

Now rail network is bursting at the seams

Overcrowding on Britain's existing railway was one of the main concerns at Railfuture's London conference in November.

But a series of speakers spelled out to the Government how the railway should be expanded to cope with the new demand for green travel and the problems of oil price and supply.

Green Party leader Caroline Lucas said trains have inspired poets, painters and novelists but they have also had their enemies.

She reminded delegates how 2,000 stations and 250 lines were closed in a process started by the Tories.

Ms Lucas, who is also an MEP, said: "I am a regular user of Eurostar. It's glamorous and also environment friendly."

She recommended lobbying MEPs because the European Parliament was becoming increasingly able to influence transport policy.

Only the European Commission has the power of policy initiatives but, once the proposals are on the table, they get debated by the Parliament which in some cases can become a co-legislator.

She said the third railway package adopted in October last year aims to stimulate competition but she said there was potential for conflict between competition and public service.

But German Railways were interested in running a Koln to London service as rail is becoming more convenient than air and can even be cheaper.

Airlines are losing traffic because of high fuel charges and environmental awareness but some people were wary of high-speed trains because they argue that switching traffic to rail frees up slots at airports and encourages more long distance air travel. But they are less

polluting than air travel which is the most damaging form of transport and Europe has failed completely to address the problem.

She said the emissions trading scheme is the only show in town but will not address the issue.

A new north-south high speed link in Britain would reduce the number of internal flights but she said improving local rail services was more important. Local lines are the blood vessels that make up the body of Britain.

She also called for a legal framework so buses meet trains.

But she added: "This is not really a European problem. It's such a basic issue. It should be provided at local level or national level."

She said MEPs had been crucial in winning the right for rail passengers to transport bikes by train but sadly there is a loophole and the UK lags behind many other European railways on this issue.

Privatisation in Britain has prevented the development of an integrated transport policy.

The Green Party wants the railways returned to public ownership and to provide a public service.

She concluded: "I salute Railfuture. I'm honoured to be a vice president and look forward to working with you in future."

She agreed with delegate Trevor Jones who asked whether the European Union could promote local cross-border services, from for instance Ashford to Calais, answering: "How much real effort is going into that I do not know. It needs to be addressed."

The financial success of Eurostar was highlighted by the next speaker, former BBC correspondent Simon Montague, who is now director of communications



RAIL LINKS NEEDED: ATOC's map of towns without trains

for Eurostar. Eurostar and High Speed 1 have been a great success, a matter of national pride and also boost the economy. The economies of London and Paris have been boosted.

The need for another high-speed line in Britain was explained by Julie Mills of Greengauge 21.

She said the estimated cost is £11 billion and not £30 billion as some people claim, adding: "There is a consensus that high-speed rail is the thing to do. It is an exciting time."

The DfT is already studying whether to go ahead with high-speed rail.

But she said HS2 was not being promoted as an alternative to investing in the existing routes.

Another proponent of high-speed rail Colin Elliff of the 2M organisation said: "Heathrow has to be a part of any new network."

He added: "Government should only be backing transport systems based on environmental best practice. If rail is the best, then the Government should be putting all the resources into rail." He said there would need to be a network so cities other than London can

be linked, particularly by using Woodhead tunnel as a good route into Manchester Piccadilly.

The message of rail as the mode of the future was reinforced by Kelvin Hopkins, Labour MP for Luton North, who called for a publicly owned, integrated system.

He added: "I am a dedicated railway enthusiast. I am delighted to be able to walk to Paris from Luton."

He called for the EuroRail freight project - which can take large containers and lorries on trains - to be given the go-ahead.

He said only 14 miles of new line is required and it would be astonishingly cheap to build, at £4 billion.

There were enormous environmental benefits in switching freight from road to rail.

Chris Green, chairman of the Railway Forum, paid tribute to the punctuality improvements on the railways.

He said running a seven-day railway made projects more expensive, particularly on the West Coast main line. To tackle general overcrowding more 12-car trains were needed, station platforms had to

be lengthened, tracks re-doubled and investment at bottlenecks.

Rugby was being done, Reading was next and then Hitchin would follow.

He added: "Then you have to do what Europe has been doing for the past 60 years, building high-speed lines." It will probably be a German solution, with bits of new lines to straighten out curves and avoid bottlenecks. You need planning permissions and projects ready to put to government.

Rail is ideally placed to deliver more and there should be double tracking of Kemble-Swindon, and Worcester-Oxford.

But the big one must be electrification. It is not in the five year plan but a lot of work has now been done on it.

Mr Green called for an immediate start with the concept of mobile factories with one train making the holes, the next train installing the poles and so on.

There could be four trains constantly on the move going from one project to another.

To cope with more rail freight, there should be also a rolling W10 gauge programme throughout Britain.

He said rail is a growth industry and will continue to expand in the recession because all the other modes do not match up.

The future is electric as some countries realised a century before we did.

Chris Austin, head of public affairs at the Association of Train Operators, said the railways had handled growth well, with a 20% increase in train mileage and 45% more passengers, and politicians are now reacting to growth on rail.

But former rail routes needed safeguarding of routes.

Tony Berkeley of the Rail Freight Group said Network Rail should be able to deliver on seven-day working.

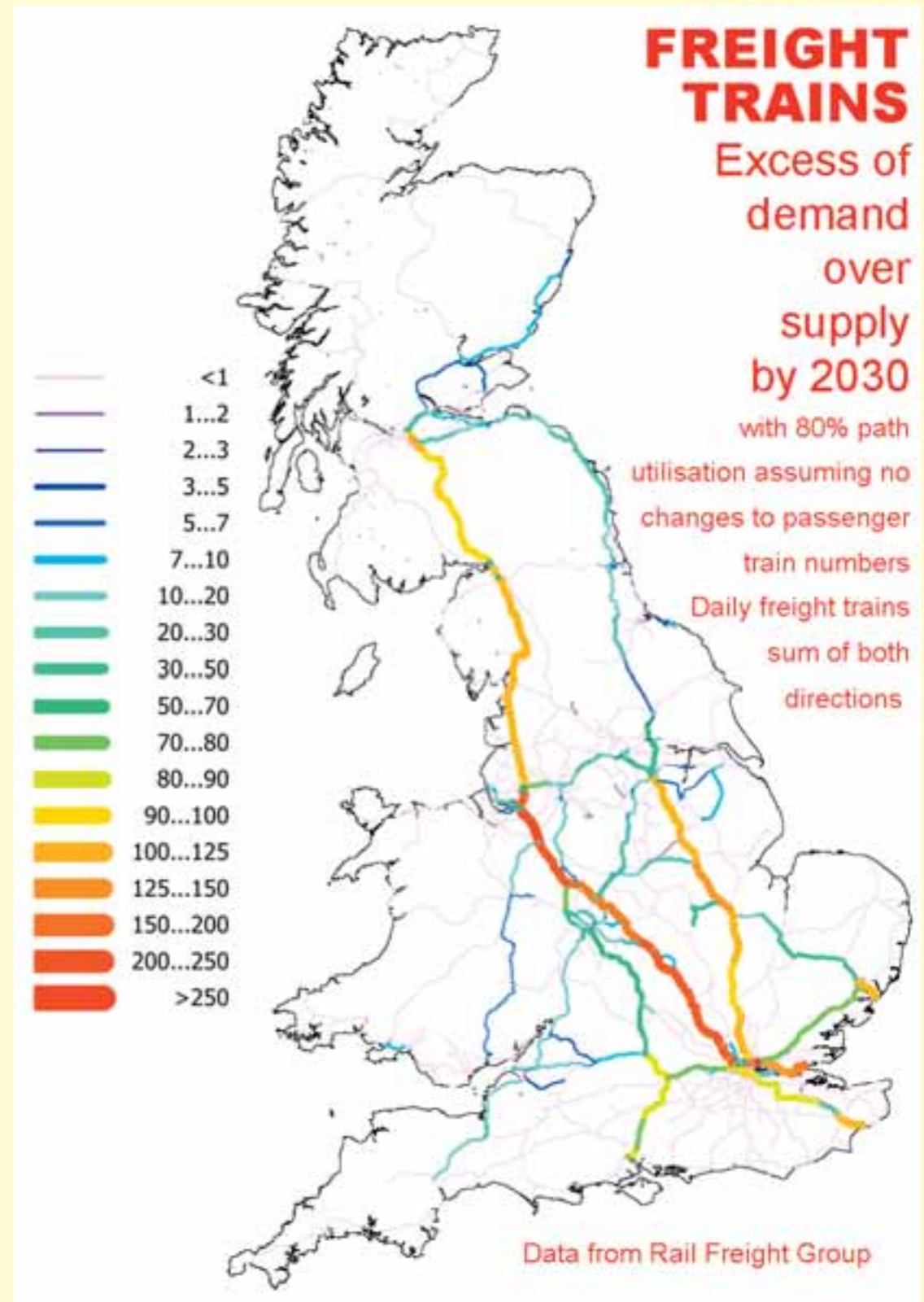
He said that instead of route closures, there should be single-line working.

Passenger numbers have grown by 30%, but in the same time freight has increased by 60%.

With supermarkets sending more general commodities by rail, there would be increasing need for extra train paths, terminals and distribution centres.

Professor Lewis Lesley explained how tram-trains could deliver modal shift economically in a way buses never will.

But he said the legal costs of promoting a light rail scheme are greater than the engineering costs and it will take us 150 years to catch up with Germany on light



CONGESTION: Action needs to be taken now to clear the way for more freight trains in the future

rail. It was very important that we did though because air quality in London was worse than Beijing when people were complaining about the pollution at the Beijing Olympics. London fails international air quality standards now and will continue to do so. Norman Baker, the Liberal Democrat spokesman on transport, said there is an electoral problem with

rail projects. They take so long the next Government takes the credit for them. But he said a high-speed railway is a cheaper way to get capacity than upgrading existing lines.

He pointed out that there is still congestion on the West Coast main line even after the upgrade and local services are limited. He called for Beeching to be rolled back and

for reopenings like Lewes-Uckfield to be given the go-ahead.

He said rail is the future for the passengers, the environment and the economy.

Summing up for Railfuture's London branch vice-chairman Roger Blake told members: "Go back to your constituencies and prepare your evidence for rail schemes."

Notice of annual general meeting

Notice is hereby given that the fifth annual general meeting of the Railway Development Society Limited will be held at Oxford Place Methodist Centre, Oxford Place, Leeds LS1 3AX at 11.00 on Saturday 9 May 2009.

There will be a morning session with a guest speaker starting at 11.00 followed by a buffet lunch. The formal AGM will commence at 13.30.

Nominations for election to the board of directors must be sent to Railfuture Returning Officer, PO Box 7690, Hinckley, Leicester LE10 9WJ to arrive by 1 February 2009. Nomination forms can be obtained from that address or from Railfuture website: www.railfuture.org.uk.

Special resolutions to amend the Memorandum of Articles of Association should be sent to Railfuture Returning Officer, PO Box 7690, Hinckley, Leicester LE10 9WJ to be received by 21 March 2009.

If you wish to receive a copy of any special resolutions please send a stamped, self addressed envelope to the same address marking the envelope 'Special Resolutions' in the top left corner.

Motions for discussion at the AGM must be sent to: M Crowhurst, 33 Station Court, Aberford Road, Garforth, Leeds LS25 2QQ to arrive by 25 April 2009. Further details and a booking form for the buffet lunch will be sent to members later.

By order of the board, C A Lingard, company secretary, 1 December 2008