

Railway safety and the media

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Outline

- Rail safety, rail privatisation, and the media
- What stories of transport accidents and casualties get into the media?
- How do the media (and society) cope with 'value for money' in safety

Rail safety, rail privatisation, and the media

Post-privatisation fatal train accidents

Year	Location	Fatalities
1994	Branchton (Strathclyde)	2
1994	Cowden (Kent)	5
1995	Ais Gill (Cumbria)	1
1996	Rickerscote (Stafford)	1
1996	Watford Junction (Herts)	1
1997	Southall (London)	7
1999	Ladbroke Grove (London)	31
2000	Hatfield (Herts)	4
2002	Potters Bar (Herts)	7
2007	Grayrigg (Cumbria)	1

Post-privatisation fatal train accidents

- Previous slide lists the fatal train collisions and derailments in the 20 years since privatisation in 1994
- There were 9 in 1994-2003 and 1 in 2004-2013
- Some received enormous publicity, notably
 - Ladbroke Grove (aka Paddington) (1999), in which the death toll was at first estimated to be ~100 rather than the final 31
 - Hatfield, which led to speed restrictions over the whole network, doubling journey times
- But some, notably Cowden, received little publicity

Media and popular conclusion on safety after a decade of privatisation (~2004)

- After a decade of privatisation, there had been 9 fatal train accidents, some very serious
- All of them involved failures by railway organisations
- The railway organisations were in the private sector
- Some accidents involved communication failures between fragmented former parts of BR
- Conclusions
 - (1) At least some of these accidents wouldn't have happened under BR, and therefore
 - (2) Privatisation made safety worse

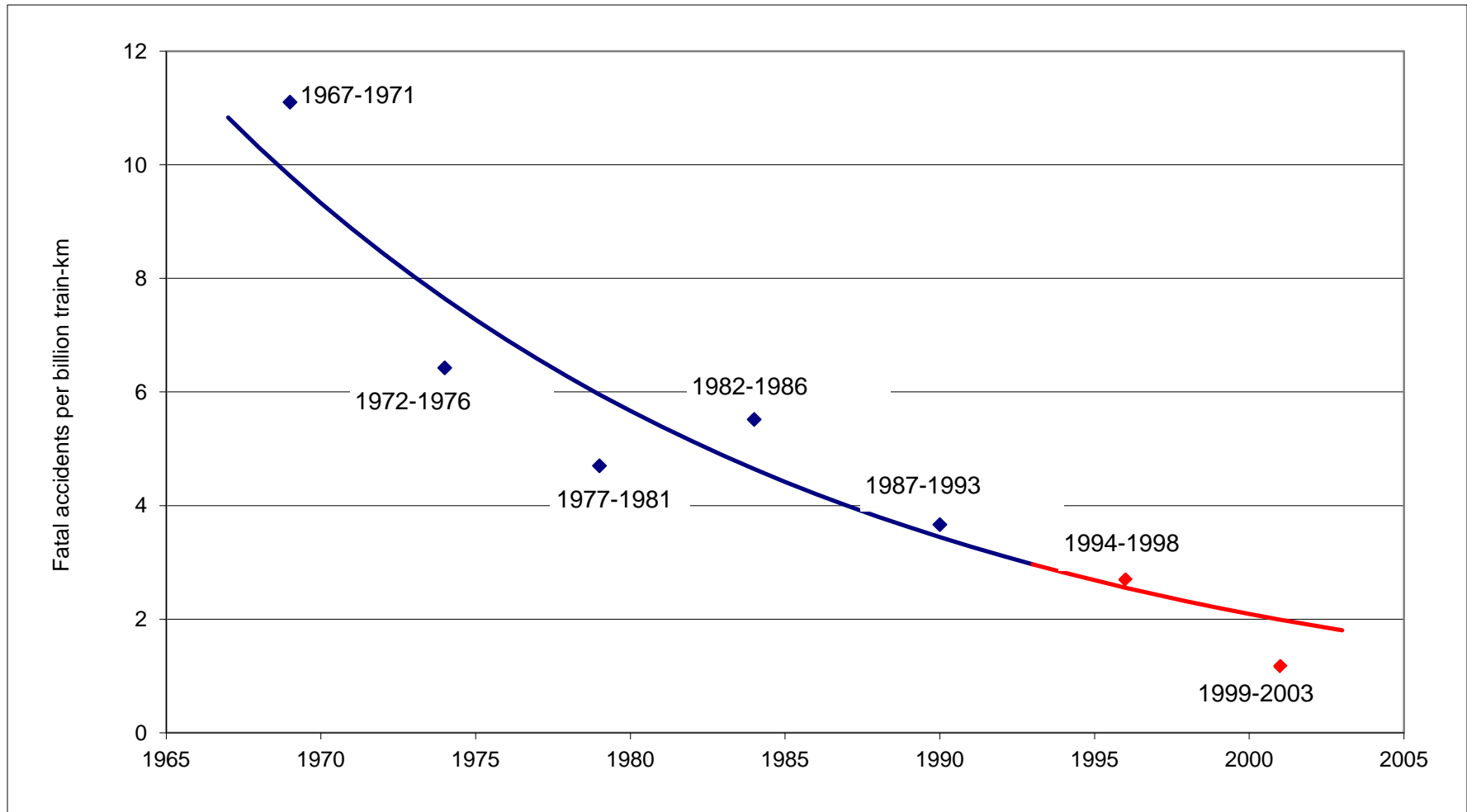
Fatal train collisions and derailments 1964-2013

Decade	Number of accidents
1964-1973	42
1974-1983	23
1984-1993	18
1994-2003	9
2004-2013	1

Counterargument on safety and privatisation

- Look at BR's safety performance in three preceding decades (previous table)
- Ask: how many accidents would BR have had in 1994-2003?
- BR had far more than 9 fatal accidents per decade – but they were falling sharply
- Following graph suggests that BR would have had about the same number as the privatised railway
- Conclusion in 2004: privatisation did not worsen safety
- Strengthened by excellent safety performance in 2004-2013 – better than any other sizeable European country

Fatal train accidents per billion train-km: 1967-2003



Media involvement

- Frequent TV appearances as an 'expert' in late 1990/early 2000s, especially after Ladbroke Grove
- No appearances now since the railways have got safer
- First presentation of argument that privatisation had not worsened safety was at a public lecture at Imperial College in 2005
- Appearance on BBC Radio 4's 'More or Less' programme
- Good safety performance now both accepted and expected
- Emphasis has now shifted to level crossings

What rail casualties get into the media?

Railway fatalities per year 2008-2013

	Deaths/y
Passengers in train accs	0
Other passengers	5.2
Staff	2.0
Level crossing users	8.8
Other public (excl trespassers)	1.6
Trespassers	43.2
Suicides	226.2
Total	287.0

Railway fatalities

- Previous slide shows number of railway fatalities in the last five years
- 79% were suicides and a further 15% were trespassers, leaving only 6% (or 18 per year) that were accidental and to people who were legitimately on the railway
- Of these 18, about half were level crossing users (pedestrians or road vehicle occupants)
- The rest were a mixture of largely personal accidents.
- No fatalities in train accidents, because there were no fatal train accidents

Railway fatalities and the media

- Almost all fatal train accidents are reported in the national and international media
- Level crossing fatalities are almost always reported in the local media, and sometimes in the national media. Not so in the past.
- Trespasser fatalities and suicides are reported only occasionally. (To avoid 'copycat' actions?)
- It seems that accidents are likely to be reported in the media if
 - The railways are wholly or partially responsible
 - There were multiple fatalities
 - They were otherwise unusual

How do the media (and society)
cope with 'value for money' in
safety?

Value for money in safety measures

- Expenditure on possible accident reduction measures is typically far greater than available budgets. For some safety measures, the benefits are small relative to the costs.
- Therefore to maximise lives saved for a given budget, projects with lower value for money should be foregone
- This is accepted in road safety. The official Value for Preventing a Fatality (VPF) on the roads is currently about £1.7m.
- The railways formally adopt the same approach.
- But it raises problems not apparent in road safety

Issues in Value for money in safety measures

- Railway managers, regulators and politicians are understandably reluctant to forgo known safety measures that would save lives, however few
 - Classic example is Automatic Train Protection
 - Ministers of both parties (Cecil Parkinson, John Prescott) have said 'money is no object' with regard to railway safety
- What do the railway managers say to the relatives of the victims of preventable accidents?

Thank you

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