

Rail Partners' annual George Bradshaw Address

February 21, 2024



Rail Partners has hosted the annual rail industry event, the George Bradshaw Address, where it called on the main parties to 'follow the evidence' backing a public private partnership for the railway, and 'get on with reform'.

At the event, which saw both Huw Merriman MP, Minister of State for Rail and HS2, and Stephen Morgan MP, Shadow Minister of State for Rail address more than 200 senior rail industry representatives, the trade body, which represents rail operator owning groups and freight operating companies, warned that government overinvolvement in the railway leads to poorer outcomes.

Chief executive, Andy Bagnall told the speakers that, 'without actual legislation to create Great British Railways, the central tenets of the Plan for Rail are in the sidings' and that 'we don't agree that a public monopoly is the best way to fix the industry'.

The event coincided with the unveiling of the new draft Rail Reform Bill by the Department for Transport,

which the trade body has previously said was a useful step forward but not a substitute for introducing legislation to create a new public body to oversee the railway.

Rail Partners used the annual George Bradshaw Address to highlight that, while welcoming the current government's explicit support for private sector operators, it has been slow to deliver much needed reforms, in spite of a plan to do so. And that the Labour party's current stated aim to put the railway back under public control goes against the evidence that shows competition leads to better outcomes for passengers and taxpayers both in the UK and across Europe.

Speaking at the event Andy Bagnall, Chief Executive of Rail Partners, said: "We believe it is possible to get the best of both worlds to deliver for passengers and freight customers – a new public body to oversee the railways so customers know who is in charge, but harnessing the innovation and investment of private sector operators to attract customers, grow revenue to balance the books, and free up money for other national priorities. We also need a stable environment for freight operators, to enable them to grow and help decarbonise supply chains."

Martijn Gilbert, Managing Director of First Open Access Operations (including Lumo and Hull Trains), commented: "It was great to hear many positive comments from speakers and attendees at the George Bradshaw Address about the growth and success of Lumo, and encouraging to hear the Government commit to accelerating the process for new open access operators. The rail sector has a vital role to play in helping the nation achieve its full potential – from hitting net zero to connecting regional economies and enabling social mobility. Just this month, Hull Trains published a report showing that it is expected to add up to £700m to the UK economy from its launch through to 2032.

"Open access operators like Lumo and Hull Trains prove that the public and private sector can work in genuine partnership, leading to investment which drives innovation and better outcomes for passengers.

"A great example of this is the new connection we hope to make between Sheffield and London, which will reduce carbon emissions and improve journey times between two key cities. We look forward to working with the government and all political parties to deliver more positive change through rail – because there are certainly more opportunities to unlock."

Prior to the event, Rail Partners launched its 'Manifesto for Rail' setting out a five steps the next government must take to allow the railway to succeed.