

Crossed lines over cash

The go-ahead for Crossrail was welcomed as a major contribution to solving London's traffic problems.

But Transport Secretary Cecil Parkinson failed to get a standing ovation at the Tory conference - where he made the announcement - and he failed to explain where the £1.4 billion would be coming from to link Paddington to Liverpool Street.

If it had been a road, the answer would have been obvious: We would all pay as taxpayers. The one-mile long Limehouse Link road in London's Docklands for instance is costing £300 million. You are paying for it.

Overall the road building programme will be costing taxpayers £5 million every working day for the next ten years.

But the Treasury feels it has to cling on tight to our (public) cash when it is considering a socially much more useful railway.

There was also disappointment that the other cross-London route, the Chelsea - Hackney Tube line would not be going ahead for the foreseeable future. It would have cost £1.8 billion.

The Crossrail parliamentary Bill will now be delayed until November 1991 and changes in the private Bill procedure may mean that construction will not start until 1995.

Fears that the line might never be built were eased in November however when, a month after Mr Parkinson's statement, the money for Crossrail was made available by Chancellor John Major who gave grant rises to both London Transport and BR.

Crossrail's BR-gauge dual tunnel will link Paddington to Liverpool Street with "possible intermediate stations" at Bond Street, Tottenham Court Road and Parringdon. Services from Aylesbury Reading and Southend would use it, allowing interchanges with seven Tube lines.

Further north a shortage of only £800,000 is threatening electrification of Hooton to Ellesmere Port and Chester. The Department of Transport gave permission for the scheme earlier this year but Cheshire County Council needs Government permission to borrow £800,000 for its share of the costs this year.

Because this will breach the national public sector borrowing requirement for this year, it looks as if permission will not be forthcoming.

If permission is not granted users are doomed to carry on with clapped-out 30-year-old diesels.

The electrification scheme is very cheap at under £10 million and meets the Government's investment requirement. Compared with investment in roads it is small change. Perhaps the local people should ask a few questions about the Limehouse Link.

At the present rate of progress, it will be another

30 to 40 years before the Merseyrail network is fully modernised and electrified, says the Wirral Transport Users Association.

October saw hopes dashed that people from Exeter would soon be getting electric trains when Network SouthEast announced it will be buying new diesel trains instead for the Waterloo - Exeter services.

NSE knows that it needs to keep on the right side of Ministers and civil servants to win approval even for new diesel trains so it "welcomed the Government's positive support for investment in modern railways".

Other major infrastructure seems to depend on whether private companies will come up with cash.

London's Jubilee line extension got the go-ahead after such an offer and was modified to suit private developers.

Now developers seem to be the deciding factor in whether the East London line is extended from Shoreditch to Dalston. They have reportedly offered £50 million as long as the line and its stations fit in with their urban regeneration scheme at Bishopsgate.

Is this the way a democratic government should make decisions about transport infrastructure?

At the time of the Hidden report into the

Clapham disaster, Mr Parkinson said "finance will not be a constraint" in implementing the safety recommendations (probable cost around £1 billion).

The Government has given BR permission to borrow £10 million (which it will have to repay with interest) for a pilot automatic train protection scheme.

In November, the Chancellor increased the grant to London Transport which also has expensive safety projects and the prospect of doing the lion's share of Crossrail construction.

Its 1989/90 grant is £287 million, for 90/91 £434 million, 91/92 £669 million, 92/3 £769 million and 93/94 £1039 million.

At the same time the Chancellor eased the squeeze on BR somewhat by allowing it to increase its borrowing by 50 per cent, up to a new limit of £1.2 billion.

He also gave the go-ahead for BR's public sector obligation grant to be increased in 1991/2 to £560 million (was £450 million), in 1992/3 to £520 million (was £345 million) and he fixed the level for 1993/4 to £500 million.

BR is now more optimistic about being able to go ahead with Channel Tunnel projects (but not the high speed link yet), new high-speed trains for the West Coast main line and Networker trains for the South-East.

Battle for Boxing Day trains

British Rail has shut down on Christmas Day and Boxing Day for many years and BR staff undoubtedly enjoy having the same holiday as others.

But BR is a public service and there is a demand for public transport on Boxing Day particularly - for visits to friends and relatives, sporting events, pantomimes, shows and even, these days, for shop sales. If people who travel are also tempted to drink, then it is better they travel by train.

RDS passed an AGM resolution this year calling on BR to reintroduce some Boxing Day services. We have since been in correspondence with BR managers and unions and also with a wide range of interested groups, including the National Federation of Football Supporters' Clubs and the Society of the West End Theatre.

ASLEF expressed support for the idea as did the TSSA provided that staff attendance was optional. The Society of the West End Theatre has offered to publicise any service that is run.

Of the three BR passenger sectors, only Network SouthEast has shown any interest. So we have suggested an experimental Boxing Day service in the South East, concentrating on ten routes into London from such places as Southend, Norwich, Peterborough, Birmingham, Bristol and Bournemouth.

Since London Transport operates a Boxing Day service on most of its lines, BR trains could even terminate at such interchange stations as Stratford, Watford Junction and Wimbledon, thus saving terminus costs. Unfortunately even London Transport is now beset with financial problems and were considering axing Boxing Day services to save cash.

General support for our ideas, however, has come from the Central Transport Consultative Committee, the Transport Users' Consultative Committee for the South East and the London Regional Passenger Committee. They do not regard the idea as a top priority because of the tightness of the public service obligation grant paid to Network SouthEast.

We have been assured that a limited Thameslink service between Luton, King's Cross, East Croydon and Gatwick will again operate this year, plus Victoria - Dover boat trains. BR has also promised to keep its options open for a wider service in future years.

RDS has published a simple leaflet putting the case for limited Boxing Day services. It is obtainable from David Bigg, Eye Level, 76 Maldon Road, Witham, Essex. David would also be pleased to hear from any member with further ideas and a willingness to help.

The clash of sectors

By PETER HARDING

The question one must ask oneself is: Is the railway run for the benefit of the "customers" or for the benefit of the management of each individual sector? No-one can deny that sectorisation has in many ways done wonders for the railways of this country. InterCity over the past few years has improved by leaps and bounds. Brand new rolling stock, electrification of the East Coast main line to Edinburgh and of course more recently, profit!

Think back just half a dozen (imperial not metric) years to the time before Network SouthEast and Chris Green, to the shambles of the London commuter service. Millions have been spent on this hitherto totally neglected part of the network. New trains, new routes (Thameslink is an excellent example) and most noticeably new branding, nice bright clean colours, giving an aura of something positive, we hope, for the future. Unlike Provincial...

Finally Provincial, some parts of whose empire haven't changed in decades. The 156s have altered the face of long/medium length journeys. Express routes from East to West and North to South, from the tip of Scotland to the West Country, are unfortunately marred by the 158 debacle. Without doubt the Government will have to continue funding Provincial and Network South-East for some years to come. What a shame though, that there seems to be a disharmony between the sectors. No matter what British Rail may say to the contrary there exists a problem if a customer's journey takes in a mixture of sector travelling.

An example: InterCity has an hourly service

from Liverpool Street to Ipswich and Norwich, yet try to travel between Manningtree and Ipswich or Norwich. It isn't easy. But why can't the NSE services be extended from Manningtree to Norwich calling at all stations en route? This would give an hourly fast InterCity journey combined with a half-hourly slow service (similar to the London-Birmingham service). So simple! NO. It may be just what the travelling public want, but I'm afraid it will not suit the accountants of the individual sectors. Personally I believe NSE should assume control of the whole of East Anglia. It cannot be that easy for InterCity to maintain an isolated single spur to Norwich, even if it is profitable. Yet think how East Anglia would benefit, in particular the rural lines, by coming under the wing of NSE. Another example of poor sector timetabling is at Needham Market on the Norwich - Ipswich line. From Monday to Saturday, there is no service from Needham Market to Ipswich between 0749 and 1412, yet during this period, eight InterCity trains pass through the station, three Provincial 156 Expresses and two old diesel multiple units from Cambridge - a total of 13 trains.

Passengers want a decent regular service and they don't really give a damn which sector runs it, so long as it can be relied upon. The sector problems were discussed at the Rail Transport Study Group conference in June. Mr Vincent Christie of the Association of District Councils said Network SouthEast's pro-electrification policy made people in other areas frustrated with Provincial and InterCity. He said the Felixstowe line should be electrified and asked: "If NSE extended to Leicester, would the Midland Main Line electrification campaign have had more success?"

parliamentary bill procedures that could affect new rail construction, and collaborated with various members drafting comments on three plans produced by local councils. I met a journalist to give him information on local authority involvement in rail subsidies and the implications thereof. To promote the "bike-and-train" combination, I distributed hundreds of leaflets to tourist outlets and updated information on notice-boards maintained for local users.

Meanwhile, there was correspondence with fifteen other organisations with whom we are trying to establish a common platform on issues like fares policy, company car taxes and maintaining the public service obligation for BR's Network SouthEast and Regional sectors.

Finally, I have met, telephoned and corresponded with our chairman, treasurer, sales officer, Railwatch editor and many other members of our national team on all manner of "nuts-and-bolts" matters, since RDS is a campaign, not a talking shop.

* Every four weeks, I write a column called Open Lines in the magazine Rail which is obtainable from newsagents. It highlights current action by RDS and its affiliated users groups and supplements what you can read in Railwatch.



What the papers say

British Rail will not publish a three-year medical and scientific study to find out why red signals are passed on average by two drivers a week.

Daily Telegraph 5.9.90

BR forward planning is usually very tentative and underestimates the needs of passengers.

Transport Users' Consultative Cttee for Southern England Annual Report 89/90

Action speaks louder than words: it is now clear that for BR's top management, meeting government-imposed targets for subsidy reduction is more important than providing a service.

Railway Gazette International 9.90

In this country, public transport is a residual system. On the Continent, it is the basic mode of transport and not peripheral, said Stirling lawyer Douglas Smart (an RDS man).

Stirling News half page feature 20.9.90

The company car remains a British institution in the European "perks" league. It is virtually a standard feature for those earning salaries of more than £30,000.

Eastern Daily Press 3.10.90

Stringent lorry bans during bank holidays are being demanded by the Association of London Authorities.

International Freight Weekly 10.9.90

It is heartening to know that an increasing number of firms are subscribing to the Railway Development Society. There is far too much talk and not enough action when it comes to opening up old railway lines.

Business Week 6.9.90

Railways cannot be run like a grocer's shop.

Transport Review 9.90

The East Coast main line electrification project is being managed better than most privately run investment programmes. It is ahead of schedule and keeping to budget.

Transport Retort Aug-Sept 1990

"Rail is the key (to Europe). We believe the tunnel will work so long as BR awakens to the challenge. The trouble is that after three years negotiating with BR, I believe it can't get its act together," said David Howes, managing director of Christian Salvesen's UK distribution division.

The Scotsman 12.9.90

ScotRail's wretched Sprinter trains represent the absolute nadir of service. Which ninny designed them? Who in ScotRail meekly accepted them? Whose bladder invented the ratio of one toilet for 146 passengers?

Letter in The Scotsman 3.9.90

Swiss Rail "rescued" Mrs Thatcher when bad weather grounded her helicopter flight over the Swiss Alps.

Daily Telegraph 22.9.90

High-tech cameras which can catch five speeding road vehicles per second have been developed.

Sunday Express 21.10.90

Contractors were carrying out secret £1 million repairs to cracked concrete in the M40 motorway extension in Oxfordshire. The Department of Transport was criticised for "lack of consultation".

New Civil Engineer 23.8.90

Appeal on fares to Freeman

Long-distance InterCity fares into London go up by 14.5 per cent in January while most fares on InterCity and NSE go up by 9.5 per cent. This is on top of recent "backdoor" increases, some as much as 20 per cent, on Provincial. We already have the highest fares and the lowest subsidies in Europe. The capital's statutory consumer watchdog the London Regional Passengers Committee was relieved that at least most of the increases were generally in line with inflation and not even higher. In Birmingham, Centro said it would not put up fares in its area because so many trains are late, cancelled or overcrowded. RDS is not happy either. General secretary Trevor Garrod wrote to Public Transport Minister Roger Freeman on 5 October. This is what he said:

On 9 September, I wrote to you about the 20 per

cent increase in Provincial (now Regional) rail fares. I have not had a reply.

Let me remind you of what I wrote. I commute on a Regional line and have no alternative. My wages have not increased by anything near 20 per cent in the past year. The trains on which I travel are over 30 years old and the service has just been reduced, not because of lack of demand, but because BR says it has to cannibalise one diesel multiple unit to keep the others functioning.

I see this situation as a direct result of Government policies in reducing the public service obligation grant to BR's Regional sector and delaying the introduction of new diesel multiple units by telling BR to look at closure and bus replacement whenever they apply to invest in new stock.

The awkward question of money

By DAVID BIGG

Our first appeal against the ruling that we should register for value added tax has been rejected by Customs and Excise at Colchester. There are still a whole series of appeals procedures for us to go through, possibly ending in the European Court.

Obviously this will take time and the law says that, in the meantime, I must charge VAT on subscriptions.

Our parliamentary friends have been active on our behalf. Worthy of special mention are Tony Speller, Peter Snape - who took our case to the Treasury Minister Richard Ryder - and Margaret Beckett, Labour's front bench Treasury spokesman.

Former public transport minister David Mitchell is also taking a keen interest. Sad to report, the Liberal Democrats have not taken the issue up.

So where does this leave us? It is fairly clear that, because of our growth, we shall have to register for VAT. I have in my latest appeal argued that only part of the subscription (that which applies to the cost of providing Railwatch) is within the scope of the tax, say 25 per cent.

What effect does this have on subscriptions? I am forced to assume the worst - yet hope for the

best. We asked you to pay more way back in 1987. Inflation has taken its toll and this year alone is running at 10 per cent.

Our increased turnover has come through increasing our membership.

The national executive of RDS has now agreed with proposals from a special working party that from January, there will be new subscription levels:

Members £10, senior citizens and unwaged £5, user groups and parish councils £10, other local authorities £30, companies £40. Families pay £1 per member after £10.

If our VAT appeal proves successful, I would prefer the new rates to stand, allowing us to freeze subscription rates for some time or to put the difference into a special projects fund, such as the video reserve or a building fund for the day when we have paid staff.

The executive will be open to suggestions. What do you think? Would better information services be a good idea, or a bi-monthly or even monthly Railwatch?

Could we have a graded membership structure with associates, members and fellows paying different amounts and receiving differing ser-

May I therefore repeat my call to you to increase the public service obligation payment to BR and to stop delaying their applications to invest in new stock. I ask this not only for myself and my fellow commuters (who, I hope you will remember, are also taxpayers); but also because rising oil prices and the uncertainty of oil supplies in the current Middle East crisis plus growing public concern about the environment, means that more than ever it is desirable to provide an attractive public transport alternative to the private car.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Trevor Garrod

likely supporters, clip it and send it to me. I can then send them an invitation to join and information about the society.

First check the address given to see that it is complete. If not please try to obtain it from the telephone directory, otherwise I will have to write via the newspaper concerned, in which case I will need its name and address, as well as the date the letter was published.

But you can take more direct action yourself. Copies of recruiting and other leaflets are freely obtainable from publications officer Roland White (address back page) and I find it a good idea to carry some with me.

When speaking to someone in the pub, club or office and the conversation turns to congested roads, train cancellations or poor public transport generally, grasp the opportunity to mention the Railway Development Society.

Perhaps some members would be willing to

sponsor an advertisement in a publication of their choice. Such generosity would be greatly appreciated.

The greater the number of people we can claim to speak for, the more powerful will be our voice. So please, in any way you can, help us to increase our membership.

I will send to anyone you name a copy of Railwatch and, if available, their local branch newsletter together with an invitation to join us.

Details of all the people to whom I write are sent to their relevant branch secretary and it is imperative for them to follow up my initial approach to those who do not become a member within two months.

A letter, phone or personal call with details of local activities will often bring them in. Perhaps each branch could appoint one member within their ranks to do this.

My address is 15 Atheneum Road, London N20 9AA

TREVOR
GARROD'S
VIEW



The nuts and bolts of our campaign

The last Railwatch contained an article giving a member's personal views on a possible future high-speed rail network. We in RDS should certainly have some vision of what railways should be like well into the 21st century but 95 per cent of my time as General Secretary is devoted to tackling the issues of the present and immediate future.

That is what, I believe, most of our members expect of the society, for most of the time. The experience, credibility and success which we gain in this way also helps us towards our more ambitious, longer-term aims.

Here are some of my tasks of recent weeks. I have protested to politicians and BR managers about heavy fare increases and given a radio interview on the topic. I have advised local users' groups on how to campaign against "skip-stopping" and service cuts and put the case for extra commuter trains, special offers and Boxing Day services to certain BR managers. I have defended Sprinters against unfair criticism in the Press and explained to an outside body why RDS supports a main line rail link to Heathrow.

Then I have worked with members of our parliamentary liaison committee to formulate the RDS response to proposed changes in the

The slow way to Europe

By JACK ELLIS

Next month Mrs Thatcher and President Mitterrand will shake hands under the Channel to mark the link-up of the two halves of Eurotunnel's service tunnel.

It will highlight the engineering achievement but also the differences between the cash-starved British rail system and the forward-looking French network.

Good as many of BR's new trains are to ride in, it still takes three hours to get from Waterloo to Weymouth for instance.

Decades ago, Japan introduced its fast bullet train and then Europe's high-speed trains began to attract passengers away from aircraft.

So what sort of figure will British Rail present after the opening of the Channel Tunnel in less than three years' time?

French Rail continues to dazzle the world and plans to recover the great cost of its huge investments in the TGV within 10 years.

French high speed trains are already the world's fastest in commercial service at nearly 200 miles an hour.

Even faster trains - and shorter journey times - are being planned.

The fastest trains from Paris to Nice now take less than seven hours, compared with 10 or 11 only a few years ago. The new generation of high speed trains will benefit from the experience gained.

In the Paris region a new line runs for more than 10 miles underground, beneath a newly created "green corridor."

In the face of this progress, what kind of future is Britain making for going into Europe? Labour MP John Prescott told a local government conference that Scotland was in danger of becoming "the branch line of Europe." He added: "It is urgent that BR is freed from the shackles of the corporate financial policy imposed on it by the Government."

* BR is at present considering which companies will build the 200 coaches for overnight Channel Tunnel services. Sleepers and reclining seats (with a 50 degree angle) will feature in the new trains which must be delivered by December 1992.

Christmas offers

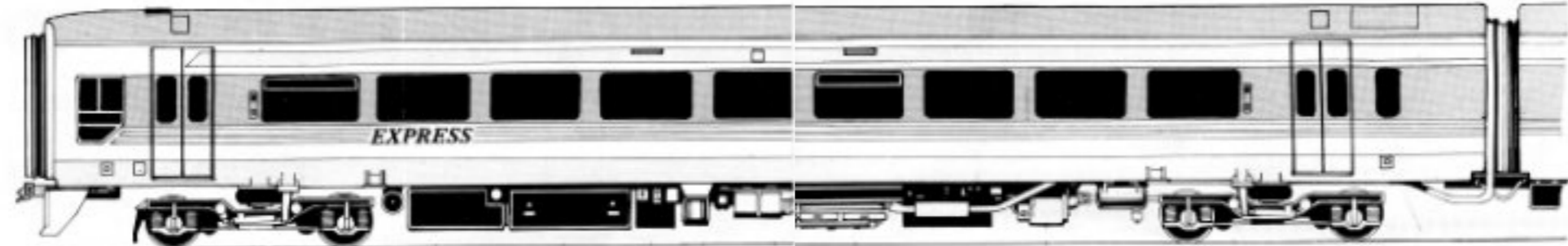
RDS railguides and books make ideal Christmas presents for your family and friends. Introduce them to the environmentally acceptable way to our Britain.

- Lanes & Cumbria by Rail £2.60
- South West by Rail £2.30
- Yorkshire by Rail £2.60
- The Line that Refused to Die (Settle-Carlisle) £6.60

Prices include post and packing
Offers close 28 February 1991

Thirty other books including In & Around London by Rail and North East by Rail are also available. There are also other rail guides, specialist books, envelope re-use labels and Railwatch back numbers.

Send orders for books or an sac for a sales list to RDS sales officer, 139 Harrowdene Gardens, Teddington, Middx TW11 0DN



Regional Railways 158 Express

FIFTY per cent cuts on some rural rail services could be illegal, according to RDS Yorkshire president James Towler.

Mr Towler said the current round of cuts and those planned for next May, which affect the Esk Valley, Skipton - Morecambe, York - Sheffield and Hull - Scarborough lines, highlight the level of deception being deployed by BR and the Department of Transport.

He explained that, under the Railways Act 1974 and subsequent ministerial directives, BR is obliged to provide a public service which is comparable generally to that provided at that time.

"By no stretch of the imagination can cuts of up to 50 per cent be seen as complying with that directive," said Mr Towler. "Whereas the Department of Transport question whether service adjustments (their word for cuts) are a consequence of a reducing grant requirement, BR is in no doubt."

"BR tells me - and I quote - 'The continuing reduction in the PSO (public service obligation) grant means that, to meet the 1992 Government targets, there will have to be reductions in service on many less well-used lines.' It would seem that BR and the Department of Transport appear to be working in collusion to implement cuts which contradict a Ministerial direction under an Act of Parliament. "Such a bizarre situation makes a mockery of both Parliament and the law."

Ten East Anglian councils came to the rescue last year when BR Provincial (now renamed Regional Railways) said it was "so short of money" it was considering axing late evening trains out of Norwich and Ipswich.

Suffolk and Norfolk county councils, together with eight district councils, were led to believe it

It's beggar BR

was a "one-off" payment - and the trains continued to run. This year Regional approached the councils for money again, to keep the trains running until May 1992 when Sprinters are expected and the timetable will be recast.

The councils' response has been mixed, with some of the districts saying they are being taken for a ride by BR and insisting that county councils are responsible for ensuring there is efficient public transport.

They have a point, although some people will use any excuse when they want to say No.

RDS and users groups have lobbied to persuade the councillors at both district and county level that the subsidies should continue and as a result most of the threatened trains have again been revived.

Philip Smart, Labour chairman of Ipswich council's transportation committee, said: "The Government's introduction of a regressive tax, the poll tax, has made it more difficult to respond to local needs."

Mr Smart who is an RDS member added: "Ipswich council came within £4 of being capped by the same government that has forced BR to go round with its begging bowl in the first place."

We in RDS believe that one way to improve the present chaotic situation is for guidelines to be laid down for Regional Railways.

The only requirement at present is to provide a service on the network broadly in line with what existed in 1974. If it wanted, Regional could just

operate one train a day. That is no way to run a railway.

Regional director Gordon Pettitt told us: "I do not believe it would be particularly helpful to have a laid-down service policy... Each route, and the communities it serves, are unique markets and therefore need an individually tailored service."

We do not want to tie the hands of Mr Pettitt and his colleagues. We want to encourage Regional, like other sectors of BR, to be enterprising and imaginative and go for new business. The new traffic that has already been gained by cross-country Sprinters is very pleasing.

But Regional receives Government grants and ought to be required to provide services to minimal criteria. For instance, a station with a certain population in its catchment area should have a fixed minimum number of trains calling at it per day. Trains ought to run up to a fixed time in the evening.

Such minimal guidelines would still leave Mr Pettitt and his colleagues plenty of scope for "individual tailoring". Regional managers will still be able to add extra services, perhaps experimentally, when they consider these justified.

Such guidelines would be fairer to local councils. If they feel their local circumstances merit extra services, they can offer to pay for improvements.

We have produced a leaflet calling on Regional to give their passengers a new deal and to introduce minimal service guidelines. Publicity officer Roland White (address back page) will send you copies of the leaflet.

Which way forward?

population and commerce are geographically further apart than in England.

Also, the very nature of the French approach to high-speed rail brooks no freight, semi-fast, level crossings or junctions - just clear unimpeded progress.

As the excellent RDS book Rail for the Future pointed out, there is certainly scope for TGV-style travel in Britain, but not to the extent suggested by Mr Nalty.

That same book also called for substantial investment in existing rail routes where the opportunities for dramatically improving transit times, by straightening out curves, installing the latest cost-efficient signalling and greatly extending electrification, are immense. Such a policy would also benefit many more people.

There is another important factor, sometimes overlooked, when considering the grafting of very high-speed routes on to the national railway network. From where will the new business be derived?

Hopefully much of it will be brand new. But the rest will be bled from existing routes, thereby threatening their finances and service patterns. And yet, all this is not to dismiss Graham Nalty's basic thesis, which is the very real need for a substantial cut in journey times between a multitude of places on the British mainland. This is already RDS national policy!

By GRAHAM NALTY

The success of the TGV is based on sustaining very high speeds over long distances and I agree that some of my suggested routes would be more suitable for 120 mph rather than 180 mph. London - Heathrow - Birmingham - Manchester - Glasgow is definitely a case for 180mph to compete with airlines. Hourly frequency is needed between Manchester and Glasgow to compete with motoring.

The nature of rail travel within the UK is such that true TGV-style services could only apply to distances over 200 miles between very large

Express comfort

The new £1 million train which will bring InterCity-style comfort to Provincial's cross-country Express services was finally introduced to Press and public in September.

The 158, built by BREL at Derby, has air conditioning and airline-style seats aligned to windows. They will replace Sprinters which in turn will displace 30-year-old diesel multiple units.

The train which has been delayed for 18 months by a series of teething troubles went first to the Edinburgh - Aberdeen and Edinburgh - Glasgow routes.

Regional Railways (the new name for Provincial) hope the new trains will eventually enable them to open new through services, like Swindon - Peterborough.

"It may be late arriving but this new train will give our customers an excellent service," said Regional director Gordon Pettitt. "This train will revolutionise rail travel in the regions."

The 158 was welcomed by RDS man Simon Hartopp in a Central TV interview on Pear Tree station but Simon, North Midlands branch chairman, pointed out that modern rolling stock was generally designed with inadequate space for heavy luggage and bicycles.

Virtually the same train is to be bought by NSE for the Waterloo - Exeter service, it was announced in October.

But cost-cutting is behind that too. Provincial is to give up 66 of the 447 vehicles it has ordered from Brel. Instead NSE will get them and call them 159.

centres, omitting London to Manchester, Liverpool and Leeds.

The UK situation is different and a different interpretation is needed. Perhaps the best approach is to say that where a domestic air service exists, there is scope for a very high speed rail link, as well as for some other similar journeys not covered by air.

My article was about new routes, so I purposely avoided using existing routes. A new direct link from London to Liverpool would certainly be more profitable than from Cardiff to Hull, but there is already a highly suitable route via Roade & Nuneaton. My article implies but does not state that all existing routes and services would be maintained and expanded.

Mr Burton's suggestion that new routes will threaten existing routes is rather defensive, an attitude possibly based on experience of the days of closure of parallel routes following the Beeching report.

* Read about the society's 1990 development strategy for Britain's railways in Rail for the Future, available for £2.45 (post paid) from sales officer Alan Harwood (address back page).

Robin Hood line rescue

By MALCOLM GOODALL

England's largest town without a railway station will soon get relief from traffic congestion thanks to the Robin Hood line.

It looks as though Mansfield, Notts, could be put back on the railway map now that local councils have produced firm plans for reopening the line (from Nottingham to Worksop) in 1992/3.

Eleven new stations will be provided with a half-hourly service to Mansfield and an hourly train on to Worksop and Retford. Journey times will be 30 minutes to Mansfield and 52 minutes to Worksop.

Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire, together with all the district councils along the line, Ashfield, Bassetlaw, Bolsover, Gedling, Mansfield and Nottingham, have contributed to a video showing how 500,000 people could benefit from the return of rail services, axed by Beeching in 1964.

One of the councils' aims is to reduce chronic road traffic problems in Nottingham.

The BR Bill to enable rebuilding at Kirby-in-Ashfield was held up in the Commons and was then delayed in the Lords because of protests over the use of the private Bill procedure, but it was finally approved.

Nottinghamshire has earmarked £6 million for track and four Sprinter trains while district councils will pay for the stations.

BR is not permitted to invest in any scheme which might increase the public service obligation grant, so cash aid is being sought from the European Community.

Local industry and businesses are being canvassed to help with cash which could then persuade the Department of Transport to give a Section 56 grant.

A pioneering agreement with BR may enable the councils to share the line's operating profits.

The estimated cost of reopening has increased from £11 million to £15 million. One idea for cutting the initial costs is to use the prototype 151 unit built by Metro-Cammell and now reportedly laid up in a shed at Llandudno junction.

Another idea is for a phased reopening programme starting with the Nottingham - Hucknall section which still has track and could be in operation next year.

Four RDS members helped to publicise the line when they undertook a sponsored cycle ride to Mansfield station, now a bistro cafe, on 30 June. Clara Zilahi, Richard Pill, Simon Hartopp and Trevor Garrod pedalled from railheads at Melton Mowbray, Alfreton, Derby and Matlock, and raised £300 for the RDS anti-closure fund.

Clara cycled a record 90 miles, not only the 37 miles each way between Melton and Mansfield but also, because of inadequate connections at Ely, the 16 miles from her Downham Market home to March. Thanks are due to the guard on the Birmingham - Cambridge Sprinter who phoned through to ensure that she made her connection at Ely on the way home.

* A study exploding the myth that road users pay more in taxation than the government spends on roads has been published by two transport economists. The net revenue from roads is £12.5 billion a year compared to costs of more than £13 billion. A free copy of the report is available from the ETA, 15a George Street, Croydon CR0 1LA. Please send an A4 or A5 sac.

Be fair to rail freight

By STEVE WILKINSON

For years government demands for cost effectiveness on our railways have been continually pushing them into an ever-weakening market position.

Government insistence upon an eight per cent return on bulk freight by 1994/5 would appear to be a major step towards the possible closure of Speedlink which handles a wide variety of business, such as wagon load traffic from private sidings, continental freight, hazardous cargoes etc.

With the opening of the Channel Tunnel in the near future, and the Government claiming concern about the environment, to be suggesting the possible transfer of 3 million tonnes of traffic from rail on to our overburdened roads is absurd. RDS shares the concern of wagon owners and operators, terminal operators and many others at the various rumours currently circulating about the future of Speedlink.

Because of this uncertainty, many companies are already regarding road as the only way to move their goods. Possible investment from the private sector in the rail alternative is in serious danger of being overlooked.

MAKE clear now any changes proposed regarding the updating of Section 8 grants under the Railways Act 1974. (The RDS made appropriate suggestions in a report published as long ago as 1988).

GIVE Railfreight new targets which cover more than simple profitability.

RE-EXAMINE its attitude toward freight transport in this country. If fair competition between the various modes is desired, then the environmental factors should be given full consideration.

GIVING BR permission to spend its own money is hardly Government investment. The sector directors should be given more freedom to use their own initiative.

We recognise that Speedlink will have to change if it is proved to be losing the amount of money alleged. Nevertheless we feel, like so many others in the transport world, that if the Government reappraises its objectives, it will survive. As a national asset, the survival of Speedlink is important - only the road lobby will benefit from its demise!

* A leaflet arguing the case for Speedlink is available from Roland White (address below left)



A diesel multiple unit speeds through the banner to herald the opening of Bloxwich North station

Old for new

An elderly diesel multiple unit had the distinction of marking the opening in October of the newest station on the BR network, Bloxwich North, on the Birmingham New Street - Hedgesford line.

The £280,000 station was financed by Centro (West Midlands PTA) and is expected to attract about 1,200 new passengers a week to the rail network. It is a half hour run to Birmingham and only 12 minutes to Walsall.

The station has a 50-space car park, paid for by Walsall council, and has ramps making it more accessible to people with mobility problems.

To encourage usage, over 14,000 people were offered the chance of a free trip anywhere within the Centro area on 2 October. Invitations were sent out highlighting the ease and benefit of travelling by train.

BR blotted its copybook by mistakenly calling the new station Broad Lane in the all-lines timetable.

Electrification of Birmingham's Cross-City line meant that from October, evening and Sunday train services between New Street and Lichfield and between New Street and Redditch were replaced by buses to allow the work to proceed. This situation will continue until February 1991.

Centro has erected special bus stops at each station to help make the service easier to use. Bus times are shown at every stop and are included in the Midline Cross-City timetable leaflet. Stops are clearly marked with an "X-City" heading.

NEWSWATCH

Video: Travels in Another Country - Round Britain by Rail is the provisional title of the proposed RDS video. David Pitt and other members in the film and video business have already done considerable research into the project. It would cost up to £20,000 to produce, although we believe a professional product could be achieved for less and we are seeking sponsors for it. Loans are also welcome and we would like to thank two members who have donated £450. The video would be aimed at the same audience as our By Rail books and represents an important opportunity to win a large number of people to the joys of train travel and to the RDS cause. It is not however the sort of project on which we can spend members' subscriptions, so other sources of finance are vital. If you can help in any way, please write to David Pitt, 50 Riverside, Cambridge CB5 8HN

Lottery winners: August: 1 J R Bisset, Bromsgrove £52.75, 2 M Challis, Cambridge £26.37, 3 R Cummings, Cheadle Hulme, £13.19, 4 G W Calvert, London N21 £13.19. September: G Bate, Wolverhampton £54.25, 2 W J Measure, London E10 £27.13, 3 M Wright, Harpenden £13.56, 4 W Lewis, Cardigan £13.56. October: 1 B Hastings, Scunthorpe £53.75, 2 I Rider, Whitehaven £26.87, 3 N Perkins, Harrow £13.44, 4 L S Wells, Sawbridgeworth £13.44.

Thanks: Graham Tolliday, founder chairman of our corporate member the Wrexham-Bidston Rail Users' Association, has stood down because of advancing years. Graham is also a former chairman of RDS Wales and has made a valued contribution to RDS work at local and national level over many years. He assures us, however: "I shall continue to work for railway improvement, but in a more static way."

Space man: Ian McGill has been appointed RDS advertising officer. He is responsible for placing adverts in as many newspapers and periodicals as we can afford to take out space in. This usually means specialist journals, but has also recently included some national and regional papers. Ian is always pleased to receive further suggestions of journals in which we could usefully advertise RDS and its publications. Please write to him at 28 Chichester Park, Westbury, Wilts BA13 3AN.

Play time: A children's theatre group from Leighton Buzzard boosted the campaign to reopen Winslow station by performing a musical called Reopen the Line with Dr Beauchamp as the main character. The play was sponsored by Lipton Teas. Bucks County Council and Aylesbury Vale district council are calling for the station to be a stop when the Swindon - Peterborough service is restored. Disappointingly, BR say the service is unlikely to begin before 1995. The 90-minute play - an unusual contribution to rail campaigning - is available on video for £14 from Chris Wright of the Oxon and Bucks Rail Action Committee, 83 Blackmoor Gate, Fuzton, Milton Keynes MK4 1DD.

Council briefing: RDS issues a special council briefing three times a year to its growing number of local authority corporate members. A number of RDS members are also councillors at various levels and a few are local government officers. Such members may like to receive the briefing and may even like to contribute to it. If you are a councillor or officer, but your council is not a corporate member, Philip Bisatt, 76 Langley Street, Basford, Stoke-on-Trent ST4 6DZ will be pleased to hear from you.

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All copy for the next issue, to be published in March, must be in the hands of Mr King by **29 January**.

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Membership: £10 per year; pensioners, students and unemployed £5; user groups and parish councils £10; other local authorities £30; companies £40. Families £1 extra per member, after £10.

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