

ASLEF

**The train
drivers' union**

**>>> Williams Rail Review
ASLEF's Response
May 2019**

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About ASLEF

The Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF) is the UK's largest train drivers' union representing approximately 20,000 members in train operating companies and freight companies as well as London Underground and light rail systems.

ASLEF welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence for this review, which presents a real opportunity to fully consider the way rail is operated in Britain and develop a system for the future which serves the needs of passengers, communities and the taxpayer rather than vested corporate interests.

Our headline calls for the railway system in Britain

- A railway that is vertically integrated and in the public sector
- A responsive attitude to investment that is informed by local knowledge and decision making
- Clear and reasonable ticketing options for passengers
- A railway that is part of securing healthy, connected communities with economic and social opportunities for everyone
- A safe and efficient, accessible railway
- A programme of infrastructure investment laid out that will benefit the whole of the country

Overview

It is clear that the current system isn't working. Franchise-holding train operating companies (TOCs) are facilitated to over-estimate growth, make profits from both visible and hidden subsidies and siphon off cash into the pockets of shareholders rather than reinvesting in the network. Equally rolling stock companies (ROSCOs), responsible for leasing rolling stock to operators, are getting a 'win-win' deal and continue to make large profits from operating companies who are feeding through funding which started in the public purse. Add to this Network Rail's continued spend on servicing debt it inherited from its predecessor, the failed privatised Railtrack, and it is clear that taxpayers' money is not being used to best effect.

ASLEF has long advocated for a fully-integrated, publicly owned and operated railway. In practical terms this means track, train, infrastructure and rolling stock all owned and managed by a single public organisation, with standard terms and conditions for staff, and the inherent strategic oversight or 'guiding mind' that an organisation responsible for the whole network can bring.

Since privatisation began in 1994, the amount of public subsidy going into the system has actually increased rather than decreased, yet the railways do not appear to be in better shape. While the ideology of privatisation drives the direction, the real needs of passengers and rail customers can never be met as there is simply not enough revenue in the system. Therefore, as public subsidy is required to keep the system running, it is logical to move to a fully public system where funding can be used to improve the railways and no money is leaked out as dividends or corporate profits.

Figures are often cited by franchise-holding TOCs that suggest there has been an increase in rail passengers due to privatisation. While there has been an increase in the number of passenger journeys made by rail over roughly the same period, there is no evidence to

prove that this was due to the privatisation of rail. Rather, it is due to the centralisation of employment in cities, and the significant rise in property prices that has meant more and more people are commuting into cities by rail from nearby towns and suburbs. The privatised model has, in fact, been given this opportunity of an increase in demand and failed to keep up and provide the required capacity.

The public, when surveyed, is strongly in favour of public ownership of the railways. Surveys over the last two years have repeatedly found over 60% support for the railways being brought into public ownership. In May 2017, YouGov found 60% of people in favour of nationalisation; In January 2018, Sky Data's survey showed 60% of people in favour of renationalisation; In June 2018 The Independent/BMG found 64% of people in favour of nationalisation with 56% saying privatisation had been a failure, and only 15% believing it had been a success.

What is the railway for?

It is helpful to begin by considering the purpose of the railway overall before addressing the various detailed processes and systems which underpin its operation. ASLEF believes that the railway is at its roots an essential utility providing the infrastructure and operations to ensure that communities are connected, people are able to travel to where they need to go and goods are able to be moved in the form of rail freight.

The union also believes that the railway is part of society, and should therefore be owned by society. ASLEF's position remains for a publicly owned and operated railway that serves communities, passengers, freight customers and the taxpayer.

An efficient and resilient railway system also brings a range of societal benefits including enabling people to access work, school, services and leisure activities; a significant contribution to the country's aims to reduce in carbon emissions and pollution; effective delivery of freight to support the manufacturing economy and essential infrastructure projects, and improving road safety as a contributor to reducing congestion. Having the most effective railway system possible connecting people, businesses and communities will help to improve the country's productivity.

It should be remembered that rail can create a huge boost for the wider economy with a significant multiplier effect. For example, a recent report by KPMG estimates that the overall benefits to the economy of HS2 could be over £53bn. Figures quoted by Credo Group for Invensys Rail showed that every £1 invested in rail by the government, an additional £1.30 is generated from the private sector – in other words investment in transport has a stronger multiplier effect than other sectors of the economy.

Funding for the railway

The current system of franchising and payment of access charges to Network Rail makes the rail network fragmented and inefficient. Passengers and communities are not at the heart of the system, and therefore lose out. Freight companies also struggle to access the paths they need to provide the services their customers are calling for, due to a lack of available slots in the timetable.

Funding is contributed to the railway from the public purse in a number of ways: TOCs which take on passenger operating franchises benefits from paying lower track access charges than the market rate; ROSCOs have a win-win deal in which they can remove profit from the system by leasing to TOCs and FOCs but also by buying publicly-commissioned rolling stock and leasing it back to the operators, TOCs receive direct subsidy on some routes in order to deliver less profitable services. Indirect subsidies also enter the system from a lack of capture of the value of land, which is often impacted by nearby rail development, and a missed opportunity to properly tax HGV operators for the emissions from lorries which cause health disbenefits to society.

As public subsidy runs right through the system, both directly and indirectly, there is no strong argument for any private profit to be available. The general public, when surveyed, consistently support the renationalisation of the railways because they are aware that public money is going into the system but profits are leaking out. ASLEF believes the railway should be publicly owned and operated, with any profit coming back into the public sector to be reinvested.

While there is an acknowledgement that it would remain preferable to separate the operation of track and train, the union believes that with both elements in the public sector, the outcomes would be improved for both passengers and freight customers. Having a vertically-

integrated system with a guiding mind would mean that strategic decisions and investment could be made at scale, across the network, rather than piecemeal by the periodic awarding of franchises.

Strategy

The main advantage of a vertically-integrated railway, owned and operated publicly, is the ability to think strategically across the network. A nationalised operator would function as a 'guiding mind' for the railway, looking at medium- to long-term objectives to put in place a strategy for infrastructure investment and operations. Alongside more clarity for the public and the state, this longer-term vision would also allow for rolling infrastructure projects and an ability to share resources across route areas.

Fragmentation of the network is particularly challenging for freight operators as the nature of freight movements usually requires longer train paths which cross several route areas. While timetabling officials do their best to fit in freight paths, it would be an easier task if the guiding mind for the railway could work on a national basis rather than having to work across multiple TOCs to balance priorities.

A large amount of rail investment over the last two decades has been concentrated in London and the South East of England. While there are reasons for this, including a surge in suburban rail commuting over the same period, it remains a fact that investment has been delivered inequitably. Commuters and communities across the rest of the country are campaigning for improvements to their services. A combination of a national body to oversee long-distance rail and devolved transport authorities to deliver local services would be an effective way to ensure that investment is delivered fairly across the country. Devolved transport authorities would also bring decision making closer to the people affected by local transport and be able to find more appropriate solutions for the communities they are working in.

While Network Rail is the infrastructure operator, with a mandate and overview of the whole of Great Britain, investment can be prioritised according to need. Proposals to 'sell off' track

and train route by route are extremely concerning to ASLEF for several reasons. Firstly, that fragmented track, relying on private operators for maintenance and safety, could lead to a return to the days of Railtrack when poor maintenance led to a number of serious and fatal derailments and collisions in the early 2000s. Additionally, track privatised and fragmented by region would inevitably lead to an ongoing inequality of investment. Profitable routes such as those in the south East of England would likely see more investment, while Wales and the North – currently benefiting from cross-subsidy under the nationalised Network Rail – would be left further behind with outdated infrastructure.

The rail network should have benefited in the last control period from a number of large-scale infrastructure projects. Unfortunately, due to a combination of poor estimation and planning and a lack of secure political vision, many have been cancelled, overrun or only completed in part. Taking a strategic approach to these kind of projects, and operating over longer planning periods, would allow resources to be used more effectively. It would also make it easier to retain skills and supply chains which, at the moment, need to be disbanded and re-established with each separate project.

Part of modernising the railway and ensuring a system fit for the future is decarbonisation. While rail remains significantly more sustainable than road transport, there is still a need to decarbonise rail itself. Evidence from several studies has shown that the only reliable way to achieve this, taking into account the requirements for traction to deliver acceptable line speeds and freight routes, is electrification. While options including battery and hydrogen power could bridge small gaps in provision, there is no better method than full electrification to deliver a sustainable future across the network. In addition to the speed benefits, electrified trains weigh less and therefore put less strain on infrastructure, and would also lead to improvements in air quality when stopped in stations. This would be extremely beneficial to the health of both passengers and staff.

Making rail sustainable cannot be looked at in isolation and the union therefore believes it is important that this Review is not considered in isolation from other policy areas such

as land use planning, road decarbonisation and housing policy. Working across all of these areas simultaneously would allow the railway to contribute to delivering the outcomes passengers and communities need as part of a network of infrastructure and services.

Although not directly in the scope of this Review, the need for integration with other modes of transport cannot be overlooked in designing a railway fit for the future. There is an urgent need to allow transport authorities to regulate bus services in order that they can be linked to train times and other connecting modes. Tying in rail planning with local developments of road networks, pedestrian and cycling routes would also help passengers access the railway and help to reduce the use of unsustainable private vehicles across the country.

The union also believes that branch lines and other routes closed in the mid twentieth century should be considered for re-opening, and a review of possible locations for new lines, particularly in the less well served regions of the country, should be undertaken with a view to increasing the number of rail lines in Britain.

Freight

The railway in Britain played a large role in the first industrial revolution. In the twenty-first century it is easy to forget this important origin of the railway, but rail freight movements remain vitally important to the success of the network, and to the economy.

Freight moved by rail produces 76% less CO₂ than the equivalent road journey, and the average freight train removes 80 HGVs from the roads. This has an obvious benefit for the reduction of pollution and road congestion across the country, contributing to public health and safety. It is therefore essential that the government and any guiding mind or authority overseeing the railway system actively work to increase the amount of freight moved by rail.

In addition to customer freight, freight trains support the infrastructure of the railway, supplying materials and operating repairs through evenings and weekends. If freight is allowed to decline, its capacity will be hit and this repair and improvement work will not be able to happen. This would then have a knock-on effect on passenger routes and safety across the railway.

ASLEF believes it is vital the needs of freight customers – and the future development of rail freight – should be considered a priority in this review of how the railway operates in Britain. Freight movements are different to passenger services as they are typically longer paths, crossing over several Network Rail infrastructure areas. Without considering these freight routes at the outset of any design process, freight users will be at a significant disadvantage into the future.

Freight movements cannot be considered in isolation from other transport and planning policies. There is a need for rail freight paths to be accompanied by adequate investment in

ports and terminals in order to make the most of intermodal opportunities, and the import and export markets. The union therefore believes that as part of the strategic design of the rail system, there should be planning guidance alongside to ensure that the infrastructure is available to support rail freight, and that its development is not hampered by problematic planning rules or blocked due to a lack of appreciation for the need for good freight infrastructure.

Rail freight receives a small amount of government subsidy but is otherwise entirely privatised and therefore vulnerable to the market. By contrast, road freight receives indirect subsidy in that the impact of HGV movements on road infrastructure are not nearly compensated by road freight operators. With calculations showing that HGVs cause approximately 106,000 times more damage to roads than the average car, but that road hauliers are only paying roughly 11% of the maintenance costs back into the public purse, ASLEF calls for an equalising of impact cost between road and rail in order that rail be ensured as the more efficient and cost-effective option for freight movements.

Reports into the possible options for decarbonisation of Britain's railways have shown that while there may be some viable new alternatives to power passenger trains, the only diesel alternative that delivers sufficient traction for freight trains is full electrification. ASLEF therefore calls for the process of electrification to be continued and the pace increased with a goal of 100% electrification of the network. It cannot be acceptable for freight to be 'left behind' or unable to operate on particular routes due to a lack of decarbonised traction.

Sustainability

It should be noted that rail can play an essential role in reducing carbon emissions. It is essential that we promote modal shift to rail. The latest figures released show that transport is the largest polluter in terms of greenhouse gasses producing 27% of total emissions. Rail accounts for less than 2% of this. As part of the Kyoto agreement the EU has set targets for the reduction of greenhouse gasses. For 2050, the EU objective is to reduce Europe's emissions by 80-95% compared to 1990 levels. The Climate Change Act 2008 goes far beyond this target with the UK committing to a 34% reduction in emissions by 2020 and 80% by 2050. This is a big challenge for our network, and one it must meet.

It is essential that the railway in the twenty-first century moves towards sustainable operation and decarbonisation as quickly as possible in order to improve public health. Passengers and rail staff, including train drivers, are vulnerable to ill health relating to the air quality on trains, in stations and at depots. As the union representing train drivers, ASLEF sees it as a key priority to ensure that the union's members are not being subjected to unacceptable levels of polluted, poor-quality air which could lead to serious health problems.

As a number of reports – notably those by the RSSB and iMechE in early 2019 – have discussed, there is a significant amount of work being done at the moment to explore sustainable alternative fuels for the railway. Possible fuel sources under discussion include hydrogen power and batteries. While these may be realistic solutions for shorter passenger journeys, where there is sufficient trackside space to house charging or hydrogen processing infrastructure, there has been no evidence produced to suggest that any alternative to diesel other than full electrification will be able to provide the required traction for freight and long-distance services.

ASLEF therefore believes that it is essential that electrification of Britain's railways continues, with the target of 100% electrification of the network. This will benefit planetary resources,

public health and rail passengers whose journeys will be quicker without the delay in acceleration of a diesel engine.

Measures of Success

In addition to working out what the railway is for, it is also important to consider what success looks like. While there is broad agreement that success may constitute efficient, reliable services which deliver passengers and goods to their destinations across the country, the union believes there are further such measures that should also be considered.

The current method of measuring public approval of the railways is through the Transport Focus annual Passenger Satisfaction Survey. While this is a good measure of the opinions and experiences of rail passengers, it only allows for a limited societal impression of the railways. Those people who don't currently take the train, or use it very infrequently, are unlikely to be represented in the Passenger Focus data, and neither are freight customers.

Open access operators choose to bid for timetable slots on the railway if they can see that there is a gap in provision which may be profitable for them to operate. The union considers that in a fully functioning, national rail system, there should not be any gaps such as this because a full and effective service should be provided to every community in the country. ASLEF therefore calls for the number of open access bids to be monitored, with an aim of achieving zero.

With statistics showing that an average freight train can take 80 HGVs off the roads, another measure of success to be considered should be the number of HGVs on Britain's roads and the increase in the number of freight trains on the railways. The goal for a sustainable and efficient railway system should be to remove as much freight from the roads as possible – improving not just congestion but road safety – and increasing the amount of freight moved by rail. A metric to be measured year on year tracking the number of HGVs on the roads and the number of freight trains should be considered as a reportable measure of success.

Alongside tracking the number of passengers travelling on the railways, a more holistic society-based approach could also be considered for measurement. Given that the union believes the part of the railway's purpose is to ensure communities and people are connected, it is therefore logical to suggest that alongside passenger numbers, the amount of people travelling between destinations, and the number of people (rail passengers and non-passengers alike) satisfied with their ability to access key destinations such as work and community services should also be measured and reported.

Safety

Any review of the operational systems underpinning the railway should take full account of the fact that the railway is a safety-critical environment. While there have not been any passenger fatalities in train collisions or derailments in Britain since 2002, it remains imperative that the lessons of the past are not forgotten.

Recent near-miss and minor incidents, including those at Cardiff Central in December 2016 and at Waterloo in 2017, show that without full regard taken of safety practices and procedures, very dangerous situations can emerge in a matter of seconds.

One of the key reasons for the serious of fatal incidents in the late 1990s and early 2000s was the actions of the privatised infrastructure company Railtrack. Operating infrastructure in the private sector meant Railtrack's focus was on profits, rather than safety, and when it employed contractors there were numerous occasions on which safe working was not properly inspected, procedures were allowed to be relaxed and extremely serious incidents occurred as a result.

ASLEF member train drivers were killed in a number of these incidents and, while corporate memory may be short, the memory of colleagues and friends is anything but. As the representative trade union for 96% of Britain's train drivers, ASLEF believes it is absolutely imperative that every measure possible is taken to ensure the safety of drivers, other railway staff and rail passengers.

For this reason, ASLEF is completely opposed to the break up, fragmentation, or privatisation of any of the track infrastructure on the railway. The union believes that relying on franchise holders to operate track and train in a particular area as a private enterprise will put staff and the public in serious danger. It cannot be proven, and indeed the opposite is proven

in industries across the board, that a private company will ever be able to fully put safety before profit.

ASLEF reiterates its support for a fully publicly owned and operated railway, working to a consistent exemplary standard for safe and healthy operation. Only a single, nationalised operator for the whole country could be relied upon to function on this basis and not be swayed by profit-making opportunities.

Alongside the need to retain the operation of track in the public sector, and nationalise train operations, it will also remain vital that this public body is properly funded and resourced to enable workers in every role – from maintenance to signalling to the driving grades – to work in full compliance with health and safety rules. It is unacceptable to starve safety-critical organisations of funding and put workers in a position where they are required to make difficult decisions about how to keep people safe.

Conclusion

ASLEF calls for a safe, efficient and fairly operated railway, publicly owned and operated and vertically integrated.

This review is an opportunity to redesign the rail system from scratch and make sure it really works for passengers, freight customers, communities and the taxpayer. The opportunity should not be wasted.



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