

Subject: A Growth Opportunity for Railways

Dear campaigner,

As Portishead Railway Group is affiliated with Railfuture you will have seen this in Railwatch, but I thought you might like to share our view of the Railways Bill and the growth opportunity that we see for railways with your members, who may not have seen it.

Railways Bill

The Long Term Rail Strategy identified in the Bill will include 5 strategic objectives:

- meeting customers' needs
- financial sustainability
- long-term economic growth
- reducing regional and national inequality
- environmental sustainability

which largely mirror what we have been calling for, but which should explicitly identify rail growth as an objective.

The Bill must facilitate industry delivery against these objectives, to achieve growth and long term modal shift to rail throughout Britain. The railway must also be accountable to all levels of Government, national and regional. The following areas need more definition in the bill:

- Definition of the customer interface with focus on passenger and freight customer needs
- Delivery of coherent, flexible and value for money fares and freight access charges, with pricing set to support the nation's wider objectives
- A structure which facilitates improved operational service quality focused on delivery
- Confidence to invest in innovation, efficiency and capacity for modal shift and traffic growth through a long-term plan for investment and improved relations with staff and unions
- Allowing devolved authorities to make choices and incorporate rail in their plans by participating in train service specification and investing in the future of rail
- A secure funding stream to invest in service quality, capacity and future growth.

We welcome Lord Hendy pointing out that the Transport Secretary's powers are rarely used to direct National Highways, and Great British Railways should be no different – but then why are 400 staff still needed working in DfT on rail strategy? The government should set the strategic objectives (what), but GBR should decide the strategy (how).

Parliamentary reception

[Railfuture arranged a reception at Westminster](#) on 3 February for MPs, peers and rail industry leaders, focusing on the Railways Bill. Our core message was that the key strategic objective which the government must set GBR is to promote growth. The operational objectives of value for money, reliability, connectivity and customer focus then follow naturally as they are necessary to deliver growth in rail and therefore in the economy. Our aim is to double both passenger and freight traffic through:

- a customer-focused culture
- a much better passenger experience
- attractive fares
- investment in facilities and capacity which enable major house building
- financial incentives which encourage modal shift

We floated the concept of a new free railcard to encourage people to use rail more. It would be available to everyone, particularly for the 50% of the population that use rail infrequently and may not be eligible for any of the existing railcards. It would be valid at all times of day and the discount given would vary with usage. Like a Tesco Clubcard, travel would earn points. The railway would better understand its individual customers, who can be given offers that are relevant to them, so building loyalty through a life-long relationship.

<https://www.railfuture.org.uk/display4276>

Northern Powerhouse Rail

On 14 January the government announced plans to develop NPR in three phases, building on the TransPennine Route Upgrade between Leeds and Manchester which is in progress. Journey times across the north of England will improve, but the key benefits will be increased capacity and connectivity between the northern cities, creating an agglomeration effect, which in time will drive economic growth and productivity. The increased capacity will also enable more frequent stopping services, particularly into Manchester, supporting the business case for the new route between Liverpool and Manchester.

£1.1bn has been approved to progress planning and development work, which is needed to fill in some of the gaps in the announcements, for example whether Piccadilly will be an underground through station, where the new Bradford and Liverpool stations will be, and the routes between there and Manchester.

This investment demonstrates this government's commitment to rail. However, the remainder of the spend will be in next parliament, after HS2 spend reduces, so a change of government at the next election could put the whole programme at risk.

[https://www.railfuture.org.uk/Northern-powerhouse#Government sets out plans for Northern Powerhouse Rail](https://www.railfuture.org.uk/Northern-powerhouse#Government%20sets%20out%20plans%20for%20Northern%20Powerhouse%20Rail)

More indicators for the future

Although the Tyne and Wear Metro extension over the Leamside line is going ahead, development of the West Yorkshire Metro has been delayed.

Digging the HS2 tunnels from Old Oak Common has started, and it seems that the design of the station at Euston will make passive provision for expansion to accommodate the maximum train frequency that the HS2 line could deliver. Following NPR there is the possibility of using land already purchased by HS2 for a new route, between Birmingham and Manchester, relieving the West Coast Main Line. Meanwhile, the government should consider alternatives to HS2 joining the WCML at Handsacre which could avoid the pinchpoint at Shugborough.

The new GBR livery mockup is something of a distraction. More significant is that passenger numbers are growing, especially at stations opened recently.

Railfuture broadly welcomes the fares freeze this year, but the potential this has for modal shift is offset by the electric car and truck discounts that the government is introducing, the

delay in introducing Electric Vehicle Excise Duty and the extension of the fuel duty cut. Promoting modal shift for freight could help to relieve the current shortage of HGV drivers. This review also appears as the Chair's Column in the latest issue of our magazine [Railwatch](#). Finally, Railfuture needs two new directors, one with finance experience. If you would like to help set the direction of our campaigning, please let me know.

Best wishes

Chris Page

Chair, Railfuture

Railfuture is an independent national volunteer-run organisation campaigning for a bigger better railway with more services.