

# West Coast Partnership Stakeholder Conference discusses future aspirations for rail

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Industry figures were joined by politicians to discuss the future aspirations for rail at a major conference organised by the West Coast Partnership (WCP).

The annual WCP Stakeholder Conference was held this week (17 May) and discussed topics including how to attract passengers back to rail, driving regional growth, enhancing customer experience ahead of the introduction of Great British Railways (GBR) and building a successful highspeed railway.

Addressing over 200 delegates, the virtual conference saw keynote speeches from Rail Minister Wendy Morton, and Shadow Rail Minister Tan Dhesi, followed by updates from WCP on how the business is attracting passengers back to rail post-Covid, and building the future high speed network.

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- **West Coast Partnership holds first ever Stakeholder Conference**
- **West Coast Partnership announce research collaboration with the University of Leeds**

This year's conference follows last year's hugely successful inaugural event and was organised by WCP,

which comprises of Avanti West Coast, who operate services on the West Coast Main Line, as well as the West Coast Partnership Development (WCPD) – that works with HS2 Ltd and the Department for Transport to develop and operate high speed rail services.

There were also two panel sessions featuring a number of speakers. The first titled: “How can we ensure Great British Railways deliver for passengers?” included Managing Director of First Rail, Steve Montgomery, the Mayor of the West Midlands, Andy Street, Darren Caplan, Chief Executive of Railway Industry Association, and Louise Collins, Senior Stakeholder Manager for Transport Focus.

The second panel, “Driving regional growth – the role of rail in levelling up the country” included Transport for the North Chair, Lord McLoughlin, John Foster, Policy Unit Director at Confederation of British Industry, Philippa Cresswell, Avanti West Coast’s Executive Director of Onboard Customer Experience, and Acting Managing Director for WCPD, Russell Evans.

Opening the conference, Rail Minister Wendy Morton said: “Rebuilding trust, renewing infrastructure and reforming rail – this is my focus for reviving one of our great industries, because a leading world economy needs a reliable, resilient and efficient network. One that continues to shape our lives in a positive way, as it has done for 200 years.”

Shadow Rail Minister Tan Dhesi said: “The West Coast Partnership Stakeholder Conference was a great opportunity to discuss the UK railway’s future and what we can deliver for passengers travelling on our network.

“It’s a critical moment for the industry to come together, to discuss and collaborate. Post-Covid, rail should be at the heart of regional growth and community regeneration, wherein we must maximise investment to give passengers better, greener railways.”

Andy Street, the Mayor of the West Midlands, said: “I was pleased to be able to participate in the West Coast Partnership’s Stakeholder conference. Events like this provide an important moment to collectively reflect on, shape, and discuss the future of rail, which has a critical role to play as we bounce back from the Covid and for the future of the West Midlands.”

Managing Director of Avanti West Coast, Phil Whittingham said: “Rail is once again playing a vital role in supporting growth by reconnecting people to places and opportunities across the UK. We were delighted to hold this conference for the second year running as it was an opportunity to discuss and showcase with our stakeholders the valuable work the industry is doing to achieve its ambitions at such an important time.”