



# THE HIGHWAY ROBBERY

A civilised industrial country needs both roads and railways. BUT, are we paying too much for one and not enough for the other? Why does the UK encourage road transport rather than rail?

This imbalance is largely the result of continual pressure by the powerful and well-funded Road Lobby. This body, led by the British Road Federation, includes members from all sectors of the road transport industry such as major oil companies, motor manufacturers and road building contractors. Slick advertising techniques present the fast car as a glamorous and desirable necessity.

In the UK, road users pay about £12 billion annually in taxes of which about a third is spent DIRECTLY on roads; but does the remainder cover all the INDIRECT costs of road transport? We doubt it.

As well as spending billions of UK taxpayers' money, the Government has also obtained from the European Development Fund £1000 million since 1975. Examples include: M25 – £80m; M42 – £20m; A55 – £29m and M27 – £13m.

Through favouring road transport so heavily we suffer from various hidden costs – something the Road Lobby ignores.

Obviously road transport – cars and lorries – is here to stay; but is our rail network being starved of finance, when a more even handed attitude, to get the best out of all land transport systems, would bring considerable benefit to today's users as well as investing advantageously for tomorrow? Unlike the powerful road lobby, our rail network has no 'built in' sponsors with the same influence.

#### **WHAT PRICE ROAD TRANSPORT?**

In the BBC2 programme, "Heavier Metal", in February 1984 the track costs for a 32 tonne lorry were quoted as £6,700 per year, but through road tax and fuel costs only £5,800 p.a. in revenue was being obtained. So the 75,000 lorries in this class alone were being subsidised to the tune of £66 million each year.

Government figures for 1982/83 put the total cost of public and private expenditure on roads, motoring and lorry freight at £48BN. But only £6BN is allocated for public transport.

#### **WHAT PRICE NEW ROADS?**

The M25 orbital motorway round London has now cost almost £1,000m. Construction

of the 3½ mile Rochester Way amounted to £75m. The upgrading of the A55 trunk road in North Wales has risen to over £500m.

A 6-lane motorway eats up over 20 acres per mile. That land can no longer be used for food production. This could increase our bill for imported food.

#### **WHAT PRICE ROAD ACCIDENTS?**

The Armitage Report estimated that road accidents cost the National Health Service over £50m annually. Their cost to the community is over £2.6 billion every year. Official figures for 1982 quoted a sum of £163,000 for each fatal accident and £8,500 for each serious accident. Around 6,000 fatalities are recorded on our roads each year. That means, on average, *one person every 90 minutes, day and night, every day of the year.*

Drinking and driving offences alone account for 1,400 fatalities each year. The law on these offences has remained unchanged since introduced in 1967. Maximum fines are infrequent and imprisonment rarely practiced. In December 1985 44% of drivers breathalysed in West Yorkshire were found guilty.

#### **WHAT PRICE ROAD POLICING?**

Unlike the railways which pay for their own police force, road policing is paid for by all taxpayers and ratepayers.

The more police time (and therefore public money) taken up with traffic regulation, prosecuting traffic offences and helping on the scene of accidents, the less time they have for chasing crime.

#### **WHAT PRICE ROAD MAINTENANCE?**

In 1982/83 £883m was spent on road reconstruction (an increase of 66% over 7 years). Motorway maintenance cost £85m. Local road capital expenditure amounted to £587m. Local motorway maintenance cost £1,305m. Grand total £2,860m.

The heaviest vehicles do most damage. The recent introduction of the 38 tonne lorry will create further substantial expenditure. "Roads to Ruin" – on Radio 4 – quoted that £400m was being called for to strengthen 10,000 main road bridges to accommodate the 38 tonne lorry. BBC2's "Heavier Metal" quoted Derbyshire County Council's estimate that such vehicles would add £3m to the county's bill for bridge damage, while British Gas estimated they needed £100m to

rectify the damage their pipes have suffered in urban areas.

Now the Freight Transport Association has called for 40-tonne lorries. What extra costs will these create?

### **WHAT PRICE VIBRATION?**

Constant vibration from heavy road traffic can damage all buildings – modern or historic.

Around 75 of the best known English ancient churches and cathedrals are facing a shortened life expectancy due to damage caused by traffic vibration, especially from heavy lorries.

### **WHAT PRICE NOISE?**

What detrimental effect can this have on a person's health? What is the cumulative burden of this for the National Health Service? The estimated cost of soundproofing households suffering intolerable levels of traffic noise is put at £2.8bn.

### **WHAT PRICE POLLUTION?**

Rather belatedly the UK has acknowledged that lead in petrol can harm growing children, if homes and schools are near major roads or motorways. In terms of atmospheric pollution, the private car emits up to 33 times greater quantities of certain toxic substances than rail does. Of course, electric trains are completely pollution free!

### **WHAT PRICE SOLUTIONS?**

People can be protected from traffic noise by double-glazing. Generous grants are available for this purpose. However, no financial assistance from the road freight industry has yet been forthcoming. How much then has been spent, out of the public purse, around the country?

There are numerous examples of lorries continuing to use local roads – for a variety of reasons – instead of new ones or by-passes that were built for them. So lorry routes are suggested; and bans on lorries in specific areas. What of the cost of enforcing these?

### **WHAT PRICE TAX AVOIDANCE?**

Almost 70% of all new cars in the UK are company registered. This may be seen as a tax loss which is estimated to be costing the Exchequer at least £1,500m annually.

### **IS THIS COST INEVITABLE?**

Does road expenditure always represent value for money? Opened only in 1966, the Severn Bridge now requires £33m for

repairs; and the Government has accepted that a second bridge will have to be built costing £180m.

In complete contrast the much older Goole Swing Bridge required £2m for repairs after being struck by passing ships on many occasions. This prompted British Rail to put in for closure the main line from Doncaster to Hull. This is small change when compared with the nearby Humber Bridge for this structure boasts a construction debt of £97m, and a current debt of £200m. Its debts are increasing by £51 per minute!

Along with a construction cost of over £500m, the upgrading of the A55 has also meant slicing through the heart of Colwyn Bay causing irreparable damage. For £63m the adjacent Crewe-Holyhead main line could have been electrified.

In Scotland £13.8m is being spent on the 1½ mile Killiecrankie by-pass on the improved A9. British Rail wish to construct 14 miles of new railway between Inverness and Wick to eliminate the present circuitous route. That cost is just £11m.

The M9 was constructed to provide a capacity of 60,000 vehicles per day, yet 1983 figures put the actual flow at only 6,000!

In 1985 the Forth Road Bridge celebrated its 21st anniversary with the disclosure of debts amounting to £21.4m. The 35m paid in tolls has failed to cover costs and a £14m Government loan.

So while money is readily available for major road projects, worthwhile or vital rail links are scarcely considered.

For a contrast in attitude to rail investment it is worth comparing the UK with France. The UK decided to spend £1000m on the M25 – and some sections needed repairing before being opened! In France for the same sum a brand new Paris – Lyon electrified railway was built, together with more than 80 ultra high speed train sets required to run on it and the city of Paris has spent £1 billion on improvements to the Metro.

Likewise Germany spends much more on railways, and accepts a higher level of subsidy as a valuable investment in its transport system.

Do not these facts and figures give, at the very least, food for thought on how we fund our transport in this country?

Although 1984 and 1985 have seen several accidents on the railways, perhaps caused by deteriorating standards of maintainance (itself due to enforced economies) there can be no doubt that rail is far safer than road, as a method of transport. In three recent years, not one rail passenger was killed in an accident, whereas every year some 5,000 to 6,000 people are killed on the roads of Britain.

An E.E.C. Commission in 1976 reckoned that, for each death on the railways in Europe, there were 1,292 fatalities on the roads. Our own Department of Transport estimates the annual cost of road accidents at about £2½ thousand million without including the cost in terms of human misery.

THE RAILWAY DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY, which has published this leaflet, is a voluntary body for rail users, independent of British Rail managers, unions, political parties and private industry.

If you believe, as we do, that a modern and efficient rail system has an important part to play in the country's economic and social life, why not join us?

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