



transport**times**

UK
RAIL
SUMMIT

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CONTENTS

- 3 **Keeping Britain Moving:** Foreword by Chris Heaton-Harris MP
- 4 **A reality check on the state of the national railway** by Jim Steer
- 6 **Transport investment is essential to economic recovery** by Andy Byford
- 8 **A railway for the next generation:** Interview with Mark Thurston
- 9 **Decarbonisation - an act of reciprocity** by Frazer Henderson
- 12 **UK Rail Summit write up** by Robert Jack & Andrew Garnett
- 20 **England's Railways need a bold agenda for change** by Martin Heffer
- 21 **Stepping up to the Plate** Interview with Andrew Haines
- 23 **Selling rail travel in the future** by Robert Samson
- 25 **Rail's role in building back better from COVID-19** by Jonathan Bray

KEEPING BRITAIN MOVING

Foreword

↗ Chris Heaton-Harris MP
Rail Minister, Department for Transport



Britain's railway played a critical role in keeping essential goods moving throughout lockdown. Without rail services, supermarkets would have been unable to replenish their shelves every night, vital raw materials would have remained undelivered to manufacturing plants, and many key workers would have had issues getting to work.

On September 7th, the industry introduced a new timetable which increased rail capacity to over 90% of its pre-pandemic levels; ensuring that as people are able to return to work, there are trains ready to get them there.

We have come a long way over the past six months. Following the outbreak of the virus we witnessed a dramatic fall in passenger numbers and revenue. The government took decisive action to support the rail industry and secure key services. We suspended existing franchise agreements temporarily, and introduced Emergency Measures Agreements, which transferred revenue and substantive cost risk to the government.

These agreements brought stability to the industry at a time of genuine crisis, ensuring that trains continued to carry freight and key workers while most of the country followed government advice and stayed at home. Now people are heading back to work we want them to be confident that returning to the railway is safe.

We've been working with the rail industry over the summer to provide comprehensive guidance on how operators should assess and address the risks of coronavirus, and the industry has worked tirelessly to prepare the network for the safe return of passengers, while continuing to protect the health of frontline staff. Indeed strict cleaning regimes have been introduced, so stations and trains can be sanitised throughout the day.

For the protection of both passengers and staff, face coverings have been made mandatory on public transport in England, Scotland and Wales. You must wear a face covering whilst on a train or in a station, unless you are exempt from doing so.

The industry has launched guidance to help passengers travel safely and maintain distance from others wherever possible. This guidance is promoted regularly through station and train announcements, posters and floor stickers, and online. Passengers are being urged to avoid busy services, and the Department for Transport is working on developing more

attractive ticketing options for those who find themselves travelling less often, to support a green economic recovery. More staff and volunteers have been deployed to help guide people at and near stations, and passenger flows around stations have been redesigned to allow for social distancing.

The industry has also reached out to the community to help it adapt to returning patterns of travel. In designing the new timetable, train operators have worked closely with local schools to identify stations and trains that will experience higher demand in the weeks and months ahead. Wherever possible, train operators are running extra services or adding carriages to create more room. Staff are on hand to explain to older children the rules on wearing a face covering and maintaining social distancing.

Train operators are also advising parents and children how to sign up for personalised journey updates through National Rail's 'Alert me by Messenger' service, which flags busy trains and helps passengers choose the least busy service for their trips. The service supports 100,000 rail passengers with more than 1 million personalised messages a month, and plays an important part in enabling passengers to make informed decisions.

I remain immensely grateful to rail workers around the country – from drivers, conductors and network engineers, to signallers, train planners, ticket office staff and cleaners – for their heroic efforts over the past six months, and their staunch determination to keep the country moving. Now the time has come to our economic recovery, to help get businesses back on their feet, and to create jobs to replace those that have been lost.

We are committed to building our economy back – and doing it in a way that works for everybody. We will continue to work with rail operators to ensure that train travel is safe and make sure together we give passengers the confidence to return to the railway.

A reality check on the state of the national railway

Jim Steer
Director Greengauge 21



The truth is that by the end of 2019, rail timetables were creaking after two decades of full-on passenger demand growth. Senior industry players, expert in finding ways to eke out more capacity on an unchanged network, spoke of taking a small step backwards. In Manchester, a few services would need to be withdrawn. Across London, Thameslink's plans for 24 trains/hour service levels would be pushed back to 2020. In truth, Covid-19 has given the railway much-needed breathing space.

Recovery paths...

There is no precedent to guide us forward. But there are some similarities with 2001/2. Following the Hatfield train crash, the timetable had become unworkable with nationwide speed restrictions. Sir Alastair Morton spoke of a collective nervous breakdown.

Some franchises were already facing up to overpriced bids and asking for bail-outs. I joined the Strategic Rail Authority at around this time. Plans for future revenues had gone out of the window and public confidence in the safety of rail travel had been lost. I suggested switching franchises to a gross cost basis. Too radical then, it's what we now have. The compromise reached then – which got the bidding process working again – was 'cap and collar' for franchise revenues. And with close monitoring, week by week, acceptable levels of service reliability were restored – and passenger confidence along with it.

... in 2020 require fares reform

If ever there was a chance to reform the half-baked, part-regulated, sometimes split-ticketed, rail fares system, it is now, when there is no need to compensate franchise holders. This will appeal to prospective returning rail users. Season tickets are unsuitable for the expected new pattern of office commuting.

The question of recovery in rail demand depends on two key factors: the resumption of activity levels in cities (especially in city centres), and the development of safe travel practices on rail. The latter suggests managing passenger volumes train-by-train. Turn up and go will have to be replaced with turn up and register. This needn't mean an end to spontaneous or last-minute travel. But it will end passenger standing over all but the shortest distances. A source of 'free' revenue to rail will be lost – and about time too.

Connecting timetables use city centres as hubs

Timetable planning centred on connecting trains at regular intervals, as pioneered in Switzerland and now being planned across Germany, could prove attractive for Britain too. This policy increases demand at network 'nodes' – where routes converge. These are often in busy city centres. Reduced commuting volume will ease this policy shift.

The interval timetable approach is intrinsically multi-modal. Unlike today, simplified fares for rail can be easily extended across support modes. With timetables built around connections, mode of transport becomes a secondary consumer issue – provided common standards apply.

Fewer, but longer, journeys

Growth in passenger trip volumes will weaken in the decades ahead. ONS has revised national population forecasts significantly downwards. Treasury has done the same with GDP. Fewer people, with lower GDP (and so less personal spending power) means fewer journeys. But more dispersed living (a middle class flight from cities) would mean longer journeys. Many business cases are going to look weaker in conventional benefit/cost terms.





Transport investment decisions ahead will increasingly be made on factors other than meeting projected rising demand levels. The rail sector already has a plan to get out of diesel traction, but investment is needed. For roads, rival camps are promoting battery electric, hydrogen and adapted internal combustion vehicle solutions; even motorway electrification has its proponents. The motoring lobby is fractured on this.

Climate change poses unavoidable resilience questions

Rail has to face up to two questions of network resilience. The first is to deal with the effects of more extreme weather and sea-level rises on its infrastructure. This will be costly – and potentially disruptive. Here, a programme approach in which selected vulnerable parts of the network are closed for a period so that remedial works can be carried out cost effectively is needed. The availability of suitable alternative routes is crucial. And this introduces the second aspect of resilience: network redundancy (will the system still work if a big component fails?).

Rather than thinking in terms of expansion to accommodate future overall demand growth, the investment questions for rail are therefore going to be about the likely scale of shifts from less sustainable travel modes; the pace of the programme to eliminate carbon-fuel energy in traction equipment; and the need to make the rail network resilient.

A new strategic agenda for rail

The strands of rail policy discussed here combine well with each other and point to a new, coherent, post-Covid policy and programme for transport, with rail the mode of choice for longer distance travel:

- **A simplified fares system for interurban bus and rail (and feeder metro/LRT systems) that can become the framework for a nationwide scheduled public transport service network**
- **An approach to demand management that eliminates overcrowding to help ensure clinically-safe travel conditions**
- **Attention given to key interchanges – with additional capacity as needed, designed for passenger safety, surety and convenience**
- **Fossil-fuel traction systems eliminated from rail – increasing the proportion of passengers carried each day on electrified rail from 60% to 100%**
- **A recognition that the rail network needs all its components to be made resilient to climate change and providing redundancy through alternative route availability.**

Transport investment is essential to economic recovery

Andy Byford
Commissioner, Transport for London



As I returned to London in the midst of the pandemic, a number of things were immediately obvious. Firstly, that the spirit and commitment of transport staff - that I remembered from my time when I started by career, 30 years ago - had not been dimmed by the ravages of the pandemic. Quite the opposite. And secondly, that this would prove to be a highly significant moment that would require all the energies of the transport industry to overcome – to give customers the confidence to return, to secure sustainable funding and to help cities recover and prosper again.

The network is cleaner than ever. We have implemented an enhanced cleaning regime using hospital-grade disinfectant, more than 1,000 hand sanitiser points are available and our army of cleaning staff are out cleaning trains and stations with anti-viral spray giving confidence to those who need to travel that the network is as safe as possible. The overwhelming majority of customers are complying with the requirement to wear a face covering unless they are exempt, and we're working closely with the police to ensure that the small minority who are not complying do so. People who are exempt from wearing face coverings can download a card to print out or show on their mobile to help make their journeys easier.

But, like all transport operators, we can only support the country's economic recovery if we have the financial security needed to do so.

Prior to the pandemic TfL had been on the road to self-sufficiency, having taken £1bn out of our operating costs over the past four years through rigorous efficiency. I understand why other cities look to London's historical investment levels with longing, but behind the scenes London's transport network has been compelled over recent years to rely to a disproportionate amount on fares income. Over 70 per cent of TfL's income to operate the network comes from fares. This compares to 38 per cent in New York and 47 per cent in Madrid's transport system and this meant that TfL's financial model was simply not built to withstand the coronavirus pandemic. London is one of the only major cities in Europe without a regular Government grant to cover its day-to-day operations

As we all know, it is public transport that provides access to work, leisure and education. It supports new homes, jobs and economic growth. It makes cities greener, healthier and more attractive to investors. Now more than ever before transport has one of the most significant roles to play in making cities cleaner and healthier places, reducing carbon emissions and stimulating green technology and innovation. It is vital that we avoid a car-led recovery, with the pollution, inactivity and road danger that would entail.

We're ready to play our part in that – to continue to modernise and improve our roads and public transport, upgrade ageing infrastructure to keep it safe for everyone and provide safer, more reliable and greener ways for people to get around.

Around half of all new buses in the UK come to London. We have the ambition to kick-start a huge new market in green energy, battery manufacturing and electric buses – changing the face of the UK bus fleet by 2030, helping to tackle the climate and air quality crisis and generating green jobs and skills across the country.

Delivering the Northern Line Extension to Battersea and London Overground extension to Barking Riverside and of course opening the Elizabeth line will unlock thousands of new homes. As it gets closer to becoming an operational railway I want responsibility for Crossrail to transfer to me and we are working with Crossrail and the DfT to look at governance arrangements to make that happen in the near future. Subject to us getting the necessary funding I will guarantee we open the Elizabeth line, this much needed expansion to London's transport network, open in the shortest possible timeframe. Increasing step-free access across the network is also vital if London's jobs, shops and leisure are to be truly open to everyone.

But, given the effects of the pandemic, to carry on our work to achieve this we must have appropriate Government support. The stakes are extremely high for London and for the UK. Failing to invest in transport would hamper the recovery and set us on a downward spiral of ageing infrastructure and increasingly unreliable and restricted transport services – in turn damaging confidence and restricting business.

Now the transport industry must speak with one voice, making the case that transport investment is essential to economic recovery. Together we can meet this challenge and ensure that the country emerges from the pandemic on track to becoming stronger, better, and greener than before.

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A RAILWAY FOR THE NEXT GENERATION



➤ Mark Thurston interviewed by Prof. David Begg
Written up by Kirsty Walton

As High Speed Two reaches a significant milestone and construction begins, HS2 Ltd chief executive Mark Thurston spoke to Transport Times' Professor David Begg in an interview for the UK Rail Summit about how the railway is important for more than just capacity.

Since its inception over a decade ago, High Speed Two (HS2) has seen more than its fair-share of debate. For every avid supporter of the railway there are just as many opponents, with some questioning the need for the project. However, Mark Thurston, who has been at the helm of the organisation for the past three and a half years, talks to Prof. David Begg about how the railway is vital for the country – in ways that go beyond increasing capacity.

Thurston firstly says he has “resigned himself to the fact that projects like this do divide opinion”. He explains that this has been one of the most surprising aspects, one that he had not fully appreciated prior to taking on the role. There are three distinct camps when it comes to public opinions on HS2, those “who tend to be pretty agnostic and don’t really take too much interest either way”, and then “quite polarized” camps for and against the project.

He recognises that long-term builds such as HS2 “are disruptive, do require land and property, they take a lot of money and time to build” and opinions are strong “particularly if it’s in a part of the country where you might live or you have a business, and our job really is to make sure we do what we have to do in the most sensitive way we can - HS2 is doing that on a scale we haven’t seen in living memories”.

The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has not provided any respite from either scepticism or criticism. High Speed Rail is predicated on the basis that we have relentless growth in demand for rail. Critics of HS2 have argued that the recent health crisis is a game changer – not only due to the severe reduction in short-term demand for rail but also because it has accelerated other trends that have been taking place in the economy, such as working from home, or online shopping.

“We don’t really know what the medium-longer term implications of Covid-19 are” acknowledges Thurston, “it’s clearly not served the economy well, with us all working from home but we’ve seen lots of stimulus packages to get people back into offices, back into city centres and back into restaurants.” However, once the effects of Covid has washed through, assuming that at some point they will and there will be a vaccine, we will return to some form of normal. Currently, we are relying on Victorian infrastructure for existing

major corridors between cities that pre-Covid have been facing obvious capacity issues. These Victorian systems are getting life expired and they are getting very expensive to renew – so we have a tipping point now.

At its core HS2 has been about delivering the capacity requirements the network desperately requires. However, it is also about so much more, including:

- **supporting economic growth**
- **improving connectivity between the towns and cities in the North – driving much greater investment and prosperity, part of the government’s levelling up agenda**
- **delivering a shift to low carbon transport**

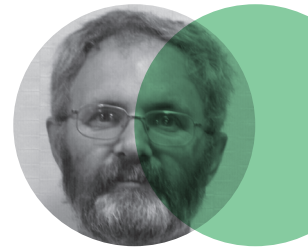
“It’s going to take us 10 years to build the first phase of HS2 and hopefully 20 years to get all the way to Leeds and Manchester – this is a railway for the next generation.”

HS2 Ltd sees itself as an “important part of the economic recovery of the country” as we begin to build our way back out of the recession that the pandemic has created for us. HS2 is shovel ready, having reached the important milestone of the construction phase earlier this month. There is no denying that HS2 is a major employer. There is around 10,000 people on the job today and that will double in the next 24 months, stretching to over 22,000 throughout the supply chain in the coming years.

Finally, Thurston also reminds us that another factor that has been accentuated by Covid-19 that we must not lose sight of is the green agenda. The fall in transport emissions as a result of the lockdown earlier this year has shone a light on this key topic. We “need to move to a carbon neutral economy and we know that travelling by train is by far the greenest way to travel, both in terms of cars and flying” says Thurston. It is not clear just yet what version of our domestic aviation market will return when the full effects of Covid have passed. This is where high speed rail can play a vital role.

Decarbonisation - an act of reciprocity

Frazer Henderson
Head of Rail Policy, Transport Scotland



Without the distractions that tend to make life hectic the recent lockdown has provided an opportunity for reflection and contemplation and a chance to gain a deeper, perhaps more insightful, perspective of the issues that confront us all. I used the occasion to spend some of the enforced confinement in expanding the range of my usual reading material. Amongst the many and various journals and books consumed the one that left the greatest impression was the runaway best-seller Braiding Sweetgrass by the Native American ecologist Mary Wall Kimmerer.

Within a highly personal narrative she effortlessly weaves plant science and indigenous knowledge, and enables the reader to gain an appreciation of our reciprocal relationship with the rest of the living world. It is not necessarily a book that one would have thought relevant to a transport professional. But it was that reciprocal aspect that resonated, both at an individual and societal level.

And it came to mind again at the end of July when Transport Scotland published the rather more prosaically entitled Rail Services Decarbonisation Action Plan. Now whilst I can't imagine that it, too, will become a best-seller I am nonetheless certain that it will have a profound, direct effect both for individuals and society. And at its heart is reciprocity.

Over time we have ripped open the earth to extract fossil fuels and we've used them in ways that we now realise have delivered harm. We've seen and are seeing the impact on human health and the personal and societal cost of subsequent illnesses. We've seen the harm to the planet manifested in dramatic changes to our climate and ecology. And we're looking at a long-term prognosis - if we don't act - that may be beyond the ability of future generations to arrest and reverse.

But by using the readily available resources of light, wind, and water – so-called naturally sustainable resources - we can dampen the effects of climate change. We can improve our own health and the well-being of the planet. By taking these sustainable resources and using them, rather than carbon-dense fuels, to produce electricity we can still provide the energy necessary to deliver a functioning society. In short, decarbonisation – not using carbon - is an act of reciprocity.

Our Action Plan for Rail forms part of a suite of initiatives in Scotland that seek to address the challenges posed by carbon the use of which has begotten climate change. We already have world-leading legislation with net zero emissions targets of greenhouse gases by 2045 and in the transport sector – now the largest single contributor to greenhouse gases – we are implementing low emission zones





within our major cities. We intend to phase out new petrol and diesel cars in Scotland by 2032 and decarbonise scheduled flights within Scotland by 2040 with the aim of creating the world's first zero emission aviation region by that date. We are also radically accelerating the deployment of zero emission vehicles within the bus sector as part of our comprehensive response. Indeed, taking action to address the ills of climate change and improve health and well-being are two of four strategic outcomes of our National Transport Strategy.

Our intentions, as set out in the Action Plan, align very much with the findings of the Rail Industry Decarbonisation Taskforce (RSSB July 2019). Accordingly, we intend to pursue cost-effective electrification, coupled with targeted battery and hydrogen technology where these provide a better or more appropriate solution.

Reducing the cost and impact of physical electrification will be key to the successful delivery of the Plan. Fortunately, there is acknowledgement, right across the rail sector, for the need for greater efficiency during design, development, and delivery. The integration of planning and delivery is key to success. There are a host of variables - route, rolling stock, power supply, structures, and service operations - which must be addressed by a multi-disciplinary team in a truly integrated manner to ensure a successful, efficient programme. The interplay between

variables is complex and challenging. All of this activity requires robust budgetary oversight, ongoing monitoring, and continual refinement. Fortunately, a detailed delivery programme, engaging the entire industry in Scotland - known as Team Scotland - in a collaborative approach, is being drawn together under the Programme Delivery Director. It is pleasing to note that progress is underway with design development work already started on a number of electrification schemes to connect and consolidate - efficiently, of course, - the electrification of lines in Scotland's central belt.

Having an Action Plan provides certainty of direction and allows key players to take steps that will stimulate innovation, create new and exciting employment and training opportunities, and help Scotland deliver a genuine sustainable economic recovery from this dispiriting health pandemic. As an example of that approach, Scottish Enterprise, Transport Scotland, and others are developing an International Rail Cluster in Scotland. Initially, in the light of prevailing circumstances, this work will begin life as a digital project with a number of events bringing the industry, businesses, and academia together online. The expectation is that, in time, post-pandemic, the momentum of a virtual gathering will translate into a physical cluster of businesses and research organisations to support and deliver a world class manufacturing capability in sustainable rail infrastructure and transport.

Our Action Plan is a charter of intent, a statement of action, a proclamation of opportunity and a call to arms. It will also deliver an act of reciprocity.

UK RAIL SUMMIT 2020

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Our Speakers



Prof. David Begg,
Chief Executive, Transport Times



Sir Peter Hendy CBE,
Chair, Network Rail



Andy Byford,
Commissioner, Transport for London



Steve Montgomery,
Managing Director - UK Rail, FirstGroup



Katy Taylor,
Group Commercial and Customer
Director, The Go-Ahead Group



Andrew Haines,
Chief Executive, Network Rail



Ed Thomas,
Partner, Head of UK Transport, KPMG



Darren Caplan,
Chief Executive, Railway Industry
Association



Bill Reeve,
Director of Rail, Transport Scotland



Simon Statham,
Head of Technical Programmes,
Midlands Connect



Stephen Edwards,
Chair, Urban Transport Group



Allan Watt,
Director of Communications, Abellio UK



Mark Thurston,
CEO, HS2 Ltd



Michele Dix CBE,
Managing Director, Crossrail2



Jim Steer,
Director, Greengauge21



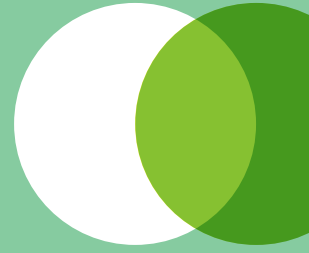
Caroline Donaldson,
Managing Director, West Coast
Partnership Development



Organised by Transport Times, the annual UK Rail Summit took place virtually on 18th September. The 200 registered delegates were able to experience the full-day conference online from the comfort of their homes or offices.

UK RAIL SUMMIT 2020 WRITE UP

➤ Robert Jack & Andrew Garnett



Passenger Transport magazine's Robert Jack and Andrew Garnett report on the main stories from the UK Rail Summit.

Hendy: This is only the end of the beginning

Senior figures in UK rail offered their views on how the coronavirus pandemic might shape the future of their industry at the UK Rail Summit on September 18.

"This is only the end of the beginning," Network Rail chairman Sir Peter Hendy told the online conference. "It's nothing like normal. For example, the footfall in Waterloo yesterday was 36% of its pre-Covid levels, which is busier than it's been for weeks and weeks and weeks, but nothing like the railway that we used to know."

Speculating on what the 'new normal' might look like, Hendy said: "I'm not sure anybody knows yet ... but what is clear already is that peoples' methodology of working has changed where they can."

However, he pointed out that many people don't have the luxury of a big office at home. "There are people, younger people, people who don't have a lot of money, who have been working in really difficult circumstances, who want to go back to office jobs," he said.

Hendy also observed that leisure travel has returned quicker than work travel over the past few weeks.

He said: "One of the scenarios that we might all want to have in our heads is that actually we might be going back to a situation like the fifties where the maximum traffic on the railway was on peak summer Saturdays and not in what we would now regard as the normal peak hours. But we don't really know that yet."

A number of speakers said that the transport market had fundamentally changed as a result of Covid-19.

Those viewing the online summit appeared to agree. A poll found that 75% agreed that the Covid pandemic would lead to a reduction in passenger demand in the long term.

Katy Taylor, group commercial and customer director at Go-Ahead Group, was among those who expect a lasting impact.

"I think people have liked not being so crowded," she told delegates, "I don't think people are going to accept a nose in somebody else's armpit for an hour coming into London Bridge any more. I just don't think that is going to be acceptable."

"So we need to start working out what is the on board experience that customers are going to tolerate, and they are going to want coming out of the pandemic. As soon as people start travelling a bit more I think we need to explore what that looks like."

"Cleaning is never going to go back," she added. "This came out of the SARS crisis in Hong Kong [in 2003]. They never reduced any of the cleaning regimes they brought in following that pandemic there."

Bill Reeve, Transport Scotland's director of rail, doesn't believe that commuting in a traditional sense will ever return.

"What we are seeing is a previous trend, that was already discernible, being accelerated," he explained, adding that the current financial support needed to keep the network running at current levels of capacity was unsustainable.

Reeve continued: "It is right the UK Government and the Scottish Government and the other governments of the United Kingdom have recognised the importance of public transport generally and rail in particular, but frankly we cannot afford to keep pouring money into these networks at that rate."

"It is very clear, and I think the Williams Review was establishing a consensus around that, but if our industry processes were not optimal before this, then they are not fit for purpose now. They simply take too long and too often are focussed on competing incentives and competing priorities. We need to adapt and we need to do so urgently."

Haines confident about future funding

Network Rail chief executive Andrew Haines sees no appetite within the government to reduce its investment in rail, despite the challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic.

A succession of speakers at the conference expressed gratitude for the financial support that the government has offered to the industry throughout the crisis - but concerns were expressed about how long it will be sustained.

"At one point during the pandemic, it was about £100 per journey of taxpayer's money that was going into the railway," Katy Taylor, group commercial and customer director at Go-Ahead Group, told



delegates. “Now I certainly as a taxpayer don't think that's good value for money and I'm pretty sure nobody else will either. So we really have to start demonstrating value for money.”

While acknowledging the impact that the huge reduction in demand for rail travel has had on business cases, Andrew Haines is confident that funding will be sustained.

“It is still historically phenomenally cheap to invest in infrastructure,” he told conference chair Professor David Begg, “and the government does appear to have an appetite to invest their way out of what otherwise is going to be the mother of all recessions.”

“And ... there is a real commitment I think in government, and in law, towards decarbonisation. An opportunity maybe to deflect some of the investment that would have gone into capacity enhancement into decarbonisation in the short term and get ahead of that might well make more sense now.”

He continued: “I'm certainly not hearing that there's any loss yet of government appetite to invest in the railway. Far from it. We have ambitious plans and very positive noises at this stage as we start to think about the next control period and beyond.”

A poll found that those watching the summit online shared Haines's optimism. Almost two-thirds (63%) believe that the government's focus on an infrastructure-led recovery, its 'levelling up agenda' and commitments on climate change, mean that rail investment will be protected despite the impact of Covid.

Meanwhile, Haines pointed out that in April this year Network Rail investment in infrastructure was 25% of the UK's total investment in infrastructure. “We kept going,” he said. “We and our supply chain responded very, very flexibly and creatively.”

Deceitful to say ‘no more landslides’

Network Rail cannot stop landslides like the one that derailed a train near Stonehaven on August 12, killing three people. Chief executive Andrew Haines says that the infrastructure controller must instead become more sophisticated at predicting when and where problems will arise.

“My very first meeting of 2020 was a review of earthworks because we had had problems in the run-up to Christmas with very wet weather, and what I learnt really was you can't spend your way out of this in the short term,” he told interviewer Professor David Begg.

“We've got over 130,000 earthwork assets, and many of them were designed in a way which means they are going to be

susceptible to changes in climate, so we've got to get much better at managing the consequences.

“Of course we need to invest in more and more, and effectively there's been a doubling of investment in this territory in the last 10 years, but that's just scratching the surface. We've got to be much more finely attuned the local weather patterns might be a problem, where we can put restrictions in place in a very localised area to mitigate impact.

He added: “If we promise politicians or passengers that we can stop landslides we are being deceitful. We are going to have to get a lot of energy into being much better at managing the consequences, and that's got to be the real focus.”

With the pandemic depressing rail patronage and climate change leading to derailments and landslides, a poll of conference delegates found that 88% anticipate more focus on resilience, safety and punctuality in the future and less focus on capacity enhancements.

“I think the investment track record of the government into Network Rail over the last decade has been good,” said Haines. “And certainly CP6 represents a significant improvement in the amount of money available to invest in assets, but we are playing catch-up.

“I think we are spending something like 20% more on earthworks, for example, this Control Period, and yet the average asset age will be slightly older at the end of the Control Period. So I don't think we'll see a big shift, but I do think we will see more investment in technology and mitigations alongside that as being smart investment.

“The railway couldn't cope with the disruption of rebuilding all of our earthwork assets even if it made economic sense. We will have to be much more agile in how we respond, is my own view.”

Covid has ‘hastened the reform agenda’

The need to reform the structure of the rail industry is greater now than it was before the coronavirus pandemic, according to Network Rail's chairman and its chief executive.

“It's hastened the reform agenda,” Network Rail chairman Sir Peter Hendy told the UK Rail Summit “The Williams Review, which is now a year old is not irrelevant. In fact, it's more relevant today today.”

He continued: “The reform agenda is still absolutely necessary and probably more even more crucial now than it was, simply because actually those hundreds of millions that the government is putting into both train operation and the infrastructure.



“We're going to have to justify every penny of that because the debt level for the country has rocketed and the Treasury at some point is going to want to know the value for money is.” Network Rail chief executive Andrew Haines agrees.

“I certainly think that reform is more pressing now than ever, and I think the government recognises that,” he told Professor David Begg in an interview which accompanied the rail summit.

“All the things which are fundamental to the Williams reform, the things identified in his problem statement are still there, but turbo charged,” he said. “So I would expect the government to bring forward those reforms as soon as they find the airtime to do it. But I wouldn't begin to imagine what it's like to be prime minister or secretary of state for transport and all the things on their desk.

“Rationally I would expect reform to be coming and to be coming soon and if anything to be coming quicker than it might otherwise have been done - albeit not exactly as Williams would have articulated because he probably wasn't thinking of a pandemic when he was writing his report.”

Plea to retain role for private sector

The UK Rail Summit heard a plea to retain a role for private sector commercial flair in the rail industry.

Steve Montgomery, managing director - UK rail for FirstGroup, addressed the event which took place ahead of last week's Department for Transport announcement that it was replacing the rail franchising with new Emergency Recovery Measures Agreements (ERMAs). This change will pave the way for rail industry reforms proposed by Keith Williams.

“Whatever the outcome of Keith's report, I think we all understand that franchising has been extremely successful,” said Montgomery. “I don't think anybody should forget how successful franchising was.

“Has it run its course? Yeah, in parts it probably has, I think we all recognise that. But what we were very good at, during privatisation, was growing this railway.”

Montgomery has been urging the government not to cast aside this expertise, which he said would be needed more than ever over the next 12-24 months.

He said: “[The] plea I am making at the moment is we need that innovation to remain in the industry and we need to make sure that we don't lose that through a short term position that we currently find ourselves in, that we look at the longer term.”

In his statement last week, transport secretary Grant Shapps

said the new model would “keep the best elements of the private sector, including competition and investment, that have helped to drive growth, but deliver strategic direction, leadership and accountability”.

Haines gives network rail a B+

Andrew Haines was offered the opportunity to mark his own report card having now served two years as chief executive of Network Rail.

“I think what I've seen is that a number of people who were sceptical about our devolution plans are seeing it and are beginning to see the dividends of that, but we've been too slow,” he conceded in an interview with Professor David Begg.

“We've been too cumbersome about it. I underestimated just how lethargic the organisation can be at times. So I would say I would be doing the same things but more turbo-charged.

“In a big organisation it's all too easy to become introspective and to look inside yourselves, so my motto - which has become almost ubiquitous - about putting passengers first, I think is more relevant now than ever, but we've got to make sure that we are actually walking the walk and not just talking the talk ... in our decision making.

Haines continued: “I think we've stepped up on industry leadership during Covid, and we've done it in a collaborative way. We haven't thrown our weight around ... We have come up with some long term partnerships, but it's still very mixey, you know, there's still too many interests which are not aligned.

“A lot of behaviours that you see in Network Rail are entirely understandable and rational given the set of incentives Network Rail has worked to, and that's why I am a passionate believer that Network Rail itself has to be subject to reform.

“I'm not talking about rail reform which involves everyone else becoming like Network Rail, never in a million years. It's about us all realigning our incentives, so we have a whole P&L, we all take decisions that make sense for the whole costs and revenue of our industry to welcome people back freight and passengers on that basis.”

Summing up his assessment of Network Rail's performance over his two-year tenure, he said: “I would say right actions, right intentions but you're just too slow ... a B+ maybe.”



Byford: crossrail key to our recovery

Gaining control of the Crossrail project is a vital component of Andy Byford's plan to lead Transport for London out of the coronavirus crisis.

Speaking at the UK Rail Summit on September 18 only 12 weeks after his appointment as TfL's new commissioner, Byford said that Tube patronage was now 34% of the pre-Covid levels while buses were now up to 57%.

"This Covid crisis has had a catastrophic, calamitous effect on TfL's finances," he said. "You can't drop your ridership by 90% and not expect to have a massive impact on your opex, and sure enough that's happened ... our budget is, to be frank, in tatters."

Byford is in talks with the Department for Transport and government officials about how TfL can get back on a stable footing. The organisation has already received £1.9bn from the government, but with TfL running a full service for only a fraction of the normal passengers more will inevitably be required to bridge the funding shortfall.

"[This crisis] isn't going away any time soon and we calculate that we'll need £2bn for H2 and a further £2.9bn for the next financial year," Byford told delegates at the online event. "Now that's no small chunk of change and we're not just going to get given that without conditions."

Byford said he was ready to talk about conditions, but he said it was unrealistic to expect passengers to continue to provide almost three-quarters of TfL's revenues. It contrasts with the approach of other major cities in world, including New York, where he was President of the New York City Transit Authority before joining TfL.

"One thing I am crystal clear on is that the existing funding model of TfL, namely 72% reliance through the farebox, has proven to be recklessly vulnerable to events such as this, unforeseen events such as this, catastrophic events such as this," he said.

Byford repeated his call for TfL to be handed control of the Crossrail project in order to halt further slippage on the budget and timeframe. However, he also said that this transfer of authority was also vital for TfL's post-Covid recovery.

"I am very grateful to what the CRL board has done in terms of retrieving from a very difficult situation in 2018, but now is the time to give it to TfL, let us get that thing across the line," he said. "It's critical to increasing the capacity that London needs and to maintain that social distancing, a massive uplift, a 10% uplift in tube capacity once it's open end-to-end, and once customers do come back much needed £500m annual boost to our bottom line."

How can rail overcome fear factor?

Strong warnings to avoid public transport in the UK have created a culture of fear that will be difficult to reverse.

This issue was discussed by speakers with a number of them drawing on international comparisons.

Andy Byford, Transport for London's Commissioner, noted that metro services in the Far East were "not so hard line in terms of social distancing", although he acknowledged that those countries have a very different societal model.

"People are much more used to, and compliant with wearing masks [in those countries]," he told delegates. "But I think there will come a point where I would want to make a call to relax the social distancing somewhat, provided that's backed by very high levels of mask usage."

As well as being a major operator of buses and trains in the UK, Go-Ahead Group also operates services in Singapore and Northern Europe. Katy Taylor, Go-Ahead's group commercial and customer director, has observed significant differences in approaches to public transport during the pandemic. In parts of Northern Europe, for example, all seats on public transport are being used facing in one direction if people are wearing face masks.

Taylor believes that there are opportunities for the UK to look at what other countries are doing, in order to strike the right balance between safety and sustainability.

Network Rail chief executive Andrew Haines believes that the risks associated with using public transport may have been overstated in the UK.

"There's an ongoing debate to be had with the government's scientists about what is the risk on public transport," he said.

Haines cited a study on high-speed Deutsche Bahn services in Germany, where a track and trace equivalent has been in place since the spring. Not a single cause of infection has been traced back to a train journey over the past six months, "a very powerful statement".

He warned: "One of the things we are going to have to overcome is that even when the government wants people to return to using public transport, because they want to rejuvenate city centres, people have misunderstood the message, and people have thought there was something fundamentally unsafe about public transport ... I have seen no evidence to support that thesis."



To help get people to overcome their fears, Katy Taylor believes that the industry needs to persuade them to “try it once”.

“People who have tried transport once, who've gone back on one journey since the lockdown have found it great, have really enjoyed the experience and are really positive about it,” she explained.

Taylor said that influencers, such as politicians, could also help to encourage people by being seen on public transport themselves.

A campaign akin to the Government's ‘Eat Out to Help Out’ initiative, which encouraged people to return to pubs, cafes and restaurants in August by subsidising their meals, is seen as something that could help get people to return to rail.

A poll of delegates at the UK Rail Summit found that more than three-quarters (76%) think that the Government should replicate the successful “Eat out and Help out” initiative for restaurants for public transport, with discounted fares to encourage passengers back onto the network.

Taylor agrees. “It's amazing how much people love a bargain,” she said. “Who would have thought that would be so popular? Restaurants were dead the week before that campaign started. So I think there's a real opportunity there to do something across rail ... It will just give people that encouragement to try it that once.”

However, she believes that it will be difficult to get people to move on from the ‘avoid public transport message’ that the government came out strongly with at the beginning of the pandemic.

“We can't under-estimate the impact that that authoritarian voice of government coming out and saying that has had,” she warned. “We see a lot of the customer data says people are waiting, especially people who are in the sort of high fear segment, people are waiting to be told by government that it's safe.”

“I really think there needs to be a change in that messaging from government and just moving away isn't sufficient ... it needs to be a very clear message from government that public transport is safe.”

Reeve urges ‘be more freight’

There was much talk at the UK Rail Summit about the structural changes that could take place as a result of the much delayed Williams Rail Review.

Bill Reeve, Transport Scotland's director of rail, said that while he believed that passenger rail demand may not return to what it was as a result of Covid-19, climate change required the industry to still be more ambitious for public transport and rail freight. He described rail's mission in Scotland to be that of securing a greater share of a smaller and changed market.

“The current organisational structure of the rail industry in Britain is not fit for that purpose,” he said. “So we are working with our colleagues across the industry, not least in the UK Government, to encourage the need for change at pace.”

He said the answer was for the rail industry to “be more freight”.

Reeve continued: “That's been my watchword for the last week or so. What do I mean by that? Well it's interesting isn't it that freight volumes are now back in the mid-90s of what they were pre-Covid, whilst the passenger railway is languishing at the 30 to 35% mark.”



"Even during the worst of lockdown, the business-focused railway, which is the freight railway, in the absence of a bailout, turned its attention to deploying its resources to secure new customers in new markets - there was a timber freight trial on the Far North Line over August.

"The freight railway replans its timetable every eight weeks, it's always on the lookout for new markets and redeploying its resources and is used to markets, like the coal market, disappearing. It weathers that with a real competitive and business focus. We need to bring that thinking and those processes into the passenger railway as a matter of some urgency."

'Make ticketing simple'

The conference heard calls for the industry to make rail fares simpler and more attractive to passengers.

"Our fares and ticketing system wasn't even suited to the 21st century, let alone post-pandemic," Katy Taylor, Go-Ahead Group's group commercial and customer director, "so I think we need to massively accelerate that."

Allan Watt, Abellio's director of communication, said he was proud of the way in which the railway has produced some impressive punctuality scores throughout the lockdown, but sounded a note of caution by adding that while 60% of the population are back at work, rail patronage was languishing at 30% of pre-Covid levels.

"In terms of simplicity and making the railways simple to use, well customer expectations have been rising for a number of years and I think expecting them to put up with what they've put up with in the past just won't work," added Watt.

"We've all sat home and used Deliveroo, we've had Amazon and we've had Netflix - these are very easy to use services. We just haven't kept up with that pace of change in technology. It's still quite hard to buy a ticket."

He urged the rail industry to use the immense amount of data produced by the sector more efficiently and make buying a ticket as simple as ordering an Uber.

"The five-day season ticket is just not going to happen in the future for many people. We need products like dynamic discounting where it gets cheaper the more you use," he concluded. "That takes away the uncertainty."

Industry urged to tackle green agenda

Speakers urged the industry to work together to play a part in tackling climate change.

Bill Reeve, Transport Scotland's director of rail, called on the industry to look to the future and invest now in order to "save for the future".

He said that Scotland was committed to decarbonising rail services by 2035 - five years ahead of the UK Government's own targets. Reeve said that while battery and fuel cell technology were options to green Scotland's railways, they were, for now, extraordinarily expensive when compared to a conventional electric train powered by overhead line equipment.

Reeve continued: "Given our diesels at some point over the next 15 years will need to be replaced, and that might be sooner rather than later given recent trends in clean air legislation in city centres... we don't want to do so with unnecessarily expensive and less well-performing new kit when the old solution is cheaper to buy, cheaper to operate and more effective in service, so we are continuing to invest now in electrification in our network in order to avoid a substantial and unnecessary higher cost in future."

While Scotland's recently published rail decarbonisation action plan called for extensive electrification of the network by 2035, Reeve admitted he foresaw some opportunities for new technologies on some areas of the network, in particular rural routes.

"They are not the right technology for our high volume, high speed, high power requirement railway," he added. "But they will be very useful during the transition to help us get to a decarbonised railway sooner rather than later."

However, Allan Watt, Abellio's director of communication, added that decarbonisation was not just about trains - he said the railway needed to do more to attract people out of their cars and onto trains.

"That's not just about the train, it's also about the services around about the train," he added. "I was very struck by chief executive of BP talking about the fact that over 50% of his retail wasn't selling petrol, it was selling customers other services at petrol stations. I think we need to think about the role of the whole railway infrastructure in people's lives."



Devolution transforms transport, delegates told

Talk of the power of devolution in transforming local transport networks led conference chair, Professor David Begg to wonder why it worked so well.

Michèle Dix, managing director of the Crossrail 2 Ltd, pointed out London's public transport network had been largely judged a success in recent decades as a result of the significant transport powers held by the Mayor of London, however she said that greater fiscal devolution was now required.

Simon Statham, head of technical programmes at Midlands Connect, said that his organisation was not actually seeking devolved powers to undertake its ambitious plans to transform transport networks across the Midlands. Instead Midlands Connect favoured a partnership-based approach.

"We actually think that partnership-working is a better model for us than a devolved statutory status that creates a new quango of some sort," he said. "We're not actually seeking devolution in the Midlands for the type of long-term planning that we're doing."

This was not the view taken by Bill Reeve, Transport Scotland's director of rail. He said devolution connects the decision-taking more immediately with local democracy.

He continued: "In the case of Scotland we've got devolved rail powers that map onto a democratically-elected body with its own budget responsibility and when you bring those things together you've got the starting point for a sensible mix."

"What I think we need more than anything else is proper devolved responsibility for the railway as a system. At the moment I have to wait for the much-delayed Williams Review before we can have confidence in how should lay out our plans. In the meantime, we're having to spend an awful lot of time and resource fulfilling processes we know are mad, but we don't have the power to change."

Stephen Edwards, chair of the Urban Transport Group and executive director of South Yorkshire PTE, said he felt that devolution was an essential part of the levelling up agenda. He felt that there were issues though in that many regions of the UK were all competing for the same money for priorities that are set elsewhere rather than locally.

"The distribution of that money doesn't always reflect those projects to a local community," said Edwards. "They are competing for projects across the whole country. So I think having that self-determination of what your priorities allow you to respond to local conditions. I think it's a more efficient way of getting funding into the things that are really needed and making sure that they really do reflect local priorities than being dictated by national priorities that don't always resonate."

Begg concluded the session with a prediction.

"I bet you after Covid-19 that the structure of government in the UK has been found wanting and we don't have strong enough regional government across the UK," he said. "We'll have to see if I'm right on this."



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England's Railways need a bold agenda for change

Martin Heffer
Technical Director Rail and Transit, WSP



England's railways are facing the greatest period of change and uncertainty since their development. Our assumptions about how they are planned, delivered and used are being challenged in a way that would have been inconceivable only a few years ago. One thing is clear, to weather this storm we need to set in place a programme of change that delivers not only a more dynamic railway but one that is future ready for the uncertainties ahead.

When the Strategic Rail Authority wrote "Everyone's Railway, the Wider Case for Rail" in 2003, it recast our perceptions to a railway that is safer, quicker and kinder to the environment than alternatives. The railway is an increasingly reliable and comfortable way of travelling, it is a mode in renaissance. Industrial relations issues and COVID-19 have challenged that. Demand first faltered and then dived and the public perception of what remains the safest mode of surface travel cooled dramatically.

These changes along with the enforced and accelerated rate of change in the way we work means that now more than ever we need to be clear on the role of our railways in delivering safe and sustainable connectivity, social value, economic benefits, decarbonisation and regeneration. We need to understand the future role of the railway and develop new models for the way we plan, develop, deliver and operate our railways if they are to continue as a key enabler of our economy.

The railway has always delivered access to opportunity. This access is not distributed evenly across the UK and the railway is rightly at the heart of Government's levelling up agenda. The access that many of us take for granted in the South East must be replicated elsewhere; it is critical that HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail are supported and allowed to deliver to their full potential. Realising nationally important infrastructure in the UK is not without its challenges, but such investment in rail will deliver social value, business security, employment and skills. Good design is time consuming and Government must not be seduced solely by the shovel ready. It must find space in its portfolio for the shovel worthy as well.

When the post-COVID-19 UK economy reinvents itself (as it surely will), our railways will be a key enabler of sustainable growth helping us hit our commitment to net zero by 2050. That reinvented economy is unlikely to be too different; what will have altered is the rate of structural change and our ways of working. Fluidity and flexibility are likely to be with us for the long term. We need a railway that is structured in a way that responds to that fluidity in the way it is delivered.

Much of this new way of responding is about existing challenges. Delivering for passengers in a way that grapples with the significant gap between cost and revenue is a long-standing challenge and one that is being viewed in increasingly stark relief against current DfT emergency measures. Our railway needs to get to grips with who is best placed to deliver value to the passenger and how to maximise revenue and reduce cost at the same time. These questions need to consider how we judge (and calculate) the true value of rail in its delivery of economic, environmental and social capital.

In order to solve the cost gap while dealing with the changing nature of rail demand and delivering benefits there is some pain to be felt. I argue in our [WSP White Paper](#) that we need a dynamic railway that can respond to future shocks and accelerating change and that we need to forge an agenda that delivers:

- **Change to regulation to allow more dynamic working;**
- **Adoption of technology to create a more efficient and reliable railway;**
- **Rebasing of cost by copying other industries' drive to efficiency;**
- **A change to the way we procure and deliver services; and**
- **Creation of a truly supporting policy environment.**

Our current Government has proved itself bold enough to tear up the rule book in terms of its approach to many things. The railway is ripe for that approach and ready for a bold set of changes.

STEPPING UP TO THE PLATE

Getting passengers back on trains, and continued investment in across the railways



➤ Andrew Haines interviewed by Prof. David Begg
Written up by Kirsty Walton

With passenger numbers down and demand for rail in the medium-long term unknown, Professor David Begg talks to Network Rail chief executive Andrew Haines, in an interview for the UK Rail Summit, about the implications for investment in capacity, resilience, safety and decarbonisation in the railway.

Over the last 20 years there has been an unpredictable phenomenal growth in demand for rail, creating a clear investment case for increasing capacity on the network. However, this year's Covid-19 pandemic could be seen as a real game changer, accelerating trends such as working from home and online shopping.

In the short-term we know that passenger numbers are down – but what is the medium-long term impact on the demand for rail? “The easy answer is that it’s too early to say” comments Haines, noting that it’s clear that the very significant number of people comfortable working from home – all of the time – has a lot of people in the industry “spooked”.

The strong financial interest for individuals will play a huge part. “If you can convert an annual season ticket into maybe one trip a fortnight – for some people that’s a very sizable increase in net disposable income.” Another factor playing a role is that at times the messaging around the safety of public transport during pandemic has been confusing and inaccurate. So, the industry has a huge job to encourage people back to the railway, with Haines declaring that “it’s important we step up to the plate”.

Rail reforms will help to do this. “There is a need for the railway to be a welcoming place, where we welcome people back, where we get rid of the complexity through fares modernisation, through much more integrated services at stations, through online facilities”. Haines expects that these reforms may be “coming quicker than it might have done, albeit not exactly as Williams would have articulated because he probably wasn’t thinking of a pandemic when he was writing his report”.

Whilst recent investment has been established on the increasing growth in demand and the fact remains that if demand is down in the short and medium term it will affect business cases, it is also clear that there is no loss in Government’s appetite for investing in the railway. After all there is desire from the government to invest its way out of the impending recession.

Haines suggests that with a real commitment in government and law for decarbonisation this decline in patronage “may spark an opportunity to deflect some of the investment that would have gone into capacity and enhancements into decarbonising in the short-term and get ahead of that”. Perhaps “a realigned decarbonised economy would be a sensible way of maintaining that investment, maintaining the supply chain who have done a brilliant job for us during lockdown.”

It is also important to recognise that in April this year Network Rail investment in infrastructure was 25% of the UK’s total investment in infrastructure. Haines comments this is because the organisation “kept going” with the “supply chain responding very flexibly and creatively and so when everyone else slumped we kept going.” It is a remarkable demonstration of just how agile Network Rail can be. Decarbonisation could be a key way of investing in the short-term – something that can keep the confidence in the supply chain maintained

The changing climate will also have an impact on the investment strategy going forward for rail – safety and resilience on the forefront of many minds (especially given the recent Carmont derailment). “We’ve got over 130,000 earth work assets” says Haines and “many of them were designed in a way that they will be susceptible to changes in climate, so we have to get much better at managing the consequences.”

Acknowledging there needs to be more “smart investments” in this area, Haines comments that “there’s been effectively a doubling of investment in this territory in the last 10 years but that’s still just scratching the surface. We’ve got to be much more finely attuned to local weather patterns, where there might be a problem where we can put restrictions in place in a very localised area to mitigate impact. If we promise politicians or passengers that we can stop landslides, we are being deceitful. We need to get a lot of energy into being a lot better at managing the consequences and that has to be the real focus.”



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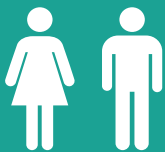
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Selling rail travel in the future

Robert Samson
Senior Stakeholder Manager, Transport Focus



Fairer Fares

What legacy will this crisis leave for how people travel and use rail in future? We've been using our weekly Covid-19 survey to build up insight into how people think their travel habits will change. Over 18 weeks of the survey around half of those answering the question said they expect to work from home more often in the future. This suggests that the national experiment in working from home will lead to a long-term shift.

Prior to the pandemic, fares and retailing reform was high on the agenda as part of the Rail Review recommendations. This was the culmination of a decade or more of research and campaigning by Transport Focus. We know many passengers see the fares structure as complicated, confusing, illogical, and expensive. Transport Focus has urged that reform is accelerated and has welcomed news the railway is working on developing and extending availability of 'flexi-season' and 'carnet' tickets.

If designed to meet passengers' needs, they could incentivise passengers to return to commuting by train, while – unlike the unlimited travel offered by a traditional season ticket - also helping to manage demand while social distancing continues to limit capacity. Flexi-seasons and carnets can't solve all the problems with rail fares, but they could be offered quickly and at least begin much-needed changes to improve value for money for rail passengers.

Transport Focus's new research (Fairer fares – August 2020) confirms there is a strong appetite for tickets offering savings to those who expect to commute less frequently, but also highlights passengers' needs and concerns as they consider a return to commuting by train.

Transport Focus recommends new 'flexi-seasons' and 'carnets' focus on delivering:

- 1. Value for money – passengers commuting two or three times a week must be clearly better off than if they bought separate 'day tickets' or a traditional season ticket.**
- 2. Pace of change - alternatives to season tickets, whether flexi-seasons or carnets, should be rolled out across the rail network as quickly as possible to support and incentivise passengers returning to commuting this year.**
- 3. Flexibility and duration – number of days' travel, ticket duration and refund terms should recognise the uncertainty passengers are facing and their need for flexibility.**

“Changing work patterns will probably result in most of my job being based from home and trips to the office will be too infrequent to make a season ticket financially beneficial.”

Previous South Western Railway monthly ticketholder

“Even when the office reopens, I expect I will be going there fewer than 2 days a week. Unfortunately, there's no flexible ticket offering for regular part-time travellers.”

Previous Northern annual ticketholder



All Aboard – The Perception Express

Linked to the need for fairer fares, our survey has highlighted the gap between the views and experience of those people actually using rail and the perceptions of those who aren't. Around eight in 10 passengers were satisfied overall with their journey by train and around nine in 10 train passengers say they felt safe.

On the other hand, among those who haven't travelled by train in the last week only around a half say they'd feel safe travelling on a train. There are signs that attitudes may be slowly shifting with an improvement in this measure of perceived safety in recent weeks. However, almost one in four in our survey still say they have been avoiding public transport and they don't feel safe using it.

Here's what members of our community had to say:

“People...are in a very enclosed space without fresh air and often can't maintain a good distance. Ventilation on public transport is poor and vehicles are not cleaned regularly/properly.”

“Because there's no escaping public transport once you're on and it's moving. In shops, restaurants & pubs you can assess the risk according to how busy it is and how many are breaching the rules by not wearing a face covering & you are then able to walk away if the risk feels high.”

These perceptions will be very hard for train operators to change. We have called for incentives – including better value rail fares and a 'Head Out to Help Out' offer – to remove barriers to giving public transport another try. However, it's clear incentives alone won't be enough for people with these fundamental safety concerns.

They're looking for firm assurances about safety measures and a sense of accountability and commitment they will be delivered. Can rail operators do enough to instil confidence? Our insight shows it will need more effort – and more visible communications about what's already been done – on issues like cleaning, ventilation and intervening to manage the behaviour of other passengers.

Rail's role in building back better from COVID-19

Jonathan Bray
Director, Urban Transport Group



Pre-pandemic, the UK's rail network was a runaway success on patronage growth but an industry facing a comprehensive redesign after being let down by a cumbersome structure which passengers and politicians lost patience with for its day to day performance and periodic nervous breakdowns (the coup de grâce being the Thameslink and Northern timetable meltdowns).

Now the world is turned upside down. The pandemic has delivered a punch to the railway's solar plexus – its ability to get commuters quickly in and out of city centres at scale.

Meanwhile, administering financial life support, and creating some breathing space about what to do next, has taken precedence over whatever it was the somewhat obtuse Williams Review was aiming to achieve.

So what next? The extent and rapidity which rail use (particularly commuting) comes back is as yet unclear – but looks unlikely to return to what it was anytime soon which means the COVID-19 funding gap is likely to remain substantial.

At the same time, the Government's long-term ambitions for levelling up, decarbonisation and rail expansion (from HS2 to putting Beeching into reverse) remain intact. The railway (like much of the rest of the public transport) is currently straddling the chasm between the Government's sunny long term aims and the Treasury's desire to scale back and withdraw from additional COVID-19 funding as soon as it can.

But let's be positive and take the Government at its word on its long-term ambitions for rail. All of which are shared by devolved authorities and administrations - who were ahead of the game in seeing how they could use devolution of responsibilities of franchising to achieve these goals prior to them being taken up in Westminster. Hence, where franchising responsibility for services were devolved, we have seen greater investment - from the UK's most advanced commuter trains on Merseyside to a line and station reopening programme in Scotland implemented when the Treasury in London was still looking to complete Beeching rather than reverse it.

You wouldn't know it from much of the coverage of rail issues but devolution was one of the biggest and best things to happen to rail in the last decade – with pre-pandemic one in three rail trips made on fully or partially devolved networks.

Devolved authorities and administrations back rail now for similar reasons as they did before the pandemic - but more so as they seek to build back better as part of a green and just recovery from the crisis. They back rail because they see how it can contribute to their wider goals of taking road traffic out of urban centres to create places that people want to live, work in, and invest in. And because of how it can be at the heart of their housing, regeneration, and economic plans.

The danger of the current period is that the industry retreats into its shell and becomes insular. The industry's future shouldn't be about repelling 'outsiders' but lies in being essential to the wider plans of the three nations of Great Britain and every region and city region of England in building back better from COVID-19.

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incorporating RISE Awards 2020

4-6 November 2020, Virtual



Speaker highlights



// How UK Rail will reboot the economy:
a look at projects, policies, routes into rail and much more

// 3-day Conference with over 30+ national and international speakers

// Networking opportunities to meet with key industry leaders

// Programme combines keynote speeches, panel discussions and interview sessions

// RISE Awards ceremony hosted by Pete Waterman and Paul Clifton, including networking cocktail making

RISE Awards - 5 November 2020

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