

Innovation can transform rail across the North, says industry

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In a report released today, the Northern Rail Industry Leaders (NRIL), a group of more 150 rail business in the North of England, has set out how Transport for the North can embrace innovation to deliver transformational improvements to the region's rail network, including Northern Powerhouse Rail.

The work was led by the NRIL Innovation Group following a series of workshop and engagement sessions with TfN over the last 18 months. The authors identified five key challenge areas for innovation at the transport body and set out recommendations for each area. These include:

1. **Awareness:** Develop a plan for identifying, defining, and prioritising TfN challenge statements and communicating these widely to solution owners.
2. **Funding:** Define an innovation funding strategy for TfN that specifies sources and means of accessing funding for solution owners.
3. **People:** Make innovation a key pillar of TfN's people strategy, ensuring that the leadership and corporate behaviours support an organic culture of innovation.
4. **Procurement:** Embed procurement and contracting approaches in TfN that support and drive innovation, its exploitation and commercialisation
5. **Supply Chain:** Develop a plan to harness the inherent capability of northern SMEs, consultants and universities.

Co-authors of the report, Rhianne Evans and David Taylor both from Thales, said: "Innovation can be a key driver of Transport for the North's vision for a thriving north of England that is underpinned by a world class transport system. In this new report we sought to outline how, through enabling innovation and adopting new ways of working, TfN, Key Stakeholders & the Supply Chain can work together to deliver the rail improvements to achieve this.

"There is a clear case for improving transport links and connectivity across the North through major upgrades, to help boost investment, provide jobs and drive economic growth in the region. Against the backdrop of the Coronavirus pandemic, there is now even greater pressure on our industry to deliver these outcomes on time and on budget. We also know that TfN faces challenges to decarbonise, increase connectivity and improve accessibility on the network.

"We believe that innovation is part of the solution to address these challenges. Innovation has an important role to play in the procurement of infrastructure and services, improving passengers' experience of transport; and improving business processes and ways of working. Through this, TfN will be able to deliver transformational changes to our transport system."

Justin Moss and Mike Hulme, Co-Chairs, Northern Rail Industry Leaders (NRIL), said: "NRIL are delighted to share this report on how innovation can help transform our transport system across the North. In a post-Coronavirus world, ensuring the rail industry is able to innovate, deliver to time and budget and show that network improvements are value for money, will all be essential. To encourage passengers back following the pandemic and help in restarting the economy, we need to show we can deliver in an affordable and effective manner – something which will require new, innovative approaches.

"We want to say to thank you to David and Rhianne, as well as to everyone who helped author the report and participated in our workshops. We have also had fantastic engagement with Transport for the North throughout, and we look forward to continuing to work with them to implement the recommendations of this report.

"At NRIL, we believe that innovation in the rail industry can help drive growth and provide opportunity across the North, as we look to build a transport network that meets the needs of everyone in our region."

Moving forward, NRIL will continue to coordinate an Innovation working group to support delivering on the

report's recommendations.