

**A LETTER ON BRANCH  
RAILWAYS ADDRESSED TO  
THE RIGHT HONOURABLE  
LORD STANLEY OF ALDERLEY**

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A Letter on Branch Railways Addressed to the Right Honourable Lord Stanley of Alderley by  
Edmund Sharpe

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**EDMUND SHARPE**

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*From the Author*

A LETTER  
ON  
BRANCH RAILWAYS

ADDRESSED TO

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

LORD STANLEY OF ALDERLEY,

President of the Board of Trade,

&c. &c. &c.

CONTAINING SUGGESTIONS FOR THE CREATION OF A SYSTEM OF SECONDARY  
RAILWAYS FOR THE AGRICULTURAL DISTRICTS.

BY

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*Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects.*

WITH AN APPENDIX AND MAP.

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TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE .

LORD STANLEY OF ALDERLEY,

*&c., &c., &c.*

MY LORD,

I venture to address the following remarks to your Lordship, upon a subject in which, as coming within the cognizance of the Board of Trade, you may naturally be supposed to take an interest, in the hope, that, if the necessity for an alteration in the law, as regards Railways of the nature herein referred to, be made apparent, your Lordship's co-operation will not be wanting in support of any efforts, that may hereafter be made, to remove the disabilities and evils complained of.

It is not difficult to imagine the astonishment with which an Engineer of the last century, were he permitted to revisit the earth, would view the gigantic public works, which have covered the face of this country during the last five and twenty years. Nor would his surprise, at first sight, be lessened on discovering, that the whole of these numerous and costly works of earth, stone, timber, and iron, were constructed in order that a pair of narrow iron bars might be carried continuously, as nearly as possible level and in a straight line, exactly four feet eight inches and a half apart. If, however, he were told, that it is possible for a

horse to draw, in a carriage adapted to these iron bars, eight times the load, that he can upon an ordinary high road, his astonishment would rapidly diminish; and if he were further informed, that an engine has been invented capable of drawing fifty such eight-horse loads, at a speed of forty miles an hour, on this iron road, it would almost altogether disappear. One circumstance would alone remain to puzzle his mind; he would be at a loss to discover why the whole of these iron rails should, with certain exceptions, be laid exactly four feet eight inches and a half apart—neither more nor less. Nor would the solution of this question be rendered easier to him were he to learn the fact, that this width, or gauge, of the iron road has been fixed and determined by legislative authority; and that a special enactment has provided that, with certain specified exceptions, all such public Railways for the conveyance of goods and passengers shall be constructed with this gauge, and no other.\*

It is to the injurious operation of this and other similar Parliamentary restrictions on the industry and enterprise of all those districts, which do not lie upon a Main Line of Railway, that attention is principally intended to be drawn in the following remarks.

Of the two great discoveries already alluded to, upon which the system of Railway Locomotion is based, the first mentioned is undoubtedly the most important. Without the *facility of traction*, afforded by the use of a carriage with *flanged wheels on parallel iron rails*, the Locomotive would be, and indeed has been proved to be, a comparatively useless machine. The perse-

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\* 9 and 10 Victoria, cap. 57.



vering efforts which have been made, since the Manchester and Liverpool Railway was first opened, to adapt the Steam-horse to the high road, have uniformly ended in disappointment;\* and although in Boydell's Traction Engine the attempt has been successfully made to cause a locomotive to traverse, not only the high road, but the open country, yet the success is due to the circumstance, that this engine, with its flanged wheels, carries with it its own Railway, laying it down, and taking it up, as it proceeds.

Power and speed the Locomotive has brought to the rail; and economy also, where heavy loads are carried long distances; but the saving effected by it in the cost of the transit of goods under ordinary circumstances, is, owing to the costly machinery necessary for its use, after all, trifling, compared with the saving already previously effected by the rail and the flanged wheel combined.

As this fact has an important bearing upon the matter in hand, it may be well, in the first instance, to consider the relative cost of conveying a Ton of

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\* The last attempt of the kind, and not the least interesting, is that which has recently been made by Lord Willoughby d'Eresby, on a private road four miles in length, leading from the village of Edenham in Lincolnshire to the Little Bytham Station, on the Great Northern Railway. In this case a solid roadway was formed of two parallel lines of contiguous wooden blocks laid level with the surface of the road, on which it was attempted to work a very perfect small 8-inch cylindrical locomotive with flat wheels, built at the Swindon works. The experiment, which was in every respect well carried out, and is worthy of record, removed the last existing doubt upon the subject; it was ultimately found necessary to place iron rails upon this solid block-road, and the Edenham Tramway, liberally designed for the benefit of the tenants of the Grimsthorpe estate, is now converted into a Railway of the usual gauge, and worked by a locomotive and carriages with flanged wheels.

Goods one mile ; I. on an ordinary high road ; II. on the rail by horse power ; and III. on the rail by locomotive ; this may simply be stated as follows :—

On High Road by Horse . . . . .	8d.
On Railway by Horse . . . . .	2d.
On Railway by Locomotive . . . . .	1d. *

Now the disadvantages under which all those towns and districts lie, that are not so fortunate as to be within easy distance of a siding or Station on one of the Main Lines of railway, are due to the circumstance, that they have, on the above shewing, to pay *eight times as much* for the carriage of a ton of produce or goods for every mile of the distance which separates them from that Station, as they have to pay for its carriage when once upon the Line : and the grievance of which they have to complain, is, that the Standing Orders and requirements of the Houses of Parliament are such as not only to render any lateral extension of the Main Line for their limited traffic utterly hopeless, but also to deprive them of that simple and inexpensive substitute, which would otherwise be within their reach, and which would place them on more equal terms with their more fortunate neighbours.

This, then, is the grievance ; but before we proceed to speak of a remedy, let us consider its effects.

The natural result of our limited Railway system, already for some time in operation, is perceptible over the whole kingdom, in the rapid and considerable improvement in the value of land and houses

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\* These prices cover all costs and charges including those of maintenance, and interest on first cost.

in the neighbourhood of railways; in the increase of habitations and population in their immediate vicinity; in the gradual decay of the remoter towns and villages; in the deterioration of the high roads and means of communication; in the abandonment of small trades, manufactures, and handicrafts in these less accessible parts, and in the consequent increase of vice and crime. It will be readily believed, that with such self-evident results, efforts were not wanting, on the completion of the main lines of communication, to push the system into every outlying lateral district, the amount of the traffic in which afforded the slightest justification for the attempt. Nor did these efforts on the part of those interested in obtaining these facilities of communication remain unseconded; it is not to be supposed, that those who had profited so largely by the construction of the Main Line were unwilling to promote the Branch; the officials of the parent trunk were generally the sponsors of the offshoot; and in this way numerous Branch lines, designed after the model of the original standard, were brought before the public, and carried into execution. Of these minor projects it may, with safety, be affirmed, that few have proved to be other than unprofitable undertakings, and the greater part of them absolutely disastrous to the shareholders, or to the unfortunate parent company which was induced to originate or adopt them; and the lamentable error committed by the Boards of the older Railway Companies, in the purchase and construction of these Branch Railways, is recognized as one of the principal causes of the subsequent decline in the value of Railway property.