

“Don’t let good ideas fall at the last hurdle” – RIA publishes rail innovation strategy

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The [Railway Industry Association \(RIA\)](#), which represents over 300 UK businesses, has today published a new rail innovation strategy calling for the sector to be more radical and overcome barriers to innovation, ahead of the transition to Great British Railways (GBR).

The paper, *[A Railway Innovation Strategy](#)*, looks at the state of innovation and R&D in the sector and the barriers to getting new products and services into the railways. It stresses that further collaboration to help businesses get new ideas to market more rapidly, and a culture of innovation, will be key under GBR to make the industry more cost-efficient, sustainable and accessible to passengers. This paper comes after RIA published a survey of industry professionals in December last year, which found that – whilst there is support for R&D – procurement processes remain the biggest barrier to innovation.

The strategy sets out six ‘asks’ for industry and Government decision makers to maximise the benefits from R&D and innovation. These asks include:

1. **Increase Government investment in rail research, development, and innovation.**
2. **Strengthen support during the innovation rollout phase.**
3. **Lead a concerted cross-industry effort to identify and overcome barriers to successful adoption.**
4. **Provide a pathway and funding for radical innovation.**
5. **The railway must adopt a whole-system and long-term view to enable the right innovation.**
6. **Support skills development and the creation of an innovation culture.**

RIA emphasises the cost benefits that investments in innovation can have, pointing to estimates that Network Rail's £245m of R&D funding from 2019 to 2024 is expected to create a gross value add of £1.6bn over 20 years.

The report also makes five recommendations to those responsible for crafting the shape of Great British Railways and highlights a number of case studies and current projects which will help drive innovation.

Darren Caplan, Chief Executive of the [Railway Industry Association \(RIA\)](#), commented: "The UK is home to some of the most innovative rail businesses and organisations anywhere in the world, with valuable products and expertise to reduce costs, cut carbon and improve the experience for passengers. An innovative sector is also good for UK plc, with expertise that can be exported globally.

"The RIA [Railway Innovation Strategy](#) sets out how the industry can harness this innovation, to make a real difference to everyone who uses, builds, operates and maintains the railway, opportunities which should be seized by the Government as it establishes Great British Railways. Central to this will be the willingness of decision-makers to embrace radical innovation - for example, a technology, outcome, or approach, which can completely transform or replace existing ways of doing things, and help get new ideas to market or in procurements. We cannot keep letting good innovations fall at the last hurdle, instead we need to ensure there is support as they are delivered.

"On funding, whilst the Government has supported Network Rail with its R&D fund and held recent innovation competitions, we would like to see this go further, with businesses encouraged to invest in new products and workforces. Co-funding is key, but this requires long-term commitment and clarity from clients.

"Enabling innovation really is a win-win for everyone. It is now up the Government and GBR to work closely with the railway industry and unleash the full potential of the supply chain, to help build a greener and more reliable railway system, at better value to the taxpayer."