



Principles for the rail review

About the Urban Transport Group

The Urban Transport Group represents the public sector transport authorities for the country's largest city regions (West Yorkshire, Sheffield City Region, Tyne and Wear, Greater Manchester, West Midlands, London, Liverpool City Region).

Our members are one of the biggest investors in the national rail network and have significant responsibilities for rail services in their areas, up to and including being the franchising authority.

Collectively we have also assembled an extensive evidence base around the benefits of high investment and devolved rail networks which can be found here: <http://www.urbantransportgroup.org/resources/regional-and-urban-rail>

The key principles which should underpin rail reform

Where we have seen devolved administrations or authorities given responsibilities for rail services, overall this has led to better performance, higher levels of investment and increased passenger satisfaction. This is because devolved administrations and authorities are closer to the ground and can more easily see and realise the opportunities for better rail services to support wider goals for local economies, meeting housing need and serving communities. Accountability for performance also rests in the areas served, rather than remotely in Whitehall, providing greater incentive to resolve any problems in more agile and concerted ways. The rail review should therefore be seen as an opportunity to **deepen and widen the benefits of rail devolution** to more people and to more places.

It is not within our remit to take a position on whether the rail network should be **privatised or nationalised** however we believe that devolution is compatible with either option.

We believe that devolution is also compatible with retaining a rail network that operates at a **national dimension** including in terms of long term investment planning, high quality national intercity rail services and ensuring that rail freight remains competitive and able to take more goods off our congested roads.

Alongside greater devolution of responsibilities we also need to see **much greater long term investment** in city region rail networks. Expanded rail networks are essential if city region economies are to grow and housing need is to be met in a way that also reduces carbon emissions, improves air quality, avoids car-dependent sprawl and allows more streets to be places for people rather than for road vehicles. However there is widespread frustration about the high and rising costs of schemes

which bring about improvements to services on the national rail network which serve the city regions. There is also frustration about the way in which schemes which city region transport authorities are funding can drift out with impunity in terms of costs and timescales. Any restructuring of the rail industry should have as one of its objectives **improving efficiency, competency in project management, cost containment and accountability in the delivery of rail infrastructure schemes.**

There can be benefits in better **integrating rail infrastructure and operations.** These include operational benefits in terms of responding to planned or unplanned disruption as well as longer run benefits around coordinated investment in track and trains. There are also many different options for how greater integration of infrastructure and operations could occur at both a spatial level and in terms of the degree of integration. These in turn are overlaid by different options for the governance, oversight and organisational status of the bodies involved. The many possible variations could also bring with them different elements of risk. These include: protecting the interests of services which cross organisational borders; whether the long term stewardship and investment needs of the network will be maintained; and retaining the skills, expertise and research and development capacity to ensure the safe and efficient maintenance and development of rail infrastructure.

As devolved bodies serving city regions we would want to be assured that if there is to be greater integration of track and train that the following objectives are central to the evaluation of the options:

- Devolved authorities should have the option of taking an **enhanced role in the delivery of infrastructure schemes** on the national rail network up to and including taking over infrastructure where they have the capacity and ambition to do so. This could be for example to deliver schemes which would not happen due to wider rail industry priorities (devolved authorities have already undertaken such schemes including at Manchester Airport and on London Overground); taking over single routes, or relatively self-contained sub sections of the network, where devolved authorities are best placed to deliver transformational schemes (such as tram-train conversion) or to bring about efficiencies through integration of infrastructure and operational management.
- Devolved authorities should have the option of taking an enhanced role in the ownership, management and oversight of **stations** where they have the capacity and ambition to do so.
- Any restructuring of the organisation of the rail network, either spatially or vertically or both, should **map on to a devolving UK** in terms of both facilitating existing devolved arrangements as well as future aspirations for devolved arrangements. Devolved authorities should also have a meaningful role in the governance and decision making process in any new structure.

- Any restructuring should ensure that investment in the railway (both on maintenance and on enhancements) is guided by a **broad set of objectives** that recognise and reflect rail's wider role in achieving social, environmental and economic priorities including rail's role in meeting housing need, reducing road congestion, improving access to opportunity for all and supporting regional economies.
- Given that the infrastructure of the railways is a long term asset for the country as a whole, as well as for the regions and cities it serves, any restructuring should ensure that there is good long term **stewardship** of that infrastructure, that investment in the network as a whole is balanced and that investment decisions are not skewed toward towards purely commercial interests or short term gain.
- Building on the good **safety** record of the current structure should be paramount.
- The rail sector is short of critical engineering skills and the workforce is both ageing and does not reflect the diversity of the society it serves. Any restructuring should prioritise and accelerate, rather than side-line or undermine, the railway industry's current efforts to **develop the skills base it needs and widen the diversity of its workforce.**
- The rail sector is a significant employer and purchaser of goods and services. Any restructuring should seek to ensure that the employment and purchasing policies of the railway contribute to wider objectives of **improving skills, providing good long-term jobs and building a stronger UK supply chain** across the country.