

Written evidence submitted by Transport East (RRB0027)

The UK Government has put forward a plan for the future of railways, publishing a draft Bill for pre-legislative scrutiny. The draft Bill will see the creation of Great British Railways and bring together responsibility for both rail infrastructure and services. This will provide clearer lines of accountability and help to build a more modern and financially secure sector and a network that is more adaptable and efficient. Scrutiny of the Bill will be led by the Transport Select Committee.

This paper sets out the response to the draft Bill endorsed by the Transport East Board on 22 March 2024.

1. A summary of the aims of the Draft Rail Reform Bill.

- 1.1 The draft Rail Reform Bill contains the primary legislative measures, which form a key part of delivering rail reform in Great Britain and the delivery of the reforms included in the Government's Plan for Rail. The Transport Select Committee has launched a pre-legislative scrutiny of the Draft Rail Reform Bill and make recommendations to Government on how the Bill might be improved.
- 1.2 If enacted, the draft Bill will provide the necessary legislative foundations for an Integrated Rail Body (IRB) with franchising power creating Great British Railways.
- 1.3 The draft Bill will enable:
 - **More accountability** through the establishment of GBR by bringing together the management of the network and the commissioning of passenger services into a new public rail body that puts customers first and delivers efficiency. The Secretary of State for Transport's franchising authority functions will be transferred to GBR, ensuring that operational and infrastructure decisions are made in a coordinated way. The new body will serve as the single point of accountability for the performance of the railway where previously it was split between Network Rail and the Secretary of State.

- **Better service** by bringing track and train together enabling the sector to run as one system for the benefit of customers and taxpayers. Whole system strategic decision-making should lead to improved reliability and performance of passenger and freight services. GBR's regional structure is intended to ensure differing regional customer needs are part of decision-making.
- **Smarter growth of the sector**, as GBR will be a commercially-focused organisation that will contract with the private sector to maximise investment and innovation throughout the sector. This includes improving connectivity and choice through more direct links and more options for passengers.
- **Greater efficiency** by working in close partnership with the private sector to deliver a more efficient, modern rail system underpinned by better collaboration and aligned incentives, generating value and savings that will have benefits for passengers and taxpayers.
- **Improved focus on customers** through specific accessibility and freight duties to ensure that accessibility on the railway is improved and the experience for disabled passengers is enhanced. Rail freight will be targeted for growth, recognising the sector's economic benefits and potential for expansion.

1.4 Ministers published the Bill on 20 February 2024 and the deadline for submissions to the Transport Select Committee is 27 March 2024.

1.5 The Draft Rail Reform Bill can be found [here](#).

1.6 The question being asked is, would the provisions of the draft Bill establish an IRB with the independence and accountability to achieve its aims?

2. **Great British Railway Transition Team (GBRTT) Call for Evidence February 2022**

In February 2022 the UK Government had developed five strategic objectives for the Whole Industry Strategic Plan over the next 30 years: meeting customers' needs, delivering financial sustainability, contributing

to long-term economic growth, levelling up & connectivity, and delivering environmental sustainability. This would bring together all areas of rail under one organisation.

2.1 A summary of Transport East's top five responses to this call for evidence is provided below.

- **The role of STBs:** As the 'single voices' for transport investment across England, we fully recommend that STBs are an integral part of the new governance structures of Great British Railways
- **Using STB Transport Strategies:** The seven Transport Strategies of the STBs across England (and the Mayor's Transport Strategy in London), have been developed in partnership with all regional partners and subject to widespread consultation, and should be part of the foundation of the WISP's national and regional priorities for rail.
- **Decarbonisation and new models of funding:** Rail is fundamental to the UK's decarbonisation goal, but to facilitate the mode shift required from road-based transport, we must tackle affordability, connectivity and convenience. New models of funding may be needed, and STBs are well placed to support GBR with this.
- **Integration:** Integration with other transport networks is fundamental to deliver end-to-end journeys for the customer that are competitive with the private car. This requires strong collaboration with National Highways and Active Travel England, as well as local partners. STBs, with multi-modal transport strategies and multi-agency partnerships are ideally placed to support GBR in facilitating this.
- **The Transport East region:** The objectives of the WISP must look beyond a focus on metropolitan urban areas and also prioritise better connections our smaller towns, coastal and rural communities. In the East, this requires new and better East-West rail connectivity, connectivity from South Essex to the north of the region, and faster connections to

neighbouring regions including London, Cambridge, the Midlands and the North.

- 2.2 Transport East's response to the Draft Rail Reform Bill is consistent with the points raised by Transport East in 2022.

The Transport East response to the Draft Rail Reform Bill will be a broad response and not focussed on the detailed legislative clauses.

3. The role of Sub-National Transport Bodies

- 3.1 The Local Government and Cities Devolution Act 2016 sets out that the role and governance mechanisms for Sub-national Transport Bodies (STBs) are the governance mechanisms by which locally elected leaders from across the region come together as a Single Voice to agree transport strategy and investment priorities.
- 3.2 The legislation requires that STBs set a Transport Strategy and advise the Secretary of State on transport priorities for region. Transport East's Strategy was accepted by the Secretary of State in May 2023. It sets out an integrated framework for investment to deliver a range of outcomes against its four strategic priorities, listed below, delivering both locally and for government.
- Decarbonisation to net-zero
 - Connecting growing towns and cities
 - Energising coastal and rural communities
 - Unlocking international gateways
- 3.3 The Transport East Strategy was developed through engagement with all local authorities and subject to robust public consultation and Integrated Sustainability Appraisal. It has been endorsed through the formal cabinets of each of our Local Transport Authorities
- 3.4 Taken together the seven STBs Transport Strategies (alongside the Mayor's Transport Strategy) are the only endorsed multi-modal sub-

national transport strategies in place in England. These should be the framework on which all strategic transport, including rail, is planned.

- 3.5 The STB Boards contain the right people and governance requirements to make strategic decisions. The Transport East Board contains elected members from Local Transport Authorities, Local Planning Authority representative and include participation from National Highways, Network Rail and the Department for Transport.
- 3.6 Transport East has a Rail Leadership Group, which reports to the Board and contains the region's lead parliamentarians for rail, representatives of TOCs, Rail Freight, Local Authorities, Network Rail, GBRTT and other bodies.
- 3.7 Transport East in collaboration with England's Economic Heartland and Transport for the South East are proactively seeking to establish the Wider South East Rail Partnership proposed in the Williams-Shapps Rail Reform White Paper. This will ensure wider co-ordination of strategic rail priorities across the three STB regions.
- 3.8 Therefore, the building blocks of the Integrated Rail Board (IRB), regional governance already exists through the STBs, and we would encourage the Transport Select Committee to recommend their use as part of the IRB Regional Structure.
- 3.9 Whilst Transport for the North is the only statutory STB as yet, other STBs are actively considering their evolution, in line with the devolution agenda. It is conceivable that over the next few years, the resource and influence of STB partnerships in all areas of transport may grow to play a more formal role in representing 'place' in rail / transport decision-making.
- 3.10 Given the proposed role that TfN (through the Rail North Committee) and TfL will have in the IRB, it would be logical at this stage in reform to consider how that approach be applied elsewhere in England, using the

STBs to ensure consistency of approach and representation of places across England.

- 3.11 The Transport East board has consistently identified the Transport East partnership as the body by which they, as democratically accountable authorities, collectively wish to pursue strategic rail planning across the East region with government and the IRB.

4. Smarter growth, greater efficiency and improved focus on customers

- 4.1 We welcome the commitment to maximise resources to deliver social and economic benefits resulting from the operation of the railway network. Rail infrastructure and services are a vital component to the delivery of STB integrated transport strategies.
- 4.2 Following acceptance of the region's Transport Strategy, Transport East has published a series of documents over the last year to further evidence and identify the rail priorities of our partners. These include the State of Rail report ([link here](#)), Keeping Trade on Track ([link here](#)), and our forthcoming Short Term Opportunities for Rail in the East.
- 4.3 The STB Transport Strategies are integrated transport strategies, considering the end-to-end needs for passengers and freight. They also recognise the importance of rail in delivering net-zero through mode shift. An integrated approach to rail is essential if it is to achieve its full potential for growth.
- 4.4 Acknowledging the importance of an efficient rail system that provides value and savings. However, it is also important to recognise the social needs of customers and the importance of connectivity, especially on branch lines. This may require consideration of providing services that, in the short, term may not be commercially viable.
- 4.5 Smarter growth and efficiency will also require coordination and cooperation across regions, STBs already work closely with each other.

4.6 The Rail Reform legislation should therefore include future provision for:

- STBs to have a lead role in the Integrated Rail Board governance structures, and
- The STB Transport Strategies to be the basis on which all rail priorities are identified in each region.

5. **Recommendations**

5.1 The Rail Reform legislation should therefore include future provision for STBs to have a lead role in the Integrated Rail Board governance structures

5.2 The Rail Reform legislations should consider STB Transport Strategies to be the basis on which all rail priorities are identified in each region.

5.3 The Rail Reform legislation should ensure that rail is part of an integrated approach to transport, considering the end-to-end needs of customers.

March 2024