

Railwatch

AN INDEPENDENT VOICE FOR RAIL USERS

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90p



First rate

Third class

The Government has condemned Britain's premier rail line to a third-rate standard of service and has refused to provide any cash for upgrading.

It has ruled out building new cut-offs to provide a 185mph West Coast main line and is happy to see the existing tired old trains run on for another 10 years.

The Franchise Director looks set to allow train speeds to be lowered when he issues his passenger service requirement for the West Coast franchises and he is likely to clear the way for operators to be able to make substantial train cuts, probably by as much as 20%.

As a continual reminder of how far we have fallen behind our continental counterparts, Eurostar trains will trundle along the line at just over half the speed they run at in France.

"The original intentions and commitments to the line have been hugely modified and downgraded," said the West Coast 250 campaign.

The only real improvement to be agreed so far is that the line will get a new cab-based signalling and train control system in a five-year programme entirely funded by Railtrack from track access charges. There will be NO Government money. That has got to be saved for building new roads. Nor will there will be new trains. However

Railtrack will be given new opportunities to raise private finance for improvements. *Stop laughing at the back there!*

In Parliament on 29 March, Rail and Road Minister John Watts spent so long waffling that he was cut off by the Speaker just as he was getting to the most important issues of how upgrading the line would be funded and how long it would take.

He did manage to explain that the new signalling system could be installed without replacing the old.

"It is not a matter of ripping up cables and trackside signals and replacing them," he said. "The two will not interfere with each other."

He also seems to have grasped that upgrading equipment can actually save money in the long term.

Preston's Labour MP Audrey Wise painted a more realistic picture. She said the line had been grossly neglected for 15 years and now the Government was effectively washing its hands of its financial responsibility. She said there needs to be public sector involvement in addition to any private finance which might be found. Labour transport spokesman Henry McLeish (Fife Central) said the Government is dragging its feet over investing in an

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This Amtrak train is giving Americans and Canadians a taste of high-speed rail on its international scenic journey beside the Cascade mountains.

The lightweight but luxurious Talgo Pendular 200 train which leans into curves began operating a four-and-a-half-hour schedule in May between Seattle, USA, and Vancouver on Canada's west coast.

The Spanish-built Talgo has pneumatic suspension and can travel at up to 186mph on conventional track.

The technology has been refined over 40 years by Spanish railway engineers and is now earning foreign exchange for Spain - while Britain's abandoned Advanced Passenger Train is rusting away at Crewe.

Amtrak travellers - about 60,000 of them - were impressed by the Talgo when it appeared for a seven-day-a-week six-month trial on services between Seattle and Portland, Oregon. Passengers liked the big windows and comfort while Amtrak was impressed by its reliability.

Washington State Department of Transportation has leased the train and recognises its enormous social benefit and potential. It gives the Vancouver route a train service for the first time for 14 years. The department calculates that, if used to capacity, it can carry the equivalent of 16 lanes of car traffic!

The Spanish have set up a subsidiary company, Renfe Talgo of America, with headquarters in Delaware, in the hope of selling more Talgos to America.

A home station for RDS

By Tony Smale

No office, no stock room, no retail outlet, no library and no archive. No Home! RDS has looked into the question of acquiring permanent premises before but here is an idea which might take off.

What better home for the RDS than a vacant station building on a branch line which still has a passenger service? We wouldn't need the whole building. Ideally, part would be tenanted by a new or existing commercial venture. A complementary venture could be a travel agent, a retail shop, a cafe, a pub or similar.

Two members of Portsmouth Friends of the Earth (membership around 250) decided to buy old warehouse premises near Fratton station in 1986. With a £1,000 grant from the European Year of the Environment,

they set up a separate company and allowed the FoE group to use the upstairs as an office. There are now two commercial ventures, a veggie cafe and a used cycle centre. A ground floor information office has been set up, and a full-time officer employed with local authority grants. An upstairs office has been maintained for the FoE group.

RDS, with a huge membership in comparison, could follow this example. A station building would be appropriate, since members could visit easily and we would have the chance to set up model passenger facilities (ticket sales on an agency basis where none exist, plenty of information and bright modern surroundings).

Our minimum requirements would be an office, a stock room, a committee room and kitchenette/toilet, which could all be on the

first floor. If there is a retail shop on the ground floor, we would like them to display RDS products. A ticket sales and information counter on the ground floor would be desirable. Dormitory accommodation for visiting volunteers (say, two rooms plus shower) would also be desirable.

There may be scope to use outbuildings or even to site a caravan or camping coach nearby. But it is important that public areas must be declared a nostalgia-free zone, otherwise we will look like any one of the hundred preservation societies!

The location would need to be fairly central, say in Worcestershire, Derbyshire, Cambridgeshire or somewhere similar. An agreeable town setting would attract volunteers, but it would not have to be so cut off that there's no one about and only one train a day! I should think that if we made enquiries, we would be spoilt for choice. What we need is a substantial building, vacant or semi-vacant, but not hopelessly derelict.

As in the Portsmouth FoE example, there is a need to separate commercial premises from the society's rooms for rating and insurance purposes. The precise financial arrangements between the landlord, the commercial ventures and the society can be left open for agreement as negotiations progress.

Ideally, we would wish to rent the premises with an option to buy at a later date. If the entrepreneurs setting up the commercial ventures are taking most of the risks, clearly the society must allow them to offer what terms they consider reasonable.

Many's the time I've passed a disused station building and planned what I could do if I could only bring myself to tell the gov'nor what 'e can do with 'is job! Others must have had similar daydreams!

This could be a spiritual home for the RDs, and an exciting and interesting point of contact for members. Future administrative assistants could be recruited from within easy commuting distance of the station, and volunteers could converge for working weekends or longer stays (office jobs, building maintenance or manning the information desk). The recruitment of a full-time administrative manager may coincide nicely with opening of the station office, so that he or she can work from a proper office environment.

No soulless central London office for an organisation such as ours! With the RDS station project, we would be visibly supporting the rail service in a small community and hopefully enhancing facilities for passengers along the lines so often stated in our own publicity material!

■ Do you know of someone going into business or someone with a bit of space to rent? We are on the mailing list of Railtrack Property so we have details of railway premises on offer. But if you know of an office or industrial unit near a station which might fit the bill, please contact me, Tony Smale at Broadheath, Fishers Hill, Catisfield, Fareham, Hants PO15 5QY, or a national executive member.

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RDS and the new scenario

I recently received criticism from Left and Right about the RDS position on rail privatisation. We were accused of not being supportive enough of the Labour Party. We were also seen by some as too hostile to private enterprise!

Let us take stock. The privatisation legislation was forced through by the Government despite the weight of public opinion. Our opposition and robust stand was in tune with the public mood.

We are not against private involvement in railways. The society holds shares in Eurotunnel, for example, and our freight committee has close contact with many firms involved in rail freight.

It may well be that in two years, Tony Blair will be Prime Minister and a new Labour Government will halt the break-up of British Rail. But we cannot be sure what stage the privatisation process will have reached by 1997. It is unlikely Labour will re-establish BR in exactly the form it was in 1993, 1979 or 1948.

Labour can also be susceptible to vested interests in the road lobby just as the Conservatives have been. Whatever it does, the rail system could well be in a state of flux until the end of the century.

In this shifting scenario, rail users need a steady, strong voice. That is what RDS seeks to provide. It means talking with everyone of influence. Many of us have spent the past 18 months making contacts with anyone likely to have a say in the future of our train services.

In the past few months, for example, we have held meetings with the Franchising Director and the Rail Regulator. The Regulator has agreed to meet us every six months. We

submitted detailed comments at national level on his "core stations" proposal; most RDS branches also made their own comments, as did nearly 50 of our affiliated users' groups and scores of individuals. Our evidence, and that of other bodies, convinced him to scrap this potentially disastrous proposal.

Our paper on ticketing was also sent to every train operating unit and those private companies which had expressed an interest in bidding for rail franchises.

About half the latter replied. Southern Vectis and Go-Ahead Northern sent interesting comments. High-profile firms like Badgerline and Stagecoach did not reply.

During the winter, members of our parliamentary liaison committee had a strong presence at the transport conference of the Socialist Environment and Resources Association and at the Conservative Transport Conference.

RDS delegations have also been to meet Richard Rosser, general secretary of the Transport Salaried Staffs Association and Wilf Proudfoot and Mark Walker of the Rail, Maritime and Transport Union.

We are in no one's pocket and we are free to criticise.

For example, as a result of our monitoring of the privatisation process, we published *It's a Shambles* at the beginning of April. We are not necessarily attacking individual managers or staff but we are casting doubt on the system under which they have to work.

If things improve we will say so. If we continue to criticise constructively and knowledgeably, the U-turn over "core stations" may not be the only one.

A nightmare for rail users

Former operations manager Peter Rayner told RDS campaigners at the end of April that he feared for the future of the railways following privatisation.

"Martin Luther King had a dream," he said. "Well, I have a nightmare! My nightmare is that six years from now, Michael Portillo will be Prime Minister and the 1993 Act will still be in place.

"In my nightmare, the network is destroyed. I would hate to draw a map of it.

"The only chance of stopping the nightmare is for you, and people like you, to be active and well organised to resist the closures that will surely come."

Mr Rayner highlighted the row in Scotland over painting the Forth Bridge, the most spectacular part of Britain's rail infrastructure.

Despite officials insisting the bridge was still safe, he predicted: "In a few years' time it will be fit only for lightweight diesel multiple units.

"It won't be able to carry the heavy trains we want to bring back to the rail network."

He said maintenance on many other bridges is being reduced to the minimum level.

He added: "While not a supporter of the Railways Bill, I believe Railtrack could protect the fabric of the railway if properly directed and if it was not too closely aligned with the aims and objectives of the Property Board.

"Railtrack can be the means of protection or attacking the national system."

He told RDS members at the Exeter annual general meeting: "The greatest tragedy will be the privatisation of Railtrack itself. Do all you can to prevent its sell-off." He reminded

Exeter 95

The Railway Development Society annual general meeting at Exeter Riverside Centre 29 April 1995



We are not alone: This is the logo of the Paint Our Bridge campaign being run by the *Edinburgh Evening News*. Below the Save Our Sleepers logo from *The Scotsman's* campaign.

everyone that the £446 million the Government has spent on fragmenting the railways and making it MORE difficult to keep safe, could have given us a system of automatic train protection.

But the public was looking for change, said Mr Rayner and he advised: "Be ready with a sensible plan when the opportunity arises."

Mr Rayner's alert was echoed by Liberal Democrat transport spokesman Paul Tyler.

He said buck-passing between Franchise Director, Regulator and Ministers is already one of the shoddy consequences of rail privatisation.

"Ministers are trying to distance themselves from the disastrous effects of their policies," said Mr Tyler.

"I find it disturbing the extent

to which Transport Secretary Dr Brian Mawhinney disclaims responsibility."

Everyone was dismayed by the effects of Dr Beeching's butchery but now Dr Mawhinney is inflicting totally inappropriate surgery on the body of the railway.

"Dr Mawhinney's prescription is killing off the patient," he said.

He warned that the moment of truth is fast approaching.

"If you think the attack on the railways is at its height, you're wrong. We are going to see much worse in the future."

Mr Tyler stressed the importance of the railways to the environmental and economic wellbeing of the South West.

He said Road and Rail Minister John Watts appeared to have never heard of the rail sleeper

service which, until last month, linked the South West of England to Scotland.

"Vital tourist industries in vulnerable local economies depend on these rail services," said Mr Tyler.

He said that already buses were being substituted for trains on branch lines and maintenance is being reduced so that punctuality and reliability is at risk.

He stressed the importance of maintaining prudent repairs because between Exeter and Plymouth alone there were 30 viaducts and bridges.

He warned that "huge stretches of the network" can be downgraded so that they will be useless for fast or heavy trains.

The Government had promised orders to train makers only to renege on the deal.

"It is criminal folly to reduce the effectiveness of the railway infrastructure."

At least local councils were beginning to appreciate what can be done with the railways, he said.

"But we need an effective national rail policy from the Government and investment by the Government. The rail system is a national asset."

He added: "Railtrack is a publicly controlled asset and must remain so. It must not be sold off like a bag of potatoes."



Your new national executive line-up and the AGM resolutions

Steve Rackett of Wessex branch and former administration officer Reg Snow were elected to the national executive for the first time.

Andrew MacFarlane rejoins it after being elected along with Mike Crowhurst, Shirley Dex, Don McPhee, Malcolm Goodall, Peter Wakefield, Peter Lawrence and Simon Martin. Ian Murray and Trevor Jones were not elected.

Chairman Steve Wilkinson,

vice chairman Ray King, general secretary Trevor Garrod, treasurer David Bigg, membership secretary Elisabeth Jordan and sales officer Tony Smale were returned unopposed.

The annual meeting passed resolutions to:

SUPPORT the idea of a full-time official and the need for subscription increases.

ENCOURAGE Somerset County Council to help bring back through trains between Taunton and Minehead, utilis-

ing the existing West Somerset Railway.

OPPOSE the privatisation of Railtrack.

WELCOME the idea of open access for freight train operators.

CONDEMN the uncertainty of funding rail services in big city rail networks.

URGE regulation to avoid large increases in the pay of the directors of privatised rail operators.

URGE Millennium Commission funds to go to rail projects.

SUPPORT micro franchising of branch lines where appropriate.

SUPPORT Thameslink 2000 and CrossRail and make greater use of neglected rail lines in cities.

GIVE honorary RDS membership to roads protester Emma Must who was jailed for peaceful protest against road building.

Ironic really

It was good to see the article in *Railwatch* 63 about Thameslink 2000. In the same mailing came the leaflet *Getting Tracks Back to Dunstable. Connection?*

The Dunstable campaign is trying to fend off a proposal to convert a rail route to a busway, a rail route that for half the cost of the busway could become part of Thameslink (via Luton).

Proponent of the anti-Thameslink busway is Bedfordshire County Council. And which local authority leads the Thameslink 2000 consortium? You guessed: Bedfordshire County Council. Another of life's little ironies.

Roger Blake, 70 Dymecor Road, Stoke Newington London N16 0DX

Editor's note: Bedfordshire must be congratulated on supporting Thameslink 2000 and also on commissioning Transnet Research to investigate the potential of the Bedford-Bletchley line and the feasibility of linking the line to community environmental projects. But it has failed to recognise the national importance of reinstating the rail link from Bedford to Sandy or the potential of the Midland main line north of Bedford. It has not even considered reopening the line to Northampton.

Disconnected networks

The Underground's decision to remove the London Connections was rightly condemned in the last *Railwatch*.

Is there a commitment to this map from the train operating units and London Underground?

What happens if "BR" stations withdraw the Underground map? Would RDS consider taking over this map if the operators ditch it?

London already suffers from its stupid map system. Underground maps show a couple of "BR" lines but leave out others, including the Barking-Gospel Oak line. This hides away a vulnerable line and marginalises it even more.

The London Connections map is touchstone for London's partially integrated rail and Underground network. If it goes, the concept of a network is threatened and we are left with separate lines each calling themselves networks, competing with each other, when what we all want is co-operation and collaboration.

Incidentally what is the collec-

tive term now for lines other than the Underground for which "BR" used to suffice?

Colin Newman, 14 The Bloomfields, Church Road, Barking, Essex IG11 8PW

Looking forward

Euro enthusiasts should stop knocking Britain's railways, says Tim Mickleburgh in *Railwatch* 63.

In my experience, RDS members express admiration for the efforts of BR staff. They deplore, however, official policy towards our railways.

He says potential passengers are put off rail but how can you call for improvement without expressing dissatisfaction with the status quo?

You would not be able to attract much new custom by publicising 17-year-old rolling stock.

The Midland main line has got high speed trains but the pressing question is: What about their replacement?

Sheffield has got new trams but it will be decades before it has a comprehensive network capable of significantly reducing car traffic.

Officialdom does not take public transport seriously in Britain so it's only natural some RDS members will look to the continent for ideas.

Rail users will achieve nothing by looking back.

A W Collins, 8a Moorland Road, Mickleover, Derby DE3 5FX

Private solution

Can someone explain why, if the operation of privatised railways is to reflect market forces, that ScotRail, desperate for capacity in the tourist season, does not appear to be able to lease suitable trains from the ROSCO cartel, and cannot go to any other source as an alternative option?

Would European Union rules allow ScotRail to hire trains from say Fiat or another European or offshore rolling stock leasing agency?

By way of precedent, did not BR hire electric locomotives to Netherlands Railways for some time?

Dave Holladay, 96 West Graham Street, Glasgow G4 9LL

Private plan

The biggest threat to the future of our railways through privatisation is the fragmentation of the system. One can only hope that, if elected, the

Labour Party will abide by its promise to bring everything back under unified control.

Separate operating companies could exist provided they cooperate with each other, as happens in an efficient country like Switzerland.

The big problem of course will be Railtrack, and this is no doubt one of the reasons for the unseemly haste to sell off the system, to make it difficult to reunite the network in the future.

What does the individual do. Whatever we may think about the sale of Railtrack, is it not better that anyone who cares about the railways and can afford to buy a few shares should do so? This might keep a few shares out of the hands of institutions who would only be interested in profit.

There are a lot of people interested in railways. Together they could influence the future as shareholders.

D E Askew, 14 Kiln Ride, Upper Basildon, Reading RG8 5TA

Merger benefits

RDS must watch carefully how the Franchise Director shares out subsidy but I wonder about his decision to guarantee only 55% of Gatwick Express services. Network SouthCentral provides other services to Gatwick. Better value for subsidy could come from letting NSC run Gatwick Express.

A merger between the two would profits to contribute funds for leasing some much-needed new Sussex Coast stock.

There may be other examples of overlapping franchises which if merged would benefit passengers by integrating services and increasing financial efficiency. How about Anglia and Great Eastern?

There are moves in this direction already in the bus industry.

Chris Packham, Mead Cottage Lippiatt Lane, Tisbury, Bath BA3 1JE

Plea for the poor

Many railway users cannot afford a car even if they wanted one. They depend on public transport. We must do our best for them by fighting against cuts and for a better service. The retired, unemployed and students are a fruitful recruiting ground for RDS which is why I am opposed to suggestions to increase the reduced rate of membership by £5, the same

amount as the ordinary increase. Money is tight, especially if you are at the bottom of the pile. Please reconsider and, at the very least, make the reduced rate half the ordinary rate.

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

Dangerous road lobby

Clara Zilahi is to be commended for not forsaking her cycle after being hit from behind by a car driver. She was the innocent victim but seems to have a guilt complex, in buying a helmet and more reflective clothing.

The ultimate logic is to give up cycling in just the same way many people do not venture out of their homes for fear of crime.

Hyping up helmet use by the Department of Transport, RoSPA and other groups with a pro-motoring bias is a cynical attempt to reduce cycling in favour of cars.

Cycle helmets are irrelevant because they can only withstand a 12 mph impact.

When compulsory helmet wearing was introduced in Australia, there were dramatic falls in cycling. In New South Wales, cycling by children fell by 36% and in Victoria by 44%. Adult cycling in Melbourne fell by 37%.

The motoring interests are fully aware of the consequences of compulsion. At the moment, they are assiduously promoting voluntary use.

Once enough people are wearing helmets, the others will be brought into line by legal means.

Everyone who wears a helmet is contributing to the demise of cycling and the expansion of car use no matter what short-term personal advantage they see in it.

Maurice Knights, Editor, *Choice in Personal Safety*, 47 East Cliff Road, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN4 9AG

Airport service

Now that Rhoose airport in South Glamorgan is to be privatised, there is the prospect that it could be developed to international status as the airport for Cardiff in particular and Wales in general.

A rail service should of course be provided via the freight-only Vale of Glamorgan line.

Trains from Cardiff to Barry could be extended to Rhoose, Llantwit Major and even Brid-

gend. A passenger service could be justified by the massive growth of communities within the vale.

Costs would be low, apart from building stations, halts and park-and-ride facilities.

A bus could operate from Rhoose station to the airport, pending the construction of a rail spur.

Mervyn Matthews, Welsh Railways Action Committee, Stone-walls, 5a Broadway, Cowbridge, South Glamorgan CF7 7ER

Privatisation defended

I enjoy *Railwatch* and particularly Westminster Watch, an invaluable barometer of the political scene.

John Ellis's letter in *Railwatch* highlights the unfortunate negative reporting which all too often hinders progress and is currently doing so in the matter of rail's revival.

I find it frustrating that many people attack privatisation and the opportunity it may offer.

Pressure should be maintained to ensure we get the best railway possible and in this RDS has a central role to play.

Privatisation is capable of bringing about necessary, desirable changes.

Chris Nichols, Rail Freight Group, 26 Squithey Lane, Oxford OX2 7LD

Positive planning

There have been service cuts on the Sudbury-Marks Tey line but a more positive alternative would be to reopen the Cambridge-Haverhill-Sudbury line and operate a daily Cambridge-Colchester inter-city service which would attract more passengers and make a profit.

When BR closed the Cambridge-Sudbury section in 1967, its own financial information showed the complete Cambridge-Colchester line could be operated at a profit, had a new more attractive and efficient timetable been introduced.

BR had run this service down but a two-hourly service could

have given a better service to areas with large populations and been cheaper to operate.

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

Necessary secrets

I have just joined RDS and read with considerable interest and enjoyment the first issue of *Railwatch*.

I was however concerned to read the snide remarks about the "staggering number" of top secret and secret files held by the department of Transport.

Recent events in Japan have shown the range of threats for which public transport systems must have secret contingency plans.

D J Hardwick, 42 Bellamy Road, Oundle, Peterborough PE8 4NF

Rickety transport

The National Trust has recently issued to members a helpful guide suggesting how to use public transport to visit their properties.

One suggestion is to use a pedal rickshaw from Salisbury station to the lovely Queen Anne Mompesson House in Cathedral Close.

What a sad thing for our formerly great railway system to be reduced to organising journeys by pedal rickshaw. Stephenson and Brunel would be turning in their graves. But at least there ought to be no signalling problems or leaves on the line.

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

Road into rail

I probably belong to a minority of RDS members who oppose the Channel Tunnel and the proposed new high-speed line to link up with it.

A new line would rape the beautiful Kent countryside almost as much as a motorway. If there is a real need for such a link, then surely converting the middle lanes of the existing motorway into a railway would be cheaper and quicker.

R M West, 55 Hampton Road, Warwick CV34 6TL

Sharing a dream

I would be glad to buy shares in a scheme to build a steam and diesel depot at Hellifield on the Settle-Carlisle line, as suggested in *Railwatch* 63. It is glorious country and the line from Blackburn to Hellifield was always passenger friendly.

Phyllis M Blackburn, 10 St Christopher's Way, Morecambe, Lancs LA4 6EE

Virtuous cycle

Cyclists from RDS will be taking part in a sponsored ride on Saturday 25 June to highlight the case for reopening the Dereham to Wymondham line in Norfolk.

The case for reopening would be overwhelming if proper logical transport decisions were made but in the crazy world of road-lobby dominated Britain, our political leaders prefer to spend billions on roads instead of smaller sums on cost-effective public transport.

Politicians pretend to be in favour of less use of the car but take decisions which force people to use them.

The Government has prevented proper exploitation of the car-train combination by insisting BR bought unsuitable trains which do not carry cycles.

But one of the new train operating companies - Network SouthCentral - seems to recognise that cyclists and walkers are key customers. With the co-operation of East Sussex County Council it has produced an excellent guide called *Trails by Rail*.

This is one of the few areas of the country graced by trains which have adequate space for cycles and prams.

Other operators have inherited trains which have space for only one bike!

Mainstream European countries already recognise the importance of cycles, converting more and more trains and coaches to carry them and providing parking spaces for them.

In Germany, the number of bikes going on 60-mile rail trips has increased from 15,000 to 360,000 in 10 years. New trains, particularly the equivalent of our Regional trains, have special areas for bikes.

German Railways are rebuilding passenger coaches specifically to accommodate MORE cycles. One initiative in the former East German area of Brandenburg is seeing £150,000 spent on refurbishing 1970s-built coaches to provide a large area of "flexible space" with seven folding seats, space for four wheelchairs and up to 15 bicycles. The

coaches with the word BIKE painted in large letters on the side will be used on *InterRegio* services.

Perhaps the lettering will be large enough to penetrate the consciousness of British railway managers and Government officials.

In backward Britain by contrast, politicians, bureaucrats, the Treasury and car-driving rail managers have been making it difficult.

As one station manager commented: "Why do we insist on upsetting our customers?"

In Holland, 35% of all rail passengers get to the station by bike.

Dutch civil servants are no longer allowed to travel by car on official business. They can have their travel costs reimbursed only if they cycle or take the train.

Even single-car trains in Austria have the capacity to carry eight cycles in "flexible" space designed for both seating and luggage. On other trains a whole carriage is often provided for bikes, prams and other luggage.

Dangerous Britain: In Germany 60% of children cycle to school. In Britain, parents are so frightened of the dangerous anarchy on the roads, that only 3% of children ride to school.

The charity Sustrans is doing a valuable job which Britain's Department of Transport has deliberately avoided, creating long-distance cycle routes, often using sections of closed rail track.

This achieves the admirable extra purpose of maintaining painstakingly created linear routes instead of allowing them to be broken down into useless parcels of land by government-inspired short-sighted financial policies which involve selling off station sites.

But it does create a further problem. Does the existence of the cycle track make it impossible to reinstate the route for rail?

RDS is contacting Sustrans to see if we can agree some guidelines on the use of abandoned rail lines.

Go with Doe

Doe's Bus/Rail Guide

Send a cheque for £6 to receive the latest edition to Martin Ball, 89 North Wallington, Fareham, Hants PO16 8TJ. Cheques payable to RDS.

Sun, sea – and sewage

Railways gave millions of people the chance to visit the seaside for the first time in their lives. They still do. Unhappily many of the beaches that you can get to by train are now polluted.

For instance, if you head for Sussex by the Sea, you will find that several of the beaches have bathing water which fails the test for quality devised by the Marine Conservation Society.

Only two beaches in Sussex qualify for four-dolphin awards from the society and neither East Wittering nor Selsey Bill can easily be reached by train. They are both eight miles from the nearest railhead at Chichester.

Beaches at Worthing West, Lancing, Southwick, Hove, Brighton Kemp Town, Seaford, Hastings Queens Hotel CAN all be reached easily by train but their bathing waters fail the test for water quality.

Luckily people who want to go to beaches in Kent by train fare better in the clean water stakes. Four-dolphin awards go to Hythe, Joss Bay (near Broadstairs), Botany Bay (Cliftonville), Minnis Bay (near Birchington), and Sheerness Beach Street. Folkestone, Deal Castle, Sandwich Bay, Ramsgate and Herne Bay however all failed the water quality test.

Essex can claim not one four-dolphin beach that can be reached by train. Leigh-on-Sea, and Thorpe Bay failed the water quality test.

In neighbouring Suffolk, the beaches at Felixstowe and Lowestoft South are four-dolphin rated and can be reached by train. In Norfolk, the only four-dolphin rated beach that can be reached by train is Sheringham.

Cromer and two beaches at Great Yarmouth failed the test for water quality. Skegness is the star beach in Lincolnshire

and gets a four-dolphin award. Luckily it has a regular train service augmented by special trains in the summer.

The truth which many holiday resorts do their best to hide can be found in *The Good Beach Guide 1995*.

Skegness can be proud of its facilities. The guide describes it as one of the first planned resorts in Britain, the brainchild of Lord Scarborough, whose aim was to provide the burgeoning middle classes with wholesome holidays by the sea.

It has seven miles of open sand beach, backed by dunes, safe bathing, boating lakes and landscaped seafront gardens. Dogs are banned from the beach in sum-



mer. Gibraltar Point Nature reserve is three miles away. Local walks include one to Mablethorpe, loved by the poet Tennyson.

Unfortunately, Cleethorpes in neighbouring Humberside, easily reached by train, fails the water quality test.

Yorkshire's leading resort of Scarborough, which thousands of people visit by train fails the water quality test for its South beach but wins a two-dolphin award for the North beach.

In the North-East, rail-accessible beaches at Hartlepool North Sands, Seaham, and Whitley Bay fail the water quality test.

One of the few beaches in Northumberland that can be easily reached by train, Alnmouth, wins a four-dolphin award but sadly has dangerous conditions for bathing.

In Cornwall, Hayle station near St Ives gives access to a magnificent "necklace" of four-dolphin rated beaches. A short ferry ride from rail-connected Falmouth takes you to four-dolphin rated St Mawes. Rail-

served Torquay is one of Britain's most popular seaside destinations and can boast several beaches with four-dolphin clean water, particularly along Babbacombe Bay to the north of the town.

Taking the train to Weymouth, Dorset, also gives access to a four-dolphin rated beach. Bournemouth which has excellent train connections can boast four top-rated beaches, Durey Chine, Fisherman's Walk (Southbourne), Southbourne itself and Hengistbury Head.

Four-dolphin rated beaches which are rail-connected in Wales are Rhosneigr, Barmouth, Fairbourne, Borth, Freshwater East and West (near Pembroke), Manorbier.

Rail-connected beaches which failed the water quality test are Prestatyn, Llandudno West shore, Deganwy, Criccieth East, three beaches at Aberystwyth, Goodwick (Fishguard), Saundersfoot, Burry Port Beach East, Llanelli, Swansea Black Pill, Barry and Penarth.

Four-dolphin rated beaches in Scotland accessible by train are: White Sands Bay and Belhaven (both near Dunbar), Silver Sands (Aberdour), Montrose and Nairn Central. Dornoch also has a four-dolphin rated wide, sandy beach. If a rail bridge had been built along with the road bridge, rail travellers would have had access to it too.

Not one beach in Strathclyde qualifies for a four-dolphin award. Saltcoats, Irvine, Prestwick, Ayr, Turnberry and Girvan all fail the bathing water quality test.

We have highlighted the best and the worst of the rail-connected resorts. For full details of the other beaches:

■ *The Good Beach Guide 1995*, published by Readers Digest and compiled by the Marine Conservation Society, costs £7.99, ISBN 0-7153-0341-4

Give us back our train

By DAVID OGILVY

A new rail user group was hurriedly formed in April when people were given less than six weeks notice that the service on their local line was to be seriously downgraded.

Although the St Albans Abbey to Watford Junction branch was electrified as recently as 1988, North London Railways decided that the class 313 electric unit would be replaced by a 35-year-old class 117 diesel unit for the May timetable.

NLR is also withdrawing the first train, the last two trains and two intermediate trains. A longer term threat is to replace Sunday services with buses.

This is the same BR train operating company which last year provoked outrage by replacing trains with buses on the Bedford-Bletchley line. Rail users who seem to put a greater value on trains than rail managers immediately formed the Abbey Flyer



Users' Group (AFLUG). A hurriedly arranged public meeting was held on 4 May at St Stephen Parish Centre, close to Bricket Wood station, where public concern was so strong that the hall was overfilled. We needed an outside loud-speaker for the benefit of those who were unable to get in. Social Services Secretary

Peter Lilley, who is also MP for St Albans, travelled to the meeting by train. Tristan Garel-Jones, MP for Watford, also attended to offer support. A three-strong management team from North London Railways under the Director David Watters, came to hear the depth of feeling, state their case and answer questions, while representatives of London Regional Passengers' Committee and Hertfordshire County Council also attended. In addition, the problems were aired very extensively in the local press.

Many problems remain, but, due to pressure from users, the electric service is to be retained and the diesel unit is not to be reintroduced. The other difficulties will form subjects for ongoing negotiations with NLR, but readers may take heart that, even in the present unstable situation prior to privatisation, organised and orchestrated pressure can produce results. Do not lose heart!

Are you listening Mr Major?

By John Barfield

Mr Major's attempt to relaunch himself as the leader of a "listening government" will be tested by a new report into rail investment.

So far he and Transport Secretary Brian Mawhinney have spent more time listening to the road lobby than sensible transport arguments.

But now they have the chance to respond to an independent report entitled *Investing in Britain's Railways* which calls for £1.5 billion investment in rail to enable the system to survive and keep pace with European rail development.

The report by Reg Harman reveals the extent of the backlog of infrastructure investment which this Government has allowed to build up.

Stagnation pervades the railway supply industry (ABB is closing its York factory and Hunslet is also closing down).

And the private finance dogma is stunting any form of meaningful infrastructure and operational development.

How long can this general malaise be allowed to continue?

RDS Branches have been monitoring the effects of Privatisation and have a sorry tale to tell about the quality of local rail services and fragmentation of the network.

The 70-page Harman Report reveals how erratic investment in rail has been.

It had been thought £850 million annually would be needed for rail investment but the 1993 Railways Act has pushed up that figure to £1500 million.

Too much rail investment has had to be provided from fares and productivity improvements when operators in the other major countries of Europe are guaranteed a fixed rolling programme of development.

In Britain, unless the private sector is interested, forget it.

The Harman report highlights the need to keep the existing infrastructure in good condition if it is to function effectively and economically.

But in return for careful investment, the network has enormous capacity to relieve



pollution and traffic problems - as an alternative to unending expansion of the road network to meet demand.

There is also the need to be in step with the European Union Common Transport policy as enshrined in Directive 91/440 and Communication COM(92)494, which recognises that public support is necessary for an efficient and quality service, and that all modes of transport must be considered on a fair, comparative basis. They certainly are NOT in Britain.

The report shows that financial constraints on the British Rail system are narrowly drawn and that no formal basis has existed for establishing what wider economic and other opportunities investment in Britain's railways might achieve.

It also shows conclusively that investment at present is not even achieving renewal rates.

The report gives the Government the option of simple renewal which would need spending of £850 million a year for the British Rail system (i.e. other than LUL, Metro and private railways) which are considered separately in the report.

The fast link, CrossRail, Thameslink 2000, upgrading the West Coast main line, upgrading a TransPennine route, various re-signalling, and a programme of electrification are identified as a way to achieve big improvements.

But the network has an even bigger potential to expand if the Government chose to allow it.

In assessing the demand for additional capacity, the report

uses the same criteria as many RDS branches in assessing the adequacy of the Franchise Director's passenger service requirement, that is four trains per hour on urban or short regional lines and two per hour on others.

The cost of a full expansion programme is put at £7.65 billion, and investment on this scale would bring benefits to the construction industry and create 55,000 jobs annually.

The final price tag for renewal, improvement and expansion is put at £28.9 billion, a small price to pay for the basis of a national public transport network, compared to the unlimited billions which have been spent on providing new roads.

■ Investing in Britain's Railways. Harman Atkin et al. 1995. Atkin Research & Development Ltd. Price £35.00. ISBN 1 899906 00 2

Glib verdict

RDS campaigner Trevor Jones was able to challenge Welsh Secretary John Redwood when he attempted a glib justification of rail privatisation at the Consumer Congress in Swansea in April.

Mr Redwood who claimed to be a regular rail user then followed the normal Government approach of saying that everything about BR is rubbish and everything about privatisation will be marvellous.

Trevor was able to point out the Government had had power over BR for nearly 50 years but had chosen not to tackle the problems it now says will be "solved" by privatisation.

Mr Redwood's response was

that we have all misunderstood the relationship between BR and the Government.

Winners on line

RDS lottery winners: February: T D Christopher, Basildon £53.40, Mr and Mrs Ernest Booth, York £33.39, A D Clark, Grimsby £20.02, M Ashdown, Ballater £13.35, Ms B Easter, London £6.67, J R Bissett, Bromsgrove £6.67.

March: H R Fowler, Angmering £54.40, Mrs Iris Graham, Birmingham £34, Peter Spencer, Ewell £20.40, Mark Edgell, Rotherham £13.60, Donald Graham, Work-sop £6.80, Norman Campbell, Loughborough £6.80.

April: F H Russell, Birmingham £55.20, C J Lindley, Sutton Cold-field £34.50, Peter Spencer, Ewell £20.70, A S Williams, BFPO 36 £13.80, Elisabeth Jordan, Corby £6.90, G J Heathcock, Cambridge £6.90

If you would like to join the lottery for one year, send £12 to Dave Finch, 28 Neville Avenue, Kidderminster, Worcs DY11 7AL. Make cheque payable to RDS and include your RDS number if possible.

Welcome Glenda

The National Conference of Rail Users is on Saturday 14 October at the Camden Centre opposite St. Pancras station, London.

Guest speaker will be Glenda Jackson MP, one of Labour's transport team.

The fee for this all-day conference will be £7.50, and there will be a buffet lunch for £5.00.

You can book now with David Soames, 158 Atherstone Avenue, Peterborough, PE3 9UN.

Britain holds back a Star performer

By Trevor Garrod and Sean Emmett

The second RDS journey on Eurostar took place on 23 April and was trouble free. We filled a coach on the 0814 Brussels service.

Speeds were as low as 35-45 mph until clear of Herne Hill, and then a 60 limit applies through the suburbs, apart from Bickley junction which is restricted to 50.

The limit after Petts Wood is now 75mph increasing to 80 after Orpington and to 90 entering Sevenoaks tunnel.

It became clear we were following the presumably late running 0800 Charing Cross-Ramsgate and were checked while it made its Orpington and Sevenoaks calls.

Fortunately this train was looped at Tonbridge to give us a clear road and we twice touched 87 mph on this racing ground, which is however no improvement on the 1950s-built Kent Coast trains. Once in France, we achieved 185 mph.

Speed was slower in Belgium but the first stage of the Belgian high speed line, from Lille to Antoing should be open next year.

Several people bought day tickets at just under £3 for unlimited travel on Brussels buses, trams and metro. Trams from the suburbs go in tunnel under the city centre and serve the spacious underground station at Midi. The metro trains were well used and enjoyed remarkably powerful acceleration.

A few of us ventured out to the eastern suburb of Woluwe, where an old tram depot has been converted by volunteers into a Museum of Urban Transport. It is well worth a visit, with vintage trams and other light rail vehicles, some buses and a trolley bus. For details, write to the museum at Avenue de Tervuren 364b, B1150 Bruxelles.

Once home, we concluded that, from a performance point of view, Eurostar on the third rail is a disappointment, even compared to 1950s trains.

But the potential for sustained 185 mph running, only glimpsed on the Brussels run shows what Eurostar is capable of. Let's have that fast link - fast.

Peter Cannon is organising more trips in the autumn, probably one involving an overnight stay. Lyon, Strasbourg or Cologne have been suggested as possible destinations for the latter. One-day trips would probably be to Lille, Paris or Brussels. He would be pleased to hear members' views and also to hear from any members willing to be group leader.

Details will be in the next *Railwatch*, but if you would like details as soon as they are arranged, send a SAE to Peter Cannon at 6 Garrett Crescent, Leiston, Suffolk, IP16 4LB. He will also be pleased to handle bookings for individual members going for all continental travel. You can book through him at Deltaplan, 1 Upper Orwell Street, Ipswich, IP4 1HN. Tel 01473 213000.

Lorries

Let's have them!



By Ivan Stewart
and Steve Wilkinson

Simple isn't it? If the Government was really serious about getting freight off the road on to rail, then road semi-trailers could be delivered to rail heads and loaded on to spine wagons like these and be transported the length and breadth of Britain.

A tractor unit could pick up the semi-trailer from a rail head and make the final delivery by road.

You will hear all sorts of arguments about how rail is uneconomic and how firms must have freedom to do what they like but little mention of the argument that families should have freedom from danger and pollution caused by lorries.

You will hear even less about the money road lobby companies pay into Tory funds or the undemocratic malign influence exerted over the Department of Transport for years.

But the demands of ordinary people for a way out of the transport mayhem inflicted on Britain are growing by the day and there are tentative moves in the right direction.

The American Thrall Company, which has been manufacturing wagons in its Chicago Heights factory for 75 years, is moving into Britain to build for the European market.

The company has chosen Rosyth Royal Dockyard as manufacturing site for its EuroSpine wagon.

In association with Babcock Rail, it aims to produce four-unit articulated wagons to carry lorries within Europe via the Channel Tunnel. The design,

which was introduced in the USA in 1984, could easily be used for journeys within Britain - if the will existed.

Thrall's engineering services vice president Shaun Richmond, a former engineer with BR, says the wagons remove hundreds of thousands of vehicles each year from American roads.

More than seven million semi-trailers and containers have been moved on USA rail since 1993.

"The EuroSpine wagon provides Europe with a profitable alternative to road lorries, an alternative that can help reduce traffic, lessen air pollution and slow down the deterioration of the roads," said Mr Richmond.

He paid tribute to the many people in Britain including The Piggyback Consortium headed by Lord Berkeley for help in setting up the project.

Other members of the consortium include Railtrack and BR's freight companies, Mainline, Transrail, Loadhaul and Rail-freight Distribution.

Mainline may work with Finland's Oy Transtech on a piggyback wagon.

But whoever makes them, a piggyback service from Scotland to Europe could remove 100,000 heavy lorries from the A74/M74 alone. The capital cost of providing height clearances along the 500 miles of rail to the tunnel is less than £100 million, equivalent to just 2.5 miles of the planned M74 extension in Glasgow. The Channel Tunnel was supposed to give Britain's railways an advantage in winning back long-distance traffic from road. But underinvestment and short-

sighted decisions undermined the Dagenham car component. The Dagenham car component was seriously delayed running seven train was with drivers who arrived at Dagenham the train. RDS be more serious from Stratford. The train has Hill in North is out of gauge tunnel.

But on seven wrongly routed and had to be Gospel Oak routed via Pr

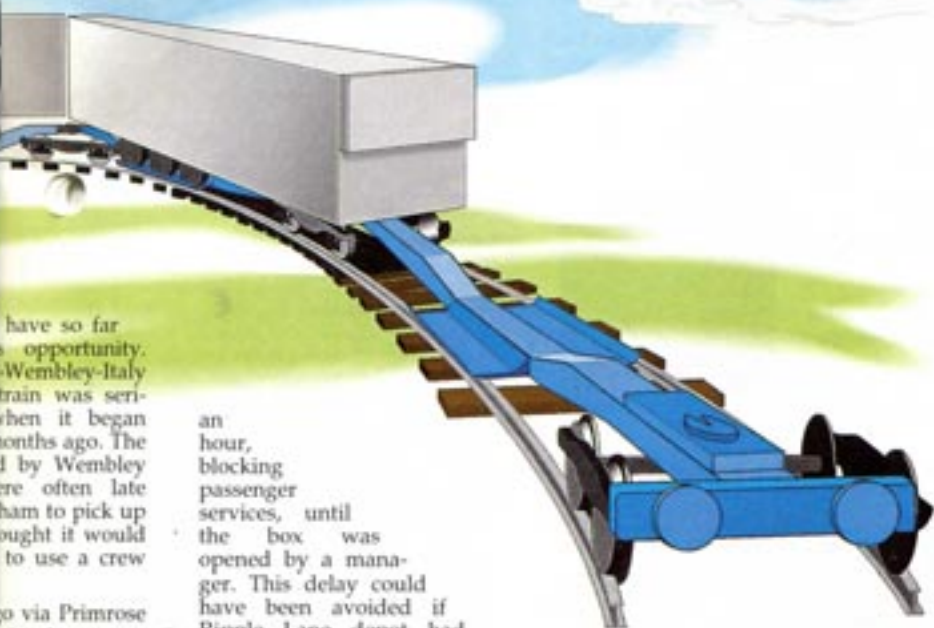
Trains from V East Coast n Holloway are because under cannot tackle Crouch Hill trailing loads.

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A solution reinstating the at Upper Ho that trains c route is clear Coast main then checked Another pro the North L box closures

A special Southampton Acton signal Kew East closed. The

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have been avoided if
Ripple Lane depot had
been told what was happen-
ing. Another Southampton-
bound Freightliner train was left
from 1.30am until 5am because
of an engineer's possession of the
line. Luckily no passenger trains
were running at that time.

Trains travel hundreds of miles
across Europe, only to be de-
layed between Acton and
Willesden!

There appears to be inadequate
communication between
Railtrack and operational staff
who may not even know which
signal boxes are open or where
engineering possessions are.
Some of these problems began
with British Rail sectorisation
and have worsened since the
inception of Railtrack.

So far there is little evidence of
transfers to rail, rather rail cus-
tomers are being offloaded.

The roundabout-London route
for tunnel freight trains is hardly
conducive to modern, simplified
freight working.

But daily freight trains are now
running from Liverpool Freeport
to France and Italy with links to
Spain.

And RfD is running 100 trains a
week through the Channel Tun-

nel. It has the capacity to run 245
trains and when the fast link is
built, its weekly capacity should
increase to 420 trains. Of course
we are still waiting for a dedi-
cated tunnel rail link.

Even if the present proposed link
via Ebbsfleet and Stratford
makes it through Parliament and
attracts funding, the extent of its
availability for freight is not
clear.

Oh for a forward-thinking
Department of Transport and an
unbiased Treasury!

They still fight against investing
in rail freight and cling to their
dodgy friends in the road lobby.

In Germany with much long-
distance freight already on rail,
minds are being concentrated on
short hauls.

A Ringzug service is being intro-
duced in the Ruhr industrial area
with container-carrying flat
wagons running timetable ser-
vices with the aim of attracting
business from road even for jour-
neys as short as 40 miles.

Reopenings conference

Edinburgh's "Mr Transport" David Begg is speaking at the RDS National Conference on Rail Reopenings on Saturday 17 June at the Fairway Hotel, Bathgate. Mr Begg, chairman of Lothian Region's transport committee will be joined on the speaker's rostrum by David Jarman, head of planning at West Lothian district council. For last minute bookings, phone 01733 263018

Come and talk to me Rail Regulator John Swift has agreed to regular meetings with RDS after we raised the issue of through ticketing. If you have issues to raise with the Regulator, send details to David Bigg, Eye Level, 76 Maldon Road, Witham, Essex CM8 1HP.

You wouldn't understand dear! Draft franchise agreements are so full of legal technicalities they are not being issued in full to groups who have asked to be consulted. Franchise officials have told users groups nobody would be able to understand them. Even the simplified documents issued for the South West Trains franchise have thrown up a series of confusions which Geoffrey Penn of the Yeovil and District Rail Action Group has been attempting to unravel, after a series of meetings with local authorities. He will be supplying reports on progress which should help other rail user groups when franchising comes to their areas. The reports are available from Paul Krebs, 24 Bartok House, 30 Lansdowne Walk, London W11 3LT.

Cash on offer Rail user groups, community groups and preserved or private railways may be able to benefit from the Heritage Lottery Fund or the Millennium Commission. A leaflet is obtainable from the National Heritage Memorial Fund, 10 St James Street, London SW1A 1EF (tel 0171 747 2088). The capital projects should be "lasting monuments to the achievements and aspirations of the nation". If you want further information, contact Edward Boxell of RAIL, 17 Azalea Close, Uxbridge Road, Hanwell, London W7 3QA.

Railwatch on tape for blind members. Please send one C120 tape or two C90s when the next *Railwatch* is due to Elisabeth Jordan, 13 Arnhill Road, Gretton, Corby, Northants NN17 3DN.

Where cycling meets public transport If you have had trouble taking your bike on a train, maybe you should consider a folding bike! Contact the Folding Society, 19 West Park, Castle Cary, Somerset BA7 7DB. 01963 351649

It's a Shambles The first hiccups of privatisation £1.25 post free from Martin Ball, 89 North Wallington, Fareham, Hants PO16 8TJ. Cheques payable to RDS.

Railway books and magazines for sale For list send 9"x6" SAE to P Cowan, 135 Woodlands Avenue, Eastcote, Ruislip HA4 9QX

LOCAL ACTION

Lincolnshire

By Paul Jowett

Going Green The Green Line leaflet developed by John Ginns is being distributed to councils along the Lincoln-Peterborough and Skegness-Sleaford lines to encourage consideration of house building near rail stations and rail lines. Branch chairman Brian Hastings also promoted the idea in the community councils' newsletter.

Political briefing Liberal Democrat national transport spokesman Paul Tyler came to Sleaford in April, was briefed by RDS and acknowledged our work. He praised the "unique" Green Line leaflet and suggested other RDS branches should follow our example. So should the Government. If other branches would like to develop a similar strategy, please contact chairman Brian Hastings, 312 Wharf Road, Ealand, Scunthorpe DN17 4JW.

Jolly Fisherman The branch is planning a leaflet to help market the Grantham-Skegness "Jolly Fisherman" line.

Jolly well done Skegness is marketing its tourist attractions in the Potteries following the introduction of a better service from Crewe in the new timetable.

Spreading the word RDS advertised in the county council rail timetable book.

Limited operation There are fears that class 153 units will be inadequate for London-bound travellers from Lincoln via Peterborough. The Spalding-Sleaford section is also only operating for nine hours a day because of the need to upgrade signalling and crossings.

Stop signal Railtrack has cancelled the 1993 agreement to modernise signals and crossings between Sleaford and Lincoln and build new stations at Donington and Pinchbeck. This had been agreed between the county council and BR. The county council is continuing to support rail in its new public transport strategy to be published shortly. Its long term aim is to see the stations built.

Freight Greater Manchester household waste trains are regularly travelling to the infill site at Roxby Gullet near Scunthorpe. A new chemical train is running from Stalybridge to Immingham. Steel is now

going from Tinsley to Goole Docks (though not to Grimsby). There are additional Scunthorpe to Hartlepool steel trains. Each train keeps 40 lorries off the road. We want more freight on rail!

Rail watch Rumours that Regional Railways North East want to abandon the current practice of stopping Cleethorpes-Manchester trains at Barnetby and Haborough. Our member Dr Don Peacock is watching the situation.

Cost contest Lower track charges on the Doncaster-Lincoln-Peterborough joint line could mean some slower freight trains are diverted from the East Coast main line.

More privatisation blight High track charges are blamed for the fact that not one extra passenger train was provided to Skegness over Easter. Charter trains are also now rare because of the absurdly high charges.

North West

By Robert Cummings



West Coast upgrade

At last, Railtrack has announced a £1 billion eight-year investment in the West Coast main line which will include a cab-based signalling system - the first in Britain. The go-ahead for the scheme was given by Road and Rail Minister John Watts on 22 March 1995 although it is not yet clear when the work will commence. The installation of cab-based signalling should cause less disruption to services than a conventional re-signalling. The Minister's announcement has received a mixed reaction from groups lobbying for the upgrade, including the Railway Development Society, as it falls well short of what the line needs to take it into the next century. The West Coast 250 Campaign said that the line needs a £1.7 billion investment package, including new rolling stock, which is not catered for by the present investment programme. The campaign also criticised John Watts for the last-minute cancellation of a meeting in London to discuss the findings of a feasibility study into the upgrade after the West Coast delegation had already set off for London. Lancashire County Council leader Louise Ellman said Railtrack's plans would "only bring us back to the position we held 20 years ago before the years of neglect and decline".

Disconnected brains Southport station is an example of one ridiculous aspects of privatisation. A fence has been erected which separates the Merseyrail Electric platforms from those operated by Regional Railways North West. The station has effectively been split in two. The fence is a physical symbol of the division of Britain's rail network and can only help to engender a "no connection with the firm next door" mentality between the employees of two train operating units. Only the British are

erecting new barriers when all across Europe even national frontiers are becoming less and less significant. The Southport situation was rightly ridiculed by the Independent on Sunday.

Wilful neglect The Daily Mail meanwhile recently highlighted the decline of Carnforth station. As Milford Junction, the station was immortalised in the 1945 film Brief Encounter. It is now a shadow of its former self - an unmanned halt with only a local service, the platforms on the West Coast main line long since demolished. Even the blue plaque commemorating the making of the film has been stolen. Despite this, droves of tourists, particularly Japanese, still arrive. The local authority and Carnforth's Chamber of Commerce would like to see the station refurbished and its refreshment rooms reopened. Unfortunately, according to the Daily Mail, such proposals have been "throttled by the red tape of reorganisation" (Don't the mean privatisation?)

Cash tangle The funding of PTE-sponsored rail services beyond 31 March 1996 is still a major worry. In Greater Manchester it has been estimated that the channelling of rail funding via the district councils would cost each of the 10 districts on average £7 million extra, a prospect the districts are hardly likely to relish. The problem should have been resolved before the 31 May 1995 because the PTEs have to give 12 months' notice of withdrawal from the Section 20 agreement. Rail investment by Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Executive is still on hold due to the problem of "paying twice" (having to pay Railtrack higher track access charges to use infrastructure which the PTE has itself funded). This problem is delaying both the Salford Crescent electrification scheme and the proposed expansion of Manchester Airport station. Its resolution would appear to be neither easy nor imminent. Yet another of the "benefits" of rail privatisation!

Mawhinney's mistake There were hopes that Transport Minister Brian Mawhinney, would be a better minister than his predecessors, but he showed his colours in March when gave his consent to close Park, Miles Platting and Godley East Stations in Greater Manchester. At the public enquiry held in Manchester last June we argued for the retention of Park Station, which even BR's own figures showed covered its costs with a hard core of regular users, despite a sparse five trains per day service. We also called for Miles Platting station to remain in-situ for a future reopening after regeneration of the area around it. The Rail Users' Consultative Committee which produced a report on the hearing for the Secretary of State, largely agreed with us recommending retention of Park, carrying out a study into retaining Miles Platting platforms and making Godley a "permanent" station. Godley was opened under the Spellar "experimental" openings amendment to Section 56 of the 1962 Transport Act 1962 and largely replaces Godley East. Unfortunately Dr Mawhinney chose to ignore all these sensible recommendations and gave unconditional consent to the closure of all three stations. The closure of Park, Miles Platting and Godley East marks the end of

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an era. Under the Railway Act 1993, future closure hearings will be decided by the Railway Regulator and not the Secretary of State. Given that closure consent has not been refused since the Settle-Carlisle line was reopened in 1988, this change COULD be for the better. Future Branch Meetings: Saturday 22 July 1995 Blackburn Central Library. Saturday 23 September 1995 Royal Station Hotel, Carnforth.

East Anglia

By Trevor Garrod

Bring back the trains The campaign to reopen the Dereham line to passengers has taken important steps forward this year. RDS was among a number of bodies and hundred of individuals who wrote to Breckland District Council about the matter in January. The council agreed in principle to buy the track ("mothballed" since its closure to freight in 1989) and lease it to the Mid Norfolk Railway Society. The council's bid for the line was accepted by the BR Property Board and at the time of writing finishing touches are being put to the deal.

RDS General Secretary Trevor Garrod was guest speaker at the AGM of the Mid Norfolk Railway Society, held in Wyndham on 25 March. Over 100 members were present and were given a progress report on the moves to reconstitute the society as a preservation trust, which will help it to raise funds. It is planned to have a cafe open in Dereham station this summer and to start a limited passenger service from a temporary halt southwards to Yaxham. Members of the society have already cleared undergrowth from the track down to the junction at Wyndham, and services will be progressively extended southward to there.

Longer term plans include a small conference centre at Dereham station and a museum specialising in diesel multiple units from the 1950s. A museum of goods handling is also proposed. The society aims to combine a regular passenger service for local people with a service that will bring tourists and enthusiasts into the area. The MNRS Membership Secretary is Stuart Moye, 21 The Brambles, Ware, Herts, SG12 0XU and it costs £12 to join (£9 for students and retired; £27 for families; £150 for life membership.)

London and Home Counties

By Simon Martin

Take off A new leaflet on the connections to Heathrow has been published and officers of the branch have met public transport planners at BAA. We are certainly influencing the debate on improving public transport links to the airport.

Now let's invest in rail We continue to lobby for rail improvements in the "south west quadrant" following the defeat of the Government's more grandiose plans to expand the M25.

Shadow boxing The branch has organised meetings in Sutton, Guildford and Battersea, allowing people in the areas to get involved with the shadow franchise documents.

Welcome Peter Collingborn is now co-ordinator for the East Kent region. His

address is 82 Burnham Walk, Rainham, Gillingham, Kent ME8 8RX

One train wonder It is 10 years since the Lea Bridge closure and we will be campaigning to highlight the ludicrous position of a route in central London with one train a day.

Help for Cinderellas We also want to see the abysmal service provided at London Fields and Cambridge Heath improved so the two East London "Cinderella" stations are useful all day, not just for a couple of hours at the peak.

Sunrise in West We will be supporting local councils' plans for a feasibility study for new stations on the West London line which now has a service between Willesden and Clapham Junctions. Train operators' empire building is reported to be preventing through services across London via this route being considered.

Strategy on target New services are proposed in Surrey's Rail Strategy document through Chertsey from Camberley. The council wants to see the reopening of the Cranleigh line.

Plea for help RailLondon is no longer being distributed with *Railwatch* and is now being sent out from an office in North Kensington, a few minutes walk from Ladbroke Grove or Westbourne Park Tube stations. If you can help, please contact the editor.

Yorkshire

By James Towler



Bully for the Regulator!

The decision of John Swift to maintain the status quo regarding ticket sales for two years ranks as victory for rail users and common sense.

Had the "core" stations option been implemented it would have reduced the number of booking offices nationally by 78%. In Yorkshire it would also have added more names to the list of unstaffed stations.

We could hardly believe our ears therefore when, during the consultation process, the chairman of the RUCC for NE England said (in the presence of one of the Regulator's sidekicks) that this "worst scenario" position would be "acceptable" if travel agency and telephone bookings were improved. We told the RUCC that what was acceptable to them was quite unacceptable to the vast majority of rail users whose interests they have a statutory right to represent; a

point we also stressed in representations to the Regulator.

Fortunately, he took more heed of what we had to say than he did of his "eyes and ears" in the region, the local RUCC. Proof, indeed, of the importance of the role truly independent user groups play.

Getting There at Last? While an InterCity East Coast flunkey questioned the time-keeping statistics listed in our Yorkshire Rail Review 1994 as being "based on a very small sample", EC Managing Director Brian Burdall was more candid when he referred to "a fairly dismal performance" last year. At the risk of tempting providence, timekeeping has got off to a good start during the first half of 1995. The first quarter was the best we've encountered since 1992. There has been an improvement on the East Coast main line while Passenger Transport Executive and local services have fared even better - albeit all based on a small sample!

Ebullient Railtrack "I and my team have the vision, commitment and enthusiasm to provide a better railway," Railtrack's North Eastern director Aidan Nelson told our AGM luncheon at the Union Bank, Huddersfield, in March.

In an upbeat address, Mr Nelson said that although Railtrack was a sole supplier it must avoid taking on the characteristics of a monopoly. It had to maintain and improve the safety of the network and wished to work with train operators to ensure further developments.

Goodbye to Mr Bowler! One of the best things ever to happen at Leeds was the arrival of Gerald Egan as station manager. "The Man in the Bowler Hat" spruced up the station and established a rapport with his passengers. Under his high-profile leadership the station enjoyed a new lease of life.

Following the transfer of Leeds from Regional Railways to Railtrack, Gerald has bowed out and hung up the bowler. We wish him and his wife Jean a very happy retirement, and are conscious that Leeds station will never be quite the same again.

Wales

By Chris Magner, Rod Fairley and Dave Sallery

Heart of Wales Please support the Sunday Rambler trains from Shrewsbury and Swansea to Llandrindod Wells between 16 July and 17 September. Connecting bus services are provided to the Elan Valley and other areas. It is important these trains are successful to clear the way for a year-round Sunday service. A special leaflet is being provided and will be available from Shrewsbury and Swansea stations.

Speed it up We are campaigning to have the 70mph line speed on the Chester-

Products bearing the RDS logo

Pocket note pad. PVC holder with ruled-paper pad (refills available) for the special introductory price of 95p. Order the pad plus a refill for only £1.35.

High quality necktie with gold logo on either a maroon or royal blue background (please state preference) for only £6.75. A must for meetings and train trips.

Key ring with leather fob lettered Railway Development Society for 85p.

Order from Martin Ball, RDS Sales, 89 North Wallington, Fareham, Hants PO16 8TJ. Cheques payable to RDS. All the above prices include postage.

Shrewsbury line improved to at least 75 mph.

Marches line New ramps for disabled people are to be provided at Ludlow station at a cost of £80,000. Next winter will see the start of a year-round Sunday morning train. The Sunday afternoon loco-hauled train will switch to Sprinter operation in the autumn leaving only the Friday evening train loco hauled.

Redwood talks rail but builds roads The £150 million dualling of the A5 road across the Anglesey has been given "high priority" status by John Redwood. The branch is meanwhile awaiting a reply from Mr Redwood following his stated wish "to see the train take more of the strain in Wales". We responded by sending him a list of schemes which we wish to see adopted.

High speed trains The May timetable saw the North Wales InterCity service provided by InterCity 125 trains from Longsight depot, Manchester. Previously the IC125 trains were part of the Great Western fleet and based in Plymouth Laira, a long way from home when things go wrong.

Irish express A new overnight service between Holyhead to Manchester is a welcome prospect. Introduction of the Stena Sealink HSS Catamaran in October will see the fastest ever service from Dublin Bay (Dun Laoghaire) to London in only 6½ hours. Despite Stena's involvement in the Cross-Channel market it will be advertising fast times to Paris - via the Channel Tunnel.

Conwy confidence The branch has received assurances that ending the Nuclear Flask traffic from Trawsfynydd will have no effect on the future of the Conwy Valley line. It is also hoped extensive road works on the parallel road this summer will encourage more motorists to travel by rail.

Piggyback News that prototype wagons are shortly to be built has given a boost to hopes that Holyhead could become a terminal of the network. The branch intends to launch a campaign to inform the public of the technology. Costs of widening the loading gauge to accommodate standard European lorry trailers is estimated at £11 million for the Crewe - Holyhead section.

Slow coaches Because of the condition of the Wrexham-Shotton track, present maximum speeds are 40 mph for passenger and 25 mph for freight trains.

Disabled aid Regional Railways North West has modified coaches to accommodate wheelchairs on the loco-hauled trains between Holyhead and Crewe.

Road hog quangoes The Welsh Office is creating eight quango road agencies to take over the work previously done by local authority highway departments. There will be no democratic input.

Progress but . . . Rhyl station has been

A New Station

RDS report on the costs and how to campaign. £1.80 post free from Martin Ball, 89 North Wallington, Fareham, Hants PO16 8TJ. Cheques payable to RDS.

rebuilt in an impressive fashion. Within hours of the station concourse opening, however, smart new ceramic tiling had been vandalised with graffiti.

Pocket package Regional Railways NW are producing a pocket timetable in conjunction with Clwyd County Council. Typical fares and suggested days out are given. The timetable will be mailed to towns and villages along the Wrexham-Bidston line. The Rail Users Association will distribute it on the Wirral. New platform timetables are being produced which will be tailor made for each station with a line route map showing the relevant station in a "you are here" box. Each display will show train times from that particular station in an attempt to make things easier for the general public to understand. Regional Railways NW recognise there has not been any promotion on the Wrexham-Bidston line for at least three years. As well as the above initiatives, fares are to be reduced by approximately 25% between Wrexham and Bidston. Through fares to Merseyrail will also be cut.

Station hope Railtrack, Regional Railways and Clwyd County Council have carried out a survey of the stations in the county and some refurbishment may result. It is hoped to obtain some funding from the Welsh Development Agency. Track renewal work continues with a half-mile stretch near Buckley station being completely replaced.

Wessex

By David Stevenson



A model campaign

The branch model franchise document has gained RDS valuable publicity following a press launch in Southampton. Interviews with branch officers were featured on Meridian and BBC South TV news, along with extensive radio and press coverage. Responses from local authorities have also been encouraging - although we have yet to have a reply from the Franchise Director who is ultimately responsible for guaranteeing service levels on many rural routes.

Network Benefit? Regional Railways South Wales and West is no longer allowing tickets purchased with Network Cards on their Friday Brighton-Portsmouth-Bristol-Cardiff services. The move is designed to reduce overcrowding but has provoked anger, especially between Southampton and Salisbury where these trains have a virtual monopoly on the direct route via Romsey. Local managers assure us they do not plan any restrictions beyond those which now apply to busy trains in the Friday afternoon peak. We are seeking assurances from other operators that they do not intend to impose restrictions undermining the value of this popular discount card.

Oil be back Rail-borne traffic to the oil

terminal at Micheldever ceased last year, and fuel is now carried in by road tanker. The area is currently undergoing extensive resignalling as part of the £4 million scheme to upgrade the route between Basingstoke and Winchester, and a new connection to the main line has been laid. It is understood that when the work is complete the new layout will reduce the movement cost of rail traffic to the terminal, and we hope that the loss of this freight flow is only temporary.

South West

By Gerard Duddridge

Railtrack ups the bill The new Digby and Sowton station was complete with footbridge, platforms, shelter, signs and approach footpaths and awaiting its planned opening in May. Devon County Council has been able to allocate £120,000 from the 1995/96 Exeter package bid for the completion work. This covers the rise in costs experienced after Railtrack took up responsibility for the work. The Exeter package also covers £30,000 for station improvements in the Exeter area, probably at Exeter Central and St James Park plus £30,000 for preparatory design and costing work for the new Cullompton station. It has also been possible to allocate £30,000 from the Plymouth package for further preparatory work on the Tavistock scheme.

Reopening agenda In Cornwall it is reported that reopening Cam Brea station is back on the agenda. There are some fears that this would lead to closure or loss of services at Camborne and Redruth. We don't believe this to be the case and fully support the reopening.

Insurance man! We are concerned about the Newquay branch and worry about bus substitution. Speaking on local radio David Mather from Regional Railways South Wales and West train operating unit has been reported as saying that the Newquay branch is his "insurance" for stock shortages in the region. The branch has had some problems in the first part of 1995, but the St Ives line has been performing better.

Friends and allies Friends of the Earth Cornwall transport group held a Turning the Corner meeting in Perranporth in March. Colin Jarvis of the county council said its transport awareness campaign encouraged people to consider alternatives before they use the car. Dr John Whitelegg of Ecologica said improving roads tended to extinguish the local economy as outside suppliers found it easier to transport goods from centralised areas.

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.

Scotland

By Douglas Smart

Political talk

There has been a considerable amount of electioneering in Scotland in the past few months. Despite our efforts, other issues such as education were given greater prominence than transport in the elections for the new all-purpose councils.

However one positive pointer for the future which did emerge was that all four main parties included in their manifestos claims that they supported integrated transport systems. We now await evidence that they are prepared to put this into practice. The Scottish Office, under the Conservatives, has never shown any inclination to promote any such policy. Some Labour councils also seem reluctant to promote integrated transport networks.

Political action After one year in office the SNP-controlled Tayside Regional Council has still not explained to us why it intends to rebuild Dundee bus station rather than move it to a vacant site adjacent to the railway station. We cannot even get them to put a simple information board for bus services in the station.

Privatisation cuts Despite massive protests there is no indication that the Government is prepared to avoid the disgrace of massive cuts in services at the end of May.

Rail jobs We succeeded in making privatisation an issue in the Perth and Kinross by-election with letters and some news items in all the local papers. We wrote to all the candidates. There is no doubt that all the opposition parties forced the Conservative candidate on to the defensive on the railway issues. Railways are a major employer in Perth and any cuts in the Highlands will affect jobs in Perth. We also warned against a privatised Railtrack centralising jobs away from Perth.

Question of finance Aside from privatisation, we will endeavour to get answers from all the parties as to where they will find the money to meet essential subsidies for sleepers, Motorail etc. and for such things as painting the Forth Bridge which has been given coverage in the Scottish press almost equal to the closures. We have tried to shift the blame for the dilapidated appearance of the Forth Bridge from Railtrack to the Government.

Outrageous suggestion One matter which has given us great concern is a letter from Roger Salmon to Scottish Secretary Ian Lang stating that since road coaches already operate overnight services there is no need for BR to operate seated coaches on their overnight trains. Our protests that this is the first stage towards "Bustitution" have so far been ignored by Mr Lang and Mr Salmon.

It's no joke A story which appeared in the Scottish press on 1 April about a "ghost train" to be operated on bits of lines used only by the Fort William sleeper as a devious means of avoiding closure procedure was assumed by readers to be a spoof until it was pointed out that it was true, even if John Ellis, the incoming director appeared to know nothing about it.

Lost leader



Chris Green

Chris Green had a magic touch. He created Network SouthEast, the best thing to happen to BR since nationalisation. Before that, he had given a new confidence to beleaguered rail staff in Scotland. He went on to make InterCity a more successful organisation than most private companies. But even he could not make privatisation a success. If

Labour had won the last election, he might have been made chairman of British Rail. He would have given it confidence and direction.

Perhaps that was why the Government was so frightened of him. He could and did make a state enterprise successful.

To Mr Major and Mr Portillo British Rail could do no right.

While we should not over-emphasise the importance of one individual, the resignation of 51-year-old Chris Green has deprived the railways of a man of remarkable vision and drive.

Some might go further and see it as a condemnation of the privatisation forced on to BR, that a man of Chris Green's calibre could not live with it.

We in RDS have had many dealings with Chris Green. Twice he addressed our rail users conference - the only speaker to have been invited back.

While he was at Network SouthEast, our London & Home Counties branch had useful private discussions with him. He was also supportive of our Scottish members seeking a rail crossing of the Dornoch Firth.

In 1989, a small group of us paused on the platform of Histon station, to meet the chairman of the Parish Council, as part of our sponsored cycle ride from Cambridge to Oxford.

As we were preparing to leave, who should make an unscripted appearance on the platform by Mr Green, conducting a private reconnoitre of villages along the Cambridge-St Ives route, in whose reopening he was interested!

General secretary Trevor Garrod has sent our best wishes to Mr Green in his new role as Chief Executive of English Heritage.

Railways have a role to play in tourism which could be better exploited. Victorian and Edwardian stations and structures are part of our heritage and, while RDS does not suggest all should be preserved at all costs, there is a case

for investigating how these can be adapted to modern conditions. It could well be that we have dealings with Chris Green in his new role over the next five years.

Thanks a lot, Reg

Reg Snow was appointed in the summer of 1986 as the Railway Development Society's first Administrative Officer. Since that time, the society has grown from 1,400 members to over 3,300, and Reg has been a key contributor to that growth. After a career in the civil service and considerable experience in voluntary work (including running an open air theatre) he tackled the new job with imagination and attention to detail.

However, Reg also ranged well beyond his basic remit in the range of tasks and responsibilities which he undertook. Over the past nine years these have included serving on the Reopening and New Railways committee, the board of Transport 2000 and the committee of the London and Home Counties branch, as well as producing *A Rail Strategy for Surrey* and in recent years, promoting our annual draw.

Reg now feels that he must slow down and take things easier, and we have accepted his resignation with regret.

At the national AGM he was presented with a cheque for garden furniture and a symbolic trowel. His wife Mollie, whose catering a number of us have enjoyed has received a bouquet.

Reg was elected to the national executive and his advice and experience will be valuable.

JOHN BIGNY is now chief administrative officer in Reg's place, and we are looking for a further administrative officer to serve under him.

WANTED A new administrative officer to start as soon as possible. An honorarium of £500 per year will be payable, plus expenses, for interesting and varied work. The duties will include:

1 To receive correspondence and answer it or pass it to the relevant officer. The administrative officer's address and telephone number will become the society's official one and be publicised as such.

2 To control stationery stocks, the RDS photocopier, and despatch limited circulation bulletins and reports.

3 To attend eight meetings a year for which travel expenses will be paid. The duties and remuneration may change as the society grows.

For a full job description, please contact the general secretary. Written applications should be sent to the General Secretary by 1 July.

WESTMINSTER

Great Sleeper Con

Liberal Democrat Charles Kennedy accused Ministers of being misleading in repeatedly stating that services following privatisation would be based on the May 1994 timetable. But during the debate on passenger services under privatisation on 7 February, Minister for Railways and Roads John Watts said that the franchising director has not yet published a passenger service requirement (for the Fort William and Motorail services). But he "will do so later in the year and that will be the opportunity for those towards whom he has an obligation to consult to say what they think about what is and what is not included in the proposals. Anything that happens in advance of that will be decisions made by BR under the present arrangements."

Mr Kennedy then quoted from a letter from Mr Salmon to Highland Regional Council: "If BR proceeds with the proposed changes in the May timetable, then these services will be withdrawn before OPRAF starts its consultation process. We would not, in such circumstances, include these particular services in the PSR consultation." Mr Watts replied there was nothing to stop local authorities or even Members from putting forward their views on the PSR. Mr Kennedy, MP for Ross, Cromarty and Skye, said the Central Rail Users Consultative Committee was unhappy. He said CRUCC chairman Major General Lennox Napier had written to Mr Salmon saying: "By making a separate announcement about sleeper services...you appear to have pre-empted the consultation process". General Napier had asked whether Mr Salmon would "consult the relevant RUCC about your decision?" and "not permit the operators to discontinue any of the relevant

services" in the meantime. Mr Kennedy said: "There is a world of difference between consulting over a proposed level of service in a proposed timetable and consulting over a service that does not even feature in the timetable."

Cash squeeze

Mr Brian Donohoe (Lab Cuninghame South) expressed doubts whether the new unitary authorities in Scotland would be able to fund railway services in the future to the degree which Strathclyde had done in the past, £400 million in the last 10 years. He also doubted whether vital infrastructure, such as the Forth Bridge was receiving adequate maintenance. Brian Wilson, (Lab Cuninghame North) said the issue simply was that the subsidy for the Fort William sleeper and Motorail was being withdrawn in May, therefore the services finished in May. The services will not exist, therefore there will be no consultation on them. If that trick is being used to get rid of these rural services, it can be used to get rid of every rural service in Britain.

Rigged figures

Mr Wilson quoted the minister's figures for the subsidy needed for each passenger on the sleeper as being £180 excluding the infrastructure cost, but with that included the figure becomes £540, ie access charges to Railtrack are £360 per person! A charge of such ludicrous proportions would render every service in Britain hopelessly uneconomic. Figures rigged to give the required result could be used to shut any service they wished.

Confused signals

On 6 February, Transport Secretary Brian Mawhinney said: "When the Franchising Director produces his passenger services requirements for ScotRail, there will be consultation on whatever

proposal is or is not included with respect to Fort William. Four days before, Transport Minister Viscount Goschen told the House of Lords: "The Franchising Director has announced that he does not intend to include sleeper and Motorail services between Fort William and Easton in the Passenger Service Requirement for franchises."

Eighteen days later, Viscount Goschen said: "In determining the passenger service requirements for the ScotRail franchise, the Franchise Director will be consulting with the Scottish regional councils and the Rail Users Consultative Committee for Scotland. He will take into account all the relevant representations about the consequences of the withdrawal of the service. The Government has committed itself to consultation. The franchising director has made a preliminary announcement. No final decision has been made; none will be until after the consultation has been completed."

Scottish Under-Secretary George Kynoch, told the Commons on 24 February: "The Franchise Director is required, under guidance issued by the Secretary of State for Transport, under the Railways Act 1993, to consult formally the RUCCs and local authorities on the pattern and quality of services to be provided through franchising."

"Consultations on the ScotRail franchise will start after the PSR is published, probably in May." *As we now know, despite repeated protestation by officials and ministers that "consultation" would take place, the sleeper services have been temporarily reprieved, not by the Transport Secretary, Franchise Director or Regulator but by a Scottish judge.*

Daylight robbery

During a debate on the Robin Hood line in February, John Heppell (Lab Nottingham East) expressed concern that further stages of the project were threatened due to privatisation. He quoted a leading consultant, Eurolog, as stating that more than £1 million - one third of the total capital costs - of the extra cost results from the reorganisation and privatisation of BR. He also quoted from a letter from Robert Horton, boss of Railtrack thus: "I must stress that these charges are as a result of

Railtrack being separated from British Rail following from the implementation of the Railways Act 1993."

Mr Heppell quoted from another letter which showed that hiring a two-car Sprinter under the "old" regime would have cost the county council £125,000 per annum.

Now the train operating company says the "latest indicative leasing charge received from the rolling stock companies for a two-car Sprinter is £256,000.

Railtrack has also told the council that access charges will increase substantially due to the change charging principles, profit margins and increases passed on by BR.

How does the Government still maintain that these proposals will increase the chances of new lines and routes being opened?

Sir Donald Thompson (Con Calder Valley) said on 6 March that the Calder Valley line is a most important east-west line and my constituents look forward to rail privatisation.

Since opinion poll figures say 75% oppose privatisation he must have a rather strange constituency.

Sir Donald asked that whatever money is necessary is spent to ensure that they receive fair and honest information about every aspect of privatisation.

Cheats exposed

During the debate on rail privatisation on 7 February, Labour Shadow Transport Secretary Michael Meacher (Lab Oldham W) said ministers had given assurances either in the Commons or Lords on 17 different occasions that "the franchises would be based on the current timetables and the existing level of services." He maintained that many of the service requirements produced by the franchising director fell far below these standards. He quoted the Government amendment to Labour's debate that the proposals would "develop new and additional services based on current timetables which are more attuned to the needs of the passengers." Well, in 1979 on the London to Cardiff route, there were 26 trains per day and the mean journey time was 103 mins. In 1995 there are 19 trains averaging 120 mins. And the proposed passenger service requirement is 12 trains averaging



WATCH

125 minutes. He wanted to know if that was attuned to the needs of the passengers.

Car lover Robert Key, a former Tory Roads Minister, intervened to say that it probably was, because in 1979 there was no motorway to Cardiff and no airline operating a daily service from Heathrow. Privatisation will take account of present day needs instead of "BR running a railway to suit itself".

Dr Mawhinney says more trains will run as the railways react to passenger needs, whereas Mr Key says fewer are required. Who do you believe?

Mawhinney, replying for the Government said that since 1948, BR had invested £54 billion in the network only to see its share of passenger travel slashed from 17% to 5%. In that time BR had complete freedom to alter services often to the disadvantage of passengers. He repeated that PSRs were not timetables. They provided levels of frequency, maximum journey times, first and last trains and levels of crowding, all for the first time.

Mrs Gwyneth Dunwoody (Lab Crewe and Nantwich) predicted that if any new trains were eventually ordered they would be built overseas.

Several Conservative MPs "contributed" to the debate by denigrating BR and announcing that privatised railways would be better because all the other privatisations had "worked".

Among them were Graham Riddick (Colne Valley) who was later suspended for accepting cash to ask questions, Richard Ottoway (Croydon S) and Anthony Steen (South Hams). Mr Steen was upset that French water was served in the restaurant car of the InterCity train to Devon.

The fact that the whole train could well be French after privatisation seemed to have eluded him!

Robert Key (Con Salisbury) pointed out that the mere threat of privatisation had caused BR to react with new trains and a more flexible timetable on the Salisbury line.

Could this be more to do with the class 159s ordered some years ago by BR and now in service?

Winding up the debate for the Conservatives, Road and Rail Minister John Watts said he was at a disadvantage in that he was "unable to give an example of private operators running

passenger rail networks" so he cited the case of the National Express coach company which has expanded to a network of 180 routes since being privatised. *He didn't mention that a massive infrastructure programme of new motorways has been provided for them by the taxpayer!*

Prime time

Mr Major stepped into the debate about rail privatisation during Question Time on 28 March. He claimed that "a number of countries that have privatised their railways have adopted precisely the same model that we have adopted."

Which ones? We and presumably Mr Watts would like to know!

A week earlier there had been an acrimonious exchange at Question Time when Labour leader Tony Blair challenged Mr Major on the costs of privatisation. Mr Blair said that using the Government's own figures the sum was £300 million, and that BR had estimated that it would spend an extra £100 million in the next two years. He further maintained that if you add the metropolitan railway grant, recognised by the Department of Transport as costing £200 million this year and £200 million next year, and also include just a fraction of the redundancy costs, we reach a figure of more than £1 billion, a sum which would be better spent "not on a privatisation that nobody wants but on delivering the modern railway network that the nation needs."

Mr Major insisted these were "fantasy" figures. He went on to quote what he called "real" figures. Investment will be sustained at around £1 billion per annum of which £250 million will come from the private sector. *This figure of £250 million from the private sector is often bandied around, but from which companies is this money going to*



The road to a railway job

Transport Minister Steven Norris who makes decisions about whether rail schemes should go ahead, has 12,650 shares in Anthony Ince - formerly Steve Norris (Western) Ltd - a car dealership in Salisbury whose turnover in 1991 was more than £6 million.

In the 1960s, former Transport Minister Ernest Marples had enormous family interests in Marples Ridgeway which built many new stretches of Britain's roads. As minister, he instituted the vast railway closures which have continued.

come? RDS would like to send them letters of thanks and commendation.

During business questions on the same day, Piers Merchant (Con Beckenham) complained about the "noise and vibrations" from Channel Tunnel expresses affecting his constituents, and wanted a debate to determine levels of compensation.

But for the prevarication and muddle of the Conservative Government, the fast link would have been built by now and Mr Merchant's constituents would have had only hundreds of noisy clapped-out domestic trains to contend with.

Opening a debate in the House of Lords on 8 February, Lord Ewing of Kirkford regretted the lack of consensus when deciding transport policies. He cited Germany, France and the Netherlands as including the environmental lobby in the discussion and consultation process when transport infrastructure programmes are being decided. In comparison we seem always to be in conflict. Lord Haskel quoted economists who said that spending on the public rail network has twice the potential to increase productivity as spending on roads.

Viscount Goschen claimed: "The privatisation of transport

operations and the private finance initiative have enabled us to speed up progress on major schemes and to provide new services more quickly."

A list of such schemes would be instructive.

A Labour call for increased investment in a publicly owned rail system was rejected on 17 May by the House of Commons - by 24 votes.

Mr Meacher said rail privatisation was universally detested and was clearing the way for market rigging, using even bigger public subsidies.

But investment had dropped from £1 billion in 1992 to £490 million. He said the Government preferred to see ABB go into liquidation rather than allow a follow-on order for Kent Coast Networkers. He accused the Government of hypocrisy in its plans to limit fare rises.

Privatisation had created the farce where it was cheaper to transport trains by lorry because of Railtrack charges.

Hugh Bayley (Lab York) protested about the closure of ABB's factory at York because of the lack of orders.

"The mood in York is one of bitterness, anger and betrayal at what the Government has done to York with its rail privatisation measures," he said.

What were the Hon Gents trying to say?

COMMENT

By Michael Weinberg

It is sad to see the abysmally low standard of debate and degree of ignorance exposed when the House of Commons debates rail matters and supposedly scrutinises Government policy. Allied to the quaint and idiosyncratic procedures of the House, it allows the governing

party to push through damaging legislation. On one occasion, Railways and Roads Minister John Watts was stopped mid-flow by the Deputy Speaker with a "time's up" order when he was explaining how the Channel Tunnel fast link is a "totally private sector project with an initial capital contribution from the Government, partly in the

form...." We will have to guess what he was going to say! Transport Secretary Dr Mawhinney tried to impress on another occasion by claiming Britain would be the only country with Channel Tunnel through services from north of the capital. Of course the whole Eurostar enterprise would be doomed but for the French high-speed line.

West coast blues

From Page One

"arterial spine" of the railways system, a vital project for the next century. He said: "The line is a symbol of what needs to be done in this country. We need to invest, to make the economy a priority and to ensure that passenger services are as good as they can be."

The key issues should be investment, jobs and passenger services - not privatisation. He said it was crazy to divide the line into two Railtrack zones.

While the Government has shilly-shallied about the line for years, the West Coast Rail 250 campaign of local authorities and politicians has struggled to keep the line in the public eye.

The campaign has managed to achieve what the Government failed to do - get the WCML upgrade accepted as a priority project in the European Union's Trans-European Network.

Mr Watts caused considerable inconvenience to representatives of the campaign, MPs and Peers who had travelled hundreds of miles to see him - by cancelling a meeting on 14 February at only hours notice. The campaign has protested to the Prime Minister, Transport Secretary Brian Mawhinney and to Mr Watts himself.

Mr Watts did finally meet representatives on 22 March when it became clear that the Government was NOT going to recommend a full-blooded upgrade to equal best European practice or even best British practice.

Tory MP Winston Churchill (Davyhulme), a campaign supporter, was scathing. He was "thrilled" at the prospect of the line being nearly as good as the Italian railways after five years.

Tory MP Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield) also warned that the five-year programme could easily "slip" to eight years.

Lord Whitelaw said there was a widespread feeling that no-one cared about the line's decline.

Labour's Eric Martlew (Carlisle) questioned how the costs of the proposed core programme of improvements to the line had soared from £600m to £1,000 million now that Railtrack had taken over the project.

The 250 campaigners had a meeting in



January with European Transport Commissioner Neil Kinnock who impressed them by being "extremely well briefed".

He pointed to the practice of Scandinavian countries where projects were often funded by the Government and then leased to the private sector when completed.

The campaign has concluded that many issues remain unresolved after Railtrack's study and the Government's stance.

The programme agreed so far might address some of the backlogs of maintenance and produce a more cost-effective railway but it will not improve it enough to meet the needs of the next century.

Public finance should be used to provide benefits for the whole community - like reducing traffic and pollution.

The Government cannot claim it does not know what is needed. That has been spelled out for it in a Steer Davies Gleave report which said improving the line would foster economic development and improve travel opportunities in an environmentally sustainable way.

Local authorities, the European Union and the electorate are in step. The Government is on its own.

The Government has been shamed into promising a substantial contribution to the Channel Tunnel rail link. The social and economic benefits of investing in the West Coast main line should also be recognised. The Government and Railtrack are underestimating the latent demand for rail travel.

Railtrack reckons patronage would increase by 22% if there was a good 150mph service but improving the train service in California has seen patronage go up by 52% in one year, followed by 22% the next.

The Government and Railtrack have also missed the opportunity to get lorries off the roads and on to trains.

Railtrack wants to clear a way for piggyback only as far as Daventry, Northants, which would negate most of its benefits as a route to Scotland.

Mr Watts claimed any piggyback freight scheme would take at least eight to 10 years to implement.

The Piggyback Consortium meanwhile has submitted a scheme for a six-month feasibility study for a two-year programme to increase bridge clearances on the line.

It is estimated a piggyback service would attract 400,000 semi-trailer trips a year via the Channel Tunnel within 10 years.

Privatisation cuts

Railtour operators have been put out of business and user groups have new obstacles put in the way of running special trains by the 1993 Railway Privatisation Act.

Now train operating companies have to have their trains "validated for safety" if they want to run into other operators' areas. Imagine a similar requirement on the roads!

The result, presumably what the Government intended, is that many special trains have been axed.

David Latimer's Cheshire Railtours is the latest firm to withdraw from the market.

He said: "The Government wants to get as much of the rail system shut down as possible. It is trying to wreck the railway."

One user group is however going ahead with plans to run a "special" tagged on to a service train. The Bedford-Bletchley group is going to Brighton on 15 July for optional trips to Eastbourne, the Kent & East Sussex Railway and the Channel Tunnel exhibition centre. Details from Richard Crane 01234 351771. Fare is around £13 return.

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