

# PROGRESS AND PROSPERITY

Traditionally at the start of January we wish each other not only a Happy New Year but a prosperous one too. In wishing all of you that in abundance, I am very much aware that prosperity is an unpredictable commodity depending, as it does, on an array of factors many beyond our control. We have in recent years benefited from a relatively robust and stable economy and while, in some respects, the rail industry had a rough ride with safety crises eventually culminating in the demise of Railtrack and the emergence of Network Rail, overall privatisation has brought progress – and there has been prosperity too!

It has not always been so.

For most of us 1945 and the end of the Second World War seems an unimaginably long time ago; indeed it is now beginning to fade from living memory. But the half-way point 30

years ago, 1975, seems, at any rate for this writer, not all that far off. And how things have changed in that time.

Think back to the Britain of the mid-1970s; rampant inflation, constant industrial conflict and chaos, management seeming to lose the will to manage, a plummeting pound and our prestige abroad diminishing. When yet another run on the pound had us going 'cap-in-hand' to the IMF it seemed the nation's post-war recovery of the previous 30 years was going into reverse. It all culminated in the infamous 'winter of discontent', after that we all seemed to come to our senses and another recovery began.

Nonetheless, there are people of a certain age eager to tell anyone who will listen that the past three decades have been a slippery slope of falling standards and declining values. I am

not one of them. On the contrary, I believe, most of the changes – industrial, economic and social – have been for the better. If we can maintain the same pace of progress over the next three decades then I believe we will hand on something worthwhile to our grandchildren and great-grandchildren. And there can be little doubt that the country's transport network will be a vital ingredient in that 'something worthwhile.'

According to Atoc, our railways are outstripping every other European country in attracting new passengers. Over the past 10 years, it says, 18 new passenger lines and 48 new stations have been added to the network. By the end of December last year, over 148 route miles and 51 stations had been added to the national network since 1995.

This is impressive. But nevertheless the CBI is calling for massively increased investment in the whole transport infrastructure. Vitality necessary, it says, if Britain is to maintain its position as a place to do business and our economy, the fourth largest in the world, to thrive. This seems obvious but ironically there



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Contact Tatjana Hauer at Woodhouse Communications on 01444 473588 for table bookings and full details of RBA categories and sponsorship.

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# — A LESSON FROM HISTORY

is a danger that over the next few years there could in fact be a falling off of investment as the train operators and Network Rail complete the renewal of their rolling stock, the modernisation of their stations and investment in major infrastructure projects. This must not be allowed to happen; we must maintain the momentum of investment and the Government must take the Eddington review of long-term transport needs to heart and not hide or ignore it if its findings turn out to be unwelcome.

In a way the rail industry is a victim of its own success. With the growth in traffic and passenger numbers, capacity is becoming a crucial issue. That, of course, directly involves Network Rail but the company's massive net debt, now standing at £16.8bn, could present an obstacle to further investment.



One way of raising the cash to increase rail capacity suggested by the Institute of Directors (IoD) is the introduction of widespread road pricing. Graeme Leach, the IoD's chief economist, argued that greater use of optimal road pricing could provide a substantial boost to the railways and investor confidence. The

successful implementation of the London Congestion Charge and the fact that other towns and cities are looking at similar schemes would bear this out. In addition the Transport Select Committee's report 'Road Pricing – the next steps' – says the Government must prioritise in complementary measures, including public transport. However, the debate on this is

only just getting underway.

We have in the 2012 Olympic Games a rare opportunity as well as a fantastic focus for rail investment and development in and around the

capital. This is good news but we must not fall into the trap of letting it happen at the expense of other, just as important, infrastructure projects across the rest of the country. Neither must the various project developers be allowed to waste money on unclear schemes.

Continued investment and capacity expansion are vital to the future of the railway and the success of the UK but they must be supported by ever increasing efficiency and cost control if, 30 years hence, the first decades of the 21st century are to be seen as railway renaissance. That is very much up to both the train operating companies and Network Rail.

Let us hope that all parties from governments, train operators and network owners, to rail industry workers and rail customers learn from history and move forward together over the next three decades to make sure the progress we have made since 1975 is sustained.

But in the short term – here's to a prosperous 2006!

## PASSIONATE ABOUT COMMUNICATION

**The Rail Business Awards is delighted to have *Railnews* as sponsor of the Internal Communication Excellence category. Here, editorial director Alan Marshall explains why good internal communication is 'the vital factor'**

With 75,000 copies circulating each month across the rail industry *Railnews*, which began its life as British Rail's popular staff newspaper, is very much in the communicating with people business.

Alan Marshall – the publication's publishing and editorial director and formerly BR Group's public relations manager – is passionate about the importance of communications in an industry that, since privatisation, has tended to become fragmented.

He said: 'Until the launch this year of the Internal Communication Excellence of the Year category in the HSBC Rail Business Awards there has not before been, in the many awards

schemes, a category that seemed to be particularly relevant to our activities. *Railnews* seeks to communicate with the people at all levels who bring things together across an industry that still seems to retain that sense of being 'the railway family'. We strive to provide an overarching communication between everybody in a similar style people are used to reading in popular newspapers. So it seems relevant to us to support the category, because communication is what we are all about, and to help encourage the improvement of communications within the industry.

'Good internal communications at all levels are a vital factor in the running of any modern railway company. There is a need for communication at the workplace level within a company as well as a need for communication across companies. An example would be the recent decision to go back to the idea of integrated train controls and bring train operating company and Network Rail staff together in the one place with an emphasis on the need for everybody to communicate together irrespective of whom they work for.'

As well as *Railnews* sponsoring the categories Alan will also be one of the judges and says he is hoping to see entries that are 'not just inter-company but intra-company as well, because it is vital that everybody can communicate

effectively with colleagues, customers and clients across the rail industry'.

One of Alan's responsibilities at the time he was BR Group public relations manager was the production of *Railnews*, which was put up for sale towards the final stage of the privatisation process. An attempted MBO by Alan and the then editor was not successful and BR decided to close the paper down. Later Alan and Cyril Bleasdale, who had been London Midland Region's general manager when Alan was the region's public affairs manager, decided to have another stab at keeping *Railnews* alive. 'Cyril had gone off to be the first director of ScotRail and had subsequently retired in 1994. BRB closed *Railnews* down in October 1996. We succeeded in getting it started up again in the following February.'

Others were involved in the venture but Cyril and Alan were the principal protagonists. 'We obtained access to the title. The printers and distributors agreed to restart the paper on the same terms and conditions that BR had enjoyed. The paper now provides an effective as well as entertaining means of communication for staff at all levels and in all sectors of the rail industry.'

Cyril is *Railnews* Ltd's managing director, Alan fulfils the role of deputy MD as well as his editorial responsibilities, and the chairman is Sir Robert McAlpine.