

## The East Coast main line is anathema to the neoliberal ...

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I wrote this morning about the absurdity of re-privatising the East Coast mainline, and a number of useful comments have been made. Ivan Horrocks of the Open University added this, though, that I thought worth sharing more widely:

*Two points worth adding. First, the East Coast mainline service has to be re-privatised because it's an ongoing and deeply embarrassing illustration, for the Treasury, the Department for Transport, and government more generally, of the fact that publicly run services can be highly successful. Furthermore, it demonstrates that rather than running a service for the financial benefit of private shareholders and senior management (or private equity houses), ie. largely for the benefit of the few, profit can be returned direct to the public purse, thus potentially benefiting the many. As these features of the East Coast mainline case are anathema to the neoliberal project they cannot be tolerated under any circumstances and thus a situation must be constructed where their existence is expunged. I've no doubt it would have taken place several years ago if the franchising process had not been thrown into disarray by developments elsewhere.*

*Second, by pursuing the re-privatisation process despite the success of the current state owned company, it demonstrates beyond any doubt whatsoever that this government, and more fundamentally perhaps, departments of state (the Treasury in particular), are so ideologically compromised that they no longer act in the public interest. Indeed, across government as a whole we now see clearly that the mission of departments of state is to gift public assets and services to private interests at whatever short or longer term cost to the state (and thus to the citizens of this country). The re-privatisation of the East Coast mainline service is simply a particularly egregious example of actions of the form of public administration that a neoliberal state demands.*

I think those particularly useful comments because, firstly, East Coast proves private ownership is not needed to make things work. This operation has worked not just very well but very obviously better under state control. Managers do not need to be owners or to have private owners for this to happen. That is, as Ivan says, profoundly

antithetical to neoliberal ideology.

And second, I agree, that this proves that this government proves how a civil service can be disempowered to the point of undermining its own purpose by the neoliberal state.