The public and privatised rail

Contributed by Ipsos MORI
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Ten years on, is the public warming to privatised rail?

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But a greater percentage disagree than agree that the rail network is safer now than it was before privatisation (45% compared to 24%). The research also reveals that a majority (56%) do not think a rail journey today offers better value for money than under British Rail.

Looking back on 10 years of privatised rail, Ipsos MORIâ€™s head of transport research, Carole Lehman, says: â€œWhat passengers want is reliable clean trains. Since Hatfield, reliability has been poor, so it is no wonder that the public were unhappy with the rail service. However things are at last getting better, satisfaction is back to pre-Hatfield levels and the investment that many train operators have put in updating their rolling stock is at last showing dividends. But be warned, now that reliability has been tackled, the public are now turning their attention to the cost of travelling by rail. On the safety agenda, good news if often overlooked, and the message on safety does not seem to be getting acrossâ€™

When the British rail network was privatised in the 90s, the Government of the day said it was the best way to provide much needed investment. Research conducted by MORI among rail passengers in 1991Â revealed some recognised potential benefits in privatisation â€“ 30% thought efficiency would improve if British Rail were privatised (compared to 7% who thought it would get worse), 22% thought there would be an improvement in how it was managed (again with 7% who thought it would get worse) and 24% thought there would be an improvement in overall quality of service (against 9% who thought it would get worse). In terms of safety, there was more of an even split â€“ 17% expected an improvement compared with 16% who expected safety to get worse.

By 1993 , the year parliament passed the rail privatisation bill, half of British people (52%) opposed plans to allow private companies to run passenger trains on the British Rail network, with just a third (31%) supporting the plans.Â

Last year (Winter 2005) we asked MPs for their views on a number of different industries, and only 35% said they had a favourable view of the rail industry, compared to 38% who said their view was unfavourable. Transport journalists are also more likely to take an unfavourable view of rail in Great Britain â€“ 57% unfavourable compared with 30% favourable. However regarding safety issues, the majority of MPs (72%) believe the quality of track is better now than at the time of privatisation and 69% feel the railway is also safer now.

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