

Bibliography for Tokyo Jan 2024

The published literature on railways is vast. Much is aimed at “tetchans” and need not concern us here. Some of the serious books I have found particularly useful are listed below.

Transport in Britain, From Canal Lock to Gridlock, P Bagwell & P Lyth, Hambledon & London, 2002

A comprehensive overview of UK transport from the canal age to supersonic air transport.

The Railway Age, M Robbins, Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1962, Penguin 1965.

An authoritative and well written account of the Railway Age up to the end of the Victorian era.

Bradshaw, Continental Railway Guide, 1853, Adams London, facsimile Collins, Glasgow, 2016. Bradshaw's Guides are well known and contain much of huge interest as well as comprehensive timetables. This is the first European version

The Victorian Railway, J Simmons, Thames & Hudson, 1991.

The pre-eminent author on early railway history, this concentrates on the UK.

Post-war Government interaction is well covered by

British Government and the Railways, 1948-2002, G L Huxley, Back Track, 18, 1&2, 2004.

The next two volumes cover the British Rail era in monumental detail:

British Rail, 1948-73, A Business History, T Gourvish, Cambridge university Press, 1986

British Railways, 1974-97, From Integration to Privatisation, T Gourvish, Oxford University Press, 2002.

A History of Japanese Railways, 1872-1999, well covers its title, Aoki et al, East Japan Railway Culture foundation, 2000, whilst *Early Japanese Railways, 1853-1914* by Dan Free discusses the Engineering Triumphs that Transformed Meiji-era Japan.

Of the many books outlining the limitations of rail privatisation in the UK, the following are good representatives:

Signal Failures, Politics & Britain's Railways, D Wragg, Sutton Publishing, 2024

Broken Rails, How Privatisation Wrecked Britain's Railway, C Wolmer, Auram Press, 2001.

For a realistic optimistic view from Japan:

From JR East

Success Story, The Privatisation of Japanese National Railways, S Sumita, Profile books, 2000.

And from a huge influence of modern times in Japan:

Japanese National Railways, Its Breakup and Privatisation, Y Kasai, Global Oriental, 2003.

Early progress on European rail unification is provided by

Reforming Europe's Railways- An assessment of Progress, Eurailpress, Hamburg, 2005.

European Rail policy

Official policy and its development is covered in great detail in the following:

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/130/rail-transport>

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/rail-transport-policy/>

in early 2024, it is clear that much remains to be done, that the money for reform will mainly come from public funds, that throughout Europe the concept of the national state railway is

still strong and whilst rail's mode share struggles to increase beyond 6%, many ambitions targets remain unattainable with attractive competition coming from the low-cost airlines and the ubiquitous automobile.

I own and have read many autobiographies of UK politicians of the post-war era. The pile of books is 2.5 m high and contains approximately 30,000 pages. There is scant mention in this mountain of literature of railways, rail policy and the role of railways in public life and certainly no serious informed discussion of these topics.

Trade magazines and newspapers contain many articles on railways and railway policy. Not all such information is reliable.

Increasingly information arrives by mobile phone services. I receive daily messages on the state of the service between Oxford and London provided by Great Western Railway, operated by First. As I write, (11/01/24) today's messages are:

Train services may be delayed after leaving due to a points failure, The 08:46 will be cancelled due to more trains than usual needing repairs at the same time.

In the last two weeks, the following were received:

The 16:23 will be cancelled due to a broken-down train.

Services are affected by a speed restriction over defective track.

Services are disrupted due to urgent repairs to the track.

Train services may be cancelled due to flooding.

Services may be cancelled or delayed due to a tree blocking the railway.

Train service may be cancelled or delayed due to a problem currently under investigation.

Train services may be cancelled or delayed due to the emergency services dealing with an incident earlier today.

It is left to the reader to imagine the punctuality and reliability of the service.

Additional note:

In JNR Its Break-up and Privatization, Kasai, above, a Panel discussion on rail privatization held on 6 September 2002 is reported:

What were the objectives of privatization in the UK?

Sir Steven Robson, former Director of Finance, Regulation and Industry of the UK Treasury

Well, I think, the motivation for privatization in the UK was to improve efficiency and also to improve service to the users of the railways. These improvements were seen to come from replacing the flaws in state ownership. I think there were seen to be four. Firstly, there was a lack of clarity about the objectives of all enterprises in the state sector in the UK, and hence, there was no definition of success and so no real accountability for performance. The second problem was the interference in the activities of the enterprises by civil servants and politicians, which is obviously part of the lack of clarity of objectives. The third aspect, I think,

was that the public sector generally in the UK is motivated by aversion to risk and this means that it is motivated to avoid doing new and different things, so effectively it was motivated not to improve. And finally, the finances of state enterprises in the UK are often constrained by the state's own fiscal position.

He *thinks*, he should have known!

Christian Woolmer writes: <https://www.christianwolmar.co.uk/2009/02/robson-missing-from-the-dock/>

Robson is a serial offender when it comes to wasting taxpayers money. A very cerebral and self-confident mandarin, he pushed through the structure of rail privatisation, insisting on the separation between operations and infrastructure that is at root of so many of the railway's problems and so heavily criticised by rail managers from Japan who know how to run a railroad. Robson was obsessed with the notion of open access and stimulating competition and had no knowledge of operating practices of the railway. With the Tory politicians unable to agree on a new model for the industry, Robson was able to push through his scheme ignoring the protests of all and sundry in the industry. It was he who had the notion that every train path should be sold individually which fortunately never came to fruition. At the Treasury, he also blocked moves to regulate the banking industry more tightly and then got his reward by being made a non-executive director of RBS. The role of non-execs is to safeguard the interests of shareholders. With RBS shares having gone down from £17 50 to 22p in the past four years, he has obviously done as good a job with the banking industry as he did on the railways.

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