

Transport 1/12/88

F

James Kirby vice chmn of B.R

Higgins, Adley, Jack, Gregory, Amos, Knapman,
Robt. Hayward, Dorrell

Knapman more passengers. More space between trains ^{int} &
slower trains for more passengers.

Adley anti-privitisation. Please explain why trains
are different. Is cutting of subsidy affecting services.
French investment for channel tunnel.

Higgins separate channel line will offend
commuters on N. Kent line.

Conal Gregory On train catering.

Alan Amos channel tunnel & N. of England.
Are you funds as efficient as possible.

Michael Jack
Overcrowding on W. coast line

~~Environment~~



MAIL BAG

Privatisation fallacies

SIR.—Your September editorial, "Privatisation Prospects", was most timely in exposing two fallacies inherent in proposals for privatising the BR network, as distinct from private operation of services under a specified contract. The latter, of course, is already a common practice on BR, and indeed private capital is very substantially involved throughout the freight sector.

The first mistake generally made by advocates of privatisation is to argue that BR is a "monopoly" which needs "opening up" to competition. In reality BR is under intense competition from other forms of transport and in this respect is in no sense a monopoly. It may be true that BR has a monopolistic control of track, but even so the railway network is not an example of a "natural monopoly", akin to the gas, water and electricity supply systems, whereby each individual consumer only has access to a single source of supply. Mr. Robert Adley's book "Tunnel Vision" (reviewed in *RM* September) recognises this fact; it is a pity that so many of his Parliamentary colleagues appear not to have read it.

This leads on to the second fallacy, namely that consumers would receive a better service from a private company and that these services would be profitable. Where is the evidence to support such a claim? I have yet to see any; on the other hand there is plenty of evidence to show what happens where short-term commercial pressures are allowed to subordinate long-term service provision—witness the catastrophic decline of US passenger rail services, the state of the rail network in Ireland (North and South) or the disappearance of half the UK railway system under both the "Big Four" and nationalised British Railways.

The Beeching philosophy, still alive and well in government circles today, conspicuously failed to make BR commercially viable. Like many service industries, railways tend to be labour-intensive and thus in a competitive situation, inherently unprofitable, unless fares are set so high that customers are priced off most of

the network. In this situation— which a simple change of ownership from public to private (or, indeed, *vice-versa*) cannot alter—the real choices facing the country are not concerned with railway finances *per se*, but with the broader context within which railways have to operate. When economic, social and environmental factors are properly taken into account, BR appears not as a drain on the public purse needing to be disposed of, but as a sound investment. But people must remember the old adage: "service don't come cheap".

PHILIP BISATT

Shirley, Southampton

Rejected freight

SIR.—As the road system between East Anglia and Herefordshire is slow and tedious, we recently enquired about the prospects of moving a wagon load of freight by rail, thereby keeping our lorries working locally on deliveries, their main function.

The wagon load could be moved from the railhead in East Anglia to Chester railhead for offloading on road lorry for local delivery in Herefordshire. We asked if Hereford siding could be used and Hereford were not interested despite being served by a daily pick-up freight from Newport.

We were staggered and have resorted to road transport. I wonder what other experiences your readers have had with a similar situation.

C. C. SELWYN FOTT

Hoarwithy, Hereford

"Sprinter" experiences

SIR.—In July I had the good fortune to be chosen as a steward for one of the *Mallard* specials. I thought it would be appropriate to travel to York by train and left the motor-bike at home. I arrived at Lime Street to find a two-car "Sprinter" set posing as the Liverpool-Scarborough train.

I have to agree with Mr. Semmens and your other contributors on the virtues of the "Sprinters". The basic vehicle is well engineered. I was impressed by its acceleration and its ride, especially at speeds over 70 m.p.h. The faults of the "Sprinter" services seem to be poor layout and overcrowding.

Firstly, the seating layout was obviously designed by accountants. We passengers do like to have seats which correspond at least roughly with the windows. Some of us find the view from the window interesting and our country is worth looking at, apart from matters of purely railway interest. In the early London Underground stock the notorious "padded cell" carriages were provided with no windows other than narrow strips through which passengers could read

station name-boards, on the logical grounds that there was nothing to see in tunnels. As we know, accountants' logic soon had to give way to the passengers' desire to see what little there was to see. Travel on White Saver days is not particularly cheap and surely BR can give us a good view for our money.

Boarding at Liverpool, I was lucky enough to have a seat. At Manchester Victoria another two-car unit was added, but this was insufficient to cope comfortably with the crowds waiting to join the train. As we called at more stations, the story got worse: elderly people and families with young children had to fight their way on board and the carriage resounded with calls from anxious parents to each other and their children. For most who joined after Manchester there was standing room only.

I understand that it was a fair sample of the conditions on cross-country trains on Saturdays. Dare I hope that conditions improved for those poor souls who were travelling through to Scarborough? On my next trip to York there will be no room for sentiment: I shall go by road.

M. S. HARRINGTON

Formby, Liverpool

SIR.—As a student who travels frequently between Southampton and Plymouth via Westbury, I was disappointed to find an article in your September issue entitled "Crompton from Cardiff". It was not particularly informative — all cab rides produce similar accounts. Perhaps I am a little biased because, on that route, I have often had to share a compartment with fanatics who are convinced that they know better how to drive a locomotive than BR staff.

Others have persisted in lowering all of the windows on icy cold days. When "Sprinterisation" loomed, I found a compartment covered with indelible pen markings, reading, "Say NO to Sprinters on Bristol to Portsmouth Line" and, "... it's just like a bus — no privacy". Just how much lower can these people stoop?

The "Super-Sprinters" are not perfect and some have uncorrected vibration problems. They are, however, far more attractive to the majority of travellers and help to reduce the Provincial Sector's grip on taxpayers' pockets. The Bristol to Portsmouth line provides a service for the majority; it is not an oversized train set for a select few.

R. ORMSTON

Hythe, Hants.

Indicator traps

SIR.—An article in your September issue includes (page 569) elevations of new coaches for the BR East Coast Main Line showing side destination indicators, apparently of the

roller-blind type. May I suggest that these devices as currently used on BR are a trap for the unwary traveller, as they so often display wrong information. Nearly every issue of your magazine illustrates at least one train with the rear indicator showing where the train has come from. Additionally, the front-end indicators are not always correct, which in the present era of much reduced platform staff is a further source of potential trouble for the unwary passenger.

D. A. HAWKINS

Kobe, Japan

"Loreley" travel

SIR.—With reference to P. W. B. Semmens' article in your October issue, touching on his comments dealing with the Provincial Sector "Loreley" express operating between Blackpool North and Parkestone Quay, Harwich. On the Wednesday of the first week of operation (May 18) over this route via the new Windsor Link at Salford I travelled on "Super Sprinter" No. 156 415 *ex-Ipswich*, departing from Stockport at 11.10 and arriving at Blackpool at 12.36. The train, consisting of a two-car set complete with catering trolley, was "on time" throughout.

The same set returned from Blackpool at 14.14, but to the best of my recollection it did not carry "Loreley" labels, though the catering trolley was again in evidence: in charge of same was an attractive young stewardess who was, I believe, a Danish (or maybe Dutch) national. She was based at Ipswich, having travelled north in the morning on No. 156 415.

The up train took on a large number of passengers at Manchester Oxford Road and Piccadilly stations and a fair number had to stand, and when I alighted at Stockport it was still over-crowded. But I did not experience any delay between Bolton and Manchester such as that described in Mr. Semmens' article, although we did lose three or four minutes in Manchester because of the large number of passengers enquiring there.

It was my first journey on a "Super Sprinter"—a great improvement on the "150" class. Riding was very good and the speed was often up to a steady 75 m.p.h. I look forward to the introduction of the 90-m.p.h. "158" class in due course.

My main criticism (admittedly based on one journey only) is that two-car sets are insufficient to cater for the volume of passengers on certain stages of the journey on such long runs as those from the North-West to East Anglian destinations. Over-crowding is "off-putting"!

R. H. O. BENSON

Heaton Mersey

SIR.—I see that the Blackpool—Harwich train logged by Mr. Semmens in his October article converted a nine-minute late