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How have Britain's railways transformed?

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Martin Griffiths is Chairman of the Rail Delivery Group, representing train operators and Network Rail, and Chief Executive of Stagecoach Group.

Commercial operators began running train services in Britain in the 1990s. Since then, the number of journeys taken each year on our railway has almost doubled - growing much faster than other European countries with, often, rail networks run wholly by the public sector.

For example, journeys per person have increased far faster here than in France, Germany and the Netherlands, our railway has become safer than any of our continental peers, and passenger satisfaction is higher than on any other major European railway.

Like Britain, other countries have invested heavily in their rail services, and much of Europe is experiencing similar changes which are encouraging a switch to public transport, such as growing congestion. But why has GB rail grown so much faster?

A major reason for our success is the diverse range of commercial passenger and freight companies who run services on a single national network, working in partnership with government and the industry's supply chain.

It's been really important that successive governments have committed to invest in the rail infrastructure - things like the tracks, signalling system and stations - with five year plans that provide crucial long term certainty for companies. High Speed 2 is a great example of this commitment to improve the country's rail network.

Private sector companies have also played a very important part - using their commercial acumen and innovation to attract more passengers and freight customers.

Companies running passenger services know they need to offer new things in order to win franchises. Once won, these contracts with government have encouraged train companies to keep down costs, and to grow income by attracting passengers with better services and discounted fares. The vast majority of this extra income is returned by operators to government for reinvesting in the railway – the amount paid back has increased fivefold since 1998.

A privatised rail freight sector has invested in longer, lighter wagons and new depots, adapting to changing demands to seek out new business. The amount of freight carried by rail has increased by 70 per cent since the mid-1990s. This helps to get fresh food onto supermarket shelves and power people's homes, with rail freight carrying half the fuel to generate electricity.

There is still more to do to build trust with users of the railway, to offer customers an even better service and to ensure that when we commit to improving the network, we deliver. But Britain's successful formula for running rail services – an effective partnership between the private and public sectors — has achieved the near impossible task of sustaining and expanding a vital public service through a prolonged economic downturn and in a climate of reduced government spending.