

Is rail privatisation dying?

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The [Guardian](#) has published this graphic based on newly published data on rail travel:

The evidence of a downturn in commuting appears very clear. Whilst one-off rail journeys continue to rise, which is welcome given they are better environmental alternative to cars, commuter traffic is falling. And this is equally welcome: there is no joy in commuting. IT is liberating many of us (me included for much of the year) from the need to be physically present at work.

This, however, has important ramifications. Almost all businesses assume ever-rising demand for their product, and rail franchises have almost universally been granted on the basis that this is the case for rail travel. If it is not true then many of those franchises will fail.

That does not mean we no longer need railways. Or that the railway industry has failed: it will not have done so. All that will be proven is that private rail operators have limited commercial aptitude, and the model within which they work has little commercial merit.

The alternative is, of course, state ownership. Labour has to do very little, I suspect, to promote this now. Over the next few years rail franchise operators will be queueing up to hand back the keys to their trains.