

## RAILWAY STUDY FORUM

**W**e held the final virtual session of the year on 22nd June, when Jac Starr, Forum President, and CEO, Rail Delivery Group (RDG), hosted a star-studded panel of industry experts, in a joint event with the Rail Freight Forum.

It was a very well received panel discussion involving: Peter Wilkinson, MD, Rail Passenger Services, Department for Transport; Anthony Smith, CEO, Transport Focus; Julian Worth, Chairman, Rail Freight Forum; Chris Polack, Bootham Network Solutions; and David Turner, Malcolm Logistics.

Issues discussed included the need to keep the railway running reliably throughout the pandemic and beyond as passengers start to return and train services ramp up accordingly. The use of evidence from passenger surveys undertaken by Transport Focus and the need to focus on passenger confidence to encourage passengers back. The panel welcomed the Williams-Shapps plan for rail and agreed that it presented a great opportunity for the industry.

There was a very interesting presentation on the challenges presented to the logistics sector during the pandemic, when maritime trade dropped off considerably early on, combined with the sunniest spring on record, which drove up demand for many

consumer goods. This combined with a shortage of road lorry drivers, which presented an opportunity for rail freight to expand.

There followed an engaging question-and-answer session addressing lots of topical issues, including electrification and the case for enabling east-west rail for freight potentially to take a thousand HGVs a day off the A14 from Felixstowe, Britain's busiest container port. The most entertaining question asked what 'magic sauce' the panel would apply to rail if it was down to them, which led to several interesting sauce analogies! The issue of the environmental benefits of rail over other modes was discussed. The question was raised as to whether rail should follow other major changes taking place in society, or whether it should lead some of these changes and a longer forward-looking view was needed. On a final note, it was agreed that climate change pressures were likely to be one of the biggest challenges facing the sector.

This was Jac Starr's last event after nearly two years as Forum President. Simon Feast, Chairman, formally thanked her for all her work, and in particular for how we quickly mobilised online webinars with the help of CILT last year and have managed to attract a larger and more diverse audience in the process.



A Charlene Wallace, Freight, National Passenger & Customer Experience Director, Network Rail

Simon Feast went on to announce that our new President for the coming year is Charlene Wallace, Freight, National Passenger & Customer Experience Director, Network Rail. Her role is about putting the customer first, and her wide remit includes passenger experience, stations, track access, accessibility and the freight team, whose objective is to grow the amount of goods transported by rail. She is also co-chair of the RDG Stations Strategy Group. She is looking forward to taking up her new position from September.

