Key dates in the history of Britain's railway

Great Britain was the first nation to use steam locomotives, and Britain's railway is the oldest in the world.

The arrival of the railways contributed to the dramatic growth of industrialisation in the nineteenth century and massive social and economic change. The population increased, and the growth of industrial manufacture led many people to move from the countryside to the towns.

Alternative means of transport – the canals and roads – were not sufficient to meet the needs of the new industry. The railway filled this gap, developing rapidly alongside new means of producing iron and steel for construction, using more efficient steam locomotives. Today, the railway is being modernised again with improvements to major stations, upgrades to track and signalling and key routes being electrified.

DID YOU KNOW?

Brunel's walking stick was especially made to unfold to 7ft ¼ inch (2.14 metres) at the flick of a wrist. This was the width of his broad gauge railway track and enabled him to check whether it was being dug to the correct width.

Timeline

1804 The first successful steam locomotive (Richard Trevithick's Penydarren) runs on wheels and is used to transport iron across nine miles of track.

1807 The first passenger-carrying public railway is opened by the Oystermouth Railway. It uses horse drawn carriages on an existing tramline.

1812 The first successful steam powered commercial locomotive – the Salamanca – is built by John Blenkinsop and Matthew Murray for the Middleton Colliery Railway.

1825 The first public railway in the world to use steam power is opened at the Stockton and Darlington Railroad by George Stephenson. The railway moves 36 wagons of his steam-powered coal train 'Locomotion' across nine miles of track in two hours.

1829 George and Robert Stephenson's locomotive, 'The Rocket', sets a speed record of 47 km/h (29 mph) at the Rainhill Trials held near Liverpool.

1830 Robert Stephenson's 'Invicta' powers the first railway to run regularly scheduled passenger services in the world, linking Canterbury to the seaside town of Whitstable six miles away.

1838 The Great Western Railway from Paddington to Maidenhead, engineered by Isambard Kingdom Brunel, opens.

1840s Rapid expansion of the railway sees the first large-scale merging of several railways to form a single company.

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1883 Britain's first electric railway opens in Brighton. It's the oldest in the world and is still operating! The inventor Magnus Volk was an engineer who grew up in Brighton and enjoyed experimenting with electricity. He was the first person in Brighton to have electricity in his house! The railway opened on 4 August 1883 and ran for over a quarter of a mile along the seafront.

1902 Automatic signalling makes its first appearance between Andover and Grateley.

1904 The first electrified suburban railway line was opened between Newcastle and Benton.

1914 First World War breaks out and the Government takes over the running of the railway until 1921, when the private railway companies regain control.

1921 An Act of Parliament is passed, merging 123 railway companies into just four: the Great Western Railway; London Midland and Scottish Railway; London and North Eastern Railway and Southern Railway.

1940 During the Second World War the rail companies effectively operate as one organisation to help Britain's war effort.

All Clear for the Guns on BRITISH RAILWAYS

1947 The railways are nationalised to form 'British Railways' under the Transport Act.

1950s Modernisation programme as diesel and electric trains are introduced to replace steam trains.

1960 The railways are re-organised with many secondary routes and branch lines closed to allow the network to make money.

1970s Introduction of the high-speed diesel-electric Intercity 125 trains.

1990s British Rail is broken up and Railtrack is created to run all tracks, signals and stations. Private companies start to run trains on many of the routes.

1994 The Channel Tunnel opens, beginning a rail service between London and Paris.

2002 Network Rail buys Railtrack and takes on its responsibilities.

2011 The number of rail journeys in Great Britain between 2010 and 2011 reaches a record 1.16 billion.

2013 Britain's railways are now the second safest in Europe (after Luxembourg) and Network Rail is delivering a major modernisation programme including electrification of key national and local routes.

RAILWAY ELECTRICITY IS 100 TIMES MORE POWERFUL THAN ELECTRICITY IN THE HOME. It is very dangerous so remember the **Rail Life 'Safety Top 3':**

• **STAY CLEAR OF THE TRACKS.** Is it worth putting your life on the line?
  - electricity can jump up to three metres.
  - don't play with kites or balloons near overhead power lines.

• **USE THE LEVEL CROSSING.** Shortcuts across the railway can kill.

• **KNOW THE SIGNS.** Be alert to railway signs, they could save your life.

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