

# Evidence to the Williams railway review

This week I met the Williams rail review team and gave them some analysis and proposals for improving the railway. They are reviewing the current system and will be offering policy proposals to the government. I will send them a formal written follow up.

## General aims

The prime aim of the railways should be to provide safe and reliable transport for people and goods in the UK.

The Review needs to consider how we can improve the traveller's experience, placing the customer at the heart of railway reform and improvement. Any structural changes proposed should be ones that will promote improved travel for customers. Greater choice is likely to be a guiding principle to ensure a better passenger experience. This in turn will require more capacity at popular times on popular routes. Punctuality and reliability are crucial to passenger satisfaction.

## Capacity

The railway is most useful for commuters and peak time business users wishing to get to work and back at times when the roads are congested, and seeking to travel long distance in a timely way. These essential trips are the ones most liable to shortage of capacity and shortage of choice of trains to meet the requirement.

The industry typically runs just 20 trains an hour on any given stretch of track. On main routes into large cities this can mean just two or three trains an hour when we could do with a multiple of that from any given station along the route. In my case there are only 6 trains between 7 and 9 in the morning to Waterloo from Wokingham, a popular route where more choice and capacity would be welcome.

The railway needs to speed up the introduction of digital signalling to give full system visibility of where every train is, with feedback to each train to ensure no collisions. The railway accepts this could lead to a 25% increase in capacity. In due course it may provide a 50% increase in capacity. The London underground can now manage 30 trains an hour on modernised lines. Effective capacity could also be improved by selective investment in short additional sections of track to allow more overtaking. All too often a fast limited stop train gets caught behind a slow stopper, disrupting timetables. This will be a much cheaper option than building new long haul railway lines. It will also boost network safety.

## Home to work, home to holiday travel

Travellers want to know the time it takes to do their whole journey, not just

the time from one station near departure to one station near destination. We also want to know how easy or difficult getting to and from the station is going to be. The railway industry has to work with Highway authorities, car parking businesses, bus and taxi firms on total journey times, costs and hassle.

Station car parking needs to be cheaper, more plentiful and easier to get to. Highways authorities often do few favours to stations, delaying access to station car parks by restricted road space, aggressive lights, unhelpful one way systems and limited roads space on the main feeder roads. This puts off potential train users who may find it cheaper and faster to head away from the town centre where the station lies to get directly onto the motorway and trunk road system to do the whole journey by road.

Bus services need to be more easily accessible for travellers visiting new places. The train companies could make information available on trains about the main public transport options at each station for those needing advice. It is time there are display screens in carriages with more journey and connection information for those interested, with an option of interactive service on a traveller's phone or tablet. They should also offer real time information about the journey and estimated arrival times, to allow re scheduling of your day where a train is running late. For tourist and leisure travellers there could be more information available about the places being passed and visited.

(to be continued)

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## **My letter to the Attorney General about the draft "Withdrawal" Treaty**

The Attorney General raised with me the question of a reply to my letter when I bumped into him in Parliament this week. He wanted to tell me they are planning a reply. He also said that as my letter raises policy issues as well as legal ones it might be the Brexit Secretary who replies. It was clearly on his mind as I did not raise the matter.

I said I did not mind who replied on behalf of the government. I take the long delay in replying to mean the government is finding it difficult to answer my points in a way which puts a better gloss on the "Delay our exit and take away our powers" Agreement we are talking about. The more people who read the critique of the Agreement the better.

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## US policy set out in London

I attended the lecture by the US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, yesterday at Lancaster House. Arranged by the Centre for Policy Studies, it was a good event reminding us of the closeness of the Atlantic alliance as seen by a senior member of the current Administration.

The Secretary of State repeated the US offer of an early free trade agreement just as soon as the UK is an independent country again able to negotiate and sign one. He stressed the important contribution the UK makes to the 5 country intelligence grouping that underpins our security and US security. He praised the UK for its support in promoting democracy and better government worldwide, and for the substantial humanitarian aid supplied to trouble spots.

He called for us to support the US view that Germany is undermining western security by undertaking the second gas pipeline from Russia, making the EU far too dependent on Russian energy. He thought the UK could do more to ensure its own energy self sufficiency as the USA has now done through its shale gas revolution. He reminded us of the tough diplomatic response the US made to the Salisbury poisonings. He also warned the UK of the dangers of using a Chinese company which also acts for the Chinese state in 5G networks, suggesting that it will limit US ability and willingness to share with us if they feel the Chinese have access to secret data and messages between allies.

His visit was a preparatory visit for the President's on the occasion of the NATO Summit. He told us how the new US Ambassador who arrived in London in 1941 at the nadir of our fortunes in that war opted to live in a modest flat and to live under the rule of the UK ration book to share the dangers and deprivations faced by Londoners fighting for our freedoms. It was a moving address from an important ally. It was also good to hear from a country that has the full range of powers for self government, and a country willing to use them for what it sees as its national good and for the wider causes of freedom and democracy worldwide.

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## Wider ownership and Margaret Thatcher (first published in House magazine)

Everyone an owner was the central slogan I put to Margaret Thatcher when I became her principal policy adviser. She liked the idea. I worked up ways to promote home ownership, small business ownership, share participation in larger companies, employee share schemes, popular shareholdings from nationalised industry sales, more identification of an individual with their pension or insurance savings, portable pension plans and strengthened

shareholder democracy. It was an exciting time. We wanted many more people to have a stake in the country, to own their own piece of land, their own home, a share in larger enterprises or their own business. Whilst the socialists worried about the concentration of ownership and wealth with a view to taxing the few that did enjoy the benefits of ownership, we wanted to do something positive to empower the millions in the economic life of the country and to spread wealth much more widely.

I wrote about the revolution in "Popular Capitalism" and in pamphlets on promoting wider ownership. Each privatisation sale of a nationalised business contained special provisions for free and discounted shares for employees. My favourite government asset sale was National Freight. This nationalised road freight business was sold to its employees who immediately set about transforming it into a more modern more profitable and successful logistics company. As one of the lorry drivers explained to me when I interviewed him for a film about it, becoming a shareholder changed his approach. Where before if the lorry did not work in the morning the driver might give it a kick and decide he could not take it out, as a co-owner he helped coax the vehicle back into life so it could generate revenue again that day. The truck driver owners opted for professional management on the grounds they wanted their investment looked after by people who knew how to do it. Later I was able to help the miners of Tower Colliery in Wales buy out their pit which the Coal Board said was no longer economic and wanted closed. The miners proved the Coal Board wrong and kept it going for many years afterwards successfully.

The movement needed lower taxes to make it cheaper to acquire assets and to hold and enjoy them. Income taxes were lowered generally, leading to a big overall boost in revenue, whilst savings were given special treatment to boost them further. Council house sales were developed with bigger discounts to make them more affordable. Labour argued strongly against it on the bogus grounds that it reduced the supply of housing. We pointed out the same person lived in the home after sale as before, but the state had a capital receipt it could use to build another home. Soon we found Labour party members and Councillors buying their own Council home, undermining their party's statement of principle against the idea.

Some Unions wanted to oppose employee shareholdings in former nationalised industries, as they opposed privatisation. They found most of their members wanted to take up the free shares on offer to employees, and many wanted to buy discounted shares on top. Why wouldn't you want to have a share in the profits of the business you worked for? How did the employee share schemes for former nationalised industry staff differ from the co-op approach to ownership which the Labour party supported?

We encountered opposition from unlikely quarters in business and the Conservative party. Harold Macmillan, a former Conservative Prime Minister complained in a very patrician way we were selling the family silver. I countered we were returning the silver to the family members. Some in the nationalised industries did not like the way we introduced competition into unresponsive monopolies when we sold off telecoms or energy businesses. It was giving customers choice and allowing challengers to emerge to the

traditional businesses we sold that added much of the economic gain and helped fuel the UK economy to better performance.

Privatisation solved the bedevilling problem of capital shortage that nationalised industries faced. All their investment counted as public spending and it often got cut to give priority to the NHS or schools. Once out in the market they could raise much larger sums based on the need and the prospective returns. In the case of electricity generation it allowed the change from fuel inefficient and dirty coal driven power stations to much more thermally efficient and cleaner gas stations. It was the greenest policy any UK government has followed.

Our telephone system was modernised rapidly once out of state hands. It moved from electro mechanical old fashioned equipment to electronic and digital. It moved from copper cable to fibre optics. It moved from only allowing a handful of phones and add on equipment from the monopolist to a profusion of choice from worldwide suppliers. Out went rationing of phone capacity by delay in installing a line and line sharing through so called party lines, to modern levels of service and availability. The mobile phone revolution became possible thanks to privatisation and the end of the monopoly. It would have been very difficult for the UK to build the amazing success in financial and business services which followed if we had continued with a monopoly phone supply with rationing and out of date equipment.

Popular capitalism did create many more homeowners, share owners, business owners and employee share holders. It did transform whole industries from phones to electricity. It was part of Margaret Thatcher's great success and enduring legacy.

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## The future of Mrs May

People write in to tell me the Conservatives need to get rid of Mrs May as PM. Others write in to tell me to leave the Conservative party altogether because of the way she has handled Brexit.

I intend to remain a Conservative MP. I was elected as one, and wish to influence the future course of the present government as I was elected to do. I am trying to get the government to stick to the sensible approach to Brexit we jointly set out in the Manifesto in 2017. Any Conservative MP who resigns the party whip loses a vote over Mrs May's future and loses a vote to choose the next Prime Minister. The fact that the Brexit party has been formed to agree with the line I have been pursuing throughout, seeking an exit without signing the Treaty, does not mean I have to join them. My vote is secure in the Commons for the outcome I have always said may be our best option and they now want anyway.

I voted No confidence in Mrs May when the issue was tested late last year. I

had argued against holding such an early Confidence vote as I thought it difficult to win it, but other colleagues wanted to go ahead and did so.

Today there are two movements underway to get the PM to go. The voluntary party has expressed its displeasure and has demanded a special meeting on the subject of her leadership, which is likely to take place soon after the Euro election. An unknown number of MPs have written to the Chairman of the 1922 Committee making clear their lack of confidence in the PM and urging him to tell her to go. If and when he gets to more than half the Parliamentary party it is difficult to see why the PM would continue to hold out against naming the departure day. He is likely to get there quite soon if Mrs May persists with her wish to do a deal with Mr Corbyn to force through the Withdrawal Treaty with even worse terms attached for the future negotiation over our possible exit from the EU in due course. The 1922 Committee would doubtless change its rules and turn a majority of MPs into wanting her to leave into a requirement she leaves. The only way I think she could save her Premiership is to get us out of the EU without signing the Treaty.

Iain Duncan Smith has been leading the movement to get her out, asking in public for a date for her to leave in all circumstances. She has hinted she would leave after getting the Withdrawal Treaty through the Commons, without precisely naming a date. I do not believe she would leave as soon as she passed the Treaty, were that to happen with Labour votes. It would be seen by her and the pro May parts of the press as a great triumph to have got it through against all the odds and against the overwhelming opposition of the voters. Why wouldn't she then say she was needed to handle talks with the EU based on the Treaty?

That is why my best option is she takes us out this month, cancelling the European election. If she fails to do so the pressures should become overwhelming for her to go.

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