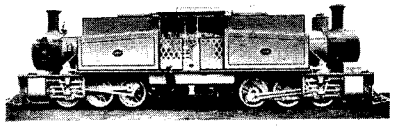
SIGNAL FAILURES



Rolling shock

RAISING regulated rail fares by inflation plus 3 percent annually from 2012 will help Britain "afford new rolling stock", said George Osborne in his spending review speech. Er, what new rolling stock?

South-east commuters are the biggest group affected by the rises, but thousands of south-east carriages are under 12 years old and won't need replacing for decades. Older electric trains will happily run for years more. Even if replacements were ordered now, they wouldn't be ready in time to justify the 2012 fare hike.

In the north, south-west and south Wales, there's no sign of new trains for rail networks which resemble museums of 1970s and 80s diesel technology. Massive fare rises from 2012 could price more people off trains where average incomes are already low, even before public sector jobs start to disappear.

So what was the chancellor hiding with his "new rolling stock" smokescreen? Presumably the Tories' embarrassment that rail subsidy has quadrupled since the fragmentation and privatisation they devised in the 1990s – although passengers have suffered years of inflation-busting fare rises and Network Rail has amassed £24bn debt.

The dysfunctional railway needs masses of cash to pay shareholder dividends, millionaire executives and the huge supporting cast. The Office of Rail Regulation (ORR), for instance, has 302 permanent staff. Last year they earned £49,000 each on average, excluding social-security contributions. ORR needs four years and the help of external consultants to fix NR's spending for each five-year period. It's just postponed by six months the start of work on NR's 2014-9 framework because of current uncertainty, but it promises to "deliver final rail funding and output determinations by October 2013".

Before privatisation the network ran more efficiently with just one board of directors and some external safety inspectors. Reverting to that model would save billions of pounds but shift thousands of jobs from private to public sector. Tory and Liberal Democrat ideology demands the opposite, so passengers will be clobbered financially to sustain the industry's wastefulness.

WHO was responsible for last week's shameful chaos on the London underground?

Bob Crow, leader of the RMT union, claimed that an overtime ban on weekend maintenance had led to the chronic disruption on Monday 18 October. But anything Crow's men could do, London Underground could do far better.

LU bosses pooh-poohed the overtime ban as "only a factor in delays on the Metropolitan Line" while taking full credit for pandemonium on the Central, District, Piccadilly and Northern lines.

The RMT couldn't compete with the torment LU then inflicted on hundreds of Jubilee passengers, trapped underground by a power cut until they were led to safety along the tracks. The next day 400 Victoria Line passengers had to take to the tracks after a train broke down. Then on Thursday hundreds of thousands of passengers were barred from huge chunks of the network due to a cracked rail on the Jubilee line.

The money that should have modernised the tube in the boom years was of course squandered on disastrous public-private partnerships. In the age of austerity, the well-prepared tube traveller needs nerves of steel… and a torch.

EUROSTAR's order for 10 new German trains has exposed the real reason for the uniquely strict safety rules that apply in the Channel tunnel (see *Eye* 1253).

The French government is furious, insisting that only French train builder Alstom meets the Chunnel's special rules (imposed by the French and British governments). Last week France replaced its recently appointed chief adviser on Chunnel safety. Eurostar's order was "null and void" because only Alstom trains could go through the tunnel, fumed France's transport minister.

Alstom is taking Eurostar to the high court, to argue that rival trains would undermine Chunnel safety. Is that the same Alstom that built Eurostar's existing trains, five of which caused safety nightmares in the tunnel when they were halted by a tiny ingress of snow last winter?

'Dr B Ching'

The Agri Brigade

UK FARMERS can afford to be remarkably detached about the coalition decision to cut annual spending by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) from £3bn to £2.2bn over the next four years.

Though as a group farmers are more or less wholly dependent on taxpayer handouts for their livelihoods, the vast bulk of their subsidies come via Brussels and the EU's common agricultural policy (CAP), funding of which is not threatened until 2013.

Last year UK net farm incomes averaged £23,000, of which roughly £18,000 came from the CAP. The coming cuts at Defra will mostly impact on "back-room" spending: the 30,000 civil servants employed directly by the ministry and Defra-funded agencies and quangos (to be culled from 92 to 39).

All farmers can do is hope that by 2013, when the next round of CAP reform will be agreed, most EU member states will have entered the economic recovery phase and so be able to renew the €40bn annual CAP budget intact.

THE law firm Clarke Willmott has contacted the *Eye* after our revelation last month that the animal rights group Animal Aid had obtained covert video footage filmed inside abattoirs which appeared to show the potentially illegal treatment of pigs and cattle (see issue 1272).

Solicitor-advocate Jamie Foster, who has been representing a number of the abattoirs, states that Animal Aid's "investigator" Thomas Frampton (whom Foster alleges has "a string of previous convictions, including for violent offences"), obtained his surveillance footage "by gaining entrance to abattoirs in the middle of the night" to "erect tiny covert surveillance cameras". Foster says such trespass might have compromised abattoir hygiene, and speculates how "chilling" it is to think "what could have happened had he [Frampton] been confronted".

Foster argues that because the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act contains safeguards about how UK citizens are watched, Defra has "recognised that there is no realistic chance of a successful prosecution arising out of the covert surveillance footage".

However, despite the apparent civil liberty and privacy grounds for ruling out such evidence in court, at least the authorities appear to regard such footage as good reason to tighten regulations in abattoirs. Since the *Eye*'s report, and in response to the Animal Aid campaign, Andrew Rhodes, the Food Standards Agency director of operations, has recommended that abattoirs themselves install CCTV cameras to help ensure animal welfare or face additional inspection costs.

Whether this will be followed through is open to doubt, however: the FSA has been identified for partial absorption into what is left of Defra in the coalition's spending review.

'New Bio-waste spreader'

MEDICINE BALLS



Failing children (again and again)

SIR Al Aynsley-Green, professor emeritus of child health at University College London and former national clinical director for children and children's commissioner for England, has written to the *Eye* to expose the continued neglect of children in the NHS.

"We have failed, are still failing and are likely to continue failing far too many children and young people through inadequate health services," he says.

"Ten years ago, the Bristol Inquiry was cataclysmic in its condemnations[1], saying that children had been the 'Cinderella' service in the NHS for far too long. Lord Laming's equally devastating conclusions followed from his inquiry into child protection triggered by the murder of Victoria Climbie[2]. Both uncovered the care of children being subordinated to the demands of adult services; lack of concern for vulnerable individuals; failure to protect children's rights; quality of care less than it should be; failure of communication, effective planning and partnerships with professionals and parents; and lack of responsibility for children with ineffective leadership.

"Even before the financial crisis, the UK ranked bottom of the 21 richest countries for the well-being of children[3,4]. Sir Michael Marmot's recent review[5] on health inequalities documents highlighted (again) the impact of social disadvantage on longevity and morbidity, with so much adult ill health having its roots in childhood. Now we have Sir Ian Kennedy's follow-up report on children's health services commissioned by Labour in 2009[6].

"He has exposed yet again that although there are patches of excellence, health services for many children and young people are still highly unsatisfactory, because of ongoing failure to give them political priority in the NHS coupled with cultural barriers between services that prevent professionals working together. He highlights again the imperative for effective leadership, and is highly critical of the role and the lack of training of GPs in the care of children.

"As national clinical director for children, I led a taskforce to define standards of care for children, young people and maternity services through a National Service Framework [NSF]; it was published in 2004 and defines evidence-based standards of care for every aspect of children's health[7]. Alas, the NSF's orientation was changed by Labour from 'must-dos' with hypothecated money for implementation to nothing more than aspiration over ten years. Without incentive to change, there was little progress.

"The coalition's proposals for children's services[8] are set in the context of GPs being given responsibility for commissioning, just as Kennedy has highlighted their lack of training and failure to deliver effective children's health care. The proposals appear to shoehorn children's services into adult-centric ideological reforms, rather than starting with the fundamental question of how they should best be structured. Children are our most precious resource and it is beyond belief that we have failed so dismally to protect their best interests for so long."

Time for the health select committee to investigate?

1 Kennedy I (2001) Learning from Bristol: The Report of the Public Inquiry into Children's Heart Surgery at the Bristol Royal Infirmary 1984-1995. 2 The Victoria Climbie Inquiry(2003). 3 UNICEF (2007) An overview of child. wellbeing in rich countries. Innocenti Report Card 7 4 OECD (2009) Doing better for children. 5 Marmot M (2010) Fair Society, Healthy Lives: Strategic Review of Health Inequalities in England post-2010. 6 Kennedy I (2010) Getting it right for children and young people. Overcoming cultural barriers in the NHS so as to meet their need. 7 National Service Framework for children, young people and maternity services (2004). 8 Achieving Equity and Excellence for Children. How liberating the NHS will help us meet the needs of children and young people (2010).

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