

# THE PATHWAY TO A BRIGHTER TRANSPORT FUTURE

Harnessing the  
opportunity of our  
local railways



## CONTENTS

Foreword	3
Summary	4
The value of our railway	12
The opportunity of our railway	14
The Government's plans for rail and devolution	16
Progress on greater local engagement, partnership and devolution on rail	18
Our proposition: foundations for rail reform that delivers for passengers, local communities and businesses	25
Key areas of influence	34

### About Urban Transport Group

The Urban Transport Group is the UK's network of transport authorities. Our vision is for city regions, their towns and surrounding areas to be green, fair, healthy and prosperous places, with public transport and active travel options that provide access and opportunity for all.

[urbantransportgroup.org](https://urbantransportgroup.org)

### About the author

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## FOREWORD

Ever since the first passenger service opened in 1825, right here in the UK, railways have shaped societies across the world in countless ways. From the early days of steam engines to today's high-speed trains, railways have connected places, people and ideas, shaping nations and improving lives.

As we reflect on the contribution of 200 years of our railways, we must also look forward – and grasp the unique opportunity to reshape the railways so that they meet the needs of passengers and businesses and help to support the economic strength of the UK.

Railways are a vital component of a broader public transport mix, offering numerous economic, environmental and social benefits. The UK's rail system contributes billions to the economy and supports hundreds of thousands of jobs. It moves people and goods, without contributing to congestion. It is essential for achieving net zero targets. And when we look at the value to our broader society, the railway is hugely important for social cohesion by connecting communities and providing access to essential services.

Yet we must be honest and acknowledge that our relationship with railways has been tested over the past few years, with punctuality, reliability, affordability and safety all areas where there is ample room for improvement.

It is in this context that we must welcome the Government's commitment to rail reform.

For the Urban Transport Group and its members, one of the most exciting aspects of this reform is the potential for greater devolution over the railways. This is a chance to bring decision-making closer to the communities served, better integrating rail into local transport networks.

Investment in rail infrastructure and services (locally and nationally) is also crucial for realising the full potential of the network. This is not just about laying tracks and building stations, it's about creating a network that serves our communities, supports agglomeration and spurs economic output.

And we need to improve the passenger experience, and make rail services more reliable, affordable and accessible, which is why I welcome the government's commitment to setting a powerful passenger watchdog and a review of fares and ticketing across the network. Enhancing the passenger experience is about more than just convenience, it's about creating a system that people can rely on and feel proud of.

The Government's commitment to rail reform, combined with the proven benefits of devolution and integration, offers a once-in-a-generation chance to create a railway system that truly works - a moment to embrace the spirit of innovation that has always defined this industry and to be positive about what reform can do to ensure that the railway flourishes.

I hope this report - published ahead of the introduction of the Rail Reform Bill – contributes to our understanding of the value of our railways and how they can be better shaped to deliver much more.

The future of our railways is bright, and with the right reforms, it will be a future that benefits everyone.

Jason Prince

Director, Urban Transport Group



## SUMMARY

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Working closely with Mayors and Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs) to improve the UK's rail network will enable the Government to kickstart economic growth across the country and to achieve its other key missions for clean energy, unlocking access to opportunity and keeping people safe and healthy. Funding for rail is an investment that will deliver returns on multiple fronts.

With greater fiscal devolution and powers to use investment levers to raise funds locally, Mayors and MCAs can ensure every penny is targeted and maximised to achieve the biggest impact on local economies and communities, allowing alignment with national Government missions and local plans for the economy, housing, health, skills and net zero.

Our railway already contributes over £43bn to the UK economy annually<sup>1</sup>, provides jobs, increases the effective size and productivity of cities and acts as a catalyst and focal point for development and regeneration.

The Government's vision for rail reform recognises the role of our railway as the backbone that connects and grows the UK's economy, with passengers at its heart.

New legislation will seek to achieve that vision, bringing railways under public ownership and control through the establishment of Great British Railways (GBR) and the introduction of a new passenger focused watchdog.

Crucially, GBR is intended to be accountable to devolved leaders (including Mayors) who will have a statutory role in governing, managing, planning and developing the rail network.

Democratically accountable Mayors and Mayoral Combined Authorities (or their nominated bodies<sup>2</sup>) are well placed to perform this role for the areas they serve. They can ensure that rail fully integrates with local plans for the economy, housing, skills and net zero as well as with wider local transport networks.

They provide a direct line to passengers, ensuring their needs and priorities are front and centre of a reformed railway. By better aligning the railway to the needs of passengers and businesses, there is the opportunity to grow its usage and generate greater returns to the public purse.

With bus franchising plans progressing at pace and many areas already running or specifying their own services - from trams to ferries, shared bikes to tunnels - devolved powers, funding and influence on rail remain the missing piece of the puzzle that will be needed to deliver fully integrated transport networks that truly serve their communities.

This paper explores the value and opportunity of our railway, the government's proposed reforms and progress so far in securing greater local influence, partnerships and devolution.

It proposes a series of key foundations that should underpin a new, meaningful role for Mayors and MCAs (or their nominated bodies) in our railways, ensuring the network delivers for passengers, local communities and businesses as well as against local and national policy missions.



## The foundations are:

1. **Protect and build on what has already been achieved on greater devolution of railway decision making and delivery.**
2. **Bring decision making on rail as close as possible to the communities served, ensuring alignment with wider local ambitions.**
3. **Create a menu of options for engagement, influence and control.**
4. **Unlock local rail funding and investment levers.**
5. **Ensure accountability.**
6. **Allow time for transition.**

Ensuring these foundations underpin forthcoming rail reforms will play an important role in setting us on a pathway to a brighter transport future. One which holds passengers at its heart and maximises synergies with wider policy ambitions at local and national level, through empowered local partnerships and continuing devolution.

Under each foundation, we propose a series of recommendations that will enable local leaders to have a meaningful role. We also explore some of the key areas that MCAs and Mayors will wish to have an influence over – timetabling; fares and ticketing; passenger experience and standards; stations and land; and network development.

The recommendations under each foundation and each area of influence are collated below. Together, they will set us on a pathway to a brighter transport future that fully harnesses the opportunity of our local railways.

## Recommendations under each foundation

1. **Protect and build on what has already been achieved on greater devolution of railway decision making and delivery.**

GBR should work closely with local areas to understand existing mechanisms and partnerships for local influence or powers over rail services, exploring together what works, what should be safeguarded and what could be improved or built upon in support of local ambitions and priorities for passengers and economic growth.

There is clear ambition among areas with existing powers, and without, to go further on rail devolution as part of transformative plans for local rail and economic growth. Rail reform should recognise and enable those ambitions, supporting with the capacity building and resources required for the task.

2. **Bring decision making on rail as close as possible to the communities served, ensuring alignment with wider local ambitions.**

Mayors and their MCAs (or their nominated bodies) should become, as a minimum, central partners (as opposed to stakeholders or consultees) working collaboratively with GBR to identify the best approach to ensure that railways deliver local ambitions for passengers, communities and economies whilst balancing the need for GBR to ensure an integrated network and offer at national level.

MCAs with the capacity and ambition to do so should – through devolved funding arrangements and service carve out – become the central decision makers on local rail services in their area (again whilst recognising the need for GBR to balance national network requirements).

GBR should have a duty to work with MCAs (or their nominated bodies) to ensure plans for rail reflect and enable the delivery of local ambitions for growth and for rail, as set out, for example, in Local Growth Plans (and associated Local Transport Plans and strategies).

Where local ambitions for rail cannot be met, GBR should be transparent as to the reasons why and work collaboratively with MCAs or their nominated bodies to identify constructive ways forward.

Mechanisms for local influence and control over rail should allow for MCAs and other partners, such as neighbouring authorities or nations to work collectively with GBR where this contributes to simpler engagement mechanisms, makes sense for local travel patterns or where strategic plans are likely to impact across boundaries. The form of any such groupings should be determined locally and convened by local partners.

MCAs (or their nominated bodies) should be enabled to enter into statutory partnership agreements with GBR, supported by devolved funding, to secure the provision of railway services that the MCA considers most important to ensure an integrated and efficient public transport network that meets the needs, priorities and ambitions of its people and places.

### 3. Create a menu of options for engagement, influence and control

MCAAs should have access to a menu of options for engagement, influence and control over rail at local level. The starting point should be meaningful collaboration and partnership with GBR to deliver local plans and ambitions on rail.

MCAAs should continue to be able to invest in rail as well as have automatic access to options to locally commission services with commercial exposure, risks and rewards.

Where there is a financial relationship between the MCA and GBR, the MCA should become the local client for GBR, with more scope to manage, plan, locally design, monitor and develop agreed priority rail services and infrastructure.

There should also be the right for established MCAs to request service carve out from GBR, with MCAs taking on revenue risk and locally managing delivery for defined local services. There should be a clear pathway for how this would be achieved, including access to the operators' management accounts and transparency around key detailed data such as costs, income, performance and staffing.

GBR should support MCAs to move towards deeper partnerships and devolution when there is readiness to do so and where the benefits can be clearly demonstrated.

There should be a clear duty on central government to devolve powers and associated funding on local rail to MCAs or their nominated bodies where they have the ambition and capabilities to do so, and where this would deliver enhanced outcomes for users, communities and taxpayers.

### 4. Unlock local rail funding and investment levers

MCAAs need financial devolution, fiscal freedoms and local investment levers to enable them to raise and allocate funding to invest in the local rail network and to be in a position to locally commission services with commercial exposure.

This means working towards long-term, single funding settlements for local transport and unlocking local investment levers which enable MCAs to decide where investment will deliver the best outcomes, including determining the balance of spend between different modes and the ability to choose alternative delivery partners.

It could also involve appropriate devolved funding settlements from within existing local railway budgets to further enable meaningful MCA prioritisation and decision-making.

Mayors should have a statutory role, working collaboratively with GBR, in prioritising spend aligned with the ambitions set out in Local Growth Plans and Local Transport Plans.

In addition, the National Rail Investment Programme and Rail Network Enhancement Pipeline (or successor) should have a statutory role for Mayors in prioritising spend, aligned with Local Growth Plans and Local Transport Plans.

Funding should take the form of multi-year settlements, running for a minimum of 10 years and ideally up to 30 years, given rail infrastructure investment projects can take many years to plan and deliver. Settlements could be reviewed every five years to ensure they remain fit for purpose.

### 5. Ensure accountability

The relationship between GBR, Mayors and MCAs should be collaborative and transparent, including reciprocal data sharing (as pledged in the English Devolution White Paper).

GBR must also be accountable to local leaders where MCAs are locally commissioning services from GBR and/or are taking a financial risk on services provided.

Whilst a collaborative and open working partnership should avoid the need for such an intervention in most cases, as democratically elected leaders for their areas, Mayors have the freedom to hold GBR to account for their performance locally should it fail to meet agreed standards and priorities.

### 6. Allow time for transition

Resources should be allocated at national level for capacity building to support and enable the transition to the new framework for railways.

Transition to new arrangements should not put a block on work towards the achievement of MCA ambitions. Shadow GBR, should continue to work with Mayors, MCAs and their nominated bodies in the lead up to the establishment of GBR, ensuring progress can continue during the transition period.

## Recommendations under each key area of influence

Building on the above foundations, there are a number of key areas that MCAs will wish to increase their influence in.

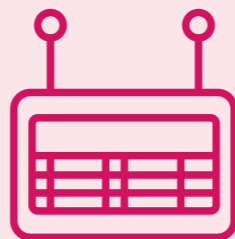
### Timetabling

GBR should endeavour to deliver the timetables Mayors want to enable them to secure local rail networks that best meet the needs of their people and places.

Working collaboratively with GBR, MCAs or their nominated bodies should have the opportunity to have significant strategic input throughout timetable development processes for local services, particularly for those where they have taken on revenue risk.

MCAs should also have strategic input into service planning and delivery of rail services from outside of the area, but which provide a core part of services between stations in the region.

They should also be statutory consultees for national timetable development in respect of services that serve or pass through their area.



### Fares and ticketing

Provided there is a clear business and passenger experience case for doing so, MCAs or their nominated bodies should have the power to make and implement decisions on local rail fares and ticketing products that work for their areas, providing appropriate subsidy to support the schemes.

Additionally, where this best serves passengers, contributes to reducing complexity and is technically and practically feasible, rail services travelling between stations in the area (but originating from and/or terminating elsewhere) should be required to accept the relevant local, regional or multi-modal ticketing products for journeys between stations in the area.



### Passenger experience, staffing, customer service delivery and standards

GBR and MCAs or their nominated bodies should work together to agree a local passenger experience that maximises integration and consistency across the local transport network.

This could include workforce development initiatives, local co-branding and multi-modal wayfinding, passenger assistance, customer information, safety and security. There should be the opportunity for MCAs to deliver those customer services themselves if they wish to do so.

Where it is taking a revenue risk on a service, MCAs or their nominated bodies should have the power to specify, or take on themselves, all aspects of the passenger experience and customer service delivery.

GBR should collaborate with MCAs or their nominated bodies on rolling stock strategy, with a view to working towards a consistently high standard of rolling stock across the country.

Where local areas wish to invest in local rolling stock to go above and beyond these standards, they should have the ability to do so.



### Stations and land

MCAs or their nominated bodies should have a clear role in setting GBR's approach to stations in their areas.

They should additionally have the power to enter into agreements with GBR to take on an active role in the management and control of rail stations and surrounding Network Rail land in their geography.

MCAs should be given the power to develop and use railway land in their geography to support economic growth and integrated transport networks.

This should include the ability to assemble adjacent plots to create development zones and to enter into joint ventures with GBR to deliver regeneration priorities.



### Network development

MCAs need the ability to develop shared, long-term network development plans – for passenger and freight services - with GBR so that all parties are working towards the same goals and avoid conflict with local plans for growth.



## THE VALUE OF OUR RAILWAY

Modern and efficient rail networks, for passengers and freight, are key to ensuring cities, towns and their surrounding areas can play their part in kickstarting economic growth, the Government's central mission.

Rail is also an important component in achieving the Government's other priority policy missions: accelerating the transition to net zero; breaking down barriers to opportunity; and keeping people safe and healthy. Funding for rail is an investment that will deliver returns on multiple fronts.

The UK's rail system already **contributes over £43bn annually to the UK economy, provides around 710,000 jobs and generates £2.50 for every £1 spent on the network**<sup>3</sup>.

**Efficient rail connections increase the effective size and productivity of cities.** They enable firms to draw upon a wider pool of workers, visitors and customers without contributing to the congestion that would otherwise hamper growth and reduce productivity. **The time savings for commuters derived from public transport in the UK's six largest cities alone are worth £1.4 billion a year**<sup>4</sup>.

Meanwhile, **rail brings goods to markets, with rail freight generating £2.45bn in economic benefits every year**<sup>5</sup>. **A single rail freight service removes up to 129 heavy goods vehicle movements** from the country's roads<sup>6</sup>, easing congestion and improving road safety.

**Railway stations themselves can also become focal points and catalysts for regeneration** and new commercial, residential and civic developments, encouraging inward investment and creating spaces and places that people want to spend time in, becoming destinations in themselves.

Rail unlocks **access to opportunities** connecting workers to jobs; students to education; visitors to attractions; people to shops, services, leisure and healthcare. It draws friends and family closer together.

**Rail can accelerate the transition to net zero.** Carbon emissions from diesel trains are already 2.6 times lower than conventionally fuelled cars per passenger<sup>7</sup>. Rail freight produces 76% less carbon per tonne than the road transport equivalent. The benefits will be greater still as more of the rail network is electrified<sup>8</sup> alongside, ultimately, the decarbonisation of the National Grid. These developments would see rail reduce to near zero emissions, as well as bring down operating costs. Over a 30-year vehicle life, **the costs of purchasing, maintaining and powering electric trains are £2 to £3 million per vehicle less than for diesel or hybrid equivalents**<sup>9</sup>.

Through modal shift, and as more of the network becomes electrified, rail is one of the most clean and green ways of transporting large volumes of people and freight. Some 70% of passenger rolling stock is now electric, as is over a third of the total UK route network<sup>10</sup>.

Increasing electrification of the rail network will see further reductions in the harmful emissions that damage **health**.

Rail also remains one of the **safest** modes of transport<sup>11</sup> in itself and as a means to remove cars and lorries from the road network.



## THE OPPORTUNITY OF OUR RAILWAY

### For the passenger

Our railway should operate with an understanding of the passengers it serves. Railways should be planned with knowledge of where people want to travel and when, whilst tickets and fares should be easy to navigate. It should be fully integrated into local public transport networks to offer a seamless passenger experience. It must be reliable, affordable, accessible and ensure passengers feel safe, respected and comfortable.

### For local communities and businesses

Rail services and developments should complement local priorities, joining up with plans for economic growth, housing, jobs, skills, health, education, commercial development, regeneration and tourism.

By joining up local development and rail plans, synergies can be realised that maximise the value of every penny of rail and wider local investment and ensure the network truly serves and adds value to its communities and places.

### For freight

Our rail network should enable more goods to be transported by rail, rather than road, to keep our cities safe, clean and liveable. Freight should ideally make its way into urban areas and development sites by rail before being transferred onto smaller, zero emission vehicles to travel into cities.

Rail also offers a sustainable means to move goods, materials and people to lower density areas, such as out of town business parks, construction sites and industrial areas.

### For devolved authorities

To truly serve and balance the needs of passengers, local communities, businesses and freight operators, it is vitally important that decision making on rail takes place as close as possible to the communities served.

This means enabling greater strategic engagement, partnership, influence and control at local level whilst ensuring a coordinated, consistent and coherent network overall.

Decision making at local level is agile, swifter and more able to identify, and proactively and dynamically respond to, changing passenger behaviours and market conditions.

With their in-depth knowledge of their people and places, Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs) are ideally placed to join the dots between different policy areas, plans and funding. They can also ensure that rail services integrate with wider public transport services as well as opportunities for walking and cycling.

Given that many MCAs already own and operate local light rail networks and increasing numbers of authorities are seeking to take back control of local bus services through franchising,

it makes sense for them to be able to ensure local rail can form part of a fully integrated local transport network and maximises its contribution to wider local and national policy priorities.

The Government's plans for rail and devolution recognise the opportunity that a meaningful role for democratically accountable local leaders and bodies presents in better aligning the railway with the needs of passengers as well as policy priorities at local and national level.

### For national government

Rail has a vital role to play in achieving each of the Government's missions, particularly its central mission of economic growth. Greater local engagement, influence and devolution of policy and funding levers brings decision making and investment closer to the communities and businesses served. This makes it more likely that the network will meet local needs, therefore growing usage. In turn, this generates a greater return to the public purse as well as attracting external investment.

With greater fiscal devolution and powers to use investment levers to raise funds locally, Mayors and MCAs can ensure every penny is targeted and maximised to achieve the biggest impact on local economies and communities, allowing alignment with Government missions and with local plans for the economy, housing, health, skills and net zero.

Growing usage, together with greater opportunities to raise investment locally through devolved mechanisms, will support MCAs to reduce reliance on central government funds over time.





## THE GOVERNMENT'S PLANS FOR RAIL AND DEVOLUTION

In 'Getting Britain Moving: Labour's Plan to Fix Britain's Railways', published prior to the election, the now Government set out its priorities for rail reform, recognising the role of the railways as the backbone that connects the UK's economy.

It aims to place the passenger at the heart of the railway and bring train operations under public ownership and control through the establishment of Great British Railways (GBR), envisaged as the 'directing mind' behind the railways.

GBR will be accountable to the Secretary of State who will set an overall long-term strategy for rail to ensure it delivers for passengers and freight. A new passenger focused watchdog, the Passenger Standards Authority, will also be established to independently monitor standards and champion improvements.

The plan also states that GBR will be accountable to devolved leaders (city region Mayors and leaders in Scotland and Wales) who will have a 'statutory role' in *'governing, managing, planning and developing the rail network, to bring decision making as close as possible to local communities.'*<sup>12</sup>

The Government is moving at pace with its plans, introducing two specific bills on rail reform in its first King's Speech in July 2024.

The Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Bill<sup>13</sup> aimed to deliver on the manifesto commitment to bring railways back into public ownership. It will amend legislation to make appointing a public-sector operator the default position rather than the last resort, as is currently the case.

The Government plans to fold the contracts currently held by private train operators into a public sector operator (which will ultimately become GBR) as they expire or if they are broken by operators. The Bill began making its way through parliament in July 2024 and has now received Royal Assent, reflecting the Government's desire to ensure that the legislation is ready as soon as an existing contract expires or is defaulted on.

The second, larger, bill – the Railways Bill - will establish GBR and pave the way for the creation of the Passenger Standards Authority.

Both bills will apply across Great Britain.

The King's Speech also laid out the foundations of a new English Devolution Bill based on a core belief that *'greater devolution of decision making is at the heart of a modern dynamic economy and is a key driver of economic growth.'*<sup>14</sup> It recognises that *'Westminster does not have the local knowledge, capacity and flexibility needed to take advantage of every opportunity available in every place.'*<sup>15</sup>

It promises to enable local leaders to 'take back control' and give them the tools they need to kickstart their economies and transform their places. This includes a more ambitious standardised devolution framework (rather than each place negotiating its own individual deal), including enhanced powers on local transport.

There will also be a statutory requirement for all Combined Authorities to develop Local Growth Plans to guide national government, Non-Departmental Public Bodies and Arms Length Bodies (including Network Rail) on the interventions that they believe will deliver growth locally, over a ten-year time horizon. These plans, together with Local Transport Plans, are likely to inform and shape local ambitions and priorities for rail.

The English Devolution White Paper<sup>16</sup> sets out in more detail the direction of travel that will underpin the Bill, including the concept of Strategic Authorities which will support the desire to move away from deal-based approaches. Instead, three new tiers of authorities will be defined in legislation, with different functions and powers automatically unlocking at each tier, with the highest tier corresponding to the greatest level of devolution. The three tiers are:

- Foundation Strategic Authorities: Non-Mayoral CAs, Combined County Authorities and Local Authorities designated as a Strategic Authority without a Mayor.
- Mayoral Strategic Authorities: The Greater London Authority, MCAs and Mayoral Combined County Authorities.
- Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities: Authorities who meet specified eligibility criteria, unlocking greater devolution and an integrated funding settlement.

More specifically on rail, the White Paper pledges:

- Engagement with all tiers of Strategic Authorities on **how local rail ambitions can be reflected in national rail planning processes**, including through mayoral partnerships, building on progress made with trailblazers in Greater Manchester and the West Midlands.
- A statutory role for Mayors in **governing, managing, planning, and developing the rail network**, to further embed collaboration and bring decision-making as close as possible to local communities (Mayoral and Established Mayoral tiers only). The exact nature of the role will be consulted on but will be based around a flexible, place-based and bespoke approach.
- The right for Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities to **request further rail devolution**, up to full devolution of defined local services.
- The option for Mayors to have **greater control over appropriate local stations**, subject to meeting transparent criteria (Mayoral and Established Mayoral tiers only).
- To work with Strategic Authorities to **explore how the land value potential of rail-owned land could become a catalyst for regeneration, commercial and housing opportunities**.
- To collaborate closely with Mayoral Strategic Authorities to **expand integrated, multi-modal ticketing**, with priority given to Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities with existing ticketing schemes across other modes.
- **Greater reciprocal data-sharing** to aid transparency and accountability.

When considering the proposed reforms, it is important to note the progress that has already been made towards greater local involvement and control on rail.

## PROGRESS ON GREATER LOCAL ENGAGEMENT, PARTNERSHIP AND DEVOLUTION ON RAIL

In the words of Sir Andrew Haines<sup>17</sup>, Chief Executive at Network Rail and GBR Transition Team lead, *'we are in an increasingly devolved kingdom: the people of Scotland, the people of Wales, the people of London and the powers of the Mayor[s].'* In England alone, devolved areas account for almost half of England's population and more than half of its economic output.<sup>18</sup>

If GBR is to be a 'directing mind' as envisaged in the Government's plans, it **must be a mind that is informed and shaped by the priorities of devolved authorities**, whether they are nations or city regions and their Mayors and local leaders.

Devolved authorities bring the local insight and democratic accountability that will ensure the railways deliver for passengers and maximise the potential for economic growth by joining up with wider plans for local transport, housing, jobs and other development.

However, devolved authorities have often struggled with the complexities and costs associated with the structure of the rail industry. Too often in the past, local rail services have sat outside wider integrated local transport networks, remote and unresponsive to local need.

That said, many areas already have some degree of influence over their local networks such as through working in partnership with DfT to manage local rail contracts, investing in stations or, in a handful of places (Merseyside, London, Scotland and Wales), operating fully devolved local rail services.

Progress on rail devolution to date is summarised in the map opposite.

## Rail devolution and partnership: the story so far



## Case studies – devolution in action

### Liverpool City Region CA – the Merseyrail network

Liverpool City Region is the first (and so far, only) area in England outside London to take control of its local heavy rail operations, with devolution of both the power to award the concession and the associated funding in 2003.

Overseen by Merseytravel (which is responsible for the coordination of local transport under the direction of the Liverpool City Region CA), the intention from the outset was to deliver a network that acted in the interests of the people and places it served. Merseytravel enshrined this principle in the Merseyrail contract, along with customer service standards based on feedback from its customer panels, including forums for women, disabled people, businesses and local authorities. The result was a train operating contract based on the needs of local passengers and the local economy.

In the latest Rail User Survey by Transport Focus<sup>19</sup>, Merseyrail had a passenger satisfaction rating of 91% (placing it in the top 4 in the country) and topped the table for satisfaction with punctuality and reliability; frequency; and level of crowding. It scored second only to London Overground (the other devolved rail network in England) for value for money.

Merseyrail branding and ticketing operates across the network. The network benefits from a new £500m fleet of rolling stock owned by Liverpool City Region CA and designed in close collaboration with the communities it serves<sup>20</sup>.

The state-of-the-art fleet is fully accessible (including innovative sliding steps to close the gap between the train and the platform edge) and includes the first battery-powered fleet of trains in the UK. These enabled the Merseyrail network to be extended to a new station without the need for electrification of infrastructure and could see the network running to other, previously inaccessible places.

Merseytravel has also invested in new stations, aligning these with local development priorities, including Maghull North, a key piece of infrastructure in the Sefton Local Plan, which was built to anticipate public transport demand from hundreds of new homes that were planned (and now delivered) for the area.



### London Overground and the Elizabeth Line – unlocking the power of devolution to deliver passenger satisfaction and economic growth

Since 2007, London Overground, the capital's suburban rail network has been under the concession control of Transport for London. This has allowed integration of the service with the rest of the capital's network, including common branding, information, fares and smart ticketing, creating a seamless, multi-modal passenger experience.

In the latest Rail User Survey<sup>21</sup>, London Overground sat at the top of the table for overall satisfaction (with a user rating of 92%) and for value for money. Like Liverpool City Region CA, TfL has invested in new state-of-the-art trains. The electric trains can carry almost 700 people, double the number of people compared to the old rolling stock<sup>22</sup>.

TfL's backing for the Overground was designed to relieve pressure on bus and underground routes, offering an attractive alternative, whilst also using its local knowledge to ensure the railway supported housing and employment growth areas designated in the Mayor's London Plan.

Devolution meant that network extensions, new stations and additional services could be linked with wider economic plans to stimulate private investment in regeneration areas; provide new employment opportunities; and to ensure new property schemes were well served by public transport as soon as they were completed.

For example, a 10,000 home development in Barking Riverside (the largest housing development in east London) was only approved after the developer agreed to contribute £170 million towards extending the Overground to the area. Expansion continues to be driven by the London Plan to increase housing supply and maximise planning gain.

TfL also manages the Elizabeth line, crossing London from east to west. Since opening in 2022 it has so far had a direct impact on the development and delivery of 55,000 new homes, including in Abbey Wood, one of the largest regeneration areas in London<sup>23</sup>. Some 60% per cent of employment growth within greater London, during the Elizabeth line build between 2015 and 2022, has been within 1km of an Elizabeth line station<sup>24</sup>.



### Transport for Wales – the South Wales Metro

Through the South Wales Metro programme, Transport for Wales (TfW), a wholly Welsh Government-owned company, is developing a modern, integrated network of rail, bus and active travel to improve connectivity and make sustainable travel easier across the region.

A key element of the project has been the transfer of ownership of the Core Valley Lines (CVL) rail infrastructure from Network Rail in 2020.

The programme involves the electrification of lines, of which 116km has already been completed<sup>25</sup> and the introduction of new rolling stock, which will enable the delivery of high-quality 'turn up and go' services, with pay-as-you-go ticketing.

A new depot and integrated control centre have been built in the Taff's Well area to service the rolling stock of Metro vehicles and oversee rail operations.

TfW is also making significant upgrades at stations across the CVL network to improve accessibility and ensure that they are ready for the new Metro vehicles.

The new CVL timetable in June 2024 has already brought more frequent services later into the night for passengers<sup>26</sup>. In addition, electric 'tri-mode' trains have been introduced to passenger services for the first time in the UK<sup>27</sup>, using diesel or battery on sections of railway track where there are no overhead wires.

### Future ambitions

Many authorities have plans to further influence, develop and shape their local rail networks, for example:

- **Liverpool City Region's Mayor** has signed a memorandum of understanding with DfT and Network Rail to explore the option of devolving aspects of rail infrastructure to the city region from Network Rail<sup>28</sup>. This could enable them to take control of stations on their network, ensuring that they are fully accessible to avoid the disconnect between accessible trains calling at inaccessible stations.
- **London's Mayor** would like to bring more commuter rail services under the control of Transport for London as franchises end, provided resources and funding are made available to invest in those services. There is a long-term 'Metroisation' vision for a single transport network for London rather than individual lines run by different companies.
- **The West Midlands**, together with **Greater Manchester**, have been promised additional powers around rail through their Trailblazer Deeper Devolution Deals, agreed under the previous government. The powers sought would help embed rail within the local and regional transport network to help drive economic growth and break down barriers to opportunity. Measures are set to include integrated and (ultimately) multi-modal ticketing.
- **Transport for Greater Manchester** is working with industry partners to integrate rail with Greater Manchester's 'Bee Network' – the city region's multi modal transport offering. This will see an initial eight local rail routes and 64 stations joined up with other modes by 2028, followed by the remainder of the local rail network by 2030. As part of this, rail will evolve over the next five years - with branding, customer standards and the service proposition changing to become consistent with other Bee Network modes - providing a fully integrated transport system.



- **The North East** already runs the Tyne and Wear Metro. It has ambitions for greater influence over local rail to specify and manage services to match the Metro's flexibility and accountability and operate as one network to better serve residents and businesses. There is commitment to integrate fares and ticketing across rail, metro and bus. Multi-year funding streams through further devolved powers are sought to enable long-term planning and a seamless experience for users<sup>29</sup>.
- **West Yorkshire** is keen to work in partnership with GBR to ensure passengers feel the benefits of rail reforms. Its Strategic Rail Partnership with industry stakeholders has been established as a forerunner for strong and effective local collaboration. The authority is keen to have increased local control over investment in the rail network to ensure alignment with local plans and priorities.
- **South Yorkshire** is in the process of updating its plans for rail, seeking to maximise its potential in realising economic growth ambitions. The Mayor has pledged to make transport his main priority.
- **East Midlands** transport is a key priority for the newly formed Combined County Authority, with rail set to form part of a single transport strategy under development for the whole region, seeking to improve services and grow patronage.

There is huge potential for local partnerships and rail devolution to go further and achieve more across the country. Our proposition sets out the six foundations through which this can be achieved.



## OUR PROPOSITION: FOUNDATIONS FOR RAIL REFORM THAT DELIVERS FOR PASSENGERS, LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND BUSINESSES

### 1. Protect and build on what has already been achieved on greater influence and devolution of railway decision making and delivery

Greater influence and control over local rail decision making and delivery has, among other things, delivered investment in state-of-the-art rolling stock designed and owned by the public; enabled joined up, easy to navigate local transport networks; set new standards for quality and seen these reflected in table-topping levels of customer satisfaction; and aligned rail investment with wider local aspirations, unlocking housing and development.

A starting point for **rail reform must be to protect and not reverse existing gains on local rail partnerships and devolution**, whilst remaining open to simplifying existing governance structures and mechanisms where this is considered beneficial.

Recent debates as the Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Bill made its way through parliament offer reassurance that this will be the case, with no intention to reverse what has been achieved around devolved rail in London and Merseyside.

Furthermore, the English Devolution White Paper confirms that established MCAs will have a clear right to request greater devolution of services, infrastructure and station control where it would support a more integrated network.

#### Recommendation

GBR should work closely with local areas to understand existing mechanisms and partnerships for local influence or powers over rail services, exploring together what works, what should be safeguarded and what could be improved or built upon in support of local ambitions and priorities for passengers and economic growth.

There is clear ambition among areas with existing powers, and without, to go further on rail devolution as part of transformative plans for local rail and economic growth. Rail reform should recognise and enable those ambitions, supporting with the capacity building and resources required for the task.

## 2. Bring decision making on rail as close as possible to the communities served, ensuring alignment with wider local ambitions

The Government has already recognised the need to bring decision making on rail as close as possible to communities and pledged to place passengers at the heart of the railway.

GBR must be accountable to those passengers and to wider communities, ensuring decisions are shaped by local needs and priorities whilst also balancing the wider requirements for a coordinated national passenger and freight network.

The best mechanism for ensuring alignment with passengers and wider strategic priorities is through democratically accountable Mayors, MCAs and other transport authorities. They provide a direct line to those communities and to their needs and priorities. Indeed, communities already increasingly see Mayors as figures to hold accountable for public transport in their areas, regardless of whether they are responsible for its operation.

MCAs are particularly well-placed to perform this role. They are tasked with integrating local transport in their areas to better serve passengers and wider priorities for their people and places.

Most MCAs are now either exploring or progressing bus franchising, and many more local authorities are likely to do so in the future thanks to planned changes to bus legislation opening up franchising to all. Others run trams, metro systems, ferries and tunnels and oversee shared mobility schemes, such as bike hire, in their areas, as well as measures to boost walking and cycling more broadly.

MCAs, who have increasing control over much of the wider mobility offer in their areas (and have demonstrated capability to wield those powers), should have the opportunity to shape and drive how local rail is integrated into that offer, bringing their expertise and local knowledge to decision-making to better serve their people and places.

MCAs are also tasked with planning and delivering economic growth, increased employment, housing targets, net zero and access to opportunity. It follows that they should also have greater influence and control over all aspects of the transport networks that are key to enabling those tasks and ensure they deliver maximum value and return on investment.

Rail should no longer be the missing piece of the puzzle in MCA efforts to connect, and maximise the potential of, transport networks and wider strategic plans for their areas.

**Rail reforms should support transport authorities to fully join up journeys, creating a seamless experience for passengers, informed by local expertise in the operation of the wider network.**

**Their expertise and knowledge should be fully utilised in governing, managing, planning and developing a high performing rail network that integrates with the wider local transport network, enhances passenger experience and maximises synergies with local plans and priorities.**

MCAs (or their nominated bodies) should assume a leading role in decision-making around local and city-regional services and a collaborative role (with other MCAs and convening bodies) in decisions affecting services that cross MCA boundaries. GBR meanwhile should take the lead role in balancing local, regional and national priorities to ensure an integrated and coherent network that makes sense for passengers and freight, actively involving MCAs in its decision making where it affects them.

This should take the form of a truly collaborative, outward facing approach between Mayors, MCAs and GBR, with Mayors and MCAs (or their nominated bodies) cast as the principal partners and enablers (as opposed to consultees or stakeholders) in ensuring that local rail delivers for passengers, communities and economies.

The spirit of collaboration and transparency must be retained throughout, recognising that trade-offs must sometimes be made against priorities for the wider network and other partners, such as freight operators and neighbouring authorities.

### Recommendation

Mayors and their MCAs (or their nominated bodies) should become, as a minimum, central partners (as opposed to stakeholders or consultees) working collaboratively with GBR to identify the best approach to ensure that railways deliver local ambitions for passengers, communities and economies whilst balancing the need for GBR to ensure an integrated network and offer at national level.

MCAs with the capacity and ambition to do so should - through devolved funding arrangements and service carve out - become the central decision makers on local rail services in their area (again whilst recognising the need for GBR to balance national network requirements).

Working together, GBR and MCAs (or their nominated bodies) should identify the best ways of maximising the contribution of rail in achieving local ambitions, as set out in Local Growth Plans, Local Transport Plans and other strategies for the area.

It is important to recognise that a lack of opportunities to influence and shape rail in the past, as well as a lack of guidance in developing LTPs in recent years, may mean that existing LTPs do not yet consistently feature rail ambitions.

GBR should therefore be flexible in their approach and seek to meet authorities where they are, support them to develop their approach and understand rail's potential contribution to local plans for growth.

**Recommendation**

GBR should have a duty to work with MCAs (or their nominated bodies) to ensure plans for rail reflect and enable the delivery of local ambitions for growth and for rail, as set out, for example, in Local Growth Plans (and associated Local Transport Plans and strategies).

Where local ambitions for rail cannot be met, GBR should be transparent as to the reasons why and work collaboratively with MCAs or their nominated bodies to identify constructive ways forward.

We recognise that this process will require a degree of negotiation, given the need to balance local priorities with GBR's responsibility to deliver a coordinated national offer on rail for passengers and freight.

Often, priorities for joining-up journeys and wider strategic plans will cross beyond MCA boundaries, for example. The English Devolution White Paper commits to supporting Mayors to collaborate across larger regional footprints. Mechanisms for local influence and control over rail should allow for collaboration across boundaries and national borders, enabling neighbouring MCAs, local authorities and nations to work collectively with GBR on shared priorities as well as in managing any potentially conflicting ambitions.

Where appropriate, a collective engagement with GBR between MCAs and other partners could drive efficiencies, reducing the need for multiple meetings and aiding transparency.

The form any such collaborations take should be determined locally and convened by local partners, rather than by GBR. There is the opportunity here to build on existing partnerships and bodies which extend beyond MCA boundaries, such as the West Midlands Rail Executive, Strategic Transport Bodies, the West Yorkshire Strategic Rail Partnership, the Liverpool-Manchester Rail Board and the North East Rail Management Unit.

**Recommendation**

Mechanisms for local influence and control over rail should allow for MCAs and other partners, such as neighbouring authorities or nations to work collectively with GBR where this contributes to simpler engagement mechanisms, makes sense for local travel patterns or where strategic plans are likely to impact across boundaries. The form of any such groupings should be determined locally and convened by local partners.

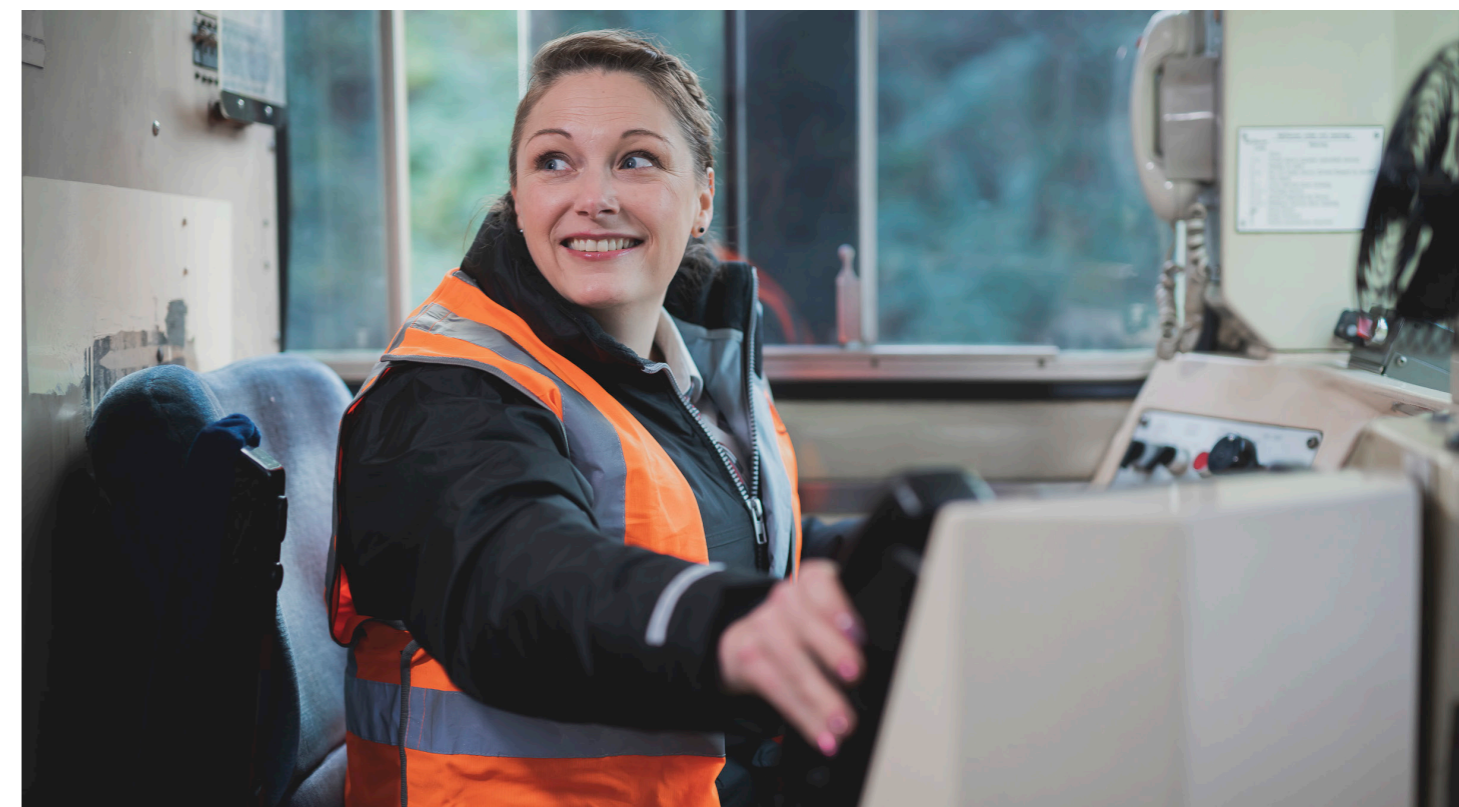
More broadly, the role of MCAs must be protected in statute to provide long-term stability and to prevent any watering down over time. A means to achieve this could be to re-instate (with appropriate re-wording) previous provisions from the Transport Act 1968 (which established the Passenger Transport Executives - PTEs).

Section 20 of the original act placed a duty on the PTEs (with the consent of the Minister) to review and keep under review passenger rail services to ensure they met the needs of people travelling between places in that area or outside of it within a permitted distance (which could be a travel to work area for that area, for example).

If considered necessary, it enabled the PTEs to enter into agreements with the then Railway Board to secure the provision of railway services that the PTE considered necessary to *'ensure that such services make a proper contribution towards the provision for that area'* specifically *'a properly integrated and efficient system of public passenger transport to meet the needs of that area'*, the creation of which was one of the original drivers for establishing PTEs.

**Recommendation**

MCAs (or their nominated bodies) should be enabled to enter into statutory partnership agreements with GBR, supported by devolved funding, to secure the provision of railway services that the MCA considers most important to ensure an integrated and efficient public transport network that meets the needs, priorities and ambitions of its people and places.



### 3. Create a menu of options for engagement, influence and control

Efforts to enable greater local engagement, influence and control on rail cannot adopt a one-size-fits all approach. Each MCA is different, with varying levels of maturity, existing powers, aspirations and governance arrangements.

For example, MCAs may be content with lighter touch strategic engagement for certain parts of their network but may wish to have deeper collaborative involvement in others, including investing, or having a commercial role in, priority lines, services and infrastructure. Some areas will wish to see local controls and powers extend up to full devolution.

As such, a menu of flexible options should be available, with MCAs or their nominated bodies able to take on a mix of roles to suit their circumstances, capability and ambitions for different parts of local rail networks, with support to build up to deeper devolution over time.



#### Recommendation

MCAs should have access to a menu of options for engagement, influence and control over rail at local level. The starting point should be meaningful collaboration and partnership with GBR to deliver local plans and ambitions on rail.

MCAs should continue to be able to invest in rail as well as have automatic access to options to locally commission services with commercial exposure, risks and rewards.

Where there is a financial relationship between the MCA and GBR, the MCA should become the local client for GBR, with more scope to manage, plan, locally design, monitor and develop agreed priority rail services and infrastructure.

There should also be the right for established MCAs to request service carve out from GBR, with MCAs taking on revenue risk and locally managing delivery for defined local services. There should be a clear pathway for how this would be achieved, including access to the operators' management accounts and transparency around key detailed data such as costs, income, performance and staffing.

GBR should support MCAs to move towards deeper partnerships and devolution when there is readiness to do so and where the benefits can be clearly demonstrated.

There should be a clear duty on central government to devolve powers and associated funding on local rail to MCAs or their nominated bodies where they have the ambition and capabilities to do so, and where this would deliver enhanced outcomes for users, communities and taxpayers.

As partnerships between GBR and MCAs grow deeper, and especially where a financial relationship is established between the two bodies (e.g. where MCAs choose to invest in the railway or take on an element of revenue risk), the role of the MCA increasingly becomes that of a 'local client', where more elements of local rail services can be specified locally, to be delivered by GBR.

This in turn could evolve into full devolution for certain parts of the local network (where this can be accommodated operationally and financially) as part of the wider national network. In this case, there would be full service carve out from GBR for specific local rail services, which would be specified, managed and delivered locally at full revenue risk. In these cases, GBR would, however, retain a role in ensuring these services coordinate with the wider national network.

### 4. Unlock local rail funding and investment levers

Financial devolution is inextricably connected to enhanced local control over rail. If the DfT is the railway's primary funder, its requests and requirements will inevitably be prioritised.

Greater financial devolution, and the power for MCAs to decide where money is spent, unlocks the opportunity for greater local investment in – and therefore control over – the rail network.

Devolution of funding and investment levers to the local level brings decision making closer to the communities and businesses served. This means the rail network will be better aligned to their needs, thereby growing patronage and generating greater returns to the public purse. It also enables Mayors and MCAs to ensure every penny is targeted and maximised to achieve the biggest impact on local and national policy priorities – from economic growth to net zero.

Financial devolution means working towards long-term, single local transport funding settlements with the ability to flex between spending on different modes. This would enable MCAs to decide where investment will deliver the best outcomes based on their local ambitions and to have the financial security to locally commission services and take on the associated risks and rewards.

It could also involve appropriate devolved funding settlements from within existing local railway budgets to further enable meaningful MCA prioritisation and decision-making.

Where GBR is delivering on behalf of MCAs, using locally managed resources, this adds greater accountability for how that money is spent, given that MCAs could decide it is better used to support other parts of the network in support of their Local Growth Plan ambitions or other strategies. Such an arrangement also offers the incentive for GBR to drive efficiencies as they would need to ensure that rail is a competitive local investment proposition.

Greater financial devolution and long-term settlements should be supplemented by access to local investment levers, enabling Mayors and MCAs to raise funding locally to invest in rail and, ultimately, support financial sustainability and independence. Levers could include retention and control of business rates, land value capture and tax revenue devolution.



**Recommendation**

MCA's need financial devolution, fiscal freedoms and local investment levers to enable them to raise and allocate funding to invest in the local rail network and to be in a position to locally commission services with commercial exposure.

This means working towards long-term, single funding settlements for local transport and unlocking local investment levers. This will enable MCAs to decide where investment will deliver the best outcomes, including determining the balance of spend between different modes and the ability to choose alternative delivery partners.

It could also involve appropriate devolved funding settlements from within existing local railway budgets to further enable meaningful MCA prioritisation and decision-making.

Mayors should have a statutory role, working collaboratively with GBR, in prioritising spend aligned with the ambitions set out in Local Growth Plans and Local Transport Plans.

In addition, the National Rail Investment Programme and Rail Network Enhancement Pipeline (or successor) should have a statutory role for Mayors in prioritising spend, aligned with Local Growth Plans and Local Transport Plans.

Funding should take the form of multi-year settlements, running for a minimum of 10 years and ideally up to 30 years, given rail infrastructure investment projects can take many years to plan and deliver. Settlements could be reviewed every five years to ensure they remain fit for purpose.

Long-term funding settlements build investor confidence, increasing the likelihood that Local Growth Plan objectives will be met, putting an end to the inefficiencies of stop-start delivery and short-term thinking.

Plans should be designed to support growth in rail patronage to further contribute to a stable and sustainable funding environment. This could be complemented by fiscal powers to raise additional transport funding locally.

MCAs may additionally wish to see funding for specific local rail operations in their areas entirely devolved to them.

**5. Ensure accountability**

Mayors and MCAs are directly and democratically accountable to the communities they serve and are ideally placed to ensure local rail meets the needs of those communities and economies.

As the English Devolution White Paper recognises, Mayors have the profile to stand up for their citizens on the national stage – *'able to both partner with and challenge central government where needed'*. This should also apply to the relationship between Mayors and GBR.

**Recommendation**

The relationship between GBR, Mayors and MCAs should be collaborative and transparent, including reciprocal data sharing (as pledged in the English Devolution White Paper).

GBR must also be accountable to local leaders where MCAs are locally commissioning services from GBR and/or are taking a financial risk on services provided.

Whilst a collaborative and open working partnership should avoid the need for such an intervention in most cases, as democratically elected leaders for their areas, Mayors have the freedom to hold GBR to account for their performance locally should it fail to meet agreed standards and priorities.

A further accountability mechanism could be to hold regular meetings between Mayors and GBR, Chaired by the Secretary of State.

Deep collaboration and direct lines of accountability to MCAs and devolved nations are vital to ensure GBR stays connected to the people and places it serves, helping to drive performance and ensure value for money.

**6. Allow time for transition**

Changes to the railway framework and decision making should incorporate a transition period to allow authorities and other stakeholders to evolve their approaches and build their capacity and capability.

Taking on new and enhanced powers around rail will take time, and the time taken will vary according to the organisational maturity of an authority and their starting point in terms of their existing transport offer, powers and economic circumstances.

During the transition period, steps must be taken to ensure progress towards the achievement of local ambitions on rail continues and that existing service levels are guaranteed to be maintained as a minimum until new arrangements are in place.

**Recommendation**

Resources should be allocated at national level for capacity building to support and enable the transition to the new framework for railways.

Transition to new arrangements should not put a block on work towards the achievement of MCA ambitions. Shadow GBR, should continue to work with Mayors, MCAs and their nominated bodies in the lead up to the establishment of GBR, ensuring progress can continue during the transition period.

## KEY AREAS OF INFLUENCE

Having set out the foundations for rail reform above, this section explores some of the key areas that MCAs will wish to increase their influence in as part of their statutory role.

### Timetabling

The most significant element is timetabling, one of the railways' most important outputs. The ability to input into timetable development, in partnership with GBR, is critical for delivering economic and social objectives, as well as ensuring integration with wider public transport networks for a seamless passenger experience.

Local input into timetabling can ensure that services match-up with local demand and travel patterns, including the needs of employers and supporting new commercial and housing developments. It can ensure that other local transport services are timetabled to 'meet trains' so that passenger's onward journeys join up. GBR will need oversight to ensure that, in turn, local services are integrated with regional, inter-regional and national services.

#### Recommendation

GBR should endeavour to deliver the timetables Mayors want to enable them to secure local rail networks that best meet the needs of their people and places.

Working collaboratively with GBR, MCAs or their nominated bodies should have the opportunity to have significant strategic input throughout timetable development processes for local services, particularly for those where they have taken on revenue risk.

MCAs should also have strategic input into service planning and delivery of rail services from outside of the area, but which provide a core part of services between stations in the region.

They should also be statutory consultees for national timetable development in respect of services that serve or pass through their area.

### Fares and ticketing

With many MCAs set to have increasing opportunities to set bus fares for their local areas through franchising, combined with existing powers to price light rail and other local transport modes, it is right that local rail services should form part of an integrated package.



### Case study – Northumberland line

In the North East, the new Northumberland Line will accept the area's Pop Pay As You Go smart card daily capped fares, offering seamless interchange with the Tyne and Wear Metro.

Northern, the Northumberland Line's operator, has worked with Nexus (covering Tyne and Wear) and neighbouring Northumberland County Council to establish the integrated fares.

There are plans to extend integrated ticketing across the region by bringing buses and other rail services inside the daily cap.

Fares and pricing would benefit from local input given the differing context locally. For example, peak travel times in one area, will differ from those in another affecting fares and ticketing offers that make sense for that place.

#### Recommendation

Provided there is a clear business and passenger experience case for doing so, MCAs or their nominated bodies should have the power to make and implement decisions on local rail fares and ticketing products that work for their areas, providing appropriate subsidy to support the schemes.

Additionally, where this best serves passengers, contributes to reducing complexity and is technically and practically feasible, rail services travelling between stations in the area (but originating from and/or terminating elsewhere) should be required to accept the relevant local, regional or multi-modal ticketing products for journeys between stations in the area.

For the passenger, this would enable the creation of a simple, integrated, and consistent fares system across the local public transport network. Analysis from available evaluations of integrated ticketing find it has a positive effect on patronage<sup>30</sup>. London Overground's launch in 2007 introduced Oyster to all 55 stations at the time, ensuring seamless travel between local rail, Underground, bus and other services in the capital.

## Passenger experience, staffing, customer service delivery and standards

Just as passengers should expect public transport timetables, fares and ticketing to join up across modes, they should also expect a consistently high standard of passenger experience and customer services delivery (such as accessibility, security, passenger assistance, passenger information) regardless of mode.

The new independent Passenger Standards Authority should be a powerful force for ensuring the railway meets the needs of its users and sets high standards at national level.

However, it is important that the passenger experience also has a local flavour, to ensure that local people feel a sense of ownership and pride in a rail network that reflects the needs, priorities and identity of their area and local transport network. There should also be scope for local areas to go above and beyond standards set nationally.

### Case study: a splash of local colour

TfL recently announced new names and individual colours for the six London Overground lines to make the network easier to navigate and reflect the capital's diverse history.

The Lioness line honours the legacy of the England women's football team; The Windrush line recognises the contribution of the Windrush generation; The Weaver line celebrates an area of London known for its textile trade and shaped by migrant communities; The Liberty line celebrates the freedom that defines London and the historical independence of the people of Havering; the Mildmay line celebrates the NHS hospital of the same name that worked tirelessly during the HIV/AIDS crisis; and the Suffragette line celebrates the movement that fought for votes for women and paved the way for women's rights.

The names and colours were chosen following engagement with staff, passengers, communities, local historians, academics and transport specialists<sup>31</sup>.

Their approach was to hear from as many different communities that live near the network to learn how best they can be represented.

This highlights the opportunity devolution brings to instil a sense of local identity and pride.



With MCAs increasingly seeking to establish a common public transport brand, quality standards and unique identity for their areas, they should have the power to specify what standard of service is required from all operators who will work under that brand. There should also be the opportunity for MCAs to employ their own staff to deliver that service to passengers.

The rail industry in general is experiencing skills shortages, there are opportunities here for MCAs to collaborate with GBR on workforce initiatives, such as apprenticeships or targeted training programmes. They should have the flexibility to prioritise skills development that supports local economic and transport priorities.

### Recommendation

GBR and MCAs or their nominated bodies should work together to agree a local passenger experience that maximises integration and consistency across the local transport network.

This could include workforce development initiatives, local co-branding and multi-modal wayfinding, passenger assistance, customer information, safety and security. There should be the opportunity for MCAs to deliver those customer services themselves if they wish to do so.

Where it is taking a revenue risk on a service, MCAs or their nominated bodies should have the power to specify, or take on themselves, all aspects of the passenger experience and customer service delivery.

Rolling stock also forms an important part of the passenger experience. Many passengers in the city regions will be familiar with ageing rolling stock, short formations and carriages bursting at the seams, inadequate to meet demand.

GBR should work towards ensuring a consistently high standard of rolling stock across the network. With the potential for rolling stock to be used on our railways for 30-40 years it will be important that the standards set are future proofed as far as possible, especially in relation to decarbonisation and net zero. Infrastructure will also need to be upgraded or resilient enough to accommodate these standards.

A collaborative approach between GBR and MCAs or their nominated bodies will ensure local knowledge informs rolling stock decisions and that the quality, quantity and deployment of trains matches passenger expectations, local travel patterns and infrastructure.

Some areas may want to go further still and follow Merseytravel's lead in developing their own publicly owned and designed fleets, going above and beyond national specifications.

### Recommendation

GBR should collaborate with MCAs or their nominated bodies on rolling stock strategy, with a view to working towards a consistently high standard of rolling stock across the country.

Where local areas wish to invest in local rolling stock to go above and beyond these standards, they should have the ability to do so.

## Stations and land

Continuing the pursuit of a consistent passenger experience, MCAs should have a clear role in setting GBR's approach to stations in their areas. Some MCAs may wish to go further and be empowered to invest in, or take a more active role in, the management and control of certain local railway stations to ensure these are fully integrated with the wider public transport network and benefit from the same standards of service and accessibility.

Often, it is high footfall stations that are prioritised for upgrades. Greater local control and funding levers would enable local areas to decide which stations are strategically important for fulfilling local priorities and ambitions.

MCAs are well placed to ensure railway stations – both new and existing - join up with, contribute to and support wider priorities for economic growth in their areas, such as new homes, employment sites and commercial premises.

Furthermore, as suggested in the English Devolution White Paper, the government should work with MCAs to explore how *'the considerable land value potential in rail-owned land could drive regeneration, commercial and housing opportunities.'*

### Recommendation

MCAs or their nominated bodies should have a clear role in setting GBR's approach to stations in their areas.

They should additionally have the power to enter into agreements with GBR to take on an active role in the management and control of rail stations and surrounding Network Rail land in their geography.

MCAs should be given the power to develop and use railway land in their geography to support economic growth and integrated transport networks.

This should include the ability to assemble adjacent plots to create development zones and to enter into joint ventures with GBR to deliver regeneration priorities.



## Case study: Kirkstall Forge, West Yorkshire

West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) and Leeds City Council worked with developer CEG, to transform the former Kirkstall Forge industrial site, four miles from Leeds city centre, into a new, rail-based development.

A new station opened in 2016 and was integral to the site's development which, on completion, will provide 1,050 new homes, 300,000 sq ft of office space and 100,000 sq ft of retail, leisure and community space.

The presence of the station on site prior to completion of the housing and office space establishes public transport as the mode of choice for residents and staff from day one.

The urban realm within the development supports the Combined Authority's wider goals for sustainable transport and active travel take-up and is linked to the Leeds Liverpool canal towpath cycling and walking route. The route was resurfaced through the Combined Authority's City Connect active travel programme, further demonstrating the ability of authorities to join up projects to maximise impact.

WYCA, Leeds City Council and the developer secured £10.3 million from the Department for Transport to support the new stations at Kirkstall Forge and nearby Apperley Bridge, with additional funding from the Leeds City Region Local Enterprise Partnership.

Kirkstall Forge station exceeded projected demand of 20,200 passengers in the first year, achieving those numbers in the first five months of operation even though the site was still under development.

## Network development

MCAs need the ability to develop shared, long-term network development plans with GBR so that all parties are working towards the same goals. This should encompass both the passenger and freight network, given that infrastructure plans in both areas will impact on the potential for local economic growth and affect congestion, speed and reliability on networks locally.

The funding and delivery of infrastructure enhancements could take on a variety of forms, but ultimately, these will feature in MCA Local Growth Plans and therefore require collaboration to come to a shared view.

### Recommendation

MCAs need the ability to develop shared, long-term network development plans – for passenger and freight services - with GBR so that all parties are working towards the same goals and avoid conflict with local plans for growth.

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31. [Choosing the new London Overground names](#)



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