

The future for rail

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Thank you.

It's a great pleasure to be here in Birmingham, in the company of so many colleagues, friends, experts and advocates of a modern railway.

I am delighted we are in the capable hands of Steve Norris. I note that his autobiography was entitled *Changing Trains*, which couldn't be more apt. Thank you, Steve, for being with us today.

You know, listening to Sir David Higgins how can we not be struck, yet again, by the awesome potential of High-Speed 2.

Not just faster journey times, but also new connections, stations, investment and jobs. A transformation in the ways we think about time, distance, and possibilities.

A chance for Britain to shine with the quality of our engineering and design.

A vote of confidence in uncertain times.

But if HS2 represents a huge opportunity, and it does, it is also a huge responsibility. A responsibility to get it right, and as with Crossrail, to deliver on time and on budget.

To acknowledge the legitimate concerns about the impact on communities and the environment and to continue to make its case for the benefit of Britain.

Uncertain times and challenges

I mentioned uncertain times just now.

The results of the general election surprised even the most seasoned of analysts and observers. It also proved the robustness of our constitution in dealing with any and every eventuality that an election can deliver.

As the business of government continues, I welcome the Rt Hon Chris Grayling as the returning Transport Secretary. We wish you all the best, and we look forward to continuing to work together to deliver for Britain for the long term.

During this time, full of speculation and intrigue, it is vital that the business of delivering a dynamic, growing passenger-focused railway continues. There are many vital decisions, issues and developments over the next few weeks and months that need attention and progress, not stagnation – certainty not doubt.

The railways and policy continue to need to evolve.

The RDG is ready to play its part in leading and delivering a positive forward agenda for customers, communities and staff delivered by one industry team progressing one clear, forward plan.

No government, whether it has a majority of hundred or a single digit, can sidestep the capricious challenges and testing trials of fate. What Macmillan called ‘events, dear boy, events.’

If the past teaches us anything about the future, and we would do well to heed this right now, it is this: we should always expect the unexpected: in politics or a volatile global economy, or the threats to our peace and security.

Like everyone here, in the last few weeks, I have been reflecting on the terrible events in Manchester and London.

The incredible heroism as well as the horror.

The triumph of love over hate.

It was railway staff at Victoria Station in Manchester and at London Bridge who were amongst the first responders at the scenes of the attacks.

We salute all the heroes who responded selflessly – Northern staff rushing to the scene with first aid kits and our British Transport Police officer colleague, who, at the London Bridge attack, confronted the terrorists armed only with his baton, courage and his sense of duty.

As we know, he was seriously injured as a consequence and our thoughts remain with all those railway people affected and their families.

Let’s take a step back.

We all know the big picture: a global revolution in technology and trade; new digital start-up companies snapping at the heels of analogue institutions; the rise of India and China as global powers; a world economy tilting to the East, and to the South.

Europe, for centuries a powerful and dominant economic bloc, looking more fragile than before.

In an uncertain world and an uncertain United Kingdom, I say that, the railway, long the economic backbone of this country, can provide some surety, be an anchor in stormy seas, and help deliver the prosperity we seek post-Brexit.

Nationally, the rail industry and its supply chain contribute up to £10.4 billion in Gross Value Added each year to the British economy. To put it into context, that’s the equivalent of one quarter of the UK’s entire schools budget, just from our industry. It is a huge contribution to the nation’s income.

We are investing over £50 billion to improve Britain’s railway now and for the long-term. This is a massive opportunity for social and economic good and it must continue.

Take the all-important issue of jobs.

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We employ 240,000 people on the railway, in a vast array of disciplines, trades and professions. New independent economic analysis commissioned by the Rail Delivery Group shows that the rail sector and its supply chain is employing up to 24,000 more people than two years ago, with an 11 per cent increase that far outperforms the national average of just under 3 per cent.

Ours is therefore not an industry with poor future job prospects but a genuine growth industry for skills and jobs.

So we should be proud of our role as a major national employer. As we invest, we will create more long term, secure jobs, and that means more opportunities, more taxpayers, more national wealth.

And it's not just jobs.

As we continue to invest around £190million a week to improve the railway for the long-term, we offer a massive opportunity for social, as well as economic, good and it must continue.

It's good for the environment: each freight train removes up to 76 lorries from Britain's roads a year, and helps reduce CO2 by up to 8.4million tonnes per year. And it's good for businesses, transporting goods from Penzance to Paddington. Whether it's keeping our supermarket shelves stocked with freshly caught salmon or Cornish cream fudge or getting our high-value goods to export markets around the globe, the railway has always distributed wealth and opportunity across the country throughout its lifetime, strengthening our communities.

And let's not forget our social purpose. Be it discounts for those actively seeking employment or addressing the question of how best to serve those people still in full time education, who have to pay full fare to get to school or college. We are part of the social fabric of this country, with a network that drives the rebalancing of the economy across the Britain.

As we navigate this new era, it's a role that will become even more vital, as we ensure opportunities are fairly distributed in every region.

Why? Because we need to tap into the latent potential of every part of the UK to truly prosper as a nation.

So I hope everyone on all sides can appreciate the many ways that investing in the railway is no less than investing in the United Kingdom itself. Helping businesses thrive, bringing friends and families together and keep the economy moving. We are in the DNA of the nation, and a growing part of our national story and our national life.

The future

As I said in my recent Bradshaw Lecture, the railway is rightly proud of its past glories, but we must be focussed on our future – and even more so right now.

Even something as significant as HS2 is just a part, and just the start, of the growing role and influence of the railway.

We will work together as one team, one railway, enabling vibrant markets to work in a joined-up way and

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helping Britain succeed, regardless of the part we play in delivering a modern railway, from the station staff to the infrastructure engineers.

This is not the time to stop, pause or, unthinkable, go backwards.

We must continue to work together, with the support of government and other authorities to evolve the way train franchises are set up for the benefit of customers, communities and the economy and create extra capacity on the railways, new lines and stations, new facilities for freight, and new services for places poorly served.

And we must continue to put customers at the heart of what we do.

We know technology can deliver instant choice, access, information and gratification. Why wait to go to a shop to buy music, when you can download it instantly?

There's an app for everything in most walks of life. But are we truly 'appy' in rail?

This technological and information revolution is changing the ways we think about public services, institutions, and quality of customer care. The public is rightly more informed, inquisitive, swift to seek redress.

This has an impact on the railway. Our customers hold us to a high standard and compare their experience with other areas of their lives. They naturally demand the best possible service. They want clear information, clean trains, and transparency when things don't go according to plan. And we should welcome that, and strive to meet the high expectations placed upon us.

We are investing to improve the service to our customers: faster trains, more connections, modern carriages, better wifi, more services.

And as we plan new services, customer voices should be heard loud and clear: passenger groups, frequent users, passengers with disabilities accessibility needs.

I welcome feedback, even complaints. An industry which fails to listen, engage and involve is an industry which is destined to fail.

And that brings me to our relationship with our people. I have worked in the railway industry for 20 years now, with Railtrack, Thames, Southern and now as managing director of Arriva, and chairman of the Rail Delivery Group.

I consider myself very lucky: I love the job, love the challenge, love the railway. I know, from working with so many dedicated people over the years, that without dedicated staff, often going way beyond what's required of them, we cannot deliver for customers.

So just as we work together as one railway, our workforce is our one team. High skills. Decent pay. Secure, skilled, long-term prospects with evolving and modernised roles. This is what the railway is offering the next generation of young people thinking about their future.

As we continue to invest and innovate there will be 100,000 new opportunities to work in rail. As the system expands, more jobs will be needed, and I am determined we will attract the brightest and best at

every level.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can be proud of what we've achieved.

Last year, there were 1.7 billion journeys on the UK's railway. Unlike in many other countries, rail travel in the UK is increasing.

Britain is the 23rd biggest country in terms of population, but the fifth most-used railway.

As passenger numbers, have increased, we have raised our game as an industry, embraced the change, and led the way.

Not static or sclerotic, but a vibrant and dynamic system capable of great growth and change.

In uncertain times, the railway can bring economic surety and a progressive agenda for customers and staff. It is vital we sustain this momentum now.

Steve, you called your book *Changing Trains*. We too are all in the business of changing trains: making them faster, more frequent, more cost-effective and modern. Innovating and investing in our economy, and communities and people. Creating opportunities in a world of challenge and change. We are, and need to be, one team, one railway, working together.

Thank you.