

# Railwatch

AN INDEPENDENT VOICE FOR RAIL USERS

RAILWAY DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY

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## Return to sender

The chorus of criticism accompanying the privatisation proposals has persuaded the Government to make some important concessions to rail users.

RDS can claim credit for alerting people and politicians to the dangers. We delivered a petition urging that the plans were "returned to sender".

The Government has made some concessions but many threats remain and we will be working hard over the coming months to try to remove the worst aspects of this ill-conceived package of proposals.

RDS would prefer the whole scheme to be abandoned and proper public investment to be made in the national rail network.

The Railways Bill descended on Britain in January like a 1950s London smog. The Government's long-running zig-zag route to privatisation has confused even its most ardent supporters.

Passengers were looking to the Bill for clarification and detail after more than seven years of leaks and rumour. No chance!

Its effect however is likely to be the dismantling of Britain's only credible national public transport network for the benefit of the discredited road lobby.

Each time the current privatisation "policy" has been tested, it has been found wanting, but each time the message from Government has been: just wait for our next trick.

**Privatisation is not wanted by passengers or the public at large.**

As the Bill proceeds through Parliament we will join with other groups to try to get it amended.

- There should be a guarantee of NO further line closures. Reopenings and NEW lines must be an essential part of future policy.

- We need a national rail authority to plan for strategic investment, within an overall transport policy, neither of which exist at present.

- There should be increased public funding to improve standards and for strategic investment in major capital projects like Thameslink 2000 and upgrading the West Coast Main Line.

- Freight must have access to the network at MARGINAL COST to encourage the transfer of freight from road to rail and thus to reduce the menace from juggernaut lorries which do not pay for their social and environmental damage.

- Consumer representation for passengers needs to be improved and be made democratic with rail user group involvement. It should cover ALL trains, including any run by private



*RDS delivered a 20,000-name petition to Parliament in February, urging MPs not to approve the Government's rail privatisation plans. National executive member Elisabeth Jordan who co-ordinated compilation of the petition and Midland Main Line campaigner John Armstrong, pictured, delivered the petition to Labour's Peter Snape, a former railway signaller. The RDS team also met Public Transport Minister Roger Freeman who agreed to attend an RDS meeting in order to defend the Government's plans.*

operators. Trains should be run for people, not franchisees.

- BR and passenger transport authorities must be allowed to compete for any franchises. They must not be relegated to the status of "last resort".

- There must be a national timetable available to passengers and covering all services. Good connections, off-peak through ticketing, cross-validity of all tickets, national railcards, facilities for the disabled, luggage and bicycles should all be guaranteed in any new regime.

- British business and industry have been largely critical of the proposed privatisation. Few investors are interested other than property sharks and bus companies intent on creating local monopolies.

The public demands improving and expanding rail services. Write to your MPs and urge them to defend rail users. If we still have a coherent

rail network in five years time, it will be in spite of the Government - and because rail users have fought to maintain it.

The Government's statements have tried to defuse some of the anger by cosy reassurances that there will be a national timetable and there will be aid for moving freight from road to rail.

As we know from experience, these statements cannot be taken at their face value. Miserly Catch 22 clauses have long been used to avoid spending on rail.

And just what sort of timetable is being "promised"? Ministers have been heard saying that existing pocket timetables are sufficient.

The Department of Transport is also still putting out highly dubious claims about rail investment at high levels when investment by BR is set to drop to its lowest level since 1948.

# What you want from RDS

By JULIAN LANGSTON

Nearly one third of the RDS membership returned the questionnaire sent out last September, gaining us interesting and useful feedback of RDS members' thoughts. Thank you to the 742 members who took part in the survey.

So far, just over 100 returns have been analysed, but trends are already emerging. One interesting, but disturbing finding is that only about 10 per cent of the membership is female.

Over 90 per cent not surprisingly think rail development important and 83 per cent are interested in the environment. More than half also have an interest in rail preservation.

If the British electorate were made up entirely of RDS members, Parliament would look very different. Assuming proportional representation, the Liberal Democrats would top the bill with 282 MPs. Labour come second with 164, and the Green Party would hold 99 seats. The Tories would have 66; the Scottish and Welsh Nationalists would hold 21 between them. A similar number go to other parties.

RDS members also buck the national newspaper readership trends with over half reading either the Guardian or the Independent.

Disintegration of the rail network is members'

greatest worry, but fighting rail cuts and promoting greater use of rail are also thought important campaigns.

The channel tunnel high speed rail link comes low down the list, with some members arguing against the scheme. Practical work (tidying stations) is considered the least important campaign.

Many people believe RDS should make greater use of the media to carry out campaigns.

Most people think the balance and readability of Railwatch to be about right.

Some suggestions made in the questionnaire: Central Government cannot be persuaded by the merits of rail transport so we must raise "rail consciousness" among the general public; indoctrination courses for Tory MPs in the benefits of rail (spoken by a Tory!); making BR management a lot more efficient and less top heavy; making management more aggressive in its attitude toward the present government i.e. demanding decisions on channel tunnel links and investment; RDS should have one address and redirect mail as necessary - this is much more professional.

● The £10 draw, entered by returning the questionnaire was won by J. Cressey of Barnetby, South Humberside.

# Cycle appeal

RDS members will take part in another sponsored cycle ride this year to highlight the need for a railway station to be reopened there. They will ride to Wilton which was once the county town of Wiltshire and until the 1950s boasted two rail lines and two stations.

The cyclists will raise cash - through sponsorship - for the Rail Defence Fund which helps fight cuts and closures. Each person will donate 50 per cent of the money raised to the fund and 50 per cent to a campaign of their choice.

If you would like to sponsor one of them, please complete the form below and return to the rider concerned. If you would like a larger form to encourage others to sponsor, please tick the box. If you want to take part by cycling the 10 miles, please contact Trevor Garrod at 15 Clapham Road, Lowestoft, Suffolk NR32 1RQ.

To:

I am willing to sponsor you at \_\_\_\_ p per mile or with the fixed sum of £ \_\_\_\_

Please send me a large form

My name.....

My address.....

The riders: Trevor Garrod, address above, cancer research. Ray King, 4 Christchurch Square, London E9 7HU, National Asthma Campaign. Clara Zilahi, 31 Wimbotsham Road, Downham Market, Norfolk PE38 9PE, St Ives feasibility study. David Greeno, 37 Rectory Road, Farnborough, Hants GU14 7BT, coronary and artery disease research. Robert Martinez, Flat 1, 131 York Road, Woking GU22 7XR, all for Rail Defence Fund. Richard Hill, 4 Rowlandson Way, Manton Heights, Bedford MK41 7LT, East-West rail links campaign. Len Hodgkinson, Little Meadow, 40 Ainsworth Avenue, Ovingdean, Brighton BN2 7BG, Royal Alexandra Children's Hospital Appeal. Peter Atkinson, 7 Orange Grove, Whickham, Tyne and Wear NE16 4TA, research into cot deaths.

TREVOR  
GARROD'S  
VIEW



Steaming  
in right  
direction

As I walked into the door at a meeting where I was representing RDS, the chairman announced: "Aha, Mr Puff-Puff himself!"

It was 14 years ago - and thankfully that sort of thing rarely happens nowadays. We have firmly established RDS as a consumer organisation concerned with the modern railway and the people who use it.

The media people who once reported our activities with headlines like "Rail buffs get steamed up", now refer to us more accurately as the leading pro-rail pressure group.

Nevertheless we do take an interest in those steam railways which have actual or potential links to British Rail lines and can therefore play a role as part of the national network.

For example, we have over many years put the case for through trains between BR and the West Somerset Railway.

We support the Great Eastern Railway Co (1989) in its efforts to reopen the Dereham branch and even hold shares in the company.

There is a potential for a diesel commuter service between Dereham and Norwich as well as tourist steam trains on the branch.

Commuter services should qualify for Government or local authority grant.

Last year I travelled on the Bluebell Railway on the spring bank holiday weekend and saw large numbers of cars that had picked their way through the Sussex lanes to bring the many visitors.

If and when this line is reinstated to East Grinstead, BR will benefit because customers from the London direction will be able to visit the Bluebell using trains all the way. Other BR routes such as Norwich - Sheringham and

Middlesbrough - Whitby already benefit from having a steam tourist line connecting with them. In some cases though, more could be done to promote this fact.

One of the more recently established lines is the Bodmin and Wenford Railway in Cornwall. It is also a corporate member of RDS and I was pleased to learn of its "phenomenally successful" 1992 season, with passenger revenue up 70 per cent on the previous year.

Here is another line with potential for all-year traffic as well as tourism. It also operated a successful weekly freight train for Fitzgerald Lighting Ltd. for nearly three years until 11 December.

The end of this service was due to the problems affecting many other freight links around the country. Fortunately the company has announced that it will actively pursue any realistic method of getting its traffic back on the rails in future.

There is a limit to the number of preserved lines which could be operated in Great Britain. Some lines running from nowhere to nowhere, remote from the main network, are unlikely to play a serious transport role.

But there is plenty of scope for co-operation between BR and companies like the Keighley and Worth Valley, Ffestiniog, Mid-Hants, East Lancs and North Yorkshire Moors. RDS will do its best to encourage such co-operation.

● The Bodmin Steam Railway runs from Bodmin, Cornwall, and reopens at Easter. Phone 0208 73666 for details.

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

## Package deals

You can save money with these all-in book package prices:

*Settle - Carlisle Country PLUS Scotland by Rail* £8.50

*In and Around London by Rail PLUS Thames and Downs by Rail* £6.25

*A to Z of Rail Reopenings PLUS Who Should Run our Railways?* £6.50

*A to Z of Rail Reopenings PLUS Who Should Run our Railways? PLUS Rail for the Future* £8.25

*Who Should Run our Railways? PLUS Rail for the Future PLUS Buntington PLUS Fighting for Rail* £5.

Order the above by 15 May.

Other interesting titles:

*High Speed Trains - Fast Tracks to the Future (new)* £9.99

*The Line that Refused to Die (new edition)* £7.99

*Traffic Congestion: Is There a Way Out?* £9.95

*Our Environment: A Bigger Role for Rail* £5.25

All prices here include post and packing.

Other books can also be ordered through RDS. Send orders or an SAE for a sales list to RDS sales officer, 139 Harrowdene Gardens, Teddington, Middx TW11 0DN. Make cheques payable to RDS.

# Air we go

By JOHN DAVISON and NICK DIBBEN

Manchester Airport gets a big boost in May when it gets a train service for the first time in its history.

The airport is already expanding, with its second passenger terminal having been opened by the Queen in March and plans for a second runway at the environmental assessment stage.

The rail link has been built for £26 million, provided 50-50 by Regional Railways and Manchester Passenger Transport Authority.

The new service will consist of four trains an hour in each direction. Two electric multiple units will "shuttle" from Manchester Piccadilly while there will be a Sprinter every hour from Blackpool via Preston and one every hour from Scarborough. New trains with larger luggage areas will work the long-distance trains when teething troubles are ironed out.

The airport, which is a limited company jointly owned by 11 local authorities, is confident that the new rail link will soon carry seven per cent of air travellers.

In the long term, the airport is hoping another £6 million will be raised, with help from Cheshire County Council, to extend the line south so that the branch can be turned into a loop. That would clear the way for through trains and a service to Crewe - which would provide connections to a multitude of other destinations.

In the south however, one of Stansted airport's rail links is to be mothballed by Regional Railways. Stansted is Europe's fastest growing airport, in terms of passenger throughput. Scheduled American Airlines flights from the Essex airport to Chicago only began in June but have proved very popular. The new electrified rail link from London Liverpool Street with its specially liveried 322 electric multiple units operated by Network SouthEast is one of the

airport's greatest assets. Stansted Airport station was partly funded by the BAA (which began life as the state-owned British Airports Authority) and the Stansted Express trains, which have attained admirable levels of reliability, have attracted around 25 per cent of airport users.

But services from the north - provided by Regional Railways - are being axed. In May, the 15 weekday departures to places like Cambridge, Peterborough, Birmingham, Nottingham, Sheffield, Manchester and Liverpool, will be chopped.

BAA, which had been unhappy with Regional's reliability record, said: "It would appear that Regional Railways has taken the decision that, because it cannot improve its services to the airport, it is to withdraw them." BAA was having talks with Regional before Christmas to try to salvage something from the sorry mess.

The only beneficiaries are likely to be those towns in Suffolk to which the Stansted trains may be re-routed, and some express coach operators with whom BAA has also been having talks. Perhaps NSE will step into the breach with a Stansted to King's Lynn electric service? We can but hope.

Plans for a fast rail link to Heathrow from Paddington are "near collapse", reportedly because of disputes between BAA and BR over track charges.

But the ever-present Treasury requirement for an eight per cent return on capital - the stupid and unfair Catch 22 rule which has bedevilled almost every worthwhile rail project for years - is more likely to be to blame.

Meanwhile the Treasury has approved doing out £80 million of taxpayer's money for the Hayes bypass which the Department of Transport say will "improve access to Heathrow".

# Dismay on the buses

By JOHN DAVISON

The politicians told us to expect lower fares when the bus industry was deregulated five years ago but lower fares have not materialised.

On average - outside London - they have risen by 12 per cent more than inflation. Even companies such as Luton and District, which are now wholly owned by their workforce, are not noted for low fares. A return day trip from Sidcup to Luton would cost half as much again by Invicta/Luton coaches as by BR.

Wages of bus and coach drivers meanwhile have plummeted. In 1986 their wages averaged 7.1 per cent above male manual rates but by April 1991 they were 12.2 per cent below, according to official new earnings survey statistics from the Employment Department.

In the past agreements gave consistency to workers - across companies and throughout depots - but this is no longer the norm. In Wales where average wages are lower than in any other UK region, Caerphilly Busways slashed hourly rates by a fifth to £3.40 in 1991.

In many areas newly recruited drivers often receive significantly less. In some places, bus operators pay lower wages on the subsidised socially-necessary routes than on those considered profitable. Greater Manchester Buses drivers of tendered services have been getting 23 per cent less pay than colleagues on commercial routes. In yet other areas there is

discrimination by depot. In 1991 Midland Red depressed conditions at Tunstall relative to Crewe. Nottingham City Transport paid 12 per cent less to Gotham big bus drivers than to their equivalents in the city centre.

The Government claims bus deregulation has been a success. Most people disagree.

"Since 1986 there have been some new entrants to the industry although most have failed because of a lack of commitment needed to operate a bus service to the standards required," said the Association of Local Bus Company Managers.

"Other operators, often using old and poorly identified vehicles, have merely duplicated successful commercial services, creating difficulties in congested streets. Passengers have been confused as companies frequently revise timetables to gain short term competitive advantage."

The Government must repair the damage done to our country-wide bus network and show that deregulation can deliver the promised benefits. Until then passengers and taxpayers will look at rail privatisation with suspicion.

● Private practice: British Midland Airways has withdrawn its East Midlands - Heathrow air service. British Airways has admitted a dirty-tricks campaign against competitor Virgin Atlantic and is paying compensation. Dan-Air has folded and its assets bought by BA.

# Volunteers to rescue

By STAN ABBOTT

Volunteers are fighting to save yet another branch line abandoned by British Rail and the Government.

They are hoping to secure the future of the 22-mile line from Northallerton to Redmire (a village on the edge of the Yorkshire Dales). Eventually they want to restore passenger trains to Hawes and Garsdale (on the Settle-Carlisle).

The Wensleydale Railway Association launched a major fund-raising venture in advance of a British Rail deadline.

The association had until the end of March to demonstrate that it has a realistic chance of raising sufficient funds to buy the line, closed by Railfreight Metals at the end of last year. BR said it wanted more than £1m for the track and land.

The association believes the true value, taking into account ongoing liabilities, is no more than half that figure. BR required only a £2,000 deposit as a gesture of intent by the March 31 deadline, but the association believes some demonstration of available resources will be essential if the line is not to be sold for salvage.

Because the very short timescale has effectively ruled out a formal share issue, the association is, in the first instance, raising funds through sale of track certificates, the proceeds of which will be lodged in a trust fund and used for the sole purpose of buying and operating the line.

The Wensleydale Railway is a 40-mile scenic link from the S & C to the East Coast Main Line. The villages and small market towns in between last saw regular passenger trains 40 years ago.

Now the association has set up the Wensleydale Railway Company Limited with the aim of running tourist-orientated services along at least part of it, if the purchase bid succeeds.

This may seem far removed from the lofty ideals of a community railway to serve the people of Wensleydale and the Vale of York. But it has become an essential prerequisite of achieving that long-term aim: only by assuring the continued use of the remaining line can the association hope to protect the track and formation.

If you would like a brochure, including details of the Track Certificate scheme, please send a cheque for £2, payable to Wensleydale Railway Association, to: Wensleydale Railway Project, 19 Springwell Lane, Northallerton, DL7 8QJ.

● Stan Abbott is chairman of the Wensleydale Railway Association and the Wensleydale Railway Company. He runs a small design and publishing company, near Hawes.

**Roads to Ruin:** A new leaflet has been prepared by RDS to highlight the billions of pounds of our money being spent on new roads and motorways. A leaflet is also available warning of the dangers of privatisation. You can help RDS by distributing this leaflet at stations, preserved railways, pubs, cafes, garden centres, etc. Please always ask permission before doing so. The following leaflets are also available: What sort of railway do we need? Don't break up BR, Railways and the Environment, Switch on our Trains (electrification), Why I joined RDS. They are available free from the Publicity Officer, Latymer, The Drive, Belmont, Surrey SM2 7DJ. Please state how many you want and make a contribution towards postage. Also available are anti-privatisation postcards to send to MPs.

# PLATFORM For your views on the present and future of rail

## A change of culture

I don't agree with the way privatisation is being set out and I think the Government simply does not care a damn about the future of the railways in this country but one has to agree that if privatisation - assuming they survive - brings a change of culture, it can only be a good thing.

For many years now in Somerset, a prominent quarry company has run its own railway transport organisation, shipping some 90 per cent of its production by rail to the Channel Tunnel and other construction projects all over the country.

Its experience was that, in the early days, the BR way of doing things simply could not satisfy it commercially and it set about forming its own organisation.

It could not make a sufficient return if it submitted to BR culture. Since then, apart from the necessity of BR drivers, it has run very successfully on its own, even buying its own locomotives and wagons.

What then is quite so wrong with privatisation? Here is Foster-Yeoman running better privately under the equivalent of a Railtrack authority than under the omnipotence of a BR set-up.

Try finding Railfreight in the telephone book. If you find it, give up 24 hours in the hope of getting an answer. If you do get an answer, be prepared to hear Railfreight say that it would be better if you sent your goods by road!

G Lankenau, Minafon Number Two, Rhos-y-Gwaliau, Bala, Gwynedd LL23 3EY

## One small step can be enough

Shortly before I joined RDS, the unsung Penistone line won its eight-year fight to remain connected to the national network. Let anyone feeling despondent take heart that it has spawned new stations.

Edmund Burke said: "Nobody made a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he himself could only do a little."

As individuals we have opportunities to advance our cause while remembering that we have to be polite but not apologetic.

My definition of a rail passenger is someone who leaves some countryside for others to enjoy.

G Angell, 11 Franchise Street, Kidderminster

## Don't upset the Tories

While I am an ardent rail supporter and am very anxious to promote the interests of railways and rail users, it is with dismay that I observe the attempts to politicise the rail debate.

We risk alienating the largest single body of political opinion in this country, the Conservative Party.

I don't support the Conservative line on transport policy. I would like to see a radical change of attitude in the party. In government, the Labour Party oversaw the closure of more

trackage than the preceding Tory administration. Privatisation may not be the panacea for all BR's ills but it is not necessarily the ogre that many on the Left believe it to be. Let us not waste energy kicking against political policy.

We should be taking positive steps to try to alter attitudes within the Department of Transport. Ministers and governments come and go but these people are the holders of power over transport in the long term.

Cynical attitudes among civil servants are the biggest hurdles we have to overcome if rail is ever to get a fair deal.

T L Davis, Lloyds Bank Chambers, 31 Chapel Ash, Wolverhampton, West Midlands WV3 0UE

## Testing for Europe

I refer to the picture of a locomotive in our climate-controlled wind tunnel published in Railwatch 54. We do test Austrian - and most other European railway - vehicles but the locomotive in the picture at Vienna Arsenal is the Swiss high-speed locomotive 460.001. The British Rail class 465 was here in September, while British Rail's class 323 will be here in April and May 1993. We aim to subject the British trains to the most troublesome weather they are likely to meet in Britain.

G Schuecker, National Testing and Research Institute, Faradaygasse 3, Vienna.

## How to compete with M-way

I welcome the electrification of the King's Lynn - Cambridge rail line and the more frequent train service to London.

If the King's Lynn trains ran into Liverpool Street (rather than King's Cross) with stops at only Cambridge and Bishop's Stortford, it would compete with the M11 motorway.

British Rail should also reopen the line from King's Lynn to Hunstanton which operated at a profit when it was closed in 1969. With electrification, it could offer a two hours 15 minutes service to Liverpool Street.

E H Longland, 20a Rous Road, Buckhurst Hill, Essex

## Stop those sleepers

I have recently joined RDS and travel by train whenever I can.

I am concerned about the lack of station stops for overnight sleepers to Inverness and Fort William. In fact they do not stop at all in the Midlands.

In the past I have used Rugby, Coventry and Birmingham but there is now no stop for passengers between Watford and Crewe.

I thought this was an issue RDS might wish to take up, particularly as the BR response to my letter seemed incredible. Even the "facts" BR quoted are wrong.

J M Hollis, 23 Suthers Road, Kegworth, Derby

## "Shock, horror" protest

It is sad to see RDS slipping into the trap that besets so much media reporting and other pressure groups - progressive loss of rational perspective - which inevitably leads to overstatement of its case and undermines its essential credibility.

Failure to curtail this tempting tendency in pursuit of banner headlines and "shock, horror" tactics, very beguiling in keeping one in the short-term public eye, is immensely damaging to the excellent long-term cause we sincerely espouse.

We need to be energetic - but by way of being receptive, good humoured, resourceful and persuasive, rather than risking discredit by becoming as myopic and obsessive as the road

lobby. With the congenial British resistance to anything new, this has predictably been greeted with widespread opprobrium. But if the European Community favours separation of infrastructure ownership and operation, we ought to find out why and consider this on its merits.

The current hiatus in forward equipment procurement and electrification could and should be promptly circumvented.

Keith Tyler, 29 Sycamore Road, Bournville, Birmingham B30 2AA

## Write on request

RDS members should write to their MPs to protest about the proposals to franchise rail services.

The Government should instead invest in the railways rather than roads.

In Yorkshire alone, the Department of Transport is planning to spend £352 million on new road schemes.

Philip Oldroyd, 211 Midland Road, Royston, Barnsley S71 4DN

## Badge of action

I think RDS needs an enamel brooch or badge which can be worn on the lapel, hat or shoulder bag. You could invite members thoughts on this.

And what about a rubber stamp which can be used to stamp slogans on envelopes or publicity material. One option could be a person with a blank speech balloon in which you could write your own slogan.

R E Norton, 5 Chequers Park, Wye, Ashford, Kent TN25 5BA

## Tired of car lag

Graham Nalty's Doing the Business article in Railwatch 54 was most interesting, particularly his reference to the fatigue effects of car driving.

When I travelled by car with others to contractors' meetings, the choice of who was to drive was often decided by who had the least demanding role at the meeting. Those with "car lag" were adjudged less able to respond to demanding situations.

Derek Quedsted, 3 County House, Ordnance Road, Woolwich Common, London SE18 3SP

## Keep going

We can hope for an improved service from Kidderminster in the future now that contracts have been exchanged to reinstate the line from Birmingham Snow Hill towards Stourbridge.

Could BR be persuaded to extend its proposed Marylebone - Banbury - Snow Hill services on to Kidderminster to give those of us who live west of Birmingham an alternative route to London avoiding changes in Birmingham and opening up connections to towns west of London in the Thames Valley.

I would appreciate advice and comments on how to persuade BR there is a demand.

Alan Crowhurst MSE BA MRSH A Inst TA, 2 Clematis Cottages, Hopton Bank, Cleobury Mortimer, Shropshire DY14 0HF

● Editor's note: A ceremony to start work on rebuilding the Snow Hill to Smethwick line (formerly Great Western) took place on 28 January.

The scheme is being paid for by Centro, the passenger transport authority (£15 million), the European Community (£5 million) and Regional Railways (£3 million).

It will allow trains to run from Worcester and Stourbridge to Snow Hill, Moor Street and then on to Stratford-on-Avon and Leamington.

## 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, 139 Harrowdene Gardens, Teddington, Middx TW11 0DN. Cheques payable to Railway Development Society.

# California dreaming

*MALCOLM GOODALL visited California last year, travelling by public transport. He questions the widely-held assumption that America is totally dependent on the private car.*

*The USA has spent an estimated £82 billion creating its interstate highway. More money has been spent on local roads. No wonder that the state of California, and indeed the whole country, is bankrupt. Motoring has been positively encouraged with petrol at about 85p a gallon compared with a UK price of £2.*

*But there is a growing awareness that this preoccupation with roads has led the country up a blind alley to environmental disaster. Now state and local authorities are putting money into public transport, sometimes backed by federal grants.*

Patronage of mass transit systems is aided by Southern California Transit Checks, a benefit that is tax-free for employees and tax-deductible for employers (in contrast to Britain, where company cars are subsidised).

## SAN FRANCISCO

San Francisco is a transport fan's paradise with a large and varied public transport system. The city is sited on a narrow peninsula, and consequently doesn't sprawl as much as other American cities. There are tower blocks in the centre and densely packed suburban low-rise housing in the familiar gridiron street pattern.

There is considerable traffic congestion, alleviated slightly by demolition of the elevated Embarcadero Freeway, damaged by earthquakes in 1989; a stub is used for bus parking. The Oakland Bay Bridge funnels traffic into the city from the east, and the Golden Gate Bridge from the north, resulting in jams in the centre. Luckily, there is a large and varied public transport system.

Amtrak buses run from the Southern Pacific station to Oakland Amtrak station. The state-sponsored CalTrain commuter service operates diesel-hauled double-deck trains to various peninsula towns on the 50 mile route to San Jose, where there are Amtrak connections and a new light rail system.

The SP terminal used in 'Frisco is not very central, but it would be easy to extend the service along derelict freight tracks to the ferry terminal on the Embarcadero, adjacent to the business district and other rail operators.

BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit) is a modern heavy rail metro, which runs from Daly City through central San Francisco, under Market Street and the bay to Oakland. The BART system is broad gauge, highly automated and computer operated; there were initial teething troubles but trains are now reliable and popular, despite fairly expensive fares.

MUNI (San Francisco Municipal Railway) has a large fleet of well-used single deck buses and articulated buses, on a dense route network. In contrast to Los Angeles, the vehicles are shabby and covered with graffiti. MUNI also runs frequent single deck trolleybuses on several routes, including connections from the SP terminal to downtown.

There are plans to extend the system and to reduce air pollution from diesel buses. Cheap hydro-electricity from generating plant installed in the Sierra Nevada mountains early this century helps to ensure the continuing popularity of electric traction.

MUNI streetcars survive because of the advantage conferred by two tunnels built years ago under the city hills. Trams are all modern



**Trains of the Bay Area Rapid Transit Authority transformed links between San Francisco and Oakland. Now services are being extended from Oakland into the Livermore valley with trains built by the American firm Morrison Knudsen.**

Boeing-built cars, articulated twin units running either singly, or in multiple. The streetcar system passes through some of the best of SF's Victorian architecture, and affords some sweeping panoramic views of the city. Some portions of tramway are on reservations alongside the road, but much is down the centre of streets.

The Boeing cars are scruffy, graffiti-covered and costly to maintain. As on BART, aerospace company designers underestimated the rigours of traction service. Abandoned freight railway tracks along the northern waterfront to Fisherman's Wharf may form the basis of another rapid transit line in future.

MUNI cable cars are a big tourist attraction, but also used as normal everyday transport by locals. Original trams remain on three routes, hauled by electrically driven underground cables.

The cable cars are held in such affection that the winding mechanism and cable traction system were totally renewed in the 1980s; the cars are the only moving National Historic Landmark in the USA!

Riding a crowded car is exciting; it's normal practice for six passengers to stand on the running boards each side, hanging on tightly to handrails, and brushing against passengers doing likewise on cars coming other way!

Cable cars are expensive to ride, at a flat fare of £1.40; the normal MUNI flat fare is only 85 cents (about 55p) and includes two free transfers to other MUNI vehicles. Bargain 3 day (£7) and weekly tickets are available for unlimited travel.

A system map is very informative but difficult to read because of the sheer amount of detail given. Alternatively, a free 'BART and Buses' guide has excellent simple maps of the bay area cities.

**Employers can provide up to £170 worth of commuter fare subsidy tax-free to employees in the San Francisco Bay Area.**

Ferries carry tourists to Sausalito and Larkspur, passing the notorious island jail of Alcatraz. £2.50 buys a one-way ticket.

## OAKLAND

The leading port of Oakland on the mainland tends to be overshadowed by its more famous neighbour San Francisco, across the bay but does have the advantage of being a centre for Amtrak long-distance rail passenger services with double-deck Superliner coaches and sleepers. The daily California Zephyr runs to the state capital, Sacramento, eastwards over the Sierra Nevada mountains to Salt Lake City, through the Rockies to Denver and across the midwest plains to Chicago. Service south to Los Angeles and north via Sacramento to Seattle is provided by the Coast Starlight. The state sponsors three daily trains on two routes, operated with single-deck coaches.

Unfortunately the long-distance trains require advance reservations and are renowned for bad timekeeping.

The Amtrak image in Oakland is very poor. Passengers disembark at a temporary shack alongside the earthquake-damaged stone-built 16th Street station in a seedy, rundown part of town. AC Transit bus 62 runs to central Oakland's BART 12th Street station.

Local rail services in Oakland though were transformed by construction of the BART tunnel under the bay from San Francisco.

BART stations have a network of feeder bus services run by various operators; the free BART and Buses booklet gives details of these. Construction of BART extensions to East Contra Costa County and the Livermore Valley is under way. The American firm Morrison-Knudsen beat off intense Japanese competition to win an order for eighty new cars to handle the extra traffic. An excursion ticket allows three hours unlimited travel on BART for £1.80, providing you enter and exit the system at the same station. Bicycle permits are available for travel outside commuter (peak) hours.

## Worries on the West Highland

By TOM ELLETT

1993 got off to a bad start for Scotland's West Highland line. Trainload Freight announced in November 1992 that all oil freight services on the line would end by April 1993, and Esso deliveries to Oban and Mallaig had already switched to road by the start of the new year.

The axing of the traffic, which BR claims had been running at a loss for some time and could not have continued without a huge price increase to customers, will force about 60 extra tankers a week to use some of the worst and, in summer, most congested trunk roads in Britain. Large parts of the A830 from Fort William to Mallaig are still single-track.

The move, which leaves the line from Crianlarich to Oban without any freight, was widely condemned locally. Argyll & Bute District Council and its Lochaber counterpart have set up a joint committee to monitor the future of the line. Mrs Ray Michie, Liberal Democrat MP for Argyll & Bute, and Brian Wilson, a Labour transport spokesman, both took the matter up with BR and the Department of Transport. However, Michael Forsyth, Conservative MP for Stirling and Government Minister, declined to comment. Mr Forsyth's constituency includes the stations at Crianlarich and Tyndrum, and the narrow and winding A84 road, which will be used by tankers plying between the West Highlands and Grangemouth refinery.

A glimmer of hope that the oil freight service might be saved by the private sector came when Hunslet-Barclay of Kilmarnock expressed an interest, but by January that initiative seemed to have stalled as the company felt the effect of empty order-books on its manufacturing activities.

There was bad news on the passenger front too, with a massive fares increase from 3 January. Although full-price singles and returns went up by only about 2 per cent, the price of the popular Saver return from Oban to Glasgow rose by an incredible 19.1 per cent from £19.40 to £23.10. People living north of Garelochhead are now able to buy a Railcard for £5 entitling them to 34 per cent off all journeys on the line for a year, but this will not benefit users at the Glasgow end or the thousands of tourists every summer.

Speaking at the launch of the West Highland Railcard in Oban, ScotRail's marketing manager Bob Orme said the idea was to reduce fares for local people by making tourists pay more.

He implied that people who used the line only once a year would continue to do so whatever the price, but omitted to mention that many tourists use Rover tickets. Mr Orme went on to say he could not understand a decline in the number of Glasgow people making day trips on the line - the very group likely to be hardest hit by this latest fares increase.

The line is becoming increasingly uncompetitive with road transport. The end-to-end journey time of some Oban - Glasgow trains, cut to just under three hours amid much publicity when Sprinters first took over, has increased by as much as 15 minutes over the past year or two.

The morning train does not now arrive in Glasgow until just before midday, its departure from Oban having been put back to 0840 (from 0730 and latterly 0805), supposedly to allow more civilised departure times from Mallaig and Fort William for the other portion that combines with the Oban train at Crianlarich. Yet ScotRail's proposals for separate Oban and Mallaig services this summer presently envisage moving the Mallaig departure forward again to 0600, leaving the Oban one at 0840.

Inevitably, there is much speculation locally about the line's future. Among the rumours in circulation are a reduction from three to two trains a day next winter, cuts in the local workforce, and summer-only operation of the Fort William - Euston sleeper service.

## A load on our

There was a massive exodus of freight from rail over the autumn and winter - which defied the Government's stated intention to switch traffic in the opposite direction.

Rather than explain what was going wrong, amateur magician John MacGregor went to the House of Commons transport select committee in January and reiterated that it was still Government policy to encourage more freight on to rail. He quoted dubious figures which appeared to justify investment in roads as cost-effective.

But committee chairman Robert Adley pointed out to him that there are vast hidden costs which are not taken into account when the Department of Transport does its sums.

In fact many commercial organisations, more in tune with their customers than the Government is with its electors, are keen to transfer their freight to rail.

But they find the pricing structure built up over the years by BR, the unrealistic commercial remit forced on BR by the Treasury and the Department of Transport's enormous subsidies to road transport make such a move difficult.

*It is heartening therefore to see one organisation investing in the future of rail freight and making a success of it now.*

Thamesport on Kent's Isle of Grain was only opened for business in 1990 but already two trains of containers are leaving each day, plus bulk trains of coal destined for industrial customers throughout south-east England.

Coal imports come from Australia, South America and other parts of the world to Thamesport where they are blended with coal shipped down the coast from north-east England.

About 10,000 tonnes of coal is now leaving Thamesport by rail each week.

The purpose-built terminal incorporates the latest highly automated handling equipment but until January, standard 8'6" containers had to leave on special small-wheeled rail wagons because of the tight clearances on the Gravesend - Hoo link line.

BR has been spent £1 million to increase bridge heights and lower tracks so that standard containers can be used on standard flat wagons. This will enable Thamesport to despatch its trains to anywhere in Britain instead of only to Stratford, East London, where the containers had to be handled again.

Now rather than the relatively short first haul to Stratford, the trains will go first to Crewe.

Thamesport is the brainchild of Geoffrey Parker, Robin McLeod and Derek Peters who spent 16 years together at Felixstowe, Suffolk, building it up into Britain's largest container port.

Then the three raised £155 million to do their own thing at Thamesport. Container capacity by rail was boosted from 30,000 in early 1992 to 140,000 now.

The port is able to handle a total of 400,000 containers a year and 8 million tonnes of bulk goods. Four new rail tracks, independent crane rails and adjacent service roads were added in 1992.

The £4.4 million project was partly funded by a 40 per cent freight facilities grant from the Government. One effect of Thamesport's traffic going direct is a big reduction of work and



A ship loading containers at Thamesport

consequent job cuts at Stratford Freightline Terminal. In fact in the short term Stratford will handle only domestic traffic. All international freight will go to the new Willesden Euroterminal which is nearing completion.

Railfreight Distribution says that a multi-million pound investment programme will continue at Stratford so that in the long term it will be Channel Tunnel "facility".

The Government meanwhile waited until large chunks of freight were lost to rail, before announcing "measures to assist rail freight" a part of its propaganda campaign to make privatisation look more attractive.

In the new regime, it says freight facility grants will be enhanced and track charges might be reduced if justified by "wider environmental and other benefits".

This COULD be a turning point but the Department of Transport and the Treasury have notorious reputations for using small print to avoid their responsibilities.

The other change - to allow the use of 10-ton lorries in rail-road combined operations - is probably a devious way of appeasing the road lobby by opening the door to even bigger juggernauts, against the will of the British people. Even a 38-tonne lorry does more damage



Top team at Thamesport: Marketing director Geoffrey Parker and managing director Robin McLeod

# minds



on the Isle of Grain in Kent

travelling one-tenth of a mile than a car does in a lifetime of 200,000 miles.

But Transport Secretary John MacGregor praised the road haulage industry in December for its "efficient and vital contribution in oiling the wheels of the economy". In fact its major infrastructure - the road network - has been provided for it at taxpayers' expense.

At least now, the views of rail freight customers and operators are being put to Government by a new organisation called Freight on Rail, formed in December. Its address is 132 Buckingham Palace Road, London SW1W 9SA (tel 071 730 0430). FoR is demanding lower costs, a fair charging regime, an end to BR's monopoly and more consultation with private sector operators.

The European Commission meanwhile has cleared the way for member states to tax motorway lorry movements to encourage rail freight. Don't hold your breath waiting for the British Government to act. It has too many friends in the road lobby.

In Europe, 17 per cent of freight already goes by rail, compared to only seven per cent in Britain.

Speedlink was killed off in 1991 and there are predictions now that most container traffic could soon switch from rail to road thanks to Government insistence that it makes a profit.



Director Derek Peters (left), chairman Geoffrey

## Birdwatching by train

If you want to see a buzzard, you could try taking a train ride from Exeter to either Barnstaple or Yeovil.

Without any steering to attend to and without risking your safety, you can give your undivided attention to the passing birds.

But to do some really serious birdwatching, you have to get off the train - and that's where a new book will help.

Birdwatching by Train identifies 50 sites in Britain which are within easy walking distance (not more than a mile) from railway stations.

It gives detailed instructions on how to get to them and what kinds of birds you are likely to see at each site. In some cases, access to a nature reserve is direct from the platform.

The book even points out that lesser black-backed gulls are common on Cardiff Central's parcels platforms and that swallows nest in the waiting room of one Lincolnshire rural station.

Kingfishers can be seen near Attenborough station, Nottinghamshire, treecreepers near Bookham station, Surrey, crossbills near Brandon station, Suffolk, red kite near Cynghordy station, Dyfed, knots at Emsworth, Sussex, peregrine near Betws-y-Coed, Gwynedd, osprey maybe near Aviemore, Highland, woodcock near Delamere, Cheshire, merlin near Dent, Cumbria, red-breasted merganser near Starcross, Devon, skuas near Fife, North Yorkshire, golden eagle near Forsinard station, Highland, rock pipits near Kinghorn, Fife, eider duck near Tynemouth.

The book by Alison and Nigel Harris also gives a few hints on how to maximise your chances of seeing these birds whether you are on a day trip or on holiday.

Many people who profess to enjoy the country are helping to destroy it by using their cars. This book helps you to enjoy the countryside and keep your environmental reputation intact.

● Birdwatching by Train, a 128-page paperback, includes several colour pictures. It is available for £9 (including post and packing)

## Going green for a week

Green Transport Week is being held in June in an attempt to persuade people to switch to more environmentally friendly ways of travelling.

Trains, buses, bikes and feet have excellent green credentials for the modern world.

So RDS will be staging activities at national and local level to complement the work of the main organisers of the week - Transport 2000 and the Environmental Transport Association.

Typical local activities are library exhibitions at Thetford and Felixstowe and a campaign to reopen the Ilkeston line in the north Midlands.

An action group has already been formed at Ilkeston, sponsored by RDS and Transport 2000. The co-ordinator of the campaign is Mr L. Atterbury of 14 Granby Street, Ilkeston, Derbyshire (phone 0602 300838).

Nationally RDS will be holding a Conference on Rail Reopenings at Maesteg, Glamorgan, on Saturday 26 June. The conference will start at 1.30 p.m. in the local sports centre after a buffet lunch and the chance to see a special exhibition.

This will be an excellent opportunity to ride on the recently reopened line to Maesteg and to learn how the line was brought back to life.

Then we will be looking to see what can be learned from it to help rail expansion elsewhere. RDS also plans to publish a small pamphlet on

from A & N Harris, 43a Palace Square, Crystal Palace, London SE19 2LT. Make cheques payable to A & N Harris.

● Planning Passenger Railways - A Handbook edited by Nigel Harris and Ernest Godward is also available from the same address for £26.50 including post and packing. Make cheques payable to E W Godward and N G Harris.

## Hi-Tech Trains

Plans for motorway building in Vancouver provoked such an outcry that eventually the people demanded and won a new railway.

The creation and development of that light rapid transit system which opened in 1986 is described in Hi-Tech Trains, a new book by professional railman Arthur Tayler.

The doubters in Vancouver were won over because the city kept the public informed of its rail plans and convinced them that the Skytrain made less noise than road traffic.

The book's 128 pages are packed with information on other rail development ranging from the German InterCity Express to our own Docklands Light Railway. It also covers the Japanese Shinkansen lines, iron-ore railways in Western Australia, monorail and maglev.

The book also alerts us to the opposition that railways encounter. The road lobby for instance tried to prevent the building of the first Ligne à Grande Vitesse from Paris to Lyon.

It reminds Transport Ministers MacGregor and Freeman that the railways face fierce competition from road and air.

The book is well illustrated with colour photos, maps and diagrams and is internationally user-friendly. Gradients are shown in percentages and the 1 in 20 format, and kilometers are usually accompanied by mile equivalents.

● Hi-Tech Trains by Arthur Tayler costs £9.95 and is published by The Apple Press, 6 Blundell Street, London N7 9BH. ISBN 1-85076-397-6. Review by Trevor Garrod

Green Transport Lifestyles which will feature short articles on how 10 people around the country cope with travel.

We shall be showing how it is possible to lead a full life without being dependent on the car.

For details of both the reopenings conference and offers to contribute to the booklet, please contact general secretary Trevor Garrod, 15 Clapham Road, Lowestoft, Suffolk NR32 1RQ. Please enclose an SAE.

Green Express which supports both RDS and rail user groups is organising a series of excellent trips this year.

April 3: From Rochdale over the Settle - Carlisle, including a special stop for rambles at Langwathby. Fare £18 (£12 children).

May 3: From Barnsley to Carlisle via Newcastle and then south over the Settle - Carlisle line. £18 (£12).

May 30: From Rochdale, Bradford and Leeds to Whitley via the Esk Valley line. £15 (£10).

June 20: From Huddersfield and Leeds Whitley. £15 (£10).

June 27: Leeds to Sheffield, Manchester, Hellifield, Carlisle. £18 (£12).

July 18: Barnsley and Penistone to Llandudno. £18 (£12).

There are numerous boarding points for all the trains. Full details from Nick Harvey, Huddersfield Green Party, 16b Byram Buildings, Station Street, Huddersfield, West Yorkshire. Please enclose an SAE.

# LOCAL ACTION

## Scotland

We were angered by the Chancellor's announcement in November of cuts in BR's grant, dressed up as "increased investment". We contacted papers in Scotland pointing out how the Department of Transport had fought for the road lobby while capitulating to the Treasury on railways.

We called for a switch of resources and traffic from road to rail while the public saw instead freight switched from rail to road. The Scottish Office appears oblivious.

The future of Rosyth dockyard which has already successfully diversified into refurbishing London Underground trains, is causing concern. An economically ignorant government does not seem to see the advantage of providing jobs in Fife and better trains for London. We expect the only thing the Government will give Fife is to advance the case of a third Forth (road) bridge - which will bring disastrous environmental consequences.

Both the Prince of Wales and Magnus Magnusson spoke of the need to integrate road and rail transport when they attended a conference on roads in the countryside. Scottish Office Minister and road builder Lord James Douglas-Hamilton was less impressive. His talk of replacing a concrete bridge in Glencoe with brick arches was his environmental offering.

The branch has called for passenger transport authorities for the whole of Scotland if the Regions are to be broken up in any local government restructuring.

Lord Thurso has publicly praised RDS for our continuing campaign for a rail bridge over Dornoch Firth.

Transport Secretary John MacGregor has a degree in economics from St Andrews. It is a pity the university could not have taught him something about transport realities.

*Douglas Smart*

## Severnside

Newspapers believe a new age of the train could be coming following the publication of STARS - the Strategic Avon Rail Study.

The study, sponsored by Avon County Council, recommends improving train services and reopening stations.

The decision to relocate up to 6,000 Ministry of Defence staff to Bristol Business Park at Filton has clearly helped to concentrate minds on the transport infrastructure.

The park will be served by a new South Filton station. Services are to be improved to allow commuting from Bath, Bristol, Gloucester and Weston-super-Mare.

Some new trains may avoid Bristol Temple Meads and connecting buses may operate to the city centre from Lawrence Hill station.

Consultants Transmark will consider ways to fund the ambitious plans which will probably require the provision of six two-car units.

The first phase will include South Filton, a new Bath Newbridge station and the reopening of Long Ashton and Winterbourne stations.

The second phase will provide a new station at Bathampton and reopenings at Corsham, Flax Bourton, Horfield, Saltford and Wickwar. There is some doubt about Charfield because of problems with land purchase.

The third phase will see a new station at Hallen Marsh - to serve the projected Bristol Rovers stadium - and reopenings at Henbury and North Filton on the same line, at present freight-only.

The STARS report is also backed by Bristol

Development Corporation, the Ministry of Defence, InterCity and Regional Railways.

The county council is particularly concerned to reduce road traffic in the Filton area where, apart from the MoD, industrial development is planned and where there are already aircraft industries, colleges and offices.

Details of South Bristol are yet to be revealed. Plans for a Bristol "spine" road are threatening the Avon Metro scheme which is to have a new management set-up.

Former British Rail chairman Lord Marsh has meanwhile been appointed chairman of the recently formed Severn Vale Transit Steering Group which is promoting a light rail scheme for Cheltenham and Gloucester.

However an eight-month feasibility study will also consider bus lanes and a guided bus system. Some form of new public transport must be provided otherwise car traffic may double in the next 30 years, as predicted.

Serious congestion affects the town and suburbs on Cheltenham race days. RDS has suggested that the Cheltenham draft local plan should cater for reinstating the Cheltenham to Honeybourne section of line (now a cycle track) and running a light rail service.

Unfortunately cash-starved BR is planning cuts rather than expansion of services. Regional Railways is considering withdrawing the 0710 Gloucester to Bristol and the 2241 Bristol to Gloucester in May.

Regional Railways has also shelved plans to introduce a Sunday service at Yate.

*Eric Barbery*

## East Anglia

East Cambridgeshire District Council has backed RDS plans to reopen Soham station and provide a direct service to Cambridge via a new curve at Newmarket.

Traffic on the line to King's Lynn was up by 20 per cent in the first three months following electrification. This is further proof, if any were needed, that investment is the way to attract people to rail.

*Nick Dibben*

## North East

Air pollution from motor vehicles is likely to be a crucial factor which will move public opinion and hopefully the Department of Transport to switch investment to buses and trains, the branch was told in November. The assessment came from BBC northern transport correspondent Alan Whitehouse who addressed the meeting.

He warned that BR's predicament had never been as bad as it is today. In the 1970s branch lines were under threat, but now even InterCity was at risk. British and continental attitudes to rail investment were poles apart.

Rural rail lines were being commendably promoted by Regional Railways and local authorities which knew they were a cost-effective way of dealing with traffic congestion. Regional Express, especially TransPennine, was successful while the West Coast main line was being allowed to deteriorate. The follies of under-investment were apparent while more people are beginning to recognise the ability of efficient and reliable railways to make things happen in the economy, particularly in tourism.

Members agreed that privatisation would not bring additional investment, redress traffic congestion or pollution or deal with the imperfections of BR.

The branch has sent detailed papers to Tory MPs in the area asking them to consider the effects of privatisation.

MPs, local authorities and campaigning groups have been galvanised into action by Railfreight's plans to lift the track on the Weardale line from Bishop Auckland to Eastgate following the loss of cement traffic. Such a cut-throat approach to a beautiful and historical rail route is an act of vandalism and highlights just one of BR's present failings. Durham County Council is co-ordinating a feasibility study to which RDS is contributing financially.

Apparently Portland Cement prefers to use rail but the Treasury dictated financial targets to Railfreight which was then of course forced to put up rates. The immediate result will be another 70 lorry movements a day along the dale, with all the attendant environmental and accident costs foisted on to the community, local authorities and the taxpayer.

British Rail has now revealed its blueprint for the North East for the next 10 years. Plans include new stations at Yarm, Sunderland University and Newton Hall (Durham) and improved services between Darlington and Middlesbrough and along the coast to Hartlepool. A brand new passenger service is proposed along the now-closed Leamside line from Pelaw to Durham. RDS has fought hard to keep Leamside in the frame. Unfortunately there is no indication of how these welcome plans are to happen if privatisation goes ahead.

Still no word from Tyne and Wear Passenger Transport Executive about the preferred Metro route from Newcastle to Sunderland.

*Tony Walker*

## Wessex

Wiltshire County Council is considering three options for a new station at Wilton, near Salisbury. The branch is keeping in touch with developments and maintaining contacts with district and parish councils.

The freight line to Poole docks clings to the national network by its fingertips. The main user is keen to keep heavy freight off the roads. But suggestions to reinstate boat trains are unlikely to attract much interest in the present climate.

The first meeting of a Portsmouth area RDS group took place recently and should help our Portsmouth and Sussex members fight threats to the Coastway services.

We are watching the situation on the Isle of Wight where rail services have been earmarked for franchising. Repairs costing £80,000 needed for the pier railhead at Ryde are causing service restrictions. There is now a plan for a ferry-rail terminus at Ryde.

*Peter Argent*

## South West

A possible threat to Newton St Cyres station on the Exeter - Barnstaple line emerged in the local media in January. The Health and Safety Executive has finally noticed that the platform is too low and BR estimates improvements at the station which serves only a small population will cost £27,000. It has one advantage - a popular real ale pub called the Beer Engine.

We objected to the "improvement" planned for the A30 Honiton to Exeter trunk road on the grounds that it would threaten the trackbed of the former rail branch to Sidmouth which should be reopened. The new road crosses the trackbed between Feniton and Ottery St Mary at a level which would make bridging impossible. It could be realigned at little cost to preserve the rail route. Our argument was not helped by British Rail's comment that it had no plans to reopen the route.

*Gerald Duddridge*



## London and Home Counties

Privatisation looks like the Treasury's way of escaping the duty to provide investment cash for socially necessary rail services. It is still of course prepared to spend £2.8 billion - several times more than the entire subsidy for BR - on widening the M25.

We believe there are rail alternatives to widening the M25, including developing existing routes like the North Downs line.

Significantly this is the very line at risk if James Sherwood of Sea Containers takes over the plum part of Network SouthEast he wants. Rail closures still seem very much part of this Government's strategy.

*Howard Thomas*

## North Midlands

**Flying start:** After a break of several years, the Attenborough Rail Users' group was reformed in January by RDS member Andrew Walker. News of the Group's resurgence made the front page in the local Beeston Express newspaper and was broadcast on Radio Trent, prompting residents to telephone messages of support. Many people are worried that the recent rundown of the station, which has been left unstaffed and boarded up, may eventually lead to closure. The group is pressing British Rail and local authorities for badly-needed improvements. At present, one of Attenborough's platforms does not even have a waiting shelter. The media coverage has given the group a flying start, and gained valuable publicity for the regular Sprinter services to Nottingham which deserve better patronage. For more details, phone 0602 256115.

*Andrew Walker*

## North West

**Closure:** A major blow to the rail industry was the closure of Powell Duffryn Standard's works at Heywood. Many local firms of sub-contractors will also be hit. The firm carried out pioneering work, including building low-height container flat wagons for Cawoods which BR said were impossible. They also produced the self-discharging hopper trains for Redland and the body shells for Metro-Cammell's class 156 Super Sprinters.

**Congratulations:** A firm which uses Red Star for virtually all its emergency orders has won an excellence award for the fifth year running. Robert Taylor and Sons, agricultural engineers and farriers from Bentham, North Yorkshire, sent 700 parcels worth £120,000 last year. Parts manager Ian Taylor is an RDS member whose firm relies on the Settle - Carlisle line. The award comes from Case International.

**Spark:** An RDS leaflet calling for electrification of the Blackpool - Manchester line was launched at a civic reception in Preston town hall attended by the deputy mayor and a member of the North West Transport Users' Consultative Committee in December. The Press and radio took note and copies were sent to MPs and councillors along the route.

**Million month:** Manchester's light rail Metrolink system carried over a million passengers in December despite the recession, IRA bombs and numerous hoaxes. On one day, three days before Christmas, the automatic machines issued 36,000 tickets, another record. On Christmas Eve, 25,000 people used the system despite a major power failure. Trams ran until 1 a.m. on both Christmas Day and New Year's Day, hours after the buses and trains stopped. Frequency was increased on Bank Holiday Monday because of severe overcrowding. Off-peak demand for the system has been way ahead of predictions with services doubled and 12 extra drivers employed.

*Robert Cummings*

## Yorkshire

Branch chairman James Towler sent a robust criticism of A Voice for the Passenger to the Department of Transport. His analysis also formed the basis of the RDS national response to the document.

He has also raised various issues with the TUCC for NE England including the inability of BR to provide for peak holiday passenger traffic. He points out that even reserving seats cannot guarantee a place in heavily overcrowded trains. Other holiday problems include lack of luggage space in new Mark 4 coaches and Regional Railways' 158 Expresses, understocked buffets and safety fears in crowded trains.

The Yorkshire Rail Review was published in February.

A points failure at Leeds was partly to blame for major delays when snow hit Leeds on 4 January. Many of the points and crossings in the throat of the station are due for renewal and the signalling was "knackered" five years ago.

# Opening the way for new trains

By TREVOR GARROD and NICK DIBBEN

More and more people are getting the message that rail reopenings are a key way to combat traffic congestion.

Thanks to money raised in our 1992 national draw, RDS has been able to give support to more local campaigns.

A high quality leaflet putting the case for reopening the Cambridge - St Ives line to passengers was produced with £125 claimed by the East Anglian branch.

The leaflet stressed that the line is an under-used asset which could provide a service for commuters and leisure travellers to Cambridge from the growing communities to the north west of the city. If it was extended to Huntingdon, it could also be a strategic link to places further afield.

A 2,200 signature petition demonstrated the level of local support.

The St Ives campaign attracted support from MPs and councillors right across the political spectrum. The Cambridge Evening News was inspired by our leaflet to run a sustained campaign for reopening which we estimate would cost £6.2 million.

Our greatest short-term achievement was the decision by the county council in January to commission a full-scale feasibility study. District councils have offered to help with funding the study.

East Anglian branch had also pledged to raise cash for a feasibility study at a meeting in November. Donations can be made to our chairman Steve Wilkinson, 52 Manor Park, Histon, Cambridge CB4 4JT. Make cheques payable to RDS.

The reopening campaign which has been going for 20 years - since the line closed to passengers - has intensified in the past few months following BR's decision to sell the line.

RDS wants the line upgraded and electrified with new stations at the Science Park and on the existing main line. Electrification would allow existing rolling stock to be used and provide a cross-city service as well as through trains to London.

We criticised an earlier county council study in 1988 but now we are working closely with it to ensure the new study is accurate.

The county council is also considering a plan to restore passenger trains to the single-track freight-only line between Wisbech and March.

Meanwhile Midlands branch received £300 from the draw proceeds to help its campaign for restoration of services on freight-only lines. An attractive leaflet was

also produced calling for a station at Aldridge on the existing line to Walsall. This was issued following meetings with the public transport authority Centro and was widely issued to local politicians. The branch has also published a 15-page illustrated report The Dudley Dasher, urging a fast diesel service for Stourbridge, Dudley and Walsall. The report states that such a service could be operated as a five-year experiment on a marginal cost basis, as has been successfully done on the Cannock line.

Initial capital expenditure, in signalling improvements and two new stations, would be below £1 million and the two-way flow of passengers on a low-cost service could well achieve a break-even in operating costs.

Smaller sums of money from the draw proceeds have also been spent on research into the rail alternatives to widening the M25 motorway and on a joint RDS-Transport 2000 leaflet on east-west rail links.

Meanwhile a new national draw has been launched for 1993 so that we can continue this important area of work. All profits will go to campaigns for reopening lines and stations.

A book of draw tickets is enclosed. Apologies to those who do not wish to receive them.

Backing for the reopening of the line from Shanklin to Ventnor on the Isle of Wight has come from Ventnor Professional and Business Association whose president said that the town's steady decline in prosperity could be traced back to the rail closure in 1966.

**Lottery winners:** The winners of the RDS lottery for November were Nigel Perkins, Harrow £66.20, D R Reeve, Norwich £41.38, J E Dwelley, Felixstowe £24.82, Mrs E Alford, Cambridge £16.54, Brian Hastings, Scunthorpe £8.28, M C Rogers, Stoke £8.28.

December: S F Simms, Walsall £66.40, A J Macbeath, Grange over Sands £41.50, A J Boulwood, Edgware £24.90, R Burrows, Hassocks £16.60, R Grainger, Edenbridge £8.30, John White, Hadley Wood £8.30.

January: R Eaton, Plymouth £64.40, C Skanner, Warley £40.25, Charles Rowe, Orpington £24.15, J Cully, Norwich £16.10, A Lambert, Falmouth £8.05, Graham Smith, Gedling £8.05.

If you want to join the lottery, send a minimum of £12 (for a £1 a month stake) to Dave Finch, 28 Neville Avenue, Kidderminster, Worcs DY11 7AL. Make cheques payable to RDS.

# WESTMINSTER

Privatisation of the railways was opposed by *John Prescott* (Labour, Kingston-upon-Hull East) on 12 JANUARY. The debate came shortly before what was assumed would be a new Bill, he said.

Confusion reigned. At the beginning of the New Year the Government said that they would privatise the railways. Then the Prime Minister changed that to semi-privatisation. "I say that is a policy U-turn."

The assumption was that private operation of the railways was far better than leaving them to public operation. It was almost an ideological difference between them. What was the evidence for justifying privatisation? There was such a system in Argentina, but after a few years of operation, the passenger system was in collapse.

## In public hands

Sweden was often cited as having a privatised rail system, but only one per cent of the system was privatised while the track and operations remained in public hands. Track subsidies had to be maintained because of very expensive investment.

"In Japan we are talking not about privately owned companies, but publicly owned private companies, such as municipally owned bus services. The service is not privately run. Therefore that is not a good example.

"In France the system is basically state-owned. The only private sector - between France and Orly - collapsed a few months ago. Much is made of the EC moving towards privatisation of the rail system, but it is not. It is moving towards transparency, a clear distinction between services that receive public subsidies and those to be operated as profitable.

*Michael Fabricant* (Conservative, Mid-Staffordshire) asked if British Airways was not profitable at the time of its privatisation because it did not provide a good service in comparison with other airlines. Now it was profitable because it provided a good service.

Mr Prescott said he conceded that British Airways was able to eliminate its losses, largely because it restructured its manpower. The British Rail system had one of the highest levels of efficiency in Europe. The argument could not be about labour or efficiency. Every good, successful railway system in Europe was publicly owned.

## Bad bedfellows

*Robert Adley* (Con, Christchurch) said that whatever the state of the railways at the moment, things could only get better. "In my view, party politics and public transport policy are very uneasy bedfellows. If my enthusiasm for the railways is a crime, I plead guilty."

The Labour Party said no to any form of privatisation. "I voted against the poll tax because it always smelt wrong to me. At the moment there is a hint of unease amongst my friends. Shrewsbury, Cleethorpes and Blackpool have lost their direct services to London. It will be Penzance, Middlesbrough and Swansea next, and large swathes of Cornwall, Scotland and Wales. Did people think that trains to Penzance would continue indefinitely, even if there were connecting services from Plymouth? Those through services - an essential feature of the rail system - would inevitably be placed at risk if the franchising proposals took effect.

The Transport Secretary *John MacGregor* had made a statement on the question of closures: that railway services would continue subject only to "economic and commercial realities". He did not mention social need, nor environmental or congestion factors.

Mr MacGregor asked him not to distort his words. As economic conditions changed, and if there was no demand for a service, closure proposals might follow and be considered in the normal way. Nothing in what was proposed was different from what had happened in railway practice for a very long time. Mr Adley repeated that the phrase he had

used was "economic and commercial realities."

When electricity was being privatised, he added, he in the south-west was told that fears about increased regional charges were totally unreal. But when an industry is nationalised - for better or worse - the Government has some control and can give instructions to ensure that the things they want done are done.

"Let us compare that state of affairs with that pertaining in the privatised electricity industry. The President of the Board of Trade has responsibility for the coal industry but no power. This is what happens: the words of the Transport Secretary may become wholly irrelevant if, in 10 years' time, the vast majority of railway passenger services in Britain may no longer be operated by the nationalised industry."

The Labour motion was lost by 270 votes to 309.

## Second reading

British Rail has improved considerably in recent years in many of its services, said Transport Secretary *John MacGregor*, moving the second reading of the Railways Bill on 2 FEBRUARY.

We began, he said, with a railway regime not fundamentally changed since nationalisation in 1948. BR combined the classic shortcomings of the traditional nationalised industry. That meant too little responsiveness to customers' needs, no real competition, and too little diversity and innovation. Inevitably it also had the culture of a nationalised industry: a heavily bureaucratic structure, an insufficiently sharp awareness on the part of employees that their success depends on satisfying the customer.

All this showed up in public dissatisfaction with the railways, he said. "Those who work in BR and the system have been constrained by the nationalised industry, which has now been found wanting for all the other industries that we have privatised."

The railways and their customers, he said, would benefit as much as other industries from a change in the system under which they have to operate. The aim was to create a new regime for the railways. There were three advantages in getting as much private-sector involvement as possible. First was the big issue of the change of culture: the transformation in work practices that occurs when they realise that their success depends on always putting customer requirements first.

This was a fundamentally important point which was stressed by many people. Secondly, what was being done would help to create more competition and choice. Thirdly, it would enable private sector capital to supplement the existing sources of BR finance.

BR freight and parcels services would be sold to the private sector and there would be open access for new operators. Breaking BR's monopoly was crucial in order to succeed in getting more freight back on the rails. It was a challenging target. *John Prescott* said that Mr MacGregor had begun his remarks by speaking of an historical change, "and one is certainly being made". Mr MacGregor suggested that it would be for the better, but that was not proven and certainly not by Mr MacGregor's speech. The Government should be more concerned about who was to run the railways rather than who was to run one or two lines.

Mr MacGregor said that privatisation had produced better results, whether it be in respect of gas, electricity or water. That was disputable. A comparison had been made between BR and the privatisation and deregulation of buses, which it had been said would provide better services, lower fares and investment. Instead, there is clear evidence that passengers pay a lot more, fewer services are available, buses run only on profitable routes and there were no service cross-subsidies. It was plain that deregulation and privatisation destroyed our effective modern bus industry.

Never had a Bill been so universally condemned or so lost its essential justification - that private competition and privatisation would provide the means by which to change the service. To replace public with private management there would be fundamental changes. Of course there would - the pay increases for the bosses who would be running the system. That would happen straight away.

## A better service?

"We shall have to wait to find out whether privatisation will lead to improvements, but I do not believe that it will. Essentially the Bill is an enabling measure. I believe a publicly owned railway system can provide a better service than one privately owned."

The process would not, however, be completed under the present Government. It would not be completed until the next century.



# WATCH



Nor would it reduce bureaucracy. As Mr MacGregor had been forced to admit, there would be more quangos.

The Bill offered no guarantee that the existing network of 11,000 miles would continue. That was the justification for the public service obligation payments made by the European Community. There was no guarantee of protection from closures, especially in rural areas.

Mr MacGregor had talked of a record level of investment, meaning the actual amount put into the Channel Tunnel. The chairman of BR had said that after two years, investment in the tunnel would fall to an average of £600 million a year. This was less than enough to maintain the support required by Network SouthEast.

## Filched ideas

Mr MacGregor had not guaranteed that the railways would retain freight, rather than more being transported by road. It was interesting to hear Mr MacGregor say that he is now convinced of what needs to be done to transfer the traffic from road to rail. "An awful lot of the ideas he has announced have been filched from Labour.

"All the ideas offered by Mr MacGregor were published years ago; he is merely trawling documents and adding our policies to his. I agree that those ideas will help to transfer traffic from road to rail and I am in favour of that. But he has just announced there must be an eight per cent rate of return on freight. His present policy is driving a number of private companies to

tries from rail to road in the south-east. No need to wait for legislation to change the position: change it now.

"I welcome the proposals. I have advocated transferring more traffic from road to rail. My only disagreement is that it is unnecessary to wait 18 months." Nick Harvey (Liberal Democrat, Devon North) said it would be more credible to expect private operators to want to run rail services if they did not have to pay for the many years of under-investment in the rail network, and to pay for what is likely to prove a most unattractive charge for using the track.

It contrasted with an example he had given where the infrastructure was built and provided free of charge and on which the operator was to make a return.

"There might have been circumstances in which my party

could have supported a Bill on railway privatisation. We have no ideological objection to private operators using the rail network, but there is no such Bill." This was not a classic privatisation.

## Closure procedures

Roger Freeman (Public Transport Minister) said the remark by Brian Wilson (Lab, Canningham North) that there could be closures on a significant scale was untrue. The Franchising Authority would start with the existing timetable and would impose on franchise companies a requirement to run a specific service for the length of the franchise.

There would be clear closure procedures. In exchange with Mr Prescott at the beginning of the debate, the inference that privatisation or the reforms proposed would lead to closure were quite wrong.

Mr Wilson criticised the disaggregation of subsidy – the allocation of subsidy to individual railway lines. He would find that he was in a minority. The Transport Users Consultative Committees were broadly in favour of the allocation of subsidy to particular lines and groups of services.

BR was rightly taking relatively modest steps to price up certain traffics. It was sensible to increase prices where the business was not even covering its avoidable costs, making no contribution to the infrastructure. "I confirm that we shall discuss with BR opportunities for the private sector freight operator in the immediate future."

Sir David Mitchell (Con, Hampshire NW) asked if there would be open access for the private sector freight operator to use BR track this year.

Mr Freeman said that there could not be open access until Royal Assent had been given to legislation. We first needed the co-operation of BR. It had a statutory right to provide the drivers of trains.

Replying to Mr Harvey, who asked what were the benefits to passengers, Mr Freeman said that during the debate he noted 10 practical benefits. The first was the interconnection of InterCity and other rail services. The second advantage was an improvement not only in car parking for users of commuter services but also in the security of car parks.

Thirdly, there could be better passenger information systems. This was a question not merely of money but of attitude. It involved paying attention to passengers'

interests. Fourthly, there could be the improvement of retailing opportunities at stations. Fifthly, there could be early provision of new equipment and the design of new rolling stock, instead of engineers being responsible for designing what they think the public needs.

"Who will do it?" asked Mr Prescott. "The private sector owners," replied Mr Freeman. Sixth, there should be better marketing. There must be new opportunities for changes in the price structure for off-peak travel – to encourage more traffic. Seventh, there should be better on-board services and, eighth, development at stations. Ninth, there should be better staff incentives, giving rail staff the opportunity to own a share in the company.

## Remember Speller

On station services, more could be done at the major stations if the staff were interested in the passengers rather than the running of the trains. It was right to remember the Transport Act of 1981, promoted by Tony Speller. We should record the progress made in introducing experimental new rail services and the Speller process would be preserved.

"Order books for the past 44 years have reflected the fact that BR, being a nationalised industry, can look forward only a relatively short period. One of the great advantages of bringing in the private sector is that the time horizons for investment planning can be greater – a great advantage."

## Tunnel: What next?

When the Channel Tunnel was announced a few years ago, it was said that we needed only one London terminal for the Channel Tunnel rail link, Sir Keith Speed (Con, Ashford), speaking at 6am after an all-night sitting on 14

DECEMBER. "We then did an about-turn and said we needed two terminals – King's Cross and Waterloo."

Since then the history of the project had bordered on high farce, causing major problems and uncertainty for many in Kent and south-east London. Eventually a likely route was arrived at – the southerly approach into London through Ashford and North Kent, and across the river, through Essex, Stratford and King's Cross.

At the beginning of 1992, Union

Railways, a new subsidiary formed by British Rail, was set up to redefine the project.

"Over the past five years, my constituents have been subjected to numerous anxieties. All the consultations and statements on the Channel Tunnel rail link have been totally misleading and out-of-date, bearing no relation to the latest initiative.

"Roger Freeman (Public Transport Minister) has done a great deal to try to promote Ashford International passenger station, but it is clearly unlikely to open before the international services start running."

## Shell-shocked

What was the cost of the exercise? Clearly in excess of £100 million. "For £100 million we could have built Ashford International and had £20 million left over for something else. People in Kent are angry and shell-shocked."

The rail link would at best be five or six years behind the comparable link that the French were to open in 1993. "On the Channel Tunnel rail link, we want publication now. We want consultation as soon as possible. We want the very best environmental protection, and we want early construction."

Sir John Stanley (Con, Tonbridge and Malling) said that a new proposed line was to pass in tunnel under the North Downs. "I accept," Sir John added, "that in carrying out public transport projects, it is inescapable that blight will follow. In human terms it is incredibly distressing, making it impossible for people to sell their houses."

People who were previously blighted should not be re-blighted. There must be a tunnel through the North Downs. If there is any question of the Government reneging on that, the Minister will face absolutely determined opposition.

Roger Gale (Con, Thanet North) said he spoke for all his colleagues in East Kent in the belief that the fast link was needed, and that the necessary investment should be brought to a satisfactory conclusion swiftly. It was time to get the freight off Kent roads and on the railways. Ramsgate and Dover were saturated with heavy and dangerous traffic. Heavy lorries were breaking up Kent's roads and using side roads as rat runs to an intolerable level.

# Throttling the watchdogs

One thing is certain about the Government's rail privatisation plans: They have not been drawn up with the passenger in mind.

The complete package of proposals is market-driven.

The attitude was summed up in what the Government called a "consultation" document about consumer representation in the new regime.

A Voice for the Passenger was supposed to be sent to "anyone with an interest".

But initially it was not sent to anyone in RDS or to any of the 200 or so rail user groups spread throughout Britain even though the department insisted it was not trying to exclude us!

RDS, however, and a few of those user groups were able to obtain copies and make their comments to the Department of Transport in the three short weeks allowed.

General secretary Trevor Garrod protested to the department.

RDS believes user groups should be officially represented in the new arrangements.

But the Government is content to allow the present set-up of transport users consultative committees to continue under a new name - Rail Users' Consultative Committees (RUCCs).

They will have fewer powers and their members will be appointed as in the past. The Government has used this system of patronage to exclude genuine champions of the rail user.

The existing system has seen half Britain's rail network close, fares rising high above inflation and cynical reductions of service levels. We have trains without adequate lavatories, seats positioned so you can't see out of windows, insufficient space for prams, bikes and luggage - and destaffed stations. Few user groups are represented.

The Railways Bill may tighten up some of the legal procedures. In future for instance, an operator will have to say why he wants to close a line.

But he still won't have to give financial details which will make it almost impossible to argue effectively against closure.

And closures are more likely to occur - because they will be more difficult to stop.

Imagine the case of 100 railway managers who have mortgaged their houses - giving them £10 million, just enough cash to take on a "vertical" franchise. Then bridges on their line are washed away in floods. Will they be able to raise the millions needed to do repairs? Would the line then close? If the operators have a "vertical" franchise, users will be excluded from making representations to the RUCCs. And even if the RUCC was able to take up the case, a new



**Rail to the rescue:** Thousands of people devastated by war in the former Yugoslavia were helped by an international rescue mission by rail. More than 50,000 mattresses made by Beauvale Furnishings of Glossop, Derbyshire, were despatched in January to Belgrade for the Red Cross as part of the United Nations aid programme.

RDS chairman Steve Wilkinson watched 50 four-wheel wagons loaded at the Potter Group's Queen Adelaide private European freight terminal at Ely, Cambridgeshire. The initiative also involved freight forwarders Schenker and Co of Austria. The wagons were taken to Dover by Railfreight Distribution to cross to Dunkirk on the train ferry. Then a series of national railways took over.

Picture by Bob Osborne

clause forces it to take "resource restraints" into account when making representations. It is not likely to be a forceful friend of the user with that kind of remit. The RUCCs will not be allowed to "interfere" in fares, or to suggest the levels of service to be specified in franchises.

Critics say the present system puts the watchdogs too much in the hands of BR. Under the new proposals, they will be even less independent - answering to the new rail regulator who has already been named as John Horton.

He was reportedly forced off the BP board in a coup after gaining the reputation of having an abrasive personality.

The Government appointed him to the BR board to stabilise chairman Sir Bob Reid, who began to warn the Government that it should take the railways' social value into account.

Now Mr Horton will be asked to take a sympathetic view of rail users' needs! The chairman of the Central Transport Consultative Committee, Major General Lennox Napier, has been a doughty champion for rail passengers but has had insufficient powers to persuade either BR

or the Government to adopt more sensible policies. He predicts the new committees will be enfeebled. That means that we as rail users will be enfeebled too.

We agree with Public Transport Minister Roger Freeman who said: "An effective voice for consumers is vital."

The present proposals make a mockery of any effective statutory consumer protection and representation. It looks deliberate. The need for RDS and individual user groups will be even more vital in future.

## Sounding the alarm

More and more people are coming together to fight the Government's plans for massive road building. Delegates at a Birmingham conference urged the Government to shift resources to more environmentally friendly forms of transport - rail, bus, cycling and walking.

Organised by Alarm UK, it was the first conference in this country to bring together the grassroots opposition to road building. The Department of Transport's dirty tricks were exposed by David Croker of the Twyford Down Association. Further information on Alarm UK from John Stewart on 071 737 6641.

## Farewell George

Railwatch assistant editor George Cooper died suddenly in December. George was a consumers' champion who felt he had to take action when he saw stupidity or sharp practice. He put right many a wrong to the benefit of the public at large. He was scathing about ignorant and lazy behaviour by BR managers "who should know better". He jokingly called himself Mr Growser but even he was surprised when he was ordered off a station because he had advised a couple of pensioners how to take advantage of a cheap ticket. He will be greatly missed.

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