

# Railwatch

A VOICE FOR RAIL USERS

RAILWAY DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY

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## Tory privatisation muddle

Government ministers were reportedly locked in a dispute throughout January over how British Rail should be privatised. The argument has been going on inside the Cabinet since at least 1982.

Right-wing think tanks have come up with a string of hopelessly unrealistic schemes more frequently than Ministers of Transport have been going in and out of the revolving doors at the Department of Transport.

The Government has been repeatedly warned that preoccupation with privatising the railways is likely to throw away hard-won gains in efficiency and prove a "poll tax on wheels".

The railways were not reorganised into groups in 1923 for political dogma, but to make them more efficient. It ended an era where companies often practised a "beggar your neighbour" policy at the expense of the passenger.

They were nationalised in 1947, largely because it was a cheaper option than paying vast sums of compensation for war damage. But British government since the 1950s has been a dismal example of short-sightedness and ignorance.

Any hopes of making the system work properly in the 1950s and since were wrecked by road lobby tricks and bureaucratic interference — coupled with political stupidity and cowardice.

The last time the Tories tried to "sort out" the railways, they let Beeching loose. What a disaster that was.

Despite the Government, the railways that survive into the 1990s are far better than at any time in their history.

Great strides forward have been taken since rail enthusiast Sir Peter Parker, knowing what had been going wrong, took a sensible and balanced look forward, while justifiably highlighting Government inadequacies.

He described the difficulties of running a business without any capital. One of Mrs Thatcher's early actions was to get rid of him!

Network SouthEast has been transformed since Chris Green first took it over and decreed a new look which began with painting the lamp posts red. The critics were scathing but NSE now looks better and is better.

Richard Hope, former editor of Railway Gazette International, has only recently said that Government Ministers who dream of recreating the "glories" of the pre-nationalisation companies are inspired by nostalgia owing more to Thomas the Tank Engine than to historical reality.

In public at least, BR chairman Sir Bob Reid has been gently reminding us all that great things have been achieved by BR in recent years while reminding the Government — and it certainly needs reminding — that any privatisation should be aimed at improving services.

Labour's John Prescott predicted privatisation would be a "bloody mess".

One of the contenders to run private trains is Virgin whose boss Richard Branson is noted for



### Viva España

The state railway of Spain joins the European high speed rail club this month when its new TGV-style line opens from Madrid to Seville, in time for Expo 92 at Seville. The British Government, after years of prevarication, is still wondering when and where to build Britain's first high-speed line — to the Channel Tunnel.

tidying up Britain as a special aide to Mrs Thatcher. Did you notice the difference?

Another is Stagecoach Holdings which has taken over various bus companies following deregulation.

Labour MP Brian Wilson commented: "Stagecoach's record is one of asset stripping, downgrading employees' conditions and wasteful competition on profitable routes."

Since deregulation, overall bus use in Britain has gone down by 26 per cent while fares have gone up 31 per cent more than inflation. The Association of Metropolitan Authorities is calling for a fundamental review of the present set-up.

A third is James Sherwood's Bermuda-based Sea Containers which bought Sealink British Ferries for £66 million in 1984, "made no significant investment in it" and then sold most of it for £430 million in 1990.

The Germans meanwhile — who run Europe's strongest economy — plan to set up a railway operating company which the government would own. The aim is to free managers from bureaucratic interference.

RDS believes the Government should adopt a similar strategy with BR becoming a fully fledged public company, with shares held by the Government. This would free BR from the stranglehold of the Treasury.

BR should be restructured into separate infrastructure and operating divisions within an overall parent organisation. This would be in line with European Community demands for "transparency" between the two aspects of the rail business.

Private operators could be allowed regulated entry on appropriate routes on a sensible, partnership basis, as already happens in Sweden and Switzerland.

RDS chairman Steve Wilkinson has warned the Government that privatisation could leave Britain with a half-baked railway system while the rest of Europe forges ahead.

A free-for-all between competing operators would simply confuse passengers, as has been the case following bus deregulation.

It is vital to maintain the integrity of the network and unified information and ticketing arrangements.

We also recommend that money allocated to grandiose road building should be diverted to down-to-earth rail schemes. At least £3 billion of the £12 billion allocated under Roads to Prosperity should be diverted to rail.

Unless privatisation is handled properly, a whole new set of problems could be thrown up.

RDS organised an advertisement in The Independent on 16 January, opposing any break-up of the network by privatisation. Various groups and individuals sponsored the initiative but 25 Tory MPs and Peers who were approached did not.

Now we are producing a leaflet calling for the network to be kept intact. Order your leaflets now from publicity officer Roland White, Latymer, The Drive, Belmont, Surrey SM2 7DJ.

**BR is our only coherent national public transport network. Despite its problems, it is a great national asset.**

# The line from Labour

The example of Bletchley flyover is one of the "sticks" regularly taken up by Whitehall mandarins with which to beat British Rail.

The concrete viaduct has hardly been used since it was built in the 1960s as part of a grand freight concentration scheme.

Now, Labour rail spokesman Mr Peter Snape told RDS, it is the perfect excuse to stop enterprising BR managers in their tracks when they have the temerity to suggest public money is invested in rail schemes.

"You wasted millions on Bletchley and on Carlisle Kingmoor yard in the 1960s. Why should we give you any now?" they thunder.

These projects, tiny by comparison with the enormous outlay of public cash on road schemes, have given wrong-headed Department of Transport bureaucrats the excuse to implement a policy which has switched virtually all Britain's rail freight to lorries.

Now Mr Snape says: "We in the Labour party believe BR managers should not have to go to the Department of Transport to ask permission to spend BR's own money as they do at present."

He promised that a Labour government would review public expenditure on transport immediately it came to power, pledging that buses and trains would get an "equal" chance to road building.

"We've fallen so far behind Europe, we need to make long-term changes to get freight and passengers back on the railways."

Mr Snape told an RDS delegation that Labour would "encourage" people to use public transport.

The party was considering whether a payroll tax of one or two per cent could be used to improve both train and bus services.

"We will have a coherent railway policy from the beginning of the Labour government."

## Trevor Garrod's View



Like any voluntary campaigning body, RDS needs the oxygen of publicity and we should all take every opportunity to obtain coverage in the media.

During the past 12 months I have, as general secretary, had letters published in periodicals ranging from the Sunday Telegraph to the Western Morning News. I have been interviewed by the BBC World Service, Radio Orwell (on a station platform) and Anglia TV (in a car park).

I have been on the panel of experts for a radio phone-in and obtained publicity for RDS in papers and magazines, from Green News to La Vie du Rail. The society has been quoted in journals from the Sun to the Daily Telegraph, and my fellow national officers have also been featured.

We receive frequent mentions in East Anglia, Yorkshire and Scotland. Members such as Ken Sutherland, James Towler and John Armstrong regularly appear in their media.

We cannot force the media to report what we say, however, unless we pay for advertising as we did on 16 January in the Independent.

Sometimes they interview us but nothing appears, perhaps because we are not prepared to say what they want us to say.

For example I was recently phoned by a reporter on a national tabloid who asked me if I did not

"The Labour party has grown up. We don't see things in simple terms like if there is a complaint about something, let's nationalise it.

"But the Tories are still saying: If there's a problem, privatise it." He added: "There is an urgent need to get people out of cars and into buses and trains. But we can't force them out of cars."

Mr Snape supports the idea of red routes in cities and backs some bus drivers who say pedestrians are one of the major road safety hazards! (Perhaps we can soon expect to read newspaper stories headlined: Pedestrian in collision with bus. The bus was badly hurt.)

The reluctance to criticise drivers is a reminder that Mr Snape is not just listening and talking to RDS. Although he is sponsored by the rail union RMT, he points out: "I represent a car-producing constituency."

[A Euro-wide survey has revealed that politicians in general wrongly believe that only 49% of the public favours public transport. The correct figure is 80%.]

But he did point out that his was the second name on the "Speller Act" which has led to successful rail reopening schemes.

Mr Snape is not happy with the Government's stated preference for the Stratford route for a high-speed Channel Tunnel link. He welcomed an RDS offer to prepare other options while admitting that it would be politically impossible to resurrect BR's route through South London.

Pointing to a picture hanging behind his desk of Edgeley Junction No 2 signal box where he started work in 1957, he said it was a symbol of the failure of the Government to invest in the railway.

Its mechanism, dating back to 1888, was still being used to control trains and was not expected to be modernised until 1994.

## Press ahead bravely

think it appalling that BR did not have a customer complaints officer at Charing Cross.

I replied that, with BR under constant pressure to reduce staff, I considered it a higher priority to employ enough staff to drive and maintain the trains. Surprise, surprise! My remarks were not printed.

The experience, knowledge and credibility we have built up in RDS mean that we are often contacted by researchers and journalists. The time we spend with them may not immediately bear fruit, but in the longer term, results often emerge.

Some while ago, I spent a considerable amount of time answering questions from a daily paper journalist. Yet the following day nothing was printed. Three days later, the newspaper published an editorial which could virtually have been written by me.

We may not have the resources to take out regular full-page adverts, treat media people to freebies and such like, but we can impress them as the only national independent voluntary body for rail users and supporters who know what we are talking about.

■ Trevor Garrod is general secretary of RDS and also writes a column every four weeks for the magazine Rail.

## NEWSWATCH

BR's cross-country sector has added 110 miles to its passenger route network in the last 10 years, a Reviving Regional Railways conference at Birmingham heard in January.

The conference, attended by two RDS representatives as well as council and passenger transport executive members, heard how 25 new stations had opened in Glamorgan since 1982.

The sector runs a total of 4,634 route miles, but only two per cent of it is electrified. RMT union leader Jimmy Knapp called on Regional Railways to adopt a clear programme of electrification, as part of an integrated network.

**Elect your officers:** The annual general meeting of RDS will be held on Saturday 2 May at the Lytton Theatre in the Birmingham and Midland Institute, Margaret Street, Birmingham.

Dear Minister: RDS President Dr Michael Caton has written to Transport Minister Roger Freeman with a list of line reopenings and rebuildings for which we consider that Government grants should be available. The Minister had asked us for such information, when he met us in July, and indicated that money might be made available for rail schemes that would ease road congestion.

**Cheapskates:** The lorry pays only 15 per cent of its track costs if noise, pollution and road building costs are taken into account, according to German research at Heidelberg.

Victims: 2,500 pedestrians die each year on British roads which also claim around 2,500 drivers. Warrant warrants more concern?

**Victims:** In the next 20 years, we will have more cars per head than present-day Los Angeles where levels of vehicle pollution are already so high that some non-smoking adults have the type of lung damage found in smokers. Source: Greenpeace.

The way forward: A 20 mph speed limit and traffic calming would save four of the 13 lives lost every day on Britain's roads, according to Tim Pharoah of London's South Bank Polytechnic.

**Big noise:** 36 per cent of people are disturbed by traffic noise — in their own homes!

Addicts: The average motorist spends more on the car than holidays, hotels, clothes, toys, entertainment and sport put together. Source: Ark survey.

**Consequences:** The refusal to carry stone traffic from Ribbleshead Quarry has led to an increase in 20-tonne tipper lorries blasting their way through Settle. Now a £12 million bypass is being proposed for the town.

Spongers on society: Company car drivers are subsidised to the extent of £150 from every household in Britain.

**Sparky:** ScotRail is considering plans to electrify the five miles of track from Mid to West Calder at a cost of £3.2 million so that electric trains could run from North Berwick through Edinburgh to West Calder.

Data Protection Act: Under this Act, we are required to ask all members whether they have any objection to their membership records being held on computer. Any member who does object should write to the Membership Secretary, 49 Irtham Road, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands B74 2TQ.

**Co-ordination of bus and train timetables was one of the issues discussed at a meeting with the National Federation of Bus Users in December, attended by RDS members David Bigg, Chris Borland and Trevor Jones.**

The Government has increased the amount of public cash available for section 8 freight facility grants from £3 million to £6.5 million, following Steve Wilkinson's article in the last Railwatch. The Department of Transport, however, is determined to maintain restrictions which prevent cash being paid out to divert motorway traffic to rail. It clings tenaciously to the Catch 22 rule that it will only pay up to switch traffic from "environmentally sensitive roads" while reserving the right to decide just what such a road is.

Steve Bell



# Take the train to a better world

The role of the railway in easing environmental problems will be the topic for an RDS seminar to be held in June.

It will give all of us a chance to learn more about rail's advantages and the problems of how to encourage blinkered politicians to act positively.

will be asking how we can help persuade people to reduce car usage, and how we can convince councils that they should adopt rail-orientated policies.

The seminar will be held on Saturday 20 June from 1100 to 1600 in the YMCA building at Leicester, just across the road from the station.

If you want more details, send an s.a.e. to Paul Clark, 69 Glenmere Close, Cambridge CB1 4EP.

If you would like to attend, send £3 (£2 for RDS members) to Roger Skilton, 63 Abbots Road, Leicester LE5 1DD. Cheques payable to RDS. A buffet will be available at extra cost.

To coincide with the seminar, a new RDS report is to be published entitled *Our Environment - A Bigger Role for Rail*, compiled by Chris Amundson.

National Environment Week which is being held from 16 May should help to focus more interest on the problem.

One of RDS's contributions to the week will be a sponsored cycle ride from Uckfield to Lewes in East Sussex to seek the reinstatement of the seven-mile missing link in Network SouthEast. If you are interested in taking part or sponsoring a rider please contact Trevor Garrod at the above address.

Meanwhile it is encouraging to see RDS ideas taking root. Three in five motorists now support abolition of the road fund licence, to be replaced by a 25p increase in the price of petrol — a tax on use rather than ownership.

## Cooking the books

A MISH-MASH of half truths and contradictions is revealed as the basis for Government decisions on funding road and rail schemes. In a Department of Transport booklet which attempts to explain how it makes its "investment appraisals", the overall impression is: We've made up some rules and we reserve the right to choose which rules apply in each case.

Despite 10 pages explaining the complicated calculations used in assessment, the booklet admits: "Judgment is needed to decide where, for rail investment, the balance should lie between the use of commercial appraisal and cost-benefit analysis."

In other words, whatever scheme for rail improvements you come up with, we can find a rule to wreck it. If you succeed in getting through the fog

of regulations, we'll change the rules. The big lie in the booklet entitled *The Role of Investment Appraisal in Road and Rail Transport* is the last sentence: "The procedures used need to adapt over time as circumstances change, but they are applied in ways designed not to favour either mode over the other."

Is that why many towns and villages have been robbed of their rail services and are forced to rely only on road transport? Is that how, over 30 years, most freight has been switched from rail to road — in defiance of public opinion?

One of the key weaknesses in the department's case is its admission: "Environmental considerations are not generally given monetary values."

A whole list of environmental disadvantages of road schemes is provided but then it is admitted that theoretical time savings account for 85 per cent of the gross benefits of trunk road schemes. What a balanced view!

Even though rail is so clearly more environment-friendly than road, the Department is desperate to find fault. It lamely points out: "New rail infrastructure can have significant environmental impacts."

The department's grammar creaks when it issues another less-than-half-truth: "It is general policy that, on average, road users pay through taxes at least the level of public expenditure on roads."

The flimsy excuse of "enhancing road safety" is used to justify road building where the reality is that the net effect of road building is to increase general traffic levels — and make all roads less safe.

Meanwhile rail users are treated with contempt. The booklet admits: "New subsidies are provided only when they lead to clearly focused benefits (in particular benefits to non-users)."

The booklet warns: "Subsidies can be especially inefficient where capacity is heavily used, since they can lead to increased overcrowding."

"Subsidising public transport can be justified by net benefits, described by economists as externalities, which it brings to the wider community as distinct from users. Examples are any reduction in road congestion." In other words, if it is merely to save rail travellers some time or to make their journey more comfortable or to persuade people to leave their cars at home, it can't be justified.

Let's hope this booklet is rewritten as soon as possible with some sensible, up-to-date — and fair rules.

## Chunnel guidelines

It will be possible next year to get on a train at Waterloo for a three-hour journey to Paris. Breakfast in London and lunch in Paris will be just one of the possibilities offered by the Channel

Tunnel. RDS meanwhile is working on a new guide *Beyond the Channel Tunnel by Rail* which will help every one of us to make full use of the opportunities.

We have prepared articles on Lille, Tours, Brussels, and the TGV routes to Grenoble and Bordeaux.

Others will cover Rouen, Amiens, Arras, Strasbourg, and Mulhouse as well as lines in the Rhineland, South Limburg, the Netherlands and the Belgian coast.

But we need authors for Cologne - Trier, Amiens - Rouen, Liege - Luxembourg, and a general article on the Black Forest. If you have the knowledge, please contact Trevor Garrod (address back page).

Articles from periodicals might be useful. If you have some, please let me know. We have members who are competent in eight languages.

If you would like to comment on any of the existing drafts, let me know. There is still time for new ideas to be incorporated into the book.

■ RDS Wales has co-operated with Friends of the Earth to produce an environmental transport charter for Cardiff, writes *Julian Langston*.

The charter calls for better public transport, facilities for cyclists and pedestrians, traffic calming and integration of services. The importance of through ticketing is stressed. The charter also calls for an elected passenger transport authority for South Wales.

A report commissioned from Transport and Environment Studies urges investment in the Valleys Lines which are an "asset of great value". Two new links are also suggested at a cost of £25 million, much better value than road building costing £40 million. Copies of the charter (50p) and the report (£8) are available from Chris Gittins, 28 Diana Street, Roath, Cardiff CF2 4ST.

## Spring offers

Special prices (which include post and packing) on a selection of RDS books and railguides.

*Who Should Run Our Railways* (very topical) £1.75, *South West by Rail* £2.60, *Lancs and Cumbria* £2.85, *Yorkshire* £2.85, *Wales and Marches* £2.60, *A Ticket to Europe* (BR's continental ticketing) £2.30.

A free copy of *Bustitution: Why Bus Can't Replace Train* will be sent to everyone who orders before 30 April.

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

## Addicted to cars

During the past 18 months, I have written to 16 places of interest which profess to safeguard our heritage, but which, in their promotional leaflets, omit details of how to get there by public transport.

Some positive response has ensued — but only a little. Surely conservation is about how you live? Campaigners have warned about excessive drinking and smoking, but what about this addiction to the car?

Environment groups should ask themselves: How much do we use public transport? Shouldn't using public transport be a basic component of good citizenship?

*G S Angell 11 Franchise Street Kidderminster*

## What kind of service is this?

It is right to emphasise the need for minimum service standards at stations. If British Rail could show that these standards would not be lowered, perhaps they should then have the freedom to close any line they wish?

An example might be the line south of Yeovil Pen Mill, which would close if services were diverted to run via Yeovil Junction and the proposed South Chord. This would be trading absolute protection of a particular section of line for protection and overall improvement of service.

If this had happened 25 years ago, a line such as Taunton to Barnstaple would only have closed with the provision of greatly enhanced services and connections via Exeter.

Today in the case of Stockport to Stalybridge the diversion of Huddersfield line trains to Piccadilly has removed the original role of linking across to the lines to the south. Here only the minimum requirements of Reddish South and Denton would keep Stockport to Guide Bridge open.

However, it is Guide Bridge to Stalybridge where the greatest problem lies and I assume even the last remaining trains can be withdrawn. No closure notice is necessary as the line is used by non-stop Manchester to Leeds trains.

Minimum service standards would ensure that some of them stopped at Guide Bridge to allow the possibility of journeys such as Glossop to Huddersfield without a nine mile round trip into Manchester.

*Gerard Duddridge 38 Haldon Road Exeter*

## Round the bend

Rebuilding Leighton Buzzard station will benefit commuters but it is nevertheless extremely depressing and short-sighted — without making any attempt to ease the sharp curve.

The ride through there and many other sharp curves on the West Coast main line (Wolverton and Atherstone et cetera) currently varies from the uncomfortable to the almost frightening. It is also potentially dangerous for elderly people en route to the toilet or buffet. The severe sideways lurching must add to wear on coach bearings and track.

We need to know, and urgently, if the promise of faster journeys on this route will be prefaced by a really radical programme of curve easing. The line needs real, not cosmetic, upgrading.

*J B Davis 41 Fairmead Avenue Harpenden Herts*

## The case for reopening

I think RDS is not being as effective as it could be in the fight for rail. The society seems to have its priorities badly wrong, in particular, the apparent obsession with electrification irritates me.

RDS Wales recently announced a major campaign for the wires to go up on the North Wales coast main line. While this is a worthwhile scheme, I believe there are far better things to spend the money on. Rail travellers in North Wales have InterCity 125s and new class 158s. Other rail users in Wales are not so fortunate. Indeed many people have no rail service whatever and the £60 million

that electrification in north Wales would cost, could go towards many worthwhile reopening schemes.

It is important to work for reopenings as every day brings new threats to former railway alignments from roads and other developments.

People are much more likely to get involved in campaigns for local reopenings than grand schemes involving main lines. We must increase our membership to become more effective.

Finally if there are any RDS members attending the Polytechnic of Wales who would like to assist me in lobbying within the Poly, please get in touch.

*LA Sewell 3 Penmain Street Porth Mid Glam*

## Bigg mistake

What on earth did RDS treasurer David Bigg think he would achieve by appearing on Ring My Bell (Channel 4 December 6) with a drag act, a trans-sexual, an extreme Communist and a "far out" musician?

Did David mention the RDS at all when he was on camera? Perhaps it is better if he did not! I did not see all of it. This programme is not to be taken seriously, so how can any rail pressure group representative be taken seriously if he appears on it?

Incidentally, as a true Scot, I think RDS (Scotland) should become a completely separate group. Much of what I read in Railwatch is not of much interest to the Scottish membership. Perhaps that's why in the December 1991 issue there was not one letter from Scotland.

The tone of this letter may sound bitter but I'm only reflecting the views of most of the Scottish population who are sick and tired of the South East of England being given everything while we are supposed to be grateful for two-car 158s on prestige routes such as Edinburgh - Perth et cetera.

*Yours rather disgruntled*

*James Howison 11 Glen Road Shotts Strathclyde*

**David Bigg comments:** I have no regrets about appearing on this programme. Surprisingly it is watched by a large number of MPs and a generation which rarely hears the rail point of view. The discussions raised were all of a serious nature and with over 300 people wanting to talk to me, it appears to have caught the public imagination even at that ungodly hour. As a result, I had a meeting with Social Services Minister Tony Newton to discuss the 25 per cent disabled people's fare increase. Also I am donating part of the fee to RDS funds. Incidentally I shall be talking to RDS Scotland on 11 April in Edinburgh.

**The editor comments:** Contributions from Scotland are always welcome.

## Unfair burdens

Throughout the UK there are many structures along disused railway lines which still have to be maintained by BR. For example, across the end of my garden, there is a bridge carrying the A674 road over the old Chorley - Blackburn railway line which was lifted in 1966.

There are numerous similar examples: not only of road bridges but stone viaducts (many even "listed"), sea walls, et cetera. Why does BR management not point this out to the general public and politicians? Are they so frightened of losing their jobs if they do mention them?

Now to a different subject, privatisation. If, God forbid, this Government is returned to Parliament at the next general election and puts BR up for sale, perhaps RDS and Transport 2000 should lobby SNCF, SNCB, DB and the other keenly run railways to form a consortium to buy it!

*Don Fifer Withnell Station Abbey Village Chorley*

## InterCity correction

I expect I will not be alone in pointing out the

error in Railwatch 50. Shrewsbury does not have 28 direct trains to Euston per day. It has six, Monday to Friday, and five on Saturdays. All other journeys require a change in either Wolverhampton or Birmingham.

BR intended to withdraw all of these but has since admitted that there is a need for the early morning Shrewsbury to Euston (it leaves at 0706 in the present timetable) and for one early evening train from Euston to Shrewsbury. These two trains will continue in the new timetable to be issued in May 1992.

*David Peters 11 Barnfield Crescent Wellington*

## My apologies (editor)

### Local action

National campaigns for an improved railway depend for their success on persuading politicians to allocate the necessary funds, and politicians are very aware of the value of votes, so is this not a good time to launch a drive for new members (voters) for RDS?

The increased membership should be sought from the travelling general public and not just from railway enthusiasts, with publicity material stating briefly the aims of the society and where to get information about joining.

Rear window car stickers might also be effective. Most rail travellers, while interested in national campaigns such as the one for the extension of the east coast main line electrification beyond Edinburgh, are much more concerned about if standard of service on their local route and public support for the work of RDS could be greatly increased by the establishment of local action or user groups throughout the country similar to those for Yorkshire mentioned on page 7 of the October Railwatch.

Such groups could be established by the various regional branches from members familiar with each of the routes in an area and could regularly monitor matters such as timekeeping, cancellations, station facilities, local availability of railway information, et cetera, which if unsatisfactory do not necessarily involve BR in major expenditure but rather in the more efficient use of existing resources.

They could work in association with local community and district councils and might even be able to do something about the problems of unmanned or partly manned stations.

*J H Brown 11 Loch Drive Helensburgh G84 8PY*

## Another missing link

Not many years ago there was a missing link between Farringdon and Blackfriars. Eventually BR invested a relatively small sum of money to open Snow Hill tunnel and launch Thameslink, which has been a phenomenal success, raising much needed revenue for Network SouthEast.

A Thameslink mark two could be created by spending fairly small sums of money on the line between Willesden Junction and Clapham Junction.

Stage one: The present Kensington Olympia - Clapham Junction shuttle could be extended and run as a half-hourly service all day on Mondays to Saturdays. This would require at most two extra train crews.

Stage two: The line is to be electrified for Channel Tunnel train traffic. NSE could sponsor electrification of the gaps and any signalling changes for a few million pounds. Then an electric service could be run, using class 456, 313 or 319 units, depending on whether 25 kV or 750 DC is adopted.

Stage three: Through services could be developed, such as St Albans Abbey to Guildford via the Hounslow loop, Milton Keynes to Gillingham via Swanley or Windsor and Eton Riverside to North Woolwich via Barnes and the North London Line to name just a few.

*Nigel Perkins 76 Roxborough Road Harrow*

# A short cut to Birmingham

By DAVID REES

Travelling home in the evening rush hour, my Central line Tube train goes through Hanger Lane. On one side, traffic on the A40 is often at a standstill, while on the other, BR's double track main line is usually completely devoid of trains.

The line from Paddington via High Wycombe was built in 1910 to relieve the Metropolitan Railway but also to give the Great Western the shortest route from London to Birmingham.

It has declined to the situation where there is only one express train in the morning from Paddington to Banbury, and one in the evening. These will soon cease too.

Leaving London at 0543, it is possible to be in Birmingham at 0943, as long as you are prepared to wait 72 minutes at Banbury for a "connection".

The service cuts may have seemed right 30 years ago but the situation has changed dramatically from the 1960s. Now Network SouthEast and the Tube trains are overcrowded to an alarming extent, and InterCity services are full on the southern section of the Euston line.

The contrast between road and rail is to be seen everywhere. For instance, a six-lane motorway beside a singled railway.

The High Wycombe route has been destroyed piecemeal. Station loops at Denham, Beaconsfield, Gerrards Cross and High Wycombe have been removed. The line has been singled between Greenford and Ruislip and between Princes Risborough and Aynho.

Just how much money has been saved by all this? Can it really be worth it for such a loss of flexibility?

Other than the express, the only service on the line is the diesel multiple unit service from Marylebone which is slow and uncomfortable.

BR seems to have given up the challenge, just when London's Crossrail, the Channel Tunnel and development in the Banbury and Bicester area offer such promise.

Land should not be disposed of and the under-used section of line between Paddington and Northolt Junction should be revitalised. The BBC is opening its new headquarters building at White City which should generate extra traffic.

After years of neglect, BR is doing *something*. The new 1650 Turbo diesel multiple units must bring some improvement and there is a new signalling system at Marylebone (which does not cover Paddington to Northolt junction).

From May, it is likely that a small number of Chiltern line trains will be extended to Stratford upon Avon, at last giving Britain's second most popular tourist spot a direct service from London.

But most people in Ruislip, Gerrards Cross, Beaconsfield and High Wycombe do not even know there is a rail route to the Midlands from their towns. A whole generation has grown up and thousands have moved into the area since the 1960s.

Bicester will have grown from a population of 5,521 (in 1961) to 30,000 by the year 2000. Banbury has already grown by 11 per cent.

I would like to see a regular limited stop service from Paddington to Birmingham, using the new 165 Turbos, Regional's 158s or even InterCity 125s cascaded from other routes.

Birmingham gives good opportunities to connect with trains to many other parts of Britain but some services could continue to Manchester or even to Aberystwyth.

With only 7,000 passengers arriving at Marylebone each day, the two Chiltern Line routes are the most under-used commuter lines to London.

The areas served are fairly affluent and there would be little resistance to higher fares. British Airways is opening its new headquarters at South



**A new Turbo diesel at Marylebone: The start of something good?**

Ruislip. The Turbo trains from Marylebone to High Wycombe, Bicester and Banbury will improve matters and some will run non-stop between High Wycombe and Marylebone but they have a top speed of only 75 mph and follow the circuitous route — to Marylebone, rather than Paddington.

There is a good case for some new local trains from Paddington to West Ruislip, Gerrards Cross and High Wycombe to serve the BBC, British Airways and other destinations.

It is also necessary to improve the abysmal connections with the Tube. South Ruislip is better than West Ruislip.

To make use of the Crossrail potential the line from Paddington to High Wycombe or even throughout would have to be electrified.

*The Channel Tunnel:* Continental freight could travel via Old Oak Common to Northolt junction, through High Wycombe and, via a rebuilt Ashendon junction, on to a re-constructed Great Central.

In the 1950s and 1960s, railway closures were widespread and it was generally considered that

the future lay with the car and lorry. Few anticipated the effect this would have on the environment. We do not have that excuse of ignorance today. As taxpayers we have a right to expect investment in a safe, environmentally sound transport system — rail — that can and should carry more traffic in this important corridor.

I call upon BR to draw up an investment plan for the development of this route and to seek ideas and financial input from the Government, local authorities and commerce and industry.

BR threw away its shortest route to Oxford when it closed the Princes Risborough to Oxford line. Are we going to let the same thing happen to the short route to Birmingham? Future generations will look back in disbelief at the apathy and downright stupidity of such lack of foresight.

■ David Rees lives at Gerrards Cross and comes from a railway family. He works for the BBC but has maintained a life-long interest in all aspects of railways. He has been a member of RDS for five years.

## This way please

Thames Valley branch of the RDS was keen not to be identified with Mr Rees's report but asked him to circulate it as a discussion paper, writes *Thames Valley branch secretary Martin Smith*.

Our view is that the completion this year of the M40 motorway, closely following the route of the former Great Western main line from London to Birmingham, presented British Rail with a major challenge.

The present Network SouthEast service to Banbury with its atrocious connections to Birmingham cannot compete. The Thames Valley branch does not believe that the introduction of InterCity trains between Paddington and Birmingham via High Wycombe would be the right response.

We fully support the planned introduction of a two-hourly service of Turbo Trains between Marylebone and Birmingham Snow Hill which will, we believe, meet the need by providing a fast journey direct from Chiltern Line stations to Birmingham. The romantics who hark back to the "good old days" forget that very few express trains actually stopped at High Wycombe.

To ensure the success of the planned Marylebone -

Birmingham service, it is essential that an additional passing loop should be constructed at Ashendon, to break up the long single track section between Princes Risborough and Bicester North. We do not believe that a reliable service can otherwise be guaranteed.

British Rail has its own plans using Turbo diesel units.

In May, a new NSE service, operated by Turbos, is to be introduced from Marylebone to Banbury, the NSE border.

In May next year, Regional Railways plans to introduce a once-every-two-hours Birmingham Snow Hill to Marylebone service with Turbos.

Also in May next year, Regional Railways is to extend the Great Malvern - Oxford service to Paddington, again with Turbos.

Regional Railways has also "looked at" the possibility of a service from London to Aberystwyth via Birmingham with Turbos but its chances will depend partly on how successful the Marylebone to Snow Hill service proves.

# Lesson in absurdity

A visit by Public Transport Minister Roger Freeman in January to the "worst rail line in Europe" prompted hopes that a £25 million improvement scheme was at least being considered. Campaigners say relaying seven miles of track between Uckfield and Lewes, coupled with electrification from Oxted would have a magical effect — creating a third route from London to the Sussex coast.

Mr Freeman gave this reassurance: "We are in the business of reopening railway lines, not closing them." But he admitted that BR had lost 10 per cent of its business because of the recession. He warned: "BR is responsible for the railway. It would be silly of me to say that the Uckfield line must come before others."

Brian Hart, director of the Wealden Line Campaign, commented: "It is only this Government's absurd rules which prevent the line from opening." More information from PO Box 645, Uckfield, TN22 5BZ.

**Motorway madness:** The Government is spending £2.8 billion to widen the M25 around London. In London's Docklands, it is spending £240 million to build one mile of road. But it "can't afford" to invest in rail.

**Motorway madness:** Deaths on motorways in Britain added up to 1,000 in 1989. These are the very roads the Department of Transport justified building — on safety grounds.

**Going with the Grain:** The Government has contributed nearly £2 million (in section 8 grant) to create a new £4 million rail terminal for the Thamesport container depot on the Isle of Grain, Kent.

**Cross links:** There is a good case for reopening to passengers the freight-only line between Oxford and Bletchley, according to a report by the South East Regional Planning Conference. Serplan's Rail Strategy for the South East calls for better cross-London services, like Thameslink, and suggests safeguarding routes.

**Carbon weighting:** Road freight produces 110 grammes of carbon dioxide per net tonne kilometre, compared to rail freight's 35 grammes. Source: Future Rail. BRB 1991.

RDS lottery winners for November: R Neville, Cardiff £36.60, D Bushell, Leeds £22.88, D McCutcheon, Portsmouth £13.73, J Rustrick, Whitehaven £9.15, P Ralph, Leeds £4.57, D Harvey, Lincoln £4.57.

December: C Burton, Cambridge £37.20, H White, Bant Green £23.25, B Hastings, Scunthorpe £13.45, A Lambert, Falmouth £9.30, R Cummings, Cheadle Hulme £4.65, K Burton, Theford £4.65.

January: G Heathcock, Cambridge £38, S Clarke, Birmingham £23.75, P Hutchinson, Oxted £14.25, M Rogers, Stoke £9.50, P Keeplin, Wisbech £4.75, J Savage, Luton £4.75.

If you would like to join the lottery, write to Dave Finch, 28 Neville Avenue, Kidderminster, Worcs DY11 7AL.

**Video:** We are renewing our attempts to make a video promoting our railguides. If you can help in any way, including sponsorship, contact David Pitt, 50 Riverside, Cambridge CB5 8HN.

**ALARM UK** is the Alliance Against Road Building a network for activists fighting road schemes. They have a resource pack with briefings on pollution, campaigning, environment impact assessment and other topics. Most are free to members. Membership is £5 a year. Alarm wants to encourage people out of their cars on to their feet, bikes and public transport. Information from John Stuart, 13 Stockwell Road, London SW9.

**British Rail's attempt to close the Castleford - Milford junction line without the legally necessary advertising has been described by Yorkshire RDS president James Towler as "contemptible disregard for the law".**

RDS president Michael Caton has written to British Rail highlighting the disappointing scale of development proposed in its 10-year Future Rail plan. He called for increased public investment to achieve a

## NEWSWATCH

substantial increase in rail use. He highlighted the lack of good InterCity services north from Leicester to Leeds and Scotland and the recent enforced transfer of hazardous traffic from rail to road because of the closure of Speedlink. More than 50,000 tonnes of resin a year has been forced on to the roads around Duxford, Cambridgeshire, even after public money was paid out 10 years ago for a new rail siding. Around Swansea, 20,000 tonnes of sulphuric acid is now on the road after formerly going by rail.

**Cricketer commentator John Arlott who was a vice president of RDS for 20 years has died. He first became actively involved with us — fighting the closure of the Alton to Winchester line which partly survives to this day as the "Watercress Line" from Alton to Alresford.**

RDS leaflets are available from publicity officer Roland White (address back page). Send an s.a.e. for a list or for specific items like What the Sun did not Print or Keep the Network Together.

**RDS chairman Steve Wilkinson wrote to the Prime Minister in December calling for £3 billion of the cash allocated for road building to be diverted to rail investment.**

**Road to nowhere:** Catalytic converters are being fitted to car exhausts to reduce nitrogen dioxide emissions. Any reduction achieved will be cancelled out by the expected growth of car numbers by 2020. At 13 of 14 monitoring points in Edinburgh, nitrogen dioxide levels exceed European Commission guidelines. Other British cities which do not report pollution levels are likely to be worse. Does your town or city admit how bad it is?

**More trains please: Improved frequencies on BR and a park-and-ride scheme based on a reopened Salford station are recommended in the Bristol Integrated Transport and Environmental Study. Rail has a "significant role to play".**

**Land bridge:** Hopes of Liverpool becoming the land bridge for transatlantic traffic for Europe was boosted by plans for a new through rail service between the "free" ports of Liverpool and Budapest.

**Cheering news: Hansa beer from Bergen is being taken 250 miles by rail to Oslo in bimodal trailers which are used for final delivery by road. The bogie stays on the rails with this Kombitrailer system unlike the system used by Charterrail.**

**Speed limits save lives:** If pedestrians are hit by a car at 40 mph, most are killed. At 30 mph, half are killed, with many seriously injured. At 20 mph, few are killed. Most injuries are slight. Source: Cycle Touring and Campaigning 12.91

**Campus fools: Nottingham University has 2,000 car parking spaces and two proper cycle racks.**

Asthma and bronchitis are on the increase among children in Greenwich, Lambeth, Camberwell, Lewisham and Southwark because of car pollution.

# Back 1

By ROGER SKILTON

Passenger services are to be restored to one of Britain's oldest lines following the Government's decision to back the Ivanhoe line.

Sixteen stations will be opened including four on the Swannington to Desford section built by George Stephenson in 1833.

Work will start this year on the £16 million project which has been promoted enthusiastically by Leicestershire County Council since 1988.

The three-year scheme will give far-reaching benefits to the region and is outstanding value for money compared to anti-social road building.

The Ivanhoe line is named after Sir Walter Scott's novel, set in Ashby-de-la-Zouch, which will now get a station again.

People will be able to enjoy a local train service between Leicester and Burton-on-Trent for the first time since 1964. There will be an hourly Monday to Saturday service with extras in the peak.

New stations will be built in the Leicester area at Bede Island, Rancliffe Crescent, Park Rise and Forest East. Stations at Kirby Muxloe, Desford, Bagworth, Coalville, Swannington and Ashby-de-la-Zouch, Moira and Castle Gresford will reopen.

A north curve may be reinstated at Knighton junction.

A new station will open on the Birmingham - Derby line at Willington, Derbyshire, not far from Toyota's new factory at Burnaston.

The scheme will also mean a local service on the Midland main line between Leicester and Loughborough with reopened stations at Barrow-on-Soar, Sileby and Syston. This is likely to be the first phase with the overall scheme being completed in 1995.

Transport Secretary Malcolm Rifkind claimed in January it was "another demonstration of the Government's faith in rail as a means of transport".

The Government is providing £5 million in section 56 grant. It has also given the county council permission to borrow £10 million and raise the remaining £1 million from the private sector.

North Midlands branch believes the planned service could be extended to Derby which would give a direct link from Long Eaton to Leicester — and better connections to London.

BR has appointed a full-time project manager to handle this scheme and the Robin Hood line in Nottinghamshire.

The first stage of the Robin Hood scheme sees the reopening next year of the line from Nottingham to Newstead with Mansfield being served by 1996. The full half-hourly service will be in operation by 1998.

Pressure is growing throughout Britain for more reopenings. Wiltshire County Council has recently set aside £300,000 to reopen and improve existing services.

In Wales the £3 million plan for an hourly Pacer service between Cardiff and Maesteg is expected to come to fruition in 1992.

In Scotland, agreement has been reached for the reopening of Stirling to Alloa in 1994.

## Time to confer

RDS has been successful over the years in highlighting the need to reopen stations, giving more people the opportunity to travel by train.

To focus more attention on the problems — and advantages — the society has organised a

## Cut-price summer advertising rates for Railwatch

Display: Full page £150 Half page £75 One third £50 One sixth £25

Small ads: 20p per word

Copy to the editor by 30 April

# o the future



Reopening favourite: The Sprinter

Reopenings Conference to be held at the George Hotel, Nottingham on March 21. Colin Franklin of 109 Curlew Crescent, Bedford MK41 7HY, is organising the bookings. It costs £5 per person (£4 to RDS members). Buffet lunch is extra. Colin may still be able to accommodate late applicants. But hurry!

The question of whether new lines can be built on abandoned lines, or from scratch, will be considered as well as the role of preserved lines and light rapid transit.

The main speaker will be Mr Arthur Cowie, team leader of Nottinghamshire County Council's Robin Hood Line project. The council has done important work in preparing for the reopening of the Nottingham - Mansfield - Worksop line in stages during the 1990s. Mr Cowie will show a video and give a talk, followed by questions and a discussion.

In the afternoon there will be a presentation on the campaign to reopen the line from Cambridge to St Ives which involves using a freight-only line and laying a stretch of new track.

## Reopening read

A new bumper edition of the best-seller A - Z of Rail Reopenings is being published by RDS to coincide with the conference. The 100-page book with 16 pictures has been compiled by Alan Bevan. It is available at a special price of £4.50 (post free) if ordered before 30 April. Order yours now from RDS sales officer, 139 Harrowdene Gardens, Teddington, Middx TW11 1RQ.

**Drawing ahead:** Any reopening campaign costs lots of money. The society's general funds can help and the branches do all they can to raise money.

This year the proceeds from our national draw are to be devoted to the reopenings campaign. Branches will benefit and the society depends on them, as well as individual members, to make the draw a big success.

We enclose draw tickets with this despatch and hope members will be able to sell them — and come back for more.

We know some members object to receiving them and we ask them to accept our apologies. It has not been practicable for the computer and voluntary helpers to operate an effective exclusion system.

**Best:** Templecombe, Somerset, which reopened in

1983 has won the £1,000 Best Kept Station award for the second year running. Volunteers have helped staff to build a new waiting room and toilet, surface the car park, build an old-style footbridge, and create a garden with sculpture.

## Green line

By NICHOLAS HARVEY

Ninety per cent of people are in favour of reopening their local station according to a survey carried out by the Green party in West Yorkshire.

A similar number want the freight-only Spenn Valley line to be reopened.

Such a move would mean a direct service could be run from Bradford to Wakefield, while also paving the way for Cleckheaton, Liversedge and Heckmondwike to be put back on the railway map.

The survey was conducted among 400 people living in the Thornhill district of Dewsbury.

It also showed that 98 per cent of car drivers would sometimes use the train rather than the car if a service was available.

Huddersfield Green party was one of the organisations which became involved in a two-month campaign to counter a threat to the Huddersfield - Wakefield line.

The threat has now been lifted — after the party leafleted outside the town station, collecting 600 signatures on a petition.

The Greens are planning to continue their campaign to get stations at Thornhill and Horbury reopened as well as the reinstatement of Sunday trains on this, the only line in West Yorkshire without them.

Dewsbury, Batley and Huddersfield Greens are trying to mobilise support for the reopening of the Spenn valley line and bringing trains back to the Huddersfield to Halifax line.

They want the introduction of a circular passenger service, starting in Leeds and running via Bradford, Halifax, Brighouse, Dewsbury and Batley.

The plan is being presented to the Department of Transport as an alternative to building a new dual carriageway or motorway from Wakefield to Brighouse, a road which Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Tories are all calling for.

The £54 million to be spent building 10 miles of motorway from Durkar to Clifton could pay for 54 new Regional Express trains.

Huddersfield Green Party raised more than £800 for the Friends of the Settle to Carlisle Line Association last year by running special trains over the line. It aims to raise over £1,000 this year for railway groups. It is also keen to support RDS.

*Provisional Green Express Trips this year:*

**Sunday 11 April** Barnsley to Carlisle, calling at Penistone, Denby Dale, Shepley, Hanley, Huddersfield, Mirfield, Wakefield Kirkgate. Stops on the Settle Carlisle at Garsdale and Langwathby for walkers, Appleby (two hours), Carlisle (one hour) with a short halt at Ribbleshead on the return. Price £18.50.

**Saturday 16 May** Rochdale to Carlisle, calling at Littleborough, Todmorden, Hebden Bridge, Mytholmroyd, Sowerby Bridge, Mirfield, and Wakefield Kirkgate with stops on the Settle & Carlisle as above. Price £18.

**Saturday 22 August.** Edinburgh Festival. From Barnsley, via Penistone line stations to Edinburgh via the East Coast main line, returning via the Settle to Carlisle. Tickets £22.

*Bookings and more details:* Nick Harvey, 24 Burnsall Court, Reinwood Road, Quarmby, Huddersfield, West Yorkshire HD3 4EE. Tel: 0484 656263.

## LOCAL ACTION

### Scotland

**Warning:** We have warned all the Scottish MPs that we are opposed to any break-up of the network caused by privatisation. We are, however, hoping for some sort of devolution of functions, within the public sector, to ScotRail.

**Fears:** There have been reports that through trains from London to Inverness and Aberdeen would be abandoned and the lines relegated to mere feeder routes, dependent on changes at Edinburgh or Glasgow for trains to London.

**Bizarre:** The possibility of companies like Virgin or Stagecoach running some Anglo-Scottish trains on the same tracks as BR is bizarre. The danger is that they will run fast non-stop trains, creaming off custom from BR which would then struggle to maintain the less lucrative trains serving intermediate stations.

**Off the buses:** The disastrous example of bus deregulation should provide even the keenest privatiser with plenty of examples of how not to run a transport system.

**Short cut:** Trains heading to Stranraer from Carlisle might soon use the Mauchline to Ayr freight line, saving 25 minutes on the existing roundabout route via Kilmarnock.

**Remember Helen:** A memorial seat and plaque is to be put up at East Kilbride station in memory of railway campaigners Jack and Helen Broadbent. Helen was a member of the RDS national executive and also membership secretary of RDS Scotland. *Douglas Smart*

### Midlands

**Snow Hill suffers:** The Government has yet again refused to authorise the £20 million long-standing Birmingham Snow Hill to Smedwick link. Snow Hill, opened in 1987, is only half-used while Stourbridge line travellers endure delays because they are obliged to use grossly congested New Street station. The Government is allowing West Midlands to spend only £5 million in 1992/3, five times less than other authorities. Why are we being penalised? The European Community grant will be lost if the Snow Hill extension is not allowed to start in 1992. We must protest to MPs about Government indifference to this essential rail link.

**InterCity:** The Transport Users Consultative Committee has declined to oppose the loss of InterCity trains to Shrewsbury! Regional Railways is, however, planning to operate an hourly 158 Express train to Birmingham, alternately from Chester and Aberystwyth. Between Birmingham and Euston, there will be a train every 15 minutes in peak hours from May.

**Avoiding line:** Railfreight was planning to close the Nuneaton flyover and avoiding line in February. RDS has objected on the grounds that slow freights weaving across the West Coast main line would delay high-speed InterCity services. We want a full-scale reconsideration, the retention of the flyover and a new chord allowing cross-country trains to stay clear of the main line.

**Property blight:** Railfreight and the Property Board have been trying to get rid of the Ryecroft to Brownhills route while the PTA and Walsall council are hoping to safeguard the corridor for future Metro or BR passenger use. The Property Board claims to have been "unaware" of the various future plans and to have no interest in operational matters!

**Central:** A private consortium is talking about rebuilding the Great Central to create a Berne gauge-plus route from Ruislip to Ashendon junction and then on to Rugby and Leicester.

**Kiddy:** Regional Railways is reportedly considering a Turbo diesel service from Birmingham to Stourbridge, Kidderminster, Worcester and Paddington.

**Cambrian:** The Welsh Office has granted £415,000 to provide 75 mph track on the Shrewsbury - Aberystwyth route.

*Alan Bevan*

# LOCAL ACTION

## East Anglia

**Lift-off:** Many business travellers are switching to Stansted from Heathrow because of the new Express rail link to the Essex airport, according to passenger surveys. Transatlantic flights begin in June with American Airlines starting a once-daily service to Chicago.

**Way forward:** A new discharge pit, sidings and warehouses, provided with the help of Section 8 grants, have opened at the Potter Group freight terminal at Ely. RDS supported the grant application and attended the official opening.

**Stop here:** A temporary station at Chettisham, suggested by RDS to minimise the effects of the temporary closure of Ely station for track improvements, has opened and is very effective.

*Nick Dibben*

**Topping out:** British Rail has said the overall roof on Lowestoft station must be demolished by the end of March because it is unsafe and will cost an estimated £800,000 to repair.

RDS has called for a stay of execution while an independent consultant, commissioned by the local civic society, looks at BR's report and figures. We have also suggested that if a detailed and realistic figure can be produced for the repair work, it may be possible to persuade some outside bodies to share the cost, as happened successfully over repairs and maintenance to the nearby Reedham - Yarmouth line.

Plans for major refurbishment of the station have been shelved for three or four years because of Regional Railways' cash problems. In the meantime, rail users need facilities that are convenient and give protection from the elements.

It is said that the local MP has sought to make political capital out of the issue by claiming that if the railways were privatised, the roof would be saved. The claim is difficult to square with the experience of the town's bus station which a private developer has left devoid of seats or waiting room.

*Trevor Garrod*

## Thames Valley

**New chairman:** National treasurer David Bigg was elected branch chairman to succeed Dr Pat Willmore who stood down after two years in the post.

**Sector gaps:** Problems in expanding Regional Railways in the Mid-West were highlighted for us last year along with the need to bridge gaps between Network SouthEast and Regional Railways, particularly on the lines west of Didcot and Bedwyn, Wilts. The information came in an address by John Chapman and Peter Simmons from the Western England Transport Users Consultative Committee.

**New age:** Turbo trains are being introduced between March and May promising better travel opportunities in the Thames Valley. There will be through trains between stations in east and west Berkshire as well as new trains on the Thames Valley branches and on the Reading - Basingstoke line. The services were discussed in December with Nick Illsley, planning and marketing manager for the Thames and Chiltern area by an RDS delegation which included David Bigg, secretary Martin Smith and press officer Michael Gooder. There seems little prospect of improvement on the Reading - Gatwick line. Neither electrification nor new diesels are being considered. Hopes of extending Network SouthEast services beyond Bedwyn were dashed, apart from one commuter train from Westbury. The meeting was constructive and, we hope, the first of many.

*Martin Smith*

## Wales

**Hearty success:** This summer should see Sunday trains for ramblers again running on the Heart of Wales line between Swansea and Shrewsbury. Support from RDS members is vital to ensure that the service continues. Last year was a great success with 1,700 passengers being carried. Just think how many cars were kept off the roads as a result. The connecting coach service from Llandrindod to

the Elan Valley was excellent thanks to regular driver George of Roy Brown's Coaches from Builth Wells. Stewards from the Heart of Wales Travellers' Association gave out special walk booklets prepared by Dyfed, Powys and Shropshire County Councils to all passengers. The association spent a substantial amount on advertising and promoting the trains.

**Walk on:** Rail Rambles are also taking place on selected Saturdays in the Conwy valley and on the Cambrian main line until May. Experienced guides from the Ramblers Association meet trains at selected stations. All passengers are welcome to join them for a choice of walks by quiet lanes and footpaths through wonderful scenery. Details from County Planning department, Gwynedd County Council, County Offices, Caernarfon LL55 1SH.

**Happy Birthday:** The Barmouth to Pwllheli line celebrates 125 years on Saturday 10 October.

**Promotion:** We are trying to form a promotion group for the Cambrian lines. A public meeting is to be organised in Newtown. If you are interested in the formation of a Cambrian Line Travellers Association please send an s.a.e. to RDS Wales, 25 Dunual Road, Bridgnorth, Shropshire WV16 4NA.

**The way ahead:** The branch has produced a 30-page strategy booklet explaining how rail services in Wales can be improved. It points out that rural rail services must be comfortable and faster if they are to persuade people to leave their cars at home. It is full of excellent ideas, including trying to involve the private railways and manufacturing companies as well as reopening lines and stations and building new links to provide a better overall service. There is also a call for more satellite rail depots, feeding into the regional yards. The booklet is available for £1.20 (post free) from Adrian Fawcett, 5 Ambryn Road, New Inn, Pontypool, Gwent NP4 0NJ.

*Chris Magner*

## Wessex

**All go:** Lobbying by the branch helped to smooth the introduction of improved services with new class 159s on the Waterloo - Exeter line. Work has now started on the new maintenance depot at Salisbury.

**Isle of hope:** Local businesses have approached us to see whether there is a possibility of reopening the Shanklin to Ventnor line — a project for the spring.

**Council cash:** Wiltshire County Council has earmarked £300,000 for investment in new stations and improvements to existing ones. Eastleigh Borough Council has produced a transport strategy. The branch has also made a positive input to a number of studies by Hampshire County Council.

**Roundabout:** A shortage of rolling stock on the Portsmouth - Cardiff service has produced strange sights. An ill-fated bus service replaced trains between Salisbury and Southampton, only to be replaced itself by a loco-hauled two-coach service. To avoid running round at Southampton, the return journey to Salisbury was made via Chandler's Ford, over the freight-only Eastleigh to Romsey line. The branch asked whether this might be made a permanent feature of the timetable. The customer relations officer said the suggestion had been "forwarded to our timetable planning managers". I wonder what that means.

*Peter Argent*

## Sevenside

**Way out:** British Rail is trying to get rid of its responsibilities to viaducts by offering them for sale at nominal prices. It has been refused permission to demolish Royate Hill viaduct in Bristol.

Trains of imported coal travelling from Avonmouth to Didcot will mean that the line between Hallen Marsh Junction and Filton will be doubled — after being singled. On the passenger side, there is a chance that Henbury station might be reopened, and North Filton renovated to allow for a service from Yate to Avonmouth.

*Eric Barbbery*

We have been informed by the chairman of the

West Somerset Railway that its working party, investigating the costs of extending to Taunton, will report in April. Meanwhile an RDS member has also put forward an alternative, or interim, proposal whereby BR might extend some of its local diesel multiple units from Bristol through to Minehead. This is not official RDS policy, but it is an option worth considering.

We welcome the news that Avon County Council has provisionally agreed to finance 75 per cent of the cost of reopening Charfield station, on the border with Gloucestershire. It is also providing £130,000 to lengthen the platforms at Yate. For many years, RDS was active in the campaign to reopen this station.

*Trevor Garrod*

## North West

**Backing the network:** Blackburn borough council has now agreed to give cash towards the running costs of a new regular service between Blackburn and Clitheroe from May 1993. The council was initially reluctant to fund the route even though it was in favour because it objected to community charge payers subsidising the national network. Now it is searching for a site for a North Blackburn station. It is hoped that two trains a day will run on to Hellfield to connect with the Settle - Carlisle line. This summer, a Saturday service of three trains a day will run.

**Dalesrail:** Trains from Stockport and Blackpool will run over the Settle - Carlisle on 3 May, 24 May, 21 June, 19 July, 9 August, 30 August, 20 September and 11 October.

**Merseyrail:** Fares have risen substantially in recent weeks and the branch was worried there might be a fall in patronage, even though fares are cheaper than Manchester's and services far superior.

**Metrolink:** Light rail vehicles (trams), already five months late, should be running between Manchester and Bury by now, and possibly through the city centre. The Manchester - Altrincham section is scheduled for May and Piccadilly station opening for June. In January, potential users were still in the dark about likely fare levels. Replacement buses have taken an hour to do the trip to Altrincham, completed by the old trains in 20 minutes. Not surprisingly people crammed aboard two-car Sprinters to travel via Stockport, only to revert to driving their cars when the service was not strengthened, as suggested by RDS. Will they now be enticed out of their cars on to Metrolink?

*Robert Cummings*

## London and Home Counties

Transport could be a real election issue. Ask your MP and candidates some awkward questions. Cuts in evening and weekend services have already been implemented and have been a great inconvenience.

High commuter fares will lead to increased wage and salary demands and could lead to firms relocating away from London. Now that 1992 has arrived, low-fare cities like Frankfurt and Paris could expand. Increased subsidies are needed to keep both BR and Tube fares at tolerable levels.

**Warning:** The Department of Trade has ruled that travelcard schemes in other parts of the country are cartels, restrict competition and are therefore out of order. Will they be at risk when BR privatisation and bus deregulation come to London?

Tight Treasury rules and a ban on BR raising money in the financial market have starved Network SouthEast of cash. Delays to Colchester line resignalling and Networker trains for Kent are just two of the consequences.

*Howard Thomas*

Only a change of government can now bring the grimy neglected inner-city Westbourne Park BR station back to life. The station near Paddington was expected to shut its doors in March after our "pro-rail" Transport Secretary Malcolm Rifkind approved a plan put forward by BR which has provided an infrequent and badly publicised service and then used declining passenger figures to justify closure. Labour has pledged to halt all threatened closures pending reassessment.

*Graham Larkbey*



## NEWSWATCH

The Government has come under renewed pressure to create a "level playing field" to give public transport a chance to solve traffic problems.

Bus and train solutions should be considered on the same basis as road building. Public Transport Minister Roger Freeman was told in December.

"We want investment rules which currently favour road improvements to be changed so that fair consideration can be given to the potential of better public transport as a way of solving our transport problems," said Derek Bateman.

He was speaking on behalf of 20 authorities from the North West of England who called on the Government to consider practical measures to promote the creation of a properly balanced transport network.

Better bus and rail services, better links to London and Europe and more electrification were needed said the North West Region Annual Consultative Committee.

Mr Freeman promised to consider various suggestions and promised to ask BR to review plans for enlarging the West Coast main line to take continental freight wagons.

BR will also be asked to consider Motorail services through the Channel Tunnel direct from the North West.

"Urgent action is needed on all the issues we raised," said George Slyn, of Lancashire highways and transportation committee.

**Twelve people were detained in hospital after the Severn Tunnel rail crash in December. It was front page news. A public inquiry was ordered in addition to an internal BR one.**

Four army cadets were killed a week later on the M20 near Swanley, Kent. On the same day two people died on the M56 at Runcorn. The road crashes were given a one-paragraph mention in a national newspaper. There will be no inquiry.

**Careless driver Justin Biddle who started a 50-vehicle pile-up on the M4 at Hungerford in which 10 people died was fined £250.**

ScotRail and Grampian Regional Council are considering a local authority-funded commuter service for Aberdeen, starting at Stonehaven and working through the city to Inverurie.

**Geneva is considering a new tramway system with the aim of reducing car use by 40 per cent.**

# Double our money

By LIONEL BOYLETT

A strong membership is essential if RDS is to achieve its aims. The more people we can claim to speak for, the greater the respect we will be given when challenging a rail cut or urging some sort of positive action.

Because the society is almost entirely financed by subscriptions and donations, we need as many people to contribute as possible.

At the moment, we have in excess of 2,000 members although not all pay the full subscription because we have students and senior citizens in our ranks.

The money collected pays for Railwatch and grants to RDS branches, with which they produce their own newsletters and pay other expenses.

Thus at the end of the day, there is only a limited amount of money left for the society's active work. It is up to each and every one of us to do our best to recruit new members. We could double our strength if each member was able to recruit one person.

There is a variety of leaflets containing an entry form, obtainable from publicity officer Roland White (address back page). These can easily be carried in the pocket ready to hand to anyone you meet and who shows interest. If you do not have a

# Goodbye travel centres?

By GRAHAM COLLETT and GEORGE COOPER

In a move which has turned the clock back 20 years, many Network SouthEast travel centres have closed.

In their place, we are getting "inquiry" windows at booking offices which are useful only if there are sufficient staff to operate them. This is a concept reminiscent of the 1960s and earlier.

It seems that, in the march towards the holy grail of financial viability, NSE can no longer afford such "extravagances".

Over the past two years, we have seen centres at Charing Cross, Victoria, London Bridge and Cannon Street closed down in an effort to cut costs.

Even the new Liverpool Street can only manage a poorly advertised "designated information window".

Other casualties include the important tourist centre of Richmond, East Croydon, Dover Priory (hard luck international passengers), Wimbledon, Sutton and Bromley South.

In the case of Bromley South, a spirited local campaign led by the leader of Bromley council succeeded in keeping a reduced service for a while. Then that disappeared.

The excuse might well be financial pressure but this policy adds to the pressure. BR will sell fewer tickets if potential customers cannot find out about trains.

Apart from NSE financial pressures, the travel centres have been the victim of sectorisation.

The centres were originally established as an attempt to provide an overall rail-based service for customers. Even BR uses the word customer now, although it has got a bit carried away with the idea.

The centres offered international tickets, car hire and air tickets as well as providing a general inquiry facility for ALL BR services.

Following sectorisation, NSE reviewed its commitments and decided that it could not afford to continue running them unless other sectors (notably InterCity) were prepared to contribute.

It seems InterCity did not consider it worthwhile making a contribution even though it seemed to be the main beneficiary.

The centres which have remained open appear to

be mainly those where InterCity is "prime user" and is thus willing to bear the cost, for example Euston, King's Cross and St Pancras.

The Regent Street centre survives but only as part of a revamped tourist information centre.

Even at the surviving locations you will be lucky to be offered a seat while you wait (one of the original aims), even if you are elderly, disabled or carrying heavy luggage. So much for progress.

It would be interesting to hear experiences from other parts of the country. And what is Regional Railways policy towards travel centres?

# Ouch!

## The impact of the car

By GILES ANGELL

Have you ever wondered why lamp posts are often sited in the most inconvenient place for people walking along the pavement? Thank the Department of Transport.

The posts were formerly positioned at the roadside but so many drivers crashed into them that the department ordered them to be sited further back from the road — on the pavement.

This is just one of the many examples of how the department has been more determined to save drivers from their own folly, rather than looking after the interests of other road users, like cyclists and pedestrians.

Ever wondered why you never have time to cross comfortably at a pelican crossing? They are designed to keep the traffic flowing.

The farcical local newspaper reporting of "pedestrian in collision with a car" illustrates how the victim is blamed — in the world of the car.

These are some of the things you will discover in a new book by an expert on child pedestrian casualties, Barbara Preston.

In *The Impact of the Motor Car*, she reveals how Britain is lagging behind most developed countries in tackling drink driving and speeding drivers.

She highlights the national discrimination against public transport and the prejudice against rail investment.

The book shows in a fascinating way how the car rules the roost but it remains a master reference work, packed with scholarly information.

Illustrated by ample scientific tables, it is still eminently readable.

The book costs £9.50 from publishers Brefi Press, Plas y Gorwydd, Llanddewi Brefi, Tregaron, Dyfed SY25 6NY.

**Get Across: A new leaflet from the Pedestrians Association explains how to campaign for a pedestrian crossing. Available (with s.a.e.) from Pedestrians Association, 1 Wandsworth Road, London SW8 2XX. You can join the association for £10.**

**30 times wrong:** Britain's Health and Safety Commission has paved the way for more hazardous cargo to go by road after an amazing decision that road is no more dangerous than rail. The German government has meanwhile decided it is wise to transfer more hazardous traffic to rail because it is 30 times safer than road.

## Envelope re-use labels

RDS envelope re-use labels are available with the slogan: For Cleaner Air, Go by Rail.

£1.80 per 100 post free from RDS sales officer, 139 Harrowdene Gardens, Teddington, Middx TW11 0DN. Cheques payable to Railway Development Society.

leaflet handy or do not wish to make a personal approach, please send me the name and address of potential supporters and I will send them a package of information which will include a copy of Railwatch and, if available, a copy of their area newsletter.

You can also help by checking the letters page of your local newspaper including "free sheets", and the national press. If you come across one which is pro-rail or likely to be sympathetic, send me the name and address so I can contact them.

Where full addresses are not given, you can often find them in your local telephone directory.

Society advertising can yield good results but is expensive. If any member is willing to sponsor an advertisement, or a series of them, the society will be grateful — and strengthened. If anyone is willing to do this, please contact the society's advertising officer, Mr Ian McGill, 28 Chichester Park, Westbury, Wiltshire BA13 3AN.

Over the year, I have sent out packets of information to 200 people, out of which, so far, 44 have become members. Details of the others have been sent to the branches who can follow up my first approach.

■ Lionel Boylett is the society's membership promotion officer.

# WESTMINSTER

## Changes in Tunnel?

What changes are to be expected in the area of King's Cross and St Pancras stations after the passing of the King's Cross Railways Bill? It would give London its second opportunity for an international station via the Channel Tunnel, said **Gary Waller** (C, Keighley) on **25 NOVEMBER**. There had been some important developments since the Bill was first debated a year ago.

**Dr Keith Hampson** (C, Leeds North West) said he feared that people in the north of England had been somewhat misled. It had been suggested that the decision to go east of London to Stratford would be detrimental to them; it was vital for freight traffic that King's Cross links were maintained. Mr Waller agreed; it was vital that King's Cross should go ahead. As long as the Bill went through, the King's Cross project would go ahead, regardless of the timing of the link between the Channel Tunnel and London.

**Frank Dobson** (Lab, Holborn and St Pancras) asked whether British Rail had asked consultants whether it would be possible to build a satisfactory station above ground. Mr Waller said he thought there had been no such request by BR. They had considered all options. Needs of international and of domestic travellers dovetailed at King's Cross.

## Link with Euston

BR had decided to have a dedicated high-quality link between the stations, and was examining a number of options effectively to make Euston part of the international terminal complex. Mr Dobson asked how exactly could BR connect Euston and King's Cross stations? They were a long way apart.

Mr Waller replied: "At this stage I cannot say what the link will be. A bus may travel on a dedicated route or on a dedicated track. Interchange by the Euston-King's Cross route link will complement the through international train services that BR plans to run from the North West and the West Midlands to Paris and Brussels."

**Chris Smith** (Lab, Islington South and Finsbury) said a number of factors relating to the King's Cross proposals had changed. He did not believe that BR had got it right. It involved the loss of 83 homes and the displacement of 325 residents, the demolition of four listed buildings, plus the loss of 168 work places and 58 shops. Furthermore the Transport Minister had announced the decision to bring the high speed link from the east via Stratford rather than from the south.

Neither the Government nor BR had said what the status of Stratford station would be. Would it be a major interchange? "If passengers join or leave trains at Stratford, fewer would use the King's Cross interchange than was first expected."

**Norman Muncampbell** (Con, Blackpool North) said that if there is to be a high speed link it must come through King's Cross. "We will be able to have the Stratford complex as well as King's Cross, but this will all cost money. We must also say that money must also come from the Government. We cannot get it from private enterprise and there is no way round that. The truth is that Stratford is no substitute for King's Cross."

**Geoffrey Lofthouse** (Lab, Pontefract and Castleford) said that rail plans for Stratford should be made clear if there are any. "Any passenger facilities at Stratford must not dilute the full development of the King's Cross terminal project as proposed. Some northern areas had been devastated by the decline in the mining industry and hoped to attract alternatives. Their success might depend on the King's Cross development."

**Roger Freeman** (Public Transport Minister) said he agreed with many speakers about the importance of King's Cross and of the links via not only the East and West Coast but also the Midland main line to the north of England.

As to how passengers were to travel between Euston and King's Cross, they would wait to see whether BR had in mind an elevated platform or something at ground level. This did not invalidate the importance of a

brand new station at King's Cross and St Pancras.

He had made it plain that they did not favour a high-speed rail link that terminates at Stratford. "We want the link to run through Stratford, with a station to take trains on to King's Cross. There is no question of passengers being stranded at Stratford, although it is an important interchange, and will become more important as time goes by."

The links were within London - on Crossrail, the Jubilee Line and the Docklands Light Railway.

## Against Stratford

**Peter Snape** (Lab, West Bromwich East) said there were both cross-party support and cross-party opposition to the Bill.

Mr Smith said he thought that Stratford was a suitable alternative terminus. Mr Snape said no, it was inconceivable that through passenger trains could run to Birmingham or other places in the Midlands and the North via Stratford. It was not reasonable to suggest that those who represent constituents north of London should leave a trans-Europe train at Stratford and make their way via the east-west Crossrail to the London terminus from which they wished to continue their journey. **Andrew Rowe** (C, Mid-Kent) said that since the Bill was before the House there had been many changes. First it was lamentable to imagine that the high-speed line would go to Stratford; now it was going to Stratford. "How it will get there is as opaque as it always has been. Nothing is the same as when the Bill was first presented."

**Brian Wilson** (Lab, Canningham North) said he could not accept that for the rest of the country, from now until the year dot, everyone had to struggle across London to Waterloo, which was how things would start, or worse, under the new madness, that everyone would have to struggle out to Stratford. It is anachronistic.

## The key terminal

**William O'Brien** (Lab, Normanton) said the Bill should be accepted by the House because King's Cross would be the key terminal linking the north of England with the Channel Tunnel.

"We would prefer a direct link from the towns of the north straight through to the Channel Tunnel, but that cannot be achieved. The best alternative is the King's Cross terminal."

The development at King's Cross would provide an excellent interchange for passengers from the north and regions beyond London. Given a fair wind, the development could go ahead with minimum

delay. "The Government must be pressed to accept the BR view that the link is needed within the next six or seven years."

**Kenneth Hind** (C, Lancashire West) said he brought the support of the North-West Channel Tunnel Group, a vast range of north-west commercial interests. "We say that the proposed second international passenger terminal at King's Cross is essential to the development of the north-west of England."

If the fast link went through east Kent it should not finish at Stratford, but continue to King's Cross. He looked forward to the arrival of trains from Europe which would stop at King's Cross and continue to Manchester and Liverpool. They would travel on to Glasgow and, he hoped, beyond. The rival proposals for Stratford were unacceptable.

## Tunnel crash

The signalling system regularly used to detect the position of trains under the Severn Tunnel was not working normally when two trains collided at about 10.35am on **7 DECEMBER**.

**Malcolm Rifkind** (Transport Secretary) reported the crash immediately after question time at 3.31pm on **9 DECEMBER**. The 7am Sprinter diesel train from Portsmouth to Cardiff collided with the rear of the 8.30 InterCity 125 train from Paddington to Cardiff. The trains were inside the tunnel about 1¼ miles from the Newport end. BR had said that the impact was less severe than it might have been, since both trains were on the move at the time. Some 90 passengers and the driver of the Portsmouth train were, however, injured. Eight people, including the driver, were kept in hospital. A signalling and axle counter system, used to detect the location of trains in the tunnel, was not working normally at the time.

**Sir John Cope** (Minister of State for Employment) said it was peculiarly frightening to have an accident in a tunnel. That should not obscure the fact that the Severn Tunnel in particular, and the railways in general, had a very good accident record.

Would Mr Rifkind say more about communications? "These days we should expect the drivers of all trains to have two-way communication at all times with the signal box and those in control of the track. Would such communication have helped to avoid the accident?"

Mr Rifkind replied that some 5,000 people died on our roads each year, compared with only 84 on the railways during 1990.

"As for communication, there is no way of knowing whether a cab



# WATCH

radio would have made any difference in this accident. I agree that it is desirable that cab radios should be fitted into locomotives and multiple unit fleets.

"Already some 60 per cent of BR locomotives and multiple unit fleets have some such radio installed. All Regional Railways units will have such radios installed by next June." Roy Hughes (Lab, Newport East) said the Welsh entrance to the tunnel was in his constituency, and that people living there had been worried for some time about safety factors affecting the tunnel. "The accident had been waiting to happen."

## Lighting the tunnel

"I wrote to Sir Bob Reid (BR chairman) over 12 months ago, expressing my constituents' concern. I also tabled an early-day motion, supported by 39 Members, calling for lighting throughout the tunnel and for closed-circuit television."

Those facilities would have helped in evacuating the injured. "The Severn Tunnel is a wonderful structure which has served the travelling public well for over 100 years. It is now badly in need of modernisation."

Mr Rifkind replied that as far as he was aware there had not been any previous accidents in the tunnel. James Hill (C, Southampton Test) said he was gravely worried that a series of accidents seemed to have taken place where trains simply ran into each other. It must be tantamount to neglect of the safety of our railways if we did not spend more and more money on a system that can give early warning.

Aircraft had systems that could locate it exactly so that everyone for several miles around the plane knew where it was. Surely research and development could provide similar high technology which could prevent trains from slamming into each other.

Mr Rifkind agreed that BR needed to use modern technology to further reduce the incidence of accidents. The latest report on railway safety showed a modest reduction in the number of collisions between passenger trains in 1990.

Alex Carlile (Lib, Montgomery) said that this accident, and the collapse of a railway bridge in Wales recently, together with declining standards and quality of service, raised serious questions about the competence of BR's management of the rail network in Wales. Would the Transport Secretary ask the chairman of BR to report as a matter of urgency on the state of BR in Wales and its financing?

Mr Rifkind replied that the resources available for safety had

increased from £140 million to about £200 million for the current year, and were likely to continue at least that level.

Donald Anderson (Lab, Swansea East) asked if the Transport Secretary could confirm that there had been recurrent problems with the signalling at either end of the tunnel as the result of damp; and if the system in case of emergency at a red light was not for the driver to get out of the cab and use a telephone near the tunnel?

"Although that will be remedied by next June, is it not somewhat antiquated to have persisted for so long?"

Mr Rifkind replied that he had agreed there was a failure in the signalling system, which was why an emergency procedure was in operation. Radios were being introduced into all new cabs by next June.

Jan Grist (C, Cardiff Central) asked if it took the emergency services an hour to reach the injured and another hour before the 125 was able to move off? Many people were therefore trapped for a long time. Could not that delay be shortened in any future, but hopefully never to be repeated, accident?

Mr Rifkind said it must have been a frightening experience. One of the reasons for the length of time was that the emergency services went to the inappropriate end of the tunnel and had to be redirected.

Robert Hayward (C, Kingswood) asked if the BR chairman would be urged to look at the position of tunnels further along the line to ensure that precautions similar to those being instituted in the Severn Tunnel would also be made if signalling changes had taken place recently.

Mr Rifkind agreed. "I have told the Railway Inspectorate to look at all the implications that may be relevant to the work being undertaken."

## Vital signalling

Gwyneth Dunwoody (Lab, Crewe and Nantwich) asked if Mr Rifkind would send for the chairman of BR and, exceptionally, offer him enough money to allow him to put into operation an immediate emergency programme for the renewal of signalling systems? "It is clear that signalling is one of the vital factors that, unfortunately, has contributed to several accidents."

Mr Rifkind replied that the signalling in the Severn Tunnel was relatively new. The suggestion inherent in Mrs Dunwoody's question — that the signalling was antiquated — did not seem to be justified.

Robert Adley (C, Christchurch) asked if Mr Rifkind agreed with Sir



John Cope that the crash in the tunnel was frightening, but that the problem was not caused by junctions so one should not associate what happened at Purley, for example, with what happened in the Severn Tunnel.

"Are you familiar with the automatic warning system of the Great Western Railway, which has kept this tunnel and hundreds of miles of railway line safe for years? "We now seem to have a serious problem with some of the new technology. In view of the importance of signalling and telecommunications to the railways, would it not be sensible quietly to contemplate the proposition of an independent inquiry into all the technological changes that are taking place on BR signalling?" On locomotive-hauled trains a flashing red light was used by BR, while on multiple units a static light was used. Was that not a matter that should be rearranged? Surely a flashing red light would be far more visible in a tunnel than a static light.

## Thanks to Mr Adley

Mr Rifkind said he was grateful to Mr Adley and would take his point to the chairman of BR so that it would be taken into account.

John Prescott (Lab, Kingston upon Hull East) said it was three years since the Clapham rail tragedy, caused by faulty signalling and negligence. Further, one heard in recent weeks of a thousand signalling faults on BR, followed by this further terrible accident. He hoped Mr Rifkind would look again at the figures, not looking at them superficially as he had done, to see that in the past five years the incidence of passenger train collisions had increased by 40 per cent over the average for the past 10 years. That was the point that was causing public concern.

Could Mr Rifkind tell us, three years after Clapham, the total cost of implementing the Hidden recommendations to make our system safer? Did he accept that the public wanted to see him and his department using all their energies to ensure the implementation of a safe, reliable railway, instead of producing a White Paper on the privatisation of BR?

Mr Rifkind replied that Mr Prescott had also spoken on the radio of an increasing number of passenger train collisions.

He must know from the recent railway safety report that the total number of significant collisions in 1989 was 85 and in 1990 it was 59.

If that was what Mr Prescott described as an increase, he did not deserve the attention or respect of the House.

## Kent Coast protest

Protests were made by Dame Peggy Fenner (C, Medway) at midnight on 13 DECEMBER against travelling conditions on north Kent lines. Conditions had been monitored for four weeks from mid-October. Almost 50 per cent of trains were late and there were additional speed limits due to deferred track renewals, said the Transport Users' Consultative Committee.

Bob Dunn (C, Dartford), commenting on the conditions, said: "We want apologies sent to our constituents. We want a radical examination of BR's management structure."

Peter Snape (Lab, West Bromwich East) said that nothing was more annoying to passengers than to sit still in a train or wait at a station without being given information. There was a management problem in BR. "Modern communication equipment is not yet installed in many stations, or not used properly."

Roger Freeman (Public Transport Minister) said he had travelled with Roger Gale (C, Thanet North) from Ramsgate at 7.20am to Cannon Street: 90 miles which took about an hour. It was a bumpy ride, and then took one hour and five minutes. The driver had to use the best of his resources.

A White Paper on BR privatisation was being planned in the New Year. Positive proposals were in hand to improve the quality of the service.

"I shall be setting new standards of performance for the Kent coast." On JANUARY 13 Public Transport Minister Roger Freeman apologised for his "injudicious" remarks about cheap and cheerful trains for typists.

Labour Transport spokesman John Prescott outlined Labour policy on JANUARY 14, which includes a review of railway finances, backing for Thameslink 2000 and train leasing, while on the following day the Lords debated the Channel Tunnel and Network SouthEast.

On JANUARY 28, the King's Cross Railways Bill received its third reading in the Commons and now goes on to the Lords. With Chris Smith's wrecking amendments defeated, the Bill was finally approved by 191 votes to seven. It is being sponsored in the Lords by Lord Whitelaw.

**I'd rather be going by train!**

**Railway Development Society**

★ The slogan, left, can be cut out and pasted on to a car window to spread the word that trains are best as a way of getting about Britain. RDS is thinking about ordering a supply of vinyl stickers which could be offered for sale to members. If you have a better slogan, write to the editor.

## We wuz robbed

The cost of travelling by train is now 50 per cent times more expensive in real terms than it was 20 years ago. Then the price of a cheap day return fare from Ruislip to central London roughly equalled the price of a gallon of petrol. Today a cheap day return costs £3.10 while petrol costs £2 a gallon.

The latest fare increases — in January — were double the rate of inflation. They were trumpeted by BR as around seven per cent. As usual with BR, that was partly true. A cheap day return from Bracknell to London, however, increased by 12 per cent. The one-day Travelcard from Bracknell increased by 26 per cent over the year. It is now £6.30 compared to £5 a year ago.

At the same time BR has been trimming back the discounts it gives to old people, families and disabled people.

As a result of these two antisocial policies combined, the senior citizen from Bracknell has experienced a 66 per cent increase in the price of his Travelcard in just one year.

If he chose to travel on the 0924 or the 0944, the real increase would be 152 per cent!

British fare levels compare unfavourably with Europe. A roughly 100-mile London - Birmingham single costs £24.50, compared to £9.60 in France, £11.50 in Switzerland and £13.75 in Germany. A weekly go-anywhere public transport ticket in Paris costs £13. Payroll tax has been increased to 24 per cent to pay for even better public transport.

One of the undoubted problems in Britain is fare evasion. As BR withdraws staff from more stations, the problem is growing. The RDS passenger committee is updating its Missing Fares report. If you have any information, please contact Paul Clark, 69 Glenmere Close, Cambridge CB1 4EF.

The much-vaunted Citizen's Charter of John Major adds to the problems by clobbering BR while leaving its competitors to decide for themselves whether to give compensation for abysmal service.

After delays and cancellations, some bus companies offer "grudging apologies", according to a quick survey by general secretary Trevor Garrod. One did not reply to a complaint, while another gave a full refund.

BR already offers compensation vouchers. If you have personal experience of how BR and its competitors behave in this regard, contact the general secretary.

RDS is also concerned about the spread of BR's penalty fares scheme.

### NEWSWATCH

A total of 122,000 working years of life were lost as a result of road accidents in just one year, 1989. Source: Mortality Statistics: General 1989 OPCS £7.40.

**Scandalous:** The London Borough of Havering spent £200,000 to exempt itself from a law to ban cars from parking on pavements. Instead it gave the go-ahead for parking on pavements in 200 streets.

**False prophets:** False assumptions about journey times and traffic forecasts are used by the Department of Transport to justify road schemes that damage the environment, according to Dr Stephen Atkin in his report for the Wildlife Trusts Transport Campaign (80 York Way, London N1 9AG).

**No cowboys here please:** Common Market bullying has forced Switzerland to let 38-ton lorries in. But the Swiss have insisted only 50 a day will be given access and only if rail capacity is full. The lorries must be carrying perishable goods and must be less than two years old (to minimise pollution and danger).

The British Department of Transport is to spend £95 million (that's your money) in making five miles of the A50 through Stoke-on-Trent more useful for 38-tonne lorries. Pedestrians and cyclists will be less than delighted. That sort of cash could have bought 95 new Regional Express trains, some of which could have been used to beef up the service on the parallel rail line.

**Super:** Construction work has started on the Sheffield supertram system. The first trams should be running by the end of next year.

### ADVERTS

Special train to Peterborough (for Nene Valley Railway) and Spalding (for Flower Festival) on Saturday 2 May from Oxford (7 am), Islip, Bicester Town, Winslow, Fenny Stratford, Woburn Sands and Bedford. Approx fare £16.50. The idea is to promote the potential of the route to assist reopening moves. Details from Chris Wright, 83 Blackmoor Gate, Furzton, Milton Keynes MK4 1DD. Tel: 0908 502473. Oxon and Bucks 1 Action Committee.

Terminal operations conference and exhibition, Genoa, Italy, 16-18 June. Details from Cargo Systems 081 330 3911.

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