

# Transcript of 'The Fall and Rise of the Sleeper Train'

## Season 2, Episode 32, Transforming Tomorrow

[Theme music]

**Paul:** Hello and welcome to Transforming Tomorrow, the podcast from the Penland Centre for Sustainability in Business.

I'm Paul Turner.

**Jan:** And I'm Professor Jan Bebbington.

We're taking the Night Train. Not to Georgia, and not on the Orient Express.

In today's episode, we're chatting night trains, why they should be more popular and what that means for sustainable travel.

[Theme music]

**Paul:** Jan, how do you feel about Gladys Knight and the Pips?

**Jan:** Oh, I wish you had asked me a question I knew the answer to. You knew I wouldn't know the answer to that. [laughs]

**Paul:** What, you, you, you don't know anything about Gladys Knight and the Pips? You, you've heard of them, you know they exist.

**Jan:** It sounds familiar.

**Paul:** It's, it, it, it sounds familiar. Well, for that it's a they, and if you were to narrow it down to just Gladys Knight, it will be a she and not an it.

**Jan:** Well, there we are...

**Paul:** That was just rude. [Jan laughs] Rude of them and their whole genre.

I ask for a reason, by the way. I'm not just quizzing you on your knowledge of sixties, seventies, and eighties Motown and similar ilk.

**Jan:** Those things never came to New Zealand until the two thousands. That's why I don't know.

**Paul:** So you only got Motown 30 years after it actually happened?

**Jan:** [giggles] Yes.

**Paul:** Yeah, it sounds about right, actually, the things you've told me about New Zealand, I'm not, you know, stereotyping, I'm just basing it purely on things you've told me...

**Jan:** ...well there, there you are...

**Paul:** ...so you are entirely responsible...

**Jan:** Well anyway, why are you telling me about things I ought to know about, but I don't.

**Paul:** I'm telling you because they had a song called Midnight Train to Georgia.

**Jan:** Now I know about that song, but I wouldn't have known who sung it. So do you like the midnight train to Georgia? Is that one of your favourite wee trips.

**Paul:** [repressing laughter] I've never been on the midnight train to Georgia. I've never been to Georgia, and I've never been on a midnight train.

So therefore, all of the elements of it that you're asking me whether I like it or not, I have no knowledge of.

**Jan:** Well, how well I love midnight trains. I've, I've slept a lot on trains.

Although, um, as a, a friend of mine always used to call 'em, uh, rather than a sleeper, he used to call it the fitful dozer. So, uh, so the, the sleeping can be good, it can be not so good, but I love being on a train. For any reason, but I also love sleeping on trains.

**Paul:** I like being on trains. I like traveling on trains. I've done lots of long journeys by trains, but I've never done one that's gone overnight.

**Jan:** Oh, well, we're all in for a treat then.

**Paul:** Yeah. The reason I tend to be on trains that run late at night is because there's been delays. [Jan laughs] And because, uh, living in the back end of nowhere when it comes to the rail network, if you get on the last train, you go here via here, there, and everywhere, just to finally get home at something like half past midnight.

But I wouldn't call that a night train, and I wouldn't call it a sleeper train.

**Jan:** Yeah, no. Don't fall asleep on those trains. [laughs]

**Paul:** If you do fall asleep, you wake up in the depot in the morning, and that's an entirely different experience of sleeping on a train.

We're talking about this because today we're going to be talking about sleeper trains.

**Jan:** Excellent.

**Paul:** And it seems like you have knowledge of them that I don't have. Firsthand knowledge.

**Jan:** But there's firsthand knowledge and then there's knowledge about, you know, how, how sleeper train markets are put together, how they operate, which is, is something I have no knowledge about.

So we'll be able to combine the conceptual and the practical all in one podcast.

**Paul:** Because my knowledge of sleeper trains very much tends to be through James Bond films, because James Bond loves a sleeper train. [Jan laughs]

Um, in from Russia with Love he travels on, uh, the Orient Express essentially, and you know, he gets attacked on the Orient Express, the person he's with gets drugged and knocked out so that the baddie can come and attack him.

Then in Live and Let Die he's on a sleeper train and he's, you know, getting ready for bed when he gets attacked by a man who doesn't have an arm, he has a metal car instead.

So essentially my knowledge of sleeper trends through those two films is: I don't want to be on a sleeper train.

**Jan:** Well, it just, I suppose I would say that that's never happened to me on a sleeper train, uh, I must say.

But also, maybe that's like the imagination we have about sleeper trains and how kind of like romantic they are and how exciting they are and how they cover vast distances.

And of course, you can't necessarily have a brawl in a airline cabin, although some people do, but that's not desirable. Whereas on sleeper trains, it's much more fun.

**Paul:** [laughing] What, having a brawl is much more fun?

**Jan:** [laughing] ...cinematically...

**Paul:** ...having a brawl, much more fun on a sleeper train than on an aeroplane...

**Jan:** ...cinematically, of course. So anyway...

**Paul:** ...I'm gonna bring you back. Murder on the Orient Express. It's in the title. You know there, there's someone gets murdered. I, I'm, without even having this discussion, I'm suddenly becoming very sceptical about the whole concept.

**Jan:** Well, let's find out more then.

**Paul:** Yes. Let's bring in someone who hopefully will, you know, dispel all these worrying myths that I've suddenly come up with about sleeper trains.

'Cause we're joined by Dr. Nicole Bulawa, who is a lecturer in the Department of Marketing here at Lancaster University Management School.

First of all, I, I need to ask, your experience of sleeper trains.

**Nicole:** Uh, not existent. [laughs] So while I'm doing research on sleeper trains, um, I'm part of a research team where we actually realised at the beginning of the project that none of us has.

So, um, while I was already in the UK and the sleeper train offer here is kind of limited, I asked my other colleague to at least, you know, jump on a sleeper train. So we have some first, first hands experience in that.

**Paul:** Have you watched James Bond films or Murder on the Orient Express?

**Nicole:** I, I did. [laughs] But I dunno whether they're as representative as they should be of nowadays sleeper trains or, yeah, the market.

**Paul:** So there, there you are Jan. It, it seems that maybe my picture of sleeper trains: not 100% accurate.

**Jan:** Well, I think that's probably the case.

So, Nicole, tell us about your background and your work in general, before we narrow down back onto the, you know, the, the reemergence of, of a sleeper train market.

**Nicole:** So, um, I'm an early career researcher in Marketing, and before I joined Lancaster University I think a year ago, I did my PhD in Germany. And during that time, quite early on, I realised I actually want to look at markets. And I

want to look at them from a point of view where you look at, how are they created, what do we need to make a market work?

So while getting into the topic of market making and market shaping, I realised I actually like to look at markets that are struggling in some sort of way. So markets that we have at this moment, which aren't working perfectly well yet.

And what I focus on is actually looking and talking with various actors to see, okay, what can we do about this? How can we change them? How can we make them work in the future?

**Paul:** Is that where sleeper trains fit in then? Because obviously your work, the reemergence of sleeper trains, which is something that stereotypically you might think of as from 50, 60 years ago, and then disappearing.

But certainly whenever I look in to travel nowadays, it seems to be more of an option across certain parts of continental Europe, say between Paris and Berlin, between Brussels and Munich, between various parts of Switzerland and other parts of Austria.

Is that how this fits in as a reemerging market that's been struggling?

**Nicole:** Yes, exactly. So while markets undergo several stages from their early developments to at some point becoming more established. In the case of the sleeper train market, we had exactly the case that they were very popular in the sixties and seventies. Um, and just, yeah, a very common means of transport to actually cover long distances between cities.

What happened in the two thousands was that all of a sudden it was very common to travel by airplanes, and that was very cheap at the time. Um, and that was actually combined with two different developments in the market.

So for one, we had the cheap air travel. But then we also now had high speed trains, which became very common. So, you kind of did not need to take a night train anymore because you could cover long distances in a much shorter time.

And from a market perspective, what also happened is that the market became liberalised. Which means beforehand, the operators and the infrastructure were one unit, but in the two thousands, in Europe, they actually decided to make those two separate entities.

So all of a sudden, I, as a operator had to pay track access charges, which means that this market became much more expensive to run. So with the increased competition, the increasing costs, and then the alternative of high-speed trains, the market kind of disappeared.

**Jan:** One of the things you said there, which I found quite interesting is high, high-speed services displacing, um, sleeper trains. Because, um, as a, a very, uh, high sleeper train user in the UK, um, I, the slowness was actually the advantage.

So when I lived in Scotland, I, I used whenever I had, you know, maybe meetings in London if you, and I lived north of Edinburgh, so I wasn't able to get like a 5:30 from Edinburgh South, which is, is quite a good timely train, although a hellish time in the morning to be up.

I used to hop on a sleeper train about 11 o'clock at night and it used to take me into central London for eight o'clock in the morning. So, so it went slowly. And I think it even has to pause somewhere, because they join up all the, the, the various sleeper trains from different parts of London together.

So actually the slowness was perfect 'cause I don't want to get to London at three o'clock in the morning. [laughs] I want to get there at eight o'clock. And you can have your first meetings at, at sort of nine o'clock and half past nine, 10 o'clock or so.

So actually speed is a really interesting element in this whole conversation.

**Paul:** Can you tell us then, Nicole, a little bit about what the sleeper train services across Europe look like at the moment, how this reemergence has come about?

**Nicole:** One of the issues with a reemerging market, like the sleeper train market, is that now you have, I mean, common day infrastructure, like the tracks and the stations that kind of developed over time, while the rolling stocks or the carriages that you have from sleeper trains, they haven't been produced over such a long period of time.

So what happens now, we have quite a lot of sleeper trains who actually still use the infrastructure from the sixties and seventies. So now we got sleeper trains with infrastructures from the sixties or seventies. And while those carriages have been refurbished and modernised in certain ways, they do not

really realign with what we kind of expect nowadays as a consumer in terms of modern train travel.

And that's obviously not the full picture. So we got those and we have a couple of actors who are actually invested now in new sleeper train carriages like ÖBB, which is the Austrian railways.

So they modernised the whole concept. They introduced quite a new innovative design, which I think they took from Japanese capsule hostels. So you now have your tiny little mini-cabin as a consumer in your new ÖBB sleeper train.

But that also means that you have this wide range of different sleeper train options and carriages, and as a consumer it's kind of difficult to see what you get and um, the amenities that come of that. And yeah, the way how you travel in the sleeper train is therefore, yeah, vastly different.

**Paul:** You of course, unlike with planes, you're limited by the fact you're riding on a rail and you've got to have a train that is within certain size parameters. Whilst when you go to Europe, and I always love this, when you go to Europe, you have double decker trains, I think, why don't we have them in there, they go all the way from the ground up and it's built brilliantly.

But you are still limited width-wise. You're limited height-wise. It's not like we have a plane where you can build the super jumbo jets and you can build, you know, those cargo planes that can carry a tank and things 'cause they're so big, you are still restricted within the size of it.

So you're still gonna have, um, a, a compartment that is within a certain size of course, but right you say, you can do certain things within that though.

**Nicole:** Yes, exactly. So you have certain options. Um, and as I said, like even the old carriages have been modernised in certain, certain ways. But you need to imagine a sleeper train has limited capacity.

So while in a day train I can just put in a lot of seats. If you need to sleep on a train, you kind of need space. So that means I can put much less people in a carriage in comparison to, yeah, what I have in a day train.

And also we have this new development, especially that happened after Covid, people do not like to share common spaces anymore. That's just a recent development. Um, which means that back in the days, in the sixties and

seventies, it was so common for you to sleep in, yeah, a couchette or a sleeper wagon with three strangers, and that was just as it was.

But nowadays we kind of do not feel comfortable with that anymore, which means that right now you have all these different options of, you can either book a cabin for your yourself and your family, but that is rather expensive.

Or if you are on a budget, you still have to, you know, share that space with strangers. Or if you're lucky and one, on one of those new sleeper trains, you can actually then maybe book your tiny mini, mini-cabin, which is a budget option.

And while you are restricted in the space that you have, because you can sit up and sleep and that's kind of about it, um, yeah, you do have that own tiny little room that is yours.

**Paul:** We looked at it last year when we were traveling from Switzerland. We were in, oh, sorry, no traveling to Switzerland from Austria, and whether it was an option to go from Vienna to Zurich on an overnight, and like you say, booking as a family is actually still quite expensive. And we were thinking, and then you ended up arriving in Zurich, which was not to be our final destination, uh, about six o'clock in the morning.

So, there's still issues around logistics, aren't there? You say you like it because you get there at a certain point in the morning, but some people it might still be a bit too early in the morning.

There's still lots of considerations. You're not just considering transport. It's like you're considering transport and your hotel for the night at the same time.

**Nicole:** Yes. So, um, one of the issues with the night trains is they use the same infrastructure as day trains, right? So you kind of need to align them with each other and make that work.

So, what happens at train stations is that in the morning, especially around seven to nine, you have the highest volume of traffic. And that's where actually railway operators and stations don't want you as a night train operator. Because it takes so much longer for people to get off a night train in comparison to a day train, because you have all your luggage, you need to get sorted, all these things.

So that means that the slot that you actually get assigned to as a night train operator is most of the time either very early or a bit too late. And that is, uh,



for instance, the case, if you would travel for business as Jan, you explained earlier, timings don't always work that well, and that is one of the struggles that you have with reemerging markets. So, the market kept on developing. Now you kind of come back with your own little needs and requirements, and they do not always fit so well together.

One of the big reasons why the market actually reemerged is sustainability. So we could really see that from 2010 onwards, there's this huge demand for more sustainable travel. Because let's face it, our travel between European cities has been increasing so much that as a consumer, I think a lot of people thought, okay, is this really the way to go? And that was one of the points that really pushed that market back.

The other very important part was that actually the EU Commission wanted to move transportation towards more sustainability. So they actually push for more intercity and cross border train travel, and that was one of the ways with their packages, how they actually help this market to get reintroduced.

A very important actor that also took part in that was the Austrian railways because back in the days when everybody left the market in the two, in the two thousands. So that was the only actor that did the complete opposite. So they bought rolling stock and they actually made sure to sustain the market just on a smaller level.

And based on their actions, and showing and proving that that night trains can actually operate sustainably and that you can run them cost efficiently as well, that was such an important market signal for everybody else to actually make this comeback.

There are certain hiccups and sometimes it's a bit difficult to book them. You do have the very huge advantage of first of all saving time, because you travel overnight, right? And it's such a nice thing. You board a train in the evening and you arrive in the morning and all time that you kind of spent was time sleeping. Whether you did so in a very comfortable way is a different thing, but you know, it, it is, um, a huge advantage.

And then the other aspect that we have, actually even going by a plane you still have to go to the airport, you have to check in. There's so many restrictions on your luggage and all these kind of things that you have to be aware of now. While most of the time, if you take a night train you actually end up in the centre of the town that you want to go into. Which is a great thing.

You don't have to then go from the airport to the town centre, which is kind of far away and difficult to get to, et cetera, et cetera. And that also adds up to the cost that you have as a consumer.

**Jan:** And so, is there something about Europe, which is the, the perfect size and the perfect level of connectivity that makes sleeper trains very viable or, or are they suitable for all kinds of regions of, of the world?

**Nicole:** Europe is not the only region that has sleeper trains. But we do have train history.

So, as I said back in the days in the sixties and seventies, it was so common to use sleeper trains, and train travel is kind of engrained on how we commute as people, which makes it easier, right? And which makes it kind of more suitable to kind of to have this market reemerge.

But similarly, we have other regions. For instance, in China you also have a lot of night trains, and they even have high speed night trains, because they have so long distances that it makes sense for them to introduce them.

In Europe that would, for instance, not be a viable option because of the costs, but also because you would arrive at 2:00 AM somewhere in Paris, and maybe that's not the time where you want to be...

**Paul:** ...or maybe it is. Maybe that is the perfect time to arrive in there, Paris...

[Everyone laughs]

**Jan:** ...if they let you stay on the train sleeping, it would be okay, but I suspect they would turf you out forthwith.

**Paul:** Obviously you've got some countries as well in Europe, such as France, looking at restricting domestic air travel. And there is gonna be, I daresay, other countries within the EU that won't look at this as well, so that if you travel within the country, you need to take a train, you need to take an option that's not planes, and then you've got somewhere not like that.

So let's say America, for many reasons, you've got. The rail network is not what it was a hundred years ago, that the rail networks essentially disappeared, if you're not down certain corridors of the East coast of America, certain corridors of the West coast. When it comes to going coast to coast, you're going very slowly and taking days over it.

So, that's where the difficulties are. But yeah, it, it seems to fit perfectly with Europe, fits perfectly with China there.

What about somewhere like, say Japan, where they have the high-speed trains that, but they also have a good rail network, would, would that be a suitable network for sleeper trains?

**Nicole:** Actually, in Japan, they also had sleeper trains, but similar as in Europe. They slowly phase them out, because I think they rely so much on their high-speed rail travel.

At the same time there is a bit of a development towards more luxury night train travel. Similarly, similarly as we have in Scotland with the Caledonian Sleeper. So that was just recently introduced in Japan and apparently it's very popular.

Again, similar as the Caledonian Sleeper. While they are very expensive, they have this adventurous, nostalgic kind of vibe to them, and that is a market that is growing at the moment.

**Paul:** Sounds a bit like the Orient Express, in which case, you know, death, murder, people being stabbed in their cabins.

**Jan:** There was a Scottish TV programme that was set on the sleeper that did involve murder. And I, I didn't, I didn't see it and I can't now recall what name was.

But yeah, I, 'cause I was chatting to people in Scotland, and they said, been on the sleeper, and someone goes, no, no way I'm going on the sleeper. So I sort of uncovered that there was this, this show...you might remember its name.

**Nicole:** I think it was actually just called the Sleep Train or the Night Train, or I'm mixing that up with a recent movie that just came out when we started to look into our research and I was wondering whether this is a good thing in terms of popularity and, you know, pushing the topic, or whether this actually keeps people on their toes in terms of the night train, um yeah.

**Paul:** I'm pretty sure if you were to look into the actual death rate on trains compared to the death rate on trains that are depicted in TV and film [Jan laughs] that there's gonna be a big discrepancy there.

Because suddenly thought of the 4:50 from Paddington, which is a Miss Marple...

**Jan:** ...yeah...

**Paul:** ...book and also therefore dramatised many times. And that's it, another one, you know, a woman on a train wakes up suddenly you see someone else getting murdered on the other train that's going past...

**Jan:** ...oh yeah, yep...

**Paul:** ...essentially, as long as you're not living in a fictional world, I think you're safe traveling by sleeper train. If you are living in a fictional world, and I'll leave you to figure out to yourself whether you're part of the Matrix, um, then do not take a sleeper train.

**Jan:** This is, this episode is much darker than I thought it was going to be.  
[laughs]

**Paul:** Well it's murder than we were...

**Jan:** ...murder and mayhem...

**Paul:** ...yes. [laughs]

What do you think the trend's going to be then going forward? You've talked about how there's been the resurgence. How do you see moving forward into the future, what's going to happen with the sleeper train market?

**Nicole:** In my opinion, there is still potential to grow, right?

We can see that new lines are introduced across Europe. We can see that operators expand the market, but we can also see a couple of new actors entering the market, which is always a good signal. That means, okay, something is happening, people are interested.

And there is demand, we can see that as well. So, the market will grow, at least in my opinion. But the sleeper train market is a niche market. Based on the capacity limitations that we have with less people on a train, you can only run them once per night. Right?

And certain limitations in terms of routes because there are certain gaps that remained because the infrastructure just decayed over such a long time. Um, it will not replace air travel completely.

But that doesn't mean it's not worth it. It's a niche market that actually can make a difference. And there's also studies about that [laughs] just to support that.

So while it will not replace air travel completely, it can make a contribution to traveling more sustainably, to cutting our CO2 emissions. And I think if it wouldn't, the EU Commission wouldn't have pushed that so far.

**Jan:** Despite Paul's attempt at making us frightened of trains... [laughs]

**Paul:** [mock indignant] ...I'm not the one who made all of these films. We, we can hack back to an episode we did not too long ago about the, the train to Busan as well...

**Jan:** ...oh, yes....

**Paul:** ...and zombie trains.

I, I, the more I think about it [Jan laughs] the more I think that filmmakers have got a real cushy deal with the airline industry, the way they're trying to convince people never to take a train.

**Jan:** They're clearly appealing spaces in which all sorts of things can happen. So, uh, um, Nicole, what's, what's your favourite daytime train?

**Nicole:** So I'm, I'm very torn between two. So I took recently the Jacobite steam train in Scotland and that is just lovely. It's vintage, it's old, it's cute, and I mean, Scotland landscape. If, if you haven't been there go because, you know, it's beautiful.

Similarly, when I was still a student, I lived in Sweden for quite a while. I always took the train from Goteborg to Trollhättan where I studied, and that was just picturesque.

You have the, the landscape, you have the tiny little, uh, red Swedish houses. And every time I took the train, I remember just. Looking out of the window thinking, oh my gosh, look at this. This is beautiful.

**Paul:** I'm gonna pick one that's close to home and one that's, uh, further away.

So, the one close to home is the journey I would take if I ever were to leave home and not head north, which is coming from Barrow or around Morecambe Bay on the train as far as when you get to Arnside, Silverdale, that's about when it ends, when you've got long, lovely views of the Bay.

And even if I'm absolutely shattered on the way home or I've barely woken up that morning, just making that nice journey where you've got the sunrise over

the hills, or you've got the sunset over the bay, you've got the wildlife, you've got the views for miles and miles and miles.

And then further away, I like the Bernina Express in Switzerland where you're going up into the Alps, and there's some special trains where you can pay an absolute fortune to ride on this particular train.

We had a Swiss rail pass, which let you ride on any standard train, and the standard trains are just as good. You've got viewing carriages where you've got the just glass windows from floor to ceiling. You've got the, the Alps there, the snow on the Alps, and you end up in San Moritz and, yes.

**Jan:** That sounds pretty good.

**Paul:** Yeah, yeah. There you go.

What are you, Jan, I'll ask you because I realise sometimes you ask me these questions and I don't, don't care about your answer [Jan laughs] but no, I, I do care about your answer and I'd like to know.

**Jan:** Well, I'm, I'm with Nicole actually. My favourite, uh, day train is Glasgow to Fort William. And what's nice about it, it, well, it's beautiful Scottish landscape, so it's, it's quite slow.

But then at one stage you go out into one of the train station stops, actually there's no road access to it. It was made very famous by the film Trainspotting, which was, was there, which, um, they weren't impressed by the scenery in that particular film.

So that's a really nice route, and I've been on that steam train as well. And again, it's coming through some of that kind same kind of landscape. It's just absolutely epic.

And I once went Stockholm to Kiruna in the Arctic Circle in January. It was wondrous. So we sat down for the first bit and then the whole thing sort of unfolds in a really amazing way into beds. And you wake up in the Arctic Circle.

**Paul:** Is that not some kind of like trick night train? Because if you're in the Arctic Circle in January, there is no daytime.

**Jan:** It's really, really strange. It's bright, because there's lots of snow and so the little bit of light there is 'cause, I thought we'd see nothing, I thought we were just doing it to get to Kiruna, but you could see loads of things.

We did see a lot of trees and a lot of snow, so... [laughs]

**Paul:** Reindeer?

**Jan:** No, but, just trees and snow...

**Paul:** ...trees and snow....

**Jan:** But it was, again, it was a pretty, it was a magical thing. And I, I think, Nicole, you've talked about this, it's sort of, there's a functionality to this market.

But then there's a, an imaginative element to it, an emotional connection, which is that excitement of hopping on a train and going somewhere perhaps new for yourself, but going in a way that you don't get to travel anymore.

And so I think that's one of the magic things about this market.

**Paul:** It is, it is, it's um, whilst I may not have travelled by, uh, night train, I do love traveling by train, and we've done it a lot.

I have travelled into Europe from here. You know, the long journeys where you end up in Northern Europe in less than a day, and it's, yeah, that's it. It's brilliant.

So, let's bring this to a conclusion then, Nicole, and just ask where are you finding inspiration? You know, as we face up to difficult situations at the moment with regards to sustainability and transport wise particularly, or maybe any other area of your work?

**Nicole:** So, for me personally, I just think sustainability is important. It's very basic, and then that adds to my role as a researcher, and even when as a early career researcher, what you do might not have the largest impact in that world, I still think it's important that you do your bits and pieces to make this world a bit better.

And for me personally I, yeah, started to look at markets because I thought I want to help those struggling markets to kind of maybe figure it out. And as part of my work, I kind of started to look into transportation.

So looking from autonomous vehicles, electric vehicles, now to sleeper trains, because um, that is one of the ways where you, in your everyday life, you make choices. And that is one of the ways where you can actually, yeah, make

a difference just by choosing a train, for instance, or then maybe choosing the night train and in comparison to an airplane if you have the chance.

I think even if it's a difficult landscape to navigate at the moment, there are opportunities and ways how we can actually make an impact.

**Paul:** Thank you very much for taking us on this journey today, Nicole. Whether it be via night train, day train, steam train, electric train, diesel train, it's been absolutely brilliant.

Thank you.

**Nicole:** Thank you so much.

[Theme music]

[Jan makes train horn noise, Paul makes train wheel noises]

**Jan:** [to the rhythm of the train wheel noises] ...what are we doing, what are we doing, on the tracks, on the tracks.

I think they, they don't need us doing that.

**Paul:** No, they really don't. [Jan laughs]

They don't need you. Trying to rap to the, the rhythm of a steam train...

**Jan:** [laughs] ...aaaah, epic fail. But this is...

**Paul:** ...I'm ready to go now. Yeah, I am...

**Jan:** ...that wasn't it?

**Paul:** No, that wasn't it. That really wasn't it, no.

It seems, Jan, I'm not the only one who has come across lots of media that's depicting death and dismemberment and carnage on night trains. And it's really interesting to see that from the 2010s onwards, so in the last 10, 15 years, there has been a great interest in sustainability when it comes to long distance travel.

And that that has provided a spark for the resurgence that there has been in sleeper trains, because it was something of the fifties and the sixties, and then seventies, eighties, nineties, early two thousands.



No, I don't want to take a sleeper train. And now, yes, the sleeper train. I've seen lots of cases of it, as I was mentioning, in Europe, from Paris, from Berlin, from Brussels, from Vienna, and they seem to be really popular.

They're charging enough and getting enough money for them to obviously be popular because if they weren't making any money, they wouldn't be doing it. And if they were charging too much and no one was going on them, they wouldn't be doing it.

But they're operating their things that people are willing to pay for. And it's a, a very worthwhile venture, both in terms of a new way of traveling and in terms of sustainability.

**Jan:** You really got the sense that actors do matter. So sometimes we think that individual, you know, companies or even ourselves, you know, can't make a difference.

But she was speaking of the Austrian railways that actually kept that knowledge and expertise alive, so that when it came back again there was somebody who knew how to do it, that the rolling stock was there, even if it needed to be refurbished, et cetera.

So the importance of single um, entities actually making a difference was a really great part of her story as well, and a, a great part of all kinds of sustainability stories.

**Paul:** And it's good to see as well that they're innovating. They're coming up with new ways of doing it.

She talked about the equivalent of a sleeper train version of the Japanese pod hotel, where you've got a very small space, but that space is all your own. So you're not having to have a shared carriage or compartment with four other people, three other people who you've never met before in your life. And all the various awkwardness that comes with such a thing. You're getting your own little space.

Or you've got the, the bigger, more grand ones. You've got the high-speed sleeper service...

**Jan:** ...yeah...

**Paul:** ...the fact that China is such a big country makes it make a lot of sense there. You can spend nine hours on a high-speed train in China, you won't have

reached one side of the country from the other, because it's such a big place, and you can see why it makes sense. But also you see why that's not necessarily gonna be the case from going between London and Edinburgh, because a high-speed rail between London, Edinburgh, you'd be there in two and a half hours. [Jan laughs]

It's not so much of a sleeper trainer as a, I've just had a small nap and feel even tireder than I was train service.,

**Jan:** Yeah, no, I think we learned a lot about trains, but also a lot about market design.

**Paul:** And next time, Jan, we're gonna be learning about something completely different. Although I could see where there might be a little bit of an overlap.

Servitization.

**Jan:** Oof. That's a big word, I have a feeling we'll find out everything about that.

**Paul:** Yeah, it's a big word and it does something I really don't like, but because the Americans probably managed to coin it before anyone on this side of the pond did, it's got a zed in it.

**Jan:** Yeah, I did notice that.

**Paul:** Yes, but I've had a discussion and apparently yes it is spelt with a zed.

And servitization is essentially where you don't as a company have to own everything. You can have other companies providing you it as a service, and we'll find out how that fits in with the sustainability agenda for businesses.

Until then, thank you very much for listening. I'm Paul Turner.

**Jan:** And I'm Professor Jan Bebbington.

[Theme music]