

Transport Committee

Oral evidence: [Scrutiny of the draft Rail Reform Bill](#),
HC 584

Wednesday 8 May 2024

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[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Iain Stewart (Chair); Jack Brereton; Sara Britcliffe; Fabian Hamilton; Paul Howell; Karl McCartney; Grahame Morris; Gavin Newlands.

Questions 91–129

Witnesses

I: Alex Robertson, Chief Executive, Transport Focus; Ben Curtis, Head of External Affairs, Campaign for Better Transport; and Professor Matthew Campbell-Hill, Chair, Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Transport Focus](#)
- [Campaign for Better Transport](#)
- [Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee](#)

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Alex Robertson, Ben Curtis and Professor Matthew Campbell-Hill.

Q91 **Chair:** Welcome to today's session of the Transport Select Committee, where we continue our pre-legislative scrutiny of the draft Rail Reform Bill. Before we get going, for our records, can I ask each of you to state your name and organisation?

Professor Campbell-Hill: I am Professor Matthew Campbell-Hill, chair of DPTAC, the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee.

Ben Curtis: I am Ben Curtis. I am the head of external affairs at the Campaign for Better Transport.

Alex Robertson: I am Alex Robertson. I am the chief executive at Transport Focus.

Q92 **Chair:** Welcome, all. We are very grateful to you for giving us your time and opinions this morning. I will start by asking each of you a very general question. It is often claimed that the ambition for this rail reform process is to put the interests of the passenger at the heart of the decision-making and delivery process. Very briefly, do you think that the Bill as it is currently drafted would do that? I will start with Professor Campbell-Hill.

Professor Campbell-Hill: A key part of it is that there was no provision in the Railways Act 1993 for having any due regard to passengers, especially with regard to accessibility. A key starting point is that the Bill pays regard to accessibility for passengers. However, it is important to note that this is primary legislation. When we think about passenger needs, especially disability and, therefore, accessibility for disabled people, we have to consider the heterogeneity of the disabled population and the wide differences in it. Of course, that, and what is available to disabled people to enable them, is changing all the time. Primary legislation might not be the place to get too specific, because it can be slow to respond. Actually, we want to be able to respond quickly to opportunities. That is my first point.

As a slight caveat, I note that it is very easy to think of the disabled population as about 20% of the population. It is not. It is everyone. At some point in your life, you are disabled—every single person. It may be only when you start off as a child, when you have to be carried around, or when you are wheeled around and, therefore, you have your first wheelchair. It may be transient, because you have injured yourself or are poorly. It may be in the later stages of life, because you have succumbed to illness or other issues. It may be because you are with someone who is disabled. You are a carer, a friend or a colleague, but you are with them, so you have the same restrictions on you as they do. In that regard, at this point, it is certainly a move forward from the original position.

Q93 **Chair:** I will come to the secondary powers in a moment. Ben, can we



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have your opening comments, please?

Ben Curtis: From our perspective, looking at the Bill, the plan for Great British Railways as it was envisioned in the Williams plan will be good for passengers. The current fragmented system is evidently not working for passengers. The concept of centralisation in the name of cohesion can only be a good thing. Currently, geography determines service patterns, the cost of tickets and the quality of service. That evidently needs to change. While there are financial realities that will underpin the railway, we are certain that the establishment of an integrated rail body is a good idea and, ultimately, good for passengers.

Q94 **Chair:** Thank you. Alex?

Alex Robertson: Yes, I think it is good. We know from passengers what they want. They want a more reliable, punctual service. They want better value for money. They want to get a seat when they get on the train. They want a more frequent service. They want to be kept informed when there are delays. Those are things that passengers repeatedly tell us they want.

This Bill creates a better environment in which that can happen by lining up track and train planning and getting the incentives right, but it will be a lot more than the legislation that delivers those passenger priorities. Good management and leadership is absolutely crucial. We need to get the right people into the industry, in the right positions. We need to get the culture right so that we have a real, hard customer focus driven through the industry. There is a lot more to come. This is just one important part of the jigsaw. I am sure that we will talk about some of the other pieces later.

Q95 **Chair:** That leads me neatly to my next question. We have had some concerns expressed that GBR may become Network Rail 2.0, particularly because the corporate vehicle is the Network Rail infrastructure body. How concerned are you about that happening, that it will not change the culture in the railways?

Alex Robertson: I understand the concern that people might have. You could argue that it is easier to create a new culture in an entirely new organisation. I don't think it is particularly a problem, though. It is worth saying that Network Rail sees creating a new culture in the IRB as absolutely critical. I am sure that you will have had evidence on that from Network Rail itself. It is about having the right people, getting in the right leadership and the IRB having sufficient clarity of direction and purpose in how it is set up, and then the operational freedom to go on and deliver with the new culture. I don't have a problem. I think it is a sensible, pragmatic way of moving forward.

It is obviously worth saying that we should not wait for change to happen and the legislation to come in. Passengers right now want a better service. Getting the right management and culture set up to drive those



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improvements forward is crucial. I don't think that it is hindered by the arrangements in the legislation.

Q96 **Chair:** Matt and Ben, do you share those views?

Ben Curtis: We broadly agree. The logistically easiest thing to do is to designate Network Rail Infrastructure Ltd as the IRB. Obviously, Andrew Haines has made a big song and dance of saying that he does not want to create a Network Rail 2.0, but it is important to make sure that the same cultures, practices and focus on engineering are not taken forward to the new IRB, either through primary legislation, if needed, or in the licence or the business plan afterwards.

Q97 **Chair:** Thank you. Matt?

Professor Campbell-Hill: Again, I broadly agree. For me, part of it was thinking about a lot of what you heard in this Committee throughout the latter half of last year, especially on the difficulties of regulation, the difficulties of enforcement and the difficulties around service. There is a lot of uncertainty. We may well come on to that later today. Here is a chance to revamp all of that and bring it into one system. Hopefully, that will enable a much clearer path for everyone included.

Q98 **Chair:** Another concern that has been reported to us is about the reserved powers of the Secretary of State to intervene. While it is entirely appropriate that the Secretary of State is ultimately responsible to Parliament and the country for it, there is a concern that these reserved powers could stop it being an independent body. How concerned are you about that?

Alex Robertson: We are talking about a very large amount of money, so it is important that the Secretary of State should be able to set the strategic direction and priorities for the new body. I can understand why directions and guidance are potentially useful beyond that, too. It is a question of how they are exercised in practice and the transparency around that. There is a good degree of consensus that the operational management now needs to come out of the Department for Transport and sit with the IRB, with the right people driving the right customer-focused culture in the IRB. They should be able to get on with doing their job, but it is a very large amount of public money, so I can completely see why the Secretary of State would reserve some powers of direction and guidance.

Q99 **Chair:** Would you want to see the Bill amended in any way to create some framework or to set out the ways in which the Secretary of State could intervene, or are you happy with the drafting as it is? I will start with Alex.

Alex Robertson: I am happy with the drafting. Some transparency about the directions and guidance will be important when they are issued, but I would not suggest any changes to the drafting.



Q100 **Chair:** Ben?

Ben Curtis: At your last oral evidence session, Andy Bagnall said that there is broad agreement across the industry that the Secretary of State is going to need powers to set up the terms of the licence and the teething pains that will occur when we move towards Great British Railways, but I think those powers need to be limited when the IRB is up and running. The reason that we are here discussing this Bill is that one of the things that is not working on our railways at the moment is that too many decisions are being held up by the DFT and other stakeholders, as they have too much oversight of aspects of the railways. Although some oversight is necessary, I agree with Alex that these powers need to be applied judiciously, to make sure that the IRB can have space to breathe, so to speak.

Q101 **Chair:** Matt, do you share that view?

Professor Campbell-Hill: Yes. There is always a flip side when you create an opportunity for oversight like this and that is what you are raising here—what would be the concerns? But what are the opportunities? As I raised earlier, if there is a change, or a change is needed, that is quite an opportunity to enable enforcement. I come back to what we heard last year about the lack of enforcement, or the difficulties that people were having. Enabling someone at that level to say, “This needs to change, this is how it needs to change, and it needs to happen now,” is really important.

Q102 **Karl McCartney:** Chair, I was hoping that you were being devil’s advocate with some of your questions just now. Although I liked to hear some of the answers from the three of you, I am probably going to question Ben more than the other two, if you don’t mind. Feel free to chip in.

Ben, surely you will agree that, whoever the Secretary of State is, they are the elected person who represents the country and transport in the Government. Nobody wants anything like covid and lockdowns to happen again, but should there be some emergency planning or emergency contingency, there has to be something in the regulations that allows a Secretary of State to step in to help or assist the whole rail sector, rather than saying, “It’s nothing to do with me, guv. You’ve got the powers, the reasons and whatever else, and the decision is to be made.” That may be where Matt was coming from.

Those are the things I am looking at. I worked in the SRA, which really was not an independent body. Everything went through the Department for Transport and then to the Treasury. You would hope—this comes to your point, Alex—that where we are going at this point is that there is proper autonomy and the right people, in the right roles, to run the railways as they should be run, on a customer-focused basis.

Ben Curtis: Obviously, there needs to be a level of the Secretary of State being able to set out, through the business plan, the outline of what



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needs to happen, but there needs to be a level of independence. As I said, it is not about the day-to-day operations of running the railway. I am no legislative expert, but it is our position that the IRB needs to have space to breathe in order to get the job done, essentially.

Q103 **Karl McCartney:** I agree with that. Does either of the other two witnesses have anything to add?

Alex Robertson: No.

Professor Campbell-Hill: Not from me.

Q104 **Grahame Morris:** Matt, I was interested in your answers earlier about the 1993 Act and the fact that the interests of passengers and disabled passengers were not even considered. What role should passengers and organisations like yours have in shaping the policies in the integrated rail body's business plan?

Professor Campbell-Hill: There is a very key part. I will focus a bit on the accessibility side, if I may.

Grahame Morris: I want to do that because, very recently, a constituent of mine, Jill Cole, contacted me. She was having a day out with her disabled nephew, who was in a wheelchair. We only have an hourly service from Seaham to Newcastle. It consists of two carriages. They were denied access on three occasions. They waited for two hours. The little boy was in tears. It doesn't seem to me that the interests of disabled passengers are being served properly either with the physical infrastructure—ramps and lifts—or with the personnel, through Northern Assist or Passenger Assist.

Professor Campbell-Hill: I am very sorry to hear that. Unfortunately, I couldn't say to you anything along the lines of, "I'm glad that's a one-off," because it is not. It is nowhere near it, as we have heard. I say "we" because I went through all of your sessions on this last year. What you heard time and again is that there are systemic failures. Our systems, especially our rail system, are seen as complex, inefficient, unreliable and discriminatory. That is a big word that came up for me. There is a real need for some kind of legal provision to protect people and to enable disabled passengers to get on.

Q105 **Grahame Morris:** It is not happening now, but how is it going to happen under the new structure?

Professor Campbell-Hill: A key part, for me, has to be that from this point onwards—actually, DPTAC has been involved in all of this work until now—we should not be looking at having conversations about how we make the thing that already exists accessible. It should have been baked in. It has to happen from the start.

I have yet to be shown an example where an accessibility improvement has been made that has made it worse for anyone else. That is in any area or mode of travel. That is what we need to do. It appears that that



is being baked in at this point, with the “due regard to”. DPTAC would like to see much more clarity on exactly what that says. Essentially, I am picking up on what Ben was saying a moment ago. What does it actually look like? Of course, that is not going to be done at this point. That is the work that is to come.

Q106 Grahame Morris: Mr Robertson, the draft Bill broadens the powers of your organisation to allow it to raise issues with other bodies. I am thinking about the Office of Rail and Road, in particular. There is the example of the ticket office closures, when the Rail Delivery Group brought forward proposals to close the ticket offices. What do you think about the draft Bill’s proposals in relation to the powers that your organisation will have?

Alex Robertson: You are right: it broadens our powers slightly in terms of who we can raise issues with. Broadly, we keep the same functions and are not so dissimilar from now. We are an advocate for consumer rights and for passengers. We are not a regulator. We are really clear about that. We are not suggesting that we should have enforcement powers. Understandably, we work closely with the ORR at the moment. Its role will obviously change once the IRB is set up. We will need to think about that. It seems sensible to me that, as the White Paper suggested, we should revisit the MOU that we have with the ORR so that we are really clear about what we do.

One of the things on which you will have heard a lot of evidence is the need for absolute clarity, so that you do not get two different regulators. We are not a regulator. We need to be very clear about how we relate to the ORR under the new relationship, once it is set up.

Q107 Grahame Morris: I can see that the draft Bill is giving you powers to make representations—to be consulted—but you won’t have any teeth. I am thinking of a practical example. If you think that the closure of ticket offices is a bad idea and you say that, but the Secretary of State or the ORR decides to do it anyway, is that a good thing?

Alex Robertson: The ticket office closure was a very particular one-off power that does not relate generally to what we do. We are quite comfortable with the idea that we are a consumer watchdog. We are very passionate about what customers want. We can investigate, go anywhere, do anything and look at any issue. That is different from a regulator. A regulator will have to operate within the bounds of the regulation.

In our evidence, we suggest a small change to the legislation to bring our responsibilities and powers into line with what we have in relation to the bus network, where people are required to respond to us. In practice, that tends to happen—

Q108 Grahame Morris: I was just going to ask about that. I was trying to tease that out. You want the powers not just to be consulted and to make



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representations, but to receive a response from the Secretary of State or whoever.

Alex Robertson: Yes. In practice, we have tended not to have an issue, but it would give us a bit more teeth, as you say, and bring us into line with the powers in relation to the bus network, which were reviewed relatively recently.

Q109 **Grahame Morris:** Ben?

Ben Curtis: There is not much more that I would add to that. It seems like a smart move to allow Transport Focus to make direct representations to the IRB and the ORR. That seems like the obvious thing to do. I do not have much more to say. We are not a statutory body. We do not feed back to Government in that way.

Q110 **Grahame Morris:** Matt, are you in broad agreement there?

Professor Campbell-Hill: Yes. We feed back to Government in a very different way. We have direct access. Arguably, under GBR, you would not have the issue that came up around ticket offices. The way that came about would not happen.

Q111 **Chair:** I have a supplementary for Alex. Under the powers that you have with regard to buses, is there a timeframe within which the response has to be made, or is it open-ended?

Alex Robertson: It is open-ended. We have not suggested exactly what the timeframe should be in relation to rail, but some timeframe equivalent to what other public bodies need to respond would seem sensible to me.

Q112 **Gavin Newlands:** Can I direct my questions to you, Matt? I suppose that they are a continuation of my colleague's questions, but I will start with a more general one. The draft Bill proposes to expand DPTAC's role to advise both the IRB and the Secretary of State. How do you anticipate that working in practice?

Professor Campbell-Hill: It is an issue we have to keep thinking about and looking at closely with them. The explanatory notes on the draft Bill say that there were conversations with DPTAC about this. I believe that there were but, unfortunately, it was before my time. It was felt that no particular resource was needed or anything like that. Where I am sitting now, I do not know what the resource needs are going to be. That is something we really have to come back to. What is the clarity? What are the specifics that are going to be asked, and do they stack up?

It is important to understand that DPTAC is a very small organisation. We are a small committee, and everyone working on the committee is working part time for DPTAC. To enable them to give the right advice and pay due attention, we need to ensure that we have the staffing and the time to do that. We rely heavily on the organisations outside. We are really fortunate in this country to have some fantastic organisations, like



my colleagues here and Transport for All. There are huge numbers of them who are brilliant at making it understood what conversations need to be had. At DPTAC, we rely on them as well as our own knowledge.

Q113 Gavin Newlands: To be clear, you will be engaging with those groups as you work out your role, so that you get as wide a range of voices as possible. Do you think that the role envisaged for DPTAC in the draft Bill as it stands is a sufficient safeguard for accessibility?

Professor Campbell-Hill: It is part of it. You wouldn't want to rely on a small committee like DPTAC for all of it. The important part is to ensure that it is not wholly reliant going forward. It is about ensuring that DPTAC is engaged over the coming years so that you get clear regulations in place.

As some of you may know, I have spent quite a lot of the last few years working across different regulators. In my mind, regulation works only when it is clear, so that you can actually act on it. If we can work to do that, it will help to set some of it in place and enable other parts. You would never want to be wholly reliant on one small organisation, but it is an important part of the whole.

Q114 Gavin Newlands: You will be aware that DPTAC has come under a bit of criticism for its submission and efforts thus far. Do you think that you have the confidence of the wider disabled community as regards the accessibility requirements that will be on the face of the Bill moving forward? Is that something you need to work on?

Professor Campbell-Hill: It is something we definitely need to work on, and we continue to do so. When I started the role at the beginning of last year, one of the first things I was very clear about was that we need to increase public awareness and understanding of who we are, what we do and what we are doing. As you will see, over the past 14 months we have published 34 documents. In the previous year, DPTAC published three. The year before that, it published seven. Those are the numbers you were looking at before. There was not the ability to have transparency.

Now you can see the minutes not only of our main meetings but of our working group meetings. I thought that it was very important for people to be able to see what we are talking about. Obviously, minutes are different. The key bit is that we are not a lobbying organisation. Like the non-executive director role, we are the critical friend. We are the Fool to King Lear. We are the person who is there to be able to have the frank conversations. What is really important about those conversations with your friends and colleagues is that they are the people you can ask the stupid questions. You need a feedback system where you can ask the stupid questions and people can give you the true, unfiltered answer. That is not understood by many.

Do we have the confidence of the public? I am very pleased to note that we have launched our recruitment exercise to take on new members.



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There was a pause on it because of the issues around covid for many people. We had over 200 applications. I believe I am right in saying that DFT has never had so many applications for a role. I think that we have the confidence there. We are in the process of doing that.

The final thing to say is, that if you look through our minutes from last year, you will see that I and other members of DPTAC were heavily involved in discussing ticket offices. Obviously, we had a very clear view of what was needed around that, and there was a clear outcome.

- Q115 **Gavin Newlands:** In an answer to Mr Morris, you referenced the words “have regard to”. Transport for All has said that the duty to “‘have regard to the accessibility requirements of persons who are disabled’...falls very short of providing the necessary legal framework to enforce tangible improvements.” Do you agree? Do you also agree with its assertion that we need to see the proper safeguards put in or written down, either on the face of the Bill or in secondary legislation, rather than this vague statement to “have regard to” that is in the Bill as currently drafted? If so, what would you change it to? If you were writing it yourself, what would you change it to?

Professor Campbell-Hill: That is the problem.

Gavin Newlands: I am giving you the power.

Professor Campbell-Hill: It is actually something I have asked myself. What is the right wording? I understand what Transport for All said there. Again, going back to what we heard last year, these are real concerns. What does it actually mean? What is that clarity?

For me, it comes back to the point that I do not think that primary legislation is the place to have anything else. Where does the specificity stop? What do we get into? For me personally, the problem is the second part of your question: what are the words to replace it? I don’t know what the words to replace it are for this Bill.

- Q116 **Gavin Newlands:** Speaking personally—I am not speaking for the groups—I think that the problem is this. I have been in this place for nearly nine years. We hear, “We don’t want to be too specific. We don’t need to see that on the face of the Bill. That will be dealt with in secondary legislation.” Lo and behold, when secondary legislation appears, either it is not dealt with or it is not dealt with anywhere near sufficiently. I take your point, but that is the understandable concern of groups. With that in mind, here is my last question. Is the Bill as it stands a missed opportunity to tackle the long-standing accessibility issues in the rail sector that we all know exist?

Professor Campbell-Hill: No, I don’t think that it is a missed opportunity. Mainly, this particular Bill is about starting the process to enable the work that will enable us to do that. That is why I get stuck with the previous question—the end bit of what to change those words to.



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No, I don't think it is a missed opportunity. The really important work starts now.

Q117 Sara Britcliffe: In December, the Government announced that they were not going to pursue a centralised ticketing system run by GBR. Is that a concern for the panel?

Alex Robertson: We know what the public want. They want simple, easy to understand fares, and they want to be able to get them in a variety of different ways. They want it to be clear whether any conditions are attached to those fares and they want to guarantee that they have got the best fare.

A centralised ticketing database would be one way that might have helped with that. I don't think it is critical for it. If you ask the public what they want, they tend to say the three things that I said, rather than, "Give me a central ticketing database or website." I do not think the change you described pre-Christmas is necessarily a bad thing, but what I would want to see in fares reform, which is absolutely critical, is to reduce the complexity of the fares and make them much simpler so that when you are going to buy a fare from X to Y or A to B, you are confident that you have the lowest fare possible. That is what needs to happen, and there are different ways of achieving it.

Q118 Sara Britcliffe: Do you believe that the Bill addresses that in any way, shape or form?

Alex Robertson: It is the same issue that we were just talking about in relation to accessibility. The legislation gives you the framework to create the IRB, to get a single organisation that brings together track and train, to get the business planning right, and to make sure that you have customer priorities in there from the beginning. You can do all of that. Is the legislation the way to solve some of those issues? Personally, I do not think so.

Q119 Sara Britcliffe: Ben?

Ben Curtis: I concur with that view. I could talk until the cows come home about the broken fares and ticketing system that we have and the 55 million different fares that are on sale. There should be a broader third-party market for ticket sales so that innovation can take place in the sector, but I would probably defer to your next witnesses to talk about fares and ticketing. They will be able to talk more about the centralisation of ticketing and the Government and Opposition view on that.

Q120 Sara Britcliffe: You don't think it is a mistake that it is not on the face of the Bill.

Ben Curtis: No, I don't think so. As I say, I think it needs to be dealt with in secondary legislation. That is my understanding. Just getting the basics and the broad framework right is the most important thing rather than going into minute detail.



Professor Campbell-Hill: I agree, especially after the issues we heard last year. It has already been brought up that you can get different tickets in different areas and the specialties, especially if you add the issues around accessibility. This is not the place for it. It certainly needs to be dealt with, though.

Chair: Thank you. As you alluded to, we will be exploring the ticketing issue further with our next panel.

Q121 **Grahame Morris:** We touched on the role of the ORR. Do you agree with the suggestion that the role of the ORR should be expanded so that it is not just involved in the oversight of safety and competition? Alex, I will ask you because you touched on it previously.

Alex Robertson: I think the role of the ORR will clearly change when the IRB is created.

Q122 **Grahame Morris:** Should it involve the views of passengers? Should it have some responsibility for the passengers' perspective as well as for competition and safety?

Alex Robertson: We have slightly different roles. We are in a position where we can give really clear advocacy in relation to what passengers want. The ORR's role as a regulator needs to be different. It needs to be grounded in the licence and the arrangement that the IRB is set up for.

I know you took evidence from them a couple of weeks ago. They were talking about whole-system regulation. I think they will need to think about what that looks like in practice. It is slightly down the line. It depends on the operating model that is set up and what the relationship is between the IRB and the transport operating companies. Of course, there will be some parts of the network that sit outside the IRB's control as well. There is a lot to be worked through.

There needs to be good dialogue with the ORR. I mentioned the White Paper and revisiting the MOU with them. I think that is right. I have said this before. It is not so much for the legislation, but baking in a laser-like customer focus all the way through, from setting up with the right people at the top to the metrics that are set up to measure performance and the priorities of the sector—all of those things need to be in the foundation of the IRB. Some of that, as I have been saying, will need to be worked through in the next stage.

Q123 **Grahame Morris:** Ben, you were nodding. Should service and quality be baked into the ORR's role?

Ben Curtis: Yes, we think so. It is slightly strange that the ORR will only have responsibility for the track part of bringing track and train in-house. This would be quite a good opportunity to create a kind of unified regulator that encompasses all areas of the integrated rail body. The integrated rail body will be huge, and getting on top of the information



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that is produced or released is going to be a task in itself. We would certainly welcome that idea.

One of the things that we felt was needed in the Bill is the ability of the ORR to sanction the integrated rail body if it has failed to meet the obligations as laid out in the business plan. At the moment, you can levy fines and penalties on operators when they are not performing. We do not really understand why that is not being transferred to the new integrated rail body.

Q124 **Grahame Morris:** I have made a note of that. It is a really good point. Thank you. Matt?

Professor Campbell-Hill: For me, this is where it comes back to what we were talking about with Transport for All's quote earlier. This is a great opportunity for a stronger, proactive and really enforceable route to accessibility duties. It is being able to have the teeth that we have talked about. That definitely goes beyond the "having regard to" phrase. That is the role of a regulator.

Q125 **Grahame Morris:** It is not revolutionary. It is simply a continuation of what we have under the current arrangements, but given the powers to apply fines and other sanctions.

Ben Curtis: My understanding is that it is relatively common practice, not just on that point but to bring the regulator into track and train. They do it in Germany, France and the Netherlands. As I say, I cannot speak as a real expert on rail regulation, but I am sure there are greater minds who can assess the details and the functionality of how it might work.

Grahame Morris: Thank you very much indeed.

Q126 **Chair:** The final question for this panel is an open one. Is there anything else that you would like to see in the Bill?

Alex Robertson: Not for me. There is a lot of stuff that is not in the Bill that comes next. Get that absolutely right. Get the culture right. Get the leadership right. Also, don't wait. Let's crack on. The Bill is going to create a framework. It is going to bring track and train together, but if we know it is coming we can start to make some of the changes and some of the more customer-focused interventions even before the change comes into effect.

Q127 **Chair:** Ben?

Ben Curtis: I absolutely agree. The key point is to get this Bill before the House of Commons and, hopefully, passed. I joined Campaign for Better Transport in September 2022, and we were talking about the possibility of it going before the House. We are now two years down the line, and we still have not seen it. I would try to keep the Bill as streamlined as possible.



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One concern that we mentioned in our report—I am afraid my knowledge doesn't extend to talk about it further than just this point—was that a member of our team made the point that Network Rail was not subject to freedom of information requests until 2015. We would be very keen to ensure that the new body was subject to freedom of information requests. As I say, I do not know much more on that, but it is definitely something we did not see in the Bill and it may need to be covered in primary legislation.

Q128 **Chair:** If your organisation has any further points on that, please write to us with the detail.

Ben Curtis: I would be delighted to.

Q129 **Chair:** Matt?

Professor Campbell-Hill: Again, what we heard throughout last year—I apologise for keeping coming back to it, but it was very powerful—were strong sentiments, warm words and voluntary commitments. Strategies that do not translate into real change are not of comfort. A coherent action plan with commitment, ringfenced funding streams and cross-operator working is the important route forward. This gives us the opportunity to start doing that with the idea of—even though it is only “having regard to” at the moment—having accessibility and the passenger baked in from the start. That is really important.

Chair: Thank you all very much indeed for your evidence this morning.