

## ALL CHANGE IN 2024?



*(Tomorrows Voters'.... and Rail Commuters? Photo: Roger Davis)*

After what has been a turbulent few years, it is clear that 2024 is going to be a year of significant change for the railways, as it will be for many other aspects of life in the United Kingdom. There will be a General Election, although there is some uncertainty at the time of writing as to when the election will be as the timing is in the gift of the Prime Minister.

Now is the time though to start debating and contacting those who wish to become Members of Parliament and form the next government as to what should be done to improve the lot of the rail user over the course of the next five years. There is plenty for an incoming government to get to grips with.

Firstly **HS2**. It is not just the southern half of the West Coast Main Line to Euston that has congestion and capacity issues, the route between Birmingham and Manchester is just as crowded, with paths being at a premium. The back of the envelope suggestion concocted at the Conservative Party Conference in Manchester last October to shoehorn in additional express trains slowing to 125 mph from HS2 at Handsacre Junction onto a line which is already choked with freight trains at 60 mph and the existing InterCity and regional passenger services is risible. It is another example of the short term thinking that has bedevilled the railway for decades.

The new government should have a plan to implement Phase 2a of the HS2 plan (which it has the legal powers for) over the life of the next Parliament.

There is the risk that as we've seen before with electrification that the teams building the first phase of HS2 between London and Birmingham end up being disbanded and we have to restart again and reassemble them from scratch.

Next – **Cross Country**. It is the only operator on the National Rail network that provides services to every region of the country. With passengers returning back to the railways, particularly the leisure markets, wanting to travel on a weekend, it is clear that the current operation is struggling.

There seems to be no long-term plan to develop this business and ensure that it can have the capacity and product needed for the next 20 to 30 years. The Voyager sets are now long in the tooth, without any money being spent on a decent refurbishment since Arriva took over the running of the franchise in 2007. The InterCity 125 sets which were being used to provide additional capacity on busy trains have now been retired without replacement. The politicians need to commit to a strategy to improve this operation that looks at the long-term. It provides key InterCity links but the service is not InterCity quality.

Arriva also operates the **Chiltern Railways** services between London Marylebone and the West Midlands via High Wycombe and Banbury. Chiltern Railways was one of the success stories of rail privatisation with scores of new users along the corridor being attracted to use its services. But the flair has now gone with passengers suffering overcrowded and delayed trains. What will the aspiring MP candidates along the route be doing to change this and ensure Chiltern gets its fair share of the investment cake?

2024 will also see the election for the West Midlands Metro Mayor. What will the candidates' plans be to expand, develop and improve the West Midlands local and regional rail network? Will Aldridge and the Sutton Park line see a new local passenger service after promises for so many years? Will the Inter-regional services such as Birmingham – Nottingham be placed under devolved control? What will the candidates medium and long-term plans be for the local rail network, given how long it takes to deliver a rail improvement scheme, which sometimes is well beyond the five year term of an elected politician.

Are we going to see the establishment of the new strategic body for the railways following the election, on which progress has been on the slow rather than fast lines? Will it have the drive and vision needed to move rail forward into the 2030's, 150 years after the first passenger railway services?

2024 could be like 1979, 1997 and 2015, a year with an election that could define the future direction of travel for the United Kingdom for decades to come.

## WHAT DO YOU THINK SHOULD BE IN THE PARTIES GENERAL ELECTION MANIFESTOS?

At the time of publication of this issue, it is unclear when the General Election will be.

The General Election could be held any time between May 2024 and January 2025.

It is unclear what will be in the manifestos of the main political parties for the railways, transport in general or indeed any issue, especially the economy which is struggling.

What do CfR supporters think should be in the parties manifesto for rail?

E-Mail [contact-us@campaignforrail.org.uk](mailto:contact-us@campaignforrail.org.uk) your thoughts and ideas, and keep an eye on our website [www.campaignforrail.org.uk](http://www.campaignforrail.org.uk) for the latest rail news and updates on our campaigns.