day. After track alterations, and platform improvements at Wolverhampton the new hourly EMU service to Walsall is planned to start in May 1984 at a cost of £323,000.

The most recent RDS enterprises in the area are the Inter-City charter from Walsall to Windsor on 30th May; a DMU charter from Stourbridge to Matlock on 30th June and sales of a new 12 page booklet packed with illustrations and facts about re-opening of the Walsall - Hednesford service entitled "Trains Via Cannock" which is available for only 35p. (Incl.p&p) from 8, Goldthorn Avenue, Cannock, Staffs. WS6.

AB

EAST ANGLIA

Over 40 members attended the Branch A.G.M. at Ipswich Town Hall on 29th January, when Branch Chairman Steve Wilkinson, attacked the Serpell Report, not only for its negative approach but also for its cost - £600,000. - "I'm sure all of us in this room could have found another use for that money" he added. Branch Secretary, Trevor Garrod, in his report also reminded members that Sir Peter Parker had predicted 1983 would be "watershed year" for the railways, especially the secondary services like most in East Anglia. "So the need is there" he stressed "as perhaps never in the last 20 years, for a strong voice for rail users to put the case for a modern attractive rail system."

Members present were also able to view Russell Whipps' film of one of the nine special trains chartered by RDS and its associated users' groups in East Anglia, during 1982 and hear a talk by RDS National Committee Member, Leslie Freitag, on the Society's efforts at national level to increase both its membership and influence.

In February, 50 people attended a public meeting, organised by the Branch, in Colchester, addressed by Mr. Gordon Pettitt, BR's recently appointed Deputy Director of London & South East Passenger Services. In a well presented talk, accompanied by many visuals, he emphasised that Essex had seen one of the highest population growth rates in the country since 1945; but there had not been a matching investment in its rail system.

He outlined the way in which BR would be electrifying northwards from Colchester to Ipswich, Harwich and Norwich over the next four years and announced a £1 million face-lift for Chelmsford station. He also held out the prospect of a low-cost electrification scheme for the Southminster Branch by 1986; but made no promises to electrify the Sudbury branch, though he urged the local authorities to help pay for modernised level crossings on it.

Elsewhere in the region, a timetable has been announced for modernisation of the East Suffolk Line. BR hope to have automated or simplified most of the level crossings by 1985 and introduced radio signalling, with the closure of 5 signal boxes. RDS and its corporate member, the East Suffolk Travellers' Assn. support such moves — having campaigned for them for many years — though we are less happy about proposals for large-scale track singling, and have made our views plain to BR and the local authorities.

Another matter which has been causing concern is the continual whittling away of rural bus services, coupled with the introduction of new bus links which largely duplicate BR services and in a letter published in the "Eastern Daily Press" (February 28th) the RDS Branch Secretary questioned whether this was the best use of resources. Further local bus cuts in the Wymondham and Attleborough areas have also prompted RDS to suggest to BR the reinstatement of the evening mail train as a passenger train. With the latest cuts it is now impossible for people from these towns to have a reasonable evening in Norwich using public transport.

Among the wide and varied correspondence being conducted by the Branch are attempts to ensure that coal traffic to Lowestoft and Yarmouth continues to go by rail and putting the rail case to local authorities continues with RDS submissions on the latest Suffolk and Norfolk Public Transport Plans, whilst Branch Committee Member, Peter Lawrence addressed the February meeting of the Norfolk Association of Parish Councils. Finally a legal technicality has blocked the bid by Yarmouth Borough Council to challenge in the High Court BR's decision to close the Wensum Curve (which enabled trains to the coast to by-pass Norwich) as Mr. Justice McNeill dismissed the action without hearing arguments of the merits of its case on the grounds of undue delay in bringing it to court.

TJG

YORKSHIRE

After many months of uncertainty South Yorkshire County Council announced at the end of February that it would give financial support to the Sheffield — Huddersfield train service, diverted via Barnsley, for a trial period of a year. Prior to this the Branch had conducted a vigor-

ous leafletting campaign, pointing out that West Yorkshire County Council would be unable to support a truncated service from Denby Dale to Huddersfield and urging people who wished to keep the trains to write to South Yorks. C.C. Leaflets were posted on the stations; given out on the trains and displayed in shop windows. In addition British Rail issued 5,000 leaflets setting out the value of retaining the service.

A drive to retain the Spenn Valley Line, between Low Moor and Dewsbury, has been mounted by a group of local supporters called the "Missing Link". The local Branch of RDS consider that a restored service on this line would provide an excellent link between Bradford (Exchange) station and the Wakefield area. Regrettably West Yorks P.T.E. do not have sufficient funds to support such a proposal, but there are plans to re-open the line as a tourist attraction either as a steam railway or as a tramway, for which money could be raised from outside sources and thereby prevent the track being lifted.

It is likely that the Sheffield Division of B.R. will be closed down in the near future and local services administered from Leeds. In the new May Timetable however, Trans-Pennine services are to run from Scarborough, via Manchester, to Llandudno and Bangor, alternating with the present services from Newcastle to Liverpool.

DJB

SEVERNSIDE

In the Avon County Structure Plan (Report on Public Consultation — Vol. II — 266 pp.) a disappointingly small amount of space was given to the submission prepared by a Working Party of the local Branch of RDS. As the County Council state that investment on the scale required to provide major rail facilities (such as Metro) would be far beyond its resources they see little point in proceeding with a Feasibility Study to establish its merits unless a clear assurance is given that funds will be forthcoming for its implementation.

The Society's recommendations centred on exploitation of existing rail routes in view of present traffic congestion and that likely to be generated by new housing estates. The suggestion to build a new rail halt between the former Puxton & Worle station site and Weston Milton Halt to serve future housing estates was noted but the Branch expressed concern at the continued failure to allow the remaining platform at Chipping Sodbury to be served by the HST services which pass through it. It has also been suggested that Yate New Town could be served by Gloucester line services (although not necessarily at the original station site) as provision has been made for the line to be re-directed to run past the new town shopping centre to a new junction at Wapley Common.

A decision is still awaited on relaying, and reopening the line to Portishead largely depending on the level of shipping activities at the new Royal Portbury Dock. Turning to the Serpell Report, Gloucestershire County Council have rejected the three options which would curtail its services and have asked for full consultation with all interested parties to ensure that the present level of rail services is maintained and improved, having drawn attention to overcrowding on some 3-car DMU workings on the Swindon — Gloucester line.

County Councillors had also discussed the light loading of rural bus services a problem which has already been examined by RDS who had drawn attention to the scope for improving bus patronage by reopening a number of main line stations as Halts to permit a co-ordinated service. To achieve this a new pattern of Limited Stop trains would be required to augment the bus services, the direct service between Gloucester and Bristol now being very sparse due to the policy of running trains non-stop from Cheltenham to Bristol.

Completion of a Market Survey by the Local Authority in the Ashchurch area is still awaited but the County Council has stated that the results would be used to formulate policy regarding other re-opening proposals put forward by the Society. Support has also been received from a number of quarters to the idea of providing a concrete platform against the Weymouth Line for Interchange with Salisbury — Exeter services at Yeovil Junction, but BR's response has not been encouraging.

ERB

DEVON

At a meeting last year the North Devon Railway Line Development Group decided to approach the E.E.C. in Brussels, through the Executive and Devon's M.P. for financial help to save the Barnstaple — Bideford — Torrington — Meeth line. The result has been encouraging and earlier this year a special train ran to Torrington conveying a party of officials and interested parties, including Devon MEP, Lord O'Hagan, who was impressed by the line's potential and undertook to do what he could to get assistance from the E.E.C. BR for their part have undertaken to keep the line in situ for at least 2 years whilst attempts are made to save it from final closure. If anything concrete comes of this it will doubtless set a useful precedent for other Users' Groups who may seek Euro-cash for rural railways. — In May BR will be re-opening Pinhoe station — 4 miles from Exeter on the Salisbury line.

WALES

South Glamorgan County Council are funding a new station costing £83,000 at Cathays just ½ mile north of Queen Street station on the Treherbert/Merthyr lines.

NORTHUMBERLAND & DURHAM

The Society's recently appointed Area Representative, Mark Roberts, was interviewed on Tyne-Tees television about the Serpell Report when it was published. RDS also organised a public meeting in Hexham on 28th March to discuss the problems of the Tyne Valley local rail service and to form a local Rail Users' Group.

Some 30 people attended a public meeting in Consett on 25th February, the first in a series to publicise the Society's new book "Bring Back the Trains." Having seen the Prince of Wales arrive in the town by a Special train in December, local people are now more determined than ever to press for a restored passenger service. Speakers at the meeting included Harley Sherlock (National Chairman of Transport 2000), and Trevor Garrod for the RDS.

TJG

CLEVELAND & DARLINGTON

Despite the certain closure of BREL's Shildon Works the future of the Darlington - Bishop Auckland line is assured as a result of increasing freight revenue from East-gate goods line. This very profitable corner of BR will see increased traffic as the Blue Circle Cement Company is increasing its output. Sedgfield District Council is continuing to actively support the rail passenger services.

The Coast Line Users' Group are now holding regular meetings in Hartlepool. On the Newcastle - Middlesbrough service three trains are to be withdrawn from the timetable, although one will be replaced by the "Cleveland Executive" HST which will leave Newcastle at 6.30 am and arrive in London at 9.52, calling at Sunderland, Hartlepool, Stockton and Middlesbrough on the way. This really puts Durham and Cleveland on the "main line" map again. A similar 125 HST will make the return journey later in the evening.

SJB

LANCASHIRE & CUMBRIA

The Ormskirk - Preston Travellers Association hopes to undertake a study into the line in conjunction with Dr. Lewis Lesley of Liverpool Polytechnic, at a cost of £3,000 if the local authorities along the line are prepared to foot the bill. If the study is carried out it will examine in detail how people are currently using the line but more importantly how improvements to the service will affect usage. The study will evaluate schemes such as a new station at Burscough Mill Dam Lane; electrification to Burscough Bridge from Ormskirk; the viability of a Preston to Southport service and others.

The Association has been told that BR is to single the line from Farrington Curve Junction to Midge Hall in May this year. Whilst this is good news for regulars, as the permanent speed restriction on the Liverpool side has meant missed connections at Ormskirk, there is a worrying aspect to it. Originally BR were going to close Midge Hall signal box, which is also the fringe box to the Preston PSB, and make Rufford the fringe box, but this is no longer planned so the long term future of the crossing loop at Rufford is once again in question.

From October BR plan to cut the South Fylde Line service by more than 25% to enable it to single the line entirely and run the service with 1 DMU only. The local Users' Association has mounted a well-run campaign to oppose these cuts and a meeting with BR was to take place on March 30th. Squires Gate station has now been adopted by the Group and the first working party started work on Sunday March 13th. The station has suffered badly from vandalism in recent years so this work is especially urgent.

At a Public Transport Conference, organised by Lancs. C.C., to inform the local M.P.s of the plight of public transport in the county, held on Saturday 26th February, a six point resolution was passed calling on the Government to devote more resources to public transport, both bus and rail, and objecting to the Serpell Report. "..... only looking at finance and not at the social and other economic benefits to the country." In answer to RDS Local Representative, Richard Watts, questioning the wisdom of always cutting local services, BR Divisional Manager, Mr. Trevor Anderson, replied that it was the only option that he had.

In the light of BR's expected application to close the Settle - Carlisle Line this May RDS produced a special 4-page leaflet to assist the Friends of the Settle - Carlisle Association in its campaign to stress the foolishness of such a proposal and to promote its improvement and development, which was launched at a Press Conference in Leeds on 28th March. A meeting of interested MPs at the House of Commons is also planned.

RW.

MERSEYSIDE

Sunday 7th November 1982 saw the commencement of engineering operations in connection with the £10 million redevelopment plan for Liverpool Lime Street. For nearly 2 months work went ahead on the realignment of the ends of platforms 6 and 7, together with associated alterations to trackwork and signalling. Other works to be carried out during 1983 include the widening of the concourse; provision of a new booking office/travel centre and vast improvements to toilet and refreshment facilities. New lighting is to be installed; the train shed roof repainted and new train departure/arrival indicators provided. The Lord Nelson Street side of the station is due to be demolished and replaced by a multi-story car park and new taxi rank.

BR have advised that as a result of poor passenger figures between Lime Street and Manchester Victoria, there will be a revision of the hourly trans-Pennine services in the 1983/84 timetable inasmuch as every alternative train will be re-routed to/from North Wales, effectively linking up with the Manchester - Bangor services. Trans-Pennine services to/from Liverpool will therefore be reduced to a two-hourly frequency with DMUs providing a connecting service to Manchester Victoria every other hour.

At long last the Department of Transport has given final approval for electrification between Rock Ferry and Hooton. Work has commenced with much of the track already relaid with concrete sleepers and continuous welded rail. As the sleepers have been pre-drilled to take 3rd rail, installation will be simplified and together with the building of two sub-stations at Hooton, work should be completed by 1985. It is then expected that electric trains will run every 15 minutes between Liverpool Loop and Hooton. A missed connection at Rock Ferry will then be a thing of the past and journey times will be up to 10 minutes shorter. All credit must therefore go to the Bebington Rail Action Group who for many years have been conducting a relentless campaign for improvements to services on this line. It just goes to show what a little pressure by an organised body of people can do. Now for the remaining eight miles to Chester!

The Wrexham - Birkenhead Rail Users' Association has launched a research project to evaluate the future potential of the line. A student from Liverpool Polytechnic is to be employed together with a team of assistants who will be allowed to travel on the trains in order to gather the required data. A number of local authorities have agreed to provide the necessary finance. Negotiations are also proceeding for the return of this service to Birkenhead North from its present terminus at Bidston. However the terminating facilities (crossovers and signals) at North were removed some time ago and replacements will involve a six figure sum.



Introduction of the 1983/84 Timetable will see the through-running of electric trains between Kirkby and Hunts Cross. As a result of this extension the stopping services from Liverpool to Warrington and from Warrington to Manchester will be revised. They are to be combined into an hourly all stations Hunts Cross - Manchester Piccadilly service with convenient connections to/from Liverpool Central and Kirkby being provided at Hunts Cross. Only a number of peak-hour services will continue to run to/from Lime Street, as will certain trains on Sunday evenings.

These changes will result in a 50% reduction in off-peak services on the line between Lime Street and Allerton which has upset users in the Mossley Hill area who have organised themselves into the Mossley Hill Line Action Committee in order to fight the cuts. An RDS member from the Leicester area whose parents are users of the line compiled an excellent report which was sent to both local politicians and the MPTE. Despite this and good press publicity the PTE are totally intransigent on this issue and are adamant that cuts must go ahead. Their excuse is that in order to finance the Garston - Hunts Cross electrification they are obliged to make cuts elsewhere to meet an essential condition laid down by the Department of Transport. If this is the case and future investment in public transport in Merseyside is to be based on cuts elsewhere purely to demonstrate "good housekeeping" to the Dept. of Transport rail users in other conurbations beware!

Two new stations are being planned in Merseyside: at Bromborough Rake, between the present Spital and Bromborough stations and at Arrowbrook, between Moreton and Meols on the West Kirby line. Upton-by-Chester is also to be re-sited 1/2 mile in the direction of Chester and renamed Bache.

MJB

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

The campaign to re-open the Corby - Kettering line to passengers continues with even greater effort now that the Government has approved plans for the multi-million pound Wonderland Leisure Project. As reported in January's "Modern Railways" the District and County authorities are prepared to finance a service and so local RDS members are about to launch a strong campaign to push things along.

It is hoped to gain direct access to the Wonderland Park via the BSC Tube Works holding sidings - only a mile distant. These in fact could link up with the new park area via a former BSC Mineral line with only the trackbed remaining. RDS objected to the District Council and the Wonderland Planners at the high level of car parking proposed initially and the lack of rail access as a result of which a "rail corridor" is now likely to be provided. Detailed work on a proposed Rail Charter for the County is now planned by local members.

BDSC

SCOTLAND

Following the meeting held in Stirling during Rail Development Week a further meeting of Scottish members and supporters of RDS was held in Glasgow on 26th February. This heard Frank Spaven give a critical account of the Serpell Report whilst Trevor Garrod introduced "Bring Back the Trains." Participants from as far away as Aberdeen and Inverness agreed that the time was now ripe to launch RDS SCOTLAND - replacing the Ad Hoc Committee for the Defence of Railways which had now served its purpose. The Inaugural Meeting of the new Branch was due to be held on 19th March. Meanwhile RDS has also launched a local petition against what has been called "the Glasgow Mini-Serpell" proposals by Strathclyde which could lead to the demise of most of the city's suburban rail services.

NOTICE TO RAILCARDHOLDERS -

- Further to the notice in the February MEMBERS' BULLETIN we are pleased to announce that John Cooper, Insurance Consultant of 6A, Church Street, Woodbridge, Suffolk, IP12 1DH is prepared to give 10% reduction in travel insurance premiums to holders of current RDS TRAVELCARDS.

This includes holiday insurance, business travel insurance, special travel policies such as mountaineering or yachting package policies.

This offer will be of particular interest to Travelcardholders in East Anglia and further details of the policies available can be obtained by telephoning Woodbridge (03943) 4749.

JOIN THE RAILWAY DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY

The Society is a national voluntary, independent body, formed in 1978 by the amalgamation of the Railway Invigoration Society and Railway Development Association, both of which were formed in the early 1950s.

Its aims are the retention, modernisation and greater usage of rail transport, for both passengers and freight. Affiliated to RDS are many local rail users' groups and reopening campaigns around the country; and RDS, together with these affiliated groups, aims to provide a voice for rail users.

General enquiries about RDS should be addressed to the General Secretary, RDS, BM/RDS, London WC1N 3XX (Tel: 01-405 0463).

Membership is open to all who are in general agreement with the aims of the Society and current subscriptions are:

Ordinary Members	£5
Corporate Members	£6
Local Authorities	£6
Parish Councils & Voluntary Bodies	£5
Students over 18	£3
Members over 65	£3
Students under 18	£2
Families	£5 plus £1 for each member of household

Subscriptions should be sent to the Acting Membership Secretary, L. I. Elias, 78, Rochford Gardens, Slough SL2 5XT.

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C = Conservative, Lab. = Labour, Lib. = Liberal.
An asterisk denotes the reply was given orally.

Serpell Report

JANUARY 20* Discussion of the Serpell Report took the form of question and answer, when Mr. Howell made a statement on the report after question time. The Speaker said he was giving it an exceptional amount of time.

Mr. Howell: I am publishing today the full Serpell Committee reports. The committee was appointed on May 5 last year, after the BR Board had proposed a review. It was chaired by Sir David Serpell, who was a member of the board for a number of years. Members were Mr. Bond, of the Bank Organisation, Mr. Butler, a partner at Great Marwick, and Mr. Goldstein, a transport consultant and engineer. There is a minority report by Mr. Goldstein.

The committee was asked to examine and report on the short-term financial prospects of the railway and on the options for many years ahead. The majority document fully reflects this. The minority document gives more attention to the longer term.

The committee does not support the view that yet larger injections of public funds are needed to preclude extensive closures, or that large parts of the system are at risk from lack of maintenance with present levels of support. Nor did the committee accept the case for a high investment option.

I welcome the efforts by Sir Peter Parker and his board to improve their management arrangements, to reduce costs and get rid of restrictive practices. We now have the opportunity for informed discussion about the sort of railway we want.

Albert Booth (Lab. Barrow-in-Furness) said that those who had studied network options A and B in the report had been absolutely appalled to find an 84% cut in the network. Did the committee not even examine proposals for main line electrification, nor BR's proposed investment programme? Did that not show the most horrendous anti-rail bias? Was it not absolutely disgraceful to suggest that savings might be made by curtailing track and equipment maintenance that were considered essential for safety? The report appeared to show blatant disregard for the needs of passengers. It used a financial criterion that bore no comparison to that used by any other railway system.

Mr. Howell: You overlook the fact that it was the BR Board that sought this review. Neither I nor the Government wish to see substantial closures. If that policy were changed, it would be after a long and informed debate.

The question of electrification investment depends on the ability of BR to

bring forward proposals on how it can put its inter-city business into profit. I hope you will give a more open-minded approach to a very full and substantial report.

Mr. Booth: BR has said that the reports are a disappointment to it. How can you suggest that this is regarded by those responsible for running BR as making any sensible contribution to the important debate that should be taking place on maintaining and sustaining the railway system?

Mr. Howell: BR has indicated to me that it sees constructive aspects in this report and it wishes to build upon them. It is true that it has expressed disappointment. This report has shown that there are substantial opportunities for cost savings, thereby building on the spirited efforts that Sir Peter and the board have made.

Sir David Price (C. Eastleigh): The snapshot judgment you condemn becomes inevitable if a report gets dribbled and leaked to the press in the way that this has been. Do you accept that the main conclusion is that BR can improve efficiency and reduce costs, while keeping the railway at broadly its present size?

Mr. Howell: That is entirely right. I deplore a great deal of speculation.

Gordon A. T. Bagier (Lab. Sunderland South): Do you agree that this is almost in line with the Beeching report. Will you give an undertaking that a large part of it will be consigned to the dustbin? Do you accept recommendations designed to destroy BR Engineering Ltd. (BREL)?

Mr. Howell: I do not think there is any comparison with the work of Dr. Beeching. It covers a wider area and is concerned with the cost and structure of the railway. It puts forward a number of options of what the public is getting in the way of value for money. When you study the report you will see that it contains information and illustrations of importance and value.

The future of BREL is considered. I hope that British is best, that British equipment is competitive and will be supplied to our railway system. The best way of achieving that is to ensure that BREL has a proper structure and is highly competitive.

Stephen Ross (Lib. I. of Wight): The report contains no comparisons with other countries, is short on recognition of safety standards, and seems to assume that the recession will continue ad infinitum. Will you ease the purse strings of BR, so that

it can at least order badly needed replacement rolling stock?

Mr. Howell: The Government have always said that they look with sympathy at the financing of transitional costs to meet the problems of adapting a great service and industry to future needs. It is true that the report looks at our system and does not go too far into international comparisons. Those can vary from countries that run their systems at a huge loss to those that run relatively economic systems. We must choose what is best for us.

Les Huckfield (Lab. Nuneaton): Do you accept that the conclusions in the report are far worse than anything recommended by Dr. Beeching? Will you specifically condemn those parts that say safety standards ought to be reduced?

Mr. Howell: I have frequently said the Government do not wish to see substantial closures. If a different policy were necessary, the House would be informed. I do not accept that there should be any prejudicing of proper safety standards.

Roger Moate (C. Faversham): The principal conclusion in the main report is that railways can be maintained at broadly their present size, given greater efficiency, without any increase in subsidy. Will you give the lie to the suggestion that the Government are in favour of major cuts in the networks?

Mr. Howell: You are absolutely right. The Government do not want to see a substantial number of closures.

Ted Leadbitter (Lab. Hartlepool): Will you oppose proposals on the removal of subsidies on inter-city lines? Will you uphold the principle of a fully developed and invested rail system as part of an integrated transport system?

Mr. Howell: I am prepared to look at new facts and illustrations which have never before been examined except by the railway industry itself. Those figures are now available to the public. I am prepared to consider where investment priorities can be switched for the greater benefit of passengers and customers — who also come into the equation — and the railway system.

Alex Pollock (C. Moray and Nairn): Can you confirm that there is no foreseeable threat to the Aberdeen-Inverness line, which is so important to north-east Scotland?

Mr. Howell: I cannot stand here and guarantee the future of the entire system for all time.

'Part of our heritage, of great beauty and value'

Ronald W. Brown (Lab. Hackney South): Have you any comments on the section on the section on longer-term options, where there is full support for London commuters? In the Transport Bill, now in committee, you are not proposing to pursue that policy.

Mr. Howell: You are confused about the Government's attitude towards subsidies. This year London is receiving a larger share of national taxpayers' support for transport than ever before, and very substantial levels of subsidy support for London's transport system are fully supported by the Government. In one paragraph of the Serpell report it is made clear that the subsidies are well worth while because they prevent totally unacceptable and anti-social congestion on the roads, so that it is a sensible policy.

David Mudd (C. Falmouth and Camborne): Can you give me a simple message of encouragement to take back to Cornwall? For 20 years, whenever there has been a hint of rail closure, we have seen hotels and guest houses converted to old people's homes and nursing homes, with a loss of tourist capacity. Industrialists who had expressed an interest in coming to Cornwall decided that it was not for them. There are six options in Serpell and three of them ignore Cornwall. In the remaining three there is the total elimination of the important economically and socially relevant Falmouth to Truro line. What will you tell me to say to my constituents about about this?

Mr. Howell: The Serpell report indicates ways in which better transport facilities can be brought to rural and outlying areas by the better expenditure of funds and a more imaginative development of the transport system. That will be for the benefit of your constituents and is a message worth taking to them.

'Adley was really scathing — says Labour MP'

Sir Hector Munro (C. Dumfries): Will you allay fears by saying today that some of the extreme options are not acceptable and that the route mileage in Scotland will be largely maintained?

Mr. Howell: I believe that the extreme options are not acceptable. They are there as a valuable framework for us to consider the future.

David Stoddart (Lab. Swindon): If you think Mr. Booth was scathing about the report, you should have heard Mr. Adley describing it on the "World at One." That really was scathing. Instead of congratulating Serpell, do you not consider the report is notable only for its incoherence? Isn't it one that few people will understand? Serpell recommendations have already caused fear and uncertainty among railwaymen throughout the country. If BREL were privatised, it would be a disaster for passengers, BR and for safety standards.

Mr. Howell: Even my friends can sometimes be wrong or premature in their jud-

Alex Lyon (Lab. York): Is it possible to make a reasonable assessment of what the level of subsidy to BR should be, without international comparisons, when every other major country gives subsidies to its railways which are far in excess of ours? Is it not absurd that Serpell should have examined and rejected the desire of BR to keep BREL going, on the basis that there is no alternative information about its productivity and its capacity to make profits? It states that the information is not available, yet suggests that it might be privatised as one of the options.

Mr. Howell: The committee considered a number of options, of which privatisation is one, and putting it much closer to BR is another.

As to international comparisons, it is not true that every country subsidises its railways to a much larger extent than we do. To take one example to do with urban systems, we are often told that we have a low subsidy for London, but the subsidy for greater Tokyo rail system is only 5%.

Matthew Parris (C. Derbyshire): Is there a distinction between a constructive attitude to rail transport and a sentimental attitude to every current aspect of BR practice? If this report directs our minds to that distinction, it will have done a service.

Mr. Howell: I agree with this point, without condemning it, about a sentimental attitude. We are dealing with part of our heritage which is of great beauty and value. The rights of way on which railways run are precious. All these matters should be considered in developing a system that meets our future needs.

gment. The danger is that if railways do not adapt they will die. That is the spirit of the report.

David Crouch (C. Canterbury): Your calming words that the possible rise in fares will be minimal will be heard with a sigh of relief. A million passengers a day in London and the south-east are BR's best and most regular customers. The report suggests that they should be subject to a substantial increase in fares. Will you bear in mind the need to give assurance that this increase will not take place?

Mr. Howell: The caution concerned about jacking up fares as the way to solve financial problems is right. The best way to control fares is to keep down costs, and there is plenty of scope for that.

Michael Martin (Lab. Glasgow Springburn): There is over 30% unemployment in my constituency and there are only two main employers: Eastfield railway loco-

motive depot and BR engineering workshop.

Mr. Howell: I understand your worries. The social as well as the economic implications must be taken into account.

A number of opposition MPs then raised points of order about the appointment as consultants to the Serpell committee of Travers Morgan and Peat, Marwick Mitchell & Co., the consultancy firms of Mr. Goldstein and Mr. Butler. Mr. Howell replied that he chose them "fully in line with proper procedures."

'Subsidies: road congestion a relevant factor'

FEBRUARY 8 Les Huckfield (Lab. Nuneaton) asked what information was given by the Transport Department to Serpell concerning increased road congestion.

Mr. Eyre: The Department's evidence suggested that road congestion was a relevant factor when considering passenger transport subsidies; that the effectiveness of subsidies in reducing road congestion was likely to be greater in London than elsewhere; and that outside London the rail strikes in 1982 resulted in a little more congestion in city centres and in significantly increased congestion in London.

FEBRUARY 16 Robert Cook (Lab. Edinburgh): When did the minister expect to reach a decision on the Serpell recommendations?

Mr. Howell: The BRB was considering what action to take in the light of the scope for improvements in costs and efficiency. On the longer term issues he would not reach conclusions until all the facts had been considered and public debate completed.

Les Huckfield (Lab. Nuneaton) asked when the minister would meet the chairman of the BR board and the trade unions to discuss their response to Serpell.

Mr. Howell: I have already begun discussions with Serpell. I have invited each rail union to discuss the contents of the report with me, and one of these meetings has already taken place.

George Foulkes (Lab. Ayrshire South): What representations had he received from Scotland regarding proposals as they affected Scotland.

Mr. Eyre: About 15.

Timothy Sainsbury (C. Hove) asked what representations he had received in respect of the railway finances report.

Mr. Eyre: About 300.

HOUSE OF LORDS — MARCH 2 SERPELL DEBATE

Lord Marsh: (formerly Sir Richard Marsh — B.R. Chairman and at one time Minister of Transport) moved a motion calling attention to the Serpell Report.

Amongst the points he made were:-

(a) If it took 25% of the Committee's eight months to find out that they did not agree with what they had been discussing (he was referring to the Minority Report of Mr. Goldstein), then the conduct of the whole exercise must be in doubt;

(b) the report's figures make no allowance for substantial transitional costs (e.g. of redundancy) or for any implications for revenue or for additional investment;

(c) the report's neglect of the political considerations involved in withdrawing some railway services — he cited the Central Wales Line which runs through six marginal constituencies.

Lord Tanlaw referred to Chapter 16 of the Report which describes "how bus substitution could replace the cut in rail services". Overall he seemed to favour bus substitution, provided that BR has the responsibility of running the buses, but stressed the need for integration of these services into the railway network.

He also drew attention (as did several other noble Lords) to the way the Serpell Committee had apparently ignored the social and commercial dimension of railways. When the Central Transport Consultative Committee wrote to Sir David Serpell suggesting that the Inquiry's terms of reference should be extended to include the interests of passengers, he replied that "passengers were only another relevant consideration."

Lord Tanlaw further suggested that the maintenance of the railway track should become the responsibility of the state, with BR only providing the train service.

Lord Prys-Davies drew the House's attention to the great concern felt in Wales about the way the report's conclusions would be viewed. A forthcoming Conference convened by Mid-Glamorgan County Council which would be attended by M.Ps, Councillors, railwaymen, CBI representatives and consumers throughout Wales would consider the report's implications.

Baroness Elliot of Harwood warned the House that any proposal for cutting off all railways north of Glasgow and Edinburgh would lead to much bigger "Highland risings" than ever took place in past centuries!

Lord Ferrier and Lady Saltoun stressed the importance of the "contra-entry factor" (i.e. the value of the contribution to society which the railways make) when considering the annual grant of £960 million to BR and Lady Saltoun instanced the value of the railways in War time and suggested they should be paid something for that provision.

Lord Lucas of Chilworth: responding for the Government said the Government would wish to consider Lord Tanlaw's suggestion of the state assuming responsibility for track maintenance but would need to bear in mind the Committee's view that separating operating and maintenance decisions might be harmful. The Ministry of Defence would be consulted

regarding their war-time railway requirements.

Regarding bus substitution, he replied that the Government would want to look at these ideas carefully — perhaps more carefully in the light of the Beeching bus arrangements, which were not perhaps entirely satisfactory!

Threat to take off Manchester sleeping cars

MARCH 9* Anthony Steen (C. Liverpool Wavertree), introducing the day's motion for the adjournment, pleaded for sleeping cars not to be withdrawn on services between London and Manchester and the surrounding area. He said that Robert Parry (Lab. Liverpool, Scotland Exchange), who was in Strasbourg, wanted to be associated with his remarks.

His purpose (he said) was to expose a cover-up aimed at cutting out the sleeper services linking the capital with the entire north-west of Britain. "But for the activities of a night mole," MPs would have been kept in the dark, with no idea of what BR was up to.

Having confronted the chairman of BR with the fact that he knew of his plans to take off the sleepers, it took two months to get his general manager to meet an all-party group of MPs on February 10. Facts and figures were promised to justify BR's decision, but after a month none had been produced. In a random check in May last year, it was found that 96 of the 140 first-class berths and 255 of the 358 second class berths were occupied on the Manchester-Euston service. So much for BR's contention that only MPs used the sleepers.

BR's arguments were that the sleeper coaches were about to expire and that the traffic did not justify new stock, costing £250,000 each. Why should not BR refurbish some of the old coaches from the north-west and redundant coaches on the Edinburgh and Glasgow routes? The cost would then be between £90,000 and £100,000 a coach and they would look like new.

As BR must find a 7.5% return on its capital, each coach must earn between £8,000 and £10,000 a year. Was BR saying it could not expect to earn £10,000 per coach when the Manchester coach earned more than £2,000 in May? Admittedly the throughput in the north-west had declined over the past three years, but that was as much a result of the appalling rundown in the service by BR as of the recession. The withdrawal of the service would have been more rapid if it had not been for the remarkable team of stewards who had done their best to keep their side of the service running.

'BR's new sleepers were the world's finest'

Fred Silvester (C. Manchester Withington): If the sleeper service was taken out the options open to business men would be limited. In a highly centralised country, it was an essential part of the quid pro quo that BR should ensure that services for the regions were properly maintained.

In summing up, he re-iterated the Government's position, as stated by David Howell in the House of Commons, that a full debate involving the re-examination of the objectives of the Railways Board, the structure of the railways and other questions would be held before any decisions were taken.

The service would be profitable if the pricing, product and marketing were right. Why, on a brand new poster at Birkenhead station, had BR advertised sleeper services which the House was told were coming off in May. He did not believe subsidies were needed, but would they be inappropriate, bearing in mind that every European network was subsidised, recognising that a good transport network was a prerequisite for a buoyant economy.

Already the north-west was one of the most heavily subsidised parts of the country. BR was planning to spend £2 million on a facelift for Lime Street station, plus £5.4 million under the urban programme for the same purpose. What was the point, if train services were being run down? It was not just the night trains: there was now one fast train every three hours between London and Liverpool, compared with one every hour last year.

What was the point of the Government spending £13 million on an international garden festival in Liverpool in 1984, if the three million visitors who were supposed to come from the Continent were unable to travel overnight to their destination? Either BR wanted a share of the action, or it would increasingly lose out as people took to the road or flew to Speke airport, where private enterprise was capturing the market.

Charles R. Morris (Lab. Manchester Openshaw): The service may have unfortunate connotations for the Chancellor of the Exchequer and other Conservative ministers, who have been known to lose their trousers when using it. Nevertheless it meets a real community need. BR says that the 7am train from Manchester arrives in London at 9.30am. That sounds reasonable, but one must consider the practical problems of getting to the station in time.

Andrew Bennett (Lab. Stockport North): Those who want to appear in court in Manchester have to go up the night before or fly up in the morning. More and more people are doing that.

Mr. Morris: You are right. It is assumed that one lives near the station in Manchester or that the meeting is being held right next to the station in London.

Albert Booth (Lab. Barrow-in-Furness): The finest sleeper coaches in the world were being introduced on BR, and it was proposed that the service between Barrow and London should be withdrawn. What possible justification could there be for the taxpayer being required to pay more

than £800 million as a public service obligation to BR to maintain the post-Beeching network if services were to be withdrawn from it?

Barrow had been offered, as an alternative, the opportunity of travelling to Preston to catch a sleeper to London. The clear alternative was to offer work to BREL, which had a superb capacity to build or refurbish coaches to the highest standards.

Mr. Steen: I am told by my tame mole that many of the sleepers are in first-rate order. They do not need £80,000 or £130,000 spent on them. They might need £50,000, but on a 7% return basis, there was no reason why they should not be introduced into the north-west on May 1.

Mr. Booth: They should not, in any case, be required to make a 7% return.

'Could injure prospects of economic recovery'

Mr. Eyre, replying, said he was aware of MP's deep concern for the quality of life in our great cities and of concern that the withdrawal of sleeper services between Liverpool and Manchester and London could injure the prospects for economic recovery in the north-west.

He would draw the attention of BR to the points that had been made. The BR board was reconsidering the financial case for retaining these sleeper services and he believed it would reach a decision soon. It would have regard to the views that had just been expressed.

Mr. Steen: MPs found the behaviour of BR inexcusable. It did not say it was withdrawing sleepers. He learnt it from the tame mole.

Mr. Eyre said he would draw this to the attention of the BR board. Except for the services to Glasgow, Edinburgh and Inverness, all BR sleeper services formed part of the inter-city sector. It was common ground that inter-urban travel should operate without subsidy. This commercial remit meant that the case for investment in any part of the business, including sleepers, had to be judged according to its financial return. It would be wrong and serve to undermine managerial responsibility for the Government to intervene in service scheduling.

BR was in the process of introducing a generation of sleeping cars. The previous generation was built between 1957 and 1964, with a working life of 20 years. The new cars would have to offer standards of comfort comparable to BR's latest day coaches and good hotels. They were based on the mark 3 day coaches. They incorporated the latest sound-proofing techniques, airprung suspension and smooth braking. They were air conditioned, with a separate temperature control in each compartment. They contained highly sophisticated fire prevention equipment, reflecting safety lessons learned from the investigation of the Taunton sleeper fire in 1978, in which 12 people died. It was not surprising that they were expensive to build and maintain.

Doug Hoyle (Lab. Warrington): It was important to show the strength of feeling throughout the region. It was not unusual for Warrington new town to appear on TV urging people to come to Warrington, but the means of doing so was to be cut off. He had travelled by sleeper from Manchester when a radio station had conducted a survey of passengers. All said the service saved them hotel accommodation and that they could do a full day's business in Manchester and return to London next day.

Bob Cryer (Lab. Keighley): The problem was being faced by other provincial cities such as Leeds. BR was proposing the withdrawal of the Kings Cross-Leeds service, which would affect the Yorkshire and Humberside regions.

Mr. Hoyle: It is an attack on the regions. It is a further blow and does not make financial sense.

One of the most important factors influencing the demand for sleeper services was the quality of day services on the same route. People would usually prefer to do the trip in a day, rather than use a sleeper.

In 1958, the age of steam, it took four hours to travel by train between London and Liverpool. The earliest time by which a London business man could be in Liverpool, travelling by day train, was 11.31am. He would then have 5½ hours before having to catch the last train home. Today the earliest train arrives at 10.30am and there are 8½ hours before the last train back. There had been similar improvements in day-time services between London and Manchester.

It was hardly surprising that these major improvements should have reduced the demand for sleeper services. Between 1969 and 1981 the number of journeys by sleeper between Liverpool and Euston fell 65%, from 20,000 to 6,900 a year, and between Manchester and Euston from 21,000 to 7,900. Most of the journeys were southbound: twice as many people used sleepers going south as north.

In contrast, on services between London and Scotland journey times had improved but not to the point where, for most travellers, a day return trip was feasible. The demand for sleepers had remained buoyant. Over intermediate distances, to Preston and Barrow, results had also been intermediate. Demand had been more buoyant than on Liverpool services but less than those to Scotland. But the imbalance between northbound and southbound passengers had been more marked: about 4-1 in favour of southbound.

New vehicles were already operating on Anglo-Scottish services. These were the main revenue-earners and received priority. But the board was considering the case of the less heavily-trafficked services. The decision to retain a southbound sleeper service from Preston, using the new vehicles, and to introduce a linking day train service from Barrow, would be welcomed.

"I note the point about refurbishment, and that will be considered."

The future of the Manchester and Liverpool services was still under consideration. "I cannot judge whether the figures that have been quoted this evening demonstrate a financial case for the services to which they referred. I am sure the board will look carefully at it."

Mr. Steen asked if he would say something about the Holyhead service. They were not asking for new coaches but for old ones to be renovated.

Mr. Eyre: "I am told that the point about refurbishment may be relevant to the case you have in mind. I shall ask the BR board to consider that aspect very carefully."

Mr. Steen: "We hope we shall not have to call you back here again."

PREVIEW

Hopes were rising, at the time of writing, that sleeping car services between London and Manchester and neighbouring towns would not, after all, be withdrawn.

Mr. Charles Morris, one of the MPs who took part in the debate on the subject in March, told me he hoped the BR Board would not only "reconsider" the case for retaining the services, as the Commons had been informed, but go further and make sure to retain them.

For many people these sleepers were a life line, he said. Many used them to travel overnight to London before starting a continental holiday. He represented the north-west group of MPs on the subject and had written to the chairman, Sir Peter Parker, about it. "I've had no response from him."

Labour and Conservative MPs united in the debate on the subject. It showed the Commons at its best," he said. Many MPs used the service on a Thursday night, to be in their constituencies next morning. *Mr. Albert Booth*, the shadow Transport Minister, used it to Barrow.

When asked his opinion about modern BR sleeping cars' riding qualities, *Mr. Morris* said: "After 12 hours at the House, I'm too tired to do anything but sleep."

What about sleeper services to Plymouth and the west country? I asked him. "The traffic's expanding" he said. It enjoyed the growing support of holiday makers.

J.E.