

National report

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Country UK
Organisation Railfuture
Name Dennis Fancett

Positive points for public transport in your country:

New Hope For Rail Re-Openings: The government has confirmed it is actively working with a number of groups, including Railfuture, to explore the possibility of reopening rail routes axed under the so called Beeching cuts of the 1960's. A "Transforming Cities" fund has been established to which sponsoring local authorities can apply for assistance with re-opening capital costs, provided strict criteria are met. Railfuture has long campaigned for rail re-openings which have a strong business case in particular, economic, regeneration and environmental benefits, and where construction is technically possible within realistic cost.

One example of a scheme now being actively considered is re-introduction of passenger services on the Newcastle to Ashington freight route in North East England which connects the city of Newcastle to the economically deprived former mining areas of South East Northumberland. This scheme was visited by Secretary of State Chris Grayling in January who took a special train part way round the line, attracting considerable media interest. Dennis Fancett, Chair of the local campaign group SENRUG was invited to join the VIP party on board the special train and had a brief meeting with the Secretary of State. Other proposals with strong business cases being supported by Railfuture include Portishead to Bristol and Wisbech to Cambridge.

The Devolution Agenda: Northern Powerhouse: Work on devolving responsibility for the rail network in the North of England to a regional authority continues; the key political and economic objective is to develop the economy of the region by a coordinated plan to integrate and improve the transport system both in terms of urban routes serving key northern cities such as Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield and Newcastle and also in terms a regional network designed to integrate the economies into a single strong economic entity – The Northern Powerhouse.

Railfuture is heavily involved at branch level in these discussions and has also produced its "Blueprint for the North" (<https://www.railfuture.org.uk/article1817>). This is not a detailed prescription but addresses key issues such as the capacity requirements on the rail system together with governance changes that could assist in making the railways in the region far more accountable to regional government and stakeholders.

The Williams Review: Following the initial consultation of this major government review into rail franchising led by Keith Williams, the government has announced that changes to the rail franchising system are necessary and will be implemented. The eyes of the world are on this exercise as rail franchising has remained relatively unchanged since privatisation of the British Rail network, completed in 1996. Railfuture has been active in terms of contributing to the Rail Review exercise. A summary of the terms of reference for the review itself is *The 2018 Rail Review*, (<https://railfuture.org.uk/article1810>) which is a briefing on the remit and scope of the review. Railfuture's responses are *Rail Challenge 2019*

(<https://railfuture.org.uk/article1815>) which is Railfuture's challenge to the industry and the Review team on what we want to see as a result of the exercise *and The Williams Rail Review* (<https://www.railfuture.org.uk/article1820>) which is Railfuture's detailed response to the questions posed in the Rail Review consultation.

Northern Industrial Dispute: The long-running and highly damaging industrial dispute between the conductors' union RMT and Northern Railways, which has seen strikes every Saturday across the network for several months, has finally been placed on hold, following talks brokered by the conciliation service ACAS. The dispute was based around responsibility for opening and closing train doors; Northern wanted this to be transferred to the driver but guaranteed a 2nd member of staff would continue to be deployed on all train services. The Union argued this had safety implications and wanted the responsibility to be retained by the conductors. The agreement to suspend industrial action, whilst welcome for passengers, does not mean the dispute is fully resolved, but management and the unions have agreed the terms of a detailed investigation into the issue.

Negative points for public transport in your country:

Industry Structure Concerns: Two key concerns are apparent with rail in the UK, both a result of the fact that the number of passengers using the system has doubled over the last 15 years. Firstly, lack of capacity, necessitating the need to undertake a series of major upgrades including catching up on electrification. Equipping the rail industry to deliver major programs to time and at a realistic cost is a serious challenge. The second concern is agility, ie the ability of the rail system to react quickly to meet growing demand for new services whilst achieving operational cost efficiencies. Much remains to be done to achieve a regular 7 day a week railway with the resilience to mitigate staff shortages and accommodate the need for major engineering works. The damaging series of rail strikes during 2018 were essentially attempts to resist the structural changes necessary in the industry.

International Travel: With just a couple of weeks until Brexit, it is still not clear if the UK will leave the EU with or without a deal, or even if it will leave at all! Thus, it is not clear what additional border crossing formalities may be required. In terms of train travel this is of particular concern for inbound journeys to the UK from Amsterdam and Marseilles where train schedules only permit a specific amount of time for passengers to complete formalities en route at Bruxelles and Lille respectively. Additionally, the international passenger terminals at London St Pancras and Paris Gare du Nord are both space constrained which could cause difficulties if they need to accommodate significantly more passengers due to a need to arrive earlier for a longer check-in process, which could potentially include visa checks.

Dennis Fancett
Railfuture European Passenger Group and EPF Delegate
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