

A modern growing railway

Greens like trains. They seem to think they are free or low on CO₂ though all the time there diesel trains and electric trains running on power from a fossil fuelled power station that is a lie. One day when all the trains are electric, and when all the electricity is from renewables maybe this will be a sensible view of theirs. In the meantime we can harness their enthusiasm for trains with plans to maximise use of the substantial railway assets the nation owns.

The best green and commercial use of rail capacity could be for goods movement. Taking many more lorries off the road and using rail tracks more at night would be a double win. To work well there needs to be more track spurs from mainline to retail and industrial parks. The rail businesses need to offer good pricing for waggon loads, not just whole train loads. There needs to be a network of tractor units to collect from stations and do the last few miles where there is no track direct to factory or warehouse.

To win back commuter travel the industry needs to find the best way of charging. Flexible season tickets where the more you travel on the specified journey the cheaper per journey it becomes is the obvious way to go. Discounts could be bigger for Mondays and Fridays the less popular days.

The railway needs to experiment with events, leisure, short breaks and holiday travel. This is becoming the most common, with huge discounts in fares to win heavily loss making business. This is a very bad model for the taxpayer and generates more CO₂ creating discretionary travel. Prices need to be more realistic, and entrepreneurs need to venture with event, hospitality and travel organisers to make it an attractive package.

The current losses on rail are unacceptable. Too many little used passenger trains run, whilst some popular times and routes lack capacity. Freight could be economic.