

Labour vows to bring railways back into public ownership as contracts expire

September 26, 2022



The Shadow Secretary of State for Transport Louise Haigh used her speech at the Labour party conference today (26 September) to claim that Labour would “bring railways back into public ownership as contracts expire.”

She gave no further details as to how this would be achieved should Labour win the next General Election.

She told the conference: “Labour in power will bring our railways back into public ownership as contracts expire. Because we believe in a public transport system where power is in the hands of the public. A system that serves - above all else - the public interest. Where lower fares, and more reliable services help reverse the spiral of decline. A system that can deliver economic, social and climate justice.”

She also claimed that “many millions” can no longer rely on public transport.

In her speech she said: “Record delays, overcrowding, routes and services slashed week on week. We have a system where the public have come last for too long, and we know there is too much at stake for the country and the climate to carry on with this shambles. Where broken promises on public transport hold

our country back. Where services connecting our major cities are slashed without warning by unaccountable private operators. And where the public pay ever more for less.

“Because if many millions - let down by services they can no longer rely on - cannot or will not use public transport then - quite simply - there is no path to net zero. And we will never build the fairer, greener future our country demands.

“That’s why my number one priority as your Secretary of State will be ending this spiral of decline on our public transport system.” She said that when the foundations for the modern railway were laid in the Victoria era, it was a vote of confidence in Britain’s future, and that today there are new challenges demanding the same ambition.

Louise Haigh also claimed that no less than 60 times the Conservative party had promised to connect “our great Northern towns and cities and deliver Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR).”

She called NPR a once-in-a-century chance to invest in public transport to transform opportunity across the whole country, rebalance our economy, and take millions of cars off the roads. She said the Conservatives “flunked it.”

She used her speech to claim that Labour would: “lay the foundations for the century to come.” She said: “We will build an Elizabeth Line for the North and deliver Northern Powerhouse Rail and HS2 in full.”

She also criticised the current situation regarding Avanti West Coast. “We can only build a fairer, greener future by taking power from failing private operators and putting it back in the hands of the public. Avanti West Coast (AWC) has become just the latest poster boy of the failing status quo. The worst performing operator in the country - half of all trains late, 60,000 complaints, and what have the Tories done in response?”

She accused the government of rewarding AWC, stating: “They handed them £19m including - and you couldn’t make this up - £4m in performance bonuses. Out of the pockets of the public, and directly into the hands of shareholders. Instead of holding those responsible to account for this fiasco - the Tories played their tired, old tune. They blamed the workers who keep our rail network going. The workers aren’t failing the British public - the Tories and their disastrous rail system have catastrophically failed us all.”

She claimed that under the Conservative party the British railway has become “a cash machine for companies and foreign governments,” and that: “no matter the performance, failure will always be rewarded.