

Whole Industry Strategic Plan

Call for Evidence Document (English)

09/12/2021

Foreword

The railway has long played a vital role in Britain's economic and social development. For 200 years, it has connected people with places, moved goods and services, and supported the growth of businesses and regions. Yet, despite its distinguished past and valued present, the full potential of rail is yet to be realised.

In May 2021, the government announced its plans for the biggest reform to the railway in three decades, bringing it back together, after years of fragmentation, under Great British Railways, a new public body that will run and plan the rail network, own the infrastructure, procure passenger services, and set most fares and timetables.

Great British Railways will have a fundamental role to play in supporting Britain's economic, environmental and social ambitions, and in delivering the government's priorities. It will embody the new way of thinking about the railway and its purpose, one where rail is the backbone of a cleaner, greener public transport system that will offer customers a better deal and taxpayers better value for money. It will reflect an entrepreneurial mindset where the potential of the private sector – working in partnership with Great British Railways – is unleashed to generate value, drive efficiencies, and promote business, innovation, and investment in order to benefit passengers.

I am excited to be leading the Great British Railways Transition Team. We believe that the rail network can be run better – for everyone. Together, we will create a simpler, better railway for everyone in Britain. We will get there by placing customers at the heart of our decision-making and building a system that serves their needs – not ours.

We are facing one of the biggest challenges the transport sector has ever seen but have a unique opportunity to reshape the way that the railway delivers for the people of Britain and our broader social and economic prosperity.

The government's plans for rail include a commitment to develop a sector-wide, long-term strategy for rail: the Whole Industry Strategic Plan (Strategic Plan). The Strategic Plan, produced by GBR for Ministers, will be the first strategy of its kind, a thirty year high-level plan shaped by a set of strategic objectives that have been developed for the benefit of our passengers, freight users, taxpayers and staff, to support Britain's nations, regions, and communities to achieve their goals, and to benefit the economy and the environment for the long term.

If we are to succeed in setting a direction for the railway over the next thirty years, the development of the Strategic Plan will need to be a collective endeavour drawing on the expertise and insights not only of the rail sector but of those beyond it. This call for evidence will help shape the Strategic Plan and the future of the railway, and we want it to be informed by as many different perspectives as possible, to learn from the lessons of the past and to meet the challenges of the future.

I hope that our stakeholders share their views and provide evidence to make the most out of this opportunity. Together, as we build a sustainable railway that truly serves the country's goals, we can move the sector forwards to delivering for all that use, service and depend on it.

Andrew Haines

Introduction

The UK Government's ambitious plans to reform the rail sector were outlined in a white paper, the [Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail](#), in May 2021. The Plan for Rail recognised that rail has a fundamental role to play in supporting the economic, environmental and social goals for Britain, and recommended the establishment of a new organisation, Great British Railways ('GBR'), which will bring together the whole rail system to run the network in the public interest.

When the Secretary of State for Transport announced the creation of the GBR Transition Team in October 2021, he set out the core goals that will define GBR:

- Changing the culture of the railways, not simply creating a bigger version of Network Rail
- Thinking like customers, both passengers and freight, and putting them first
- Growing the network and getting more people travelling
- Making the railways easier to use
- Simplifying the sector to do things quicker, driving down costs and being accountable
- Having a can-do, not a can't do culture
- Harnessing the best of the private sector
- Playing a critical role in the national shift to net zero

GBR will create a simpler, better railway, one that enables much closer collaboration and joint working with local leaders so we can serve the people of Britain and help deliver the government's priorities. The Plan for Rail states that GBR will develop a 30-year strategy for the entire railway network over the coming decades.

That strategy – the Whole Industry Strategic Plan (Strategic Plan) – will be a landmark resource, enabling the government to set a clear and unified direction for the railway in support of long-term priorities, assisting with problem solving, and aligning the rail sector behind a common vision and with joined-up decision making. GBR will be responsible for achieving the outcomes within the Strategic Plan, providing regular updates to Ministers on progress and adapting it to reflect changes in the economy, society and technology.

The Strategic Plan will reflect how we meet the significant challenges facing the railway, particularly following Covid, and how we can best seize the opportunities of the future. The priorities in it will be used to set realistic ambitions, measures, and areas of focus over the short, medium and long term. Crucially, it will recognise that rail needs to be joined up with the wider transport system in order to achieve the strategic objectives shared in this document.

The Strategic Plan will be a key component of a continuous planning process, with the strategy reviewed and updated on a regular basis. This will ensure that it continues to support Britain and its people as our society changes and evolves, and as new opportunities and risks arise, while providing a clear direction of travel to bring the sector together. Decision-makers will benefit from the wider picture it will give, and customers, businesses, the workforce, the supply chain, and investors will all benefit from the greater certainty and collaboration it will enable.

In order for it to live up to its name, the Strategic Plan needs to look to the whole of the rail sector, and – crucially – to the people and communities beyond it, to ensure that it is built on the knowledge, skills and experience of experts across a wide range of areas. That requires us to work together to develop a plan that considers the whole railway, acknowledging the trade-offs that may be required in the face of the economic reality of the short and medium-term, while putting in place the necessary building blocks to achieve longer-term ambitions.

The Strategic Plan will be framed and driven by strategic objectives that have been set by government. Those objectives will underpin the Strategic Plan, reflecting that the railway must serve the nation and the railway's objectives must align with the nation's. We are clear that the Strategic Plan cannot be a list of projects and investments; in order to be of value it must help to inform decisions on how the railway can improve and contribute to wider benefits over the coming 30 years.

The evidence provided to this call for evidence, as well as the broader engagement planned with partners, will be vital in the strategy's development.

Call for Evidence

As the UK Government works to achieve long-term goals in reducing net greenhouse gas emissions to zero, levelling up, and growing the economy, rail will have an important role to play. We want this call for evidence to provide the opportunity for full and meaningful participation in the Strategic Plan's development, demonstrating our commitment to strengthening collaboration, as promised in the Plan for Rail, and reflecting the outward looking culture GBR will have.

This call for evidence is a key way in which we are engaging with a wide range of stakeholders to ensure the Strategic Plan will be based on robust, evidence-based foundations. We are seeking to consider the perspectives of stakeholders both inside and outside the rail sector, and how rail can support their ambitions and priorities. We recognise that this call for evidence is shaped by UK Government objectives, and that the Scottish Government, as funder and specifier of the railway in Scotland, has separate but similar strategic objectives they are working to deliver. Similarly, the Welsh Government is the specification body for passenger rail services (although not rail infrastructure) in Wales. Collaboration between funders and specifiers is critical to delivering improved outcomes for rail as a whole in Scotland and for rail passengers across the Wales & Borders network.

Our team recognises that views on, and priorities for, rail differ across the UK, and we continue to research the published strategies, plans and thinking of the rail and wider transport sector, as well as local and devolved transport authorities. As such, we are particularly keen to see the current and best available thinking of organisations in light of the challenges and opportunities that have been created by the pandemic.

This call for evidence launches on 9 December 2021 and will be open for eight weeks until 4 February 2022.

Responding to this Call for Evidence

We recommend you read this document in full before submitting your response. You may respond as an individual or on behalf of an organisation or organisations (please let us know all the organisations you are responding on behalf of) and can submit a response in the following ways:

- Online via the call for evidence [webpage](#).
- Via email to cfe@gbrtt.co.uk using the response template, which is available to download from the call for evidence webpage.

We have grouped the questions below according to a number of themes. You can answer as many of them as are of interest and relevance to you or your organisation. The passenger and freight customer experience will be central to our new organisation, as well delivering affordability for taxpayers, and we ask that you put them at the heart of your responses. **Please provide as much evidence, based on credible data or verifiable qualitative information (such as examples and case studies), as you can to support your submission.** We will not be able to give as much weight to your responses without understanding their basis.

The timeframes we have considered for this call for evidence, and which we will be using to assess responses, are below:

1. The short term: the five-year period from delivery of the Strategic Plan in 2022.
2. The medium term: the next ten years, which is the timeframe in which we expect to have moderate levels of certainty in our project planning and sequencing.
3. The long term: the thirty years up to 2052, which are highly uncertain and unpredictable, making it all the more important that the rail system is prepared for a number of different scenarios that will be able to adapt to the challenges that the future holds.

The most valuable responses will show how we can make progress towards our strategic objectives over these different timescales, balancing each against the other, highlighting tensions and trade-offs, considering stretching yet realistic ambitions, and linking them to wider long-term trends and national priorities.

We want to understand your views of what trends, scenarios and trade-offs will affect the rail sector and what we could be doing now, and in the future, to prepare for them.

Responses that identify opportunities for prioritisation, efficiency, and cost reduction in order to drive value for money for the taxpayer and rail user, will be particularly welcome. Any responses that focus solely on requests for new investments or enhancements will not be considered, and any proposals for new funding will need to evidence the cost reductions or efficiencies such proposals would realise. The purpose of the Strategic Plan will not be to present an investment pipeline, and as question 3 sets out below, the unprecedented taxpayer support given to the railway during the pandemic combined with the long-term cost challenge of providing rail service means that it will be crucial for the Strategic Plan to recognise the restraints on public finances.

Once we have received your responses, we will analyse and consider the feedback and evidence received in detail and publish a report with our findings. These will assist with

the further development of the strategy before the draft Strategic Plan is submitted to Ministers.

Before, during, and after the call for evidence period, we will continue to organise events and meetings as well as provide other opportunities to understand your thoughts on the future of the rail system. Your engagement is crucial to this process.

Strategic Objectives for the Whole Rail Industry

The UK Government has developed five strategic objectives for the Strategic Plan over the next 30 years: **meeting customers' needs, delivering financial sustainability, contributing to long-term economic growth, levelling up & connectivity, and delivering environmental sustainability**. We intend to put these objectives at the heart of the Strategic Plan, and we are using them to guide all of the questions in this call for evidence.

Strategic Objectives		Ambition for rail
I Meeting customers' needs		Meeting the needs of future passengers and freight customers by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Increasing value for money and improving the performance, reliability and convenience of rail, b. Meeting multi-modal expectations and reducing end-to-end journey time, c. Maintaining a safe railway as part of a safe transport system and widening accessibility.
II Delivering financial sustainability		Ensuring rail is financially sustainable, efficient and value for money by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Reducing costs to government, b. Ensuring a sustainable balance of fare/fee and government funding, and c. Increasing the efficiency of operations, asset management and capital investment – delivering on time and on budget.
III Contributing to long-term economic growth		Catalysing long term economic growth by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Reducing total journey time and cost for transport users, b. Connecting labour markets and realising agglomeration benefits, and c. Connecting places to markets, directly investing in skills, innovation and digital infrastructure, crowding-in foreign investment and facilitating the housebuilding & place-making agenda.
IV Levelling up & connectivity		Reducing regional inequalities and improving connectivity between communities by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Contributing to long-term economic growth in areas in support of levelling up, b. Contributing to social benefits from improved connectivity, and c. Improving rail passenger and freight connectivity across the union.
V Delivering environmental sustainability		Supporting government's environmental sustainability objectives by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Encouraging modal shift by increasing the attractiveness of rail, b. Delivering rail net-zero (traction and infrastructure), protecting biodiversity and addressing air pollution, and c. Protecting transport links by investing in climate adaptation.

We recognise that many of you are working to similar long-term objectives. We are very interested in how you define and quantify your objectives, and how they match or differ from our own. When considering your response to question 1, please use your experiences to inform your answers and share any examples, taking into account that in all future scenarios we expect affordability to be a significant constraint.

Question 1

- How would you apply these objectives to rail in your region or to your area of expertise within the transport sector? Do you have evidence you can share with us of how you have applied similar objectives in relation to rail, and do you consider the objectives to have missed any key areas?

- b) How is it possible to make progress against a number of the objectives simultaneously? Do any of the objectives have larger barriers associated with them than others, or do any objectives pose possible barriers to others? Where would you make the trade-offs?
- c) What long-term trends in wider society, the economy, and the environment will affect these five objectives over the next 5, 10, and 30 years? Please give evidence to support your response.
- d) What are the key uncertainties you consider that the Strategic Plan must be resilient to in order to be effective over the next 5, 10 and 30 years?
- e) Over the next 5, 10 and 30 years, which steps should the sector take to improve integration of rail with the wider transport system (including walking and cycling) in pursuit of these objectives?

Meeting customers' needs

Rail industry customers broadly fall into two types: passengers and freight. The rail network provides important benefits to the customers who rely on it. The Plan for Rail says that passengers must receive high-quality, consistent services day in, day out. This means accessible, reliable journeys that are well connected with other transport services and include new customer offers at stations and on trains.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, the rail freight industry has shown its resilience and agility, working to transport food and medical supplies around the country. This example, and others given in the Plan for Rail, highlight how important rail freight is to our economy now and in the future, and how we will develop growth targets for freight that will be included in the Strategic Plan. The Plan for Rail says of freight: 'national co-ordination, greater opportunities for growth and strong safeguards will put rail freight on the front foot.'

When considering your responses, please take account of the likelihood of changes in levels or patterns of passenger and freight demand over the next 5, 10 and 30 years, what that would mean for the rail system, and what will the interventions be over that period that will provide the maximum value for money.

Question 2

- a) Passenger: 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?
- b) Passenger: 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?
- c) Freight: what evidence can you provide regarding the advantage(s) of transporting goods by rail and what evidence can you share for how that could develop in the next 5, 10 and 30 years? What do you consider to be the most effective role for rail freight in the existing supply chains served and those that it

- doesn't? How could this change over that period? In answering, please explain and take account of likely developments in technology and in the wider economy.
- d) 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 claim?

Delivering financial sustainability

Rail is both a public service, supported by the taxpayer, and a business, run by private operators, with paying passenger and freight customers. The railways have received unprecedented levels of public support throughout the pandemic, protecting the essential services that people, including commuting key workers, rely on. As the recovery and rail reform gains pace, as with all areas of public expenditure, there is an onus on the rail sector to ensure value for money for users and taxpayers in how funds are used, and it must harness the incentives of the private sector to deliver the service in the most cost-effective way.

The railway, accordingly, must seek to deliver infrastructure and services more efficiently, in order to maximise beneficial outcomes while balancing costs against revenue and taxpayer funding. This is more than just a short-term issue: we are clear that reducing the cost of the railway, increasing efficiency including through innovating with private partners, and achieving a better deal for users and taxpayers is a critical priority over the next 30 years.

When considering your answer to the question below, please consider how we can support greater efficiency (such as joined up operations), innovation, alternative sources of funding and/or cost base reduction. Similarly, what steps you would propose to improve the efficiency and reduce the cost of infrastructure projects, operation and maintenance, and what evidence you have to support your response.

Question 3

Where are the most significant 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?

Contributing to long-term economic growth

Rail helps to boost productivity and growth through improved connectivity and job creation, enables supply chains, delivers goods to businesses and consumers and directly employs over 240,000 people (source: [the rail sector in numbers](#)). Among other

factors, such as population growth, long term economic growth is influenced by emerging technology, and innovative, more effective ways of thinking and doing things. Over the next 30 years, wider economic, social, environmental and technological trends will change the role rail plays in our economy. It will be for the whole sector to demonstrate that it cannot only continue to deliver wide economic benefits in the face of a changed economy but that it can find new ways to catalyse growth and prosperity.

When considering your answer to the questions below, please share examples of any relevant local, regional and national growth and productivity, and examples of innovations and technology from the UK and abroad, research into trends that may influence rail's contribution to economic growth, and/or new ways of thinking that should be used in or for the rail sector over the coming 5, 10 and 30 years.

Question 4

- a) 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?
- b) 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?
- c) 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.

Levelling up and connectivity

The Secretary of State for Levelling Up has outlined four key outcomes on which the government will focus:

- Empowering local leaders and communities;
- Boosting living standards by growing the private sector and improving productivity and connectivity;
- Spreading opportunity and improving public services; and
- Restoring local pride.

Rail has an important part to play in working toward these outcomes, and particularly so in connecting the nations, regions and communities of the UK. Improved rail links can connect people to jobs, education and skills, high-quality housing, social opportunities, services, and green spaces, as well as encouraging the growth of businesses, and attracting leisure visitors into an area. Improving stations and surrounding areas can also act as a catalyst for regeneration and development and a cause for local pride.

At present, usage of rail differs widely across the UK; before the pandemic, almost two thirds of all rail journeys made were in London and the south east ([Rail Sector in Numbers report from 2019](#)).

When answering your questions, consider the ways in which rail can be used to improve connectivity and local economic growth over the next 5, 10, and 30 years.

Question 5

- a) 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?
- b) 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.
- c) 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?

Delivering environmental sustainability

The Plan for Rail commits to the creation of a comprehensive environment plan that will establish rail as the backbone of a cleaner future transport system, one that aims to protect and enhance biodiversity and the natural environment. That plan, the Sustainable Rail Strategy (SRS), will be one of the inputs to the Strategic Plan, and will build on and develop a strategy for achieving the policy commitments set out in both the UK's [Transport Decarbonisation Plan](#) and the [Rail Environment Policy Statement](#) that were published in July 2021, as well as the Net Zero Strategy from October 2021.

In addition to tackling the causes of climate change, the rail network must also be able to adapt to the changes already being seen. This means preparing for the impact of extreme weather events and increasing the resilience of the rail network to the impacts of these events – for example, flooding.

When answering your questions, consider the ways in which rail and the rail estate can contribute to wider national and regional environmental policy agendas, support decarbonisation, conserve and enhance biodiversity, improve air quality and increase renewable power generation.

Question 6

- a) 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?
- b) 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?
 - c) 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?

What will happen next?

A report on the responses to the call for evidence, including the next steps, will be published in spring 2022, with the intention that the Strategic Plan is delivered to Ministers by late 2022. Engagement with stakeholders will continue during that time, including through newsletters, forums, workshops, events and meetings.

We consider that the Strategic Plan is a unique opportunity to develop an exciting and deliverable vision for rail, which supports collaboration and is embedded throughout the rail sector. Thank you for your engagement and input – which is important to achieving this.

If you have questions about this consultation, please contact cfe@gbrrt.co.uk.