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FARES SOAR, SAFETY SLIPS...

YOUR LIFE IN THEIR BALANCE SHEET!

SPECIAL TRANSPORT FEATURE

The Zeebrugge ferry disaster, the King's Cross fire, and the Clapham rail crash have made transport policy a centre-stage political issue in the last two years.

The health and safety questions, together with soaring prices and declining services in the wake of privatisation, deregulation, and cuts in subsidies, mean that consideration of an integrated approach to public transport is now an urgent task for socialists.

By Jim Thain
Hackney North & Stoke Newington CLP

Cuts in the workforce, and a slackening of maintenance requirements have made services less safe and less reliable. Rising fares and growing violence on trains and stations only intensify the problem, as passengers resort to private transport on the capital's already congested roads.

The occurrence of so many transport tragedies within such a short space of time is no mere coincidence. It is the first of the government's cost-cutting safety-paring policies. It flows logically from under-funding and privatisation.

This approach has made health and safety a life and death question. Striking seafarers have repeatedly pointed out the likely consequences of P&O's punitive shift system. Underground workers cited scores of similar fire traps to the rubbish tip which caused the King's Cross inferno.

In the special feature on transport, *London Labour Briefing* examines the Tories' transport policy and opens a discussion on socialist alternatives to it. We examine the social effects of the moves towards privatising public transport, bound up ideologically and organisationally with the abolition of the GLC.

We call for a system that is not piecemeal and profit-based, but integrated, and based on social need. We wonder whether the Labour leadership, with its capitulation to Thatcherism on the economy can really pose such a radical alternative.

We look at the effects of deregulation on workers themselves. The transport unions, finding it increasingly difficult to ignore members' demands for greater safety, should play a leading role in the struggle against Tory transport policy.

The following articles aim to promote wide discussion on the crisis of public transport. We welcome readers' contributions on the best way of developing an alternative approach to the current profit-oriented chaos.



LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

NETWORK SOUTH EAST



Grinding to a halt!

Nearly half a million people use Network South East every day into London, a 25% rise in the last five years.

Lines are working to full capacity, and the slightest problem often brings them grinding to a halt.

Early this month BR has implemented its short term answer to this problem: higher fares, particularly for long distance commuters. Its long term answer is no different — higher fares to discourage people from using the service.

By a British Rail NUR member

In the early 80s, GLC policies were designed to make it more attractive to use public transport. The government thought differently.

Before the Law Lords dealt with the Fares Fair policy and the government could abolish the GLC, their first act had been to stop BR from joining with the GLC in promoting cheap travel.

Proposals for the GLC to subsidise suburban train fares were squashed when the government announced that it would merely withdraw the equivalent government subsidy from BR.

Following this, BR forecast that passenger use would be relatively stable, and the increase in use has now found them unprepared.

Whilst London has seen significant BR investment in new rolling stock, in better signalling, and new services such as the new cross-London Thames Link, in the main this has been aimed at making BR more attractive for privatisation rather than producing a service capable of meeting new demands.

Typical of this approach has been the way they have dealt with the Channel Tunnel proposals. As the Tunnel itself was in private hands, the BR proposals were little more than the minimum necessary to make the Tunnel a viable investment.

Very little work was done to see if the Tunnel could be used to give an impetus to the strategic role played by rail. The only plans were for major development at Waterloo — a prestige project in itself, but built aginst local opposition and having a negative effect on the rest of services at Waterloo.

Only the work of those opposed to the Waterloo development, followed by pressure from Northern Labour Councils for some of the benefits of the Tunnel to reach north of London (in particular Sheffield drew up detailed plans with the aid of the NUR) made BR reconsider whether it could use the Tunnel in a positive way.

Now plans to build high speed lines and passenger lines to Kings Cross capable of going beyond London are being put forward — but too late to fit in with the opening of the Tunnel itself.

Elsewhere investment in new rolling stock and new signalling is to be used as on the Bedford St Pancras line to be able to remove staff from trains and thereby make the system more profitable. Likewise station improvements have been used to allow management to cut down on platform staff.

Cutbacks in other staffing, such as with Signals & Telecom workers (end result Clapham Junction), have been allied with a rolling programme of privatisation.

First to go were the non-rail sectors — the hotels and Sealink. Now the Catering division has gone and others like BR Engineering are being picked off depot by depot. Increasingly specialist work is being put out to tender.

Changes in management structure have also been made preparatory to privatisation and it only remains to be resolved how BR should be cut up (a debate does appear to be raging on different options between the BR Board and the government).

Profitable lines, such as Victoria to Gatwick, are prime targets, and Network South East as a whole and Inter-City would form saleable assets if problems with coordination with the other parts of BR could be worked out.

All the above does wonders for morale of course and, with wages significantly lower than comparable trades elsewhere, BR is now finding it difficult to hold onto staff, and shortages are leading to even more disruption of service to the public.

On some unpopular (for railworkers) lines in South London, commuters are complaining that they never get the timetabled service — so BR has cut back on the timetable and runs less trains even though they knew the existing timetable meant overcrowding.

In moves similar to the Post Office's, BR have now announced £10 million panic measures to give special bonuses to London-based staff. Rail unions are opposed to the plans which will be both divisive and ineffective.

What is to be done? A socialist policy for transport rests on the need for a fully integrated and comprehensive public service. We should be demanding expansion of BR services, integrated with the bus and underground networks.

Confidence

As a first step, that means immediately restoring confidence to railway workers:

- a realistic rate of pay, with a dramatic improvement in conditions of service to recoup what has been whittled away in years of management attacks on staff;
- a reduction in overtime working;
- restoration of staffing cuts;
- the bringing back in-house of all the functions put out to tender;
- the privatised sectors must be brought back into BR.

Restored confidence will immediately improve services, but will not solve the overall problems. Clearly a strategic approach is needed and demands the reinstatement of a GLC-type body given power over all transport matters.

Department of Transport studies of the problems of London have been carried out and as a first step their proposals for rail should be carried out. They call for new cross-city lines and for longer platforms to take more and longer trains.

Thames Link, though underresourced, has shown the possibility of reducing underground congestion by running BR passengers through London without having to change trains. Proposed lines include: London Bridge to Finsbury Park, Liverpool Street to Paddington and Battersea to Euston/Kings Cross.

Elsewhere proposals exist for a high speed link from Paddington to Heathrow and for a new line from Waterloo to Canary Wharf.

Under current government philosophy the private sector is being looked to for finance for these as private ventures. Instead they should be taken up as part of an overall public sector investment policy.

Labour's GLC Manifesto in 1981 called for integration of BR commuter services with LT, improved connections particularly between BR Southern Region and the underground network and for an orbital rail service.

All of this is still relevant. Whilst the North London Line has been partially successful, plans for a similar South London Line to complete the circle have been shelved with BR demanding resources from local Councils to make it viable.

Without significant investment and integrated planning, BR's Network South East could be allowed to degenerate into an expensive (but profitable) commuter system aimed at those long distance commuters who have no choice but to use the railway.

In 1987 Jeremy Corbyn started to draw up proposals for the London Labour Party, and last year in response to a resolution put forward by the NUR the GLLP set up a Transport policy review committee which has begun to look at how we would update GLLP policy.

Transport is the most popular subject put forward in resolutions to next GLLP conference in March.

As socialists we must respond to the challenge by developing a detailed policy which can recognise the threats we are currently under — but also the potential an expanded, integrated system can have.

A collis of inte

It is sad but indisputable that nothing is better guaranteed to focus attention on the public transport industry than a major disaster.

When, in under two years, a whole catalogue of catastrophes accumulates, then alarm bells start ringing in high places.

It would be cynical in the extreme to put this down to the way that air, sea and rail disasters don't discriminate between passengers travelling Clipper or economy, first or second class.

But whether they were Sun day-trippers or £100,000-a-year City commuters, they were all sacrificed on the altar of profit.

The unceasing drive for greater "efficiency" in the public sector, greater profits in the private sector, and the all-pervading embrace of the "enterprise culture" have done for safety standards.

In 1987 rail deaths were up, even if the 31 killed at Kings Cross are omitted. On the day of the Clapham crash, Shadow Transport Secretary John Prescott reminded Transport Secretary Paul Channon that deaths and major injuries were up by 62% over five years, collisions up by 18% and derailments by 6%.

1988 saw 24 fatal air crashes in which 833 people died. In the first eight months of the year the Civil Aviation Authority recorded 47 air miss incidents compared to 37 over the same period in 1987.

But in replying to Prescott, Channon asserted that the rate of significant train accidents per train mile had been steadily declining for 20 years and trains were "very, very much safer than road vehicles."

By a London Underground NUR member

In other words, while these things are regrettable, the overall statistics remain at the level of acceptable risk. This view is not acceptable to those who work in public transport or those who have to use it. While accidents will happen, public transport must plan and operate the service to prevent such occurrences, whatever the cost.

It is now publicly accepted that safety was way down the agenda (if it was there at all) of London Regional Transport. Sir Keith Bright said as much at the Fennell inquiry. It was a similar low priority of Townsend Thoreson's parent company P&O.

The motivation of these people was the obsessive drive to meet marketing targets and to keep trains and ships rolling to a computer-projected schedule. Transport is very, very big business indeed. That was the other aspect of Channon's reply: to try and maintain public confidence in the transport system.

After all, 900,000 people enter central London by rail each working day between 7am and 10am. A record 1.2 billion people travelled by air in 1988 and the market is expected to double by the turn of the century.

Going

A rough rid

The past year has been an unmitigated disaster for London's tube and rail services.

The central thread is the sharp deterioration in safety which has accelerated since the King's Cross fire in November 1987.

The second rail disaster, at Clapham, is a product of the same official transport policies.

These cost-cutting programmes have virtually taken on a life of their own and will inevitably produce further fatal accidents in and around London.

The New Year has ushered in a swingeing 12.4% increase in Underground and bus fares on London Regional Transport, coinciding with the streamlining of the rail, bus and tube Travelcard and Capitalcard systems.

Central London passengers are here being forced to contribute towards the Underground's latest five year investment programme. This is largely a cheap con as many of the so-called improvements in the plan are simply work in progress.

Passengers are paying for a programme of renewal and investment which has been needed for some three decades but which is only now being implemented to keep the Underground profitable for privatisation.

In fact, this year the whole tube system will be split into ten line-based profit centres, with powers currently centralised at 55 Broadway, the LRT Head Office, being devolved.

By Dave Welsh Tubewatch

Tube workers are also paying for this "modernisation" with increased productivity, worsening conditions of service and the massive loss of jobs which will come with the phased introduction

People or Profit?

sion rests



Rush hour on the tube: the "hamburgers" are sandwiched onto the train.

Given the scale of the market, t is not surprising that Boeing were reliably reported as being "relieved" that the Lockerbie disaster was caused by a bomb and not by structural failure.

They make two in three of the civil aircraft in the advanced capitalist world. Since deregulation in America and privatisation in Britain, inter-airline competition has been intense.

Pan-Am, the carrier involved at Lockerbie, must also have been "relieved" that it wasn't structural failure. Due to losses totalling £1.5 billion since 1980 they had just decided to refurbish their older jets rather than renew them.

Metro-Cammell

Now comes the news that Metro-Cammell and its sister company Metro-Cammell Weymann are for sale. Present owners, the Laird Group, will make substantial provisions to cover losses of over £25 million, almost all incurred in 1988 due to a massive slump in bus building after deregulation. In other words, cowboys will run clapped-out buses way past their safe life span.

The escalators at King's Cross were way past their safe life span, as was the signalling system at Clapham. The first impulse was to look for "human error". Staff were called incompetent for not knowing Underground emergency drills; signal installation staff were blamed for messing up the job on BR.

But the succession of disasters muted the usual scapegoating of individuals and attacks on regressive trade union practices. Major publicity was given to the massive cutbacks in BR's signalling department, leading to regular 60 hour/seven day working and the cutting of gangs from six workers to one.

But little has changed. British Rail has dismissed one signalman and will bring a second before a disciplinary hearing after the pair made allegations on TV of signalling failures similar to the one believed to have caused the Clapham crash.

Drivers who complain on TV or in the press of totally unsafe operations have to do so anonymously for fear of the sack.

Those in the transport unions fighting for safe and decent working practices have always been the best guardians of the safe running of public transport. This is why P&O sacked those seafarers who went on strike against dangerous new working arrangements.

Tory anti-union laws were a gift to P&O in squashing the union fightback. Indeed, P&O, despite an estimated £25 million loss due to the Dover action and the rationalisation of its fleet for competition with the Channel Tunnel, still gave £100,000 to the Tory Party, the sixth biggest donation of 1987-88.

This is where the front line between safety and profit really is. It is why London Underground Ltd still propose to cut 500 more station staff; why BR is studying how to cut a further £1 million from its signal maintenance programme; why the number of coastguard stations is still being cut.

It is why, just two weeks before the guard on the third empty train involved at Clapham stopped a fourth packed commuter train ploughing into the pile-up, BR had demanded that the NUR agree to the removal of all guards from empty trains.

It is why London Underground management are using the King's Cross disaster not to increase staffing to safe levels and increase training, introduce new stock and signalling and new lines, but to push through a management revolution aimed at lowering costs and increasing "efficiency" in preparation for privatisation.

As new manager Denis Tunnicliffe, fresh from British Airways, said in the *Financial Times* (December 14th):

"We have to get the best out of our front line troops. Once we have redesigned the jobs so that people have a clear idea what their role is and who their boss is then we can help them with proper training; this can be done in any industry. McDonalds have shown the way in this — you don't have to have very highly paid and highly educated people to treat the public properly."

Hamburgers

So now you know you're just another one of the 800 million "hamburgers" who use the tube every year you'll realise that over-frying 31 every once in a while isn't the central issue.

It is no good trade union and Labour leaders concentrating on "overcrowding" or "lack of investment", offering an alternative set of "managerial objectives".

What is posed is: are there going to be enough people employed at the point of delivery of the service under terms and conditions of employment, and with the civil liberty to organise in free trade unions so that a safe service can be offered to the travelling public?

There can be no trade off between new investment to cure overcrowding and staffing levels. The GLC did that: a classic case of going down the middle of the road and getting run over.

For it was the GLC who started rationalisation of the supply side of the Underground (supply-side socialism?) for the benefit of the consumer.

In came the Travel Card; the superficial renewal of station decor; a far-too-small escalator and lift renewal scheme. But, also, in came the cutting of station staff and the wholesale introduction of one person operation.

An LT branch wrote to Ken Livingstone about this. The letter was referred to Dave Wetzel of the Transport Committee.

The answer was that new investment would continue but the budget had to be within the law, so if the union wanted to oppose OPO, fine — but that was an "operational" matter between union and management, not a "political" matter between the Labour Party and the management it had appointed.

Well, the Tories aren't so daft, and we all know what happened to the GLC.

Underground...

e in '89

f the Underground Ticketing system (UTS) and the "Action Stations" plan for platform staff.

1989 will witness growing confrontation on the tubes and a greater likelihood of industrial action by the rail unions.

London Underground management is currently preparing to introduce wide-ranging organisational changes, a new "unsatisfactory" attendance rule for staff, and to impose private contractors if the unions fail to cooperate with competitive tendering.

Two years ago the NUR won a big majority for strike action over private contractors. It is again currently arranging to ballot its members over these issues.

There can be no doubt that London Underground Ltd would like to take on and beat the rail unions on the tubes — providing the right political timing can be found.

The simmering problem of the Northern Line was apparently settled in 1988 but the settlement, whilst buying time for both sides, cannot resolve the growing conflict of interest between tube workers and their bosses.



Going down! Wooden escalators still in service at Bank tube station.

The background to these strained labour relations is the huge rise in the number of passengers on the Underground. Since 1982 the 20 year decline in rail, tube and bus ridership has gone into sharp reverse, producing a 70% increase in passenger usage.

No serious money was or is being put into the Tubes. It's reckoned that at least £5 billion is needed now, whilst the Central London Rail Study makes the conservative estimate of £2 billion to deal with the 20% more commuters who will hit London's twenty potential congestion points by 2001.

Cycling in London

Pedal-power now!

There are about a 250,000 cyclists in London.

Between January and October 1988, 18 were killed, 558 seriously injured, and 2,800 slightly injured.

By Paul Williams Hackney North & Stoke Newington CLP

One of the many losses from the abolition of the GLC is the complete lack of a London-wide policy to provide decent facilities for cyclists.

Individual Labour Boroughs may have tried to carry out some policy, on rapidly shrinking resources, but the central Tory Boroughs certainly have not. Instead, London cyclists are forced to use badly surfaced roads and cycle tracks.

The situation is made worse by the macho attitudes of many other road users, especially towards women cyclists.

The policy of providing for the individual motorist's "right" to drive/park at the expense of the rest of society dominates this government's thinking; to the detriment of all other transport users.

In this capitalist society, where toll lanes on motorways have been suggested so executives can drive their expensive cars without the annoyance of other road users, cyclists are viewed as competing with car users. Even the small space for a cycle lane is viewed as cutting down the space for motorists.

Added to this is the envy motorists feel for the cyclists's greater manoeuvrability in traffic jams. This leads to the abuse of cyclists just for being on the road; from sexist remarks to physical harassment.

I know of one cyclist who, to avoid being sexually harassed, swerved and fell off her bike and did permanent damage to her hand. She was told by the police that she was "lucky".

One wonders if a male BMW driver reporting even minor damage to his car would have received the same helpful reply.

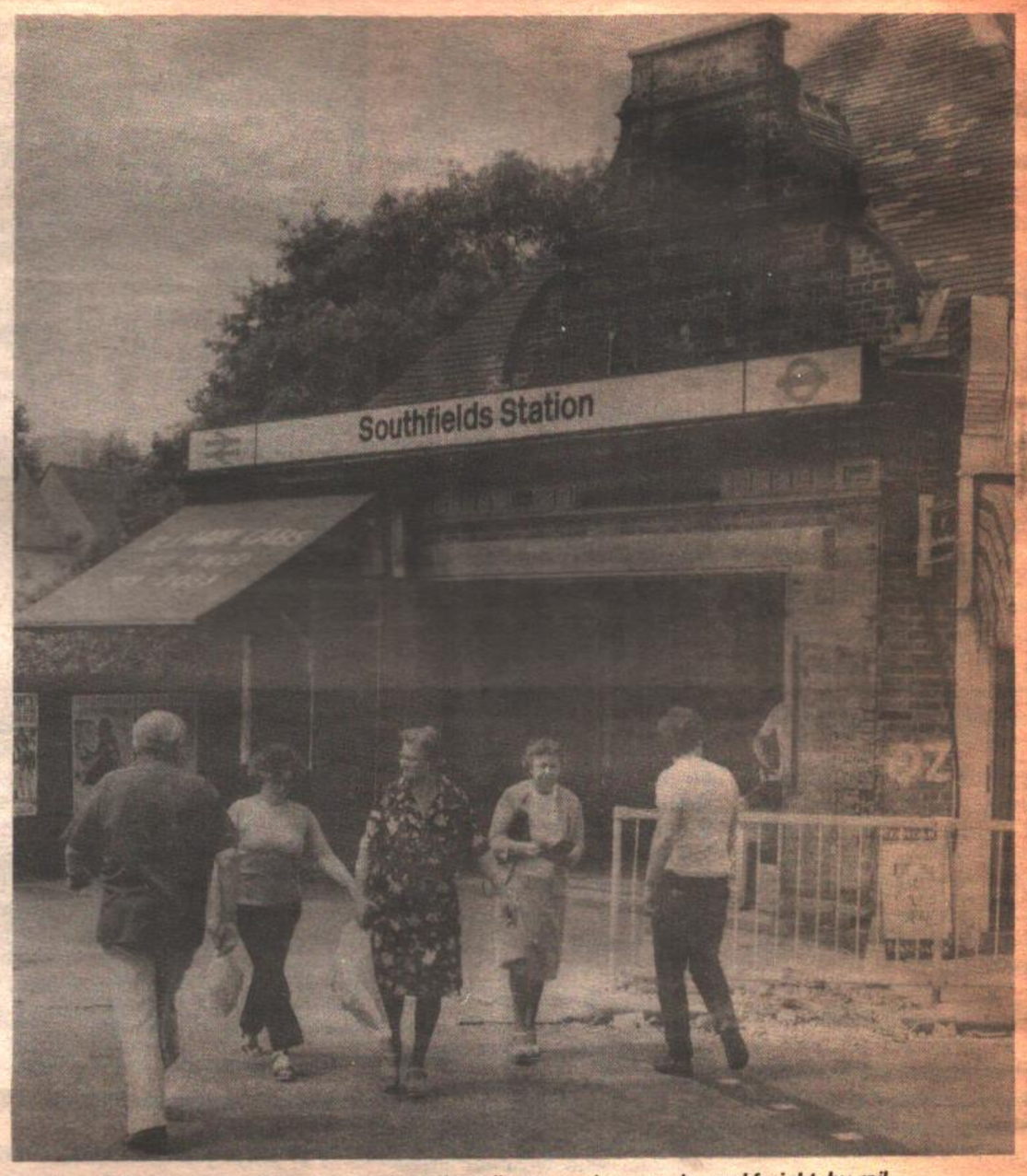
A system which ranks the ability of drivers to use the road at the expense of other people leaves cyclists as a minor irritant to them. When the state implicitly endorses negative attitudes to cyclists it is no wonder that the incidence of injuries and deaths to cyclists is so high.

Briefing usually prefers to print authors' names. However, owing to British Rail policy of sacking any NUR member who speaks to the press, contributors' names have been withheld to prevent victimisation.

PHOTOS on this page: Martine Stead

For a socialist transport policy

It's our right to travel!



A socialist transport strategy would rely heavily on moving people, and freight, by rail

The Tories' attacks on transport services have tended to take second place in the news behind their more spectacular carve-up of the welfare state, education, and public housing.

Transport policy only becomes front page news when there is a disaster, such as the King's Cross fire or the Clapham rail crash.

Yet such disasters are a direct result of under-funding, with transport managers skimping on health and safety, staff training and cleaning to "improve performance" despite dwindling state resources.

The erosion of health and safety standards and trade union rights generally, like increased productivity, is a crucial part of the Tory strategy. But what about the mutilation of transport services from the standpoint of the passengers?

Media coverage of their point of view is confined to fringe issues, such as the future of the Settle-Carlisle railway, or else the reports of the "official watchdog" Passengers Committee: a reactionary body opposed to industrial action by transport workers in defence of services.

Implicit in the Tories' strategy for public transport is an attack on the basic right to mobility. This problem scarcely affects the ruling class! But the removal of cheap, regular bus and rail systems seriously curtails the freedom of working class people to travel, and therefore to be active.

By Mike Phipps
Woolwich CLP

Government strategy is twin-track: the erosion of subsidies; and privatisation, of which deregulation is a specific form. The recent increase in British Rail fares by twice the rate of inflation indicates that it is being prepared for privatisation.

The hiving off of individual lines already threatens the cheaper Travel Card systems, such as London Capitalcard — a successful hangover from the GLC's integrated transport policy.

On the buses, privatisation is already here. In South Yorkshire fares have increased 238% since deregulation. On Merseyside they have doubled.

Thirty-eight bus companies now operate out of Sheffield where there was just one before. Yet the service is worse, with unreliable buses, untrained drivers unsure of their routes, and burgeoning traffic chaos.

In metropolitan areas overall, there has been a 12% drop in bus usage.

On the railways, rising fares and declining subsidies are "justified" on the grounds of market forces. It is often concealed, however, that much of Britain's rail network was economically viable; chiefly on the basis of carrying freight, not passengers.

It is the destruction of basic industries like steel, coal, and engineering that has hit BR revenues. But it is the travelling working public who are made to foot the bill.

The appalling situation on London Underground, highlighted in the King's Cross enquiry, reveals a classic case of long-term government under-resourcing.

It is not simply the fact that on a year-by-year basis the tube is the least subsidised of all European metro systems. Rather, due ultimately to the stagnation of the British economy, only stopgap measures have been adopted to meet the developing needs of expanding public use.

After the war, London Transport advised the government that half a dozen new Underground lines would be needed to cope with the increased volume of passengers. Twenty years later, only one line had been built, followed by a truncated Jubilee line ten years after that, and today... the pitiful Docklands Light Railway.

Meanwhile, signalling, track and stations are deteriorating; train stock is more unreliable, as overhaul depots close; and superficial and primitive maintenance techniques are reintroduced.

The Tories apply a completely different standard to private road transport. There are not market forces here — the freedom of the individual motorist is sacrosanct.

Those wanting the extension of market thinking to this area point to the fact that a parking space in the city of London can be worth more than the Porsche occupying it, and have called for new initiatives, such as road metering.

Whilst this may appear attractive in redistributing responsibility for the clogged up road network, it could not be the cornerstone of a socialist transport strategy.

In restructuring transport services, a socialist approach would use much wider criteria, in calculating the efficiency of different systems. In particular, the Tories' purely financial justifications for favouring resources for road rather than rail development exclude broader environmental, health and human aspects of the issue.

A socialist strategy would be geared to social needs, which capitalist planners rarely address. A classic instance is the M25 London orbital road, which now carries twice as much traffic as forecast.

At the heart of any alternative strategy must be at least the following points:

•A massive expansion and revitalisation of the existing rail network. BR wasted millions a few years ago on their "Advanced Passenger Train" with the infamous tilt" mechanism designed for fast bends. If resources had been channelled into laying new straight track, this misuse of investment need not have occurred.

•Public transport — rail, in particular — needs to be developed to meet the needs of a far wider section of the community. Travelling by existing public transport is enormously difficult for disabled people.

Station understaffing, guardless trains, and BR's continued use of carriages divided into isolated compartments, despite boycotts by many women's organisations, all make travelling at night, especially for women, a dangerous and stressful experience.

•Most importantly, an alternative approach must include low flat-rate or free fares in inner city areas. Experience abroad suggests that this is the most effective method of reducing urban road traffic.

With the abolition of the Metropolitan Authorities and central government pursuing a strategy of de-integration, privatisation, and union-busting, the immediate prospect is one of defensive struggles; with battles to maintain health and safety, union rights, service levels, and integrated transport high on the agenda.

Ad hoc community movements are forming to oppose government plans on housing, education and the Poll Tax. Activists must link the existing battles of bus and rail workers to the broader community's transport needs to widen the front against Tory government transport policy.

Autoguide

The Tory Answer to Traffic Chaos

In spite of the chaos overwhelming Britain's road network, the Queen's Speech for this session of Parliament contained few references to transport policy.

But it did refer specifically to Autoguide.

Autoguide is arguably the loopiest "solution" yet to have emerged from the Department of Transport, and would aptly demonstrate the muddle-headed thinking of those in High Places, were it not for an ideological undercurrent of elitism.

In essence, Autoguide is a system of computer linked roadside bollards which transmit information on traffic conditions to an on-board computer installed in a motor vehicle.

The computer relays this information to the driver through a voice synthesiser, giving precise instructions regarding the best route to avoid traffic hold-ups, guiding the driver along a constantly updated "ideal" route to within 200 yards of their chosen destination, keyed into the computer in advance.

Peter Chowney
Hackney South & Shoreditch CLP

The government plans to introduce a pilot system in West London by 1990, involving 300 beacons and 1,000 vehicles, covering parts of Hillingdon, Hounslow and Ealing. Ealing Council has wisely refused to co-operate.

Full implementation would depend on the success of the pilot. Costs are not specified, but full implementation would run to tens of millions.

The underlying philosophy to Autoguide is not difficult to tease out. Obviously, any system which was installed in a large number of vehicles would be useless, since it would simply divert traffic down different roads which would consequently become equally congested.

Government

Furthermore, the government would want to see the very large costs paid for by the users. To function at all, Autoguide would have to be a luxury for those with money to spare.

What would be the reaction of local people when they found their residential street had become a freeway for BMWs and Porches on their way to the city? Sabotage the bollards?

More likely, they would apply to the Council for local traffic schemes restricting access. But since all such schemes have to be approved by the DoT they would have little chance of success. Existing traffic schemes would also presumably be threatened.

Autoguide would be a ticket to ride the residential streets of London for the very wealthy few, at the expense of those ordinary Londoners who live there.

Autoguide is bad news for Londoners. It is important that Labour Councils across London refuse to co-operate, especially those in whose Boroughs the pilot scheme is to be set up.

Public investment should be spent on public transport, not elitist schemes for rich Tory motorists.



A Tory strategy to the transport problem: empty taxis clog up the BUS LANES in the Strand.

PHOTO: Martine Stead