

There's still time to nominate your RAIL BUSINESS MANAGER OF THE YEAR

www.railbusinessawards.com

The closing date has now passed for nominations to all but one of the categories in the HSBC Rail Business Awards 2003.

We're sorry if yours is not one of the record-breaking numbers of entries to this year's awards – there is always next year!

However, don't despair if you still want to nominate somebody for Rail Business Manager of the Year, as the closing date has been extended to Friday 16 January 2004.

All you need to do is send a photograph of your nominee together with a brief summary of why you think she/he deserves to be Rail Business Manager of the Year to:
HSBC Rail Business Awards 2003,
c/o Woodhouse
Communications,
Grosvenor Hall,
Bolnore Road,
Haywards Heath,
West Sussex RH16 4BX.



THE HSBC RAIL BUSINESS AWARDS

Monday February 23 2004

At the Le Meridien Grosvenor House Hotel,
Park Lane, London.

YOU CAN'T AFFORD TO MISS IT!

Further details are available from Helen Burgess, Woodhouse Communications, Grosvenor Hall, Bolnore Road, Haywards Heath, West Sussex. RH16 4BX
Tel: 01444 473588;
email helen@woodhousecommunications.co.uk
Or visit www.railbusinessawards.com



Time for the Government to do the decent thing



*Peter Aldridge,
Head of HSBC
Rail, on why
it is transport's
turn to benefit
from Government
funding*

THE MORE ASTUTE OF YOU WILL HAVE noticed how, in previous columns, I have suggested that the Government has some very big and difficult decisions to make about the future shape of the UK rail industry. I make no apology for returning to that theme now.

Over the past 20 years' Treasury spending on health and education has more than doubled. Funding of the NHS has gone up sharply from 2.7 per cent of GDP in the mid-1980s to 6.5 per cent today. The figures for education are broadly similar.

In the same period, spending on transport has remained static – it stands at 1.3 per cent of GDP compared to 1.1 per cent 20 years ago.

As a result – and despite public perception – there have been marked improvements in health and education, while our transport network has struggled to keep pace with the numbers of people travelling.

It took a series of crises in health and education to persuade politicians that something had to be done; we are rapidly approaching a similar situation with transport – and rail in particular. As SRA

chairman Richard Bowker puts the finishing touches to his 'Case for Rail', there appear to be just two options open to government; either double the spend on transport or take demand management seriously.

Taking the second option first, road charging is a more realistic possibility, thanks to advances in technology that make it easy to implement. Just last month we saw the UK's first toll motorway opened on a stretch of the M6.

However, progress on congestion charging – a key element in the Government's 10-year transport plan – has been snail-paced. Politicians are terrified of upsetting motorists – in other words the vast majority of voters – even though the need to tackle gridlock is overwhelming.

Rail hasn't helped its case – either as a viable alternative or as part of an integrated transport network – with rocketing costs and a failure to deliver. Nevertheless, an integrated transport system, as envisaged in the 10-year plan, without the rail industry is unthinkable.

Currently, lack of capacity on the rail network is a problem that is proving every bit as intractable as road congestion.

Passengers crammed sardine-like into commuter trains isn't the best advertisement for the industry. But rail's equivalent of congestion charging – putting up the fares to choke off demand – thankfully, doesn't figure in the SRA's blueprint.

With a re-evaluation of the 10-year plan imminent and the long-awaited spending review looming, one might expect the future for rail transport to become clearer. But will it?

With a general election likely in the next year or so, the prospect for an accelerated programme of congestion charging, or a doubling of spending on transport, are virtually nil. We need a government as passionate about a sustainable transport network as it is about health and education but I don't see this coming along in the next four years.

Whatever happens, I have no doubt that the railway is more than capable of rising to the challenge and delivering a first-class service. In the meantime, however, we will continue to have a crowded network until our politicians become passionate about delivering a first-rate integrated transport network.