

# Rail Recovery

## - how to realise

# the potential

- 👉 Format was Q&A, not presentations!
- 👉 Chaired by Christian Wolmar, Railfuture President

👉 Webinar: 11:30 to 13:00, Wednesday 12 January 2022

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**RAILFUTURE "RAIL RECOVERY - HOW TO REALISE THE POTENTIAL" WEBINAR - WEDNESDAY 12 JANUARY 2022**

*All documents (including slides) and recordings for this webinar can be found on [www.railfuture.org.uk/conferences/](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/conferences/)*

## Questions and comments raised by the approx. 266 attendees of the webinar

**Note: this section currently has just the questions. However, it is intended to revise it to include some suggested answers.**

- 1 Should the railways be seen as a metro or an airline? Are there bits that are only one or both?
- 2 What are rail companies going to do to attract the family market back? And can offers be across the network instead of buried in individual TOC websites?
- 3 Why are we reinventing the wheel? GBRTT seems to be doing some of what was already done in the 1940s-80s by British Railways. Surely we should just go straight to the BR solution, which worked well?
- 4 What is a "simpler railway" that Suzanne referred to? I hope that is not code for a smaller railway?

- 5 Operators no longer keep revenue. What incentives can GBR give operators to maximise revenue?
- 6 To attract off-peak leisure travel shouldn't the Network Rail Card and the Annual Gold card both be available across the whole of GB, not just the former London and South East area (Gold Card since extended to parts of the Midlands)?
- 7 Following on... the German Bahncard 100 and Swiss Generalabo go the whole hog: for a one-off annual payment you lock in public transport use for a year and make the sustainable choice the default choice. Can the Treasury/DfT be persuaded to trial something like this?
- 8 What is the longer-term possibility of restoring some of our lost branch lines? In my region (Wharfedale), connectivity is the main problem to encouraging people to use rail.
- 9 Rail is the most sustainable form of transport. What should the government do to encourage modal shift of passengers and freight to rail?
- 10 How will rail innovation be encouraged and incentivised?
- 11 Can the industry inform passengers that in a simplification of ticketing some fares will increase as well as others decrease and there will probably more losers than winners.
- 12 How much are you restricted from creating the railway system you want by government policy?
- 13 Post-COVID, travel patterns will have probably changed forever. Does this create an opportunity to reduce rail costs by smoothing travel demand across the day and week, and what should the industry do to encourage this?
- 14 Are you confident that the railway - through GBRTT but not only there - will actually be allowed the freedom to make its own decisions, to come up with innovative ideas and even take risks (e.g. commercially) in order to grow and improve the railway? Or is the concern well-founded that government (=Treasury) will block that freedom?
- 15 Is it time to reduce / remove peak-hour ticket restrictions and / or extend Railcard validity to be earlier in the morning, as the peak hour loadings (at least in parts of the country with long trains) no longer justify the restrictions?
- 16 Fares are up and number/frequency of services are down. Is this really the solution for rail recovery?
- 17 Why not return to a fully publicly-owned British Railway?
- 18 What is meant by 'choice' in the GBR context - surely there is a need to reduce service duplication, or is the choice between train or not train?
- 19 Does GBR support the implementation of the NTDS (Network Traction Decarbonisation study)?
- 20 There has been a push to increase income for many years with RPI+ fare rises, but this is a disincentive to people travelling by rail. For decades rail in the rest of Europe is commonly subsidised at a greater level and regular fares much cheaper to encourage people to use rail rather than the car. I am worried about the very low level of passengers last week and Omicron concerns have set back the recovery by at least six months. How do we justify greater targeted government subsidy to accelerate the return to and growth of rail usage?
- 21 Do all rail companies agree that a co-ordinated nationwide standard interval timetable based on the Swiss System is the only way forward?
- 22 With regards the London to South Wales electrification finishing at Cardiff owing to the considerable expense of redesigning the bridges between Cardiff and Swansea, would it not be more appropriate for the continuation to Swansea be via third rail? Obviously the fleet would need to be modified in order to include this (in addition to the overhead facility), but would this not be a cheaper option as opposed to overhead all the way?
- 23 What measures are being taken to ensure that the creation of GBR does not rollback the strong safety record established under Network Rail?
- 24 Do you agree that the Two Together Railcard would work better as a 'You plus 1' card (i.e. registered person plus anyone) to increase flexibility

- 25 I was interested in a panellist's concern that passengers must have choice. If you live in Scotland, like I do, there is no choice for the bulk of services, so trying to get a cheaper fare on the vast majority of routes just doesn't exist. Will GBR have any influence on that?
- 26 Is it a GBR objective to fully staff all (bar the very least used) stations from first to last service. This makes passengers feel safer and helps with accessibility issues. Such staff could be called Station Hosts perhaps?
- 27 Probably the biggest single block to a rail recovery is the price of tickets.  
Is it time for a national railcard giving discounted rail travel for "loyalty card" holders.
- 28 What engagement methods will GBR use to ensure it is "Customer Led"
- 29 Interesting promotion by a panellist of the flexible seasons, given they have been widely criticised. Are there any figures on uptake?
- 30 What role do you see stations (local as well as our large city stations) as playing in the recovery of the railways?
- 31 Instead of encouraging competition between TOCs and open access with all the inflexibility that involves, shouldn't we concentrate on external competition (i.e. road competition) instead?
- 32 Bearing in mind the climate emergency, from which mode will the rail industry be trying to attract passengers (not 'customers', please): car, plane or bus?
- 33 Is there a plan to make ITSO smartcards easier to use (e.g. clarifying that normal singles and returns can be loaded on ITSO), and promote it over paper tickets?
- 34 You state that percentage wise leisure traffic is recovering well - so when are you going to address the reduced Sunday service provision?
- 35 Why is there a business model with emphasis on profit. Why not a public service model providing free transport for all?
- 36 For rail travellers, service reliability is a major concern and has been for many years. Making sure services operate, preferably on time, would make it more attractive to use rail. What are you going to do about ensuring there are enough drivers to operate the services that are timetabled? Can operators share drivers and particularly driver training?
- 37 Seating comfort is important The latest rolling stock (class 700 and 800 series, such as Azuma) seating is worse and not comfortable compared with the mark 3. mark 4 and class 375/377 stock.
- 38 To continue on..., not only is the seating in my car comfortable, the white van that delivers my parcels has leather seating, radio and bluetooth and more. However, on trains we have (DfT-specified) "ironing boards".
- 39 Is future growth more likely to come from improving inter-urban and inter-regional journey opportunities, rather than London-centric inter-city, commuter and rural services?
- 40 How are GBRTT working with Scotland's Railway to develop a constructive relationship with the soon-to-be-nationalised ScotRail?
- 41 Why are TOCs getting rid of paper timetable booklets and staffed ticket offices if they want MORE passengers? (Please don't tell me that everything is "on-line" or available through an App!)
- 42 Currently people travelling into London are better off with paper tickets (e.g. in the event of disruption) - a disincentive for going smart. Also there are suggestions that TfL want to do away with Travelcards. How can TfL be persuaded to work more co-operatively with the main rail industry?

- 43 I find the National Rail Enquiries website very hard to use, and containing some silly errors. Clearly we no longer need one website per train operator, but I would hate to see NRE becoming the only one left. How do we justify spending more money on developing a better national website, possibly based on the best train operator's one (or leveraging the best bits from a few websites)?
- 44 Should Great British Railways actually be Great British Transport (a joined-up Authority, similar to the old SRA, to oversee the railways and the buses) with the goal of a fully integrated transport system?
- 45 When can we expect a GB-wide touch-in-touch-out ticketing system as has been standard in London for nearly two decades?
- 46 Is Southeastern facing more competition from coach operators?
- 47 Are Southeastern planning to provide and run train services directly in to Gatwick Airport noting the airport's plans to increase their capacity for more flights?
- 48 Southeastern has cut 7% of its services. Are these from commuter or mid-day services?
- 49 Last time I travelled from Darlington to Newcastle, there was a choice of an anytime day return or three different company-specific off-peak returns. Will GBR get rid of this fragmentation?
- 50 It's interesting that our speakers have spoken about the bounce back of leisure travel. Yet most of that is (surely) at the weekends and bank holidays when rail closures happen. Many a time my plans are wrecked when I hear a route is closed or curtailed. We need to think about retiming those works so that leisure travellers will be able to use the railways unhindered. What's stopping this?
- 51 I am 79 years of age and my wife is 67. We have not seen any information about the way it will work or how we can use it. My wife does not use the internet. How will we find out?
- 52 What role will community rail have in rail recovery? What can the industry as a whole learn from the huge success of many community rail partnerships?
- 53 What do the panellists feel about the impact of persistent working from home practices?  
The obvious case of, say, 20 people hopping on the train (or car) to do a one- or two-hour meeting is now seen as ridiculous as it already had become. This new WFH environment (at least for part of the working week) means that demand will be suppressed permanently. How does the industry react and survive?
- 54 Echoing the point made about lack of incentive to collect fares and, in so doing, preventing fare evasion, why is on-train revenue inspection still woeful?
- 55 I haven't made a long-distance journey since before the pandemic but I gather that the quality of service, for example regarding catering, has deteriorated. Since I have a choice about using a train or not, how will this poor service encourage me to take the train?
- 56 Now is the time to consider re-writing the timetable, yet we are postponing significant opportunities to improve connectivity as well as reliability by taking advantage of the released paths. When will GBRTT be able to influence strategic decisions like this?
- 57 Luxembourg was first country to offer free public transport for all. In what is said to be a first in the world, the move aims to support growing challenges with congestion in the country and see a decrease in car ownership. Is there a chance that the UK will prioritise the planet, rather than the CEOs?

- 58 Can passengers be told important information earlier to give more leisurely boarding (i.e. a more pleasant experience)? For example, coach side electronic displays on originating trains are generally not lit until last minute or so before departure (Newcastle).
- 59 How will the upcoming steep rises in energy costs (electricity) affect the railway?
- 60 Running an organisation for the benefit of the customer/user and effective financial and budgetary control are not mutually exclusive. How can the railway be made to do both?
- 61 Is there an issue with maintenance etc in that current on-track health & safety requirements increase costs and make line possessions more likely and cost-effective?
- 62 Southern trains leave commuters on the Uckfield Line unable to get directly to London, with long wait times at changes. I have long since been driving to pick my husband up in Lingfield to save him another hour's journey time. Can this be resolved, please?
- 63 The car wins out always in terms of generalised cost and convenience whenever two or more people are travelling together. What more can be done, than is currently done to incentivise two or more people travelling together, to use rail?
- 64 Can the railway get other sources of funding? One way to get free transport in London is to get business to pay for it. There could be creative ways of doing it; for example, if the Mayor lets the Bakerloo line become the Amazon line, Jeff Bezos will pay all of its bills and it could be free for us - he gets advertising and brand, we get costless trips to North Wembley! It's a win win!
- 65 Opening up closed branch lines is excellent, but main lines also need improvement e.g. SW Railway's Dorchester to Moreton reinstatement of double track, which was promised for Olympics. What has happened to this scheme?
- 66 The rural transport view seems to favour bringing work out to the workers rather than all go into urban centres using very thin public transport. Will this not impact on cities?
- 67 Re: Ian Brown's comments about the importance of London. Should we bow down and worship London, or seek to diversify activity across the country ?
- 68 The first and last mile journey to stations is important. Why isn't there more joined up working across buses and trains, led by local authorities?
- 69 How can we have a simple fare structure when we have so much wasteful competition that confuses many passengers and ends up with them facing penalty fares because they got on a competitor's train?
- 70 Stewart's slide asked the question "What do we do about it?" in reference to the railway having "gone wrong". Who are the "we" (rail industry, government?) and how do "we" achieve the desired changes?
- 71 RE: Integration, the Greater Manchester Mayor holds the transport portfolio. Should this apply elsewhere?
- 72 Are TOC speakers aware that the Plusbus ticketing system does not work for the start of journey by bus? It only works if you use a bus after you arrive at train destination. Why can't it work both ways?
- 73 A bicycle can go on a train, as can wheelchairs and mobility vehicles but not a trike (not even off-peak) supposedly because it takes up too much space. Can the rules be relaxed?
- 74 Steve White talked about 'maxing out' capacity and only using spare for bikes etc. However, at the moment trains are still being built with little or no bike/luggage space - even for long distance journeys, on the assumption that this takes away seating capacity. Should trains be designed for slightly lower seating levels (and perhaps some 3+2 seating converted to 2+2 to allow ease of movement through the train)?

- 75 Please can we be careful in the use of the term 'subsidy'? Are not payments to rail partly a rectification by government of transport market distortions whereby road users do not pay the full costs of their emissions (NOx, CO2 including embedded carbon, PMs, noise, light pollution)? How about calling them 'environmental rectification payments'?
- 76 In the last 20 years the total cost of owning and using a car has fallen 30% (relative to earnings). If rail is expected to operate 'economically' in this policy environment, we need to get across the message that rail needs at least the same level of treasury support as motoring has been given...not managed decline. How do we push this message?
- 77 Suzanne says that GBRTT will create a single website a app, which will be good for those who have (and can use) such facilities. But how will you attract older people back to the railway?
- 78 Why do the panel think the Government is so bad understanding the railway and do they really think GBR will be delivered?
- 79 To attract families why not allow grandparents with senior railcards to be accompanied by their grandchildren. At present you have to have both a senior railcard and a family railcard.
- 80 Do we think that lines / routes currently exist where it would make economic/environmental sense to cease/reduce passenger services in favour of freight? And if so, should it be done?
- 81 Isn't the cost of rail travel always at the top of the list of rail users' gripes and those who rarely use rail? Is it a perception problem?
- 82 Following on...many long-distance season tickets are ridiculously cheap e.g. Newark to King's Cross and holders of those tickets travel at about a third of the peak fare.
- 83 To better integrate, how about ensuring that the luggage space between seat-backs accommodates Bromptons, as they used to before carriage-designers shrunk them? That will free up bespoke (hah!) cycle spaces so more pedallers can be conveyed. Leaving bikes at stations and picking up another at the destination won't do for many; firstly, many are nervous about leaving an expensive machine at a station - locks don't prevent casual vandalism - and secondly, if you have luggage, there's no guarantee that your panniers will fit the bike at the other end.
- 84 Budget airlines price structure appears to result in very few empty seats (although they have the luxury of not having to provide an all-day service). Railway price structure very often results in the converse - very few occupied seats. Pricing appears not to understand attractability. Higher fares for a journey with a change than a through train. Will the fares team look at this?  
Response: Planes have to be 80-100% loaded. Trains are viable at lower loadings, and can be > 100% when needed
- 85 What can be done to make leisure travel more attractive? A fundamental problem with nearly all new British carriages is the lack of proper seat / table / window alignment. This was achieved perfectly in BR Mk 1s. It verges on being an 'Equalities' issue. Many train companies locate their 'Priority' seats where there is absolutely no window view at all, e.g. in First Class carriages in a Pendolino. How is that 'first class' or promote leisure rail travel?  
 Does our bad design come from lack of experience (of quality rail travel), greed, or both? 'Scenic 158s' to Tweedbank, for example, give a whole mid-carriage window bay to a luggage rack? Could luggage not be put at the windowless ends, instead of the 'priority passengers'? Greed? Is it worth throwing out the aesthetics in order to squeeze in a couple of extra seats? I suspect not, if the result is that the occasional traveller thinks that railway travel is cramped, Spartan, uncomfortable and noisy, and he can't even see out.

- 86 40% of stations are inaccessible and not step free to platforms at the current rate of 'Access for All' funding will be until 2070. Shapps-Williams only mentioned station accessibility surveys and no mention of rolling programmes for step-free access or level boarding so disabled people are excluded from travel. An inclusive railway benefits everyone. Can accessibility roll-out be speeded up?
- 87 Currently a local station is having a platform added and the new platform will have a reduced stepping distance. Whereas the existing platform despite having work done to it is not looking to tackle a high-stepping distance that makes the station hard for people to use.
- The accessibility meetings with local people seem to have in reality little power to do anything meaningful and the need was for Network Rail to engage years earlier. How will existing players and GBR work to improve this?
- 88 We need to remember that accessibility is not just the ability to walk. Some of us have dexterity problems and find using digital ticketing on a mobile very difficult. So much so that if I had no alternative to a mobile phone ticket I would just not travel by train. Does the rail industry acknowledge these kinds of 'forgotten' disabilities?
- 89 If you have a Freedom Pass in London it's still very difficult to buy a ticket starting from Boundary Zone 6 to (say) the coast. Will this be resolved?
- 90 What is the right balance between being flexible to changing traveller needs and simplicity / consistency? The Swiss have been working on / developing their timetable concept in stages since the 1980s... Can you be "too flexible / responsive" in designing our service patterns?
- 91 How does having fares/ticketing that are flexible and responsive to local market conditions square with overall fares simplification across Britain?
- 92 Is there a danger that bustitution will become the norm on some lines - e.g. the Marston Vale line (because of lack of drivers)?
- 93 The Gatwick Express is an important brand and should be kept. However, the existing operation is not compatible with the changes in both the rail and airline industry. It is too expensive, it is no quicker than other services and it runs round most of the day half empty or worse. It is in need of an urgent review. To become viable, can it include stops at Clapham Junction, which is the busiest interchange station in Britain?
- 94 The Passenger Benefit Fund (PDF) schemes in the GTR area were a great example of community engagement and lots of small improvements at stations that were of high value to passengers and local community groups and very well received. Does the rail industry recognise this? Will the PBF continue, or be rolled out elsewhere?
- 95 Maintenance is dependent on the timetable. Saturday night is busy due to getting a bigger window of time. Monday nights are short hence not a lot gets done. Under GBR will operators become more flexible - increase more time during the week (particularly early part of the week) to take the pressure away on the weekend (including Thursday, which is historically a social evening for employees).
- 96 I have heard of 'Try A Train' days, and initiatives like this - could these occur on a national basis?

## Comments raised (either in response to a question or answer, or in the chat) without asking a specific question

Views expressed about government / Treasury / DfT / railway economics

- \* Agree that people shouldn't be doing it just for the money, but the system does need to be financially sustainable.

- \* Thatcher didn't consider rail privatisation - too difficult or not beneficial. Rumour had it that her guru Nicholas Ridley came to an agreement with the 1st R. Reid that if he stayed out of politics then Ridley would stay out of railways. RR's sectorisation model was the way forward unfortunately her boy went for it to salvage his political future.
- \* One might say it suits Treasury to cling to examples like GW electrification, despite their increasing irrelevance in light of industry sorting its act out on delivery...
- \* Treasury is perhaps less of a problem in the railway than DfT micro-managing
- \* The Government fails to understand what it takes to deliver the day-to-day maintenance. It's all well and good to have projects which make big impacts on the Infrastructure but, the day-to-day work never goes away. Previous ownership and bad decisions has shaped the set up now and contributed to the decision to change it again to GBR. Going round in circles!

#### Views expressed about the rail network and services

- \* To respond to comments on community rail - Within community rail, we're very much committed to working with our rail industry partners, and local community partners, to promote sustainable travel by rail to new audiences, overcome barriers, enhance inclusion, and create a sense of pride and positivity around rail - as well as helping the railway to be responsive to local needs and opportunities. It's all about collaboration, and there's no push for a break-away or separate network that I'm aware of! (CEO Community Rail Network)
- \* It might be that trains are quieter on Sundays because (as Stewart Palmer says) there's less "product" (trains) for them to use!

#### Views expressed about enhancements to (or expansion of) the rail network

- \* Shall people from Haverhill cycle to Cambridge station? Or take the bus which takes in peak times over 1.5 hours?
- \* We need Thameslink 2, not Crossrail 2

#### Views expressed about bus travel and rail-bus integration

- \* Integrate' the Railways with the Buses - this makes sense when you consider how you wish to get people out of the private car, and on to Public Transport. Railways are very quick, smooth and efficient and they should be allowed to flourish within the pandemic recovery.
- \* To get real integration we need to remove the power of the competition's authority, which knows even less about public transport than the DfT and the Treasury
- \* Ian Brown is quite right about TOCs gaining financially from bus substitution - especially if the TOC uses its own buses - double bubble!
- \* I agree with Ian Brown that bus park and ride facilities are good. But I also feel that we have no choice but to jump into the car in many instances, e.g. Ilkley to Harrogate (no line through Otley any more). Bus is much slower than car, so is train via Leeds. Ilkley into the Dales and beyond, and Ilkley to the west coast.
- \* Buses are no substitute for an integrated and connected rail network. They just add to the congestion on the roads.
- \* Of course buses can use overhead wires - in towns, at least. I used to go to school by trolleybus. They all got removed in the 1960s.



- \* Interesting description of trains being replaced by 'smelly old buses'. Up in the North, RRB's tend to have modern lower-emission engines than the trains they are replacing !

#### General feedback about the webinar and comments by panellists

- \* David Jones of Cross Country, said "Thank you Christian and panelists for an excellent webinar. I will take back to Tom Joyner, our MD, the specific comments about CrossCountry services between Southampton and Birmingham/Manchester/North East."
- \* Warmly welcome Steve White's comments about importance of clear purpose (objectives) of the railway, allied to setting rail managers free to manage in pursuit of those purposes: well said and (dare I say!) really heartening from a TOC MD!
- \* Spot on, Steve White. A brilliant analysis of today's rail business.
- \* Interesting from Suzanne about things that will get people on trains, but she did not mention seat comfort; of course, she is from LNER!
- \* Stewart Palmer has summarised today's rail problems superbly. Bullet Point jargon will not get us back to a proper railway.
- \* Interesting that a lot of Stewart's points about effective management echo those made by Bob Reid 1 and supposedly addressed by BR Sectorisation, but since lost.
- \* Well said Stewart! Yes, we need incentives to improve efficiency -- and need a proper view of what is efficient (e.g. Bournemouth blockade)
- \* Not sure about the Bournemouth blockade tha Stewart mentioned, but believe many passengers prefer a week's well-planned / well publicised closure period over months of engineering disturbances.
- \* Just an observation of Stewart's presentation and the closure of the Southampton-Bournemouth line for maintenance work for one week. Such is the importance of this route for students at Brockenhurst College that the college had to be shut for that week.
- \* This was a very well managed, thought-out conference!
- \* It would be very useful to have a copt of the slides. [PLEASE SEE WEBSITE]

**Thank you to everyone who asked a question or made a comment during the 90-minute webinar.**

**Railfuture will use these questions to inform its campaigning and to raise with train operators and the rail industry generally.**

### **Railfuture – Campaigning for better services over a bigger rail network - run by volunteers to benefit rail users**

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