

Could the railways help growth?

When the railways were privatised there was a period of good growth in rail travel, and a more positive management enthusiasm for promoting rail travel and identifying growth opportunities. One obvious example was to add a short spur line to Heathrow airport. This large centre for people on the move had been ignored by the nationalised industry.

The nationalised business usually followed a policy of shrink and sack. They wanted trainload traffic for freight, not individual waggon loads. They allowed or encouraged the closing of sidings and links into industrial premises. They watched as business shifted to industrial parks near motorway junctions in place of the older Trafford Park style based around rail links. They ceased to actively promote U.K. holiday and events travel in the way the pre war railways had.

Today there are opportunities for growth. To recapture more of the going to work trade they need flexible fares and tickets to attract and retain the 2 or 3 day a week commuter. To recapture lost freight and get many more Lorries off the road they need to actively promote waggon loads with more direct access into industrial sites and estates. Single waggon marshalling and freight train assembly should be easier in a digital and containerised age.

They need to be more customer friendly in moving large numbers of people to and from events. A large concert or sporting contest struggles to provide adequate affordable parking and road access, and many people attending want to drink alcohol so they cannot drive. There need to be enough special trains.

The railway could work more closely with holiday resorts and other popular destinations. The railway did respond to the rise of Bicester Village as a shopping destination as an example of what can be done.

The railway can expand its capacity by introducing digital signalling on all routes. This allows central control and individual train visibility of all that is on the track, so more trains an hour can be run safely. As most track is one way only and as trains can only leave a track if points are changed it should be a very safe method of travel. Modern technology should eliminate crashes between trains on the same track,