

Supplementary memorandum from Transport-Watch (RWP 33A)

Transport-Watch note following Transport Committee meeting of 23th January 2008

WP Ref. Transcom 23rd Jan

Reference Network Rail's memorandum to the Committee RWP04:

Paragraph 19 says that rail is “by far the safest form of Transport”.

That is not true.

The deaths per passenger-km imposed by rail within the envelope bounded by the ticket barriers is 50% above that imposed by express coaches on its passengers while travelling on the Motorway and Trunk Road network after adding an allowance for casualties when boarding and alighting or shortly afterwards.

Further, System-wide, including trespassers but not suicides, the death rate by rail is 50% above that imposed by ordinary traffic operating on the strategic road system. If deaths to pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclist are excluded, on the grounds that those classes of people are rare on railway alignments, then the death rate by rail is double that likely if ordinary traffic had access to a reserved system of motor roads such as the railways may offer.

As in our previous notes to the Transport Committee, the myth of nearly perfect rail safety is propagated by the railway lobby by statements such as “every day more people are killed on the roads than passengers in a year by rail”. Such statements are a scandal in that they ignore use thereby exaggerating in favour of rail by a factor of 18 while simultaneously restricting rail deaths to passengers killed in so called train accidents and comparing that with all those, system-wide, who die on the road network including pedestrians cyclists and people on motorbikes.

The railway lobby enhances the myth, by saying “this year no person died in a train accident” whenever such a year occurs, overlooking the fact that between 1915 and 2004 1370 people died in train accidents where more than 5 people died, an average 15 per year.

Separately from that our calculations provide that the cash value of deaths in train accidents amounts to only 1.5% of the cash value of all casualties yet it is deaths train accidents alone that the railway lobby puts before the public.

Paragraph 23 says that “Rail is rightly seen as the greenest form of transport”.

That too is untrue.

If express coaches and lorries replaced the trains and had access to rails rights of way then both fuel consumption and carbon emissions would be reduced. Further if paved rail's rights of way were paved countless lorries and other vehicles would divert from the unsuitable roads that they currently burden. That would greatly reduce the fuel consumption of those vehicles.

Paragraphs 12-16: capacity

Subsidy plus loan guarantees to rail for the period 1995 to 2015 may amount to £100 billion at current prices (over £4,000 for every household in the land at a time when half of us use a train less than once a year). Meanwhile, in highway terms the network is and always will be scarcely used. For example, if all London's crushed surface rail commuters were seated in 75-seat coaches then those coaches would occupy only one seventh of the network's capacity in the peak hour. Network wide the system carries the equivalent of only 300 buses plus lorries per day per track. These overwhelming facts need to be considered before the taxpayer is asked to subsidise a system which is, for the most part used by the better off rather than by the poor.

TRANSPORT WATCH is an independent association not connected with any business or political party funded by a private trust and dedicated to making the best use of land already committed to transport in the interest of the community as a whole.