

Transport Secretary: Consultation on primary legislative changes to reform our railways

June 10, 2022



Transport Secretary Grant Shapps says his department is seeking views on primary legislative changes required to effect rail reform as set out in the Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail.

In a written statement to parliament he announced the [launch of the public consultation](#), which follows the publication of the [Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail](#) in May 2021 which heralded the start of the biggest transformation of Great Britain's railways in three decades.

There was an announcement in the [Queen's Speech](#) on 10 May 2022 to introduce a Transport Bill to Parliament which will modernise rail services, put passengers and freight customers first, deliver for taxpayers and combine the best of the public and private sectors.

- [GBRTT: Publication of key report vital step in creation of 30-year rail strategy](#)

The statement from the Transport Secretary said: "The Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail highlighted the need for change. It was clear our railways had become fragmented, the system was complicated, and passengers deserved better. This alongside spiralling costs, delays to upgrades and commercial failures

pointed to a railway in need of fundamental reform. Getting this right means we can ensure this historic industry delivers for its users, setting it on a more sustainable and secure footing. It also means delivering a stronger, more levelled up and increasingly green economy, of which the railways are a crucial part.

Many of the commitments set out in the Plan for Rail do not require legislation in order to take forward, and the government is already working in close partnership with the rail industry to deliver rapid improvements for passengers and freight customers. For example, new **flexible season tickets** went on sale last summer and we continue to work with train operators to roll-out digital ticketing to make journeys easier. We are also undertaking a comprehensive accessibility audit of stations across Great Britain, continuing to cut the costs and time of infrastructure work through **Project SPEED** and developing a 30-year **whole industry strategic plan**.

In addition to this, we have launched the **Great British Railways Transition Team** (GBRTT), under the leadership of Andrew Haines, to drive forward reforms and develop the model for a new arms-length body, Great British Railways, including its initial structure, leadership and people.

GBRTT is focused on establishing a new, customer-focused, industry culture, driving revenue recovery efforts and establishing an Interim Strategic Freight Unit to work collaboratively with the sector, ensuring an immediate focus on delivery of the government's ambitions for rail freight. GBRTT is also currently overseeing a **competition for the location of a national headquarters for Great British Railways**, to be based outside of London, in line with this government's commitment to levelling up.

However, primary legislation is required to deliver key elements of structural reform set out in the Plan for Rail. This includes providing Great British Railways, with the powers and authority it needs to act as the single guiding mind for the railways, ending years of fragmentation. The consultation launched today seeks views of all those with an interest in our railways, to help shape these reforms.

The consultation is focused across 3 key areas as outlined below.

The first is on the establishment of Great British Railways, including its proposed functions and duties and how we propose to legislate and work with stakeholders to enable Great British Railways to become the single guiding mind for the railways.

The second is focused on how we will ensure clear accountabilities in the rail sector through a new governance framework, including the regulator's role in providing independent scrutiny and challenge.

The third centres on reform of wider industry structures and processes that are needed to deliver transformation of the railways and a new industry culture, including a new Passenger Champion role for **Transport Focus** and proposals for open data sharing.

Great British Railways is key to delivering a customer-focused railway. The plans outlined in this consultation will deliver a rail system that is the backbone of a cleaner, greener public transport system, offering passengers and freight customers a better deal and greater value for money for taxpayers.

The private sector has played an integral role in improving our railways over the past 25 years – these

plans are designed to take the best of the private sector and fuse it with a single guiding mind that can drive benefits and efficiencies across the system as a whole.

I hope that all of those with an interest in our railways will find the time to participate and share their views through this consultation. Sharing your views will help to ensure the legislative changes we enact will deliver the vision set out in the Plan for Rail, securing our railways so that they are able to flourish into the future and as we approach their bicentenary in 2025.”

Responding to the consultation, Darren Caplan, Chief Executive of the Railway Industry Association, said: “These announcements are a welcome step forward in the journey to establish Great British Railways and its passage through Parliament.

“Thousands of rail businesses play a vital role in the construction and operation of the UK’s railways, and so it is good to see the Government recognise the need to harness the ‘best of the private sector’. We also support the proposal for the licence from Government to require GBR to encourage private sector involvement and take account of the benefits of rail investment for the economy and the supply chain.

“Whilst this process takes place, it is vital that the Government avoids a hiatus in current work and decision-making on rail projects, and gets on with delivering these reforms to provide businesses with as much certainty as possible.

“This consultation comes at an important time. It is clear that passengers are returning to the railway in strong numbers on all days of the week, reaching over 90% of pre-pandemic levels in May. Given the clear demand for rail travel, it is essential that GBRTT is ambitious about rail’s future and maximises the benefits of investment, to ensure rail is the backbone of a reliable and clean transport system.

“We will continue to work with our members to review and respond to the consultation by the deadline of 4 August.”

[Click here for more details about the consultation.](#)

Photo credit: Department for Transport