

**NEW GOVERNMENT SETS OUT PLANS FOR RAIL**

**TODAY'S**

**SEPTEMBER 2024**  
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**UK**

# **RAILWAYS**

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# TRAIN OF THOUGHT

**So far with Labour, mostly so good**

With Sir Keir Starmer's Labour government barely a month old when you read this and the whole gamut of policies having had to be addressed – international, domestic, economic, social – it's not surprising its handling of the railways hasn't hit the headlines every day. But quite a lot has been accomplished or flagged up, and much has been positive.

For a start, having a Transport Secretary in Louise Haigh who describes herself as "Passenger-in-Chief" is no bad thing (and she also just happens to be **TR UK's** local MP). On top of that, the appointment of Lord Peter Hendy, until recently Chairman of Network Rail, as Rail Minister looks a masterstroke; we just hope his civil servants don't mind having a minister who knows more about railways than they do! And it's instructive that apart from Hendy – former transport commissioner to the London mayors Ken Livingstone and Boris Johnson – Haigh's entire ministerial team hails from the North of England; Stephen Morgan – Portsmouth MP and Shadow Rail Minister before the election – having been moved to the Education department.

On the legislative front, the very first Bill to be given a Second Reading – on 29 July – was the Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Bill, empowering the Government to take back control of privatised franchises as they expire. The franchise owners rushed out a statement saying

that this would cost the taxpayer £1 billion a year, but while there are undoubtedly downsides to limiting the role of the private sector such a claim seems hard to believe.

The King's Speech included a commitment to press ahead with legislation to set up Great British Railways, after years of dithering and delay by the previous government. As we said last month, this could easily start its progress in the Lords – and now Hendy is in place to pilot it through. The Government has also revived the High Speed Rail (Crewe–Manchester) Bill, which having been stripped of the parts relating to the cancelled section of HS2, is now the vehicle for the Greater Manchester section of what used to be called Northern Powerhouse Rail.

On the practical side, ministers have opened talks with ASLEF in the hope of ending the strikes which have damaged both the industry and the wider economy. What remains unclear is at what stage the Rail Delivery Group, representing the train operators, will be brought back into the discussions, and whether talks with individual operators about conditions will be hived off from those on pay.

Chancellor Rachel Reeves's statement on 29 July identifying a £22 billion spending overrun (or "black hole") inherited from the Conservative government was delivered just as **TR UK** was going to press, and its full implications





**Below left:** Sheffield MP Louise Haigh is the new Transport Secretary. Currently the city is served by four operators, two of which are already run by the Government – Northern and TransPennine Express. On 27 July Northern’s 150 210 leaves the 11.41 Sheffield–York as East Midlands Railway’s 158 770/810 await departure with the 07.55 Norwich–Liverpool. **Robert Pritchard**



for rail are not yet fully clear. Her one specific announcement – the “closure” of yet-to-be-started projects in Boris Johnson’s Restoring Your Railway programme to bring back lines closed by Beeching – will disappoint communities that had worked hard to get schemes shovel-ready. Sheffield, for example, loses the potential reopening of the Chesterfield–Sheffield Victoria–Stocksbridge route. Campaigners looking to open the western end of the Ivanhoe Line between Burton-on-Trent and Coalville, where a business case had already been submitted, also hailed the decision as “very disappointing”. The decision came despite newly elected Labour MPs in constituencies the line passes through having pledged strong support.

However, the fact that the Chancellor expects to save only £76 million by scrapping Restoring Your Railway suggests that few of these projects would have advanced very soon in any case. So far Okehampton and the soon-to-open Northumberland line in the North-East have been restored by RYR – but both were fairly easy wins. Reeves indicated that individual projects will be assessed by the Transport Minister on their own merit; so how about Colne–Skipton for starters?

As we closed for press Labour’s North Somerset MP Sadik Al-Hassan said he had had it confirmed to him that the Bristol–Portishead reopening, part of the MetroWest scheme that predated the 2020 Restoring Your Railway programme, is safe,

not least as Network Rail is about to submit what seems like the 493rd update of its business case. Councillor Mike Bell, Leader of North Somerset Council and Executive Member for Major Projects, added: “The Portishead to Bristol rail line is a hugely important scheme for us and one that will make a significant difference to the lives of local people, both now and in the future. We remain absolutely committed to reopening the line and Network Rail were shortly due to submit our Full Business Case to the Department for Transport. Full Business Case approval is the final step needed before we can get spades in the ground for construction.”

It is also notable that Reeves didn’t scrap the Coalition’s New Stations Fund, which has actually achieved more than RYR.

Her reference to nearly £800M worth of transport projects scheduled for next year but with no funds behind them is worrying. It will take time to establish which involve the railways and how many of those will survive. Yet, despite much advance newspaper speculation, Reeves did not kill off HS2’s tunnel from Old Oak Common to its proposed London terminal at Euston. There must still be an element of doubt, but if the London end of HS2 was to bite the dust, surely the Chancellor’s near-emergency statement on the economy would have been the Treasury bean counters’ best opportunity.

**Nick Comfort/RP**

## Sir Kenneth Grange 1929–2024



**Above:** Sir Kenneth Grange addresses crowds at the NRM York on 2 October 2016, with “his” power car, 43002, behind. **Robert Pritchard**

Sir Kenneth Grange, one of the designers of one of the most successful trains in the UK, the HST, died on 22 July just a few days after his 95th birthday. I got to meet Sir Kenneth a number of times as the run down of the HST fleet gathered momentum, and he became a familiar face at events, also travelling on one of the last HST departures from Paddington in May 2019. Back in 2016 GWR had named 43002 in his honour and repainted it in original blue and yellow livery. It was named “Sir Kenneth Grange” by the man himself at the St Philips Marsh open day in May 2016. In October of that year and with his usual style and good humour he addressed crowds at the NRM as, with 43002 on the turntable in the background, the 40th anniversary of the introduction of the production HST was celebrated.

Sir Kenneth is described by many as a design legend. He designed, amongst other things, the Kenwood food mixers, Kodak cameras, the TX1 London “black cab” and Morphy Richards iron. But railway enthusiasts will remember him most as being asked by BR to help design the aerodynamic front end, livery and interior layout of the HST. The production sets emerged with a much more attractive front end design than the prototype following a restyling. He was knighted in 2013 for services to design and became Honorary President of the 125 Group the following year, appearing at many events and on HST railtours. **RP**