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Train fares go up again: Why privatising the railways was the worst thing to happen to British transport



[Mary Stringer](#) Monday 5 Jan 2015 6:00 am



Train fares have risen yet again (Picture: PA)

Are you angry? I am, and I've not even boarded a train yet this year.

I always feel a dull, resolute anger when I consider the overcrowded trains and appalling service that so many of us pay extortionate prices to use.

The latest kick in the teeth is the 2.5% increase in many fares, just days after the Christmas rail fiasco which saw thousands of commuters delayed and stranded in the cold for hours.

I feel especially angry on behalf of those who have to make the miserable journey into London each day on one of the worst services in the country.

Despite the fact that most people are forced to stand, the fares remain high and the seating remains extremely limited.

Get on at Reading between 7am and 8am and you needn't bother looking for a seat – there won't be one.



Train companies have failed to increase seating in lines with increased numbers of passengers (Picture: Getty)

We pay the most expensive train fares in Europe.

In fact, according to Action For Rail, UK commuters spend twice as much of their salary on train fares as most other European commuters.

Who's benefitting from privatisation? Because it isn't the commuters.

TUC's June 2014 report on the effects of privatisation dubs it 'The Great Train Robbery', and it's no wonder so many of us feel robbed when 'the privatised rail system requires billions more in tax payer subsidy each year and has failed to bring in adequate private investment in track or trains.'

When the conservative party privatised the trains in 1993 they promised affordable fares – perhaps even lower fares.

But, while many season ticket prices have risen in line with inflation, single tickets appear to have increased up to four times as much as inflation – this despite the fact that private train companies are still supported by the tax-payer (from 2007-2011 the five largest private train companies received almost £3bn in taxpayer support.)

And what are we getting for our quadrupled fares? Research indicates that the average age of trains has increased to two years older post-privatisation.

Furthermore, the increase in passengers has not been met with enough additional carriages.



A train fares protest at King's Cross (Picture: PA)

‘Rail franchising is failing both passengers and taxpayers. The government’s determination to re-privatise the East Coast Mainline – even though it is delivering the biggest cash surplus of all – shows it has learnt nothing from past mistakes,’ said TUC General Secretary and chair of Action For Rail, Frances O’Grady.

Even Margaret Thatcher deemed railway privatisation ‘a privatisation too far’.

From the beginning the public was unconvinced, and it’s been the public that have suffered.

Public transport must deliver value to the paying public – not just the shareholders.



Rail fares increase have hit UK commuters hard (Picture: EPA)

The Campaign for Better Transport predicts that ‘by 2018, fares revenue will cover 103 per cent of the operating costs of the railways, up from 80 per cent in 2009, meaning that our Government will be profiting from rail users.’

Profiting from essential public travel to and from work doesn’t sound much more ethical than profiting from the NHS.

Yes, it needs to be financially viable, but it’s outrageous that we line others’ pockets for the privilege of an uncomfortable, standing, delayed commute.

So what’s the answer?

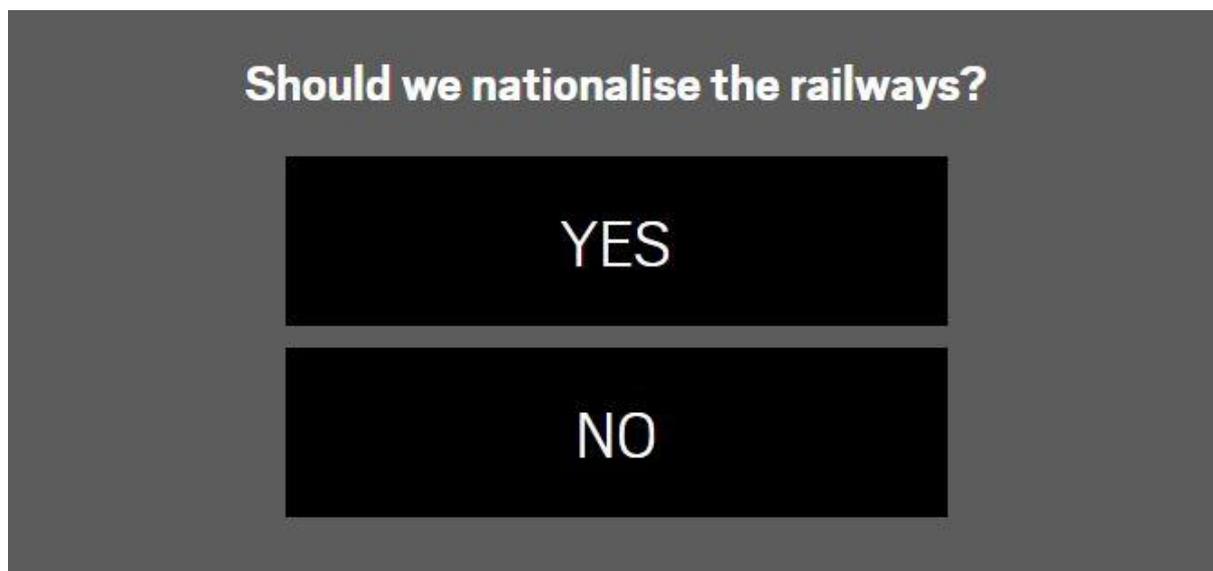
The nationalisation of the East Coast Main Line has shown us that it can work.

At one point it returned a £200m surplus to the Treasury rather than to shareholders, all whilst providing a good service.

But full renationalisation is an unlikely option at the moment, while we're still edging out of austerity.

If we do renationalise it will need to be gradual.

In the meantime we must continue to lobby for fairer fares and better services from the current franchises, and/or seek alternative public transport such as coach travel or car shares.



<https://metro.co.uk/2015/01/05/train-fares-go-up-again-why-privatising-the-railways-was-the-worst-thing-to-happen-to-british-transport-5007000/>