

New Inquiry:

# **The 30-Year Strategy for the Railways**

## **Response by Transport-Watch UK to the Transport Committee**

Transport-Watch is an independent association not connected with any business or political Party funded by a trust and dedicated to making the best use of land already committed to transport in the interests of the Community as a whole.

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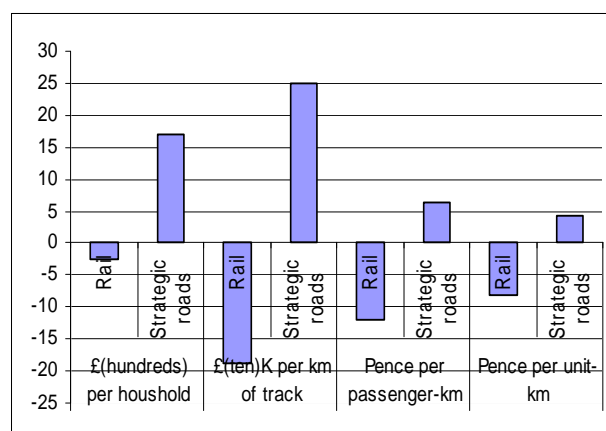
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## Main Text

1. **The rail network** is 10,000 miles long, contains 20,000 miles of track and 2,500 stations.<sup>1</sup> It serves the hearts of our towns and cities. Over the 5 years to 2014 the Government proposes to spend £15.3 billion supporting that system in England and Wales plus guaranteeing borrowing of £9 billion for HLOS (High Level Output Statement).<sup>2</sup> Additionally, Scottish rail is to spend taxes of circa £1 billion per year<sup>3</sup>. Hence, for the UK as a whole we have a total close to £30 billion for the five years. Since there has been operating subsidy of circa £(2-3) billion per year at 2006 prices since the 1950's<sup>4</sup> it is unreasonable to suggest that the additional borrowing will ever be repaid from the fare box. Instead the whole £30 billion will be a burden to the taxpayer. That is consistent with the support plus capital expenditure for the eleven years 1995-2005.<sup>5</sup> At 2006 prices that amounts to £66 billion. Hence, from 1995 to 2014 the railways will have extracted £96 billion from the Exchequer, equivalent to £3,840 per household or to 4.8 million per track mile (250,000 per year).
2. **In contrast the competing motorway and Trunk Road network** is 7,600 miles long.<sup>6</sup> It contains approximately 34,000 lane-miles (Transport-Watch estimate). Rather than extracting resources from the Exchequer, road users of that network contribute net of expenditure close to £13 billion per year. (That presumes that the net expenditure on all roads (£41 billion) is apportioned according to the vehicle miles, 32% of which are on the strategic road network).
3. **The Exchequer's profit** from the motorway and trunk road network and the corresponding losses from rail are compared on four bases in the bar chart below, namely, (i) per household (ii) per track or lane-km, (iii) per passenger-km and (iv) per unit-km where the unit is the sum of passenger and tonne-km. The profits for road are represented by the bars above the line. The losses for rail are represented by the bars below the line.

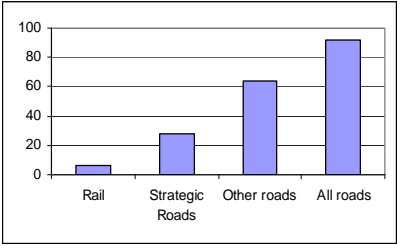


**Profits from roads losses from rail**

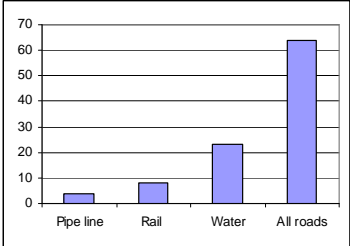
4. **As to roads as a whole** - users pay gross tax of circa £50 billion per year (including VAT on motor vehicles and servicing etc.) compared with expenditure of £9 billion. The tax amounts to £2,000 per household of which only some £360 is spent on the roads.

5. **Those costs**, the extraordinary differences between road and rail and the subsidy to rail, compared with the tax take from roads, arise at a time when:

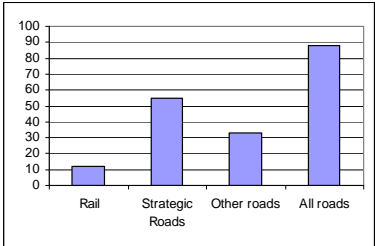
- (a) Half of us use a train less than once a year.<sup>7</sup>
- (b) Households in the top quintile of income travel four times as far by rail as do those from households in either of the bottom two quintiles.<sup>8</sup>
- (c) The railways carry just 6% of the nation’s passenger miles and 8% of its freight, after allowing for the contributions made by pipe line 4% and water 23% (mainly inshore shipping).<sup>9</sup> Bar diagrams below illustrate.



**Passenger-km %**

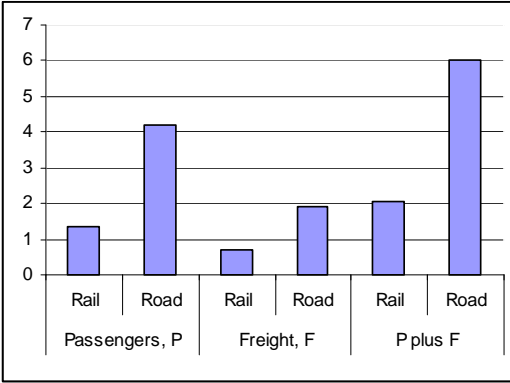


**Tonne-km% (all modes)**



**Tonne-km% (road and rail)**

- (d) The average flow across the rail network as a whole is equivalent to only some 300 buses plus lorries per day per track. (Appendix 1).
- (e) The productivity of the motorway and trunk road network in terms of tonne-miles or passenger-miles per kilometer of lane is two and a half to three times that of the rail network, as illustrated below. (Appendix 1)



**Flow density or productivity index**

(Million passenger-km or tonne-km per yr per km of track or lane, rail and strategic roads)

- (f) London’s surface rail network carries sufficient passengers in the peak hour to occupy one seventh of the capacity available if the network were paved and the passengers all had seats in 75-seat express coaches rather than enduring the crushed conditions offered by rail. (Appendix 1)
- (g) Half of all rail journeys are less than 20 miles long, (the average journey length is 25 miles due to the effect of the longer journeys).<sup>10</sup>
- (h) Track maintenance of rail is several times as expensive as for equivalent road transport. Similarly the annual cost of a railway carriage is three times that for an express coach.

- (i) The widths of two track railways are sufficient, even in tunnels, for the carriageway of a two-way trunk road. Headroom is adequate for all but the tallest vehicles.<sup>11</sup> On the approaches to towns and cities the widths are sufficient for 4 to 6-lane highways – see the vast width of rail at Battersea. That right of way is substantially disused while the surrounding roads are clogged with traffic:



6. **As to safety**, we note that the railway industry has succeeded in embedding in the public mind the notion that rail is overwhelmingly safe compared with road. For example, the Transport Committee's report on the Future of the Railway says in paragraph 186, *The figures comparing road and rail fatalities are telling. .... The SRA points out that "On average more road users die in accidents each day than rail passengers in a year"*. However, that comparison misrepresents the position. Firstly it ignores usage thereby exaggerating in favour of rail by a factor of 18 from the outset. Secondly the comparison is between passengers killed in so called Train Accidents with all those, system-wide, killed on the road system including people on foot, bicycle and motorbike. That introduces a second and similar exaggeration in favour of rail.
7. In contrast our calculations show that for the 10 years 1996 to 2005 the deaths per passenger-km to passengers by rail in the envelope bounded by the ticket barriers was at least 50% above that suffered by those in express coaches on the motorway and rural trunk road system. Further, and we found that if trespassers (but not suicides) plus staff and postal workers are added to passengers then the death rate by rail is 50% above that on the motorway and rural trunk road system. (Appendix 1)
8. The plain truth is that like for like road transport provides a substantially safer environment both for passengers and for the population as a whole than does rail. The contrary notion put about by the rail lobby these last 50 years has no basis.<sup>12</sup>
9. **Referring to fuel usage and emissions** we again find an astonishing divergence between popular belief and reality. The reality, now substantiated by RSSB report series T618, is that a train is no more fuel efficient than a medium sized diesel powered car containing two people and very much less fuel efficient than the express coach. That is reflected in emission data. Indeed, although the electric train is thought to be "green" any marginal

increase or decrease in electricity use affects only coal powered generation if the system is to run so as to minimise overall emissions. On that basis the train is little better than a short haul aircraft while being vastly more expensive.

10. **To illustrate the double think** that affects the public perception of road and rail consider the effect of paving the motorway and trunk road network with railway lines. The place would come to a near standstill. Despite that the belief persists that paving rail's comparable rights of way with steel is beneficial.
11. **The reality is** that paving rail's rights of way with asphalt would release immense potential. Costs would be reduced by a factor of four, usage would rise by a factor of 3 to 5, fuel consumption and carbon emissions would be reduced, lorries and countless other vehicles currently clogging unsuitable city streets and rural roads would divert to these superbly engineered rights of way, all London's crushed surface rail commuters would have seats and the development potential of many thousands of hectares of derelict railway land would be unlocked.

## ***Conclusion***

12. **The beliefs that have driven policy** for the past decade and that are driving the 30 year plan have no basis in fact. Meanwhile the scale of the expenditure is breathtaking. That is a tragedy on two counts. Firstly, there is the triumph of myth over reality - a disaster at many levels. Secondly, the consequential misallocation of resources, if carried forward as it has been over the past half century, is sufficient to damage the economy for the rest of the current century.
13. **The Committee should therefore put aside the 30 year plan** and find whether any of our evidence can be overturned in a discussion devoted to finding the truth. If it cannot then the painful process of building policy in the light of the facts rather than the myths must be started.
14. Meanwhile there needs to be a statement from the Department of Transport that:
  - (a) No further land covered by, or recently currently covered by, rail will be lost to the transport network.
  - (b) Subsidies should be paid to the deserving individual and NOT the mode of transport.
  - (c) There should be an overarching authority charged with making best use of transport land in the interests of the community as a whole.
  - (d) There should be a moratorium on rail expenditure, other than necessary to keep the system running, while a policy based on the facts is developed.

## **References**

5. \_\_\_\_\_
1. Transport Statistics Great Britain 2006.
2. Delivering a Sustainable Railway (table 12.1) Cm 7176.
3. Transport Scotland: Scotland's Railways December 2006.
4. Appendix 1 to Transport-Watch Facts Sheet 4.
5. Office of the Rail Regulator. National Rail Trends yearbook 05-06
6. Transport Statistics Great Britain 2006.
7. SRA Chairman Richard Bowker in paragraph two of the forward to "Everyone's Railway the wider case for rail".
8. National Travel Survey data.
9. Transport Statistics Great Britain 2006.
10. National Travel Survey data and Transport Statistics Great Britain 2006.
11. Transport-watch facts sheet 3.
12. Transport-watch facts sheet 2 (subject to update).