

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS COMMITTEE

TRANSPORT SUB-COMMITTEE

INQUIRY INTO THE FUTURE OF THE RAILWAY

EVIDENCE PREPARED BY THE PASSENGER TRANSPORT EXECUTIVE GROUP

INTRODUCTION

- 1) The Passenger Transport Executive Group (PTEG) welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to this inquiry. The Passenger Transport Authorities (PTAs) cover areas with a population of over 13 million people. The Passenger Transport Executive Group represents their 6 English PTEs and Strathclyde in Scotland. All PTEs are co-signatories to the appropriate local rail franchises in their area. In addition they work closely with the Regional and Local Authorities in their areas to improve the regional and national rail networks in their conurbations. All of the PTAs have at their hearts cities which are dependant on their rail networks for commuting and for access to wider regional, national and European markets. All PTAs strongly believe that rail has a future.

IS THE REGULATOR RIGHT OR IS RAIL OUTMODED?

- 2) Our major conurbations depend upon rail to function. The rail routes into our major cities represent one of the most effective ways of carrying significant numbers of people into city centres. For example, in Birmingham rail carries one sixth of the commuters into the city centre every week day. In Leeds, 14,000 passengers per day travel into Leeds during the peak period and in Glasgow, nearly a third of morning peak trips into the city centre are carried by rail. In Greater Manchester, a sixth of all public transport trips are by rail. Rail is particularly effective in providing an attractive alternative to the car. In Birmingham, almost half the rail users have a car available for their trip. If this rail travel had to convert into road use it would mean an additional 294,000 vehicles using the roads into Birmingham every week.
- 3) Members of the Committee will be aware of the problems suffered in some of the Northern conurbations as a result of the poor performance by Arriva Trains Northern (ATN) 2 to 3 years ago. This was set out in our evidence to the Inquiry on Northern Rail Services. Nonetheless, there has still been growth in rail passengers' use. Use of Metro rail services in West Yorkshire has grown by 44% in the last 8 years and in Centro by 25% in the last 6 years. With investment there is capacity to significantly increase the numbers utilising local networks. An investment programme in South Yorkshire in the late 1980s and early 1990s saw passenger flows doubled.
- 4) The West Midlands Area Multi-Modal Study and the West Midlands Capacity Study demonstrate that rail will have a key role to play in the 30-year transport strategy for the region. For example, in 1998/1999, 4.8 million passengers travelled between Wolverhampton and Birmingham New Street. In 20 years that number will have risen to 9.5 million. On the section to Coventry, 6.4 million journeys were undertaken in 1998/1999. By 2020, that figure will have grown to 16.3 million.
- 5) An efficient rail system forms an essential ingredient for a thriving regional economy and for an enhanced quality of life for those who live, work, visit and invest there. Economic

competitiveness is vital for the regional economy but rail and road congestion is bad for business and a deterrent to new investment. The Confederation of British Industry has estimated that congestion is costing the businesses of the West Midlands somewhere between £2 billion and £2.3 billion each year. This represents some 10% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the region and is costing each person in the area some £2.50 per day. A similar situation exists in other major cities. PTEG has therefore supported investment in the West Coast Main Line (WCML) and is keen to see plans for upgrading the East Coast Main Line (ECML) and TransPennine Express (TPE) routes brought forward. That is why there is also concern at the deferral of much-needed capacity improvements in Manchester, Birmingham and Sheffield.

- 6) The local rail network also provides an important means of ensuring good access throughout the country. A fifth of the passengers using South Yorkshire's rail network are accessing the national or regional network. Rail links between conurbations and to London are critical to the economic well-being of those communities.
- 7) Just as the local, national and regional rail networks are integrated so the rail network must be integrated with the rest of the transport network. In their conurbations, PTEs have been well-placed to develop the railway through attractive ticketing, park and ride and investment in stations and rolling stock. These networks now carry over 140 million passengers per year. Commitment and investment by PTA/PTEs in the rail network is evidence of their view that rail is not an outmoded form of transport. The attributes of rail, particularly its segregation and its quality, have been adapted in Newcastle, Manchester, Sheffield and Birmingham to provide light rail networks which also provide an important part of the transport network carrying a further 70 million passengers per year.
- 8) There are, however, issues over the costs of operating, maintaining and developing the network. PTEG has for some time been concerned about the escalating costs of infrastructure improvement and the rising cost of franchises with that money not necessarily delivering a similar increase in outputs. Much is made in particular of the average subsidy paid per rail passenger particularly on commuter networks. Part of this reflects the charging structure assumed by the Rail Regulator and Network Rail which has seen the costs of operating those franchises rise significantly. Nonetheless, in South Yorkshire, where the allocated net cost of the current ATN franchise is £20 million, work has been done to quantify the increased costs to consumers and businesses were the network to be closed. It is estimated at between £35-£40 million. This means a net social value of the railway of between £15-20 million.
- 9) Rail is an efficient mode of transport typically requiring 1/7 the power of road transport. It is the most energy-efficient form of transport in terms of energy consumed per passenger kilometre. The segregated nature of rail corridors and associated congestion means they are protected from road traffic growth and disruption. The most effective other forms of public transport tend to replicate these characteristics through tramways, guided busways and bus lanes.
- 10) The railway is more than its physical assets. It is a complex web of systems ultimately enabling passengers to make journeys. To remain relevant in modern society the rail industry needs to be able to respond more quickly to changing circumstances and customer needs. Lead times to change fares and, more importantly, timetables need to be significantly reduced. The arrangements between Train Operating Companies may also need to be reviewed. The railway also needs to respond better to special events if it is to present itself as a credible mode of transport. All too often the railway collectively is unable to provide capacity for events that are known about months in advance. It therefore appears outmoded through its inability to respond to customers.

11) Rail already makes an important contribution to the national transport network. It can do more with carefully targeted improvements particularly to services and facilities which can assist with modal shift and therefore enhance the value of the asset. There remain many things that can be done to improve the whole journey experience and develop a fully integrated public passenger transport network. These include:-

- ◆ Better information, before and during the journey;
- ◆ Better systems for planning timetables (for normal circumstances and for times of exceptional demand);
- ◆ Better ticketing systems (which may come with the introduction of Smart cards);
- ◆ Better planned and maintained passenger facilities at stations/interchanges,
- ◆ Addressing poor public perception of quality, reliability and personal security;
- ◆ Better access from the highway network to the rail network;
- ◆ Improved land use integration;
- ◆ Development of rolling stock and operational practices that better match the capacity of trains to the number of passengers wishing to travel;
- ◆ Appropriate services in the early morning, evenings, late at night and at weekends.

Centro's Park and Ride programme now offers over 5,000 station car parking spaces. Park and Ride has proved so successful that five sites were extended last year giving a further 680 free spaces. A proposed provision of a further 9 Park and Ride sites on the network could attract up to 3550 additional rail passengers in the AM peak, mainly to destinations within the conurbation. Many of Centro's station car parks are full by 8.00 am.

12) The UK rail network therefore has the potential to be a very valuable national asset if used properly but as with all assets it could easily become a liability if not properly looked after. PTEG therefore supports the Rail Regulator's view that the rail network is a system that the country needs particularly in conurbations with commuter services into London and other larger cities. It is not outmoded.

IS THE PRESENT NETWORK THE RIGHT ONE AND IF NOT HOW SHOULD IT BE CHANGED?

13) The present rail network reflects a legacy of investment over the last 150 years. This inevitably means there are places on the network where capacity is constrained and instances where the route does not best serve the community. There are also places which have grown in the last 20 years but are not well served by the rail network. These are all factors which ensure there is a need to keep the rail network and the services which operate on it under review. In broad terms the physical network in the conurbations represented by PTEG are appropriate to those areas. There are instances where the opportunity has been taken to convert to light rail and these will continue to be pursued. In some instances former alignments have been used for other forms of public transport. PTEG's main concern is securing funding to carry out the maintenance and enhancement necessary to make the network attractive for passengers and therefore achieve local and national objectives.

14) PTEs have shown themselves to be adaptable by changing service patterns to reflect changes in demand. There is scope to further optimise services by for example lengthening trains and

platforms to provide additional capacity and make better use of the transport infrastructure. However, in many cases the cost of extending station platforms can be a barrier to these relatively modest improvements. PTEG supports the work being done by the ORR and SRA to drive out inefficiencies and deliver realistic value for money schemes.

- 15) Opportunities for new stations continue to be explored. Metro's 20-Year Rail Strategy lists over 30 potential new station sites. PTEs have also been instrumental in improving the operational efficiency of the network through schemes such as the electrification of the Airedale/Wharfedale routes in West Yorkshire which have seen passenger growth on these routes of 19% per annum significantly higher than the West Yorkshire average of 6% per annum.
- 16) On the other hand, capacity constraints in Sheffield, Manchester and Birmingham are presently preventing operating additional services. Birmingham New Street currently handles over 75% of the daily total services to Birmingham and the station serves over 31 million people every year. Yet the main approaches are only double-track on each of the Coventry, Wolverhampton, Derby and Cheltenham lines. These tracks have to handle both fast and local services to other destinations. Birmingham therefore plays a unique role as both the hub of the national rail network as well as that of the increasingly busy Centro network of services. New Street station is where rail capacity and congestion problems are most acute. Birmingham New Street station was initially designed to deal with 640 trains a day. This year it is dealing with an average of 1,400 trains a day. On an average day a train leaves New Street station every 58 seconds at peak times. Scheme costs for basic improvement of facilities have been identified at £135 million but there is no funding source agreed.
- 17) There are major capacity constraints on the rail network in central Manchester. The main bottleneck is around Piccadilly Station where lines from the east and south converge and meet the connections from the north and west. The section of track between Ardwick to the east of Piccadilly and Castlefield to the west is recognised as one of the most heavily congested in the country. Other key junctions on the network add to the capacity constraints. There are five major junctions between Stockport and Bolton. In a nutshell, local, regional and inter-city passenger services and freight are all forced to compete for limited capacity. The impacts of this on passengers can be illustrated by the non-stop journey times between Stockport and Manchester. For many years this journey took 8 minutes. Now it is scheduled to take up to 15 minutes. Most Manchester to London express trains are timed to take 11 or 12 minutes to get to Stockport. Other examples exist across the network. Track capacity between Manchester and the Airport also constrains the number of trains that can serve the growing demand for travel to and from the Airport. No more than 6 trains per hour can be accommodated on this section of track. This then restricts the range of places that can be provided with through trains to the Airport. It also means that some of the long distance services to the Airport have to call at local stations between Manchester and the Airport, slowing down through passengers. There is not the capacity to provide a separate local service on the line.
- 18) PTEG believe that in appropriate circumstances there is a case for expanding the network. It supported the work recently done on the high-speed route to the North and is looking to improve rail access to Airports and other areas of development in their areas.

WHAT SORT OF TRAFFIC IS THE NETWORK BEST USED FOR?

- 19) This and the previous question have also been the subject of recent debate between the SRA and the Rail Regulator in terms of specifying the SRAs Network Outputs. There appears to be a growing presumption that the strategic or inter-city rail network and the London commuting rail network are the most important elements of the network and should be given a higher priority than some other parts of the network for investment and with it an implication that this is the sort of traffic that rail is best at carrying. There is no doubt that rail is good at carrying large numbers

of people at high speed between city centres. As this evidence also sets out, it is good at carrying large numbers of commuters not only into London but into other major conurbations such as Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds and Glasgow. It can also be instrumental in linking isolated communities, providing leisure opportunities and supporting economic regeneration. It is also particularly effective in dealing with certain types of freight. What is important therefore is to provide a network of services and a maintenance regime that is appropriate to the volume and nature of traffic using it. This may offer cost-saving opportunities.

- 20) It is not possible to take a simplistic view of the rail market because of the strong inter-dependency amongst different types of trips. The local rail network is an essential part of the total network. Equally importantly, the value of rail cannot only be judged on financial criteria. Rail has many social, environmental and economic benefits not only in isolated and rural areas but also in major conurbations.

HOW DOES OUR NETWORK COMPARE WITH OTHER NETWORKS AND WHAT LESSONS CAN WE LEARN FROM OTHER COUNTRIES?

- 21) In terms of capital investment on transport, between 1990 and 1995 Germany invested 66% more per person and France invested almost 50% more than in the UK. Investment in rail has included high-speed links between regional cities which has reduced rail journey times. In France and Germany it is intended that high-speed trains should eliminate domestic air travel altogether to free limited airport capacity for longer-distance flights. Regional cities in the UK currently lag behind the European average in terms of GDP. One of the key characteristics of successful cities is connectivity to transport and IT markets. Transport and IT infrastructure is fundamental in order to allow innovative business to connect efficiently to their markets. Congested road and motorway, networks cannot provide the competitive advantage required.
- 22) Much of the network is used close to capacity. Over the decades the network has been rationalised with the removal of potential diversionary routes and the installation of low-cost junction layouts that reduce capacity by limiting parallel moves. The only other European network with the same level of capacity utilisation is Holland where a high-speed line is being built from Amsterdam to Belgium to increase capacity by segregating trains travelling at different speeds. In Britain we are still trying to run all types of train on the modernised WCML and many other routes.
- 23) Design, maintenance and safety standards need to be appropriate to the circumstances. The higher the speed of trains and the greater the frequency of trains the more stringent the standards need to be. This is recognised in most of Europe but, in Britain, we tend to over-specify especially on little-used rural lines. For example, the removal of line crossings for passengers at rural stations and their replacement by footbridges at several hundred thousand pounds each; also the level of protection given to level crossings where both road and rail traffic are low should not need to be more than conventional rail signalling and road traffic lights.
- 24) There is a trade-off between efficient use of rolling stock and efficient use of track capacity. This trade-off should be judged on passenger need related to journey time and connections. The best example of this is Switzerland where hubs have been created 25 or 55 minutes apart (and linked by even-headway services) even though in some cases the journey time could be quicker. In Britain we are still debating the benefits of connections and clock-face timetables because the responsibility for rolling stock, infrastructure and fares budgets rests with different organisations and there is no holistic view of the railway. Track capacity could be used more efficiently if there was more willingness in Britain to couple short local trains together to form longer trains on the main line as is common elsewhere in Europe (and at one time was common south of the Thames).

- 25)** In many European countries local and regional transport is the responsibility of local and regional Government. This enables policies to be implemented in a locally relevant and appropriate way. There is more local input to the planning and funding of local rail services (and more co-ordination/less wasteful duplication with other modes). It may be that revised procedures for the control of local bus services and enhanced local input to rail services (by PTAs/PTEs and Regional Government if created) would help create a more efficient public transport network as a whole. The ability to take a long-term view of transport needs (say 25 years) would also help. In the UK there is frequently tension between the SRA and regional bodies. This is likely to increase if the SRA pursues an agenda which seeks to prioritise investment and resource allocation to inter-city services and those into London to the detriment of regional and local services in PTE areas.