

Your letters



Enough is enough

I am writing to regretfully tender my resignation from the *Railwatch* editorial board.

I have been involved in campaigning for railways since joining SRUB-LUK (Society for the Reinvigoration of Unremunerative Branch Lines of the United Kingdom – a nice catchy title) at school in the 1950s.

It has been an uphill battle nearly all the way and as I approach my 70th birthday I feel enough is enough.

With the effects of climate change becoming more apparent by the day and our cities drowning in a sea of motor vehicles, it seems incredible that our Government can take seriously a report advocating among other things the building of another 2,000 miles of motorway lanes and baldly stating that urban road building can provide “one of the best returns on capital in the transport field”.

Government policy can be summed up by: predict and provide for roads and airports; predict and price-off for railways.

Any policy sensibly meeting the challenge of future transport needs in this country would at the least have a rolling programme of electrification of our railways, provision of electric tramways and light rail for our large urban areas, a halt to the mindless expansion of air traffic and immediate steps to encourage traffic reduction.

I see no sign that any of these policies will be adopted until it is too late and we are being held to ransom by the oil-producing nations.

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Editors' note: Michael has been a tower of strength for *Railwatch*. He has agreed to contribute articles for future issues.

The real facts

I read the the “Face the Facts” letter (*Railwatch* 110) with interest. National statistics of road traffic should be treated with caution.

When researching for my book (reviewed in your January edition), I contacted the Department for Transport to ascertain the precise methodology used to establish the volume of freight and passengers conveyed by road transport.

The method used exaggerates the volume. Hence any comparison with rail is untenable, even before excluding passenger journeys and “freight traffic” (such as domestic and local deliveries) which do not compete with rail. 73% of car journeys are less than five miles, 47% are less than two miles.

The facts are set out in my book, showing the effect of the DfT methodology.

In their defence, I can see that obtaining 100% accurate statistics would be costly for the DfT and operators, who would be unlikely to finance compilation. Until that happens, comparisons are dangerous.

*E A Gibbins, 11 Bedford Grove,
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Parkway perils

Cheltenham residents are deeply concerned about possible plans to build a new Parkway station north-east of Gloucester at Elmbridge Court.

ITEC (Integrated Transport at Elmbridge Court) is part of the South West Region's spatial strategy and includes a park and ride, improvement of nearby roundabouts, bus priority measures and a bus link.

It is hard to see this as a rail-focused plan rather than a bit of add-on for motorists. Moreover it will carve into green belt. I believe Warwick is a similar case.

There is so far very little reliable information on which to base a decision like this, and indeed can we place any credence in the projected figure of 172,000 passengers expected to use the new station?

Although Cheltenham is said to be the second biggest revenue generator in the South West it is clear that the train operators will only stop alternately at Cheltenham Spa and Gloucester Parkway stations. Thus Cheltenham's north-south service

will be cut from two to one an hour. We are told the First Great Western services to London via Stroud will not be affected. We'll believe it when we see it.

Cheltenham's worry is that, despite the huge influx of visitors to our several annual festivals (music, literature, racing), our services will eventually tail off – to the point of closure.

So all Cheltenham passengers for London, Bristol and Birmingham will then have to use the already crowded A40 bypass to travel the five miles to the Parkway station.

The argument is that Parkway will alleviate congestion! Whether by car, motorbike, taxi or shuttle bus, those trips to the station represent a huge increase in carbon emissions and make no sense whatever if the Government is serious about tackling climate change.

Despite all this vagueness and worry, Cheltenham Borough Council is going along with the County Council's ITEC bid.

The next step will be “programme entry”, after which Gloucester Parkway will be more or less inevitable because of Government and regional support for the scheme.

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Scottish talk

While I agree with Peter Rayner that in Scotland there is a healthy attitude to a resurgent railway (*Railwatch* 110), there has been more talk than action.

Early in 2003, the local papers splashed a story that the closed section of line between Ardrie and Bathgate was to be rebuilt.

There would be double track, it would be electrified throughout and “services are expected to begin in 2007”.

We now think work will not begin until next year as the project is still making its way through the Scottish Parliament.

We are still waiting for an announcement that promised work will begin this year to double track most of the section of line between Bathgate and Edinburgh. This was reopened in 1986 as mainly single track. Perhaps we will receive it just before the Scottish parliamentary elections on 3 May.

In the meantime we have First ScotRail getting away with terminating many trains at Livingston North for “operational reasons”.

Other projects such as a poor single track “Waverley route”, ending at Tweedbank instead of going all the way through to Carlisle, are still waiting.

The Scottish Executive has managed to reopen Hamilton to Larkhall Central and it is electrified. But it's

only two or three miles long and single track. Big deal!

*Jim Howison, 54 Whiteside, Bathgate,
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Reopening action

I was surprised to read the claim in *Railwatch* 110 that Skipton-Colne would be the first reopening since the Robin Hood Line in 1998.

Have you not heard of the Larkhall-Milngavie project completed December 2005 which reinstated 6.3km of disused line with four new stations?

*John Yellowlees, External Relations
Manager, First ScotRail*

Train failure

The article by Julian Langston about his journey to Toulouse in January's *Railwatch* prompts me to write with my experience.

I wished to travel to Pescara in the Abruzzo area of Italy in November 2006. In September I borrowed a two-year-old Thomas Cook European timetable and found that such a journey could be made by rail from London via Lille, Dijon, Milan and Bologna to Pescara.

I then visited my local Thomas Cook outlet in Stamford to enquire about making the booking. I was told that they could not book Eurostar. If I purchased my Eurostar ticket elsewhere then they would see if they could book the rest of the journey.

This sounded pretty hopeless so I booked on-line to travel by Ryanair from Stansted to Pescara instead – quick, easy and cheap, though not as environmentally friendly as I would have wished.

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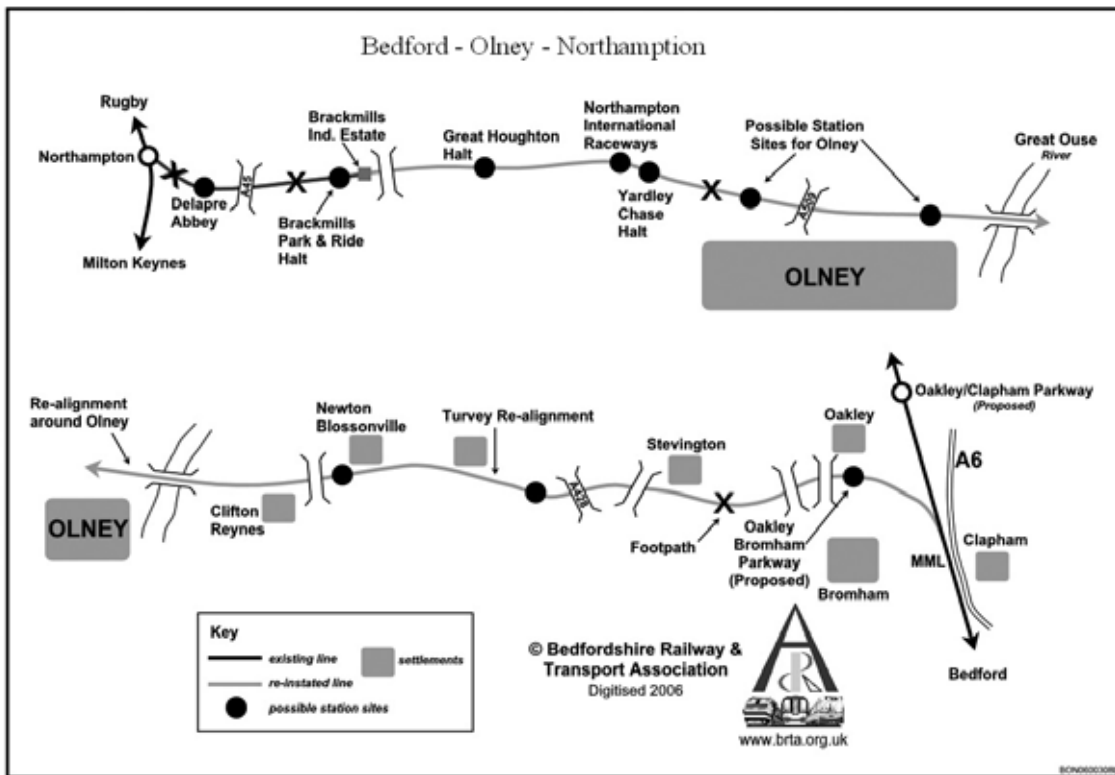
Buses cut too

Can I ask Peter Rayner (*Railwatch* 110) and others not to describe the Department for Transport, or Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire and Luton councils, as “pro-bus”. They may be splashing out £200million or so on guided busways, but that doesn't mean that buses in these areas are thriving.

As I write Cambridgeshire County Council has recently closed a consultation on a series of bus contracts which might be axed. Bedfordshire has just announced its inability to provide a full replacement to services which are being axed by Stagecoach.

And last year Luton Borough Council was able to finance concessionary travel for pensioners only by axing several contracted services.

And the Government, while it seems to be willing to spend hundreds of millions on guided busways for these three local transport authorities, has consistently failed to underwrite the much smaller sums needed to provide a stable financial



The route of the former Bedford-Northampton line which, if rebuilt, would link two electrified main lines. See letter below 'Petition clarity'

framework for local bus services, in these areas or elsewhere.

As a result, there are several areas where people wishing to take a day trip to London during the week will have to choose between returning early, using a slow train to get round the new restrictions on One Day travelcards imposed by First Capital Connect, or forking out for a taxi because by the time the first post-peak train has got to their local railhead the last bus will have gone.

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Editors' note: Peter Rayner did not say the councils were pro-bus. But he did accuse the Government of letting the railways down and the DfT of being so pro-bus it could be called the Department for Buses.

Petition clarity

I spoke at the council planning meeting which approved the application for a lake for rowing training on the route of the former Bedford-Sandy railway.

I can confirm that the petitions against the lake and in favour of reopening the rail line were presented to the meeting and I would like to express my thanks to everyone who signed them

I personally pointed out that it was a choice between the lake in the proposed location or a rail route serving Bedford.

The members chose a rowing lake which will not be used in any Olympic event.

An outer rail route will not directly serve Bedford. The members chose a hole full of water rather than a sustainable railway. At least all is not lost in terms of rails to Bedford. The route from Northampton is

viable and being supported at the northern end. All we can do now is to get Bedford to support it as well.

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Coaches

Standing at a bus stop, I was surprised to see people waiting for the National Express coach from Grimsby to London. After all the journey takes almost six hours, twice as long as its rail equivalent, despite a change at either Doncaster or Newark.

Then I realised it was probably the fact that they would have to change, as all were carrying luggage. So if rail companies want to compete for the same market, more through trains really do have to be provided.

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Station names

I was intrigued by the item on White City in the London and South East branch report in *Railwatch* 110. I maintain a keen interest in rail in the the metropolis, in which I lived until some 20 years ago.

It has long struck me that several stations on the Underground network are misnamed or less than

ideally named. For example: Bond Street, which is nowhere near that street. Couldn't it be renamed Mayfair? And Tottenham Court Road is a mouthful of a name and there are two other stations in that street. Why not Centre Point?

Down south there's South Wimbledon, which is actually at Merton. If it needs to be distinguished from nearby Merton Park and South Merton, call it Merton Cross or Merton Central.

Shepherds Bush and White City stations are certainly confusing to a stranger. Both Central and Hammersmith and Metropolitan lines have separate stations of both names, some distance apart.

The lines actually intersect near the White City stations, so the ideal solution would surely be to relocate White City Metropolitan adjacent to White City Central, with proper interchange, and retain the common name.

If the Metropolitan station is rebuilt in situ, and the name cannot be shared, then surely it is this one that should take the name Wood Lane and the Central line station that should retain the White City name?

Just next door at Shepherds Bush, the two stations are even further apart yet share the same name. Again I think the Central line has the stronger claim to the name, not least because it is now shared with the West London line.

The Metropolitan station could become either Shepherds Bush West or Uxbridge Road. I prefer the second, as it matches next stop Goldhawk Road. To those who fear confusion with Uxbridge, I say: Does anyone confuse Edgware Road with Edgware? Of course not. The problem is not confined to the

Underground. I hesitate to question the names of mainline termini, but someone once pointed out the similarity of Liverpool Street and Liverpool Lime Street especially to foreign visitors newly arrived at Stansted airport!

That apart, I earnestly hope that Eurostar can yet find a more suitable name for their parkway on the M25 than Ebbsfleet.

Even Dartford International fails to excite. Ashford, Dartford, Stratford - a pattern seems to emerge. Eastern Gateway, Thames Gateway, North Kent International Parkway are possibilities.

Presumably Gravesend or Gravelsham International is ruled out by civic sensibilities, despite that town being considerably closer than Dartford, on whose territory the station is actually sited.

Mike Crowhurst, 33 Station Court,
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Rail is the winner

I was heartened by Philip Bisatt's letter (*Railwatch* 110) drawing attention to the greater energy efficiency of rail transport compared with road. It seems to me that the point is not put with sufficient vigour by rail supporters.

The Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution Report on Transport and the Environment (HMSO, 1994) stated that road transport used about 4.3 times as much energy to move a given load a given distance as rail.

When manpower is considered the advantage of rail is even more dramatic, as one train can carry around 1,000 tonnes of cargo, while it would take at least 20 lorries to move this amount - a ratio of 20:1 in favour of rail.

How the road lobby can get away for so long with the claim that road transport is over-taxed compared with rail beggars understanding.

If this were so, the burden of taxation together with the increased consumption of energy and manpower would make road transport prices to the customer far greater than rail, whereas in fact road hauliers can usually undercut rail and thus capture the lion's share of the traffic.

These figures relate to freight. With passengers, the figures are more difficult to analyse and are in general less favourable to rail.

Road transport is under-taxed, which has the effect of giving a subsidy to the more costly, more polluting and more dangerous form of freight transport.

I also enjoyed reading about author E A Gibbins's expose of the poor case made by the Railway Conversion League (once rightly called the Flat-earthers!) and its revival under the name Transport Watch.

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Editors' note: The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect Railfuture policies.



Your letters extra

Connections

Thanks for another thought-provoking issue (*Railwatch* 110) from whose various strands I felt the seeds of a new area for development emerging.

Rail may only carry 6% of the UK's traffic (Philip Bisatt - letters) but is that calculated fairly?

One cannot travel by rail from Ilkeston, Bude or Launceston to anywhere in England by rail. One may travel to a restricted list of places on Sunday, to very few at night, and nowhere at all on Christmas Day!

Many "out" journeys can't be done by rail because the return can't be done by rail. Is it possible to estimate the true comparison - the percentage of rail transport measured against those flows where rail is a real option? I think it may be a much larger figure than most people, including transport world people, might expect!

The other - positive - side of this coin is to work to increase the number of possible journeys by rail; re-openings and new line building on a grand scale seem to be out of the picture for the moment, thanks to the Eddington report, but what about improving connections?

This is quite a complicated issue and one which I feel is being ignored by the rail industry at present. But if, as I suspect, rail is currently attracting a large percentage of "direct" travellers, future growth has to come from increasing journey opportunities involving connections.

At present as many as 14% of travellers combine bus and rail to get where they need to go. This is amazing considering how difficult this usually is, but consider the possible growth

here if it was actually made easy! Making it easy would involve more communication between operators - and between the apparently separate rail and bus arms of Stagecoach, NatEx, First, and Go-Ahead.

There would have to be more thought in the time-tabling process, more late night and Sunday journeys as well as more and better information, a better waiting environment and more staff at stations.

A big change in attitude is required from companies about holding trains and buses for connections. Many seem unaware that dispatching one train just as another arrives sends a really terrible message, to all the passengers on both trains and all those waiting.

It says: "Don't bother to try to make a journey involving a connection - we won't help you." In the narrow pursuit of absolute timing perfection, a whole new market is being lost!

There also needs to be a better way to share the income from journeys involving connections. Each of the "mere" 14% of passengers who pay £1 bus fares to get to the rail station may actually be spending £30 on the whole journey.

Naturally the bus operator isn't going to give this market much priority, but it is in the rail operator's interest that he does - so the rail operators need to show a greater concern in this area, rather than just extending car parks.

Entire journeys may be made by car because, although an outward journey is possible by bus and train, and there is a return train at the right time, there is no late night bus home from the station. So how about sponsoring that last bus?

Architects need to design new



GREEN TRANSPORT: A floral display celebrating 150 years of the Great Western at Henley-on-Thames

Picture: Laurence Fryer

stations with a view to quick and easy interchanges. On Thameslink how about replacing the Bermondsey overpass with a really imaginative high level station at London Bridge, gracefully curving over the South Eastern through platforms and giving direct access to all of them from Thameslink, or as it now First Capital Connect?

Some small construction work would be needed to get rid of the obstacle courses which afflict many stations at present. Perhaps extra footbridges and walkways could be installed to give connecting passengers that extra bit of help.

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European tickets

In Julian Langston's excellent report *Fast Trains - slow tickets* (*Railwatch* 110) he writes about the difficulties of buying tickets for a journey in France.

May I say that I have found the SNCF's "ligne direct" service very good in this respect. By calling them on 00 33 8 92 35 35 35 - and ignoring requests to call out certain words or tap numbers - and then tapping 9 you can talk to someone who will arrange to send you your tickets. I have usually received them two days later.

People travelling in groups from two to nine in size are entitled to a reduction of 25% under the "Decouverte a Deux" scheme. Note, though, that this reduction is subject to availability in TGVs and is not valid during white periods on other trains. White periods are usually Monday mornings (05.00 to 10.00) and Friday and Sunday evenings (15.00 to 20.00) but variations occur at public holiday times.

For people over 60 the aforementioned reductions are available too under the "Decouverte Senior" scheme. No railcard is required as

proof of age can be provided by your passport or identity card. For a reduction of 50%, seniors can buy a "Carte Senior" with 12-month validity for 50 euros. The SNCF will send you one of these and you can attach your photograph yourself.

Again in TGV the reduction is subject to availability, and on other trains during white periods you are entitled to a reduction of 25%. The SNCF Senior Railcard comes with "Railplus" allowing a 25% reduction on most cross-border journeys, even if neither country is France.

Travellers in Belgium can book in advance with the SNCF/NMBS. A call to 00 32 2 528 28 28 puts you through to a human being. Your tickets will not be sent to you but you will be given a four-letter code. This, along with the credit card with which you bought your tickets, will enable you to collect them from one of over 100 major stations in Belgium.

For seniors over 65, there's a real bargain to be had. For only four euros, you can buy a return ticket between any two stations. On Mondays to Fridays, this ticket is valid after 09.01, but on Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays, there is no restriction.

No doubt, similar advanced telephone or internet bookings are available in other countries.

In the "old days", at Leeds station and all other major stations, an enthusiastic team of booking staff could supply you with a ticket and lots of expert advice for any rail journey in Europe.

Eric T Smith, 17 Dalton Avenue, Leeds LS11 7NN

Special tactics

Railfuture has organised a number of group visits to mainland Europe by train. I wonder whether it's time to take this principle one step further. If regional Eurostar

UK's poor record on air and global warming

In the UK, there is lots of discussion about global warming but not about the role of rail as a solution. Yet *The Independent's* front page on 3 January was devoted to the choice of rail or air for travel between London and Manchester, giving the amount of CO₂ generated per passenger. The reports inside were also very interesting.

I give here one comparison between the UK and other countries, dealing with the number of internal flights each day each way on comparable routes in the UK and three countries in Europe. I have obtained the best estimates I can of the distances between these cities. They could vary between modes.

Country	City	City	No of Flights	Distance (miles)
Italy	Rome	Naples	4	118
Germany	Berlin	Hamburg	2	158
France	Paris	Lille	0	124
UK	London	Manchester	48	184

The UK example does have a slightly greater separation between the cities. Even allowing for this there is only one message that I can derive from the figures given here - that the rail services in the other three countries are so good that the airlines cannot compete over these distances.

Keith Lucas, New Cross, Aberystwyth SY23 4LY kwl@aber.ac.uk

A breath of air

services are still not introduced post-2007 – and given the attitude embodied in Eurostar's network map I suspect that will be the case – could Railfuture partner with one of the established railtour operators to charter a Regional Eurostar set to provide a train from Manchester to Paris? Hertfordshire Rail Tours (I think) have already been responsible for some charters from London to places south of Paris.

A Manchester to Paris trip in 2009 would coincide with the 110th anniversary of the opening of the Great Central's London extension and would therefore chime with several Railfuture themes – the farsightedness of Edward Watkin, who not only gave us a European-gauge line but also worked for a Channel Tunnel, the short-sightedness of politicians who first closed the GC and now prevaricate on a 21st century high-speed equivalent, the need to exploit the tunnel better and spread its benefits to the whole country, and the need to provide rail alternatives to short-haul flights to the near abroad. If we were really lucky, it might coincide with a general election, providing a timely publicity and campaigning tool.

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Snow line

The Snow Line to Reopen article in *Railwatch* 110 interested me. I hope we will get progress reports.

As well as O S Nock's *World Atlas of Railways*, another book, *Hollingsworth Railways of the World* (ISBN 0 86124 0235), has more information.

The magazine *Steam Railway* also has a photograph of the Kitson rack-adhesion loco of 1909.

Hollingsworth says the line over the Andes was electrified on the Chilean side. Road traffic was allowed on payment of a toll. Trains were infrequent.

I assume that in 1984 Chile and Argentina had bad relations (Chile supported Britain in the Falklands War). A few years ago, relations improved, opening up the possibility of a steam-operated connecting railway in the extreme south.

W J Snasdell, 25 Castle Rise
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Editors' note: There were indeed reports in 2006 that Argentina and Chile had signed an agreement to build a rail line in the southern Andes from Rio Turbio to Puerto Bories.

Send letters to:

The Editors, 4 Christchurch Square, London E9 7HU
Email: editor@railwatch.org.uk

Railwatch also welcomes articles and pictures

Editors' note: The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect Railfuture policies.



NEW LOOK: How North Shields station will look after a £5million modernisation plan which will add an overall roof (there is not one at the moment). The tunnel between North Shields and Tynemouth which dates back to 1847 is also badly in need of maintenance

Picture: Nexus

The Tyne and Wear Metro needs a £600million investment to secure its future for the next 20 years.

The Metro is usually described as Britain's first modern light rail system but many transport "experts" have not learned from its success.

So Metro bosses made sure they spelt out in simple terms how important the Metro is when they asked the Government in January for cash.

They pointed out that without the Metro, an extra 133,000 journeys are forced on to overcrowded roads. There would be 15million more car journeys every year and potential gridlock at many city centre junctions.

Without the Metro, 10,000 fewer people would be able to travel into Newcastle every day – a big blow to city centre shops and businesses.

It is used by 37million passengers a year.

The passenger transport authority has approved the 20-year investment plan drawn up by operator Nexus. PTA chairman David Wood and Nexus director general Bernard Garner took the message to 10 Downing Street.

They warned that without new investment Metro could go into decline and begin to fail by 2018.

Metro was hailed as a world-beater in integrated public transport when it opened in 1980.

The reinvigoration programme would provide new smart-card

ticket machines at all stations, ticket barriers at 14 main stations to control fraud, a £15.7million refurbishment of existing Metrocars and their future replacement with a new generation fleet costing £163million.

More than £63million is to be spent on modernising stations. Signalling, communications, track, bridges and tunnels would be refurbished.

Park-and-ride facilities would be improved and there will be track doubling to South Shields.

The plan aims to ensure the best possible value for passengers and taxpayers, exploiting the best in the public and private sectors.

Mr Garner said: "We're talking £250 million less than the new Wembley stadium for a vital service that benefits more than 37 million passengers a year. We think that's excellent value."

Metro carries 133,000 passengers every weekday – at the lowest public subsidy of any comparable UK urban rail network.

10 million passengers pass through Monument Metro every year, making it one of the busiest rail stations outside the South East.

One third of all households in Tyne and Wear use Metro at some point in their daily routines.

250,000 people live within walking distance of a Metro station.

55,000 students attend Tyne and Wear's three universities – all served by Metro.

One in six shoppers at Eldon Square complex arrives by Metro. As many as 80,000 passengers

travel to and from the Great North Run finish line in South Shields by Metro. Metro was built in the 1970s because local people and politicians recognised the need to ease congestion on the Tyne crossings and other major roads.

Public transport use soared as passengers discovered the benefits of jam-free travel to the heart of the city, easy connection with bus and convenient park-and-ride sites.

The problems Metro was built to ease have got more intense as car use grew. With the debate about climate change, Metro is now more crucial than ever.

Planning policy now favours city centre sites for major new developments, and a new generation is discovering city living. Metro will be at the heart of these new developments from day one:

Nexus will offer a nine-year Metro operation, renewals and maintenance concession with private sector bids measured against a public sector comparator.

Metro reinvigoration is already supported and endorsed by the Association of North East Councils, the North East Chambers of Commerce, the Confederation of British Industry and One North East, as well as Newcastle City Council, Sunderland City Council, Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council, North Tyneside Council and South Tyneside Council.

For more information, see: www.nexus.org.uk

