

With friends like this . . .

British Rail closed the entire Bedford to Bletchley line for seven days over Christmas leaving its "customers" completely in the lurch. The usual platitudes about having to save money were trotted out despite BR having a legal obligation to maintain such services on normal working days.

The action was typical of many of BR's short-sighted economy measures. Save a few pennies here and there with little thought to the long-term implications. And while the managers are sent away to country hotels for customer care courses, their frustrated passengers buy cars to get to work.

Oilman Sir Bob Reid was appointed to head BR by the Thatcher government which raised the love of profits way above the ideals of public service.

When he was questioned about the Christmas closure, Sir Bob told *Railway Gazette International*: "This is just the sort of thing that a general manager will do ... it is up to him if he closes a line, it is not a social service."

In the same interview, Sir Bob insisted he does not want bigger subsidies for the railways. Instead he wants to be able to borrow more money.

He also said: "You need new trains before you can charge higher fares."

To many rail passengers who see vast amounts of their taxes spent on grandiose road building while Government spending on rail is slashed, Sir Bob's message provides little comfort.

They will have to accept higher fares to repay capital and interest.

We can only pray that, like his predecessor Sir Robert Reid, the present chairman will repent. Let's hope it's not too long before he sees the light.



Coming soon: Manchester's new light rail vehicle will take to the streets in September

NEWSWATCH

Safety snag: The Channel Tunnel shuttle trains are being modified so the fire doors at the end of each wagon are wide enough to let wheelchairs through.

Ribble hopes: Councils along the route of the Blackburn - Hellifield line are involved in talks aimed at re-establishing an hourly passenger service on the line. A consultant's report called for by Lancashire County Council suggests that additional stations should be considered at Whalley, Langho and either Wilpshire or Brownhill. The councils would have to underwrite any losses.

What a stink: Esso has been offering scented diesel fuel at some of its London filling stations as part of a drive to clean up its image.

Request stops: Labour MP Joyce Quin is urging BR to consider providing eight new stations on the newly electrified east coast main line between Durham and Morpeth to provide a commuter service which could link into the Newcastle Metro.

Tragic cost: The economic cost of European road injuries is estimated at £49 billion, in a report to the Transport Commissioner

Money down the pit: The cost of the second stage of the Consett bypass road which is to occupy the former rail line through Consett station site doubled to £4.6 million when it was realised that numerous old mine workings would first have to be filled.

It's a tram to beat the jam

By GRAHAM COLLETT

The first section of Manchester's light rail network opens for business in only two months time just when London is thinking seriously again about letting the tram beat the jam.

The next system, centred on Croydon and named Tramlink, is being proposed by the London Borough of Croydon, London Transport and British Rail although BR was noticeably absent from the launch of the scheme in February.

The plan involves the take-over from BR of virtually the whole of the present Wimbledon to West Croydon line and the replacement of the Elmers End to Woodside and Addiscombe branch.

There is a smack of BR getting rid of its Cinderella lines to someone else, as was proposed with the extension of the Docklands Light Railway Lewisham branch to Bromley North.

But it does mean that these neglected routes will have a chance to demonstrate their importance for relieving congestion on local journeys.

Tramlink would however also run on-street and street-side, taking the trams into the heart of the area's shopping and commercial districts.

East Croydon BR station will be at the eye of the 18-mile network with a loop to West Croydon and branches to Beckenham Junction and New Addington as well as Wimbledon.

A major new public transport interchange will be located on the bridge outside the rebuilt BR station.

The bulk of the £140 million cost is expected to come from the private sector and if approved, the first trams will start running in 1994.

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Light Rail 91. G-Mex Centre, Manchester 19-21 November. Exhibition details from Judy Aspden 0707 275641. Conference details from Dr Lewis Lesley 051 707 0100

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