Whole Industry Strategic Plan

Call for Evidence Response Form

09/12/2021

RESPONSE FROM NATIONAL PENSIONERS
CONVENTION

Responding to this Call for Evidence

This call for evidence launches on 9 December 2021 and will be open for eight weeks until 4 February 2022.

You may respond as an individual or on behalf of an organisation or organisations (please let us know all the organisations you are responding on behalf of) and can submit a response in the following ways:

- Online via the call for evidence webpage.
- Via email to cfe@gbrtt.co.uk using this response template.

We recommend you read the call for evidence launch document in full before submitting your response.

Please send the completed response form, along with any supporting information or attachments, to cfe@gbrtt.co.uk.

In the email subject please include your name and/or organisation and 'WISP call for evidence submission'.

Confidentiality

The information you send to us may be shared with colleagues within Great British Railways Transition Team, the Department for Transport and published or referred to in the Response Summary Report response document. All information contained in your response may be subject to publication or disclosure if requested under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. If you want any information in your response to the call for evidence to be kept confidential, or if it contains sensitive information, you should explain why and identify the information clearly within your response. Extracts from responses used within the Response Summary

Report will be agreed with the responder before publication, where information is not already in the public domain.

I am responding on behalf of: *
NATIONAL PENSIONERS CONVENTION

Chose an item.

If you are responding as an individual, please move to Section 2. If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, please fill in Section 1 and Section 2.

Section 1 – Organisation Details

Organisation name(s)*

NATIONAL PENSIONERS CONVENTION
62 MARCHMONT STREET
LONDON WC1N 1AB

Please identify the category, or categories that best describes your organisation(s)*

If multiple categories apply, please list within the "other" field below.

Choose an item.

If other, please state

The National Pensioners Convention (NPC) is a democratically based organisation made up of affiliated pensioner groups and members from across the UK.

Please provide a brief description of the organisation(s) you are responding on behalf of.
This may include information about who the organisation represents, the size of its membership and how the views of members were obtained.

The National Pensioners Convention (NPC) is Britain's largest pensioner organisation representing around 1m older people active individually or in numerous groups across the UK. The NPC campaigns for improvements to the welfare and living standards of pensioners in this country. The response to this consultation was compiled by the NPC Transport Group whose members have significant experience often at a very senior level in the transport industry.

Section 2 – Your details

Name

Jonathan Safir

Email address

info@npcuk.org

Please choose the region you or your organisation(s) are based within*

If multiple regions apply, please list within the "other" field below.

Choose an item.

If other, please state

We are a National organisation with members and affiliates throughout Great Britain

Please provide information about the reason for your interest in the Whole Industry Strategic Plan

The NPC considers the well being of pensioners holistically. Transport, including rail, is a significant factor in maintaining and improving the physical and mental health of pensioners. We are not a research organisation; thus our response is compiled from a practical viewpoint. Pensioners have many travel needs which include, hospital visits, shopping leisure and visiting friends and relatives. Many older people are no longer able to drive and those that can often find driving long distances difficult.

Therefore, rail travel is important for them.

Strategic Objectives for the Whole Rail Industry

The UK Government has developed five strategic objectives for the 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.** We intend to put these objectives at the heart of the Strategic Plan, and we are using them to guide all of the questions in this call for evidence.

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We recognise that many of you are working to similar long-term objectives. We are very interested in how you define and quantify your objectives, and how they match or differ from our own. When considering your response to question 1, please use your experiences to inform your answers and share any examples, taking into account that in all future scenarios we expect affordability to be a significant constraint.

Question 1
  a) How would you apply these objectives to rail in your region or to your area of expertise within the transport sector? Do you have evidence you can share with us of how you have applied similar objectives in relation to rail, and do you consider the objectives to have missed any key areas?

  b) How is it possible to make progress against a number of the objectives simultaneously? Do any of the objectives have larger barriers associated with them than others, or do any objectives pose possible barriers to others? Where would you make the trade-offs?

  c) What long-term trends in wider society, the economy, and the environment will affect these five objectives over the next 5, 10, and 30 years? Please give evidence to support your response.

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  d) What are the key uncertainties you consider that the Strategic Plan must be resilient to in order to be effective over the next 5, 10 and 30 years?

  e) Over the next 5, 10 and 30 years, which steps should the sector take to improve integration of rail with the wider transport system (including walking and cycling) in pursuit of these objectives?

Type your answer here or attach relevant documents to your email.

Please note the corresponding document titles or references for any attachments in this box.

To commence a consultation with a statement that affordability is a constraint is depressing. We all recognise that funds are limited but surely the key is to use a strategy to maximise investment in rail within projects that will improve efficiency and effectiveness of the system and its links to other modes of transport, thus encouraging more use of rail both heavy and light, and for passengers and freight?

All the objectives are interlinked; you cannot discard one without affecting the whole. However we consider that there are two missing:-

- **Maintain and enhance the safety of the network and**
- **Gain the support of staff by meaningful involvement in changes**

The main barrier, as always, is the availability of funds. Progress can be made simultaneously but systematically. In our view the main target needs to be meeting customer needs. If those are not met, the other ambitions will not be achieved in the long term. On a cost-benefit basis research has indicated that pensioners generated the greatest return as although they paid least into new works they paid the same as others so generating a greater return into the national economy.

It has been shown that rail travel enables mobility, reduces isolation and enables economic activity. In the longer term as the population in general ages, the strategic objectives will still remain despite a possible continuing movement away from heavy industry. Exports will remain vital to the UK economy and demands on effective movement of freight could increase. Similarly as the population grows and ages there will be a greater demand for new stations.

What is really needed is an appreciation of UK transport as a whole, instead of individual strategies for different sectors. For example rail can cover long distance transport and conurbation based transport well. However road based transport will be essential for many smaller towns and rural areas. It is the linking together that is the key to success.

Meeting customers' needs

Rail industry customers broadly fall into two types: passengers and freight. The rail network provides important benefits to the customers who rely on it. The Plan for Rail says that passengers must receive high-quality, consistent services day in, day out. This means accessible, reliable journeys that are well connected with other transport services and include new customer offers at stations and on trains.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, the rail freight industry has shown its resilience and agility, working to transport food and medical supplies around the country. This example, and others given in the Plan for Rail, highlight how important rail freight is to our economy now and in the future, and how we will develop growth targets for freight that will be included in the Strategic Plan. The Plan for Rail says of freight: 'national co-ordination, greater opportunities for growth and strong safeguards will put rail freight on the front foot.'

When considering your responses, please take account of the likelihood of changes in levels or patterns of passenger and freight demand over the next 5, 10 and 30 years, what that would mean for the rail system, and what will the interventions be over that period that will provide the maximum value for money.

Question 2

a) Passenger: how will rail passenger expectations, including accessibility requirements, evolve over the coming 5, 10 and 30 years, what will be the driving causes of these changing expectations, and how can they be most effectively met by the rail sector?

b) Passenger: in your experience, how can we most effectively monitor and assess customer satisfaction? What is a stretching yet realistic ambition for this objective and what measures can we most effectively use to consider success over the coming 5, 10 and 30 years? What evidence can you share to support your view?

c) Freight: what evidence can you provide regarding the advantage(s) of transporting goods by rail and what evidence can you share for how that could develop in the next 5, 10 and 30 years? What do you consider to be the most effective role for rail freight in the existing supply chains served and those that it doesn't? How could this change over that period? In answering, please explain and take account of likely developments in technology and in the wider economy.

d) What is a stretching yet realistic ambition for this objective and what measures can we most effectively use to consider success over the coming 5, 10 and 30 years? What are the interventions over that period which will be the maximum value for money, and what evidence can you share to support your claim?

Type your answer here or attach relevant documents to your email.

Please note the corresponding document titles or references for any attachments in this box.

Passengers expect a rail service to be comfortable, affordable, reliable and accessible. Dealing with these individually:-

Comfort

Station infrastructure is outdated and uncomfortable. People do not want to stand on freezing windy platforms and join a scrum to board a train. Even on the smallest. Neither do they expect to be carried in seats that that are crammed into a coach to maximise loadings. When compared with older designs modern coaches are often deficient. To improve the environment for rail passengers. We would suggest that GBR has a programme of adopting the following improvements :

- **The removal of all 2 X 3 seating in carriages to be replaced by 2x2 seating.**
- **The seats themselves need more supportive frames and softer cushions.**
- **A better distribution of airline seats and 4 bay seats for groups and families**
- **More reserveable seats for wheelchairs and people with reduced mobility.**
- **Improved toilets and more toilets for people with disabilities allowing wheelchair access.**
- **Adequate Wi-Fi, USB plugs and phone charging points.**
- **Improved internal customer information screens.**

Affordability

As a universal carrier rail has to be accessible to those on the lowest incomes and the shallowest pockets. The "turn up and go" aspect of rail travel should be protected. People cannot always predict with any certainty the time of day they can travel. A book ahead and seat reservation system is important for those with mobility issues. The cost of tickets is in general too high and the range too complex. The application of radically higher prices for what is defined as peak period travel is a disincentive for many; the justification appears to be maximisation of income for the rail operator. Moreover the definition of peak period is inconsistent, not just between regions of the country but also within individual operators. For pensioners there is also wide inconsistency in so called off peak travel on local networks. In many large cities, for example London and the former metropolitan areas pensioners are given free off peak rail travel whilst others outside those areas have to pay the full cost. There is an argument for a single fare

based on distance to be charged for all UK rail journeys, with perhaps higher rates for high speed journeys on special lines such as HS1 and HS2, and significant discounts for season tickets and railcards. Pensioners are the backbone of the voluntary sector, staffing charity organisations and carrying out voluntary duties to help and assist their own families and others less fortunate. Many need to use rail for such tasks and affordability is therefore key. In today's world many grandparents look after their grandchildren, and this includes taking them to and from school and on trips during school holidays. We therefore believe that a review of existing Railcards is required in order to allow Senior or Disabled Railcard holders to be accompanied by their grandchildren without having to purchase an additional Family railcard.

We support the introduction of smart technology for ticketing in a range of options including bankcards and smart phones. However, there is still a strong case for the retention of orange paper tickets purchased from a person in a booking office, especially for cross boundary services and complex journeys. This is particularly important for passengers with disabilities, those who do not have access to modern technology, bank accounts or are not able to use ticket machines. We also believe that railcards should be added to smartcard tickets should permit the automatic inclusion of railcards to ensure passengers obtain the appropriate fare.

Great British Railways should have the ability to set a common standard for Smartcard ticketing so that it is compatible across the whole network. All sub systems must be compatible with the national system and able to be used anywhere on the national rail network, ensuring passengers who make journeys across the country do not have to purchase multiple different smartcard tickets.
There needs to be a method of using a smart card for part of a journey and obtain the correct fare without the need to leave the train and touch in or out at a boundary station before continuing a journey.
We are concerned that there is too much emphasis on the fastest journey time, and this is often achieved by removing intermediate stops. This causes passengers especially those with reduced mobility to have to change train with increased waiting and journey along with having to change platforms at stations that are not step free.
It is therefore important that there is the right balance between limited stop and stopping services to reduce the number of times passengers have to make a change of train.

Reliability
Unexpected problems will always occur in any transport system, and

information is the key to minimising any impact on passenger journeys. A unified rail network should enable passengers to readily change their route between destinations if that is practical. For customers timetable information must be easily available in printed form as well as online, and for problems that occur whilst on a journey timely ad vice on alternatives is essential. Not everyone has access to a computer. Operators seem increasingly hesitant to produce printed information

<u>Accessibility</u>
Accessibility can be defined in many ways. For many it brings to mind mobility impaired people but in its wider sense it means the opportunity to readily take advantage of the rail service, which applies to everyone and must be an objective looking forward. People will expect that, whether in terms of passengers or freight. Rail is basically a service, and its operators must be sensitive to a changing world and create new opportunities for the service as situations develop. We strongly support the "Access for All" schemes and the good work it has done in making stations step free. However, we are concerned that this programme is very slow and selective. It is also subject to variations in funding with sometimes extra funding being provided, but more frequently it is the subject of cuts in funding.

- To encourage travel by train by people "Access for All" funding must be increased and spread across the whole network as soon as possible.

- We are of the view that when train operating companies are fined for poor performance or noncompliance with their obligations. This money should be added to the "Access for All" scheme funding and not send back to the Treasury.

- The monies not paid out to passengers in compensation should be transferred to the "Access for All" scheme with no corresponding reduction by the DfT.

Similarly, for freight, the advantage for rail in dealing with bulk loads is clear, and with the increase in rail hubs will become more so. However road transport will always be needed for the start or end trip and to attract companies with smaller loads efficient integration will be essential.

Customer satisfaction cannot be measured in terms of whether a train is on time or late – it's whether the cost and outcome of the rail journey fits the customer's requirement. The correct question therefore is "did the rail journey meet expectations?".
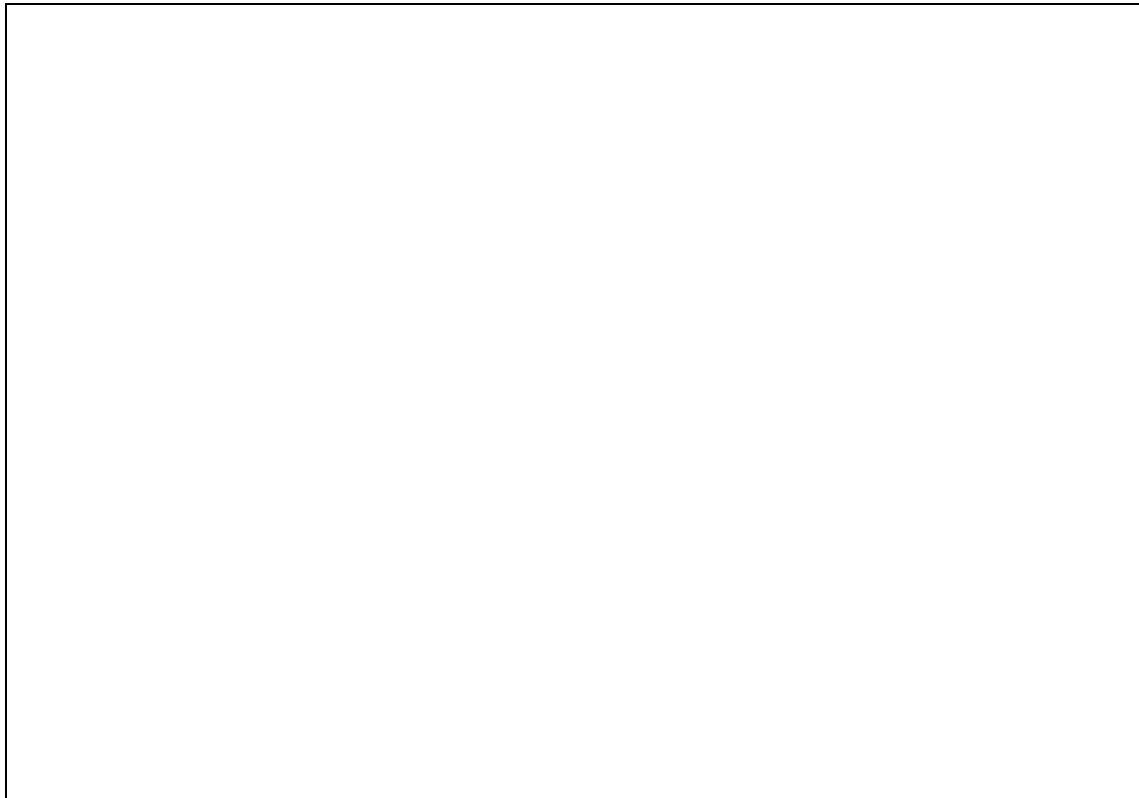
Delivering financial sustainability

Rail is both a public service, supported by the taxpayer, and a business, run by private operators, with paying passenger and freight customers. The railways have received unprecedented levels of public support throughout the pandemic, protecting the essential services that people, including commuting key workers, rely on. As the recovery and rail reform gains pace, as with all areas of public expenditure, there is an onus on the rail sector to ensure value for money for users and taxpayers in how funds are used, and it must harness the incentives of the private sector to deliver the service in the most cost-effective way.

The railway, accordingly, must seek to deliver infrastructure and services more efficiently, in order to maximise beneficial outcomes while balancing costs against revenue and taxpayer funding. This is more than just a short-term issue: we are clear that reducing the cost of the railway, increasing efficiency including through innovating with private partners, and achieving a better deal for users and taxpayers is a critical priority over the next 30 years.

When considering your answer to the question below, please consider how we can support greater efficiency (such as joined up operations), innovation, alternative sources of funding and/or cost base reduction. Similarly, what steps you would propose to improve the efficiency and reduce the cost of infrastructure projects, operation and maintenance, and what evidence you have to support your response.

Question 3

Where are the most significant opportunities and barriers to delivering financial sustainability in the rail sector over 5, 10, and 30 years and how do we achieve/overcome them? How can we most effectively monitor and assess this? What is a stretching yet realistic ambition for this objective and what measures can we most effectively use to consider success over the coming 5, 10 and 30 years? What are the interventions over that period which will be the maximum value for money?

Type your answer here or attach relevant documents to your email.

Please note the corresponding document titles or references for any attachments in this box.

As with any business the key to financial sustainability is delivering what the customer wants at a price they can afford and a timescale that fits. On the other hand the promoter of the service may have a simple profit motive. It depends on whether Great British Railways sees rail as a vehicle for profits or an enabling mechanism for economic and social targets to be achieved. The preamble to this question presumes that the private sector delivers services in the most cost effective manner. That is clearly untrue as we have seen recently in many areas of the retail and privatised utilities and indeed the bus network.
Thus, the major barrier for rail in achieving financial sustainability is likely to be political dogma at both central and local government level. Passengers as well as customers representing both passenger and freight interests must be given a real voice in planning the way ahead. As well as political appointees.

The method of financing rail is at the heart of this debate. It is nonsensical to expect rail to finance itself. After all no other transport sector does. It is right for rail to be partly funded by taxes just as road transport is. Rail is the vehicle which delivers people to work; to leisure and to school and so the UK government should rightly bear part of the costs of running the service, given that rail infrastructure and operation is for the benefit of UK society and activity within our boundaries (with necessary arrangements for international travel), The revenue stream from train transport should remain substantially within the UK, just as other countries manage that principle, so should we. And any (private) operators, if they say they are taking risk, must accept that they can and will make losses as economic activity waxes / wanes, and must stomach those losses, therefore 'cap and collar' on income / return needs to be rethought.
There is an inherent wastefulness in the present franchising system with poorly planned forward use of assets such as rolling stock, leading to wholesale scrapping of assets whose life could and should have been extended. Asset use plans should be formulated for all rail stock and infrastructure, and a planned maintenance and renewal programme introduced for the suggested 30 year cycle.

Contributing to long-term economic growth

Rail helps to boost productivity and growth through improved connectivity and job creation, enables supply chains, delivers goods to businesses and consumers and directly employs over 240,000 people (source: the rail sector in numbers). Among other factors, such as population growth, long term economic growth is influenced by emerging technology, and innovative, more effective ways of thinking and doing things. Over the next 30 years, wider economic, social, environmental and technological trends will change the role rail plays in our economy. It will be for the whole sector to demonstrate that it cannot only continue to deliver wide economic benefits in the face of a changed economy but that it can find new ways to catalyse growth and prosperity.

When considering your answer to the questions below, please share examples of any relevant local, regional and national growth and productivity, and examples of innovations and technology from the UK and abroad, research into trends that may influence rail's contribution to economic growth, and/or new ways of thinking that should be used in or for the rail sector over the coming 5, 10 and 30 years.

Question 4

a) As Britain recovers from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, what evidence do you have for how rail can contribute to wider economic growth over the next 5, 10, and 30 years? What is a stretching yet realistic ambition for this objective and what measures can we most effectively use to consider success over the coming 5, 10 and 30 years?   What type of interventions over that period will provide maximum value for money from rail's economic contribution, and what evidence can you share to support your views?

b) In the context of enabling development and regeneration opportunities both in the immediate vicinity of stations and within the surrounding area, how can rail best facilitate improvements to places and local growth, through improved connectivity and unlocking commercial activity, housing, and employment over the next 5, 10 and 30 years?

c) What innovative and modernising ideas do you have which would benefit the railway while supporting the strategic objectives? Please give evidence and make reference to how they would maintain or enhance the railway's safety record.

Type your answer here or attach relevant documents to your email.

Please note the corresponding document titles or references for any attachments in this box.

The preamble describes the context very well. Rail can be a critical factor in promoting economic growth but only if it looks more widely at its role. For example linking rail hubs to ports effectively is understood but what about exports? Too often container trains returning to ports are lightly loaded. And what about improving rail transport connectivity within the UK between production hubs?

Utilising spare rail land is obviously wise, but the availability of the land does not necessarily promote growth. That can only take place if the type of development is planned with the relevant authority to fit the infrastructure and context of the surrounding area, but of course sufficient land has to be retained to enable the railway to grow and modernise. A long-term modernisation plan with ring-fenced adequate financing is the best underpinning factor for that. The best key to long term growth through rail is to make it attractive to use and competitive on costs with other modes - it is fundamentally wrong that some domestic air fares are one-fifth of the same rail journey.

Levelling up and connectivity

The Secretary of State for Levelling Up has outlined four key outcomes on which the government will focus:

- Empowering local leaders and communities;
- Boosting living standards by growing the private sector and improving productivity and connectivity;
- Spreading opportunity and improving public services; and
- Restoring local pride.

Rail has an important part to play in working toward these outcomes, and particularly so in connecting the nations, regions and communities of the UK. Improved rail links can connect people to jobs, education and skills, high-quality housing, social opportunities, services, and green spaces, as well as encouraging the growth of businesses, and attracting leisure visitors into an area. Improving stations and surrounding areas can also act as a catalyst for regeneration and development and a cause for local pride.

At present, usage of rail differs widely across the UK; before the pandemic, almost two thirds of all rail journeys made were in London and the south east (Rail Sector in Numbers report from 2019).

When answering your questions, consider the ways in which rail can be used to improve connectivity and local economic growth over the next 5, 10, and 30 years.

Question 5

a) What evidence can you provide for how the rail sector contributes to the four levelling up outcomes and to improving connectivity across Great Britain, including through cross-border services? How does this change depending on the type of place where the sector operates (including in cities, towns and rural areas), and what are the most cost-effective ways at the sector's disposal to improve that further during the next 5, 10, and 30 years?

b) How could the rail industry, over the next 5, 10, and 30 years, become more responsive to, and more accountable to, local communities and passengers? Please give evidence and examples in your response.

c) What is a stretching yet realistic ambition for this objective and what measures can we most effectively use to consider success over the coming 5, 10 and 30 years? What are the interventions over that period which will be the maximum value for money, and what evidence can you share to support your views?

Type your answer here or attach relevant documents to your email.

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The preamble notes that nearly two thirds of all 2019 rail journeys were in London and the south east, which is hardly surprising given that for decades economic growth has been centred there. Rail cannot change this; it needs a political direction. It can however provide the basis for such a thrust. As the preamble says rail CAN connect people to better life outcomes but that can only happen with political direction. Reference is also made to cross border services presumably referring to Wales and Scotland, but there are also many borders within England for example between ambitious cities and their surrounding areas that need to be tackled as well especially in terms of passenger travel and benefits. Rural areas have largely been ignored. This requires improved investment in rail services across the country and in the regions in particular. However, this should not be at the expense of London. Levelling up is required not levelling down.

Connectivity must include overt recognition that administrative boundaries are not reflective of passenger need, with train services (as for buses) planned to maximise attractiveness to passengers, not to serve a defined boundary or local authority. Connectivity also has to include intermodal transfer for people whose start points and/or destination by rail are not near a railway facility, therefore buses and taxis etc should be integrated to stations, not timings, and passenger services on both should run for a maximised traffic day, not for profitable hours only. Connectivity can be increased by more trains and more routes (allowing for track capacity and modal power). - Electrification will increase capacity as well as speed, the latter is especially true for freight on rail.

Delivering environmental sustainability

The Plan for Rail commits to the creation of a comprehensive environment plan that will establish rail as the backbone of a cleaner future transport system, one that aims to protect and enhance biodiversity and the natural environment. That plan, the Sustainable Rail Strategy (SRS), will be one of the inputs to the Strategic Plan, and will build on and develop a strategy for achieving the policy commitments set out in both the UK's Transport Decarbonisation Plan and the Rail Environment Policy Statement that were published in July 2021, as well as the Net Zero Strategy from October 2021.

In addition to tackling the causes of climate change, the rail network must also be able to adapt to the changes already being seen. This means preparing for the impact of extreme weather events and increasing the resilience of the rail network to the impacts of these events – for example, flooding.

When answering your questions, consider the ways in which rail and the rail estate can contribute to wider national and regional environmental policy agendas, support decarbonisation, conserve and enhance biodiversity, improve air quality and increase renewable power generation.

Question 6

a) What is a stretching yet realistic ambition for this objective and what measures can we most effectively use to consider success over the coming 5, 10 and 30 years? What are the interventions over that period which will be the maximum value for money, and what evidence can you share to support your views?

b) What use can the rail sector make of emerging or existing technologies to reduce its impact on the environment and enhance biodiversity over the next 5, 10, and 30 years, and, in a proportionate and cost-effective way, help national and regional authorities to meet their environmental objectives?

c) How can rail best invest in climate resilience, supported by smarter forecasting, planning and technology, over the next 5, 10, and 30 years and what evidence do you have to support your view?

Type your answer here or attach relevant documents to your email.

Please note the corresponding document titles or references for any attachments in this box.

Firstly, 'environmental sustainability' has to be defined to answer this in a sustainable way. Rail as a service sector integrates many aspects of life and activity; therefore there is no definable boundary of where the 'environment' ends and other aspects begin. The most important aspects are (a) to avoid silo thinking and develop rail as an integrated concept from planning to delivery to maintenance, and (b) adopt a genuine and broad-aspect cost-benefit analysis to all infrastructure planning and delivery. Far too often both of these are abused or ignored.
Rail as part of a sensible cross-modal transport network needs at least a 30 year infrastructure plan, with guaranteed resourcing for people, skills, materials and innovation. Once people have been trained in the skills needed to deliver a railway, they must be kept employed there, not left with no alternative but to take their experience elsewhere because there are no relevant rail projects for them. We must move into a philosophy of capital expenditure for quality and longevity of product/service with a longer-term payback than either the annual bottom line of a balance sheet or the next General Election.

Ironically rail already contributes to environmental sustainability through its abandoned network as well as the wildlife corridors provided by the active lines. Any power sources used to run trains will have an environmental impact whether they are diesel, electric, hydrogen or battery. At present it seems likely that electrification will be the choice for major routes with perhaps hydrogen or battery for minor lines. Dual mode power is also available to remove inconsistencies such as the artificial boundary between the Merseyside network and the Northern network at Ormskirk and Kirby. Whatever the choice routes need to be treated as a whole not in part and the Midland main line for example should be electrified as are other main lines. Similarly, improved tracks or signalling systems will also have an impact. Effective use of rail instead of road or air could enhance overall sustainability as well as helping to tackle climate change. Better signalling can contribute to this.
Rolling stock should be required to have a long life, be recyclable and be capable of simple modification in the medium term. As noted in our response to Question 3 there has been much wastefulness in the use of rolling stock resulting from the franchising system. This must stop.
Clearly unpredictable weather events will still occur as they have throughout history. In general, the major weakness points on the network

are well known and a pro active improvement programme should be instituted now to address them.