

Innovation and collaboration take centre stage

The CILT(UK) Annual Railway Study Forum (RSF) Dinner was held at the Kia Oval Cricket Ground in London, welcoming a diverse range of guests and keynote speakers from across the railway industry. Gianluca Spataro reports for *Focus*.

This past year has been turbulent not only for rail and transport but for the UK as a whole.

We now have a new Prime Minister, a new Secretary of State, and a new Minister of State for Rail, who is well-known to CILT(UK) as the Institute's former president, Lord Peter Hendy.

Over 200 rail professionals attended the evening, which commenced with an introduction by RSF committee member and former RSF president, Neil Micklethwaite.

Neil then welcomed the current RSF President and Managing Director for West Coast Partnership Development (WCPD), Shamit Gaiger OBE, to speak.

Shamit provided an update on her programme of events for the RSF this year, which has showcased the challenges and opportunities facing the industry, resulting in impressive turnouts and great examples of collaboration within the sector. She also continued to advocate for enhanced standards in customer experience for the future of high-speed rail travel in the UK.

Among the keynote speakers was Alex Hynes FCILT, Director General for Rail Services at the Department for Transport (DfT). The former Managing Director of Scotland's Railway is now responsible for rail passenger services and infrastructure projects at DfT, including the establishment of Shadow Great British Railways (SGBR).

In his keynote address, Alex outlined the government's vision for the most significant change to the railways in 30 years, as the industry transitions from private to public ownership. Working alongside Andrew Haines FCILT, Chief Executive at Network Rail, Robin Gisby,

CEO of DOHL Ltd and newly appointed SGBR chair Laura Shoaf, CEO of West Midlands Combined Authority, he emphasized that the government will not wait for GBR to be fully formed before achieving key objectives.

During his speech, Alex remarked that there is 'so much to fix' and that the government intends to move swiftly. He believes the industry now has a unique opportunity to design, build, and operate a system with customers at its core.

"The Passenger Railway Service (Public Ownership) Bill is progressing well, it is now in the House of Lords, and we expect it to be formalised into legislation soon," said Alex. *"This will end years of fragmentation and waste and ensure the railway will serve the interests of the passenger and taxpayer, rather than focusing on maximising financial returns to private sector operators."*

"This means core terms of existing contracts will expire over the course of



the next three years, and that within this parliament, we expect operations will have transitioned into management by Great British Railways."

Looking ahead, the government plans to introduce a second rail bill, the Railways Bill, to solidify the establishment of GBR. However, Alex acknowledged that this journey will not be easy, as the sector faces challenging performance metrics, industrial relations issues, and significant financial constraints that may tighten further.

He then clarified the crucial role SGBR will play in the future of rail, being assigned as the new entity responsible for developing the comprehensive delivery plan for GBR. *"As Shadow Great British Railways, we've got a collective mandate to get on with the job improving the rail services,"* he said. *"The Secretary of State has set Shadow Great British Railways some initial priorities, improving services to passengers, unlocking barriers to delivery and finally, to design Great British Railways."*

Additionally, Alex mentioned that SGBR's mandate further extends to fostering collaboration across the railway industry, with the ultimate goal of enhancing the entire sector's performance and efficiency.

In outlining the government's plan for rail reform centred around the establishment of GBR, he explained that GBR aims to integrate track and train management, focusing on improving services for both passengers and freight customers. Key aspects of the reform include better leadership through a unified management structure, enhanced passenger protections, and the creation of a new watchdog called the Passenger Standards Authority. GBR is also expected to simplify the ticketing system, introduce innovations such as automatic compensation and digital ticketing, and promote rail freight usage.

Addressing the audience, Alex concluded: *"I'd like to say a massive thank you for everything that you and your organisations do every day and every night to run our railway. It's a hugely complex task which is enormously appreciated by the people of Britain, and I look forward to working with you and your organisations to make the railway better for passengers and freight."*

The event also featured presentations from Peeya Goodwin, Programme Manager, and Rupert Bickham, Industry Operations Business Support Manager, both from the Rail Delivery Group.

Their contributions highlighted the impressive talent and innovative thinking of emerging professionals in the rail industry, instilling confidence in the sector's future leadership.



When asked what people should take away from the event today Rupert said: *"Rail is going to go through a set of massive changes over the next few years and this event offers a chance to learn something new, learn some new perspectives and meet some fantastic people."*

Peeya then added: *"Today the rail industry is very diverse and is an industry where everybody is everyone's champion. That is a nice feeling to take away through these kinds of events because we come together, share our knowledge and show the spirit of our sector."*

This year's RSF Dinner highlighted that the window for industry transformation remains wide open, presenting opportunities for public transport, particularly rail, to thrive. A shared message among attendees was that this window will not remain open indefinitely; therefore, the rail industry must ensure it delivers for customers, communities, and the wider stakeholder base it serves.

Like many industries, rail remains under pressure, and there is a collective vision to evolve into a more modern, flexible, and customer-centric service, which the sector is committed to achieving. ❌

