

# WESTMINSTER

## Regions disappear

*Nigel Spearing* (Lab, Newham South) said, in an adjournment debate on **19 MAY**, that he wanted to discuss the major reorganisation of BR's management structure. InterCity would own some lines and rent others. Southern Region had disappeared on 1 April and other regions would disappear over the next year.

"Railways were invented in this country. We have an emotional attachment to them and interest in them, coupled with a fairly widespread ignorance of the complexities of their operation."

"Since the death of Mr Huskisson when the Rocket was being tested, Parliament has had a responsibility for these matters." He knew the minister would consider them with the utmost seriousness.

*Roger Freeman* (Public Transport Minister) said Mr Spearing was an expert on railways, but the Government believed strongly that times had changed. Sir Robert Reid, the previous chairman, introduced almost nine years ago the first steps towards reorganising BR's internal management, to encourage greater accountability and management orientation towards the market and what the public wanted.

"Mr Spearing touched on safety, a crucial matter. BR believes there is in place a process of safety validation at every stage of the reorganisation to make sure that, before it is introduced, it is consistent with the high standards that BR has set itself."

"The reorganisation places special responsibility on a safety manager for a particular sector of operation. It is a BR plan and the details are for BR."

"We welcome the report. Mr Spearing and I share great admiration for what BR has done."

## Three better tubes

A second reading of the London Underground (Safety Measures) Bill (Lords) was supported by all parties on **20 MAY**, requiring works to relieve congestion at three Underground stations; London Bridge, Holborn and Tottenham Court Road.

Moving the Bill, *Robert Hughes* (C, Harrow West) said it stemmed from recommendations after the King's Cross fire. The three stations did cause concern for safety, having been built at a time of far less passenger flow. Congestion and safety problems go together, he said.

*Tony Banks* (Lab, Newham North West) said Mr Hughes reminded him that he had been a member of the Transport Committee of the Greater London Council. Now he could say "rejoice", because the Labour Party was launching its new proposals to establish a strategic body in London – the Greater London Authority.

*Mr Hughes* said they should have unity among colleagues on the two sides of the House.

*Mr Banks* said he hoped Mr Hughes' Government would put resources into London Transport to give the transportation system that a capital city such as London deserved. It was unlikely to get it until it had a Greater London Authority sitting in County Hall. *Simon Hughes* (Lib Dem, Southwark and Bermondsey) said: "We all start from the premise that we want a safer Underground system. We want to ensure that the most congested Underground stations become much more pleasant and safe environments, where points of access and egress become safer."

## Travel co-ordinated

The sooner we returned to strategic planning, the better. That meant that Underground, bus, train, river bus, road and eventually tram provision must be coordinated.

*Mr Hughes* added that the Liberals supported a Greater London Authority. One of the jobs for such an authority would be to plan transport strategically.

*Patrick McLoughlin* (Under-Secretary for Transport) said the Bill would enable major works to be undertaken at the three stations to relieve congestion and improve conditions for passengers.

*Peter Snape* (Lab, West Bromwich East) said the House gave an unqualified welcome to most of the Bill. "Having used the Underground regularly for about 30 years, I have never seen it in the

state it is in today. Regular and continuous work on escalators is long overdue."

Like other MPs, he regularly used the Underground between the terminal station at which he arrived in London and the House. "For months, I have wandered around the bowels of Euston Underground station, trying to get to the Victoria Line, on my way to the House."

## No sense of urgency

"The only work that I have seen on the escalators at Euston has been the replacement, every six months or so, of the notices telling passengers that the escalators are temporarily out of order. There seems to be no sense of urgency about doing the work. As with other public sector industries since the Government axe fell on them, the work that needs to be done on the London Underground can be done only if a budget exists."

The then Transport Secretary, *Nicholas Ridley*, had assured the House that London Underground would be far more efficient when it was freed of the ideological constraints of the GLC. They had been told that freedom from the political control of the elected strategic body would benefit the passengers. It had been apparent that that has not been the case.

Why should scorn be poured on any proposal to improve the services provided by London Underground Ltd, for example, so that they match similar services provided elsewhere in Europe?

*Sir Geoffrey Finsberg* (C, Hampstead & Highgate) said he thought London was better run when it had a Conservative GLC. Since entering the House, he put his constituency interests above everything else.

He was blocking the Bill. In West Hampstead was a series of railway lines spanned by a footbridge. The bridge was over 100 years old and known as Granny Dripping's steps – named after an old lady alleged to have sat on the steps.

The bridge, prosaically called bridge No. 26 by London Transport, was closed last year. The chairman of LT said the bridge was jointly owned by London Underground and BR. *Sir Geoffrey* said the bridge had already been closed by London Transport in breach of parliamentary powers. *Sir Geoffrey* said that had London Underground carried out normal maintenance, the situation would not have arisen. He wanted the confidence to return to his constituency and tell them that Granny Dripping's steps are saved or will be replaced and that they will be able to walk across them on their lawful business, either to go to the library or to West Hampstead

North London Line station.

*Robert Hughes* thanked the Minister and Mr Snape for their support for the Bill at its second reading. "It is important for every single London constituent," he said.

## Privatisation – No!

*Malcolm Rifkind* (Transport Secretary), moving the second reading of the Finance Bill on **11 JULY**, announced: "It is important now to enable BR to go forward with the largest investment programme that it has undertaken, based on heavy Government support."

He wanted to probe "in the kindest and gentlest way", the views of the Opposition on railway policy, and the fact that Labour Party policy was opposed to privatisation. It was important now to enable BR to go forward with the largest investment programme it had undertaken.

*Dale Campbell-Savours* (Lab, Workington) asked why it took longer to travel on the west coast line from Carlisle to London today than it did 12 years ago? Why did trains so often break down on the route? Why were there repeated signalling failures? There were broken seats and toilets not working. "Every time I travel on the line, people complain to conductors and drivers. When they finally get to London, they find the escalator at Euston station had not worked for seven weeks."

*Mr Rifkind* replied that the last Labour Government had been foolish enough to cut investment in the railways and that the present Government were right to increase it. BR's annual figures showed they had gone through a difficult period in the recession.

"When the Government consider the likely course of privatisation in what we hope will be the not-too-distant future, we shall find it encouraging that, even during an economic recession, the business will demonstrate its capacity to make a profit."

## Adley says why not

*Robert Adley* (C, Christchurch) said he was still waiting to be convinced that the passenger would benefit from privatisation. "Which country are you using as a model to provide guidance, where this policy has been undertaken successfully?" The Japanese, said *Mr Rifkind*, were further ahead in these matters. The Dutch were proposing to privatise their railways and the chairman of German Railways was reported to have said that privatisation might be good for them.

*Kim Howells* (Lab, Pontypridd) said that in Japan a series of regional monopolies had been

