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Editorial

Different models of rail management

Rail reforms are going on everywhere in the world, and we are now seeing three different models of railway management in highly-developed economies. In Japan, nearly 10 years after the restructuring of Japanese National Railways, the three major JR passenger companies are demonstrating their commercial viability. They enjoy comfortable profitability, bearing entire infrastructure costs and receiving no financial aid from the government. North-American railroads also display another example of commercially-viable railways. In contrast with the Japanese passenger railways, they specialize in freight transport, but they also enjoy profitability, without any financial support from the government and with full responsibility for their infrastructure.

In Europe, neither passengers nor freight can generate enough money for railways, and the current solution is to separate railway operations from infrastructure. To maintain infrastructure by using substantial public funds may ease the financial difficulties of railways and will probably pave the way to the privatization of rail operators (although the British solution is taking a different path by privatizing Railtrack and charging full infrastructure costs to rail operators). However, the problems of safety and technical development must be always taken into account, because the most critical safety problems of today's railways arise from the interface between rolling stock and infrastructure, and future improvements of railway performance also depend on technical breakthroughs in this border area.

T.SUGA

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