

# Stronger together

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We operate in a complex and fast-changing landscape. With budget restrictions across all public spending; shifts in consumer values and habits, coupled with the uncertainty of Brexit, greater expectations, scrutiny and pressures are shining a spotlight on how businesses related to the UK rail industry make their money, on the impact they have on the communities they serve and on the importance of creating long-term shared value.

Over the past two decades my role has been to demonstrate the social and economic case for embedding sustainability (CSR) into the heart of business strategies across rail. Following privatisation, I created the industry's first sustainability role within a train operating franchise. Within the first year, youth route crime had dramatically reduced and community leverage was high. With clear strategic targets and demonstrable data, the role exceeded all expectations.

Fast-track two decades later and there is still a common misconception that being sustainable is purely about the environment. Yes, it is partly about that, but beyond the natural environment, sustainability is a concept that has a much broader scope - jobs, people, the local economy and even finance.

To be considered sustainable, a business must look beyond its immediate needs and act in a way that protects the needs of future generations. But that's not to say it is a purely selfless act. While it is about considering the long-term future of the local community and natural resources, it is also about considering the long-term future of businesses and their ability to grow in line with both public and market

expectations.

We are at a pivotal time in the UK rail industry and whilst we await the outcome of the rail review it is worth remembering that the prosperity of the industry and the communities it serves are intrinsically linked, and that one cannot survive without the other. Collaboration, accountability and transparency are key to responsible leadership.

### **About the author**

*Chris Leech MBE is a rail professional with over 20 years' experience in operations, working for passenger operators and in franchise bidding and evaluation. He is currently an Engagement Manager at the Rail Safety & Standards Board and Business Development Ambassador for the UK Scouts Association.*

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