

“The Future of Rail in London” – an investigation by the Transport Committee of the Greater London Assembly, 2018**1. Currently, what are the main challenges for London’s rail network?**

Forever improving all levels of customer service, so that for example all 39 indicators in the twice-yearly National Rail Passenger Surveys from Transport Focus show year-on-year increases in passenger satisfaction for all the London and South East Train Operating Companies. The current 15 L&SE TOCs have far too wide a variation between them, with the best up in the same league as Long-distance and Regional operators. If the strategic policy challenge is to go above and beyond just retaining existing to attracting new rail travellers, then meeting the quality challenge in the face of ever-more discerning and demanding service consumers is no less a priority than meeting the capacity challenge in the face of just more customers. For the Mayor and Transport for London a principal tool at their disposal is their own mainline operator London Overground, with a relentless drive needed to continue improving its satisfaction ratings as the pace-making, trend-setting standard-bearer for other mainline operations in London. This must include a strong collaborative relationship with Network Rail in for example the management of train paths including freight, the maintenance of the infrastructure to ensure the highest possible standards of reliability, and robust arrangements to enable rapid recovery from unplanned operational disruption.

2. What are likely to be the future challenges for London’s rail network over the next two decades?

In the face of expected growth in London’s population and economy it is not only inevitable but also desirable that more travel in London by all forms of rail – Underground, Overground, Tram, DLR, as well as the national mainline train operators – should increase both in absolute terms and in mode share of all journeys by powered transport. There is not only a long-term capacity challenge for the existing network but also the challenge of expanding the network to access areas of new housing, of which Barking Riverside is perhaps the best current example. Longer-term than that, the planning for Crossrail 2 has always been about more than just meeting the forecast demand for when and soon after it opens, but also enabling the accommodation of further demand released by its penetration of new areas which are capable of delivering the unprecedented scale of housing which a growing London will need if it is to remain a successful city. That is why Railfuture continues to back the East London Riverside Route <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/display1545> with its potential to unlock housing growth on a scale unmatched by the rest of Crossrail 2 put together, as indicated in our response to questions 16 and 19 in the consultation on the draft Transport Strategy <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/display1606> While it will probably have to follow ‘core Crossrail 2’ as a later phase that should in no way be allowed to diminish the scale of its potential contribution to London’s success, or downplay the need to make adequate provision for it in the core scheme.

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3. How is demand on the rail network likely to change over the coming decades?

Besides continuing to increase in absolute terms as London continues to grow, changing work patterns and life-style choices are already pointing towards more counter-peak and shoulder-peak travel, and also at weekends and bank holidays. A 24/7 city is likely to need more services running later into the early hours and starting earlier in the morning, and Sunday and bank holiday services at Saturday levels (with the general absence of Boxing Day trains being a particularly sore point), posing challenges for network maintenance. An ageing population will at the same time place additional demands for accessibility on the networks, while an 'always on' generation will demand uninterrupted access to the means to pursue e-life-styles. As well as network capacity and service quality, new rail journey opportunities through enhanced network connectivity are likely to assume greater significance as a greater diversity of travel patterns reflects a more diverse range of locations of, for example, education, employment and entertainment choices. In that context the welcome proposal for a West London Orbital – Hounslow-West Hampstead/Hendon – is a potentially good illustration. More rail stations are likely to need to become destinations in their own right rather than mere points of departure and return, posing opportunities for re-purposing hitherto redundant infrastructure.

4. What rail and station improvements would bring most benefits to Londoners?

Station staffing, including ticket gates where installed, throughout all service hours;
Improved Customer Information Screens at stations and Passenger Information Systems in trains, with comprehensive station public address facilities;
Step-free station [ramps/lifts] and train [platform humps] access.

5. To what extent does the Mayor's Transport Strategy address London's future rail needs?

The Mayor's Transport Strategy makes a bold attempt in the absence of most control and limited influence over many of the levers of change. Probably the biggest single difference the Mayor/TfL could make is through persuasion of central government and some sceptical stakeholders beyond London of the overall benefits of devolution to London government of more mainline operations. The next opportunity currently appears to be Great Northern's Moorgate services.

6. To what extent do Network Rail's plans for Control Period 6 address London's future rail needs?

As Network Rail's activities in CP6 are to be concentrated mainly on Operations, Maintenance and Renewals the reasonable expectation is that London's rail needs for a more consistently reliable, robust and resilient network should be met to 2024. That is but one part of addressing London's future rail needs, which also require expansion of the capacity and coverage of that network. As well as the Rail Network Enhancement Pipeline referred to below, new Market-Led Proposals with innovative funding and financing models will place added demands on TfL to be the strong, informed and intelligent client necessary to secure maximum benefits for London.

7. What impact will the Digital Railway Programme have on London's rail network? What are the challenges of implementing this programme?

While the potential impact could be highly beneficial for capacity and performance, perhaps one of the biggest challenges is living up to the expectations it generates.

8. What opportunities and challenges will the Government's new Rail Network Enhancement Pipeline (RNEP) bring for rail enhancements in London?

The devolution of Network Rail's routes should present opportunity, qualified by the knowledge that there is no London route; of the nine in Britain, seven cover London. That presents potential challenges of collaboration and co-ordination to align the competing and sometimes conflicting priorities between the different parts of the various routes in London themselves and between any one or more of them and London's own priorities as expressed by its elected Mayor through Transport for London. Within that mosaic various questions follow: who is the ultimate custodian of the vision for rail in London? Where is the single controlling mind? Where sits the informed, intelligent client, preferably with a bank of institutional memory, or is there a multiplicity of clients? What are the governance and accountability structures? What opportunities are there for meaningful stakeholder engagement to influence the size and shape of the pipeline? Throughout is the ever-present challenge of funding and resourcing more generally, coupled with the need for London not just to make its own compelling case to central government but also to justify that case in the eyes and minds of key stakeholders in other regions of the country.

9. What examples of innovative approaches to improving the frequency, capacity and reliability of rail services, could be applied to London?

Full delivery of the Thameslink Programme's planned service frequency of 24 trains an hour each way between St. Pancras and Blackfriars will be the test-bed for the application of one innovative approach on the national rail network, while another will be full delivery of the same service frequency through the Crossrail core with its mix of different signalling and control systems between east and west. Crossrail 2 will present the next major opportunity to drive those innovations further forward in mainline rail operations, with the prospect of even higher service frequencies. Meanwhile on London Underground the frequency, capacity and reliability of the Victoria line has already established itself as the beacon to inspire others, mainline as well as Underground, to follow.

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