

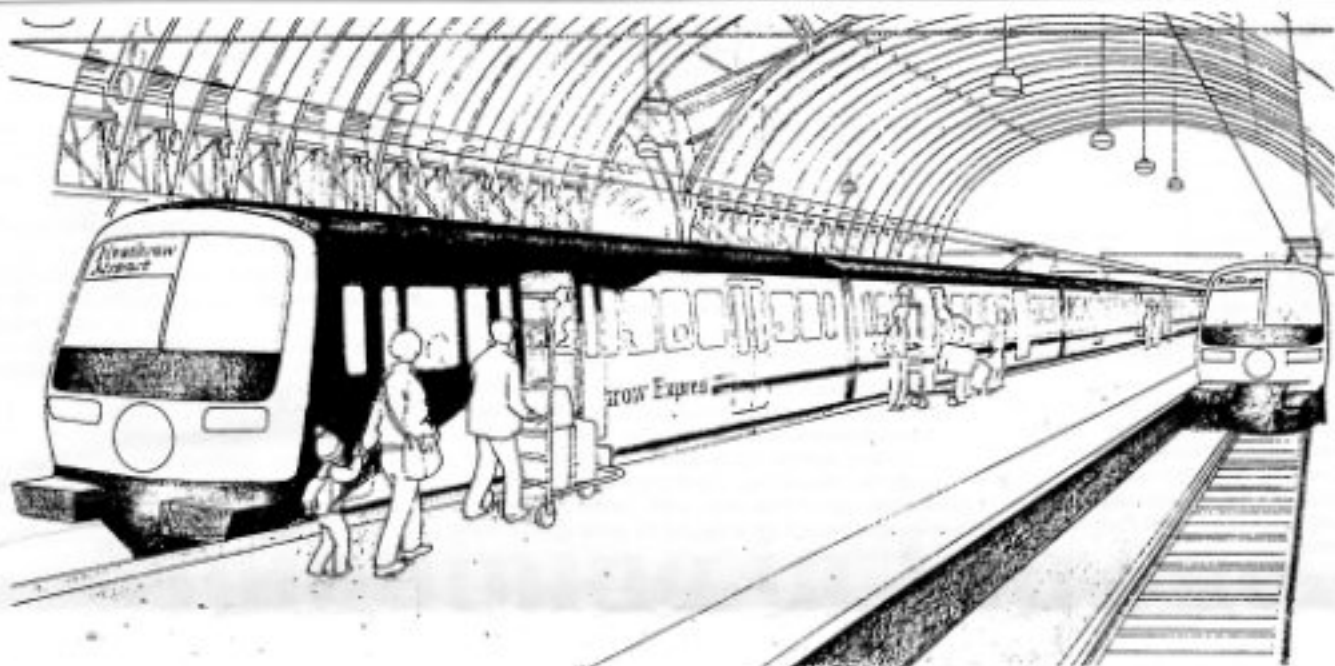


Railwatch

A VOICE FOR RAIL USERS

RAILWAY DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY No 43 MARCH 1990

60p



Paddington future: A Heathrow Express sits under the canopy. With Crossrail, this train could work through from Heathrow to Stansted

A tale of two Crossrails

The electrification of the Birmingham Cross-City line was finally given the go-ahead on 7 February by Transport Secretary Cecil Parkinson.

The £36 million scheme will use new 323 multiple units and will involve wiring 32 miles of track plus a link into Tysley depot. The scheme is jointly funded by British Rail and Centro (the new name for West Midlands Passenger Transport Executive).

Work on the Redditch section will start in May followed by the Aston - Lichfield section in October. The New Street - Aston section is already electrified. The new trains will be running in 1992.

Mr Parkinson chose to make his announcement in an answer to a written parliamentary question in the run-up to a by-election in the Lichfield area. The Mid-Staffordshire by-election took place last week and the Tories were worried they might lose. Labour had accused Mr Parkinson of electoral bribery.

The go-ahead decision came after a 14-month wait by commuters who have become increasingly frustrated by delays and cancellations to services operated by 30-year-old diesels.

The news is particularly welcome to RDS members who have worked long and hard to secure this vital improvement.

By contrast, London is still awaiting a decision on Crossrail which most transport experts, as

well as RDS, have identified as the plan most likely to ease London's travel crisis. (The capital no longer has a democratically elected transport authority.)

The proposal for a line from Liverpool Street to Paddington would open up a whole host of new east-west opportunities, in a similar way to how Thameslink has brought Kent, Surrey and Sussex in touch with Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire.

But it seems Mr Parkinson is not yet convinced of the political need for an early statement or the desirability of a full-size deep-level railway which could be used by BR and the Underground. In preference to Crossrail, he has allowed the Jubilee line extension to Docklands to go ahead, partly financed by property companies.

It is outside finance which has filled yet another important gap in the network, the £235 million link from Paddington to Heathrow airport, funded by the BAA. The Bill to authorise it is, however, still bogged down in Parliament.

By 1994 it is hoped it will be providing a 16-minute trip to the airport.

Mr Parkinson has let it be known that he will approve one major rail scheme in the autumn. That means Crossrail has to compete for approval with plans to build a new Chelsea - Hackney Tube line.

However necessary the proposed Tube line is, it cannot achieve the major strategic linkage which

Crossrail promises. With Crossrail, it would be possible to have a Bristol - Norwich train service, as well as Plymouth - Cambridge trains, Oxford - Colchester and a myriad of new Network SouthEast services. It would even be possible to run trains linking Heathrow and Stansted airports.

What's more it would relieve congestion on some of London's key roads, the A40 and the A4 and M4.

To win support for Crossrail, London and Home Counties branch plans to leaflet travellers at Paddington station during Rail Development Week.

They will be told how Crossrail can be an essential element in freeing London's blocked transport arteries, particularly the creaking, groaning Central Line, and ensuring the capital's economic prosperity.

It is also sad that BR which has been so successful with the North - South Thameslink service is not being allowed to expand it to meet the pent-up demand. There will be a few extra Thameslink services in May but Mr Parkinson has failed to give his backing to the full-blown Thameslink Metro plan.

St Paul's Thameslink is expected to open in May according to BR "in a bright modern environment" on one of the few remaining bomb sites in the City of London.

New style ticket to ride

MIKE BRESLIN explains how BR International has woken up to the fact that people in Manchester, Norwich and other regional centres want proper facilities for booking through to Europe. A new simplified ticketing system is to be introduced in May.

It will soon be possible to buy a ticket to the Top Ten destinations in Europe at practically any British station which has APTIS machines. So it should be easier to book to Paris, Brussels, Köln and elsewhere.

For other journeys, an easy-to-use manual called Euro 400 listing the 400 most popular continental destinations, can be used by even the least experienced member of the booking staff.

The manual also contains details of how to arrange bookings for Voyager journeys - by more complex routes and to destinations not listed under Euro 400.

The concept has been designed to reduce customer inquiry times and has been enthusiastically welcomed by the travel trade who may be persuaded to arrange many more bookings for rail journeys. Package holidays by train may also grow in popularity.

This is a great improvement on what BR planned to do in 1988 - to restrict the issue of international tickets to London and the ferry ports.

At that time BR also planned to stop issuing tickets for much of the European network which would have meant that a traveller from Manchester to Cannes would have been able to buy a ticket only to Paris, leaving the customer to make his own arrangements for the Paris - Cannes leg of the journey.

Many people have also been affected by BR

drastically cutting the number of Travel Centres able to issue international tickets.

Now BR seems to be getting its act together in preparation for the Channel Tunnel. A programme of staff training at BR booking offices is already in hand. Watch out for full details of the new scheme from BR.

Voting time: A Developing Provincial Network will be the subject of a talk by sector director Sidney Newey at the RDS annual general meeting in Manchester on 5 May. The meeting takes place at Liverpool Road Conference Centre at 1.30 pm. There is a frequent service from Piccadilly (platform 14) to Deansgate station which is five minutes walk from the centre.

Outside the station, cross the road, walk under the railway bridge to the crossroads. Cross the main road and continue into Liverpool Road (left turn). Walk along Liverpool Road to the Air and Space Museum. Turn right into Lower Byrom Street. The conference centre is on the left.

Members may like to take the opportunity of visiting the nearby Greater Manchester Museum of Science and Industry (10am-5pm). It offers a view of our own industrial heritage.

The museum claims the world's largest collection of working stationary engines. It also has vintage cars, motorbikes and railway locos. The development of the electricity industry is unfolded and the world's oldest passenger railway station is there too. The Air and Space gallery is supplemented by a display of water supply and sanitation.



What the papers say

Not only does laying railway tracks cost one third of roads, but the saving of fuel is enormous and, not to be forgotten, the safety of train travel is considerably greater.

Transport Review 9.2.90

Provincial services are at crisis point, says a BR staff report, with train defects forcing postponement of timetable improvements and leaving reliability at an all-time low.

Daily Telegraph 30.1.90

On city streets, almost all the airborne carbon monoxide comes from motor vehicles, as do around half of the nitrogen oxides and hydrocarbons.

New Scientist 25.11.89

Government vultures that have picked the bones of BR for decades to satisfy the belly of the Treasury are coming home to roost in the seemingly intractable problems that hang over the construction of a viable rail link between London and Folkestone.

Observer 14.1.90

Throughout the 1980s, German, French and Italian railways invested at least three times more than BR.

Daily Express 9.1.90

The people who live and work in London deserve a better transportation system. Extensions to the Underground, while welcome, are no substitute for BR gauge tunnels, which could transform the efficiency of rail services throughout the South East.

Financial Times 14.11.89

Environmentalists from seven European countries have united to fight for a sustainable transport policy.

Transport Review 26.1.90

Rail services bring benefits which spread well beyond the rail user - reductions in road congestion, lower vehicle emissions, less nuisance and a shift of freight from road to rail, said CBI director-general John Banham. But such "external benefits" of rail investment do not appear on BR's balance sheet, nor are they reflected in the profit and loss account by which the new chairman will be judged.

The Times 4.1.90

Even the road lobby was surprised by the massive £7 billion promised by Mr Parkinson for road building.

Public Transport Information 1.90

The number of company cars has quadrupled in the past decade.

Transport Review 26.1.90

SEVEN WASTED YEARS

Public expenditure on transport
On road £22,965 million
On rail £573 million
(1983-1989 inclusive) Source: HMSO

Dear Mr Parkinson,

An open letter to the Secretary of State for Transport

(written by a lifelong Conservative voter)

You must surely be aware that many people are deeply concerned about the Government's decision to phase out BR subsidies, and particularly those to Network SouthEast. I in particular am concerned over various remarks you yourself have made on transport policy recently.

Firstly, regarding commuter trains, you question why the Government should subsidise a service which is already in "excessive demand". The inference therefore is that this "excessive demand" should be curbed by removing subsidies, and that alternative forms of transport, i.e. road, should take on the business driven from the railways by prohibitive fares.

You also suggest that with subsidy, people are being "bribed" into using British Rail. Are you really suggesting that it is preferable to switch to roads, given the already severe congestion in the South East? Do you really believe that it would be better value for money for the nation as a whole:-

- invest even more in the private and company car and
- build yet more roads to cope with the extra traffic?

Main lining in Europe

Talks are currently under way to establish a European federation for the promotion and development of rail transport. One of the prime movers is the Verkehrsforum Bahn, the promotional arm of Deutsche Bundesbahn.

The planned federation would involve other European railways and the rail manufacturing industry. RDS is already building up its contacts abroad. As we learn from each other, the campaign for better railways in Britain can only be strengthened.

General Secretary Trevor Garrod approached the various transport ministries and railway undertakings for information about their electrification policies.

The most useful replies came from West Germany, Denmark and Luxembourg which are among the most prosperous countries in Europe.

The Deutsche Bundesbahn in West Germany carries 87 per cent of its traffic by electric train. Over 40 per cent of the network is electrified. The only large city without electric trains is Kiel which has a population of 258 000. The only areas without mainline electric trains are Schleswig-Holstein in the far north and eastern Bavaria, near the Czech border.

The Transport Ministry says applications from DB to electrify lines are not normally refused. The criteria are economic and take into account operational efficiency and cutting journey times. In recent years, regional and local government have invested their own cash to get electrification on lines which have not satisfied purely commercial criteria.

In Luxembourg 80 per cent of the traffic is already electric. On the remaining diesel-operated section between Kautenbach and Gouvy, the wires are due to go up soon. The chief civil

engineer of Luxembourg National Railways can proudly announce that his network will be completely electrified by 1993/4. The greater convenience for travellers and higher speeds give a commercial advantage as well as an operational benefit but the Luxembourg Government is also happy to say it took the environmental prize of reducing noise and pollution into account.

In Denmark the environment is also a key factor in the accounts. The Danish State Railways plan to electrify all their main lines by the year 2000 which will involve 1065 km of the 2344 km network.

"The criteria have been partly financial, but especially, they have concerned the environment and the supply of energy," said DSB. A return on investment of only four per cent is required, compared to eight per cent in Britain.

The Danes are also building a 20 km rail tunnel under the Great Belt, reopening lines and stations in Jutland and considering a line to Sweden, either over or under the Sound.

RDS vice-chairman Steve Wilkinson is examining continental attitudes towards the transport of

countries have public transport systems which are integrated and forward-looking, yet UK transport policy, by contrast, appears to be a model of muddle and mediocrity. Why for instance is the British Government so ready to approve public funding for road links to the Channel Tunnel, but so insistent that rail links (which would benefit the country generally) should be funded wholly by BR?

I am sure you are aware of numerous further arguments for relying less on roads, i.e. pollution, damage to buildings and health, the greenhouse effect etc. I very much hope that you will reconsider transport policy as a matter of urgency, but fear very much that you will continue to bow to narrow political dogma which used to be the hallmark of the Labour Party. It seems ironic that you of all people who have played a major part in selling Conservative policies to the electorate in the past, seem to be quite incapable of selling your own brand of transport policy, but as they say in the advertising world, no matter how brilliant the salesman, you just cannot sell a bad product.

Charles F Morgan
41 Gallagher's Mead
Andover
Hants
SP10 3BP

TREVOR
GARROD'S
VIEW



Let's keep
managers on
the right track

I am sometimes asked about the relationship between our society and BR managers.

We are prepared to criticise them when we consider their actions are not in the interests of rail users or rail expansion but we also defend them when they are attacked for things which are not their fault.

When a user complains, we have to consider where and how to apportion blame.

Suppose a train is cancelled because the 30-year-old diesel multiple unit has broken down and there is no spare stock. We know that BR has had constant obstacles put in its way by the Department of Transport when it applies to invest in new trains.

In such a case, we can feel justified in urging frustrated commuters to write to their MP.

On the other hand, the Government is not to blame for the recent withdrawal of the annual season ticket holder's railcard. This inept and insensitive move by certain people in higher management lost them goodwill and probably business.

We should like to see them admit they were wrong and reinstate the facility. Management in East Anglia had the grace to admit it made an

error in withdrawing the one-day ranger ticket four years ago. It has now been reinstated.

We appreciate BR is not fully master in its own house but we do expect it, in regular contacts with politicians, to "blow its own trumpet" by stressing the advantage and potential of rail travel.

A few years ago, three RDS people sat in a county council inquiry and inwardly groaned at the wimpy, defensive, negative comments of one (now retired) BR manager.

I once asked a manager for permission to go along trains collecting signatures on a pro-electricity petition. Her declined, saying that he and his colleagues did not want to get involved in politics.

The road lobby do not seem to have such scruples! Fortunately there are also many managers with whom we have worked constructively over the years. They have open minds, and a willingness to try out new ideas.

Whatever we may think of certain individuals, they are the only managers we have got. We should try to keep on constructive speaking terms with them, while accepting that we may not agree on everything.

'Grasp the nettle now'

The Government should make speedy decisions about large-scale investment in British Rail, former BR chairman Sir Peter Parker told Railwatch in an exclusive interview.

"We need now to set a course on some of the major decisions," he said. "There is a great public belief in the future of the railways. Anyone who takes the environment seriously, knows that the railways are the best answer around."

"Compared to the competition, they make far less noise and pollution, cause far less environmental stress, consume far less energy and create far less mayhem in terms of fatalities and serious injuries."

But he added: "We seem unable in this country to grasp that bouquet of nettles called the future. We are too adversarial."

"It is maddening how slow we are in this country at making big decisions."

Channel Tunnel freight from Europe, destined for Hastings in Sussex, will have to travel all the way to Willesden, London, before it can be despatched back to Hastings.

That was the dispiriting revelation from David Mitchell of the Freight Transport Association when he spoke to an RDS seminar in Ashford.

He stressed that there needed to be good services for the regions. Customs clearances should be done at terminals, rather than Willesden.

He also warned that hopes of the future belonging to swap bodies could be dashed because that service is only being marketed to hauliers, rather than directly to manufacturers and other businesses.

He added to the gloom by saying that Eurotunnel sees a shift in emphasis away from through rail freight towards road-freight shuttles.

Another speaker, European MP Ben Patterson, brought some joy amid the gloom with news that the European Community was questioning the need for new roads and had begun to draw up a Community Railways Policy for 1992.

The next seminar has been arranged for Saturday 19 May 1990.

Victory: British Rail has withdrawn its plans to close the 20-mile route from Gainsborough to Barnetby. Efforts by RDS and local groups helped achieve nearly 400 objections on a line which BR said only 17 people a day used. There is now an increasing awareness locally of the need to preserve the line and BR is to hold talks with Lincolnshire and Humberside county councils about possible contributions to funding and marketing the services. Two local groups now need support. If you can help, contact Phil Hewson, 1B Bigby High Road, Brigg, South Humberside DN20 9HB or David Tinsley, 30 Arthur Road, Gainsborough, Lincs DN21 3QS.

Photo winners: First and second prize in the RDS photographic contest were taken by John C Baker with third prize going to Railwatch editor Ray King. The runners-up were John Fishman and another Ray King (no relation) from Diss, Norfolk.

Oxford hopes: A whole range of new services and stations around Oxford, Aylesbury and Milton Keynes were considered in a feasibility report by consultants Kennedy Henderson. Local politicians are now deciding what funds they are prepared to offer. Provincial plans for a

NEWSWATCH

Sprinter from Swindon to Peterborough are expected to be profitable right from the start. Rail campaigners say some of the more expensive options could be achieved by using second-hand units, rather than the new equipment specified by the consultants.

Lottery winners: December: Mrs M A Wright, Harpenden £30.75, Mrs Elizabeth Norris, Kenilworth, £15.37, Paul Keepin, Wisbech £7.69, Anthony Emmerson, Belfast £7.69. Prize pool £61.50. January: P Hutchinson, Oxhey £34.50, D McCutcheon, Portsmouth £17.26, Roger Dewhurst, Southampton £8.62, C Skinner, Warley £8.62. Prize pool £89. February: A J MacBeath, Grange over Sands £48.25, A J Boulwood, Edgware £24.30, Brian Hastings, Southorpe £12.06, A C Wright, Wadhurst £12.06. Prize pool £96.

On the level: All the accidents reported at automatic level crossings in 1988 were caused by motorists, according to the report of the Railway Inspectorate. Many motorists seem willing to disregard the traffic lights and take chances at these crossings. By doing so, they not only place their own and their passengers lives at risk but also endanger the crews and passengers of trains. Throughout the year, more than 300 train accidents (a quarter of the total) were blamed on vandalism. The chief inspector Mr R J Seymour warns: "Willful acts of destruction like this are deplorable, but they must unfortunately be regarded as reasonably foreseeable in certain areas."

Israel is considering expanding its railway system, including building a 106-mile line across the desert to Eilat on the Red Sea, as a way of cutting its appalling road casualty rate which is three times that of Europe.

Win £400 and help RDS: Tickets for the Railway Development Draw are enclosed with this issue of Railwatch. The prizes are 1st £400, 2nd £200, 3rd £100. All members should try to sell these tickets, and, we hope, ask Reg Snow for a further supply. The draw will help to pay for many of the activities which have been organised for Rail Development Week.

Questions and Answers is a new RDS leaflet aimed at providing instant replies to our opponents. Examples are: Are railways inflexible and overstaffed? Isn't building new roads the best way to relieve congestion? You can have the advantage in any argument by getting this leaflet, available free from Roland White (address back page)

People: RDS administration officer Reg Snow is now at home after being seriously ill and spending time in hospital. We wish him a good recovery.

The new treasurer of RDS is David Bigg of Eye Level, 76 Maldon Road, Witham, Essex.

The society now has an assistant membership secretary in the shape of Carl Kirkham, 28 Dunmore Road, Chelmer Village, Chelmsford Essex CM2 6RY

Rail Development Week

Saturday 24

Cambridge - St Ives: Special train

There are four departures, at 10.10, 11.50, 13.30 and 16.00 with a 10-minute turn-round at Swavesey. Passengers can stay there longer if they like, sampling the walks along the River Ouse and returning on a later train. The price is £3.50 return to Swavesey or £2.50 return to Oakington.

London: Visit to Victoria signalling centre at Clapham Junction. Ticket only.

Skipton: Friends of the Settle - Carlisle AGM

Tuesday 27

Birmingham: A celebration of the Cross-City line electrification. The foyer of Dr Johnson House. 7.30pm.

London: Speaker Rufus Barnes (of the London Regional Passenger Committee) who is calling for a passengers charter. Friends Meeting House, Euston Road. 7pm

Wednesday 28

Ashchurch: To consider reopening of Ashchurch station, Gloucestershire. Ray Shill building, Lee Walk, Northway, Ashchurch. 7pm

Thursday 29

Manchester: Launch of Rail Strategy for the North West (36 pages) and promotion of Peaks and Plains by Rail. Greater Manchester Museum of Science and Industry Conference Centre, Lower Byrom Street.

Knutsford: Speaker Richard Watts on station restoration. Methodist Church Hall 7.30 pm.

Birmingham: Presentation on Midland Metro. Dr Johnson House. 7.30pm.

Friday 30

London: Crossrail exhibition and leafleting at Paddington.

Saturday 31

Edinburgh: Speaker Councillor David Begg of Lothian District Council and RDS Scotland AGM. Friends Meeting House. 1.30pm

Huddersfield: Talk by Yorkshire Post transport correspondent Alan Whitehouse at 2 pm, after luncheon and Yorkshire branch AGM. Polish Club, Fitzwilliam Street.

Manchester: All North-West user groups in joint meeting with North-West Transport Users Consultative Committee.

Dyfed: Launch of the West Wales Rail Users Association. Queens Hall, Narberth. 2pm

London: Crossrail exhibition and leafleting at Paddington.

London: Visit to Victoria signalling centre at Clapham Junction (ticket only)

Other meetings to be advertised locally:

At Cardiff (with Light Rail Transit Association) for an evening seminar on light rail. Hosted by Gower Freight Services.

Also at Haisham, Watford and Hastings

Exhibitions

London Paddington (Friday and Saturday). Eastleigh, Cambridge station foyer, Cambridge. Building Society, Reading Civic Centre.



John C Baker's picture of a 321 unit passing Shepreth junction

Displays

At libraries: Cambridge Central, Sheffield Central, Rotherham, Grimsby, Cleethorpes, Southorpe, Sleaford, Durham (19th-24th).

Leafleting

House to house: Meldreth and Melbourn, Cambs

Books

Rail for the Future
A Rail Strategy for the North West

Pamphlets

Yorkshire Rail Development Strategy (Ideas for exploiting the county's network to its full potential. Reopenings, electrification, new stations and services, light rail and freight opportunities, suggestions for rail financing other than privatisation.)
Rail Strategy for East Anglia 2
Rail Strategy for Surrey
North East Rail Review
Midland Mainliner
Report on Heathrow rail access
New links in the Watford area
Coastway potential

Sir Robert Reid who retires this month from his position as chairman of British Rail sent a special message to RDS:-

I was delighted to hear about Railway Development Week. Without doubt these are exciting times for the development of railways. BR is investing almost £5 billion over the next five years — half of that on new trains, the rest on equipment and stations.

In the next decade, the Channel Tunnel will link us directly with our colleagues in mainland Europe and this, I believe, will be but one of the exciting challenges ahead.

I have no doubt RDS will seek to widen the public awareness of these opportunities as well as continuing its well-established promotion of local opportunities.

BRANCHES

Wales

The West Wales Users Group is on the verge of being put on a formal footing with a proper constitution. Following informal meetings at Tenby, the group was planning to arrange a public meeting in Narberth during Rail Development Week.

The group will cover the three Pembrokeshire routes running from Milford Haven, Pembroke Dock and Fishguard Harbour to Swansea. The major aim of the association is to press for the retention of services on these three routes, as well as calling for improvements to stations and infrastructure. The feeling of the meetings was that the name Pembrokeshire should be incorporated into the association's name.

During the coming months, we hope to lobby for rebuilding and/or resiting of Milford Haven station, to continue asking for automatic level crossings between Manorbier and Pembroke Dock, as well as carrying out surveys, already begun, into potential usage of reopened stations at Templeton and on the Fishguard line.

Any Pembrokeshire "exiles" who may wish to join the association, can write to me at Roze, 16 Lady Park, Tenby, Dyfed, SA70 8JH. The annual subscription is £2. D G Brown

Lancashire and Cumbria

A limited service is to be operated by BR from May on the Blackburn - Hellifield line. There will be four return journeys from Manchester to Clitheroe on Saturdays and one Manchester/Blackpool to Carlisle journey on Sundays.

The upgrading of Clitheroe station has been agreed and a sum of £98 000 is to be spent on it. The prospects for the early reopening of Whalley station, costing £110 000, look good. The local authorities will look at funding it in the next financial year.

Our corporate member, Ribble Valley Rail, welcome these developments but is concerned at the timings of the Sunday service. An early meeting with BR is being sought.

Timetable changes on the Settle - Carlisle are causing concern among the local authorities steering group which is also worried about overcrowding this summer. Failure of the class 158 Express units to appear means the service will be operated by class 31 diesel locomotives with five coaches. The service is being slowed down. It seems the class 47 diesel locos have been "borrowed" to maintain the TransPennine service.

Delays in delivering new vehicles for Provincial are worrying the branch. Improvements planned for May (such as three TransPennine trains an hour between Manchester and Leeds and half-hourly services between Manchester and Southport) have been postponed.

We are also concerned about cuts recently announced to the Public Service Obligation grant. We have asked user groups to write to their local MPs explaining what the cut will mean for their line. Individual members have also been urged to write to MPs.

Our corporate member, the Ormskirk Preston Travellers' Association, has held two successful public meetings about the proposed timetable on the West Lancashire line from May. The association is concerned that the 50 per cent cut in peak hour services could lose up to 240 passengers a day from the line. This represents a 25 per cent of the current daily usage of the line. A report commissioned by the association from Ron Cotton advocates extending the service from Preston to Blackpool South.

Richard Watts

The Railway Development Week song

Railway Revival

There's a railway revival going on
There's a railway revival going on
'Cause rail's got no real rival, and we need it for survival
There's a railway revival going on

Everybody wants to keep the countryside wide green
Everybody wants the city breathing healthy and clean
Everybody's into saving power, at 90 miles an hour
There's a railway revival going on

Nobody needs a near miss or an airport delay
Nobody picks a pile-up on an eight-lane
Nobody wants to race road hogs in rain and wind and fog
There's a railway revival going on

Forty 35-tonne lorries chewing up the road
Forty wagons, one train, can slide away the load
North to South, and East to West aboard the express
There's a railway revival going on

Listen to the rush-hour roads roar, and curses fill the air
We don't knock down the neighbourhood to the jams elsewhere
'Cause when we use our brains, we put the into trains
There's a railway revival going on

The song has been recorded on cassette and is available for £2.50 (post free) from:
Helen Broadbent, 92 Hillview Drive, Clarkson, Glasgow G76 7TD.

Poll tax threat to rail lines

By Andrew Macfarlane

Many vulnerable rail lines and passenger initiatives could be threatened by the advent of the poll tax.

Revenue support from shire counties would disappear with the introduction of the new tax, warned **Derek Bateman** chairman of Cheshire County Council's public transport committee.

At the moment, the shires were topping up the public sector obligation grant which came from central government. The amount varied from small amounts paid to Network SouthEast to major sums of cash for new services in the South Wales valleys.

Shortage of cash would be a major problem for local government following the introduction of the poll tax.

Mr Bateman, speaking at a conference on the Future of British Rail on February 13, also warned that BR sectorisation was already a problem to councils. InterCity and Provincial have conflicting objectives and this caused timetable difficulties.

BR's own cash shortage now meant that station refurbishment and resignalling schemes were being deferred.

The Monopolies and Mergers Commission had suggested that the shires should take on responsibility for local rail services. But that would put them in an impossible situation where

they were just picking up the pieces, as with bus deregulation.

He said there was a need to ensure that the PSO grant was "ring fenced" to ensure that other services like education did not have to be cut.

Rail was not a business and was part of the country's essential infrastructure. It already competed with other transport modes and he questioned why we should want to privatise the railways.

Author **Paul Salvesson** told the conference that regional transport authorities were needed, linked to a new regional system of government.

Mr Salvesson, whose new book outlines his "radical alternative to privatisation" said the RTAs should have larger budgets than the present Passenger Transport Authorities and could specify service levels, fares, timetables and station facilities.

They would also co-ordinate bus services and take over strategic highway planning from district councils.

He conceded that InterCity could be operated as a commercial organisation but said there should still be scope for grants to it so it could extend services to logical destinations which were not necessarily profitable, like Bradford.

The Labour spokesman on transport **John Prescott** also addressed the conference, organised by the Centre for Local Economic Strategies.

He said the Government was anti-public transport but warned that transport would be a major political issue at the next election. There was a need for major investment on the European scale as well as integration of transport.

BR had the highest fares in Europe and the Government was not investing enough. The use of rail should be maximised and there was a need to restrict the use of the private car.

The British approach to the Channel Tunnel was a disaster, causing maximum environmental damage in the South East. The Government should take control of the project and provide a high-speed line to the tunnel. The part of the Act forbidding Government investment in rail had to be repealed.

The leader of the National Union of Railwaymen **Jimmy Knapp** said the market forces approach had contributed to accidents. Claims of enormous investment in BR were a myth.

There was a need for proper resources and adequate staffing to achieve a good service with safety.

Major General Lennox Napier of the Central Transport Consultative Committee said there was excessive overcrowding on BR and the quality of rail travel was declining.

There was a need for strategic long-term planning based on cost-benefit analysis. Passengers should not have to pay for this through higher fares.

The things they say

It is not true that rail investment has to meet more stringent criteria than road investment. Both are tested on the basis of an eight per cent return on investment.

Robert Atkins, Minister for Roads and Transport
The Government insists on looking at rail in cost/revenue terms. It should judge it like road in cost/benefit terms. This is what the French do. Cost/benefit assessments take into account such matters as pollution and the relief of road congestion.

Stuart Cole, director of transport research at the Polytechnic of North London

Benefits counted for road schemes include time savings for motorists and accident savings, all social benefits, while rail schemes are judged solely on their cash profitability.

It is amazing that the Government continues to produce this misinformation in an attempt to sidestep their responsibility for the serious mishandling of London's transport.

Sally Powell, Association of London Authorities

NEW BOOK OFFER

Rail for the Future is the latest book from RDS. It is available at a special pre-publication price of £1.80 (including post and packing). The offer closes on 31 May.

Thirty other books published by RDS are also available, including guides to touring the regions of Britain by train and specialist publications, looking at such topics as the Channel Tunnel, privatisation, and how to set up a rail users group. Prices range from 60p to £3.

Envelope re-use labels plugging the hazards of road travel compared to the safety of railways and back numbers of *Railwatch* are also on offer.

To order *Rail for the Future*, write to Alan Harwood at 139 Harrowdene Gardens, Teddington, Middx TW11 0DN.

For a free list of RDS publications, send Alan an SAE.

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Spring clearance: 1990 RDS pocket diary £1.50 (post free). Scotland by Rail 1st edition £1.50 (post free) from Alan Harwood.

The need for a London transport authority: A conference on urban transport in London and the South East will take place on 24 June 1990 at the Cathedral Conference Centre in Victoria, London. RDS members are offered a concessionary rate of £15 which will include morning coffee, lunch, tea and conference papers. Details from Pat Crane on 01 361 4402.

Rail Strategy for the North-West (36 page booklet) published 1990, available £2.25 from Richard Watts, 15 Stanley Avenue, Penwortham, Lancs PR1 9RB.

Special offer: *Staying Off the Beaten Track* is a bestseller among accommodation guides and can be useful to members travelling on business or for pleasure. RDS members will receive £18 worth of vouchers, which they can use against the cost of certain accommodation described in the book, if they mention they are RDS members when ordering it, £7.95 (post free), from Explore Britain, Alston, Cumbria CA9 3SL.

The annual general meeting of the South West branch will take place on Saturday 31 March at 1.30 pm in the conference room of the GWR Hotel at Exeter (opposite St David's station) to be followed by a public meeting.

British Rail: The Radical Alternative to Privatisation by Paul Salvesson is available for £4.95 (including p&p) from the Centre for Economic Strategies, Albert House, St Mary's Parsonage, Manchester M3 2WJ.

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