

Reopening railway lines

Posted on **March 21,2018** by **admin**

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 One of the most exciting developments in transport is reopening railway lines. The Beeching cuts that I have blogged on before were planned to cut most of the UK's rail capacity. Beeching (an engineer) in the end managed to close about a third of our capacity. This map shows what the route network would have looked like (black). Pretty much nothing in Wales, not much in Scotland and England only main trunk routes. Beeching envisaged buses taking over from the rural bus lines and main lines being used for fast freight trains. We know what happened there. Rural buses are almost non-existent and freight has never achieved its full potential (although he was right on the importance of rail freight). In the 1980's Thatcher proposed closing all but about 1800 miles and turning the routes into roads. Question would you rather have an extra road running by your house or a railway with a few trains an hour? This plan was dropped after huge protest as was the worst of the Beeching cuts. The pullback from both has left our railways viable for future expansion which either of the above would not have done. Almost ever since the closures campaigners have been trying to reinstate lines. The rise in passenger traffic, climate change, transport chaos on the roads and yes the high oil price has made reopening railway lines viable again. It even now government policy. I was asked to sign a petition this week on this. Which I did. In recent years we have seen our biggest reopening yet the Borders railway. Others such as to Portishead are under way. Reopening these lines is expensive and we should aim for the low hanging fruit. Examples of this fall into 3 categories. The first is where the lines are open and currently used for freight only. An example is Ashington - Blyth - Newcastle. The second is where the line is only recently been closed so the line has not been built on. An example here is Thornton - Leven in Fife. The track is still down (although needs renewal). The last is where much of the existing route is still there and only short stretches need putting back. Many examples here. Bathgate to Glasgow (which I use) was reopened recently all the way allowing Glasgow - Edinburgh travel. The Great central line and Worcester to Derby via Dudley are other ones. Opening the railways lines closed is vital so support your local groups. A full list can be seen [here](#). Neil

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