

# Rail Minister calls for digital skills and diversity in rail industry at Railtex 2019

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The Rail Minister, Andrew Jones MP, attended Railtex today (Wednesday 15th May) at Birmingham's NEC, delivering a keynote speech at the RIA Future Focus Conference calling for more digital skills and workforce diversity in the rail industry.

The Minister said the rail industry has a requirement for 50,000 new workers by 2033 to replace retiring workers and to adapt to changes in technology.

"The shape of transport has dramatically changed by digital disruptors. Rail travel is part of a single journey paid for on a mobile phone through a single platform that allows passengers to seamlessly travel from one mode of transport to another." He said.

He added: "If the industry is to continue to thrive it needs to become more nimble and ready to quickly respond to these changes. It's a world in which the expertise of suppliers will play an increasingly important role and one that holds a wealth of opportunities."

The Minister also addressed topics including the 'boom and bust' model of funding and how to smooth out

the process for supply chain companies, as well as the need to address the lack of a visible enhancements pipeline. He also addressed the environmental impact of diesel trains, amongst other topics, in a lively Q & A.

Following the keynote address the Rail Minister was taken for a guided tour of the exhibition, meeting representatives from a range of organisations including British Steel, EAO Ltd, Garrandale Rail, Hitachi and Knorr-Bremse, amongst others, discussing the latest product innovations and developments on show across the three days and how they can be utilised on the UK's railways.

Darren Caplan, Chief Executive of the Railway Industry Association, accompanied the Minister on the tour of exhibitors at Railtex. He said: "It was great to show the Minister the fantastic products and services the rail supply industry has to offer. From 3D printing to new digital information services, the Minister could see that the rail industry is providing benefits and innovations to UK plc every day.

"It was also good to hear at the RIA Future Focus Conference the Minister addressing rail funding concerns. We clearly need to see 'boom and bust' smoothed out in the future, and for the DfT to provide a visible pipeline for enhancement projects in CP6. But we are heartened that the Minister is clearly committed to addressing these issues."

Thursday is the final day of Railtex 2019, and will feature another packed programme of events, including keynotes from Network Rail's Stuart Calvert and Labour MP Andy McDonald at the Seminar Theatre, HS2's Robin Lapish discussing supply chain opportunities at the Knowledge Hub and a dedicated recruitment seminar and panel discussion hosted by Railway Gazette.

Registration for the final day of Railtex is available on arrival at the venue, or visitors can pre-register and pay online to avoid the queues and get fast access to the show. Registration fee is now £20.