

12 February 2019

Local government's relationship with the rail industry

Purpose of report

For direction.

Summary

This paper outlines the LGA's initial engagement with the Williams Review of the rail industry and asks the Board to consider what issues they would wish the review to focus on as well as propose any further areas of reform that could help improve local government's relationship with the rail industry.

The board will hear a brief presentation from Rachel Kelley (Industry Structures Team Lead, Williams Rail Review) and be invited to ask questions and discuss our engagement with the review. Rachel is a civil servant in the Department for Transport, leading the development of rail franchising policy and rail strategy.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the initial engagement with the Williams Rail review

Actions

- Propose areas of local government concern the review for the review to focus on
- Suggest any areas of reform that could help local government's relationship with the rail industry

Contact officer: Andrew Jones
Position: Policy Adviser
Phone no: 0207 664 3178
Email: andrew.jones@local.gov.uk

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Background

1. On the back of repeated high profile rail industry failures over the past few years the Government launched a major review of the rail industry and how it is organised. The review is wide-ranging and will consider recommendations for reform to all parts of the rail industry. This includes the Government's franchising strategy, bringing track and train closer together, how to improve transport services across UK regions, such as regional partnerships, and improving services and value for money for passengers and taxpayers.
2. The chair of the review, Keith Williams, is supported by an external panel and will report next year. The Government will publish a white paper on the review's recommendations, with the implementation of reforms planned to start from 2020. The panel will consider all parts of the rail industry, from the current franchising system and industry structures, accountability, and value for money for passengers and taxpayers.
3. Councils currently and historically have had a mixed relationship with rail – across a range of issues, such as local growth, as a land owner, but also to influencing rail services and operations. The review therefore provides an opportunity to offer local government's perspective on what we would like to see from a successful rail industry and how it supports local outcomes such as growth.
4. The LGA has made a submission to the first stage of the review, which was an initial open call for evidence. The submission included initial areas where the LGA believes the review could investigate and propose reform. The submission is included as an appendix to this report.
5. The review is wide-ranging and this phase is open until 31st May. This is therefore a timely opportunity for board members to highlight their experiences, interactions and their general relationship with the rail industry and ensure that the review properly considers the role of local government. There are likely to be further opportunities to give our perspective when specific areas for reform and reform proposals are identified by the review team.
6. The board will hear a brief presentation from Rachel Kelley (Industry Structures Team Lead, Williams Rail Review) and be invited to ask questions and discuss our engagement with the review. Rachel is a civil servant in the Department for Transport, leading the development of rail franchising policy and rail strategy.

Scope

7. The Williams review intends to examine the following review principles in its terms of reference:

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- 7.1. commercial models for the provision of rail services that prioritise the interests of passengers and taxpayers
 - 7.2. rail industry structures that promote clear accountability and effective joint-working for both passengers and the freight sector
 - 7.3. a system that is financially sustainable and able to address long-term cost pressures
 - 7.4. a railway that is able to offer good value fares for passengers, while keeping costs down for taxpayers
 - 7.5. improved industrial relations, to reduce disruption and improve reliability for passengers
 - 7.6. a rail sector with the agility to respond to future challenges and opportunities
8. The review will look at the whole rail industry, including:
- 8.1. increasing integration between track and train
 - 8.2. how to improve transport services across UK regions and devolved nations, including exploring options for devolution of rail powers
 - 8.3. improving value for money for passengers and taxpayers

Issues

9. The initial LGA submission (attached as an Appendix) identified the following core areas of concern for councils where we would wish the review to focus their efforts:
- 9.1. Councils role in suburban rail and devolution
 - 9.2. The use and disposal of rail land especially for housing
 - 9.3. Investing in improving stations and the role of stations in wider regeneration projects
 - 9.4. The provision of entirely new stations
 - 9.5. Funding from outside bodies, including local authorities, to fund improvements to rail infrastructure
 - 9.6. Crossing the railways, especially where it is done via the local highway network
 - 9.7. Community and local authority engagement by the rail industry

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Implications for Wales

10. The review will include provision of rail within Wales. At this early stage of engagement with the review officers will seek to collaborate with colleagues in WLGA to understand the level of engagement they intend to have with the review and ensure that common messages are co-ordinated.

Financial Implications

11. None

Next steps

The board is asked to provide direction for future LGA engagement with the review.