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NETWORK RAIL'S MAINTENANCE CUT UNDERLINES NEED FOR NEW TRACK SOLUTION

Network Rail has been ordered by the Office of Rail Regulation to cut almost £3 billion from its track maintenance and renewal programme. Such drastic reductions will have severe consequences in terms of unscheduled delays and cancellations as Britain's ageing rail infrastructure becomes increasingly unable to cope with the demands being placed upon it.

According to the RMT rail union at least 200 miles of track renewals have been put on hold as part of a cost savings programme that equates to almost 30 per cent of Network Rail's budget.

Such renewal cutbacks are unknown in Japan for example, where 40 years ago the Japanese replaced much of their ballast system with concrete slab track. "40 years on and the Japanese have a high speed rail system that is the envy of the world", said David Jones, director of Britpave, the transport infrastructure group. "Concrete slab track offers long-term performance that eliminates unplanned maintenance and provides high levels of safety, punctuality and comfort."

Following the proven success of concrete slab track in Japan, many other countries are replacing their ballast tracks. Unfortunately in the UK, slab track has only been used for tunnels and for short stretches of the Heathrow Express, Stansted airport link, Eurotunnel Terminal and the East London Line extension.

"Initial first cost has always been given as the reason why slab track is not more widely used in the UK," said Jones. "The spiralling costs of the piecemeal repair of ballast tracks shows that not investing in slab track is a short sighted and false economy. The maintenance costs for slab track are dramatically less than that for ballast tracks.

Until real investment is made to bring Britain's crumbling rail network into the 21st century, we will have to face the problem of spending billions of pounds on maintaining what is essentially a 19th century track system."

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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