

Railwatch

AN INDEPENDENT VOICE FOR RAIL USERS

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A golden opportunity

The European Union is counting on rail to play a far larger role.

It aims to create a revitalised railway which will operate efficiently as a European-wide network.

As a first step, it aims to fill the gaps in the trans-European high-speed passenger rail network, including building connections to airports.

It will support rail building plans which have a "genuine potential" for transferring goods from road to rail, bearing in mind the "historical imbalance in favour of road for the past 50 years".

After years of studies into the costs of various modes of transport, rail has at last been recognised in Brussels as environmentally friendly and paying more into society than it takes out.

This is in contrast to the enormous costs inflicted on taxpayers and society in general by road transport.

The European Commission is also keen to make all transport modes better integrated with each other, planning to spend £18.5million on the Marco Polo programme to promote inter-modal traffic.

And the commission has ruled that 10,000 km of the rail network needs work to remove "bottlenecks". Publishing its white paper *European Transport Policy for 2010: Time to Decide*, the commission calls for infrastructure and "external" costs to be paid by transport users. That could lead to motorway tolls paying for a new rail link.

The commission is planning a financial directive next year to establish the principles of infrastructure charging and a pricing structure for all modes with a common methodology. Railfuture's long-running cam-



Coming soon to a line near you? European railways may soon be able to run trains into Britain. This French electric locomotive runs on 1.5kV, 3kV (as used in Belgium and Italy) and 25kV (as used in parts of Britain). It already works between Calais and Italy, picking up Channel Tunnel freight hauled between Calais and Willesden by British locomotives

Picture: Romain Viellard

paign for a level playing field in transport could be realised although the time scales seem long.

The Rail Freight Group is pleased by the "welcome boost to rail freight" given by the white paper.

"We welcome the commitment by the railway administrations to creating a totally integrated European railway system by 2020," said RFG chairman Lord Berkeley. The EU - where only 8% of freight is on rail - wants to emulate America where 40% of

total freight goes by rail. 30,000 miles of the national rail networks will be opened up to regulated competition for international freight by 2003. By 2008 the entire 93,000-mile European rail freight network should be open.

The EU wants to see trains run through borders with train drivers able to drive anywhere on the trans-European network.

It also wants locomotives of the future that can pull a 16-coach passenger train at 125mph up a one in 40 incline or a 2,000 tonne

freight train at 50mph up a one in 11 incline. They will also have to operate under different signalling systems and a European standard - the ERTMS - is being developed.

The commission has drafted a directive on "interoperability of the trans-European rail system".

The four industry associations - UNIFE, UITP, UIC and CER - signed an accord on interoperability in June.

In Britain the Channel Tunnel rail link, the East and West Coast main lines and the Great Western main line are officially part of the European high-speed network.

The first passenger services to be opened up to competition will be international services where there is currently a monopoly. The EU wants to improve energy efficiency by 50% and reduce pollutants by 50% and to see compatible ticketing and reservation computer systems.

Railfuture has held a series of meetings with key people in Brussels over the years, helping to keep our own government aware of developments in Europe and to ensure that Euro money is made avail-

able for British rail schemes. In the latest meeting, Trevor Garrod joined other European passenger organisations to meet EU officials in October. Another meeting was planned for November.

A whole series of deeply ingrained problems with transport are identified by the European Commission.

One of the biggest issues is the appalling death toll on the roads. Over 41,000 people were killed on Europe's roads last year.