

# Time to reset the railway

We cannot afford to spend around £10 bn a year subsidising the railway to run nearly empty trains around the country. Nor is it a green option to run diesels and electrics drawing some electricity from fossil fuels when they have so few people on them.

The railway management need to use the current lull in railway use to make two important sets of changes. The first is to establish new timetables geared to the big change in work patterns COVID policies have brought on. The railway is currently planned to earn much of its fares revenue from five day a week commuters wishing to travel at peak times. This business will be massively reduced. We need new flexible ticketing to allow people rolling and increasing discounts the more they travel the same route for work purposes. The railway is now trying to tempt many more people to travel by train for leisure. It is difficult to see why this should be highly subsidised as it is discretionary and is more likely to be taken up by the better off.

The second set of issues are based on technology. Modern trains can be more fully automated in ways which may enhance safety and certainly raise productivity. Safety must remain the prime consideration. Managements need to sort out with the Unions new manning arrangements that reflect business needs, timetable changes and train automation opportunities. There can be offers of no compulsory redundancies around programmes of change to get the workforce and its skills and job descriptions into line with new needs.

Doubtless many of you still think HS2 should be cancelled. There is no sign of the government wishing to do this, and it has now committed substantial resource to carving an expensive route out of London. I am not expecting a change of decision on the London to Birmingham part of this project.