

# Railwatch

AN INDEPENDENT VOICE FOR RAIL USERS RAILWAY DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY No 52 JULY 1992 90p

## No mandate for privatisation

By TREVOR GARROD

A survey before the general election showed only 25 per cent of the electorate were in favour of privatising British Rail.

Two days before polling day, the then Secretary of State for Transport Malcolm Rifkind said: "The Conservatives have no proposals to privatise British Rail's passenger services." He did, however, say that parcels and freight would be sold off.

The future of BR did not feature prominently in the Tories' election campaign or indeed in their manifesto. Some candidates did not mention it at all in their election addresses and certain of them made it clear in letters to RDS members that they did not believe in breaking up the network.

What a far cry from the heady days of Paul Channon and Cecil Parkinson, Michael Portillo and John Redwood, trumpeting the need to sell off our only national public transport system. It is also quite a change from the summer of 1991 when Mr Major's Citizen's Charter had privatisation of BR as one of its key points.

The return to power of a Tory Government with the smallest majority for over 40 years may well lead to less extreme policies than we have seen over the last 13 years. At least, it is more difficult for it to claim a mandate by selling off BR bit by bit.

What has been the role of RDS in this process? How should we now proceed?

Since the mid 1980s, we have studied the BR privatisation ideas, initially floated by right-wing bodies like the Adam Smith Institute and later taken on board by mainstream Tory politicians. We expressed our concern that these schemes would not be in the interests of rail users, and questioned the practicability of some of them.

In 1989 we published *Who Should Run Our Railways?* examining in detail the arguments for privatisation and concluding in favour of a national rail network into which the private sector could have input, but warning that privatisation itself was "at least a distraction, probably an irrelevance and potentially a disaster."

Over the past three years, we have issued three new leaflets updating the issue and most of the 20,000 copies of the latest of these, *Don't Break Up British Rail*, were distributed by our members in the seven weeks prior to the general election. Our parliamentary liaison committee also produced a briefing document on rail investment and practically all our branches organised lobbying of candidates, particularly those in marginal constituencies.

Of course, we were not the only ones warning against BR privatisation or spelling out its likely effects. So did the rail unions, Transport 2000 and other pro-public-transport organisations. In fact, I did not come across any knowledgeable or representative body arguing in favour of it. However, as the only independent voluntary body for rail users nationwide, RDS can justifiably claim to have helped to create a climate in which, whatever issues helped the Tory Party wrest



Signal effort: Sponsored riders pause a while at Isfield station

### Sun shines on reopening campaign

The campaign to reopen the railway line from Uckfield to Lewes was given a boost when cyclists rode between the two Sussex towns in brilliant sunshine over the late May bank holiday. The mayor of Uckfield met members of RDS and the Wealden Line Campaign on the platform at Uckfield to give the cyclists a good send-off. Karin Ciewes led the party followed by, among others, general secretary Trevor Garrod and two-year-old Alexander King in a child seat on the back of his mother's bike.

One of the stops on the way out was Isfield station which is a privately owned rail museum on the old line. When the cyclists arrived at Lewes, the town was enjoying a Green Wheels Day, supported by East Sussex County Council, Lewes District Council and the local paper, the *Sussex Express*.

victory from the jaws of defeat, it was not its policy on BR.

Did it indeed have a coherent policy? Some candidates to whom we wrote did not seem to know the official line. They passed our letters to Malcolm Rifkind who replied in largely identical letters like this one of 16 March: "We believe denationalisation of the railway system offers the best way forward for the railway and its customers."

Compare this with the quote from the same Mr Rifkind on 7 April, in the second paragraph of this article.

Mr Rifkind has now been replaced as Secretary of State (not surely because he changed his mind), although Public Transport Minister Roger Freeman remains. We in RDS have enjoyed useful contacts with Mr Freeman who took the unique step for a Government Minister of devoting a whole evening to an RDS seminar last July. We look forward to

a continuing dialogue with him. Meanwhile I have also written to the new Secretary of State John MacGregor listing five key points which we should like to see acted on:

- 1 Resurrect the joint report on electrification issued in 1981 and use it as the basis for a rolling programme.
- 2 Study French and German investment methods, and what we can learn from them.
- 3 Study and publish annual figures for the costs of all forms of transport, so that the rail alternatives to road and air can be fairly put - and be prepared to put money into rail.
- 4 Decide which closed routes could possibly be rebuilt and maintain their integrity so that the options are open to rebuild them in the future.
- 5 Ensure that section 20 grant money to local authorities is ring-fenced to help long-term plans for public transport.

# New face of your society

The annual general meeting of the Railway Development Society in Birmingham on 2 May elected the new national executive unopposed. Three new members join the executive: Ian Murray of Porthcawl, Elisabeth Jordan from Greeting, near Corby and Malcolm Goodall of Eakring, Notts.

The following continue as members of the executive: chairman Steve Wilkinson, vice chairman Ray King, general secretary Trevor Garrod, treasurer David Bigg, membership secretary Frank Hastlow, sales officer Alan Harwood, Alan Bevan, Malcolm Conway, Mike Crowhurst, Trevor Jones, Peter Lawrence, Donald MacPhee and Peter Wakefield.

Chris Borland, Dave Finch and Tony Wiggall did not stand for re-election and were thanked for their work over the past year by the chairman.

At the first national executive meeting after the AGM, the following officers were appointed: publicity Roland White, Railwatch editor Ray King, Press David Pickersgill, computer Trevor Jones, advertising Ian McGill, membership promotion Lionel Boylett, assistant Julian Langston, lottery David Finch, commercial liaison John Saunders, local authority liaison Stuart McNair, student liaison Martin Thorne, road and rail research Peter Hayman, assistant Robert Griffiths, archivist Ray King, photographic Nick Lewis, cycling Malcolm Conway, parcels John Saunders.

The following resolutions were passed at the agm:

RDS welcomes the decision to locate Ashford International station within the existing station. We urge BR and the Government to resolve any remaining problems as soon as possible and proceed urgently with construction.

RDS urges that out-of-town parkway stations should be additional to, and not a replacement for,

city centre stations, which give direct connections with local rail and bus services, as well as access to the city centre.

RDS should campaign for more equitable investment in road and rail. Rail infrastructure costs should be principally the responsibility of the state, cost-benefit analysis methods should be used, there should be a rolling programme of rail investment over five or 10 years as well as road pricing.

RDS urges the constitution of BR as a publicly-owned company with separate infrastructure and operating divisions. This would give BR greater freedom to make commercial investment decisions, and easier access to private and public sources of funds, as well as meeting European Community requirements for transparency in funding of rail infrastructure. It would also assist through working between BR and private railways and possibly certain specialised private operators, especially in the freight sector. RDS remains totally opposed to any break-up of the national network and reminds the Government that BR does not have a monopoly over transport provision.

A resolution calling on BR to adopt new performance and quality policies was approved but will go to the national executive for consideration.

A proposal calling for a £15-a-year teletext service giving details of BR engineering work was rejected.

RDS books will be made available to RDS-affiliated groups on a sale or return basis, up to a limit of £30.

Motorists should pay through taxes for all the medical, policing and associated costs of roads rather than have them subsidised by taxation.



## Trevor Garrod's View

## A charter for fair competition is needed

I was recently telephoned by a journalist who, full of instant synthetic indignation, asked if I did not think it disgraceful that the BR passenger's charter would make it almost impossible for anyone to claim compensation if their train between Norwich and London was late.

I asked her what compensation BR's competitors were offering. There was silence at the other end of the phone. Then she said, almost in disbelief: "What do you mean - competitors? They haven't got any!"

I reminded her that BR competed with various coach operators and with Air UK for passenger business to and from Norwich and suggested she contact them. I then explained RDS policy on this issue: If compensation is to be paid, then it should be paid by all transport operators. A watered-down version of my remarks appeared in her paper the following day.

Over recent months, many people have been so brainwashed about "BR's monopoly" by right-wing politicians that they easily forget that the railways do not have a transport monopoly. Some politicians, and perhaps journalists, have an interest in perpetuating this myth. It is our task, in RDS, to explode it.

I was fascinated to receive a report of a meeting held under the auspices of the Consumer Congress (to which RDS is affiliated), attended by executives from well-respected bus and coach companies. It was suggested to them that public transport operators might offer financial compensation to their customers in the event of delay. They all threw up their hands in horror at the idea. They

were then told that BR provides free taxis for people whose last connection of the day is missed or cancelled. Not one of the bus managers thought this was reasonable and all were surprised to discover that BR did so.

The passenger's charter also commits BR to displaying figures about service punctuality - a practice which, in my experience, it has already observed at certain stations from time to time. Yet I have never seen such statistics displayed at a bus station or airport. Has any other member?

I recently sent the Prime Minister a dossier of successful and unsuccessful attempts by customers to obtain compensation from public transport operators and urged him to extend his Citizen's Charter to all of them. I received a note from an aide saying Mr Major was too busy to deal with this matter.

Our corporate member, the Yeovil and District Rail Action group, received a more sympathetic response from Liberal Democrat leader Paddy Ashdown whom they briefed on the matter.

We also sent the dossier to the Consumers Association (not to be confused with the Consumer Congress), urging them to launch a campaign against bus, coach and airline companies similar to that which they waged against BR in 1990-1. The response has been deafening silence - which merely hardens my determination to work for a level playing field on which BR can compete fairly for its share of the transport market.

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

# Disturbing thoughts after one voter's brief encounter

RDS member Charles Niven took the opportunity to talk to the then Transport Secretary Malcolm Rifkind during the general election campaign in Scotland. Here are his impressions.

After an election meeting in an Edinburgh church hall, I managed to speak very briefly to Mr Rifkind. I asked him about the Tories' plans for the railways. He said there was to be "no privatisation" of BR! However Railfreight would be sold.

He reiterated his belief that more freight should be moved by rail and that passengers should also be encouraged to make more use of rail transport.

He welcomed the news that Stagecoach was to hire coaches with seats for use on InterCity sleeper trains. Apparently Stagecoach believes that InterCity is inefficient in not being able to provide seated accommodation on these trains.

I then asked him what the plans were for general passenger services. These were not to be sold but franchised to private operators. He also promised that railways would no longer be a "bottomless pit" into which taxpayers' money was to be poured. Obviously he didn't consider the thousands of millions of pounds for new roads a drain on our resources!

I did manage to get him to reveal some worrying aspects of his thoughts. He held up the Bathgate line - partly funded by Lothian Regional Council - as a great example of the potential of rail transport.

But when I pointed out that all the proposals for reopening currently being carried out by ScotRail were in conjunction with local authorities, he shook his head and said the policy was that new services had to be brought forward by the private sector.

He left me in a state of disbelief. He speaks very quickly and I had only about three or four minutes to raise these questions as people were trying to "drag him away".

But did he mean that the Alloa branch would not reopen in 1994 as currently planned? What is to become of the Ivanhoe and Robin Hood lines in England? Could an intelligent man really be propounding such contradictions?

Members will now realise what kind of attitudes are prevalent and that the job of lobbying MPs, especially Tories, is only just beginning in earnest as far as privatisation is concerned.

Meanwhile this was one floating voter who did not contribute to Mr Rifkind's increased majority on 9 April.

Since this brief encounter at the hustings, Mr Rifkind has been replaced as Transport Secretary by Mr John MacGregor, another Scotsman.

### 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.

# A return ticket, please!

British Rail failed to help at several critical stages in the long campaign to reopen the Robin Hood line from Nottingham to Mansfield and Worksop.

The 32-mile long scheme to bring back the trains WAS given the go-ahead earlier this year but:

WHEN the idea was first mooted by Nottinghamshire County Council, BR said there was no point in looking at the scheme because Kirkby in Ashfield tunnel was blocked by coal waste. BR persuaded the council to concentrate on investing in another route.

WHEN costs were discussed, BR said it would not be able to contribute financially in any way.

LATER after detailed studies had shown the tunnel could be excavated and was in good condition, the council asked BR - as the experts - to conduct a route development analysis. BR was reluctant to take the idea seriously and so the council went to independent consultants who "saved the project".

NOW BR is involved in the choice of rolling stock. It had suggested "totally unsuitable" Pacers and then was reluctant to release an experimental Sprinter set which was languishing unused in a shed. Notts is considering buying or leasing Sprinter-type trains.

NOW BR is asking a "very, very expensive" £250,000 a year to operate trains on the route.

NOW the whole project could be jeopardised by the BR sector set-up. Passenger trains will not run over the whole route until Trainload Coal gives the go-ahead to a £5 million resignalling scheme for the northern part of the route.

These were just some of the difficulties outlined to the RDS reopenings conference by Nottinghamshire County Council's team leader for the project, Mr Arthur Cowie.

Mr Cowie said the BR project manager who had now been appointed was committed and enthusiastic and was pushing ahead with it.

But he said: "It's still not an easy task for him to deal with the various sectors of BR and then the various county councils and district councils."

There were eight local authorities involved.

Mr Cowie said raising the £10 million needed for the scheme was still a big problem.

"We need to get a section 56 grant from the Government, but that is like asking for the holy grail," he said.

When the last application was made, the Government said in effect: "No money, join the queue, come back next year."

But Mr Cowie was hopeful about obtaining EC grants for regional development and for coal mining areas hit by closures.

The conference saw a professional video about the line called Return Ticket.

In a phased programme, 11 new stations will be built to accommodate three-car trains. Park and ride facilities will be stressed. Reopening is

expected to stimulate development, for instance at Hucknall old colliery site.

The third edition of the RDS book, A - Z of Rail Reopenings, was launched at the conference by editor Alan Bevan. Order yours from Alan Harwood.

RDS president Michael Caton said: "People all round the country are asking for railways. If local people come forward and demand railway investment, the Government will have to take action."

Privatisation could halt the rail renaissance if as predicted, it led to fewer trains, fewer passengers, higher fares and fewer lines, the conference was told.

Ken Davies of RDS explained how there were schemes for BR to run through trains on to

comprehensive East-West rail link from Bristol to East Anglia.

With minimal expenditure (compared to highly expensive and anti-social road building), the link would provide connections with nine main lines.

Its key role, however, would be to give people the chance to travel by rail between East Anglia and the South Midlands for the first time since the 1960s without going through London.

The scheme was outlined by Peter Wakefield on 22 February to about 100 special guests at East Anglian branch's 20th birthday party in Ely.

Mr Wakefield, an RDS national official, said even BR recognised the potential of the route but found it impossible to finance it. The idea is to revive the truncated Oxford - Cambridge rail route with new alignments. There would also be modern 158 Express through trains from Bristol and Swindon to Ipswich, Norwich and Colchester.

Critical expenditure would be in providing a line from Bedford to Sandy, using much of the old trackbed but with new alignments at Blunham and Sandy. Instead of following the old route via Gillingay, the modern trains could go via Huntingdon and a re-opened Cambridge - St Ives line.

All that would be needed then would be to upgrade the freight-only line from Bicester to Bletchley.

Mr Wakefield urged county councils and district councils along the route to get together with British Rail to find ways of bringing the dream into reality. They should set up a working party, learning from the way other councils were putting money into re-

creating key rail routes. He praised local councils' initiative in Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire, South Wales, and Lothian region.

In Strathelyde, campaigners are now hoping to get Cummoock and Mauchline, closed in 1966, re-

## Special offers

All-in prices (including post and packing) for three topical titles

Who Should Run Our Railways? £1.75

Rail for the Future £2.10

Great Railway Conspiracy (paperback) £7.95

A free copy of Bustration: Why Bus Can't Replace Train will be sent to everyone who orders before 31 July

And don't delay, order today, the new enlarged edition of A - Z of Rail Reopenings £5.70 (including post and packing)

Send orders for books or an snc for a sales list to RDS sales officer, 139 Harrowdene Gardens, Teddington, Middx TW11 0DN. Make remittances payable to Railway Development Society.



Another new station takes shape: Pontyclun, near Cardiff, with the 1330 Swansea to York approaching the platform on 29 March. Picture by Rhodri Clark









# Rocks off the road

By GEOFFREY SYER

The absurdity of the Government's lack of commitment to rail and its preference for road is being shown up in a plan specifically aimed at cutting pollution.

To reduce acid rain, four coal-burning power stations in the Midlands are to be fitted with de-sulphurisation equipment.

One of the stations, Ratcliffe on Soar, Notts, will need to receive 300,000 tonnes of limestone every year.

It has yet to be decided whether the limestone will come from Wirksworth or Buxton quarries which are both in Derbyshire and on the edge of the Peak District National Park.

There is a rail link between Wirksworth and Ratcliffe needing only minor attention after years of disuse.

It has been calculated that one train a day would be enough to carry the stone compared with 100 movements by lorry.

Yet amazingly an argument is still going on as to whether the limestone should go by road or rail. Powergen is said to be worried that using rail is more expensive.

But the use of lorries would go far towards negating the whole purpose of the exercise - to reduce pollution.

The Government meanwhile claims it wants to clean up the environment.

The MP for West Derbyshire Patrick McLoughlin was a junior Minister in the Ministry of Transport (and we all know what that means). With magnificent understatement, he is quoted as saying he is "not against road transport".

Since Mr McLoughlin was returned at the general election with an increased majority, the outlook for rail is not good.

However an organisation called Rocks off the Road is fighting the matter and is enquiring about a promise by the old Central Electricity Generating Board (supposedly given before it was privatised) to use rail.

Rocks is receiving support from Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Greens.

Originally 10 power stations were to be fitted with de-sulphurisation equipment. Now it's only four. They are Ratcliffe, Rugeley, Staffs, Drax, Yorkshire and Ferrybridge, Yorkshire.

If you want to contact Rocks off the Road, ring Nigel Giligan on 0629 56347 or Greg Clare on 0629 580607.

● Ratcliffe is the seventh worst power station in Britain for sulphur dioxide emissions, according to Friends of the Earth.



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This is the new book produced by RDS to highlight some of the good news on British Rail. It gives details of which lines and stations have reopened in the recent rail renaissance but it also explains the routes which RDS is fighting to have reopened in the future. For small amounts of money, compared to the vast amounts wasted on roads, really useful links can be put back in place giving people a chance once again to travel by rail. The book is already selling well. Order your copy from RDS sales officer Alan Harwood, 139 Harrowdene Gardens, Teddington, Middx TW11 0DN. It costs £5.70 (including post and packing). Make cheques payable to RDS.