

WESTMINSTER WATCH

Ten Year Plan

The Government's Ten-Year Plan for Transport was introduced to the Commons on 20 July. Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott said transport was a subject that has been close to his heart for all his working life in and out of Parliament.

"However, for decades it has been in decline – dogged by stop-go funding and a short-term approach," he said.

"The number of rail passengers has increased by 17% and rail freight by 22% since the general election. Transport is now a growth industry, and many of the problems that it faces are of expansion – not of decline.

"Today's 10-year programme is based on long-term investment by Government and industry to modernise the country's transport system.

On Tuesday, the Chancellor announced that, over the next three years, public spending on transport will rise from £5 billion to more than £9 billion. Real-terms capital investment will double.

"There is now a broad consensus about what is needed to reduce congestion and to provide a bigger, better and safer railway and a real choice in public transport. With public investment keeping pace with economic growth after the year 2004, total spending over the 10 years – public and private – will now be £180 billion.

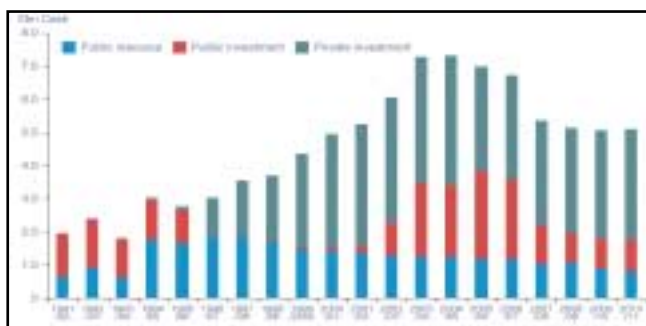
"£132 billion of that – almost three quarters – will come from the public purse. This is not all new money, but even if we maintained this year's spending as the norm, that means over £50 billion of extra public expenditure.

"Capital investment by Government and industry together will be 75% more in real terms than over the last decade.

Growth

"But let me make it absolutely clear. If we put in public money, we expect rail and bus companies – and local authorities – to deliver the goods: more investment and better services for the travelling public, on budget and on time.

"The policy that we inherited on the railways planned for decline and reduced public support. "Our programme includes £60 billion for a big-



This is how the 10-year plan sees spending on rail

ger, better and safer railway – the biggest investment in railways for generations.

"We shall deliver better quality for the travelling public, lower regulated fares, 50% more passengers and 80% more rail freight, and a new Strategic Rail Authority with a new rail modernisation fund of £7 billion to help deliver these goals.

"So we shall deliver a railway system that is better for the passengers, better for freight, better for the economy and better for the environment – win, win, win and win again.

"Light rail can transform our cities. Manchester and other cities have shown what a difference it can make. So we are going to provide resources for up to 25 new light rail projects in our major cities.

London

"In London, our great capital city, we inherited a creaking transport system, congested roads and overcrowded trains – I do not think that anyone disputes that.

"We have already made major investments in the capital, with the Jubilee line, Docklands Light Railway extension and other projects. Over the next 10 years, our programme provides £25 billion to support the London transport strategy, with better buses, less crowded trains and less congestion on the roads.

"We have made provision for new links; an orbital London railway and longer-term projects such as the new east-west rail link and east Thames crossings.

"However, we need also to make better use of our existing road network. We have already set up studies into our busiest transport corridors to find solutions that will involve all types of transport in the multi-modal studies. The first

conclusions will emerge over the next few months, and we are providing the resources to implement the results. The programme includes £21 billion for the strategic road network.

"This is enough to widen 360 miles of the most congested roads, such as the A1 and the M6, and to invest in "electronic motorways" to manage traffic better and to keep drivers better informed.

"There will be 100 new bypasses to take traffic out of hard-pressed villages and towns, schemes to tackle congestion and safety hotspots and low-noise surfaces on 60% of the trunk road network, including all concrete roads.

"We will ensure the installation of train protection systems, as recommended by Sir David Davies. I have stressed repeatedly that we will not pre-empt Lord Cullen's inquiry.

"I give a categorical assurance that the plan will deliver any further measures arising from Lord Cullen's inquiry. Safety will always be first in my priorities.

"The Opposition has plans only to cut public spending. It has no plans to cut congestion. The public will ask them to declare where they would make cuts in our programme. A Labour Government is working with business to deliver the long-term investment that is needed to rebuild our infrastructure, cut congestion, improve public transport and give people greater choice.

"New roads and railways are not built overnight. However, with sustained government investment and the backing of industry, we shall make year-on-year improvements to get the job done.

"The plan will get Britain moving and give the people of

this country a transport system on which they can rely. "The British people have waited decades for a long-term approach such as this. It is what they deserve, and I commend it to the House." Answering a question from Don Foster (Lib Dem Bath), Mr Prescott said: "There are to be 50 rural and 50 urban bypasses, making a total of 100." But he added: "Two thirds of the money that I have announced will go towards improving public transport."

Dunstable

Mr Prescott failed to give any encouragement to Sir David Madel (Con SW Bedfordshire) when he pointed out the importance of reopening the Luton-Dunstable rail line. Mr Prescott responded by talking about road bypasses.

Light rail

Asked about light rail by Syd Rapson (Lab Portsmouth N), Mr Prescott admitted he had been critical of light railways compared with buses.

He added: "I have since been converted. I considered the facts and although they are more expensive – which was my criticism – more people would prefer to use a light railway than a bus.

"I confess to a change of view. What is wrong with that?"

Ivanhoe Line

Answering a question from Mark Todd (Lab Derbyshire S) about the problems which have held up the Ivanhoe line, Mr Prescott said: "I am more interested at this stage in the expansion of the railway system than in arguing about the contract."

Road lobby

As the debate came to a close, Ms Rosie Winterton (Lab Doncaster Central) said: "As a member of the RAC's public policy committee, may I assure Mr Prescott that the RAC, as well as the AA, has warmly welcomed today's announcement, and especially the extra resources for road maintenance, bypasses and motorway widening. Will he assure me that he will continue to consult those organisations, so motorists' views and priorities can be taken into account in the implemen-