

Resolving the rail disputes

Management and Unions need a plan to modernise the railway. Only they can hammer out the detail of services, safety, investment in automation and pay that can help the railway adapt. A business which has lost so much revenue needs convincing ways of wooing back customers and restoring turnover, otherwise it needs to adjust its cost base to the reduced usage of its service.

The best way to resolve the disputes would be an agreement to the joint purpose of restoring revenues. It would be a plan to put more training and automation to work so pay can go up backed by substantial productivity gains. Only an expanding passenger base allied to new ways of delivering good service can bring forward the cash for higher pay than is already on offer.

It is going to be easier expanding rail freight from here with environmental benefit of taking trucks off the road. Wooing back five day a week commuters is going to be more difficult as many like some working at home. Many have been put off five day a week rail travel by high season ticket prices and unreliable services. The railway is not going to sustain its current cost base by just relying on expanding the leisure railway with plenty of off peak discount fares, especially given the difficulties getting enough weekend rail capacity for special events. The railway should be able to slim its cost base without compulsory redundancies if there is a shared wish by the Union to modernise.