

WESTMINSTER WATCH

Light rail

The idea of a light rail link from Bletchley, alongside the West Coast main line to Leighton Buzzard, across to Dunstable and thence to Luton and Hatfield should be considered by the London to South Midlands multi-modal study, Transport Minister David Jamieson told the Commons on 20 November.

He was replying to a debate in which Kelvin Hopkins, Labour MP for Luton North, suggested that the Luton-Dunstable line could accommodate a light rail link and a busway.

He said the multi-modal studies highlighted the need for "the development of Translink, the dedicated public transport corridor from Dunstable and Houghton Regis that passes through Luton to the airport and other areas of employment on the south side of the town."

He added: "Sadly, local authorities have been deeply divided about the form of transport that should operate on the corridor. Luton borough council has proposed a guided busway, while South Bedfordshire council prefers a rail option.

"Heavy rail would be an inefficient and inappropriate use of the corridor, and I support the development of guided buses.

"The Translink corridor is too valuable simply for local bus traffic. That is why I have proposed that a light railway or tramway be built along the whole length of the old single-track rail line from Bletchley through the Translink corridor in Luton and onwards to conurbations further east.

"I have spoken to a number of transport engineers, who say that it is feasible to combine a tramway and a guided busway on one corridor. With a tramway and a busway, the Translink corridor would be more easily financed and of immensely greater economic benefit to our sub region.

"It should be extended from Bletchley to the centre of Milton Keynes, and follow the old single-track railway line all the way to the conurbation of Welwyn and Hatfield.

"A significant advantage of a light railway scheme is that the corridor would permit two-way trams but only a single-track heavy rail service." The East-



West rail link was raised on the same day by Patrick Hall, Labour MP for Bedford.

He said: "The aim of the project is to establish a modern rail route that connects Ipswich and Norwich through Cambridge, Bedford and Milton Keynes to Oxford and the west country. Much of that link requires existing track to be upgraded, and some of it, including a section east of Bedford and parts of the Bletchley-to-Oxford stretch, requires re-railing on former track bed.

"The project is being promoted by a consortium—the East West Rail Consortium—that comprises 36 members, most of which are local authorities.

"I fully support the east-west rail link. It will be good for my constituency, and I want it

implemented as soon as possible. The route will serve the heart of Bedford.

"It will re-open the service to the east, which British Rail closed in the early 1960s, and modernise the badly neglected cross-country service west to Bletchley.

"A rail passenger partnership joint bid to the Strategic Rail Authority for improved services eastwards of Cambridge was made earlier in the year by the consortium and Anglia Railways.

"It was surprisingly successful, winning £10million for improved services and new trains, which will come into service in about 18 months' time. The problem is the western section; two years' hard work in research and discussion led to the consortium, on

the advice of the SRA, making a much-reduced bid, a concept that the SRA eventually rejected on the grounds that it was not ambitious enough.

"However, the revenue schemes associated with a smaller project were not sufficient to deliver the correct cost-benefit ratios to pay for the longer-term capital investment.

"The fact that a scheme was advanced on the advice of the SRA, which said, effectively, that that advice was not correct, has filled many associated with the project with anxiety about how to deal with the matter through the SRA in future.

"I hope that I am wrong, but it seems that although the SRA can handle simple projects involving a single franchise and train operating company, such as the successful and welcome scheme east of Cambridge, it has problems thinking strategically about more difficult concepts.

"Strategic thinking is all about looking ahead and investing for greater gain in the longer term, rather than short-term revenue, budget-led ways of looking at things."

Tom Brake, the Lib Dem MP for Carshalton and Wallington reminded the Government: "If we wish to see more people using the rail network, we must improve train speed.

"I hope that many lines will be reopened.

"I hope that the Minister will confirm that rail schemes are not disadvantaged when decisions are taken on the promotion of such schemes as opposed to road schemes, which seem regularly to get the go-ahead".

Malcolm Moss Conservative MP for NE Cambs, also reminded the Government of the importance of electrification.

He said: "Many of the important and strategic rail links in the region are not yet electrified. The section from Peterborough to March in my constituency and on to Ely and Cambridge is a priority. It is difficult to link the various services; for instance, the trains that serve Stansted airport and Liverpool cannot be electric-powered because of the gap in electrification."

Curb speeding cars

Fifty MPs have called for new technology to be used to prevent car drivers exceeding the speed limit.

They reckon that the number of deaths on Britain's roads could be cut by 60% if the Intelligent Speed Adaptation is introduced.

In early day motion 521, David Kidney, Labour MP for Stafford, highlighted recent research on the subject at Leeds University Institute.

The motion welcomes the decision by the Department of Transport Local Government and the Regions to fund further on-road research and says ISA "offers a once in a lifetime opportunity to achieve advances in road safety". It urges car manufacturers and fleet operators to offer ISA to customers on a voluntary basis to show their commitment to reducing the numbers killed and injured on our roads.

The following MPs signed the motion:

Tom Brake, Peter Bottomley, Janet Dean, Valerie Davey, David Wright, Brian Iddon, Kelvin Hopkins, Bob Russell, Tony Colman, Lynne Jones, Andrew George, Win Griffiths, David Borrow, Paul Tyler, Vincent Cable, Frank Cook, Mike Hancock, Betty Williams, Ian Gibson, Martin Caton, Terry Davis, Jim Knight, Jenny Tonge, Ann Cryer, John Barrett, Russell Brown, David Drew, Julia Drown, Harold Best, Alex Salmond, Paul Truswell, Joan Walley, Martin Salter, Nigel Jones, Mark Lazarowicz, Jim Dobbin, Brian White, Bill Etherington, John McDonnell, Paul Flynn, Rudi Vis, Alan Simpson, Eric Illsley, Paul Holmes, Jim Marshall, Hugh Bayley, Keith Vaz, Adam Price and David Crausby.