

Regional rail rebirth

Britain lags behind other European countries in involving regional authorities in rail planning and provision.

Only London and the areas which have passenger transport authorities enjoy the advantages of a regional approach to public transport, by integrating local public transport planning with their wider transport, economic, environmental and social policies.

Regional authorities can give a proper level of commitment and attention to detail to local services by contrast to large transport operators which prefer to focus on major routes.

Regionalisation of local transport is proving successful in Europe.

In France regionalisation of local rail services began in 1997 with seven regions with the aim of all 20 regions (bar Corsica and Paris) to be implemented by January 2002.

Services have so far been provided by SNCF under contract to the regions (which receive the proportion of rail funding formally paid direct by government to SNCF).

There is also an incentive scheme with bonuses payable if quality targets are reached.

Ridership is up 12.4% between 1996 and 1999 in the pilot regions (compared with less than 7% in the other regions). Revenue was also up 12% matching a 12% increase in services (compared with 6% passenger growth in the other regions).

The seven regional authorities also invested £600million in new and refurbished rolling stock.

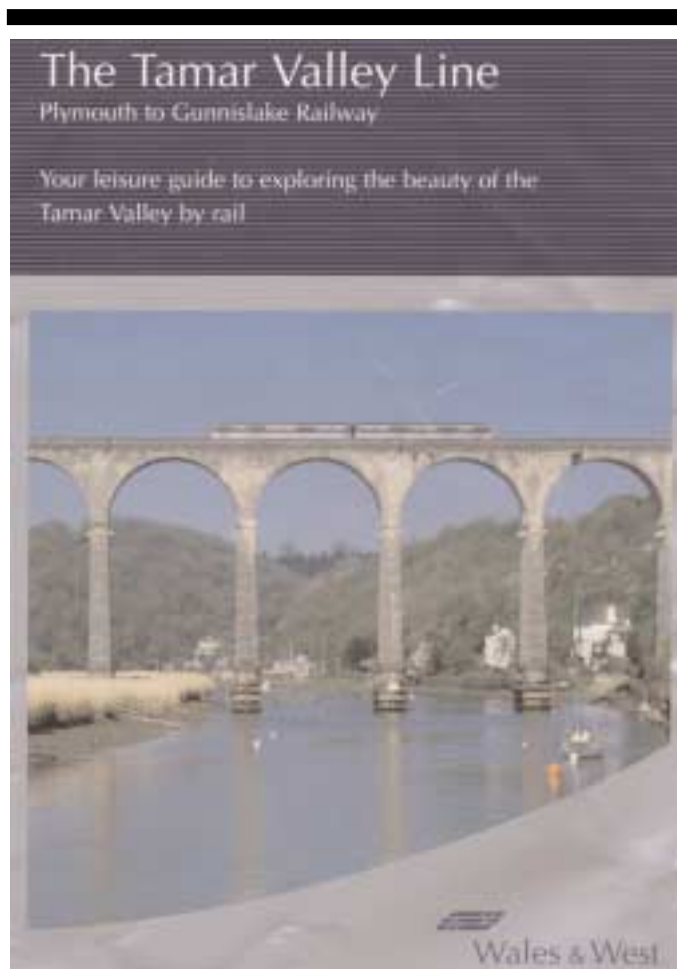
In Germany regionalisation is also progressing rapidly bringing many benefits in its wake. By May 2000 3,500 kilometres of regional lines had been transferred from the state railway (DB) to the local sector.

By January 1999 there were 165 independent operators.

Some of these are not-for-profit companies owned by regional and local authorities, others are commercial companies which operate services on a franchise basis.

The main catalyst for change has been a Regionalisation Act which transferred responsibility for local public transport from the German Federal Government to the Landers (regional authorities).

Funding was also transferred with over £450million of federal



The beautiful Calstock viaduct over the River Tamar is one of the attractions of the line from Plymouth to Gunnislake and features on the leaflet publicising it.

The line now has a Sunday service and the Strategic Rail Authority has granted £75,000 to improve stations on the line. But too often penny-pinching and lack of management commitment bedevils branch lines.

Rural areas have not always done very well in the public transport stakes, and most rural dwellers are more highly dependent on the car than other sections of the population.

Small schemes can often make a considerable improvement to the quality of life in these areas but there is often a lack of awareness of what can be done and the lack of funding for such schemes.

Now the Countryside Agency is stepping in to make money available for some of these schemes. It has produced a booklet to enable groups to get advice on producing plans for implementation, giving examples of good practice with schemes that have been implemented. The booklet is called *Great Ways to Go* and is available from Countryside Agency Publications, PO Box 125, Wetherby, West Yorkshire LS23 7EP.

Also available is their publication *Countryside Focus* which is published bi-monthly. The Countryside Agency headquarters are at John Dower House, Crescent Place, Cheltenham GL50 3RH. Transport matters are dealt with from Dacre House, Dacre Street, London SW1H 0DH.

See also their website at www.countryside.gov.uk

cash passed to the Landers to plan and fund regional public transport. A proportion of petrol duty is also paid to the Landers by the federal government to provide capital grants for

improvements to local public transport systems. In Rhineland-Palatinate, train services have increased by 40%, passenger numbers are up 80% and revenue is up 20%. Six for-

merly closed lines have now been reopened and modern, high-performance vehicles are in operation.

In Karlsruhe (South West Germany) high quality trams now use a variety of former rail routes (and in some cases share existing heavy rail lines) to access the city streets.

The municipally owned system prices its monthly season tickets to match the cost of a tank of petrol, with a monthly ticket for the core network costing £20 a month.

40% of city centre trips have shifted from car to tram raising public transport's share of those trips to 50%.

In other German towns (like Duren, near Koln) the city authority now runs the local rail and bus service as a joint operation.

In Duren, lines which had been facing closure are now thriving with new trains running at high frequencies. Overall service levels have been doubled, subsidy has fallen by 75% and ridership has increased by 167%.

The best examples of the advantages of regionalisation that we have in the UK are the Passenger Transport Executives which despite their limited powers and resources have generally succeeded in regenerating their local rail networks.

For example, both South and West Yorkshire PTEs doubled the use of their local rail networks in the 1980s.

The PTEs have achieved this success through investing in new routes and stations, effective marketing, fares initiatives, new trains and integration with other modes.

As the Association of Community Rail Partnerships points out, rail could play a greater role in helping poor people if fares were lower and bus services connected with trains at rural transport hubs.

It quotes local residents railcards as a way to achieve this. The Highland railcard gives a 50% reduction, while a similar scheme gives residents a third off fares in the Esk Valley. The Cornish railcard also gives residents a third off rail fares.

Key stations need to be developed where there is a welcoming attitude with helpful staff, good waiting facilities, real-time information and easy access to the train.

"Rail can do much to tackle social exclusion," says ACORP's