

# Thanks for nothing, Citizen

By MIKE CROWHURST

A moment's consideration of the so-called Citizen's Charter shows it to be a hollow sham.

In theory the idea is a sound one as it puts a cost on under-resourcing. But it is biased against one mode of transport — rail, despite Ministers constantly prattling on about "level playing fields".

As far as I can see, the only proposal directed at other modes of transport is the one relating to motorway repairs.

Why aren't there proposals for bus and coach operators and airlines?

The Government has made it clear that no additional funding will be made available for rail to cover the cost of the scheme.

The money therefore will have to come from fares or from investment funds with the result that there will be less money available for investment.

It will compound the problem it supposedly seeks to cure. It could even precipitate a spiral of decline. Either way the passenger will be the loser.

Faced with the prospect of a flood of claims, BR may err on the side of caution and withdraw services at present run with marginal resources which they feel unable to rely on.

In extreme situations, this could lead to the closure of certain rural lines.

The reality of the charter will be to encourage that national pastime, cultivated by the tabloid press, of bashing the national Aunt Sally — British Rail.

What we need is a properly resourced railway so that accidents and cancellations do not happen. Trains could and should be reliable in the first place.

Until we have proper funding, a charter is nothing but a cheap political gimmick.

Both RDS chairman Steve Wilkinson and general secretary Trevor Garrod have written to the Prime Minister about the charter.

Steve pointed out that rail already competes with cars, lorries, vans, buses, coaches, taxis, mini-bus schemes and air which seem to be exempt from such a scheme.

He said: "We can all tell stories of taxis arriving late and horrendous delays waiting for aeroplanes."

He asked: "Why are those operators apparently excluded from the charter?"

He said the suggested charter in its present state is clearly anti-rail.

"There is no level playing field as far as transport goes now and if the charter is allowed to go ahead without incorporating all forms then it is quite unacceptable and biased."

## Dangers of an experiment

European initiatives to separate railway infrastructure from train operators are hopefully aimed at clearing the way for more investment in rail networks by the European Community and individual governments — and increasing the use of rail.

As ever, the British Government is out of step and sees the EC moves as an opening for privatisation.

It recently re-stated its commitment to privatising the railways and Transport Secretary Malcolm Rifkind asked BR chairman Sir Bob Reid to do everything possible to accommodate private train operators on BR tracks.

The EC has admired the way the Swedes have put rail on an equal footing with roads. But the EC may be missing one of the essential points of the Swedish package, large-scale tax reforms and financial re-structuring.

Sweden re-organised its railways in 1985, writing off debts and giving Government support to more unprofitable but socially necessary lines.

A radical package was agreed by the Swedish



## Europe here we come

This is one of the trains which will take people in the North East of England to their new Gateway to Europe — Newcastle Airport. Tyne and Wear Metro's airport extension was opened in November by European Regional Commissioner Bruce Millan.

The Metro has been going for more than ten years, blazing a highly successful trail which was however hit by the Government-decreed de-regulation of the buses. Until then the whole concept had been integrated transport with buses feeding into Metro stations. Passenger numbers dropped significantly but have since picked up.

The first stage of Manchester's Metrolink system is due to open in February. The light rail vehicles for the Bury - Piccadilly service were beginning to be delivered from makers Firema of Italy in August.

Parliament in 1988 and is now being implemented. Two state corporations have been set up, one for infrastructure and one for operating trains.

Rail vehicles have to pay an annual licence fee and fuel tax — but road taxes have been raised to match.

The aim is to put road and rail on as near equal footing as possible. There is NO attempt to privatise or break up the two corporations. Some services have been taken over by local authorities.

The Swedish experiment involved a radical reform of taxation for ALL transport modes.

In Britain private operators already run on BR tracks. But the appearance of "premium" services such as the Gatwick Express are a warning.

There are indications that the Heathrow Express may lack interchange with the network other than at Paddington. This is not acceptable, nor is the idea of premium fares.

RDS fears that ideas from the Swedish experiment may be selectively applied so that an infrastructure authority could be introduced without the investment necessary and without the fiscal and financial reforms of the Swedish model.

BR is our ONLY national public transport network and the integrity of the network must be maintained.

We will need a national operating company whatever policy on infrastructure is finally agreed.

## Who uses new rail services?

By ALAN BEVAN

Estimating the likely demand for new rail services is extremely difficult. Special local factors can throw a spanner in the works, even after meticulous research. Survey information is also inherently unreliable.

To help local authorities and concerned groups like RDS, a one-day seminar in predicting demand for light rail schemes was held by Leeds University's Institute of Transport Studies.

The professionals quickly became absorbed in the computer world of disaggregated approaches, trip rate models, simultaneity, elasticities and stated preferences. A whole range of forecasting methods exist, varying from simple catchment area comparisons to complex studies for major projects.

Details of possible demand as well as user and non-user benefits need to be taken into account for complex section 56 or European Development Fund grant assessment.

The institute issued a 90-page manual of advice, giving data useful to both experts and amateurs.

The real issue underlying the seminar, however, was the difficulty of presenting forecast studies in a climate of competing bids for restricted funds. There is already a large backlog of valuable rail development schemes awaiting implementation, a situation which calls into question the Government's attitude to public transport investment.