

Network Rail boss calls on business leaders to get behind reform of rail system

December 8, 2022



Network Rail boss and Great British Railways Transition Team Lead, Andrew Haines, has set out why the creation of a single coordinating, decision-making body for rail is necessary if the full benefits of the Integrated Rail Plan (IRP) are to be realised.

Speaking to regional business leaders at the Sheffield office of Arup, Andrew Haines called on business leaders to get behind fundamental reform of Britain's rail system in the same way they support major investment projects. He said that to get the railways working as they should, supporting growth and prosperity in every part of the country, requires investment in building the right things as well as updating the way the sector is structured.

He said: "Make no mistake, the Integrated Rail Plan is a massive investment in the north. It's brilliant. It has the potential to alter the travel habits of millions of people – making journeys greener, more reliable and faster. Cities with reduced road congestion and cleaner air. New employment opportunities and business connections.

"The frequency of trains from Leeds to Manchester potentially more than doubling, and journey times

falling from 55 minutes to 33 minutes. But I'm afraid if the IRP is all we do, we will be missing a great chance."

"Only if we create a clear decision-making and leadership body for the railway – what has been called Great British Railways... can we join up decisions to maximise efficiency and speed up improvements. For instance, ensuring the IRP delivers all that it promises for customers."

The comments come after the Transport Secretary Mark Harper says a final decision on Great British Railways (GBR) had not yet been made.

Asked at a hearing of the transport committee whether it was still his intention to set up GBR, he said: "It's very much my plan to achieve the intention behind that idea, which is to get the railways to have a guiding mind behind them, to have a more integrated position between how the different parts of the industry work."

The article in the Independent said the transport secretary said he wanted to "take some time" to listen to "alternative viewpoints" about how this aim could be achieved.