

Marie Goldman

MP for Chelmsford



Renationalisation might be part of solution but not the whole answer

I've lost count of the number of times I've stood on a railway platform, watching the departure board flicker from 'on time' to 'delayed' to 'cancelled'. And I'm not alone. Across the country, passengers are fed up – fed up with unreliable services, eye-watering fares and a system that seems designed more for profit margins than public benefit.

So, when the Government announces plans to bring more of our railways back into public hands, it's tempting to cheer. After all, the current model – where private operators run services on publicly-owned infrastructure – has created a mess of overlapping responsibilities, opaque contracts, and perverse incentives. When things go wrong (and they often do), it's almost impossible to know who's accountable.

But here's the thing: renationalisation isn't a magic wand. It's not enough to simply change the name on the door. What matters is how the system is run – and whether the Government has the vision, competence and long-term commitment to make it work.

Take Greater Anglia, which serves Chelmsford and much of the East of England. It's widely recognised as one of the best performing train companies in the country. And yet, it's about to be renationalised. That raises a few eyebrows. If even the better operators are being brought under public control, we need to ask: what's the plan? Is this about improving services, or just consolidating control?

Because if it's the latter, I worry. Governments often have a habit of thinking in election cycles, not infrastructure timelines. Railways need sustained investment, strategic planning and a clear sense of purpose. Without that, we risk ending up with a publicly-owned system that's just as underfunded and poorly managed as the private one it replaced.

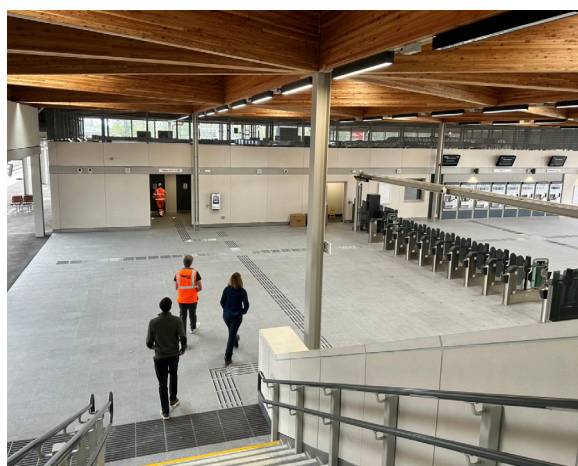
And let's not forget the lessons of history. The old British Rail wasn't exactly a model of efficiency or innovation. In fact, it was so bad it was often the butt of many jokes. Yes, it was underfunded. Yes, it was constrained by

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Marie Goldman MP during her tour of the new Beaulieu Park railway station in Chelmsford

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political interference. But if we're going to bring rail back into public hands, we need to do it better this time, not just repeat the mistakes of the past.

That said, there are reasons to be hopeful. I'm genuinely excited to see the new Beaulieu Park Station finally open at the end of October. Some Chelmsford residents have been waiting decades for this to happen, and it's a

long-overdue investment in our city's transport infrastructure. It's also a brilliant example of what can be achieved when partners work together. The station is the result of important collaboration between Network Rail, Essex County Council, Chelmsford City Council and developers – each bringing something vital to the table, from land and funding to planning expertise and long-term vision. Chelmsford City Council in particular played a key role in shaping the project and ensuring it aligned with the city's growth and transport needs.

It's proof that progress is possible.

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But if we're serious about making rail travel more attractive, we need to go beyond infrastructure. We need to tackle one of the most frustrating aspects of the system: fares.

Ask any regular commuter and they'll tell you the same thing: rail fares in the UK are confusing, inconsistent and often inexplicably expensive.

There are peak and off-peak tickets, advance tickets, anytime tickets, super off-peak tickets, railcards, split-ticketing hacks and a whole

host of other options that make booking a journey feel like solving a puzzle. And that's before you try to compare prices across different operators or navigate the minefield of refund policies. It shouldn't be this hard.

Simplifying fares isn't just about convenience, it's about fairness and accessibility. People shouldn't have to spend hours researching how to get the best deal, or feel penalised for travelling at the "wrong" time. A clear, transparent fare system would help rebuild trust, encourage more people to use trains, and make public transport a genuinely viable alternative to driving.

Other countries have done this well. In Germany, for example, the introduction of a flat-rate monthly ticket for regional travel has been hugely popular and has helped boost rail usage. In the UK, we need to explore similar models, whether that's capping fares, introducing zonal pricing or offering simple, flexible passes that work across regions and operators.

Renationalisation gives us the opportunity to rethink how fares are set and how passengers are treated. But again, it comes down to political will. Will the Government take this chance to simplify the system and make it fairer? Or will they continue to tinker around the edges, leaving passengers to navigate a maze of options and inconsistencies?

The Liberal Democrats believe in a railway system that works for passengers, not profit. That means integrating operations and infrastructure, investing in modern rolling stock and ensuring decisions are made in the public interest.

It means simplifying fares, improving accessibility and making sure that rail travel is affordable, reliable, and sustainable.

But it also means being honest about the challenges – and sceptical of quick fixes.

Renationalisation might be part of the solution. But it's not the whole answer. Without long-term thinking, proper funding and a genuine commitment to improvement, it risks becoming just another headline – another gesture that doesn't deliver real change.

So yes, I support reform. But I also demand clarity. Because passengers deserve better. Our economy needs better. And our planet demands better.

Thanks for reading.

Marie