BIG PLAN
BIG CHANGES
The Rail Delivery Group’s blueprint for rail’s future
Introduction

“When you’re up to your backside in alligators, it’s easy to forget that your initial objective was to drain the swamp.”

That wonderful old saying has applied to the rail industry for the entire time I’ve edited RAIL – and that’ll be 25 years in 2020! In that time, there have been plenty of startling successes – the most notable being the doubling of passenger numbers from 800 million on the last day of the BR regime to 1.6 billion today. On the West Coast Main Line, the WCML smashed through its 30 million target some years ago, and it has become 47 today. From 15 million in pre-Pendolino days, the WCML smashed through its 30 million target some years ago, and it now stands at 40 million. By 2025 it will be 50 million, going by current estimates.

High Speed 2 cannot come quickly enough to provide that desperately needed step-change in capacity which no amount of upgrading of trains, stations, infrastructure and signalling could ever deliver. But alongside (and, sadly, all too often obscuring) the railway’s clear successes of the first 25 years after the Railways Act, there has been a stream of really testing and often damaging internal and external challenges. This has meant that the industry has been pretty much permanently on a back foot – or, as that old saying says, ‘up to its backside in alligators.’ ‘Draining the swamp’ – finding that sweet spot where private delivery of a superb public railway delivers what everyone wants – therefore remains a tantalisingly (and stubbornly) elusive objective. It would be easy for disillusion to set in. It’s therefore important once in a while to pause, take stock, and look back over our shoulders and objectively assess progress.

This is timely because the railway faces a critical moment. There has been a steady increase in demand for rail travel, which in turn is placing pressure on infrastructure. The private sector and wider rail industry is ‘calling time’ on short-term fixes. The need for urgent franchise reform which, as the Government’s Rail Review group Chairman Keith Williams has made clear, “cannot continue in its current form.” The difficulty of meeting rapidly increasing customer (passenger and freight) expectations, which are difficult to meet in the face of these combined problems.

Both have a mountain to climb. This special publication is designed to show that the rail industry, as represented by the RDG, is ready, willing and able to roll up its sleeves and make it happen. There has been an industry-wide willingness to listen to the need for a new, informed, professional and expert arms-length body to lead the industry and deliver the Government’s strategy. RDG would be the first to admit that it hasn’t always ‘got it right’ over the last 25 years. An RDG would be the first to admit that it hasn’t been the optimum value to taxpayers.

The need to attract new bidders to operate the passenger network on behalf of the Government, delivering the increasing quality and performance required. That’s the purpose of this special supplement: to look back at progress thus far, before glancing uphil at the stiff climb remaining.

Like all organisations working in the political and media turbulence and relentless scrutiny of public-private initiatives, the RDG would be the first to admit that it hasn’t always ‘got it right’ over the last 25 years. An apparent reluctance to ‘ruffle feathers’ has, in the last couple of years, given way to a steadily emerging more direct and confident approach, with problems now openly and objectively highlighted – even where this has may led to discomfort on either side of the public-private frontier.

This new and bolder approach (not least on fares reform) is a very welcome development. It presents a snapshot of how public and private investment is yielding major benefits. This is the need for a new, informed, professional and expert arms-length body to lead the industry and deliver the Government’s strategy.

Nigel Harris
Managing Editor and Events Director, RAIL.
Lots Achieved, Lots Still to Do

It’s been more than 25 years since the Railways Act went live (in April 1994), which created the legislative framework and governance for the way in which the current system operates. During that time the railway has continued to play a fundamental role in Britain’s prosperity, connecting workers to jobs and businesses, goods to markets, and people to their families and friends. The railway has also experienced enormous growth since the first franchises began in 1996, with a doubling in passenger numbers from 800 million to its present level of 1.6 billion. This, in turn, has enabled a range of privately owned train operating companies to transform the industry’s finances, drastically reducing the burden on taxpayers for the railway’s day-to-day operation while helping to grow the network by introducing some 4,000 more services per day (see p50-53). Working alongside government, rail companies have also played their part in refurbishing or rebuilding more than 600 stations across the country including Birmingham New Street, London Bridge and Reading. Meanwhile, new stations such as Corby, Stratford International and Liverpool South Parkway have all been added to the network and new routes opened, including Oxford-London Marylebone, which was the first new rail link between the capital and a major British city to be built in over a century. This work to upgrade and increase capacity across the network continues, with the current partnership between public and private sectors hard at work delivering a £50bn investment programme in new infrastructure and rolling stock, including the delivery of 7,000 new carriages (equivalent to half the nation’s train fleet) by 2021 (see p48-49).

But with that growth has come several problems as the system has become more congested and struggles to keep up with changes in technology and the different ways in which people live and work today. This includes the outdated regulations that continue to govern fares, and an emerging lack of accountability and system integration, with the latter coming to the fore, most visibly during last summer’s timetable change when the system failed to cope with the sheer scale of its challenge to introduce hundreds of new services. The need for lasting and wholesale change was not just recognised by disgruntled passengers and government but the industry itself, which led the calls for a root and branch review into the structure of the industry and the way passenger services are delivered. The government responded in September 2018 by establishing a Rail Review that is being independently chaired by former British Airways chief executive Keith Williams. The Review is currently seeking evidence to inform the findings and recommendations that are expected to be published in the autumn. RDG Chief Executive Paul Plummer explains: “There have been many reviews in the last few years but most of them didn’t cover the whole system, and often they haven’t been fully implemented. I think that’s part of the reason we have ended up here. We are with the challenges of misalignment, a lack of accountability and a lack of customer focus because those reviews were not holistic enough. “They weren’t implemented as fully as we’d like, so we thought it was really important to deal with the very clear challenges for which some people are advocating quite simplistic solutions. We need an alternative to those simple propositions which isn’t the status quo, isn’t nationalisation but something else, and we need to say what that ‘something else’ is.”

A further reason that RDG and its members - which include Network Rail and train and freight operators - have welcomed the review is not just to help deal with the problems that have emerged from the last quarter of a century, but also to place the industry on a firmer footing to tackle challenges of the future, not least a 40% growth in passenger numbers that is expected by 2040. Plummer adds: “We know that lots of positive things have happened since the mid-1990s, but some things aren’t as good as they should be. The challenges of the future are also not going to be the same as they were 25 or five years ago, or even today. “The heart of this [review] needs to be dealing with the challenge of nationhood around the economy, productivity, connecting communities, and the situation around Brexit that is not the same as it was 25 years ago, and so that’s what we’re trying to focus on.”

On April 30, RDG submitted eight proposals on behalf of the industry to the Williams Review for progressive and bold structural change to help deliver increased accountability, customer focus and responsiveness, in addition to bringing about practical changes like increased capacity and punctuality (RAIL 879). These proposals (see panel, page 46) are well evidenced and have been developed over the last few months in close consultation with RDG members, passengers, businesses and communities.

The eight proposals also build on the separate outline proposals published by RDG in February for radical reform in fares and ticketing, that were themselves developed using more than 20,000 responses received by RDG during the public consultation phase titled Easier Fares for All, recommendations made by RDG include moving to single-leg journeys as the basis for pricing in order to make the system less complicated and eliminate the need for ‘split ticketing’. Meanwhile, it says that a future fares system should enable local prices to be set regionally, which would mean local objectives could better be met, while moves should also be made to facilitate greater use of pay-as-you-go smart ticketing. Regulations governing peak and off-peak travel should also be changed to encourage a better spread of demand, while the whole reformed system would be backed for the first time by a ‘best fare guarantee’.

The proposals have been well received by industry and industry commentators, including RAIL’s Fares and Services Expert Barry Doe (see p48-49), and therefore...
The eight proposals RDG submitted to the Williams Review

1. Deliver easier fares for all
2. Put a new independent organising body in charge of the whole industry
3. Introduce customer-focused ‘public service contracts’ to replace franchising
4. Give customers more choice on long-distance routes
5. Make sure track and train are working together
6. Bring decisions about local services closer to home
7. Enhance freight’s central role in the economy
8. Invest in people

Crucially, it would combine regulation of infrastructure with the contracting of passenger services. “The organising body needs to be accountable for national decision making and long-term issues. It can’t and shouldn’t try to do things that elected politicians do because they also need to make decisions about the future railway we want.”

“Also, it should try and make decisions that should be made locally, but align decisions and incentives so that everybody nationally and locally is focused on customers.”

The independent body would also have oversight over franchising, or the new ‘public service contracts’ with which the RDG is proposing to replace the current system. In mass-commuter areas these would be tightly specified with an integrated transport body given more devolved control. RDG is also calling for more choice and competition on long-distance routes, and tough outcome-based contracts on rail operating franchises.

RDG’s third proposal is to introduce a new independent body to oversee the whole industry, with RDG having oversight over franchising, and tough outcome-based contracts on rail operating franchises.

“All of that is overseen by an independent body and underpinned by a radical reform of fares.”

“Paul Plummer concludes: ‘Taking all of that together, you end up with a package which offers concessions in some markets, genuine outcome-based contracts to enable innovation in others, and real competition and choice in other places. All of that is overseen by an independent body and underpinned by a radical reform of fares.’”

“The three proposals concern the greater devolution of decision making and regulatory control from Westminster to the communities served by the railways, and the need to develop a clear national framework to permit freight across the network. RDG says it will publish a separate document to provide more detail on freight in the coming months. RDG would also like to see the continued investment in people placed at the heart of any reforms, to provide the rail workforce with the skills, resources and rewards needed to deliver these generational changes.”

“In a constantly changing world that would, effectively, mean going backwards.”

“Inevitably, pulling something like this together is a huge challenge and people here at RDG have done a great job in confronting some of the issues. There’s obviously a huge range of views across the industry. Addressing that range and coming up with a coherent package that is sufficiently bold and radical to represent genuine change, and doesn’t throw away a lot of good things we already have in the system, was a challenge.”

“I think we’ve risen to it and given Keith Williams something to contemplate. We hope to see quite a lot of that in whatever he proposes. We have to change now because the future challenges are very different and there is no credible do-nothing option on fares or how we organise the industry.”

“There is no one way of running a railway but we need to use this pivotal moment to come to a consensus on how we’re going to make it work and then implement it.”

Paul Plummer, Chief Executive, Rail Delivery Group
GROWTH INDUSTRY

Proposals for wider industry reform are being considered, as an ambitious £50 billion plan is rolled out across the rail network. RAIL presents a snapshot of how this major flow of public and private investment is already beginning to yield tangible benefits.

Investment in new trains and infrastructure has generated an estimated 100,000 new jobs in the rail sector and supply chain.

These pledges have been accompanied by the delivery of a pipeline of £50 billion worth of private and public investment in new trains and infrastructure, supporting an estimated 100,000 new job opportunities in the rail sector and supply chain, and a potential £50bn of wider economic growth from providing better connections, increasing employment and new business opportunities.

The plan was launched at St Pancras International which, having reopened in 2007 as the UK’s gateway to Europe following the £317m Ordsall Chord project, which has provided a direct link between Manchester Piccadilly and St Pancras International.

Investment in new trains and infrastructure has generated an estimated 100,000 new jobs in the rail sector and supply chain.

Great Western Electrification Programme (GWEPP) marks the biggest investment in the route from London Paddington to Cardiff since it was built more than 200 years ago.

As well as more than 600 miles of track being electrified, GWEPP has included the rebuilding of Reading station which serves some 20 million passengers a year, and reopened a year ahead of schedule in July 2014.

The eastern section of the Great Western Main Line has also been upgraded to accommodate Elizabeth Line services between Paddington and Reading, which will bring 1.5 million people within 45 minutes of central London.

These works were completed by NR in September 2018, having taken more than eight years and 13 million work hours to complete.

The section from Stockley to Maidenhead was energised in spring 2017 to enable the introduction of three new sets of rolling stock in a 12-month period, which created more than 4,000 extra seats into Paddington each morning.

Great Western Railway now operates a new fleet of Class 387 electric multiple units to Reading, while Class 800 Intercity Express Trains are now in squadron service to destinations as far west as Penzance.

Nine-car Class 345 units are also now running from Paddington to Hayes & Harlington and further west on test in advance of a full Elizabeth Line service.

Electricity is expected to be completed to Cardiff Central by the end of the year, which should eliminate 15 minutes from current journey times between the English and Welsh capitals.

Great Western Railway 387165 trails 387135 into Oxford Parkway as the 1157 London Paddington-Oxford Parkway semi-fast on April 6, JOHN STIRTON.

THAMESLINK

Network Rail’s £7bn Thameslink Programme is now nearing completion to provide higher frequency services through central London to a wider range of destinations, including Peterborough, Ashford and Cambridge.

Beginning in 2009, the project has given an additional 80 stations direct access to St Pancras International and has involved the rebalancing of several major stations, including Blackfriars and London Bridge, to accommodate a new fleet of 12-car Class 707s.

Peak time capacity through the Thameslink route between St Pancras and Blackfriars will eventually rise to 24 trains per hour in each direction, made possible by the installation of ETCS (European Train Control System) Level 2 and ATO (Automatic Train Operation) digital in-cab signalling technology.

One 12-car Class 707 can carry 50% more passengers than the ’319s’ they have replaced, and the same number of passengers as 21 double-decker buses.

CROSSRAIL

The Elizabeth Line will remain Europe’s largest construction project until main works get underway on HS2 Phase 1 from Heathrow Terminal 2 later this year.

Having been originally billed as ‘the £15bn railway’, its construction has been estimated to have created over 90,000 full-time jobs across the country with 66% of contracts going to British companies based outside the capital.

Once open, it will provide a high-frequency metro-style service to 40 stations between Reading and Heathrow in the west, and Shenfeld and Abbey Wood in the east.

It will provide a 10% increase in rail capacity, creating an estimated £40bn of extra connections and providing another £85bn of wider economic benefits to the UK economy from the

Thameslink

Southern 377114 and 377264 stand at London Bridge on May 11 2017. The fourth busiest station has been rebuilt to enable more Thameslink services to call, providing 30% more capacity, JANE ROSETTI/PA.

Two entirely new trains called Elizabeth trains will begin running on the Crossrail line in 2020, making journeys between Farringdon and Heathrow Terminal 2 far faster and more direct.

Crossrail 2

The £31bn project aims to link up to 25 London underground stations on the Crossrail network, extending the railway into the East End.

The network will be extended to Stanmore and Heathrow Airport, with trains running from Paddington to Heathrow by 2028. Once completed, Crossrail 2 will help to deliver a 25% increase in capacity through central Manchester, PAUL SHANNON.

so that more trains can run in and out of the station, whose work continues to extend over 100 platforms at more than 70 other stations throughout the region to accommodate longer trains being introduced by Northern and TransPennine Express.

Looking ahead, the TransPennine Route Upgrade will aim to deliver faster and more frequent services between York, Leeds and Manchester. Options for potential new infrastructure have now been submitted to the Department for Transport for considering, with some £1bn allocated to cover the works that are expected to commence later this year.

Breakdown of £50bn+ investment in rail

£12.7bn
in renewals work*
£15.1bn
in enhancements*
£7.7bn
on HS2*
£6bn
on Crossrail*
£11.6bn
in new and refurbished rolling stock by 2021

*Mainly between 2014-19

Great North Rail Project

The GNRP is a multi-billion-pound programme of improvements across northern England that is being implemented by Network Rail to enable 2,000 extra services to the region each week and 80,000 more passengers to travel each day, bringing up in track of wider economic benefits to the region per annum.

Major components of the GNRP include the £6.5bn electrification programme to electrify more than 300km of track on routes from Manchester to Preston via Blackburn to the Ribblehead, and Manchester to Liverpool.

The construction of the Elizabeth Oxtall Chord was another key element of the project, which has provided a direct link between Manchester Piccadilly and Manchester Victoria ever since its opening in December 2012.

Meanwhile, its construction has enabled the restoration of Grade 1-listed viaducts and raised encouraging regeneration on surrounding land that was previously derelict.

A capability upgrade has also been completed at Liverpool Lime Street as part of GNRP to upgrade signalling and remediate platforms.

The Oxtall Chord will help deliver a 25% increase in capacity through central Manchester, PAUL SHANNON.

In Partnership with Rail

Growth Industry

The key pledges are an estimated £50 billion of public and private investment in major new trains and infrastructure, supporting an estimated 100,000 new jobs and a potential £50bn of wider economic growth from providing better connections between regions, increasing employment and new business opportunities.

The plan was launched at St Pancras International which, having reopened in 2007 as the UK’s gateway to Europe following the £317m Ordsall Chord project, which has provided a direct link between Manchester Piccadilly and St Pancras International.

In Partnership for Britain’s Prosperity, the plan committed all RDG members – which include Network Rail, train and freight operators – to four key pledges to improve services for passengers, secure more jobs, better connect to housing, employment and new economic growth from providing better connections.

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St Pancras International provided the backdrop for the launch of the In Partnership for Britain’s Prosperity industry plan that is being implemented by more than £50bn worth of investment, including the delivery of £17bn new rail tunnels by 2021.

PAUL SHANNON.

ON October 30 2017, the Rail Delivery Group launched a unified plan to facilitate further improvement in the railway and deliver significant economic growth.

Titled ‘In Partnership for Britain’s Prosperity’, the plan committed all RDG members – which include Network Rail, train and freight operators – to four key pledges to improve services for passengers, secure more jobs, better connect to housing, employment and new economic growth from providing better connections.
You have to know the past to understand the present. So as the industry contemplates the prospect of great change, it is worth taking stock of how the last 25 years has been a story of significant progress.

Passenger numbers in the UK have doubled since 1997, and grown faster than any other European country, including France, Germany and Spain. Many of the problems we face today are down to overcrowding - but that’s a symptom of success, rather than failure. The industry must not be complacent about the challenges ahead, but it should also be proud of some of the gains that have been made since the mid-1990s, thanks to the public and private sectors working in partnership.

Financially, the railways are now in rude health. Train operating companies have helped transform the industry’s finances, drastically reducing the burden on taxpayers for day-to-day railway operations. This frees up taxpayers’ money for investment in other vital public services and has been driven by a large increase in revenue that is, in part, due to the TOCs’ commercial activities. This has enabled the number of TOC employees to increase from 40,000 to 55,000. A public-private partnership has saved the railways from stagnation, and the challenges ahead can be faced with the knowledge that the UK network is now steadily evolving.

BUILDING ON SUCCESS

A MAIN LINE REBORN
When Chiltern Railways took over the line from Birmingham Snow Hill to London Marylebone in 1996, it had been in steady decline since the 1960s. Many sections had been singled by BR and after decades of underinvestment in stations and trains, it was seen as a backwater of the national network. Chiltern Railways embarked on a vision to provide a main line rival to Virgin Trains (which operated inter-city traffic on the West Coast Main Line) between London and Birmingham.

Handed a new 20-year franchise agreement in 2002, the operator has invested more than £600m in new tracks, new trains, refurbished stations and three new parkway stations at Warwick, Aylesbury and Oxford. Two new platforms have been added at both Birmingham Moor Street and London Marylebone, while new track and trains have allowed Chiltern Railways to deliver a saving of 25 minutes on the journey time from London to Birmingham.

The number of services operated by Chiltern Railways has increased from 240 to 432 each weekday, 24.5 million annual journeys were made with the operator in 2018 compared with a low of just 7.7 million in 1996.

HIGH-SPEED JOURNEYS TO KENT
How does the idea of taking 40 minutes off your morning and evening commute sound? For someone working Monday to Friday, that’s six hours and 40 minutes given back to you each week. That’s exactly what happened for passengers travelling from Dover, Canterbury and Ashford to London St Pancras International following the introduction of high-speed domestic services on High Speed 1 in 2009. Designed to travel at 140mph on HS1, Southeastern began its high-speed services with a new fleet of Hitachi ‘Javelin’ trains that are also able to run on the existing network to serve towns in Kent.

The operator found significant demand with passenger numbers rising 12% year on year, and it regularly scored more than 90% in customer satisfaction surveys. As well as transforming the passenger experience for commuters, the new services have helped transform Kent too - an estimated £3.8bn of economic and social benefits have been brought to the county, and over £300m brought in by visitors to Kent’s tourist economy.

Southeastern 395007 crosses the Medway Viaduct on September 8 2016. The ‘395s’ were built by Hitachi between 2007-2009 to operate the UK’s only domestic high-speed service, the HS1.
A great example of the increased focus on regional connectivity since the mid-1990s is the service between Cambridge and Norwich operated by Greater Anglia. Until 2002, rail travellers had no direct services between these two cities, with a change at Ely required and a limited number of services.

To address this long running anomaly, £18m was invested in 2002 in four two-car trains to provide a new hourly direct service for commuters, business travellers, students, tourists and passengers of other kinds.

The service was an immediate success, with 340,000 journeys made in the first year so that, by 2010, three-car trains were added to serve the growing demand.

Annual journeys on the route have now topped one million, with 40% of passengers having switched from their cars to the train to avoid congestion on the A11, cutting carbon emissions.

Travellers between Norwich and Cambridge haven’t been the only ones to benefit, however, with more frequent services also now serving Sheringham on the North Norfolk coast and an hourly service introduced between Cambridge and Ipswich in 2005.

The development of the Stansted Express dedicated airport service has also triggered remarkable growth. Rail now accounts for more than 30% of all passenger journeys to the UK’s fourth busiest airport.

Further success is set to come, with GA investing £1.4bn in a new fleet of 169 services.

Great Anglia 379299 operates Stansted Airport with a service bound for Liverpool Street on March 21 2015. This 12-car Class 745s are currently being built by Stadler to replace the current fleet of Class 379s on these services. PAUL SHANNON.

When Virgin Trains took over inter-city traffic on the West Coast Main Line in 1997 there were only 17 trains from Manchester to London each day. In 2008 that was almost three times higher, with 46 trains per day.

This step change in frequency and capacity helped passenger numbers to double at Manchester Piccadilly during the same period to 28 million per year. It also supported the broader growth of the city, which now has 1.4 million workers commuting some 652m to the national economy.

Manchester has become an international hub in high tech sectors. Major employers, including BBC and ITV, have moved large parts of their operations into high-tech sciences. Major employers, including BBC and ITV, have moved large parts of their operations into high-tech sciences.

The visitor economy is now worth over £7.5bn, tourism plays a vital part in Scotland’s economy. The best way to see the country’s natural beauty is by rail, for which demand for short trips and longer journeys to more remote areas remains high.

When train operator Abellio began running ScotRail services in 2015, it built on the Great Scotlines of Scotland brand by expanding it to cover six lines. From the sweeping views of the West Highland Line to the newly redeveloped Borders railway, the views from the train are unbeatable. ScotRail has tried to improve the passenger experience, including a £40m refurbishment of its trains to increase reliability and provide more comfort and better facilities.

Passengers can now enjoy locally sourced food and beverages from trolley services and an onboard media service with entertainment and information on local visitor attractions.

Carriages have been equipped with new seats that are better aligned with windows to maximise the view while significant improvements have been made to provide access for passengers with reduced mobility.

Meanwhile, many ticket offers are now available, including reduced entry to visitor attractions and convenient passes to cover rail, bus and ferry trips around Scotland.

In 2013, passengers took almost one million scenic journeys. That figure has now grown to 3.5 million - a boost for the railways and the revenue for hotels, restaurants and shops in local towns and villages.

Boosting communities across a region

Passengers using Rugby station have grown from 750,000 to 2.5 million per year, since 1997. The service was an immediate success, spending more than £11bn in total. Tourism plays a vital part in Scotland’s economy. The best way to see the country’s natural beauty is by rail, for which demand for short trips and longer journeys to more remote areas remains high.

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Trebling trains from Manchester to London

Virgin Trains 390104 passes Cathiron near Rugby on February 7 2018 with the 1035 Manchester Piccadilly to London Euston. There are now 46 inter-city services per day.

With journey times to London falling by 17% to just 48 minutes, it is now the only major town on the WCML where a trip to either central London or central Birmingham takes less than an hour.

Passengers using Rugby station have grown from 750,000 to 2.5 million per year, since 1997. The number of season ticket holders is now five times higher, having soared from 308,000 to 1,560,800 today.

Rugby’s regional rail connections and its proximity to the M1 and M6 motorways has helped make it one of the best connected places in the UK which is why, even when the British Chambers of Commerce named Warwickshire as the fastest growing area of Britain in the UK in 2015, Rugby’s local economic growth was 40% higher still.

The town’s population is expected to rise by a further 20% in the next 20 years.

Great scenic railways of Scotland

With over 165 million visitors in 2017, spending more than £11bn in total, tourism plays a vital part in Scotland’s economy. One of the best ways to see the country’s natural beauty is by rail, for which demand for short trips and longer journeys to more remote areas remains high.

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The UK now has the safest railway out of Europe’s ten largest networks.

While it is accepted that the current fares system is now outdated and ripe for reform, innovation and new products introduced over the last 25 years enabled more than 73 million passengers to benefit from discounted advance fares in 2018. Meanwhile, the Two Together railcard – which was the first ever railcard to be introduced in over 30 years – has saved passengers more than £19m since it was first issued in 2013.

Last but not least, in the last 25 years safety has been transformed. Following a spate of accidents at the start of the century, the UK now has the safest railway out of Europe’s ten largest networks, and no passenger fatalities have occurred due to an accident since 2005.

The landmark of zero fatalities among workers on the railway in a calendar year was also reached for the first time ever, in 2015. It is worth saying that customer satisfaction has also grown over the last two decades. Overall passenger satisfaction has risen from 76% to 85% since surveys began in 1999, before dropping to 76% in 2018.

While this indicates that further improvement and structural change is now needed, it also goes to show how the private sector has been able to help drive positive change and a part of the success of Britain’s railways. These case studies offer just a few highlights from along the way.

For more information on how private and public sector investment and innovation has brought rail benefits to the people and communities that rely on rail, visit: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/changes-co.uk
M any people mistakenly believe I am an advocate of nationalisation. My objection to the abolition of the British Rail in the mid-90s was the break-up and fragmentation of a highly successful, unified railway. Had it been merely a change of ownership by way of sale, I would have been ready to invest in a ‘BR plc’. I had travelled extensively and so became non-standard across what is currently nobody knows which trains customers have used. To reduce this loss, operators prefer people to purchase advance tickets, as they keep all the money.

It’s a false economy, of course; the more advance tickets operators sell the less income becomes available for distribution from walk-on fares. Even with the current industry structure, modern technology could address it: all tickets (paper, smartcard or mobile) could be scanned at a barrier and on the train. That way, even with walk-on tickets, the system would know the trains being used and could allocate revenue accurately.

Another negative side of competition is the ludicrous situation whereby, according to competition law, it is illegal for operators to cooperate on fares. It’s particularly laughable, seeing as operators are obliged to price fares well beyond the boundaries of their terrain, yet have to second-guess the sort of fare charged by adjacent operators.

If this leads to split ticketing being used to save money. The very bold approach advocated in the RDG’s proposals is that operators should have their own domain and an external system would be used to calculate fares for longer distance journeys. This would reduce fares and end split ticketing for good. Of course, the industry needs to move to single-leg ticketing to simplify journey planning for all users. It is also inevitable that more and more people are switching to using smartphones to buy and store their tickets. In this respect, the industry must move faster to get technology into stations to read such tickets at gates.

To get the best out of any reform, however, the restoration of a command structure of professional railway people is the thing most needed for National Rail as a whole. That way, if we did retain some sort of franchising, the operators would merely be responsible for implementing SRA policy as well as looking after their own customers (including train specification, as I mentioned earlier).

A key thinking for all operators for the RSRA is Easier fares for all can be downloaded from the RDG’s publications site at www.rdlegroup.com/default.asp/publications.html.

FURTHER READING

RAIL 873 - RDG system overhaul to simplify fares and ticketing

RAIL 754 - The way ahead for fares: an excellent industry report.

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