

Railwatch

AN INDEPENDENT VOICE FOR RAIL USERS

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90p

The core of the problem

The future of secondary and branch lines looks increasingly precarious following rail privatisation, the rail users conference was warned in October.

It became clear that both Railtrack and the new train operating units will be in a "tight financial position" and will be concentrating on their "core" activities.

They will be seeking to maximise revenue on main lines while socially useful but financially vulnerable lines will find it increasingly difficult to get the necessary investment in both infrastructure and new trains.

The rail user representatives were warned by RDS vice chairman Ray King that it would be largely up to them to safeguard their lines, in the face of official lack of interest.

Reports were also circulating of train operating units being told to cut their costs by 3% as soon as possible and to be ready for a further 3% cut next year.

The bleak financial outlook for "Cinderella" services was revealed by Railtrack production director John Ellis.

"We will not necessarily support every station or every route," he said.

"We want to develop the network as far as we can but it will be on a commercial basis. We cannot and should not take into account social issues.

"Some services are expensive to maintain and cannot be met by revenue."

Asked by the Cotswold Line's Derek Potter about the threat to outlying stations, he said the money might be better spent on providing a bus to a "railhead".

Nor could he give much encouragement to Chris Wright who wanted investment to modernise the 16 manned level crossings on the Bedford to Bletchley line. "The



blunt fact is that it is not very economic to do it," said Mr Ellis.

"Staffing costs are high but are low compared to the money needed to invest in centralised signalling. We will focus the available investment on the power boxes on the main lines.

"I don't see us doing much re-equipping on the branch lines."

Asked by Andrew MacFarlane of the Mid Cheshire Line Users about the high charges facing charter train organisers, he warned: "We are not a public service. Why should we view charter trains as a public service?" He also said little to encourage Mel Durrant who asked about electrification of the Midland main line. And he warned that there would be little European money available for rail investment in Britain. European money was available if only our "wonderful Government" would do anything about getting it. "But it gives me great

sadness that the 10 major projects identified for the European rail network do not include any investments in this country, because the Government did not put forward any projects," he said.

"There is little we can do if we do not have a government which is prepared to put our case in Brussels or Strasbourg."

He said the most important issue was the problem of investment. "Railtrack wants to see the issues of the social and environmental benefits of rail being addressed," he said. Dealing with the signalling strike, he said it had been a scarring experience and it was painful to talk about. "The

tragedy is that what we finally agreed could have been agreed without any stoppage of service at all," he said.

"We take our share of the responsibility. I am not going to talk about the Government's part in the dispute. But RMT has come out of it with no

credit whatsoever. We are all losers, particularly the customers."

RDS chairman Steve Wilkinson thanked Mr Ellis and commented: "We have a government that knows the price of everything but does not know the value of anything."

There were three workshop sessions in the afternoon. One revealed the need for a proper academic study of the economic effects of rail reopening schemes.

It has already been shown that roads do not generate local jobs but now RDS must find university departments willing to research the benefits of new rail projects.

Anyone with information or suggestions should contact general secretary Trevor Garrod, 15 Clapham Road, Lowestoft, Suffolk NR32 1RQ.

■ For a full report of the conference please send a cheque for £1 (payable to RDS) to Martin Ball, 89 North Wallington, Fareham, Hants PO16 8TJ



Railtrack's Mr Ellis

When the signal dispute ended, there was much media speculation about winners and losers. It could be argued that the RMT, Railtrack and the Government each lost and gained something.

But there can be no doubt that the main direct winners were rail's competitors on the roads, and to some extent, in the air. As the *Eastern Daily Press* put it, the roads lobby had received "an unexpected delivery of clover".

Business was lost to road hauliers, bus and coach operators and to all those whose livelihood depends on the private car. For all the fine words spoken at the TUC, trade unionists in those industries gained from the signal dispute, as their employers gained new business.

As soon as the dispute ended, I told those media people who contacted me that we now hoped rail operators would make every effort to regain lost business. That may be easier on the passenger than on the freight side. We in RDS should suggest, support and publicise such initiatives.

Some operators may use their losses during the strikes as an excuse to cut services. We should argue against such cuts. RDS has a Rail Defence Fund to finance our campaigning against cuts and closures.

Towards the end of the dispute, certain newspapers published articles questioning the need for a national rail network and arguing for the conversion of tracks into roads. The main argument used was that the country had not ground to a halt without train services.

People can work around one and two day strikes announced two weeks in advance, especially when these occur in summer; while an all-out strike in autumn or winter would have caused much more disruption.

TREVOR GARROD'S VIEW



Reflections on the strikes

Furthermore, on most strike days, services were run and even when, as on my local line, it was a somewhat restricted service, people could and did use it.

Nevertheless, damage was done to the economy (and therefore, ultimately, to the Exchequer), as bodies like the CBI pointed out. One estimate was that businesses had lost over £300 million because people could not get to work and freight trains could not run. As several of us pointed out in letters to the press, MPs and others, the cost of the dispute to the public purse was far higher than it would have been to settle the original RMT claim in full. One can also add indirect costs, like increased pollution on sultry July days.

As an organisation representing rail users and advocating greater use of rail, RDS should use its influence to try to make such disputes less likely in future. A few members have argued that rail employees and those in other key services should not be allowed to strike.

As a trade unionist who has on occasion taken strike action, I personally would be loath to advocate such a policy. Anyone who considers giving up the right to withdraw their labour (which let us remember means sacrificing pay and so is not a decision taken lightly) would need real incentives to do so. By all means let us

discuss within RDS the pros and cons of this and other industrial relations issues, but let us not indulge in knee-jerk reactions. It has also been suggested that we should no longer have anything to do with the RMT in our campaigning.

Unlike Transport 2000, RDS does not have formal links with, or funding from, the rail unions at national level although we have occasionally had donations for specific projects. Nonetheless, a considerable number of RMT, ASLEF and TSSA branches are affiliated to us and it helps RDS to draw on the expertise of professional railway men and women.

For example, not long ago we were told by railway managers that staffing costs prevented them from laying on extra trains. I was invited to a local RMT meeting where those present explained to me that the managers in question were being - shall we say - somewhat creative in their accounting.

Surely we should keep open such doors with the unions? RDS needs to use its unique position of independence to keep up a frank but constructive dialogue with both sides.

■ Trevor Garrod is general secretary of RDS and writes a column every four weeks in the magazine RAIL.

In brief

■ Members who work for companies with large numbers of people who travel to work or could travel by train are invited to pass details to RDS research co-ordinator John Saunders in confidence. His address is Sawyers Lane, Sutton, Wymondham, Norfolk NR18 9JH.

■ Rob Archer has agreed to organise next year's RDS sponsored cycle ride. If you have any ideas for this June event, please contact Rob at 62 Checker Street, King's Lynn, Norfolk PE30 5AS.

■ Doe's Bus/Rail Guide takes rail travellers to places where trains no longer run. It gives details of buses which can be used in conjunction with trains. One issue costs £6, while an annual subscription costs £21. Send your cheque (payable to B S Doe) to 25 Newmorton Road, Moordown, Bournemouth BH9 3NU and mention RDS.

■ An apology Former Transport Secretary John MacGregor has apologised for misleading RDS member Mr K C Burton about the speed limit for lorries



Farewell Gentleman Jack

Railwatch assistant editor Jack Ellis died at the age of 80 in October, after a lifetime devoted to railways. He was a journalist by profession, working for his local paper in Twickenham, and then in Fleet Street for the Press Association and the Sunday Express.

He also wrote for the tiny Eel Pie Bulletin and of course wrote and edited in Parliament which later became Westminster Watch. He was keen to lend a hand to many minority groups who were grateful for his expertise.

He helped to found HANDS, Help a Neighbour in Distress and with John Betjeman's assistance, he saved a beautiful historic part of Twickenham, largely by buying the riverside house he was to live in for years. He was a founder member of the Railway Development Association in 1952. He edited the society's newsletter for 26 years and later edited Railondon. Even in ill health after two strokes, he struggled to maintain his reports from Parliament.

He was a quiet, modest gentleman who will be sorely missed by the society and as a friend to many. His genial personality and good humour made him a delight to be with - both understanding and caring. But he was determined to maintain his principles. As a pacifist, from 1939-45 he worked on ambulance trains, picking up the casualties of war. We all owe him a great deal. One of Jack's favourite projects was the Swanage Railway. Any donations in Jack's memory should go there - the Southern Steam Trust, c/o 10 Brendan Road, New Eltham, SE9 3RP.

on single carriageway A roads being 60mph. Mr Burton was correct in that lorries are restricted to 40mph.

■ RDS lottery winners for August: Dr P Brooks, Edinburgh £53.20, Malcolm Jevons, Mexborough £33.25, Roger Dewhurst, Southampton

£19.95, R Burrows, Hassocks £13.30, J D Smith, Rye £6.65, John Thorley, Burnley £6.65.

September: R E Grainger, Edenbridge £52, Michael Moores, Dukinfield £32.50, Reg Snow, Great Bookham £19.50, Ms J Coombes, Ipswich £13, C M G Odell, Earls Barton £6.50,

Roger Dewhurst, Southampton £6.50.

October: C W Goodings, Wymondham £52.80, M C Stewart, Swinton £33, Jonathan Dalton, Eastbourne £19.80, A S Cleeveley, Birmingham £13.20, R Woodcroft, Leeds £6.60, K C Burton, Thetford £6.60.



Wunderbahn!

FLAGSHIP: The high-speed InterCity Express at Gottingen. But Germany's other train services are as impressive

While Britain was going through the throes of railway privatisation, the Germans were quietly and carefully meshing together the networks from the former East and West of their now united country - and reorganising at the same time. Here Michael Weinberg describes the pleasure of travelling by rail in Germany and compares it with Britain.

A recent trip to Germany and intensive use of a German regional rail pass has left me ever more convinced of the need for RDS to increase pressure on the British Government for radical and fundamental improvements to our railway system.

The Germans already have a network we can only dream about. While we are still prevaricating over a miserable 70 miles of new railway for the Channel Tunnel fast link, they already have several sections of high-speed line in use, with more being constructed daily.

They have a fleet of 60 InterCity Express trains (the equivalent of the French TGV) in service, linking all major cities, with an order for 50 more being built and a further 50 in the pipeline. Travel on these trains is smooth, quiet and comfortable, giving an hourly service of superb trains.

In addition there is a network of inter-city trains of conventional stock which run on the main routes but serve more points along the way. These too are very spacious and comfortable.

Finally there is a comprehensive system of IR (inter-regional) services travelling long distances but generally over the secondary

main lines and made up of about nine thoroughly refurbished coaches including a buffet.

In a British context imagine, say a Holyhead to Weymouth service calling at Bangor, Llandudno Jct., Rhyl, Chester, Crewe, Shrewsbury, Hereford, Newport, Bristol, Bath, Westbury, Yeovil and Weymouth, running every hour with a nine-coach buffet car train, with each seat having a copy of that particular train's schedule, together with a list of all connections made at each stop and arrival times at these connections, all given in three languages; and then consider that this is just the third division network, and you will understand the chasm between our standards and theirs! Furthermore Deutsche Bundesbahn AG has 40 tilting train sets on order to take over and speed up these services eventually!

How many high-speed trains has Britain got on order? None.

How many inter-city trains has Britain ordered? None.

How many Express Regional trains has Britain ordered? None.

How many trains has BR on order? None.

The rail services within urban areas are even more impressive, compared to shoddy Britain. Stuttgart and Munich which I visited recently have S-bahn (outer suburban expresses), U-bahn, (inner suburban and underground) and street running tram systems. All the services are available to holders of the various travel cards on offer in all German cities, so that getting around by

public transport is simple. During my travels in Bavaria, I saw no equivalent of our dreadful Pacers, or the class 150 and its derivatives with cramped five-a-side seating. There was no evidence of the paralysis which comes over BR on Sundays and in the evenings.

There were no unscheduled stops between stations - surely a sign of a railway operated and maintained in first-class condition.

The double-deck commuter trains coming into service on routes around Munich were a revelation to me, being used to noisy, draughty, dirty and unreliable class 321 electrics which are my daily transport.

The large city centre stations (Hauptbahnhofs) are magnificent and put Manchester Piccadilly, Liverpool Lime Street or Leeds to shame. Hundreds of left-luggage lockers and trolleys scattered throughout the concourses and platforms made travelling easy, even with heavy baggage.

And if you wish to forward your luggage then DB will do it, unlike BR which, as in so many other fields, has simply opted out.

Travelling on DB is easy and often a pleasure. Interestingly the only problem I had was when I inadvertently strayed on to a private railway, the Tegernsee Bahn, on which my regional pass was not valid. I had to pay an exorbitant charge to cover 15 miles or so, queue up to show my ticket at the barrier to the same man who sold it to me on the train, and when I protested that my ticket said Deutsche

Bundesbahn and the coaches had DB printed on the side, the reply was one word: Private.

Therein lies a dreadful warning to those of us struggling to protect our national rail network.

The German Government has reorganised its rail services but respects its citizens' right to an efficient and reliable alternative to the private car.

In Britain, rail users are treated with contempt.

Our backward Government is also happy to have only 7% of freight on rail while Germany sends 35% by rail.

Ten daily trains are being provided to take lorries piggyback 50 miles over the Erzgebirge from Dresden to Lovosice in the Czech Republic because they are causing so much mayhem on unsuitable roads. It will cost each lorry £36 but will reduce what can be a 16-hour journey to less than three hours. Saxony is considering forcing hauliers to use the service if they do not respond voluntarily.

A new company called Eurotrack is hauling lorry semi-trailers containing meat, fish and dairy products between Denmark and Italy using the special KombiRail bimodal trailer system. Eurotrack is owned by the national railways of Germany, Denmark, Austria and Italy.

The Danish company KombiDan is running a similar service to Italy for swap bodies and containers.

Lorry semi-trailers are being carried from Holland and Germany through the Alps on 26 daily rail shuttles. A lesson here for the county of Kent.

Logo mania

We have seen lots of new logos as a result of privatisation but more idiocies. Booking clerks can no longer make outside phone calls, for instance to chase up supplies of passenger transport executive timetables, because nobody can decide who pays the phone bill.

BR's house journal *Railnews* has not been seen in Yorkshire for several months because the North East train operating unit refuses to pay for it!

Mike Crowhurst, Garforth, Leeds LS25 2QQ

Remedy for the Pacer

The Pacer is a disaster. Each one should be fitted with bogies immediately. Hundreds of bogies are available yearly from scrapped vehicles.

Graham Tolliday, 3 Southbank, Oxton, Birkenhead L43 5UP

Heritage bonus

I'd like to comment about the return of Heritage diesel units to the Llandudno-Blaenau Ffestiniog line.

For five years I commuted into either Leeds, Manchester or Bradford. I feel that the 158s aren't as good as they're cracked up to be.

The seats are too high causing a feeling of claustrophobia, if you happen to get stuck next to someone of gigantic proportions. And as I'm also over six foot I can't say I'm happy with the room when the train is busy.

Having a limited number of exits causes delays during busy times. The 158s aren't geared for commuter travel, though they are used on such services. By contrast, the old units do have more doors, and don't forget the pleasure of sitting right at the front of a unit and seeing where you are going - always a popular pastime.

So don't knock the old units; some of us think they still have a role to play, especially on off-peak scenic routes. Let's concentrate instead on getting the new designs right, and money being spent where it is really needed.

Tim Mickleburgh, 101 Scartho Road, Grimsby, Lincolnshire, DN33 2AE

Can do better

There was a good deal to be desired in the Heritage diesels which have some advantages over the 158s. Forward visibility is one, proper luggage space, especially for

bicycles, is another. What has become of the magnificent forward visibility of the early multiple units, which reached its splendid best in the Scottish blue trains? And the maximum capacity in 158s of one bicycle, booked in advance, is a disgrace for cross country trains.

The 158s are not bad but a bit claustrophobic with their high seats and they are moderately noisy. We can do still better.

Dr Henry Tribe, 198 Gilbert Road, Cambridge CB4 3PB

Timely information

In Italy several commercial publishers produce invaluable light national timetables of all Italian services, both public and private, for only £5 or so. These are sold at most newspaper kiosks. *Orario* is the magic word. Perhaps Mr Behrend could supply them here?

On a more optimistic note, it is well worth writing to travel editors on newspapers asking them to include rail/bus information. I wrote to the author of a weekly section on walking in the *Sunday Telegraph*, and public transport information was included for a good while afterwards.

Ms Shayne Mitchell, Meadow House, Harrold, Beds MK4 3DE

Threat to ferry link

I have reason to believe that the passenger service to Heysham Harbour (for Isle of Man boats), so carefully built up by Sealink and BR over the last few years, has been abolished - by stealth and deceit.

Morecambe Promenade station was replaced by a glorified halt from 6 June.

Meanwhile, with no advance announcement, the track to Heysham was singled by July. Railtrack North West claimed that "engineering work was still continuing" and "could give no date for a resumption of the train service".

A train of nuclear flasks has gone down the single track to the power station every Monday since the end of May. Why, then, no passenger trains?

A letter to the local paper has been ignored. I can get nobody who knows anything on the phone at Railtrack. I wonder how many other branch lines and their train services are being quietly closed in the confusion of privatisation.

The service to the harbour was

clearly profitable in the holiday season. Often three or four diesel multiple units were packed to the roof. BR said they would withdraw the service in winter if it was not profitable. They didn't!

J B W Keighley, 66 Levens Drive, Morecambe, Lancs LA3 1JW

Information gap

I recently rescued a heavily-laden bemused passenger for Edinburgh on the Manchester Piccadilly through platforms. As she correctly pointed out there was no indication on the TV monitor of a departure to Edinburgh.

Without clearly saying so, that monitor was solely for "Regional Railways" whereas the Edinburgh train was on a separate InterCity departures monitor some way away!

These antics are hardly likely to encourage rail use.

John Davis, 41 Fairmead Avenue, Harpenden, Herts AL5 5UD

Rail shops

Many country villages have lost village shops.

Rail coaches could be converted into 'SPAR' type mini markets and each one could be located at a suitable siding, accessible to the public.

The coaches could be run as franchises and moved if it was found business was good at one site on Tuesday and another on Thursday. They could also be pubs, libraries, restaurants and travel centres.

I would be interested to hear from other RDS members about this idea.

Jonathan Swift, Flat 6, 190 Bournemouth Road, Poole, Dorset BH14 9HZ

Strike idea

Government, unions and managers must be forced to recognise that the passenger's interests are paramount. If this means rail and ferry workers giving up their right to strike in exchange for compulsory arbitration, so be it.

Douglas Smart, 61/5 Caledonian Crescent, Edinburgh EH11 2AT

Strike plot

I understand that rail managers have expressed fears that nearly half the rail network could be closed down permanently if the signal workers' dispute continued for three or four months more.

Unfortunately I believe this to be a very real possibility. However I would suggest that

this would be exactly the outcome that some senior Conservative politicians would wish for.

I believe that the signal dispute was engineered by ministers and senior civil servants as a relatively quick way of getting much of the network closed down with the eventual aim of using many of the former routes for private toll roads.

This is not as far fetched as it might at first seem. It is well known that, despite John Major's pretence of being pro-rail, freight traffic has been falling at an alarming rate since this government took office and that present government policies do nothing to attract goods off road and on to rail.

We also know that the dispute could never have happened had the Government not intervened in pay talks, despite its initial insistence that it had not interfered.

We are now left with a railway system that is dying at a faster rate than could ever have been achieved through orthodox government policies and a situation where public loyalty to the industry has been stretched. What better environment than this for the Government to announce at the right moment after the dust has settled, that it feels there is no longer justification in maintaining the present rail network?

The Government would have a relatively easy time getting at least some of the system shut down.

David Latimer, proprietor, Cheshire Railtours, Golsongott Cottage, Golsongott, near Raduish, Somerset TA24 6QZ

Woodhead story

A recent visit to the northern Peaks provided two contrasting portrayals of the effects of a railway closure:

At the Torside Visitor Centre the recreational benefits of the Longendale Trail, a new east-west Trans Pennine route for cyclists and walkers with all the advantages of a level valley bottom pathway, are proudly displayed by North West Water and the Peak Park Authority.

Glossop Heritage Centre, commemorating what would have been the centenary of the railway on the same route, tells a rather different story.

From the initial construction of the track to its expansion and electrification in the 1950s -

which made it the country's most modern main line - the true story of Woodhead is told.

National and local press cuttings, reports of protest meetings, the role of the unions and learned society quotes (including RDS and Friends of the Earth) are all there for the visitor to assimilate freely.

The photographs of the demolition gangs removing rails in 1981 are particularly emotive. One writer is quoted as saying "this would never have been allowed to happen in the South." I wonder.

A major result of the closure, according to locals, is the vast increase in HGVs using the A628 Woodhead Pass between Sheffield and Manchester, and the corresponding environmental and accident damage.

It seems there are two distinctly different attitudes to the loss of this railway - one of positive opportunities for tourists, and the other of anger felt by the locals.

As privatisation threatens more closures it is the latter type of people we need to motivate, and must not allow those with non-rail aspirations for lines at risk to be the loudest voices.

Finally, it appears that the rail-into-road lobby which spurred on Woodhead's demise have been scuppered anyway, as the National Grid have now bought the 'new' 1954 tunnel to carry replacement Trans Pennine power cables.

Phil Groves, 7 Newall Carr Road, Otley, W. Yorks, LS21 2AU

Stop now

Increasingly in *Railwatch* we read of complaints about schedules that fail to serve the needs of intermediate stations.

When the Wolverhampton - Shrewsbury line lost its InterCity link with the capital some two and a half years ago, the service to most intermediate stations was slashed in favour of running trains 'fast' to convince the public that the route would be better served by Regional Railways alone.

The result was a haemorrhage of custom away from smaller stations as the residue service failed to meet local needs in frequency or reliability.

The legacy remains today, to the benefit of bus and car. The frustration of experiencing the sight of lightly-loaded trains flying through stations that once used to swell loadings to

crush proportions in and out of peak periods, can perhaps be understood.

The critical issue here is that, as passenger numbers decline, there are fewer people to fight their corner for reinstatement of a realistic service and eventually it can be "proved" that stations no longer make economic sense, especially if they require extensive repairs.

RDS and all lobbying groups will need to keep a critical eye on what could result in closures by stealth. Simultaneously, councils at parish, district and county levels need to promote services, monitor them, report deficiencies and press for improvements.

Finally, it is likely that the Transport Secretary will follow his predecessor in supporting the commercial autonomy of Railtrack and Train Operating Companies.

Notions of hardship, public service obligation, ethics and public interest will become quirks of the past.

Michael R J Crump, 4 Wolverhampton Road, Codsall, Wolverhampton

Lords up the creek

The Lords' Transport Committee has come down in favour of allowing 44-tonne lorries to operate on our roads.

This despite the Government's declared intention to "positively discriminate" in favour of rail by allowing the heavier weight only for lorries serving railheads, at least until we come into line with the rest of Europe in 1999.

This was specifically intended to encourage swap body freight on rail.

The extra weight allowance compensates for the payload penalty incurred by the road haulier through the weight of the swap-body itself.

By allowing 44-tonne lorries to operate anywhere, the advantage to rail is wiped out. Road wins yet again.

The argument which now appears to have swayed the Lords is one always put forward by road self-interest groups, such as the Freight Transport Association and the Road Haulage Association, to the effect that if one allows lorries to operate at heavier weights then you get the same amount of freight moved using fewer lorries.

In fact the average payloads carried by the biggest lorries

have dropped to around 16 tonnes, loads which could easily be carried in 32 tonne lorries, the previous maximum lorry weight allowed.

One significant rider added by the Lords is that road haulage shall cover its true costs imposed on society and the environment.

Many informed observers put that at around £30 billion, and less than half that amount is collected through road-related taxes.

Curiously, another of the House of Lords committees, the European Communities Committee, recently reported that unrestrained growth in road traffic could put at risk any attempts to achieve a balanced transport policy for the UK and Europe.

So here we are on the one hand doing our utmost to ease congestion on roads, while on the other, we scupper those initiatives designed to achieve that aim.

Are the Lords fully aware of the significance and implications of their 44-tonne recommendation?

Do we want freight off roads and on to rail?

Do we want to go on spending taxpayers' money on ever bigger roads, when rail is under-utilised and available to relieve much of the pressure?

Christopher Nichols, Secretary, Rail Freight Group, 26 Squitchey Lane, Oxford OX2 7LD

Political line

One of the strengths of the RDS has been its non-political stance. It is somewhat disturbing, therefore, to note the increasing use of the term right-wing, with its pejorative overtones, in comments in bulletins and in articles in *Railwatch*.

What is meant by the term laissez-faire capitalism and state control? These terms have no place in our material.

If the society wishes to broaden its appeal, it must be prepared to accept people from across the political spectrum.

K Burton, 23 Abbeygate, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 1AX

Memo to Mr Mitchell

The following is an extract from a letter sent to former public transport minister David Mitchell.

Your letter in *Railwatch* illustrates the chronic complacency of MPs and civil servants. I imagine that in 1987,

when it was obvious there would be difficulties in getting TGV trains to London on the existing route, engineers told the Government a new route would be the best solution. They were then told Mrs Thatcher's dogmatic policy of spending no money, however worthwhile.

They were asked: is it possible to run a TGV on the third rail and existing track? They replied: Yes, but with difficulty.

The result has turned out more difficult than they imagined - which is why the trains are still not in service.

The fact is the trains are grossly under-powered on the third rail which means acceleration will be poor and top speed much less than can be achieved under the wires. There are also serious and expensive problems with the signalling system.

Moreover, is it true that capacity problems will only appear in 2000? I think capacity problems already exist even before the trains are in service.

There are difficulties in finding train paths during the rush hours. This will restrict travel to the continent during these periods. Moreover, why should we put up with the low speeds in this country? What is the economic utility of running a TGV train capable of 150 mph at 80 mph?

I have just come back from Central Europe. After passing through Germany and the Netherlands, I can see that Britain's railways compare more with those in Central Europe. But those are improving, whereas Britain's are deteriorating. I am ashamed to live in such a country.

With people like you in charge Britain is certainly not best. I was warned about pollution in the Czech Republic. Actually, it is worse here in southern England because the Government has no policy on car pollution - catalytic converters reluctantly and late, and no public transport policy (except to close it down).

I enjoyed travelling in the Netherlands where there is a policy of making buses meet trains, and providing enough so that one can visit even rural areas without a car. Again, this country seems like a slum in comparison.

E G Matthew, 20 Brookside Road, Wimborne, Dorset BH21 2BL

Gasping for air

The European Union is aiming to halve car emissions - in line with American federal standards.

Britain will be expected to require better emission controls on new cars from 1996-7.

The commission is now looking at the next stage, how to promote further reductions in emissions by the year 2000.

Thank goodness for European policy initiatives. An unholy alliance between the British Government and the car makers has meant that British-made cars have been notorious polluters for the past 25 years during which time American standards have been consistently tightened.

In October, two reports spelled out in detail to the Government the dangers of pollution from road traffic.

The Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution recommended doubling of fuel prices by 2005 with a 50% cut in the roads programme.

It urged that public cash should be switched to improving trains and buses with a target to increase cycling in towns four-fold by 2005.

The House of Commons Transport Committee also produced a report on transport-related air pollution in London.

Although worthy in some respects, its recommendations largely involve tinkering with and monitoring the problem rather than dealing with it.

Environment campaigners pointed out that it said nothing about road building and dismissed the report as a fudge.

Its weakness was highlighted when a spokesman for the Royal Automobile Club welcomed it. Nor did it recommend increased use of public transport.

The real way to cut car pollution is of course drastically reduce car use by creating a proper national and supporting the idea of a European public transport system. For years the Government has been a spectator as public transport

fell apart. It helped the process on the way by slashing subsidies. Rail's enormous potential to cut pollution and use fuel efficiently has been largely ignored.

Retired TV producer H K Lewenhak believes that there is no time to lose in creating a high speed network for Britain and Europe as the top layer of a public transport system.

The TGV is five times more fuel efficient than a car and 2½ times more fuel efficient than an Airbus.

At the moment, Government ministers are so desperate they welcome any increase in car production as a sign that the economy is on the upturn, even though more car production spells increasing pollution for everyone.

The Department of the Environment has adopted a hands-off approach to monitoring air pollution. It "employs" the National Environment Technology Centre.

The centre has 50 fully automated air sampling stations around the country. Each station costs £100,000. But not one is sited on a road.

No wonder the air quality has been officially "good" when city dwellers have in fact been choking on car exhausts.

Even after the two reports in October, the Government has not signalled its determination to DO anything.

We must have a debate, it says while also hinting that it wants to drop motorway tolls.

Ministers have also implied that the Royal Commission report is extreme. Far from it, it remains firmly committed to the car culture.

The road lobby will be laughing all the way to the bank over Transport Secretary Brian Mawhinney's one method so far of dealing with pollution from road traffic.

Instead of devising ways to reduce the overall level of traffic, he announced that older, polluting "belching monsters" will be driven from the road.

The net effect will be to boost new car sales but leave traffic

levels unaffected. The European Union - much maligned by the British Government - is planning to spend 60% of its transport cash on rail and only about 30% on roads.

The British Government claims to spend 66% on roads and 23% on rail but these figures are not reliable. They fail to take into account many hidden subsidies to road.

For every £52 per head of the Welsh population spent on roads, only £3.56 is spent on public transport with rail getting a minuscule 2p, according to Tony Cross of the University of Wales. Just a slight discrepancy!

The Department of Transport is also keeping secret a report by the Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment that shows its form of cost-benefit analysis is seriously flawed.

But it is hyping up research which claims to show that motorists would not switch from using cars even if there was a good train service.

The facts show that every time a rail line is modernised, drivers DO switch to rail in large numbers.

The Government claims to want freight to switch from road to rail but it is maintaining its demand for rail freight to make a financial return of 8% while giving road hauliers a free ride.

The cost to the Treasury of abolishing this demand is only £500 million, slightly more the cost of building the one-mile long Limehouse link road in East London.

Overall of course, such a move would save money by reducing the road and bridge bashing effect of lorries. Passenger fares could come down too.

The Department of Health is keeping secret a report on the 1991 "London smog incident" which killed 160 people. So much for a debate.

In the past, Britain has often blocked European initiatives to

reduce pollution. Now Neil Kinnock is the European Union Transport Commissioner.

He distinguished himself by crashing his car on the motorway and failing to make transport an issue at the last general election.

Let's hope he gets it right this time.

■ Go rail for growth without the pollution: Railway stations provide a useful boost to urban economies, according to RDS researcher David Henshaw in a preliminary study of the effects of rail on local economies.

He studied population growth, a key economic indicator, in 60 towns over a 10-year period to 1991 and found that rail-connected towns saw population grow by 11.1%, compared to 9% in towns without a rail service.

■ Lyn Sloman of Transport 2000, Dr Mayer Hillman, Dr John Whitelegg, Kirsten Denke of Greenpeace, and Labour MPs and MEPs will be the speakers at a conference on Transport, Employment and Quality of Life on 21 January at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC2.

Details from 0171 263 7424. If you want to attend, send a cheque for £7 (£3 unwaged) payable to SERA, 11 Goodwin Street, London N4 3HQ

■ Modernising a rail route by introducing new trains and up-to-date signalling usually increases revenue by between 40 and 60%. It also reduces wear and tear on roads and reduces pollution because people switch from road to rail.

■ Centro's next director general is to be offered a free bus and rail pass instead of a company car.

■ RDS received a donation of £138 in August from Green Express which organises special day trips by train from Lancashire and Yorkshire. Green Express trains often use the Settle-Carlisle route. For details of the current programme, phone 0484 422920.

Trains for the tourists

More people visit Shakespeare's home town of Stratford-upon-Avon than any other tourist destination outside London.

But for many years the town did not have a direct rail link with London.

Now a few Turbo diesels do allow travel from London without changing trains, although there is still no direct service on a Sunday.

But the area around Stratford has a rich railway history which is revealed in a new book by RDS member John Boynton.

He describes how the line to Birmingham narrowly escaped closure in 1969.

Protesters went to the High Court the day before the line was due to close and won an injunction halting the closure because of irregularities in the provision of replacement bus services.

Thanks to the determination of those campaigners and another campaign to save it in the mid 1980s, the North Warwickshire line survives to this day.

These events and the line's earlier history are chronicled in *Shakespeare's Railways*.

John argues for reopening the line south of Stratford to connect with the Worcester-Oxford line at Honeybourne, and the introduction of a circular service from Paddington, via Leamington, Warwick, Stratford and Oxford.

Of course our blinkered Department of Transport is trying to build a new road on the trackbed but their proposals are being vigorously contested at a lengthy public inquiry in the town.

New travel opportunities will however be created next year when a second cross-Birmingham line will be created. Trains will run from Stratford to Stourbridge via Moor Street and Snow Hill.

It has taken time to achieve improvements in rail services and the same was true in the 19th century. Henley-in-Arden residents fought for a branch line for 34 years!

John's book also contains a schoolboys' log of a journey from Stratford to the West Country in 1948. It is reproduced along with some splendid photos taken by one of them, T E Williams, in later



GONE WITH REGRET: A night parcels train in the Stratford bay at Leamington Spa in 1970. Few parcels now go by rail with the result that parcels vans trying to meet impossible deadlines, speed along our roads causing danger and confusion. One road carrier even uses the name *Panic Link*. There are lessons to learn here.

Picture: Peter Shoesmith

years. His photos are now in the National Railway Museum collection.

Stratford saw a brave experiment which if properly followed up, could have transformed Britain's railways.

The country's first express diesel service using streamlined 80mph AEC railcars ran through the town as far back as 1934, linking Birmingham Snow Hill and Cardiff General.

The diesels, which called only at Gloucester and Newport, supplemented the existing steam service and were faster by 35 minutes. Mind you a supplement of half a crown was charged.

Even though the cars were officially designated third class, they were equipped with carpets and, to start with, a buffet.

This new concept in rail services is dealt with in detail in the book which also describes experiments in the use of radio signalling in 1912 by the Stratford and Midland Junction Railway, otherwise known as the Shunt 'Em a Mile and Jolt 'Em. Everyone was impressed by Heinrich von

Kramer's "Railophone" but it was not developed.

The most surprising parallel with modern practice though was on the horse-drawn Stratford and Moreton Tramway which opened in 1826.

The company did not own the horses and wagons but charged a toll for the use of the line. The company was merely the track authority, the equivalent of Railtrack.

The tramway builder William James saw the need for a General Railroad Company (an integrated national network) in a study he wrote in 1808! Nobody was listening then. Is anyone listening now?

Shakespeare's Railways contains a good collection of unusual pictures including a push-and-pull steam train on the line from Leamington in 1952 and several rare pictures of a 1932 Ro-Railer.

This 26-seater road bus was adapted by the London Midland Scottish Railway at Wolverton so it could meet the expresses at Blisworth, then run on rail to Stratford where it would convert to road mode to

deliver passengers to the Welcombe hotel in the town.

The book also includes current colour photos, as well as plans, timetables and archive material.

The large format A4 book has 96 pages. RDS members can get a signed copy post free by sending £9.95 to Mid England Books, PO Box 323, Kidderminster DY10 4YY. Mention RDS when ordering and the society will benefit from a 50p donation for each copy sold.

Advertise Do you have second-hand railway books or railwayana to sell? Then why don't you advertise them in *Railwatch*? Small ads are available at 20p per word for members (30p for others). Send your adverts with remittance in advance to Railwatch, 4 Christchurch Square, London E9 7HU. Make cheques payable to RDS.

Your money For every £1 of taxpayers money spent on railways, £3 is spent on roads, according to Transport 2000 which says our spending on public transport is less than a third of the European average.

How Uncle Sam took the wrong turning



America could have led the world into a high-speed railway future. Instead it was hijacked by the road and aircraft lobby and took a wrong turning. The shimmering silver-skinned Zephyr train made the longest and fastest land run in history as far back as 1934.

The lightweight diesel streamliner incorporated the most advanced technologies of its day and sped across 1,015 miles from Denver to Chicago in under 15 hours, breaking the existing 401 mile record of Britain's steam-powered Royal Scot in 1928. It ran at over 100 mph for much of its journey.

Railway chairman Ralph Budd put the Zephyr into service the same year - and doubled revenue.

Other U.S. railways quickly followed suit with streamliners of their own. The Comet for instance travelled at 109 mph from Boston to Rhode Island and led to the greatest speed-up of rail services the world had seen.

In 1928 only two trains were scheduled at over 60 mph. By 1936 there were 644. By 1939, the rail business was looking good. In the war, the railways proved to be one of America's greatest assets, carrying four times as many passengers as in 1939. They hauled 90% of all army and navy equipment and 97% of all troops, helped by the round-the-clock dependability of the diesel, but also by centralised traffic control.

At the end of the war, the railways were poised to build on the speed, costs and efficiency advantages which had made the streamliners so successful.

But their wellbeing was fatally undermined by government policies.

The US government became the railways' biggest competitor, as first Congress and then the White House jumped into the transport business. Public money spent on airports and roads rocketed to dizzying heights, driven by the politics of the Cold War and the "pork barrel".

£13 billion of public money was spent on airports by 1960 with the ludicrous explanation that airports were useful for national defence.

Even the road building programme was justified on the grounds of national defence with the threat of atomic attack "needing a superhighway system to speed the evacuation of cities".

The Defense Highways Act of 1956 started the "greatest public works programme in the history of the world".

Another obstacle for the railways was the 15% federal excise tax on common-carrier tickets and local property taxes, with New York Central railway becoming the single biggest taxpayer in the city.

Railways were paying taxes and those taxes were being spent on building roads and airports. The Great Northern railway paid £1.6 million in one year while Western Airlines for instance paid £14.

The government's promotion of roads and

runways made it easy for lorry companies, airlines and bus companies, as well as private motorists, to compete with railways that built and maintained their own rights of way.

Despite the roads having the worst safety problems, the safety lobby managed to get an 80 mph restriction on high-speed trains and 60 mph on most other trains.

Now Washington's encroachment on the transport business is clearly seen for what it was, a violation of the principles of free enterprise.

The creation of 28,000 miles of interstate highways between 1956 and 1969 at public expense led to 59,400 miles of railways being taken out of passenger service.

America's inter-city rail passenger service dwindled from 2,500 trains in 1954 to fewer than 500 in 1969.

The unprecedented legislative and financial support marshalled on behalf of the roads programme completed the transformation of the railways from a proven national resource to a rusty relic.

The once blazing torch of American inter-city passenger service had dimmed to a faint dot on the horizon when the National Railroad Passenger Corporation (Amtrak) took over in 1971.

Even now high-speed rail advocates face a formidable opponent in the highway lobby, which has dominated American thinking about transport since the second world war.

But the ideas of trainmaker Edward Budd were enthusiastically taken up in Japan where inter-city streamliners were introduced to a primitive system. A few years later came the high-speed Bullet train which turned in profits from the start.

High-speed rail has played an impressive part in cutting transport costs and oil imports for Japan. The 160 mph Bullet train was three times more productive than aircraft in terms of labour efficiency, five times better in investment terms, eight times better in energy use. There has been not one death on Bullet trains and new Bullet trains will run at 215 mph.

In France, the TGV to Lyon had repaid the £1.5 billion invested in it by 1991 and France now plans over 15 years to create a 3,000 mile TGV network at a cost of £23 billion (the same cost as Britain's road building programme). Who's wrong?

Germany is building a 2,500 mile high speed ICE network, and Italy and Spain have high-speed services running.

Despite the hundreds of billions of dollars poured into roads and airports, America has less mobility today than 40 years ago. The average speed of urban traffic is seven mph, the same speed as a camel caravan 2,000 years ago.

Information in this article was extracted from an article entitled *American Railroad* by Mark Reutter published in *The Wilson Quarterly*, winter 1994 issue.

Dallas

By John Barfield



The brash Texas oil "town" of Dallas - made famous by a TV soap - resembles Manchester in 1991, when the streets were being dug up to provide the Metrolink tram system.

After years wedded to the car, Dallas is developing a light rail-based public transport network called DART, Dallas Area Rapid Transit.

Construction crews are already busy in the pedestrianised centre of Dallas where new trains will be running along the streets by next year.

The trains will operate through a part-bored and part-cut-and-cover tunnel which was completed in January.

Another key stage was passed in September last year with the completion of a new rail bridge over the Trinity River.

The 20-mile light rail network costing £575 million should be fully operational in 1996. It is described as a "starter system".

The scheme grew from a 1984 decision by voters in 14 towns and cities to allocate a 1% sales tax to fund a public transport system for the 2.5 million people living in the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

Whether the network grows beyond a "starter system" depends on a 1996 vote on additional funding.

DART came into being 10 years ago but has had a turbulent history thanks to the strength of the oil lobby.

The early years were concentrated on expanding and improving bus services - providing 13,000 stops, 500 seats, 300 shelters and eight park-and-ride stations. The buses are used by 160,000 people every day.

Now though commuters are looking forward to travelling on the two- and three-car trains which will be running every 10 minutes in the rush hour.

The electric trains will be environmentally clean, important in a city where ozone levels are "significant".

"We are pursuing funding to allow us to offer free or reduced fares during ozone alert days," said DART's Tony Mendoza.

There are plans for an airport



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When the earth moved in LA



Station for the Dallas suburb of South Oak Cliff is built. By 1997 the light rail system will be operating

commuter service... multiple... the existing... corridor between Dallas... Worth, operated by... Pacific and Burlington... well, these trains... running by 1995 to... new stations. In the

neighbouring state of Georgia, Atlanta has had an integrated Metro system for 15 years. But Amtrak will need upgrading if it is to rise to the challenge of the Olympic Games in 1996. A proper Amtrak central station is a first requirement.

Having paid four visits to the USA last year, I saw much

progress being made in providing public transport. But the ambitious Clinton master plan A Vision for Change has not been good for Amtrak, the nearest thing America has to an inter-city rail service.

Funding for it remains meagre and it is kept seriously short of cash for day-to-day operations.

Amtrak is pleading for one penny of the federal fuel tax to be allocated to a passenger rail infrastructure fund.

While Dallas is maturing, America still has a way to go.

★ Light relief: New York is planning to build a light rail line. The £89 million 42nd Street light rail line will link the United Nations headquarters, Grand Central and Times Square and will be largely funded by the private sector.

★ People power: A re-staffed station at Kissimmee, Florida, has boosted ticket revenue by 113% at a time when overall custom was static.



Rail came to the rescue when the Los Angeles area was devastated by an earthquake in January. The road system was dislocated and proved extremely expensive to repair, but Metrolink's seven rail lines proved technologically superior in earthquake country and got services quickly restored.

California had already embarked on an ambitious new urban rail programme and the quake helped to make people realise how useful it was.

Badly buckled rail lines were replaced at a fraction of the cost of rebuilding elevated freeways. New services were also introduced.

An enhanced "freeway replacement" service was introduced on the line to Santa Clarita and Antelope Valley which runs through one of the worst affected areas.

On this one line there were 20 times the usual number of passengers. The Army Corps of Engineers was drafted in to speed up the building of stations on an extension to the line. Until the quake, plans to extend the line were merely "under consideration".

Los Angeles' Metrolink system was also extended north by nine miles along the Pacific coast to Oxnard (66 miles from Los Angeles Central) to relieve congestion on the parallel Ventura freeway. New double-deck commuter trains were brought in on the 87-mile long commuter route south to Oceanside where it is now possible to interchange with commuter trains from San Diego.

In July, police had to be called in to control crowds when Metrolink launched commuter services from Riverside.

The Metro's Red line will soon reach North Hollywood and work will start next year on a £650 million four-mile extension.

Los Angeles, which is now famous for its traffic-induced smog, once had 1,000 miles of street tramways. Now Southern California plans to provide a 400-mile network of light rail, although much of it will run on existing freight-only lines. Nevertheless it will be the largest public works project in America, paid for mainly by local taxes.

On the other side of America, the US Government is putting £125 million into the £300 million plan by the state of Massachusetts to restore commuter lines around Boston by 1996 to provide "highway congestion relief".

And in Philadelphia, it was estimated that for every £1 spent on new rail links, £3 would accrue to the state while the total economic benefit would be £9. The payback for investing in rail is huge. Everyone, not just the train traveller, benefits.

★ The long wait for clean air: California has set dates for the introduction of "zero emission vehicles". From 1998, 2% of all new cars must operate free of all emissions, rising to 10% by 2003.

★ Tram comeback: Philadelphia is planning to reopen the city centre tram loop, closed in 1992.

America gets back on track

If planners were to dream up a clean, efficient and safe transport system... the world over, it would be hard pressed to find a better idea than rail.

This is not RDS "Linda". It is what large numbers of American opinion polls are saying. They look to the way Europe and Japan are creating better transport systems.

Sweden planning to invest as much in rail as in roads over the next decade and Japan planning to put investment in rail than in roads over the next 15 years.

It is clear that the global rail revival is propelled by a crisis - the global environmental crisis - but by a growing awareness of air quality and traffic congestion.

Consequently, people who take the time to work rather than play are making a significant social contribution by reducing smog. They cut personal nitrogen oxide emissions by 60% and virtually eliminate carbon monoxide and particulate emissions.

They are also helping to

prevent wasteful use of land for roads and airports. But at the moment, the American government is still locked in an embrace with a discredited and sometimes corrupt road lobby.

In 1994, it is spending £13 billion on roads, 20 times the amount spent on rail. This lavish spending and hidden aid means that US drivers are subsidised to the extent of about £400 billion a year.

Research now shows that for every mile of travel, the unpaid social cost of cars is seven times that of trains. Travel by train is also six times more efficient per passenger than going by car.

When social costs and financial costs are taken into account, the railway is almost always the most cost-effective solution to transport needs. Rail's worth to society extends far beyond mere farebox revenues.

For instance, 90% of people are affected by road noise inside their homes. Many suffer hearing loss, stress and disturbed sleep. Then there is pollution, traffic congestion, oil dependence and road accidents. The road lobby has achieved dominance of the

transport world by cheating. In the 1930s and 40s, several large companies, including General Motors, Standard Oil of California, Phillips Petroleum, Mack Trucks and Firestone Tire and Rubber, schemed to acquire and scrap the tram systems of US cities and replace them with buses and cars.

A federal court convicted the companies in 1949 but it was too late.

An important piece of the transport infrastructure had been destroyed, one that cities are now spending billions to replace.

This article is based on extracts from Back on Track: The Global Rail Revival. Worldwatch Institute 1994.

★ Off-road advice: New York City's transport authority has put up Bozo the Clown posters aimed at drivers in the traffic-choked roads saying: "Hey Bozo! Use the mass transit."

★ Belligerent Bozos: America's lorry drivers' union, the Teamsters, is targeting industrial action at 22 companies who are planning to send more goods by rail.

LOCAL ACTION

Scotland

By Douglas Smart

Strikes ScotRail estimates it has lost £8m in business as a result of the signal workers' strikes and concurrent problems with Haymarket signalling. We welcome their £250,000 campaign to win back customers and wish them every success.

New station A new station has been opened near Falkirk at Camelon, yards west of the old station. The privately financed Prestwick Airport station has also been opened, leading to attractive air/rail fare packages for flights from the airport.

Political response Public apathy, which has allowed the Government to get away with their privatisation legislation, seems to pervade political circles. We estimate that this year we have written to approximately 80 politicians at all levels, including party officials. But the branch has had meaningful correspondence with only three politicians throughout Scotland.

Busways in Adelaide and Essen have been less than successful but there is a similar scheme projected for Edinburgh Airport along with a huge park and ride scheme. The airport alone cannot possibly justify a special busway and not many motorists will leave their cars to use buses which will be stuck in the same city centre traffic jams. We can only conclude that if the busway is successful, it will be at the expense of attracting existing park-and-ride ScotRail customers throughout central Scotland. Any detailed information on Essen, Adelaide and other park-and-ride bus schemes would be gratefully received.

Wessex

By David Stevenson

Ventnor success The campaign to reopen the Shanklin to Ventnor line is gathering momentum. A grant of £5,000 from the Isle of Wight County Council has been matched by a similar amount from the Rural Development Commission. The cash has been pledged as a result of sustained campaigning by the Ventnor Railway Association and is earmarked to fund an independent engineering feasibility study. Meanwhile, a Civic Trust report into the regeneration of Ventnor has recommended restoration of the railway as the single most popular project in the town and makes it top priority. RDS has supported Ventnor Railway Association by contributing to publicity costs from the reopenings fund. Further details of the VRA can be obtained from Steve Backwell, 73 Lowtherville Road, Ventnor, Isle of Wight PO38 1AR.

Councils' forum County Councils in the area served by South West Trains have joined forces to represent their interests to the Franchise Director, Rail Regulator and Government. The grouping is known as South West Trains Forum and it has already sent a delegation to meet the new Minister for Roads and Public Transport, John Watts. It is hoped that the combined strength of this new organisation will enable it to fight any erosion of the benefits of council-funded rail improvements.

Light rail progress A Portsmouth-Gosport-Fareham light rapid transit

scheme moved a step closer with the establishment of a project office in Gosport and the completion of initial feasibility studies. Publicity issued by Hampshire County Council suggests application for an order under the Transport and Works Act 1992 could be made as early as 1995 with the system operational by the year 2000. Studies into potential extensions to the system are also under way.

North West

By Robert Cummings



Liverpool light rail Merseytravel has commissioned consultants Steer, Davies and Gleave to study the potential of light rail on three routes linking the waterfront area and city centre with Old Swan and Page Moss, Wavertree and Netherley, Broadway and Croxteth. The Liverpool Light Rail Group, a consortium of organisations, has been set up. A possible source of finance (given the lack of Government money despite the outstanding success of the Manchester's Metrolink and Sheffield's Supertram) is the Objective Area One status recently gained by Merseyside in the European Community.

Metrolink extension Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Authority is to begin consultation on the route of a Metrolink extension to Eccles via Salford Quays. The authority anticipates the link could be open by 1998, although this would appear to be optimistic. The authority has to obtain parliamentary powers. Of the estimated £75 million cost, it has earmarked £25 million from the sale of Greater Manchester Buses. European and private finance could make up the balance. The decision to give priority to this route will disappoint rail users in Oldham and Rochdale who wanted conversion of the Oldham loop line next. Trams might not now be seen in Oldham and Rochdale until well into the next century.

West Coast main line While acknowledging the need to carry out engineering works on busy lines at weekends, the branch has become concerned about the West Coast main line closures every Saturday evening/Sunday during the winter with few diversionary services over the Settle-Carlisle line or replacement bus services. On Saturdays, last trains from Euston to Scotland leave at 14.30, while the last train to the Lakes and Carlisle leaves Euston at 16.30. The last train south to the West Coast main line will depart Edinburgh at 11.50. It would seem consideration for the needs of the travelling public, something promoted by sectorisation in the 1980s, has been blown out by Railtrack and we have suffered a backwards step to the days when the civil engineers commanded more power than was good for the railway. Football fans and day trippers will suffer particularly by this action and the branch has made representations to both Railtrack and the Rail Users Consultative Commit-

tee. Our affiliated rail users association, the Lakes Line Action Group has secured considerable media attention, in Cumbria.

Hope for one station The Rail Users Consultative Committee for North West England has recommended that Park Station should not be closed. The branch gave evidence at the June public enquiry in Manchester. No case could be found for retaining Godley East though because it was largely replaced by Godley station in 1986. The committee recommended that any future proposal to close Godley, opened under the Speller Amendment, should be subject to statutory closure procedure. While finding no grounds for hardship by the closure of Miles Platting, the committee had some sympathy with the arguments for retaining the station infrastructure for emergency use in the event of the closure of Manchester Victoria station because of accident or security alert. The report has been forwarded to the Secretary of State for Transport who will make a decision on the closures. We hope Dr Mawhinney's record on this issue proves to be better than that of his dismal predecessor.

And finally A North West branch member informs me that he recently queued at Manchester Piccadilly's undermanned travel centre in order to purchase the new all-lines timetable, to be told they no longer sell it. He was directed to the station book-stall. While only a minor issue, this tale contradicts the stated aim of the Railways Act 1993 which claims to make the railways more commercially minded!

East Anglia

By Trevor Garrod

Docks hope Railtrack East Anglia director Richard Middleton gave a very upbeat presentation on future prospects at a public meeting organised by the branch in Ipswich on 17 September. Felixstowe is the country's fourth busiest port but served only by a single track non-electrified branch. So Railtrack, the port and local councils are planning a feasibility study into improving infrastructure. Railtrack is also looking at restoring freight traffic to Lowestoft and King's Lynn docks.

Unfair Railtrack was required to make a financial return on investment but roads do not. Railtrack wanted a level playing field. For example, there were two weak bridges between Norwich and North Walsham. Under present rules Railtrack would have to charge the passenger and freight operators for strengthening these. If, as a result, traffic was lost to the roads, Norfolk County Council would pay the cost of strengthening road bridges.

Reopenings Mr Middleton said Railtrack had taken over sponsorship of the passenger reopening project on the Cambridge-St Ives line and was working on costings. He would be talking to Essex County Council about a Braintree-Stansted Airport link.

Fine thoughts Memories of a former rail manager were evoked at Saxmundham on 11 October when RDS General Secretary Trevor Garrod performed the naming ceremony of a class 153 Sprinter train. The unit has been named Gerard Fiennes after the former Eastern Region general manager

who retired to Aldeburgh and became president of the East Suffolk Travellers' Association. A plaque in the train records the achievements of Mr Fiennes, who died in 1985 and was one of the pioneers of the basic railway with paytrains and automatic crossings.

Road plan shelved The plan to spend nearly £10 million on the A146 between Lowestoft and Beccles has been shelved for five years. That gives a window of opportunity to argue for rail improvements.

Cycle sense Waveney Cycling Campaign conducted a survey on train loadings on the East Suffolk line and concluded that, on the vast majority of trains, a relaxation of the rules governing bikes by train would not cause problems. Local managers say they will address this issue once present plans to make trains more accessible for wheelchair users have been completed.

Wales

By Chris Magner

Cambrian Lines David Williams has been appointed by Gwynedd County Council to help develop the Cambrian Railway from Shrewsbury to Porthmadog. The Cambrian Rail Users' Group have decided to look after and renovate Caersws station. They have also had a stand at Newtown station on Saturday mornings to assist passengers. It also organised a public excursion from Welshpool to Pwllheli which attracted eighty-two passengers. Details of the group from P. Crompton, Bettnewydd, Llandinam, Powys, SY17 5AA

Heart of Wales This summer's Heart of Wales Rambler special Sunday train service attracted an average of 63 people on each of the 20 trains. The best figure was 84 people. The connecting bus service from Landrindod and the Elan Valley attracted 25 passengers on average per week. Heart of Wales Line Travellers' Association members worked very hard to publicise the trains. HOWLTA paid for newspaper advertising, something other groups could do to publicise their lines. About 80 people attended HOWLTA AGM at Bucknell on Saturday 17 September. But RDS Wales and HOWLTA are seriously concerned about the lack of publicity at Shrewsbury for the Heart of Wales' trains.

Strike action RDS Wales was concerned that the dispute was harming rural lines, particularly the Heart of Wales and Cambrian main line (the Cambrian Coast line operated on the last few strike days). We appealed to RMT to suspend the strike on the rural routes and let the signalmen donate their wages to the union. BBC Wales, both radio and TV, featured the RDS Wales request with pictures of the Heart of Wales line on the TV. Ian Murray appeared on BBC TV for the society. The story was taken up by the Cambrian News, Daily Post, the Birmingham Post, local radio stations and HTV. This effort brought RDS Wales to a wide audience, the most successful publicity for the society yet.

Frodsham to Runcorn link line What may well have been the very last scheduled passenger train to traverse the Frodsham Junction to Halton Junction link line, the 18.20 Llandudno Junction to Liverpool

Lime Street, ran on Saturday 24 September. The five coach train hauled by 31421 Wigan Pier, contained about 50 passengers, many using the train from Chester to Liverpool to avoid the resignalling work on the direct Chester to Birkenhead line which involved a bus service from Hooton to Birkenhead.

The North Cheshire Rail Users' Group has been fighting for five years to develop the line which they believe could be used for a Liverpool to North Wales direct service. This summer the group was led to believe the outward journey from Liverpool to North Wales via Warrington (the link line is one way only), would be marketed as a day return facility, but this did not materialise. Should the line be put up for closure during the winter period a major effort will be made to save it and the NCRUA will be delighted to hear from RDS readers to help them in their campaign. Please contact John Hobbs on 0925 818791.

Severnside

By Eric Barber



Green dilemma Wiltshire County Council appears to have given approval to the rail freight depot proposed on land near the Honda factory at South Marston, Swindon but Thamesdown borough council wants the site to remain as green fields.

Clean-up needed A rail freight depot site has been reserved at Merebank, Avonmouth, between Rockingham works and the smelting works, provided the present contamination of the site is dealt with and a complementary lorry park is provided.

New stations Bristol city council is keen to see new stations opened at Ashley Hill, Horfield, Henbury and Hallen. Hallen could use the remains of Chittening platform and could become an interchange for restored services via Henbury and the Severn Beach line which could be converted to light rail and diverted inland to serve new housing developments.

Wishing and hoping The branch is somewhat disappointed by the Somerset draft transport plan for 1995-6, as the county council appears to have ignored several suggestions for improvements. The prospects for reopened stations are merely being "kept under review". The council is "hopeful" that improvements may follow both from privatisation and the replacement of InterCity 125 trains. It also records its concerns about inadequate provision for the disabled and cycles on class 159 trains.

Relief rail needed Work is due to start on the Wells "relief road" along the former Great Western formation. At the public inquiry into the road, we asked for space to be left for the rail line to be restored. The city has lost all its rail links but if eight miles of track were relaid, Wells could again be rail connected. A link with the East Somerset Railway at Cranmore could open the way for through trains from Westbury or even Swindon.

Lincolnshire

By Paul Jowett

Sunday comeback Sunday trains have returned to the Lincoln-Retford-Sheffield route following the furore over last year's cuts in the winter timetable.

Good thinking Lincolnshire County Council is hoping to formulate a properly thought-out transport strategy involving greater use of public transport to cope with the problems of increasing congestion in towns, the growth of heavy and through traffic on unsuitable rural roads and increased pollution from traffic fumes. The branch is preparing a response to the director of planning and transportation's strategy document.

Steam up Chairman Brian Hastings led an RDS contingent to the Scunthorpe Steam Gala on the steelworks' internal rail system, organised by Appleby Frodingham Railway Preservation Society.

Havenhouse horror The Central train operating unit is hoping to improve the Grantham-Skegness service in May, following pressure from the county council, district councils, the local user group and the branch. More regular interval services are planned along with better connections at Sleaford into the Lincoln-Peterborough route. Central is also hoping to address the problem caused by withdrawing stopping services at main village stations. Havenhouse now has one morning train to Skegness and one afternoon train from Skegness. On Saturdays there are two trains to Skegness and none back! Who makes such ridiculous decisions, one wonders. Is it deliberate or is it incompetence? The station has become useless for getting anywhere else on the network and not surprisingly few people now use it.

Green line The statutory Rail Users Consultative Committee has welcomed the RDS Green Line leaflet urging housing development along the rail line between Sleaford and Spalding. This initiative could be applied throughout Britain by the Government and local councils. But there is no progress on the line at which it was aimed. It is still waiting for improved signalling and new stations at Pinchbeck and Donnington. The line also needs advertising. We have sent the leaflet to BBC Radio 4's Going Places programme which may review it.

Local enterprise: The Great Northern Railway station buildings at Heckington have been restored after years of work by volunteers from the Village Trust and with financial help from BT. It has a new roof, plumbing, electrics, chimneys and fireplaces. There is now a decent waiting room on the Boston platform. On the Sleaford side, there is a modern shelter with the old waiting room converted into a small museum. The station gardens are looked after and there is a meeting room available

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for the trust and village organisations. The trust has already saved the famous Heckington windmill and the Pea Room warehouse. The trust is rightly proud of its achievements especially when British Rail had planned to take the easy way out by demolishing the buildings because they were no longer used and were prey to vandalism. Not surprisingly, the trust felt it was being kicked in the teeth when the hourly Saturday trains were axed in May in order to speed up holiday traffic to Skegness. There was a welter of protests. The village obviously deserves a good train service. Other villages could well copy Heckington's example in preserving their railway heritage.

Diary date The branch annual general meeting will be held on 4 February.

South West

By Gerard Duddridge

Strike effects Cornwall fared badly in the signal workers' dispute as traditional signal boxes survive west of the Tamar. Passenger trains operated to Gunnislake and St Ives, but St Ives remained isolated even when a limited main line service was restored to Truro on the last strike day. Services were stronger in Devon and letters in the media indicated that a few stations were receiving a better and more reliable service! One Exmouth line commuter told me how convenient it was for reaching the university, because all trains were stopping at St James Park Halt.

Park and ride The dispute cannot have helped the new Ivybridge station which opened in July. With a new town bus service linking the station, free to rail season ticket holders, and a shuttle bus from Plymouth station to the city centre it is hoped usage will increase. A summer Sunday service may be introduced next year as part of a strategy to improve access to Dartmoor by public transport. Funding would be from the Rural Development Commission and local authorities.

Railtrack barrier The new Digby and Sowton station, held up over access problems for construction, suffered a further setback over increased Railtrack charges of £120,000 over the original £580,000 cost (£200,000 was contributed by Tesco who have opened their out-of-town superstore nearby). Fears that the project would be further delayed or cancelled were allayed late in September when Devon County Council agreed to pay the increased costs, but for a smaller four coach length station instead of six. Opening is now likely to be next spring.

Cash call Tavistock's hopes for a restored rail service were boosted with Devon's submission to the Government (Transport Policies and Programme 1995/96) for transport funding of £300,000 towards land

purchase, design fees and legal processes associated with the scheme. The overall £7.5 million plan would include a new park-and-ride station with space for 250 cars. Double track would be restored at St Budeaux and Bere Alston stations. Other schemes for park-and-ride stations at Churston for Brixham and Cullompton still appear to be on the drawing board.

Asset Teignbridge Liberal Democrats are keen to see a park-and-ride station at Heathfield on the former Moretonhampstead branch to serve Newton Abbot. Heathfield is within the parish of Bovey Tracey whose 1991 population was only 4823. However, in its favour is potential for good road access, an existing freight line, a platform and potential land for parking. If not viable now, there must be a case for preserving this as a future asset. This was the point made by RDS South West to Mid-Devon district council for safeguarding the remaining sections of trackbed from Tiverton to Tiverton Junction. There are no proposals in the local plan which would impede this but the council says the plan cannot apply rigorous safeguarding policies "until proposals are advanced and funding is available."

Yorkshire

By James Towler



Reassurance The InterCity East Coast network is secure at least for the time being. Following media reports that services to Bradford, Harrogate and Hull were to be withdrawn, together with Anglo-Scottish services to Inverness and Aberdeen, Yorkshire chairman James Towler sought clarification from East Coast managing director Brian Burdall who responded: "I can assure you that there is no substance in reports that we would consider withdrawing our through services to these locations. The minimum service specification included in the East Coast franchise agreement continues to require that we run trains to all these destinations and that is the remit to which I work. Clearly, situations can change but you can certainly take this as a statement of our present intentions."

Too green! Railtrack - never short of a bob or two when it comes to new blazers for the staff and dollops of fresh paint at its stations - appears to have taken its green image a shade too far at Leeds.

Seats, waste baskets and protective wooden surrounds which used to stand out in their bright red have been repainted in Railtrack green. The net result just adds to the gloom of the station and could be a danger should people bump into them in the shadows. We have alerted North East director Aidan Nelson of our concern.

Thorny question Users at Thorne North have appreciated the benefit of the local Doncaster-Goole service, but they are peeved at the withdrawal of most stops in

the Sheffield-Hull service. As a consequence, journeys from Thorne to Hull involve a change at Goole and add over half an hour to the journey. Likewise journeys to Meadowhall take an extra 25 minutes with the change at Doncaster. We have asked North East director Bob Urie to consider reinstating the stops, especially as they could be accommodated by the generous recovery time in the timetable.

After the strikes The apparent increase in the number of delays due to points failure and signalling problems which immobilises big stations like Sheffield for an hour or more are a constant reminder that much needs to be done to improve the existing network.

1995 date The branch AGM and luncheon will be held in Huddersfield on Saturday 18 March.

London and Home Counties

By Paul Krebs

On the defensive Following the closure of the Ongar line and Aldwych branch another two lines are potentially under threat. The Romford-Upminster line is isolated and has no through trains. There is no Sunday service and the weekday trains stop at 2145.

In the new environment on the railways, this line must have a doubtful future. But it could be revitalised by introducing through services to Liverpool Street and Tottenham Hale, and building new stations at Lakeside and Tilbury Riverside.

The Bromley North branch suffers from similar problems and must be a prime candidate for the chop in a privatised railway. The branch is seeking money from the RDS rail defence fund to mount a leaflet campaign which would target the public and local media.

The Ups and Downs of Regional Railways

A new RDS report looks at the performance of branch and secondary lines from 1922 to the present day. This 24-page A4 publication is available for £2.90 post free from Martin Ball, 89 North Wallington, Fareham, Hants PO16 8TJ. Make cheques payable to RDS.

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A key ring with a leather fob lettered Railway Development Society is available at an introductory offer price of 85p post free from Martin Ball, 89 North Wallington, Fareham, Hants PO16 8TJ. Make cheques payable to RDS.

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This booklet explains how your lifestyle does not have to be dominated by the infernal combustion engine machine. £2.25 post free from Martin Ball, 89 North Wallington, Fareham, Hants PO16 8TJ. Make cheques payable to RDS.

The cheeky beggars

The railways are always being painted by politicians as needing subsidy. In fact motorists and road hauliers receive the biggest hand-outs and secret subsidies from the Government. We have already highlighted some of the injustices in *Railwatch* with David Hollis's article *The Myth of Road Taxes*. Here Norman Bradbury suggests RDS has a duty to expose these distortions.

I would like to endorse the article on the Myth of Road Taxes and to call for research into the subject.

I suggest RDS compile a list of items where road transport is known to be subsidised one way or another and invite members to help establish the total value.

The following are some examples that do not seem to have been mentioned or require clarification:

Level crossings. The brunt of the cost of these has been borne by the railways but the Department of Transport argues BR gets a grant towards the cost. The fact is that road users contribute nothing towards them even though level crossings are as much for their protection as for rail users. At least half the cost should be charged to road users, or alternatively the grant should cover the whole cost.

Road bridges. Where these cross over railways, the cost of maintaining them has been the responsibility of British Rail. I am not sure if this anomalous burden has been passed on to Railtrack nor what is the annual cost. Can anyone provide the answer to this?

Insurance. Car insurance premiums regularly fail to cover overall costs. Figures released by the Association of British Insurers show an average loss for the five years from 1988 to 1992 of £626 million per year. Another example of someone else paying the difference.

Lighting. The Department of Transport regards the benefits of road lighting as roughly equally divided between motorised traffic and other road users. I believe this to be currently valued at around £500 million each. Needless to say the users do not pay for it. The burden falls mainly on council tax payers.

Humberstone council's electricity bill for street lighting runs to £1.6 million per year!

More and more motorways are being endowed with lighting - another benefit for road users paid by others.

Of course road lighting wastes energy and causes pollution. This should be included in energy efficiency comparisons between road transport and other modes, and included as part of road transport pollution and global warming costs.

VAT. Much has been written about the company car and lost tax revenue, but does this take account of VAT? Most businesses running company cars will be VAT registered and will reclaim the VAT content of car repairs, spares and fuel.

Car parks. The country is littered with car parks, many of which occupy prime town centre locations, where the rateable value of the land they use is at a premium. It is doubtful if the revenue from most car parks is sufficient to cover their direct costs, let alone a return on the value of the land.

Scotland Central Region has spent £3.4 million on car parks for Stirling, which is equal to £15 per head from the region's tax payers.

In addition, Government policy has encouraged a proliferation of out-of-town retail developments which are thriving at the expense of town centre shops because they acquire undervalued 'green field' sites that enable them to devote vast areas to free parking.

Out-of-town developments are also difficult to serve by public transport and encourage needless extra car traffic. The Government's whole concept of land use and its value needs urgent re-appraisal.

Listed buildings. BR has over 1,000 buildings of historical interest which it is required to maintain even if no longer used. Regional Railways uses 23% of its PSO grant to renovate unused buildings, for example.

By contrast, road users pay nothing towards roadside listed buildings that are damaged by vibration, particularly from heavy lorries.

Similarly the cost of damage to gas and water mains from this

cause is passed on to the users and not to those who cause it.

Cost benefit analysis. The Department of Transport assesses the value of time saved by road investment as 3p per minute for private cars, and as much as 16p for company cars including an allowance for employers' time, income tax, National Insurance, holiday and sick pay. But the department does not cost the increased congestion which will be caused by attracting more traffic on to the road network.

This cost should be balanced against the alleged gain.

Road maintenance. The British Road Federation has recently announced that over 8,000 miles of trunk roads are in urgent need of repair. Clearly the sum allocated for road maintenance (I believe this currently totals around £5 billion annually) is proving to be inadequate, and as the road network expands, the level of expenditure on maintenance will need to be drastically increased to keep up.

Policing. Presumably the sum quoted by Graham Nalty (*Railwatch* 60) for policing, which I believe is approximately £0.5 billion, does not include the cost of time lost in the courts dealing with traffic offences and accidents. This must amount to a considerable sum and needs to be identified.

A significant proportion of road hauliers infringe speed and loading restrictions as well as drivers' hours regulations which together form a considerable benefit to themselves and a threat to the safety of others.

Emergency services. Road accidents frequently involve attendance by the fire service and ambulance service. David Hollis quotes the Department of Transport estimate of £10.16 billion for road accidents. Presumably this includes the cost of the above, but it would be interesting to know exactly what is or is not included.

Accidents on the short section of the M25 between junctions 27 and 28 require attendance by the emergency services on average once every nine days!

Pollution and energy consumption. Department of Transport statistics distort the true picture by making buses look more efficient by counting

seats only. Rail vehicles are designed to cater for a higher number of standing passengers than buses.

When this is taken into consideration, electric suburban trains consume 0.20 MJ per passenger miles compared to a 0.32 for a single deck bus.

The extent of distortion is apparent when it is realised that the Sheffield Super Tram is designed for 100 seated passengers and a further 150 standing!

A comparison of energy use must also take into account the fact that the life of a rail vehicle is double that of a bus.

Dr Richard Beeching worked on a report in 1964 into the true costs of road transport as opposed to the tax cost. But the Minister of Technology at the time was Frank Cousins, who had been general secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union and for political reasons, the report was dropped.

Graham Nalty adds: These hidden costs MUST be studied further. The most significant cost is the rental value of the road network. If Railtrack is expected to raise an eventual 8% return on its asset value from users, this should also be applied to road users. Further research is essential.

If you have further information please write to Mr Bradbury at 30 The Mount, Worcester Park, Surrey KT4 8UD.

Working knowledge

Members who work for companies with large numbers of people who travel to work or could travel to work by rail are invited to pass details on to RDS research co-ordinator John Saunders who says any information will be treated in confidence with the names of informants not revealed. His address is Sawyers Lane, Sutton, Wymondham, Norfolk NR18 9JH.

TALK

The Government says it wants to see more freight switch from road to rail.

FACT

Freight moved by rail fell by from 7% to 6% in 1993 compared with 1992. France sends 24% of freight by rail, Germany 22%, and Switzerland 40%.

Minister on the look-out for sandals

The road lobby has no effect on Government policy making, Minister Steven Norris told RDS members in October.

Just before a second wave of sleaze allegations became public, Mr Norris was asked at an RDS meeting in London about reports that a quarter of all funding for the Tory Party came from the road lobby.

"You don't seem to understand the way the Government works," he said.

The Minister of Transport for London had earlier claimed that new research showed that improving public transport does not persuade people to leave their cars at home.

He was challenged by RDS member Norman Bradbury who said that Manchester Metrolink had removed one million cars from central Manchester. Other members were straining to tell the minister how a series of railway "total route modernisation" schemes HAD taken cars off the streets.

He trumpeted the fact that 86% of commuters into London already used public transport, but failed to show how the Government planned to tackle the minority who insisted on using cars, causing enormous problems of pollution and congestion. The only positive scheme that was actually implemented was bus priority lanes which had improved the

service on two routes. The Government was considering other things and was "agnostic" about road pricing.

Mr Norris held forth at great length answering questions which he dismissed as puerile and facile and wanted to know whether people asking questions were members of the "open-toed sandal brigade".

"Simplistic nostrums" were a "con" on the electorate.

Existing problems were blamed on "inefficient, nationalised British Rail" which had "no clear idea about how to market a product".

Privatisation was going to make public transport "more efficient", he said, and claimed that he, former Transport Secretary John MacGregor, and former public transport minister Roger Freeman had "sat down together" to put the railway privatisation Bill together.

He admitted that the railways were underfunded to the tune of £10 billion but if people expected the Government to come up with extra cash, he said dismissively: "Dream on, guys."

"Don't expect bigger cheques from the Government," he said, while failing to mention the enormous amounts of money being spent on road building.

He did admit, though, that nationalised industries had been starved of investment for

years. He said M25 "improvements" relieved traffic problems but failed to mention that new roads generate more traffic.

Atrocious information

Transport Secretary Dr Brian Mawhinney has discussed with BR chairman Sir Bob Reid the failings of the railway information service which have been described as "atrocious" by the official watchdog.

But it will be Franchise Director Roger Salmon who decides on the future of the telephone enquiry bureaux, according to Minister for Roads and Railways John Watts.

Tory MP Mark Robinson, who represents the marginal seat of Somerton and Frome, was told this in a letter after taking up complaints from constituents about the difficulty and expense of getting simple information over the phone. More and more people are having to make long-distance calls as information services are axed and stations are left without even a ticket seller.

There were reports that a £5 fee was being levied at Edinburgh Waverley on people who wanted European timetable information.

A survey by the Central Rail Users' Consultative Committee showed "extremely disappointing results" from the telephone enquiry bureaux. 17% of calls had to be abandoned because there was no answer after five minutes waiting even though calls SHOULD be answered within 30 seconds. Stoke on Trent was impossible to get through to.

Two thirds of the bureaux failed to provide information about engineering works even though the information is supplied to them routinely.

CRUCC chairman Major General Lennox Napier commented: "I find it very disturbing that some callers are paying a hefty charge for the privilege of being given incorrect information which could seriously disrupt their journey plans and deter them from using rail in future."

Cheated again

The road lobby has managed to persuade a House of Lords committee that 44-tonne lorries should be allowed throughout the road network. Parliament gave the go-ahead for 44 tonners to operate to railheads and the then Transport Secretary John MacGregor told the House of Commons the 44-

tonners would be used only on journeys to and from railheads. 38 tonnes would remain the general limit. The railways and the people of Britain who want to see fewer lorries on the road look like being cheated again.

I decide

Assurances given to Parliament about consultation in the way rail privatisation is implemented look like evaporating in hot air. Commercial confidentiality is being used by train operators as an excuse to keep watchdogs and the public in the dark.

Franchise Director Roger Salmon, who has refused to meet RDS, is also warning that he will not consult with individual local councils. They will have to arrange themselves in groups to suit him.

He points out that the law only requires him to consult with those he feels like talking to. He expects only four groups to be interested in the entire East Coast main line!

"Consultation is a sham if it is restricted to consortiums," said Geoffrey Penn of the Yeovil Rail Action Group. "User groups will not be consulted and are being squeezed out completely. What about rural railways?"

RDS parliamentary committee chairman David Bigg, who is also chairman of Witham User Group, said: "Everybody must be able to have an input into the changes."

■ The "benefits" of privatisation to passengers. Rolling stock orders: 1990-91 841 vehicles, 1991-92 481, 1992-93 786, 1993-4 164.

■ Ministry of Distortion: The Department of Transport is clinging to its red routes speeding traffic through London, claiming that they have promoted greater use of public transport. In fact they are more dangerous for pedestrians and cyclists, they are reducing the use of local shops, and make it more difficult for disabled people to gain access.

■ Railtrack is not in business to run trains. It is in business to make profits from assets that belonged to the nation - former BR safety manager Peter Rayner.

■ Heritage at risk: Lorry drivers are ignoring road markings introduced in Dereham, Norfolk, to protect 1502-built Bishop Bonner's cottage.

Know your MPs

Sir Norman Fowler, the Tory MP for Sutton Coldfield, was Minister of State for Transport from 1979 to 1981 when the trans-Pennine Woodhead line closed. The 56-year-old was chairman of the Tory party from 1992 to 1994. He is on the board of the road freight company NFC, which has its head office in Bedford. He is also on the board of Evered Bardon which supplies stone for road building. Among its road contracts were the M5, Maybury Park near Edinburgh and the Bucks skin diversion on the A96 near Aberdeen. The company contributes to the Tory think-tank. Sir Norman also wrote *The Right Track* in 1977.

Labour MP John Gilbert, 67, was a transport minister in 1975-6 and represents Dudley East in the House of Commons. He is a director of road builders Edmund Nuttall which, in 1992, was awarded a £5 million road scheme contract at Kingston Bagpuize, Oxfordshire. It had a £2 million contract in 1991 to widen the M6. Mr Gilbert is also a director of road builders Kyle Stewart.

Norfolk South MP John MacGregor resigned in July as transport secretary. Three months later he became deputy chairman of Hill Samuel, the merchant bank he appointed to advise the Government on the £2.7 billion Channel Tunnel fast link. In July British Rail also appointed Hill Samuel to advise on the sale of BR's infrastructure maintenance and renewal companies, the three trainload freight companies, Rail express systems which carries mail for the Post Office and some of the component businesses of BR Central Services.

WESTMINSTER WATCH

Transport madness

Tory MPs laughed and joked their way through a debate initiated by Labour on 31 OCTOBER which called for road building to be cut and more support given to public transport.

Shadow transport secretary Michael Meacher warned: "We are remorselessly approaching a transport nightmare."

But he said there was no evidence the Government grasped the magnitude of the transport crisis facing Britain today.

Even if it does, it seems either unwilling or unable effectively to deal with it.

It has cut rail grants by more than £2 billion since 1983 and is cutting investment in rail by two thirds between 1992 and 1996.

It is still spending three times more on roads than on public transport.

Mr Meacher was opening the debate just a few days after the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution's report on transport and the environment.

"We have seen a constant, persistent and absolutely destructive run down of public transport," said Mr Meacher.

"The Government prefers to spend £270 million on widening the M62, rather than £170 million on electrifying the trans-Pennine rail network, even though that would relieve congestion on the motorway much more effectively.

It also prefers to spend millions on extending the M6 before starting on modernising the West Coast main line."

Major review

He called for a shift of freight from road to rail, greater use of light rail systems and a major review of future road building.

"The real reason why the Tories are dedicated to building roads in perpetuity ... lies in the link between the Tory Party and some of the major construction companies."

He said Taylor Woodrow had donated £1 million to Tory Central Office since 1979. Tarmac had given £389,000 and Wimpey had given £385,000.

"He who pays the piper calls the tune. In business they do it

because they believe they will get a return."

The Government was putting three times more into roads than public transport, he said, despite propaganda to the contrary.

He said: "The Government likes to claim that it has given 40% of investment to public transport. Of course that investment includes items such as the royal train, National Freight Corporation pensions and the Coastguard service."

"If we remove these items, investment in public transport has been about 26%, an extremely low rate."

Yet there had been extensive road building on a huge and massive scale and the Government had given priority to "hugely unpopular road projects."

He called for a moratorium on new road building and widening and progress towards a balanced and integrated transport system.

He said: "We want to see a common cost-benefit approach to all investment in transport that takes the environment more into account."

Ropenings

"The need for a radical change of direction towards a new strategic approach is now overwhelming."

If the M25 was being widened to 14 lanes in response to estimates of traffic doubling over the next 30 years, would it be further be widened to 28 lanes later if another doubling was forecast, he speculated.

"Where does this madness end?" Mr Meacher undermined another plank of Department of Transport propaganda which tries to deny that rail improvements have much impact on traffic levels.

He pointed out that 40% of the people using trains on the reopened Robin Hood line and the new Metrolink system are ex-car users.

Transport Secretary Dr Brian Mawhinney intervened to say: "We know."

Dr Mawhinney said the Government would seek to provide incentives to persuade people to switch to public transport but "we will not direct people off or on to the roads."

He added: "We recognise there is real concern about the damage

transport can do to the environment.

"But we also recognise Government cannot put more freight on to trains or move more people on to public transport at a stroke."

Labour MP David Cllland (Tyne Bridge) quoted findings of Oxford University's Phil Goodwin that new roads generate 10% more traffic immediately and 20% in the long term.

Modest investment

He asked whether the Department of Transport would publish Dr Goodwin's report.

Liberal Democrat transport spokesman Paul Tyler said a comparatively modest investment in the rail network would save huge sums on roads.

Matthew Banks (Con, Southport) urged the Government to take seriously the recommendations of the Transport Select Committee report on traffic pollution.

Winding up for Labour, Joan Rudock said the danger to the environment now came from an "invisible smog."

In London and other urban areas this was a cocktail of toxic chemicals produced by private and commercial vehicles.

Road obsession

"The warnings are all too clear ... 160 deaths in London have been attributed to the photo-chemical smog of 1991 and millions were suffering ill health nationwide.

Labour has warned the Government of the dangers inherent in its obsession with road building and road widening.

"Labour has proposed a moratorium, a halt on new road schemes, while we consider the most appropriate way to meeting mobility needs."

"We have never said there will be a cancellation of all roads for all time, nor have we said that contracts already let will be reneged upon."

She pointed out that 50% of women do not have a driving licence.

She said today's ecological crisis was caused by Government policy and Ministers could not evade their responsibility any more. The nation's health is the Government's responsibility. Three million people now suffered from asthma.

She asked: "Will the Secretary of State for Transport only respond to the vested interests of the Brit-

ish Road Federation?"

Replying, junior transport minister Steven Norris agreed about the need to persuade people and industry to use the railways instead of the roads.

"So how sad that Labour supported the rail dispute, which has probably done more than any other single action to discourage potential investors in rail from taking freight on to that mode of transport."

"That will take years to put right, and Labour stand condemned for its support."

Labour's motion called on the Government to make a major strategic shift away from an obsessional concern with road building and road widening in favour of an affordable, safe and reliable public transport system and to reduce pollution, accidents, noise and congestion."

It was defeated by 299 to 259, Government majority 40.

Crazy costs

Rail and Roads Minister John Watts reported on 19 OCTOBER, that the average cost of a new dual carriageway road was £5.5 million per mile, not allowing for the cost of design and VAT.

He said that the signal strike had cost BR £154 million in lost revenue. He also gave the provisional external finance limits for 1994-5 for Railtrack (£280 million) and BR (£348 million).

Danger coaches

London's Transport Minister Steven Norris said on 20 OCTOBER, there had been 87 accidents in 1993 involving motorway coaches. There had been 326 casualties as a result.

He also admitted that 208 mature trees had been cut down to make way for the M11 extension in East London.

Rose tinted

Welsh Secretary John Redwood said on 17 OCTOBER: "The rail network in Wales is in excellent order and is extensive."

In answer to a question about road building, Mr Watts provided a list of 255 schemes involving massive public expenditure.

There are 10 M1 expansion schemes alone, with just one of them costing £365 million.

There are also ten M25 widening schemes, three of them in Essex.



Railmen back on the bus

A frightening glimpse into the future came when a new profit-oriented train operating company tried to rob a local community of its trains with virtually no notice.

Luckily local councils and people united in protest and North London Railways agreed to reinstate most of the trains on the Bedford to Bletchley branch line.

But for six weeks, passengers had to make do with a mixture of buses and trains. NLR's original intention had been to replace all the trains by buses.

The passengers were eventually given an assurance that "come what may", the train service would be completely returned to normal on 21 November.

Even though NLR is still a wholly owned subsidiary of British Rail, some managers seem to have got the message direct from the Government that they must be financially hard-nosed in the new semi-privatised era.

The cuts on the branch line were officially caused by staff shortages.

But the staff shortages themselves were the result of relentless pressure from government to save money.

Many drivers saw their lifetime commitment to railway service being junked by a Government intent on privatisation.

More problems were caused when NLR closed the depot at Northampton to save money.

Many drivers at Northampton decided that their future looked bleak and chose to find others jobs or take early retirement.

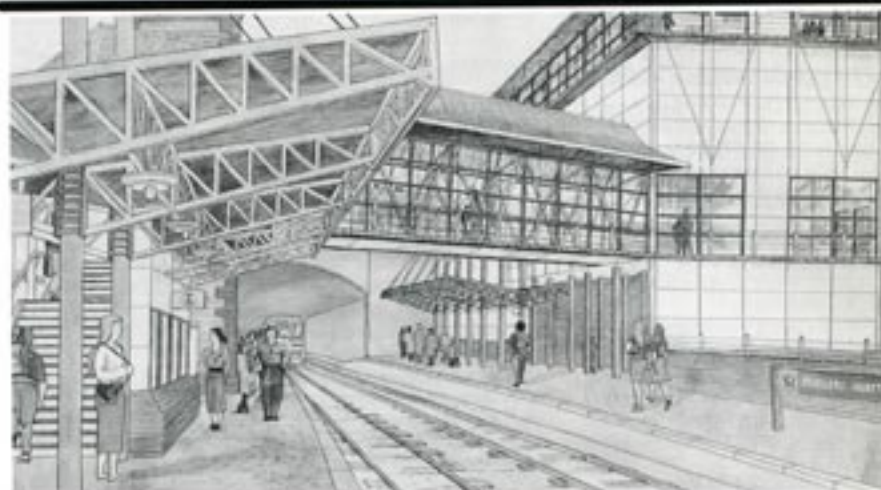
The irony is that the remaining drivers from Northampton were paid expenses to drive their cars to Bletchley to sign on for work and then were taken in taxis to Northampton where their trains were still parked - to start work.

NLR's idea seems to have been to use sidings at Bletchley for parking the ex-Northampton based trains.

But they had to pay for use of the sidings and then were told that they could not use the sidings on a long-term basis because they were needed for freight.

To further compound the problem, NLR had introduced extra trains on the main line to Euston with the start of the winter timetable and then discovered that it did not have enough crews to work them.

The branch line crews were supposed to be



The new station to be built in Birmingham's Jewellery Quarter

Football Trust goes rail

Fans going to see West Bromwich Albion play football will have a new rail station to serve their ground next year - on a reopened line. Hawthorns station is one of three on the Jewellery line which will give Birmingham another cross-city rail link.

The second new station will be built in Birmingham's historic Jewellery Quarter which gives the line its title and a third station will be constructed at Galton Bridge, which will serve as an interchange with the Birmingham to Wolverhampton line. The reopened line is on the abandoned Great Western main line from Snow Hill to Smethwick but its magic is that it will allow trains to operate from Stourbridge in the West to Solihull and Shirley in the south-east of the city.

The trains will run through the city centre stations of Snow Hill and Moor Street, avoiding already overcrowded New Street. West Midlands Passenger Transport Authority is providing £16 million, with £6 million coming from the European Regional Development Fund and £3 million from Regional Railways. The Football Trust and the BR community fund is providing another £60,000.

drafted on to the main line to make up the difference. However, the crews were as horrified as the passengers to discover what their managers were planning.

Elsewhere on NLR, buses are being used on the line from Stratford to North Woolwich while extensive track work is undertaken to accommodate the new Jubilee line extension.

Amazingly for a train operator, NLR claims "the replacement bus service has given the North London Railways at the eastern end of the line a tremendous boost in confidence to the customer".

Even rail managers do not seem to realise that however good the bus service is - and

the NLR bus service is NOT that good - people want trains.

NLR has also withdrawn Sunday services on the Gospel Oak-Barking line and reduced the Euston-Northampton service on Sunday mornings.

A further batch of train cuts was planned for the Northampton line but mysteriously dropped on 19 October.

To its credit however, NLR has introduced a completely new service from Willesden Junction to Clapham Junction.

Let's hope it shows more commitment to that service than it has shown to the trains on the Bedford-Bletchley line which has provided a good service for 148 years.

■ The feasibility study into upgrading Britain's busiest rail line, the West Coast, was expected to be presented at Parliament on 30 November, the day after the Chancellor presented his budget.

The £500 million upgrade should reduce the six-hour London-Glasgow journey to four hours. If it had been a road, the money would have been found years ago.

The whole scheme is bogged down in the Government's attempts to get the private sector to come up with some of the cash needed.

One thing seems clear: The privatisation will go on for a long time yet,

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