

# BR managed to run a proper railway

Such a lot of downbeat rail stories have been in the media since the Christmas fiasco at Liverpool Street, Rugby and elsewhere, I do not want to rerun all that nonsense. However some things



## Rayner's Review

are so annoying, so misleading, that some correction is necessary.

First I can forgive the younger generation of operators who do not attempt to use single-line working in times of engineering overrun or derailment. They know no better and have not been trained.

Furthermore their management in many cases are themselves untrained, having been brought in from some other profession. So I try to be patient and believe that slowly the industry will recover its traditional skills.

That is what makes it so amusing to see Richard Bowker, the former Strategic Rail Authority chief executive who is now running the East Coast franchise, saying proudly that he promises to make the trains run on time.

He does not control the trains, the signallers do. He does not control the possessions or the speed restrictions, the Network Rail regional people do.

He reminds me of Richard Branson, who once claimed his trains would be on time.

To the cynical, rebranding is about publicity and paint and a change in the statistical base so that no one can prove anything in three years time!

What I cannot so easily forgive are the up-beat press statements by operators of Network Rail. From many examples I could quote, the one that annoyed me most was chief executive Ian Coucher sug-

## Carbon It's looking good for rail

The chart, page opposite, from the Department for Transport shows the carbon emissions of different transport modes.

The worst are domestic air services between London and Manchester and Edinburgh.

The best is a Stagecoach 'Megabus' operating with a 90 per cent load factor.

Close on its heels are the East Coast InterCity 225 and West Coast Pendolino electric trains.

When the savings that may be achieved with regenerative braking are allowed for, the British Rail-designed IC225 has the lowest emissions of all. The 125 mph diesel is shown to emit much less carbon than its modern successor, the 125 mph tilting Voyager.

In the middle of the chart is the Eurostar, but the figures are based on a Eurostar train running on a UK route.

Eurostar Ltd points out that emissions are lower on their international services because they use French nuclear electricity over the majority of the London-Paris route, and because the load factor is higher than the UK national average.

gesting that Christmas Day and Boxing Day services had never existed before. He is quoted in *The Times*: "We now need to run railways every single day of the week, we need to run them on Christmas Day and Boxing Day which we never had to do in the past."

Will he be suggesting the reinvention of the wheel next? I give below two examples, taken from the Liverpool Street assistant station

master's log. Perhaps Mr Coucher should consider the logs if only to remind him that we always did run services and that we were a public service.

It is ironic that at Christmas 2007, it is Liverpool Street that was closed for long periods by engineering overrun, something that even the Germans could not achieve in the Blitz.

I speak as an admirer of Deutsche Bahn where I spent many days in the 1980s discussing common problems of engineering, train control and signalling.

I am therefore pleased that DB has taken over Laing Rail which has the franchise for Chiltern Railways.

Chiltern Railways will become part of DB Regio AG, the division of Deutsche Bahn responsible for operating regional and local services.

The DB takeover of Laing also includes the Wrexham, Shropshire and Marylebone Railway Ltd which is soon to become the UK's newest long-distance rail operator.

It will run regular services from Wrexham and Shropshire to London Marylebone providing North Wales and Shropshire with a much needed direct link to the capital.

DB is in my view the best European network operating and it manages to combine Swiss efficiency with flexibility and "on train" service whereas the other networks, ourselves included, are moving away from good food to a trolley culture.

DB also takes a 50% share of the London Overground which is now run by a combination of DB and Hong Kong Chinese.

What a pity the Conservative Government would not allow BR to bid for franchises overseas, or do anything else for that matter, despite the fact that prior to privatisation, it was the most cost effective railway in Europe.

So the politicians are again to blame in my book, with the Conservatives committing the cardinal sin of destroying the vertical chain

of command. If we had not had this ludicrous division of assets and fragmented operation, we would not have had a full-page advertisement in all national papers from such as Virgin Trains whose diatribe against Network Rail must have cost the taxpayer a fair amount of money.

Virgin has done very nicely out of privatisation and I am cynical when I see Sir Richard Branson and Gordon Brown celebrating Europe's first biochemical-fuelled train. Desirable as biochemical fuels are, they should not be promoted as a way to avoid electrification.

One only has to look at the recent White Paper on a 30-year rail strategy and note its carefully scripted wording against electrification which concluded: No case for electrification. Case not yet made.

Why is that? I reckon it's because electrification costs are up front, and the benefits more than five years away, which flies in the face of the still short-term philosophy of the Treasury.

Because there has been no ongoing electrification, Network Rail, until the Rugby debacle, has lost the plot on overhead line electrification.

No longer are there any sensible overhead line electrification wiring trains, just a lorry on rails with a ladder and a platform. That's an exaggeration but it sums up both the attitude and the expertise.

Last year's White Paper is in my view not at all strategic. I have read all 356 pages of it and the Government should be extending electrification – by authorising small easy schemes like Fylde Coast electrification or connecting Manchester to Preston.

There are other examples but Network Rail needs to rebuild its expertise.

Then we can go forward with main line electrification, starting in five years time with the Great Western and Midland main lines. That would be a strategic approach.

Sadly in Westminster and Whitehall, transport is still not considered important, more often than not, just a place to stop on the way up or down the ministerial ladder.

Remember when it was stated that Des Browne would be Minister for Scotland and Defence Minister there was uproar in the Press? Not possible for such an important position to have two hats!

What about two-hats Alistair Darling or two-hats Douglas Alexander? It did not appear to matter that they had Transport and Scotland.

In fairness to Mr Coucher, he is now supporting further electrification. Well to help him make his case I show in the box above the results of a DfT analysis of carbon emissions.

**London Liverpool Street**  
**Assistant Station Master's log**  
**Christmas Day 1964**

**J Hayes 06.00-14.00.**

**Xmas morning may I wish all who read this a Happy Xmas and new year.**

**A fall of snow at about 07.00, no difficulty P Way staff attended and gave attention. Frost warning received, Sub Ganger's address for today in the Sig Box**

**The 07.50 Parkeston Boat has extra vehicle attached, stated number of passengers 300. BEA and KLM grounded due to Fog. No Problems.**

**Southend Line conveyed a good number of passengers during mid morning.**

**All early turn staff reported for duty.**

**London Liverpool Street**  
**Assistant Station Master's log**  
**Boxing Day 1963**

**P Rayner 14.00 - 22.00 Deepdene for Friday Cape by wire received 16.30.**

**BG Mushrooms on 16.50 Lowestoft.**

**18.05 Ex Parkeston due 19.25 up No 7 had 10 bogies and was hand signalled away by me.**

**In order to keep 20.00 Hook Continental in No 9 altered 8.30 Norwich to 7, 8.36 Cambridge to 9.**

**999 call at 21.16 for passenger collapsed and died in 21.18 to Southend, Train cancelled and sent EGS to Southend for return. I diverted 21.30 Clacton to No 7.**