

BusinessLDN Response to the Department for Transport's Consultation on Rail Reform and the Establishment of Great British Railways (GBR)

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BusinessLDN welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Department for Transport's consultation on the forthcoming Railways Bill and the establishment of Great British Railways (GBR).

BusinessLDN is a business membership organisation with the mission to make London the best city in the world in which to do business, working with and for the whole UK. We represent 170 large leading businesses across London, spanning a wide range of economic sectors. Representing businesses across London and the wider Southeast, we recognise that a modern, integrated, and high-performing rail network is fundamental to driving economic growth, levelling up, and meeting sustainability targets.

We support the government's ambition to simplify the fragmented railway system and to place passenger outcomes and taxpayer value at the heart of reform. In the current challenging financial climate, it is essential that GBR leverages the best of both the public and private sectors, working in close partnership with private companies to unlock innovation, deliver value, and drive long-term economic growth. The creation of GBR presents a real opportunity to modernise rail infrastructure, improve service delivery, and deliver long-term strategic alignment across the system.

However, the practical delivery of the reform remains the critical test. Several areas require further consideration and greater clarity to ensure the GBR model delivers its full potential. These include the need for stronger safeguards for open access operators, a clearly defined statutory role for the independent regulator, a transparent and collaborative transition plan, robust protections for retail competition and assurances around the compatibility of private investment. The rail reform must empower all parts of the system – public and private, national and devolved – to deliver their full value.

Key principles we support

- **A simplified, transparent and unified system:** We strongly support the government's efforts to simplify the complex regulatory framework. A unified system will help GBR improve performance and efficiency across the network. A simplified framework with outcome-focused performance measures will enhance delivery and customer service, while ensuring alignment between long-term goals and day-to-day operations. Transparency and collaboration with industry stakeholders will be critical throughout this process.
- **An ongoing role for the private sector:** We welcome the government's recognition on the role of the private sector in the post-GBR era. To maintain a balanced and

resilient network, non-GBR operators must retain fair access to the network and the ability to contribute across concessions, freight, and innovation. We would also encourage the government to put more emphasis on setting out how the reform will result in increased private investment in rail.

- **Recognising the valuable role of open access operators:** We welcome government's continued recognition of open access rail services, which not only offer significant benefits to passengers and the UK's economy but also add operational and financial resilience to the rail network. Although we support this principle, the government's proposed direction of travel currently does not live up to this commitment. There is strong evidence on the positive impact of open access operations on passenger demand¹ as well as the additional revenue generated and contributions made to the UK rail sector². Ongoing recognition of the vital role open access rail services play is essential to maintaining a level playing field as reforms move forward.
- **Fair competition in ticketing:** We support a model where GBR competes fairly with third-party ticket retailers. It is essential that GBR's online retail offer operates on a level-playing field, and that the licensing function is structurally separated from GBR to maintain independent oversight and customer choice.
- **Stronger devolved roles:** We welcome the proposal to create a statutory role for devolved governments and Mayoral Strategic Authorities (MSAs) in influencing and scrutinising GBR. MSAs should have the powers to create unified transport networks similar to Transport for London's (TfL) model. In London, GBR must work closely with TfL to coordinate planning and service delivery across devolved and GBR-managed operations. Rail freight must also be incorporated into strategic planning.
- **Secretary of State oversight:** We support the Secretary of State setting a long-term rail strategy, to be published as statutory guidance to GBR. It is crucial that this strategy is co-developed with industry to ensure it reflects operational realities and provides a stable framework for long-term planning.
- **Integrated transport planning:** GBR must help deliver a nationally integrated strategy that supports modal shift, improves user experience, and drives local economic growth.

Key risks and areas requiring further clarity

- **Clarity on implementation ("the how"):** For a reform of this scale, the lack of a detailed implementation pathway may risk undermining confidence and delaying benefits. For the implementation to be a success, the government must provide much more clarity and detail on a phased delivery plan including detailed governance and transition arrangements. Achieving this will depend on proactive, early engagement with industry, suppliers, and devolved authorities.
- **Independent regulator role:** The Office of Rail and Road (ORR) must retain a robust and independent role in licensing non-GBR operators, overseeing access arrangements, and regulating interface issues. Ensuring a strong, independent role for the regulator is essential to give the industry confidence and transparency about the

¹ [The Impact of Open Access Operators on Industry Revenue and Journeys](#)

² [Open Access Operations Paying Their Way](#)

process. Collaboration between GBR and ORR on interface issues must be embedded in law, especially for managing touchpoints with non-GBR infrastructure.

- **Fairness on access policies:** GBR's exemption from internal access charges while requiring non-GBR operators to pay may distort competition. Access arrangements must be fair, transparent and subject to independent oversight. UK and international evidence shows that open access services drive competition, enhance passenger experience and bring huge benefits to our rail network and the UK economy – they should, therefore, be strongly supported where they deliver passenger value. However, considering current proposals, there is a clear risk that GBR's internal access policies may favour its own services. GBR's Access and Use Policy (AUP) must outline fair, transparent and consultative processes for allocating access terms.
- **Private sector investment:** The statutory duty for GBR to promote rail freight is positive but additional safeguards are needed to prevent GBR from prioritising its own services over others. The consultation document says little about the importance of increased investment in rail as a key to improving the passenger experience – and even less about how the proposed reforms will lead to such investment. A clear statement is needed from government on how private sector concessions can remain compatible with GBR. Without this assurance, investor confidence may be undermined.
- **HS1 and international services:** Integration of Network Rail High Speed (NRHS) into GBR must not compromise the independence or access arrangements for HS1 or international operators. The AUP must consider the HS1 network and be aligned with Access Management Regulations to preserve independent oversight and operational coherence. Necessary policies must be in place for NRHS to be incentivised to provide the required services in a fair and effective manner.
- **Licensing and performance outcomes:** While we support streamlining licensing, more detail is needed on how performance will be defined, monitored and incentivised – particularly in relation to safety, infrastructure delivery, and long-term investment.
- **Unclear transition planning:** The transition period, as with any reform of such a magnitude, poses considerable risks. Transfers of people, assets, systems and contracts must not lead to delays or loss of service quality. A clear, co-created transition plan is essential to avoid delays and costs.

Conclusion

This consultation marks a significant step in shaping the future of the UK's railways. BusinessLDN supports the vision for a more integrated, efficient, and passenger-focused system under GBR. But real success hinges on clear implementation, the preservation of healthy competition, and recognition of the private sector's critical role – and, above all, on collaboration across the entire network.

Our four main recommendations to the government are to:

1. **Ensure fair, transparent and inclusive policy development:** All future documents including AUP, Usage Plans, GBR Codes must be developed transparently, with clear timelines, in close consultation with industry, and provide clarity and fair treatment to all parties, especially non-GBR operators and implications to the HS1 network.

2. **Safeguard the regulator's independence:** The ORR must maintain a strong independent role by retaining its licensing powers, competition oversight, and an active role in regulating interface agreements and non-GBR infrastructure managers. This will ensure fairness and accountability within the new model.
3. **Clarify the private sector's role:** The government should put more emphasis on the need to increase investment in rail to improve passenger experience. To enable a level playing field and unlock private investment, the government should publish clear statements to affirm the role of private operators within the GBR model, including support for independent ticketing, freight, concessions, and innovation.
4. **Develop a phased, collaborative transition plan:** For the implementation to be a success, the government must work closely with rail operators, devolved authorities, freight, and suppliers to co-design a realistic roadmap including a sound transition plan. A clear pipeline of procurement and reform milestones will help the industry plan and invest with confidence.

BusinessLDN and our members stand ready to work with the government to build a modern rail system that delivers for passengers, businesses, and the national economy.