

# WATCH



way is to make better use of existing lines. Tackling these four problems simultaneously is an enormous challenge."

Passengers will begin to see the benefits in 1992 when deliveries of the new rolling stock will begin. The signalling to permit trains to run faster through the tunnels, and therefore increase capacity, is scheduled for completion in 1995. "There will certainly be changes on some lines and I shall consider what Mr Shersby has said and respond to it. Staff cuts of 1,000 were mainly due to the introduction of new automatic ticket barriers. Management has simultaneously to bring an Edwardian railway up to modern standard, to tackle vital safety issues and expand the system."

## Must cut services

Opening a discussion on London Regional Transport, *David Marshall* (Lab, Shettleston) said on 11 MARCH that twice in the last 18 months they had had discussions by which they were astounded. Both times they were told that overcrowding was so critical that London Underground had to increase the fares to put people off using the system in central London. "Now we are told that because of its poor housekeeping, it will have to cut services, which in turn will further exacerbate overcrowding, and even perhaps create more safety problems."

The cash crisis had forced a stop on the planning work of the Northern Line modernisation. The case for new tube lines should not obscure the need to improve the capacity and quality of existing systems. "Suffice it to say that our call has been completely ignored. "We should indeed give London Transport more money, but it should be properly accounted for. In a large city like London, it is absurd that dead escalators should make life difficult for the elderly and cause dangerous congestion at stations and on platforms."

## Years of neglect

*Mr Shersby* said the problems of the underground were partly the product of many years of neglect in the periods of office of both Labour and Conservative Governments. If the problem was to be tackled, various ways should be considered of how funding could be made available. There could be funding from central Government. Secondly, there could be funding from London boroughs. There could also be joint business ventures like the London Docklands Corporation. London Underground was already losing passenger revenue as people were driven away by the combined effect of increased fares and mas-

sive deterioration in the service. Most passengers would probably cheerfully pay more, once they have a modern, frequent, reliable and customer-oriented service.

An analysis of the problem leads to the conclusion that extra investment would lead to substantial savings and increased productivity elsewhere. "That is precisely why most other European Governments are happy to provide major operating subsidies to their public transport networks."

## Draconian steps

*Simon Hughes* (Lib, Southwark and Bermondsey), asking who was politically responsible for the mess, said that when the Greater London Council ran London Transport itself, the Government argued that the GLC ran it incompetently, took over London Transport and managed it.

Whose fault was it that London Underground underspent for three years and, having got into a mess, now had to take Draconian measures which would be hopeless at building up a properly managed system? Much of the current investment was putting right what should have been put right before - making safer what the King's Cross disaster tragically proved to be an unsafe system.

"We are supposed to be in a first-world country and should have a first-class public transport system." *John Marshall* (C, Hendon South) said: "We are suffering now from the locust years when the GLC was controlled by Mr Livingstone, who was more interested in subsidising fares paid by American tourists than in increasing the level of investment in London Regional Transport."

*Ken Livingstone* (Lab, Brent East) said that each year the GLC controlled London Transport, from 1970 to 1984, its capital budget was set by the central Government of the day. If the GLC had had the freedom to run the system as it wanted, the present problems would not be with us. "In 1981 we wanted to introduce a common ticketing policy, so that people could buy one ticket anywhere in London. That policy has now been introduced for season tickets, which we welcome. It has taken years to introduce it."

The GLC policy had seen an increase of 10 per cent in the use of public transport and a reduction of 5 per cent on London streets.

"People still remember that policy, which they enjoyed, because the system began to improve. The Government of the day, who did not want popular public spending, have run it into the ground."

*Joan Ruddock* (Lab, Deptford) asked Roger Freeman (Minister for

Public transport) if this year's increases in fares were not a good example. "Tube fares rose on average by 10 per cent. Combining the highest tube fares in Europe with the poorest services, is it likely to prove an incentive to passengers?" *Mr Freeman* replied that the Underground was overcrowded and that to go back to a policy of reducing fares would be ridiculous. It would result in less resources and more overcrowding, when more investment was needed. Turning to the remarks of *Ken Livingstone*, he said that irrespective of the permission that might or might not have been given for capital investment while the Labour GLC was in control of London Transport, by pursuing a low fares policy the GLC ensured that the resources needed for ploughing back as investment were not there. "Whatever the rights and wrongs then, we have to address ourselves to the situation today."

## Shot across bows

It was in the west country that a brilliant new way was found of getting closed lines reopened. *Tony Speller* (C, Devon North) made it permissible for lines once closed to be re-opened provided that, in the event of the re-opening being unsuccessful, it could be re-closed without delay. Now that this device has worked in his own area, *Mr Speller* says: "Do it again in other parts of the country."

So a 'Railway Reopenings Bill' has been read for the first time by that equally enthusiastic railway supporter *Robert Adley* (C, Christchurch), supported by some members of all parties, including *Peter Snape* (Lab, West Bromwich East), *Mrs M Ewing* (Scot Nat, Moray) and *Paddy Ashdown* (Lib, Yeovil). Second reading of the bill, due on 5 JULY, is never likely to be reached but, as *Mr Speller* reports, their 'little Bill' will be another "shot across the bows of the roads lobby."

## Aim at total safety

The second reading of the East Coast Main Line (Safety) Bill was proposed by *Gary Waller* (C, Keighley) on 13 MAY. The challenge to BR and other rail operators, he said, was to build on their excellent safety record.

An accident to a young woman and two children on a railway crossing in Doncaster showed the need to examine risks of public access on high-speed lines.

Some said that, because pedestrians did not endanger trains and their

passengers, they should be allowed to take their own risks. BR, however, was concerned with the safety of people.

*Martin Redmond* (Lab, Don Valley) asked, if safety was so important, why had BR delayed dealing with the problem of carriage safety where doors opened, causing people to fall out? *Mr Waller* said that BR's safety policy document stated that the board was aiming for a reduction of accidents to zero. BR believed that many of the 146 crossings on the East Coast main line were incompatible with train speeds of 125mph or more.

*Mr Redmond* asked why BR had chosen to deal with 10 crossings when there were many more on the line? *Mr Waller* said it was an important step forward. BR had singled out crossings for which the case for closure was strong, either being infrequently used or because of specific dangers that would be recognised in the cab of a locomotive.

"Drivers have extremely nerve-racking moments every day because they are not absolutely certain of the intentions of pedestrians at the side of the track." The Unions were sympathetic to the Bill's objectives. BR believed the Bill was an important step to achieving greater safety. *Robert Cryer* (Lab, Bradford S) asked why, in view of BR's new-found concern with safety after the Clapham accident, it did not take into account the provision of bridges at level crossings?

## Many restrictions

*Peter Snape* said that, given the Draconian rules the Government laid down, the cost of providing a brideway over five newly-electrified tracks in *Mr Cryer's* constituency might have led to rejecting the scheme altogether.

*Mr Redmond* said the Government placed many restrictions on BR but continued to say that safety was paramount. "Do as we say, not as we do."

*Alan Beith* said it was intriguing to discover how they had a separate East Coast Main Line (Safety) Bill. "It should be called the 'Wrong Side of the Tracks Bill'."

*Patrick McLoughlin* (Under-Secretary for Transport) said a private Bill was the only method available to BR to stop or divert rights of way across the railway. It must be right that, in the public interest, footpaths should be stopped up. The Second Reading was lost by 64 votes to 38.