

Shamit Gaiger

gives first address as Railway Study Forum President

West Coast Partnership Development's (WCPD) Managing Director has called on the rail industry to remain 'relevant in times of uncertainty' as she gave her first speech as President of CILT's Railway Study Forum.

Speaking to an audience of senior transport leaders, Shamit Gaiger highlighted the uncertainty that the rail industry faces with rising costs, ongoing industrial relation tensions and an imminent general election. She explained that to remain 'relevant', rail companies need to know their customers "almost to an intimate level" by establishing an emotional connection and trust, linking it to customers' desire for personalisation when it comes to building brand loyalty. She talked about companies needing to change their business models to match customer needs, and making strategic decisions as late as possible to match customer trends rather than forecasts.

She highlighted the transformation in customer demographics and their travelling habits, explaining how travel behaviours were evolving and further accelerated by the pandemic. This includes tracking trends of customers, which has seen an emergence of more who are willing to pay for their 'experience', with expectations of seamless ticketing, a seat and mobile connectivity. Furthermore, Shamit highlighted the industry's need to understand the growth of 'Generation Alpha' – people born (or who will be born) between 2010 and 2025, who are more digitally focused; whilst continuing to deliver for current generations, such as 'Gen Z', who are getting older and remaining reliant on public transport.

As part of her address, Shamit pledged to run an extensive calendar of events for



the Forum with leading experts from the industry. The Railway Study Forum (formerly known as the Railway Study Association) is one of the rail industry's longest standing bodies and gives members a platform to share experiences, knowledge and opinions on issues relating to all aspects of the railway industry. It also arranges events to provide opportunities for networking and professional development.

Speaking after, Shamit said: "Today was about setting the scene for the next year for the Railway Study Forum, as I want to use my presidency to talk about the future of rail and how we can address some of the challenges like uncertainty.

"As an industry we have to understand our customers better, and anticipate what their needs will be in the future so we can

design and deliver the best rail system possible for them. By getting it right for the customer we can then be a catalyst for economic growth at both a regional and national level, but to achieve this we have to work as one industry." ❌



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