

# RIA-commissioned survey reveals value of rail industry innovation – more needs to be done

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The Railway Industry Association has completed an innovation survey – with around 300 rail business representatives – which has revealed the importance of innovation to the sector, but that far more needs to be done to get innovation into the industry.

The survey revealed that:

- The majority of the respondents, 84%, consider innovation very important within the rail industry;
- None of the respondents felt that the rail sector was ‘extremely innovative’, with only 4% saying it was ‘very innovative’ and 46% saying it was ‘quite innovative’ – 50% said it was ‘hardly innovative’ or ‘not innovative at all’; and
- In comparison, when thinking about other sectors, 73% of respondents thought automotive was either extremely or very innovative. The equivalent figures were 52% for defence, 31% for finance and 27% for transport in general.

Additionally, 1 in 3 respondents said procurement processes had the greatest impact on innovation in rail, whilst 41% said availability of innovation funding would.

The results are published on the day RIA is launching a series of one hour Unlocking Innovation webinars taking place each weekday from 20 to 24 April, held in partnership with Network Rail's R&D Portfolio and the UK Rail Research & Innovation Network (UKRRIN).

David Clarke, Technical Director of the Railway Industry Association (RIA), said: "The survey published today shows the railway industry recognises the vital need for innovation within the sector, but that far more work needs to be done to unlock innovation in the months and years ahead. Whilst the industry is currently facing a difficult period with the outbreak of Coronavirus, we need to ensure in the long term that we continue to focus on innovating, bringing new ideas and solutions to market. The findings should act as a rallying-call for the industry – that we need to redouble our efforts to spur innovation across the sector.

"The rail sector is ready to meet this challenge. Network Rail now have more than £350 million available for R&D over the coming four years and the industry has initiatives like the UK Rail Research and Innovation Network (UKRRIN), a £92 million partnership between academia and industry, to develop innovative products and services. At the Railway Industry Association, we will be holding a number of virtual Unlocking Innovation events, to bring key industry players together, help the people with challenges meet the people with the potential solutions, with the aim of increasing the successful uptake of innovation.

"Over the longer-term, we hope to see perceptions of innovation in the sector improve, so we can make rail even more of a world-leading, innovative and dynamic industry in the future."

David Rowe, Head of Strategy at Network Rail Research, Development and Innovation (RD&I), said: "This survey demonstrates that the rail industry wholeheartedly believes in the importance of innovating, but that we're not yet confident enough in our ability to do so – something we at Network Rail are keen to change.

"The mission of the Research, Development and Innovation team within Network Rail is to ensure we can get new, innovative products and services to market quickly, utilising agile processes to assess how we can best develop these solutions.

"There is a fantastic opportunity for the rail industry to get involved in this work. Network Rail is investing £245 million into R&D over the five years to 2024, and with match funding from industry, we expect there to be over £350 million available to companies looking to innovate. We'd encourage all to look at our challenge statements and engage with our competitions and to think how we can work together to bring innovation into the sector, ultimately for the benefit of all those who use our railways."

Luisa Moisio, R&D Programme Director of RSSB said: "It is a recognised priority for the research and innovations programmes in RSSB, NR and UKRRIN to work together as one team and make the landscape easier to navigate, so that we obtain tangible benefits for both the industry and its customers. Our joint efforts to update the Rail Technical Strategy and to closely coordinate pipelines are helping to clarify the key technical challenges, the developing solutions and the gaps. Events like Unlocking Innovation are essential to extend the reach of such initiatives, and help stimulate increased activity in the innovation space."

Jo Binstead, Chair of UKRRIN, said: “It is clear from the survey that innovation is needed within the rail sector, 84% of respondents have stated it is very important. UKRRIN, as a £92 million partnership between academia and industry, has a central role to play in supporting innovation in the industry with a focus on getting products to market quickly, and effectively. We look forward to working with the industry to support its technical and innovation work through our Centres of Excellence across the UK.”

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