

# Get back on the **RIGHT TRACK**

**(a special message to Conservative MPs)**

*This is your last chance to stop the Government making the mistake of pressing ahead with a deeply unpopular policy - the privatisation of Railtrack.*

*Despite the vast majority of the British public being against the idea, the Government is planning to sell off Railtrack.*

*Railway travellers, professionals, workers and outside experts alike are dismayed at the inherent dangers of this policy:*

■ **LOSS** of government control and possible break-up and fragmentation of the rail network just when it is important for the environment that more passengers and freight are switched from road (where users do not pay for the enormous social and environmental damage they inflict) to rail. Track charges should be kept low to encourage this but a privatised Railtrack will want charges as high as possible.

■ **SAFETY** fears are growing by the day as more incidents and accidents occur. Every time a Wisconsen freight train comes off the track, the Conservative Party will lose more votes. The Government will take the blame should a real disaster occur. Railtrack which is responsible for safety policy will be subject to commercial pressures if it is privatised – a massive responsibility. So far it has shown that it cannot even produce its timetable properly.

■ **ASSET STRIPPING** by property sharks could prevent the much-needed transfer of traffic from road to rail, particularly if town centre freight depots are lost to unsuitable development. The Treasury is handing over millions of pounds worth of public assets to the private sector and has indulged in creative accounting to try to get the Channel Tunnel fast link built within the Private Finance Initiative. These assets have not been properly costed.

■ **INVESTMENT STARVATION** has been the railways' problem for years and the signs are that a privatised Railtrack will be investing **LESS**. Railtrack's first published ten-year plan, its "network management statement", outlines a programme of work which is a poor second even to what BR was planning. It is estimated that Railtrack plans to spend £1.03 billion a year compared to BR's £1.11 billion a year in recent years. And of course a privatised Railtrack will have no obligation to stick to even that unsatisfactory level of investment.

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Briefing from the Railway Development Society, the independent, all-party group representing rail users. Telephone 01584 890807



# A more expensive railway

■ **DOUBLE OUR MONEY!** *The Government has agreed to an effective £1 billion write-off of debts to encourage the Railtrack flotation. Already the railways are more expensive to run than they were when British Rail was in charge. Some experts say the cost to the public purse will DOUBLE! When InterCity was run by BR it made a £100 million profit. Now every InterCity franchise requires public money in the shape of a "public sector requirement" grant. The first InterCity franchise, Great Western, is getting £53 million from the Government. We cannot afford this approach.*

■ **INFLEXIBLE.** *Even in the short time it has been established, Railtrack has won a "can't do" reputation compared to the train operating companies which have generally shown a "can do" approach.*

■ **PRICING TRAFFIC OFF THE RAILS** *These days even trains have to go by road because it is too expensive for them to travel by rail because of Railtrack charges. Conservative MPs must think carefully before going further with this flawed privatisation policy.*

Privatising Railtrack will not win the party ONE vote. By contrast, halting this mistaken policy will be welcomed by more than 80% of the electorate.

Few are willing to accept dogmatic statements from Conservative Party spokesmen that privatisation per se will bring benefits to passengers and freight users. The benefits must be shown.

Way back in 1993, Masashi Matsuda, president of JR East, Japanese Railways, said:

**"I have been to England. I have looked at the way they are trying to privatise British Rail. And I know it will fail."**

93% of rail managers were also opposed to privatisation in 1993.

The Railways Act was nearly defeated in the House of Lords in 1993. It would have been better for the Tory Party if it had been. There is still time to prevent the worst damage being done - by keeping Railtrack in the public sector.

So far, Stagecoach which has won the franchise for South West Trains, has said it will be buying no new trains for the duration of its seven-year franchise. It has also threatened to make rail workers redundant when travellers have called for MORE rail staff to be on duty. Taxpayers are already paying £500,000 a day to fund redundancies on the railways.

## **So what is the benefit for rail travellers?**

Representatives of the Railway Development Society have consistently asked Government ministers, and officials from Railtrack, the Rail Regulator and the Franchise Director how new rail projects will be implemented. No-one has given us a convincing answer. Some have told us: That's not my concern. You must ask someone else.

You, as a Tory MP, must not avoid your responsibility now. We need a cohesive and efficient railway which is the basis for a national transport network. The public demands improving and expanding rail services. **Railtrack should not be sold off.**



