



Nationalisation isn't making the trains run on time, data shows

The task of nationalising Britain's train operators is well under way in a process that is expected to be complete by October 2027. The government says the transition to state ownership is the first step to address longstanding problems and bring Britain's railway infrastructure and train services closer together. South Western Railway (SWR) was the first operator brought into public ownership by Labour in May, followed by c2c in July. Greater Anglia will be the next operator to transfer on October 12. South Western Railway train crossing a bridge over a river. With nine of the 24 biggest train operators under public ownership, how do nationalised trains compare with their private rivals? Public ownership has not improved timekeeping. SWR reported a 2.1 percentage point decrease in punctuality in the last quarter compared with the same period last year and c2c's record has stayed roughly the same. The state-owned TransPennine Express (TPE) is the third least punctual operator: three in ten trains arrived late between April and June, and it has got worse since last year. TPE is also one of the most unreliable services, with 4 per cent of trains cancelled in the last quarter, although the number of cancellations has reduced by 75 per cent since it was transferred to public ownership in May 2023. TransPennine Express train at a station. The performance of private operators is often much worse. Only 59 per cent of Avanti West Coast trains arrived on time between April and June this year and almost 8 per cent of CrossCountry services were cancelled. For some services, nationalisation has been a boon. After replacing Virgin Trains East Coast in 2018, London North Eastern Railway is now one of the most reliable services, with just 2 per cent of trains cancelled, leading the independent watchdog Transport Focus to name it the best operator for passenger satisfaction this year. So why aren't the train operators with the worst records being nationalised first? The government has decided to bring operators into public ownership as their contracts expire to save using taxpayer money to compensate private companies. The performance of nationalised operators depends in part on the state of the inherited system and the quality of previous management. Operators like Northern Trains, dealing with old rolling stock and the impact of constant changes to structure, have struggled to improve performance. "It's wrong to say an operator is badly run simply because of public ownership," said Jonathan Tyler, owner of the Passenger Transport Network consultancy. "Private operators cherry-pick the trains they operate whereas state-owned operators are obliged to provide an all-day, service so more issues can arise." Seven of the nine nationalised services have put more trains on the timetable, making it easier for people to find journeys that suit their schedules. The number of trains planned by c2c and SWR rose by 8 and 3 per cent respectively after they were transferred to public ownership. Tyler said the transition to state ownership was significant only in terms of the wider goal of creating **Great British Railways**, a single public body that will oversee most passenger services. "For a railway to be effective, it must be an integrated organisation. Every national railway in mainland Europe is run as a single entity." Transport Secretary Heidi Alexander boarding a renationalized **Great British Railways** train at Waterloo Station. Nationalising the railways has had majority support among the public for years, rising from 60 per cent in 2017 to 76 per cent in 2024, according to YouGov. Ticket prices remained the biggest gripe: 77 per cent of people said they were too high. Almost half of Britons



expected costs to improve after railway companies were nationalised. Privately operated services are typically more expensive. Great Western Railway was named the most expensive European operator by the campaign group Transport & Environment, which calculated that passengers paid two and a half times the European Union average. The government has not guaranteed lower fares, instead promising a “best fare guarantee” to ensure people are always paying the lowest fare for their journey. The price of regulated train fares is expected to rise by 5.8 per cent next year. • Think UK train tickets are cheaper after 9.30am? Wrong! The Labour Party has said that transferring all franchised services to public ownership will save the taxpayer up to £150 million a year in fees that would otherwise have been paid to private operators. Keir Starmer and Rachel Reeves reviewing documents on a train. The **Department for Transport** said: “We are undertaking generational reform of our railways, bringing services back into public ownership and putting passengers, not shareholders, at the heart of our railways.” Nine of the UK’s 24 biggest operators are under state ownership South Western Railway came under state ownership in May TransPennine Express is one of the least punctual and least reliable operators Heidi Alexander, the transport secretary, boards a rebranded SWR train at Waterloo in May Sir Keir Starmer, the prime minister, and Rachel Reeves, the chancellor Nationalisation isn’t making the trains run on time, data shows Bringing railway operators under public ownership has not improved punctuality, but it has increased the number of timetabled trains