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MR. SCHOLAR

HASTINGS/TONBRIDGE RAIL SERVICE

BR's argument, which DoT does not contest, is that it would be technically tidy to electrify this diesel pocket and make the Southern system wholly electric.

There is also a secondary, but in practice more important, reason. Once they have won the Hastings/Tonbridge electrification, then the East Coast electrification will be thought to be conceded much more easily. Similarly the APT development will be thought to be more likely to be approved. Hastings/Tonbridge is the "foot in the door". It will preempt proper Serpell consideration. Using Hastings/Tonbridge as a lead is a very good ploy since there is an active railway lobby and the area is predominantly Tory.

British Rail have considered in a cursory way alternatives but have rejected them because they are alleged to be technically inferior, even though they may be financially much better. For example, the BR Director of Research in 1982 suggested purchasing new loco-hauled coaches made up of bus type bodies on existing under frames, and hauled by Class 33/2 locomotives. This would have cost only £8.2m. The option was rejected, however, because it would mean bringing the locomotives out of store, and above all because it would not eliminate the diesel-operated pocket.

Similarly, British Rail have rejected the "life extension" of the existing services by postulating the option in the worst way. The point is that life extension is not an all-or-nothing proposition; it can be done gradually. And above all it preserves open all future options. Electrification would, on the other hand foreclose all future options.

As an investment appraisal it is quite scandalous. My "back-of-the-envelope" calculations suggest that BR's preferred electrification would cost at least £20m and probably £30-£40m more than keeping the line open by an efficient renewal programme.

British Rail have clearly given up proper investment appraisal and are using political pressure instead. We could respond to this pressure by arguing first that single line electrification would

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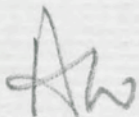
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preclude necessarily a much better alternative to be developed later within the full system; secondly that "life extension" of the present system could be associated with reductions in fares which recognise the somewhat inferior service. Residents of Hastings and Tonbridge who are charged standard fares for a substandard service have a reasonable complaint; let's recognise it by, say, reducing fares on these lines by 15%-20%.

This combination of lower fares plus a modest improvement of the worst rolling stock would be the best strategy that would go some way towards satisfying the local political aspirations.



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