



Gasping for air

Response from the Railway Development Society to the Royal Commission report on Transport and the Environment and the House of Commons report Transport Related Air Pollution in London

The Royal Commission concluded that the present transport system causes too many deaths and injuries from road accidents and causes health problems because of the pollution from vehicle exhausts and noise.

The commission is voicing increasing alarm felt by both general public and learned institutions about the effects of road traffic on health.

Ironically the British Medical Association recommends that people walk and cycle more to maintain their health but traffic is an overpowering deterrent to this.

Three million people in Britain suffer from asthma, just one of the many diseases linked to road traffic. Asthma is known to be worsened, and possibly triggered, by air pollution from vehicles.

The commission recommended, among other things:

- A big increase in public transport investment over a 10-year period.
- An immediate start on increasing the loading gauge on the Channel Tunnel to Scotland route, so that lorries or trailers can be carried on rail wagons.
- More resources for new light-rail systems.
- Discourage air travel for domestic and near-European journeys for which rail is competitive.
- Base decisions at all levels of transport policy on finding the best practicable environmental option.
- Reduce expenditure on motorways and other trunk roads to about half the present level.
- Double the price of fuel by 2005.
- Impounding the lorries of illegal operators.
- Restricting vehicles over 7.5 tonnes to 56mph.
- New tax rules for company cars,

including abolition of mileage thresholds.

- Tighter EC emission limits for all new vehicles.
- Increase excise duty according to vehicle emissions.
- Reduce benzene in petrol.
- Enforce speed limits.
- More bus lanes.
- Create safe walking and cycling networks.
- More vehicle recycling.

The Commission also called for objectives and targets to be set:

Passengers: To increase the proportion of passenger-miles carried by public transport from 12% in 1993 to 20% by 2005 and 30% by 2020.

Freight: To increase the proportion of tonne-miles carried by rail from 6.5% in 1993 to 10% by 2000 and 20% by 2010.

The main recommendation was to integrate transport policy with land use and give priority to minimising the need for transport and make sure that more use is made of rail and other environment friendly modes.

The Railway Development Society response

The Railway Development Society is keen that these recommendations are implemented as soon as possible.

The rail network has the potential to be the basis for an integrated national public transport system with co-ordinated bus and other modes feeding into it.

This does not happen except on a haphazard basis at present and the Government is confident that rail privatisation alone will make rail efficient.

While there is something in this argument given certain conditions, the harsh

reality is that British Rail has stopped ordering rolling stock and it may well be several years before any private operators are prepared to risk committing large amounts of money in ordering new trains.

In the meantime Britain's rolling stock builders face a critical period with the risk of plant closures just when there is a real need for better trains and more of them.

The new charging structure on the railways introduced to pave the way for privatisation is already increasing costs and increasing the pressure for further service cuts, the reverse of what is needed.

It is anyway too important at present for public transport to be left merely to private operators, some of whom will be inexperienced in providing train services.

We need a national rail authority to plan for immediate strategic investment, within an overall transport policy, neither of which exist at present because of Government fears of interfering in what it sees as merely a market.

We recognise that private finance has a role in marginal activities on the rail network but the national strategy must be decided by the Government as part of an overall transport policy.

While the railways must be responsive to the market, they can give enormous health, social and wider economic benefits which are given no monetary value in the present assessments.

Rail schemes are not judged like road schemes are, according to cost benefit analysis, but mainly on whether they will provide an 8% rate of financial return on the capital invested.

The Treasury has conceded that some "non user" benefits, like reduction of traffic congestion, can be allowed in certain cases, but again this is on a haphazard basis.

The cost of abolishing the demand for an 8% return is £500 million. No attempt has been made to quantify the

health, social and economic benefits which would result but they would be huge.

There is enormous potential to improve Britain's rail services if this arbitrary figure of 8% is removed.

It would immediately clear the way for electric InterCity services on the Midland main line from London to Sheffield and Nottingham for instance. This has already been costed and found to give a 7% return on capital.

We feel that it is wise for new schemes to break even financially but any "profit" should be seen in the social and health paybacks.

Often the extent to which new rail services are used is under-assessed in government studies.

Both Thameslink and the Robin Hood line reopening in Nottinghamshire have far exceeded expected use levels. For instance, market research suggested that 1,020 people would use a new rail station at Bulwell, Notts.

When it was built, the actual figure was 3,700 per week, more than three times the estimate.

RDS knows from experience that there is enormous pent-up demand for efficient and reasonably priced rail services.

Many drivers are now only too keen to leave their vehicles at home if there is an alternative.

In the West London Assessment studies, commissioned by the Department of Transport, it was found that an improved service on the line between Willesden junction and Clapham junction would reduce car traffic in the area by 5%.

We believe that the railway is the basis of Britain's only coherent national public transport network. It is a great national asset already. With care and sensible expenditure (a tiny percentage of that spent on road building), its value could be vastly enhanced.

Guarantees needed

As a first step, the integrity of the existing network must be guaranteed with a promise of no further line closures. This would have a major psychological influence, convincing workers, users and potential investors that the railways have an assured future.

While the search for private finance can proceed, there is no substitute for increased public funding to improve and expand existing services and to launch new ones.

Consumers (both passengers and freight users) must be consulted about what kind of services they want.

If private operators come forward, safety and the interests of the travelling public must be paramount, not the operator's financial wellbeing. Track

charges and fares should be kept as low as possible by switching funds from road to rail.

Existing grants to encourage the transfer of freight from road to rail are capped at £14 million and are obviously inadequate. Unless more money is made available for such grants, the freight targets called for in the Royal Commission's report will not be met.

A clear timetable, good connections, off-peak through ticketing, cross validity of ticketing, the freedom to choose routes, national and local railcards, good facilities for the disabled, luggage and bicycles should be guaranteed by Railtrack and rail operators.

The Franchise Director and the Rail Regulator should see their duties as making rail as convenient and cheap to use as possible. Little-used services can be seen as "loss leaders" with an economic value as feeders into the network.

The importance of fares: When fare levels were last cut in London, in the early 1980s, the number of vehicles coming into London in the morning rush-hour fell by 13%. Today fares are among the highest in Europe and rising.

Asset strippers should not be able to take over railway land, buildings or equipment if it undermines the network's potential to be the basis of a national public transport network.

Bus companies must be persuaded to co-ordinate services into railheads.

Passenger transport authorities have been reasonably successful in developing rail services in their areas and, in the absence of a strategic planning authority for London, establishing a PTA would be useful in developing a strategy for co-ordinated and efficient public transport.

In this age of health and environmental awareness, the public are demanding improving and expanding rail services.

Face the facts

Road accidents kill around 4,000 people a year in Britain, as well as causing 45,000 serious injuries. There are few rail fatalities in a year and in several recent years, not one passenger has been killed.

Electric trains emit only 0.2% of the carbon monoxide emitted by a car for every passenger mile, 0.5% of the nitrogen dioxide, and 42% of the hydrocarbons. This takes into account the power station emissions. Source: Wrong Side of the Tracks. Test 1991.

Electric trains require only 16% of

the energy a car requires per passenger mile. Source: Wrong Side of the Tracks. Test 1991.

Britain has only 27% of its rail network electrified compared to 36% in France, 43% in Germany, 69% in Holland and 59% in Italy.

Financial support for railways in Britain is only 0.12% of GDP, compared to 0.62% in Germany. Cash aid in Britain was cut in half between 1980 and 1990.

Railways are three times more efficient than roads in land use yet most of the Government's £16 billion Transport Supplementary Grant to local authorities is spent on road building. Only 11% goes to public transport.

Overdependence on the car and fear of traffic means children do not play out or travel independently. In 1970, 80% of 7 and 8 year olds travelled to school on their own. By 1990 this had fallen to 9%. Parents say the main reason is fear of traffic.

Elderly people are particularly reliant on public transport and are, at the same time, at risk from road traffic. A 1994 report by Age Concern and the Pedestrians Association entitled Driven Indoors found that 9,000 elderly pedestrians are killed or injured on the roads every year.

Commuting by train in Paris is a quarter of the price in London.

Nearly 80% of London's commuters use trains.

The effects of exhaust pollution from road vehicles on motorways neutralise a 100-yard band of land beside the road.

About 80% of people living in London do not have cars. The Government often uses the misleading statistic that "46% of households have access to a car".

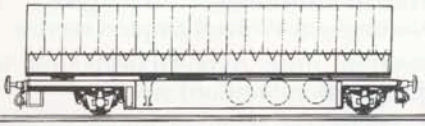
79% of company car drivers ADMIT breaking the speed limit, according to a survey by MORI published in the Lex Report on Motoring.

More than half of all car drivers break the 70mph motorway speed limit, according to a Department of Transport survey. 2% drive at over 90mph. 60% of lorry drivers break the 40mph speed limit on single carriageways. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents describes the findings as alarming. Speeds of up to 145mph were recorded on the M1 and of 124mph on the 50mph restricted North Circular Road in London.

38% of cars fail the Ministry of Transport roadworthy test. The price for a "bent" MoT is £50. The black market is estimated at £6 million.

How can improvements be achieved?

PIGGYBACK FREIGHT: A large percentage of road freight in Britain is carried on lorry semi-trailers, traffic which could be transferred to rail if suitable rail routes were modified and cleared for such piggyback traffic. Road tractor units could deliver



A lorry trailer on a rail "well" wagon

trailers to a railhead where the trailers could be driven on to specially constructed rail wagons. The unaccompanied trailer could make the bulk of its journey by rail and be collected by a road tractor unit for the final delivery leg. This method is quite usual in Europe, particularly in Switzerland which is determined not to allow road traffic to cause damage to the environment. The policy has been democratically approved by a series of referenda.

INTERMODAL FREIGHT: Containers are best delivered by road to a railhead where they can easily be transferred to rail vehicles for the long leg of their journey. Again lorries complete the journey. This system is commonly used throughout Europe and the USA.

FREIGHT TARGETS: The targets set by the Royal Commission for transporting goods by rail are very modest - 10% by 2000 and 20% by 2010. France for instance already sends 24% of its freight by rail, Germany 22% and Switzerland 40%. But more cash must be made available for Freight Facility Grants, to transfer road traffic to rail.



AMERICAN RESEARCH:

American researchers estimate that individuals can cut their personal nitrogen dioxide emissions by going to work by train instead of car. They can virtually eliminate their carbon monoxide and particulate emissions. The unpaid social cost of cars is seven times that of trains. When social and financial costs are taken into account, the railway is almost always the cost-effective solution to transport needs. Rail's worth to society extends far beyond mere fare-box levels. Source: Back on Track: The Global Rail Revival. Worldwatch Institute 1994.



EUROPE: The first high-speed TGV line in France, to Lyon, repaid the £1.5 billion invested in it by 1991, and France now plans over 15 years to



Everybody's doing it: This is the Spanish high speed train which runs from Madrid to Seville

create a 3,000 mile TGV network at a cost of £23 billion (the same cost as Britain's road building programme). Germany is building a 2,500 mile high-speed ICE network and Italy and Spain have high-speed services already running. In Switzerland, a good partnership between public and private finance provides excellent integrated public transport.

JAPAN: The 160mph Bullet trains have proved three times more productive than aircraft in terms of labour efficiency, five times better in investment terms and eight times better in energy use. They have played a key role in cutting costs and oil imports and of course in reducing pollution from transport.



LIGHT RAIL: The few British schemes that have been completed since 1970 are proving successful and there is enormous pent-up demand for more but the Government refuses to give them the go-ahead. A £112 million Metro scheme for Birmingham waited for approval for years, even though the planning and financial package had been prepared and approved by the West Midlands Passenger Transport

Authority. The "best tram in the world" is now operating in Sheffield, and Manchester's Metrolink scheme has attracted large numbers of car drivers. 40% of the passengers have left their cars at home and switched to the trams. Other light rail schemes could be quickly built - and road traffic reduced - if the Government diverted the vast amounts of road building cash into them. All over the world, new light rail schemes are being built. French examples are Lille and Nantes.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: Road building has been justified by claims that it stimulates economic activity and thereby creates jobs. There is no objective research to substantiate this claim and there is evidence that people and companies avoid areas that are "blighted" by roads. By contrast people and economic activity are attracted to areas with rail services.

Preliminary RDS studies of population growth in towns show that rail-connected towns grew by 11.1% over a 10-year period compared to 9% in towns reliant on roads.

What has been achieved so far

BRITISH GOVERNMENT STEPS: The Government is confident that privatisation will bring benefits to the customer. This may well be so but it cannot shake off its responsibility to deliver a comprehensive transport policy.

The rail network was largely provided by private capital but gave enormous benefits to society as a whole.

The road network has been constructed with public money and has created tremendous health and environmental problems.

Spending on the road network has been justified by a flawed version of cost benefit analysis.

This is now largely discredited, as it gives no value to historic and environmental land and no attempt is made to analyse the enormous increase in pollution.

The Department of Transport kept secret for months a report by the Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment that shows how the current cost, benefit analysis system is lacking.

The Department of Health also kept secret a report on the "London smog incident" which killed 160 people in 1991.

What should be done

Rail provides the transport answers without the environmental problems caused by road traffic. RDS suggests the following rail projects.

Those which have international significance and should be implemented immediately:

1. Channel Tunnel fast link, from Folkestone to London St Pancras, costing £4 billion.
2. West Coast main line upgrading all the way from London to Glasgow (for links to Scotland) and Holyhead (for links to Ireland). Costing £450 million.
3. Creation of an East-West rail route using mainly existing track, from Harwich to Fishguard, via Ipswich, Cambridge, Huntingdon, Bedford, Bletchley, Oxford, Didcot and Cardiff. This would mitigate much of the furore over the planned Trans European Road Network route.
4. Midland main line electrification from Bedford to Nottingham, Derby, Sheffield, Wakefield and Doncaster, feeding into the proposed Channel Tunnel terminal at St Pancras.
5. Great Western main line electrification from London to Bristol and Cardiff, with links to Heathrow airport.
6. Dornoch Firth rail crossing to match the road bridge built with public funds and to give the North of Scotland a quicker rail connection to the rest of the rail network.
7. Coastway electrification from Ashford to Hastings and associated development of a long distance route from Ashford (Channel Tunnel connections) to Southampton, via Brighton and Portsmouth, avoiding the damage which will be caused by building the South Coast motorway.
8. Improved rail access to all major airports, for example: Braintree-Stansted to link Harwich and East Essex to the airport, Cambridge and the Midlands.
9. Trans-Pennine electrification, to help connections with Ireland. Both Sheffield-Stockport and Liverpool-Manchester-Leeds-Middlesbrough routes.
10. Extension of electrification between Preston-Manchester and to InterCity "extremities" such as Aberdeen, Holyhead and Blackpool.

Domestic new lines and upgrading requiring urgent action:

- London CrossRail, costing £1.8 billion, bringing together the rail networks to the East and West of London.
Chelsea-Hackney Tube line, a north-south Metro costing £1.7 billion.
Thameslink 2000 costing £260 million, expanding the already successful



Thameslink services between Bedford and Brighton, increasing the journey opportunities six fold.

Birmingham Midland metro Line 1 costing £90 million.

London's Northern Line modernisation £75 million.

Follow-up electrification schemes:

Bristol-Derby

Birmingham-Coventry-Nuneaton-Leicester

Stoke-Derby-Nottingham

Reading-Oxford-Coventry

Glasgow and Edinburgh to Aberdeen

Nottingham and Leicester to Peterborough-Ely-Norwich

Preston-Blackburn-Bradford

Network expansion by reopening closed lines

Some lines like the Robin Hood line in Nottinghamshire and the line to Maesteg in Mid Glamorgan have already reopened and proved highly successful. There is great scope for more reopenings, for instance:

Bedford-Sandy-Huntingdon-St Ives to provide an Oxford-Cambridge service

Walsall-Brownhills to give a Nottingham-Wolverhampton service

Stratford upon Avon-Honeybourne to give London-Stratford service

Northampton-Wellingborough to give Milton Keynes-Peterborough service

Braintree-Stansted Airport to give Colchester-Peterborough service

Uckfield-Lewes to give Brighton-Tonbridge service (with new curve at Edenbridge)

Bere Alston-Okehampton to give Exeter-Plymouth service

Harrogate-Ripon-Northallerton to give Leeds-Middlesbrough service

St Andrews-Leuchars to give Edinburgh-St Andrews service

Bangor-Caernarfon to give Caernarfon-Crewe service.

Intensive care for existing but at-risk services:

Railways have been on the defensive ever since being savaged by the Beeching cuts. Confidence could return to both the industry and its customers if there was a guarantee of no further line closures.

There are many lines and stations at risk of closure or death by decay. Adequate minimum service level criteria must be set and enforced.

Disused rail tracks should be protected with a view to reopening.

Building new stations on some lines which have a sparse service could ensure their future.

Allowing housing development along rail routes gives more people access to public transport, is sensible in land use planning and improves the rail line's financial performance.

There are many examples throughout Britain of "Cinderella" lines which have the potential to relieve road traffic. For instance the Barking-Gospel Oak line in London could easily and cheaply be given a 15-minute service frequency which would vastly improve its popularity.

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