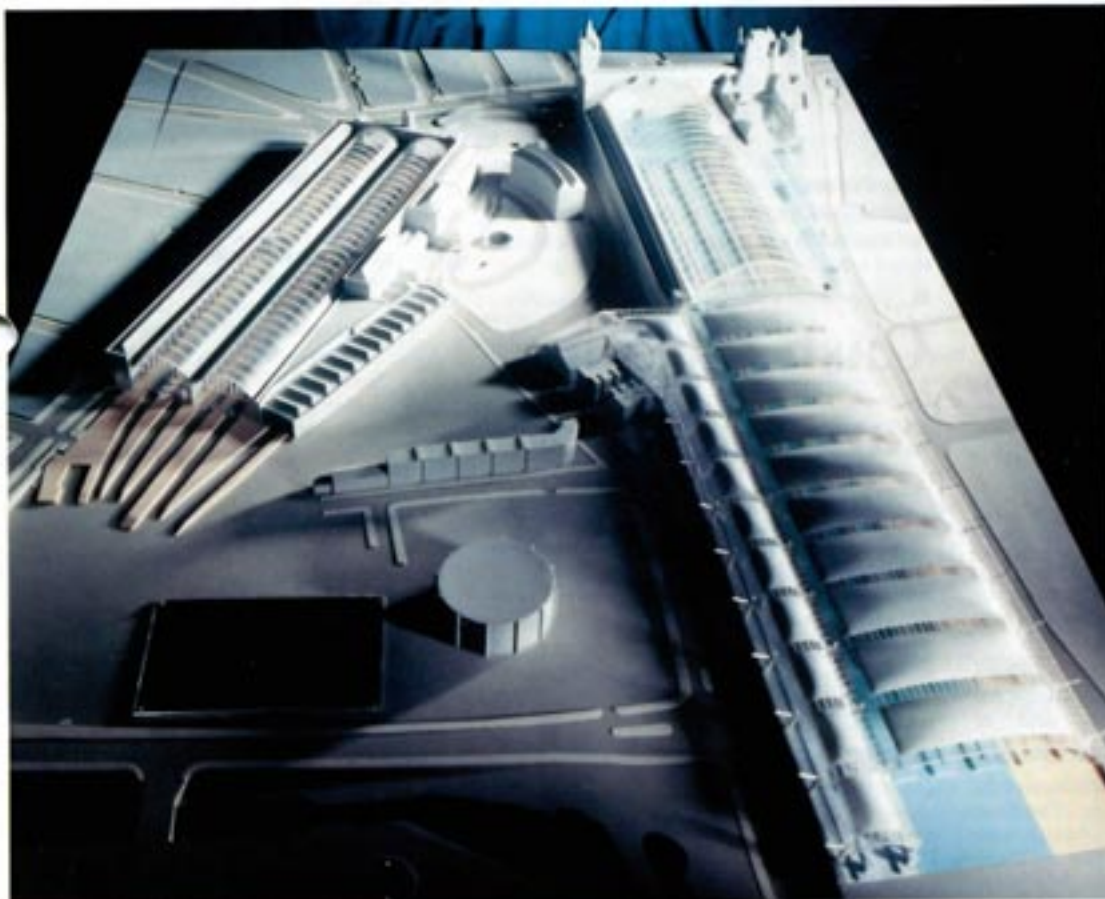


Railwatch

AN INDEPENDENT VOICE FOR RAIL USERS

No 67 April 1996

90p



Fast link to the future

This is what the London terminus of the Channel Tunnel fast link might look like.

King's Cross station is on the left and a new modern canopy will extend St Pancras's Victorian overall roof, right, to accommodate the half-mile long Eurostar trains.

Below ground it is hoped that Thameslink 2000 trains will provide connections to many parts of the South, East Anglia and the Midlands.

The parliamentary Bill to allow the fast link to be built is proceeding through the House of Commons at present and should go to the Lords in April.

It is expected to become law early in 1997.

Years after the French high speed link was completed, progress is at last in prospect in Britain.

Middle England's missing link

By Nick Dibben

An RDS campaign to re-create an East-West rail route centred on Cambridge, Bedford and Milton Keynes could be the catalyst for a new transport policy in the post-road-building era.

Consultants have confirmed that there is a good economic case for the rail corridor from Ipswich to Swindon for both passengers and freight.

The cost of upgrading the rail infrastructure, including a new eight-mile long line between Bedford and Sandy, is unlikely to be more than £90 million which is 'peanuts' compared to the cost of roads.

But if the Government is to commit money, a re-think of evaluation methods is necessary. The real costs and benefits must be honestly assessed and responsibility cannot be left to the private sector. The study by Steer Davies Gleave was supported by most of the local councils along the way

but also by two Railtrack zones AND the Government Offices for the Eastern and South East regions.

The scheme would give local, regional and national benefits, linking significant centres of population and providing many connectional possibilities as well as direct services to Stansted airport.

It could also have significance – and attract funding – as part of the European Union's attempts to create Trans-European networks. The consultants suggest three overlapping services, Birmingham to Ipswich, Peterborough to Swindon and Northampton to Reading.

Nearly 2,000 long-distance journeys a day would switch from cars. Additional benefits would be freight traffic from East Anglia to the South West and Wales and the creation of important diversionary routes between the East Coast, the Midland and the West Coast

main lines. It is good to see a group of local authorities getting on with the task of developing the rail network.

Progress of the scheme will be a test of the effectiveness of our reorganised railway and the way rail projects are assessed.

The Strategic Network Opportunity



A fare old loss of revenue

By Steve Rackett

Staff cuts on the railways are already causing significant loss of revenue and matters seem likely to get worse.

Initial findings from a survey of RDS members show that nearly two-thirds have experienced situations where ticket fares had not been collected.

Around 60% of people said tickets were not inspected because of overcrowded trains or lack of staff.

Nearly 40% reported they could not buy a ticket because either the ticket office was closed, or ticket machines were inoperative.

One traveller said the station office he went to was closed, so he looked for a ticket machine which he found but could not use, as, yes, you've guessed it, it was behind locked doors in the booking hall.

Others have been put off travelling, because of penalty fare notices, alongside inoperative permit to travel machines.

Almost all lines and operators were mentioned by users. However five companies were especially prominent - Thames Trains, Network South Central, North London Railways, Central, and South West Trains.

The last example was particularly worrying, according to RDS Wessex secretary Nick Farthing.

"Stagecoach, who won the franchise for SWT, have indicated that their first action will be to cut staff," he said.

Yet this survey indicates that staff numbers are already low. This has implications for passenger safety, information, and of

course revenue. They might claim a line is not making money and reduce the service, when the problem is one of staff not being available to issue tickets."

The point about information was picked up by RDS General Secretary Trevor Garrod. "The results indicate destaffing is on the increase. How do people go about asking for help and advice at an empty station?"

One of the few examples of increased staffing has been at St Margaret's on the Hertford line where West Anglia Great Northern increased the hours that the station was staffed.

"It encourages more people to use the service," said East Anglia branch secretary Nick Dibben.

"Passengers also feel safer and there is a reduction in vandalism." The increased ticket sales covered the staffing costs.

■ 210 members participated in the survey.

Cash for our campaigning

Our 1995 National Draw raised early £2,000 and all of our branches and affiliated groups were invited to bid for a share of this money, either to assist in campaigns for rail reopenings, or to help work towards other rail improvements.

The Reopenings and New Railways Committee were impressed by many thoughtful submissions, and made 13 awards. These included money to fund a report on the

case for a new line from Braintree to Stansted Airport; a campaign for new stations in Somerset; helping the campaigns to reopen March-Wisbech and Vale of Glamorgan lines.

Money is also going to Huddersfield Line Rail Users for their campaign to improve Huddersfield-Wakefield and reopen Thornhill and Horbury stations.

In Scotland, the Clydesdale Rail Action Group benefited from a £200 grant to publicise the service from Carstairs and press for improvement, while London and Home Counties branch is awarded money to campaign at stations such as Cambridge Heath and Essex Road which have minimal services but considerable potential.

The Heart of Wales Line Travellers' Association is to receive a contribution towards the cost of solar-powered lamps at unlit halts, which are being developed by the Centre for Alternative Technology. This could help other rural stations.

Awards have also been made to help pay for a Shropshire leaflet, a Reopen the Line play at Bletchley; a newsletter for Benfleet, Southend and Shoeburyness passengers and to help set up a Tamworth rail users group.

Money has also gone towards a school competition along the Rochdale-Oldham corridor. Pupils are being encouraged to investigate how the line might be converted to Metro.

With this *Railwatch*, you will find a book of tickets for our 1996 Draw. Please help to sell these and enable us to fund more rail development campaigns and projects around the country in 1996.

SATURDAY I caught the 0800 to Norwich, thence to Thetford for a meeting. The case for the Trans European Rail Network was debated. It was agreed to write to local MPs (one of them a Cabinet Minister) urging Government support for upgrading the route from East Anglian ports to Liverpool and Holyhead. All agreed such action would be timely in view of road lobby bleating about Budget cuts in the highways programme. Boarded well-filled Sprinter back to Norwich, then InterCity to Ipswich for afternoon meeting of RDS officers. We tackled a range of financial questions and started drawing up the remit for our first full-time officer whom we plan to appoint in 1997. Received my annual present from Trevor Jones: a print-out of the entire RDS membership. Destroyed the old list.

SUNDAY Phone conversations with officers of the Mid Norfolk Railway to discuss local council support for their reopening scheme. Received a call from a gentleman who had read about RDS in the local press and sent him an information pack. Cycled round town delivering circulars to several local members and contacts.

MONDAY Noted our action on Trans European Rail Networks was reported in this morning's paper. Issued funding circular to officers of RDS Wales and Scotland.

TUESDAY Interviewed by BBC Radio Suffolk on rail safety, stressing that people's chances of an accident on a road

TREVOR
GARROD'S
VIEW



A full week's
work and so
much more

journey are 200 times greater than on a train journey. But, of course, lack of the right sort of investment on the railways may jeopardise safety. Took a late night phone call from a member representing RDS at a public inquiry in Luton. Agreed to dash off a letter to the inspector correcting another participant's distortion of the Society's policy.

WEDNESDAY It snowed. Attended a meeting of my local rail users' association in the evening, as did one of our local rail managers. Previous train had been cancelled because of staff sickness and he spent most of the journey from Ipswich to Saxmundham talking to disgruntled passengers and offering them use of his mobile phone. At the meeting we raised problems of staff shortages, maintenance of unstaffed stations and train cleanliness. Were promised there would be more conductors by Easter. Back home, received a call from Steve Rackett to keep me abreast

of Wessex branch action on the South West Trains franchise issue. Pleased that Wessex members were using their initiative and common sense in pursuing society policy - as all of us should.

THURSDAY Shared a table on the train to work with Anglia Railways Communications Manager. We discussed issues raised in some local press correspondence. More snow. Two colleagues at work asked me for train timetables.

FRIDAY Posted a copy of *Railwatch* to a man in South Africa who had contacted me after reading about RDS in a magazine out there. Compiled minutes of meeting on my Amstrad laptop while travelling home on a 153 Sprinter (quite easy to do). Printed the minutes at home and wrote to Department of Transport about carriage of bicycles by train. Local paper printed my letter on how investment in new trains would benefit the economy. I also did 41 hours of paid work this week!

Why not here too?

By Tony Smale

When you hop on a tram in a foreign city, you normally expect to leave the centre, ride through the streets and perhaps end up in the suburbs.

But the German city of Karlsruhe is no normal city – as I found out.

After leaving the tram depot, we came to a bridge spanning the railway.

Instead of going OVER it, we signalled left, curved down the embankment and JOINED the railway.

Then it was off, through stations and tunnels, to villages and towns far away.

Ten years ago, Karlsruhe was chosen for a study into running trams on heavy rail tracks.

The commercial heart of the city lies about a mile from the main station, so diverting "trains" off rail alignments into city streets would take commuters and shoppers direct to their destinations.

Well, why not?

As we journeyed on, each technical innovation necessary to achieve this goal was revealed.

Joining the main railway tracks, the driver changed from line-of-sight control to railway signalling.

His radio switched over to railway channels and the electrical pick-up changed from 750 volts direct current to 15,000 volts

alternating current. At stations, a step slid from each doorway to bridge the gap to the platform.

In Britain of course we have high platforms to contend with. But we knew this wasn't Britain because we saw park-and-rides, bike-and-rides and all the other signs of a truly integrated transport system.

Eventually, the distinction between heavy and light rail became completely blurred, as freights passed on the opposite track and our special drew into its platform at a busy station.

After a pause, we were off again to sample new tram routes, tracks built by the tramway which Deutsche Bundesbahn trains now use and loops off rail alignments into village streets.

There was a run through a village where there's heavy rail signalling, tracks so close to houses you could almost touch them, and a commuter branch to a nuclear research installation.

What about the safety implications of a light rail vehicle colliding with a diesel locomotive?

That's a good question, but the wrong question.

What is the overall effect on the safety of people commuting to work? – that's the point! Conversion of the first DB suburban line to tram operation



Isolated: A Manchester Metrolink tram at Crumpsall. The trams are a success but are a separate entity from the main rail network, partly because of the Government's ideological insistence on involving the "private sector". It could have been different – and more exciting. Picture: Tim Clarke



Integrated: Karlsruhe trams goes through streets which have room for cyclists and pedestrians. The trams run through on to the main rail network. Picture: Tony Smale

resulted in a 600% increase in patronage. That represents hundreds of road accidents which didn't happen. Moreover, tram brakes designed for rapid deceleration in street-running mode help to prevent trams getting into trouble on the main rail network.

Karlsruhe's system is still expanding, with low-floor vehicles for street sections expected soon, and perhaps a line across the frontier into France, politicians willing.

The pedestrianised shopping centre will double its tram capacity with an extra track underground.

We were assured that no new housing estate could be contemplated without its link into the tramway system.

Far from being sidelined, DB reports increased revenue from its services. DB has even invested in four dual-mode vehicles of its own.

The city is so proud of the Karlsruhe model of shared tracks, it has set up a consultancy to sell it to the world.

On our second day as guests of the VCK consultants, our Railway Study Association party joined a luxurious special with panoramic windows and wine "cellar", to explore other parts of the network.

Finally, with about two hours to spare, our guide asked where we wanted to go next. "Bad Herrenalb" we shouted as one, anticipating an exhilarating ride in the Black Forest.

So the driver signalled right and we joined the line to the south at its former terminus.

DB's control centre reacted instantly, switching us to the up line so we could overtake the service tram. A merry "whoo-ooo" sounded from

what was previously the tram bell, and the guide remarked "Now we are a train – you can hear it I think."

In a siding, we saw the empty Bicycle Express trailer used to take cyclists to the hills on Sundays.

In recent years, bikes have been permitted on normal service trams, with some peak-hour exclusions.

"How far from town had the trams ventured?" we asked.

As an experiment, an excursion had been run right through to Switzerland.

"But I think not too often," said our guide, "the paperwork was very much!"

We settled for the picturesque terminus deep in the forest.

Nottingham is the first authority in Britain to consider using the Karlsruhe model, suggesting that heavy rail routes in the East Midlands could be integrated with proposed new tramways in city streets.

The Medway towns, Cardiff and Newcastle have also approached VCK for advice.

In my own part of the country, Hampshire County Council has published a paper for a South Hants Rapid Transit, linking the Portsmouth-Fareham tram scheme with existing lines to Southampton and beyond.

Revitalising urban rail services, or modernisation on the cheap? This is a debate which will run on into the next century.

■ If you would like a copy of VCK's handout detailing the Karlsruhe model, please write to me enclosing a cheque for £1.50, payable to RDS. Tony Smale, Sales Officer, Broadheath, Fishers Hill, Catisfield, Fareham, Hants PO15 5QY

Platform *Your letters*



Rail-air-road link

When Stansted Airport was connected to the railway system, capital expenditure was substantial, the works involving a lengthy tunnel and a triangular junction with the London-Cambridge line.

Stansted Express services to London became well known but the northern routes to Birmingham, Nottingham, Manchester and Liverpool were given little publicity.

This lack of promotion, compounded by the paucity of airline passengers then using Stansted, meant that rail routes between the airport and the Midlands and North-West were severely under-used. Regional Railways axed them.

Most people were unaware of these developments, but closure was a great loss.

For generations the only practicable route from Essex to most of Britain was to go into London and use the Underground to get to a suitable terminus for the next leg of the journey.

It was – and is – not convenient, especially with luggage. And it helped to encourage the car-only culture in recent years.

The opening of the integrated station at Stansted airport gave us the remarkable facility of direct services to many of the towns and cities of the Midlands and south Lancashire.

Instead of struggling across London or undertaking a long cross-country car journey, two million people in mid and south Essex had a more civilized alternative.

They could drive to Stansted Airport, leave the car, and take the train which was fast to Cambridge, thence via Ely and Peterborough to all points north and west.

However, to many people this was such a novel idea, after a long period of effective isolation from the rest of the UK, that a determined promotion

campaign was needed to change deep-seated attitudes.

Such an initiative was entirely lacking. Almost no-one (except the few air passengers) knew about the direct trains, so the services were discontinued.

The Eastern Rail Users' Committee is trying to persuade railway and airport authorities to renew the direct link with the Midlands and North.

This could be a vital issue for organisations such as RDS, because success would prove that entirely new rail orientations can, with proper publicity, attract substantial new passenger flows.

It would also demonstrate a symbiosis of car and railway: co-operation between private and public transport instead of futile attempts to develop fiercely competitive and quite separate "systems".

On the other hand, further failure of the Stansted lines might suggest to some that capital expenditure on new railways is a great waste of money, perhaps better spent on new east-west trunk roads like the A14, or on a greatly enlarged M25.

John B. Lucy, Dovecote, Parleigh, Essex CM3 6PX

Editor's note: RDS also wants to see a rail link between Braintree and Stansted reinstated allowing even greater use of rail from a wider catchment area. It would create a new cross-country route from Colchester and Chelmsford to Cambridge and beyond. Stansted airport station has also been designed to allow through running.

A new RDS paper *From Plane to Train* is now available for £2 post free from RDS sales (see address on page 10)

Slow on the uptake

Contrary to reports that appear in *Railwatch* from time to time advocating a more even distribution of investment at the expense of a few high speed

trains, I suggest it is high-profile fast trains which draw passengers to the network in the same way that the National Lottery high jackpot draws punters.

Eurostar would be a disaster without the French high-speed line.

The German government also shows foresight in its investment in railways. Recently £4 billion was announced for a new 115-mile-long high-speed line from Cologne to Frankfurt to reduce journey time from over two hours to under one.

The crying shame from our Government, is that investment in the West Coast main line has met with such long procrastination, along with several other high-profile projects. Do we have to wait for a change in Government before rail is given a higher profile?

Steve Moir, DLR, Linder Höhe, D-51140, Köln, Germany
Steve.Moir@europa.rs.kp.dlr.de

Oh lucky day

Defying superstition, I made my first Eurostar journey on Friday 13 October. How much more sensible than flying – hours spent at airports, getting to and from the airport, only to spend little time in the air.

Joe Barr, 16 Dragon Road, Harrogate, North Yorkshire HG1 5DF

Holiday potential

Is there a wise sponsor waiting in the wings who could help restore a through rail service to the holiday town of Minehead in Somerset?

Preserved trains already operate over the 20-mile branch which is connected to the main line at Taunton but it is an obvious candidate for through trains.

10,000 people live in Minehead and in 1992 alone 40,000 travelled by rail to Taunton and then on to Minehead by road.

There is enormous potential from Europe's biggest residential holiday centre (Butlins' Somerset World) which accommodates 10,000 people and plays host to up to 3,000 day visitors and 1,500 staff.

There is obviously scope to carry people by rail in large numbers.

Cross-country trains, including InterCity 125s, already call at Taunton en route to Plymouth and Penzance from Birmingham, Leeds, Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen.

The local station can easily cope with a 125 train and a 10-coach loco-hauled service.

Commuter trains which lie idle at the weekend could be brought into service for weekends.

A new halt could be built for Butlins itself.

Members might wish to suggest such investment to the council leader, County Hall, Taunton TA1 4DY.

Graham Lund, 179 Dalrymple Street, Girvan KA26 9BG

Luggage solution

There has been much discussion about retaining and encouraging facilities for bicycles on trains. Can I make a parallel plea for improved facilities for luggage?

We struggled back from our annual family holidays at Dawlish with various items of luggage and children. During the brief station stop, we nearly left the push chair behind. We clambered with luggage down the aisle to our reserved seats over other people's luggage! Then we had to struggle back to get the rest!

After all the stress, we relaxed as the train sped past stationary nose-to-tail traffic on the motorway north of Exeter and I again realised there is no better way to travel than by rail.

May I suggest two options: First a return of luggage in advance. I have dimly nostalgic memories from my early childhood of a large trunk being collected from home as "luggage in advance" by a British Railways lorry. It was waiting for us on arrival. I realise the business, infrastructure and staff that made the service possible have long since disappeared and its reintroduction is much easier said than done.

However, its return could be of great benefit to a large cross-section of rail travellers, families, disabled and elderly, to name a few.

Could Red Star work with InterCity and Regional Railways to reintroduce luggage in advance in some form?

Secondly, for accompanied luggage. We've all experienced heavy back packs hanging precariously in the rack above the seats, or luggage being the occasional target for a thief from the racks at the end of each coach.

Might I suggest this option? Passengers reporting 15 minutes before departure time could place heavy luggage in a trolley which could be locked in the end van.

It could be unloaded on arrival



and for air-line style collection. The trolleys could be colour coded, for example, red-York, green-Newcastle, blue-Edinburgh.

Both could help reduce the cluttering up of aisles with luggage on busy trains, and the catering trolley could get through more easily.

Charles Boylan, 56 Severn Drive, Walton le Dale, Preston PR5 4TE

Motorail alternative

Railwatch correspondents bemoan the demise of Motorail. When contemplating a holiday last year I too was attracted to Motorail despite the cost and serious doubts as to the environmental sense in having a tonne of metal freighted 400 miles aboard another few tonnes of metal, only to have it brought back the same way a few days later.

Starting from London my friend and I wanted to have use of a car in west Scotland for one or two weeks in May.

When I enquired (about a month beforehand) I found all suitable Motorail services were booked so our alternative was to arrange car hire from Glas-

gow. This proved to be a wise move: for a mere £130 (exclusive only of fuel). We had the use of a well-equipped, modern vehicle for a week. At that rate even a fortnight's hire would have cost less than taking our car by train from London to Glasgow and back!

In retrospect I'm glad we were not able to use Motorail. We saved a lot of money.

Others might consider doing likewise, travelling light and sparing themselves long, tiring car journeys.

Their car might welcome a holiday too - by being left at home!

Andrew Loughton, 125 Cottenham Park Road, West Wimbledon, London SW20 0DW

Losing revenue

Each year, on the day following Boxing Day, Leicester Tigers play the Barbarians and many responsible people use the train instead of driving. The trains are always busy but Hinckley station has suffered staff cuts over the past couple of years or so. Now the ticket office is closed in the afternoons and all tickets have

to be purchased on the train. A friend boarded the train with around 80 other people. The ticket collector came to him and he presented evidence of a special two-for-one offer - plus the fare.

The conductor was completely "thrown", appeared to know nothing about this special offer and eventually retired to his "cubby hole" and shut the door.

He came out once with a request for more information and then went back. Unbelievably, he didn't come out again before the train arrived in Leicester.

All 80 or so people got off including my friend and his party, and none had paid.

If the station had been manned all would have obtained tickets - a lot of money.

It seems counter-productive to close ticket offices and of course there is the issue of staff training and information. It all results in poor service, a poor image and an incredible loss of revenue. I read in our local paper that the local council is appealing for the station to be "cleaned" up as it has deteriorated so in recent years. We are

talking about a station which serves (or should) a population of around 40,000.

Mildred (and Kenneth) Currie, 34 Britannia Road, Burbage, Hinckley, Leics LE10 2HF

Editor's note: The new RDS fare survey results are now available from RDS sales (see address on page 10).

Go West

I was one of many people who helped restore the Bodmin and Wenford Railway in Cornwall and would encourage your readers to come to Cornwall to take a look at it.

Richard Sharp, 76 Fare Street, North Tawton, Devon EX20 2ED

Editor's note: The Bodmin and Wenford is run by volunteers, connects with BR at Bodmin Parkway and can take you by steam train up the 1 in 40 climb to Cornwall's old county town of Bodmin.

Attractions nearby include the Light Infantry Museum and the National Trust's Lanhydrock House.

Another attraction in the South West is the Wheal Martyn China Clay Heritage Centre at St Austell.

Rayner's Review



Railtrack recently launched a glossy 50-page booklet called *Developing a Network for Britain's Needs*.

I carefully examined this network management statement for 1995/6 because I thought it might throw light on the intentions of Railtrack as it rushes headlong towards flotation.

The repetition of the word network twice on the cover sets the scene for the rest of the document. Each section repeats the same message.

It is: Maintain, renew and replace.

It is NOT: Develop, expand and modernise.

"We must first understand what service our customers want," says the foreword by chairman Robert Horton.

What most people want is less traffic on the roads, less pollution, and an improved environment for their children and grandchildren to grow in.

Mr Horton's customers are the people of this country, not an asset management company anxious to improve the rate of return on its investment. My

attention was drawn to one particular sentence: "Railtrack intends to identify ways in which relatively minor modifications might ease bottlenecks". At best "minor modifications" implies cheap solutions, but at worst, it suggests infrastructure designed to operate to the minimum safety requirement.

This phrase "minor modifications" sits uneasily in my mind because Railtrack has already had to ask for dispensations regarding safety modifications which they are unable to complete on time.

Seven Railtrack zones have asked for exemptions from rules on trains starting against a red signal.

It is bad enough that Railtrack failed to make the modifications but it is a sign of the muddled railway of today that Railtrack has to ask itself for safety dispensations!

The network management statement repeats the "renewal and maintenance" message several times. But everyone

Railtrack on wrong line

outside the Cabinet, the chairman of Railtrack and perhaps his chief executive, know that the £10 billion pledged in this document is

not even enough to keep the railways in their present sorry state.

Other sections are entitled Meeting the Demands of the Network and, surprise, surprise, Projects for Developing the Network.

There seems to be an overuse of this word network.

In reality, the booklet shows us that we can expect a speeding up of the process we have seen since the mid 1980s - a gradual decline of the railway caused by minimum investment.

One of the most telling statements comes under the heading of Grants.

Almost as an afterthought, it says: "Where socially desirable enhancements would not otherwise be viable, Railtrack may be able to seek grants."

The word may ought to be replaced by must.

This pamphlet identifies only

Europe as a possible source of public money. What about the British Government?

It is all very depressing reading and does nothing to renew confidence in a rail network.

The Government ought to give a publicly owned Railtrack a direct infrastructure grant.

That would be a much more cost-effective way forward than the present merry-go-round of subsidies.

If the existing railway from Birmingham south to Southampton - which runs close to the M40/A34 route - were to be upgraded, lorries by the hundred could be transported on trains in the manner of our enlightened European neighbours.

The cost of improving the complete line would be about the same as building the Newbury bypass!

So much to be done, so little time, yet Railtrack is still heading in the wrong direction. Most people are crying out for a U-turn.

Peter Rayner

Bottom of the league

By Hugh Walker

I had the opportunity to travel on Swiss Railways while on a recent business trip to Geneva.

In the clean and quiet atmosphere of the stations on this 98%-electrified system, there is no rattle from diesel engines or exhaust fumes polluting the air.

Most trains consist of eight to ten solidly built coaches plus a baggage van drawn by an immaculate electric locomotive which enters and departs from the station quietly and efficiently.

The baggage van of course has room for bicycles, luggage and some small freight loaded at the station platform.

Every town and city has active freight sidings. What a contrast to Britain where rail freight facilities have almost disappeared, even in large cities.

Swiss Railways look good on the ground, but what, I wondered, was the real contribution to transport infrastructure.

The figures are good too. In 1992, 11% of passenger journeys in Switzerland were by rail compared to only 5% in the UK, while a staggering 52% of freight moved by rail (in tonne kilometres) compared to 11% in the United Kingdom.

I found these figures in the Department of Transport's *International Comparison of Transport Statistics* published last year.

Why should we care? Well, our main trading partners are in Europe so we need to take as a benchmark of our competitiveness the various European economic and investment indicators.

Transport is one of these indicators since energy use, accessibility, congestion and pollution all have an impact on costs and competitiveness.

For example, rail and public transport generally are five to ten times more energy efficient than road haulage and private cars; the congestion caused by excessive use of road vehicles in the UK is estimated by the Automobile Association to cost us £19 billion a year.

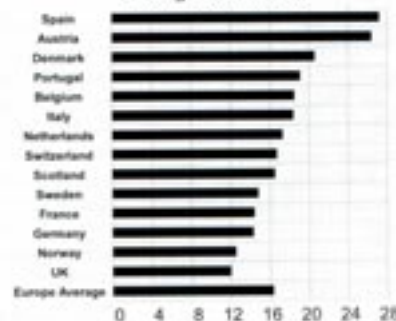
Using figures from the international transport statistics report, and similar reports on UK transport, I compared Britain with the rest of Europe, based on passenger-kilometres and tonne-kilometres as these probably relate most closely to traffic levels.

I excluded pipelines and shipping (a significant sector for freight in the UK) and concentrated on the ratios for road versus rail freight, and cars versus public transport (rail plus bus).

This revealed that the UK is bottom of the league with only 12% of journeys by public transport versus the European average of 16.3%. Scotland does rather better at 16.5% because of higher use of buses, although rail journeys at 4.4% is one of the lowest.

The situation for freight is similar with 11% going by rail in the UK versus the European average of 19.5%, while in France and Germany it is around 30%. In

Percentage of Journeys by Public Transport
Passenger Kilometres



Scotland it is only 6.5%! Britain is well behind its European partners in making greater use of efficient transport.

Incidentally these are 1992/93 figures. The figures today may be even more discouraging. Journeys by bus have declined markedly since deregulation, and rail travel took a further setback in the strikes of 1994 and 1995, with a fall of 9.5% in the past two years.

There has also been a 16% reduction in rail freight since 1992/93, with even some bulk loads being lost to road, as prices have increased ahead of privatisation.

Sir George Young, the transport minister, has boasted that we have the most liberalised transport systems. If this is the result, perhaps it is not so desirable after all.

No wonder we are constantly reminded of increasing traffic congestion on major roads and air pollution in cities that exceeds European standards. Naturally there is also demand from organisations such as the Freight Transport Association and British Roads Federation for even more road building.

Yet there is so much unused capacity on our railways, and greater use of public transport would clear many private cars off our crowded streets where they occupy a disproportionate amount of road space.

Despite a reduction in the UK road-building programme, it is disappointing that the money saved has not been redirected to railways and public transport.

The West Coast main line upgrading and the long-overdue electrification of the Edinburgh/Glasgow/Aberdeen triangle, seem as far away as ever.

It's hard to imagine such a choice being made at present, but this kind of change in strategic thinking is needed if the UK is to get anywhere close to the European average, let alone match the best.

At the moment the trends are in the opposite direction. This was the key point highlighted by the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution in its report last year.

Perhaps you might say that these comparisons are irrelevant because our economy

and infrastructure are different in the UK. To some extent transport planning is a self-fulfilling prophecy, particularly when related to land use.

However, when I looked at some macro-economic indicators, I did not find a compelling reason for our lowly position in the transport league.

After The Netherlands and Belgium, Britain is one of the most densely populated countries in Europe, which should make it attractive for public transport.

Does economic activity play a part? Apparently not, as Britain has one of the lower gross domestic product per capita figures – somewhat higher than Spain but around half that of the wealthiest country, Switzerland.

Neither is there any correlation with car ownership which is 353 per 1,000 people in the UK versus 470 in Switzerland and Germany. Wealth and high car ownership do not necessarily mean less use of public transport, although this is often used as an argument for more road building.

If we want to make progress we need to identify the key differences between our systems and those on the Continent.

Some factors might be:

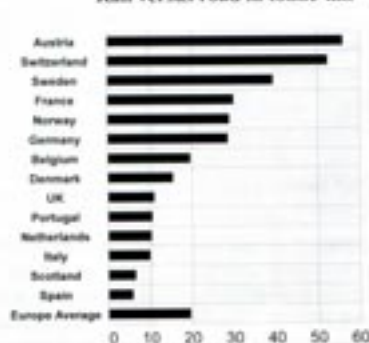
- Relative pricing between modes of transport
- Degree of traffic management
- Relative investment levels
- Degree of rail electrification. European average 42%, UK 29%, Scotland 23%
- Availability of railfreight facilities
- Level of public transport integration, accessibility and quality of service

We then need to set out a plan with target and dates to monitor progress and evaluate investment.

It takes time to change, and the early 21st century could see increasing pressure on energy consumption and pollution, and on our economy.

★ Hugh Walker is marketing communications manager at an electronics multinational in Scotland.

Percentage of Freight by Rail
Rail versus road in tonne-km



Victims of the road lobby

A group of parents in the Tufnell Park area of London took to the streets to protest about the polluted air they and their children have to breathe every day.

They have come together in a group called Airwatch and are working to improve the quality of air in their area.

Pretty quickly they realised that by improving the Barking-Gospel Oak line traffic could be taken off their local roads.

They are now hoping for a new station at Tufnell Park which would allow children to travel to school by train.

The Barking Gospel Oak Line Committee has been struggling for years to convince BR managers and the Government of the potential of the line but it has been left to moulder with aging trains, inadequate signalling and vandalism.

Ideally the line should be electrified and modernised so it can fulfil its proper function as an efficient East-West link.

At the committee's meeting in September, North London Railways commercial manager Brian Leaker was more optimistic about the future of the line.

But apologies for absence were received from four MPs – Margaret Hodge (Barking), Harry Cohen (Leyton), Judith Church (Dagenham) and Stephen Timms (Newham North East). Well at least they had the grace to apologise for not attending, but MPs of all parties must realise that people are looking to them for help in breaking through the present logjam of rail improvement schemes awaiting approval.

The rail users group was expecting the 1995 train cancellations figure to beat the abysmal record set in 1991 which saw 1,200 cancellations. They rightly describe the state of the trains as utterly appalling.

"Yes, our line is doing its bit to maintain North London Railways' position as the most inefficient of the train operating units," reported the group's newsletter.

The six local authorities along the line's route are desperate for things to be improved but, true to form, the Department of Transport is allowing only £200,000 – instead of the needed £900,000 – to be spent on improving the stations.

The Government Office for London is already being obstructive about requests for funding for next year and North London Railways has refused to ask for cash to provide a Tufnell Park station. It is worried about the consequent increase in Railtrack charges.

Even though Transport Minister Steven Norris has experienced at first hand the



Fuming at the car fumes: Parents and children get together to protest about the level of traffic in Tufnell Park, London. Rail improvements could give people an alternative to the car

Pictures: Elaine Kennedy

failings of the line – he was delayed for more than an hour on it – little appears to have been done. In an attempt to engage his interest, users sent him Valentine cards in February asking for a reliable service.

■ Airwatch, 120 St George's Avenue, N7 0AH

■ BGOLC rail users, 668A High Road, Leyton E15 6JP. Email: foulger@geo2.poptel.org.uk

Myth of 'accidents'

By Brigitte Chaudhry
of RoadPeace

As traffic increases, the danger on our roads is steadily growing.

Each year more than 300,000 people are killed or injured in road traffic incidents on Britain's roads.

Most are the victims of someone else's poor driving.

But all road deaths are considered "accidents" and are routinely referred to as such, regardless of whether any investigation is pending.

We talk of an air crash and a disaster at sea but even a fatal incident on the roads is termed an accident – just another Road Traffic Accident as far as the police and legal agencies are concerned.

Meanwhile we, the bereaved and injured, are expected to accept the catastrophe which has overtaken us without any protest or complaint.

We must give up our loved ones as sacrifices to dangerous drivers, as car-fodder, without so much as a whimper. And if we want steps taken which would prevent similar tragedies, we are generally treated with contempt.

The vast majority of drivers who cause death or injury are not made accountable for what they have done. They are charged with minor road traffic offences: the death or injury goes unmentioned, the causes left unaddressed.

Generally, the only investigation is an inquest in a coroner's court. These are conducted by coroners sitting alone, without a jury. There is no legal aid for victims' families, and even those who can afford a lawyer are often told they needn't attend.

The drivers, by contrast, are never alone, because of possible civil claims, their insurance companies send a body of legal representatives who usually advise drivers not to answer any questions.

Coroners generally acquiesce in this, which of course makes a travesty of the idea of any "investigation".

Whatever the evidence, inquest verdicts almost invariably record "accidental death". What is most upsetting for aggrieved relatives is that the death of a loved one seems rubber-stamped, with no lessons learned and no action taken. Thus the carnage continues.

■ Brigitte Chaudhry, RoadPeace, the national charity for road traffic victims, PO Box 2579, London NW10 3PW. Phone/fax 0181 964 1021.

Home thoughts from abroad

Eurostar speed in Britain: 90mph

Eurostar speed in France: 185mph

Railtrack "vision" for West Coast main line: 140mph.

What was once Britain's premier line, may eventually get tilting trains - years after Finland, Russia, the Czech republic, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Spain and Italy.

While Britain is still contemplating its navel, other countries are going ahead with definite plans.

Six ICE trains are being bought for £90 million from Germany by **Netherlands** Railways to run 185mph services from Amsterdam to Cologne, Frankfurt and Berlin. Netherlands Railways expects that 45% of the new traffic will be motorists fed up with driving. The Dutch government is also spending £2 billion on a 10-year rail infrastructure upgrading programme. Some lines will be widened to four tracks.

Spain is spending £631 million on a 136mph train service along the Mediterranean coast between Barcelona and Valencia.

Czech Railways is spending £125 million on high-speed Pendolino tilting trains from Fiat and Siemens to run trains from Berlin to Prague and Vienna.

Sweden is spending £92 million on seven ABB X2000 high-speed tilting trains and is expected to buy another six soon, some of which will run through to **Denmark** on the new Oresund link. It is also spending £240 million to upgrade the Goteborg-Malmo route for 155mph trains where tilting trains started running in January. The tilting trains will soon be the standard inter-city train in Sweden.

New high-speed Pendolino tilting trains began operating between Turku and Helsinki last year on **Finnish** Railways which is considering buying 23 more tilting train sets, some of which may run through to St Petersburg in Russia.

Florida is planning to give subsidies of £50 million a year to a consortium planning to build a high-speed rail route in the **USA** between Orlando, Tampa and Miami.

Construction has begun in **France** on the £3.3 billion project to build 180 miles of high-speed track to link Marseilles to the TGV network.

Electrification around Cherbourg will bring 125 mph trains to Normandy in June.

New double-deck 185mph trains will be introduced between Paris and Lyon this summer because demand for rail travel is so high.

Construction began in **Italy** in November on a new 50-mile Florence to Bologna high-speed line which will cost £1.5 billion.

£2.2 billion is to be invested to replace Stuttgart's terminus with a through station able to accommodate high-speed trains and eliminate the need for train reversals. The **German** transport ministry calculates that one benefit will be the removal of 4 million local car trips a day.

Japanese Central Railways is testing a 219mph train. Last year a Japanese East train reached 264mph.

No new trains were ordered in Britain last year, for the first time since 1947.

No new trains are likely to be ordered for another three years in Britain because of uncertainty surrounding rail privatisation.



Showing the way ahead: Trevor Garrod, Alexander King and Rob Archer at Yaxham

The cycle of s

By Trevor Garrod

It is not easy to reopen a railway. Tenacity, flexibility, imagination, research and a sense of humour are all needed.

The Cannock Line in the West Midlands was restored in 1989, but the campaign had lasted longer than World War II.

Norfolk can go one better. The Dereham line closed to passengers in 1969, the campaign to reopen it started five years later and on Saturday 23 December 1995 a passenger service started over one and a half miles of track.

The 12-mile line was used for freight traffic until 1988, and between 1978 and 1988, RDS and its associated local groups, the Wymondham, Dereham & Fakenham Rail Action Committee and the Fakenham & Dereham Railway Society, ran 20 charter trains, carrying over 5000 passengers.

There were shoppers' trips to Norwich, seaside excursions and InterCity specials to York and Portsmouth.

Withdrawal of the freight service, however, led to the merger of WyDRAC and the F&DRS to form the Mid Norfolk Railway Society and the setting-up of the Great Eastern Railway Company (1989) Ltd. The aim was to buy the line, including its northward extension and operate both commuter and tourist

services. RDS East Anglia bought shares and Breckland District Council showed an interest in the tourist potential.

A small railway centre was opened at County School station, six miles north of Dereham.

As sometimes happens, there were differences of opinion between members primarily interested in the enthusiast market and those whose long-term goal was a regular passenger service.

Serious concern also arose over the way the company was being run.

As a result, the Mid Norfolk Railway Society, with some 600 members, decided to form itself into a Preservation Trust and bid for the line.

In January 1995, Breckland Council decided to buy the track and lease it to the society; and on 14 December the full council granted £75,000 to the Preservation Trust, and loaned it £50,000 for purchase. Further loans or grants may be offered.

Meanwhile, the trust's members had been doing maintenance work with special permission from BR Property Board.

The Railway Inspectorate gave the go-ahead for passenger services to start over the mile and a half from Rash's Green to Yaxham and for works trains to use the rest of the line down to Wymondham. The MNRPT was able to operate its first public

New life for old railways

This was the scene, left, at Yaxham, Norfolk, last year when the RDS sponsored cycle ride visited the area. Despite the weeds and wild flowers, real trains are now back.

A service has begun to operate from Dereham to Yaxham and there are high hopes that they will soon be running from Dereham to Wymondham.

"Potentially this could be the catalyst for the much wider development of the railway network in Norfolk," said working party chairman Tim East. The RDS ride was just one of many initiatives to promote the idea.

This year the RDS ride is based on Stratford-upon-Avon. If you want to get on your bike on Saturday 8 June to help a railway project contact Rob Archer, 62 Checker Street, King's Lynn, Norfolk PE30 5AS for details. Tell him which charity you plan to raise money for. Or if you don't want to ride, you can sponsor one of the riders.

The riders will meet at Stratford station at 1200 and cycle 15 miles to Honeybourne.

Road traffic problems have become acute in Stratford since the town lost its status as a railway junction. But 1996 traffic could be eased if the railway network was expanded, particularly by reopening the old Great Western line from Stratford to Honeybourne and Broadway.

The Stratford on Avon & Broadway Railway Society has been formed to preserve a three-mile stretch of line - mothballed by BR since 1992 - and to re-connect it with the national rail network.

A link to Stratford would allow travel through to Birmingham, Leamington, Stourbridge and many other destinations. A link at Honeybourne would clear the way for connections to Worcester in one direction and Oxford in the other.

The whole question of reinstating rail lines will be the subject of our fifth national **Rail Reopenings Conference** at Bicester, Oxfordshire, on 29 June. Jim Steer, managing director of the transport consultants, Steer

Davies Gleave, which carried out the feasibility study for the east/west rail link, reported on the front page of this *Railwatch*, will be one of the speakers.

Dick Helling, Public Transport Officer of Oxfordshire County Council, will describe his practical experience of reopenings and his council's ideas for the future.

The conference will be held in the Methodist Hall, Bicester, from 1315. There will be a buffet lunch from 12 noon and mid afternoon tea. The cost is £8 for RDS members (including buffet lunch), £10 for non-members. For those not requiring lunch, the fee is £2 and £4 respectively. Please send bookings to David Soames, 158 Atherstone Avenue, Peterborough PE3 9UN. Full conference details will be sent out a fortnight before the event.

On the **Isle of Wight**, a report into rebuilding the line to Ventnor at a cost of around £10 million points out it would generate extra revenue for the town's holiday trade and benefit local residents.

Information about the **Internet and the World Wide Web** flooded in after the last *Railwatch* and assistant editor Graham Morrison has created a WWW page for *Railwatch* which can be accessed at

<http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/GMorrison/railwatc.htm>

We are in the process of developing other pages and compiling a guide to WWW sites useful for rail campaigners. The guide can be found on Graham's *Railwatch* site and will be regularly updated. We would also like to compile a directory of RDS members who have an email address. If you do, please send a short message to Railwatch@argonet.co.uk

Stagecoach which boasts of improving conditions for its customers has refused to attend the **Rail Users Conference** which will be held at the Camden Centre, London on Saturday 28 September. It has a lot to learn about its customers!

RDS lottery winners: November: Andrew Davies, Leeds £59.20, Philip Ralph, Leeds £37, W J Measure, London £22.20, Jenifer Adams, Stowmarket £14.80, H R F Mills, Cheshunt £7.40, Robert Cummings, Hyde £7.40.

December: Brian Hastings, Scunthorpe £60, Paul Scanlon, Exeter £37.50, D R Simpson, Cannock £22.50, Jonathon Dalton, Eastbourne £15, John Savage, Tring £7.50, Mr and Mrs A Hodgson, Sheffield £7.50.

January: G R Selby, Wells £59.20, Miss Joan Coombes, Ipswich £37, J E Wilson, Timperley £22.20, M Bedford, Fareham £14.80, Michael Griffiths, Market Harborough £7.40, J T Brown, Thornton Cleveleys £7.40.

Selling RDS ideas Members who travel round visiting tourist attractions, rail events and shops can help make money for the society by taking a small quantity of RDS books or *Railwatches* with them. We can supply samples and small packs of remaindered books for you to offer. For details, contact Tony Smale at 89 North Wallington, Fareham, Hants PO16 8TJ. Tel 01329 843356.

A special train between Weymouth and Dorchester which will carry 100 folding bikes will be one feature of the first international **Folding Bike Conference** at Weymouth on 11-12 May. Details: 01305 772444.



... year with the class 20s now working

Access

service on 23 December, having also run a charter service for a local school the previous Monday.

The first train was two class 20 diesels with a rake of former Network SouthEast coaches which made four return trips on a cold Saturday and carried over 200 local passengers. Local people were reintroduced to their railway, and given a foretaste of things to come. Preserved diesel multiple units are to be a special feature of the line.

Priorities now will be to extend down in stages to the junction at Wymondham and to lay 300 yards of track back to Dereham's main station.

To help in this endeavour, the Trust is issuing Bonds at prices from £25 to £1,000, and hopes to raise £100,000. If you would like a prospectus, please write to MNR Bond Issue, 2 Masefield, Hitchin, Herts SG4 0QB.

You can join the Trust as an ordinary member for £13. Write to Membership Secretary, Mr S D Moye, 21 The Brambles, Ware, Herts SG12 1XU.



Stop the decline: A bike rotting away at Yaxham

Local action



Yorkshire

By James Towler

Privatisation Fatigue? Top marks to the managing director of a wholly owned subsidiary of BR providing InterCity services who, in answer to a query about privatisation, candidly replied: "Myself and my managers are working in an environment not of our making and may or may not be of one's individual choice. It is, however, the situation in which we are expected to operate and in which we must deliver what customers need." He has a point.

Yorkshire Rail Review 1995 The good news was the improvement to local time-keeping by Regional Railways North East. The bad news was that, for the second consecutive year, no new stations opened in Yorkshire. Nor can we expect any in 1996 - nor, I suspect, in 1997. This is because everything is on hold due to privatisation which is reputed to be costing an additional £700 million each year, on top of reorganisation costs in excess of £1 billion, simply to provide the present level of service. How much better if this money had been invested in the railway itself: on electrification of the Midland main line, on opening new stations, on replacement of clapped-out rolling stock, track and signalling, rather than on a vast new bureaucracy.

Delayed yet again Once again the reopening of the direct link between Halifax and Huddersfield, which should have been up and running two years ago - with new stations at Brighouse and Elland - has been deferred. Any prospects for Midland main line electrification and proposals to put the North TransPennine route under the wires have also been shunted into a siding.

Tap Tap January's fare increases above the rate of inflation are difficult to equate with Transport Secretary Sir George Young's claim that all privatisations result in better services and reduced charges. Quite apart from anything else, he's obviously never heard of Yorkshire Water!

Well Done! Member Geoffrey Wood keeps a watchful eye on regional tourist literature and is quick to draw the attention of those responsible when reference to public transport is omitted. In one instance the administrators of a historical attraction were so appreciative that they not only redrafted the leaflet to include details of the buses and trains but also sent Geoffrey a couple of free tickets for his trouble.

Audience Participation It seems my observations regarding the role of the public at Rail User Consultative Committee meetings have rung a chord. The Eastern RUCC, like the North Western RUCC (which attracts up to 40 members of the public) includes a public forum at its meetings. Now, since January, the North Eastern RUCC under its new chairman Jim Beale, offers the public the opportunity to address its meetings, subject to 14 days notice of the topic to be raised.

Cheers! Joining the CrossCountry York-Poole train at York, I treated myself to a gin and tonic but was disappointed to find there was no ice. I suggested to the steward that he could have re-stocked at York. He replied that, as a consequence of privati-

sation, there was a minimum charge of £60 for taking on stock at York and blamed John Major! CrossCountry refutes this and says "arrangements for providing ice to this train" are being reviewed.

Naughty! Naughty! Railtrack in Leeds has been under fire for using the station concourse for cigarette and automobile promotions - let the car take the strain! - to boost its balance sheet prior to privatisation. How long, I wonder, before the executive lounge is turned into a massage parlour?

Cambrian lines

By Chris Magner

Ticketyboo Newtown station ticket agency run by Peter Crompton of the Cambrian Line Users' Association opened in November and has made a good start.

In credit Caersws station has been repainted while the restored Machynlleth station will be opened in March. Regional Railways is hosting celebrations and an open day. Those involved in the restoration work deserve great credit.

Bonus travel The Cambrian Coast Line has enjoyed extra custom because of the cheap fares promotion (maximum fare £5). This will go on until May. A survey is under way to see what work is needed to upgrade the Dovey Junction to Pwllheli line for higher speeds. Summer will see better connections with the West Coast main line.

North Midlands

By Malcolm Goodall



Robin Hood A Fun Day introduced stage two of the Robin Hood Line to the public. For the first time in 31 years, passengers are able to travel beyond Newstead, over reinstated tracks, through the reopened Kirkby tunnel, and over a new link to the existing freight line from Pye Bridge. There are new stations at Sutton Parkway, Mansfield and Mansfield Woodhouse. Crowds flocked to the line and packed aboard.

Fairground In between trains, revellers enjoyed fairground rides, refreshments, and trade stands. Arthur Cowie of Nottinghamshire County Council had his own stall publicising the service, Regional Railways promoted their routes and the RDS stall was kept busy selling pamphlets and booklets, and providing Midland main line information. RDS members found it difficult to believe 30 years of campaigning had finally borne fruit.

Promising start Through December and into the New Year, the new trains proved very popular with Christmas shoppers, and a regular commuter trade has built up from the three new stations. A basic hourly service is provided, with extras on Saturdays. The single track between Bestwood Park and Kirkby Lane End prevents operation on a regular half-hourly headway. Despite the odd problem with level

crossings, train failures and theft of new signalling cable, the public has given good support. Bicycles are carried free.

Future developments Construction of Kirkby-in-Ashfield station is planned for 1996, with the aid of an additional £33.1 million from the Department of Transport to cover cost increases of Stage two. The stage three extension to Worksop should go ahead in 1997/8 with a European grant of 25%, if the Department of Transport provides its 75% of the £5.3 million cost. This stage will involve Bolsover District and Derbyshire County Councils. Another possibility is stage four, branching off at Cresswell to follow the disused single line through Clowne and Staveley to Sheffield.

South Wales

By Julian Langston

Ten point plan We've sent a 10-point plan to Caerphilly councillors to promote public transport options following proposals for a widened northern bypass. We call for more frequent rail services and a new station, better integration between bus and rail, more information, better amenities at stations as well as bus and cycle lanes. All the suggestions are backed up by examples of where they have been successfully carried out elsewhere in the UK.

Better media coverage RDS activities over the past six months have received wide coverage. We've commented on the need for a comprehensive rail service across Wales on Sundays as ever more shops are open. We've also expressed dismay at the closure west of Swansea, to allow engineering work on one small section between Llanelli and Kidwelly. We are worried Railtrack is taking longer than necessary to carry out work by employing fewer engineers and saving money - to the detriment of passengers.

Save Rhondda rail route We have called for the trackbed of the Rhondda Fach railway to be protected from obliteration by a proposed road for the valley. The case for reopening is growing as plans for a car parts factory at Maerdy mean there is also the possibility of freight for the line. The nearby Rhondda Fawr line is one of the best in Europe per head of population; its poor brother should at least be safeguarded for future generations, even if it can't be rebuilt now.

Launch of Cardiff Group We are setting up a working group to promote rail, and address problems in the Cardiff area. There is much scope for rail development here, which we also hope will increase RDS membership in Cardiff.

Freight We are calling for rail freight facilities to be provided at the Irish Sea ports of Fishguard and Holyhead. Money could be found for the Fishguard terminal by altering plans for an intermodal freight terminal proposed for Wentloog, Cardiff, and designed to serve Channel Tunnel trains. This scheme, expected to cost at least £10 million would require funding from the Welsh Development Agency. If, however, alternative plans put forward by Associated British Ports went ahead, there would be no call on the public purse and the money could be diverted to providing a terminal at Fishguard.



ABP have a large area of suitable land in Cardiff Docks, which they believe they could fully equip for only £2 million. We support an intermodal terminal in Cardiff, but believe that Wentloog is the wrong place for it, preferring to see the ABP proposal or a similar idea using the existing Freightliner terminal adopted instead.

North East

By Peter Atkinson

Freight potential Neil Crossland of Load-haul spoke to the branch in November about the opportunities awaiting a privatised rail freight operation.

Isolation fear We are worried about the isolation of the city of Sunderland from the TransPennine network. Electrification proposals completely ignore it. The branch is pursuing this with both Regional Railways and Tyne and Wear Passenger Transport Executive.

Reopening hope The branch is establishing a consultative group to study the possibilities of reopening the Leamside (Pelaw-Ferryhill) line which has both freight and passenger potential.

South West

By Gerard Duddridge

Battle with tides Railtrack struggled with the forces of nature on Saturday 6 January. The 1747 from Exeter to Penzance was brought to a halt at Dawlish by high spring tides plus south easterly winds. The train - headlight smashed - crawled along the sea

wall. Shortly afterwards the Exeter-Newton Abbot line was closed until Monday at 1530. From 9 to 22 January, buses substituted for local trains. The complete service was only restored on 26 January. It is reported that a six-figure sum was spent on repairs in three weeks and this does not take into account the cost of disruption. Exeter's local paper the Express and Echo carried a January item headed: *Talks may undo Beeching axe*. Railtrack's Tracey Bailey said: "The company may look at opening up old sections of track to take the strain off the coastal line. At one time there were quite a few lines running in that part of Devon. Inland the Teign Valley line branched off at Exeter St David's and then rejoined at Newton Abbot. There was also the Exeter via Crediton, Okehampton to Plymouth line which closed in the late 1960s. This is the line which we would consider reopening and talks are in the early stages at the moment. There are about 20 miles of track missing which would have to be replaced before it could be linked up again, but it is possible". The society started to press for the Okehampton option when the leaflet *Bring Back Our Tracks* was published in 1993.

Labour backs road 23 members of Kerrier District Council have voted against reopening Carn Brea station, despite support by Carn Brea parish council, and 14 district councillors. A Labour district councillor described it as a "half baked" scheme. He was reported as saying that the A30 road should be completed before money is

"wasted" on this station. The vote means that the station will not be included in the district council's local plan, which will probably mean that any plan to re-open the station would be objected to by the council. The main opposition has come from Redruth and Camborne Town Councils which are afraid that reopening Carn Brea will mean that Camborne and Redruth stations will be closed. However the proposal would have been for platforms long enough for four-coach Sprinter trains but not InterCity 125s.

Wait for freight In late November the society became concerned about the loss of the Gulf Oil trains from the Heathfield line, the last remaining freight services. We feel that it is essential that the track is allowed to remain until economic circumstances allow freight to return to the route. Our letter to Teignbridge district council has shown that Bovey Tracey and Heathfield neighbourhood council have expressed an interest in the line, possibly for passengers. Teignbridge's policy is to encourage retention of the rail branch between Newton Abbot and Heathfield.

Fares The national criticism of fare increases imposed by South Wales and West on the Torbay line, appears to have persuaded the company to rescind them. Following discussions with schools, South Wales and West has agreed to reduce the season ticket price for passengers using a service three quarters of an hour earlier in the morning. This is only a partial solution

BIKE IN A BRIEF CASE?

Lovely idea, a decent bike that can be spirited out of a brief case...



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BROMPTON

Local action



to the problem of rolling stock shortages and overcrowding. With less publicity the excessive standard day returns on the St Ives branch were reduced on 7 January and the St Ives to Penzance return fare lowered to its pre-May 1995 level. However, fares will be increased again in Summer 1996 on a seasonal basis. We intend to take up these substantial seasonal fare fluctuations with the operator.

North Wales

By Rod Fairley

Electric extension Merseytravel has approved a £40,000 market study to establish the case for electrification of the Wrexham-Bidston line. It proposes to extend Merseyrail electrics to a new station at Prenton/Woodchurch. But the study will also consider further electrification to Deeside and Wrexham, with new stations at Little Neston and Deeside Industrial Park.

Paper trail Shotton Paper has signed a five-year contract with Transrail for the shipment of over 100,000 tons per year of timber from Scotland to Dee Marsh.

Investment Cheshire County Council has declared in its transport strategy to invest more in rail infrastructure.

Building up A concerted effort is being made to improve the environment at Neston, the last major station structure left on the Wrexham-Bidston line. A meeting between the rail user group, WBRUA, Ellesmere Port and Neston Borough Council and Railtrack Property Board, agreed to save the structure and find a suitable use for it. The council has since agreed to fund a building survey which will assess what needs to be done and sources of finance.

Busway A decision was expected in March on plans to convert the Mickle Trafford-Dee Marsh line into a busway.

Station wrangle Wrexham Maelor Borough Council has voted for redevelopment of Wrexham Central station. The WBRUA is still against moving the station, although Regional Railways North West has presented Railtrack with a specification for the new station, which includes leaving room for an additional platform in the future. The new transportation officer for the new unitary authority, Wrexham County Bor-

ough Council, is against moving the station and is keen to see Wrexham Central take a more important role as the town's transportation interchange.

North Wales Coast The quality of the rolling stock on the InterCity service leaves a lot to be desired. One of the InterCity 125s was running around with a defective power car for days. The hourly loco-hauled Crewe-Bangor/Holyhead service has suffered from regular power unit failure.

Recruits sought The branch committee is keen to recruit people to the branch committee because it is very difficult to keep the branch going at the moment. If there are any members interested in getting involved, please contact chairman Rod Fairley, 48 Fford Pentre, Mold, Clwyd CH7 1UY. Tel: 01352 756964.

East Midlands

By Tony Kay

Ivanhoe delay The completion date for phase two of the Ivanhoe Line project which involves restoring the Leicester-Coalville-Burton freight line to passengers and providing 12 new stations has been put back to 1998. The delay is blamed on the current restructuring of the railway industry.

Safeguarding The branch has undertaken a study of disused trackbeds in Leicestershire, and recommended those which have reopening potential. A particular focus is the need for a link between the Midland and West Coast main lines south of Leicester. The opportunities for light rail in the Leicester area are also considered. Trackbeds not needed for railways are recommended for cycling and walking.

Tourism Leicestershire County Council is encouraging Shackerstone Railway Society to extend its five-mile preserved line, the remaining six miles to Coalville along the disused Nuneaton-Coalville trackbed. It would then connect two of the county's foremost tourist attractions, Bosworth Battlefield and Snibston Discovery Park, and also link with the Ivanhoe Line.

Eurohub The first trainload of cars from the Citroen and Peugeot factories near Paris arrived at the Corby Eurohub terminal in January. From April there will be

three or four trains per week on the Paris-Corby run, each with 250 cars. The terminal may also be used for exporting cars from the Peugeot Coventry factory.

East Anglia

By Trevor Garrod and Nick Dibben

150 celebration The first railway to Lowestoft, which opened from Reedham on 3 May 1847, celebrates its 150th birthday next year. The Lowestoft-Reedham-Norwich Rail 150 Committee is supported by RDS and the secretary is our member Rod Lock, The Beehive, Hall Road, Oulton Broad, Lowestoft R32 3AW. It is hoped to involve a wide range of societies and individuals, with projects ranging from an exhibition and open day, to special trains and a booklet. History will be celebrated, but the modern railway will be promoted.

On Your Bike Anglia Railways received a government grant of £75,000 to increase cycle-carrying capacity on local trains as part of the Bicycle Challenge project. Additional money is expected from county councils. The aim is to carry four cycles on a single-coach Class 153 and up to six cycles on two-car 150s. The branch and rail users groups were invited to contribute ideas.

Branch promotion The branch, with financial help from Great Eastern has produced a leaflet promoting the Harwich branch in Essex. The leaflet extols the advantages of rail travel and contains timetable and fare information. Several thousand were delivered to homes along the route.

London and Home Counties

By Simon Martin

Paperwork The branch has commented on the East London River Crossing and the London proposals put forward by the South East Regional Planning Conference. In the past six months this now means that there have been five major reports on London and its transport. It is becoming a full-time job for the branch in responding to the papers!

Victory Rare to report but it does look like there will be an improved service on the Chiltern Lines this summer at the rush-hour only stations in London. Proof that keeping up the pressure really does work.

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Adventure A well-attended meeting at Chessington Community College agreed a campaign to extend this branch to the World of Adventures. Everyone agrees it should happen but no one is co-ordinating. We hope a new leaflet and a briefing paper will bring everyone together.

Hold tight The group agreed to monitor Stagecoach. Now that the franchise has been awarded we are very concerned about the future of the branch lines in London.

Welcome Dennis Fawcett is our new convenor for the London end of the South Eastern services. I am also hoping to report a convenor for Guildford by the annual general meeting. There is always room for more activists. If you would like to get involved ring me on 0181 831 2491.

Railondon The new distribution arrangements are working well, thanks to John Lovell for all his hard work.

Essex Metro Our proposals have been adopted by at least one Essex council, and continue to cause great interest. It may be possible to look at similar routes in future.

Local Transport Day The branch had a stand at Wimbledon on 2 March and leafleted at Hatton Cross over Heathrow access. There was also an Ashford meeting.

Lincolnshire

By Paul Jowett

Steel link The Port of Boston has applied for a £350,000 Department of Trade and Industry grant to connect existing unused dock rail lines to its new steel import warehouse. The aim is to move machined imported steel by rail to the West Midlands, initially by two 900-tonne trains a week. Other cargoes may later go by rail.

Railtrack block Central Trains wants to improve the service between Sleaford and Spalding by extending the period that the hourly service runs. The problem seems to be Railtrack are so slow in coming to decisions. Railtrack would not implement the agreement with the county council to modernise crossings and signalling. The aim was to make the Joint Line cheaper to operate. The savings could have allowed the resumption of two-shift working and reopening of two new stations at Donington and Pinchbeck. Railtrack said the cost of modernisation could not be justified. With 10 level crossings plus signalboxes, modernisation would pay for itself over about three years. Besides, the county council was contributing a large sum to aid crossing conversions.

Railtrack block The Boston-Skegness line was closed for two days after a train hit a road vehicle on an open level crossing protected by lights at Wainfleet. Motorways of course are not closed for two days even when there are multiple crashes. Wake up Railtrack.

Scotland

By Douglas Smart

The privatisation of the railways is descending from farce to tragedy. This can be summarised simply by listing the headlines in the Scottish press in recent months:

Watchdog hits out at break up of railways.

No happy ending to rail sell off pantomim.

Sleeper cuts leave staff in the cold (capacity problems on remaining sleepers caused by closures).

Anger at rail quangos. The rail bureaucracy mushrooms (ADRC - Access Disputes Resolution Committee and RIDRC - Rail Industry Disputes Resolution Committee).

New Court Bid to delay contract as Region starts legal action.

Battle for train services.

Scots lines frozen out (not snow but exclusion of Scotland from investment plans).

Feeling the strain, Railtrack float is fraught with problems (Herald editorial).

Railways sell-off thrust into turmoil.

ScotRail under fire as fares are increased.

Break-up of ScotRail is behind late trains on Edinburgh-Glasgow line (Allan McLean of The Scotsman).

Rail Users warning will be ignored.

Train and track chiefs go to war.

Railtrack rejects premier route electrification on Edinburgh-Glasgow line (despite study showing electrification gives far better than M8 improvements of 10 lanes in one section).

Delays put rail formula to the test. Allan McLean again with a brilliant analysis of all the fingers in the pie as chaos reigns after an accident at King's Cross.

There is however some light at the end of the tunnel. We have uncovered dramatic examples of enormous over-capacity on Scottish roads on which vast sums have been lavished. The Commons Public Accounts Committee is to investigate.

Sadly some railway bosses seem incapable of fighting their corner for fair treatment. We however will keep the nation posted.

Sevenside

By Eric Barbary

The replacement Ashchurch (for Tewkesbury) station is not now likely to open until September, the cost having tripled mainly through rail privatisation. It is hoped however that buses will be co-ordinated to give links to a large catchment area including many tourist destinations and the Gloucester Warwickshire Railway.

Gloucestershire is considering replacing Stonehouse Bristol Road Station if large housing estate projects are authorised in the Eastington and Standish districts.

Alternative areas for housing have been proposed west of River Severn which could promote reopening of Newnham (for Cinderford) station.

Bristol's Rapid Transit scheme may use guided trolleybuses rather than trams.

Restoration of the ex-LMS line via Warmley is threatened by the Avon ring road. But with a new link from Bitton to Keynsham, it has the potential to serve East Bristol developments and form an alternative Gloucester to Bristol rail route.

North West

By Robert Cummings

Take off? Cheshire County Council is disappointed at the way its investment in the south spur to Manchester airport is being misused. Trains operate until only 1600 hours. From June it is intended to divert one of two Manchester-Stockport-Crewe local trains to the airport. But because of the extra time taken on the airport branch, the trains will run non-stop between Wilmslow and Crewe, depriving intermediate stations of half their service. It seems investing in rail can bring cuts!

Metrolink Construction of Phase two of Manchester's successful light railway will begin this year though it is not clear where the link will go beyond Salford Quays. A route to Eccles through Trafford Park was originally planned and promoters of the massive Dimplington Centre were making promises of money to take Metrolink there. Now the Dimplington has got planning permission but private finance for Metrolink is conspicuously absent!

Line out Rail services on the Oldham loop line were cancelled for an entire day because contractors building a new road bridge under the railway at Hollinwood failed to hand the line back in time after a weekend possession.

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WESTMINSTER

Rail franchising

This debate, on 18 December, was necessary because of the decision of the Court of Appeal to uphold the request by the pressure group 'Save Our Railways' for a judicial review into the activities of the franchise director Roger Salmon in that he had acted illegally in agreeing service requirements for the first few franchises which were way below those operated by BR at the moment. This was contrary to the 'guidance' issued to Mr Salmon by the Secretary of State. Sir George Young (the latest in a long line of transport ministers) who, in his opening statement, told the House that the court had ruled that the franchise director could proceed with the award of the first three franchisees - GWR, SWT and LTSR - although it ruled that the Public Sector Requirement (PSR) for LTS rail was not consistent with instructions, ie illegal! The court also ruled that the PSRs for the next four franchises were also 'inconsistent', ie illegal! He went on to announce that the identities of the first three successful bidders would be known 'later this week'. The Minister further stated that the court had described the issue as a "limited legal problem." *I think the Minister was taking comfort from the implication that Mr Salmon had only slightly been breaking the law!* Sir George said he would therefore "clarify the instructions and guidance to the franchising director to ensure that they reflect beyond doubt the policy that we have always followed." He said this meant that a core service level is protected so that service levels operated by franchisees are broadly similar to those operated immediately prior to franchising. *Apart from this 'core level' having horrible echoes of the 'core stations' fiasco, one wonders how Mr Salmon could have so misunderstood his brief as to insist on service levels so reduced from what is on offer now that even the Court of Appeal took fright!*

Sir George went even further however in that future franchisees will have to commit themselves to providing services over and above the PSR. *This should certainly give the would-be franchisees a bit of a jolt as already virtually all available stock is required at peak times, so with an increased service commitment, and tougher regulations concerning overcrowding, plus a greater degree of comfort promised under the new regime, a lot of new trains will be required in double-quick time. Further, as fare levels will be pegged in future, many extra passengers will need to be attracted to cover the extra costs. You could sack most of the staff, but I understand customers are also promised increased manning at stations, et cetera.*

Different terms

Labour shadow transport secretary **Clare Short** suggested it would be wrong to allow the first three franchisees to be let under different terms from the remaining ones. She felt it could lead to litigation. Sir George said he was pleased to see on Coefax that Ms Short had welcomed Railtrack's 10 year investment strategy. "That strategy is possible at the higher level envisaged only because we are privatising Railtrack." A large part of that 'investment' is actually just maintenance. Real investment such as CrossRail, the Channel Tunnel fast link, West Coast main line, Thameslink 2000, et cetera, will have to be paid for by others according to Railtrack's report! He repeated, "I am giving guarantees over and above those that were necessary to comply with the court's judgement." In reply to a question from **Sir Alan Haselhurst** (Con, Saffron Walden) the Secretary of State said: "First, key fares will be guaranteed and linked to the retail prices index or lower. Secondly, services specified in the contract will have to be provided for a minimum of seven years." The prospective franchisees are already showing the ways round

these 'guarantees' by abolishing some cheaper fares, e.g. Supersavers, and altering the restrictions on some services to make fewer available at cheaper rates. **Sir Roger Moute** (Con, Faversham) wanted the next batch of franchises let rapidly so that we could secure much-needed investment. "The faster we get on with the franchising process the better, particularly the franchise for the South Eastern Train Company." *Interesting, that, because Faversham is likely to get the Networker express trains ordered years ago by the much-derided BR.*

Answering worries from **Gerald Bermingham** (Lab, St Helens S) that the Minister was doing another Beeching, Sir George said: "Every station and every line is guaranteed, and we have opened or reopened some 229 stations since we came to power in 1979." *What! The dreadful BR struggling against the desperate attempts by the Conservative Government to open stations all over the place! Most openings have been carried out under the impetus of local authorities and people. Getting Government funds has been like getting blood out of a stone! WE have opened, indeed!*

Nigel Forman (Con, Carshalton and Wallington) felt it was the complexity of the arrangements that was causing uncertainty and confusion among his constituents. He wanted the Minister to "give us some idea how the new policies would address the problems that are caused by the unreliability of the services, the problems of signalling failures, which are all too frequent, and the fact that overcrowding is now a characteristic of all too many services on the Carshalton line."

Sir George replied that overcrowding will be dealt with in the franchising director's requirements, ie there will be no overcrowding because the franchising director says so! Signal failures will be reduced because Railtrack will suffer heavy penalties if trains are delayed. These penalties may well be a lot less than rebuilding the railway from scratch, which on many routes is what is really needed.

Replying to **Dennis Skinner** (Lab, Bolsover) about employment in the new companies, Sir George said he very much hoped that the railways of the future would provide good, well-remunerated employment for those who worked on them. *As in the privatised bus industry!* Sir Teddy Taylor (Con,

Southend E) was worried about the danger that 'after privatisation, every time a train is late, or a light bulb is not working, privatisation will be blamed.' *As nationalisation has been blamed by the Tories up to now!* He wanted three-monthly reports showing what has really happened. *Think of the cost, Sir Teddy. Do I detect the faintest of cold feet here, as the realisation that there is an unmitigated disaster in the making is slowly sinking in to Tory MPs?*

Barry Field (Con, Isle of Wight) wanted the Isle of Wight railways put back to the top of the list for franchising and Peter Pike (Lab, Burnley) requested that Lancashire and the North West should take the Isle of White's place at the bottom!

Peter Luff (Con, Worcester) and **Dr Robert Spink** (Con, Castle Point) both expressed the belief that privatised services on their lines would be far in excess of the minimum PSR. Since management buy-outs were preferred bidders in both cases services are unlikely to change much from the present situation, as presumably both were doing the best they could with the resources available.

Nick Harvey (Lib-Dem, N Devon) said that in the light of the court's findings, "it would be irrational for the rest of the country to be served by franchise holders who guaranteed to provide services that were equivalent to the old BR timetable while those who served the south-west were at liberty to reduce them considerably." He quoted "much maligned" BR running 14 services a day Taunton to London whereas GW Trains only had to provide eight.

PSRs unlawful

Brian Wilson (Lab, Cunninghame N), winding up for the opposition said the courts had concluded that PSRs of 20 to 100% below the existing timetable were unlawful. The Minister had not told the House what his new guidelines were. He said the day would be remembered as the day the PSR was redefined as a 'core service level'. He wanted to know whether, when the ballyhoo has died down, franchisees would be able to come back and demand a reduction in service or an increase in money from the franchising director.

Sir George insisted that his new instructions would guarantee a service at least as good as that operating at present. The country would see in 18 months time, or whenever the election was, that



WATCH



services would be better and more popular and that the Labour party would do another U-turn. In Parliamentary Questions during the week beginning January 9, Minister for Railways and Roads **John Watts**, in answer to **Mrs Gwyneth Dunwoody** (Lab, Crewe and Nantwich) concerning control of rail fares, confirmed that the following types of fare would be regulated by the franchising director: Savers; standard open returns, where there are no saver tickets; standard weekly season tickets; and in London, Edinburgh and Cardiff standard seasons, standard singles and unrestricted standard returns.

Uncontrolled ticket types are: All class fares; Supersavers, Apex, Superapex, Network Awaybreaks, Super Advance, Cheap Day Returns, special day returns, Shuttle advance, Voyagers and Rover tickets. *Which leaves plenty of scope for increases!*

Jim Cunningham (Lab, Coventry SE) asked what percentage of the Department of Transport's research budget was devoted to road and rail. The answer given by Mr Watts was road 88%, rail just under 12%. *Mr Watts said in mitigation that it was up to the rail industry to do its own research. He didn't say why this did not apply to the road industry likewise.*

Nigel Spearing (Lab, Newham S) wanted to know what proportion of Railtrack's £10 billion investment programme would be spent when it was in the public sector, and also the sources of the finance.

Mr Watts said the precise phasing of planned investment is a matter for Railtrack. Future investment should be a matter for the private sector and the Government had announced its intention to privatise Railtrack in May 1996.

Secrets

Hugh Bayley (Lab, York) wanted details of the various bids for SWT placed in the Commons library. Mr Watts said that a copy of the PSR for SWT was in the library. Stagecoach Holdings PLC had agreed to maintain existing service levels and details of the contracts will be placed on the franchising director's register. Information about unsuccessful bids is commercially confidential. In other words the public are not allowed to know why a particular bid was preferred, or the calibre of the bids made. *This is disgraceful. In the USA any bidding process must be above board so that people can judge for themselves the respective*

merits of each case. It is typical of this country that public assets are given away in complete secrecy with no appeal against unwise decisions.

Mrs Dunwoody asked what targets for increases in passengers were made by the rail franchisees. Mr Watts said the agreements do not include passenger targets. He said the agreements contained specific commitments for improvements to passenger and station services and these were expected to increase numbers.

No assurances

Mrs Dunwoody wanted to know if any assurances had been given by the new owners of BR freight companies to continue to use rail for the conveyance of their traffic. Mr Watts replied: None! In a further answer Mr Watts told the House that the Government had paid £21.5 million of taxpayers' money to advisers and consultants in the year to end December 1995.

A question about the carriage of abnormal loads involving railway locomotives and rolling stock by road, elicited the following figures for Strathclyde area alone, (the only area for which figures are available for some reason):

| | |
|------|-----|
| 1994 | 107 |
| 1995 | 200 |

(See Railwatch 66)

Sir Teddy Taylor wanted to know on 15 January what progress was being made on privatising the London, Tilbury and Southend Railway.

Mr Watts said the franchise had been awarded to the management buy-out team, Enterprise Rail, who 'will deliver real quality of

service benefits to passengers for less financial support than is currently being paid to BR.' *Lies, damn lies and statistics! In view of subsequent events it According to Modern Railways magazine the pre-privatisation subsidy was £28 million and the new subsidy to Enterprise Rail will be £29 million.*

Mr Watts went on to say that Enterprise Rail had committed itself to an investment programme including the replacement of the entire fleet with new rolling stock in addition to station redecoration and refurbishments, improved station security, public address systems and improved ticket issuing. When asked who would pay for this new Jerusalem, the reply was "From the efficiencies of the private sector." *One wonders why the average age of our bus fleet has risen from 13 to 17 years since the efficiencies of the private sector have been brought to bear!*

SpivRail

In a debate on privatisation on 7 February, **Clare Short** advised people not to think of investing in Railtrack.

"The structures created by the Government cannot be left in place," she said. She said the rail infrastructure was being sold off cheap for £1.5 billion when it was worth £6.5 billion. Taxpayers were losing the difference. Mrs Short said allegations of

ticket fraud on the London Tilbury and Southend were a consequence of "scrapping the public service ethos and replacing it with a profit-maximising ethos."

She added: "The Government is willing to wreak great damage on our rail system and sell it off at a tiny proportion of its value. "It is madness driven by dogma and ideological zeal."

Glenda Jackson (Lab, Hampstead and Highgate) said: "The travelling public, the people of this country have been deceived about what the Government actually intends." Labour's **Andrew MacKinlay** (Thurrock) demanded the resignation of franchise director Roger Salmon who was a "puppet of the political machine". Labour's **Tony Banks** (Newham NW) said ministers should abandon their "armour-plated plush limos" and travel by public transport more often.

If they did, they might drop their "lunatic" privatisation plans. Winding up for Labour, Brian Wilson said he had invented a fictional railway called "SpivRail: the railway for spivs handed over to them by the Government of sleaze."

"One more fraud investigation and we may even rename it SleazeRail." Despite all the criticism, the Government still won the vote by 298 to 262, a majority of 36.

COMMENT

Already, some MPs are extolling railway privatisation as a success.

Sir George Young said on 15 January: "Following franchising, rolling stock has been refurbished and renewed at a faster rate than under British Rail." Peter Luff, MP for Worcester, was heard on the radio on 7 February giving his opinion that already the Great Western railway had improved, all of three days after being in the private sector!

We must guard against this claptrap. As of now, not one carriage has actually been ordered by a private company: indeed new trains have not even been designed yet. Any improvements in terms of rolling stock, new signalling schemes, et cetera, will be as a result of previous orders from BR coming on stream. No money has been forthcoming from the private sector; it is all talk.

The reality of privatisation can be seen in such things as the closure of motorail services, ending of the Plymouth-Scotland sleeper, the London to Fort William sleeper reduced to one coach, and that after a struggle in the courts.

The reality is waiting on Milton Keynes station trying to get to work on a morning when North London Railways are in chaos, a not uncommon occurrence, and watching a stream of InterCities race by, whereas

in the good old days one would have stopped to pick us up, they are no longer willing to do so as they belong to 'another company'!

The reality is IC125s roaming the country virtually empty and not picking up any passengers because they're leased to EPS and only take Eurostar ticket holders. We don't have to look in the crystal ball of privatisation, we can read the book!

We find supersaver fares abolished by Anglia Railways, and subject to more severe restrictions on other lines, and then are told that this is popular with customers. They take us for idiots. We find nonsenses like core stations and permitted routes foisted on a sceptical public and then hurriedly withdrawn when Ministers realise the horrors which would ensue. We all know what is in the pipeline. Each company jealously guarding its territory, tickets on one line not being valid on another. The end result is already being seen in the fiasco of the LT&S. Poor old Kinchin-Smith: from supremo to also-ran in one evening.

Don't be fooled: getting money from the private sector for railway investment in any meaningful way, will be even less likely than getting it from this Government. But I hope to goodness I'm wrong!

Michael Weinberg

Magic of 185mph trains



Happy travellers: A new Thalys train links Paris, Brussels and Amsterdam. A Eurostar is in the background.

Picture: SNCF

By Graham Nalty

Eurostar trains are magic. Their streamlined profile epitomises the high-speed, high-quality, comfortable travel they offer. Why can't we have trains of Eurostar, TGV or Thalys quality on the InterCity network? The prime market for Eurostar trains is between centres with more than 1 million people and which are more than 200 miles apart.

Lille with a population of 1 million and Brussels with 2 million are now firmly on the high-speed rail map of Europe, while Birmingham with 3 million and Manchester with 2.5 million are not. They should be.

Liverpool/Wirral, Glasgow, and Leeds/Bradford, each with populations of 1.5 million, and Tyneside with 1 million should be too.

The obvious route for a 186 mph line in Britain is from the Channel Tunnel to London, Birmingham, Manchester and Glasgow. Spurs to Liverpool and Edin-

burgh could be added. The trains must be made available to all UK passengers, not just international travellers.

With such a quality railway, there would be enough demand for a service between Manchester, Birmingham, London and Paris every half hour.

A single service per day, as is proposed for anywhere north of London, will appeal to only a tiny part of the potential market.

Eurostars can serve three or four destinations without the time penalty which would apply to aircraft, but in attempting to run 185mph trains and 125mph trains together, track capacity would be limited.

Only building new track would bring the commercial benefit of large numbers of people wanting to travel at high speed.

Merely upgrading the West Coast main line is not a high-speed option because it carries too much 'slow' traffic.

Two more European countries join the high-speed rail club this year as the British Government sits on its hands. New red

Thalys trains start operating a proper time-tabled service in June through Belgium to the Netherlands, using Belgium's first stretch of 185mph track.

The Paris-Brussels-Amsterdam trains are complex - able to run on four different voltages and cope with various signalling systems.

Next year they will also run into Cologne in Germany and the service will be gradually upgraded to halve the present journey time from Paris to Brussels and Amsterdam and to lop two hours off the journey time to Cologne.

The aim is to double rail's share of the market - easing the pollution and congestion problems caused by car and air traffic.

Unfortunately many travel agents - and some BR stations - are giving a second class service to people who want to use Eurostar to connect into the European rail network.

Many of the agents are not familiar with rail booking techniques and are content merely to sell tickets to Paris or Brussels and leave it to the real experts to give information about onward travel. Not good enough!

RDS member and travel agent Peter Cannon organises RDS trips but can also help with individual booking and information. Tel: 01728 830726 (evening) 01473 213000 (day). Fax 01473 214000. We hope to give details of other expert agents in later issues.

See you in Mansfield BR manager David McIntosh who helped to roll back Beeching by reopening lines is guest speaker at the RDS annual general meeting in Mansfield on 4 May. See separate booklet for details.

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