Policy paper - https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/railways-bill/railways-bill-the-long-term-rail-strategy

Railways Bill factsheet: the Long-Term Rail Strategy

The Railways Bill requires the Secretary of State for Transport to issue the Long-Term Rail Strategy (LTRS), which is the first strategy of its kind. It will set out strategic objectives for the railway over a 30-year period.

By setting out government's objectives for the railway, the LTRS will inform Great British Railways (GBR) about the government's priorities, helping GBR to make long-term choices which influence the whole rail sector. This longer-term context ensures that ministers are not dictating day-to-day operational decisions that need to be taken by GBR. Instead, the LTRS will help GBR to deliver long-term positive impacts on the railways and across society, while allowing it to remain responsive to emerging operational challenges and opportunities.

The LTRS will not be a 'once and done' document binding future governments without revision. No one can accurately predict, for example, technological and environmental changes over the coming decades. The expectation will be that revisions by future administrations will be undertaken following consultation with key stakeholders and published transparently, to announce any changes to the strategic goals for the rail sector. This will also allow future administrations to demonstrate their priorities for the rail sector.

Who is the LTRS for and what will they do with it?

Stakeholders have often cited a lack of long-term clarity over the direction of travel for the railways as an issue that hinders investment and innovation by the private sector and the organisations that supply goods and services to the industry.

The LTRS aims to look at the long-term issues the railway will need to tackle, such as the implications of an ageing population, environmental changes and technological advances. By considering how these long-term trends will impact the railways and setting outcomes the railway needs to deliver to address the challenges, the LTRS will help GBR make choices that will have a fundamental impact on British society for future generations.

While the primary audience for the LTRS is GBR, the strategy will be relevant for the whole rail industry:

- the Secretary of State will be expected to consider their own LTRS when creating any new rail policies
- GBR will be required to demonstrate how its work supports the LTRS's strategic objectives

- the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) must also take the LTRS into account in its non-safety related work

And the LTRS will benefit other parts of the sector too:

- the supply chain and investors will be able to make decisions with a clear understanding of the direction of travel
- mayoral strategic authorities will be able to use the LTRS to inform and support their wider ambitions around local transport and how it interacts with the railway, housing and jobs

What will be in the LTRS?

The LTRS will set out:

- the Secretary of State's vision for rail
- the 5 strategic objectives that should guide decision making
- the long-term outcomes they expect the railway to deliver to support the government's broader social, economic, and environmental policy ambitions, such as growing the economy and increasing housing

Further content for the LTRS will be developed via further engagement with stakeholders. While it is not possible to specify exactly what this will say ahead of this engagement, we expect it will reflect key themes raised by stakeholders in their responses to the Railways Bill consultation. These include growing freight traffic, improving accessibility, and the importance of improved integration of rail with housing, other modes of transport and with international ports and airports.

The LTRS is being developed in tandem with other key government strategies including the Integrated National Transport Strategy (INTS) and the 10-year Infrastructure Plan. The LTRS will inform and be informed by elements contained in these other strategies, to ensure wider government priorities that rail can support are fully considered. GBR will be required to take those strategies, alongside those of the devolved governments and other transport authorities, such as mayoral strategic authorities, into account when developing its response to the LTRS.

What are the 5 strategic objectives?

As explained above, the LTRS will include 5 strategic objectives that will guide decision-making. They have been tested with stakeholders, including through extensive engagement in 2022, to ensure they will be resilient and useful in the long-term strategic planning of our railways. The 5 objectives are:

- meeting customers' needs
- financial sustainability

- long-term economic growth
- reducing regional and national inequality
- environmental sustainability

Detail on each of the strategic objectives

Meeting the needs of future passengers and freight customers by:

- increasing value for money and improving the performance, reliability and convenience of rail
- meeting multi-modal expectations and reducing end-to-end journey times
- maintaining a safe railway as part of a safe transport system and significantly widening accessibility

Ensuring rail is financially sustainable, efficient and value for money by:

- reducing costs to government
- ensuring a sustainable balance of fare/fee and government funding
- increasing the efficiency of operations, asset management and capital investment - delivering on time and budget

Catalysing long-term economic growth by:

- reducing total journey time and cost for transport users and enabling agglomeration benefits by better connecting labour markets
- directly investing in rail people and their skills, innovation and digital infrastructure
- facilitating home building and place-making and attracting investment to and within Britain

Reducing inequality and improving connectivity between communities by:

- contributing to social benefits by improving connectivity
- improving rail passenger and freight connectivity across Britain
- supporting better integration of rail with local and regional multimodal transport systems

Supporting government's environmental stability objectives by:

- encouraging modal shift by increasing the attractiveness of rail
- delivering rail net-zero (traction and infrastructure), protecting biodiversity and addressing air pollution

- protecting transport links by investing in climate adoption

What are the government's long-term outcomes for rail?

As mentioned above, the long-term outcomes will be developed as the strategy is worked up through engagement with stakeholders and will then be published in the LTRS. They will be based on strong evidence and will translate the 5 strategic objectives into delivery outcomes that address the long-term trends expected to impact the railways, for instance, the ageing population and climate change. The outcomes will be assessed to ensure they are justified, feasible and affordable.

For example: one possible option, subject to consultation, is that an outcome could be included to reflect the government's priority to improve accessibility on rail.

Accessibility is a key element of the meeting customers' needs strategic objective and will become increasingly important as older people and people with complex health and mobility needs make up an ever-greater percentage of the overall population.

Our roadmap to an accessible railway.

How will GBR respond to the LTRS?

GBR will respond to the LTRS setting out the activities it expects to carry out and what it will do with the money it has been given in each 5-year funded settlement to support delivery of the LTRS. Given the long-term nature of the strategy, it is not expected that activities within a single funded period will achieve the long-term outcomes in isolation. GBR will need to demonstrate how these outcomes will be achieved incrementally over time.