

# Former Transport Secretary speaks of importance of rail fares reform for the good of Britain

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Sir Patrick McLoughlin says he wishes he'd have done more to grasp the nettle of fares reform whilst he was Transport Secretary.

The former Secretary of State for Transport carried out the George Bradshaw Address in London this week.

A politician for 33 years he was Secretary of State for Transport for four years.

He said: "I'm not one for regrets, but as I look back on my years in the Cabinet as Transport Secretary, with the benefit of hindsight, I wish I had done more to grasp the nettle of fares reform.

"I can see clearly now that we could have benefitted not just passengers, but Britain as a whole.

"If we had succeeded in refashioning a simpler, better value, and more logical system, I am sure hundreds of thousands more people would have been encouraged to use trains, bringing millions of pounds into the system.

"This is especially true of the long-distance routes."

Sir Patrick said fares is surely the next big reform that is long overdue and must be the next big moment of change.

He said: "Now I'm just an ordinary rail traveller, I am even more aware of the complexities of the current system.

"In 1995, the Ticketing Settlement Agreement (TSA) laid down regulations about how tickets should be sold.

"It was well-intentioned. But like many complex systems designed by experts, the good intentions paved the way to the hellish system we have today.

"The overall impression is of unfairness, with its baffling system of fares and prices.

"It has resulted in a system with over 55 million fares, created in fixed bundles within a restrictive straight jacket.

"Our system of fares no longer reflects passengers' expectations, nor the modern world of work, with people working at different times and in different places, not the same seat on the same train to the same office for 30 years.

"Reform requires Government and industry to work together."

The George Bradshaw Address by Sir Patrick was introduced by Daisy Crisp who gave a short introduction to his working life, including an early life as a farm labourer and his time 'down the pit'.

He opened saying his time in Government and as Secretary of State was a 'great privilege'.

"My time as Secretary of State was a time of rapid change on the railway – Crossrail, Thameslink, electrification of the Great Western main line, and of course HS2," he said.

"Increasing passenger numbers, more rolling stock, more modernisation and improvements.

"All of this a direct result of the involvement of private companies after privatisation in 1993.

"This private sector investment, innovation and energy has transformed our railway.

"The combination of private investment and public service ethos is the hallmark of successful railways across the world.

"In 2013, as Transport Secretary at the twentieth anniversary of the Railway Act, I said 'Rail privatisation has made Britain a better country'.

"It has certainly delivered a better railways system. Seven years on – I stand by that.

"It has been utterly transformed into a growing, thriving modern railway with more than double the number of passengers. But that's not to say everything is perfect – far from it.

"Just consider the complexity of the franchise system. I was told by Brian Souter, when I met him for the first time, that when the process started in the 90s, a bid might consist of a single folder. When I arrived at the Department, I asked to see the 2 bids for the West Coast Mainline. My officials wheeled in two trolley-loads of documentation."

"The nature of a vast, complex system like Britain's railway is that it requires constant modernisation and reform.

"If we take our foot off the pedal, we don't slow down, we go backwards."

During his speech, he also spoke of the 'significant contribution' HS2 will make to the nation's wellbeing and prosperity, saying it will transform the life chances of millions of people.

He said: "It will create opportunities for new communities, new businesses, new jobs and new futures.

"Our grandchildren will thank us for getting it done but ask why we didn't do it sooner.

"The lesson of HS2 is that big projects need big leadership and big advocates, otherwise things can get stuck in the mud."

Concluding his speech, Sir Patrick referred back to George Bradshaw.

He said: "The desire to travel is part of our human soul. George Bradshaw understood that.

"That's why he sold timetables and travel guides in their millions.

“People have always wanted to explore and connect, to travel and learn, to meet new people and to be united with old friends.

“Britain’s railway is that will help us to fulfil our desires to meet, work, and explore our country, with its cities, towns and coastal resorts, in Bradshaw’s times, in our time, and I believe, for centuries to come.”

The Address was sponsored and supported by the Rail Delivery Group.

*Photo credit: Rail Delivery Group*