



The Institution of
Railway Operators

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High speed rail for Britain

The business case for a new high-speed rail link between Scotland and London was clearly set out at a recent seminar in Glasgow.

Jim Summers reports

'Fly by train' was the lingering thought implanted in the minds of those present at a seminar in Glasgow last December on FastTrack North, organised by the Railway Forum and the Scottish Association for Public Transport. It was a good day in Scotland to be holding a gathering to discuss the case for a UK High Speed railway. The new Larkhall line had been opened that very morning; Network Rail and Virgin were poised to introduce tilting accelerations and an improved timetable on the West Coast Route into Scotland; while in the Inverness area, a host of new passenger services would begin.

BUILDING ON SUCCESS

These developments showed that in the UK, railways were doing well – as Chris Green demonstrated with statistics showing that the UK had the fastest rail growth in Europe, and actually had been the fastest-growing mode in the last 10 years. We were doing something right, obviously; but he questioned whether the capacity was there for it to continue. Indeed, he more than questioned it. He agreed with the prediction that, by 2016, the railway system would simply have to possess substantially more capacity to cope. Meantime, the road network was visibly overloaded with average speeds falling, while the growth of air travel on short-haul routes was reaching limits of capacity and was environmentally unsustainable.

So it made sense to build new

capacity in the form of high-speed railways, and to do so for wide strategic reasons relating to regeneration and re-balancing of the transport network, as well as speed and capacity. These merits were demonstrable already in Europe, and so our first UK high-speed route, the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, must not be allowed to terminate in London. The evidence pointed towards the need to continue it north, not just for its intrinsic dramatic reduction in journey times, but to release capacity on the east and west coast main lines, and to link and transform the economies of Scotland, the North of England, London and the Continent. And the case had to be made now – or we would fail to meet the challenge of 2016.

RAILWAYS AS A PROVEN TOOL FOR DEVELOPMENT

We need to be hard-headed about new infrastructure and its purpose, and Paul Hughes of Scottish Enterprise, as a strategic planner, stressed that a high-speed line *per se* was not as important as ensuring that new links really would improve the economies of the regions. The importance of such transport was clear, when he observed that, while Scotland's cities might seem reasonably close together, logistically they were really much further apart due to the infrastructure. In the strategic planning world, much work was going on to understand the inter-dependence between cities, instead of looking at each city or region in isolation.

Europe and Eurostar offered case studies – Amsterdam being brought within 22 minutes of Rotterdam would be worth watching, and the considerable shifts following the linking of Paris and Marseilles by high-speed rail (a distance similar to London – Glasgow) were already proven. Richard Brown from Eurostar took Lille as an example to show the dynamic leverage effect of a high-speed line on local economics. Moreover, Eurostar passengers



Jim Summers

contributed one fourteenth of the CO₂ pollution that air passengers created. One plane took off every 12 minutes on average from Scotland to London, according to Dr John McCormick of the Scottish Association for Public Transport, and the rail timings and frequencies to the north-west and midlands of England were dismal. High speed rail was needed as the step-change, while environmental issues and emerging technologies would drive policy in its favour.

Of course, the FastTrack proposal was about more than just getting to and from Scotland. It was also about the links to the cities of the north west of England and about addressing the shift eastwards in the centre of gravity of the European Union. In fact, it was important to understand and communicate that the congested south-east of England stood to gain most from the resultant improvements in capacity.

ON THE EDGE OF EUROPE

Nor was it just about passengers. Gavin Roser demonstrated how, for freight, Vienna was now the centre of the European Union and drew attention to the incredible levels of investment reinforcing that position. This would put the UK even more on the periphery, and active steps were needed to counteract

this disadvantage. Road freight had looming problems of its own. He saw fast freight services as the logistics variant of the specification for passenger services – in other words, capacity for freight and speed that were commercially attractive enough to create a real modal shift. He recommended a study of the trends in Sweden and Switzerland, and could list the potential customers and flows if rail offered scheduled freight services of the order of Seville to Glasgow in 15 hours or Glasgow to Paris in six hours. Realising the significance of a high-speed line on freight traffic was clearly crucial for understanding the potential, far-reaching extent of its benefits.

WHAT MIGHT A HIGH-SPEED LINE LOOK LIKE?

So the challenge in all this, according to former SRA director Jim Steer, was to shift attitudes from 'oh no, not another expensive rail project' to 'what are we going to do with the transport system of this country?' The time was ripe for a high-speed link, with a strong, positive business case predicted and with a potentially enthusiastic private sector; but, at this stage, what was really needed was a strategy, not a project. That strategy had to address the wider

context, the phasing, and issues of future compatibility; and it must lead to consideration of user charges and cash flows at the level of transport corridors.

Essentially, though, a high-speed line could raise the Gross Domestic Product and extend the catchment of the south-east, thus breaking down the persistent north-south divide.

In practical terms, the Channel Tunnel Rail Link and Heathrow would need to be connected to the high-speed line, access to city centres would have to be secured, Edinburgh and Glasgow would have to be served together, and the options for the line might well result in two routes northwards, one to the north-east and one to the north-west.

This surprised some of the audience, but Steer saw the need for a four-track route, and if that were so, then there were real operating disadvantages of having four tracks on the same formation, compared with the simplicity of two routes.

But the point was that logic was pointing to the need for extra capacity – and on a new, modern railway.

A WIN-WIN SOLUTION

It seemed that speakers and audience had begun to glimpse a real win-win

situation, with the merits of rail now being recognised as the solutions to deep-seated and escalating problems about the way we are going to live in future.

No opportunity should now be lost by any of us to ensure that this was widely understood.

The Government had made a manifesto commitment to look at the scope for a high-speed railway to the north, and the key study by Sir Rod Eddington, on Transport Policy objectives and the UK's economic productivity, growth and stability, was under way and taking evidence.

Members of the IoRO, especially those studying on its courses should look at the valuable information available at www.railwayforum.com, while more on the high speed link is available on www.fasttracknorth.org.uk, www.highspeedbritain.com. Comments may be made to eddingtostudy@dft.gsi.gov.uk

The author is a tutor on the Institution learning programme. He has worked in freight, passenger and shipping operations, both in the UK and overseas.

NEWS FOR IRO MEMBERS

The following employers operate a corporate membership scheme, by paying a one-off annual fee which covers all their employees' affiliate or associate membership subscriptions. Those with full membership will continue to pay their subscription personally, irrespective of whether or not they can subsequently claim it back: (Please note that, as the IRO's subscriptions are tax-deductible, a receipt will be issued for all payments, whether by cheque, standing order or internet payment) Network Rail, Eurostar UK Ltd, First ScotRail, First Great Western, First Great Western Link, Railnews, Iarnród Éireann (Irish Rail), EWS Railway, Northern Ireland Railways, Central

Trains, Virgin West Coast, Virgin Cross-Country, Thameslink, Southern, Corus Rail Consultancy, London Underground Ltd, Docklands Light Railway, Transport for London, Stagecoach Rail, South West Trains, Sheffield Supertram, Arriva Trains Wales, South Eastern Trains, Island Line, London Lines, Silverlink Trains, c2c Rail, WAGN Rail, Wessex Trains, Midland Mainline, First Transpennine Express, One, Gatwick Express. If your company would like to explore the benefits of corporate membership of the Institution, please contact us. We welcome applications from all industry companies, suppliers and associations – please contact Chris Daughton on 01444 248931 or email admin@railwayoperators.org

- Have you got experience of operating the railway? Would you like professional recognition, development and work-based academic qualifications? The Institution of Railway Operators exists to provide a professional structure and qualifications for people with knowledge and experience of operating the railway, at all levels.

An information pack is available for anyone interested in finding out more about the Institution and its education programme. Please contact Claire Wickes at the address at the top of the page if you would like a pack for yourself or colleagues.

DIARY OF EVENTS

ANNUAL LUNCH

Our 2006 Annual Lunch will take place on **Friday 28 April 2006** in Manchester. Full details and a booking form are being sent out to all members. Any companies wishing for a corporate table of 10 are welcome to contact us. Please email a provisional booking to: admin@railwayoperators.org, or call us on 01444 248931.

SCOTTISH AND IRISH AREA

Study weekend, Glasgow.

Friday 3 February – Sunday 5 February 2006

The Area Group will be participating in the weekend activities for students who are coming to Glasgow for the launch of the next set of courses with Glasgow Caledonian University, and the programme of meetings and visits for the existing students from all over the country on their study weekend.

Monday 20 March 2006

The work of the Rail Accident Investigation Branch
This event will be held in Glasgow at 5:15pm, with a venue still to be confirmed.

Monday 24 April 2006

We are hoping to arrange an event with an emphasis on Ireland. For information on all Scottish events and matters, please contact Scottish@railwayoperators.org or phone Jim Summers, acting chairman on 01324 625284

MIDLANDS AREA

Provisional dates for the diary:

Monday 20 February

Monday 20 March

Monday 24 April (please note change of day)

Monday 15 May

To contact the Midlands Area call Julia Stanyard on 0121 345 5030 or email: Midlands@railwayoperators.org

SOUTH EAST AREA

Monday, 20 March

Station Operations, Operations Master Class

Monday, 15 May

Speaker (to be arranged)

Monday, 10 July

Basic Signalling, Operations Master Class

Monday, 18 September

Speaker (to be arranged)

Monday, 20 November

Track for Operators, Operations Master Class

All South East Area meetings take place at the Union Jack Club, Sandell Street, Waterloo. Doors open at 6pm and the talks commence at 6.30pm.

To contact the South East area on any subject please email:

Southeast@railwayoperators.org

NORTH EAST AREA

All North East Area meetings normally take place at 5.30pm for 6pm, at York.

For further news on the IRO in the North East, contact us by email at: Northeast@railwayoperators.org

NORTH WEST AREA

Wednesday, 22 March

A talk on ERTMS by Paul Le Vesconte

Wednesday 24 May

A visit to the new Transpennine Express Depot at Ardwick.

Please note this event is still provisional and we will keep you informed.

To contact the North West area on any matter, please contact Clive Evans on 01270-629009 or email us at: Northwest@railwayoperators.org

SOUTH WEST AREA

For information on all South West events and matters, contact Lawrie Hall on 01453 822150 or email us at Southwest@railwayoperators.org