



Picture: URBAN EXPOSURE

Departing for the future

The last train to Derby left from London's St Pancras station on Good Friday at 23.40.

When the station reopens with six platforms in three years time, it will be for Eurostars from Paris and Brussels.

A new station for Midland Mainline trains opened on Easter Monday in a modern flat-roofed temporary station adjoining the historic arched roof of St Pancras.

Two other new stations will be completed by then so that St Pancras will also be able to deal with Thameslink and new high-speed services from Kent.

Although these are all highly promising developments for the future of rail in Britain and Europe, short-term attitudes are still alive in official circles.

Ten years after the opening of the Channel Tunnel, Eurostar is still charging too much for its tickets and failing to recognise the value of integrating with the European rail network.

"Strategic" officials have also let it be known that to pay for Kent's new high-speed services, there will have to be cutbacks on the existing network. This is no time to be thinking of rail cutbacks.

With road traffic at impossible levels, and pollution blighting the "garden of England" the humble rural stations earmarked for cuts should rather be prized as fantastic assets for the future.

Kent survived the Beeching cuts with a good rail network. It would be a tragic irony if those assets were wasted now, especially when rural road traffic is increasing by 3% per annum.

Kent County Council has rightly demanded that more investment is needed in Kent's railways to make them fit for the 21st century, especially because large numbers of new homes are being built in the county.

Railfuture's Kent division has protested to the Strategic Rail Authority about neglect of the system and the extraordinary suggestions being made on dubious and misleading evidence.

A miserly attitude also threatens to undermine the great steps forward over the past few years in building light rail systems around Britain.

The National Audit Office complains that money has been wasted. Maybe. But the new light rail systems have brought blessed relief in a few areas from the curse

of traffic congestion.

In some areas, it is possible to believe that a reasonable quality of life could return to some of the towns and cities ruined by the anarchic rule of badly behaved drivers.

Many drivers believe they do not have to abide by the law, routinely exceeding speed limits and trying to undermine enforcement cameras, let alone behave with "reasonable consideration to other road users" as required of them in the Highway Code.

Rail and light rail is the first choice for public transport users. The Government and local councils should wake up the facts, find the resources to provide quality public transport and stop talking about people's "love affair with the car".

Only misguided people are in love with their cars. We must not pander to them.

Despite routinely being lectured on the dangers of driving over the speed limit, 60% of car drivers and 50% of lorry drivers routinely break the 30mph limit in towns.

These are just the kind of areas where children, cyclists and old people are most at risk. In both

Luton and Cambridge, misleading information is being circulated in an attempt to justify converting rail lines into busways. How stupid.

Yet more than 80% of London's most influential business leaders are prepared to pay part of the £10billion cost of the capital's planned Crossrail.

The Government though is still dithering about providing a scheme which should have been started at least 10 years ago. It has however provided money for busways.

For more than 40 years successive governments have defied the will of the people who call for freight traffic to be diverted from road to rail. Last year, according to the Government's own figures, freight on the roads increased again by 1.3%

The Post Office is the latest organisation which has been allowed to switch traffic from rail to road. Normal Post Office service has since collapsed, with a large percentage of mail to the *Railwatch* address going missing. We have, as a result, dropped the image of a mail train on our letters page!