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Autumn Conference on Saturday 1st November 2014
University of Westminster London W1W 6UW
On Track for Success: The Challenges Ahead



Report by Chris Brown with additional content by Jerry Alderson.

Introduction

The theme of the conference was "The Challenges Ahead" and the original aim was to have an all female panel of speakers. In the event this was not possible as some clashes occurred and two female speakers had to be replaced by males.

The conference was chaired by Allison Cosgrove a *Railfuture* Director who spoke of the current challenges and the challenges to come faced by the rail industry and said that today's conference would look at these challenges.

Civic Welcome and London's Success and Challenge on video

Isabel Deding, London Deputy Mayor (Transport), in a video specially recorded for Railfuture from her office, welcomed delegates to London and told that rail has played, currently plays and will play an essential part in London's development. London's population is growing at twice the rate predicted and a step change is needed in rail provision as it is the only possible solution to its transport needs. The current tube network will reach its theoretical limit by the end of 2015 so London must have Crossrail 1 and Crossrail 2, as well as the Thameslink upgrade, working as soon as possible.

Plans must be made now to; increase capacity on routes into London; construct a South London Metro; expand London Overground to produce a fully orbital network and look to create an Outer London Orbital Network to roughly follow the M25.

Capacity will need to increase by at least 70%.

The Passenger Perspective

Sharon Hedges of Passenger Focus started her presentation by stating that the Rail Franchising Process was the best opportunity for passenger and passenger groups to improve and expand the network by putting forward their proposals in the consultation process for re-letting a franchise.

The next part of the presentation was about the results of the latest National Rail Passenger Survey. A bewildering set of graphs was displayed and these are available to be viewed in the Passenger Focus website.

A summary of the results of this survey showed that passenger satisfaction had increased, with most Train Operating Companies achieving between 85% and 91% ratings.

On the subject of passenger priorities, punctuality and reliability were the most important followed by interior cleanliness. The priorities varied between different categories of passenger, with commuters being more prepared to stand whereas leisure travellers were more interested in having a seat.

The area that brought out the most criticism was in the way in which delays are dealt with. Passengers wanted more information and organisation as in many cases staff did not know why there was a delay and what was being done about it. For pre-planned route closures passengers wanted more specific information.

It was pointed out at this stage that *Railfuture* is at present conducting a survey into how disruption and rail replacement buses are dealt with – see the *Railfuture* website.

Value for money was also an area that attracted criticism as did stations, where waiting rooms, shelters, toilets and ticket machines were high on the list of passenger priorities. Interestingly the factors were the same as they were in the 2008/2009 passenger survey showing that Network Rail, Train Operating Companies and The Department for Transport still have a lot to do.

Engaging With Customers

Karen Boswell, the Managing Director of East Coast Railway, first asked "is our industry on track" and then went on to explain the background to East Coast and what they were doing to actively engage with customers (passengers in our language).

East Coast has been in existence for five years now and is the trading name of Directly Operated Railways a government owned company set up to operate the route after two previous franchised operators had suffered financial problems. Its task was to stabilise the route and prepare it for a return to the private sector in March 2015.

East Coast operates over one thousand route miles and is currently carrying over twenty million passengers a year. Although it does carry commuters and business travellers its main source of income is from leisure travellers in the face of competition from; open access operators; planes; coaches and private cars.

How has the turnaround on the route been achieved? The main way has been to operate the fleet more intensively with 117 extra services being run each week compared with previously and forty six million pounds has been invested in maintenance and upgrades to wifi and air conditioning. Changes have been introduced in first class to improve what is on offer with complimentary food on offer and bargain advance fares to fill seats on off peak journeys and as a result there has been a 39% increase in first class travel.

The new operator will have to step up to the challenge in the future and as well as the new Inter City 800 Trains currently in build they will also have to innovate to cope with the predicted increase in Inter City travel. More and more people are living in large conurbations as shown by the following figures. In 1900 20% of the population lived in cities, by 2010 this had risen to 50% and by 2050 it was predicted to rise to 70%.

Since East Coast took over the route they have concentrated on improving customer satisfaction and they frequently top customer satisfaction polls, by whichever means they are calculated, due in no small way to their staff.

One measure of their success is the simple fact that in the five years they have been operating they have been able to return one billion pounds to the Treasury (murmurs of "why privatise it" from the floor). No comment from the speaker other than to say that the new operator will need a bold vision and a strong will to take the franchise forward. In answer to a question from a delegate the new franchise has to include at least all services currently operated.

Faster Horses, Railways Challenge Today and Tomorrow

Anna Matthews is the Chief Executive of Delta Rail. To say that Anna set the meeting alight would be an understatement and it was quite a surprise that the emergency services did not have to be called to deal with heart attacks both in the audience and the other speakers. It was one of the most refreshingly honest presentations ever at a *Railfuture* event.

Anna started by asking if there would be any need for a rail industry in the future or would the need for face to face communication cease to exist and be replaced by communication

using high tech. electronic devices. In twenty five years people would be able to do everything from their homes and would not **have to** do anything other than press a few buttons, so would trains still be needed.

The industry needs to be innovative, not backward looking and not be fooled by self-congratulatory figures for customer satisfaction as her evidence was that all the real figures were a good 20% less than the industry's own figures i.e. around 70% not 90% and that punctuality targets should mean being on time rather than classing between five and ten minutes late as on time.

The speed of change in life and technology is phenomenal and ways of doing things are changing quickly all the time.

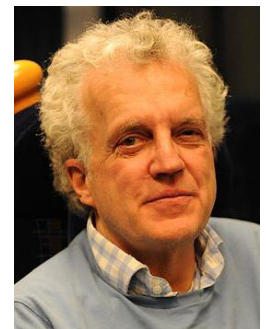
The rail industry needs to adapt to the new Quantum Computer capacity and the potential of 3D printing technology to produce equipment to a higher standard in less time. Although it may seem fanciful the use of drones, nano-technology and robots must be embraced as soon as possible.

The main thrust of her presentation was that "**Rail has no inherent right to exist but has massive potential if run correctly.**"

Rail User Group Awards



Just before lunch, *Railfuture* Director Roger Blake presented the third RUG Awards, which he takes responsibility for organising. These take place at *Railfuture's* autumn conference. This year there were five categories, such as best campaign and best web-site, which are judged by some of *Railfuture's* vice presidents, such as Roger Ford. The awards were presented to the winners by *Railfuture's* president Christian Wolmar.



Full details can be found at www.railfuture.org.uk/RUG+Awards, which has the award winners for each year, and slides showing why the winners won.

Rail – The National Perspective

Rail Minister Baroness Kramer, who, like Isabel Dedring, was unable to attend in person recorded a special video for *Railfuture*. She was pleased to see so many women speakers and was pleased to be able to contribute herself, albeit by video.

Rail was a national success story with the number of passenger journeys doubled and freight up by 75% since privatisation but how do we continue to grow the network?

Rail will underpin the government's aims for growth and the environment through measures such as the New Stations Fund but the industry needs more women at all levels. It also needs to encourage more people to work in the rail industry and must place a major emphasis on the needs of passengers.

Meeting the Skills Challenge

Stefanie Browne of Rail Magazine made, probably, her first public speech, and began by expressing her initial surprise at being asked.

She said that the rail industry needs to attract more people to work in it, especially women, who need to know that there are opportunities in railways. This is a challenge not only for the rail industry but also for careers guidance at both schools and universities to steer students in the direction of rail careers.

There will be an unprecedented demand for engineers in the future, one hundred thousand engineering graduates a year up to 2020 and there is no good reason why a great deal of these should not be women. Stefanie herself had not set out with the intention of being a journalist reporting on rail-based matters but since working for RAIL magazine she had become a great supporter of the rail network as she had learned more and more about it.

At present 22% of all unfilled vacancies are for skilled trades and with the ageing profile of traction and rolling stock there will be many opportunities in the future. We need more women in engineering as at present of 85,500 engineers only 2,250 are women.

There is a need to break down barriers and attract young people to study maths and science at A Level and show them that there is a future in engineering. The new National Rail Training Academy opening next year and the HSL academy opened in 2011 will help in this respect. We must improve the image of engineers in the rail industry, pointing out for example that it is not all about mud and big boots. Rail must "up" its profile and make it easier for students to find out about jobs other than drivers.

Stefanie's key thought was that "**We must make people want to join the rail industry.**"

Smart and Integrated Ticketing

Modern ticketing facilities are vital to the future success of the railway and the original speaker on this important subject was to have been Jenni Borg. However, **Trevor Birch, South East Flexible Ticketing & Dft. Consultant**, stepped in to present her slides and give his views on the subject.

Trevor explained the background to his job and the problems associated with it. He said that most people who live or use public transport in London will be aware of smart ticketing as they will have used either Oyster or Freedom Cards which can be used on buses, trains and trams in a defined area. What is being looked is extending this sort of system to a much wider area which is throwing up all kinds of difficulty.

In the Transport for London (TfL) area all bus, tube and tram services are worked as contracts let by TfL. so there is no problem with using a defined technology as this is decided by TfL. However, once you move out of this defined area the problems start to mount as you are dealing with a huge number of operators, some small local operators and others local divisions of national operators.

This diversity means that you have to find a system that can be used and afforded by all of these operators and even more a way of allocating revenue to these operators. Common smart systems do exist at present for concessionary passes which all have to conform to ITSO standards so that they can be read by electronic ticket machines and information on ridership downloaded not only to operators but also for those bodies funding these passes. So, what would be the benefits from the use of smart technology?

Passengers would benefit from a simpler and faster way of buying tickets as they would only have to top up their card when it suited them, hopefully at machines situated at stations, rail and bus, but also on the High Street and at shops etc.

Operators would benefit from instant access to travel data and travel patterns and especially in the bus industry speedier boarding.

More ticket types would be available such as carnet tickets e.g. ten/twenty/fifty journey tickets for passengers who travel regularly but not often enough to justify buying a season ticket.

If smart cards were available on different modes of transport then from a passenger viewpoint it would make intermodal travel easier. The drawbacks, however, are immense for both passenger and operator.

For the passengers there needs to be a system for showing what value is left on the ticket as paper tickets would have no part in the smart system.

From an operator's point of view, especially the rail industry, there is a huge cost implication. All stations would need to have card readers so that passengers can touch in and out and this could be a major problem for stations that are currently unstaffed. For one man operated trains a portable card reader would need to be developed so that travelling ticket inspectors could check tickets.

For bus operators, other than the expense of fitting the machines to the buses, this would not be such a problem as passengers would have to pass the driver to get on but if passengers were buying top ups from the driver this would slow down boarding. There would need to be top up machines available at bus stations and many bus stops.

All these problems are able to be solved given enough money and enough good will from operators as well as having some sort of organisation to organise and coordinate the system.

The Crossrail Solution

Unfortunately the intended Network Rail speaker, who would have discussed infrastructure and capacity planning, was unable to attend, so **Ian Brown, Railfuture's Director of Policy**, talked about the biggest infrastructure project in Europe, which he has a role in delivering. With large doses of well-timed humour it was a fascinating presentation.

Crossrail is not a new idea as it was first proposed in 1945 and has had to work through a rather lengthy process of campaigning followed after many years by planning and is now in the building stage which in the grand scheme of things is the shortest stage.

Basically the current rail system is full and there is a need to create more space and rail is the only way to move the numbers of people that need to be moved. As a result Transport for London has come up initially with Crossrail 1 and Crossrail 2 to try and create more capacity. In addition the Central Line Tube was full and it was found that it would be cheaper to build a new line, Crossrail 1, rather than try to rebuild the Central Line to take more passengers.

Crossrail will essentially become a Central Line relief route but with fewer stations in Central London. It will however speed up many journey times as it is being built to main line standards so that when fully operational it will be possible to travel from stations East of London to stations between Paddington and Reading without having to change trains at Liverpool Street and Paddington.

There will be 42kms of new tunnels, the boring of which is almost complete, plus huge new station interchange boxes in Central London at Bond Street, Canary Wharf, Custom House, Farringdon, Liverpool Street, Paddington, Tottenham Court Road, Whitechapel and Woolwich. The total cost will be £14.8 Billion and at present the project is on time and on budget with full opening due in 2019 which will add 10% to the network in Central London. Another 10% capacity will be needed soon so planning and implementation of Crossrail 2 as soon as possible.

When fully open there will be twenty four trains per hour in each direction on the central section and these will be new nine car trains just ordered from Bombardier at Derby which will be very eco friendly as they will be the lightest new trains built for a long time and as a result will be very energy efficient.

Obviously there was a great deal of technical and other information in Ian Brown's excellent presentation and this is all available on the Crossrail website.

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