

# Data revolution set to improve rail travel for passengers

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An innovative approach to sharing rail data that will improve journeys for passengers and support the commitments in the Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail is being kickstarted with a £5 million Government investment.

The Rail Minister has announced funding to begin the development of the Rail Data Marketplace (RDM), a collaboration between Government and the rail industry to provide the tools and frameworks to open up rail data through a new single-access platform.

The RDM will unleash new opportunities for developers and tech companies to collaborate with the industry and integrate rail data into passenger-facing apps and develop new services.

For the first time, this will allow useful passenger information such as the availability of seats, detail on disruptions and availability of facilities including lifts and escalators to be together in one place.

Rail Minister Chris Heaton-Harris said: “Sharing rail data like this opens up new and exciting possibilities for apps and websites that can make taking a train a smoother, quicker and better experience.

“Our reforms in the Williams Shapps Plan for Rail will put an end to the fragmentation of rail data in the industry and unleash new opportunities that will support innovation and enable data to power the services of the future.”

Simon Moorhead, Chief Information Officer at the Rail Delivery Group, said: “Delivering the Rail Data Marketplace will build on the rail sector’s track record of opening up data to allow train operators, suppliers and new partners, such as tech companies, to innovate for the benefit of passengers.

“The Rail Delivery Group is pleased to be building this new service to make it easier for companies to sign up for rail data and work with the sector to open up new streams of information to help improve journeys.”

The platform will have the potential to support new real-time alert services, where the technology exists, such as alerting passengers about how busy a service may be or where the most accessible point of a platform is, unlocking the potential of the railway and improving the passenger experience.

Investment in the RDM delivers on a commitment in the Rail Sector Deal between the Government and rail industry, and supports the commitments in the Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail for better information for passengers on crowding, accessibility and punctuality.

The RDM will address the fragmentation of data sources by bringing them together on one platform. Having the data in one place will facilitate better ways of sharing transparent data and real-time information with passengers, improve data sharing across operational bodies, and improve access to data for the Government and other public bodies.

The technology will also allow companies and developers to raise issues directly through the platform about which data they want to see.

James Bain, Rail Supply Group’s Mobility and Data Champion, Chair Rail Data Council and CEO Worldline UK&I said: “Simplifying data access was highlighted in the original Rail Sector Deal as a key component of a flourishing, modern and advanced rail sector.

“Today’s announcement is a big step forwards and places the sector in an excellent position to move rail forward to match and even surpass other sectors such as air travel, in terms of the offer we can make to customers and clients.

“I am extremely pleased with the open collaboration across the Supply Chain, Network Rail, RSSB, UKRRIN and Train Operators and would like to thank Rail Delivery Group for their absolute commitment to delivering this initiative.”

Transport for London has previously opened up its data in a similar ways which has led to significant benefits for passengers and the wider economy. In 2017, an independent review of TfL’s open data found that over 600 apps were powered by TfL data, and used by 42 per cent of Londoners. In addition, the release of this data was found to generate annual economic benefits and savings of up to £130m for travellers, London and TfL itself.

The RDM platform will launch next year, following development of the technology, and engagement with the sector and data consumers. The datasets made available through the RDM will continue to grow in number following launch.

*Photo credit: Department for Transport*