

Launch of SWR's 'Journey to a Better Future' sustainability strategy

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South Western Railway (SWR) has launched its new sustainability strategy – *Journey to a Better Future* – which sets out an ambitious programme for serving, safeguarding, and strengthening its people, places, and the planet.

Following the **announcement** of its landmark commitment to become a net zero carbon train operator by 2040, ten years ahead of the UK's overall legal deadline, the strategy expands on SWR's mission to become an industry leader in all aspects of sustainability.

As the cost-of-living crisis deepens and recession looms over the UK economy, the launch of the strategy is accompanied by fresh public polling carried out with YouGov, which has revealed:

- The public is more likely to think policies for tackling climate change should be prioritised over policies to achieve high economic growth. 49% of the public believes that policies tackling climate change should be prioritised, even if economic growth is slower. 34%, on the other hand, believes policies for high economic growth should be prioritised, even if they are not the best for tackling climate change.

Younger people (18-24) are more likely to prioritise policies for tackling climate change (58%) over policies for economic growth (18%). Majorities of those living in London (59%) and Scotland (60%) believe that policies tackling climate change should be the priority.

- The public is split over what the priority for public spending should be. 43% of those polled believe spending on preventing the impact of climate change is a priority now and should be significantly increased, even if this means cuts are needed elsewhere. This compares to 42% who believe we should focus on other more urgent priorities.
- Just over half (51%) of the public is concerned about future travel disruption due to extreme weather associated with climate change.

However, the polling also showed the public is less willing to prioritise the environment when it comes to spending their own money:

- 47% say their current priority is saving money, regardless of the effect this may have on the environment, compared with only 16% who prioritise acting in an environmentally friendly way, regardless of the effect this may have on their personal finances.
- 52% of all those polled are not willing to pay extra to use more environmentally friendly forms of transport, but almost two fifths (38%) would pay more, rising to 50% of Londoners.
- A majority (56%) of the public thinks that environmental impact is important when deciding what mode of transport to use, but more of the public believes that convenience (95%) and cost (91%) are important. Those living in London are the most likely (68%) to believe environmental impact is important.

SWR believes that the railways will be a critical part of building a more sustainable future for the economy and society, and is determined to play a more active role in supporting communities across its network, and customers and colleagues of all backgrounds and needs.

The strategy contains a number of additional commitments: from ensuring that SWR is net biodiversity positive at all its stations and depots by 2030, to securing the top accreditation under the Government's Inclusive Transport Leaders Scheme, and publishing and actioning a diversity, equality, and inclusion strategy roadmap.

These commitments are backed by other findings in the polling commissioned:

- An overwhelming 75% of the public believes large corporations should be doing more to support their most vulnerable customers, with only 10% believing they are doing everything they reasonably can.
- A majority (56%) of the public believes that a diverse workforce is important for improving customer service. This rises to 63% for both women and those aged 18 to 24.

Claire Mann, Managing Director of South Western Railway, said: "As one of the UK's largest train operating companies, we connect the people and places that matter, but we also know our customers care about more than just their journey."

“This polling shows that, even during times of economic hardship, people want to us to prioritise doing things in a more sustainable way.

“Our bold sustainability strategy is designed to deliver just that, setting out a series of pledges to have a positive impact on our people, places, and ultimately our whole planet.

“This is just the start of our journey to a better future and I look forward to bringing it to life with all our customers, colleagues, and the communities we’re so proud to serve.”

SWR’s *Journey to a Better Future* can be read in full [here](#).

Photo credit: South Western Railway