



## ASLEF Response – Urban Transport Group – Rail and Urban Transport Review

1. The Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF) is the UK's largest train driver's union representing just under 22,000 members in train operating companies, freight companies as well as London Underground and light rail systems.
2. We welcome the opportunity to contribute to this call for evidence. As a rail union we will answer the questions focussing mainly on a rail perspective. We know rail is integral to connecting cities and servicing regions by ensuring that there is a reliable green service for both passenger and freight users, this in turn helps the economy to grow, and as was shown by the 2022 Oxford Economics study, for every £1 worth of work on the railway system itself £2.50 of income is generated elsewhere in the economy<sup>1</sup>.
3. Despite this fact, we have seen a lack of the investment required to maintain and grow the railways to continue to provide an important public service and to ensure it is able to deliver maximum gains for the UK's economy. We are entering control period 7 (CP7) and we have raised our concerns with the planned reliance on speed restrictions to eke out as much use as possible of parts of the network which need renewal by favouring repair and maintenance<sup>2</sup>. We are already seeing major issues on parts of the network with failings in the Western region<sup>3</sup> and a backlog of maintenance work needed on the trains themselves.
4. With climate change we will need to see greater investment into the maintenance of our railways to firstly catch up with the backlog of works required and to secondly invest in the works required to ensure that the infrastructure is fit for the future and safe for workers. To this end we hope that the Rail and Urban Transport Review is able to understand the importance of valuing the railways and put forward recommendations which lead to proper investment into the railways.

### **Growth Opportunity through unlocking planning**

#### **1. What do you view as the current key challenges hindering the delivery of rail and urban transport networks and infrastructure?**

5. A lack of appropriate funding is hindering the delivery of rail and urban transport networks and infrastructure. As we outlined in our response to the ORR's draft determination the current levels of funding are not appropriate for the infrastructure works that are required to maintain the railways, this in turn leads

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.oxfordeconomics.com/resource/The-economic-contribution-of-UK-rail/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://aslef.org.uk/publications/aslef-consultation-response-office-rail-and-road-periodic-review-2023-draft>

<sup>3</sup> <https://twitter.com/PaulCliftonBBC/status/1747304618315419913>

to a lack of reliability which then leads to a lack of trust from passengers and freight users which can in turn drive away users which then offers cover for a government to not properly fund the railways citing a reduction in ridership and public attitudes. We are presently seeing this with the managed decline under this Conservative government.

6. The lack of funding is in part also due to the lack of a coherent plan for rail in England. We now have transport strategies in both Wales and Scotland which ensure that businesses and passengers have a clearer understanding as to the short-, medium- and long-term plans for transport. Both strategies place importance on assessing the social, environmental as well as economic impact of any planned transport infrastructure and we believe that all transport infrastructure should be viewed through this lens, particularly due to the well-known environmental impact and current underutilisation of rail<sup>4</sup>.
7. The Institute of Civil Engineers proposed a transport strategy for England in July 2023<sup>5</sup> and we believe that this should be built upon to ensure there is a GB and UK wide strategy to continue to keep the United Kingdom properly connected and avoid disproportionate investment in one area's public transport. This lack of a strategy has in part allowed a Prime Minister to cancel a transformative and cross party supported rail project in HS2. This cancellation was carried out to satisfy short term goals, this is even after over 1,300 hours of legislative time had been spent on four HS2 related bills<sup>6</sup> highlighting a power imbalance that does not work for the greater good of the country or the wider economy.
8. The cancellation of HS2 sets us back, damaging public and business confidence in the railways and has contributed to job losses at firms involved in the building of HS2 and could lead to job losses at the Alstom factory in Derby<sup>7</sup>. This chopping and changing of plans has damaged the views from businesses of the value of investing in the UK with Mitsubishi<sup>8</sup> looking to exit their involvement in the UK's railways and Hitachi Rail slashing the value of their Durham factory<sup>9</sup> due to a lack of a rail fleet procurement programme. These moves from businesses to devalue their involvement in the railways highlights in part how a lack of an overarching strategy, which has allowed infrastructure plans to be changed on a whim, can have a knock on effect across the economy and how having a proper transport strategy which includes a rolling programme of electrification, a pipeline of infrastructure works and a plan for rolling stock

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.bcg.com/publications/2022/riding-the-rails-to-the-future-of-sustainability>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ice.org.uk/news-insight/news-and-blogs/ice-blogs/the-infrastructure-blog/why-england-needs-a-national-transport-strategy>

<sup>6</sup> <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/what-next-for-hs2/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-derbyshire-67425330>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.msn.com/en-gb/money/other/japanese-investor-to-ditch-500m-stake-in-hs1-and-east-midlands-railway/ar-AA1mgYX3>

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.business-live.co.uk/manufacturing/hitachi-slashes-value-durham-factory-28266691?int\\_source=nba](https://www.business-live.co.uk/manufacturing/hitachi-slashes-value-durham-factory-28266691?int_source=nba)

procurement would help to create jobs and provide economic benefits across the economy through the certainty and confidence it would create.

9. The current paralysis we face on the railways with the proposals for Great British Railways (GBR) stalling and leaving the industry in limbo are incredibly damaging for growth and development of rail infrastructure and the network. The Treasury and DfT worsen matters by being overly involved in the workings of the railways, making politically driven decisions such as the ongoing pay dispute, the botched closure of ticket offices, the ill-conceived ticketing proposals for LNER and the general managed decline of the railways, we will continue to see barriers to delivering networks and infrastructure whilst the Treasury and DfT are overly involved. There needs to be an at arm's length body which is entrusted with running the railways, bringing together the infrastructure and the services into public control under an overarching transport strategy.
  
10. Another barrier is a prioritisation of finances from central government, as we have seen the continual freeze in fuel duty and prioritisation for road projects has cost our environment<sup>10</sup> and hindered the growth of both passenger and freight on rail. This in turn has led to money planned for HS2 being spent on repairing potholes<sup>11</sup> whilst encouraging businesses to use heavy goods vehicles to transport goods which in turn will lead to more potholes and deaths on our roads with HGVs having the highest rate of fatalities per passenger mile<sup>12</sup>. We believe that the movement of a vast amount goods across the UK should be completed via rail where possible with road vehicles completing the final mile.
  
11. There has been some minor progress on growing rail freight with the government setting a growth target<sup>13</sup>. Although we do believe that the target could be more ambitious, at least setting a target shows a commitment which businesses can point to and will hopefully lead to the much-needed upgrade of Ely Junction<sup>14</sup>. However, as evidenced above, the lack of an overall strategy has allowed this work to stall.
  
12. Ultimately alongside a strategy and an at arm's length body, devolved transport authorities in conjunction with relevant trade unions and relevant stakeholders should be able to have greater input in the planning of transport in their region,

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.carbonbrief.org/analysis-fuel-duty-freeze-has-increased-uk-co2-emissions-by-up-to-5-per-cent/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/dec/20/disbelief-at-plan-to-fix-london-potholes-as-part-of-network-north-project>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/reported-road-casualties-great-britain-road-user-risk-2021/reported-road-casualties-great-britain-road-user-risk-2021-data>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rail-freight-growth-target>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.networkrail.co.uk/running-the-railway/our-routes/anglia/improving-the-railway-in-anglia/ely-area-capacity-enhancement/>

as the Urban Transport Group has evidenced in the past, rail devolution works<sup>15</sup>. Presently the Treasury is holding back rail networks and infrastructure.

## **2. What spatial planning and associated policy and legislative changes would help unlock the delivery of rail and urban transport projects?**

13. We hold concerns with the change in tone in the draft National Networks National Policy Statement<sup>16</sup><sup>17</sup> which brought in the focus on financial sustainability of the rail network with no regard to the wider economic benefits of rail and await to see the outcome of the government's consultation.

14. We submitted evidence to the DfT's inquiry into freight and Logistics and the planning system<sup>18</sup> highlighting the need to recognise a national freight network in a similar way to a national cycle network, giving local authorities a duty to recognise and consult with the network provider and end users. We need to ensure that opposition to proposed transport infrastructure developments or plans to build on land which may be required to grow the rail network in the future factor in all stakeholders. For example, there are under used railway yards which have the potential to play an important role in growing rail freight in the future, but current planning practices could lead to areas nearby being developed to an extent which limits this possibility i.e. an adjacent housing development which then stifles any possibility of increasing the rail yards use due to noise.

15. The use of the 'agent of change' principle could be developed further to be embedded in the planning process. This could happen via the National Development Management Policies as part of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill. This could be enshrined in law to protect current site operators from having their operations curtailed by a new housing development which did not sufficiently factor in the potential for nuisance for residents that the current freight and logistics i.e. rail freight / strategic rail freight interchange site could have.

## **3. Are there best practice or wider international examples that could be adopted to support growth through unlocking transport network and infrastructure delivery?**

16. We believe lessons can be learnt from Scotland, Wales and Merseyrail. In Scotland through Transport Scotland's work with stakeholders inclusive of the rail unions who put forward 'A vision for Scotland's Railways'<sup>19</sup> work is underway and progress has been made in opening a large number of rail lines

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.urbantransportgroup.org/resources/types/report/rail-cities-uk-our-vision-their-future>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/draft-revised-national-networks-national-policy-statement>

<sup>17</sup> <https://aslef.org.uk/publications/aslef-evidence-submission-transport-select-committee-national-networks-national-policy>

<sup>18</sup> <https://aslef.org.uk/publications/aslef-evidence-submission-department-transport-freight-and-logistics-and-planning>

<sup>19</sup> <https://aslef.org.uk/publications/vision-scotlands-railways>

as was highlighted by the Urban Transport Group's report in 2018<sup>20</sup>. In Wales progress is being made on new rail stations, electrification and the transformation of the Core Valley Lines working on the South Wales Metro as well as plans for a North Wales Metro. Merseyrail has shown the way for bringing the ownership of rolling stock in house, saving the taxpayer millions in the long run which can ultimately then be re-invested in to transport infrastructure.

17. We know that rail is a natural monopoly, it requires high levels of capital investment for slow returns. In Great Britain the involvement of private operators has been acknowledged as a failure and the involvement of private companies in maintenance lead to deaths<sup>21</sup><sup>22</sup>. We need to have a rail network which is run for the public with stakeholder involvement inclusive of trade union representation to ensure that safety is maintained, with rail seen as a public service rather than a commercial opportunity. One international example of the private sector stifling growth would be New Zealand which privatised its network in 1993 and ultimately had to re-nationalise and heavily invest in the network due to the private sector not sufficiently funding the railways and being accused in places of deliberately running down lines.

### **Clarity and certainty of policy and funding**

#### **1. What are the key tenets of a successful, strategic long-term policy for the delivery of rail and urban transport networks, taking into account wider decarbonisation and transport integration goals?**

18. As we have outlined above, firstly there needs to be a long term transport strategy as we see in Scotland and Wales helping to guide the long term projects. This strategy needs to highlight the importance of public transport to meet the UK's net zero targets and the importance of rail freight in enabling business to decarbonise.
19. We would also again add the importance of engagement at regional and local level for a strategic long-term policy to be successful, this should also involve staff via their trade union representatives having a say as they can bring an important perspective from the frontline of the transport network and infrastructure.

#### **2. What reforms to current transport funding approaches would support the safeguarding and expansion of rail and urban transport networks and infrastructure? Does the Green Book allow for sufficient factors to be taken into consideration and what should any additional factors/considerations be regarding infrastructure?**

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<sup>20</sup> <https://www.urbantransportgroup.org/resources/types/report/rail-cities-uk-our-vision-their-future>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.railmagazine.com/trains/specifications/the-crash-that-began-railtrack-s-demise>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.hertfordshiremercury.co.uk/news/hertfordshire-news/hatfield-rail-crash-how-devastating-4620580>

20. Currently the Green Book appraisal system requires reform, it is heavily biased against public transport schemes favouring road and private motor vehicle schemes. There needs to be a greater focus on the factor of the cost of carbon emissions and the future carbon emissions when schemes are assessed. When you factor in the impact that rail freight can have by reducing carbon emissions on average by 76%<sup>23</sup> when compared to road transport it would be hard to favour road over rail for haulage let alone for the impact it has when also factoring in individual passengers.

### **3. What mechanisms are available to facilitate effective public/private relationships and funding?**

21. We believe that due to the nature of the railways to be a monopoly, rail infrastructure and networks are best served by public funding. A private investor will ultimately look to extract profits out of the network, this can lead to a de-prioritisation of routes / services and a reluctance to fund the works required to ensure that the network and infrastructure is safe due to private investors often looking at the short to medium term. As mentioned above New Zealand offers a cautionary look at the damage that a reliance on private funding for a transport network will have. The UK's privatisation of the railways highlights vast losses for the UK taxpayer with operators extracting profits whilst rolling stock companies (ROSCOs) are continuing to pay out millions in dividends<sup>24</sup>. Further to the specifics of the rail sector, we know that with PFI in the UK, the costs outweigh the benefits<sup>25</sup>.

22. The current plans to only extend HS2 to Euston if it can be financed privately also limits the potential for high-speed rail to grow in the UK. Private investors will most likely only input funding if they are able to also develop in and around Euston station reducing the ability for the station to be scaled up to increase the frequency of services. Essentially this private investment is looking to invest in areas other than the transport network itself. The movement of responsibility for Euston from HS2 to a new Euston Development Corporation<sup>26</sup> green lights the reduction in platforms at Euston and the development of land which could be used to grow the service in the future, this will be yet another mark of public-private funding damaging our transport network.

### **4. What role does the maintenance of existing transport assets play in harnessing growth and how could the current approach be improved?**

23. As we have outlined above, we are entering CP7 and are set to enter another 5 years of a lack of adequate investments which will lead to current assets being used and maintained for as long as possible rather than renewed, this will lead to speed restrictions and a reduction in reliability. This lack of investment

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<sup>23</sup> [https://www.raildeliverygroup.com/files/Publications/2019-05\\_rail\\_freight\\_delivering\\_for\\_britain.pdf](https://www.raildeliverygroup.com/files/Publications/2019-05_rail_freight_delivering_for_britain.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.thecanary.co/uk/analysis/2023/03/30/the-rmt-found-a-government-funded-train-company-splashed-75m-on-dividends-so-the-canary-dug-deeper/>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.lrd.org.uk/free-read/pfi-rip-just-keeps-taking>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.ft.com/content/44a302a3-1a19-4f81-9265-fe3edcaac7a8>

hampers growth and impacts on both passenger and freight services.

24. As we saw last year, the approach which will be taken for CP7 led to the failure of Nuneham Viaduct<sup>27</sup> which had severe impacts for rail freight traffic which in turn hampered the ability for the UK to harness the growth that a fully functioning network would offer both passengers and freight users.
25. To avoid these failings, listening to stakeholders such as trade unions representing the workers using, maintaining and renewing the assets would be a step in the right direction to ensuring that the need for appropriate funding is heard. Just this year we have already seen broken rails appearing on the network after Network Rail has had to cut its Track Renewal Service due to the funding restraints in CP7<sup>28</sup>.
26. There is scope for insourcing of services around the maintenance of existing assets. Presently Network Rail has over 4,000 suppliers, a financial saving and greater focus on the work of Network Rail could be achieved by insourcing these services where possible, this greater focus could in turn help to harness growth.

### **Devolution and sustainable partnerships**

#### **1. What role does devolution have in supporting and accelerating the delivery of rail and urban transport networks and infrastructure fit for the future?**

27. Devolution can ensure that transport networks and infrastructure have input from the communities that they will serve. It is essential that the devolved authorities have meaningful dialogue with stakeholders inclusive of trade unions and that, as stated above, the network and infrastructure is also viewed as part of the bigger picture so whilst a decision by a devolved authority may have a direct impact on their region, due to the interconnected nature of the network, it could also impact on another devolved authority, so it is essential that dialogue and input is received by all effected stakeholders.
28. The TUC have identified a set of key principles to ensure that devolution delivers for working people. The TUC outlines that devolution processes should result in sustainable and quality local public services that meet local needs, and which support the creation of decent jobs and drive up pay and conditions for the workforce delivering them. They will also be well funded and well-resourced as well as publicly accountable, with in-house service planning, administration and delivery as the default. Additional powers should be given to public

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<sup>27</sup> <https://www.newcivilengineer.com/latest/how-engineers-worked-at-pace-to-restore-nuneham-viaduct-in-only-10-weeks-03-07-2023/>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.rmt.org.uk/campaigns/rail/rail-cuts-cost-lives/>

authorities to bring services back into public ownership and control where barriers to doing this exist.

## **2. How can effective relationships be facilitated between all tiers of government, to help accelerate growth and deliver rail and urban transport networks and infrastructure?**

29. Relationships need to be developed and maintained across all tiers of government with trade unions and businesses also having input. As was evidenced during the Covid-19 pandemic on the railways when private operators would have completely collapsed, the government, operators and trade unions stepped up to work together to ensure that the railways continued to run safely for the benefit of the UK by moving goods and key workers around the country.

30. Unfortunately, since the lifting of pandemic restrictions our members have been treated with contempt by the Westminster government and some of the decision makers on the railways who are under the Westminster government's remit, this has resulted in a long running dispute over pay. This combative approach from the government has hampered the ability of the rail network to grow and function effectively.

## **3. How can the capacity of public bodies be enhanced to effectively partner, procure and deliver urban transport and rail networks and infrastructure and provide value for money?**

31. Allowing public bodies to cut out needless wastage of taxpayer money to private companies will help provide value for money. As we have mentioned above, ROSCOs currently extract vast sums of money which could be re-invested into the rail network and infrastructure. The current National Rail Contracts and potential future Passenger Service Contracts continue to allow private companies to extract profit away from public transport, stopping it from being re-invested into the network. As evidenced by Avanti West Coast's operator First Trenitalia, they openly mock the taxpayer describing funding as "free money"<sup>29</sup> as the government is needlessly paying a third-party performance bonuses for running a service which could be run without a private operator as is currently the case with those operating under the operator of last resort.

### **Private Sector and Industry Capacity**

#### **1. How can effective private sector investment be best leveraged in the long term to unlock growth?**

32. In most areas of the network and infrastructure, private sector investment is not appropriate in unlocking long term growth, this is, as explained above, because many private investors are looking for short to mid-term returns. Government authorities meanwhile are able to borrow at a lower cost, are accountable to the public and can truly invest in the projects for the long term, which if a transport strategy was in place, could potentially not be damaged for short term gain on

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<sup>29</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-67997916>



the whim of a PM at a political party conference.

## **2. What can be done to build resilient and efficient supply chains and necessary skills to accelerate infrastructure delivery and maximise value/job creation to local communities?**

33. There needs to be a pipeline of infrastructure work alongside a rolling programme of electrification and a rolling stock procurement plan. Having this certainty should help to ensure that there is efficiency and resilience in supply chains with the necessary skills to build and deliver infrastructure being developed and kept within the sector. Lessons can be learnt from Spain who have been able to expand their high-speed rail network to now have the second longest in the world, only second to China. By planning ahead and sticking to their plans to invest in high-speed rail, Spain has been able to keep supply chains resilient and keep the knowledge and skills of those building high-speed rail in Spain. Spain's value of the railway has not just shortened travel times but enabled economic growth with rail being a main driver of both economic and social development.<sup>30</sup>

## **3. How to best harness the benefits and be adaptable to future technological trends in the sector?**

34. When focusing on harnessing the benefits and utilising future technological trends, it is essential that the workers via their trade unions are involved in the decision making around any potential adoption of new technologies. As the workers will be using the technology and the technology itself could impact on their role and safety on the railways it is essential that any future technology adoption is carried out with input from all stakeholders and with agreement from their trade union. There is scope for new technologies to assist workers but it should always only be implemented with agreement from the staff and their relevant trade union.

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<sup>30</sup> <https://www.thalesgroup.com/en/spanish-high-speed-rail-network-success-story>