

Speech: Investment and innovation crucial to modernising railway

Good afternoon.

It's a pleasure to be here.

And a welcome opportunity to speak to you after my recent appointment as Rail Minister.

I understand the responsibility that comes along with the job.

Responsibility for a service that provides 1.7 billion passenger journeys a year.

And for the equally vital rail freight sector that keeps our economy on the move.

And I understand the pressures – the pressures that you face too.

Of busy commuter trains on an over-stretched infrastructure.

Of managing massive maintenance and upgrade projects.

Of dealing with industrial action.

And through it all, trying to provide a reliable service, day-in, day-out.

So I know it's tough.

And I congratulate the industry for keeping things going during the recent spell of cold weather.

But I also believe that today, the prospects for the railway are brighter than they have been for generations.

However, we face 2 significant challenges.

First, we have to deal with the consequences of long-term underinvestment and soaring demand.

In the 35 years before privatisation 2 decades ago, passenger numbers fell by a third.

But in the 20 years following privatisation, they doubled.

Putting a significant burden on some of the most intensively used rail lines in Europe.

We're working hard to reverse decades of rail underinvestment.

With the biggest rail programme since the Victorian era.

One of the first decisions that the government had to take in 2010 – when the current Chancellor was Transport Secretary – was whether to approve the Civil Service's recommendation to cancel Crossrail.

Because the economy was in crisis, and the new line would require significant funding.

We saw it differently.

And today, as a result, the first Elizabeth Line test trains are running under the Thames and central London.

We've rebuilt major stations in Manchester, London, Birmingham, Leeds and Reading.

Every Northern and TransPennine Express train in the north of England is being replaced or refurbished.

And of course we're building HS2.

Towards the end of last year we published our rail spending commitments for the period from 2019 to 2024.

Total spending will be around £48 billion.

Billions of pounds from franchise operators is also helping to renew train fleets, upgrade stations and transform services across the country.

And that leads me to the second great challenge.

Compared with other transport, the pace of innovation in rail is slow.

Transport is now the most polluting sector of our economy.

And while it is cleaner than other modes, rail cannot rest on its laurels.

Rail emissions have increased in absolute terms.

So it's time the rail sector made a stronger commitment to cleaning up its act.

Electrification of every last mile is unlikely to be the only or most cost effective way to do this.

New bi-modes are a good bridging technology to other low emission futures.

And in time, as battery technologies improve we expect to see the diesel engines in bi-modes replaced altogether.

That's why we need to continue developing battery technology for hybrid trains.

And work towards the real prize which is to develop and introduce zero-carbon alternative-fuel trains to the network.

I look forward with great interest to industry taking forward a hydrogen train trial in the next Control Period.

Ushering in a new era in low carbon rail travel.

So I have called on the railway to provide a vision for how it will decarbonise.

Including the removal of diesel-only trains from the network by 2040.

I am pleased that the industry has risen to this challenge by forming a task force to lead its response, and I look forward to my meeting with its Chair next week.

Our ambitions must also go beyond the method of traction.

I want industry to play its part in addressing the public's very real concerns about air quality.

The research which industry is leading into air quality at and around stations, is a good start.

Now I want us to find new and innovative ways to tackle this blight.

But innovation is not just about new technologies.

We can also innovate by changing the way the railway is managed and run.

This is still a fragmented industry.

And this fragmentation has been a big factor in preventing the railway from focusing on the passenger.

That's why our Rail Strategy goes further than ever before to get private and public sector working more closely together.

To end the operational divide between track and train.

And to rebuild the railway around the customer.

The railway also needs a much stronger regional focus, with integrated teams in place to sort out problems and manage local services.

So the strategy sets out plans to reorganise Network Rail into a series of regional businesses.

With greater autonomy and responsibility for local decision making.

These are common sense changes.

But they represent a radical reorganisation of the way the railway works.

Joined up management.

Simpler, more accountable structures.

Regional teams whose whole focus is on the customer.

So, to sum up.

Privatisation brought a revolution to our railways, and turned round half a century of decline.

Increased funding since 2010 – and well into the future – has turned round decades of underinvestment.

Now it's time for the next transformation.

Modernising rail services and delivering HS2.

Committing the industry to a carbon-free future.

And uniting the railway in a relentless focus on the customer.

Thank you.

Press release: Meet mytholmroyd team constructing vital flood defences

People living and working in Mytholmroyd are invited to meet the construction team who are building the flood defence scheme to protect 400 homes and businesses in the village.

A construction open day is being held at Mytholmroyd Community Centre on Thursday 22 March, 11am – 8pm, for members of the community to drop in to find out more about the Mytholmroyd Flood Alleviation Scheme which will cost in the region of £30m.

The flood alleviation scheme has been developed by the Environment Agency in partnership with Calderdale Council and is expected to be completed by Winter 2019. Design and construction of the scheme has been carried out by main contractor VBA, a joint venture comprising VolkerStevin, Boskalis Westminster and SNC-Lavalin's Atkins business.

Staff will be on hand throughout the day to explain what work is being carried out in each planning area of the village and answer questions on many issues including access routes and the size and type of equipment being used during construction.

Visitors will be told about the schedule of works and be asked during the event how they would like to be provided with up-to-date information about the progress of the scheme.

Vital works to be completed as part of the scheme include construction of new, raised and improved flood walls, relocation of Caldene Bridge, widening of the river channel at key locations and flood proofing of the buildings next to the river.

During the next stage of the scheme, which begins in April, drainage improvements will be made along Burnley Road to reduce the risk of surface water flooding.

Helen Batt, Calder catchment director for the Environment Agency said:

We're keen for local residents and businesses to take this opportunity to find out about our plans for the Mytholmroyd Flood Scheme which will provide them much better protection against flood risk in the future.

Our team is committed to involving the community where possible in the delivery of the scheme and keep them informed at every stage of its progress.

Chris Blenkarn, project manager for VBA, said:

We are pleased that flood defence works are moving into the next phase on site, which will make a difference to the community and protect local homes and businesses. We look forward to hosting the event and answering any questions about the construction work.

Cllr Barry Collins, Calderdale Council's Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Economic Strategy, said > The Mytholmroyd Flood Alleviation Scheme is part of our ongoing partnership work to help protect local communities and improve resilience following the devastating 2015 floods.

With the second phase of the scheme on its way, we encourage local people to come along to the open day and talk to the experts to help them visualise the scheme and understand the impacts.

If anyone has any questions about the scheme they can email the project team: mytholmroydFAS@environment-agency.gov.uk

There is also a regular news bulletin produced with information about the scheme which is distributed throughout the village and you can request online by emailing the team.

Drop in surgeries are held at the Mytholmroyd Community Centre each week on: Tuesdays 12pm-3pm and Fridays 9am-12pm.

[For latest updates visit:](#) or follow #MytholmroydFAS @EnvAgencyYNE on Twitter.

The Environment Agency is investing £475m in Yorkshire to better protect 66,000 homes across the county as part of our current six year programme to 2021.

Residents are urged to check their flood risk online at (<https://www.gov.uk/check-flood-risk>) and sign up for free flood warnings to give them vital time to save themselves and their possessions from the devastating effects of flooding. Find out how to prepare for a flood at the Floods Destroy website

[News story: First meeting of the Financial Inclusion Policy Forum](#)

First meeting of the Financial Inclusion Policy Forum – GOV.UK

Industry leaders and consumer groups meet for the first time today for the Government's Financial Inclusion Policy Forum.



Industry leaders in finance, consumer groups, and the regulators will meet for the first time today for the Government's Financial Inclusion Policy Forum.

The Forum's mission is to ensure that people, regardless of their background or income, have access to useful and affordable financial products and services.

The forum will be co-chaired by John Glen, the Economic Secretary to the Treasury and Guy Opperman, Minister for Pensions and Financial Inclusion, and will meet bi-annually.

The members of the forum are:

Name	Organisation
Phil Andrew	StepChange
Charles Butterworth	Experian
Professor Sharon Collard	University of Bristol
Charles Counsell	The Money Advice Service
Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles	Financial Inclusion Commission
Simon Crine	Money and Mental Health Policy Institute
Joanna Elson OBE	Money Advice Trust
Huw Evans	Association of British Insurers
Jayne-Anne Gadhia	Virgin Money UK
Martin Lewis	Money Saving Expert
Gillian Guy	Citizens Advice
Stephen Jones	UK Finance
Vim Maru	Lloyds Banking Group
David Orr	National Housing Federation
Chris Rhodes	Nationwide
Marlene Shiels	Capital Credit Union
Jane Vass	AgeUK
Paula Vennells	Post Office Ltd
Sian Williams	Toynbee Hall
Chris Woolard	FCA
Rowena Young	Just Finance Foundation

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Thank you for your feedback