



A Railway Fit for Britain's Future

A Response from CTA

April 2025

www.ctauk.org

A RAILWAY FIT FOR BRITAIN'S FUTURE: CTA'S RESPONSE

Introduction

The Community Transport Association (CTA) is a charity and membership organisation leading a thriving Community Transport movement across the UK. Our mission is to ensure everyone has access to local transport which meets their needs, no matter who they are or where they live.¹

Community Transport is all about community solutions to unmet transport needs. We represent more than 1,300 local charities, community groups and social enterprises addressing unmet transport needs by delivering community-led transport projects and services on a non-profit basis.² Our members are as diverse as the places they serve, from community-owned buses and car clubs to dial-a-ride and volunteer car schemes.³ We provide expert advice, information, guidance and support to help groups set up new schemes and improving existing ones.

CTA is a proud member of the Sustainable Transport Alliance, a partnership of eight organisations working to advance and champion sustainable, inclusive travel.⁴

Summary

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the Department for Transport's consultation on a new Railways Bill, which will create Great British Railways (GBR) and shape a 'railway fit for Britain's future'.

Our response focuses on the following key points:

- **Leadership for Britain's Railways**

- **Public interest:** We agree that Britain's railways should be run in the public interest for passengers, not in the private interest for profit, with GBR as the network's 'guiding mind'.
- **Multi-modal integration:** GBR should show leadership in achieving multi-modal integration, working with the Community Transport sector to align timetables; improve the provision of information online and at stations; and widen access.

¹ www.ctauk.org/about-cta

² <https://ctauk.org/sites/default/files/2024-09/CTA-Mapping-England-Report-2024.pdf>

³ www.ctauk.org/what-community-transport

⁴ <https://communityrail.org.uk/partners-and-supporters/sustainable-transport-alliance/>

- **A New Voice for Passengers**

- ***Passenger watchdog.*** The new rail passenger watchdog should be a 'one-stop-shop' with a holistic, multi-modal mandate; provide scrutiny, accountability and advocacy for availability, affordability and accessibility of rail; and fully involve disabled peoples' organisations and disabled people themselves.
- ***Empowered communities:*** GBR should bring Britain's railways closer to the people and communities they serve.

- **Devolution**

- ***Respecting devolution.*** We welcome the commitment to respect and protect the devolution of rail to London, Scotland, Wales and Liverpool City Region.
- ***Local Community Transport operators:*** GBR's 'empowered local business units' should work closely with their local Community Transport operators.

Leadership for Britain's Railways

We welcome the creation of Great British Railways (GBR) as a 'directing mind' for the rail network with the mandate and the resources to end fragmentation, improve coordination, deliver strategic focus and deliver better outcomes for rail passengers. GBR will need to demonstrate leadership not just in the rail sector, but in the wider transport system too.

The move towards public ownership should ensure rail services are designed and delivered in the public interest for passengers, not in the private interest for profit, just as community ownership and participation ensures that Community Transport services are designed and delivered in the interests of local communities. Simplifying the structure and leadership of the rail network can support Community Transport operators to engage and work with our partners in rail to improve the transport system as a whole.

GBR creates opportunities to deliver multi-modal integration and give communities a greater say in the design of integrated transport services. GBR must engage with key sectors and partners, including those represented by the Sustainable Transport Alliance, such as active travel, bus, shared transport and the UK's thriving Community Transport movement.⁵ Our sectors can work together to align timetables, improve integration in

⁵ <https://communityrail.org.uk/partners-and-supporters/sustainable-transport-alliance>

and around stations and improve the provision of information online and at stations for sustainable transport options, from bike share and car clubs to dial-a-ride and local buses. Community Transport plays a critical role at the first- or last-mile in empowering rail passengers, especially those with a disability or a mobility need, to access local rail services and stations.

A New Voice for Passengers

The interests of passengers and the voices of communities should be at the very heart of the future of Britain's railways. We therefore welcome the proposal for a new passenger watchdog.

It must have a clear role, sufficient resources and strengthened powers to advance and protect the interests of all passengers. Alongside providing the scrutiny, accountability and advocacy necessary to accelerate the improvement of the availability and affordability of rail services, a key focus of the new passenger watchdog will need to be accessibility. In its creation and ongoing work, the new passenger watchdog must therefore fully involve disabled peoples' organisations and disabled people themselves, recognising their right to equity and pro-actively learning from their lived experience.

All trains and all stations should be accessible. GBR must work with the passenger watchdog to remove transport barriers and have a statutory duty to improve accessibility. We welcome the commitment to ensure Britain's railways are 'accessible' as one of the six objectives of the Bill 'so that our railways are available for everyone to use'. At present, this is not the case. Many people's transport needs are not met by rail today, because they are excluded by poor infrastructure or a lack of support. There are 14 million people with a disability in the UK, but 41% of our train stations do not have step-free access. At the current pace of change, all of our train stations will not be fully accessible until 2070.⁶

We agree that the new rail passenger watchdog should be hosted within a body with a holistic, multi-modal scope which ensures it becomes a 'one-stop-shop' for all public transport users, including both GBR and non-GBR services. This will help avoid the confusion and duplication of the status quo and improve scrutiny, accountability and advocacy for multi-modal, multi-operator journeys.

⁶ www.leonardcheshire.org/get-involved/campaign-us/accessible-trains

The Community Transport sector looks forward to working with GBR and the new rail passenger watchdog to 'ensure the railway delivers for local users and communities' and harness the power of communities to widen access and increase patronage.

Devolution

The Community Transport movement is all about community solutions to unmet transport needs. We believe in bringing control over transport closer to local communities. Devolution reflects and reinforces this principle of subsidiarity.

We therefore welcome the commitment to respect and protect the devolution of rail to London, Scotland, Wales and Liverpool City Region, as well as the commitment to work in partnership with other devolved authorities with transport powers, such as in Greater Manchester and the West Midlands, which can support improved multi-modal integration at a local, regional and national level.

It is critical that the proposed 'empowered local GBR business units', which are expected to work with sub-national transport bodies, are required to progress local partnership working, including with Community Transport operators, bus operators and Community Rail partnerships. CTA can support and facilitate this process in relation to the Community Transport sector. Local partnership working can improve accessibility, increase integration and build patronage.

Further Information

For further information on this submission, the work of CTA or the UK's Community Transport sector, please contact:

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