

Input 5 Railway mania (1840–1850)

The early success of passenger railways between Stockton and Darlington, and Manchester and Liverpool led to a boom in railway construction. It gathered momentum as people recognized the advantages of rapid movement of goods and people between major towns and cities, which themselves were growing rapidly through industrialization.

Each new venture required an act of Parliament for authority, and was resisted by vested interests – such as canal users and owners, and landowners over whose property the new lines would run. The rush by speculators to fund such ventures was frequently lampooned, as shown in the contemporary cartoon from Punch magazine (Figure C7).

However, there was great enthusiasm from the public, and this was celebrated by J.M.W. Turner in his painting *Rain, steam and speed* of a locomotive crossing the new bridge over the Thames at Maidenhead, probably painted in 1844 (Figure C8). The period saw the completion of much of a national network, although there were still large gaps, especially in the north.

In the early part of the next decade, the country saw the great festival celebrating the growth in manufacturing, trade and communications, the Great Exhibition of 1851. It was held in a vast tiered pavilion, the Crystal Palace, constructed from cast-iron columns and beams, glass and timber.



Figure C7 Cartoon from Punch in 1845 lampooning railway mania



Figure C8 Turner's *Rain, steam and speed*, painted about 1844