

The waste at Battersea

Picture courtesy of National News & Pictures

A nearly empty dual 4-laner surrounded by clogged city streets - within a stone's throw of Westminster.



Gosh!

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Some quotes from the past – as valid now as then

1 As so often, the fashionable ideas – and in particular the belief that rail is obviously better than road for carrying commuter traffic – are simply not borne out by the facts ... there is an overwhelming case for a thorough consideration of the conversion to road of parts of the suburban rail system ... A single urban motorway track could carry 500 double-decker buses with 60 seats each – that is 30,000 seats an hour [*Transport Watch would say 1,000 buses providing 60,000 seats*]... buses can provide a good range of non-stop services, while stopping services can also be provided by using lay-bys to act as bus stations ... Insofar as the capacity of the road is not fully needed for buses it can be made available for cars. This solution can give the unfortunate commuter a far better defence against strikes and also against the inevitable steady rise in labour costs.

*Professor Alan Day,
London School of Economic
in The Observer 18 March 1973*

2 As rail routes the rail network is never likely to be used to more than a fraction of its capacity. **But it remains a communications network of incomparable potential if people would only break the habit of regarding it as something on which trains alone may be permitted to run.** Were Mr Marsh to be given a free hand to decide on which tracks he wanted to continue to run trains, and on which it would pay him to run buses, or to charge tolls to other vehicle

users, the answers that he might come up with could begin to look different and even exciting. They might even show that British Rail again had a future.

*The Economist
23 June 1973*

3 All is not lost. A new scheme is being put about for coping with the juggernauts ... It is, quite simply, to concrete over many of London's least efficient railway tracks and run lorries – and buses as well – on them instead. The relief to existing lorry-filled London streets would be considerable. And commuters would leap at the chance of a direct high-speed bus route to their place of work.

*Simon Jenkins
in The Evening Standard, London
17 July 1973*

4 When trains are still the theme of nursery rhymes and children's stories, it is small wonder that the railways have a romantic fascination for most adults. **Only years of nursery conditioning can explain the calm with which the public has accepted a bill of £3,000 millions (£33bn at 2007 prices) to subsidise British Rail over the last decade.**

Why should we go on pouring money into the railways? If British Rail were Concorde or Marlin this endless drain on public funds would be regarded as a national scandal. Think, we would be constantly told, how many schools, hospitals, council houses could be built

with all that money ... When the railways were built in the nineteenth century they evoked the same squeals of anguish from Wordsworth and other Victorian environmentalists as new road do today.

The people who use BR's passenger services are mainly the better-off. The poor suffer from the diversion of resources out of improving roads and bus services, into keeping up the railways. It is the suburban owner-occupier who supports BR's commuter services. It is the businessman who uses Inter-City: the poor go by car ... If the resources had been pumped into bus transport that have been lavished on the railways, we would no doubt now have a flexible system of rural transport based on post-buses, instead of a sporadic system of branch line services. We would no doubt have a fast and comfortable express inter-city bus service, on the lines of Trailways and Greyhound in the United States ... We might even have taken note of the series of studies which suggested that for town commuting, buses are faster, cheaper, less polluting and use less fuel than trains.

*Frances Cairncross,
Economics Correspondent
in The Guardian
29 April 1974
(Now, 2005, the managing editor of
the Economist)*

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