

SMARTER RAILWAYS TO MEET EXPECTATIONS

Sir, After a period of extraordinary growth, our railway is at a crucial turning point. Starved of investment for much of the past century, it is ten years into a sustained programme of improvement with more to come.

To respond to the challenge of a huge increase in rail journeys and people's expectations rising faster than the improvement in services, the railway must harness new technology and change the way we work.

By exploiting technology and smarter working, we can make train travel more reliable, accessible, affordable and comfortable, creating jobs in the sector and enabling manufacturers to grow the British economy. If we do not move forward, public and private investment will be harder to attract and these huge gains will be put at risk.

All of us in the railway and its supply chain are responsible for delivering a better railway.

We look forward to every part of the sector working together to see through this change and improve the lives of customers and the nation today and in the future.

Martin Griffiths, chief executive, Stagecoach Group; Mark Carne, chief executive, Network Rail; Paul Plummer, chief executive, Rail Delivery Group; Karen Boswell, managing director, Hitachi Rail Europe; Sir David Higgins, chairman, HS2 Ltd; Russell Mears, chief executive, Freightliner Group Ltd; Professor David Begg, chief executive, Transport Times; Dominic Booth, managing director, Abellio UK; David Brown, chief executive, The Go-Ahead Group; Malcolm Brown, chief executive, Angel Trains; Chris Burchell, managing director, UK Trains, Arriva; Nick Crossfield, managing director, Alstom UK & Ireland; Dean Finch, group chief executive, National Express; Paul Francis, managing director, Porterbrook; Alistair Gordon, chief executive, Keolis UK; Richard Hunter, UK managing director, Bombardier, Transportation; Mary Kenny, chief executive, Eversholt Rail Group; Jeremy Long, chief executive European Business, MTR; Tim O'Toole, chief executive, First Group; Neil Robertson, chief executive, The National Skills Academy for Rail; Steve Scrimshaw, managing director Rail Systems, Siemens UK; Maggie Simpson, executive director, Rail Freight Group; John Smith, managing director, GB Railfreight; David Stretch, managing director of transport, Serco; David Tonkin, interim chief executive, Railway Industry Association; Hans-Georg Werner, chief executive DB Cargo UK; Phil Whittingham, managing director, Virgin Trains

[November 21 2016, 12:01am, The Times](#)

[Railroading Change](#)

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[Only when rail unions accept new technology can extra investment be justified](#)

In a letter to The Times today, the heads of Britain's train companies warn the government that, without massive investment in new technology, the rail network will grind to a halt. Their intervention comes at a critical time. A record total of 1.69 billion passenger journeys were made on British railways last year, putting a huge strain on the network. Services are overcrowded, time-keeping is slipping and some operators are unable to run enough trains to keep pace with demand.

The train companies' attempts to harness technology to operate the railways more rationally and efficiently has run into the Luddite opposition of the rail unions, however. These unions are among the most recalcitrant in the country. Strikes and confrontations have left passengers furious, train companies reeling and the government powerless to sort out the chaos.

Britain's rail operators know that the industry needs to be hauled into the 21st century. It is no good trying to tinker with a system built for the steam age, as they admit in a report issued today. The technology exists to save money and boost efficiency. Innovations include locator beacons on trains to allow waiting passengers to track oncoming services and tell them of any delays, tickets that can be downloaded to smartphones and in-cab signalling to allow trains to run closer together and increase the number of services.

All this costs money. So also does the electrification of more routes, the building of new carriage fleets, redesign of antiquated stations, lengthening of platforms, removal of level crossings and the improvement of freight services. Costly new high-speed routes are needed not so much to cut journey times (a gain of only marginal benefit for the affluent few) but because they will free up essential capacity on existing mainline routes that are already choked.

The rail industry's pitch for more money for modernisation makes eminent sense in order to repair a backlog of dismal underinvestment. It will in turn help to make British industry more efficient and competitive. Rail is a good investment but the money must come with conditions; it cannot be squandered on a new "modernisation" that proves as ineffective as the 1950s proposals to end steam and make the railways pay.

Rail chiefs urge unions to join new century

Graeme Paton, Transport Correspondent
November 21 2016, 12:01am,
The Times

Attempts to modernise the railway have led to strike action by union members. Another 24-hour stoppage on the Southern network starts tomorrow

Britain's Victorian railway risks grinding to a halt unless the system is rapidly modernised, the country's most powerful train bosses have warned in a thinly veiled attack on union leaders.

Overcrowding and congestion on the network will reach crisis point in only a few years unless operators "harness new technology and change the way we work", it is claimed.

Major reforms being introduced to the railway include replacing paper tickets with digital ones, pulling staff out of ticket offices, replacing hand-operated signal boxes with digital lines and giving drivers sole responsibility for operating new trains — negating the need for a traditional guard.

In a letter to The Times today, 27 key figures say that without major reforms investment will be harder to attract and services "will be put at risk". The comments are seen as a direct attack on the unions, which have staged action in the past year over attempts to modernise the railway. The unions have called, or threatened, strikes on Southern Rail, Thameslink, Great Northern, Gatwick Express, Virgin Trains east coast, Eurostar and ScotRail so far this year.

In the biggest flashpoint, members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) have staged strikes adding up to more than ten days since April on the Southern network. Another 24-hour stoppage starts tomorrow.

The protest centres on the move to driver-only operated trains, in which the driver controls the doors from the cab, making the role of the guard redundant. The RMT claims that it represents a safety risk but Chris Grayling, the transport secretary, has accused the union of being opposed to the continued modernisation and trying to “cling to 1970s working practices”.

In today’s letter, rail bosses say that the industry needs to change to “respond to the challenge of a huge increase in rail journeys”. It is signed by Mark Carne, chief executive of Network Rail, Sir David Higgins, chairman of HS2 Ltd, and the heads of Britain’s biggest rail companies.

The letter coincides with the publication of a report from the Rail Delivery Group, which represents train operators, spelling out the key changes being made to the network. The report says that putting drivers in charge of doors has led to a 23 per cent reduction in the “dwell time” that a train spends sitting in stations. The change, which has been introduced to more than 30 per cent of trains, frees the conductor to focus on selling tickets, “reducing the need for customers to buy tickets at stations if they are pressed for time”.

Paul Plummer, chief executive of the group, said that outdated practices had to change to get the most out of billions of pounds of new investment.