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## **Train Ticket Price Increases**

After a period of record low passenger numbers, caused by the pandemic and associated measures to tackle the health threat of the pandemic, it is clear that we need to encourage people back on to trains to help our economy and our environment, and this cannot be achieved when trains are unaffordable for many people. Despite this, regulated fares were increased again for 2021 and there are now fears of rail passengers facing the highest fare hike in a decade in 2022.

The Government has announced a number of changes to the rail system over the last year. Under the current system of Emergency Recovery Measures Agreements for train operating companies, as introduced in September 2020, taxpayers continue paying hundreds of millions of pounds in profit to private rail companies to run the network, several of these companies are commercially connected to nationalised train companies in Europe. This is completely unacceptable.

More recently, in the Government's rail plan released in May this year, it introduced a more flexible ticket system. However, this system is nowhere near ambitious enough. I know the Campaign for Better Transport, for example, has said that the new flexible tickets "are not comparable to the discounts for people commuting full time" and that they could turn out to be a "real missed opportunity". I believe it is important that our local railway stations should serve all our local residents, rather than excluding those who can't afford to pay the current expensive ticket fees. When this is partnered with the increases in gas prices, general cost of living and the increase to the rate of National Insurance Contributions, I believe that even more people will be priced out of using our public transport both locally and nationally.

The plan also announced the creation of a new public body, Great British Railways. While I welcome steps to increase public ownership and control over the railways, the plans do not go far enough. I believe fuller public ownership, rather than a concession model, would better serve the state, the public and long-term investment. While we may see a change of name on the side of the trains, my concern is that fundamentally passengers will still be left short-changed. I fear we have nationalised risk but continue to allow the privatisation of profit.

We are in a climate emergency and green, efficient transport must be the future and it is vital that our public transport should be affordable and accessible to the public. I worry that decisions taken by the Government are continuing to make rail travel unaffordable at a time when it is vital to get the rail sector on a stable footing and ensure its sustainability in the long term.

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