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Rail Travel Improving, says Rail Regulator. But can regulator stand up for passengers? Politeia series debates way forward.

Rail travel is rarely out of the news. To many passengers it often seems unreliable, overcrowded and expensive. What, or who, can stand up for those who travel by train? In *Regulating Rail: for whom should regulation work?* Chris Bolt explains his role in protecting the passenger, licensing the train operators and working to the Government's remit. As Chairman of the Office of Rail Regulation, he sees to 'the integrated safety and economic regulation for the railways', enforcing health and safety regulation and competition laws, and giving advice to the Secretary of State.

How well does the system work?

Bolt is confident the system has improved: punctuality and safety are better, passenger satisfaction is up and there are now long-term plans for rail over the next 30 years, for infrastructure - at Thameslink, Birmingham New Street and Reading - and for doubling today's rail capacity by 2030. The regulator's role must develop to meet the new challenges: higher passenger expectations for a seven-day railway, improved efficiency, more investment and planning for additional capacity and high-speed lines.

Bolt's pamphlet raises a number of questions about the effect of regulation in practice.

- Is the job of protecting passengers' interests consistent with Government policy and funding for rail?
- How effective are the regulator's sanctions for dealing with Network Rail?
- Should the rail regulator have a real voice in setting fares?
- Can the regulator's powers to license train operators be effective? Or do the agreements for franchising between the Department of Transport and train operators rule the day?

Bolt's pamphlet is the second in Politeia's *On Track...?* debates. The series will include protagonists and opponents of the status quo. So far, those who see the system from the inside* suggest that present arrangements are working and can be built on with success. Readers will be invited to judge as the series unfolds.

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*Chris Bolt is the Chairman of the Office of Rail Regulation and Arbitrator for the London Underground PPP.

Chris Green served as a Chairman of the Railway Forum (2005-2007), he is a Non-Executive Director of Network Rail and was Chief Executive Officer of Virgin Trains (1999-2004).

**Regulating Rail: For Whom Should Regulation Work?* is published by Politeia on Tuesday 17th June 2008. For an E-version please click http://www.politeia.co.uk/Portals/0/Bolt_Final.pdf. Hard copies are available to journalists on request from secretary@politeia.co.uk