# Call for Evidence: Railways Bill[1]

## Community Planning Alliance Response

The Community Planning Alliance welcomes the consolidation of rail services under the umbrella of Great British Railways (GBR) and understands that the Bill will establish GBR as the main body responsible for delivering rail passenger services, including setting fares, selling tickets, etc. We agree that this will reduce fragmentation and hope it will result in a simpler, easier, more user-friendly system for passengers.

We do, however, have some concerns that we hope you will consider raising. These are set out in response to your specific themes below.

## Themes

### A. Improving rail travel for passengers

**Encouraging Modal Shift:**

Passenger number growth is an important consideration, not only for the sustainability of the railway, but also to accelerate modal shift, reducing the impact of road-based traffic on the health and wellbeing of communities and the natural environment. It is an essential element of climate mitigation (reducing carbon emissions, reducing air, noise, light, vibration, dust and water pollution). It is also critical to service growth (more frequency, more affordability, more reachable destinations). There must, however, be incentives for citizens to make this change. It is currently perceived to be much more convenient, and also cheaper, cleaner and safer, to travel in your own car rather than by train, including for long distance journeys. So, there needs to be more than just financial incentives to drive this change, GBR must ensure services are supported by staff whose responsibility it is to ensure passenger trains are clean and safe (particularly following the recent mass stabbing on an LNER train). Such staff must be protected themselves too, with a supply of stab vests and other tools being available on all journeys.

**Funding:**

We are disappointed and concerned that the Bill does not provide the power for the Secretary of State to provide funding to GBR for passenger services (we understand this will remain under existing legislative powers). The existing funding mechanism appears to favour the construction of new or extended road schemes, rather than more sustainable transport options.

We note that clause 34 requires GBR to provide discounted fares to vulnerable passengers and hope the Bill will explicitly encourage GBR to stimulate passenger number growth through innovative schemes, such as offering a number of ‘free’ tickets at times when services are not at capacity. Funding would be required to provide such incentives, which we believe would encourage more rapid modal shift.

[1] https://committees.parliament.uk/call-for-evidence/3775/

**Consultation:**

Whilst we also welcome the intended improved customer experience the Passenger Watchdog will bring, the watchdog should be required to consult regularly with the public to determine priorities for passenger services. Whilst clause 36 requires the watchdog to consider the interests and needs of disabled persons, this is not the same as an explicit requirement to engage with a range of potential and actual rail users. This will be essential to ensure the stated priorities of GBR reflect the needs and concerns of citizens.

## B. Network access

We welcome clause 17, which requires the introduction of a target to increase rail freight, and we hope this will be a 'stretch target', ambitious and challenging to achieve but with results that will encourage a huge reduction in the amount of road freight.

This would not only reduce the impact of road-based freight traffic on the health and wellbeing of communities and the natural environment, it will also result in a significant reduction in carbon emissions and air, noise, light, vibration, dust and water pollution.

The target should encourage quick wins (particularly on routes which could accommodate an immediate increase in rail freight), a tangible increase in the medium term (with incentives (carrots and sticks) to persuade road freight users to introduce the modal shift) and longer term aspirations (which are likely to need a significant shift of funding from roads to rail).

We recognise that it is the government's intention for GBR to take decisions on the best value uses of the network it controls, and we understand that the housing secretary has told MPs that the government will make further announcements on streamlining planning decision-making for new homes near train stations in the coming weeks.

Whilst we believe that there are real benefits for the sustainability of GBR and our railway services if closed lines and stations are reopened, and that both passenger and freight services are significantly increased, we are rather concerned by the government's mistaken belief that development near a railway station is inherently sustainable. So, rather than further planning deregulation, we believe it is essential that there is a clear, funded, and sustainable transport strategy.

We recognise the former government allocated a small amount of funding to reopen railway lines and stations[2]. To grow the use of the railway, it is essential that this funding is significantly increased as reopening lines and stations can be complex and costly. Station buildings can also be restored and repurposed for new uses, such as community hubs or commercial spaces, to revive them and the surrounding areas. GBR should be required to ensure more effort is made to reconnect communities and businesses.

Whilst we believe such schemes will be strongly supported by local communities, there should be an explicit requirement to consult those impacted if there are to be any planned extensions to, or additional, lines and/or stations. Given the potential for personal and environmental harms, there should be significant opportunity for citizens to influence what is happening in their areas and how such impacts can be mitigated.

Where practical, communities should be encouraged to lead the restoration initiatives, with funding and support from GBR.

[2] https://www.gov.uk/government/news/moving-ahead-to-reopen-railway-lines-and-stations-including-one-not-used-since-reign-of-king-george-v

**C. Devolution**

Including the effects of the Bill in Scotland and Wales, the effectiveness of the proposed new statutory role for Mayors in England, and whether the right balance is struck between local decision-making and national direction.

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| Whilst we recognise it is the government's intention to agree partnership arrangements with mayoral strategic authorities (MSAs) to enable local influence over the railways and support integration with other transport modes, this does not bring decision-making close to local communities. Consultation with MSAs is not a replacement for public input. As mentioned above, there should be an explicit requirement to consult those impacted if there are to be any planned extensions to, or additional, lines and/or stations. |

Kind regards

Marj Powner

Vice Chair

Community Planning Alliance

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## About the Community Planning Alliance

The Community Planning Alliance is a national umbrella group for over 700 communities, all are campaigning against inappropriate development in their areas, and all disagree that decisions are being made in the 'public interest'. We have extensive knowledge and experience of the planning system, and our aims include seeking increased community participation, better environmental protections and the right homes and infrastructure in the right places.