

Do the Tories have a clue about anything - including tr...

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Philip Hammond has made the most extraordinary range of comments in response to a report on the future of our railways [according to the Guardian](#).

As they note:

Philip Hammond said above-inflation fare rises could disappear within four years if reforms set out on Thursday in an independent report are implemented. But he ruled out fare cuts as he warned that the £5.2bn-a-year state subsidy for the "relatively small" and "better off" proportion of the population that use trains is unsustainable.

Yes, of course: I see. £5.2 bn of subsidy will go but fares won't rise. That's obvious, isn't it?

Next:

"In the long term the taxpayer will not be prepared to just continually increase the level of subsidy that they give to the relatively small number of people who ever use trains — something like only 12% of the population. And of course those who use trains tend to be better off anyway," he said

Quite so: let's shut down all our cities then. There's no other way they can function: trains are critical to their survival. I wonder how he's going to handle the chaos of removing their arteries, or the economic disruption of the extra pay that's going to be required to cover fares?

And doesn't he realise that passenger rail services in this country have almost certainly never paid? Until the post war period freight made all the money for railways. Losses began when freight went to roads. Until it did it cross subsidised passengers. Like Lansley demanding of the NHS something that has never been done before now Hammond is demanding that railways make a profit running passenger trains - something that has never been done before.

The next selection of the inspired wisdom?:

[The report] will avoid echoing the Beeching report of 1963 that resulted in the closure of more than 8,000 miles of track and will not recommend cuts in heavily subsidised rural lines. But the report is expected to lay bare the cost of supporting such services. Hammond said responsibility for those lines could be devolved to local authorities.

Ah, the standard Tory ploy these days - don't blame us for cuts. We gave responsibility to local authorities and they closed the service. The fact we cut their budgets by billions and denied them the right to raise taxes has nothing to do with it of course. The Tories are doing this on health (where the Health and Social Care Bill specifically creates a Local and not a National Health Service with the state having no role left in health care - all responsibility being devolved to local authorities who will have no cash at all to undertake the task given to them) and now he's doing it with railways. Saying a local authority is responsible for subsidising a local route but giving it no additional funds is simply saying someone else must take responsibility for closure. That's sure indication of the pygmies we have in this cabinet.

Finally - to show ignorance of rail operation:

Hammond also paved the way for taking carriages out of service out of rush hour, a suggestion blocked by his Labour predecessors. "What's the point in running empty trains around the country? In some parts of the network carriages could be taken off in off-peak. Shorter trains are a possibility."

Of course it costs energy to move trains around. But it takes additional staff, extra trains movements, extra line capacity and considerable extra cost as a result to split trains, move them to carriage sidings for a few hours and then bring them back again. This suggestion shows the most basic lack of understanding of railways. But then he's a transpor secretary in the mould of Thatcher - I suspect he thinks only failures use trains. She did (she did not go near them - like buses). And that's what's at the core of this.

Railways work as a system, collectively, with cross subsidiation and sometimes subsidy. It's the best net outcome for soc