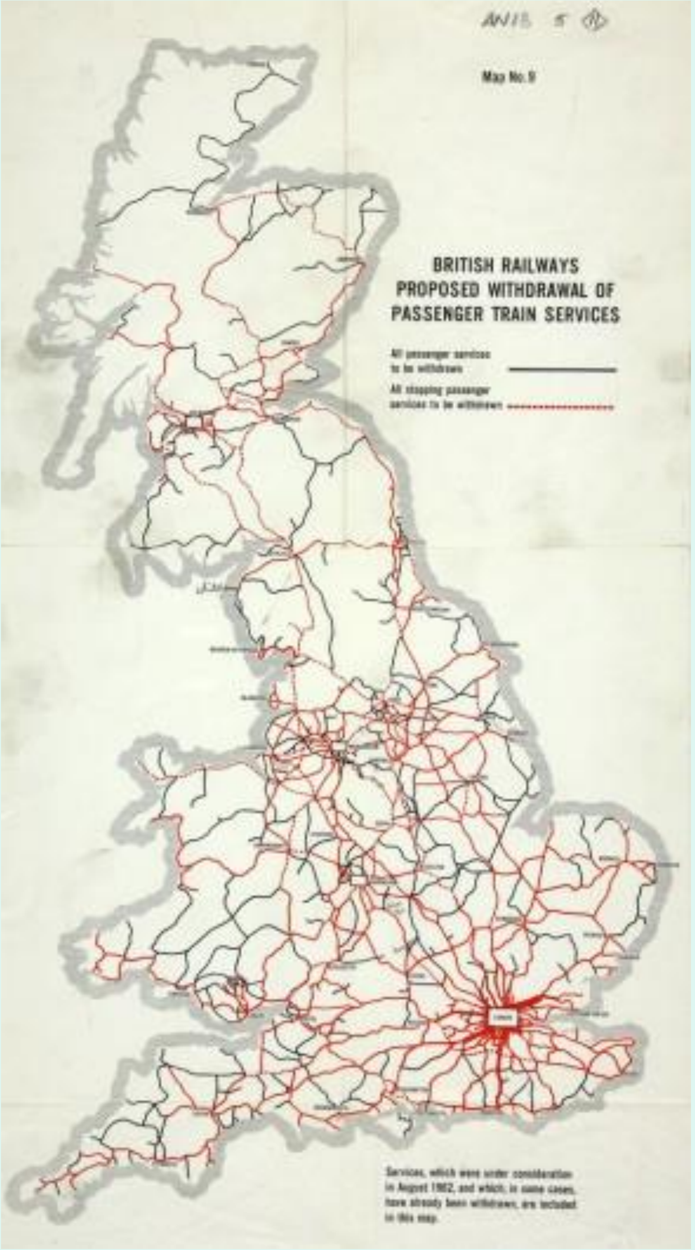
Framing infrastructure policy: the lessons of British Railways, 1955-75 Background

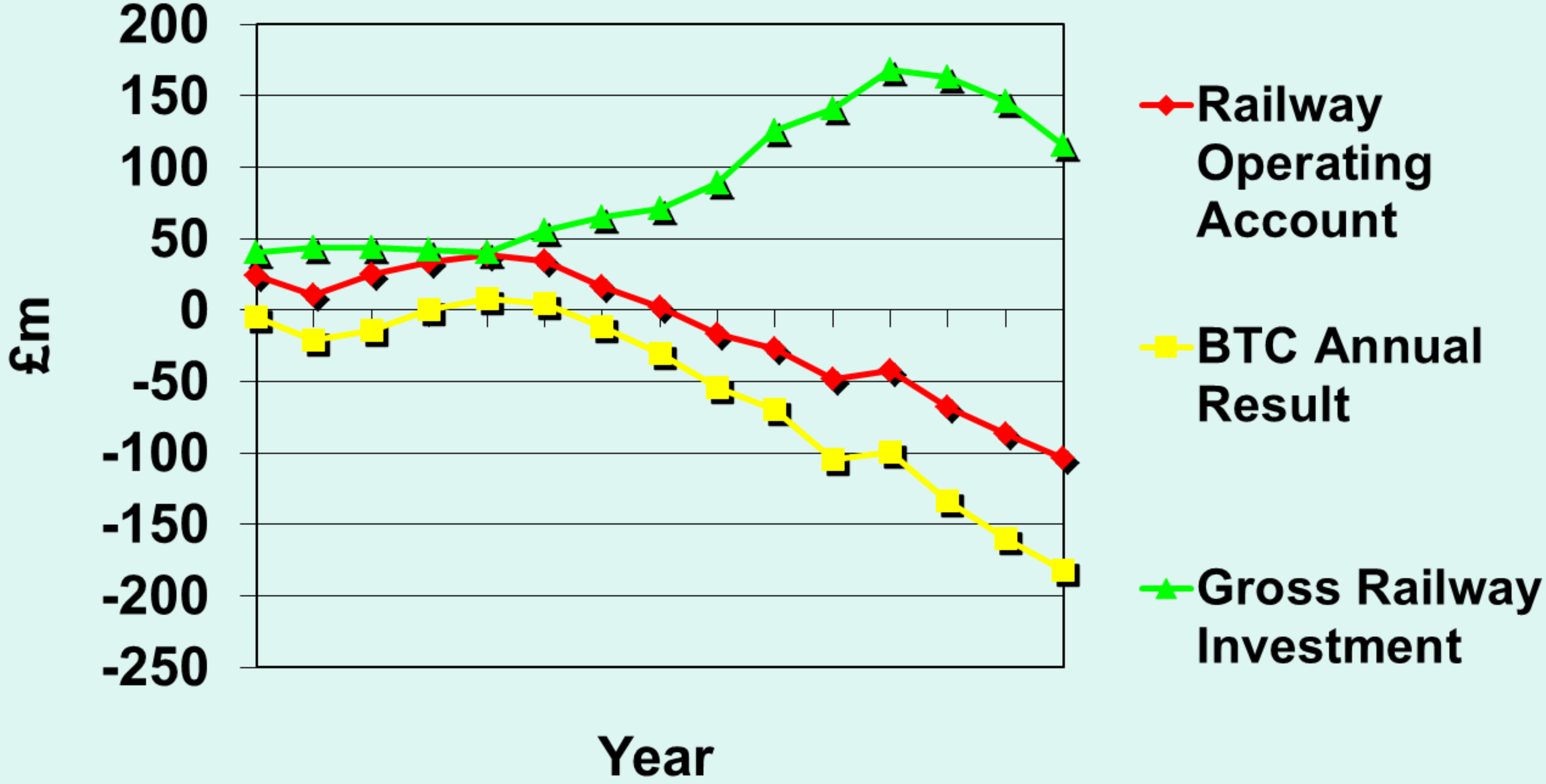
Charles Loft

- 1962 Transport Act
  - simplified closure procedure
  - set BRB a clear financial objective
  - left Minister to decide on the social case

- 1963 Beeching Report (Reshaping British Railways)
  - Recommended closing 1/3 route miles and nearly 2,500 stations



BTC 1948-62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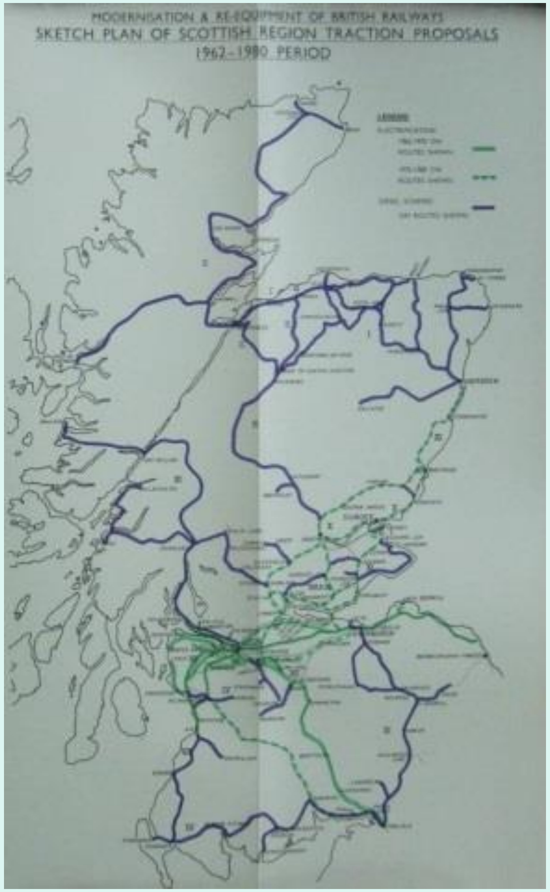
£m
Year
Railway Operating Account
BTC Annual Result
Gross Railway Investment

'these closures of branch line services are going to give us plenty of trouble' - BTC public relations department memo, 1950.

- ‘it would not be the sort of service which we ought to be engaged in. It is against the whole conception of the Reshaping Report that we should’
- ‘proposals in the plan are interdependent - realisation of many of the savings depends upon the adoption of the plan as a whole’.

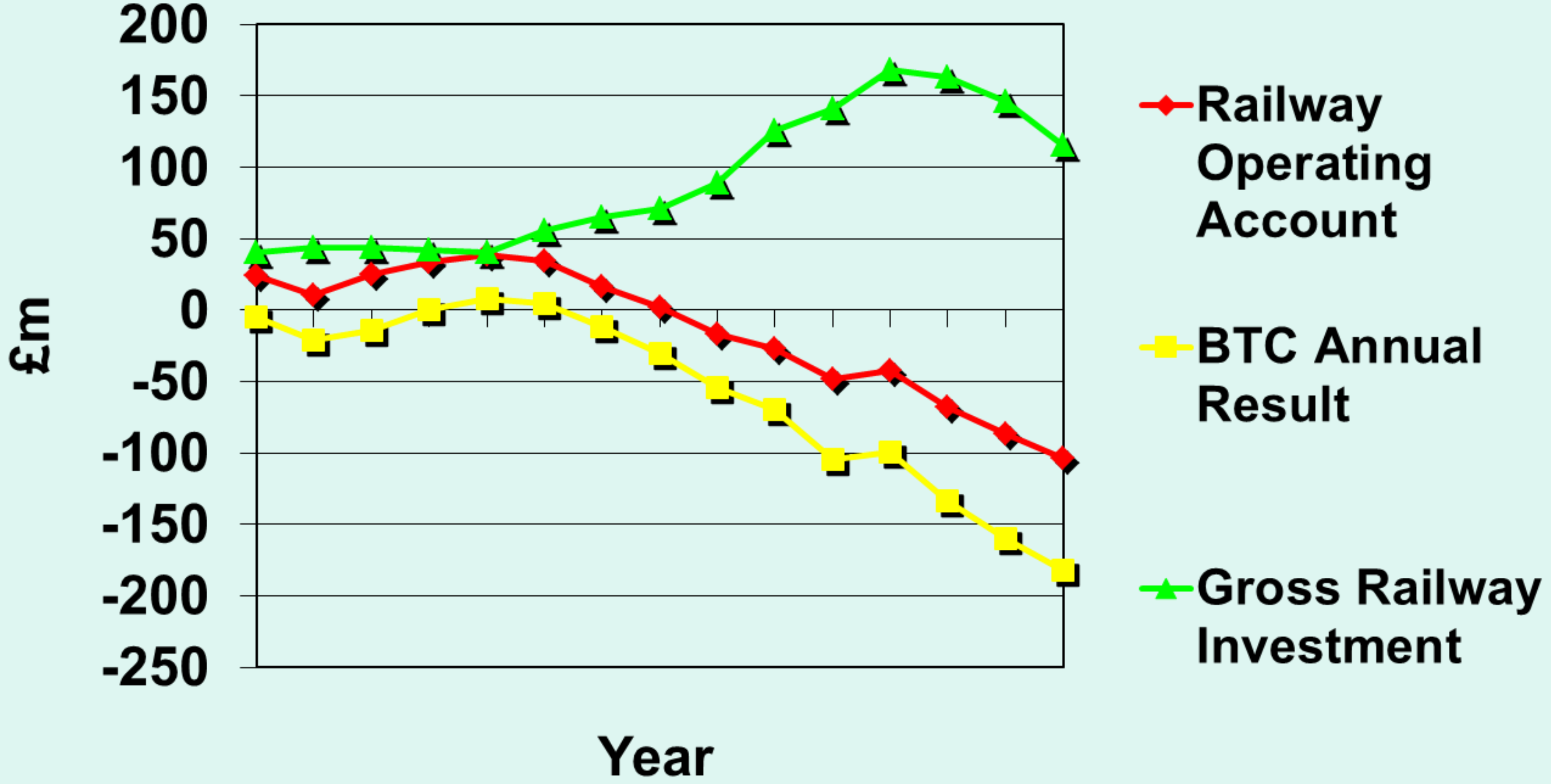
‘These three requirements - namely, the service of the new capital, the additional depreciation charges, and the rectification of the inadequacy of current net traffic receipts-amount to some £*80* million a year. As already stated, the Commission are of opinion that the actual return from the investment should be of the order of £*85* million a year and might conceivably be much greater’. (Modernisation Plan 1955)



‘a lot of mouldering schemes which the BTC and the Regions had found after a hurried search in their pigeon holes’,

G. Fiennes (BRB)

BTC 1948-62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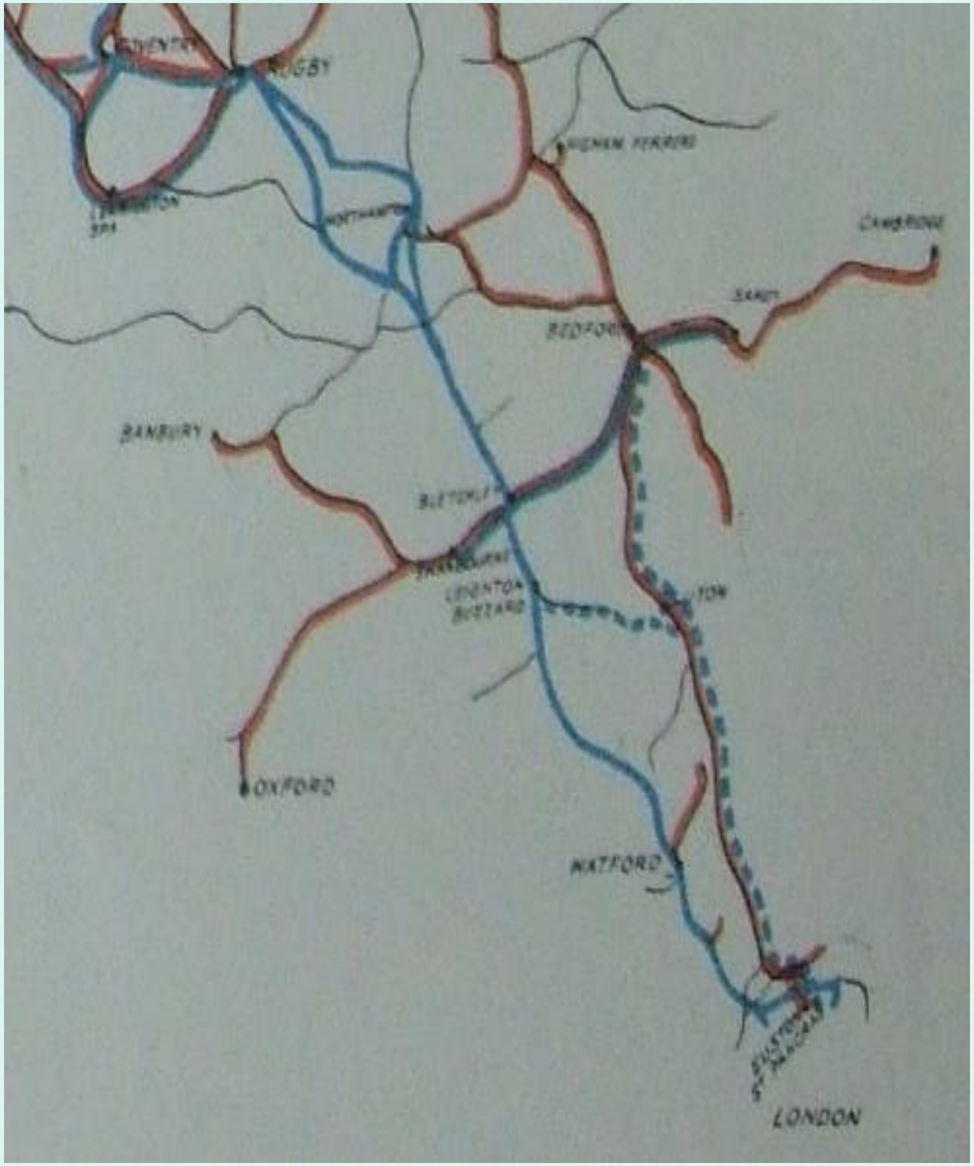
‘if in a private firm shareholders’ money had been committed with the recklessness which characterised the inception of some of the projects making up the modernisation scheme those responsible would have been indictable... [I]t almost seemed ... as if the judgement whether or not to start a scheme had depended on the degree of support which it received from the particular technicians or other people in authority in, say, a particular region rather than on any economic justification’.

Sir Ivan Stedeford, Special Advisory Group, 1960




A VITAL LINK IN THE SYSTEM
THE POINTS OPERATOR
THE RETARDER
THE CUT-CARD
3 MARSHALLING YARD
New trains are coupled up and examined by guard.
Brake vans added and trains taken to departure sidings and thence South.
2 THE HUMP
Wagons are shunted over the Hump and directed to the appropriate sidings.
Points "P" are automatic and pre-set from "cut-card" in Control Tower.
1 RECEPTION SIDINGS
Mixed trains arrive and are "cut" by uncoupling wagons.
A "cut-card" is prepared to show which siding each wagon must go to according to its ultimate destination.
London
WHITEMOOR MARSHALLING YARD
A FOCAL POINT BETWEEN EAST ENGLAND AND THE NORTH
WITH 70 MILES OF SIDINGS AND COVERING 250 ACRES, WHITEMOOR HANDLES ABOUT 7,000 WAGONS EVERY 24 HOURS. THERE ARE OTHER MODERN MARSHALLING YARDS THROUGHOUT GREAT BRITAIN
BRITISH RAILWAYS
THE BUSIEST RAILWAY SYSTEM IN THE WORLD

‘a discussion of 1 1/2 hours every year on each of the industries’ investment programmes is little enough, but it is particularly unsuited to considering a fifteen year plan which will cost £1,200 million… the discussion was too short, and lacking in critical appraisal for the Treasury in its role as “bankers” to the Commission to either obtain a clear idea of the shape of and return from the plan or to impress upon the commission the urgency which attaches to it’

Alex Jarratt Treasury Principal 1955

‘At present investment demand as a whole is neither obviously too great nor obviously too small in relation to resources. In these circumstances… it is difficult for the Treasury to take a very strong line about a particular nationalised industry. The case for doing so would rest on the assumption that the industry was not measuring up to its job’

Treasury Asst Sec reply to Jarratt

Whitehall is collectively fumbling after a new policy to meet new conditions which threaten to overwhelm existing outlooks. Indeed, they may already have done so.’

Peter Vinter, Treasury, 1961