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East Coast rail firm's £208m for taxpayers

john-paul ford rojas

Wednesday 9 October 2013

THE nationalised railway company operating the East Coast Main Line has returned £208.7 million to taxpayers as revenues soared, fuelling the debate over plans to return it to private hands.

Directly Operated Railways (DOR), which took over the running of the London-Scotland route four years ago, saw the figure increase 6.6% in the year to the end of March.

Turnover rose 4.2% to £693.8m and total sales were up 4.2%, including ticket revenues, as well as other income, such as catering and car parks.

The figures reignited the debate about the Government's intention to re-privatise the line - with a new franchise expected to start in February 2015. They also revealed Michael Holden, chief executive of DOR, was paid a salary of £224,800.

Labour and rail unions have questioned the need for re-privatisation, saying DOR is returning a high level of money to the Department of Transport and gets a lower taxpayer subsidy than others.

Last week it was announced Channel Tunnel company Eurostar was bidding to operate the route jointly with French firm Keolis.

Bob Crow, general secretary of the Rail Maritime and Transport union, said: "These figures destroy this Government's case for handing the East Coast back to the rip-off merchants from the private sector.

"DOR is paying even more money back to the Treasury, in contrast to the fat profits extracted from the privatised routes, yet the politicians are prepared to ignore that."

Doug Sutherland, DOR chairman, said East Coast had improved levels of customer satisfaction and punctuality.

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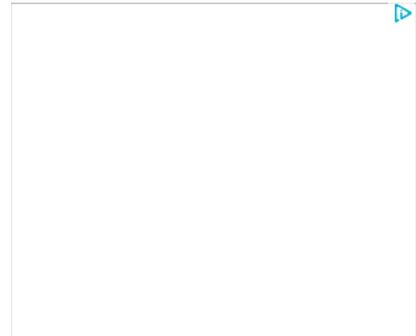
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