

Getting in shape for the future



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Director

It's certainly a busy time for transport campaigners, and rail campaigners in particular. Transport is likely to be one of the hottest potatoes for Labour when the next election comes round. The Transport Bill has been published, with a whole section devoted to rail issues, following on from the Railways Bill last year.

Railtrack publishes its Network Management Statement in March, an annual update which sets out plans and spending for the next 10 years.

Rail Regulator Tom Winsor is reviewing track access charges – the way Railtrack makes its money from the train companies – so that there is more incentive on all sides to run more trains.

The Department of Transport Environment and the Regions has decided to outline 10-year transport plans, and five-year Local Transport Plans are to become statutory requirements for local authorities.

And the RDS is shouting as loud as we can to get improvements passengers want in the new franchises that are being negotiated by the shadow Strategic Rail Authority.

Before Christmas here at the RDS office we produced an Action Stations briefing pack for RDS branches and rail user groups around the country.

The pack, which is also available to other transport and environment groups (just call 020 8981 2992), explains how we can get our voices heard so that new passenger rail franchises can take up our suggestions.

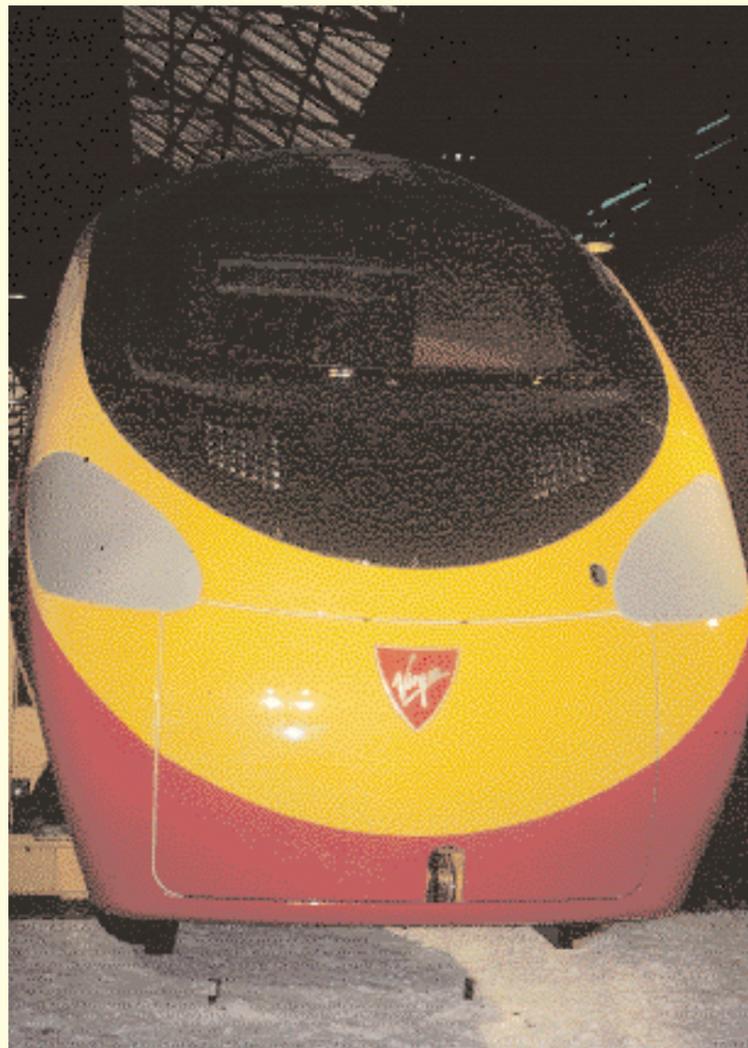
If you have suggestions for improvements to services that you use, please do contact your local RDS branch, or the branch which is responsible for liaison with the train operator in question, and let them know your ideas and comments.

During the franchise re-negotiation process the SRA must consult the Rail Users Consultative Committee and the Central Rail Users Consultative Committee on passenger issues, so it is vital that RDS branches pass our comments and aspirations on to them.

These new services could be in place for the next 10 to 20 years (albeit with five-year reviews) so we really cannot miss this chance to have an input.

The SRA hopes to have replaced all of the current seven-year franchises by the end of 2001, so we should get our skates on!

Here in the RDS office we are also working on amendments to the Transport Bill, for better protection of



Train operators are demanding ever more shapely trains as a way of wooing extra customers but often at the expense of comfort inside the train.

Virgin is certainly no exception in demanding a striking external view but the company seems to appreciate that internal comfort is probably more important. The two pictures giving a preview of the inside of their new carriages show that at least the popular and sociable style of seating around a table has survived.

The £600m Pendolini-based train fleet is already being built for the West Coast line at Alstom's Washwood Heath factory. Once the first two trains are completed in the summer, they will go to France for some serious testing before entering service in Britain next year. By 2002 all the trains will be in service and the line



speed will be increased by 25mph to 125mph. Three years later, the trains should be operating at 140mph. With Virgin already attracting an extra 11% customers each year, it may be difficult to find a seat!

Pictures: Milepost 92 1/2



Land grab

RDS is continuing its battle to persuade the Government and the shadow Strategic Rail Authority to be realistic about protecting former railway land.

In cooperation with other groups, we are asking Rail Property Ltd to hold back on land sales until it is clear they are not needed for transport uses.

The Government should include this reasonable approach in the Transport Bill.

This is obviously necessary as many councils and other agencies have not yet got to grips with the basic principles of integrated transport.

Multi-modal studies are also still looking at corridors where rail can play a significant role.

At the moment, land is being sold off despite our appeals.

Branches have protested about land being disposed of at Rowley Regis, Selly Oak, Castle Vale and the Abbeyhill loop in Edinburgh.

But David Hansen reports that objectors are being told to provide a fully developed business plan within weeks of their objection. In the real world business plans take a long time to develop, so this condition seems designed to ensure objectors don't halt the land grab.

We have also protested about the proposed sale of substantial sections of the closed Bere Alston-Tavistock line including the Shillamill tunnel and viaduct as well as a half mile section of the former St Dennis Junction to Parkandillick route which would be used

if the Newquay line trains were to be diverted to run directly to St Austell.

Other land which might be used in rail reopenings or for extending station car parks or providing new rail freight sidings at existing stations has not been identified by Rail Property Ltd.

We have identified land for protection at a number of sites including Pinhoe, Lapford, Morchard Road and in Plymouth at Marsh Mills and on the approach to the former Friary station.

North Midlands are worried about the Old Dalby test track where Virgin intends to test its tilting trains and Rowsley viaduct on the Matlock-Manchester route which is being considered for reopening by Railtrack. Three sites are in the corridor served by the M1 multi-modal study and could be of use to Central Railway.

RDS members and branches can help prevent any further dismantling of the many closed and lifted routes throughout the country.

Please list all the routes and sites in your area which you believe have future potential, including former freight facilities.

And if you have pictures of the blatant blocking of abandoned but potentially useful trackbeds please send us a copy.

Please send material to Alix Stredwick, at Room 12, 9-10 Roman Road, London E3 5AN. She will pass the information on to the reopenings committee.

disused rail routes. We are still seeing ludicrous situations where parts of old lines are being built upon by developers, rendering them almost useless for the future.

It seems that often local authorities forget a rail route has to be preserved as a whole, and that if part of it is built upon, there will be repercussions literally further down the line.

Along with Transport 2000, the Rail Freight Group and others we are making loud noises about the SRA sell-off of some disused land that could have transport use.

Rail freight issues are often overlooked by the media who tend to concentrate on passenger stories. But the RDS Freight Committee is hot on the case pushing the case for rail freight.

The Government's Transport sub-committee is holding an inquiry into the road haulage industry, which the RDS Freight Committee contributed

to, in conjunction with RDS head office. We are also liaising with Tara Garnett, Transport 2000's new Freight on Rail campaigner. See page 6.

I have recently represented RDS members at a London Underground focus group as part of research into how it can provide a better service.

I have also briefed MPs on the case for electrification and rail land sales so that our campaign views are voiced in debates. We are working on the web-

sites, www.rds.freewire.co.uk and www.therailcampaign.org.uk so that it can provide information on our national campaigns. If you would like to take a look, but do not have access to the internet at home or at work, remember that most public libraries provide internet facilities.

I am hoping to produce the first revived RDS Campaigner for RDS activists, rail user groups and other RDS group members before the sum-

mer. It will be a concise update with facts and information on campaigns that we and others are undertaking.

Not long ago I took part in a forum on women's specific transport needs with regards to Local Transport Plans. Like it or not, it is still the case that women often have different transport needs to men, and problems arise when operators do not see this.

For instance, season tickets are good value for money if they are used by a full-time worker, so part-time workers, the vast majority of whom are women, miss out on the discount.

A system where 20 tickets for the price of 15 can be bought, for example, with expiry lengths suitable for part-time workers as well as other travellers, would be an improvement.

Timetabling services that suit out-of-hours workers would also especially benefit women workers, such as early-morning and late-evening serv-

ices for nurses and domestic staff. RDS needs to get the voice of rail heard in the multi-modal studies that are taking place around the country. These are studies by the Government to see what would be the best solution to particular transport problems, without assuming that the only solution is to build another road. We will be producing support materials for RDS branches and committees to get us more involved in these studies, as it seems that rail interests are not always currently well represented.

But the bigger question is: what is the Labour Government's real transport policy as a whole? Are social inclusion and sensible environmental protection important to it?

Is Labour really serious about public transport and other sustainable ways of getting around? And even if so, how large a part will rail play in Labours plans? Be assured that the RDS will be keeping tabs.

This way to a better station

The importance of adequate signs was one of the initial findings of the RDS access to stations survey. Other areas needing attention are disabled access, local maps, information on buses and cycle storage. Some found that, even on unstaffed stations, operators are not providing proper information about their services. The passenger committee is collating the information and may draw up a code of good practice for operators. Thanks to all those who took part. Branches may wish to send their own results to their train operators and rail users consultative committees.