

Millions and billions

By STEVE WILKINSON

More than 100 inquiries have been received by the Department of Transport for more information from private companies interested in building new sidings for freight.

There are firm applications for schemes worth more than £20 million and other projects worth a further £15 million are being considered.

The biggest problem seems to be an inter-department battle with the Treasury. It is necessary for the Treasury to increase the budget allowance for these section 8 freight facility grants.

The current budget stands at only £4 million and provisional allowance for the next two years is a miserly £8 million.

Unless these figures are increased, several schemes will obviously fall by the wayside.

It seems to be just another example of how Whitehall is dragging its feet in response to the general desire to get more freight on rail.

As long ago as 1988, the Railway Development Society's freight committee prepared a detailed paper suggesting revisions to section 8 grants.

It was sent to the Government's Transport Secretary as well as other interested parties.

The Department of Transport responded — two years later! Then in July this year, a new publicity brochure was printed by the department. On one page, the word rail appeared by mistake as road.

Rail is so foreign to the department's vocabulary, it seems it can hardly bring itself to use the word.

It is spending £32 billion on road building with even more on motorway widening schemes — not

a cost-effective or an environmentally sensitive way forward surely.

■ **ONLY** one Channel Tunnel freight terminal, the one for Strathclyde, was outstanding following the announcement in October that Seaforth was to be the choice for Merseyside. The others are Normanston near Wakefield, Trafford Park for Manchester, Birmingham, Willesden and Stratford in London, Cleveland near Middlesbrough and Cardiff.

Know your friends

RDS tries to co-operate with like-minded organisations wherever there is a significant area of common ground between us.

National Executive member Chris Borland attended this year's AGM of the National Federation of Bus Users and RDS representatives met NFBU officers in the autumn to discuss issues like co-ordination of bus and train timetables, travel card schemes, Sunday travel and substitution.

We look forward to participating again in the Civic Trust's National Environment Week, from 16 - 24 May 1992. Branches can start now planning local events. Our annual sponsored cycle ride could take place in National Environment Week again. Would any member be interested in participating in a ride in the Home Counties, possibly Essex, this year? If so, please contact the General Secretary.

RDS has supported Cardiff Friends of the Earth in their study of the alternatives to major road building in and around the city, and given a small donation towards this project.

However, our efforts to work with the federation Transport 2000 to organise a Green Transport Week next year have not achieved much.

NEWSWATCH

Trust the AA: RDS member L Webb of Peterborough who is also a life member of the National Trust was dismayed when he saw the new Trust map, based on an Automobile Association one, which was sent to members earlier this year. It showed no railways! The trust has now promised to consider producing a new version (with the co-operation of the AA) after Mr Webb wrote pointing out that people who care about the environment should be encouraging the use of public transport. He drew attention to the fact that maps which deny the existence of railways make it more likely for people, particularly young ones, to turn to cars first.

Flaw and order: Railway ticket inspectors and transport police who have a difficult enough job already were pilloried in a Sunday Telegraph article on 1 September 1991 which took up almost a page. General Secretary Trevor Garrod wrote to the paper pointing out that they are the very people who are trying to help honest travellers by tackling the thieves and fiddlers who cost BR £21 million a year. They deserve support especially from "organs" lecturing us about law and order. The paper printed two paragraphs of his letter.

Italian state railways has opened an office in London to boost Anglo-Italian traffic from its present 1 million tonnes a year.

Lottery winners: August: C D Pickstone, Wrexham £38.20, John Savage, Luton £23.87, C Lindley, Sutton Coldfield £14.33, William Morton, London £9.54, Bill Stoneham, Maidstone £4.78, Roger Dewhurst, Southampton £4.78.

September: Mr and Mrs P Smith, Chorley £37.80, Barry Buttigieg, Croydon £23.62, E J Partington, Stourbridge £14.18, I Rushton, Nelson £9.44 D G Fifer, Chorley £4.73, Dr Alan Berson, London £4.73.

October: Paul Burton, Horsham £38, M Humphrey, Romford £23.75, George Lilley, Alnwick £14.25, Edina Lewis, London £9.50, C Oley, Liverpool £4.75, Jonathan Dalton, Eastbourne £4.75.

Company Briefing: John Saunders is producing an RDS newsletter aimed at giving companies details of rail development campaigns. The latest issue includes news on electrification, service cuts and a report of a visit to the Potter group at Ely. Please send any helpful information to John at Stockwell Gate, Whaplode, Spalding, Lincs PE12 6UE

No action at all has been taken by the Department of Transport to implement guidelines in the Government's 1990 environment white paper which urged the department "not generally to provide or encourage new road capacity simply to facilitate additional car commuting into already congested areas." Source: Department of the Environment.

BR is hoping to win new 300-mile plus overnight freight business which can be carried on its mail trains. The Post Office contract comes up for renewal in 1993.

The Government is spending £150 million to convert the A1 from Alconbury to Norman Cross (Peterborough) into an 8-lane motorway.

The chief executive of the re-united German railways wants the state-owned enterprises to be constituted as a company, answerable to a government supervisory council. He says the railways' present massive debts (£1.5 billion at half year) could be eliminated if road and rail operated under the same financial conditions.

Sweden's 150 mph tilting train has been a spectacular commercial success running between Stockholm and Gothenburg.

Dutch railways are speeding up their InterCity trains, introducing new inter-regional semi-fasts while maintaining local services in a bid to double the number of passengers, while reducing road congestion and pollution.

TREVOR GARROD'S VIEW



Trevor Garrod delivers a petition to No 10 Downing Street

For several years, RDS has argued against inflationary fare increases. We have even taken out Press adverts and published leaflets on the issue.

This country's rail fares are among the highest in Europe and are obviously a disincentive to train travel for some people.

A BR manager recently told an RDS meeting that passengers did not mind paying high fares. He had commissioned a survey on local trains which showed they rated reliability as much more important.

However, if his survey team had been questioning people NOT travelling on his trains, the result would, I am sure, have been rather different.

There is some sense in charging more for a service that has recently had a lot of money spent on it and provides greater speed and comfort. One can understand BR putting up fares by a higher percentage on the East Coast Main Line than on the London, Tilbury & Southend.

What made many of us see red, however, was an increase well above the rate of inflation for users of Regional Railways services, still thundering along with stock that is over 30 years old.

That is why I wrote to management in East Anglia, urging them to freeze fares until new Sprinter trains are delivered. If they are worried about losing revenue (assuming that an 11 per cent fare rise will not drive away some business anyway) they can sue train makers BREL for compensation.

For it is the failure of these privatised suppliers to

deliver new trains on time that is causing us, BR's customers, to suffer unreliable services with obsolete diesel multiple units. Government insistence that improvements must be financed out of revenue (only 23p in every £ of BR investment comes from public funds) helps drive up fares.

RDS has important work to do in campaigning for more equitable funding of rail. That means political lobbying. Our leaflet For a Saner Transport Policy is very relevant. Sometimes one can obtain cheaper rail travel by "shopping around".

Having sympathetic and knowledgeable booking clerks helps. When I recently went to buy a ticket at my local station, both the clerk and I were shocked to discover how much it would be. However, a little further research on his part revealed a perfectly legal way of saving £6, by re-booking at a station where I would have to change anyway!

RDS branches and affiliated user groups have a key role in publicising fare bargains. Equally, every plea we make to BR management for special offers should be accompanied by an offer to help advertise the facility.

Let us be constructive and imaginative in getting the best deal we can in the short term, while campaigning politically for a better financial set-up in the long term.

■ **Trevor Garrod is general secretary of the Railway Development Society and also writes a column every four weeks for the magazine Rail.**