

[View in browser](#) **Jonathan Bray**

Connections

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News and stories of progressive change

I'm glad you asked

My research for my year's fellowship with the Foundation for Integrated Transport on [decarbonising suburban transport](#) has taken me to Bremen, Kortrijk, Paris, Grenoble, Orléans, Geneva, Berlin, Barking and Oxford so far this year. I've seen car share do what buses usually do; mobility hubs at scale; and streets where cars aren't allowed to overtake cyclists. There's some snapshots on what I've seen in the rest of the newsletter. But what's striking on this quest so far is the diversity of approaches; the different strategies for scaling up pilots; and the strength of the civic imperative (rather than the growth / environmental preoccupation that tend to dominate the discourse here). Looking forward to getting stuck into drafting the paper over the summer.

Meanwhile in GB public transport is returning to public control and/or provision at an accelerating rate. I produced [these graphics](#) which shows 32.2 million people in the British Islands are now in areas where bus services are already (or will be) controlled and/or provided by the public sector. With Sheffield Supertram, Tyne and Wear Metro and West Midlands Metro having moved from a concession model to direct provision the balance on light rail has shifted towards direct operation by the public sector. At the same time a substantial chunk of the UK heavy rail network is in the public sector already – with more to come. Below I make the case that to realise the benefits of public ownership of rail we need a vision to match. A good example of making the most of public ownership is the trail blazing

and award winning Warrington's Own Buses, proud to be municipally owned and one of the most dynamic bus operators in the country. I'm currently enjoying working with them on how they can continue to thrive following the passing of the new Westminster buses legislation. Meanwhile in Wales new buses legislation has entered the Senedd bringing all the work that's been going on behind the scenes (which I continue to play an advisory role on) is getting closer to fruition on the ground.

At the same time one of many good things about not working full time is more time to read. Want to know how we got to Trump? I recommend 'Kill All Normies' by Angela Nagle. That's you they are talking about.

Policy geek postcard from Orléans



Small cities can do big things. In Orléans (population: 117,000) they have reimaged their public transport provision. Its beating heart (and that of the city centre itself) is a two line tram system. In the city centre tram, street and city design come together seamlessly and beautifully. They also have stylish new urban buses which enhance the streetscape and which nullify any risk of stigmatisation of the mode. For low density suburbs and outlying employers there is an extensive demand responsive transport service provided at scale feeding into the high frequency linear bus and tram lines. There are reasons why you couldn't cut and paste the Orleans approach into British places of similar population (such as Crawley, Gloucester, Basingstoke or Basildon) but nevertheless growing public control and provision of public transport (and an accompanying change in mindset) should enable us to move from incrementalism (plus short lived gimmicks chasing funding streams and awards) to more

strategic rethinks rooted in local circumstances and ambitions.

Meanwhile [join me on this trip through Orlean's reimagining of small city public transport](#) via the medium of powerpoint.

Stories of progressive change: Blocking a roads programme



In the nineties I was one of the founders and coordinators of ALARM UK – a successful national coalition of anti-road protest groups in the 1990s. So I'm proud to have been a 'blocker' (as the clunky argot of Starmerism would have it). I'm pleased that Spring is in full spate in woodlands that would have been uprooted to make way for motorway intersections. That there are homes where there would have been car parks, traffic jams and sprawl. That there are flourishing communities that we helped save from being beaten, divided and hollowed out by the road engineers.

Here's an extract from 'Road Block – how people power is wrecking the roads programme' which told the story of the campaign...

"The question is simple," said Rupert Harwood, one of the founders of ALARM UK, "can we reproduce the successful anti roads campaign [that had taken place in London] across the country? If so, the Government's National Roads Programme would be in severe trouble." He was speaking in 1991 to Jonathan Bray, Gina Harkell and John Stewart. Together, round a kitchen table, they formed ALARM UK.

Each person had played an important role in ALARM (All London Against the Roadbuilding Menace). Now they set out to employ the strategy they had used in London to take on something much bigger – the £23 billion National Roads Programme. The DoT had unveiled it in 1989 with bravado, boasting that it was the biggest road-building programme undertaken in Britain 'since the Romans'.

The DoT had not been put off by what happened in London. It put its defeat over the

Assessment Studies (a plan for a series of new and widened arterial and orbital roads) down to London being a special case. Nationally, it intended to spend £13 billion over ten years to substantially 'upgrade' the country's road system. This was later revised upwards to £23 billion. The scale of the programme was awesome. Huge swathes of the motorway and A-road network were to be widened and rebuilt. The country was to be transformed, with the motorway network widened to ten, twelve or even fourteen lanes. New motorway boxes were proposed for regions like the West Midlands and Greater Manchester, plus new quasi-motorways like the South Coast Expressway and the Home Counties East-West route. According to English Nature, 161 Sites of Special Scientific Interest were threatened (SSSIs represent the UK's best areas for flora, fauna & geology), while English Heritage calculated that over 800 important archeological sites could be affected. A survey of the South East found that over 370 wildlife sites were threatened by, national or local road schemes. For the powerful road lobby, the 1989 roads programme represented their finest hour. With such a vast increase in road-building, rocketing car use (during the 1980s, traffic doubled on the motorway network) and declining public transport, the future looked bleak from the point of view of campaigners. On the plus-side, the scale of the roads programme was such that the scale of potential opposition was equally vast, especially when the road-planning process was so skewed against objectors that it was capable of radicalising the most conventional of citizens.

Around that kitchen table, ALARM UK devised its strategy. Essentially, it followed the London pattern to provide: a central, umbrella organisation which supplied local groups with information on transport, environmental and campaigning matters, which staged occasional nationwide stunts (including a 'Stop That Road Week') and which held conferences where the groups could meet. ALARM UK groups would be autonomous. ALARM UK has never had a constitution, just a set of guiding principles. The idea was never to build up ALARM UK for its own sake, but simply to establish a movement to create a climate of protest which would overcome the National Roads Programme and so pave the way for real investment in more sustainable forms of transport.

For the full story click [here](#).

Meanwhile, solidarity with the [Transport Action Network](#) who are fighting the latest outbreak of road building mania.

In depth: Rail nationalisation - without a vision the people perish

 Privatisation Departures Board			
Expected	Franchise	Operated by	Days to go
25 May 2025	South Western Railway	First Group & MTR Corporation	63 days
20 Jul 2025	c2c	Trenitalia	119 days
01 Oct 2025	Greater Anglia	Transport UK & Mitsui	192 days
20 Sep 2026	West Midlands Railway & London Northwestern	Transport UK	546 days
18 Oct 2026	Avanti West Coast	First Group & Trenitalia	574 days
18 Oct 2026	East Midlands Railway	Transport UK	574 days
15 Oct 2027	CrossCountry	Arriva	936 days
12 Dec 2027	Chiltern Railways	Arriva	994 days
01 Apr 2028	Thameslink, Southern & Great Northern	Go-Ahead & Keolis	1105 days
25 Jun 2028	Great Western Railway	First Group	1190 days
Departures		Arrivals	23 Mar 2025

The interminable death throes of rail privatisation are finally coming to an end. The process of putting the railway back together again is very slowly pulling out of the siding. It really is happening now. An integrated and nationalised railway is going to replace the expensive pretence that a heavily subsidised public service can be made to behave like a free market. Government no longer has any tolerance for endless tinkering with a structure that has proved itself fundamentally incapable of providing a reliable railway at a price the nation can afford. A railway that has also been subject to periodic nervous breakdowns - from Hatfield and Railtrack going bust to persistent timetable meltdowns and staff shortage fiascos. The bar of the last chance saloon is finally closing and the financial engineers have been asked if they have got homes to go. Treasure island (as Britain was known to overseas franchise bidders) is closing its borders.

All well and good. But what happens now? Well we know that the initial focus is on gingerly rebuilding the custom and practice of operating an integrated railway again. This to be done through 'alliances' on select parts of the network where although infrastructure and operator are still separate entities there is no financialisation of the relationship. Instead there is a common goal of doing what's best for the railway and its passengers. We know that the rail minister doesn't want GBR to be a large organisation and the intention is that it will grow out of government, operators and Network Rail - rather than Network Rail turning into GBR. We know that the government doesn't want open access passenger operators excessively freeloading and cherry picking at the state's indirect expense. We also know it's going to take time. Time for the franchises to expire, time to set GBR up and time for the railway to get used to being one team again. We know that the Government wants a single integrated GB railway - but it also favours Mayoral areas, with the ambition and resource, integrating the railway into their wider single integrated public transport networks. If you are a neat freak this seems incompatible. Scotland and Wales already have (to a greater or lesser extent) their own railway. There's also London Overground and Merseyrail Electrics. Bee Rail is on the cards for Greater Manchester. Does this mean that GBR railways is really GB long distance and the

English regional rail network that Mayoral authorities haven't successfully claimed? The tensions are already apparent. This isn't the big railway that railway folk were assuming. However, I believe it can work if a bigger vision is there – which I will come back to later.

So that's what we know. What we don't have yet is a sense of how this is going to work in practice. What it will look like and feel like for passengers? What will the structure and governance of GBR be. If you are glass half full you would say caution and slowness makes sense given the complexities and that you don't want the railway to perform worse before it gets better. If you are less generous you might argue that the nature of rail reform is so far characterised by lofty high level adjectives and insular railway organisational pre-occupations. Missing in the middle is a vision of what this new railway will actually do for passengers and places and what the proof points are along the way. And although it feels like there's lots of time for steady as we go, there's also an argument for moving faster. Because the world is an uncertain place and politics abhors a vacuum. Because there needs to be some concrete sense for passengers, places and the workforce of where this is all heading.

In some ways there are some uncomfortable echoes of the 1948 rail re-nationalisation. There the railway was exhausted by war rather than rail privatisation. There was also a similar conservatism among the railway establishment who succeeded in translating the preceding division of the railway into four large companies into the new British Railways. This was a 'Morrisonian' form of nationalisation where publicly owned industries were still to be run by the same kind of businessmen and specialists as they were before they were nationalised. Meet the new boss, same as the old boss. For the railways this meant it took a long time before British Rail (as it became) started living up to its name and stopped organising itself around railway operational geography and started to align themselves with the services the railway offers to the people and places it serves - namely regional, inter city, London and the south east and freight. So if we don't want 1948 again what could a vision for the future of an operationally integrated and publicly owned railway look like?

Well how about a simple and compelling fares offer? How about a GB version of Germany's Bahn Card? For an annual fee you get a third or a half off? A good proportion of the population can get a third off anyway through one of a myriad range of national railcards so why not extend the privilege (you could charge less for the card for concessionary groups if you wanted). Also use the card to make public ownership more tangible and associated with the more positive aspects of life – leisure travel offers, opportunities to get involved and news about how the network is developing. The way to blend the devolved railway with the national railway is through going back to a national InterCity network, a London and South East network and a regional network - alongside the devolved nation railways (Scotland and Wales) and big city urban networks (London, Manchester, West Midlands etc). To help prevent non-devolved regional railways ending up as the bits and pieces that nobody wants, I'd establish a regional express network. The railway remains orientated around making radial routes out of London better and better whilst the service linking other cities can be very poor. Poor regional links often map onto areas of sizeable population which are relatively underserved by local rail too such as East Lancashire, Teeside and the East Midlands. A regional express network would open up new markets, bring some cache to the sector and make the national railway feel like it wasn't as London-centric as it feels now. Meanwhile freight is supposed to be the big success story of privatisation. I'm not so sure. True it's not repeatedly fallen apart like the privatised passenger railway but we are now left with a specialist bulk freight only railway which various companies scrap for at margins which leave

no room for investing in expanding rail freight's role into new markets. That's why cities as large as Bradford have zero rail freight and why stations which could act as distribution hubs for urban deliveries stand empty at night. A nationalised railway should and could judiciously widen the role of rail freight in a way that would be both popular and capture the public and political imagination.

That's my vision. Pick holes in it by all means. But some kind of vision (with proof points along the way) is what's needed. And to do that I'd also argue that we also need a less Morrisonian concept of how the railway should be governed. The state corporation model is far better than what we have now. But with a state corporation a lot depends on who is the CEO. For every good CEO (like BR's Sir Peter Parker) there's plenty of examples of lost years under much lesser leadership. I'd therefore argue for the governance of rail to reflect a greater diversity of voices and perspectives than has hitherto been the norm. In the absence of public interest representation in the governance of a State corporation the civil service becomes a poor proxy for the wider public interest.

Back in 1948 the nationalised railway nearly ended up being called Great British Railways. It staggered into being and took a long time to find its feet. This time there's the opportunity not just to make the railway more reliable but also to set out a broader and more inclusive vision rooted in how best a national railway owned by all of us can best serve people, passengers and place. There is a world to win.

[This article first appeared in Passenger Transport magazine. Pic courtesy of [Bring Back British Rail](#)]

The future shock three



Car share that acts like a bus route. In Grenoble they are trying out a new form of car sharing. Car sharing that does what a bus usually does - with a fixed route and stops. Here's how it works. If you drive into Grenoble on the [pilot route](#) (which includes a dedicated car share lane on the expressway section of the route) then you can register on an app which tells you if there is anyone at a stop waiting to be picked up. As a driver you get paid 50 cents per empty seat and €2 per person you pick up. If you are a user of the service you register on the app and every car share trip you make is free. The logic of this form of car share is that bus provision can be expensive and frequencies low – so why not take advantage of the vehicles that are already travelling the route instead. Grenoble isn't the only city that's trying this approach in a country where more widely car share has exploded. This is the latest development in a country where car share has gone mainstream. Go on the SNCF site and you get the option for car share as well as rail; car pool lanes are springing up all over - including on the Paris orbital motorway; and 27 million people are signed up to BlaBlaCar.

Cities of mobility hubs. We have a few in the UK so far. Strictly pilot and small scale, But what happens if you cut to the chase and put mobility hubs everywhere in a city? From city centre to outer suburb? That's what Berlin is going to do. In Berlin there are three dimensions to mobility hubs. Firstly there are mobility points (where you can hire two wheel vehicles), secondly there are stations (where you can also rent, hire and charge vehicles) and thirdly there are clusters (made up of multiple points and stations in a single neighbourhood). The gateway app to the system is Jelbi which is both journey planner and payment system giving

access to Berlin's entire public transport and sharing services in a single app: all forms of public transport as well as e-moped, e-scooter, bike, car and taxi. The [Jelbi app](#) is great but it's an aggregator and a gateway – which ultimately routes payment to the different public and private providers. It's not therefore Mobility as a Service' as originally conceived (which was about purchasing packages of 'mobility' for different periods at a capped price).

Most of the existing mobility points, hubs and clusters are in the central area – but they are spreading (mostly where there are willing infrastructure funders). Will it work? Well it depends what you mean by 'work' plus we don't have the full scaling up or the data yet. But Berlin is on its way to being the first World City to be a city of mobility hubs so before long we are going to find out.

Streets where cars can't overtake cyclists. In Kortrijk (in the Flemish part of Belgium) city centre cars can never take over a cyclist. [That's because every street in the city centre \(which isn't fully pedestrianised\) is a cycle zone.](#) Cars are welcome - but as guests. And being a guest means that you can't overtake a cyclist and you can't exceed 30km per hour. Cyclists can also use the entire road space. And the same principles have also been applied to numerous suburban streets – except there the maximum speed for cars is 20km per hour. It's quite an experience to be part of a relaxed flotilla of cyclists cruising through the city centre with any cars following behind. It also keeps the street space alive dodging the danger of one too many echoing pedestrianised deserts on wide streets which just don't work somehow; of in-centre retail and residents feeling cut off; or of traffic being funnelled along secondary 'sacrifice' streets. Will we see this approach taken up in the UK?

Side projects: Latvia - European railways' Jurassic Park



Not so much changed after the collapse of the Soviet Union for Latvian rail freight. Its Soviet era infrastructure and traction was making good money moving vast amounts of Russian and Belarusian raw materials to its three ports at Riga, Ventspils and Liepāja. But whilst the Soviet-era infrastructure remains largely intact much of the transit freight has fallen away with Russia pivoting east before the war and sanctions decimating much of what was left. The country's vast yards at places like Daugavpils (reputed to be the most complex in the Soviet Union) and Ventspils (the USSR's largest oil export port) are much quieter now. However they still sometimes rumble to the rolling thunder of the standard double-unit Soviet freight loco – the mighty 2TE116 with 6000 hp at their disposal - to shift long, clanking consists of basic broad gauge wagons.

As the Baltic Railways correspondent for Today's Railways Europe I took an in depth look at European railways' Jurassic Park in [this illustrated feature](#)

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