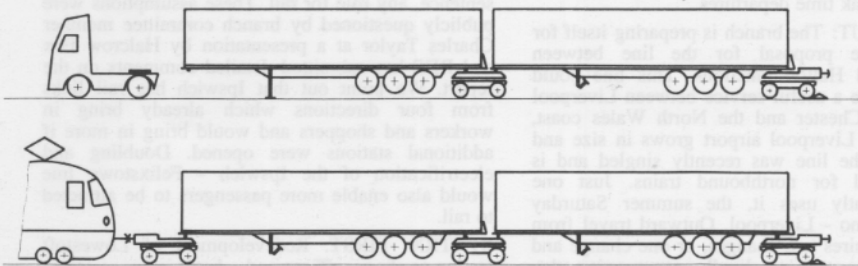


there's a will



Euro future: Lorries can be used to help trains take a bigger share of the freight market

two-mile tunnel to give Hamburg a rail link to Fuhlsbüttel airport.

On the line: A network of 15 international corridors for intermodal traffic is being planned for Europe. Each would have a line manager and a team responsible for marketing, under the auspices of the International Union of Combined Transport Companies. The aim is to hack a path through the jungle of red tape and bureaucracy that is strangling international rail freight in Europe. The railways should take heed and co-operate.

Double it: France is to spend £500 million on 45 double-deck high-speed trains to boost capacity on the Paris - Lyon route. The French Government has also agreed a £21 billion plan to expand high-speed services to create a 3,000-mile network.

Rolling road: French Railways is to spend £6 billion to create a 260-mile "rolling road" between Dijon and Avignon to ease congestion on the A6 and A7 motorways. Trains carrying lorries will leave every hour.

Land of the car: More than 45,000 people are killed on American roads each year. But at least Amtrak is to spend £200 million on new Superliner coaches for its prestige trains.

GEC-Alsthom has been awarded the £3 billion franchise to build a 600-mile high-speed network linking Dallas, Fort Worth, San Antonio and Austin to open in seven years time.

Land of the train: Basle in Switzerland is to be the venue for the ET92 exhibition of rail equipment from 24 to 26 November 1992. One of the reasons Switzerland was chosen for the exhibition is that the Swiss have consistently invested in rail. Swiss Railways is the largest investor in Europe per route mile. The other big spenders, Italy, France and Germany, all have services running to Switzerland. A conference will be staged at the same time. Exhibition details from Judy Aspden 0707 275641. Conference details from Professor Lewis Lesley 051 707 0100.

Finding the cash: Regional and town councils between Lyon and Strasbourg will provide 40 per cent of the cost of completing the electrification of the rail route. The £36 million project will be completed by 1995.

Go cheap: The launch of Inter Rail Plus giving bargain travel to Europe will help to ensure the success of our Beyond the Channel by Rail book which is being compiled soon. We have many offers of help but we want people who can write articles on northern France and the Rhineland. Please contact the general secretary (address back page).

Good thinking: There are no car parking facilities for MPs in Zurich. The city insists that private cars must take their place behind public transport, cyclists and pedestrians.

Ticket wise: There has been a good response to

the RDS report A Ticket to Europe? which examined the facilities for booking journeys to the Continent. The marketing director of BR International has invited society officers to discuss our suggestions.

The report is "packed with sensible ideas for improvements" according to the secretary of the Central Transport Consultative Committee and it echoes many of his committee's concerns.

The Continental Rail Agents Consortium, which represents travel agents wanting to promote rail travel to Europe, has also contacted the society. Most travel agents could obtain continental tickets but many do not seem to bother to publicise the facility properly. Clearly there is scope for further discussions between RDS and the agents. There are at least 100 agents who are keen to offer help even with complicated bookings.

There are difficulties of course. French, German and British railways all have computer reservation and ticketing systems but so far these systems do not "talk to one another".

BR cuts don't help. At Cambridge station, which has vast amounts of foreign visitors, it is now possible to buy tickets only to major European destinations. So far Oxford has retained a full continental booking service.

In the London area, it is now unacceptably difficult to buy an international rail ticket because "sectorisation has tended to marginalise BR International" according to the London Regional Passengers Committee.

Meanwhile if you have travelled abroad by train and boat this summer, Mike Breslin would be pleased to receive a brief note of your experiences, to update our survey. Write to him at 35 Rudston Road, Childwall, Liverpool L16 4PG.

The report is available for £2.50 post free from sales officer Alan Harwood (address back page)

Sitting pretty: Norwegian railways are fitting seats that can be swivelled or tilted in their new inter-city electric units.

Wait for it: British Rail submitted its Channel Tunnel Link proposals to the Government on 3 May but no decision was taken before Parliament went into recess on 25 July. Even if the Government now approved the line immediately, it could not open until 1998 at the earliest.

Deadly bureaucrats: America's Department of Transportation is planning to force modifications costing £300 million to rail wagons carrying hazardous material even though no-one has been killed in incidents involving hazardous rail cargoes for the last 10 years. 133 people were killed in 1989 alone because of

LOCAL ACTION

Yorkshire

RDS TO RESCUE: RDS put its role as consumer watchdog into action in June, convening rail user forums in Pontefract and Selby at which passengers hard hit by Regional Railways cuts could give evidence of hardship. Local user groups had asked the Transport Users Consultative Committee to stage such a meeting but it had refused. Our report will detail problems and outline solutions.

CLOSURE CONFIRMED: Closure of two more sections of line were confirmed when Transport Secretary Malcolm Rifkind approved BR plans to withdraw passenger services from the Anlaby curve in Hull and the Gascoigne Wood - Milford junction link near Selby. The final train to use the lines was a summer Saturday Scarborough - Leicester at the end of August. Gascoigne Wood will remain in use for freight but the Anlaby curve is likely to be lifted, thus rendering Bridlington and Filey inaccessible without a reversal in Hull. Once again the network is made inflexible for the sake of petty sums allegedly saved.

CLOSURE CONTESTED: A classic case of closure by stealth was exposed in June when BR published plans to close six miles between Castleford and Milford junction, part of the Wakefield - York route. The route was used by InterCity trains from the North East to the West Country as recently as 1983, but has since been run down to the point where a summer Sunday Wakefield - Scarborough was the only passenger train. In contrast to previous summers when the train ran daily, with BR and the local users group working together to promote it, BR this year failed to publicise the service and withdrew the usual cheap fare offer. There were accusations that it was attempting to hide the train from potential customers to prove a lack of demand. Pontefract District Rail Action Group, helped by RDS, produced its own leaflets which attracted many passengers. The group also collected objections on board the train and it is hoped the enthusiastic public response will strengthen the case for retaining the line.

David Pickersgill

London and Home Counties

CRISIS CUTS: Drastic cuts even on peak hour services were feared in the summer as BR tried to grapple with its financial shortfall. A foretaste was provided in the July timetable alterations but the branch is worried these cuts will not save the necessary cash, will alienate customers and will worsen overcrowding, as well as increasing road traffic and pollution.

VALLEY CONFLICT: Local services in the Lea Valley between Tottenham Hale and Waltham Cross have been significantly reduced in stages over the last two years or so. The transfer of many trains to Stratford rather than Liverpool Street seems to have exacerbated the problem of low patronage. Its withdrawal of weekend services "does not represent a policy decision". We are not convinced. There is also growing concern among users that their trains are giving way to lightly used Stansted Express trains. Peak trains to such stations as Broxbourne have been reduced, with resultant overcrowding, while airport trains pass by with a handful of passengers.

LONDON STRATEGY: London Transport's strategy for the next three years warns the passenger to expect to pay for more investment, even though fares are already viewed as too expensive. LT supports the Government view that rail costs should be increasingly put on the passenger while at the same time accepting the need for greater subsidy of "socially desirable" buses.

POLITICAL PROMISE: There are 30 marginal constituencies (where the MP has less than a 5,000 majority) in the London and Home Counties area.

Howard Thomas