

National report

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Country	UK
Organisation	Railfuture
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Positive points for public transport in your country:

On 20th September 2018, the UK Secretary of State for Transport, the Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP announced 'A sweeping review to Transform Britain's Railways'. The Rail Review (Williams Review) is expected to be the most significant since privatisation, and will consider ambitious recommendations for reform to ensure the British rail system continues to benefit passengers and support a stronger, fairer economy. The Review will take into account the findings of the report by Professor Stephen Glaister (Office of Rail and Road) into the May 2018 timetable introduction fiasco. The government have written to Railfuture inviting it to submit a formal response to the Rail Review Consultation.

On December 7th, the Office of Rail and Road published its recommendations for preventing a repeat of the May 2018 timetable failure which stimulated the Rail Review. This was alongside a draft final order requiring Network Rail to improve its timetabling process. Recommendations include clearer scope for industry boards to oversee major network change, independent system wide advice and auditing for major network changes, addressing optimism bias by learning from other sectors and enhanced monitoring by ORR.

Also on December 7th the Department for Transport published "*The Case for East West Rail, Western Section Phase II*" setting out why the government supports the project to reinstate a rail link between Bicester/Aylesbury and Milton Keynes/Bedford. Railfuture continues to strongly campaign for re instatement of the whole Oxford to Cambridge route, with some success.

A new national timetable was implemented on December 9th. Two significant rail service landmarks were achieved. Firstly, a major stage in the North to South, across London Thameslink project was implemented with 200 additional trains running across Central London per day. Electrification delays have continued to be an issue but Scotland, with its better rail governance saw three new electric services introduced. Glasgow to Edinburgh via Cumbernauld, Glasgow to Dunblane and Edinburgh to Alloa. There are now 5 rail services running between Glasgow and Edinburgh with a standard service pattern of 13 trains each hour! This is resulting in a significant transfer of diesel trains to England where there is an acute shortage given delays to English electrification projects.

The former Eurostar terminal at Waterloo reopened permanently on December 10th, initially for three platforms followed by the remaining two platforms in May 2019. This will facilitate the big increase in service levels by South Western Railway from May.

The Office of Rail and Road published its 2017-18 estimates of station usage on December 11th. London Waterloo was the busiest station for the 15th consecutive year despite the total number of passengers using it dropping by 5m to 94.4m. Demand for rail travel in Britain has resumed its general upward trend except in areas which have

been subject to regular rail strikes or disruption from major project engineering work. Of particular interest is the success of recently reopened stations in large conurbations such as West Yorkshire (Leeds) - Kirkstall Forge, Apperley Bridge and Low Moor, following successful campaigning by Railfuture.

The industry is testing technology from Zipabout, designed to provide passengers with personalised travel information through Facebook Messenger. Passengers who take part in the trial will be able to sign up to receive alerts for regular commutes and one-off journeys via a "*Keep Me Updated*" button. For years Twitter has been the main source of information for minute by minute information on travel news but people do not want to scroll endlessly through news feeds to find out about delays to journeys that may not be relevant to them. Railfuture will be taking a keen interest in this development.

Negative points for public transport in your country:

Whilst the rail industry has now on the whole recovered from the May 2018 new timetable implementation fiasco, with the wholesale cancellations and bus substitution for entire routes in some cases now finally replaced by the full scheduled timetabled service, it has resulted in the December 2018 changes, other than the Thameslink and Scotland exceptions listed in Section 1, being largely unambitious and risk-free. Upgrades that had been planned for May 18 but withdrawn just before the timetable publication have not as yet been re-instated in all cases. Other improvements scheduled for December 2018 have been put back to May 2019.

Sadly, ongoing strike action continues in the North of England with local Saturday services widely disrupted and withdrawn completely on some lines. This has a detrimental effect on major sporting fixtures and Christmas markets. The dispute concerns responsibility for safety critical "door closing" duties. There was a glimmer of hope that statements of clarification issued by Transport for the North would be sufficient to resolve the deadlock between the Train company Northern and the union, but whilst it enabled a fresh round of talks to commence, no breakthrough has yet been announced.

Whilst the government remains committed to HS2 from London to Birmingham and North West England, it is rather less committed to the north east leg to the East Midlands and Leeds, saying that stakeholders need to work harder for it. This is partly out of concerns on cost escalation for the Crossrail project in London leading to the removal of its chairman, Sir Terry Morgan who also chaired HS2.

On December 11th Transport for London published its draft updated 5-year plan for 2018/19 to 2023/24. The Mayor of London had previously included a fares freeze as a main element of his election manifesto, but a weakening of demand for London Underground journeys plus the just declared £1.7bn cost overrun for Crossrail has resulted in this being abandoned, with the plan now saying London fares will rise by RPI + 1% each year. Some investment in systems and renewals in London Underground has also had to be cut back but the plan still contains significant investment including the Northern Line extension to Battersea (under construction) together with further development of the London Overground and Tramlink.