

RAILWAYS PAST STEAM

RAILWAYS PRESENT DIESEL



RAILWAYS FUTURE ELECTRICITY

IT'S TIME TO MAKE THE SWITCH!

At last, it looks as if railway electrification is being taken seriously as a way to provide clean, green public transport.

The Department for Transport is at this moment compiling a report on whether and when to go ahead, prompted largely by the soaring price of oil in mid 2008.

Ministers are now even talking about a rolling programme of electrification. After a period when many railway managers denied its value, most now accept the wider arguments in favour of electrification.

Even the Department for Transport says: "Electric trains are cheaper to operate than diesels, require less

maintenance and emit between 20 and 35% less carbon. Electric trains are zero emission at the point of use, improving local air quality."

The also offer extra carrying capacity and improved passenger comfort.

The leaflet shown above was produced by train drivers' union Aslef which pointed out the "shocking" fact that less than a third of Britain's railways are electrified. It also pointed out that the complete network could be electrified for £9.3billion.

This is a very modest figure compared to the money wasted on other less sensible Government policies. For instance more than

£7.5billion is spent on British roads every year! Aslef realistically pointed out that no private train operator, concerned with short-term profit, can be relied on to invest in what is quite obviously in the public interest, an electrification programme.

The Midland and Great Western main lines have been obvious candidates for years but there are many fill-in schemes, including London's Barking-Gospel Oak and two non-electrified connections, Junction Road junction to Carlton Road junction for the Midland main line, and Harringay Park junction to Harringay junction for the East Coast main line.

'Not so smart' rail fare rises on way

The Government and train operators are continuing their policy of punishing rail passengers with above-inflation fare increases.

From January passengers will be forced to pay an average of 7% more when many are already suffering from the credit crunch and inflation is around 2%. Some Virgin fares will treble.

As a further insult, the Government is proudly announcing that it is pressing ahead with road building from taxpayers' money.

It always fails to mention the accompanying increase in air pollution caused by this policy.

Yet it wants rail passengers to pay for the expensive system of running the railway that was created by government.

Anthony Smith of Passenger Focus said: "The seemingly unstoppable rail price express ploughs on.

"We cannot simply go on dumping costs on to the passenger in this way."

Even now there are bargains to be had, mainly by booking in advance through the various websites.

So it is good to see that the Association of Train Operators is investing £13million to upgrade the computerised journey information service.

The rail journey information system provides the timetables, fares, route planning and ticketing services used by passengers, operators and travel agents.

It will be interesting to see whether even after the Fujitsu upgrade it comes anywhere near the much superior German Railways computer information system.

DB provided a good journey planning and ticket buying website service long before Britain's railway managers woke up to the Web.

Now DB has journey planning and ticketing sorted out, not only for users of home computers but it provides superb journey planning and ticket buying facilities at stations as well.

So far Britain has nothing to match it, with too many rail operators interested only in short-term profits.

At last they have stopped resisting moves to smartcard ticketing.

The Oyster card system is being extended to more London area National Rail stations.

And in the South West Trains area, the first tentative steps are being taken to test the Department for Transport's National Rail smartcard which has the potential to give major advantages to both passengers and operators.

A National Rail smartcard is long overdue and so too is a National Railcard giving fare reductions.

You can download information from www.railwatch.org.uk and www.railfuture.org.uk