

Connecting Communities – Building a Rail Network for the 21st Century



Trains aren't working properly for the people who rely on them.

Years of Conservative neglect left Britain's railways failing passengers. Fare rises have pushed costs up by nearly £1,100 a year in some areas since 2019, while services have become less reliable and ticketing remains too complicated.

Liberal Democrats want to put passengers first. Rail should be affordable, reliable, and simple to use so that it can connect communities, support jobs and drive economic growth.

That's why today, Liberal Democrat members have passed a policy which would improve our rail services with:

- **Nationwide tap-in tap-out ticketing** so passengers can travel seamlessly without fuss.
- **Automatic compensation** whenever trains are delayed or cancelled, removing the hassle for passengers.
- **A statutory duty on accessibility** so everyone, regardless of ability, can use the rail network with dignity and ease.

- All new rail lines **electrified by default**, with clear targets to speed up electrification elsewhere, plus the smart use of battery and hydrogen technology where suitable.
- Alongside new rail routes, **public rights of way for walking, wheeling, and cycling** should be created, encouraging active travel and healthier communities.
- Reverse the harmful government cuts to the **Restoring Your Railway** programme, which aimed to reconnect communities cut off by the Beeching era.

Read our new policy in full

Rail is vital to building a fairer, healthier, and more connected Britain. It's time to get rail back on track, putting passengers first and investing in the future.

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Author:

[Don't Nix Care: Protecting our Hospices](#)

For too long, the vital role played by hospices in our health and care system has been overlooked. These organisations provide compassionate, dignified care for people at the end of life, they support their families, and they give vital relief to our overstretched NHS. Yet years of neglect and underfunding have left them in crisis.

Under the last Conservative government vital services were put in jeopardy, with hospices and end of life charities forced to turn sick and dying people away. Between 2022 and 2024 hospices faced a £47 million real terms funding cut. A Hospice UK survey found that 7 in 10 of hospices believed they would need to cut services due to pressure from rising costs.

The Liberal Democrats believe no one should be denied dignity and comfort at the end of life because of where they live, or whether local charitable fundraising can plug the gap left by government.

Today our members have passed new policy which calls for urgent action to end the postcode lottery in hospice care, secure fair and sustainable funding, and protect the future of these essential services:

- **End the postcode lottery** by allocating NHS funding for hospice and palliative care according to demand, so that areas that struggle to raise charitable income are still properly supported.
- **Exempt hospices from the increase in Employer's National Insurance Contributions**, which has placed unsustainable financial pressure on already struggling providers.
- **Tackle staffing shortages** through a dedicated hospice workforce plan, cutting vacancy rates and ensuring hospices have the skilled staff they need to deliver high quality care.
- **Establish a sustainable financial footing** for hospices through a new commission, creating a fair and consistent funding model integrated with the wider NHS and care system.
- **Support families and the bereaved** by expanding access to bereavement counselling and therapy, available from the point of diagnosis.

Read our new policy in full

Hospices already care for around 300,000 people each year, but just one third of their funding comes from the NHS. Many clinical costs are met instead by charitable donations – leaving patients' dignity at the mercy of fundraising capacity.

NHS spending on hospices varies wildly across the country, from over £10 per head in some areas to just 23p in others. This broken, incoherent model undermines services and leaves families without the support they need.

Liberal Democrats would fix this.

A sustainable funding model, backed by fair commissioning, would save money as well as improving care. Palliative care provided in the community or by hospices costs far less than hospital-based care, and studies have shown that services like those run by Marie Curie can save the NHS more than 50% compared with in-patient admission.

Properly funded hospices ease pressure on overstretched hospitals and deliver the care people want, where they want it.

By protecting and strengthening hospice services, we can ensure that everyone has the dignity, comfort and support they deserve at the end of life.

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Author:

[Backing Hospitality for Growth and Jobs](#)

Pubs, restaurants, cafés, and hotels don't just contribute billions to our economy – they create local jobs, support vibrant town centres, and bring people together.

But the hospitality sector has been hit hard. Years of workforce shortages, the Covid pandemic, the energy crisis, and poor economic management under the Conservatives have taken a heavy toll. And now, the Labour Government's policies are making things worse.

Rachel Reeves' hike in Employer's National Insurance Contributions is hitting hospitality particularly hard. Recent surveys show 1 in 3 hospitality businesses are running at a loss, 6 in 10 have cut jobs, and many have reduced staff hours.

The Government's changes to business rates also shift the burden unfairly, forcing independent small and medium-sized enterprises to subsidise large corporate chains. On top of this, energy market failures continue to push up bills, with little competition to drive prices down.

Liberal Democrats believe that hospitality is vital for economic growth, jobs, and thriving communities. That's why our members have today passed new policy:

- Abolishing business rates and replacing them with a fair Commercial Landowner Levy that supports small businesses.
- Helping small and medium-sized businesses invest in training, digital technology, and energy efficiency to become more competitive.
- Reforming the apprenticeship levy into a more flexible system that truly supports skills development in hospitality and beyond.

We are also calling on the Government to act urgently by:

- Exempting hospitality small and medium-sized enterprises from the Employer's National Insurance Contributions increase to ease their cost pressures.
- Consulting on a new, lower NIC band for the portion of workers' salaries between £5,000 and £9,100, to support part-time workers

- Making sure the Review of Electricity Market Arrangements delivers real improvements so hospitality businesses can access better energy deals.
- Speeding up apprenticeship reforms and empowering Skills England to be truly independent and employer-focused to tackle skills shortages.

Read our new policy in full

If we want a growing economy and flourishing communities, we must back hospitality, not leave it to struggle under unfair policies.

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Author:

Opportunity For All

Across the country, people are being held back not by a lack of potential, but by a lack of access to the training they need to succeed.

From care homes to construction sites, clean energy to HGV driving, employers are facing critical skills shortages. And while the world changes faster than ever, with AI transforming how we work, investment in training has fallen drastically.

If the Government are serious about driving growth, they would put skills at the heart of their agenda. Instead, their approach leaves key decisions tied to short-term politics rather than long-term needs.

Liberal Democrats believe in real opportunity for everyone, at every stage of life. That's why today, our members have backed new policy with a bold, long-term plan to close skills gaps, boost growth, and help people turn their potential into success:

- A **£10,000 Lifelong Training Grant** for every adult, available in instalments at ages 25, 40, and 55, to support re-skilling and career transitions.
- **Reforming Skills England** into a truly independent body, accountable to Parliament and driven by regional and sectoral expertise.

- **Guaranteeing apprentices are paid at least the National Minimum Wage,** and scrapping the lower apprentice rate.
- **Extending the Pupil Premium** to post-16 further education learners and equalising per-student funding with school sixth forms.
- **Creating Skills Cooperatives** for small businesses to pool training resources and transforming the Growth and Skills Levy into a Skills and Training Account model to empower both employers and individuals to fund training.
- **Boosting vocational qualifications,** micro-credentials, and modular learning to give people more flexible routes to success.
- **Speeding up recognition of people's existing qualifications** when they move to the UK, so they can use their skills here.

Read our new policy in full

We also know that opportunity is about removing barriers. That's why our plan tackles the childcare gap for full-time students, gives extra support to young carers, improves prison training, and makes care experience a protected characteristic under the Equality Act.

These reforms will help fix the skills shortages holding back our economy, while giving people the freedom and confidence to take on new challenges at any stage of life.

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Author:

[Freedom From Harm – Gambling as a Public Health Issue](#)

It's marketed as harmless fun – a quick spin, a flutter, a chance to win big. As the MP for a town with a racecourse, I'm no stranger to gambling. As a liberal I view this as both a freedom-to and a freedom-from issue.

Because for too many people, gambling leads not to a jackpot, but to debt, broken relationships, and even tragedy.

Across the UK, millions are affected by gambling harms each year. It's estimated that one-person-a-day dies by gambling-related suicide. Children are growing up in households where gambling problems overshadow family life. And the rise of online slot machines available 24/7 on phones means that gambling is easier, faster, and riskier than ever before.

The gambling industry knows this. It profits from it. And for years, the absence of firm regulation has let them get away with it. Public safety has been put behind profits, with few wider economic benefits from the rise of online gambling.

In 2023, politicians from all parties agreed we needed a public health approach to gambling, and now the Labour Government must not quietly step back from that consensus.

As liberals, we believe adults should be free to gamble if they choose. But freedom also means freedom from harm.

Today, Liberal Democrat members have passed new policy to put public health at the heart of gambling regulation:

- Creating a statutory, independent Gambling Ombudsman with real power.
- Curbing the impact of gambling advertising, marketing, and sponsorship.
- Enforcing affordability checks so no one can gamble beyond their means.
- Giving local councils the same powers over regulating gambling venues as they have over pubs.
- Regulating online 'loot boxes' as gambling.
- Making online gambling companies pay their fair share by increasing remote gaming duty from 21% to 42%.

Read our new policy in full

The scale of the problem is clear: 1 in 40 people experience problem gambling, including 1 in 66 11–17-year-olds; and more than three million adults are harmed by someone else's gambling. The cost to society is as high as £1.77 billion a year – and the human cost is far greater.

These reforms would not only save lives, they'd raise hundreds of millions of pounds to help fund NHS treatment for gambling addiction and prevent future harm.

The gambling industry has had a free pass for too long. Liberal Democrats will hold them to account and put people before profits, so that gambling in

the UK can be safe, fair, and free from harm.

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