

WATCH

manufactured goods were carried to a much greater extent by the train system than, alas, they are today. In addition, general goods were moved to local stations throughout Kent. There was the noise of shunting at stations which are now empty of freight traffic. Moreover, the freight trains were loose coupled, unbraked wagons which clanked and banged their way along. This clinking and clanking did not disappear from British Rail until comparatively recently. If proposed improvements to the railway line were not carried out, it was not fanciful to suppose that more freight would otherwise go by road, and it would not be fanciful to say they would be enormously more disturbing to the environment.

Most beyond London

About 75 per cent of international freight coming into the UK after 1993 will be going to destinations beyond London. Mr Snape continued that he thought it essential that the freight was not delayed in the south east, to the disadvantage of the West Midlands, the North and Scotland. He asked MPs to reflect in a non-party way on the effect on transport patterns in this country if their wishes as regards compensation were acceded to. Competition between road and rail, beloved by some MPs, could be distorted in an even more anti-rail form. Cost of compensation under the provisions of the Channel Tunnel Act 1987 would have to be borne by the customer if the Government insisted. If the pledge of the Secretary of State to encourage freight traffic to transfer from road to rail was backed up by any evidence or extra cash, the Government should ensure that no additional burden is placed on any section of British Rail. Roger Freeman (Public Transport Minister) said that Mr Snape had raised the important issue of road and rail freight, and Mr Thorne would wish him to deal with some of the points not pertinent in the Bill. As for rail freight, the Government believed that any rail operator should take responsibility for any measures deemed necessary. The Government accepted that there was a real problem relating to noise caused at night by freight, while there were other problems in other parts of the country; it was admitted that problems existed, although they might disagree about how to approach the problems. As for road freight, through the regime of the taxation, vehicle excise duty and fuel duty, our heavy goods vehicles bear one of the heaviest burdens in Europe. They continue to provide from four

to five times the value of Government funds for the maintenance and further construction of our road and motorway system. Our hauliers pay a much higher proportion than those in many other European countries.

"Any financial burden that might be placed on road hauliers in the future in relation to noise mitigation measures is already amply covered by taxation. For their work on highways, the Government amply pay."

Massive investment

BR and the Government recognised the importance of replacing and improving the existing rolling stock for the Kent coastal services. It was a matter of investment priorities. It was important that BR completes the Kent link services first, a massive investment programme of more than £500m. In the course of this year's public expenditure survey, Mr Freeman said he would consider the relative importance of further assistance to BR to enable it to continue its investment programme. Mr Snape asked the Minister, in what circumstances railway expansion in the UK might become more or less likely? Mr Freeman replied that any announcement of a new rail link involved a massive increase in rail capacity and it was most important that there should be no doubt in the minds of those affected as to where they should stand in relation to noise mitigation and compensation. "I hope the House will be persuaded by my arguments."

Agreed noise level

Andrew Rowe (C, Mid Kent) said he had been discussing whether there was an agreed level of noise beyond which it was not right to subject people. That standard applied to transport, whether on roads, aircraft or railways. "Sir John Stanley made an important point when he said that rail noise was more akin to aircraft noise than to the almost continuous roar of motorways." A recent report of the Mitchell Committee, set up by the Transport Committee, had said that traffic on a railway could be intensified by minor construction such as passing loops and resignalling, or traffic can be re-scheduled into previously lightly loaded lines. Mr Snape asked if there were any cases where compensation had been paid to people living alongside roads that had seen a dramatic increase in traffic in recent years. Roger Moate (C, Faversham) said: "It's all a question of degree." BR had been very helpful and gone some way towards meeting the



point. BR should consider providing compensation. The second reading was carried by 210 votes to 10.

Fatal Glasgow crash

Following a crash between two electric trains at Newton near Glasgow, Roger Freeman, Transport Minister, made a statement on 22 JULY, the day after the accident. Four people died, including both drivers, and more than 30 people were injured. John Prescott (Lab, Kingston upon Hull East) said that according to the railway inspectorate's safety reports, significant collisions between trains had increased by 60 per cent, when comparing the first half of the decade and the last half of the 1980s. In 1989 there was a 100 per cent increase on the average for the previous four years. Had the Minister read the report of the previous inquiry into the Bellgrove accident, which took place in March 1989? There are certain similarities, said Mr Prescott, between that accident and the recent one. It involved new track alignment, converting double track to single track crossovers, which in the event of failure put trains on a head-on course. Mr Prescott suggested that replacing double crossover points with single ones is a cheaper option, and that the justification for doing so relied solely on everyone observing the signal procedures. Therefore the judgment to use the cheaper option might be considered faulty. The recommendation in the Bellgrove Report said that any such changes should be allowed only on condition that an automatic train protection system should be implemented, of the sort that was fitted to some trains in the 1970s. Mrs Ray Michie (Lib, Argyll & Bute) said she welcomed a public inquiry and hoped it would consider the matter of training. With all the new, sophisticated signalling equipment, was it not essential that everyone involved with trains should have proper training? "We should know the type of training, its length and how often it is available. Will the inquiry tell us whether the signalling system was installed to try to reduce the time of the Glasgow to London trains by four and a half or five minutes?" Mr Freeman said that BR had commissioned a study by the Royal Holloway and Bedford New College and by BR research staff. One of its principal

recommendations was on the provision of better driver training. "There would be a much more positive culture among BR staff."

Tunnel rail link

A statement was made on the Channel Tunnel rail link by the Transport Secretary Malcolm Rifkind on 14 OCTOBER. The Government expected, he said, that as demand for rail services built up through the Channel Tunnel a new railway line would be needed between the Tunnel and London. British Rail's advice was therefore accepted that a second international terminal was needed in London to complement Waterloo. It was agreed with BR's proposal that it should be at King's Cross, which should provide excellent connections to many parts beyond London. Secondly, it was decided that the route of the line should approach London via Stratford. This would minimise the impact of the line on the environment and on residential property. Only two domestic properties would be acquired and none demolished, as against 127 acquired and 24 demolished on the southerly route. The impact on the landscape would also be lessened. The new line would serve as an important catalyst for plans for regeneration of that corridor. The start of construction was still some way away, as was the need for the line. BR forecasts that the capacity of the existing network was expected to be sufficient to meet demand until around the year 2005. He had told the chairman of BR that the Government intended that the rail link should be taken forward by the private sector. The line would be built through East London, where the prospect was welcomed for the economic regeneration that it would bring. John Prescott said he welcomed what appeared to be the endorsement of Labour's policy on an East London-King's Cross route, outlined in 'Moving Britain into Europe'. Mr Rifkind said he saw every reason for the King's Cross Railways Bill to receive a boost from the recommendation of King's Cross as the main terminus. "I also see a strong need for improvement at Waterloo. Not only will Waterloo be the sole terminus for the first few years after the opening of the Channel Tunnel; even after the high-speed link is complete, about half the people using the Tunnel are likely to want to use the Waterloo terminus."