

promoting quality public transport.....

Great British Railways (GBR) Transition Team
1 Eversholt Street,
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NW1 2DN

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Dear Team,

WHOLE INDUSTRY STRATEGIC PLAN

Introduction

1 TravelWatch NorthWest (TWNW) is an independent Community Interest Company representing all public transport users in North West England. We are pleased to give our views as follows to this consultation. We have previously responded to the Williams Rail Review in 2019.

2 We welcomed the launch of the Williams – Shapps Plan in May 2021. Many of the points we made in our original response to the Williams Rail Review appeared to have been incorporated into that plan, including –

- The rail industry to be restructured into a more co-ordinated entity, in particular bringing infrastructure control and operations much closer together, bringing better integration and passenger benefits.
- Fares – simplification, pay as you go, flexible season tickets and continuing regulation.
- More local control and input from local stakeholders including Community Rail Partnerships.
- The commitment to strengthened passenger representation with an increased regional presence.

1. Question 1 - Strategic Objectives

1.1 As a body representing rail passengers, we concentrate here mainly on the overriding priority of meeting customers' needs. One key factor in the plan will be ensuring key investment levels to increase capacity, modernise the railway and attract passengers.

1.2 Just to comment on the specific reference to integration. The rail industry has an opportunity to lead and inspire worthwhile changes by closer working with other forms of travel. This will only be achieved with a willingness to

change and evolve itself and where an outward looking culture becomes the norm. Silo thinking should have no place in GBR.

1.3 There must be a much greater emphasis on co-ordination amongst/ between all transport modes with a key driver being persuading private car users to migrate to public transport. Accessing stations and affordable car parking are important and we stress that the establishment of GBR should be a key facilitator of promoting integration between rail and other modes including bus and light rail as well as walking and cycling.

1.4 Much more could be done to improve the availability of integrated ticketing for varying modes to allow "complete journey" purchases. For example, there are currently inadequacies with through ticketing between Manchester Metrolink and other public transport modes which have been in existence ever since the system opened in the 1990s and have been exacerbated as the system grows. The complexities of the current railway structure and uncertainties about ownership of issues like this have always held up any progress towards remedying this situation. Devolution of powers to such bodies as Transport for the North would also help this process.

2. Meeting Customers' Needs

Question - how will rail passenger expectations, including accessibility requirements, evolve over the coming 5, 10 and 30 years, what will be the driving causes of these changing expectations, and how can they be most effectively met by the rail sector?

2.1 There needs to be an ethos in the organisation **to provide all passengers with high quality facilities**. These will include facilities appropriate to the length of journey – comfortable seating, refreshments, luggage space etc, ample toilet facilities, ease of accessing information and ticketing, appropriate arrangements for disabled passengers, station amenities and value for money.

2.2 Accessibility has serious shortcomings at many stations. There are many stations on the rail network where passengers have to travel to a station beyond their destination to either leave or to cross the line by legal means and take a train back to their original destination so that they can satisfactorily exit. This is because many stations do not have level access to all platforms and the universal provision of this is slow in coming about. A visible programme of improvements should be firmly on the agenda of GBR.

2.3 Connectivity is vital. Timetables/connections and engineering work disruption planning must be much more passenger focussed. Train services should provide a viable alternative to private transport and so frequency of services is vital. With regard to engineering work, planned disruption should reflect and avoid times of peak demand (e.g. not at holiday times in major tourist areas such as the Lake District) and should always aim to keep passengers on trains as much as possible, using diversionary routes to the maximum possible extent.

2.4 Fares need to be affordable. The existing fares structure is complex - there can be a marked contrast between many anytime fares, which are very expensive and advance tickets which can be an excellent way of saving money on long journeys. There will need to be better collaboration in future between TOCs in allowing flexibility of use as uninitiated travellers can be confused. On a journey involving two or more operators the best fare should be offered for the overall journey. GBR's role should be to steer this process.

2.5 There are mixed views about competition on the track and whereas many passengers will welcome cheaper fares albeit with single operator restrictions, it should be recognised that rail as a whole is in competition with the car, airlines on long-distance routes and road coaches on others.

2.6 We believe that fares regulation should continue. It has to be said that for many years there have been relentless inflation-plus fares increases with the purpose of passing cost from the taxpayer to the passenger.

2.7 We support a Pay as You Go system in the North West. Roll out of consistent SMART card technology would seem to be a way forward, though would require detailed work on how it could be structured in a complex multi-urban hub region. It should embrace all transport modes and offer good discounts on travel as in the London scheme.

2.8 Common to the whole range of passenger expectations sits the overriding need for comprehensive and accessible information on train times, fares and other facilities. In this context decisions such as that to repress printed material, including timetable leaflets are questionable.

Question - in your experience, how can we most effectively monitor and assess customer satisfaction? What is a stretching yet realistic ambition for this objective and what measures can we most effectively use to consider success over the coming 5, 10 and 30 years? What evidence can you share to support your view?

2.9 The national rail strategy should encompass the means to measure benefits to rail passengers. Good work in monitoring is currently carried out by Transport Focus, the statutory body representing rail passengers.

2.10 Their work underlines the importance of good effective users' champions, independent of the GBR body - crucial for passengers and their expectations. There will be a continuing need for such an independent organisation that has direct access to customers, which is transparent and where information can be passed freely to parts of the industry which rely on gleaned information to ensure consistent standards.

2.11 Some years ago the regional statutory bodies representing passengers were abolished to the detriment, we believe, of local rail users. As noted above a strong regional presence for passenger representation is needed. We advocate the restoration of similar bodies to the former Rail Passenger Committees, in line with a greater emphasis on an increasing role for local

stakeholders. In this part of the world, such a body would fit well with the devolved authority of Transport for the North. These consumer organisations must be totally independent and TWNW would be well placed to fill this role, perhaps extending its horizons across the North of England.

Question – the advantage of transporting goods by rail.

2.12 Whilst not being directly involved, we firmly support the move of more freight to rail. This would have the added benefit of relieving road congestion enabling public transport to operate more smoothly.

3. Delivering financial sustainability

Question - Where are the most opportunities and barriers to delivering financial sustainability in the rail sector over 5, 10, and 30 years and how do we achieve/overcome them? How can we most effectively monitor and assess this? What is a stretching yet realistic ambition for this objective and what measures can we most effectively use to consider success over the coming 5, 10 and 30 years? What are the interventions over that period which will be the maximum value for money?

3.1 In conventional economic terms the railways will never be a true commercial organisation because of the enormous costs of operation, particularly for maintaining and renewing the unique infrastructure. Railways are an environmentally propitious and economically essential public service that should be encouraged to attract passengers (and goods) from more damaging – less sustainable - modes of transport. Rail particularly has the potential to provide a vital sustainable underpinning of society. Therefore, TWNW 's view is that they justify subsidy and will continue to do so. In an industry where a long-term view is vital, franchising has suffered from short-terminism and a competitive pressure to keep bids low, not allowing the wider strategic view and greater investment to enhance the product.

3.2 There needs to be a completely new approach to financing public transport in this country, taking a holistic view of all transport. In today's railway structure there is no coherent strategy for investing in and promoting rail. We are simply not giving anything like enough attention to win people to rail in order to help combat climate change and protect the environment. For example, rail needs to attract many more passengers from internal air flights and roads to help lower carbon emissions, dependence on fossil fuels and relieve congestion. Financial sustainability and long-term costs must be seen in this context.

3.4 Although many taxpayers do not travel by rail it should be recognised that their contribution to rail services is helping the experience of road users by helping to reduce congestion. One of the problems with the current model is that investment in rail is not seen in a broad context of overall benefit to transport and the environment.

3.5 Compared with some other European countries state support for our railways (Covid apart) is relatively low. Given the vital role of railways in underpinning the economy of the UK and their unique ability to contribute to sustainability, this should be reviewed. In France, for example, the regional train network, an integral part of SNCF is heavily subsidized by French taxpayers. On average, 72% of the cost is borne by the State and the regional councils, with passengers paying only about 28% of the cost (in sharp contrast to the UK). Whilst not advocating irresponsible spending of state funds, properly managed increases in financial support for railways where there are clear socio-economic benefits should be identified.

3.6 We are disappointed that, as we understand, train fleet provision is not to be subsumed into Great British Railways, leaving this key role and its strategic implications in the hands of the private sector. ROSCOs have been perceived to act in their own commercial interests rather than the good of the railway network as a whole. A report from the ORR 'Understanding the Cost of Rolling Stock', January 2015 highlighted some key facts about the problems with the ROSCO model, including a high level of variation between the total costs associated with rolling stock for each of the TOCs and the challenges posed to operators in managing and controlling costs.

3.7 There are other models for the provision of rolling stock that should be more widely adopted across the UK, as an alternative to ROSCOs. The example of the Merseyrail replacement rolling stock shows an alternative way of funding such items.

4. Contributing to long term economic growth

Question - As Britain recovers from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, what evidence do you have for how rail can contribute to wider economic growth over the next 5, 10, and 30 years? What is a stretching yet realistic ambition for this objective and what measures can we most effectively use to consider success over the coming 5, 10 and 30 years? What type of interventions over that period will provide maximum value for money from rail's economic contribution, and what evidence can you share to support your views?

4.1 As a passenger representative body, economic growth is not a primary concern of ours. However, the strategy should aim at achieving wider economic and social objectives of regeneration, employment, inclusion, and accessibility in the communities served by rail. Of particular importance is to influence the development of spatial and planning policies to include partnerships with the railway industry, wherever practicable.

4.2 One outcome of the Covid pandemic has been an upsurge in domestic leisure travel and that trend is continuing. In our region the Lake District is an enormous attraction and there is overwhelming potential to offer a public transport choice to the hordes of private car users who clog up the roads. Unfortunately, various constraints have hindered such opportunities in the past. Another rail route with great potential is of course the internationally

acclaimed Settle Carlisle railway - again its development has been hindered by railway structural factors.

Questions - In the context of enabling development and regeneration opportunities both in the immediate vicinity of stations and within the surrounding area, how can rail best facilitate improvements to places and local growth, through improved connectivity and unlocking commercial activity, housing, and employment over the next 5, 10 and 30 years?

- What innovative and modernising ideas do you have which would benefit the railway while supporting the strategic objectives? Please give evidence and make reference to how they would maintain or enhance the railway's safety record.

4.3 The Rail Delivery Group's 'Vision for Stations Report' (2015) recognised that:

"Railway stations offer the opportunity to contribute to the attractiveness of rail journeys and have the potential to support the development of ever more vibrant, growing and attractive local communities - - - Our vision is for Britain's stations to be places which are inclusive and welcoming, and which encourage everyone to travel by rail. This vision will be enabled by those working at the station, by the innovative use of technology, and by the involvement of the communities which stations serve".

TWNW fully endorses this Vision and wishes to see it developed widely across the rail network.

4.4 There must be a greater emphasis on improving railway stations by actively developing partnerships with a range of stakeholders. Community Rail Partnerships should have a greater innovative role in developing stations. The structure of network rail and franchising has meant there a curb on incentives to develop railway stations. TWNW is aware of examples of examples when private, 3rd party organisations have offered to lease station buildings and to invest several £thousands in local stations, it has been impossible to make progress. GBR should foster a management team with the expertise or incentives to bring unused station buildings into worthwhile use, rather than trying to realise unrealistic commercial rents.

4.5 Much can be done, relatively simply, to increase awareness and access to stations and the services they provide. These provisions range from visible off-station signposting to accessible feeder and interchange facilities which help to attract new passengers – often an area of weakness. To go further additional stations need to be reinstated and new ones opened if motorists are to be persuaded rail travel is not only better for the environment but a more convenient way to travel. On that subject we are heartened by the statement in the recent "Levelling Up" white paper that "towns left behind by rail closures, including those from the Beeching report of the 1960s, will be reconnected to the national network." There are many such in our region!

4.6 There is an argument for a massive expansion of cost-effective electrification. In the longer term a wider ranging programme will bring down the per kilometre costs of electrification, and in turn this brings down operating costs and accelerates the railway's contribution to sustainability and economic regeneration. On 5 March 2015, the North of England Electrification Task Force published its report, 'Northern Sparks', stating that: "*Across the world a modern urban or indeed intercity railway is an electric railway because there are a number of significant benefits from electric traction*". It is regrettable that this worthy report has had very little success in terms of progress with electrification schemes. The WISP should re-examine the merits of the report's findings.

5. Levelling up and Connectivity

Questions - *What evidence can you provide for how the rail sector contributes to the four levelling up outcomes and to improving connectivity in across Great Britain, including through cross-border services? How does this change depending on the type of place where the sector operates (including in cities, towns and rural areas), and what are the most cost-effective ways at the sector's disposal to improve that further during the next 5, 10, and 30 years?*

- *How could the rail industry, over the next 5, 10, and 30 years, become more responsive to, and more accountable to, local communities and passengers? Please give evidence and examples in your response.*

- *What is a stretching yet realistic ambition for this objective and what measures can we most effectively use to consider success over the coming 5, 10 and 30 years? What are the interventions over that period which will be the maximum value for money, and what evidence can you share to support your views?*

5.1 We welcome the notion of devolving local control to integrated transport bodies and that local/regional train services should operate as public service contracts within an integrated system.

5.2 We advocate more local input through the medium of Community Rail Partnerships and other stakeholders. The Settle – Carlisle line's Railway Development Company is a good example of devolved local management and initiatives in promoting the railway to the benefit of the local communities and the various categories of passenger alike. Much more can be done to promote Community Rail.

6. Delivering Environmental Sustainability

Question - *What is a stretching yet realistic ambition for this objective and what measures can we most effectively use to consider success over the coming 5, 10 and 30 years? What are the interventions over that period which will be the maximum value for money, and what evidence can you share to support your views?*

6.1 Trends in environmental considerations including climate change should afford a golden opportunity for rail to assert its key place in our transport needs. GBR must constitute the single overall strategic planning and controlling authority required to pursue that opportunity in a joined-up way and ensure that rail contributes to sustainable development across the UK.

Questions - What use can the rail sector make of emerging or existing technologies to reduce its impact on the environment and enhance biodiversity over the next 5, 10, and 30 years, and, in a proportionate and cost-effective way, help national and regional authorities to meet their environmental objectives?

- How can rail best invest in climate resilience, supported by smarter forecasting, planning and technology, over the next 5, 10, and 30 years and what evidence do you have to support your view?

6.2 Electrification has been referred to previously. We are simply not giving anything like enough attention to win people to rail in order to help combat climate change and protect the environment. For example, rail needs to attract many more passengers from internal air flights and roads to help lower carbon emissions, dependence on fossil fuels and relieve congestion. Incentivising travellers to transfer from air and road to electrified railways might well be a more effective way of “responding to the challenge of a carbon-free transport future by 2040” than any deployment of alternative fuelled trains. In order to achieve this, the need for more infrastructure is of course paramount but train capacity and design is also fundamental.

6.3 Technologies such as Battery Trains and Hydrogen trains require careful evaluation. Compatible full electrification schemes have many advantages for rail network service integration.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond

Yours faithfully

John A Moorhouse

John Moorhouse
Company Secretary