

The future of rail in uncertain times

C ILT's new Railway Study Forum President discusses her vision for the Forum and the main focus of her presidency.

As I start my time as President for the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport (CILT), I want my focus to be around the future of rail amidst a background of high level of uncertainty. I am a firm believer that rail is one of the best ways to travel, and that as industry it can be a catalyst for economic growth at a regional and national level. Whilst we strive for excellence across the industry, we have to be mindful that we are operating in times of high uncertainty. There is a danger that we become self-absorbed rather than proactively adapt and increase our relevance to the environment we are in.

We are currently living through ever-changing political and social landscapes; coupled with macroeconomics which are moving at an extremely fast pace and increasing shocks to the system whether they are climate change, Covid or cyber security. We also need to go through a digitalisation and upskilling of the workforce – this is a cultural change and not a small task. As an industry we have to be resilient to change, meaning we need to truly understand the landscape we operate in. We need to develop design agility into our plans and operations so we can respond to changes in the future whilst meeting customer and community needs.

This is why I would like to focus this year's programme on the future of rail, in that context, and how we can address some of these challenges. We will kick off in January with my presidential address that will set the scene for the rest of the year. I will focus on the key drivers of change and their implications for the sector and passengers. I will share my thoughts on the future customer and their challenges around future travelling needs say in five, 10, 15 or 20 years, whilst recognising that as an industry we need to make these

decisions today to enable that. This will be challenging if we just consider, for a moment, the impact of disruptors like TikTok or Citymapper, which weren't as influential a decade ago! I will debate how we keep relevant to our customer bases – current, future and potential.

Throughout the year we will cover different themes with some great experts from within and outside the industry! They will include The Skills challenge – how do we get the right skill, at the right time, in the right place for the future. And how do we deal with the digitalisation revolution. We will also address Long term planning in a political landscape of short termism and TikTok politics. We, of course, can't discuss future of rail without touching on technology and innovation and the challenges rail have in that environment. And we will also consider diversity, safety and most importantly sustainability – from the both the environment and social value.

In my day job, as the Managing Director for West Coast Partnership Development (WCPD), who are designing the future services for the new HS2 railway, I address these challenges daily. We are designing, developing and building for the future in times of the forementioned high uncertainty. We know that HS2 is a complex programme with a lot of political interest and it is imperative to work with government in collaboration to ensure that we can maximise the benefits of the investment. This is the same for any project within rail though; we know that there are social, political and economic pressures in constant play – and again at a regional and national level.

I am personally driven about delivering improvements, legacy and transformational change within the industry, and proudly sit as a non-executive director of both Women in Rail and the Campaign for Better Transport. I have built an extensive portfolio of delivering positive transformational change within rail in areas of sustainability, skills, innovation,

productivity and more from my previous roles at the Rail Safety and Standards Board; Director of Strategy at National Skills Academy for Rail; and at the Department for Transport (DfT) where I led the Rail Sector Deal negotiations on behalf of the UK Government, and I was a Non-Executive Director for the DfT Passenger Services.

In my current role, it's a fantastic opportunity to do something that has never been done within rail in this country. I want my team to challenge the existing processes and establish new ways that will ultimately deliver for the customer. To be successful we need to use our expertise bringing new thinking which is focussed on solutions; all whilst developing transparent and productive relationships with our partners.

I am proud to take on this exciting role as President of Rail Study Forum CILT, and I want to inspire and engage with our members through a calendar of events, talks and visits. Rail and transport are very much entrenched in uncertainty at the moment, and it is now imperative – more than ever, for us all to come together for our customers, stimulating economic growth and building a better future. ✕

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