

Billions to be spent on expansion

£2.4billion rail expansion plans were announced in April by Network Rail. The programme will include the lengthening of hundreds of platforms, speed increases, new tracks and major resignalling.

Chief executive John Armitt said the programme was a response to rising demand for rail travel.

The not-for-profit company admitted many of the projects had been identified before and it involved only about £200million of "new" NR money.

The £2.4billion enhancements will be implemented in the next two years. NR will contribute £1.7billion to the schemes, with the rest coming from the Department for Transport, Transport Scotland, the Welsh Assembly, passenger transport authorities and local authorities.

At £1.2billion a year, the total is more than double the average annual spending on enhancements. Schemes being worked on over the next two years include projects for the 2012 Olympics, on which £109million will be spent by 2009.

Around two-thirds of the £300million Airdrie-Bathgate project – approved by the Scottish Parliament in May – will be completed over the next two years.

Other projects include new platforms at Manchester Airport station and King's Cross in London, as well as £165million worth of new track in the Trent Valley.

Mr Armitt said: "The railway is thriving. Demand for rail continues to grow. Three million people use the railways each day, more than at any time in the past 60 years."

RMT general secretary Bob Crow said it was a good start towards the major work needed to increase rail capacity as a way of getting people out of cars and planes and on to trains.

The Government followed up NR's announcement with the publication in May of a planning assessment for the railways in the South West where there has been recent chaos because of cutbacks.

Rail Minister Tom Harris launched the rail planning assessment as he opened a new £3million platform at Bristol Parkway. The South West RPA includes Bristol, Plymouth, Bournemouth/Poole, Exeter and Swindon. It looks in general terms at the "challenges and options for development of the railway over the next 20 years".

RPAs covering the Thames Valley, East Midlands, Yorkshire and Humber, and Wales, will be published later this year.

Rail campaigners are hoping for more specific good news when the DfT publishes its long-term rail strategy and high level output specification which will set out the Government's railway spending plans for the period 2009-2014.



CHANCE TO RELAX: Young passengers enjoy the opportunity to talk and read

Picture: Virgin Trains

International ticketing

By Trevor Garrod

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Railfuture branches have been checking on how well – if at all – train operating companies are promoting international ticketing.

First ScotRail did at one stage offer joint ticketing with Eurostar but no longer do so. Nor is there any easily accessible information on their website or station posters.

However, enquiries at one intercity station produced a Eurostar leaflet with train times for Paris and Brussels and a contact number for Eurostar.

A call to the First ScotRail call centre also produced a phone number for Eurostar. This is better than nothing.

A look at some Midland Mainline and Central Trains stations revealed no international information anywhere.

A check in both companies' pocket timetables could not uncover anything either, except for a brief mention of airport links and the need to "allow one hour for cross-London connections".

Inputting "Paris" in MML's website produced "Paisley".

Further searching did, however, produce a hyperlink from MML's website to Eurostar.

A survey of four major First Great Western stations revealed no posters advertising Eurostar

but several advertising air travel to the Continent and to Africa. The travel centre at Bristol Temple Meads was, however, able to produce a leaflet about Eurostar on request.

Virgin Cross Country makes brief reference in its pocket timetables to international services by stating that Euston is the station for onward travel to Waterloo.

The former Anglia Railways published a very useful guide which contained a short section on Eurostar and rail/sea/rail services and where to obtain further information about these.

Its successor ONE published no such guide, but issues timetable leaflets for each service.

None of those which we looked at had any reference to where to obtain international tickets or information.

They do refer customers to National Rail Enquiries, and its website can, with patience, be used to navigate to such information via the National Rail website.

The position is not at all satisfactory but we have been assured by the commercial director of ATOC that discussions are in progress with Eurostar to provide through fares and ticketing, and joint marketing, with several train operating companies from 14 November.

I hope to be able to report details in the next *Railwatch*.

Railfuture policy

Railfuture has produced a policy folder to give short meaty answers to key questions.

It consists of 10 sections with bullet points on such themes as The Case for Rail, Transport Finance, How to gain more Passengers, How to gain more Freight, The Case for Electrification, Easier Journeys, Light Rapid Transit, Reopenings and Route Protection, The Future of Secondary Services and the Role of High Speed Rail.

It is called a Policy Folder because that gives us more flexibility to add new sections or update sections.

For example, if an innovative fares scheme is introduced or a new freight flow is attracted to rail, we can feature it in the relevant section.

If a campaign is successful – or unsuccessful – we may want to add a section on lessons to be learned.

Initially the policy folder can be accessed on our website but you can also receive a paper version by sending a large SAE to Trevor Garrod, 15 Clapham Road South, Lowestoft NR32 1RQ.

Olympics

People from all over Britain should be given the opportunity to travel to the Olympic Games in London in 2012 by train.

A Railfuture AGM resolution urged the Olympic Delivery Authority to ensure rail services are properly promoted and that through fares are reasonable.