

please reply to:
Neil Middleton
Director, Railfuture
(Address)

The Transport Select Committee
c/o The House of Commons

26 November 2025

Dear Committee

The Railways Bill

Railfuture is Britain's leading and long-established national independent voluntary organisation campaigning exclusively for a better railway across a bigger network for passengers, and freight users, to support economic (housing and productivity) growth, environmental improvement and better-connected communities. We seek to influence decision makers at local, regional and national levels to implement pro-rail policies in development and transport planning.

Introductory remarks

- We believe there is a general misunderstanding that the Railways Bill is “the answer”. It isn't – it will create a walled garden that will set out the constraints and guard rails for GBR and other operators. The choice within the walled garden that is the best spot to be is not a goal of the Bill. So, it is essential that focus on the Bill is not on the best choice, but that a range of good choices is available for future use. The hard work to select, then operate from that sweet spot can start now, but is largely separate from the Bill. And in many respects is harder and more important than the Bill itself. There seems to be a common misconception that once the Bill is law, “it is all done” – but that is far from the case.

Specifically, you ask about:

A. Improving rail travel for passengers

- On #34 (on discounted fares), On Discount Fares we see no requirement in the Bill for GBR, Scottish Ministers and Welsh Ministers to even consult each other on creating single products that are shared between nations. We think there should be both this duty and one to create products valid throughout England, Wales and Scotland. Anything similar to the Bus Concession arrangement, valid in one nation only is very much unwanted.
- On (eg) #18, there is (correctly) a requirement to look after disabled persons. However we think it appropriate for consideration of other personal characteristics, such as not being a computer user or smartphone user. There is a danger that the railway will start making assumptions such as “everyone has a debit/credit card” or “everyone has a smartphone (that is charged and has network coverage)”. We believe some wording is needed to extend protections to cover characteristics such as these and also others who require an easier to use station and train environment such as these with younger children, with prams or with larger suitcases (or indeed all of these).

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- On the “Disabled”, there is a lot of ‘may’”, “‘have particular regard’ and similar. We are doubtful that these are enough to ensure sensible provisions is made and believe this issue should be explored thoroughly – reality is that there is no “blank cheque book” so a balance needs to be struck, but there need to be elements of “it is essential that...”.

B. Network access

- On #63(2) it seems to us that this clause could be treated as a Carte Blanche to say “No”. Whilst we agree capacity needs to be used effectively, we believe some limits (eg an appeals process) are needed. Also, it is not clear how this is compatible with the general requirement to encourage use of rail for goods traffic.

C. Devolution

- We see much requirement to “consult” but very little requirement to “take account of”. For instance, if GBR wanted to allocate a greater portion of capacity on the Great Western line for GBR services, they will need to consult TfL, but it seems to us that even if TfL demonstrates that, overall, the best service is obtained by retaining current Elizabeth line frequencies, this would not be a deciding factor. Possibly there needs to be some requirement for GBR to aggregate impacts of both “their” passengers and passengers who are already / soon will use a devolved operator’s services.

More generally

- We have recently heard stories such as “700 Civil Servants to remain at the DfT. This, in itself, is not a matter for the Bill, but we do think it indicative of a wish for Civil Servants to retain high levels of oversight and more detailed management and approval. We believe this to be inefficient, will slow down decision making and cause decisions to be taken remote to the customer. The words “Secretary of State” appears 245 times in the Bill. As a very simplistic test, we think this is too many times; it is essential that the bill encourages the DfT to have a more strategic approach and for the detail to be handled by those responsible for running the railway.

If you have any queries in respect of this submission, please do not hesitate to contact me. Should you wish it, we would be happy to appear in front of the Committee to give Oral evidence.

Yours sincerely

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Railfuture Ltd