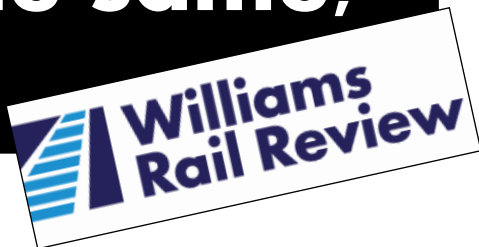


# **More of the same, and worse**



**R**eading the government's Williams-Shapps Rail Review is like watching someone say they're too hot in a jumper then putting on an overcoat. The report slams rail industry inefficiency, but proposes more of the same, and worse.

Network Rail is to be replaced by 'Great British Rail' — the same kind of pseudo public body as before. GBR will run fares and timetables but sub-contract running of trains. The report boasts that this will end the wasteful delay attribution process, but a new wasteful process of tendering and arbitration will begin.

Operators' staff will stay employed by the private sector, but decisions about how services run will be made by GBR. So it will be harder for staff to fight job cuts and other attacks, as anti-union laws allow us only to take industrial action against our direct employer.

Attacks seem inevitable. The report promises to 'rectify' inflation-plus pay rises, proposing year-on-year savings of £1.4bn, presumably by cutting staff costs. Big changes are proposed for stations, and a simplified ticket system is likely to translate to ticket offices closing.

We must not wait until these plans become concrete before organising against them. After the McNulty report recommended cutting guards, the unions waited for each employer to attack before fighting, even though we all knew the attacks were coming. We must organise now to demand a fully nationalised railway network, no job cuts, and decent pay and conditions for all across the sector.

## **Start the fightback now!**

# Track worker safety: what's the plan?

**It's great that RMT is developing a strategy for track worker safety.**

RMT has emailed to tell us it is sending a document about improving lineside safety to top safety people at Network Rail, asking for a meeting.

*Off the Rails* thinks it would be great if RMT could send the strategy to members too.

Four track workers have died at work in the last two years. RAIB's investigation into the two deaths at Margam strongly criticises Network Rail's management. NR has shown blindness bordering on unconcern, tolerating and encouraging

unsafe practices. Major change to improve safety is needed.

This is our chance to demand change: reduced workload, more staff, other proposals. We go to work and put our safety on the line. We are well-placed to discuss and decide what Network Rail can do to improve safety.

It's great that RMT is placing its strategy in front of Network Rail. But the union needs to inform us about what it's demanding and empower us to make extra demands if we need them. The more involved we are, the more we will feel prepared to fight for our safety.

## East Midlands Rail: the fight awakens

**A**fter a twenty-month delay due to Covid and a change of franchisee, guards on East Midlands Railway resumed their fight against unfair starter contracts and T&C-busting rostering with three strikes on Sundays starting on 16 May, the first day of the new timetable.

Reps paid attention to what members wanted, with most favouring consecutive Sunday strikes rather than Saturdays, weekdays or multiple days per week. Plans are being made to further pressurise management if they don't see sense.



With lockdown easing and the vaccine programme providing more protection, guards feel it is high time for the company to materially, not just verbally, acknowledge the key role they have played in keeping the trains running.

# Scotrail dispute rolls on

**T**he Scotrail dispute is still going strong, with guards not working Sundays or overtime. But management have not even offered a meeting, let alone a retreat from their scrapping of overtime rates.

Scotrail's social media posts telling passengers we demand a 50% pay rise for overtime are annoying strikers, but the same post appears on Twitter every weekend! And since management offered to extend ASLEF's rest day working agreement until October this year but stopped the agreement for other grades last year, we know how unfair the company's position is.

Ticket examiners are now taking action, but a ballot of engineers fell a single vote short of the turnout threshold required by anti-union laws. Traincare staff have launched a dispute following a manager being promoted after breaching dignity and respect policies.

While support for the strike is likely to continue, the company is just reverting everyone to spare on a Sunday rather than an actual turn. It looks like Abellio has given up even trying to resolve the dispute because it will no longer have the franchise after next March.

It's an odd dispute to be involved in. Hopefully, more grades taking action will have a domino effect, but it would be good to consider ways of cranking up the pressure so the company can't just ride it out for another nine months.

What we are missing is getting union members together to discuss where the dispute is going. Some ideas are being floated — such as a day of action across the whole network. Bringing members together will no doubt generate more.

## Sleeper strike

**C**aledonian Sleeper workers will stage an eleven-day strike from 15 June against the company's threat to freeze pay. With the employer already showing scant regard for staff welfare, its refusal to increase pay adds insult to injury. Little wonder that nearly three-quarters of members voted in the RMT ballot, with 85% voting Yes to strikes.

This is exactly the sort of concerted action that can win, and in doing so, make it harder for all employers to freeze our pay. This strike deserves the active support of all rail workers.

## also on the OTR blog

### [Why do so few union members vote? What can we do about it?](#)

Out of every five RMT members, four did not vote in the recent General Secretary election, but the problem of low turnout is not confined to RMT.

How can we change this?

### [Stitch up over Merseyrail drivers' pay?](#)

Despite reps' rejection, ASLEF Executive 'notes' ie. accepts, no pay rise on Merseyrail.

### [After RMT GS election: organise the rank and file](#)

While there is widespread desire for change in RMT, the union's left has not organised this or focused it on specific proposals for change, so defeating the continuity candidate was always a tall order.

### [Let's talk about the left platform](#)

Left-wing activists call for discussion on union election platforms and candidates to replace the current culture of candidates simply declaring themselves.

**Plus longer versions of the articles in this issue of Off the Rails.**

**[www.workersliberty.org/blogs/rails](http://www.workersliberty.org/blogs/rails)**

For stories from London Underground's frontline, check out Tubeworker's blog:

**[www.workersliberty.org/twblog](http://www.workersliberty.org/twblog)**

## ***off the rails***

- is written by railway workers
- **is for all rail workers, whatever your job, employer or union**
- provides information, support and a forum to discuss strategies
- **welcomes reports and opinions**
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- **is fiercely pro-union, but independent of union head offices**
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