Whole Industry Strategic Plan

Call for Evidence Response Report

June 2022

Foreword

Creating Britain's first long term rail strategy of its kind is an ambitious task, rooted in a fundamental desire for us to create a simpler, better railway for everyone in Britain.

Last May the government announced its plans for the biggest reform to the railway in three decades through the publication of the Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail. The foundation for these reforms, which will bring track and train together, is the creation of a new national body, Great British Railways. The Plan for Rail also commissioned a 30-year strategy for the railway, setting the strategic context and key priorities for the sector, which will be developed for Ministers by Great British Railways.

We have been keen to learn the lessons of the past as we continue with the work of developing the first version of the strategy, the Whole Industry Strategic Plan. It must not be an aspirational list of investment schemes, and we must, as the Plan for Rail recognises, be consultative and collaborative throughout the development process.

In December we launched a call for evidence, alongside the Department for Transport, to gather meaningful insights and data from as wide a range of stakeholders as possible. Respondents were asked to provide evidence based on five key strategic objectives, which were set by the government for the rail industry to deliver: meeting customer needs, delivering financial sustainability, contributing to economic growth, supporting levelling up and connectivity, and delivering environmental sustainability.

We reached out to a wide range of organisations and experts, meeting more than 400 stakeholders and receiving 307 responses. The evidence we gathered, summarised in this report, provides insights from across both the public and private sector.

Some clear themes emerged from the responses, such as the importance of decarbonisation, accessibility, and customer service; rail's contribution to 'levelling up' and integration with other forms of transport; the need for much greater efficiency; and a recognition that rail isn't always the answer.

Many organisations recognised that financial sustainability is core to the future success of rail. There is no doubt that this will lead to tough choices and difficult conversations, particularly as we recover from the pandemic. It was also clear that there is a lack of evidence available in some areas, which tells its own story about the need for better data collection and sharing in the rail industry.

Understanding our stakeholders' views and collecting evidence is a central part of creating the Whole Industry Strategic Plan. I would like to thank everyone who responded to the call for evidence for sharing their insights and evidence, without which it would not be possible to develop and deliver a meaningful 30-year strategy.

The challenges the railway faces today are considerable but they are not insurmountable, and I look forward to continuing the conversation as we work together to develop this strategy and transform the railway.

Andrew Haines

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Executive summary

We would like to thank everyone who submitted a response to the call for evidence for their time and willingness to share their views, knowledge and insights. We look forward to continuing the conversation as we take the next steps in developing the Whole Industry Strategic Plan.

The Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail (Plan for Rail) identified the need for a long-term strategy to set the key strategic priorities for rail over the next 30 years. The Whole Industry Strategic Plan (the Strategic Plan) will help to inform decisions on how the railway can improve and contribute to British society over the next three decades.

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. It will be a key mechanism that Ministers will use to ensure the railway responds to long-term public priorities, not a list of projects and investments for which funding is sought.

Great British Railways Transition Team (GBRTT) was asked to develop the strategic planning capability to lead the strategy's development, which is now well underway. Produced on behalf of Ministers, the Strategic Plan will be shaped by long term national strategic objectives set by the UK Government on customers' needs, financial sustainability, economic growth, levelling up and connectivity and environmental sustainability. It will also take account of the objectives and plans of devolved authorities for those portions of the rail network and industry for which they are responsible, in particular the Scottish and Welsh Governments and regional and local bodies.

The development of the Strategic Plan is a collective endeavour, drawing on the expertise and insights not only of the rail sector but also of those beyond it. 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. For that reason, we developed the call for evidence, based around the five key strategic objectives outlined above. Those objectives, which will frame the Strategic Plan, will be the foundations of Britain's new railway age – one with an entrepreneurial mindset where rail is the backbone of a cleaner, greener public transport system that offers customers and taxpayers a better deal, and a partner in delivering national, regional and local ambitions.

The call for evidence, which ran for eight weeks between 9 December 2021 and 4 February 2022, was supported by a comprehensive programme of stakeholder engagement. We met with over 420 stakeholder organisations at 30 stakeholder forums, two virtual supply chain events and a roundtable event, chaired by the then Rail Minister. Those stakeholders included our partners in the rail industry that we've been working with on the Strategic Plan, such as the train and freight operating companies and passenger groups, but also representatives from customer bodies, the rail supply chain, business groups, sub-national

transport bodies, mayoral combined authorities, community rail, sustainable travel organisations, academics, think tanks, and innovation groups.

As you will read in this report, some clear themes emerged in the 307 response we received: the key role rail should play in decarbonising the wider transport network, the need to improve accessibility and the service we offer customers (including integrating rail with other forms of transport), the importance of rail's role in levelling up, the need for much great efficiency, and the recognition that rail isn't always the answer. There were suggestions for how we could reduce 'gold plating' on Britain's railways, use railway land to provide solar energy to the national grid, and more effectively standardise and share data.

It was recognised that all of that, and much more, needs to be set against a very challenging financial environment, where costs have increased. As an industry, we are billions of pounds in the red, with fares from passengers not consistently at even three quarters of pre-pandemic levels. The pandemic has also underlined the importance of developing a 30-year strategy for rail that can flex to changing circumstances, as well as to emerging technology. There should be no doubt that, collectively, we face a series of hard options and choices, as well as a unique opportunity to reshape the way the railway delivers for Britain and its people.

Beyond the question themes, a number of responses suggested confusion about what the Strategic Plan will be. Some stakeholders seemed to be anticipating a detailed delivery plan, rather than the long term, high level 30-year strategy that will be produced. We are considering how best to address that as we work to meet the commission for the Strategic Plan set in the Plan for Rail.

Eighty per cent of responses to the call for evidence were from stakeholder groups and organisations. There were six questions, with a total of 19 sub-questions, that covered six themes, all aligned to the Government's strategic objectives for rail. More than 80 per cent of all respondents provided a response to at least one of the questions. Over half of respondents (52 per cent) provided at least one piece of evidence as part of their response. This was lower than anticipated and seems to underline the need for better standardisation and sharing of data in the rail industry that a number of our respondents called for.

This report provides a summary of the responses to the call for evidence, including those that weren't supported by evidence. They demonstrate the breadth and depth of responses and highlight the common themes identified for each of the questions asked. The report doesn't cover every individual point raised but it provides a comprehensive overview of the responses received. In the Strategic Plan itself, we will give more weight to call for evidence responses that were supported by credible data or verifiable qualitative information.

The wealth of knowledge that our stakeholders have shared with us in their call for evidence responses will be used to inform the development of the Strategic Plan and the five strategic objectives it will support. The Department for Transport and GBRTT will also use the evidence to inform the other plans and strategies we will develop as we work towards the creation of GBR.

Summary of responses

Question 1 – Strategic Objectives for the Whole Rail Industry

Eighty-nine per cent of respondents with comments related to Question 1 shared their views on the application of the strategic objectives and there was general support for the objectives and the 30-year scope of the Strategic Plan. There were a number of suggestions on ways the objectives could be enhanced, including recognising dependencies between the objectives, inclusion of further objectives such as a 'people' (workforce) objective and combining the economic growth and levelling up objectives into one.

Some respondents recognised that the railway is not able to 'do all things at once'. A number of ways to manage trade-offs were suggested including transparent reporting and improved accountability, and methods to trade off measures against each other, including through the Transport Appraisal Guidance (TAG) appraisal process.

There was very strong support for better integration of rail with the wider transport system – something many respondents suggested could be supported with better use and sharing of data and technology. It was widely argued that broader strategic planning policies could support this. Evidence was provided to support the use of data to develop meaningful industry insights.

Respondents also identified a number of trends that could affect the rail sector, including an ageing population, the growing importance and impact of climate change, and changing customer expectations. Several respondents also noted the many future uncertainties the railway would need to be aware of in setting long term plans, including changing political, environmental and economic priorities.

Question 2 – Meeting customers' needs

More than 70 per cent of respondents with comments related to Question 2 highlighted a need for customer expectations to be better understood. There was strong support for improved monitoring and assessment of customer needs, with some evidence provided to demonstrate the need for improvement and to support use of existing tools and measures that could be adapted for industry wide application. It was noted that better access to data would help provide evidence to inform this objective.

Many respondents commented on the need for the railway to provide accessible and affordable services in order to reduce barriers to travel. Frequent, comfortable and reliable services were also considered key to maintaining and building passenger satisfaction.

There was support for expanding the role of rail freight, particularly in relation to UK supply chains. Respondents commented on, and provided evidence to support, the environmental and economic advantages of modal shift of freight from road and air to rail. It was suggested that growth in demand could be met by more efficient use of existing network capacity and the creation of additional capacity.

Opinions were mixed on balancing the demand for passenger and freight services. Some respondents suggested that freight services should not be considered as less of a priority

than passenger services, while others were clear that increased demand for freight services should not come at the expense of passenger services.

Question 3 – Delivering financial sustainability

Multiple respondents felt that the current costs associated with rail, both to taxpayers and customers, are too high. More than 60 per cent of respondents with comments related to Question 3 made suggestions related to delivering a more efficient railway. There were multiple suggestions of potential cost saving measures and reductions in the 'gold plating' of Britain's railway, some supported by evidence of reports and examples from other countries. Suggestions included improving procurement practices, outsourcing work, methods to reduce duplication and use of new systems and technologies currently on trial in the UK.

It was suggested that delivering financial sustainability would require better use of private sector expertise to support productivity improvements, facilitate long-term revenue growth, offer alternative funding for network improvements and to deliver cost efficiencies. The role of the supply chain in reducing industry costs and maximising value for money was considered critical by some respondents.

Respondents noted the challenges of balancing continued investment with increasing demand. Simplifying fares, making rail travel affordable and using alternative pots of funding alongside government support were suggested as ways to manage this.

Harnessing innovation and technology and better data sharing were both seen as crucial to reducing operating costs and improving customer service initiatives (increasing revenue by encouraging greater demand). Some respondents felt that the immediate focus should be on attracting customers back to rail following the pandemic.

Question 4 – Contributing to long-term economic growth

Over two thirds of respondents with comments related to Question 3 (67 per cent) recognised the role of rail in driving external economic activity, through providing connectivity to stimulate economic activity, creating economic hubs around stations, and better integrating the railway in development planning. Evidence was provided outlining how investment opportunities in the rail sector can support the development of regional hubs and further enable housing and economic opportunities, capitalising on the regeneration process.

It was also suggested that improvements to better serve major employment and education centres could be an effective means of driving economic growth. Some respondents noted the additional economic benefits generated by improving rail freight connectivity, highlighting the varied role of rail freight in the economy. It was suggested by a small number of respondents however, that at present, there is a lack of evidence to demonstrate exactly how rail can contribute to wider economic growth.

Many responses focused on specific initiatives that could be implemented to better support the railway as an enabler of growth, including enhancing the role of the rail industry and its supply chain within the economy and harnessing digital and technological advancements more effectively to facilitate growth and innovation.

Question 5 – Levelling up and connectivity

Almost 70 per cent of respondents with comments related to Question 5 shared their views on the role of rail in facilitating better access to employment, education, and social opportunities. Rail capacity enhancements were suggested as a way to support levelling up, with some respondents stating that that capacity enhancements should be delivered alongside other changes (including improved education, access to training and improved integration with other transport modes) to fully realise the benefits.

Improved connectivity between national and regional economic centres was identified as important in some responses, while others indicated that poor rail connectivity was a particular challenge in rural areas. It was suggested that the Strategic Plan should incorporate the union connectivity review recommendations to ensure that the benefits of the railway are extended as far as possible across the whole of Britain.

Many felt that devolution, improved collaboration and proactive, meaningful engagement with regional and local stakeholders, including community engagement, would lead to transport schemes which are better positioned to respond to local needs and challenges. This was seen as empowering for both local leaders and communities. It was suggested that this could help maximise the opportunity for rail to enable local regeneration, stimulate growth and ensure long-term planning is in line with Local Plan development, and result in efficiencies.

Some respondents noted a potential role for rail freight in levelling up, with evidence provided that most of rail freight's economic and social benefits are realised outside of London and the South East. Evidence was also provided to note how the rail freight sector contributes towards economic growth and social outcomes, including reduced congestion and air quality improvements.

Question 6 – Delivering environmental sustainability

Many respondents (71 per cent) with comments related to Question 6 suggested that the railway could play a greater role in decarbonising the transport network including through increasing the number of people and goods travelling by rail, electrifying the network and harnessing opportunities to generate and use clean energy.

There was support for a move away from using diesel trains, including in relation to making improvements to carbon emissions and air quality. Electrification was identified by many respondents as an important part of decarbonising the railway and improving air quality. However, some respondents recognised the high costs associated with this, and that value for money and the wider implications of associated infrastructure were also important considerations. Some respondents also indicated support for alternative solutions to full electrification, identifying hydrogen, biofuels and batteries as potential alternative power sources. Carbon emissions and reduction statistics were provided as evidence of the savings forecast across the different interventions listed above.

A shift from road and air to rail was considered by some respondents to be an effective short to medium term method of decarbonising the transport system. However, it was also suggested that, as road travel decarbonises further, the carbon 'benefit' of rail will reduce unless the rail network is decarbonised further. It was also pointed out that to be 'net zero', the railway would need to remove embodied carbon from its infrastructure development,

construction, and supply chain. Guides and case studies were provided to illustrate best practice and as tools to help embed sustainable practices.

There was broad recognition that the railway must adapt to a changing climate. Respondents suggested a need for improved monitoring and forecasting of extreme weather events and their impact on the railway network, as well as investment in climate-resilient technology and infrastructure.

Next steps

The call for evidence submissions demonstrated the significant amount of thinking already available from across the industry and wider stakeholders to help us shape our approach to long-term planning. This includes informing views on the strategic objectives and the development of the Strategic Plan, and other plans and strategies we will develop as we work towards the creation of GBR and meeting the commission for the Strategic Plan set in the Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail.

The Strategic Plan will set a clear direction for the railways in support of national priorities. It must be built on understanding rail's relative advantages to, and connections with, other transport modes. We must explore how this advantage may change over time under different assumptions and to ensure the strategy can be adapted and resilient to alternative futures for the railway.

The call for evidence was an early step in ensuring a broad range of stakeholders from across Britain had the opportunity to shape and inform the development of the Strategic Plan. We will continue to engage, through our communications channels and through regular meetings or one-off forums / workshops as we develop the strategy over the remainder of this year. This approach will be crucial to both the successful development of the Strategic Plan and to the wider work of preparing for the creation of GBR.

Introduction

Purpose of the call for evidence

The UK Government's ambitious plans to reform the rail sector were outlined in the Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail, in May 2021. The Plan for Rail recognised that rail has a fundamental role to play in supporting 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.

The Plan for Rail states that GBR will develop a 30-year strategy for the railway industry. This strategy will be framed and driven by five strategic objectives that have been set by government. Those objectives will underpin the Strategic Plan, reflecting that the railway must serve Britain. We recognise and will take account of the objectives set and plans made by devolved authorities for those portions of the rail network and industry for which they are responsible, in particular the Scottish and Welsh Governments and regional and local bodies.

A summary of the five strategic objectives and the ambition for rail is provided in Table 1.

Table 1 Strategic Objectives

Strategic Objectives	Ambition for rail
Meeting customers' needs	Meeting the needs of future passengers and freight customers by: 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.
Delivering financial sustainability	Ensuring rail is financially sustainable, efficient and value for money by: 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 budget.
Contributing to long-term economic growth	Catalysing long term economic growth by: a. Reducing total journey time and costs 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.
Levelling up & connectivity	Reducing regional inequalities and improving connectivity between communities by: 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.

Strategic Objectives	Ambition for rail
Delivering environmental sustainability	Supporting government's environmental sustainability objectives by: 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 climate adaption.

In December 2021, GBRTT launched a call for evidence to inform the development of the Strategic Plan. The submissions received as part of the process, as well as the wider engagement undertaken with partners, will be vital in ensuring the Strategic Plan is built on robust, evidence-based foundations.

By taking a fresh and comprehensive look at stakeholders' views on Britain's railways, we planned to gather and consider a wide range of evidence on rail's contribution to the long-term objectives developed by the UK Government for the Strategic Plan, to align the rail sector behind a common vision.

The call for evidence approach

The call for evidence launched on 9 December 2021 and ran for eight weeks until 4 February 2022. Respondents were invited to answer 19 questions across six themes within the call for evidence, all relating to the strategic objectives developed by the UK Government for the railway. Responses could be submitted via a dedicated Citizen Space[1] portal or via email. A structured response form was made available for email responses.

The approach to analysing the responses

All responses were read in full and analysed by a dedicated analysis team. In addition to the work of the team, a code frame was developed for each question and sub-question, with key words and phrases relating to the sub-question included as codes. This enabled comments in responses to be grouped into common themes. Any evidence submitted within the responses was also logged and analysed at this stage. Chapters 2 to 7 provide further detail on the responses to each of the questions and report the most common themes.

Stakeholder engagement throughout the call for evidence

To support the call for evidence, launch materials and an outreach programme was developed and designed to create awareness and ensure as broad a range of stakeholder groups and organisations as possible participated. To inform this, target stakeholder groups and audiences were identified covering bodies, both within and outside the rail sector, that reflected the reach of the strategic objectives listed in Table 1.

At launch, we contacted approximately 750 stakeholder groups and organisations, inviting them to respond to the call for evidence, and issued a reminder email two weeks before it closed. A press release, dedicated website portal and introductory video from the GBR

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[1] Citizen Space is a digital platform, originally developed as a joint initiative with the UK government, as a vehicle to improve consultation.

Transition Team Lead, Andrew Haines, were also developed and published for the launch on 9 December. The press release resulted in around 20 individual pieces of media coverage.

On 15 December, the then Rail Minister held a roundtable discussion with experts from sectors spanning rail and transport, business, technology and innovation, economics, infrastructure and the environment, inviting them to give their views on the long-term objectives of the railway and to participate in the call for evidence process.

Alongside the launch activity, we developed a proactive and comprehensive stakeholder engagement plan to raise awareness of the call for evidence, answer questions, build relationships and encourage high-quality, evidence-based responses. The plan delivered a mixture of one-to-one sessions with influential bodies inside and outside the sector, attendance at existing forums and meetings, and responding to requests from stakeholders to attend meetings.

In January and early February, GBRTT presented at 30 meetings, as well as several informal sessions where requested. GBRTT also held two virtual supply chain events in January to support the call for evidence outreach and generate wider interest. In total, more than 420 stakeholder organisations were engaged during this period, including passenger groups, sub-national transport bodies, devolved authorities, business groups, rail owning groups, train and freight operating companies, the rail supply chain, active travel organisations and the tech and innovation sectors.

Response to the Call for Evidence

The call for evidence received 307 responses, with 131 (43 per cent) submitted via Citizen Space and 176 (57 per cent) received via email.

Question response rate

Some respondents did not use the response form but made comments that the analysis team determined were related to question theme(s). Figure 1 below shows how many respondents made comments related to each question theme.

Figure 1 Respondents commenting on each question theme
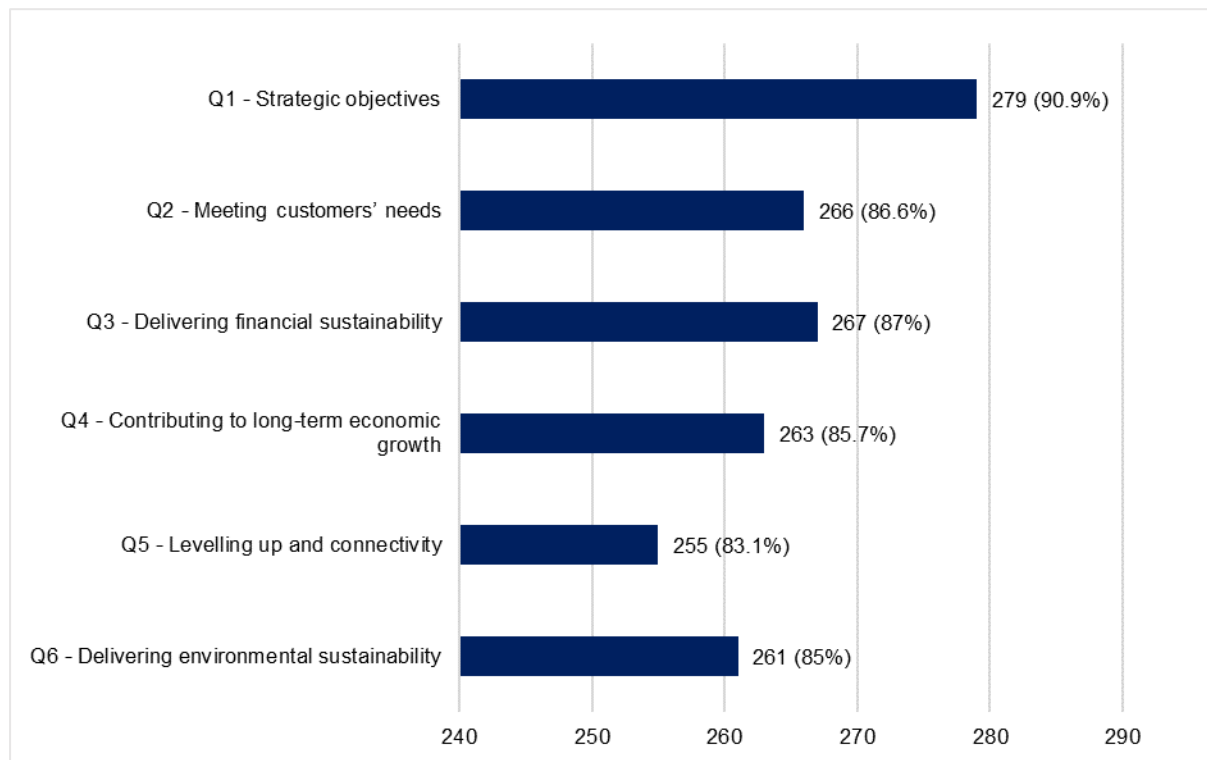
All questions received a high level of response, with more than 80 per cent of respondents commenting on each question theme. The question that received the largest number of responses was Question 1 (90.9 per cent) relating to the Strategic Objectives for the railway. Question 5 (83.1 per cent) relating to Levelling Up & Connectivity, received the fewest number of responses.

As part of the call for evidence, respondents were encouraged to submit evidence to support their response. A total of 76 respondents (25 per cent) submitted evidence alongside their response. Many respondents also referenced evidence and citations within their responses to specific questions to support their answers. In total, 52 per cent of respondents (159) referenced at least one piece of evidence, whether as supplementary evidence or within their response. The types of evidence provided in responses varied across each question, but common evidence included reports, academic/research papers, websites and strategy or policy documents.

While we were clear in the call for evidence that we would put greater weight on responses that were supported by evidence, the numbers of respondents providing evidence was lower than we had anticipated. It was notable that many responses highlighted a need for data collection to be standardised and for there to be greater data sharing across the rail industry. In this sense, it seems likely that by developing a culture of better, and more open, data sharing, we would be able to significantly increase the evidence base available to rail organisations, our stakeholders and customers.

Table 2 below provides a summary of the number of responses that referred to at least one piece of evidence/additional material; this is reported by question.

Table 2 Response evidence referred to within each question theme response

Question	Number of respondents providing evidence	Proportion of respondents with comments related to each question
1. Strategic objectives	86	31%
2. Meeting customers' needs	49	18%
3. Delivering financial sustainability	37	14%
4. Contributing to long-term economic growth	58	22%
5. Levelling up & connectivity	56	22%
6. Delivering environmental sustainability	47	18%

Respondent demographics

Respondents were asked to provide information on a number of demographic characteristics including whether they were responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation. A total of 250 (81 per cent) responses were marked as on behalf of an organisation, while 57 (19 per cent) responses were from individuals.

Respondent location

Responses were received from across Great Britain. It should be noted that in instances where organisations did not provide their location, the analysis team answered this based on the answers or by researching the location of the organisation. A significant number of responses came from organisations or individuals noted as UK wide, 118 (38 per cent).

The geographic area with the second largest proportion of responses was the South East of England with 43 responses (14 per cent).Figure 2 provides a summary of the location of respondents to the call for evidence.

Figure 2 Location of respondents
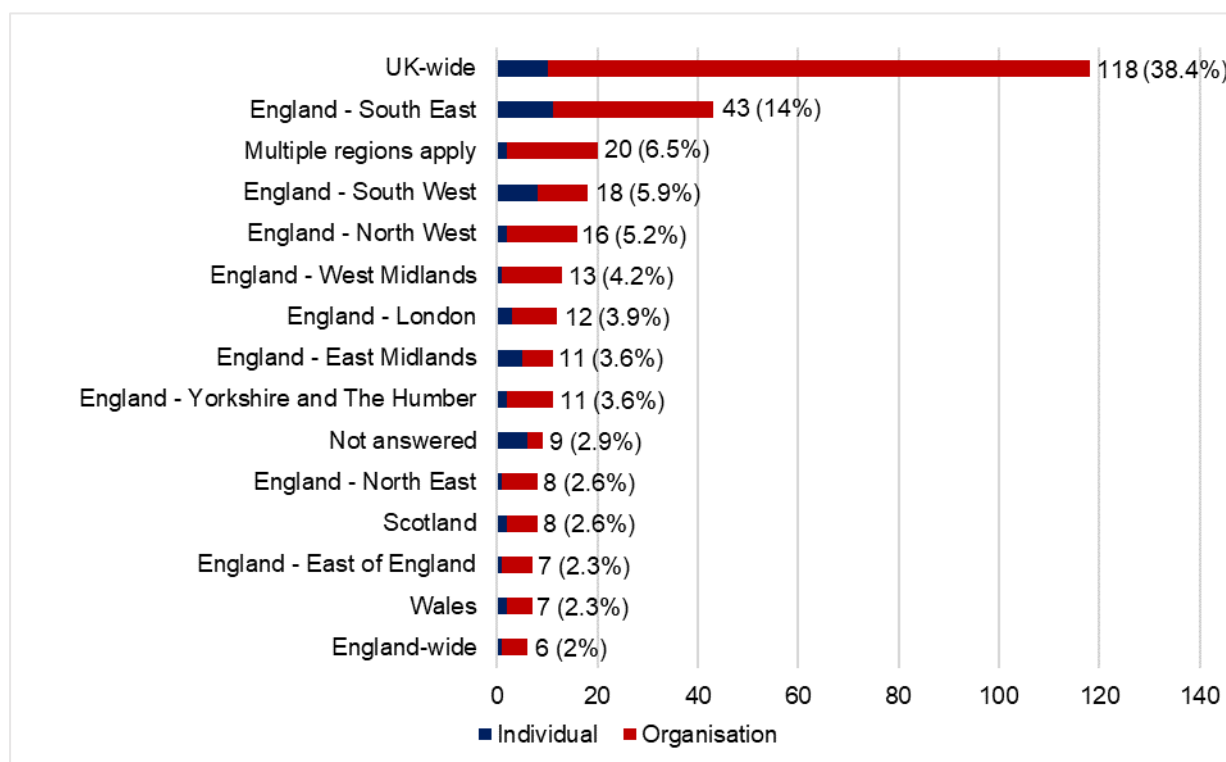
Stakeholder type

A wide range of stakeholders submitted responses to the call for evidence, including those from the rail sector (e.g., train operators and owning groups, rail supply chain and rolling stock companies), and those beyond the rail sector (business groups, environmental organisations, infrastructure organisations and technology groups), as well as passenger groups, national governments, regional and local authorities, non-governmental organisations and unions, interest groups, individuals and academics. If the organisation did not specify their category, this was completed by the analysis team. Figure 3 presents a breakdown of the organisation respondents by stakeholder group.

Figure 3 Respondents categorised by stakeholder type

Stakeholder type	Value
An individual	57 (18.6%)
National government; regional, local or combined authority	41 (13.4%)
Other	36 (11.7%)
Passenger body or interest group	27 (8.8%)
Business representative group	24 (7.8%)
Rail organisation	17 (5.5%)
Rail supply chain	15 (4.9%)
Accessibility body or interest group	13 (4.2%)
Train operator or owning group	13 (4.2%)
Technology company	12 (3.9%)
Sub-national transport body	9 (2.9%)
Infrastructure organisation	7 (2.3%)
Sustainable travel group	5 (1.6%)
Rolling stock company	5 (1.6%)
Innovator	4 (1.3%)
Freight operator	4 (1.3%)
Union	3 (1%)
Environmental organisation	3 (1%)
Academic body	3 (1%)
Tourism body	2 (0.7%)
Research and development	2 (0.7%)
Freight customer	2 (0.7%)
Developer	2 (0.7%)
Rail project	1 (0.3%)

The largest stakeholder group responding to the call for evidence were national governments and regional, local or combined authorities (41 respondents, 13 per cent). Passenger bodies or interests' groups and business representative groups were also well represented with 27 (9 per cent) and 24 (8 per cent) organisations respectively. Other notable organisation categories included rail organisations (17 respondents, 6 per cent) and rail supply chain (15 respondents, 5 per cent).

Structure and purpose of this document

This report summarises the responses received to the call for evidence and identifies the main issues raised in or related to each question theme. The remainder of the report is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2: Summary of responses to Question 1 – Strategic Objectives for the Whole Rail Industry
- Chapter 3: Summary of responses to Question 2 – Meeting customers' needs
- Chapter 4: Summary of responses to Question 3 – Delivering environmental sustainability
- Chapter 5: Summary of responses to Question 4 – Contributing to long-term economic growth
- Chapter 6: Summary of responses to Question 5 – Levelling up & connectivity
- Chapter 7: Summary of responses to Question 6 – Delivering environmental sustainability
- Chapter 8: Next Steps

Quotations included in chapters 2 to 7 have been taken from responses to the call for evidence. They represent the view of the organisation or individual that provided them.

Summary of responses to Question 1 – Strategic Objectives for the Whole Rail Industry

The call for evidence asked respondents to consider the five strategic objectives for the Strategic Plan over the next 30 years and reflect on their application in response to environmental, economic and societal trends and uncertainties; differing regional priorities; and the impact of rail on the wider transport sector in Great Britain. Respondents were asked five questions:

a) *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?*

Response overview

A total of 279 (90.9 per cent) respondents commented on the strategic objectives for the whole rail industry. Of the respondents commenting on Question 1, 31 per cent (86 respondents) provided additional evidence to support their answer. The forms of evidence included reports, academic papers, research papers, White Papers, transport strategies and plans, masterplans, blogs, videos, websites, government data releases and case studies.

Most responses were focused on one or more of the following themes:

- applying the strategic objectives to deliver the Strategic Plan
- improving integration with the wider transport system
- building resilience to environmental, financial, political and technological uncertainties
- navigating long term economic, environmental and societal trends
- progressing the objectives, overcoming barriers and making trade-offs.

The distribution of respondents with comments on these key themes is shown in Figure 4. There were a number of comments made as part of Question 1 that were not relevant to the question or the call for evidence more generally. These comments were recorded as 'other' as part of the analysis. The remainder of this chapter summarises the views of respondents on each of these themes in turn.

Figure 4 Number of respondents with comments on Question 1 themes*
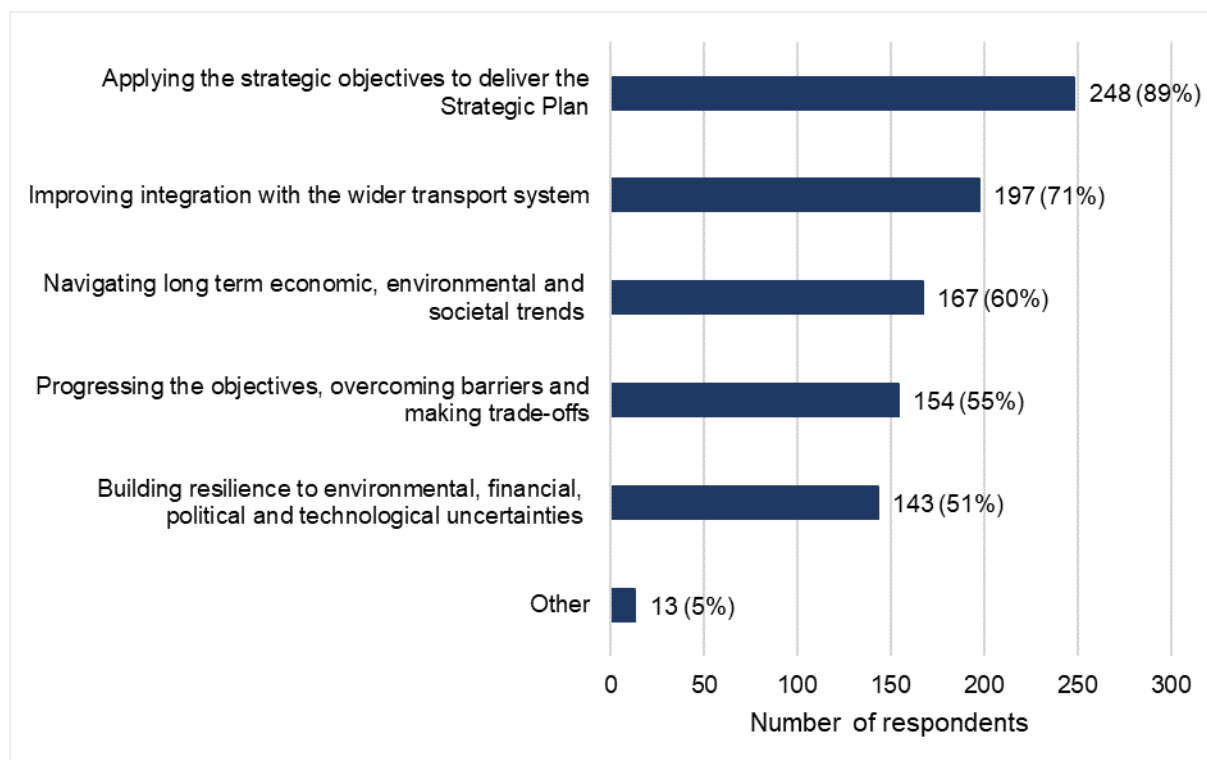
* Please note that per cent are of the 279 respondents that submitted a call for evidence response with comments related to Question 1.

Eighty-nine per cent of respondents with comments related to Question 1 commented on the application of the strategic objectives to deliver the Strategic Plan and 71 per cent made remarks on improving the integration of rail with the wider transport system. The volume of evidence provided within each theme was varied, the text in the sections below includes references to instances where evidence and citations within responses were provided to support answers.

Within each theme, many respondents proposed investing in research, development and innovation to help deliver objectives; and indicated a view that rail should be considered as part of a wider transport system that connects people to work and leisure opportunities in a sustainable and affordable way.

Applying the strategic objectives to deliver the Strategic Plan

Respondents were broadly supportive of the objectives and the thirty-year scope of the Strategic Plan, with some indicating a view that, combined with the Williams-Shapps

proposals for reform of the sector, it presented a once in a generation opportunity for change. Many respondents suggested that the Strategic Plan should be designed with clear priorities that work to put the customer first, deliver environmental sustainability benefits, drive revenue growth, make efficiencies, and allow rail to be flexible in response to unpredictable developments.

Most responses relevant to the theme of applying the strategic objectives to deliver the Strategic Plan focused on the following topics:

- modifying the objectives
- interaction of the objectives
- applying the objectives locally and regionally
- planning approach and integration.

Respondents' views on each of these topics are summarised in the following sections.

"The strategic challenges that we are all addressing are significant and stark, from ensuring the railways support stronger growth and fairer opportunities for all, through to the need to work rapidly towards net zero. It is clear that this cannot be done in isolation and projects and funding need to work together in order to deliver outcomes that work across different objectives and deliver value for money."

Modifying the objectives

In the context of broad support for the objectives, some refinements were suggested. Multiple responses supported including a 'people' focused objective to address rail industry skills issues, improve the culture of the industry, and ensure adequate succession planning, given what some respondents argued was an ageing workforce and a sector with complex future demands.

Other suggestions for modifying the objectives included the following:

- stronger mention of health, wellbeing and safety
- firmer commitment to ensuring accessibility and inclusivity
- more focus on regional and local collaboration
- stronger reflection on the impact of rail on Britain's global competitiveness
- reference to protection and enhancement of the historic and built environment
- reference to the role of stations and places in the wider community
- addressing social value within the financial sustainability objective
- reference to the sustainability of the rail industry supply chain.

Interaction of the objectives

Many respondents highlighted the complementary nature of the objectives and identified links between them, suggesting they could be strengthened by acknowledging these connections. For example, some felt that the economic growth and levelling up objectives

were closely aligned and could be combined into one objective. In addition, meeting customer needs and financial sustainability were seen by some respondents as enablers to achieving progress in other objectives.

Some respondents suggested that some of the objectives conflicted or were in tension with others, which could hinder delivery. There were also differing opinions on the relative importance of objectives; although the call for evidence launch document had made it clear that the objectives were not in any particular order of priority, some respondents argued that 'delivering environmental sustainability' should not be presented as last in the list and that measures to achieve it must not be considered last when implementing the Strategic Plan.

It was also suggested that achieving the objectives generally would depend on the strength of links with wider government policy.

Applying objectives locally and regionally

Multiple respondents highlighted that the strategic objectives aligned with their regional or local transport plans, objectives, ambitions and investment priorities. Some provided evidence on the success of transport measures within their region and overseas as examples of best practice that could be applied to the Strategic Plan. Others noted that there are differing local challenges and felt that it was important that the Strategic Plan employ a flexible approach to manage and respond to these challenges.

Some respondents stressed the importance of aligning GBR regions with local government and Sub-national Transport Bodies. Several suggested ways that external transport bodies could input into GBR plans in a more coordinated and organised way. There were also suggestions that regional strategic plans could be used to implement Strategic Plan objectives at local and regional levels. The importance of the Strategic Plan being seen to benefit customers throughout each nation equally was also stressed by some respondents.

Planning approach and implementation

There was support for an industry wide approach to the identification, prioritisation, and funding of rail enhancements through the Strategic Plan, with some respondents raising concern with continuing a fragmented approach to investment decisions.

Multiple respondents suggested that to realise the benefits of the Strategic Plan there should be clear ownership of objectives, and cross industry communication – including sharing of best practice and improved vertical and horizontal interfaces within GBR and the rail industry. Many respondents also thought it was important that GBR were transparent with decision making processes, demonstrating clear accountability and responsibility for delivering objectives while communicating constraints, particularly related to finances.

"The creation of GBR is a significant opportunity to reduce the complexity and fragmentation that exists in the rail industry and to better align long term planning of the railways to the journeys and options that passengers and freight want to make, both now and in the future"

It was suggested that GBR should have a collaborative approach with the wider industry, including a clear engagement plan to ensure that views from multiple stakeholders are considered when making decisions. The importance of a strong partnership between the public and private sector was also suggested by some respondents. Suggestions for stakeholders that should be engaged included those within the supply chain (so that their expertise could be harnessed, and innovation encouraged), those with day-to-day experience of working in rail, community rail/station partnerships, and customers. It was felt by some respondents that there was currently under representation of passengers and freight in governance, strategic planning and decision making.

As well as investing in new infrastructure it was also suggested that rail make better use of existing assets, resources and capabilities including re-skilling the workforce to overcome skills shortages through investment in training; making use of smarter operating practices; running additional services on existing track; and reopening railway lines. Respondents also mentioned the importance of engagement and leadership behaviours to improve the workforce's health and wellbeing.

Many respondents suggested that the industry could make better use of available data and expand data collection to better forecast future demand, revenue and pricing. Evidence was provided to support the need to make better use of data to develop meaningful insights, including the use of smart ticketing.

Progressing the objectives, overcoming barriers and making trade-offs

Many respondents suggested that making progress against all objectives would be reliant on the availability of resources. It was stressed that employing a collaborative and technologically driven approach could help to navigate trade-offs, especially when facing financial constraints.

Most responses relevant to the theme of improving integration with the wider transport system focused on the following topics:

- simultaneous progress
- barriers
- trade-offs.

Respondents' views on each of these topics are summarised in the following sections.

Simultaneous progress

Some respondents supported efforts for working towards simultaneous progress of the objectives rather than on progressing each in isolation. A few respondents suggested that identified links between the objectives could influence simultaneous progress. There were some comments that achieving progress in one objective might cause positive and/or negative impacts on others. Dependency mapping was suggested as a way to understand these links and the resulting impact on decision making. Some respondents also noted that delivery and success seen at a regional level could vary, with one suggested solution being for the Strategic Plan to identify priorities region by region.

Some respondents were concerned about the measurability of the objectives. Use of sub-objectives, weighting systems with multi-criteria analysis and regular progress reviews were suggested as ways to support decision making and measure success. Evidence was provided in the form of existing transport strategies as examples of how to measure and monitor objectives. Some respondents also recommended the use of Key Performance Indicators and specific tools such as the Rail Social Value Tool[2] to measure performance of the objectives across rail. There were also multiple suggestions for improved data collection as a way to support simultaneous progress.

Barriers

Availability of funding, affordability of travel coupled with increased costs of living, uncertainty of demand and lack of network capacity were commonly suggested barriers to progress. Multiple respondents called for clarity on roles and responsibilities for management of funding, infrastructure and planning.

Other suggested barriers included the price and availability of energy and people, existing decision-making procedures (which were felt to limit innovation), workforce reform measures (including increased use of technological over human capacity) which were perceived to be unpopular, lack of flexibility in franchise agreements, and a shift to autonomous vehicles or virtual means of interaction impacting demand for public transport.

Trade-offs

It was recognised by some respondents that the railway is not able to 'do all things at once'. Multiple respondents noted that providing affordability for users versus delivering financial sustainability and good value for the taxpayer and other funders could be a common trade off. Others flagged trade-offs between allocation of capacity for different passenger and freight markets on certain routes and balancing expansion of services with potential environmental impacts. Some respondents suggested ways to trade off measures against each other, including through the Transport Appraisal Guidance (TAG) process. Transparent reporting and improved accountability were also suggested as ways to manage trade-offs.

"There is… an important trade-off between investing to deliver future connectivity and current financial sustainability. The case for local investment must be clearly articulated and demonstrated as benefitting the country as whole."

Navigating long term economic, environmental and societal trends

Economic trends

Respondents highlighted multiple economic trends that could impact the objectives both positively and negatively. Examples of economic trends that could negatively impact rail

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[2] An online tool that enables social value to be measured and monitored in rail projects and operations.

operations included rising inflation and costs of living impacting consumer choices; cuts to public spending; international labour market restrictions; and increased volatility and pricing in the global energy sector.

Examples of trends that could positively impact rail operations included increased digitalisation; population growth; city centre development; and a growth in the tourism industry in Britain. It was also suggested that the emergence of new technologies such as digital coupling and autonomous shunting could make rail more competitive. It was noted by some respondents that a lack of Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) drivers and increased costs in the road haulage supply chain could result in increased demand for rail freight services.

Environmental trends

Many respondents referenced climate change as being a key environmental influence on the strategic objectives, noting the strength of government commitment to decarbonising the UK economy and increasing customer awareness about environmental impacts.

Some suggested this would increase the demand for further and accelerated electrification of the rail network and for improved integration of rail services with walking and cycling, which would also be strengthened by increased awareness of the public health benefits of active travel. Developments in alternative fuel sources including the development of cheap, scalable hydrogen and/or nuclear fusion were also noted as an influence on objectives in some responses.

An increased focus on air pollution including particulates and increasing congestion on the road were also cited as likely to influence customer travel choices, resulting in further mode shift to rail. However, evidence was also provided suggesting sustainability does not strongly influence transport decisions and that mode shift to rail would be better supported through cost and convenience benefits. It was suggested that more environmental policy, legislation and government initiatives could accelerate organisations' shift to environmental sustainability and increase demand for rail freight usage over HGV distribution. It was also noted that further growth in online retailing could be supported by the introduction of express freight services. Some respondents suggested a need for early investment in new freight services to pre-empt this demand.

Multiple respondents also suggested that extreme weather events resulting from climate change would place greater stress on the physical infrastructure of the railway. It was argued that rail infrastructure requires significant investment to increase the resilience of the rail network to flooding, landslips and high winds.

Societal trends

Many respondents indicated that, as Britain recovers from the pandemic and the resulting longer-term impacts are realised, customer needs will change, and rail will need to evolve to meet those needs.

Some suggested that trends resulting from changing customer demand and travel patterns linked to shifts in working and leisure choices could have a significant impact on the strategic objectives. Many respondents also noted that demographic changes including an ageing population would present additional need for increased public transport provision and accessibility improvements for people with mobility impairments (both within stations and for

interchange to other modes, including an increased demand for onward connections via car or bus). It was also suggested there would be changes to typically recognised peak and off-peak hours and that there may be a growth in off-peak travel demand especially for leisure journeys.

Changes in income and wealth distribution were also cited in some responses, with increasing inequality, decreasing social mobility, and growing poverty aggravated by the pandemic all flagged as challenges for the Strategic Plan. Some respondents also suggested that there could be a skills and resource shortage in the future and that existing railway staff may need to be re-skilled as automation and innovation advances replace the need for traditional jobs. It was also suggested that if autonomous cars become mainstream there could be a shift in the way people and vehicles move around in cities.

"The future rail network will also need to take account of the significant social change of an ageing population – 1 in 5 of the population was aged 65 or over in 2019 but this is projected to grow to 1 in 4 by 2043. Such changes will increase the focus that the rail industry needs to give to the design and accessibility of services. Making accessibility both a long and short-term priority future-proofs the network for all current and future generations."

Building resilience to environmental, financial, political and technological uncertainties

Many respondents noted multiple uncertainties that they suggested the Strategic Plan would need to be resilient to. However, some respondents suggested that it was important that uncertainties were not used as a reason for delaying decisions or delivery of rail projects and that the Strategic Plan should be designed to adapt to change. Multiple respondents suggested that the Strategic Plan, and the railway more generally, would need a flexible approach to react to impacts from uncertainties.

Environmental uncertainties

A commonly suggested environmental uncertainty was the fluctuating cost of energy and the resulting implications for consumer spending and rail operations including for the expansion of electrification across the network. The feasibility of moving the non-electrified parts of the network from diesel to other forms of traction within 25 years to meet net zero targets was questioned in some responses.

Many respondents also highlighted climate change as a key uncertainty, due to the unpredictable nature of extreme weather events including intensity and range of impacts. Other highlighted environmental uncertainties included future environmental regulation and resource scarcity.

Financial and economic uncertainties

Respondents identified some financial uncertainties that could impact the Strategic Plan, which mostly related to public and private funding availability. Pressures on revenue, funding

and industry costs, both operational and related to delivering enhancements, were also raised. Navigating peaks and troughs in demand and revenue was seen as a challenge in some responses. Some respondents also suggested that financial uncertainties could stem from the supply chain. Connecting and expanding rail facilities to support the development of new housing was also flagged as a possible uncertainty.

Some respondents also suggested economic uncertainties, including: availability of disposable household income, changes to travel behaviour (both the pattern and demand) and recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Political uncertainties

Some respondents highlighted the importance of developing a Strategic Plan that is resilient to changing governments with different priorities. There was concern that changes in government policies and priorities could impact funding availability and support for both public and private aspects of the rail industry. It was suggested that a well-supported, cohesive Strategic Plan could help minimise any resulting impacts and instil confidence from customers and industry. A few respondents also suggested there could be uncertainty over the long-term trading relationship between the UK and other counties, including on the labour market.

Technological uncertainties

Many respondents highlighted uncertainty over how technological offerings will evolve over time, the ability of the industry to adapt to rapid technological advancements and the feasibility of technology to automate and enhance rail operations – including customer service and track side operations. Some respondents indicated concern that customer confidence could be impacted by inconsistent application or performance of new technologies.

Improving integration with the wider transport system

Many respondents advocated for a movement away from considering the rail system in isolation but as part of the wider transport system. It was suggested that better sharing of data, integrated transport and planning policies from government and other authorities, and use of technology would support this. Evidence was provided to support this, including government publications. Respondents showed support for rail as part of a multi-modal system, addressing end-to-end transport needs, to deliver on net zero commitments. It was also suggested that empowering local and regional authorities to deliver joined up planning would be another way to support better integration.

Most responses relevant to the theme of improving integration with the wider transport system focused on the following topics:

- improved integration with other transport modes
- improved integration with active travel
- integrating rail freight into the wider transport system
- the role of collaboration
- improved technology and modernisation
- improvements to ticketing options.

Respondents' views on each of these topics are summarised in the following sections.

Improved integration with other transport modes

Multiple respondents suggested that rail should, in particular, be better integrated with public transport services including bus, tram and ferries, as well as with car parking, and with air travel. Some respondents provided specific examples of bus/rail and air/rail connections that they felt needed improvement as a priority and for improved facilities to support the use of electric vehicles. It was suggested that this improved integration would help customers to make more informed travel choices, make public transport more attractive and improve customer experience. Evidence was provided to support this, referencing Future Mobility Hubs and case studies in Europe.

"In terms of integration – making public transport easier to use by all is the key ask for the future. This involves all parties recognising the need to work together, and also for policy makers to understand that this does have a cost."

Improved integration with active travel

Many respondents also suggested that improved integration with active modes would support healthy and sustainable travel. There were multiple suggestions of ways that rail could better integrate with active modes, including better provision of well secured high quality bike storage on trains and in stations, provision of bike and e-scooter hire facilities at stations, parking and power for e-cycles, and supporting local authorities on improved walking and cycling routes to stations. Some respondents also suggested that integration with active modes could be better facilitated by stronger policy and funding commitments and increasing awareness of existing schemes.

Integrating rail freight into the wider transport system

Some respondents called for stronger acknowledgement that rail freight does not operate independently from other transport modes in the UK and often forms part of a multi modal journey. It was suggested freight has crucial role to play in an integrated transport system and often complements other modes of transport, particularly carrying goods over long distances for core routes while roads operate first/last mile delivery. It was also suggested that the Strategic Plan could look to optimise freight routing. A review of the location of terminals was also suggested as a way to facilitate moving freight flows closer to final destinations and better integrate with last mile delivery options.

Some respondents suggested the development of additional freight terminals and interchange points in strategic places around the network and the continued development of technology, including the real time tracking of goods, could further integrate rail freight into the wider transport system. Some also raised that rail freight must be more competitively priced to compete with other modes of travel and integrate seamlessly into customers' wider supply chains, especially in emerging markets such as express logistics. Evidence was provided highlighting major road network improvements and the expected monetary savings they are expected to achieve in comparison to the equivalent journey taken via rail.

The role of collaboration

Multiple respondents suggested that early, regular and targeted stakeholder engagement and communication within and beyond the rail industry would be important to integrating rail with the wider transport system. Some respondents suggested more engagement was needed with the local community, local authorities, users and operators of other transport modes to inform decisions and planning. Improved collaboration across the freight industry was also cited as important to growing the role of rail freight in an integrated transport system. Some respondents stressed that local authorities should work together on policy initiatives and integrated forward planning to make it easier for people to make a journey using a number of different transport modes.

"GBR will need to engage effectively with LTAs, planning authorities and other stakeholders to deliver better integration of various modes."[3]

Improved technology and modernisation

Many respondents suggested improvements to technology would support rail's integration with the wider transport system. The availability and display of information for onward travel online, onboard trains, and at stations was cited as requiring improvement. It was suggested that this could include information about connecting rail and bus services, availability of parking and provision of e-bike or e-scooter hire at stations.

Improved Wi-Fi connectivity on trains and at stations was seen as an important element of improving integration in this way, as well as enabling commuters to work on trains, and encouraging longer leisure trips. However, some responses noted that digital technology is not always accessible to Britain's ageing population and the Strategic Plan should be mindful of this.

Respondents suggested that integrated timetabling across multiple modes would make it easier for passengers to change services and plan multi-modal travel, with some respondents suggesting a need for a national integrated timetable.

Improved collection, monitoring and reporting of data, including real-time operator data, industry performance and customer satisfaction data, was also a frequently suggested way to support a fully integrated, resilient and agile transport system.

"Modal integration-digital connectivity and real-time information flow also provides the opportunity for rail to become the backbone of a joined-up mobility experience"

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[3] LTAs - Local Transport Authorities

Improvements to ticketing options

Many respondents suggested an integrated ticketing system with other forms of public transport, including suggestions of travel/smart cards for use on rail, bus, tram, bike, ferry and coach journeys. It was suggested that simplifying ticket pricing and purchasing would help better facilitate multi-modal journeys, with many respondents calling for a system which enables purchase of travel for a 'complete journey'. Some respondents provided examples from other countries where integrated ticketing options have been successful.

Summary of responses to Question 2 – Meeting customers' needs

The call for evidence asked respondents to consider ways in which rail could best serve the customers, both passenger and freight, who rely on it. Four questions were posed, as follows:

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?

Response overview

A total of 266 (87 per cent) respondents commented on meeting customer needs. Of the respondents commenting on Question 2, 18 per cent (49 respondents) provided additional evidence to support their answer. The forms of evidence to support responses included reports, strategy documents, academic papers, websites, Census data, project examples, transcripts and presentations.

Most responses tended to focus on one or more of the following six key themes:

- better understanding customer expectations
- providing accessible and affordable services
- improving the comfort, reliability and frequency of passenger services
- expanding the role of freight
- providing attractive train and station facilities

- using technology to improve customer experience.

The distribution of respondents with comments on these key themes is shown in Figure 5. There were a number of comments made as part of Question 2 that were not relevant to the question or the call for evidence more generally. These comments were recorded as 'other' as part of the analysis.

Figure 5 Number of respondents with comments on Question 2 themes*
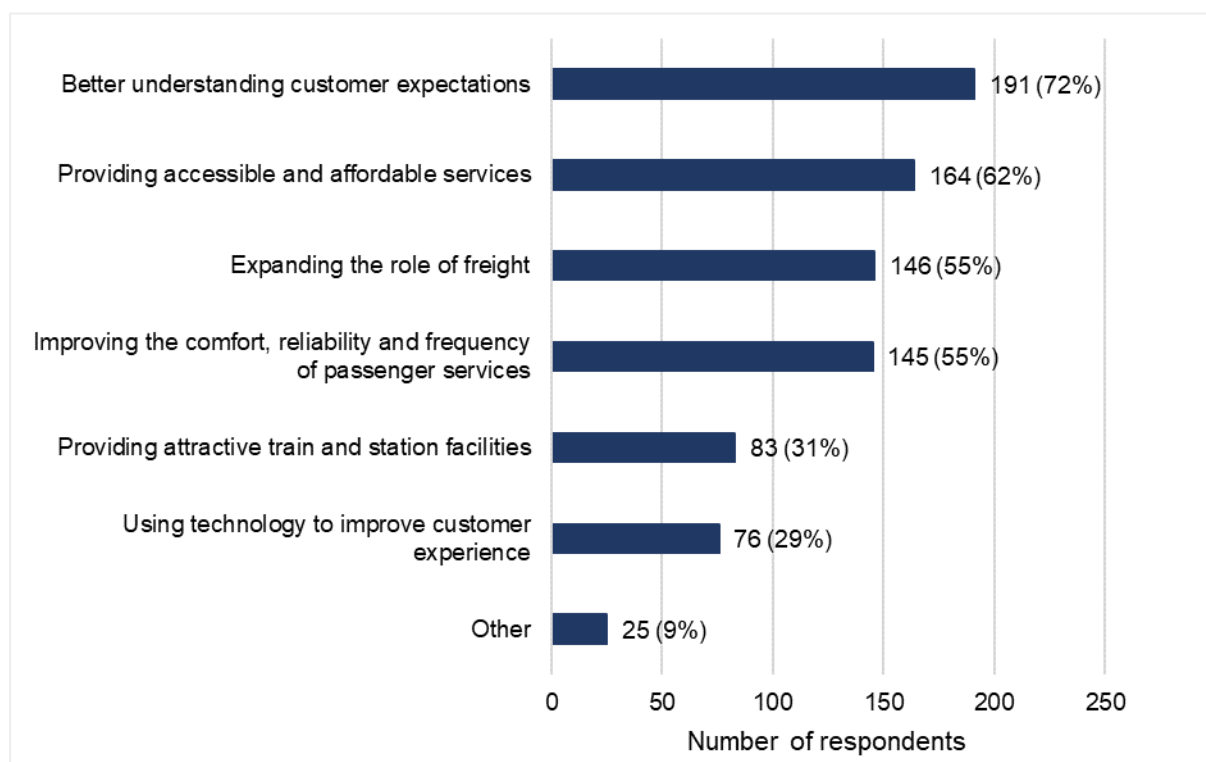
* Please note that per cent are of the 266 respondents that submitted a call for evidence response with comments related to Question 2.

Over two-thirds of respondents (72 per cent) with comments related to Question 2 commented on better understanding customer expectations and 62 per cent made remarks on the provision of accessible and affordable services. The volume of evidence provided within each theme was varied; the text in the sections below includes references to instances where evidence and citations were provided to support answers.

Better understanding customer expectations

Respondents suggested that customer needs, both passenger and freight, should be at the heart of the Strategic Plan and considered use of rail services as the best measure of success. It was suggested that customer expectations could be better met in a number of ways, including, investing in relevant and effective technology, proactive engagement and communication with customers and strong partnerships between the public and private sectors.

Most responses relevant to the theme of better understanding customer expectations focused on the following topics:

- passenger habits and travel trends
- increasing focus on environmental sustainability
- monitoring and assessment of customer needs
- Potential trade-off between freight and passenger services.

Respondents' views on each of these topics are summarised in the following sections.

"To understand and improve customer experience, we need to invest in systems, data and people, rather than simply infrastructure."

Passenger habits and travel trends

Many respondents suggested that passenger travel habits and patterns of demand have significantly changed as the result of the pandemic, and this presents challenges to meeting current and future passenger expectations. Respondents believed travel patterns would continue to change with the biggest impacts seen to commuting and leisure trips – resulting in changes to peak travel times and increased demand for evening and weekend trips. Evidence was provided to support suggested changes to travel patterns, including studies suggesting homeworking is likely to continue and demonstrating growth of leisure customers. It was suggested that timetables would need to adapt to better suit these changes in demand. Multiple respondents also suggested that passengers, particularly commuters and families, will require improved, consistent and reliable Wi-Fi capability on journeys to support work and leisure needs.

Many respondents commented on the need for rail services to be better integrated with other transport modes and ready to support passengers choosing rail over other modes. Suggestions were repeated from answers to Question 1. See chapter 2 for an overview of these comments.

Increasing focus on environmental sustainability

Many respondents noted that sustainability is an increasingly important focus area for customers and is likely to be a growing factor in customer decisions. Some respondents mentioned that customers will expect reassurance that the network can be resilient to extreme weather events and is positioned to manage the risks presented by climate change. Multiple respondents suggested that customer support for decarbonisation and electrification of the rail network was strong. These comments are further explored in chapter 7 of this report, which reports comments on delivering environmental sustainability received in response to Q6.

"Other trends, such as increasing awareness of carbon footprints and the proliferation of other zero-carbon modes of transport will increase expectation on the railway to be fully decarbonised."

Monitoring and assessment of customer needs

Several respondents highlighted the need to ask for, listen to, understand and learn from customer feedback. Many respondents suggested customer satisfaction should be measured against a series of Key Performance Indicators such as tracking satisfaction, use of the network, punctuality and cancellation data. There was evidence provided of existing tools and measures that could be used or adapted for industry wide application.

Some respondents highlighted the importance of engaging with people who do not travel by rail, to build a better understanding of why. Several respondents stressed the importance of speaking to people in person, suggesting staff engaging with people on trains or at stations, and by partnering with key groups, such as disability organisations. It was noted that seeking feedback must include actively collecting the views of disabled passengers through a range of accessible channels and formats, both digitally and offline, with evidence provided to demonstrate how technology can act as a barrier to data sharing from some customers. The importance of keeping all data safe was also stressed by some respondents.

Some respondents asked for data collection to be standardised across the industry, suggesting that data be gathered on a centralised platform, enabling consistent monitoring and assessment of customer satisfaction across the network. Other respondents commented that a lot of data is already being captured, and that this could be better used through improved sharing of information between stakeholders. Several respondents provided a word of caution in relation to the frequency of surveying, explaining that overload may contribute to apathy towards the feedback process.

"Tracking and measuring customer satisfaction levels is critical for success… We must connect with customers everywhere they connect with the industry … and use general consumer trends and insights to shape our activities and the industry going forward."

Potential trade-off between freight and passenger services

Some respondents raised concerns that there may be conflict between passenger and freight services on certain parts of the network, leading to delays or loss in competitiveness and that a mixed-use railway needs better consideration.

Some suggested that freight services should not be considered less of a priority than passenger services, while other respondents suggested that an increased demand for freight services should not come at the expense of passenger services. It was noted that both passenger and freight services can cause delays and resulting negative consequences to each other; suggestions to improve this and resolve timetabling conflicts included infrastructure upgrades, rerouting and retiming.

Multiple respondents suggested that changing passenger travel patterns resulting from the pandemic could create additional capacity for freight services which could then be run to complement these changes and network availability. It was also suggested that rolling stock could be adapted to enable the carrying of time-sensitive light freight on passenger services. Respondents also suggested the development of ways to determine the overall 'value' of routes, to enable quantified trade-offs between freight and passenger services.

"The Strategic Plan needs to enable a regular review of capacity allocation of freight vs passenger services, to enable the most optimal mixed-use railway."

Improving the comfort, reliability and frequency of passenger services

Avoiding overcrowding at stations and on trains

Multiple respondents felt that the rail network should be designed to provide a level of capacity capable of catering for existing and future customers. Many respondents suggested that crowding at stations and on trains was a consistent 'pain point' for passengers and the desire for personal space was thought to have increased as a result of the pandemic. Some respondents suggested that purchasing a ticket should guarantee access to a seat for the entirety of a passenger's journey. Respondents suggested potential solutions for overcrowding, including:

- better sized lobby entrances and gangways
- clearer information on platforms, including on where to stand for specific carriages and capacity information for arriving trains
- improved capacity information
- better real-time demand analysis
- reduced waiting times
- improved timetabling.

"The experience of Covid may have changed some values, such as the value placed on crowding. Research on these issues is urgently needed, but of course may require a period of stability before any long term changes can be measured."

Punctual, reliable, more frequent services with appropriate capacity

Many respondents suggested that speed, reliability and frequency of services were important to building trust in the railway and considered key to customer satisfaction, attraction and retention. Some respondents pointed to existing local, regional and international research and customer surveys as evidence for these suggestions.

Multiple respondents suggested that reduced delays, shorter journey times and better/proactive provision of journey information, to minimise the impact of unexpected delays, would better meet customer needs and encourage modal shift from car to rail. It was noted that reliability is of increased importance in rural areas where fewer alternative modes of travel are easily accessible.

Many respondents suggested a need to expand the frequency or capacity of some services, including adding additional carriages. However, other respondents noted that some services have empty carriages that are not needed to serve current demand. Some respondents gave examples of specific routes or services that are currently underserved or experience

unreliable rail offerings and suggested specific or general frequency improvements to address this – including provision of new lines and stations and 24-hour service provision.

Some respondents also noted that passengers are likely to continue to expect more flexible service offerings, including later evening services and expanded weekend offerings and appropriate planning is needed to meet these needs.

Providing attractive train and station facilities

Multiple respondents suggested that passengers will expect a safe and secure travelling environment, free from harassment - including in and around stations and onboard trains. It was noted that provision of facilities across the rail network is varied; the need for addressing this was raised by a number of respondents. Respondents also gave multiple suggested improvements to train and station facilities, as detailed below.

Improving train facilities

Many respondents suggested ways that train facilities could be upgraded to better serve passengers. Suggestions included:

- modifying/improving seat provision by providing additional seats by windows, more comfortable seats, better distribution of four bay seats for families and groups, more reservable seats suitable for users with reduced mobility, ensuring seats line up with windows and offering wider seats
- providing additional carriages reduces overcrowding, some respondents suggested design upgrades were also needed
- providing additional and improved toilet facilities, including better facilities for disabled passengers
- offering stronger Wi-Fi connections on all trains, stronger mobile phone services and additional USB plugs and power sockets for charging of phones and laptops
- providing better onboard information for passengers, including real-time screens that show information on train seat availability, connections, crowding and service updates
- providing additional onboard storage space for cycles and luggage
- catering: provision of food and drink for those with intolerances and allergies, gluten and dairy free options needed
- improving staff training to benefit customer experience
- expanding level boarding offerings, with suggested use of specific technology solutions
- reducing or removing First Class
- improving onboard cleanliness.

"Options for multipurpose spaces should be considered and a service that supports wheelchair users; family access needs for example pram spaces; and bicycle spaces – there is a growing need to review design that is inclusive and accommodates all

needs thereby reflecting less on fixed seat capacity to encourage more passengers to use the railway by providing spaces that are multi-functional."

Improving stations and surroundings

Many respondents suggested ways that station facilities could be upgraded to better serve passengers. Suggestions included:

- improving the provision of first/last mile travel options from stations including via public transport, introduction of Park & Ride at stations and additional facilities to support active mode and micro-mobility users building more and reopening of stations to allow better access to the rail network outside of main cities
- improving information display: illuminated departure displays and timetables with big text
- providing charging points for electric cars
- improving toilet facilities: provide toilets at all stations, facilities should be free, increase provision of baby changing facilities
- providing step-free access at all rail stations
- improving facilities for babies and young children at stations
- providing storage facilities: provide safe, secure bike and luggage storage
- providing clean, safe and heated waiting rooms
- improving ticket machines, which do not always work, are hard to operate for some users and should be available at all stations
- providing pray/faith and quiet rooms
- increasing capacity through investment in platform lengthening to support longer trains
- improving connectivity by providing station Wi-Fi and offering power sockets.

Providing accessible and affordable services

Many respondents highlighted the importance of providing affordable, accessible rail services for all passengers as poor accessibility and cost of travel can be significant barriers. It was noted that accessibility is especially important for users with mobility impairments (including those with hidden disabilities and health concerns), families, younger people and the elderly (particularly in the context of an ageing population). Some respondents also commented on the rate of change in providing accessible services, and challenged the rail industry to go faster.

Most responses relevant to the theme of providing accessible and affordable services focused on the following topics:

- accessibility considerations
- access to information and customer service
- affordability of services.

Respondents' views on each of these topics are summarised in the following sections.

Accessibility considerations

Some respondents provided evidence that people with mobility impairments make fewer trips and travel fewer miles than others and suggested that some are reluctant to travel by rail at all. Many respondents suggested that there should be improved engagement with mobility-impaired passengers to better understand their needs and determine solutions to barriers. More consistent provision of facilities and customer service was considered by some respondents to be key to improved accessibility. Some also made clear that accessibility considerations must also be applied to railway employees.

Some respondents stressed the importance of considering legal and contractual obligations in relation to accessibility and undertaking better monitoring and evaluation to assess and demonstrate progress.

Multiple respondents suggested measures to assist railways users with accessibility needs, including level boarding, step free access at every station, advance booking of passenger assistance at stations, tactile surfaces, and provision of boarding ramps. Some also called for a commitment to implement level boarding over time. It was also suggested that rolling stock design needs to better reflect the needs of mobility-impaired passengers and their carers, older people, and families. There was strong support for 'Access for All' schemes.

"It is important that the whole transport system is inclusive by design, allowing people to travel with confidence and ease through well designed fully accessible physical infrastructure and accessible information to help aid journey planning."

Access to information and customer service

Some respondents felt that delivering accessibility should also include greater consideration of customer service and information provision. It was suggested that the use of driver-only trains and a reduction of station staff presence removes support for assistance, particularly from disabled passengers. . Multiple respondents suggested there will continue to be a need for staff presence on trains and at stations to support passengers with accessibility needs and ensure a safe environment for all.

A number of respondents mentioned the need for provision of alternative rail travel information formats for some customers. Some respondents suggested that technological innovations would be of benefit, but others were concerned that it would be a disadvantage for some users with disabilities, older people and those without access to smartphones. There was concern that this could prevent these users from accessing required support.

"Whilst there have been worthwhile and significant improvements to the accessibility of the rail network over recent years (rolling stock and staff training have been notable areas of improvement), the very significant disparity in terms of use of the rail network by disabled people and non-disabled people highlights just how much more needs to be done… The 2020 National Travel Survey showed disabled adults (16+) make around 28% fewer trips per year than non-disabled adults. In terms of

miles travelled per year the disparity was even greater with disabled adults travelling 40% less miles than non-disabled adults."

Affordability of services

Many respondents suggested that the growth in the cost of living would increase passenger demand for affordable travel that provides value for money. It was also suggested that there needs to be a better understanding of what affordability means. Multiple respondents suggested that to retain and attract passengers, pricing of tickets would need to be competitive relative to other modes of travel.

Some respondents suggested measures to address affordability concerns, including offering discounts to attract passengers back to rail, enabling pre-booking of tickets beyond the current three-month window to provide better value for money and attract passengers planning holidays, and offering refunds for unused tickets.

"Rail should be accessible financially to everyone, the cost of tickets are generally too high and the range is too complex, especially during peak travel times."

Expanding the role of freight

Respondents were supportive of increased modal shift from road to rail for freight transportation. Benefits cited included environmental benefits, UK business productivity, railway cost savings, agglomeration benefits, and revenue generation. It was felt that this wide range of benefits should be considered in the appraisal of infrastructure schemes. Some respondents highlighted that industry forecasts indicate strong long-term growth in demand for rail freight services.

Most responses relevant to the theme of expanding the role of rail freight focused on the following topics:

- supporting the UK economy
- contribution of rail freight to net zero
- expanding UK rail freight's role in UK supply chains.

Respondents' views on each of these topics are summarised in the following sections.

Supporting the UK economy

Rail freight and logistics were reported to be vitally important to several sectors and geographic locations across the UK, contributing to economic opportunities including overseas trade and the movement of bulk materials. Many respondents identified reliability, speed, and cost-effectiveness as advantages of transporting goods by rail, pointing to supporting evidence. These advantages were thought to be greatest where there are large volumes, long hauls and/or low transfer costs. Rail freight was praised by respondents for demonstrating supply chain resilience during the Covid-19 supply chain crisis.

"Tesco … credits use of rail freight for keeping shelves stocked in supply crisis, demonstrating supply chain resilience benefits."

Structural challenges for road haulage, the introduction of low emission zones in urban centres and a growth in businesses seeking to diversify logistics chains were reasons suggested by respondents for increased demand for rail freight. It was expected that growth will require more efficient use of existing capacity, as well as the creation of additional capacity, in the network. Investment in rolling stock, railway infrastructure and technology were identified as levers for delivering longer-term economic growth and boosting the economy through cost-effective, reliable, national logistics. Respondents suggested that this would allow rail to be competitive in markets from which it was previously excluded on price.

Contribution of rail freight to Net Zero

As was seen in the call for evidence for the Williams Rail Review, multiple respondents reported the environmental benefits of rail freight. Many respondents see rail as having a critical role in the national shift to net-zero and decarbonisation of the supply chain, citing the rail industry as having strong potential to shift towards zero carbon fuel solutions.

Evidence was provided to demonstrate rail freight's green credentials, including how rail produces fewer emissions compared to road (impacting air quality and climate change), imposes less noise disturbance than HGV traffic, reduces the amount of congestion and delay on the road network, lessens the damage to highways caused by HGVs and is often safer than other freight modes. Multiple respondents suggested that these green credentials would result in additional businesses turning to rail as a more environmentally friendly means of moving goods. Infill electrification schemes and alternatives fuels were also cited as further enhancing the environmental attractiveness of rail freight.

Expanding rail freight's role in UK supply chains

Respondents referred to declines in traditional flows, such as coal and metals traffic, being offset by other bulk traffic, such as a growth in container and construction traffic. Strong rail freight flows were reported to have developed from both domestic freight terminals and deep-water ports for international trade. Some respondents credit rail freight with being most effective for long-distance flows of heavy materials, including into city centres.

"There are … potential opportunities more widely across the network to integrate with last mile logistics models making railway stations a key part of the freight supply chains."

Suggestions for expanding on existing supply chains included lowering the barrier to entry for end-customers, using existing Channel Tunnel freight capacity, enabling express freight of lighter, time sensitive items (the potential for 'parcels as passengers') and responding to 'just in time' inventory management – which requires responsive and flexible systems across the freight and logistics sector. It was noted that increasing express freight could require

additional space at stations to accommodate parcels traffic in urban locations. Respondents also highlighted that newer/smaller customers can find it difficult to fill a full train load and suggested the facilitation of more aggregated train loads (allowing end customers to purchase segments of a train load).

Using technology to improve customer experience

Multiple respondents suggested using technology to support integrated travel. Some respondents mentioned that demand for Mobility as a Service, enabling users to plan, book and pay for multiple transport services through one digital platform, is likely to increase.

The provision of a simplified ticketing system was frequently cited as a way to improve passenger experience. Many respondents suggested the use of travel cards and 'London-style' ticketing technology, and easier to navigate booking systems.

"We expect GBR to provide the focus for the development of customer-focused systems which will require improved telecoms connectivity, open data and sensors on trains, stations and infrastructure."

Some respondents suggested that freight customers also require better systems – to plan their operations and track shipments. It was suggested that GBR enable the development of customer-focused systems through the use and deployment of sensors on trains, improved telecoms connectivity and open data.

Technology to better capture and communicate data

Some respondents suggested technologies, such as mobile apps, be used to better capture and relay data to customers. Mobile apps were suggested as a way to communicate journey updates – including service delays, seat availability and connecting service information, to passengers.

Some respondents suggested the creation of a centralised industry-wide data system to improve customer experience, aid decision making, inform timetabling, aid revenue forecasting and staffing. The role of automation and artificial intelligence in data capture was thought to increase in the future.

Mitigation of cybersecurity risks

Although technological change and increased collection and use of data were suggested by many respondents as ways to meet customer needs, other respondents suggested that this could increase the risk of cyber-attacks. Some respondents noted the importance of ensuring that new data and systems are resilient to cyber threats to prevent disruption and safety risks.

It was suggested that increased digitisation within the railway sector should be informed by best practice and adhere to international standards, with cyber-security proactively managed. It was also noted that customers and staff need to trust that the data they provide is being kept secure, especially personal and financial data.

"A key uncertainty that the Strategic Plan must be resilient to will be the development of new technologies that could impact on the cybersecurity of railway assets."

Summary of responses to Question 3 – Delivering financial sustainability

The call for evidence asked respondents where they saw the most significant opportunities and barriers to delivering financial sustainability in the rail sector and consider ways the Strategic Plan could support greater efficiency (such as joined up operations), innovation, alternative sources of funding and/or cost base reduction. The question posed, was as follows:

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?

Response overview

A total of 267 (87 per cent) respondents commented on delivering financial sustainability. Of the respondents commenting on Question 3, 14 per cent (37 respondents) provided additional evidence to support their answer. The forms of evidence included reports, academic papers, research papers, excel data, websites, articles, case studies, government data, a financial sustainability plan and press releases.

Most responses tended to focus on one or more of the following five key themes:

- delivering a more efficient railway
- balancing government funding and passenger revenue
- harnessing innovation and technology
- driving revenue growth
- realising the full potential of the private sector.

The distribution of respondents with comments on these key themes is shown in Figure 5. There were several comments made as part of Question 3 that were not relevant to the question or the call for evidence more generally. These comments were recorded as 'other' as part of the analysis. Many respondents highlighted potential challenges associated with delivering a financially sustainable railway but supported efforts to work towards this.

Figure 6 Number of respondents with comments on Question 3 themes*
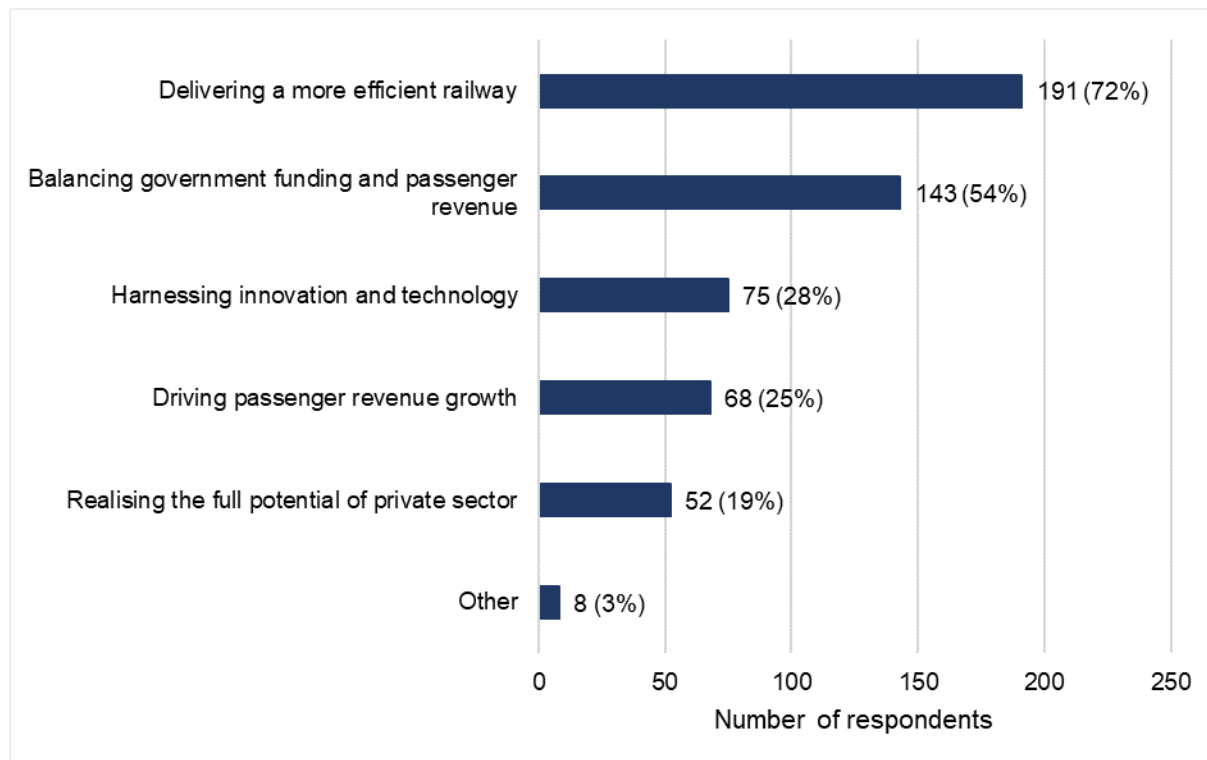
* Please note that % are of the 267 respondents that submitted a call for evidence response with comments related to Question 3.

Over two-thirds of Question 3 respondents (72 per cent) commented on delivering a more efficient railway and 54 per cent made remarks on balancing government funding and passenger revenue. Multiple respondents felt that current taxpayer and customer costs associated with rail are high and suggested a range of ways to reduce costs. The volume of evidence provided within each theme was varied, the text in the sections below includes references to instances where evidence and citations within responses were provided to support answers.

Delivering a more efficient railway

Many respondents felt that there is an added premium in the costs of doing anything associated with the railway, which stops the industry from delivering value for money for both the taxpayer and passenger. It was suggested there should be a concerted effort to reduce or eliminate 'gold plating' and to open the industry supply chain to greater competition. It was noted that care would need to be taken to ensure standards, quality of service and safety were not negatively impacted in the process, which many acknowledged is a difficult balance to strike. Some respondents suggested experimenting with different contractual/in-house methods of delivery to help identify the best methods of cost reduction to bring this premium down.

Numerous respondents suggested opportunities to deliver financial sustainability, for example using unused capacity or reducing costs, as well as examination of the cost base of infrastructure. It was also suggested that GBR review all cost elements of the rail network and drive as many efficiencies as possible. Case studies, academic papers and ongoing trials were provided as evidence for how capacity could be increased and cost reductions achieved.

Several respondents indicated that opportunities for cost savings and rail investment should be considered alongside other transport modes. It was felt that this would enable a holistic view of national transport investment priorities rather than considering them separately. These comments were echoed in responses to Question 4.

"It is crucial that the role and importance of rail investment is considered, assessed and evaluated alongside that of other modes, enabling a holistic view of national transport investment priorities rather than treating them as separate."

Most responses relevant to the theme of delivering a more efficient railway focused on the following topics:

- cost savings
- reducing duplication
- cost reduction through improved procurement
- capital and operational expenditure
- people.

Respondents' views on each of these topics are summarised in the following sections.

Cost savings

Many respondents detailed smaller changes that could be made to the way the railway is maintained and operated to reduce costs, stating that small incremental changes could result in much larger savings if applied across the whole railway and not just by one operator or one region. Evidence cited savings achieved by bringing work in-house rather than outsourcing, and presented cost benefit analysis for the implementation of new systems and processes currently being trialled in the UK.

"Across the industry there is significant scope for cost saving and revenue growth in an entire range of activities at the large and small scale by joining accountability for revenue and revenue at the right level."

Others suggested that reducing the industry's cost base through improved productivity, including initiatives such as condition monitoring, automatic train operation and the closure of traditional booking offices, while maintaining high levels of customer care throughout the journey experience, would have an impact.

Respondents referred to other nations and global examples where GBR could look to drive down cost and pass savings onto passengers and freight users by making rail more competitive, one example being the Luxembourg Rail Protocol [4].

Some respondents mentioned that they felt that the current track access agreements increased the cost of infrastructure projects due to the compensation paid to operators. They suggested that future contracts could employ a level of predetermined penalty free access, and revenue forecasts could be planned based on this level of access.

Cost saving through greater partnership between GBR and National Grid and energy providers was suggested several times. Respondents noted that the financial relationships between the two are of a scale that could involve reform and efficiency under a clear mandate.

"Government have levers over both National Grid and Network Rail…this may be an area of cross-departmental integration that is required to make GBR energy needs more efficient."

Reducing duplication

Many respondents suggested that the proposed structure of GBR must embrace the opportunity for significant efficiencies by eliminating duplication. Some argued that throughout the sector there are several different organisations all doing the same things in different ways, and respondents felt that there is an opportunity for the railway to come together to share best practices and processes that will result in less duplication and increased cost savings and efficiencies.

There were comments that suggested that there could be significant reductions in the costs of senior management achieved through the joining together of RDG, Network Rail and RSSB.

Cost reduction through improved procurement

Many respondents believed that costs could be driven down through procurement and improved competition when bidding for contracts. It was suggested that successful procurement and management of supplier relationships, in an ethical and sustainable manner, would be key to minimising the risk of future financial success. Savings achieved in Sweden, Germany and the Netherlands were provided as evidence of savings achieved through contract and franchise reform. Several respondents felt that opportunities to reduce costs could be derived from early and collaborative engagement during the procurement stage with more SMEs who could offer innovative approaches and ideas, removing barriers that make it harder to engage.

Some felt that enabling procurement decisions to be made in a way that optimises whole-life costs and supports the use of assets during their full economic life of up to 35 years was

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[4] designed to make it easier and cheaper for private sector to finance rolling stock without state guarantees

essential to the future of the railway. Others suggested that less focus on process/bureaucracy at the front end of the procurement process and more focus on relational contracts and collaborative working throughout the life cycle of contracts would allow organisations to see improvement in both performance and financial stability.

"[Improving] delivery efficiency through the adoption/adaptation of technology and enabling the cultural changes … requires a new approach to contracting."

Some provided a vision of a future commercial structure that allows for the sharing of risk and reward, supporting third party investment and revenue streams. It was also suggested that an alternative commercial structure should be explored through vertical integration. Some respondents suggested that GBR could leverage opportunities posed by such integrated solutions providing the ability of integrated authorities to act on issues relating to costs and revenues.

It was recommended that all rail procurements are aligned with the Cabinet Office's wider procurement reform. This includes shifting to 'Most Advantageous Tender' so that social value and net zero are also assessed, something that was mentioned by several respondents.

There were numerous specific suggestions for potential initiatives to improve financial sustainability by reducing cost through rolling stock/infrastructure procurement. By procuring these together, it was suggested that it could reduce the integration risk and cost. Alternative rolling stock replacement models were cited as opportunities for shared learning within the industry. Existing frameworks, route maps and playbooks were suggested as a means of making key changes in the design and procurement processes.

"Public sector contracting authorities must recognise the role that procurement can play in delivering value for money and improved outcomes if done right… key changes during the design and procurement process would enable an improvement in outcomes. These include earlier engagement with industry, a greater emphasis on co-design, co-creation and co-ownership, and more open and transparent dialogue between client and supplier to enable flexibility and innovation."

Capital and operational expenditure

Respondents commented that financial sustainability may initially be hard to achieve due to capital investments required to progress other objectives and that greater revenue from the railways would come as a result of improved services. It was noted that balancing capital and operational expenditure is difficult.

Some respondents suggested that the biggest opportunities to drive value for money come through the new structures being created by GBR. It was observed that currently there is a lack of alignment between investment by Network Rail on railway infrastructure and the investment by operators in new trains and services.

There were comments relating to improving capital efficiency to mitigate unavoidable capital expenditure with a coordinated and renewed focus on reducing both operating and capital costs. A number of responses observed that the railway was renowned for rarely keeping to budget on the delivery of projects and often running over time. It was suggested that capital expenditure needs to be simplified by reducing the processes and perceived bureaucracy in line with the principles of PACE (Project Acceleration in a Controlled Environment) and SPEED (Swift Pragmatic and Efficient Enhancement Delivery) to support greater involvement of the supply chain in the delivery of works.

Many respondents showed concern that focus on short-term affordability of measures would negatively impact financial sustainability over the longer term.

"There is a disconnect between operations, maintenance and renewal (OPEX) and infrastructure investment (CAPEX) budgeting that is hampering the implementation of joint P&L initiatives, aimed at improving the overall financial position of the railway."

There were several comments that stated that the 'boom and bust' approach to procuring rolling stock needs to end by providing clarity on volume with a rolling stock pipeline or industrial strategy. It was suggested that this could help manufacturers reduce their cost and advance innovation to help reduce OPEX of the industry.

Some respondents suggested that rolling stock lease costs are a significant element of rail industry costs and recommended the creation of a rolling stock regulator to ensure these lease charges are set at fair and reasonable levels. Evidence of a framework to support private sector investment in railway rolling stock was provided as a way to reduce purchase and leasing costs.

People

Several respondents felt that investing in people, reforming working practices, and ensuring the railway is seen as an "employer of choice" will be critical to the industry's future growth and financial success. Existing programmes designed to improve social mobility and diversity, as well as develop key skills were cited as examples of attracting and retaining talent. It was suggested that increasing workforce diversity will make better use of Britain's talents and better reflect the communities the railway serves. Opportunity to invest and grow the workforce in local areas was commented on by several respondents. These respondents felt a localised skilled workforce would in turn contribute to local economic growth.

Some respondents stated that those engaged in any aspect of purchasing, contract management and/or the procurement of products and services need the necessary skills, knowledge and, where necessary, qualifications to be able to manage supplier relationships in an ethical and sustainable manner, to minimise the risk to financial success in the future.

Some respondents highlighted skill shortages negatively impacting on level of service. This was illustrated by an example where train drivers have six-month notice periods to serve, and the training of replacement drivers takes 12 months. Respondents highlighted the need for a whole industry needs assessment to ensure trained staff are available to meet demand.

"Workforce planning is one of the key 'analytical' tools needed to ensure an efficient, cost effective and financially stable rail sector"

Driving revenue growth

Recovery of passenger demand following the coronavirus pandemic

A large number of respondents acknowledged that the immediate focus for the industry should be on demand growth following the pandemic. In the short term, respondents reflected on the uncertainty that has arisen and on how people will travel and connect both economically and socially in the future. Some suggested that this uncertainty should be coupled with scenario planning to allow the sector to respond and invest with the best available information.

"It will be important not to overreact to lower demand in the coming years, for example through significant service reductions, which could allow car-dominated travel patterns to become established as we enable lower carbon transport options for people to utilise as behaviours and the economy evolves."

Respondents acknowledged that there is also likely to be greater competition for funding and investment across other government departments and parts of the economy. This could lead to short-term funding agreements that may cause the suspension or cancellation of planned longer-term projects. It was suggested by many that continued investment was needed, despite large losses over the past two years to ensure long term success.

Some respondents argued that with some demand returning post pandemic there would be a need for continuous improvement and further capital spending to expand the network and add resilience. Chapter 5 contains more comments concerning the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

New markets

Some respondents suggested that there was a changing balance between commuter trips and leisure/off peak journeys, seeing a growing new market with leisure trips filling the 'commuter void' they thought would be left by the pandemic. It was suggested that this would require a different way of thinking about access to rail travel at weekends and public holidays which could be viewed as peak times in future demand modelling.

Some respondents felt that there was a need for the sector to be more ambitious in its approach to developing new markets and expanding the customer base of rail. It was suggested rail look to new demographics (and the way they have responded to the pandemic) to encourage people back. Some respondents suggested using better marketing to target new markets which could provide a new revenue stream, specifically targeting the leisure sector, to highlight great leisure destinations or highlighting the environmental credentials of the railway.

Some respondents suggested there is an increasing environmental consciousness that will drive up more demand as people move away from driving, particularly for access to work in urban centres where clean air zones and other measures could be in place.

Other respondents suggested that a potential new market could be unlocked by making the network more accessible. With 14 million disabled people in the UK, removing the barriers to travel could unlock a large new market.

"It is clear from the evidence presented earlier that disabled people make significantly fewer rail trips than non-disabled people and travel less far on the rail network. Removing the barriers to access that prevent disabled people from travelling by rail potentially unlocks a very large new market, which could make a material contribution to the long-term financial sustainability of the rail industry."

Comments were also made that HS2 (High Speed 2) and the Integrated Rail Plan (IRP) offers an opportunity to encourage new customers to the railways and create new travel corridors leading to greater connectivity to economic centres.

Realising the full potential of the private sector

A significant number of respondents stated that delivering financial sustainability could be achieved through harnessing the expertise of the private sector to deliver greater productivity, cost efficiency and attracting customers back to rail following the pandemic. Respondents suggested that the private sector has a large and crucial role in the new model of the railway and should be a key partner moving forward. A collaborative relationship between GBR, operators and suppliers would better leverage their experience, capability, and expertise in planning, delivering, and financing schemes in the most cost-effective and optimal way.

Several respondents suggested that the Passenger Service Contracts (PSCs) should give the Train Operator Companies (TOCs) and Owning Groups the responsibility to manage revenue risk, including setting fares. Responses from businesses were concerned that GBR's intention to control fares and ticketing would result in a 'one size fits all' approach.

"The private sector can deliver value for money, grow revenues, cut costs and be incentivised to make the right, long-term investments aligned to an agreed, collaborative long-term plan. Contracts on offer to the private sector, such as new PSCs should be attractive enough to retain talent and experience in the industry."

Attracting the private sector with the use of longer and broader contractual commitments was suggested by some respondents to be key to the success of GBR in the long term. Some suggested that GBR should consider securing private sector funding and investment not tied to HMT Green Book guidance.

Several respondents suggested that GBR should ensure that Open Access operators' track access rights are protected and they are encouraged to innovate.

Private investment

Several responses suggested that GBR consider alternative funding sources and proposed alternative private sector focused interventions offering cost savings and value for money.

Respondents suggested that operators should be encouraged to invest in infrastructure that enhanced services, it was suggested that this was balanced with a subsidised approach to rural rail networks. Some respondents suggested that it was important that investment was made in infrastructure that serves multiple purposes with particular focus on linking transport to employment opportunities and connecting more isolated communities.

Many cited the need to fund new stations, with some suggesting that exploring the planning process to deliver financial contributions should be considered (section 106 planning contributions) from large developers and through other business investment from those who are looking to attract new talent to a place or region.

Supply chain

Responses stated that there is a significant opportunity for efficiencies and maximising value for money from having a resilient and capable supply chain. They felt that providing the supply chain with improved visibility of future investment programmes will give suppliers the confidence to invest in people and technology to drive up productivity and reduce costs. Evidence detailed cost saving recommendations for the delivery of future electrification schemes. A case study set out the importance of a consistent approach to procurement and supply chain management, detailing the importance of managing supplier relationships to minimise financial risks.

Many respondents felt that the supply chain has a key role in reducing industry costs through productivity improvement, innovation and whole-life whole system cost reduction based on specialist knowledge. Respondents stated that they believed that sharing information and data with the supply chain would encourage more innovation and improve efficiencies as problems could be better solved as a sector rather than in isolation.

"When increased affordability does lead to increased industry investment and volumes of future work, this incentivises greater supplier-led innovation and industry-wide skills investment to reduce costs at a faster rate – creating a win-win scenario for the whole rail sector."

Balancing government funding and passenger revenue

Respondents suggested that there needed to be continued investment in the railways to drive up demand through increased capacity and improved line speed and a better service to customers at stations. They also commented that to increase revenues from fares, the services to customers need to improve, suggesting further investment in infrastructure.

Many stressed the importance of continuity, confidence, and certainty of funding as a foundation of financial sustainability, enabling funding to be obtained from third parties and allowing funding to be deployed more effectively.

Most responses relevant to the theme of balancing government funding and passenger revenue focused on the following topics:

- simplification of fares
- affordability of rail by customers
- continued government support and funding
- linking to other strategic outcomes.

Respondents' views on each of these topics are summarised in the following sections.

Simplification of fares

Many respondents said that fares across the network need to be simplified – echoing the responses received in the Williams Rail Review call for evidence.

There were comments that suggested moving to a dynamic, single-leg pricing arrangement would enable clearer, simpler and more transparent ticketing. It was suggested that changes such as the removal of peak/off-peak ticketing would spread passenger demand more evenly throughout the day. Research was provided to suggest that this would attract more people to the railway. These proposals were thought to also enable pricing structures that encourage higher levels of cross-border and regional rail use.

"The current fares and ticketing system is confusing and complex for passengers and detracts from the customer experience."

Affordability of rail by customers

It was recognised that increasing energy costs and availability, rising inflation, stagnant wages and rail fare affordability would impact consumer spending choices and have implications on the financial performance of the railway. There is a risk that passengers will choose other modes, for example private vehicles; respondents made it clear that the railway needs to compete more effectively with car.

"The recent introduction of flexible season tickets is a step in the right direction (recognising how our customers' needs have changed), however there is scope to incentivise the travelling public through the pricing of fares."

Affordability to taxpayer

Many respondents mentioned the need to save the taxpayer money and ensure that the railway is affordable, by maximising revenue from all sources. This included existing stations and properties, with an emphasis on how the whole industry can deliver better value for money to the UK taxpayer.

Others suggested that private finance could be better used to help support taxpayer investment, or that tax from other sources, such as road user charging, should help support the railway and ultimately encourage mode shift to sustainable modes, including rail.

"There is a need for a mix of general taxpayer revenues, farebox and some specific tax revenues. This can include road user or congestion charging, workplace or retail parking levies or looking to adopt funding models that incorporate property portfolios."

Some respondents recognised the importance of the railway to the overall growth of the UK economy and that continued taxpayer support was ultimately good for the whole of the UK. They said that state support is reasonably low in the UK compared to other European countries, and that the socioeconomic benefit of the railways should be balanced with taxpayer support. Existing working groups and tools were evidenced as a means of better assessing, understanding and developing the social value associated with the railways.

Continued government support and funding

Some respondents identified that there needs to be continued government support of the rail industry, especially given the impact of the pandemic. Respondents reflected that a long-term solution would be a stable agreement between the government and public transport operators to fund the gap between operating costs and whole industry revenue, in recognition of the suggested contribution that public transport makes to achieving wider societal goals.

Respondents highlighted the benefits of the Mode Shift Revenue Support (MSRS) programme, which exists to help incentivise new freight flows on the network and provides them with initial while the service becomes more economically viable.

Multiple opportunities to improve the financially sustainability of the rail network were suggested. These included using alternative pots of funding from private investment partners, smarter use and investment in technology, improved collection and application of data and better management of rail assets.

"The sector should also be open and innovative towards alternative funding sources, such as through private investment partners and through schemes such as land value uplift."

It was suggested that infrastructure projects can be costly and take time to deliver. In the short-term, and given current financial constraints, it is likely to be more cost effective and less disruptive to make better use of existing network capacity by spreading passenger demand through innovative pricing and new ways of ticketing.

A comment was made that government funding should support the rail sector's ability to pursue a transition to a sustainable future. Some respondents suggested holistic solutions that could be used. For example, capital funding could come with conditions that stipulate authorities produce plans to reshape their networks with greater levels of active travel.

Others suggested that it can be a disincentive to enhance funding by operators and authorities, where the asset is owned by a third party. Opportunities to encourage investment by joint funding streams, or ownership and operation of key assets by one body was encouraged.

Linking to other strategic outcomes

Some stated that rail and strategic connectivity is too often considered in isolation in business cases and investment decisions. They add that decisions should made more holistically, and that social value and quality of life metrics should be given a greater weighting in these processes.

Others stated that there should be a clear position on the treatment of revenue and that the return on investment in rail must be incentivised not only on the opportunity to share fares and ticketing and secondary revenue, but also on the achievement of the strategic objectives.

Harnessing innovation and technology

Most respondents stated that innovation and technology aimed at reducing cost, improving customer service initiatives, and improving revenue will be essential for the future of the railway in the short to long term. Respondents believed that the speed of technological change/development over the next 30 years should not be underestimated and that the strategic plan must ensure that the railway is able to adapt to and adopt new technologies at pace and not be locked into 'traditional' ways of doing things.

"Innovative technology remains difficult to implement and the rail industry lags behind other sectors of the economy and even other transport systems in deploying technology that drives cost reductions and efficiencies. ... there remains a strong case for increased focus and investment in delivery of innovations and new technologies as a basis for driving efficiencies and improved cost performance throughout the sector."

Some suggested areas where costs could be reduced through greater adoption of digital technologies such as remote condition monitoring to optimise maintenance costs. Battery technology was cited by several respondents in terms of reducing costs and an alternative to electrification for those areas where full electrification is not an option, this could also reduce the electrification CAPEX (Capital Expenditure) and deliver OPEX savings.

Innovation

Some observed that the Passenger Service Contracts need to provide flexibility and incentivise innovation, cost-saving and revenue growth, stating that these are currently set up to do the opposite. Numerous respondents saw GBR as the catalyst to create efficiencies and spark innovation across the industry. Some respondents stated that the industry must maintain an open mindset and learn from other industries to keep up with modern technology.

Some felt that government funding for research, development and innovation should be prioritised with innovation made central to industry structures and processes, by having the right incentives and freedoms in operator contracts, for example.

"…opportunities will require the retention of sufficient public funding to enable the pursuit of the non-commercially fundable elements and to leverage the private R&D investment required."

Respondents highlighted the benefits of integrated digital systems and robust cyber security and the use of common data environment and 'digital twin' technology to improve collaboration and facilitate lessons learned and best practice adoption. They suggested that this would lead to greater efficiencies across the network and across TOCs. A briefing paper set out the benefits of a 'value toolkit', designed to drive innovation while identifying cost effective solutions.

There were comments that short-term cost reduction should not hinder long-term innovation or investment which could deliver passenger benefits, jobs or unlock industrial opportunities in the medium to long-term. It was suggested that advances in automatic inspection and conditioning could be more widely adopted. Greater adoption of digital technologies for remote condition monitoring to optimise maintenance costs were areas where respondents felt that innovative approaches could reduce cost.

Summary of responses to Question 4 – Contributing to long-term economic growth

The call for evidence asked respondents to consider ways in which rail and the rail estate can find new ways to catalyse economic growth and prosperity over the next 30 years in the context of wider economic, social, environmental, and technological trends. Three questions were posed as follows:

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.

Response overview

A total of 263 (86 per cent) respondents commented and made observations relevant to contributing to long-term economic growth. Of the respondents commenting on Question 4 themes, 22 per cent (58 respondents) provided additional evidence to support their answer. The forms of evidence included reports, academic papers, research papers, websites, videos, case studies, survey, Office for National Statistics (ONS) data, white papers, books, strategies and presentations. Most responses tended to focus on one or more of the following five key themes:

- the role of the railway in driving economic activity outside the rail sector
- improving rail connectivity and capacity across the country
- enhancing the role of the rail industry and its supply chain within the national economy
- making rail digital and harnessing technological advances
- realising the economic benefits of rail freight.

The distribution of respondents with comments on these key themes is shown in Figure 6. Note that there were some comments made as part of Question 4 that were not relevant to the question or the call for evidence more generally. These comments were recorded as 'other' as part of the analysis.

Figure 7 Number of respondents with comments on Question 4 themes*
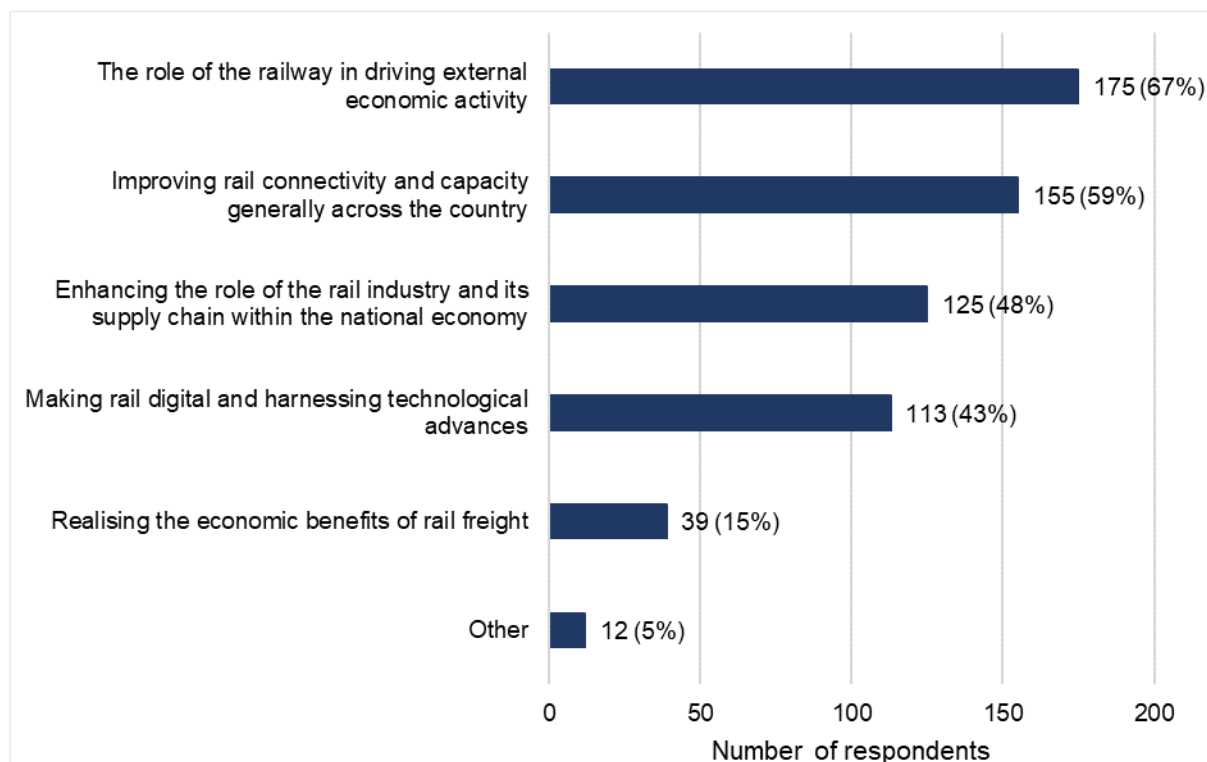
* Please note that per cent are of the 263 respondents that submitted a call for evidence response with comments related to Question 4.

Many of the respondents (67 per cent) with comments related to Question 4 commented on the role of the railway in driving external economic activity and 59 per cent made remarks on improving rail connectivity and capacity across the country. The volume of evidence provided within each theme was varied, the text in the sections below includes references to instances where evidence and citations within responses were provided to support answers.

It was noted in some responses that the drive for economic growth should not generally be undertaken at the expense of the social value delivered through railway investment. The need for inclusive growth was highlighted, with a focus on equality and diversity, recognising, for example, the role of rail in facilitating travel and opening-up related opportunities for people with mobility impairments and other disabilities.

Many responses also flagged the link with environmental sustainability, highlighting the importance of rail in driving "clean" economic growth and a decarbonised economy. Further details on responses focused on environmental sustainability are provided in chapter 6.

The role of the railway in driving economic activity

The railway's role in delivering economic benefits, particularly related to enabling development and regeneration (including, for example, driving a switch to higher value jobs), was recognised in many responses. These responses tended to note the existing and historic role of rail as an enabler of economic activity, with evidence provided on the wider economic outcomes of rail enhancement in places such as Sheffield and Manchester and in areas in Kent with access to High Speed 1.

"Rail can be at the heart of both the immediate recovery post pandemic and the sustained growth in the future. The importance of rail as an enabler of a strong national economy cannot be underestimated."

Most responses relevant to the theme of driving external economic activity focused on the following topics:

- providing connectivity to support economic activity
- creating economic hubs around stations
- integrating the railway more effectively in land-use/development planning processes.

Respondent views on each of these topics are summarised in the following sections.

Providing connectivity to stimulate economic activity

It was recognised in many responses that rail can play a significant role in increasing labour and customer/market catchments for businesses; reducing their travel times and costs and boosting their competitiveness (including in international markets where connectivity is provided to ports and airports); and providing people with access to better jobs, and training and education opportunities to help them upskill. It was suggested that these could all help to drive economic growth.

However, there were differing views on priorities in terms of the approach to stimulating economic activity. Some were in favour of driving 'local' economic growth through the promotion of shorter rail journeys to local centres. It was suggested that planning should be more responsive to emerging social trends in some of these responses, with the concept of '15-minute neighbourhoods' (focused on an aspiration for residents to have access to all necessary services and employment within a 15-minute travel time) cited as an example driving the need for better local rail connectivity.

Others felt that investment should be focused on connecting larger and denser urban and suburban areas and other important economic hubs such as ports and airports. The trade-offs between providing urban metro-style services, long-distance passenger services and rail freight on the same infrastructure was also noted, and there was some support for exploring non-heavy rail solutions to improve connectivity and drive economic growth in certain areas. Manchester's tram system was cited as good example of light rail driving and supporting local and regional development.

"Greater consideration [should be given to] the role of light rail and guided bus schemes with minimal infrastructure in rural and suburban areas to avoid the costs and timescales needed for heavy rail schemes"

In some responses, rail enhancements were linked explicitly with Levelling Up ambitions, with respondents highlighting the need for better local rail services connecting deprived and isolated places with more jobs and learning opportunities (albeit high rail fares were flagged by some as a barrier to realising rail's potential in this regard). Proposals covered both new rail connections and service improvements at poorly served stations. In some areas there were also calls for the railway to focus more on supporting the tourism and hospitality sectors, assuming that these sectors would grow rapidly after the pandemic.

Creating economic hubs around railway stations

The potential for significant economic benefits linked to station investment was another topic highlighted in many responses. The potential of this investment to increase commercial and retail activity, commercial development and employment was identified for numerous opportunities around the country. The need for a long-term approach was raised by some respondents who suggested that at present there tends to be a focus on short-term commercial considerations.

"Stations are critical touch points for the rail network. Not only in providing a gateway to rail services, but also in terms of their role as gateways to towns and cities"

There was support for using railway stations as community hubs to boost local economies, including proposals to provide more co-working and meeting space; and retail, hospitality, entertainment, and 'click and collect' delivery facilities to generate economic activity. Respondents to the Williams Rail Review also highlighted the importance of stations in local placemaking. Some respondents felt that there should be more collaboration between rail authorities and community groups to give local communities more of a say in how commercial opportunities at stations are realised.

Linked to the calls for more investment in ancillary services at stations, some respondents highlighted the need for the railway to focus more on commercial revenue-generation models, using innovative funding mechanisms to raise private sector funding to channel back into station improvements and the railway more generally. Some respondents felt there was a lack of current mechanisms available to link business revenue growth with railway investment and suggested this should be addressed by working in partnership with government and local authorities. Evidence was provided to support the importance of an effective partnership approach in stations' developments and on the opportunities that private sector investments constitute.

It was also suggested that development rights for land surrounding stations should be given to the private sector/railway operators to improve use of the valuable land and enhance facilities.

Integrating the railway in land-use and development planning

Some respondents felt that long-term railway planning is out of step with local and regional land-use planning (including the process of Local Plan development by local authorities), and that this is a barrier to better integrating the railway with economic activity. It was suggested in these responses that this is the reason why opportunities to integrate railway enhancements with new development are often not delivered to their full potential. Uncertainty around the delivery of railway projects was cited as an issue that can dissuade developers from delivering major sites, with calls for the Government and the rail industry to do more to provide confidence to developers and local authorities in this regard.

"The planning context for enabling regeneration and redevelopment opportunities, including both new housing around stations and rail links into warehouse areas and factory complexes, needs an overhaul so as to incorporate rail access into future plans around existing rail stations and freight connections, and enabling new ones."

However, the need for a 'two-way street' was also recognised, with some respondents suggesting that local authorities should be more proactive about enabling rail enhancement by freeing up land for development around stations, including selling existing Council land and considering more use of the Green Belt. It was also suggested in some responses that local authorities could do more to reduce car ownership and promote the use of the railway in developments close to stations, for example through more stringent requirements on car parking provision and better public transport and active mode connections to stations.

A more proactive approach to joint working on both sides was highlighted as a solution to the issues summarised above. Partnerships were flagged as potential vehicles for raising more awareness among local authorities, communities and businesses about rail planning timescales and requirements; developing joint plans to integrate the railway with surrounding land-uses and development plans (including maximising the use of rail to support sustainable construction); and collaborating to secure investment. It was recognised that in some areas, particularly those with low land values, a more proactive approach by government would be needed. Organisations like the London Legacy Development Corporation were identified as potential models for driving railway-related development in disadvantaged areas.

Enhancing the role of the rail industry and its supply chain within the national economy

Some respondents pointed out that improvements within the rail industry itself could further increase the already significant contribution the rail industry makes to national economic growth, including supporting hundreds of thousands of British jobs.

"In 2016, for every £1 worth of work on the railway system itself, £2.20 of income was generated elsewhere in the economy… by 2019 this had grown to £2.50 of income generated."

It was noted that specific strategic objectives such as delivering environmental sustainability could generate a significant number of additional jobs and further boost local and regional economies.

Most responses relevant to the theme of enhancing the role of the rail industry and its supply chain within the national economy focused on the following topics:

- recognising the value of the rail supply chain to the economy
- increasing skills through education and training
- driving innovation through research and development.

Respondents' views on each of these topics are summarised in the following sections.

Recognising the value of the rail supply chain to the wider economy

Many responses highlighted that the rail supply chain is well established across the country and is a significant source of direct and indirect employment opportunities, including many highly skilled engineering jobs. Rolling stock factories were highlighted as examples of major employment hubs making significant contributions to local and regional economies. The role of the supply chain in boosting the economy by generating international business in addition to domestic was cited in some responses. Rolling stock orders and the involvement of contractors on a range of overseas projects were provided as evidence of the industry's contribution to the Government's 'Global Britain' aspirations.

It was particularly noted that some of the strategic objectives such as delivering environmental sustainability could generate a significant number of additional jobs and further boost regional economies.

The role of the rail industry's supply chain in boosting the economy by generating international business in addition to domestic was also cited in some responses. Rolling stock orders and the involvement of contractors on a range of overseas projects were provided as evidence of the industry's contribution to the Government's 'Global Britain' aspirations.

It was noted that government commitments to long-term domestic pipelines for enhancement, renewal, and maintenance spending created certainty for contractors, allowing them to hire more staff and invest in new technology to improve productivity and drive growth. There were also proposals that the industry should transition to a more 'outcome focused' procurement model in some circumstances, where suppliers are paid based on the benefits realised from rail schemes and incentivised to boost productivity. The importance of establishing and maintaining strong partnerships between rail authorities and contractors were cited in this regard.

Increasing skills through education and training

The rail industry's role in driving wider economic growth by supporting the development of skills through education and training was also raised in some responses. Investment in schools and further education (particularly to promote science, technology, engineering and mathematics) and sponsorship for academic projects by the rail supply chain were highlighted as examples.

It was suggested in some quarters that prior to the Williams review, fragmentation in the rail industry had led to a loss of knowledge and a lack of knowledge-sharing. Some respondents felt that GBR could make improvements by establishing an enhanced and more integrated operating model to increase productivity. Various proposals were put forward in responses linked to this, including better integrating staff in different teams; establishing career paths to encourage fresh thinking into the industry; and making the railway more attractive generally as an employer (granting railway workers 'key worker' status was cited as an example in this regard).

Driving innovation through research and development

Driving innovation through research and development was also highlighted as a key contribution of the rail industry to economic growth. Some responses provided specific examples of centres of excellence and research and development facilities that generate benefits in advancing the use of more effective and cost-saving technology on the railway and by providing highly skilled jobs boosting local economies. Providing opportunities for small and medium enterprises to develop through such initiatives was also flagged as an additional economic benefit by some respondents.

"The rail supply chain is highly innovative – and this has strong potential to contribute to long-term economic growth and development as well as the Government's aim to cement the UK as a global science and technology superpower"

Some respondents indicated that research and development in the rail industry should be guided by the Rail Technical Strategy and coordinated through the UK Rail Research and Innovation Network (UKKRIN). There were suggestions that more incentives should be put in place to encourage the industry to invest more in research and development as part of an outcome-focused innovation strategy. Improving links and collaboration with academia and with international industry partners were among suggestions to facilitate this, and it was noted that such partnerships provided a basis for securing an increase in innovation funding either from government or the private sector. Some responses noted that the rail industry generally could also make a more effective contribution to national innovation strategies for other sectors (for example digital and power) to benefit from cross-sectoral improvements.

Realising the economic benefits of rail freight

Some responses highlighted the important, multi-dimensional role played by rail freight in the national economy. This encompasses supporting complex national and international supply chains as well as the construction industry (for example through the transport of aggregates

and the removal of waste from large sites). Some responses also mentioned the socio-economic benefits of rail freight, driven by businesses clustering around rail freight facilities, and the local and regional economic benefits generated by industries that are reliant on rail freight (for example biomass power generation).

"Rail freight… makes a significant contribution to UK PLC by delivering £2.45 billion in economic and social benefits annually, with 90% of these benefits occurring outside of London and the South East."

Among these responses there was support for initiatives to encourage more mode shift of freight to rail, with some highlighting the increasing challenges faced by the road haulage industry related to congestion, fuel costs, and driver shortages as a reason for action.

A key area of focus in many responses was the need for a more flexible approach to rail freight, better using new and emerging technologies. Various proposals were put forward, including encouraging the use of short, fast, self-propelled bi-directional freight multiple units to compete for domestic palletised and intermodal flows; allocated capacity on passenger services to carrying light-weight freight; gauge-enhanced lines to allow trailers on trains between major cities; digital automatic coupling; and autonomous wagons and shunting services. There were also calls to improve integration with road freight, including for example highlighting the potential for trains to carry lorry semi-trailers. These initiatives were seen by some as a means of introducing new customers to the rail freight sector.

In parallel, some responses also made the case for a greater focus on increasing line and terminal capacity on the network for rail freight on strategically important rail routes, noting particularly that siding capacity is important for the transport of bulk freight.

Making rail digital and harnessing technological advances

Many of the responses which referred to the link between the railway and the wider economy referred to making better use of digital technology as a facilitator for growth. Some called for more use of digital technology to improve railway operations and increase capacity and performance, referring for example to the potential for digital signalling to increase operational flexibility or the use of driverless trains. The use of various digital technology as a facilitator for more efficient and cost-effective renewal and maintenance of railway assets was also identified in several responses.

"Effective delivery of plans to digitalise Britain's railway will bring a range of benefits to Britain's rail network and to the broader economy, including: increased reliability of track infrastructure, increased train punctuality, better information for passengers and freight users, and improving resilience to the impacts of climate change."

In other responses, digital technology was seen as a primary enabler of making the railway more attractive to passengers through the provision of real-time, multi-modal travel

information and integrated ticketing and payment systems (GPS-driven account-based ticketing and barcode technology to improve interchange were two examples suggested). The opportunity to use such systems to incentivise customer spending on the railway was also raised, for example through introducing digital reward points redeemable with the railway's commercial partners. It was felt that better use could be made of digital technology to advertise the commercial offer in stations to customers.

There were also calls in some responses for improved Wi-Fi connectivity at stations and on trains to allow people to use travel time more productively. In stations, improvements of this nature were seen as important for enabling the provision of co-working and meeting space.

Some respondents said that the rail industry should be making more use of customer data for planning purposes. It was noted that digital data generated by customers on the railway was often collected and held by private sector businesses, and that rail authorities should be negotiating more effectively to secure access to it to support with planning and to facilitate revenue generation initiatives.

Finally, it was noted in several responses that railway land is ideally located to support the roll-out of fibre broadband, and that the rail industry should be working more closely with the Government and telecommunications providers to facilitate this roll-out and to look for opportunities to improve digital connectivity for rail users in the process.

Improving rail connectivity and capacity across the country

Many respondents also highlighted the importance of expanding and improving rail services across the country generally as a primary means of contributing to long-term economic growth. Some felt that setting and delivering stretching targets to increase rail use and mode share would be an effective way for rail to contribute to economic growth, and that these targets would be more effective if they could be shared with contractors involved with network development and operation.

In general terms, most responses relevant to this theme focused on proposals to expand the rail network and increase the frequency and capacity of train services; expand rail catchments through improved integration with other modes of transport; and make the rail network more attractive to passengers.

The responses to Question 4 in this regard were very similar to those provided in response to earlier questions, notably Questions 1 and 2, and have not been expanded upon in this chapter.

Summary of responses to Question 5 – Levelling up and connectivity

The call for evidence asked respondents to consider the ways in which rail can be used to improve connectivity and drive local economic growth, with specific reference to the Government's Levelling Up ambitions. Respondents were asked the following three questions:

a) What evidence can you provide for how the rail sector contributes to the four levelling up outcomes and to improving connectivity across Great Britain, including through cross-border services? How does this change depend 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?

Response overview

A total of 255 (83 per cent) respondents commented on levelling up and connectivity. Of the respondents commenting on Question 5, 22 per cent of respondents (56 responses) provided additional evidence to support their answer. The forms of evidence included reports, research papers, strategy documents, policy documents, websites, videos, films, project examples, government guidance and transcripts.

Most of the responses focused on one or more of the following themes, aligned to the four key levelling up outcomes:
- boosting productivity, pay, jobs, and living standards
- empowering local leaders and communities
- spreading opportunity and improving public services
- restoring a sense of community, local pride and belonging.

The distribution of respondents with comments on these key themes is shown in Figure 7. There were a number of comments made as part of Question 5 that were not relevant to the question or the call for evidence more generally. These comments were recorded as 'other' as part of the analysis. Many respondents noted that their responses to Question 1 and

Question 4 had already covered much of what they wanted to say on the issues raised in Question 5.

It is important to note that the Call for Evidence closed on 4 February 2022, two days after the publication of the Government's policy paper on 'Levelling Up the United Kingdom' on the 2 February. That means the majority of responses we received on levelling up would have been prepared prior to the policy paper being published.

Figure 8 Number of respondents with comments on Question 5 themes*
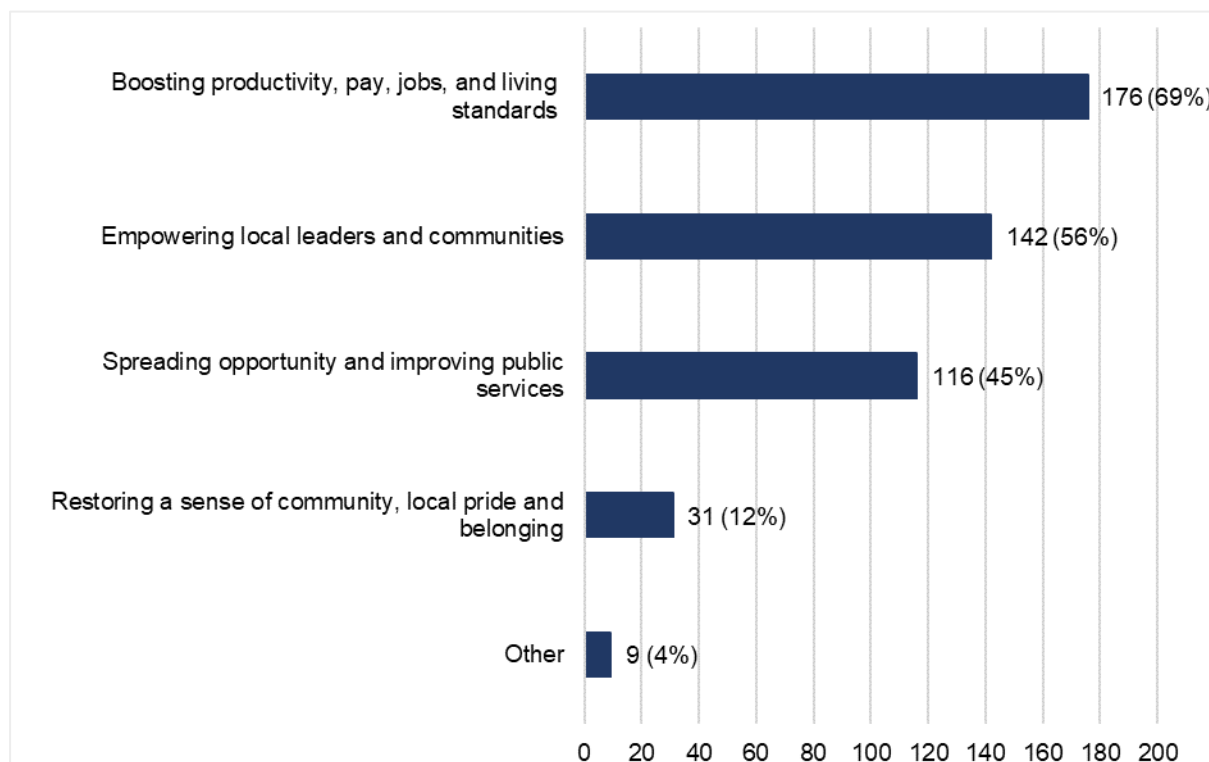
* Please note that per cent are of the 255 respondents that submitted a call for evidence response with comments related to Question 5.

Many of the respondents (69 per cent) with comments related to Question 5 commented on boosting productivity, pay, jobs and living standards and 56 per cent made remarks on empowering local leaders and communities. The volume of evidence provided within each theme was varied, the text in the sections below includes references to instances where evidence and citations within responses were provided to support answers.

Empowering local leaders and communities

Many responses referred to the role of rail in empowering local leaders and communities. Developing strong relationships with a wide range of stakeholders (including sub-national transport bodies, local authorities, residents, businesses, and other community groups) was typically highlighted as an important starting point in this process.

Some indicated a view that historically the railway's engagement with stakeholders had not been as good as it should have been, considering the major role rail plays in many people's

lives, both as a means of accessing employment and leisure and as a landowner. The post-pandemic period was cited as an opportunity for a concerted effort to engage and build back confidence, creating a railway more responsive to local needs and helping to drive demand for public transport in future. The importance of the railway responding to local needs was also a common theme in the Williams Rail Review call for evidence.

"Effective engagement and involvement of local stakeholder groups that bring together regional leaders, businesses, community leaders and local authorities should be a key step in the development of regional transport planning."

Empowering local leaders

Developing Passenger Service Contracts (PSC) was seen in some responses as a means for GBR to empower local leaders. It was felt that GBR should make key strategic system-wide decisions but should provide PSC holders and relevant local leaders with levers to optimise local delivery and coordinate engagement. These responses highlighted requirements for strong collaborative partnerships between GBR and relevant local partners; and embedding a 'can do' culture with operators looking outwards to customers and local leaders and not inwards to GBR.

Respondents also suggested that relevant leaders could be empowered in the process of setting local and regional targets for the railway through the Strategic Plan, including identifying benchmarks for how rail can contribute to levelling up.

Empowering communities

Community Rail Partnerships (CRPs) were also highlighted in some responses as an important vehicle for empowering communities to participate in and influence key decisions on the railway. Suggestions included giving CRPs an enhanced role in promoting local and regional rail travel and establishing better processes for them to bring forward and seek support and funding for improvements to the railway in their area.

It was felt in some responses that more support for Partnerships (for example with GBR) would contribute significantly to levelling up objectives and to increasing the value for money of rail interventions. However, some noted that steps must be taken beforehand to ensure that Partnerships are suitably inclusive and that a wide range of representatives are invited to participate from local authorities, residents, businesses, rail user groups, and other relevant community interests.

"The Community Rail Network's report into social inclusion shows how community rail partnerships can also be catalysts for growth and participation. The report shows that the benefits being realised through community rail activities are far broader than boosting passenger numbers alone."

Spreading opportunity and improving public services

Many responses highlighted regional inequalities in the provision of rail services as a barrier to levelling up. Some focused on specific issues, for example shortcomings in terms of rural services; connections between key economic centres; and connections between the nations within Britain.

Some respondents felt that more should be done to understand the key drivers for mode shift in specific areas so that proposed interventions would strike the right balance in terms of service frequency and connectivity. Integration with non-car modes of travel (including integrated ticketing) were also cited as important to driving cost effectiveness and increasing the catchment of the railway in some circumstances.

Improving rural services, connecting economic centres, and improving Union connectivity

Some respondents indicated that poor connectivity was a particular challenge in rural areas (including villages and some small towns), and that improving public transport services would improve access to jobs and education for low-income households and reduce social exclusion. Extensions to the rail network, including line re-openings, were identified as a means of facilitating such improvements, with some responses providing examples of how previous schemes have delivered benefits.

Improving connectivity between adjacent economic centres was also flagged as important in some responses, to ensure that connectivity-related opportunities are spread as far as possible. East West Rail was identified as an example of a scheme that would deliver improved connectivity throughout the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, linking major regional economic centres with areas of deprivation and potential housing development. Similarly Northern Powerhouse Rail was cited as a means of improving rail connectivity to help level up major cities in the north of England, for example Manchester, Liverpool and Leeds.

Some responses also stated that the Strategic Plan should ensure that the benefits of the railway extended as far as possible across the whole of Britain, including Wales and Scotland.

"Currently there are poor links into the North of England and it must be recognised that any long-term benefits to North Wales rail services will ultimately rest on the level and quality of services to the main cities in the North West. An improved connection to northern cities would open the north Wales corridor to wider possibilities in terms of relocation of business and industry, job, housing and leisure opportunities."

High Speed 2 (HS2) and the Integrated Rail Plan (IRP)

Some respondents reflected on there being uncertainty over plans to improve rail services and connections in the Midlands and the North. Some referred to the Northern Powerhouse Rail and the HS2 eastern spur projects that have been respectively scaled down and

reprioritised through the IRP. Both projects were identified as having the potential to bring significant regional economic benefit.

Many respondents acknowledged the opportunities that HS2 presents to enhance the levels of service and help rebalance the regional economy. It was argued that the delivery of HS2 should not be viewed in isolation and should be an integral part of the network, realising opportunities to improve services on the existing lines through released capacity.

Boosting productivity, pay, jobs, and living standards

The view that rail can boost local economies and living standards was expressed by some respondents, although others identified that it needed to be delivered in tandem with wider changes (for example improving education, training and skills) to have a meaningful impact. Some responses also questioned whether rail was the right solution in some areas, referencing investment in cheaper forms of public transport as an alternative approach.

Some respondents reflected on how a successful railway increases labour catchments and access to employment, distributing wealth from core areas with agglomeration benefits to communities beyond city and town centres. It was noted that rail enables some rural communities to diversify away from reliance on a seasonal economy.

Some also noted that capacity enhancements can drive population relocation, boost local businesses, and catalyse improved public services, reinvigorating urban areas. This was supported by evidence including reference to existing and upcoming local schemes. It was also claimed that rail can drive uptake of other non-car modes, including walking and cycling, resulting in health benefits.

Productivity

Some respondents also felt that rail could significantly support levelling up by helping places and communities reach their productivity potential. Examples of the benefits highlighted in this regard included expanding business labour and customer catchments, reducing business travel times and costs, and providing people with better access to jobs, education, and training. Providing the necessary capacity to meet demand was cited as important in some responses. Comments were raised about the need to control ticket prices to ensure that productivity is not stifled by transport that is not accessible to those on lower incomes.

"The key objective for rail here should be reducing the productivity gap due to poor public transport that currently exists in many cities across the UK."

The importance of the rail freight sector in boosting productivity and local economies was also highlighted in some responses. Rail freight's contribution to businesses and communities - by connecting ports to power stations, manufacturers, and logistics hubs - was highlighted, as were the wider agglomeration benefits of businesses clustering around rail freight terminals.

As with some responses to Question 4, it was suggested that many of the benefits of rail freight accrue to freight customers and wider society outside London and the South East,

making a significant contribution to Levelling Up. This was attributed to rail freight's links with sectors that are concentrated outside the South East, including construction, manufacturing and energy.

There was some support in responses for a national freight co-ordination team within GBR. Some noted that rail freight businesses operated nationally (including significant connections between England, Scotland and Wales) and that it was important that they were not subject to regional administrative burdens.

The role of the private sector

Many respondents cited a wide range of different ways in which the private sector is supporting with delivering Levelling Up.

The rail supply chain particularly was highlighted as a major employer across Britain and of significant importance to local economies in many places. The rail industry is a major purchaser of materials, machinery, plant, and other high-tech equipment, which provides significant custom for many external businesses that are relatively removed from the industry itself, including many small-medium enterprises.

The importance of the supply chain to regions outside London and the South East was particularly identified, with references to places such as Glasgow, Birmingham, Manchester, Derby, Crewe, Widnes, Goole, Northampton, and Doncaster provided as examples where rail supply chain businesses maintain a major presence (in terms of factories, manufacturing facilities, and large offices).

In addition to being a major employer in these locations, the supply chain was also noted in many responses for providing high-quality, highly skilled jobs, including in engineering, research and development, and senior management. The role of the supply chain in driving economic growth and supporting Levelling Up in tandem with other Government aspirations was also identified in some responses, with some suppliers for example expecting to employ significantly more people in future in fields related to supporting decarbonisation and delivering net zero.

Many respondents also highlighted the benefits the supply chain brings in terms of its links with education and training. The commitment to providing apprenticeship opportunities was flagged in some responses, as was engagement with schools to promote careers in the rail sector. It was suggested that these initiatives should be encouraged and expanded to attract new and diverse talent to the industry across all regions as an important element of Levelling Up.

"The rail industry relies on a diverse, resilient and sustainable supply chain and is well placed to contribute significantly to reducing inequality nationally"

Similar to the response to Question 4, some responses to Question 5 highlighted the importance of Government continuing to maintain long-term pipelines of rail investment. This was cited as a key mechanism to encourage suppliers to continue to recruit highly skilled staff, upgrade facilities and equipment, and invest in research and development. Each of

these elements was identified as playing a role in Levelling Up in different areas of the country. It was indicated in some responses that there is not a direct link between regional rail investment and the supply chain in that region, with investment in London and the South East often leading to supply chain benefits in the Midlands and the North of England. Evidence was provided on how investments in London' rolling-stock and infrastructure benefits regional economies and their supply chains.

Some respondents also felt that the private sector has a clear role in supporting the provision of rail services locally by delivering services at stations such as cycle hire and storage facilities, catering and retail and other entrepreneurial services that can be hosted at rail facilities. More private sector involvement and removal of barriers to do business at stations will have a positive impact and improve other aspects, such as safety at stations.

Restoring a sense of community, local pride and belonging

Respondents reflected on the transformational effect of rail on communities and how stations and good connectivity can restore local pride, while noting that meaningful local collaboration is an important ingredient of this process. The link with the first theme in this chapter was drawn by some respondents, noting that empowered local communities and leaders need to be involved in the creation of rail facilities in their areas as a first step to ensuring a sense of ownership. Engaging and collaborating effectively with local communities and enabling them to inform and direct rail's development locally, was seen as crucial to bolstering local pride.

"Local pride in railways can be enhanced when local communities adopt their local station and work to enhance its appearance by working with station staff to identify areas for improvement."

A common thread in many responses was the importance of creating a more integrated, place-based approach to infrastructure investment that looks across different transport modes and different types of economic infrastructure to identify the right interventions that will maximise the benefits in a particular area and be more accountable and responsive to the local community.

The link between pride of place and historic rail infrastructure was also noted in some responses, which indicated that it was important that historic assets were maintained effectively and used to deliver community benefits. Some responses focused on the importance of maintaining them for heritage reasons, citing the connection with the past and collective memory as important elements of local pride for communities. For others, these assets were seen as potential core drivers of regeneration, noting the importance of this being managed sensitively to avoid negative outcomes.

Many responses referred to the importance of maintaining and capitalising on core historic assets that were still being used for their original purpose, such as station buildings and railway viaducts. Others also referred to the potential of re-purposing disused buildings and spaces to drive regeneration. For example, it was mentioned that railway archways could be

better used and that there are many locations where their full potential is being successfully realised.

Summary of responses to Question 6 – Delivering environmental sustainability

The call for evidence asked respondents to 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. Three questions were posed as follows:

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?

Response overview

A total of 261 (85 per cent) respondents commented and made observations relevant to delivering environmental sustainability. Of the respondents commenting on Question 6, 18 per cent (47 respondents) provided additional evidence to support their answer. The forms of evidence included reports, academic papers, government papers, consultancy technical reports, project case studies, news articles, websites, blogs, videos, policy documents, strategy documents and statistical data.

Most responses tended to focus on one or more of the following four key themes:

- decarbonising the railway
- building resilience to climate change
- enhancing the railway to encourage mode shift
- improving the natural environment and biodiversity.

The distribution of respondents with comments on these key themes is shown in Figure 8. There were a number of comments made as part of Question 6 that were not relevant to the question or the call for evidence more generally. These comments were recorded as 'other' as part of the analysis.

Figure 9 Number of respondents with comments on Question 6 themes*
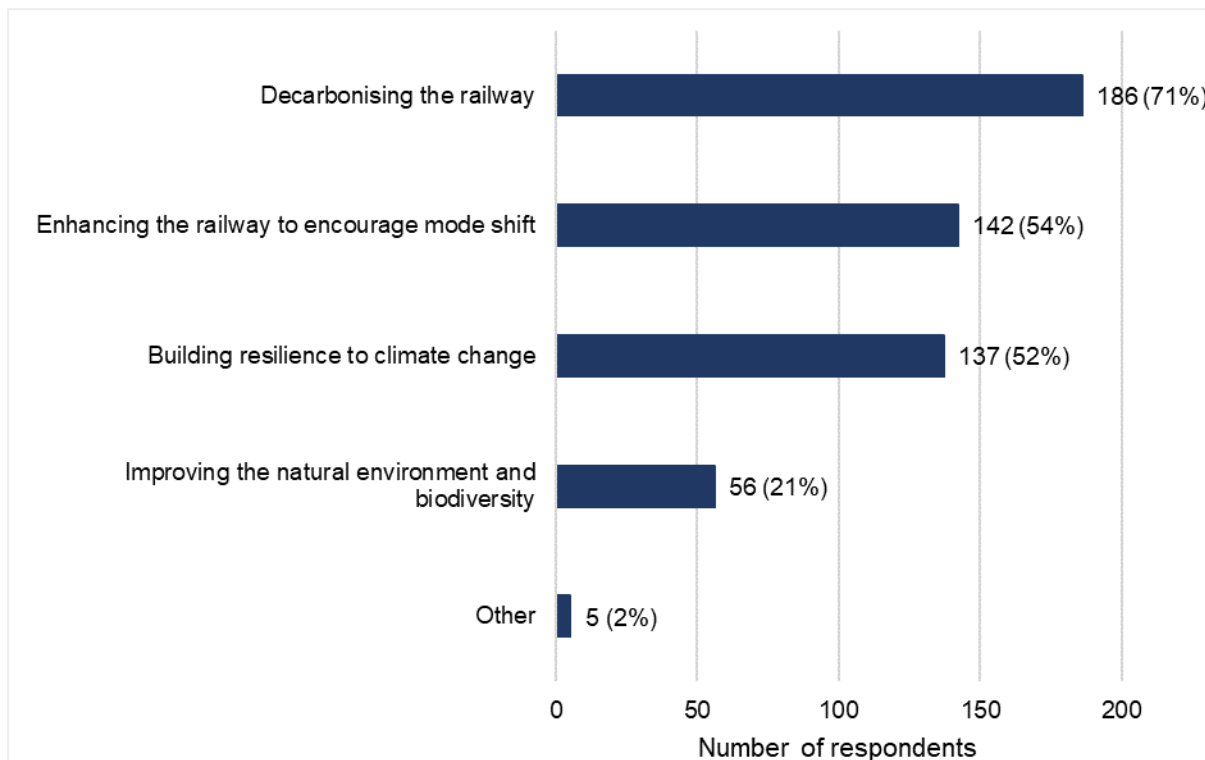
* Please note that per cent are of the 261 respondents that submitted a call for evidence response with comments related to Question 6.

Over two-thirds of respondents (71 per cent) with comments related to Question 6 commented on the decarbonisation of the railway and 54 per cent made remarks on enhancing the railway to encourage mode shift. The volume of evidence provided within each theme was varied, the text in the sections below includes references to instances where evidence and citations within responses were provided to support answers.

Within each theme, many respondents referred to the need to facilitate innovation and make better use of technology; to carefully consider the economic and social implications of the strategy and decision-making; and to learn lessons from best practice in other sectors to deliver environmental sustainability. These views have been referenced in the relevant sections throughout this chapter.

Decarbonising the railway

Many respondents identified decarbonising the railway as a fundamental contributor to delivering environmental sustainability; this was also a common response to the Williams Review call for evidence Responses were broadly supportive of the rail decarbonisation ambitions set out within the Transport Decarbonisation Plan and Rail Environment Policy Statement. There was also general support for innovation that was seen as a critical enabler to the decarbonisation of the rail industry.

However, some respondents felt there could be more ambition on rail decarbonisation. They considered there to be some contradictions between regional and national targets for decarbonisation and air quality and that greater clarity is needed on long-term targets for the industry. There were suggestions that industry wide interim decarbonisation targets could be used to track progress towards overall net zero targets. Some respondents expressed concern around the availability of funding needed to achieve rail decarbonisation targets.

Four areas of focus were identified by respondents to decarbonise the railway through the Strategic Plan, as follows:

- electrifying the network and modernising trains
- making the rail network more energy efficient
- harnessing opportunities to generate and use clean energy
- valuing carbon in the assessment and delivery of rail projects.

Respondent views on each of these topics are summarised in the following sections.

Electrifying the network and modernising trains

Electrification was identified by many respondents as an essential part of a strategy to decarbonise the railway. Many respondents highlighted a need to move away from using diesel trains, including in relation to making improvements in air quality and noise pollution. Multiple respondents recognised that in order to reach net zero by 2050, extensive electrification would be required, in particular to support freight, due to suggested limitations of alternative traction technologies. Conflicting views were however noted on the pace of change. Some respondents suggested that a continuous programme of electrification to drive down unit costs, would be crucial to achieving net zero in the rail industry. However other respondents suggested that the focus should be on high priority routes, with the cost of electrification raised as a factor.

The need to consider cost, value for money, and the wider implications of associated infrastructure (for example an increase in the use of overhead line equipment) were also raised be some respondents, and there was support for more use of new technology, for example drones, to monitor electrification infrastructure such as overhead lines. It was suggested this could help reduce maintenance and renewal costs.

The majority of respondents also indicated alternative traction solutions are required to support electrification in the roadmap to net zero. Hydrogen, biofuels and batteries were identified as potential alternative or supplementary power sources (in circumstances where electrification is challenging). In the shorter-term, an increase in the use of bi-modal (diesel-electric) trains was also promoted by some respondents, as was the increased use of technology (for example use of particulate filters in addition to stop-start technology) to reduce emissions from diesel trains.

"For parts of the network that have not been electrified, battery hybrid rolling stock has a critical role to play in decarbonising routes in the short-medium term."

The need to support road vehicle electrification to deliver decarbonised 'door to door' journeys was also cited as important by some respondents, for example, through the provision of electric vehicle charging points at railway stations.

Making the network more energy efficient

Many respondents also suggested proposals to make the rail network more energy efficient as part of a decarbonisation strategy.

These proposals included improving the design of stations and trains to reduce energy consumption; using technological advances in train operation (for example regenerative braking systems and automated advisory systems guiding optimal driving); improving power supply efficiency; embedding energy saving behaviours (for example reducing instances of engine idling at stations); and matching train composition more effectively with demand to reduce empty carriages operating on the network.

"Short term timetabling is… possible through technological developments to understand and predict passenger demand and the industry should experiment in flexing the service to match demand."

The Sustainable Stations Guide was referenced as a source of environmental-best practice and suggested as a tool for developing station sustainability, including enhancing existing buildings and adopting environmental practices within new contracts.

Harnessing opportunities to generate and use clean energy

Some respondents suggested that there was significant opportunity to use railway land (as the rail estate is extensive), infrastructure, and facilities to generate clean, sustainable energy that could then be re-used on the railway to reduce net energy consumption.

For example, opportunities to provide solar panels and wind turbines on station roofs, at level crossings, trackside, and on unused railway land were highlighted, in addition to proposals to use traction power generated by train operations. It was also noted that electricity is an increasingly valuable commodity and using the rail estate to generate renewable power presents an opportunity for energy security. Evidence of small-scale solar traction supply projects demonstrate the potential for railway-specific renewable energy production.

The focus in some responses was on using output to power both traction and non-traction energy demand, for example stations, signals, level crossings, and other lineside assets. In others it was also suggested that further financial benefits could be generated for the railway by returning energy to the grid.

Other responses also included proposals to develop carbon sequestration initiatives on railway land to support decarbonisation (particularly linked to new rail schemes) and to plant crops for biofuels. Integrating energy generation schemes with enhancements to the natural environment and biodiversity on the railway was also flagged by some respondents as important.

"Solar farms, managed appropriately, have been shown… to function as biodiversity hotspots due to the lack of pesticides, herbicides and human activity."

Valuing carbon in the assessment and delivery of rail projects

Some respondents also indicated a view that carbon assessment should be a key consideration in the assessment and delivery of railway projects. There were concerns that short-term affordability issues sometimes associated with investment in environmental measures would result in insufficient action. This was considered to have potential long-term negative impacts on the financial sustainability of the railway. There was some support in these responses for revising assessment criteria for new projects (enhancements, renewals, and maintenance) to place a higher value on carbon impacts over the life of new assets.

To provide a better evidence base for revising carbon assessment criteria, some responses highlighted the benefits of increasing the use of sustainability reporting systems on digital platforms to record material use, fuel consumption, and emissions on railway projects. There was also some support for writing more rigorous carbon targets into contractor requirements on projects to support with reducing carbon impacts during delivery.

"Net Zero requirements must find its way into contracts that ensure carbon impacts are measured and managed. This will create a level playing field on which the supply chain can compete and increasingly collaborate to bring solutions."

Enhancing the railway to encourage mode shift

Many respondents recognised that the railway has a key role to play in decarbonising Britain's transport network, and suggested that the Strategic Plan could support this as part of delivering the environmental sustainability objective. It was suggested that rail is more environmentally friendly than many road-based modes and that a key focus of the Strategic Plan should be to encourage mode shift from road and air to rail to support the drive towards net zero. Scotland's National Transport Strategy was cited as an example of government level commitment to promote active travel and public transport in preference to single occupancy private car use.

Some stakeholders observed that modal shift towards rail is the most impactful thing that rail can do to 'deliver' environmental sustainability. However, some respondents noted that rail's current sustainability advantage over other modes is reducing over time, for example as electric vehicles gain popularity. It was suggested that mode shift would have less impact on decarbonisation in the future.

Some respondents wanted a firmer commitment to delivering this objective through the identification of a passenger mode shift target in the Strategic Plan. This was highlighted in the context of growth target proposals and passenger mode shift targets for other major railways across Europe.

"Increased usage of local railway lines within a framework focused on urban lifestyles and travel patterns can play a substantial role through improving accessibility for everyone and enabling a reduction in car use. This will produce great improvements in air quality and hence public health. It will also serve to reduce carbon output from transport, in line with the government's targets on tackling climate change."

Four areas of focus were identified by respondents to encourage mode shift as part of the Strategic Plan:

- expanding the rail network and providing more services
- making the rail network more attractive to users
- harnessing technology to improve the integration of the network with other modes and land-use planning
- encouraging more freight onto rail.

Respondent views on each of these topics are summarised in the following sections. Other mechanisms cited to encourage mode shift included a reform of fare structures, changing road/air tax pricing and carbon pricing.

Expanding the network

Some respondents highlighted a preference for increasing investment in the railway to expand its catchment area, including re-opening disused railway lines and providing new connections to parts of Britain with no current train services. Many of these responses were focused on specific local and regional schemes.

There were also local and regional calls to accelerate the delivery of planned infrastructure and train service enhancements to deliver a more environmentally sustainable transport network. For example, delivering Northern Powerhouse Rail was raised as important by some respondents in the north of England.

Some responses covering network expansion also identified the link with the Government's Levelling Up ambitions as important, citing the social and economic benefits facilitated through the delivery of new train services.

Making the network more attractive

Alongside network expansion, making the railway and train services more attractive to passengers was also identified as an important element of encouraging mode shift. Responses relevant to this topic generally focused on the need to improve the reliability and punctuality of train services and the environment for passengers (for example through the provision of modern, user-friendly concourses, platforms and rolling stock); and on fare policy and ticketing systems to incentivise travel by rail (for example discounts for certain user groups).

Some respondents suggested the need for ongoing investment in rail to ensure competitive advantage over other transport modes. It was suggested that tax levies and other charging

mechanisms could be used as a way to incentivise mode shift to rail, by making rail relatively more attractive.

Improving integration and harnessing technology

Improving the integration of the railway with other modes of transport and local communities was also highlighted as an important element of delivering mode shift in some responses. These referred to facilitating 'last mile' connections via sustainable modes, for example through the provision of mobility hubs, electric vehicle charging (including for bicycles), high quality cycle parking and bus interchange at railway stations. Enhancing walking links to and through stations (ensuring compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act) and supporting passengers with taking bicycles on trains were also highlighted as key measures.

Making better use of digital technology to provide passengers with richer, real-time information on onward travel choices and disruption to services was also a popular topic raised as a means of encouraging mode shift. The role of technology in facilitating more integrated, multi-modal ticketing (for example bus-rail tickets) was also cited as important by some respondents.

Some responses in support of rail network expansion also raised better integration of railway and land-use planning as being important, to ensure that network enhancements are focused on growth areas across the country.

Encouraging more freight onto rail

Finally, some respondents highlighted the importance of not overlooking freight in the drive to encourage mode shift to rail. Respondents were generally supportive of more capacity on the network and improved timetabling to accommodate more rail freight services. Some indicated a view that the Strategic Plan should set out a framework for closer working between Government and the freight/logistics industry to identify priorities as a key measure.

Solutions were also proposed in some responses to reduce 'last mile' freight trips on the road network, including the provision of new freight terminals and inter-modal freight hubs. Opportunities to facilitate this reduction in road trips through better use of technology (for example end-user freight termination automation) were raised in many of these responses.

Building resilience to climate change

In parallel to reducing emissions and climate change effects, many respondents stressed the need for the railway to adapt to a changing climate. Multiple respondents felt that climate change resilience would be fundamental to the delivery of other strategic objectives. A number of responses showed support for Network Rail's adaptation pathways approach to managing climate risk.

"A nature rich future is a climate resilient future. As well as decarbonising through resource management approaches, like electrification and waste reduction, the Plan for Rail can also contribute by enabling nature-based solutions across their managed

assets. For instance, with appropriate vegetation planting / management, slope stability and flood mitigation can be achieved"

Some respondents expressed support for a 'live' approach involving continual review and adjustment of environmental standards and targets as the climate evolves. A key area of focus was on providing a flexible network, including where practical alternative routes for passengers and better mitigation for when disruption does occur (for example through measures to effectively re-route trains during line closures and to improve rail replacement services). Embedding resilience as a factor in all railway processes was seen as important to delivering a flexible network by some respondents. It was also suggested that infrastructure renewals should replace like for better as opposed to like for like.

Four key areas of focus were identified by respondents to help build resilience to climate change through the Strategic Plan, as follows:

- improving monitoring and forecasting of extreme weather events and their impact on railway assets and train services
- building more effective partnerships with local authorities, communities and key external agencies
- investing in climate-proof technology and infrastructure
- valuing climate impacts in railway project planning and delivery.

Respondent views on each of these topics are summarised in the following sections.

Improving monitoring and forecasting

More effective horizon scanning and forecasting to understand future challenges linked to the changing climate was highlighted as important by some respondents. This included making better use of dynamic, seasonal, and cross-sectoral data (for example information on flood risk and real-time weather data) to inform improved, flexible resilience standards and targets and to identify priorities for investment in future. A map of land at risk from sea level changes was cited as evidence of the need for an industry wide action plan.

"Investment in fundamental data science can ensure the rail network is better prepared for climate change. Combined with improved weather forecasting, it can enable infrastructure and fleet assets, and service delivery, to respond better to localised events such as landslips or tunnel flooding. Incidents will occur, but intelligently optimising the network will ensure that disruption is minimised and the response is 'joined up'."

Many respondents also highlighted the importance of better understanding the condition of railway assets. Embankments, cuttings, and seawalls were identified as particularly at risk due to climate change effects, and there was broad support for more use of technology (for example drones, train-mounted CCTV, telemetry systems, GIS capability and driver

reporting systems) to identify and prioritise at-risk assets when developing renewal and maintenance programmes.

The use of digital twins and cloud-based data sharing between different teams working on the railway and key stakeholders (for example the police and utility providers) were also flagged as opportunities to improve incident response, including more dynamic imposition and withdrawal of network restrictions (for example temporary speed limit reductions).

Building partnerships

Building better partnerships was also raised by some respondents as an important consideration for the Strategic Plan in the context of building resilience to climate change. This was flagged as particularly important in areas where rail services are vulnerable to the effects of climate change, for example areas prone to flooding. References were made to involving railway authorities, government departments (including the DfT and DEFRA), other transport authorities, external agencies (for example the Met Office and the Environment Agency), and local communities in partnership building. Local Climate Commissions were cited as helpful forums to be utilised by the rail industry. An example of local climate resilience infrastructure benefiting the rail industry was provided to illustrate shared mutual interests.

Some respondents also indicated a view that the deployment of digital technologies and products that support data sharing and reporting on climate resilience and environmental sustainability generally should be a key consideration when establishing partnerships.

Investing in climate-proof technology, infrastructure and rolling stock

A flexible approach to infrastructure provision was advocated by some respondents, who expressed support for focusing investment on high-risk locations. Upgrades to sea walls and the long-term diversion of coastal rail routes vulnerable to sea-level rise were flagged as examples, as was investing in snowsheds and mud avalanche sheds, flood management/defence, and improving drainage systems.

Better use of rainwater harvesting technology to reduce water consumption was identified as an opportunity with regard to improving drainage systems alongside other more general measures (for example recycling water and purified wastewater on trains and at stations). There were also suggestions for investment in rolling stock design that is resilient to climate impacts going forwards.

"Rail operators and rolling stock manufacturers should make far greater use of data available from vehicles or other indicative datasets to drive more efficient vehicle operations, responsive to passenger demand, weather, events and maintenance cycles."

More focus on and investment in research and development into climate proof technology and infrastructure was also raised as a key issue by some respondents, and there was some support for improving linkages between the rail industry and academia in this regard. Some respondents also indicated a view that more incentives should be provided by the

Government and the rail industry to encourage private sector innovation in this space. Examples of areas of focus for research and development raised included climate-resilient materials for constructing railway assets and new battery technology for trains.

Valuing climate impacts

Finally, in a similar vein to valuing carbon in the assessment and delivery of rail projects, some respondents highlighted the importance of embedding climate impacts so that decisions account for climate change-related costs in the future. An example of this was the proposal that cost-benefit appraisal of new projects should fully capture climate change costs and impacts in 'do nothing' scenarios, helping to support the case for investment to improve the resilience of the network to climate change. Similar proposals were also made with regards to the valuation of natural capital assets and environmental sustainability generally in project appraisal.

Improving the natural environment and biodiversity

In addition to decarbonisation, many respondents indicated a view that the railway should make a positive contribution to the natural environment and biodiversity as part of delivering environmental sustainability.

It was suggested that the Biodiversity Action Plan and targets would need to go further towards environmental net gains). There was also some support evident for strengthening accountability within GBR and the DfT for delivering targets, including through embedding them in contractor requirements on railway projects. It was also suggested that an expert panel or committee should be appointed to oversee management of the natural environment and biodiversity on railway land to support with delivering targets.

Considering impacts and opportunities in the early stages of project planning was also flagged as important, as was improving understanding of the current state of railway land to provide a baseline for identifying targets and improvement opportunities. Findings and recommendations from an industry Vegetation Management Review were detailed to support this approach. Some respondents recognised that Network Rail has already made progress on this, and it was suggested that better use of digital technology, including GIS-linked databases, could help facilitate further understanding.

Respondents identified two key areas of focus to improve the natural environment and biodiversity through the Strategic Plan, as follows:

- improving the environmental management of railway land
- initiatives to encourage biodiversity.

Respondent views on each of these topics are summarised in the following sections.

Improving the environmental management of railway land

Management of trackside vegetation was a key issue for some respondents. Planting in trackside locations was generally seen as a positive way of improving the natural environment, preventing soil erosion, and securing embankments. Some respondents flagged as important the need to improve monitoring of asset conditions to identify priority areas for intervention.

However, there was some divergence of views about how trackside vegetation should be managed. For example, some respondents favoured focusing heavily on species less likely to result in 'leaves on the line,' while others felt that reducing the planting of deciduous trees would result in negative environmental impacts.

"The Plan for Rail must both seek to minimise the impacts of the rail network on species, sites and connectivity, whether being considerate when operations are carried out to reduce disturbance or making sure that Invasive Non-Native Species are controlled. This should happen before maximising any benefits for nature that the rail network (infrastructure) can provide through nature enhancement delivery. The Scottish Government are developing planning policy and guidance that will direct development to apply positive effects for biodiversity."

Some respondents also indicated a view that other types of natural environment and the wider benefits of their location on railway land should be more widely recognised. The role of peatlands and wetlands in mitigating flood risk through water capture and storage was highlighted as an example of this. Managing flood risk generally was identified by some as an important environmental management issue although this was often raised in the context of climate change. Responses on this topic are summarised later in this chapter.

In addition to integrating energy generation with environmental enhancements, some respondents also felt more should be done to incorporate facilities to encourage more walking and cycling journeys through natural environments on railway land as part of delivering an environmentally sustainable transport network.

Some also indicated that railway authorities should look to release as much surplus land as possible for external projects involving enhancements to the natural environment. This would essentially involve handing over environmental management of land to third parties to improve integration with the surrounding area.

Encouraging biodiversity

Early consideration of biodiversity impacts (including for example impacts on habits) in railway project planning was raised as important in some responses. There was evidence of some support for the application of mitigation hierarchies, increased use of environmental impact tools made available by DEFRA and use of DNA meta-barcoding and eDNA to capture data on biodiversity impacts on rail projects.

Many measures proposed by respondents to encourage more biodiversity through the Strategic Plan were linked with proposals to improve the natural environment, including incorporating more green space and planting on railway land alongside more green infrastructure embedded in railway assets (for example, the provision of green roofs, living walls and gardens within and adjacent to station buildings).

"Vegetation adjacent to railway lines and crossing railway lines can act as a corridor of natural habitat which can aid biodiversity net gain and connect otherwise 'islanded' species and habitats."

Biodiversity was also a key element in the divergence of views evident on trackside planting with some respondents encouraging the use of robust and fast-growing species to support biodiversity. In other responses, issues related to train service disruption from trackside vegetation were flagged as a cause for concern.

There was also support in some quarters for doing more to provide for a wider range of wildlife through initiatives on railway land, for example looking for opportunities to facilitate dedicated wildlife corridors.

Next steps

Developing the Strategic Objectives for Rail

The strategic objectives guiding the trajectory of the railway over the next 30 years, and shaping our approach to the Strategic Plan, are set by Government. They embody the new way of thinking about the railway and its purpose, one where GBR and the wider rail industry will play a fundamental role in supporting Britain's economic, environmental and social ambitions, and in delivering the Government's priorities.

The submissions we have received through the call for evidence on the strategic objectives for the railway are being shared with the Department for Transport, with appropriate confidentiality safeguards in place. Although the objectives have been designed to be resilient to new developments and to stand the test of time, Government Ministers will retain the right to amend the strategic objectives in response to both the evidence in this report and as new trends and national priorities emerge.

The key questions we need to answer to develop the Strategic Plan

The Secretary of State for Transport, in the Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail, commissioned GBRTT to develop the first 30-year strategy for the railway. The commission underlined the importance of consulting our partners across the rail sector and beyond on the strategy as it develops. GBRTT has been working with the rail industry, with funders and wider stakeholders, including through the call for evidence, to develop our thinking and to answer several key strategic questions relating to the strategic objectives for rail:

- How does the railway perform against these objectives today and how might it perform in the future?
- Where and how does the railway perform well – what are its core strengths relative to other modes and how might these change over time?
- What are the key trends and uncertainties we need to consider and the range of possible futures for rail?
- What are the opportunities and barriers to improving the railway's performance against these objectives?
- What framework will we use to understand the impact of different strategy options and how might trade-offs be considered?

How we will use the responses to the call for evidence

The call for evidence submissions revealed the great wealth of thinking already available from across the rail industry and from wider stakeholders to help us formulate our views on the potential range of answers to the questions posed above. We will use the submissions, along with our own research and discussions with stakeholders, to inform the advice we will provide on key strategy choices in the context of the strategic objectives. The 30-year strategy must be built on understanding rail's role and how it compares with, and is

complementary to, other transport modes. We must explore how this advantage may change over time under different assumptions and the strategy must be adaptable and resilient to alternative futures for the railway.

We will also use the responses to the call for evidence to inform other strategies and policies, focused on specific subject areas, that will be developed to underpin and support the overarching 30-year Strategic Plan, continuing to work and engage with our stakeholders as we do so.

Further stakeholder engagement and publications

The call for evidence was a first step in ensuring stakeholders across the country were able to shape and inform the development of the Strategic Plan in a constructive and transparent way, but it isn't the only opportunity stakeholders will have to input and comment. We recognise the importance of continuing to engage with stakeholders inside and outside the rail industry as we develop the Strategic Plan, as well as working with them to develop a culture of mutual collaboration in the longer-term.

The publication of this call for evidence report, and its findings, is an important next step. We will also share further updates on our work and seek additional views, drawing on specialist knowledge and evidence from organisations across the country, as we continue to develop the Strategic Plan and the wider work of preparing for the creation of GBR.

We will do this through our stakeholder e-newsletter, website updates and through regular meetings or targeted bilateral sessions and forums to discuss specific aspects of our work. Continued engagement with our stakeholders is crucial to the successful development of both the strategy and to the transition to GBR, and further engagement events will be held around future milestones.

We are working towards meeting the commission for the Strategic Plan that was set in the Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail. The evidence provided as part of this call for evidence exercise, and the work on the Strategic Plan more broadly, will be taken into consideration in the Department for Transport's high-level output specification (HLOS) and statement of funds available (SoFA).

Appendix 1

Organisations that responded to the call for evidence	
Abellio	Community Rail Network
ABPorts	CoMoUK
Accenture	Confederation of British Industry (CBI)
AKW A+V Protec Rail GmbH	Cornwall Council
AllanRail	Costain
Alstom UK	Cross London Trains
Amey	CrossCountry
Angel Trains	Cumbria County Council
Arcadis	Cycle Rail Working Group
ASLEF	Cycling UK
Atos IT Services UK & The Nichols Group	Day Group Ltd.
Balfour Beatty	DB Cargo
Bedford Borough Council	Derby City Council
Beds & Herts Community Rail Partnership	Design Council
Bexhill Rail Action Group (BRAG) / Battle Chamber of Commerce	Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership
Birmingham City Council	Disability Rights UK
Black Country Innovative Manufacturing Organisation (BCIMO)	Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee ('DPTAC')
Blackpool Council	Drax
Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk	East Coast Mainline Authorities (ECMA) Consortium
Braintree District Council	East Surrey Transport Committee
British Destinations	East west Rail
British Standards Institute (BSI)	England's Economic Heartland (draft)
British Transport Police Authority	Enterprise M3 Local Enterprise Partnership
Broads Authority	EUROFIMA
Buckinghamshire Council	Eversholt Rail
Burton Joyce Train Action Group	Evo-rail
Campaign for Better Transport	Federation of Small Businesses (FSB).
Campaign for Family Friendly Trains	Fen Line Users Association (FLUA)
Campaign for Level Boarding	First Rail Holdings
Cardiff Parkway Developments Ltd.	Friends of the Shakespeare Line
Cellnex UK	G&W UK – Freightliner
CEMEX	GBR-Rail Ltd
Central London Forward	Gemini Rail Services Ltd, Alan Dick Communications Limited, Rail Order Limited, IPS Communications Limited
Chartered Institute of Highways and Transportation (CIHT)	Getlink
Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply	Global Centre of Rail Excellence
Cheshire West and Chester Council	Go-Ahead Group
Chinley and Buxworth Transport Group	Greengauge 21
City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council	Growing Mid Wales Partnership
City of York Council	Growth Track 360
Civil Engineering Contractors Association	Halifax & District Rail Action Group and Electric Railway Charter
Colas Rail UK	Hampshire County Council
Community Rail Lancashire	Hastings Borough Council

Organisations that responded to the call for evidence	
Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership	Milton Keynes Council
Heathrow Airport Limited	Mima
Heathrow Express	Mineral Products Association
Heathrow Southern Railway	Mitsui
Herefordshire Sustainable Transport Group	Moreton-in-Marsh Town Council
Hertfordshire County Council	MTR Corporation Limited
Historic England	Muslims in Rail C.I.C.
Hitachi Rail's	National Highways
Hitchin Rail User Group	National Pensioners Convention
HS1 Ltd	National Skills Academy for Rail
Hull and East Yorkshire Local Enterprise Partnership	Natural England
Icomera Group	NatureScot
Independent Rail Retailers (IRR)	Network Rail
Industry Standards Coordination Committee (ISCC)	Network Rail Wales and Western Region
Institute for Transport Studies (ITS)	Network Rail's Built Environment Accessibility Panel (BEAP)
Institution of Civil Engineers	North East England Chamber of Commerce
Institution of Mechanical Engineers (IMechE)	North Wales Economic Ambition Board
Institution of Railway Signal Engineers	Northern Trains Limited
International Air Rail Organisation (IARO)	Nuclear Transport Solutions (Direct Rail Services)
IPEX Consulting	Otterpool Park LLP
Jacobs U.K. Limited	Ove Arup & Partners
Kent County Council	Oxford University
Lakes Line Rail User Group	Oxfordshire County Council/ Oxford City Council
Lancashire County Council	PA Consulting
Leeds City Council	Peninsula Transport / Devon County Council
Leidos Innovations Ltd.	Permanent Way Institution
Leonard Cheshire	Peter D Stirling Ltd (Mossend Railhead)
Lincolnshire County Council	Porterbrook
Linearis Beratungs GmbH	Portsmouth City Council
Liverpool City Region	Public Policy Projects
Logistics UK	Rail Delivery Group
London Assembly Transport Committee	Rail Forum Midlands
London First	Rail Freight Group
London Gateway Port Limited	Rail Operations (UK) Limited
London Luton Airport	Rail Reform Group
London North Eastern Railway Limited	Rail Wagon Association
London Travelwatch	Rail Working Group
Manchester Airport Group (MAG)	Railfuture
Maritime Transport Ltd	Railfuture Severnside
Marston Vale Community Rail Partnership	Railway Heritage Design Advisory Board
Metro Mayor for the West of England	Railway Industry Association
Midlands Connect	RazorSecure

Organisations that responded to the call for evidence	
Reading Borough Council	Transport Focus
Riding Sunbeams	Transport for All
RMT	Transport for Greater Manchester and the Greater Manchester Combined Authority
Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead	Transport for London
RSSB	Transport for the East Midlands
RSSB Sustainable Rail Working Groups	Transport for the North
Salfords and Sidlow Parish Council	Transport for the South East
Scottish Association for Public Transport	Transport for Wales
Serco	Transport North East, Joint Transport Committee, North East LEP
Shakespeare Line Promotion Group	Transport Planning Society
Siemens Mobility Limited	Transport Scotland
Signature Rail Limited	TravelWatch NorthWest
SilverRail Technologies Ltd	TravelWatch SouthWest CIC
SNC Lavalin Group (Atkins)	TSSA
Solent Transport	Tyne Valley Community Rail Partnership
Solihull & Leamington Spa Rail Users Association	UK Rail Research Innovation Network (UKRRIN)
South West transport Network, Bristol disability equalities forum and South Gloucestershire disability equalities Network	UK2070 Steering Group
Southeast Community Rail Partnership	UKTram
South-East Lancashire Community Rail Partnership	University of Southampton
Staffordshire Chamber of Commerce	Urban Transport Group
Stagecoach	Vehicle / Structures Sytems Interface Committee
Stratford Rail Transport Group	Vehicle System Interface Committee
Sustrans	Vehicle/Track System Interface Committee Adhesion Research Group
Talgo Uk Ltd.	Vehicle/Train Control & Communications System Interface Committee (VTC&C SIC)
Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA)	Visa Digital Ticketing
Thales Ground Transportation Systems	Warrington Borough Council
Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce	Wealden Line Campaign
The Association for Consultancy and Engineering (ACE)	Welsh Government
The Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport (UK)	West and North Yorkshire Chamber of Commerce
The Rail Innovation Group	West Coast Rail 250
the Rail Supply Group Industry Champions'	West London Line Group
The Rail Wellbeing Alliance	West Midlands Rail Executive
The Settle-Carlisle Railway Development Company Ltd	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
The URBED Trust	Western Gateway Sub-National Transport Body
Timber Strategies	Wheels for Wellbeing
Tonbridge Line Commuters	Witney Oxford Transport Group ("WOT Group")
Tourism Management Institute	Worcestershire County Council
Tracsis PLC	Worldline
Trainline	Wrexham- Bidston Rail Users Association
Transform Scotland	WSP
Transport East	Wychavon District Council