

TUC South West

# Annual Conference 2025

## MOTIONS

### **1. A progressive transport agenda for the South West - RMT**

Conference welcomes the government's Passenger Railways Services (Public Ownership) Act which will ensure all rail services in our region are back into permanent public ownership within the first term of a Labour government.

The legislation also marks the first step towards the creation of Great British Railways that will reintegrate track and train into one publicly owned rail company. After over 30 years of rail privatisation and campaigning for public ownership this is a significant victory for the trade union movement.

Conference is concerned however that there are vested interests seeking to dilute and delay these policies. These includes the private open access rail operators which are profit-driven entities that abstract revenue from publicly owned operators and increases fragmentation on the railway.

Conference therefore agrees to work with affiliates to lobby MPs and politicians within our region to support the delivery of a progressive rail agenda for the South West, including:

- The implementation of Labour's proposals to take the train operating companies into public ownership and integrate rail operations with infrastructure into Great British Railways (GBR), creating a single employer.
- GBR must move to end outsourcing, absorb open access operations and rail freight, end the profiteering of the rolling stock leasing companies and develop publicly owned rolling stock ownership and manufacturing.
- Increase staffing on our railway in the region to improve service reliability and accessibility and protection of rail jobs and skills, including in our rail infrastructure and supply chain.
- Improved integration between rail, bus and ferry services.

- Stronger legislative and enforcement measures to protect transport workers from assaults at work.

Conference also notes that Labour's rail policy commits to set targets for modal shift to lower emissions from transport and also acknowledges that every £1 spent on rail can create £2.50 in economic benefits. Conference therefore believes this is a strong basis for this TUC and affiliates to lobby the government for a massive increase in public transport investment in the region, including high speed rail services and significantly improved and new connections between our towns and cities. An example of such a new connection would be the reopening of the Tavistock to Plymouth railway line and conference agrees to write to local MPs and councillors to support this initiative.

## **2. Supporting Rail Nationalisation & Avoiding Re-Privatisation - ASLEF**

Conference welcomed the Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Bill receiving Royal Assent on 28 November 2024. This will enable the fragmented franchised passenger operators to be brought under public ownership and eventually become Great British Railways, this is an important step in ensuring that the railways function for public needs and not private profit.

Conference also acknowledges the Government's English Devolution White Paper which was published on 16 December 2024. The proposed devolution could enable local authorities the ability to better integrate public transport modes and through the yet to be published GBR Bill, mayors are expected to get a statutory role that will give them a greater say in their local rail services and should provide a statutory role for mayors in governing, managing, planning and developing the rail network. The mayors of 'Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities' may also request greater devolution of services, infrastructure and station control.

Conference however is concerned with the mixed messaging that is being presented around the role for the private sector in operating passenger rail. The White Paper highlights the success of rail in London and the Liverpool City Region both of which have the private sector operating their rail services under concession models. This is at odds with the UK Government's preference and TUC policy for passenger rail services to be publicly owned with profit being re-invested into the network and not being paid to shareholders.

Conference notes the need for the union movement to ensure that we do not sleepwalk into another fragmented and privatised passenger rail system which sees the interest of shareholders put ahead of the needs and wants of the public. As such conference calls on the TUC South West Region to:

- a. Oppose any rail devolution in the South West which could see services that are operated by publicly-owned operators (i.e. GBR) being operated by the private sector
- b. Oppose any devolution of rail infrastructure from a publicly-owned infrastructure manager to a private sector manager
- c. Lobby current and future elected Mayors to guarantee that any devolved rail will be managed and operated by the public sector and not concessioned out to the private sector

### **3. A four-day working week - PCS**

That this conference supports the wider exploration of the four-day week (4DW) through trials carried out under Defra and its arms length bodies where PCS has been campaigning for trials of a shorter working week with no loss of pay (under the catchier title of 4DW) carried out to prove that this can benefit both the workers and the public that they serve.<sup>1</sup>

This conference notes that a UK pilot for a 4DW with no loss of pay involving 61 companies employing a combined 2,900 staff resulted in 56 of these companies opting to continue the trial, 18 of these making the shorter working week permanent has happened across various industries.

The wellbeing benefits of the shorter working week could not be clearer neither can the knock-on benefits to the employer.

- 39% of workers reported being less stressed.
- 44% reported they were sleeping better.
- 54% stated they now had a better work-life balance
- 71% reported reduced levels of burnout.
- An average increase in revenue of 35% is reported
- A decrease in Sick days of 65%
- Improved retention rates of 57%

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<sup>1</sup> Also see: <https://www.theguardian.com/money/2025/jan/27/two-hundred-uk-companies-sign-up-for-permanent-four-day-working-week>

The UK pilot is by no means an isolated one. Several other countries and organisations have experimented with variations on the shorter working week and have invariably recorded similar results to the UK pilot.

This conference supports a wider understanding of the benefits of a 4DW that can help improve productivity, mental health, and give people time to better support their families and their communities. On that basis the South West TUC is instructed to support campaign events exploring and explaining the benefits of a shorter working week as well as to promote and support union campaigns calling for the 4DW.

#### **4. Public Sector Cuts - PCS**

That this AGM expresses serious concern regarding the government's approach to public sector pay and the recommendation of a 2.8% rise. We refute the Chancellor's recent statements positing that 'ministers would have to consider cuts to frontline services if they want to fund above-inflation pay rises for public sector workers'.

Cutting public sector spending is detrimental to working people and their communities still facing the consequences over a decade of Tory austerity. To create a narrative in which public sector pay rises would serve as the trigger for cuts to public services not only insults thousands of public servants, but also shows a blatant disregard for the real terms pay cuts that working people have faced over the last 14 years.

The anticipated consequences of these budget cuts are alarming. They threaten to undermine essential services, create job insecurity among public sector employees, and negatively impact the communities we serve. We believe it is imperative to advocate against these funding reductions to safeguard public sector jobs and services.

This AGM supports the hundreds of thousands of trade union members and working people rightfully demanding fair pay. We dispute the government's claim that above inflation pay awards will have to be funded from existing budgets. 14 years of austerity has demonstrated that cutting the way to growth is impossible and we call on the government to tax those who can afford it, instead of cutting pay from thousands of working people.

The regional executive is instructed to:

- Set up campaign events to highlight the benefits of public sector pay rises to the wider economy
- promote and support union campaigns to oppose the misleading narrative that public sector pay rises equal service cuts, thereby protecting jobs and services for the benefit of communities in the South West and throughout the UK.

## **5. Better buses for the South West - RMT**

Conference notes with concern that as a result of the deregulation and privatisation introduced in the bus sector in England in the 1980s, there has been a significant decline in the bus sector with the loss of thousands of services and bus worker jobs. Conference further understands that rural areas, such as much of the South West are particularly impacted by cuts to bus services.

Conference notes that the Bus Services (No2) Bill is currently on its passage through Parliament and understands that if enacted, this could introduce new powers for Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) in the South-West to regulate their bus services and set up new municipal bus companies.

Conference calls on the SW TUC to use this process and the subsequent implementation and development of this legislation and bus policy to campaign for the following objectives.

- Stronger protections for bus workers where LTAs implement bus regulation including provisions to protect all jobs, pay, conditions and pensions and prevent the creation of two-tier workforces;
- The creation of a national bus forum comprising local and national government, trade unions and operators as recommended by the Transport Select Committee in 2018 with a commitment to agree a move towards sectoral collective bargaining for the bus sector;
- A greater focus on public ownership of bus services, including for LTAs to be able to directly award their bus service provision to their municipal bus company without needing to compete with commercial operators;
- An improved safety regime for all bus workers including
  - a) Restrictions on excessive hours with no loss of pay
  - b) The establishment of a dedicated independent crash investigation unit for bus safety incidents similar to the Rail Accident Investigation Branch, Air Accidents Investigation Branch, and Marine Accident Investigation Branch.

- c) Urgent action on bus fires, including authorities auditing the cause of serious bus fire incidents in the region to inform the development of preventive measures
- d) A requirement for all LTAs to provide bus workers with access to an independent and confidential safety reporting system such as CIRAS.
- e) The publication of bus safety data.

Conference notes that there have been significant cuts to bus and wider local authority funding in the past decades and believes that there needs to be a ring-fenced, longer-term funding settlement for local authorities to enable them to deliver the bus services their communities require, including reversing previous bus cuts.

Conference believes that the benefits of increased investment in bus services and manufacturing would be significant and understands that research by Transport for Quality of Life on behalf of the TUC, RMT and other transport unions found that an annual increase of £300m operational funding and £300m capital funding for buses in the South West would facilitate modal shifts necessary to meet climate change targets and create more than 90,000 new jobs in bus operation and maintenance in the region.

## **6. Re-Industrialisation of Shipbuilding Apprenticeships: Returning to Practical Skills Over Academic Rigour - GMB**

This Conference Notes:

- The UK shipbuilding industry has been a cornerstone of our industrial heritage, with a proud tradition of producing some of the world's finest vessels. However, decades of neglect, offshoring, and reduced investment have led to a decline in domestic shipbuilding capacity and expertise.
- Shipbuilding apprenticeships, which were once a key pathway to skilled employment, have increasingly become more academic, with a growing focus on theoretical knowledge rather than hands-on, practical skills. This shift has resulted in a generation of young people entering the industry who are ill-prepared for the practical demands of shipbuilding.
- There has been a substantial gap between the skills taught in current apprenticeship programmes and the skills actually required by the industry, leading to significant skill shortages on the shop floor. Employers are

increasingly reporting difficulty in recruiting workers with the necessary trade-based experience and expertise.

- Shipbuilding is a vital part of the UK's national security, economic recovery, and the green transition, particularly with the rise of sustainable maritime technologies. It is essential that we invest in developing a new generation of shipbuilding apprentices who are trained to the highest standards in the traditional, hands-on methods of the trade, while also adapting to the future demands of the sector.

This conference Believes:

- The current approach to shipbuilding apprenticeships, with an overemphasis on academic qualifications and theoretical knowledge, is failing the next generation of workers and failing to meet the real-world needs of shipyards across the UK.
- A shift back towards a more practical, hands-on apprenticeship model is necessary to properly equip young workers with the skills and experience they need to thrive in the shipbuilding industry. This approach should incorporate industry-led training, mentorship, and real-world experience in shipyards.
- The UK's shipbuilding industry must be re-industrialised through investment in both apprenticeships and innovation, ensuring that the sector remains competitive and can meet the growing demand for green, sustainable ships and vessels.
- Investment in the UK's shipbuilding apprenticeship system is crucial to ensure the long term success of the industry and to create sustainable, well-paid, unionised jobs for working people in coastal and industrial communities.

## **7. National Shipbuilding Strategy - A Call for Stability in UK Shipbuilding, GMB Union Wales & Southwest Region**

This conference recognises the vital importance of shipbuilding to the UK and Southwest economy, national security, and industrial capability. For too long, the UK's shipbuilding industry has suffered from cycles of boom and bust, leading to the erosion of skills, the closure of yards, and the loss of strategic manufacturing capacity.

The National Shipbuilding Strategy, launched by the then conservative government in 2017, was meant to provide long-term, sustainable growth for the sector. However, the industry's continued instability highlights the need for more immediate and comprehensive action to ensure that the strategy is fully implemented, with long-term funding and a clear vision for future procurement. This conference therefore calls on the Southwest TUC to Lobby alongside national TUC the UK Government to:

- **Fully implement the National Shipbuilding Strategy** with a clear and defined pathway for consistent investment in the sector.
- **Ensure sustained funding for shipbuilding**, including support for shipyards, suppliers, and the workforce, to prevent the boom-and-bust cycles that have plagued the industry for decades.
- **Commit to a long-term shipbuilding programme**, which includes the procurement of both military and civilian vessels, in order to provide stability and a clear pipeline of work for UK shipyards, thereby preserving skilled jobs and enhancing the UK's strategic industrial capacity.
- **Support workers in the shipbuilding sector** by ensuring decent pay, training, and long-term job security, with a focus on apprenticeships and skills development for future generations of shipbuilders.
- **Prioritise UK-built vessels** for both public sector and defence needs, ensuring that the UK's shipbuilding capabilities remain at the forefront of technological innovation and national security.

This conference believes that by implementing these measures, the three yards in the Southwest, Appledore, Devonport and Falmouth and the UK Government can stabilise the shipbuilding industry, create sustainable jobs, and ensure that the UK remains a global leader in shipbuilding for decades to come.

## **8. Restoring Winter Fuel Payment must be a first step in reforming the whole UK energy system**

Conference notes that:

1. The Labour government's cuts to Winter Fuel Payment has been condemned by politicians across the party spectrum and by charities working with older people, and is deeply unpopular with voters. Unite's Survation polling carried out in September 2024 found that 67% of UK voters objected to means-testing Winter Fuel Payment.
2. Some local authorities have made efforts to mitigate the effects of the Winter Fuel Payments, for example in the NEYH region Doncaster Council have

offered £150 payments using their Household Support Fund allocation. Congress also notes the mitigation put in place by the Holyrood and Stormont governments. While these measures are welcome, they do not fully cover the losses to pensioner households and create a postcode lottery of help with fuel costs.

3. The loss of Winter Fuel Payment is not the only energy setback faced by households and businesses in the UK since July 2024:
  - a. The Ofgem price cap rose by a total of £170 in September 2024 and January 2025, meaning higher prices in the Winter months.
  - b. Labour promised before the election that its GB Energy project would save households £300 a year, but that commitment has since been quietly dropped.
  - c. Energy costs remain far higher than before the pandemic, with the price cap 53% higher in Q1 2025 compared to Q1 2020.
  - d. UK businesses consistently report that high energy costs put them at a competitive disadvantage compared to our European neighbours, putting UK jobs and economic growth at risk. For example, UK Steel reports that UK steelmakers paid 85% more for electricity in 2023/24 than German and French steelmakers<sup>2</sup>
4. While UK households and businesses pay unsustainably high prices for energy, the privatised energy system continues to generate multi-billion profits for its shareholders, and eye-watering salaries for senior executives, for example:
  - a. British Gas profits in 2023 were £750m, a tenfold increase on the previous year<sup>3</sup>
  - b. National Grid has paid a total of £30.5m to its CEO in the five years to March 2024<sup>4</sup>
  - c. In 2022, as the household energy price cap hit £2,500, the total profits made by the UK energy sector were £45bn, more than treble the profits made in 2021<sup>5</sup>
5. The UK public overwhelmingly agrees that our privatised energy system is not fit for purpose, with consistently around two thirds of UK adults supporting a return to public ownership<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.uksteel.org/electricity2023>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-68303647>

<sup>4</sup> <https://highpaycentre.org/uk-pay-database/> 'National Grid'

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.unitetheunion.org/media/5642/unite-investigates-renationalising-the-energy-sector.pdf>, p.37

Conference believes that:

1. The public outrage over the Labour government's cuts to Winter Fuel Payment entitlement is not just because it is a cruel and unnecessary attack on 10 million pensioners. It also reflects a broken UK energy system, and an urgent need for root-and-branch reform.
2. The cuts to Winter Fuel Payment indicate that the Labour government has embraced the austerity economics of their predecessors, seeking to pay for a 'financial black hole' through further cuts to working class households and communities. The UK public is desperate for real improvements in the cost of living, and as Joseph Rowntree Foundation research has shown, if this does not happen quickly and visibly, support for Labour will evaporate<sup>7</sup>. The beneficiaries of this will be the new radical right of Reform who are widely using the Winter Fuel Payment issue as a recruiting tool.
3. Our privatised energy system is a failed model, overseen by a weak and compromised regulator – Ofgem – which puts corporate profits first. The post-pandemic period has seen a multi-billion transfer of wealth from UK household bill-payers to energy companies, largely owned by foreign capital. The only solution to ensure fair prices is to remove profiteering from the system by returning our energy system to public ownership. Unite's research has shown that this is both possible and affordable<sup>8</sup>.

Conference resolves to:

- Support unions calling for the immediate restoral of the universal Winter Fuel Payment, backdated to ensure all pensioners receive a Winter 2024/25 payment.
- Support unions calling for the abandonment of the failed approach of austerity. Support unions calling for savings through spending cuts, growing the economy, and stimulating jobs through government spending on infrastructure. Support unions seeking to ensure that the "change" that was promised is delivered rapidly and visibly through improvements to the cost of living such as reduced energy bills.
- Support unions calling for the return of the UK energy system to full public ownership.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/consumer/trackers/support-for-bringing-energy-companies-back-into-public-ownership>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.jrf.org.uk/news/benefits-of-pms-plan-for-change-must-be-felt-by-worst-off-as-bottom-40-face-further-drop-in>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.unitetheunion.org/media/5642/unite-investigates-re-nationalising-the-energy-sector.pdf>

