



Department for Transport

Huw Merriman MP
Chair of the Transport Committee
House of Commons
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From the Secretary of State
The Rt. Hon. Grant Shapps

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Dear Huw,

Great British Railways: The Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail

When I became Secretary of State for Transport, I said that my overriding priority was to make the trains run on time. I want a railway that works in the interests of passengers and which makes travelling by train as easy, as comfortable and as affordable as possible. I have today set out our plan to achieve that through the publication of the Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail White Paper.

In 2018, following a chaotic timetable change, the Government commissioned Keith Williams to undertake a root and branch review of how our railway system operates. What we found was a railway system which was too fragmented, too complicated and which did not put passengers first. In the time since the review, the railways have faced an existential challenge through the near total collapse of passenger demand during the coronavirus pandemic. The plan we are setting out today has been developed both in response to that review and to ensure a sustainable future for the railway network.

Through our reforms we will make a bold new vision for passengers – of punctual and reliable services, simpler tickets and a modern, green and innovative railway that meets the needs of the nation. The Plan sets out our vision for an ambitious rail transformation programme delivering 10 key outcomes:

- A modern passenger experience
- A retail revolution
- New ways of working with the private sector
- Economic recovery and financial sustainable railways
- Greater control for local people and places

- Cleaner, greener railways
- Bold new opportunities for rail freight
- Increased speed of delivery and efficient enhancements
- Skilled, innovative workforce, and
- A simpler industry structure

To bring about change on the scale that is needed we will create a new body, Great British Railways, to integrate the railways for the first time in a quarter of a century, owning the infrastructure, collecting most fare revenue, running and planning the network and setting timetables. It will be a single, familiar brand responsible for delivering better value fares, punctual and reliable services and which ends the confusion of the current system.

This is not renationalisation, which this Government continues to believe failed the railways – rather, it is simplification. While Great British Railways acts as the guiding mind to coordinate the whole network, our plan will see greater involvement of the private sector – private companies will be contracted to run the trains, with stronger competition to run services. Our reforms will also unleash huge new opportunities for the private sector to innovate in areas such as ticket retailing and data that can be used by passengers to better plan their journeys.

By treating the system as a whole, Great British Railways will simplify the current mass of confusing tickets. This will include rolling out new flexible season tickets, making significant roll-outs of pay as you go, contactless ticketing and digital ticketing on smartphones. Tickets will be available from a single website ending the current confusing array of train company sites and a single compensation system in England will provide a simple system if things go wrong.

As we build back better from coronavirus we have the chance to do things differently in this country. We are a Government which profoundly believes in the future of the railway and Great British Railways will help to secure its recovery. By ending the fragmentation, increasing accountability, making journeys easier and more comfortable, and by putting passengers first we can ensure that the system thrives for decades to come, and of course, that the trains really do run on time.

I look forward to discussing these reforms in greater detail when I appear before your committee next week.

I am copying this letter to members of the Committee

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Grant Shapps', written in a cursive style.

Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT