



National Policy Forum consultation on the future of work

June 2018

1. The Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF) is the UK's largest train driver's union representing approximately 20,000 members in train operating companies and freight companies as well as London Underground and light rail systems.
2. ASLEF is pleased to have this opportunity to respond to the Labour Party's consultation on the economy, business and trade because although employment rates are currently good, the economy has shifted towards low-skilled, low-paid, insecure jobs and inequality is growing. ASLEF believes that to address and reverse this trend Labour must reverse attacks on trade unions, such as the draconian Trade Union Act of 2016, and must meaningfully consult trade unions about enforcing and strengthening workers' rights and empowering workers.
3. Employers also need to recognise the vital work of unionised workforces and the value of providing facility time to union representatives. Health and safety reps, for example, bring huge benefits to our economy and their work results in millions of pounds of savings to employers and the exchequer by reducing the number of Employment Tribunal cases, reducing working days lost due to workplace injury and reducing work related illness.
4. Strong trade unions can also help employers to identify problems, find solutions, and prepare for challenges and opportunities arising from changes to technology and workplaces. ASLEF is proud to have been part of an industry that has improved its productivity and grown significantly over the decades. Much of this has come thanks to technological advancements such as electrification, improved in-cab technology and longer trains. ASLEF members and staff from across the railway have re-skilled and negotiated changes to their roles to enable this transition to happen safely and efficiently. This has been facilitated by strong industrial trade unions and collective bargaining for staff across the network.

5. For many decades, the UK has increasingly moved towards a service economy and the lack of balance in our economy is concerning. Britain needs a workforce that is well educated, qualified and capable of delivering new innovation but it is the younger generations who are most affected by the present government's austerity measures, unaffordable tuition fees for universities and the rise in short-term work contracts. Apprenticeships can provide a valuable first step on the path to a career for young people. As a union we also endorse investment in lifelong learning and ongoing training programmes, to give young people the skills and opportunities they need, but also to support older employees to keep up with advances in technology.
6. Further investment in housing and transport could create thousands of jobs as well as creating apprenticeships, skills and training in engineering, building and other areas for the next generation. Building homes could help to stimulate the construction industry and help regional employment and economic growth, and rail freight can play an important part in this growth by moving materials in a clean and efficient way around the country. Investing in sustainable transport also would create jobs and establish new industries in low carbon transport, clean energy and renewables.
7. The UK needs stronger transport policy based on improving the sustainability of the public transport sector and moving more freight transport from road to rail. Rail freight is an essential part of our economy, worth £1.6 billion per year to the UK economy according to the Rail Delivery Group. An average freight train can remove 76 HGVs journeys from our roads, so rail freight can improve productivity and generate savings in road congestion costs across the whole economy.
8. Rail rolling stock procurement should where feasible be awarded to British engineering and manufacturing companies and as many rail infrastructure projects as possible ought to support UK employment and use UK steel to support the supply chain.
9. The Labour Party's outstanding result at the May 2017 general election demonstrated that the Labour manifesto was progressive and forward thinking, with the pledges of renationalisation of vital utilities seen as a vote winner for many. As a union we campaign for a national, publically owned rail network answerable to the people who use it. We condemn privatisation that has

created a fragmented, dysfunctional and inefficient system with private companies paying hundreds of millions of pounds in dividends to stakeholders rather than using the money to hold down fares and reinvest in our railway network. We deplore the DfT's willingness to bail out train operating companies at the expense of taxpayers, and their disregard for the interests of rail passengers. Perhaps no other franchise demonstrates the failures of the franchise system as well as the East Coast Mainline: The recent failure of VTEC was the third time in 11 years that a commercial franchise collapsed because it was unable to meet its financial commitments and the government had to intervene. In contrast to the failings of private companies, the East Coast line was profitable when it was nationalised and run by publically owned Directly Operated Railways (DOR): In the 5 years between 2009 and 2015 DOR successfully returned over £1bn in premiums and several million in profits to the Treasury, kept fares down and achieved high levels of passenger satisfaction. DOR paid 235m to the government in the last year it was running the route and was one of only two companies to make a net contribution to government coffers over the last two years, paying in more than it received in subsidy or indirect grants. There was absolutely no good reason to reprivatise the route after 5 years of successful state control.

10. A point made in the consultation paper about the future of work is that decisions about our economy and society are often made by a narrow elite. ASLEF supports this view and it is our belief that rebalancing the economy and spreading wealth and industry throughout the UK must be a priority. It has widely been recognised that the rail services axed by Beeching left many rural communities isolated, deprived of inward investment and cut off from employment opportunities which are concentrated in city centres. Reopening closed lines could give a new lease of life to communities that have been isolated after being cut off from the railway network and could address the problem of overcrowding across the network. This would require investment but many communities have been deprived of investment for decades and it is time to rectify this.

Mick Whelan
General Secretary
77 St John Street
London EC1M 4NN