

# Railway delays – nationalisation did not and will not cure them

Southern Rail has delivered a very poor service for months thanks to a Union dispute on the line. Northern Rail is now delivering a bad service thanks to mismanagement of a new timetable designed to provide a better service. The one criticism that is unfair is the criticism that says of the problems the North is now experiencing happened in the south they would get fixed. They were not. There is an equality of misery around the country with cancelled and delayed trains not concentrated in one part.

The government and the Transport Secretary are well aware of the problems, and wants things to get better. There has been no shortage of financial resource into Network Rail in recent years. There have been endless government responses to poor performance by elements of the rail industry when they let the customers down. Ministers can only intervene when Network Rail and a train operating company have failed to meet targets and promises. Day to day the operating companies and Network Rail run the trains, make the decisions and are answerable to the public. In each case it is important to see what has caused the problems and to ask what could solve them.

In the case of Southern it is reminder of the poor labour relations we often experienced in nationalised days. Then Union action threatened the whole network, where today it is more likely to be concentrated on one or two lines or companies. The nationalised tube has shown that nationalisation does not eliminate labour disputes.

In the case of Northern the main problem was the inability of Network Rail, the large nationalised part of the current railway, to provide the train slots and track capacity they promised for the train operating company to deliver the revised and improved service. They delayed responding to the new timetable proposals, then replied late with a different and more limited pattern.

The senior personnel at Network Rail are paid very high salaries, miles above the pay of the PM and Transport Secretary, for doing public sector jobs with access to huge sums of public money. We need more investigation of how and why Network Rail has let us down again with the advent of this new timetable. Why didn't they say earlier in discussions that the new timetable was too demanding? Can we at least have the satisfaction of knowing that some of those (7 Executive Committee members) paid more than £300,000 a year for making Network Rail work will face a financial penalty for the failures?

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## Time to boost the economy

The Bank and Treasury have slowed the economy too much by tax hikes and monetary tightening. At a time when the USA is reflating its economy, and when Japan and the Euro area are still printing money and keeping interest rates at zero, UK policy has gone the other way with the predictable slow down. The UK's performance has nothing to do with the Brexit vote and everything to do with domestic policy. The economy did well for the first nine months after the Brexit vote until policy was tightened and more taxes put in.

So what should the authorities do? They should plan to spend the £12 bn saving on net EU contributions from next March and make it clear to the EU we won't be paying them money after we have left. The EU is not offering us a good deal, so why pay? We need that money at home. I have set out before a mixed package of spending increases and tax cuts to spend this money, with the emphasis on more money for the NHS.

We do not want a debate about a new NHS tax or any other tax increases. Tax rates are too high in the UK. At a time when the USA is slashing its tax rates with a top rate of 37%, and the new Italian government favours a two rate Income tax at 15% and 20% the UK cannot afford to keep its rates too high. To do so is to export talent and jobs to lower tax rate regimes, and to lose possible revenue.

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## Tribute to my mother at her funeral.

I knew my Mum best when I was small boy. I spent most of my waking hours in her company or close by her in the home we shared. I enjoyed that privileged access to many of the details of her daily life which comes from being little.

I was living in a world of giants. The chairs were too high, the table was well out of reach. Many of the things I wanted to touch or explore were wisely put beyond me. I remember my mother teaching me to walk, holding my hand to reassure that I would not fall over. When I tried on my own I had to pilot a course from chair cushion to chair cushion to have something to hold on to. I remember loving the time in the afternoon when she would read to me. It was a chance to be close to her as I sat with her in the armchair she used. I would try to puzzle out the meaningless symbols as she read fluently to bring my chosen story to life.

My Mum was in those days a hard working and accomplished housewife. She ruled the home, cleaned and tidied, cooked and shopped, washed and ironed. She put herself through the contemporary tortures of the home perm, as I watched her

trying to control the unruly rollers. I was fascinated by her dressing table, where she would sit on a low stool applying powder and lipstick. As I got a bit bigger she wanted me to get the tiny hook at the top of a dress into the wayward eye, and get slightly impatient if I fumbled it for too long. I would go with her when she went to choose a pattern for her next sewing challenge. I was ready with three year old's advice on which dress styles I liked, but she would understandably take her own counsel.

She was a talented seamstress and adroit with knitting needles. She acquired a knitting machine which extended her range and speeded progress on garments. I tried to assist her in the kitchen, gradually moving from high risk nuisance through play cook to providing some proper help. If she made mince pies she made the mince meat first. If she wanted to use minced beef she would create it herself in a hand mincer. She made jams and preserved the autumn fruit in Kilner jars, always worrying whether they would seal properly. Her Christmas cakes were good. She wrestled with the icing but always managed to pull off difficult tasks including writing messages and creating elaborate icing baskets.

When I was a teenager away from home long hours as my school stood on the opposite side of the city she had less to do. She announced she was going to get a job, and did so despite my father's early reservations. I enjoyed talking to her about her work, and saw her rise rapidly from sales assistant to First Sales to Manager of the local Lotus shop. It was my introduction to the world of a national chain, with a tricky political balance between what Head Office did and what the local store could do for itself. She became a valued Manager. Asked to keep an eye on a neighbouring wayward store when the manager was quite often on holiday, she unearthed the problems. They wanted to promote her to be a regional Manager, but she felt that would absorb too much time and involve too much travel.

In later life she became one of the Pensions Visitors for Debenhams who had taken over the shoe chain. She edited a Pensioner Magazine and went on visits to Pensioners who might be lonely or needed extra help. With her husband as chauffeur she did this for many years well into her 80s when she was normally visiting people much younger than herself.

I am grateful to her for providing a stable and well run home all the time I was a child. She wanted me to be clean, well dressed and eat sensible meals, and did everything to ensure that when I was small I met those standards. I have tried to be those things ever since! I have seen more of her in recent years as she came to live nearby. She told me many times she was very old and in her unsentimental way said she did not want to live on disabled. I tried to help her find things to do and enjoy after my father had died. My head tells me her matter of fact approach to death in old age is right, but my heart tells me I have lost my Mum and it hurts.

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# How to put some strength into the UK negotiation of Brexit

Some contributors here and many in the Remain parts of the media seem to think every day should be Groundhog Day. Each day they warm up some old Project Fear myth from the Referendum campaign, or parody themselves by inventing a new one. In doing so they damage their own position, bore much of the nation rigid, and try to undermine the UK's negotiating position. I wish to tackle a variety of issues that matter to my constituents and the wider nation on this site, and many of them have nothing to do with Brexit. Those that do have something to do with Brexit are public services which need more cash, which should come as soon as possible from cancelling our contributions to the EU. Getting all our money back remains one of the biggest wins from leaving the EU.

In the run up to the June 28 Council the government needs to assert the UK position. They should tell our EU partners that we are ready to leave without a deal on March 29 2019, and ask them if they want a Free Trade deal with no tariffs or not. If they do then we sit down and agree it. If they don't then we leave without a deal.

Meanwhile I am amazed at the crazy stories that some take seriously as Project Fear moves into its more extreme versions. How about Airbus will be selling planes without wings on? Don't they realise there are binding contracts to supply, and Airbus needs the current wings made by the current supplier in order to carry on selling the planes? Some say without a deal the port of Calais will seek to destroy the port of Dover by blocking exports from the continent. Doing so would of course damage Calais not Dover, as many other continental ports would rush to take the Calais business. I read that we would be unable to levy customs dues on EU trade or handle it coming into our ports, yet I see we handle the majority of our trade that comes in from outside the EU and levy customs without delays or problems. I hear they think there will need to be border towers and detailed checks on every lorry at the Northern Ireland border. Have they not heard of electronic manifests, Authorised Economic Operators and the rest that ensures we do not need to stop each lorry at a port or point of entry and calculate the VAT , Excise and customs whilst the lorries queue?

This week some seemed to suggest the French would seek to starve us back into the EU by refusing to sell us any more Camembert and the EU would want to deny us medicines! Can it get more ludicrous? If they really think our continental neighbours hate us that much and would break the law and damage their own businesses in this way, why do they want to stay attached? Have they not realised there is plenty of supply from the rest of the world if the EU did want to cut up rough.

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## Strategic highways

I met Highways England yesterday to talk about the state of the national network.

A successful modern economy needs sufficient motorway capacity to allow easy transport of goods and people. Motorways are our safest and fastest roads. Like railways they segregate traffic moving in opposite directions to avoid head on crashes, and like railways they prevent pedestrians, cyclists and other vulnerable users from using them. Their junctions can flow freely, with easy access and exit when capacity allows. Motorway travel should allow greater levels of fuel efficiency and improved journey times.

Highways England controls most of our motorways and our major trunk roads. Most of the roads it looks after are dual carriageway or better. Many have grade separated interchanges. The problem is we do not have enough principal route capacity. We have invited in many more people who need roads for their own travel and for the supply of the goods they need. As our economy and the individuals in it enjoy rising real incomes so they can afford to spend more and need more goods supply. We need to be realistic about the amount of capacity we need.

In my local area Highways England has just increased capacity on the eastern part of the M3 by 33% and plans to do the same for the eastern section of the M4. We also lack north-south capacity. There the A 34 trunk experiences congestion as lorries struggle with inclines, whilst we do not have a good sized bridge over the Thames to the east of Reading.

Nationally there are various routes that lack sufficient capacity. We need a better south coast highway, better links to the east coast ports, a completed dual carriageway to the south west on the A 303 and similar extra capacity in the North and Midlands.

Highways England pointed out that there is now more money for road improvement, and the government does understand the need for more capacity. I would be interested to hear your priorities for improvement.