

BRIT95  
14<sup>th</sup> April 2008

## **DREAM OF NEW ERA OF RAIL TRAVEL NEEDS A ROBUST TRACK SOLUTION**

Claims of a new era of rail travel could prove to be empty pipe dreams if the necessary new rail tracks are not built right first time.

The claims of a dawn of a new era of rail travel are based on the unprecedented growth in train journeys. Figures released by the Association of Train Operating Companies (Atoc) show that the number of miles travelled on the rail network reached a staggering 30.1 billion miles (49 billion km) in 2007. The only time that train passenger miles – calculated as the number of journeys taken multiplied by the distance travelled – has been higher was during the Second World War when the rail network was two thirds larger than it is now and large numbers of troops were being transported around the country. The annual passenger growth rate is 7.8 per cent.

Atoc believes that over a thousand miles of new high-speed railway line and new rail tunnels under the Irish Sea and the English Channel will be needed to cope with the continuing growth. It has published a vision for the network in 2057 which calls for the construction of three new 200mph lines from London halving journey times between the capital and all the major regional cities. The first new line should run from London, via Heathrow to Birmingham and Manchester. The second should run up the east Coast to Newcastle upon Tyne and Edinburgh. The third line should go from London to Bristol and Cardiff while a fourth new high-speed line would link Manchester, Sheffield and Leeds.

However, if the potential of the visionary rail network is to be released then Britain needs move away from its 19<sup>th</sup> century ballast track make-do-and-mend approach and build rail tracks that provide guaranteed long-term performance and minimum maintenance. “The 21<sup>st</sup> century alternative to ballast tracks is the concrete slab track”, said David Jones, director of Britpave, the transport infrastructure group. “Concrete slab track offers proven and unrivalled long-term performance that includes no unplanned maintenance, increased levels of safety and comfort and impressive whole life cost savings”.

Jones points to Japan where concrete slab track has been used successfully for over 40 years. Throughout Europe, in Germany, the Netherlands, Italy and Spain, ballast track is being replaced by slab track. In the UK only a limited of slab track has been constructed: for the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, for a 150m trial section on the Crewe to Kidsgrove line and several rail tunnels

“Slab track is a proven technology that provides a robust and low maintenance solution for our rail network”, said Jones. “If the delays, weekend closures and overcrowding currently being experienced on our railway network are to make way for a shining new vision of the future then investment in a track technology that can deliver long-term performance is a must”.

**ENDS**

**Notes to editors**

1. Britpave (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](http://www.britpave.org.uk)
2. Issued by Steve Elliott, Constructive Dialogue, tel: 01276 36735, email: [condialogue@aol.com](mailto:condialogue@aol.com)

---000---