

A year of rail change – the inside track of 2019

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As we enter the final weeks of 2019, it's only when you look back through the 12 months that it hits home what a year it has been for rail.

It started in January with calls for a big lasting change and with the sector gearing up ready for the start of CP6 and has ended with a General Election.

Throw in the transformation of smart ticket journeys and a 1,000 extra rail services a week and we're just touching the surface.

Below are just a few of the highlights of 2019.

CP6

This year marked the start of Control Period 6 – the spending period which started in April and will run until 2024. It will see an increase in spending from around £38 billion in CP5 to £48 billion.

The funding is much needed for a railways sector which has seen passenger numbers double in the last 25 years, with a similar growth expected in a similar timescale – 6.4 billion passenger journeys are forecast per annum in 2050.

Add that to the population growth, expansion of freight transportation and historic under-investment and it has spurred the UK Government to commit and plan to spend £200 billion in the next decade – having invested £80 billion over the last decade in the rail network. The forecast is that the Government will increase investment until 2035.

Williams Rail Review

The man tasked with working out how to improve the railways in the UK gives an update during the summer into his review saying the current franchising model has had its day.

Keith Williams said what worked in the 25 years after privatisation is now holding the sector back. He also called for a greater distance between government and the running of the day-to-day railway.

Among the five key issues he said to achieve improvements are:

- A new passenger offer that is focused on customer service excellence and driven by performance measures.
- Simplified fares and ticketing.
- A new industry structure, reducing fragmentation, better aligning track and train.
- A new commercial model.
- Greater flexibility so the sector can respond to changing travel patterns and long-term incentives for creativity and innovation.

It was due to be released over the last couple of months, but it has been held back due to the General Election. The industry waits to hear his findings in early 2020.

Oakervee Review

The Government announces independent review into the HS2 project with Douglas Oakervee leading the review and working with Lord Berkeley as his deputy.

Speaking to businesses, academia and the transport sector, the aim was to look at its:

- Benefits and impacts.
- Affordability and efficiency.
- Delivery and scope.
- Phasing, including its relationship with Northern Powerhouse Rail.

A final report was due to have been sent to the Secretary of State by the Autumn. We anticipate this to be out in the New Year.

Election

With the General Election bringing the Conservatives biggest majority since 1987 – with an 80-seat majority.

The Department for Transport remains the same – with Grant Shapps remaining as Secretary of State – but there will be changes happening in the coming years.

Below is a list of the pledges the Tory's made in the run up to December's election.

- The Conservatives has pledged to build Northern Powerhouse Rail between Leeds and Manchester and then focus on Liverpool, Tees Valley, Hull, Sheffield and Newcastle.
- Invest in the Midlands Hub, strengthening rail links between Birmingham, Leicester, Nottingham, Coventry, Derby, Hereford and Worcester.
- There will also be improvements to train lines to the South West and East Anglia.
- Contactless pay-as-you go ticketing will be extended to almost 200 more stations in the South East.
- City regions will be given funding to upgrade train, tram and bus services.
- The party will end the complicated franchising model and create a 'simpler, more effective' rail system, which includes giving metro mayors control over services in areas.
- The findings of the Oakervee review will be considered when it comes to the costs and timings of HS2 and the pledge is to work with leaders of the Midlands and the North to decide the optimal outcome.
- Plans to restore many of the Beeching lines.

Franchise changes and new trains

It has been a year of change both of and on the railways, none more so than on the issue on contracts.

Among some of the more high-profile changes included:

- West Coast partnership contract to First Trenitalia.
- It's revealed Abellio ScotRail contract will come to an end early around March 2022.

There's been significant levels of new rolling stock coming onto the tracks too, with Greater Anglia, TPE, Northern, LNER and Hull Trains to name a few all introducing new trains in 2019.

Rail fares

In November it was revealed that train fares will rise on average by 2.7% next year. The Rail Delivery Group have revealed 98p from every £1 spent on fares goes into the running of the railway with fares almost covering running costs.

Smarter tickets

During the summer changes were made by rail companies which led to jargon being slashed on tickets for over a million routes, making it easier for people to buy and use the right ticket.

Words such as 'Any Permitted' were replaced with clearer descriptions of the routes a ticket can be used.

It's revealed in October that more passengers than ever before are opting for smart tickets – with paper tickets dropped by 13.3 million year on year, saving an estimated 1,100km of paper.

Figures released by the rail industry show that just half of all journeys are now taken using paper tickets. This is down from 63% last year.

Rail timetable change

It was with bated breath that the new winter timetable came into effect earlier this month, with plans to cut journey times, increase services and add new routes across the country.

1,000 extra services per week were added to the weekly timetable and with that investment in the network, including new and upgraded carriages.

It happens twice a year (May and December), but after problems and disruption in May 2018, there were some concerns passengers could be hit with similar issues this time round.

However, like the December 2018 and May 2019 timetable changes, the latest have been seen as largely successful, with thousands of new services and an improvement in punctuality.