

Press Release

Thursday, 19 May 2011

Rail campaigners have given a cautious welcome to Sir Roy McNulty's report on railway efficiency. Mike Crowhurst from the pressure group Railfuture said: "Improving efficiency in the rail network is obviously in everyone's interests. We're very happy that we're not looking at Beeching mark 2. However, we do have some concerns.

Firstly, are these efficiency savings going to rely on cutting staff? Efficiency savings should mean providing the same level of service at lower cost, but there are proposals to cut staff at some stations. These staff provide a valuable service in ensuring a safe environment, helping people to buy the right tickets and reducing fare evasion.

Allowing train-operating companies to manage track has some obvious advantages in terms of coordinating investment and maintenance. However we're concerned that this could lead to the squeezing out of other operators who use those lines, particularly freight operators. It seems that we could be looking at a geographical fragmentation of the rail network, and fragmentation is one of the causes of increased costs.

We would welcome any simplification of the fare structure, but allowing companies more freedom to set fares looks like giving more freedom to put fares up and price off demand. Rail fares will already be going up next year at 3% above inflation. This only has the effect of driving more people on to the roads, and is not a satisfactory substitute for more long-term investment to increase capacity.

We're in danger of managing passengers to meet the needs of the railway rather than managing the railway to meet the needs of passengers"

Notes to editors:

Railfuture is the UK's leading independent organisation campaigning for better rail services for both passengers and freight.

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Railfuture's mission statement:

To be the number one advocate for the railway and rail users.

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