



LEAPING OVER OBSTACLES AT RAIL: NORTH OF THE BORDER

With an increase in passenger numbers by 25 million people in the last 10 years alone, it's never been a better time to be working on Scotland's railways.

The Rail: North of the Border networking dinner, which took place in September, was therefore an evening for much celebration – but also for constructive dialogue on how suppliers can help the Scottish rail network thrive even further



In Alex Hynes' own words, Scotland's railway has recently resembled more of "a building site" than it has a system. The Aberdeen-Inverness upgrade, the electrification project of the Stirling-Dunblane-Alloa route and the rolling-out of others throughout the country, and a revamped Glasgow Queen Street station are just a handful of the investments being made into Scotland's rail sector.

These transformations were celebrated at the annual Rail: North of the Border dinner, the country's most prestigious event to bring together the stakeholders in the sector. On 5 September, Scotland's rail industry descended on the Radisson Blu hotel in Glasgow for a night full of networking with current and new relationships amongst colleagues in the industry, as well as looking ahead to some of the major upcoming investments in the pipeline. Sponsored by headliner Babcock International and supporting partners Telent and BAM Nuttall, now

in its fourth year, the Rail: North of the Border dinner has established itself as the leading rail networking event in Scotland, hosting attendees ranging from local government, Network Rail, members of the commercial sector, and key shareholders in the supply chain that make up one of the most auspicious railway systems in the world.

Hynes, the managing director of Scotland's Railway – a collaboration between government and rail industry partners including the ScotRail Alliance, which provides passenger services for all of the country's routes – applauded the industry and supply chain for their delivery of projects despite less than ideal bouts of extreme weather and a surge in passenger demand, forcing the industry to be agile in minimising disruption. But the work is far from over: challenges still remain, including continuing to manage the railway against what can only be described as a volatile climate, whilst striving to reduce its carbon footprint in

the sector's journey to becoming more sustainable.

Forecasting where Scotland's Railway will look to be investing in the future, Alex highlighted electric – both in the form of low-carbon rolling stock, and through the continued expansion of track electrification – as one of the key staples of investment in the sector in coming years. A promising 75% of ScotRail's customers already travel on electric trains, and the team at Scotland's Railway wants to go further: "Our ambition is for even more of our customers to be travelling on electric trains," Hynes told the 400-strong audience in Glasgow. "It's why we're working in partnership with Transport Scotland; we're looking at the potential electrification of the East Kilbride and Barhead routes, we're exploring the option of electrification of the line between Dunblane and Perth, and the work that we have planned between Glasgow and Perth will help to reduce journey times from Aberdeen and Inverness to Glasgow."

Outside of electrification, planners are looking to increase freight capacity between the central belt terminals ►

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► and Perth, as well as accommodating for increased freight demand on the East Coast Main Line being made a priority over the short, medium, and long term.

Mushrooming passenger numbers for ScotRail, delivering 97 million customer journeys each year, and an increase of 25 million journeys in the last 10 years alone, presents a welcomed problem for the Scottish rail sector. And one of the key changes to Scotland's rail structure since the 2018 networking dinner are the additional powers granted to Scotland's Railway to control and manage the delivery of projects around the country. "In particular, the operational devolution of strategy and planning to Scotland means we have a greater ability to serve our customers," Hynes commented. "For the first time, we now have control in Scotland of which big infrastructure projects we embark upon, and how we deliver them." The £70m reopening of the disused Levenmouth rail link, connecting Leven to the Fife Circle, was highlighted as a "good test case" for the new power structure, with Hynes arguing that the speed at which the supply chain can restore the line will indicate the success of the new devolution agenda for Scotland's Railway. "We're connecting Scotland's seven cities through our intercity network. We're in the process of cutting journey times across the country. We are making the journey to work area bigger," Hynes told crowds at the dinner.

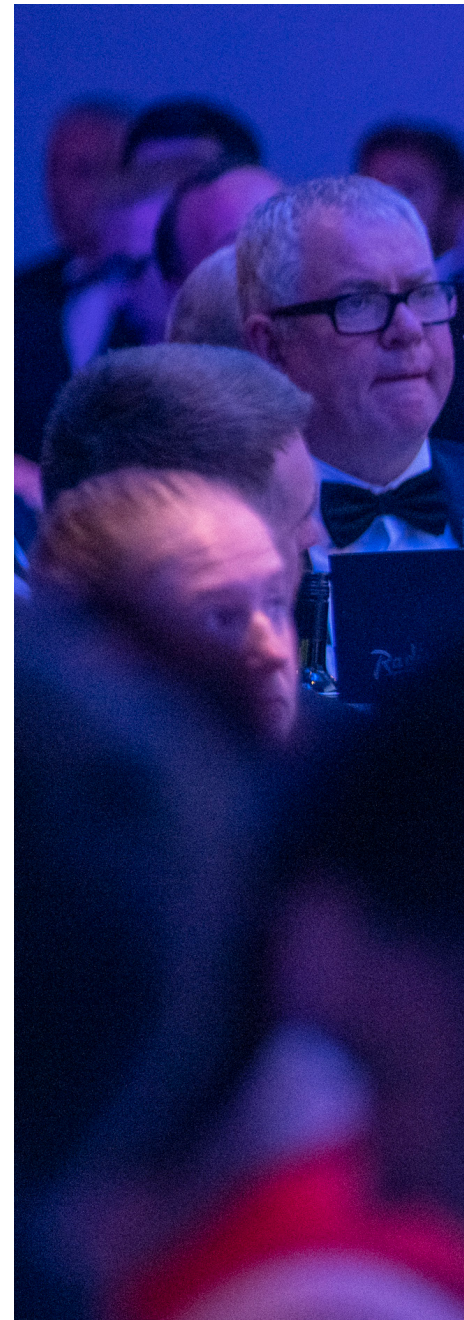
The electrification drive from Scotland's Railway forms part of its stance on creating a greener and more sustainable network, a key topic of discussion on

the night. Paul Tetlaw, a member of the stakeholder panel for the ScotRail Alliance and board member of Transform Scotland, Scotland's national alliance for bringing together organisations to create a more sustainable transport system, sat down with Tangent after his panel discussion to talk further about the country's sustainability efforts.

For Tetlaw, this confluence of stakeholders resulting in Scotland's coordinated approach to delivery of electrification is what separates them from England's "stop-start" electrification roll-out. "Things, to my mind, are better planned and better delivered in Scotland, and there's more consistency," Paul said. "There's no better example of that than the electrification programme which has gone ahead right across the central belt in Scotland, and with each new scheme – from the Stirling-Dunblane-Alloa line to the Shotts line – the cost of electrification has progressively come down.

"That's partly because there's been a deliberate and continuous programme of electrification which has helped keep skills together and keep the workforce together. So there hasn't been this dreadful stop-start like there's been in England. In England, I think they've gotten themselves in a right mess – and because there hasn't been a joined-up approach, ministers have changed their minds, schemes have been partly delivered and then cancelled. It makes no sense, really, in terms of long-term investment and in terms of building a skilled workforce that can help bring down costs."

Although innovative solutions in the





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rail sector are welcome in reducing the rail industry's carbon footprint, Paul believes electric trains and track will be the way forward for long-term planning of the nation's public transport. "My understanding, looking ahead in the next few years, is the continuation of the electrification programme in Scotland. I'm sure alternative power sources, such as battery and hydrogen, have a role to play – but I don't think it's on the mainlines.

"Everything that I read and understand is that by far the most efficient and long-term solution is electrification of all mainlines, and that's where I see us going in Scotland."

With a general election still on the horizon at the time of our conversation, we asked Paul what exactly he was looking for from party manifestos to help transform the industry. Paul highlighted the continued imbalance of capital expenditure in favour of highways

as a key obstacle in the drive to get people travelling more sustainably. "The Scottish Government is very clear that there is a climate emergency, so that is welcome that they've recognised that," he explained.

"In policy documents, they're very clear that they want to make rail quicker than road between Scotland's cities, so that's between Edinburgh and Glasgow and in the north with Inverness and Aberdeen. And yet massive capital expenditure is going onto road-building on those corridors in the north – £3bn to the A9, £3bn to the A96 – and it's very doubtful that they can keep to those expenditure envelopes.

"So you declared a climate emergency, you said you wanted to make rail quicker than road between the cities, but yet your priority at the moment is improving the road journey times at the expense of rail. My big plea to the Scottish Government would be to look at spending priorities and shift into sustainable transport modes."

A focus on active travel, encouraging the rail industry to make it easy for cyclists and walkers to access their services, was also a key topic of discussion at the dinner. ►



TOM HARRIS AND THE WILLIAMS REVIEW

After speaking at the networking dinner, former rail minister and current member of the Williams Rail Review panel Tom Harris sat down with Tangent to provide some insight on what to expect from the highly anticipated review.

How did the invite to the panel come about, and what is your relationship with the rest of the members?

I got a phone call from the Civil Service who had been commissioned by Chris Grayling, who I knew from parliamentary days. I knew [the review] was coming up and I was keen to be involved in some way. I felt it was desperately needed. We know the state of the industry, especially franchising systems.

I knew the government were serious about reviewing the whole structure. I just thought to grasp with both hands any opportunity to play a role in that. We meet around monthly at the moment, but there's work and meeting different stakeholders between meeting the actual review team.

It's been good; other people in the rail review have been great – I didn't know any of them when I first started. I didn't know Keith Williams until the first meeting, and he's been terrific. He's very inclusive and while his background isn't in the railways – he's more from the John Lewis and British Airways background – he's a very quick learner and is establishing some really strong relationships politically and in the rail industry, so he was a good choice.

What's the general feeling amongst the group on if or how the rail system should be restructured?

In terms of the structure of the industry, which is one of the things we're looking at, I think there's no disagreement at all in the industry or in the rail review about the need for a return of what he [Keith Williams] calls 'a central guiding mind.' This would basically be some kind of organisation that may have some similarities with what used to be the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA). When the SRA was abolished in 2004, all of the franchise

responsibilities were transferred to the DfT. That was a mistake – it was a mistake by the Labour Government, two years before I became minister by the way, so I don't accept responsibility for that. It's clear that if you persuade politicians to step back and allow the industry to run itself, you need to take them out of the central guiding mind, whatever shape it is, whatever structure it is – and that's one of the key central parts of what we will be producing.

Can you give us a little detail about some of the areas the review panel is considering to help implement changes?

We're looking at the workforce; what's fundamental about the workforce, and what I think a lot of politicians and experts have failed to grasp, is that 20 or 25 years ago there were essentially two or three employers in the industry and however many thousands of workers. Now there are 25 to 30 employers, and because franchisees keep changing every five, seven, or 10 years, the relationship that is key in the industry now is the one between an employee and their trade union. That is actually quite a good thing, because it provides some semblance of stability. We're learning the lessons from that, and we think there has to be some kind of continuity of employer. Not to rival the relationship between the unions and the members, because that's a good thing and we wouldn't want to encroach on that, but we just have to recognise that that's a crucial part of the culture in the railway industry. We want to respect the unions and the employers – and it's a very, very unionised industry – but at the same time we don't want that to stand in the way of really important reforms.

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► A view from the industry

Despite Babcock International's sheer size in its reach and impact on the engineering sector, the company "generally shies away" from publicity, in the words of managing director at Babcock Rail Colin Deuchars. But Rail: North of the Border was one event they could not afford to miss out on, headline sponsoring the evening and networking with current and potential future clients at the dinner. Following the winning of the Network Rail CP6 Signalling & Telecoms framework contract for Scotland earlier in 2019, Colin outlined the collaborative work ongoing in the industry to deliver improvements for rail passengers around Scotland.

"I want to talk a little bit about alliancing and the work we're getting to. The Rail Systems Alliance in Scotland is now up and running, and being ably led by the charismatic Mr Alex Sharkey," said Colin. "Our alliance strapline is 'Engineering your journey,' and we at Babcock are very proud to be part of that alliance alongside Network Rail and Arcadis. But those three parties are only able to deliver when they are ably supported by the supply chain. We have many of these great suppliers in the room who all strive for best results every time they're out on the railway."

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"We've recently completed a 15-week major blockade as part of the bigger engineering programme, alongside BAM Nuttall, Siemens, DJ Civils, Network Rail, and others. As a team, we have renewed more than 27km of track between Aberdeen and Inverness, added significant resilience to the network in the Grampian area, and completed the programme in line with client expectations."

The company is also making great strides in varying markets through collaboration, most notably through the creation of Swietelsky Babcock Rail, branching out further into the on-track plant market. "My point here is that whilst not all work is done in a formal alliance, it's achieved great results through great teamwork. Working collaboratively with our suppliers is no different," Colin explained.

Because of this collaboration, he notes, Scotland's railways are "the envy of the rest of the UK," and it will see the industry come together again for projects at Castairs and Levenmouth, too. "Of course, the wider improvements continue in the Highlands enhancements programme. But it's great to see fantastic teams doing great work across the railways in Scotland," the Babcock boss said. "We're the envy of the rest of the UK in that regard – and we need to keep pushing the boundaries, but always in a safe, professional, and efficient manner."





The passenger-first railway

Liam Sumpter, the new chief operating officer at Scotland's Railway, has a wealth of experience working on the UK railways. A Network Rail veteran of 13 years and holding almost three years' worth of experience working as a regional director for Northern, Liam opened the evening outlining what it is that makes Scotland's railway different from the rest.

"[When joining from Northern] I immediately noticed that the level of scrutiny we face here in Scotland is unlike anything else throughout the rest of Britain. With such a concentrated media market, more politicians than can ever be healthy, and customers with justifiably very high standards, anything less than perfection just isn't tolerated," Liam told delegates in his keynote speech.

"Scotland's Railway is part of the conversation of daily life of the people in Scotland. We are rightly considered vital to the economy, to connecting communities, and to building a more sustainable, productive, and successful country. That's why the pressure on us is so intense – because we matter to the future of Scotland. And that's a good thing."

His appointment to his current role less than a year ago coincided with the 'Putting Passengers First' drive by Network Rail, notably since Andrew Haines took over as CEO. "What my time at Northern showed me was that for those of us at Network Rail, the needs of passengers and freight customers don't always appear to come first, but they really should," he noted.

"When we're carrying out engineering works, what access strategy is best for passengers and for freight users? When we're dealing with disruption, what is the best for passengers and for freight users – for example, do we cancel a service to help others catch up or not? And what does cancelling that service really mean to people stuck on that train?"

"The point is that for those with responsibility for infrastructure in Scotland, we must always have the best

interests of the end customers, both passenger and freight, at the forefront of our mind."

More than just a simple public relations drive, Liam believes the passenger-first ethos signifies a culture shift within Network Rail. When dealing with those tempestuous weather issues north of the border – more than 60% of average monthly rainfall fell within a three-hour period in August last year in one instance, flooding and closing the Winchburgh Tunnel and the Edinburgh-Glasgow line – how the industry responds to these testing times will say a lot about the progress that the Putting Passengers First movement is making.

And, ultimately, investment in resilience measures that prevent extreme weather conditions from impacting services means that Scotland will be issuing several high-value tenders for projects in the coming years. Operations, maintenance, and renewals funding has been increased by 22% in CP6, with around a third of that extra £500m tied specifically to weather resilience.

"That's money going to things like better drainage, and cutting back on trees that can encroach on the railway and put safety at risk," Liam explained. "Dealing with weather is arguably the biggest challenge we face as an industry in Scotland, and it's a challenge we are determined to meet so that we can deliver for passengers and freight."

That final statement from Liam encapsulates the very character of the stakeholders of the Scottish rail industry who frequent the Rail: North of the Border dinner. No matter the scale or nature of the task facing the supply chain and the industry leaders who make it up, through collaboration and a joined-up approach, the sector is able to meet evolving demands from passionate rail users to ensure they can get to where they need to be. The Rail: North of the Border dinner brings those passions together to build on what is an already brilliant industry in order to provide a first-class service for users. □

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