

"Our future transport" - House of Commons Transport Committee Call for Ideas for future Inquiries

Future of Transport Policy.

Transport Policy must address national issues of the economy, social inclusion and cohesion and the environment by the provision of cost-effective sustainable transport for Britain. To be effective, it must also address the Levelling Up agenda.

Rail is a key component of such a policy, but it can only realise its potential as part of an overall integrated transport strategy.

Rail is essentially a high capital cost, potentially high volume, provider and should therefore be the backbone of an Integrated Transport Strategy. Modal shares of 10% for both passenger and freight suggest that rail under-performs as such a backbone. Railfuture contends that a higher figure of the order of 20% should be tested in an integrated context.

The strategy should address how to achieve this by carefully targeted investment in rail capacity and into the means of gaining access to the railway through freight and passenger interchanges.

In doing so the strategy needs to address the devolution agenda (at city, regional and country wide levels) so that other modes fit into the emerging plan. This requires devolution of the means of achieving this so that a national rail system, which is essential for freight and many longer distance passenger services, can meet and contribute effectively to these objectives at all levels.

Why the Committee should look at this future transport issue.

The country emerges from Covid with significant changes to transport demand, and the need for value for money and proper integrated planning of a transport system.

The establishment of 'Great Britain's Railways' should be set in such a strategic context forming the leadership necessary to implement this as a once in a generation sustainable transport policy. The Committee is in a very good position to do so as the timing is right for leadership and direction to be injected into our transport network.

Why it should benefit from scrutiny by the Committee.

There are few players with an overall strategic role in the transport industry. Those that there are represent individual components, with a commercial imperative to make money. The transport industry has been spectacularly successful in this respect; in supporting passengers and freight customers, much less so.

We cannot expect such a strategic approach to be self-generated where financial resources are limited, given the lack of leadership and direction. The Committee is respected by transport professionals who are desperate for strategic leadership. There are few contenders who are capable of undertaking such a dialogue which needs to be in public. The Committee clearly has the skills to do this and is listened to by government.

Why now?

The industry, particularly the rail industry has lost the confidence of its customers, stakeholders and the general public, even its own staff. It needs to re-establish such confidence, not carry on as before but in the context of the demographic change described above and timed to coincide with the launch of a new body for our railways, properly set in an integrated economic and transport context.

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