



# A MESSAGE FROM OUR CHIEF EXECUTIVE

## Andrew Haines, OBE

When we set out on our journey to put passengers and freight users first, we never imagined a year like the one we've just had.

The coronavirus pandemic has seen passenger numbers fall to a fraction of usual levels, but those who still travelled by train needed us more than ever and this fuelled our determination to provide the very best service to those who depend on us. With more decision making power in the hands of local operational teams, our new organisational set-up helped us respond to the pandemic in a way that makes me proud.

This year has been one of the most challenging in our recent history – this is as true for Network Rail as it is for individuals. But it has presented a real opportunity to reset the way we work and make a difference to those we serve. We've had the freedom to do things differently and we've risen to the challenge: we've shown we can adapt and, critically, deliver at pace. We achieved this by doing things in a very 'un-Network Rail' way. By thinking radically and pushing the boundaries, we delivered five national timetable changes – each in a matter of weeks rather than months. And it worked, so as an industry we're changing our strategy so that we can stay flexible with the timetable. In April and May 2020, we were responsible for 25 per cent of all construction spend in the UK – testament to the speed at which we and our supply chain were able to adapt during uncertain times.

As well as keeping the railway running for passengers and freight, we have been committed to supporting our tenants, our suppliers and our

communities. We provided rent relief for those in our properties and set up faster payment terms for suppliers. We're also donating hundreds of refurbished laptops to children to support home learning and divert waste from landfill.

And our people have really stepped up too. In their day jobs, they have worked in unusual and testing conditions to keep the railway running – focussing on keeping themselves and others safe while enabling key workers to travel and moving vital supplies around the country. On top of this, they have donated their time to the national effort, helping to set up Nightingale hospitals, giving much-needed equipment to the NHS and delivering food parcels to vulnerable people in their local areas. As individuals and as an organisation, we have shown our imagination, agility and strength. We have raised the bar. Now we must keep it up during this important time because these ways of working will be critical for building back better and greener.

The railway has a huge role to play in Britain's sustainable economic recovery, re-connecting communities, levelling-up and delivering a zero-carbon future. Making sure our people have the tools to support this will be critical as more passengers return. With a sharp drop in commuter and leisure travel demand, we have had a much less congested network for much of the year. Fewer services with fewer passengers have allowed the network to operate far more punctually and with more resilience. We've used these quieter times to make changes to the timetable that will help us stay reliable, such as choosing not to reintroduce certain services which have a disproportionate negative impact on performance. We have also used this time to accelerate maintenance and renewals work and fast-track our plans to bring longer and heavier freight trains into service. This, combined with smoother ways of operating, will help the network to keep moving freely as we welcome passengers back.

In a time where public funding will be scarce, efficiency and value for money are also a vital part of building back better. We have a responsibility to make sure that we are using every pound from Government appropriately and where it can do most good. That's why we're set to deliver £4bn of efficiencies across Control Period 6 (CP6) which runs from 2019 to 2024, having previously committed to £3.5bn at the start of the control period. By the end of the financial year, we expect to have already achieved over £1bn of this target, and we're on track to deliver our future year plans as well.

Efficiency doesn't mean cutting corners or cutting investment. Instead, we will work harder, faster, smarter and deliver more for less. Doing things quickly and strategically is how we will ensure the taxpayer can trust the railway to put funding to the best possible use in an industry with huge potential for innovation. Being able to continue investing during such an extraordinary time is a powerful reminder of how important our railway is to Britain and the economy. That's why we carefully planned ways to minimise any potential impacts of the UK's exit from the EU on the railway – such as making sure our supply chain was robust and that we were ready for any crowding or disruption. We've now turned our attention to how we will manage the impacts and make the most of any opportunities brought by changes to the operation of our borders in the future. These plans will help us to keep things running smoothly for our passengers and freight.

During a year of tragedy as a result of the pandemic, there were also painful losses from within our railway family. In April, contractor Aden Ashurst was fatally struck by a train in Roade. Our ScotRail colleagues Brett McCullough and Donald Dinnie, along with our passenger Christopher Stuchbury, lost their lives in the terrible accident near Stonehaven in August. In November, a horrific incident at our facility in Eastleigh saw us lose another friend and colleague. A few months later, in February, we devastatingly also lost our colleague Tyler Byrne on track close to Surbiton station. These losses force us to stop and look again at how we do things. They are stark reminders of the risks and challenges of operating our railway – a complex system now also facing the realities of climate change. The RAIB report into the tragic loss of life at Margam in 2019 tells us clearly that the way we work must change if we are to keep everyone safe. This is why we are redoubling our determination and our efforts to get everyone home safe every day, led by our Track Worker Safety Task Force. The task force has already reduced the amount of work on open lines by more than half, and we are focussed on achieving a real step change in our safety culture - modernising how we work on track by deploying hundreds of items of safety equipment to protect colleagues on or near the line. Many things have felt outside our control this year, but a safer railway is very much within our control and a challenge we own.

The accident near Stonehaven has also highlighted that improving the resilience of our railway is becoming an urgent task. Even before this recent tragedy, work was underway to better understand our infrastructure so that we can target investment in resilience where it's most needed. Following the accident, we set up two independent

task forces, led by world-renowned experts, to improve how we manage our earthworks and our response to severe weather. We are using new weather forecast technology to help us be better prepared and looking more closely at how we control water on the network. The experts' recommendations will guide further action.

Climate resilience is also one of four pillars at the heart of our new Environmental Sustainability Strategy which we launched in September. Our strategy outlines plans for a cleaner, greener railway over the next 30 years, focussing on decarbonisation, climate resilience, improving biodiversity and reducing waste. Rail is already the greenest form of public transport and we want to make sure it stays that way. We know rail has a vital role in building back better and greener and helping Government achieve its target of net zero emissions by 2050. That's why, this year, we hit the first major milestone in our strategy, becoming the first railway in the world to introduce ambitious science-based targets for cutting carbon.

Creating an efficient, sustainable railway that's fit for the future can only be achieved through teamwork and we're committed to building teams that represent the communities we serve. Our Race Matters and Gender Matters programmes have really upped the ante in our work to level the playing field. Our ethnicity pay gap has decreased 2.3 per cent this year, though it remains above the national average, so we're working to better understand the barriers BAME employees and candidates face. We've also set an ambitious target to tackle the gender imbalance in our workforce by 2024 by bringing more women into parts of the organisation where they have been historically under-represented. We always knew that doing this would temporarily increase our gender pay gap, as it has this year, but it's still the right thing to do and will help us grow a more equal railway in the long run.

The pandemic has been a time of deep worry and huge personal loss for our people, partners and passengers. Despite many dark days, it has also shown that we can work harder and faster than we ever thought possible and shone a light on the care and commitment that exists across the railway. We care about our passengers' priorities – which we know have changed – and we are determined to win them back. To be able to do this we must be structured to deliver for them. Our new internal set-up is already helping us to do this better, but the Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail both recognises the progress we have made and shows that more is needed now. This blueprint for industry-wide reform provides a clear and

confident vision. It sets out the plan for Great British Railways to deliver a modern passenger experience that's greener and provides simpler ticketing, faster upgrades, better value and new opportunities for freight.

As we transition, I am determined to bolster the momentum that we have built. We have proved what the rail industry can achieve when it is better aligned and goals are shared. Simplification and integration on our railway – with its many parts pulling in the same direction, along with clear accountability and the right resources to make it happen – is how we will create a system that works better for everyone.



**Andrew Haines OBE,**  
chief executive

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