

## “Smart, business-like, rational.” The future of the industry, according to Sir Peter Hendy

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Keeping track of who's who in politics hasn't been the easiest task over the past few months, and nobody understands the issue more than Sir Peter Hendy CBE, chair of Network Rail.

Since the start of September there have been three Prime Ministers, three Secretaries of State for Transport and three Rail Ministers (at the last count) – plenty to keep abreast of.

Speaking exclusively to Rail Business Daily at the Railway Industry Association annual conference in London this week, Sir Peter explained that although it has been a bumpy ride for a while, he is confident about the new team flying the flag for rail in Westminster, and hopes that finally, we may see some traction.

He explained that the most difficult part of the recent political turmoil has been the need to extensively brief people who were not in office for more than a few days, and who may not have the greatest understanding of the complexities of this in-depth industry.

However, Sir Peter is feeling positive about the new team: “The reason I’m optimistic is not because I

didn't think much of Anne Marie Trevelyan, or Kevin Foster, because it looked like they were good, sensible people. The limited engagement we were able to have in the time that they were in office seemed to me to be heading in the right direction. And it's a bit of a shame that we got to start again.

"But so far, Andrew Haines and I have met the new Secretary of State Mark Harper, he seems to be smart, business-like, rational. He asked the sensible questions, he listened to the answers, and the decisions I thought he made on the basis of that are very rational ones. So that's a good sign.

"And even better is that Huw Merriman is not a novice to the railway. He is an experienced chair of the Transport Select Committee. He has conducted, chaired numerous investigations into the railway in the last several years. So, he's coming with a great knowledge. He's nobody's fool. He asked good questions, but he starts with a much greater knowledge of the railway than many people would. I must admit to being really pleased that somebody like that has become the rail minister, because that will short circuit a hell of a lot of explanation, which otherwise we'd have to go into."

Sir Peter said that he received a report on 10 November that said the new transport team "gets the need for reform and they get the relative urgency and that we can continue down the same path."

He said that he thinks the political situation will stabilise, adding that new Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has got a pretty heavy job ahead of him. "Clearly the public finances are in a very precarious position. And I don't suppose the fiscal event in the next few days will produce much that's popular across many people. But I do think they look a good deal more stable than the last government did.

"If we concentrate ourselves on the Secretary of State for Transport and the Rail Minister, which is what we're all interested in, I think we've got two rational, clever people and however bad the public finance position looks to the railway I'm confident that they'll do the best that they can for the for the railway finances of the future."

*Image credit: Railway Industry Association*