

Perhaps someone is listening at last

Things get better—albeit slowly. I have been banging on about Train Regulation in *Railwatch* after *Railwatch*.

Now at last Virgin announces: "Performance initiative reaps rewards".

It transpires that the long distance cross country services are being given a new headcode so they can be regulated through the congested areas.

That announcement on 12 August heralded the reinstatement of yet another standard of good operating, which had been destroyed by Railtrack.

Even the recent buckled rail fiasco, which got into the headlines as something new, I have previously covered in *Railwatch* articles as largely the result of the engineering problems stemming from the contractor culture.

We have always had the possibility of a rail buckling; indeed I have attended derailments with that as a cause. The difference is that we managed it by having locally based engineers with railway knowledge and a proper chain of command so extra shoulder ballast was put down where required and limited speed restrictions applied as required.

It is another legacy from the incompetence of Railtrack which Network Rail is trying to



Rayner's review

put right by increasing ballast and also by taking some of the worst offenders back in house, too late of course to avoid the bad publicity.

Talking of the media generally on that issue, the press, radio and television all proved they are as uninspiring as the railway by collectively saying, "We have had the wrong type of snow (tee hee), now we have the wrong type of sunshine". Not an original approach from one of them. I was on four or five radio pro-

grammes and some television. It is a sad fact of life that most people, apart from the professionals, think it is simple to operate a railway.

There have been hard new lessons to learn over these past few years and it is not going to be put right overnight.

Some "senior industry source" is said to have remarked to a national newspaper commenting on the recent corporate manslaughter charges: "If you are a track engineer with a couple of kids living at Pickets Piece, Wilmslow, and you see that court case, in future you're never going to say anything other than 'I ain't taking the risk'." That just about sums up today's society. If managers don't make judgements why are they being paid at all?

Management is about knowledge and experience, about considering the risks, not ducking behind a lawyer to please an accountant with his eye on the share price. Incidentally Pickets Piece is near Andover and Wilmslow is in Cheshire so it was all fanciful stuff.

That brings me finally to another of today's problems.

Everyone and everything is learning about passing "information". We hear about insider sources, on the record, off the record. It's a defence system and while people are playing about

with these often irrelevant exchanges they are not getting on with the job.

Whistle blowing is very much today's topic. I have some knowledge on this with regard to the railway industry, because for making a statement publicly on what I saw as dangerous fragmentation I was removed from my job. This led me to set up my own consultancy, now 12 years old. (Some of my long time former BR colleagues are asking for a long service award!)

My departure from BR was described thus by one journalist: "A manager whose stubborn insistence that safety must come before profit was, in effect, treated as a sacking offence."

If more people of my generation had stood up between 1993 and 1999 and said formally what they believed was wrong we would not be in the muddle we are in still.

I will accept that some of the younger middle managers were right to stay inside and try to make the fragmentation work.

That was an impossible task given the arrogance and ignorance combined with the political will to drive the flawed privatisation through that existed in the death throes of the last Conservative administration.

■ Peter Rayner is a former BR operations and safety manager.

Light from the tunnel

By Lloyd Butler

When I was a young railway fan growing up in the 1960s, one of the few rays of light amidst the gloom of the Beeching cuts was the development of a new line through the heart of London – the Victoria Line.

Most work went on unseen, but a remarkable engineering feat was accomplished at Oxford Circus, where a steel umbrella was erected over a Bank Holiday weekend to allow road traffic to flow overhead while work continued beneath on a new passenger interchange.

This work is highlighted in the first DVD release by Beulah, entitled *Building London's Victoria Line*, and will certainly evoke memories of the developments taking place during that time. The DVD (and equivalent VHS video release) contains four British Transport Films reports on the construction of the line – spanning six years – and in the evocative style for which BTF remains famous. The

first report, subtitled *Over and Under*, is an introduction to planning the line and then concentrates on the construction of the Oxford Circus interchange.

The second report, *Down and Along*, highlights tunnelling carried out below Londoners' feet and includes fascinating shots of the manufacture of concrete and iron tunnel segments and their fitment behind both mechanical tunnelling shields and the age-old manual shield. Of special note is the full colour underground footage of miners working on the new structures as existing services continue to run just feet away!

Problems and Progress, the third item, highlights complications overcome, sometimes in the most ingenious fashion, including footage of the scene at King's Cross – not a million miles away from today's rabbit warren of tunnels beneath Cubitt's timeless trainshed. And were you aware that the subsoil through which Tottenham Hale

station was driven had to be frozen during the height of summer to allow safe tunnelling?

The fourth report – *Equip and Complete* – illustrates the design, development, testing and production-building of the automatic rolling stock for the new line, together with track-laying, signalling and station design. It even includes a visit to the famous Lots Road power station as new equipment was installed and commissioned.

Finally, a short public information film completes the 105 minute running time, informing travellers how to use the new automatic fare collection system – including advice on how to use the ticket barriers which were to become such a commonplace feature of railways in the capital. The shots of pre-decimalisation ticket machines will certainly bring back memories and, while the BTF films have a certain dated charm to them, the graphics on this film are proof-

positive of the psychedelic sixties!

Overall, this DVD tells a compelling story in fascinating detail and would appeal to anybody with even the slightest interest in railways or construction.

Building London's Victoria Line costs £14.95 in both VHS and DVD format and is released by Editions Audiovisuel Beulah, 66 Rochester Way, Crowborough TN6 2DU. Tel/fax: 01892 652413. email: in@eavb.co.uk. Web: www.eavb.co.uk.

It can be purchased online, at London's Transport Museum in Covent Garden or at specialist shops.

