

Whole Industry Strategic Plan

Call for Evidence Response Form

09/12/2021

Responding to this Call for Evidence

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

You may respond as an individual or on behalf of an organisation or organisations (please let us know all the organisations you are responding on behalf of) and can submit a response in the following ways:

- Online via the call for evidence [webpage](#).
- Via email to cfe@gbrtt.co.uk using this response template.

We recommend you read the call for evidence launch document in full before submitting your response.

Please send the completed response form, along with any supporting information or attachments, to cfe@gbrtt.co.uk.

In the email subject please include your name and/or organisation and 'WISP call for evidence submission'.

Confidentiality

The information you send to us may be shared with colleagues within Great British Railways Transition Team, the Department for Transport and published or referred to in the Response Summary Report response document. All information contained in your response may be subject to publication or disclosure if requested under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. If you want any information in your response to the call for evidence to be kept confidential, or if it contains sensitive information, you should explain why and identify the information clearly within your response. Extracts from responses used within the Response Summary Report will be agreed with the responder before publication, where information is not already in the public domain.

I am responding on behalf of: *

Chose an item.

If you are responding as an individual, please move to Section 2. If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, please fill in Section 1 and Section 2.

Section 1 – Organisation Details

Organisation name(s)*

Urban Transport Group

Please identify the category, or categories that best describes your organisation(s)*

If multiple categories apply, please list within the “other” field below.

Choose an item.

If other, please state

Membership body for public transport authorities serving the largest urban areas in England

Please provide a brief description of the organisation(s) you are responding on behalf of.

This may include information about who the organisation represents, the size of its membership and how the views of members were obtained.

We represent the public sector transport authorities serving the largest urban areas in England – Transport for London, Transport for West Midlands, Merseytravel, Nexus, South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority, West Yorkshire Combined Authority, Transport for Greater Manchester.

Section 2 – Your details

Name

Jonathan Bray

Email address

Jonathan.bray@urbantransportgroup.org

Please choose the region you or your organisation(s) are based within*

If multiple regions apply, please list within the “other” field below.

Choose an item.

If other, please state

North East, West Yorkshire, South Yorkshire, Greater Manchester, Liverpool City Region, West Midlands, London

Please provide information about the reason for your interest in the Whole Industry Strategic Plan

Our members have:

- Significant responsibilities for the provision of heavy rail services as either franchise authorities or as part of wider franchise management arrangements
- Consistently been among the biggest investors in rail over a period of decades
- See rail as key to their wider social, economic and environmental objectives and strategies

Strategic Objectives for the Whole Rail Industry

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

[Click here to see more information](#)

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

Question 1

- 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.

[Click here to see more information](#)

- 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?

The objectives themselves are reasonable but the objectives suggest an approach that risks being top down / inward facing rather than recognising the need to work collaboratively with devolved authorities and administrations to support their rail aspirations which are in turn based on their wider economic, social and environmental objectives and policies.

For example the inference of the objectives is that it is the railways that will determine how best it will 'connect labour markets and realise agglomeration benefits' whereas transport authorities are better placed to do this (and also have a multi-modal perspective which the railways do not have).

Meeting customers' needs

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

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

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

Question 2

- a) Passenger: how will rail passenger expectations, including accessibility requirements, evolve over the coming 5, 10 and 30 years, what will be the driving causes of these changing expectations, and how can they be most effectively met by the rail sector?
- b) Passenger: in your experience, how can we most effectively monitor and assess customer satisfaction? What is a stretching yet realistic ambition for this objective and what measures can we most effectively use to consider success over the coming 5, 10 and 30 years? What evidence can you share to support your view?
- c) Freight: what evidence can you provide regarding the advantage(s) of transporting goods by rail and what evidence can you share for how that could develop in the next 5, 10 and 30 years? What do you consider to be the most effective role for rail freight in the existing supply chains served and those that it doesn't? How could this change over that period? In answering, please explain and take account of likely developments in technology and in the wider economy.
- d) What is a stretching yet realistic ambition for this objective and what measures can we most effectively use to consider success over the coming 5, 10 and 30 years? What are the interventions over that period which will be the maximum value for money, and what evidence can you share to support your claim?

This section risks being a narrow definition of what the customers of the railway are given it makes no reference to devolved authorities and administrations who are major investors in the railway including in new and refurbished rolling stock, station improvements and re-openings, new services and routes, marketing and promotion, multi-modal ticketing products and systems, environmental improvements around stations, concessionary fare offers which benefit rail, brokering and promoting major housing and economic developments, improvements to accessibility for people with disabilities and so on. In addition pre-COVID one in three trips on the railways were being made on services which were partly or fully devolved.

The success of the devolutionary approach and our aspirations for rail are set out in a series of recent reports including:

[Action stations: How devolution is transforming rail stations for the better | URBAN TRANSPORT GROUP](#)

[Rail Cities UK: Our vision for their future | URBAN TRANSPORT GROUP](#)

[Rail Devolution Works | URBAN TRANSPORT GROUP](#)

Devolution and interventions by devolved authorities and administrations has also brought consistent benefits for customer satisfaction and passenger experience including through

- Setting higher standards than the railways have set nationally including for quality standards and enforcement
- Greater prioritisation of disabled access (for example the new Merseyrail Electrics fleet)
- By and large full devolution has led to a general increase in passenger satisfaction

On freight we set out the need for further ambition and a more interventionist approach to modal shift for rail in a report we published earlier this week which can be downloaded here: [Delivering a greener future - Urban freight and the decarbonisation of the city regions | URBAN TRANSPORT GROUP](#)

Delivering financial sustainability

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

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

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

Question 3

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

In general the experience of devolved authorities and administrations of the costs and efficiency of the railways has not been positive. The streamlining of the structures of the industry should help in this regard. Devolved authorities and administrations can also play a role in the direct delivery of heavy rail investment and have a track record of doing so (from conversion of heavy rail routes to light rail through to projects at individual stations such as an additional platform at Manchester Airport) and the WISP should recognise this. At present transport authorities and administrations lack sufficient leverage with the railways to influence and manage cost overruns, specification changes and delays in projects which they invest in or which are vital to their wider plans and aspirations. A stronger role for devolved authorities and administrations could help bring about greater efficiencies rather than the railway marking its own homework.

Devolved authorities and administrations are also well placed to broker and bring together different sources of funding (both private and public) to rail projects and have a track record of doing so.

Contributing to long-term economic growth

Rail helps to boost productivity and growth through improved connectivity and job creation, enables supply chains, delivers goods to businesses and consumers and directly employs over 240,000 people (source: the rail sector in numbers). Among other factors, such as population growth, long term economic growth is influenced by emerging technology, and innovative, more effective ways of thinking and doing things. Over the next 30 years, wider economic, social, environmental and technological trends will change the role rail plays in our economy. It will be for the whole sector to demonstrate that it cannot only continue to deliver wide economic benefits in the face of a changed economy but that it can find new ways to catalyse growth and prosperity.

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

Question 4

- a) As Britain recovers from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, what evidence do you have for how rail can contribute to wider economic growth over the next 5, 10, and 30 years? What is a stretching yet realistic ambition for this objective and what measures can we most effectively use to consider success over the coming 5, 10 and 30 years? What type of interventions over that period will provide maximum value for money from rail's economic contribution, and what evidence can you share to support your views?
- b) In the context of enabling development and regeneration opportunities both in the immediate vicinity of stations and within the surrounding area, how can rail best facilitate improvements to places and local growth, through improved connectivity and unlocking commercial activity, housing, and employment over the next 5, 10 and 30 years?
- c) What innovative and modernising ideas do you have which would benefit the railway while supporting the strategic objectives? Please give evidence and make reference to how they would maintain or enhance the railway's safety record.

See answers to previous questions on the role that devolved authorities and administrations can play in realising these objectives.

Levelling up and connectivity

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

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

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

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

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

Question 5

- a) What evidence can you provide for how the rail sector contributes to the four levelling up outcomes and to improving connectivity across Great Britain, including through cross-border services? How does this change depending on the type of place where the sector operates (including in cities, towns and rural areas), and what are the most cost-effective ways at the sector's disposal to improve that further during the next 5, 10, and 30 years?
- b) How could the rail industry, over the next 5, 10, and 30 years, become more responsive to, and more accountable to, local communities and passengers? Please give evidence and examples in your response.
- c) What is a stretching yet realistic ambition for this objective and what measures can we most effectively use to consider success over the coming 5, 10 and 30 years? What are the interventions over that period which will be the maximum value for money, and what evidence can you share to support your views?

We note that the introduction identifies four key outcomes of levelling up is 'empowering local leaders and communities' which the rest of the text then makes no reference to or acknowledges in anyway.

See answers to other questions

Delivering environmental sustainability

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

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

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

Question 6

- a) What is a stretching yet realistic ambition for this objective and what measures can we most effectively use to consider success over the coming 5, 10 and 30 years? What are the interventions over that period which will be the maximum value for money, and what evidence can you share to support your views?
- b) What use can the rail sector make of emerging or existing technologies to reduce its impact on the environment and enhance biodiversity over the next 5, 10, and 30 years, and, in a proportionate and cost-effective way, help national and regional authorities to meet their environmental objectives?
- c) How can rail best invest in climate resilience, supported by smarter forecasting, planning and technology, over the next 5, 10, and 30 years and what evidence do you have to support your view?

See answers to other questions on the role that devolved authorities and administrations can play.