Open Data Obligations for Privatised Utilities and Public Infrastructure Operators

Privatised utilities operate public infrastructure, serve captive customers, and generate data of significant public interest — yet there is no consistent obligation to release it to agreed open standards.

The contrast between sectors is stark. In rail, station-level performance data is now publicly available at over 1,700 stations, driving improvements and rebuilding passenger trust. In energy, the Energy Data Taskforce built its entire strategy around two principles: filling data gaps by requiring better-quality data, and embedding the presumption that energy system data is open. This has driven innovation and competition, unlocking the opportunities of a modern, decarbonised energy system for consumers. CiTTi Magazine + 2

Water tells a different story. Companies resisted disclosure of sewage spill data, and transparency had to be forced through regulatory intervention rather than being the default. Beyond environmental accountability, restricted data is preventing meaningful citizen engagement with water as a shared and increasingly stressed resource. Work we have proposed to the Water Efficiency Lab demonstrates what becomes possible when data across the full water cycle is openly accessible, but that potential remains largely unrealised.

Establish a Water Data Taskforce, modelled on the Energy Data Taskforce, to develop an integrated open data strategy for the water sector, embedding a presumption of openness across environmental performance, supply, demand and consumption data. Extend mandatory open data obligations to all privatised utilities as a condition of operating licence, with independent regulatory oversight and machine-readable APIs enabling third-party reuse.

Rail and energy demonstrate that open data from utilities drives accountability, innovation and better citizen outcomes. Water is the conspicuous gap and the model for closing it already exists.