

2010 Party political manifesto summary

This note summarises the rail content of the three main party manifestos, and provides a short commentary at the end.

Labour

“Britain needs to invest in a modern, high-capacity and low carbon transport infrastructure.”

1. North/South High Speed Line built in stages.
 - a. London to Birmingham, Manchester, the East Midlands, Sheffield and Leeds.
 - b. Then to the North and Scotland.
 - c. Through trains to the classic network from day one.
 - d. Will consult on legislation to take through High Speed plans during the next Parliament.
2. Major investment programme in existing rail services.
 - a. Improving commuter services into and through London
 - b. Electrification, including the Great Western Main Line from London to South Wales.
3. Will complete Crossrail.
4. Encourage more people to use rail with an enforceable right to the cheapest fare.
5. Will treble the number of secure cycle storage spaces at stations.
6. Will welcome franchise bids from not-for-profit, mutual or co-operative enterprises.
 - a. Will look to remove unfair barriers that prevent such bids benefitting passengers and taxpayers.
7. Support for tram schemes including upgrading systems in Manchester, Nottingham, Birmingham, Tyne & Wear, and a trolley bus system for Leeds.

8. More smart ticketing systems in cities
9. Greater scrutiny and regulatory powers for bus services.
10. No VAT on public transport fares.
11. No road pricing in the next Parliament.

The supporting policy document gives more details on HS2 and reiterates the principle investment commitments in CP4 such as Birmingham New Street and Reading.

Conservatives

“Improving our transport system is vital for our quality of life, our environment and our economic competitiveness.”

1. Will begin work immediately on a high speed line.
 - a. This will link London and Heathrow to Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds.
 - b. Construction will begin in 2015.
 - c. Stage Two will deliver two new lines bringing the North East, Scotland and Wales into the high speed network.
2. Longer, more flexible franchises to incentivise private investment in longer trains and better stations.
3. Support Crossrail
4. Support electrification of the Great Western Main Line.
5. Turn the Rail Regulator into a powerful passenger champion.
6. Reform Network Rail to make it more accountable to its customers.
7. Moratorium on building on disused rail lines.
8. Introduce a lorry road user charge

Liberal Democrats

“Public transport is an important part of a fair society and the best way to cut carbon emissions from transport without trying to limit peoples’ opportunities to travel.”

1. Set up a UK infrastructure bank to invest in public transport like high speed rail.
2. RPI-1 formula for regulated rail fares.
3. Network Rail to refund a third of the ticket price if passengers have to take a rail replacement bus.
4. Switch traffic from road to rail by investing in local rail improvements, such as reopening closed rail lines and adding extra tracks. (Funded from cut backs in the roads budget).
5. Overhaul Network Rail to put the interests of passengers first and to bring it under the Freedom of Information Act.
6. Prepare for revenue neutral road pricing scheme in second Parliamentary term.

Short commentary

These manifestos reflect a more positive attitude to rail than for many years, and also a surprising agree of agreement between the parties, at least on the principals, if not on the detail. In particular, note the common threads of:

- High Speed Rail plans, with Labour and Conservatives committing to planning extensions
- Fares regulation
- Electrification
- Continued investment in the classic network
- No road pricing

Labour's plans, with their experience in Government, include more detail, while the Liberal Democrats show relatively little detail, considering the work put in on previous party policy papers. There remain some questions over funding the proposals, although the Liberal Democrats do indicate how some of their rail investment proposals are to be funded, through taxation on flights and heavy goods vehicles. Nevertheless, all three manifestos set out an encouraging and expansionist programme for rail.

Chris Austin,

16 April 2010