

# “A clear statement that GBR remains the destination”

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The government has announced that Parliamentarians and experts across the industry are going to have the opportunity to review and test the legislation needed to create Great British Railways (GBR).

This is a clear statement that GBR remains the destination and, given the scale of the changes being made to the sector, it will help the Bill to have a swifter passage through Parliament when legislation is brought forward.

As you might expect, as the [Great British Railways Transition Team \(GBRTT\)](#), we are now working with the Department for Transport (DfT) to adapt our plans to deliver reform, accounting for the delay to legislation. In preparing for all eventualities, we have taken a realistic appraisal of what can and cannot be achieved ahead of legislation, and where we can deliver most benefits for customers ahead of GBR.

Considerable effort has gone into the design of GBR – a design which resolves the fundamental weaknesses the [Williams Review](#) diagnosed in the structure of Britain's railway today:

- Misaligned incentives that don't focus on serving customers, taxpayers, or generating social, economic and environmental benefits for the nation
- Railway fragmentation leading to unclear accountabilities, poor decision making and a blame culture
- Too much reliance on politicians to take risk on operational decisions

Alongside and underpinning this, we've been working to support and enable joined-up decision making within this current, imperfect environment.

## Providing industry leadership until structural reform can be progressed

The Secretary of State has asked the leadership of the DfT, GBRTT and Network Rail to work together to provide industry leadership until legislation is in place. Alongside this, we need strong leadership and support from the private sector.

To date, GBRTT has played a valuable role across a broad range of areas. Driving initiatives to boost revenue recovery – recall the Great British Rail Sale in the spring of 2022 and the largest push on national marketing in a decade, which between them generated many millions in net passenger revenue. And developing tools to support better decision making across track and train that drives efficiency today.

From TOC commercial teams to Network Rail directors, local leaders to devolved transport bodies, these experts know their own contexts best. But they don't always have access to the whole picture – that's where we've come in with the relevant tools and independent insight to support them.

Launched this summer, for example, our Industry Financial Model brings together a virtual profit and loss, giving rail leaders and funders visibility of rail finances in a joined-up way which hasn't been done for a generation. It can model the impact of different options across track and train, helping to drive more commercial, customer-focused decisions. Meanwhile, the new forecasting model we built for rail revenue is better predicting how current performance and other factors will affect revenue – helping to inform rail spending as the industry approaches the start of the next funding period in 2024.

Over the past two years, we've supported the industry to pilot whole-system thinking in the here-and-now, in spite of fragmentation. That means decisions which incorporate both cost and revenue implications, as well as considering infrastructure alongside passenger and freight operations across track and train.

This is far easier with a single guiding mind, but it's not impossible in the interim.

So as we await legislation we're calling on industry leaders to join us in making whole-railway thinking the new normal and, crucially, to find ways to deploy that thinking in as many areas, as swiftly as possible.

## An evolved role for GBRTT

Where there are opportunities to work better across organisational boundaries to improve rail's financial sustainability and the customer experience, we will support this to happen.

As a transition team, our role will now need to evolve from being primarily focused on setting up GBR, to further applying the capability we have built as a whole-system thinker in a way that supports the sector in tackling today's challenges within the current legal framework.

There are some fantastic examples of where this more collaborative, cross-industry approach can deliver better outcomes for the benefit of customers and taxpayers, for example: the Manchester Recovery Taskforce, the East Coast Engineering Access trial or the West Coast 2022 timetabling change.

I want to be clear: whole-railway initiatives don't need to involve GBRTT, often they won't. There are armies of capable, gifted people across rail who are already working in this way. But there's plenty more to go at.

This is our offer to the industry: in the period ahead of us, before GBR is established, we have the resources, remit and experience to help accelerate and embed this sort of closer collaboration.

Network Rail and DfT own the largest network-wide levers and so will be central partners in these efforts, but collaboration will also include train operators, Rail Partners, Rail Delivery Group, Office of Rail & Road, Rail Freight Group, DfT OLR Holdings Limited, Mayoral Combined Authorities, the Rail Industry Association, and Rail Forum – to name a few. Success will depend on working with leaders across the industry to develop thinking, spot opportunities and address challenges promptly.

We will continue to engage stakeholders across the industry in the coming weeks and months, and want to discuss with them where they feel a more collaborative approach could be beneficial in addressing the challenges facing the railways today.

Within existing accountabilities and structures, we'll be looking to support better alignment of business planning across train operators, Network Rail and DfT, as a mechanism for joining up the way the industry plans train services and infrastructure. Given changed travel habits, we want to support the industry to develop timetables that are optimised to meet today's demands and deliver the mode shift to rail we all want.

There are also critical opportunities to pull together to deliver tangible benefits for customers and increase satisfaction over the next 12 months. From rolling out Pay-As-You-Go and barcoding ticketing to more stations, to working with operators to bring greater consistency to the customer proposition across the rail network.

## Creating bridges to that new reformed railway

Whilst GBR represents a necessary and important fix, what we've learnt along the way and what I am focused on now is using reform as a platform to share best practice and to empower people to deploy good

solutions that work for the whole-system.

Yes, today's fragmented structure and misaligned incentives make it much more challenging. But positive progress in tackling the major challenges the railway faces is within our collective gift today.

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