Proceedings of a Conference

THE FUTURE OF RURAL RAILWAYS

held at Policy Studies Institute, London
on 7 January 1981

Policy Studies Institute       March 1981
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chairman's introduction to morning sessions</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alistair Stone</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Chairman of the Council of the Royal Institute of Public Administration)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session A</td>
<td>Opening address</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Michael Posner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Member of British Railways Board and Chairman of SSRC)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session B</td>
<td>The rural rail network</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peter Keen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Chief Passenger Manager, British Railways Board)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session C</td>
<td>Social issues</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mayer Hillman and Anne Whalley</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Research Fellows, Policy Studies Institute)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session D</td>
<td>A local authority perspective</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>David Macklin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Chief Executive, Devon County Council)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session E</td>
<td>Technical and operational opportunities</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bill Bradshaw</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Director of Strategic Development, British Railways Board)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peter Keen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Chief Passenger Manager, British Railways Board)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>David Glassborow</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Director of Research, National Bus Company)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session F</td>
<td>Policy options</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kenneth Gwilliam</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Professor of Transport Economics, University of Leeds)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chairman's introduction to final session</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sir Charles Carter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Chairman of Research and Management Committee of Policy Studies Institute)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session G</td>
<td>General discussion; where do we go from here?</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Annex A. Response to comments by Richard Pryke in Session C</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mayer Hillman and Anne Whalley</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Notes on contributors</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>List of participants</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PREFACE

This is a report of the proceedings of a one-day conference held in January 1981 at Policy Studies Institute in London. It was devoted to papers and discussion on various issues related to the future of rural railways.

It is perhaps helpful to indicate the reasoning behind the convening of this conference.

Three years ago PSI was commissioned by the British Railways Board to undertake a study the aim of which was to establish how users of rail lines in rural areas were affected by the withdrawal of services, both from the viewpoint of their activity and travel patterns and also in terms of the suitability of the bus services upon which many people were then dependent. The conclusions to the report of this study* pointed out the implications of its findings for the policy options known to be under consideration on the future planning of rural public transport services and the role of railways in this.

The positive response from many quarters to the report encouraged PSI to take the further step of organising this conference. This was also sponsored by the British Railways Board.

This report has been prepared from outline papers provided by the principal speakers and from records of the discussion in each of the sessions of the conference. The participants contributing to its preparation are: Bob Gregory, Mayer Hillman, Malyn Newitt, Anne Whalley and Peter White.

Chairman's Introduction

ALISTAIR STONE

My principal attribute of relevance and qualification for being here as one of the two chairmen of this conference on the future of rural railways is that I am entirely free from any bias or prejudice about the issues you will be discussing. This is of course not a bad quality in a chairman because I have an open mind and have no desire to urge you in any particular direction.

However, there are many here today who have a wealth of experience. As you will have seen from the list, participants are drawn from all the principal bodies with a close interest and involvement in the future of rural railways in this country -- British Rail itself, the Department of Transport, local authorities, the trade unions, bus operators -- public and private -- consumer and other public interest groups and the research world -- both technical and academic.

Clearly this is a conference of great social consequence and relevance at this time. There is an evident need to identify and expose the various conflicting issues in this sphere of public policy and, having identified them, to balance them and perhaps move towards resolving them in society's overall interest. There is clearly a need to have well-informed judgements which have due regard to the longer term, social implications as well as to the all-too-obvious shorter term financial ones.

I wish to pay tribute to the Institute for inspiring and mounting today's conference. I understand that it is indeed the first wide-ranging conference on the subject of the future of rural railways in this country. It is very appropriate that it should be held here in an independent institute formed with the function of carrying out just such studies, and making their findings available to those who have responsibilities for taking decisions. As Chairman of the Royal Institute of Public Administration, a kindred independent institution serving public administration, I am very pleased to be acting as the Chairman of the sessions of the conference this morning.
SESSION A Opening address

MICHAEL POSNER

It gives me pleasure to open this conference for three reasons: first, I see the conference as a PSI exercise, and I regard myself as part of PSI. Secondly, I regard it as a railway exercise, and I very much see myself as a part of the railways. And thirdly, I regard it as an exercise in economic and social analysis, and I regard myself as a social scientist.

With these perspectives, I would like to draw attention to some general principles. I regard this railways conference as an occasion for opening an issue which is not perhaps the biggest of all issues facing the railways system at the moment, but a continuing and important one. It is one which is very difficult to get round because of the considerable number of different interests and considerations to take account of and because the organisational framework and the intellectual understanding necessary for the job aren't always readily available. This assembly of distinguished participants here at PSI is gathered in exactly the right sort of environment in which it should be possible to make progress. Issues are obviously not going to be settled -- this is not a bargaining session -- but we should be able to identify some, at least, of the main problems that need to be tackled and to come closer to finding the ways in which they might be solved.

We have as the foundation piece, the backward-looking study which Mayer Hillman and Anne Whalley have put on the table. The British Railways Board is delighted to have been able to contribute in some way to the production of their study, which is, of course, otherwise an entirely independent scholarly work in the best PSI tradition and I would like to feel that it was going to be the common bedrock of the discussions.

When we look at the railway network we don't altogether find it easy to separate the rural from the rest. From time to time some people claim that we must return to 1968, and carve up the railways into separate profit- or loss-making activities, whilst others argue that we must hold the network in common -- signalling, overhead services and so on -- passengers who get on to a rural railway do not transform themselves into main trunk line passengers when they make the connection at Didcot. Clearly it is neither all one network, nor is it all bits of separate network, but there is a very substantial degree of overlap between our concerns about each bit of the network-like rural railways -- and our concerns about the total network.

Our outlook on what is happening to the rural services is of course very much swayed by our understanding of the considerable change that has taken place in rural society over the last twenty years. Our knowledge is not up-to-date -- though the 1981 Census will help. There is no doubt in my mind, however, that levels of car ownership have again been rising and are now a very important ingredient. Levels of bus services have certainly been falling, and the quality of rail service, if not its quantity, has also gradually declined as the rolling stock becomes older.
At the same time, price levels for both types of public transport have been rising pretty sharply and at an accelerating rate over the last few years, and there have been changes in the population mix and occupational structure in rural parts of the country which I don't yet think are fully understood. So we are going through a period of very rapid change to reach a point very near decision-time on issues for the survival of at least one, and probably both forms of public transport for rural areas. The majority of the population has managed to keep itself mobile by the use of cars, but buses have been disappearing fast and the railways are very considerably under threat.

Now you may think that to talk about the railways being under threat is just crying 'wolf'. I think there are genuine reasons why the 'wolf' really is appearing now: when buses can't cover their costs, they tend just to stop running, and you can do that straight away. On the other hand, railways are a service characterised by very high overheads, overheads being a very large proportion of total costs. Even if you are a completely commercially-minded economic man, you can't operate in the same way. You tend to go on operating, provided that you are covering your direct operating costs until the overheads need renewing. And then the leverage is very considerable, one or two pounds less revenue, and the commercial calculation is, 'Shut the whole lot!'

On many rural services, we are at present covering very much less than direct operating costs. So that point of leverage, that commercial decision, could—if invoked according to the strict letter of the economic textbooks—have clicked over and devastated the whole of the rural services already. After all, covering an average of 60% of direct operating costs is not a very good basis for assuring the financial soundness of a system and for basing a case for renewal of assets or for new capital investment.

Yet we now need the new capital investment, if the lines are to be kept going. In many cases this will enable us not only to offer a better, more efficient and cleaner service, but will enable us to reduce operating costs: if there is an underlying necessity to keep the lines going, it is better to invest than not to invest, because the maintenance costs of keeping very out-dated capital equipment in being are greater when properly capitalised over a run of years than the costs of renewing and going over to new techniques.

Yet how can you make a case to anybody—your own accountants, public authorities, the taxpayer, even the passengers—to go in for that sort of investment, with the capital charges that that sort of investment involves, when you are only covering a proportion of your direct operating costs from your present fares. We want to replace rolling stock, we want to overcome backlogs of track maintenance, we want to renew the mechanical signalling system. Even if we could see our way to justifying a decision to keep the rural network as a whole going, it seems to me inconceivable that we can keep the most uneconomic lines in their present way when their own particular specific pieces of operating mechanical equipment crumble. So first, there's the huge question of keeping the mass of them going. There is then the smaller, but it may be socially, politically, and industrially the very important question, of what to do with the bits of rural network which clearly can't go on in their present way at all, whatever happens. We have to think, I believe, about alternatives to traditional train services in a very open-minded way—from the viewpoint of industrial relations, and passenger services.
The bus companies have been in severe financial difficulties and have already reacted in large measure to those difficulties. The railways have been, and are, in equivalent difficulties, especially on rural services. They have reacted so far only by allowing the quality of service, as measured by all the normal ways of cleanliness, comfort and so on, to decline. But the lever will click over at some stage, and more dramatic failures of service will have to occur unless solutions are found.

Now there are traditional cries, with which many of us have been associated from time to time, for co-ordination of services in rural and semi-rural areas. I daresay we all have our own personal horror stories to tell about this -- it really is true that a bus and a train left on the hour simultaneously, from York Station to go to Scarborough, both a quarter full. That didn't seem to me -- with great respect to the railwaymen and the busmen present here -- to be a very intelligent way of doing things. I daresay that there are many, many other lacks of co-ordination which can be pointed to, but I doubt, myself, whether it will be found, after detailed investigation, that co-ordination will do a substantial amount of the trick on the network as a whole. I doubt, too, whether in very many cases the substitution of one form of public transport for another form of public transport is the solution. I suspect that all sorts of changes will have to take place, the most exciting and attractive of which, in my view, are the new ways of running passenger services on rails, which could be called trains, or could be called buses, or could be called whatever you like, but are basically and recognisably different, even to the customers, let alone the operator.

Overriding all the technology and all the finance and all the economics, though, is the institutional and social question of how we are going to organise this. How is it going to be discussed, how are decisions to be made, how are payments to be levied, how are transactions to be made, what is the form, what are the different interests, how can they be brought together? When it comes to operating a system, British Rail believes that it has a high degree of competence, whatever the set of rules to which it must conform. The difficulty is not the operating, but getting the right institutional framework within which sensible operating requirements can be imposed and met.

Looking through the list of participants which PSI have organised for this conference, what is so attractive is that there are representatives from all the different walks of life who do need to come together and form a discussion group. In the future, such a decision-making group needs to set a framework of rules and transport objectives and meet them within a financial constraint. What we then discuss is what is worth doing against the background of the financial, economic, technical and social facts which I hope are going to be sketched in the papers which immediately follow. Then the railwaymen will be able to go and shovel coal into the furnaces and turn their handles and all the rest of it and the trains will run.
Perhaps one of the more cheerful elements in the rural rail scene, is the trend in traffic covering roughly the ten years since the end of the major round of Beeching closures. To look at these trends in aggregate, we have to consider the grouping in the total rail network which appears in the BR Annual Report as "OPS" -- Other Provincial Services -- the smallest of the four passenger groups. However, it is a little difficult to do this for the early years of the 1970s because the statistics were not in that form until about the middle of the decade. Nevertheless, the indication is that, during the decade, the volume of passengers carried was roughly level on OPS. Although rising or falling somewhat from one year to the next, the figures move along the level of about one thousand million passenger miles a year -- in fact, 1978-79 saw an increase of about seven per cent, while the previous two years were down, and a bit of a fall is likely in 1980.

However, it is interesting to contrast this with two other movements: first, the volume of change in Inter-city services which, over the corresponding decade, saw an increase of 25 per cent; secondly, the change in the use of bus services, for which it is not possible to get a totally comparable figure. But if you take out the municipal services, the PTEs, and the London Transport operations, again during the 1970s, there is a decrease in the number of bus journeys (not miles) of about 19 per cent.

This is a world in which to run fast enough to stand still is something of an achievement. It is worth asking why it is that in spite of a rise in rural car ownership, railway use has not declined?

There seem probably to be three main reasons. The first is the undoubted fact that the provincial service network is associated with the growth area of British Railways -- Inter-city. Second, there is the fact that over recent years something like half of the volume growth which British Railways' passenger business achieved year by year has been due to the marketing policies and marketing developments of the British Railways' passenger service. These developments are not specific to any one area -- they are not Inter-city, they are not London and South East developments. They are, broadly speaking, promotions, senior citizen and student railcards etc., which are relevant to the whole system and that includes the OPS. Thirdly, pricing policy has also been important during the decade. OPS is not an area in which one makes dramatic demarches in the marketing area, but the freedom to set fares at the levels which maximise revenue is something that has been a help and is one reason why it has been able to achieve this result.

Of course, OPS do not completely equate with the subject of today's discussion. They include a group of routes which we call the Secondary Inter-city which are remarkably like some of the Inter-city routes. From the examples of South Humberside to Manchester, Norwich to Birmingham, Bristol to Cardiff, Bristol to Portsmouth, Glasgow to Dundee, it is remarkably difficult to decide which are OPS, and which are Inter-city services. They are a mixture and a
lot of the OPS are of this nature. There are also a lot of services which are stopping services on main lines, so that only about a third (by revenue) of the OPS is, strictly speaking, branch lines of the sort that are being discussed. However, the change of patronage over those branch lines is not so very different from the trains on the other parts of the OPS network.

However, it is undoubtedly true that the OPS network as a whole is financially insecure. In 1979 the direct expenses were £95 million (direct expenses are those incurred before taking account of track, signalling or administration); revenue was £53 million -- a negative contribution of £42 million. That again is for the OPS sector as a whole. When the third of it which consists of branch lines is looked at, infrastructure in most cases is pretty well specific to the passenger services concerned, and the results are substantially worse. On a rough estimate this branch line sector, accounting for some two per cent of the total revenue of the passenger railway, is absorbing something like ten per cent of the public service obligation grant. And the problem seems to be getting worse. The standards of infrastructure are deteriorating and yet the level of maintenance expenditure is such that, even if continued at its present level for the railway as a whole, and even if that expenditure is concentrated as a priority on the passenger railway, there is no way in which a general closure of branch lines can be avoided. In the case of rolling stock, the situation is not quite so urgent, though it is pretty serious. Virtually all Diesel Multiple Units -- DMUs -- operating on these routes are now over twenty years old. They will serve for a few more years since relatively low mileage is involved in the use of these routes but, by the middle of the 1980s, it will be essential to replace them if the services on them are to continue. The lead times of railway rolling stock development and construction are the important constraint, so that to get rid of rolling stock by 1987 means that decisions on them have virtually to be made now.

It was in the context of the needs of the lower end of the passenger market that the regular meetings between the passenger business and the research department of British Railways produced one of a number of very good ideas. It was asked, "Why can't we just have a bus on steel wheels?" Four-wheel vehicles are nothing very new on the railway -- there were four-wheel rail buses in 1950 -- but things have changed quite dramatically over the years. The technical capability for good four-wheeled suspension has been dramatically improved as a result of the developments partly in the Advanced Passenger Train -- APT -- and also in freight vehicles, and the bus industry has produced a robust body on a modular basis, which has led to very interesting possibilities. However, a warning note should be sounded. This vehicle is not only required for branch services. There are areas which go to the heart of the railway business, like PTE services, where this type of vehicle has a potential and relevance. PTEs are very interested, and there will certainly be competition for priority in the new vehicle.

One final issue which concerns many involved with the rural branch lines needs to be mentioned. That is the issue of freight-only lines. A number of bodies have suggested that it would be appropriate for passenger services to operate on freight-only lines, bearing their direct expenses and the cost of maintenance and replacement resulting from the additional wear and tear they cause to track and signalling. It does, on the face of it, seem very unreasonable that, if a freight line is there, one should not run a passenger service for, in effect, the marginal costs of running that passenger service for that route. The problem is that that is not the basis on which the financing of the very important PTE operations takes place. On PTE routes where track is shared by freight and PTE services, it is the PTE that carries the cost of the basic
facility and of the infrastructure, and there is no way, in BR's view, in
which you can have a situation in which you apply one rule in the rural areas
and one rule in the PTEs. It is BR's view that there might well be possibilities,
without increasing the cost to the public purse as a whole, for revising the
actual mechanics of the way in which the payment of the PTE services takes
place, so that one could produce a uniform system for both types of service.

It is now ten years since the end of the round of major Beeching closures.
It is worth remembering the circumstances under which those closures took
place; the public investigation of hardship by the TUCCs and subsequent
provision of substitute bus services at the cost of the road operator, and
under the road operator's control. As a result of that, when a rough check
was conducted half-way through the 1970s, about a third of those substitute
services had either disappeared altogether or were in an unrecognisable
condition. It is common ground between British Rail and road passenger manage-
ment, and between national and local politicians, that this is not the type of
policy which is tolerable for the future. British Rail respects the require-
ment placed upon it by statute to operate in some way a system of broadly the
present size.

Discussion (SESSION B)

Andrew Dodds said he was glad to hear Mr. Keen say in his final remarks that the
British Railways Board accept the obligation under the 1974 Act, but he thought
Mr. Keen was soft-pedalling quite a bit in relation to the problem that confronts
the British Railways Board and the industry in meeting the obligation laid on
them by this Act. Even in the short period of time since the conference was
arranged the problem had become very much worse.

Peter Keen said that he would like to make it quite clear that the obligation
was to maintain a network of passenger services roughly comparable to that
which was operated at the end of 1974. It was not necessarily going to be
good value for money, or right in all cases, to maintain that network by rail
only. That there must be a public transport system was one thing -- how that
public transport system was to be provided was what the conference was about.

Richard Pryke thought that it was germane to the question of retaining these
services in one form or another to raise the question of the contributory
revenue. Roughly what amount of Inter-city revenue is contributed by passengers
who begin or end their journey on the Other Provincial Services and what does
BR's market research indicate about the proportion of this which would be lost
if the branch line service or stopping service were withdrawn, and some people
transferred to car?

Peter Keen replied that he did not have the figure on contributory revenue
available. However, if a branch line closed, there were two or three possible
developments. First, a situation of virtually no public transport. Second, a
situation with the sort of substitute bus service, experienced in the 1960s
and to some extent in the 1970s, where there was some degree of co-ordination
between independent operators of bus and rail. Third, the situation which the Board outlined in "Opportunity for Change" some years ago, of a bus substitute which, though not operated by British Railways, was operated to BR's specification, appeared in the BR timetables, and was a part of the BR system for the total operation and marketing and fares. There would be variations, and losses might occur if a very long route where the journey time was substantially worse was converted, but in many of them, the loss of Inter-city traffic would be very small indeed. However, more practical experience of doing something like this is needed.

Colin Speakman said that for the Dales rail service, West Yorkshire PTE and the National Parks charter trains and they had been able to operate bus services which have in effect been train services. There was a common title and through bookings, but even so there had been some resistance.

Peter Keen said that there was a tendency when thinking about the bus/rail concept for the eyes to range over the map devising elaborate schemes which looked very nice on paper. However, the interface between a major rail and a major bus network was always difficult. It was not easy in an urban area, but was even more difficult in rural and semi-inter-city areas. It was important to keep the bus/rail concept simple as BR had with the Peterborough to Ketteringham service. They had kept it simple, and the amount of disruption and late running by rail or by road had been very small.

Malcolm Gylee asked whether bus substitutions would be supported by the TSG rather than the PSO?

Peter Keen thought it would be a matter for individual negotiation, but that if you looked at the straight economics, it would be found that BR could provide comparable, and in some cases, better services by road at a lower cost, simply regarding them as part of the PSO operation. He questioned whether it would really be sensible to do this when there was a network of bus services very largely supported by the Shire Counties. He did, however, regard the marketing of services by the railway as being very important.

John Gilks said that many of the passengers on these Inter-city services were tourists. His Association was now putting rather a lot of faith in tourism as one of the ways in which the economy of some of our rural communities could be assisted. Some of these branch lines were in very attractive areas and he wondered whether there was any way in which tourism could be encouraged and whether it could provide any additional revenue. The BR Board's tourism officers and the Golden Rail had been active in the field, and he just wondered whether it could be stressed in BR's advertising that some of these lines were for tourists.

John Glover said that it might be worthwhile just looking back quickly at what had gone wrong with the bus replacement services. The first thing that seemed to have gone wrong was that bus replacement services were organised to serve rail passengers -- that was their primary purpose -- but they also tried to do all the other local journeys as well. A lot of bus traffic is essentially local. Therefore if there was a conflict of interest between local passengers and longer distance passengers, it was always consideration of the local passengers' requirements that came last. When it came to things like connections, many people would be inconvenienced for the sake of the few transferring to rail. The public, he said, didn't see bus services in the same way that they saw rail.

Peter Keen replied that he agreed with a lot of what had been said about the unsatisfactory nature of the substitute bus services. As far as tourism was concerned, it was worth looking at the overall figures. Foreign tourism was worth about £30 million for BR -- a small figure but not an insignificant one, and one that was in fact growing. Promotion of the rural lines features quite largely in BR's overseas publicity in America and elsewhere. It was partly a matter of promoting things in that way, and partly of getting the management of the Other Provincial Services interested in this sort of local market.
SESSION C Adaptation to the withdrawal of rail passenger services in rural areas

MAYER HILLMAN and ANNE WHALLEY (Policy Studies Institute)

Background

Peter Keen has given us a mainly operator's-eye-view of the rural rail network, so we would now like to examine it from the perspective of the users. As the title of our published report implies, the PSI study was designed to gather evidence on social rather than financial or operational consequences of closure, aiming to establish the impact on the travel and lives of people in ten rural communities which lost their rail services between 1969 and 1976.

Evidence was obtained from three sources: first, personal interview surveys conducted among users of the former rail lines; secondly, documentary evidence obtained from local authorities, British Rail and bus operators in the areas previously served by rail; thirdly, discussions held with representatives of public and private organisations and with other authorities acting on behalf of people living in the communities.

The ten case studies were chosen, from 47 rural lines closed since 1968, to be broadly representative of the different characteristics of rural lines. Factors taken into account were: whether or not the route was seasonal; the year of closure; the length of line; whether it served a mainly local purpose or was primarily a feeder onto the rest of the network; whether it linked two sections of the network or was literally a branch off it; the number of stations closed; the national and regional location; the population served; and the nature of alternative transport existing and proposed at the time of closure.

The study sought to answer questions about the use of the lines before closure, about public attitudes to closure and to the process leading to the decisions on closure, about the adaptations made by different groups in the community to the loss of their rail services, and about the adequacy of the replacement bus services.

Attitudes to closure, and rail use beforehand

Closure engenders considerable public disagreement and resentment. Half the former users said they had been very upset at the time and only a very small proportion were unconcerned or had mixed feelings. Table 1 shows that though the feelings have abated over time, one in three still feels very upset, in spite of the fact that it is now nine or ten years since some of the services were withdrawn.

The extent of reconciliation to closure varies by area, though all areas were fairly close to the average level of upset at the times of their respective closures. Surprisingly, neither current attitudes nor the changes in attitudes since closure are consistently affected by the actual date of closure or length of the line. Neither was the strength of feeling affected by the
attitude of respondents towards rail travel generally, nor by their satisfaction with the service before closure. It seems, therefore, that the blend of characteristics in each area and of the people in it, together with the consequences, or perceived consequences of closure, affect the pace and extent of reconciliation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude to closure</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>G</th>
<th>H</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>J</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AT TIME OF CLOSURE</td>
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<tr>
<td>AT TIME OF SURVEY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>very upset</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>moderately or a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>little upset</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no feelings/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mixed feelings/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pleased</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Areas are ranked according to the date of closure, 'A' being the earliest and 'J' the latest.

These regrets were not the sentiments of a small minority of people, for no less than half the populations of the areas had travelled on the lines in the year or so before closure. A few used the lines daily for getting to and from work, many more used them once or twice a week to go shopping, to make social visits or to get to leisure activities, and many others used them, although less frequently, for journeys for medical purposes and for holidays.

Use was not restricted to any one group in the population. All groups used the railways, though not all for the same purposes nor at the same frequency. So, older people used them more than others for social purposes; women were more likely to use them than men, and for shopping purposes; people in blue collar households used them more than others on medical trips or when going grocery shopping -- though not when going to work; non-car owners were, not surprisingly, rather more likely than other people to use them, and they used them more often, though not very much more, than the car-owning rail travellers (who accounted for about half the former users).

Changes in activity after closure

The closures brought about marked differences in the pattern of activities. Seventy-two per cent of the former rail users reduced or stopped making their journeys. This had the effect of limiting travel to 65 per cent of the places they had previously reached by rail, at the same time, affecting 58 per cent of the activities previously reached by rail.

Table 2 shows that, at one extreme, under three in ten people reported no change in behaviour apart from the obligatory change of travel method. At the other extreme, almost one in twelve reported a total curtailment of their
previous (rail based) activity — they no longer visited any of the places they formerly reached by rail, and they did not compensate for this by going somewhere else instead. The remaining majority of people made some adjustments to their travel — they stopped going to certain places but not all of them, or they continued going there but went less often, or — what was quite likely — they cut back on some former trips and reoriented others by going somewhere else instead. The table shows the number of people, the number of activities and the number of different types of destination affected. The variation between the three measures occurs because a person making fewer journeys overall might have continued travelling to one activity or one destination as often as before, whilst reducing or stopping their travel to other activities or destinations.

Table 2  Amount and type of adjustment in activity after closure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effect of closure on:</th>
<th>people</th>
<th>activities</th>
<th>destinations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Per cent of former travel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>no change in former journeys</strong></td>
<td>28</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(except travel method)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>former journeys reduced</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>former journeys stopped</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(included in above)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>journeys reduced or stopped but some reoriented</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>not applic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>journeys reduced and none reoriented</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>not applic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>journeys stopped and none reoriented</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>not applic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number in sample</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>3140</td>
<td>1553</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table indicates that the geographical pattern of travel was strongly affected, with some people no longer visiting certain places. This implies a significant change in accessibility in spite of attempts to match the bus services to the closed rail services.

After closure, the hardest-hit people were those without cars — that is, the ones most dependent on buses. These are a substantial group, for even now two in five of the former rail users live in households without a car, and there are also those in car owning households who cannot drive or who do not have a car of their own. Moreover, the offer of car lifts to people without a car was found to be far less prevalent than is widely believed: only one in five of those in non-car owning households get a lift at least once a week.

There are other findings that relate to car ownership and use. One in five of the former rail users said that their household had acquired a car since the withdrawal of the rail service, and over a third of these said that the closure had strongly influenced their decision to get the car.
Travel method after closure

Table 3 shows what happened to journeys which did continue to be made to the same places, either as often as before, or less often. More people transferred at least some of their former rail journeys to car travel than to bus travel. Surprisingly, less than half of all respondents mentioned transferring some journeys onto the alternative bus while over half mentioned the car.

Table 3 Adjustment in travel method after closure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effect of closure on:</th>
<th>Per cent of former rail travel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>some or all former journeys continued (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by bus/coach</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as car passenger</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as car driver</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on remaining railways</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by other methods</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>former journeys stopped (2)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number in sample</td>
<td>800</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1) More than one travel method possible.
(2) Includes some reoriented travel.

Travel by train after closure is still possible on journeys which extend beyond the catchment of the closed line -- either to relatively local destinations, such as regional or county towns, or to more distant centres, holiday places and so on. However, there has been a considerable decline in such rail travel: before closure, 86 per cent of the respondents used the rail network in this way, whilst now only 57 per cent do so -- travelling to the railhead by bus or car. They use the rest of the network less often, also; before closure 54 per cent travelled at least several times a year, but now only 20 per cent do so.

Bus use after closure

There are marked differences in the proportion of respondents using buses in each area, but the incidence of use then or now does not reflect the number of years since closure. In six areas, including some with recent closures, the proportion using buses now has dropped back to or below the level it was when the train service was also available.

When analysis of bus use is restricted solely to the journeys formerly made by rail, the decline is even steeper, as Table 4 shows. Only one-third of the respondents still use the bus for these journeys, where previously nearly half had done so. The table illustrates a variation between areas which is wider than that between different groups of respondents, suggesting that the bus services, and the nature of the settlements they serve, strongly influence the use made of them. The length of the closed line is not a major influence, for this is not related to the proportion of respondents transferring to the bus after closure, nor to the decline in use since then.
Table 4  Respondents transferring to bus after closure for former rail journeys and still using bus for these journeys in ten areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey area</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>G</th>
<th>H</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>J</th>
<th>All areas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>per cent of respondents</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>used train before closure</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transferred to bus</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>still use bus now</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparison of former rail service and replacement bus service

The reason for this low bus use can be seen through comparing the public transport services before and after closure and from assessing attitudes to the convenience of travel on the former rail lines and the buses.

In most of the ten areas in the study, as Table 5 shows, the bus was considered less convenient than the train: there were fewer, they did not run as late in the evenings and journeys took longer. The buses were -- and indeed still are -- less advantageous in other respects too: people mentioned the lack of toilets needed on lengthy trips, proneness to travel sickness, and difficulties when taking children in prams or pushchairs or when carrying bulky luggage. In only one respect were the buses generally considered better -- they are easier to reach as the stops are generally closer to people’s homes than were the stations. But people did not think that this compensated for the slower bus journey -- even if the other disadvantages are not taken into account. Another aspect, not shown here, is the added inconvenience on journeys beyond the local area, of interchange from one means of travel to another. Evidence reported earlier shows that this had a marked effect on the amount of use respondents made of the remaining railway network.

Table 5  Comparison of train and bus for various characteristics of service

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Per cent of respondents considering</th>
<th>Train better than bus</th>
<th>Both about the same</th>
<th>Bus better than train</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>comfort</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>evening service</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>day service</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>frequency</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reliability</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>access to stop</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents who did not transfer to the bus services after closure were asked why they had not done so. As Table 6 shows, the reasons given largely mirror the problems cited by those who did transfer, although the cost of fares and the problems of interchange were more often mentioned. It can be seen that the reasons include aspects of bus travel which are unlikely or unable to be modified.
Table 6  Respondents’ reasons for not travelling by bus, to destinations formerly reached by rail

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for not travelling by bus:</th>
<th>Local</th>
<th>Destination:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>End of line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Beyond end</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>longer journey times</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>general inconvenience</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cost of tickets</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inconvenient departure times</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>problems of interchange</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dislike of bus travel</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>distance to bus route</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>service infrequency</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unreliability</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>can travel by car</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusions

Thus the study found that most people are not reconciled to the loss of their rail services. Indeed, many of the fears expressed about the likely consequences of the closures have been realised -- adaptation has not been benign.

This can be seen particularly in the fact that replacement or augmented bus services do not adequately compensate the affected communities for the loss of the rail services -- as indeed they were intended to do. This inadequacy is reflected in a variety of ways -- in people’s subjective response, in a comparative assessment of public transport services before and after the closures, and, not least, in the effect that the closures have had on the lives of those who formerly used the services as measured by the extent of their subsequent inconvenience and curtailment of activity. The inadequacy is revealed, too, in the generation of more car buying, and in the fact that whilst the train was clearly a preferable form of travel for some of the journeys of people in car-owning households, the bus clearly is not.

Throughout the study distinctions were seen in the social and geographical characteristics of the ten case study areas. The consequences of closure also varied in the different areas but no single social or geographical characteristic can be used to explain this. In our judgement, therefore, it is not possible to make any simple categorisation of lines for use in decisions about the future of the remaining rail network.

In isolation from other considerations, the travel and associated social consequences of past withdrawals of rail services in rural areas provide grounds for retaining these services if at all possible, for it is difficult to see how further closures could be effected without requiring the local communities to suffer a reduction in the quality of their public transport which would inevitably lead to a significant curtailment of activity and opportunity. Moreover, if it is assumed that the services likely to lead to the least hardship and inconvenience have already been withdrawn, then it would become progressively more difficult to close lines without generating adverse consequences of at least the scale that we identified.
Of course, we are not denying that there are other considerations to be taken into account with regard to rural services -- we were only looking at the social consequences. So if one considered, let's say, equity, perhaps one would put in a stronger case for retention on the grounds that people in rural areas have already suffered considerably in the decline of their public transport services and even more as a result of a decline in local facilities, so they are even more dependent -- those that don't have personal use of a car -- upon a good public transport service to avail themselves of various more distant facilities and opportunities. On grounds of energy too, one could make out a stronger case for retention, because one should be wary about disposing of transport infrastructure which is not necessarily dependant on oil as its energy source and which is likely, therefore, to become more valuable as time runs on. On the other hand, on economic grounds of course the costs of some of these services is out of all proportion to the benefit gained by their retention -- and we would be the first to say that you can't just take the findings of our study and say therefore all rural rail services must be retained.

Nevertheless, something that we did have to conclude in our study is that though something more could be done to arrange better replacement buses, there are marked differences between the two services -- the bus services and the former rail services. This has an impact on people's lives so that we judged and concluded that it would be an illusion to suppose that a bus service can fully replace or compensate for the loss of a rail service. Maybe the decision has got to be made but, if so, we shouldn't kid ourselves that there will be no adverse effects.

Discussion (SESSION C)

Richard Pryke doubted whether the PSI study had established the facts about the consequences of railway closures. He noted that the PSI survey showed that 15 to 20 per cent of those using rail services were unaffected, but that the remaining 80 per cent stopped making journeys or made them less frequently. He then cited a similar Marplan survey, carried out in 1967 for the Ministry of Transport, which produced findings that he considered to be almost exactly opposite to the PSI findings: there was a 15 to 20 per cent reduction in journeys after closure, in the Marplan survey, so 80 per cent of journeys remained unaffected. In his view the Marplan survey, which was based on a slightly larger sample size than the PSI one, was a better survey because Marplan had actually questioned people on the train before closure and then followed up what actually happened after closure. He supported his doubts by quoting from the Marplan survey as follows: "In terms of increased cost and times of journeys, no widespread hardship resulted from the closures. About half the former regular travellers reported lowered or unchanged costs, and about two-fifths reported shorter or unchanged journey time. Average increases in cost and time were small." He acknowledged that this was a subject where it is difficult to get a proper sample and where a good deal of feeling is aroused, and so -- whilst not trying to cast doubts on Hillman's and Whalley's intent to establish the facts -- he wondered again whether they had done so or had tried to do so. He certainly thought that the Marplan survey seemed a very convincing one, yet it did reveal findings almost diametrically opposed to the PSI one.
Mayer Hillman, in reply, was concerned at Richard Pryke's veiled allegation that there was something improper in the way the PSI research had been conducted. He said that the survey had been carried out in ten areas in a perfectly straightforward way and that the findings from the 850 respondents had been set down, published and then presented to this conference in an abridged form. In his view, if the PSI survey of ten closures (average closure date 1972) showed harsher consequences than had the Marplan survey of earlier closures (closure date 1965), then one could only conclude that this was because there were harsher effects in later closures. He thought, therefore, that both sets of results could be valid.

He added that the validity of the PSI findings could be seen in the consistency of the relationships which emerged for the ten areas -- something which would have required an extraordinary element of collusion between 850 people all over the country for the records to have been passed on to PSI in an inaccurate form!

Anne Whalley commented that it was not sensible to compare research results so broadly without looking at the detail of the results and of the research methods used.* She instanced the fact that Richard Pryke had compared Marplan findings about journeys with PSI findings about people -- an unreal comparison in her view. She accepted that people may be inclined to exaggerate precise numbers somewhat, but she maintained that people knew well enough whether they generally went shopping by rail each week before closure, but generally went only fortnightly or monthly by bus afterwards.

Christopher Foster posed the problem that the PSI study had been observing people's reactions to a period of time when travel changes were brought about by all sorts of other changes -- such as in the pattern of employment. He felt that the PSI report or the respondents might be in danger of attributing to one cause -- the railway closure -- the reactions to many other things, including changes in the quality of rural living. He suggested that it would be of value to compare the PSI results with the attitudes and travel decisions of people from areas in which railways did survive: he considered this would be a good way of seeing to what extent the survival of their railway had protected them from the effects of various other events -- such as the closure of local schools or hospitals. He wondered whether the railways would have made much difference to the quality of their lives -- whilst keeping the railways would not have made things worse, their benefits probably would have been fairly marginal. He reiterated that ways of life had been changing in many respects, some of which reflected people's increasing propensity to buy cars, so he wondered further whether the PSI respondents would have used the railways had they continued to run.

Mayer Hillman surmised that planning changes in rural areas in recent years which had resulted in a reduction in the number of locally accessible faculties might have been expected to have encouraged or obliged people to travel. But as far as non-car owners were concerned, this had not occurred; indeed, he reminded the conference that after the rail closures, these people made fewer public transport journeys than they did when the branch lines services were still available.

*See Annex A for a comparison of the Marplan and PSI studies, together with Mayer Hillman's and Anne Whalley's response to Richard Pryke's criticism.
Colin Speakman referred to a unique experiment in the Yorkshire Dales, where a railway -- closed in 1970 -- had recently been reopened. He pointed out that people had returned to it, up to 200 people from the local villages turning up to use the service which had been withdrawn in the 1970s after two TUCC inquiries had established that some hardship would result from closure. A TRRL study of the renewed service had shown that the users were mainly from social group C, D and E, had suffered hardship, and were delighted to get their service back. He thought that the clue to its success was that they had concentrated the demand by running the service just once a month, and he also pointed out that the demand still exists, ten years after closure, because people do still live in the villages.

Malyn Newitt highlighted the fact that most of the morning discussion had been concentrated on people in rural areas who want to travel outwards; he thought there was also in effect a reverse problem -- that of people wanting to get into rural areas. He felt that there was a need to examine how much the decline of rail services in the National Parks -- obviously Dartmoor and Exmoor are good examples -- and to many seaside resorts, has for instance put these out of the reach of considerable sectors of the population, has greatly increased road access problems to these areas and has denied local authorities the option of developing 'park and ride' schemes.

He raised a second issue, referring to the argument that an earlier speaker had put forward, namely that if people were faced with having to pay the full cost of their services in rural areas they might well have different preferences. In his view, however, this must surely be seen against a whole background of providing services to rural areas. So, if the farmer who uses the road past his farm every day were faced with the full cost of maintenance of that particular road, he might also have a different set of preferences; if someone living in an isolated house were faced with the full cost of having a letter delivered to them, they might also decide to give up all forms of correspondence; and so it goes on to every single sort of service, fire service, educational service, provision of electricity and telephones and all the rest of it. He put it to the conference that there has been a collective decision made to maintain rural communities and, by and large, to charge them on a level rate for services with people in towns; to make an exception of public transport, whilst still allowing post offices, telephones and roads and so on to be provided at a level cost seemed to him to be grossly unfair and inequitable, and to be a factor in need of consideration.
SESSION D  A local authority perspective

DAVID MACKLIN (Devon County Council)

County Councils have a statutory responsibility for planning and promoting passenger transport. Some measure of that responsibility in terms of the scale of operations of bus services and the number of passengers carried can be seen in the following table which shows what has happened to bus use over a period of 25 years in Devon.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Vehicle miles operated</th>
<th>Vehicles in service</th>
<th>Passengers carried</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>29m</td>
<td>775</td>
<td>110m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>26m</td>
<td>731</td>
<td>89m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>25m</td>
<td>733</td>
<td>76m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>23m</td>
<td>676</td>
<td>59m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>14m</td>
<td>435</td>
<td>50m (est.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>12m</td>
<td>425</td>
<td>42m</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It can be seen that approximately 40 million people travel by bus in Devon at present. This may be compared with approximately 6 million who travel by rail.

In Devon in the 1950s, an extensive railway network existed with 401 miles of track with 131 stations. By 1975, only 191 miles of track with 43 stations remained. The reasons for this decline are several. In the simplest terms they can be related to the greatly increased role of the private motor car. Nevertheless, as the table below shows, the number of rail passengers using stations in Devon has been rising somewhat in the last two or three years. The future no doubt could see faster travel times through use of High Speed Trains and improved parking facilities for the motorist, thereby encouraging "Park and Ride". But of course these would have far less value to rural dwellers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Passengers at stations</th>
<th>Devon: % increase</th>
<th>National: % increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>5,850,283</td>
<td>+ 0.1</td>
<td>+ 3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>5,857,116</td>
<td></td>
<td>+ 1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>6,132,760</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following table shows the level of financial support, both capital and revenue, contributed by Devon County Council towards rail and bus. Clearly, it is linked to the differing levels of patronage, as the railways only receive a minor part
of the total. It can be seen that, last year, rail received 0.5 per cent and bus 99.5 per cent of the total revenue support, whereas rail received 12.0 per cent and bus 88.0 per cent of the total capital support. 90 per cent of the revenue support goes to the National Bus Company, the remaining 10 per cent going to private bus operators.

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<th>Revenue (£)</th>
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<td>Railways</td>
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<td>1974/75</td>
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<td>80,000</td>
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<td>1975/76</td>
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<td>1976/77</td>
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<td>1977/78</td>
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Devon County Council's spending on school transport is well in excess of even the revenue and capital support combined. It now amounts to £5.0m per annum and is largely spent on buses, but a small amount is used to purchase rail season tickets. Support is also given for the promotion of railway use by publicity, timetables, etc., on the branch lines and bus feeder services into rail stations, and lists of the areas served by local buses, the location of taxis thereby improving co-ordination. Publicity for Rail Line Development Groups also helps to make people become aware of the rail services available on the branch lines.

Most of the railway funds, however, cover capital items, such as station refurbishing, new passenger reception facilities, passenger shelters and station forecourt improvements at such places as Barnstaple, Exeter St. David's and now Axminster. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that there is a difficulty for local authorities in assessing the benefit and risk attached to such projects, for instance with regard to the relatively large sum of money spent on a rail/bus interchange in Exmouth. Hopefully, the cost of all these exercises is not out of proportion to the benefit.

Other types of investment have been made in rail facilities by other local authorities. In the mid-1970s, Derbyshire County Council, in conjunction with British Rail, re-opened a station on the main Sheffield/London line. The money involved -- £30,000 -- was justified in this case because that area of Derbyshire/Nottinghamshire was to be developed as an alternative to expanding Derby and Nottingham. Known as "Alfreton Parkway", this main line railway station encouraged business and industry and, if the utilisation of the station at 150,000 passengers a year is a guide, it appears to have worked. The extra revenue must surely have been of net benefit to British Rail, who seem sufficiently confident to stop the "Master Cutler" prestige service on its route to serve that station. This station opens a new catchment area for railway as an alternative to a car journey into Derby.

A further example of this type of investment concerns an old railway line which used to run from Manchester to Sheffield and along the East Coast, trundling through Lincolnshire. In pre-Beeching days it served numerous little stations,
and the associated villages. They were then closed, but, by the early 1970s, British Rail had already begun to consider the idea of resurrecting some of these closed stations. The inevitable desire to research and then reach a decision would in one instance have cost £3,000 in terms of research and £5,000 to re-open the station (Metheringham). So the research element was omitted and a financial commitment was made to re-open that station and another one (Ruskinington) some miles away. Within six months passenger use confirmed that the risk had been worthwhile -- totalling about 600 trips per week or 20,000 per year. Had that decision not been taken, those people could well have been in cars congesting town centres, or riding on buses, or possibly staying at home and using the village shop. That raises interesting questions about the value of railways and transport in general, especially the effect on rural communities.

One of the problems, of course, is that whereas a comprehensive road network on which buses may run exists, the same flexibility is not available to the railway system. A bus can be diverted or routed past a particular small community and the service may be varied in capacity and frequency very easily. It can be removed as a system more or less immediately if it proves a mistake. These circumstances are very different from those faced by the railway system.

Partly no doubt because of this lack of flexibility, quite large towns in Devon are no longer connected by a passenger train service, for example, Bideford, Okehampton and Kingsbridge. Yet rural life continues so that, while the value of rail links should not be underestimated, it would appear that many towns must and do exist without them.

In Devon, as elsewhere, railways were built to connect the larger towns and cities and not necessarily to serve the towns and villages enroute. The Exeter to Barnstaple line goes to the centre of Exeter and the middle of Barnstaple, but goes to the middle of nowhere else. Most villages are on the hillsides, while the railways run in the valleys. Fifteen years ago villagers would have walked, but nowadays few are willing to consider hiking two or three miles to their nearest station. Where halts exist, Devon has tried to provide bus/rail connections, but for many people once on the bus they prefer to stay on it. Thus, the Exeter to Barnstaple line contributes very little to the lives of communities on the shoulders of the valleys along that corridor, though of course there could be limited hardship when such services are withdrawn but perhaps that should be faced.

Some insight on the apparent effects of rail closures on the prosperity of small towns can be gained from a recent study. Anne Glyn Jones of Exeter University was commissioned by the County Council in the late 1970s to research into the social and economic circumstances of a small township in north-west Devon called Hatherleigh. This is a small town some 10 miles north-west of Oakhampton, which itself is 20 miles west of Exeter -- close to being remote and fairly representative of country towns experiencing rural decline. Its future had been a matter of concern in the early 1950s and it was desirable to undertake a follow-up study examining the actual change of circumstances 20 years later. Miss Jones's conclusion was that the loss of the railway was not particularly important to the community. By the time of its closure it was of little use for people travelling to work, although no doubt a few were still disgruntled over its loss. Interestingly, she concluded that despite rural policies and local investment facilities, more people, especially young people, were now living in Hatherleigh establishing family groups, and generally the community was viable. It will be very interesting if this is confirmed on a wider basis by the 1981 Census.
Public transport costs money and in Devon's case significant capital sums are being allocated. It would be interesting to know whether this expenditure is contributing merely to a hiccup in a trend of decline or comes as a turning point in the future role to be played by bus and rail. There are signs, and Miss Jones's paper is one, that rural areas are beginning to revive despite the loss of rail services and, in many cases, poor bus services. The question that has still to be answered is whether support of public transport facilities, though desirable, is really necessary.

Discussion (SESSION D)

Ray Buckton expressed the view that too much emphasis was being placed on the past, especially the last 15 years or so. Instead, he felt that attention should be consciously turned to the problems of the future. Being a villager most of his life (incidentally, his father being a shareholder in the Derwent Valley Railway), he could see that many villagers who could ill afford it were increasingly having to depend on the private car. And yet the indications were that in the foreseeable future oil would be increasingly in short supply -- undermining the value of the private car as a future alternative. In the London area over the last few months more bicycles and mopeds were evident than ever before. He interpreted this as showing that people could not afford to run cars and where there was an alternative they would endeavour to use it. He predicted that even businessmen with their various perks encouraging car use could be looking for a bicycle very shortly. As an ex-Alderman of the City Council as well as Chairman of Transport 2000 York, he thought society was foolish not to concentrate more on the medium- and long-term future. He very seriously queried the advisability of further cuts to the railway system. Only a bare skeleton remained and soon it would be extremely difficult to restore services.

He noted that in Australia and America the loss of local railways was much regretted. The cost of catering for the private car in towns and large urban areas -- in terms of policing, parking, traffic management and roadworks -- was becoming unduly onerous. Finally, he observed that, while many who lived in villages were having to relocate their jobs as the mechanisation of agriculture progressed, they were being replaced byweekenders and those interested in developing rural skills and so on. The real accessibility problem was therefore not going to go away.

Nick Lester made two points connected with Mr Buckton's statement. Concerning the future he felt that, while contemplating the problems of the minor communities on the shoulders of the valleys and the extent of their benefits and disadvantages, there should be more concentration on the larger communities currently served by railways where the future was insecure. This was where the real problem lay. Regarding control over people migrating into the country and its relationship to local government policies, he felt that Mr Macklin had given the impression that he believed these features were beyond the control of planners. He strongly disagreed, feeling that "where people can live" is
both a cause and consequence of local authority and central government action. He recalled an article in the *Sunday Times* property pages about three years ago when the Mil was opened at Bishops Stortford: prices suddenly doubled over night. People migrated to the villages then, as the new highway capacity, presumably an instrument of Government policy, suddenly allowed them to do so. There were a variety of controls available to local authorities which could effectively constrain and promote development as required.

David Macklin in reply referred to the M5 and the effect that it was likely to have on Barnstaple. It was a major road and inevitably was going to detract from the use made of the Barnstaple to Exeter freight line. The railway had contributed in the past to Barnstaple's well-being, but would in his view inevitably be superseded by this new major road.

One speaker commented on Mr Macklin's concern about the future role of the car. He wondered if we need be so worried for an examination of history showed that society usually solved its problems in due course. He instanced the canal, and before that, no doubt, stage coach services. Somehow over a period of time society readjusted to new circumstances and people coped. He suggested that the car would be replaced by some other form of transport for which there was a good energy source.

Peter Keen said that what Mr Macklin had been talking about were micro-problems. They were important -- bus stops, bus shelters, halts on existing lines, and so on -- and a considerable amount of progress had been made in dealing with them. Some ten years ago the first station was re-opened at Dedham Market, and this example was now one of many. Mr Macklin's theme was that there was still a considerable amount of "by guess and by God" surrounding decisions both by Local Authorities and by British Rail on these matters. It was time that this position was improved and the decisions were put on a more rational basis.

The concept of the "cost per passenger mile produced" was a useful one. It could be applied to sections of line or to individual stations or individual services. You could simulate the existing arrangements and then examine the costs and consequences of doing something different allowing British Rail, the Local Authorities and Central Government to reach decision. He suggested that an objective was needed which could be the maximisation of passenger miles within a given financial support level. This would allow commercially sensible decisions to be made.

Malcolm Gylee continued in the same vein indicating that revenue support for the Central Wales line was provided by his County -- Clwyd. The kind of approach suggested by Peter Keen was adopted. Over the last 2½ years targets had been met and passenger levels steadily increased. Clwyd also contributed £5,000 towards the cost of station approaches. All in all, the County was coming to terms with its obligations.

Christopher Foster indicated that it was the subsidy situation which was so confusing. The 1968 Act had resulted in a stalemate position, with subsidies emerging from a variety of quarters making it extremely hard for the Chief Executives of County Councils to make rational decisions. He wondered if there were not better alternatives.
Not so long ago in association with the World Bank, he had learnt something of the arrangements on the railways in Yugoslavia. There they had devised a procedure for administering their railways including rail closures which appeared to have come to terms with these problems. It combined consumers and workers and virtually everything else one seemed to value. He described the whole railway system as being organised in terms of interrelated workers' co-operatives with each buying services from the other and the whole inter-meshing. Some 10 per cent of the railwaymen's pay is based on the revenue earned on their own particular sections of the railway. Should a particular branch line be in difficulties, a pooling of the various ideas for saving money, raising more revenue, increasing the efficiency of the service occurs.

The Local Transport Consultative Committee, representing all the local industries and local authorities, is then approached by the railway workers' management and unless funds are forthcoming services have to be closed or modified or wages reduced. Modifications of this sort including railway closure are not uncommon, but on nothing like the same scale as had been seen in Beeching times in Britain, and the consultation procedure seems right with local authority and local community having total responsibility for funding. The local workers know what their profits are and service reductions do not necessarily mean job losses. Retraining, however, can be necessary with former railway workers being prepared to drive lorries or buses as a substitute for the original arrangements. If Mr. Keen and Mr. Basnett were right in their prognostications for the future, and a crunch situation was approaching it was time to modify and improve our procedures, perhaps based on something similar to the encouraging and interesting methods adopted in Yugoslavia.

Ray Buckton agreed with Professor Foster's suggestions, pointing out, en passant, that perhaps these desirable procedures were being practised in a country with a socialist government.

Iain Skewis took an opposite view to Professor Foster's. He thought the British wanted to examine positively the contributions made by railways. He had been actively involved in development with the Government in several parts of Britain and thought the key to successful projects was often the public transport ingredient. That applied very much in mid-Wales. Spending several million pounds each year on building factories, houses, theatres, leisure centres, etc., he saw the importance of including also the best features of the transport element so that these developments would be successful. In his view, public transport should not be looked at in isolation — it was too important in its underlying effect on community activity to be regarded in this way.
SESSION E  Technical and operational opportunities

This session was devoted to three outline expositions of alternative ways of providing public transport for rural areas through which conventional rail services run at present.

Changes to existing rail services

BILL BRADSHAW (British Railways Board)

New technology has an important role to play in lowering costs for lower-density rail routes. Recent studies of the Ipswich to Lowestoft line can be used to illustrate this. The route, some 79 km long, acts both as a local service and as a feeder to London Inter-city trains at Lowestoft. It has recently received considerable attention as a result of the trials conducted with the Leyland National "Railcar" passenger service in the Autumn of 1980.

Costs of operating such routes tend to rise in "steps". For example, as each train set is added, for instance, to carry commuters into Lowestoft as well as Ipswich, more rolling stock is required. With a two-car passenger unit costing between £200,000 and £300,000, these steps are clearly quite large, and each increment has to be considered carefully. At present the line is double-track throughout, with frequent signal boxes. By changing the service pattern so that one crossing point is provided half-way (an extended loop to allow a margin for late running), a level of service similar to that at present can be provided with single track at much lower cost.

In flat areas, such as East Anglia, the number of level crossings is a major problem: there are some 46 along the Ipswich to Lowestoft line (which is by no means typical of all rural lines), of which 27 are manned, 18 unmanned and one is an automatic half-barrier. Telephones to the nearest signal box are provided at the unmanned crossings. The system dates from Victorian times, and is very labour-intensive, but a report by British Rail and the Department of Transport published in 1978 proposed a much simpler and cheaper replacement than the rather complex automatic crossings previously recommended. This will make replacement of the manual crossings worthwhile. The new crossings rely more heavily on the discipline of the road user. A prominent warning light is displayed, and the operation of the crossing is monitored through the power supply to the lights.

A major cost in signalling is the provision of telephone cable links between signal boxes. Replacement by radio links is now being investigated. This will also permit direct contact with the train itself, so that incidents can be handled quickly. This system could also be used to advise level crossing keepers whether a particular section of route is at present occupied. A high standard of discipline from those using such a system will be demanded by any radio system, but the ability would exist to control the whole line from one centre.
The next feature is rolling stock. At present there is one locomotive-hauled passenger train per day, some locomotive-hauled goods workings, and diesel multiple unit (dmu) trains for other services. The dmus are coming to the end of their life and so a new railcar has been developed, based on the Leyland National bus. LEVI -- the first prototype -- is a short-wheelbase, four-wheeler and has been tested on the line. LEVII, which is a longer version, is now on trial in the USA, and a two-car version -- Class 140 -- is due to leave the workshops shortly. Their interiors are very similar to those of buses, but give an acceptable standard of comfort and ride.

So far as stations are concerned, there is a need for much simpler structures. In some cases, it may be necessary to relocate stations so as to serve newer population settlements. For example, one current station on the Lowestoft to Norwich line conveniently serves just the station house, about one mile from a new housing development: but to relocate the traditional station would obviously be extremely expensive. It would be more sensible therefore to provide a simple trackside platform, providing a low height, low-cost structure, as has been employed in the USA.

In order to put these elements together, total investment in signalling, stations, track and rolling stock would cost between £2,000,000 and £3,000,000 on the Lowestoft line. The level of support required from Government would fall from about £900,000 to £300,000 -- a very good return on investment.*

"Railbus" -- problems and possibilities

PETER KEEN (British Railways Board)

Bus replacement and new coach feeder services to link with the Inter-city network are, in effect, additional solutions to the simplified rural railway service discussed in Bill Bradshaw's paper. All these need considering. A worthwhile approach to examining their suitability for different situations is to refer to the characteristics of rural public transport services which Hillman and Whalley compared in their recent study for British Rail. The disadvantages and difficulties of bus replacement services which they identified include some which are physical and some which are the organisational problems of the bus substitutions of the 1960s and early 1970s -- many of which can be rectified.

It should be recalled that the bus has the benefit of providing better accessibility than the train, and is not necessarily slower. For instance, during the closure of the Machynlleth-Barmouth section of the Cambrian Coast Line, the bus is providing the same schedule as the train and, north of Barmouth, the service has not had to be retimed. However, the contrary can be true, especially in congested areas, where rail does offer better timing than the bus, a notable instance being the service into the centre of St. Ives in Cornwall on the branch from St. Erth which has been utilised for a park and ride facility.

*For more detail on the Lowestoft line, see "Four elements in the half-cost railway", Railway Gazette, February 1981, pp. 130-131.
The bus should be able to offer a higher service frequency for similar cost owing to the smaller size of unit operated, and a more flexible service. On the other hand, rail travel even on old diesel multiple units is generally considered more comfortable for longer journeys, although this could change somewhat in the case of coach services.

As regards costs, buses have the advantage, even in comparison with the low-cost, simplified rail service outlined in Bill Bradshaw's paper. One could think of new feeder services to rail as putting the railway back where it was ten or fifteen years ago, at low cost.

In order to do this, however, the "respectability" of bus/rail links needs to be established in Britain, such a concept being common elsewhere in Europe: most bus terminals in Holland are adjacent to rail stations, and 5 per cent of all bus trips are made for interchange to rail. In Britain, the rapid growth of BR coach links to Heathrow airport shows what can be achieved, with 0.75 million trips per year, and the Heathrow booking offices, albeit not rail-linked, functioning as a major "Inter-city station".

The concept of a new coach/rail feeder service is being tested between Kettering and Peterborough, via Corby, an area which lost its rail service some 10-15 years ago. An earlier link from Kettering (on the Midland Main Line) only as far as Corby did not prove successful, but extending the service to connect with the East Coast Main Line at Peterborough has widened its scope. The service is operated on behalf of British Rail by the National Bus Company, with which an excellent relationship exists. It is run as a "train" and shown in the national rail timetable, connecting at both ends. Quick results are not expected, but although the average load is only 8-10 passengers, the Inter-city traffic generation makes it worthwhile: one-third of the passengers are making new Inter-city trips, with an average length of 100 miles on the rail network. After six months, the service is "breaking even" in terms of the global corporate objective of relating costs to total revenue. Regional managements are now looking at opportunities for similar services in other areas, and are finding a number of possibilities.

Replacement bus services

DAVID GLASSBOROW in association with JOHN BODGER (National Bus Company)

Arguments on the relative costs, performance and qualities of different public transport modes are very familiar to anyone like myself with experience in the 1950s at the British Transport Commission, and later in the Transport Holding Company. Yet the main issue in rural areas is not about different techniques of movement, but about how finance is to be provided to meet the need for rural public transport -- "need" being a concept which first requires a clear definition.

Experience over the years has shown that branch line closures are unlikely to solve the railways' main financial problem, so public support is necessary. Nevertheless, it must be borne in mind that in many ways, the railway industry is treated much more favourably than the bus industry in financial terms, with the rural bus passenger receiving much less assistance than his rail counterpart.
It is important to acknowledge that the rural bus cannot be an identical replacement for rail. For a start, each of the two modes of public transport has its respective advantages for passengers. The railways ought to be able to provide a better service in rural areas given that they have a well-designed and clear track not congested by other vehicles. They could therefore gain advantage in terms of reliability, speed and comfort -- as other papers have pointed out. The buses, though, have to use roads which are often inadequate for the vehicles carried -- including farm vehicles which cause obstruction. New roads cannot be provided in these areas just for buses, but there are areas in the country where road improvements are required anyway, and these can help to bring about improvements in the bus services. But there are other areas where the geography is such that adequate public finance cannot be provided for their improvement. On the other hand, buses often do have the advantage of being more directly accessible to the population they serve. More importantly, they cost far less to provide.

It is as well to recognise that the replacement bus services following the 1968 Act were put on at the minimum level that it was possible to have while still allowing closure of the railway to go ahead. Better services could have been provided at more cost -- and the overall savings would still have been substantial. The taxpayer was ostensibly going to save a lot of money from rail closures, yet in effect "taxation" by cross-subsidisation from National Bus Company and Scottish Bus Group passengers paying higher fares was to be used to pay for the costs of the replacement services. If even half taxpayers' money saved from rail closures had been used to serve their rural communities in the same area by bus, a much better public transport service would now be provided in these areas. This was not permitted by the Act.

The current organisation of the finances obscures this type of thinking -- what is needed therefore is for an overall view to be taken of the level of support for rural public transport, rather than the view being of bus and rail in isolation. An acceptable level of public transport at acceptable fares would not be commercially viable, so if the overall objective is to provide a system to give a community what it requires, financial assistance from the public purse will be necessary.

The next question is what sort of system gives the community what it requires at minimum resource cost. The system may be an amalgam of modes of transport, including the non-conventional ones, such as community buses, the conventional ones -- both rail and bus -- and also co-ordinated services, as described in Peter Keen's paper. There is in fact much more co-ordination in practice than is realised, though some new examples have been well publicised. There are difficulties, of course: for instance, diverting existing bus services to connect with rail may disrupt the journeys of the much larger number of bus passengers using them for purposes other than to link with rail, including using them to link with other bus services.

However, the real difficulty in all this lies in trying to set these decisions within the framework of a proper public transport plan, and in relating this to an agreed measurement of need for rural public transport.
Discussion (SESSION E)

Charles Bentley commented on the scope for rail/bus development, in which his firm was co-operating with BR. He considered that what was being produced matched the need for a vehicle for rural rail lines.

Andrew Dodds suggested that discussion should concentrate on railways as such, rather than on bus replacements. He stressed how essential it is, in his view, to maintain current safety levels. He also pointed to the dangers of multiplying the different types of railbus on BR, though certain types might appear suited to certain routes; such aspects as design costs could be high for small-batch production. Finally, he queried how the amount of traffic on the Ipswich-Lowestoft line which was double-track at present could be accommodated on a single-track line, as Mr Bradshaw had proposed.

Bill Bradshaw replied that singling has to be considered when the need to renew track arrived, as it has on the Lowestoft line. So far as rolling stock is concerned, BR hope to standardise on a single type as far as possible, following trials of various designs now in progress. All significant traffic flows could be accommodated on a single track line.

Richard Pryke asked whether savings on lines like the one from Ipswich to Lowestoft could not also be made without investment. He wondered whether, for example, guards were needed, and whether any signalling was required, given the lightweight units used and their short stopping distances. He also thought that conversion of rural rail lines to a busway would be another option that might be worth investigating.

Col. Ian McNaughton intervened to assert that a basic signalling system was still necessary. Despite shorter stopping distances, collisions would occur on single-track lines. In reply to another member of the audience who had suggested that such a system at crossing points would suffice, Col. McNaughton commented that such a system had recently "achieved a radio-assisted collision" in Holland. He insisted on the statutory requirement to ensure that only one train is in a section of line at any one time. Before accepting a radically-changed system, he had to be able to advise the Minister that it would be safe. He pointed out that Britain has a fine record, with no head-on collisions on single-track lines for over fifty years. As an adviser to the Minister, he could only recommend wholly safe practices.

Mr. Bradshaw commented on Dr Pryke's questioning the need for guards, to say that the idea had been examined, but given quite heavy passenger loadings on the East Suffolk line, the rather complicated nature of railway ticketing, and short intervals between stations, guards were certainly needed to handle ticketing.

Malyn Newitt stressed that options should be kept open and experimentation encouraged. At certain times of day, one-man-operation could well be sensible. Likewise, radio signalling, and low-height stations -- the latter requiring suitably-designed vehicles -- may be appropriate in some situations. He asked whether there were any technical problems associated with running passenger services or lines currently only carrying freight. He welcomed the experiments with "buses running as trains" to which Mr. Keen had referred. Finally, he thought that TUCCs should include rail-feeder bus and coach within their purview, so that, in common with true rail services, these could not be withdrawn without notice.
Mr Bradshaw pointed out in reply that there was no basic problem in passengers using freight lines, the presence of freight being determined entirely on commercial grounds. And in reply to Dr Newitt and a subsequent question from Len Dunelow, Mr Keen pointed out that the bus and coach feeders do not come under the PSO. However, he thought that services replacing existing railways should come under the PSO, and thus also under the TUCCs.

Nick Lester supported the idea of aiming to bring back rail services lost some years ago, in the form of buses. The Kettering to Peterborough success was encouraging. Partial replacement of certain trains, such as the early and late runs on the Boston to Skegness line, was another aspect. However, he was worried about cases where a rail-replacement bus ran parallel with an ordinary local service, both quarter-full. If both were funded from the local authority, there would be pressure to combine them, removing the benefit of the dedicated rail-replacement bus which most agreed was necessary.

Mr Keen agreed that this was a big problem. He was convinced that in any replacement services, retention of the link with the railway was fundamental.

Peter Hodge commented that the replacement buses on the Boston to Skegness line had retained the level of patronage -- albeit low -- which the train had carried, and had maintained connections very well.

David Glassborow raised a further issue. He doubted that two standards -- one for existing bus passengers, and one for the ex-rail passengers -- were sensible. The same financial standard should apply to all public transport services.

Ian Heggie returned to the question of level crossings. In his view, a rail crossing was in essence the same as that where one road crossed another. White markings and a "Give Way" sign should be quite sufficient. He stressed the high cost of replacing like-with-like on existing rural railways. The Lowestoft scheme described earlier was very encouraging, but will still not cover its direct costs, even after a capital expenditure of £2 million--£3 million. In his judgement, the same money spent on buses could provide much more service. He illustrated this point by referring to the Leyland National bus which costs about £50,000, but modified as a railcar costs £120,000 -- plus signalling and ancillaries. Was it, he enquired, in the interests of the customer to deny him increased services, or in the interests of NUR members to deny them possible increased employment?

Col. McNaughton referred to the fact that despite the advocacy of British Rail and the Department of Transport, very strong local objections were raised to specific modern crossing proposals, with petitions, etc. He pointed out that Victorian gated crossings were very dangerous, compared with half barriers, manned barriers or even flashing lights with no barriers at all -- trains run through about 40 pairs of gates per year, but it was difficult to persuade people, such as local headmasters, of the truth of this fact.

Another speaker asked whether we could not simply get rid of level crossings, by closing minor roads crossing railways, just as minor railways have been closed for economic reasons. He considered that the extra time taken to divert to another crossing could be quite small, but the Department had not looked at this. Counties could surely review such opportunities.

Ray Buckton expressed considerable concern about proposals to simplify crossings. He stressed that British Railways were operated on the "fenced-in" principle, whereas continental lines were generally unfenced. Introducing crossings without barriers ran counter to this national practice, and imposed extra strain on drivers. In his view, the solution lay in replacing crossings with bridges and tunnels.

David Macklin pointed out that when he was with Lincolnshire County Council, a review of crossings suggested by the earlier speaker had been carried out. The Skegness to Boston line had been studied, but only in one case out of 25 was there an agreement to close a local road; opposition on grounds of extra vehicle running costs, inconvenience to farmers, etc. was very strong.
Mr. Buckton then cited the case of the York to Newcastle line, where all crossings had been replaced by bridges or tunnels. Mr. Macklin intervened to point out that this was a main line and not a rural route as on the Boston-Skegness line, where such expenditure could not be justified: it was better to close the crossing.

Sir Peter Parker pointed out that a £10 million programme had been agreed for level crossing modernisation over ten years, although he would have liked to see that accelerated. The investment had a good rate of return, and was an aspect of the rail programme that could perhaps be financed "from outside", were that permitted.

Rex Faulks expressed interest in the one-man-operation of lightweight rolling stock. He had been impressed by the railcar on the Lowestoft line. He said that his area has a heavily loss-making rail service, which offers a more direct route than the PTEs bus service, and is more reliable. However, the train is not supported by the PTE because a two-man railcar crew cannot be justified, although a one-man lightweight train might be.

Mr. Bradshaw said that the railcar would be suitable for one-man operation, but the wide mix of ticket types purchased on trains might make the service too slow. If the operation involved very simple ticketing, then one-man-operation by the driver only was feasible.

Dr Newitt pointed out that the Kettering-Peterborough coaches are one-man -- albeit most tickets being bought off-train. Mr. Faulks returned to point out that heavily-loaded bus services were one-man-operated, and ran to strict schedules. Another speaker stressed the added complexities caused by traffic congestion, coupled with boarding delays on services with one-man operation. Mr. Keen accepted that the Barmouth rail replacement bus schedule might be affected by summer congestion. Colin Speakman stressed that peak summer loads also affected the ability of rail-replacement buses to function effectively, in terms of capacity, a problem that in principle applied to both modes. In his view, provision is made much more economic if vehicles can be diverted from urban peak demands.

Dr Iain Skewis stressed the "social acceptability" of the train, which a replacement bus might not enjoy.

Mr Glassborow commented on the high level of support given to Other Provincial Services -- he thought it was about £150 million of the £500+ million of the PSO. He considered that it was unfair to expect the buses to compete with the railways when their level of public financial support was much lower -- about £45 million for bus services outside London and the other PTE areas.* Mr. Buckton intervened to point out that, unlike railways, the cost of bus services does not include the cost of policing, lighting and providing and maintaining the permanent way.

*Postscript: Mr Glassborow was speaking very much "off the cuff". Since the conference, he has established the precise figures. For NBC in total, in 1980, support from all sources amounted to, broadly, £90 million, from new bus grant, from fuel duty rebate and from Section 1 revenue support from local authorities. This includes support for all NBC bus services, urban, inter-urban, suburban and rural but none goes to express services. It can be compared to the whole of the railway PSO for 1980, which applies to London and South East and to other provincial services, of some £600 millions. NBC's revenue from supported services was £520 million to which the £90 million can be added. BR's revenue from supported services in 1980 may have been some £320 million and to this should be added £600 million from the taxpayer.

British Rail point out, however, that NBC local operations do not cover Scotland or the inner London suburbs which feature largely in the support requirement for local rail services.
SESSION F  Policy Options

KENNETH GWILLIAM (University of Leeds)

One of the most difficult problems in formulating and appraising policy options for the problem of rural railways is to structure the questions appropriately. The danger is to adopt premises which are not generally, or politically, acceptable and then to construct upon them edifices of policy which are as strong, or weak, as their foundations.

The purpose of starting with that observation is to emphasise that there appear, politically, to be now quite radically differing foundations which might be presented.

The 1977 White Paper on Transport Policy argued "The issue in passenger transport is not so much a question of fairness between one transport mode and another, but rather how much we can and should spend as a nation on supporting public transport" (Para, 53). Although the White Paper did not unambiguously answer its own question, it clearly implied that some political decisions would be made, partly at central and partly at local government level, which would determine a level of public revenue support for public transport, including rural public transport. The spirit of the way in which those decisions were expected to be made was set out in the earlier definition of the objective "to meet social needs by securing a reasonable level of personal mobility, in particular by maintaining public transport for the many people who do not have the effective choice of travelling by car". But, of course, this falls far short of being an operational basis for appraising rural transport subsidy.

The view of the present government appears to be somewhat different. The Minister has made it clear that his general principle in dealing with the bus sector is that the bus industry, both management and employees, must learn to live broadly within the limits of what the customer can afford. Whilst this does not totally exclude the subsidy possibility, especially if locally financed and administered, it puts the emphasis for determining what services shall be provided onto the market mechanism and the response of suppliers to the potential of the market. One must not therefore presume the acceptability of the general principle of support for public transport in unprofitable areas. Of course, the unwillingness to approve rail closures and the continuation of TSG payments to counties offering bus revenue support makes it clear that the policy of market determination is not being pursued immediately to its extreme logical conclusion. But in the present circumstances it would be foolish to presume that the problem of rural railways can be presented, as may be tempting, as the problem of funding the best way of ensuring their continuation in order to avoid the inconveniences of hardships associated with their closures.

The problem of rural railways is thus, in my opinion, most sensibly to be seen nested within the set of financial problems of public transport; and the relevant policy options for consideration must have a wider perspective than that of rural railway users. In particular two observations seem to follow from that, namely:
(i) The most fundamental and crucial policy issue is whether the level of rural public transport services is to be determined by the aggregation of personal willingness to pay decisions or is to be based on some global decision by a public authority.

(ii) Whatever judgement is made on the first issue, the level of service to be supported -- either by the unattenuated market or by the decisions of public authorities -- cannot be based solely on consideration of desired levels of service, or hardships, but must reflect both the costs and benefits of different modal, institutional or level of service objectives.

Let us start with the most extreme presumption that it is the political judgement that, for local public transport, the levels of service to be provided, if any, should be determined by the market. The logical corollary of that, it seems, would be the elimination of constraints on transport operators as to what services to provide. Thus the 1974 Railways Act requirement to maintain levels of service (in so far as it is in reality still maintained) should go. So should any requirement, explicit or implicit, for N.B.C. to maintain existing bus networks by internal cross subsidy.

As the railway managers well know, this still does not make the calculation easy. Given common usage of some track or facilities with other services (freight or inter-city) there are problems of identifying the avoidability of costs with local passenger service withdrawal. Even where there is little such inter-dependence in operation there is still the problem of estimation of contributory revenue.

The extreme market solution also calls for the full range of mixed mode solutions to be capable of provision without impediment. Here we need to look carefully at light rail solutions using the advantages of existing rail track, as Bill Bradshaw has described. But we must also look closely at bus replacement services, and particularly at more constructive attempts to integrate bus and rail terminals and schedules to seek a viable, co-ordinated public transport outcome. There are already some examples (such as the Skegness experiment and the Kettering-Corby service) where this has been attempted.

If I may be allowed a digression at this point, I would comment that whilst Hillman and Whalley have provided an excellent insight into the social consequences of rail closures, I am worried that their observations on bus replacement services may be very misleading. It is not terribly surprising that a sample of passengers who chose to use a particular rail service find that a replacement bus, usually put on much more cheaply and with a quite different scale of subsidy, is less satisfactory to them. The real question of public welfare is whether they would make the same judgement if the full costs of both alternatives were charged to them. Perhaps the experience of some of the metropolitan counties on the support of bus and rail services is more directly relevant to this issue than estimates of differences in benefit level unrelated to any cost comparison.

Moving away from a pure market solution into the realms of public support options there appear to be a number of dimensions in which the options might be explored, including:

(i) Who should be responsible for making support level decisions?

(ii) Who shall be responsible for management and operation of supplied services?

(iii) On what evidence and criteria are the support decisions to be made?
Responsibility for Support, Operation and Management

One possible answer to the first question is that the strategic level authority responsible for transport planning under the 1972 Local Government Act and with the relevant financial powers under the 1974 Local Government Finance Act should be the supporting authority. The metropolitan counties as the P.T.A. exercise this power both for local rail and bus services and, at one remove through the P.T.E., combine planning and operational responsibility with the financial responsibility. For the shire counties, where the vast majority of the rural services are found the situation differs in two respects. Firstly, they have no direct responsibility for rural rail services so that there is a lack of uniformity, or even co-ordination between rail and bus support decisions. Secondly, there is a separation of financial and operational responsibility which certainly attenuates the direct effect of the financial control.

Two new options are thus suggested:

(i) **County responsibility for local rail support.** The main argument against this seems to be the problem of cross-county services, though such problems are faced both by P.T.E. area local rail services and by cross-boundary bus services. The great advantage of a move in this direction would be to get a greater consistency of standards of support between modes.

(ii) **P.T.E.'s for the shire counties.** The main argument against this is the potential loss of operating efficiency as public transport service control is bureaucratised; its advantage would be a more direct control of the administration and direction of support.

These kinds of change would inevitably reduce further the powers both of the T.U.C.'s and the Traffic Commissioners. Given a transfer of financial responsibility to the local political system one might sensibly ask whether there would remain any "ombudsman" role of sufficient importance to justify separate institutions.

Criteria for Support

The case for progressive concentration of control of public transport in the hands of the local authorities would be strongest if it could be shown that rational service planning by the democratically elected authority was being subverted by the independence of the operators, or that operational efficiency could be improved by local control. There appears to be little or no evidence in support of either contention.

In any event, there would seem to be an urgent need for a much more clearly defined criterion for support. The identification of numbers of affected persons, their characteristics and the degree of inconvenience or advantage that they obtain from any change in public transport availability, offers some kind of a basis for calculation or judgement. But more than this is needed. It must be converted either into a criterion for support payments if the services are to be provided by an independent operator (as for example in the passenger mileage maximisation criterion of London Transport which yields a shadow price per passenger mile for only global level of support), or into a service design criterion if services are to be provided directly by the supporting agency. The former could be done, and might be a reasonable way to proceed given the evidence both from West Yorkshire and London Transport that the passenger mileage maximisation criterion is a reasonable proxy for social welfare maximisation. Such a criterion could be applied both to rail and to bus support claims.
The Long Run and the Short Run

A particularly difficult problem is that of replacement of assets of very long life. In the case of a market mechanism the assumption would be that assets would only be replaced if they were expected to yield a sufficiently high return to service the capital involved. This would be quite consistent with continuation of service with a lower yield until such time as the re-investment could be postponed no longer.

The re-investment decision is equally important, however, where some level of continuing public revenue support is expected or intended. In this case, the important decision is that of selecting the mode of transport to which this support is to be channeled. The appropriate solution would appear to be a cost-benefit analysis of the alternatives over the whole life of the assets concerned. It would be equally wrong to decide against replacement of rail assets on too short a decision horizon as to pre-empt future resources by replacement without such a full life appraisal.

This procedure, of course, does require some prior determination of the criterion for support.

Conclusions

The main conclusion of this review of policy options is that the judgement concerning the basis and level of support for rural public transport is crucial. A procedure for appraising rural rail closures or re-investments which fails to take into account both benefits and costs, or which does not consider alternative ways of meeting transport demand, is unlikely to have the confidence at local or central government level, and indeed is unworthy of it. By the same token the operator must be given the requisite freedom to design and implement whatever solution appears to best meet the social criteria.
Introduction to SESSION G  General discussion

SIR CHARLES CARTER

I would like to highlight two issues at this stage. First, there is an admittedly ill-defined social problem about rural railways, partly owing to the fact that people are sentimentally attached to them. Nevertheless, there is evidence that a certain amount of harm is done by the contraction of the rail network, and the provision of less than adequate alternative public transport services, and that this harm is likely to be felt more by the less-privileged members of the community. It will not do to assume that everybody can drive a car. We are going to have an increasingly large number of elderly people in the community. And there are numbers of wives who are left stranded when their husbands take the car to work. There is also a real problem with providing public transport services, the decline in which is very difficult to sort out from the other influences which are changing rural life generally.

Secondly, we must recognise that the financial problems of providing transport services by rail are very severe. They are not, of course, the whole problem, nor even the big part of the problem of rail operations, but they are a substantial problem. Although we have had some fascinating suggestions for ways in which this may be improved, I don't think that any of the participants in this conference has suggested a method by which existing rural rail services -- even on the rather curious financial conventions used -- could be made to pay their way. We have a problem which is vastly complicated by the fact that every form of public transport is subsidised, in one way or another, in ways explained by people who have sectional interests which emphasise one side of the picture more than the other. The whole picture of who pays for what is indeed a very difficult one, and perhaps one on which we need an up-to-date view of just what is happening and where the money is going.

We are clearly going to continue to have a very messy series of subsidies or concealed subsidies in a very large number of different transport situations. This will make it even more difficult to make national decisions as to what is the best thing to do. It does raise the question, which I am sure many very hard-hearted economists presently raise, as to why people should not pay for the full cost of their transport anyway. If they don't like it, they will just have to make other arrangements. Let us immediately double the fares for all commuters. Why not? Why have a privileged class?

I think that few of us imagine that there are any simple answers along these lines, but the best way to proceed is rendered even more difficult by the fact that we are in a situation which is changing in terms of the relative costs of running private cars compared with going by public transport. This is in the realm of conjecture because, so far, the owners of private cars appear to have reacted to rising costs by buying smaller ones and by using them less, rather than by not running them at all. But if the price of petrol doubles again, can we be sure that this will still be the reaction? We just don't know. We have no idea how people would make the choice between personal and
public transport if the price of fuel were to rise to £2.50 a gallon. We have also very much to bear in mind two facts: first, problems of oil availability caused by the instability of suppliers are unlikely to go away; and secondly, there is the long-term problem caused by the steady depletion of this finite resource and the absence of any proven alternative — the assumption that science will always find a way leaves a great deal to hope for. As with means of transport, so with energy sources: it is very possible to find alternatives but it is not at all certain that we will be able to afford them.

So the situation in the future is an obscure one. We are really starting from rather uncertain, unquantifiable social problems, proceeding through a system obscured by existing public payments, and then working our way into a future that we don’t know very much about. We are left with a very difficult problem to answer. It is not surprising that there are very many different views about what should be done.

SESSION G  General discussion

John Glover raised the issue of the cross boundary problems of rural railways which made it difficult to transfer statutory responsibility for rural rail services to County Councils.

In reply Peter Keen reminded the conference that during one of the morning sessions he had referred to the fact that just because OPS (Other Provincial Services) are treated as a group and are a small part of the total network, that does not mean that they are uncomplicated. For instance, they contain many stretches of what could be called secondary inter-city services which are simply stopping services on main lines and tend to cross county boundaries. These services have much more in common with the "bottom end" of inter-city services than they have with some of the rest of the OPS and in terms of direct expenses and revenue, require little support because their infrastructure is generally paid for. On the other hand, he added, there are also the branch lines 80-90 per cent of which are local to one shire so that the option cited by Mr Glover was not ruled out on that score.

Mr Keen highlighted two other aspects of the discussion during the day. The first was that concerned with 'meeting the obligation' — the PSO — with which he saw enormous problems because of the existing low levels of investment, the need for renewal, the depression of productivity and so on, in relation to the system as a whole. He felt that solutions would be more easily found if British Rail had the flexibility to choose the bus option where this was economical, as otherwise the operation of rural services — be they rail or road — would be lost as BR inevitably concentrated on the core network.

He also expressed considerable concern about the effects of the 1980 Transport Act, not only from the viewpoint of railway management but also that of public policy. However, he felt that both BR and the NCB are capable of competing with each other in the areas for which that is appropriate, and of collaborating where that is required — as in the provision of rural transport services.
On the investment side he saw one advantage in that individual decisions can be made for branch lines, though, of course, this still left the major problem of where the rail support funding is to come from. The current system is by a national PSO grant which for the last ten years he judged to have worked well, but in order that this support is retained he considered that attention would have to be turned to improving the management aspects, including 'going out and selling the service'.

Peter White referred to his involvement with the Report of the Select Committee on the Nationalised Industries which had suggested major staff productivity improvements to reduce the costs of the rail system as a whole, and the experimental conversion of one or two routes with better bus replacement services. It was anticipated that careful monitoring of the results and cost-benefit studies could confirm that such an approach could be more widely applied. Had these recommendations been followed, he felt that it could have shown the way to resolving the problems that were now under discussion.

He felt, too, that there was a tendency to consider rural railways as only enabling passengers to travel to local stations, and perhaps implicitly to equate that with the socially important trips that we should be subsidising, but it is very important also for people in rural areas to have access to the main line network for the occasional longer distance trip. He reminded the conference of the finding of the Hillman/Whalley study which had shown that the most frequent trip is not necessarily the only important one to the user. He pointed out that most people only use inter-city services occasionally -- for the odd business or pleasure trip. That did not mean that these trips were unimportant. But the aggregate demand for inter-city services is such that they may cover their direct costs whereas the branch line services in rural areas do not. Care should be taken therefore to ensure that attention is also paid to these occasional longer trips on the main network as part of the social argument for subsiding branch lines.

Finally, it seemed to him that there was scope for better timetable information: very often good bus connections are available at the end of the line, albeit not necessarily timed exactly to meet specific trains, but because bus operators were not sharing the rail timetable, and because it is difficult with NBC's national coverage for passengers to get a timetable in one part of the country for travel in another part, people were unaware of the existence of these bus services. In his study of the Barnstaple to Exeter line, he had found people going to the end of the line at Barnstaple, not knowing at that time that there was a limited stop, early bus feeder service still running. Having alighted at the station, they were 'ripped off' by local taxi firms even though the bus was standing in the station car park. That has since been corrected -- the BR timetable now shows connections for the bus.

Mayer Hillman took up a further aspect of Prof. Gwilliam's paper, namely the issue of comparability and institutional bias. He reminded the conference that that paper had pointed to the need to talk about rural public transport rather than rural railways. In his view, discussion should be widened beyond the standards and responsibilities imposed on BR and bus operators to embrace the whole subject area of rural transport. Were the same standards applied in all respects, people's patterns of travel in rural areas -- or, indeed, all areas -- would be very different.
In support of his argument, he suggested that if Lt. Col. McNaughton were seconded from the Railways Inspectorate of the Department of Transport to its Road Safety Directorate, and the Minister continued to accept his advice on safety standards, more stringent safety measures on road travel, and in particular car travel, would be applied. This would obviously generate considerably more support for the safest transport mode -- rail.

He admitted that, at present, this was unlikely to happen because the public do not appear to be so concerned about private transport accidents as they are about public transport accidents. But he interpreted this as an indictment of the mass media which are more encouraged to report 'newsworthy' multiple casualty accidents, even though these occur relatively rarely. What was needed, he argued, was a change of public attitude on this issue. The question then raised is -- 'Who should be doing this?'. Were public perception of the road safety costs incurred as a consequence of present policy more realistic, it could bring about a dramatic change in the way that people travel, and this would be likely to result in increased patronage of public transport and would thereby improve the viability of services currently being considered for reduction.

Ray Buckton considered that the primary issue to be faced was whether or not the few remaining rural rail services should be preserved. One option was another deliberate 'Beeching' which we could have tomorrow -- or one by default if action to replace the rolling stock and invest in these lines is not taken urgently. Alternatively, we could accept that rural railways were a social service -- albeit that they were constructed in the first place for commercial reasons. He did admit, however, that Britain will never be able to afford the reinstatement of railway lines that have been closed unless it is practically obliged to do so by electricity becoming the only source of transport energy. For this reason, he urged more investment in electrification.

Nevertheless, he agreed with the previous speaker that all aspects of the rural transport system must be considered -- not just rail. Whilst welcoming the development of the 'railbus', he pointed out that it was not capable of doing what rail can -- carrying passengers, water, freight and so on. In his view we needed an integrated road-rail system. He derided the 1980 Transport Act's attempt to improve the situation through competition, for this was simply leading to a run-down of services, part of the problem being that road taxes were far too low to cover the true costs incurred by road vehicles.

He hoped that the primary benefit of the conference would be a wider recognition of the need to retain the remaining rural rail lines, if necessary linked to the national electrification system. Subsequently, he said, we could decide whether we needed more lines in future.

Richard Pryke criticised Mr Buckton on the grounds that he was too conservative in just wanting to treat all existing services as sacred. What was needed, he said, was a new, more rational form of administrative machinery, equivalent to the PTEs, and proper cost-benefit studies which would show that many lines were just not worth keeping.

He was pleased that rolling stock on branch lines was coming up for renewal shortly as sensible decisions would be more likely to be taken against a background of considerable financial stringency. People in his view were all too easily prepared to exaggerate the effects of rail closures.
Mr Dodds intervened to say that whereas he had no faith in politicians' judgement on these matters, he now had no faith in that of academics, either!

Colin Speakman noted that railways had a further burden to bear which stemmed from the concessionary attitudes adopted towards motoring. For instance, he said that had he come from Yorkshire by car, he would have been £20 in-pocket, because the system of travel payments is so generous to car users and thereby to car-based travel and life styles.

Drawing the conference to a conclusion, Sir Charles Carter said that many issues had been explored in a very interesting way, with gems of common sense being produced during the day. It appeared to him that we were faced with the near impossibility of getting rational solutions because decisions were distorted by having to take account of so many conflicting objectives. He added that it was worth remembering that rural railways serve an agriculture much of which would not exist were it not for the fact that decisions on agriculture were distorted as well to ensure that the countryside does not become depopulated -- in each instance, we interfere in the system and then try to reduce the side results.

He congratulated all those who had contributed to the conference, and expressed particular thanks to British Rail for their commendably progressive approach to the subject which he felt had probably surprised many who may have come to the conference to attack its policy.
Annex A: Response to Richard Pryke's comments on the PSI research, made during discussion of the paper presented in Session C

MAYER HILLMAN and ANNE WHALLEY

The following paragraphs are a more detailed response to Richard Pryke's comments than it was possible to make at the conference, and are written after a close examination of the Ministry of Transport's Report on the Effects of Closing Three Rail Passenger Services (The "Marplan" Survey) of 1967.

Not only did Dr Pryke make a misleading comparison between the PSI and Marplan survey findings and then base his criticism of the PSI research on this comparison, but the criticism is unjustified in terms of both interpretation and selectivity.

Comparability of data and surveys. Dr Pryke compared a PSI finding about the number of people affected by closure, with a Marplan finding about the number of journeys affected -- a meaningless comparison because a discrepancy between these two figures does not necessarily imply a discrepancy between the more general research findings, nor does it imply that one of the figures is wrong. To illustrate this it is apparent that in an extreme situation, 100 per cent of people may be affected, but if this is in respect of just a few of the journeys of each person, then the proportion of journeys affected could be, say, 10 to 20 per cent. Clearly, the 100 together with the 10 or 20 do not represent conflicting findings. Furthermore, statistics calculated on the basis of all journeys made will naturally be weighted towards what happened to the most frequent type of journey (mainly daily journeys to and from work or school), which the PSI results showed to be the journeys least affected by closure: the journeys associated with 77 per cent of work/school activity were unaffected by closure. And Marplan acknowledged in their report that this type of journey was over-represented in their survey.

Interpretation of findings and of the difference between the surveys. The Marplan survey showed that about 40 to 50 per cent of people interviewed had journeys with lower or unchanged travel times and costs after closure. This was interpreted as "no widespread hardship" by Marplan, but does not, in our view, contradict our own finding that widespread inconvenience did occur after closure: the corollary of the above finding is that 50 to 60 per cent of the Marplan respondents did experience longer or more expensive journeys afterward. This compares with the fact that about 60 per cent of the PSI respondents considered their journeys took longer after closure. Also, the Marplan calculation of the increase in travel time is based on the average extra time for all respondents, including those whose time was unchanged or lowered -- possibly because they transferred to car travel after closure rather than to the alternative bus services. Analysis of bus and train schedules in the PSI research showed the bus journey generally took over one-and-a-half times longer than the equivalent rail journey -- an average increase from 30 to 47 minutes on 25 routes examined. This was offset to some extent by a saving of about five minutes getting to and from bus stops, though this in turn was somewhat offset by the greater unreliability of the buses.
On a number of other issues the findings of the two surveys were broadly similar, so Dr Pryke's interpretation that they produced fundamentally different results is false.

Selectivity. Dr Pryke justifies his interpretation by selecting three sentences from the official summary of the Marplan study. The above paragraphs throw doubt on whether even these three sentences -- which comprised one of their broad conclusions -- did justify his comments. Finally, a closer look at the official summary reveals that virtually all the other broad conclusions are fairly closely in line with the conclusions of our own report.

January 1981
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Michael Posner is a Fellow of Pembroke College, Cambridge. He has served Government in numerous capacities such as Economic Adviser to the Treasury in the late 1960s and to the Department of Energy in the early 1970s. He is a member of the Advisory Council on Energy Conservation, Chairman of the Social Science Research Council since 1979, member of the Board of British Rail since 1976, and a member of the Council of PSI.

Peter Keen joined the staff of the British Transport Commission in 1955 and worked on the BR Modernisation Plan. Since then he has worked at BR in a variety of capacities including the initial planning of the freightliner network, Passenger Manager of the London Midland Region, Director, Channel Tunnel, and Deputy Managing Director of the Board of Transmark. His present position is Chief Passenger Manager -- a post he has held for the last four years.

Mayer Hillman and Anne Whalley have been engaged in research at PEP (Political and Economic Planning), now called PSI (Policy Studies Institute) for over ten years. This has been primarily concerned with social aspects of transport policy. In April 1980, the Institute published their report, "The Social Consequences of Rail Closures", which was a study of the effects on ten communities in different parts of Britain of the withdrawal of rail services.

David Macklin started his career as a solicitor in private practice but has spent most of his professional life in local government. His last post was Chief Executive of Lincolnshire. He was appointed Chief Executive of Devon County Council -- his current post -- in 1979.

Bill Bradshaw joined British Rail in 1959 and has worked both in the Regions and at Headquarters in various managerial capacities. He was appointed to his present post of Director of Strategic Development in 1980.

David Glassborow joined the British Transport Commission as the first Head of its Economics Department in 1954. After the Commission's abolition he moved to British Rail and shortly afterwards was appointed Head of Economic Research of the Transport Holding Company. He joined the National Bus Company in 1968 and is currently its Director of Research.

John Bodger has been in the bus industry all his professional life except for a two-year secondment to the Department of the Environment (when that Department included transport) as an adviser on bus operations. He is currently a Regional Executive of the National Bus Company.

Ken Gwilliam is an economist who worked for a short time in industry. Subsequently, he moved into the academic world and has held the chair of transport economics at Leeds University since 1967. He is also a director of the National Bus Company. He recently completed a study for British Rail which was concerned with making international comparisons of railway performance around the world.
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