

BRIT111
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UK'S RAIL NETWORK NEEDS INVESTMENT VISION

Britpave, the transport infrastructure group, has welcomed Sir Richard Branson's calls for the government to let the private sector have a greater role in investing in new rail stations and track especially where 'private vision and investment can take on the challenges that taxpayers are unable or unwilling to fund'.

In particular, Sir Richard highlighted the problem of running 21st century trains through crumbling 19th century stations and along track still in need of upgrading.

Britpave has been campaigning for the replacement of Britain's dated ballast rail tracks. "If Britain is to have a rail system that can provide a real high-speed reliable service then we must have a 21st century rail network. The use of a 19th century-based ballast rail track system undermines the speed, efficiency and safety of the high-speed trains", warned David Jones, director of Britpave.

Jones believes that concrete slabtrack, as used by the highly successful Japanese high-speed rail network and now elsewhere in the Far East and Europe, is the way forward. 40 years ago, when commencing their high-speed network, the Japanese replaced much of the ballast system with concrete slab track. This provided a rail track that has maximized operating efficiency by eliminating unplanned maintenance, provided high levels of safety and comfort and impressive shown whole life savings.

Concrete slabtrack has been used in the UK for tunnels and for short stretches of the Heathrow Express, Stansted airport link, at the Eurotunnel terminal and the East London line extension. Initial cost has always been given as the reason why slabtrack is not more widely used in the UK. "This is a short-sighted and a false economy. The maintenance costs of slabtrack are dramatically less than ballasted systems and the long-term performance is significantly increased", argued Jones. "If we want a 21st century rail network then investment is necessary for a 21st century track system."

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Notes to editors

1. Britpave, the British In-situ Concrete Paving Association, promotes the better and greater use of concrete for transportation solutions. Its members include major contractors, specialist equipment and material suppliers, consulting engineers and interested trade associations. Together they provide a single voice for the in-situ concrete paving industry. For further information see: www.britpave.org.uk
2. Issued by Steve Elliott, Constructive Dialogue, tel: 01276 36735, email: condialogue@aol.com

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