

Rail Delivery Group



60 Seconds with Andy Bagnall, Director General, Rail Delivery Group

Hi Andy, please tell us a bit about your role and the work you do?

As your readers might be aware, RDG implemented a new leadership structure following the retirement of Paul Plummer in December 2020 that anticipated the move to the Great British Railways and a new Trade Body structure. Jac Starr became RDG's Chief Executive Officer with overall accountability for service delivery and I was made Director General to direct policy development. I am accountable for guiding the development of policy that aims to transform how our railways will operate in the future (e.g., fares reform, contracts reform, freight reform, decarbonisation strategies, long-term planning, and so on) and leading advocacy activities through campaigns and stakeholder engagement, supported by our communications and public affairs functions. In recent months since the publication of the Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail, much of my time involves participating in debates and panels with senior stakeholders from across the Industry to advocate key policy changes needed to support the biggest transformation of our industry in a generation.

I hope this gives you a glimpse into the varied, fascinating, and hugely fulfilling aspects of my role as Director General at RDG.

What do you see as the key benefits of smart ticketing for rail customers?

We need to bring rail into the 21st Century and digital ticketing gives our existing and new customers a modern, consistent, convenient, and simple-to-use ticketing experience that is inclusive for all. We can then use this smart data to understand our customers' travel needs and create better products so our rail services stay relevant and evolve as customer demand changes.

Smart ticketing data could also deliver benefits that will enable the industry to use dynamic pricing to incentivise customers to make more journeys on otherwise lightly loaded trains, similarly to how the airline industry operates to attract more customers to their flights. These improvements to retail will also be key enablers to support the wider economic recovery and importantly promote a sustainable and green way to travel – something we will be promoting at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow later this year in November.

What do you see as the biggest challenge to realising these benefits?

The Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail has begun the "Retail Revolution" that will drive up digital ticketing across GB Rail but we now need to continue to advocate for changes to the underlying fares structure to maximise the benefits from new technology in the retailing and ticketing space. Fares Reform is a key enabler to support the rollout of PAYG/Contactless and provide a better way to approach the retail of long distance and regional journeys – but if it was easy, we'd have done it by now as an industry!

As a customer, what would be the one piece of innovation you'd like to see in the rail industry and why?

I'd like to see faster progress to harness the use of new technology to make it easier for customers to choose rail with simplified digital tickets that offer greater flexibility (so we can easily change our tickets when our plans need to alter). We have to make our ticketing and fares work for the way we now live and travel, and this flexibility will attract existing and new people to use the railway which will be essential if we are to prevent a car led economic recovery from the pandemic.