Future Integrated Railway Think Tank
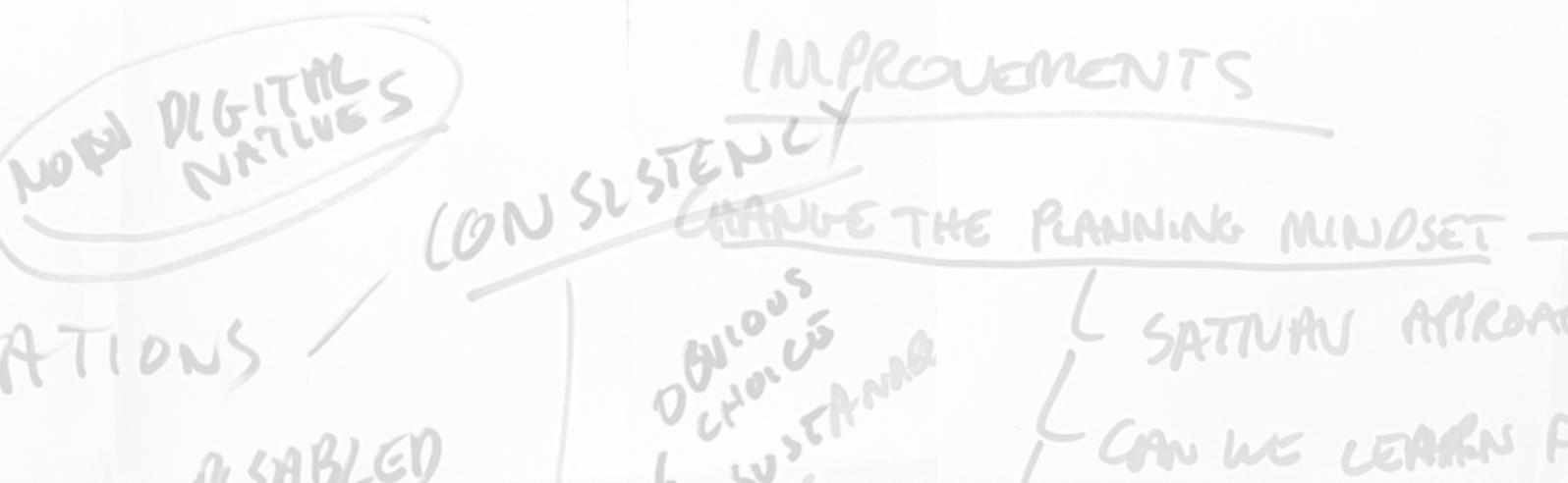
Railway's contribution to a connected transport system

WSP   IRSE///   Rail Delivery Group
National Rail   KPMG

The Workshops

ACCESSIBILITY
How do we make rail travel user-friendly, easy to undertake and an enjoyable experience for all passengers?
November 2019

AFFORDABILITY
How can we make the railway more viable in economic terms (for government and service providers), and be more affordable and offer better value for money for passengers?
Mid 2020

DEPENDABILITY
How can we make rail travel more reliable, so that a disrupted journey is a very rare event?
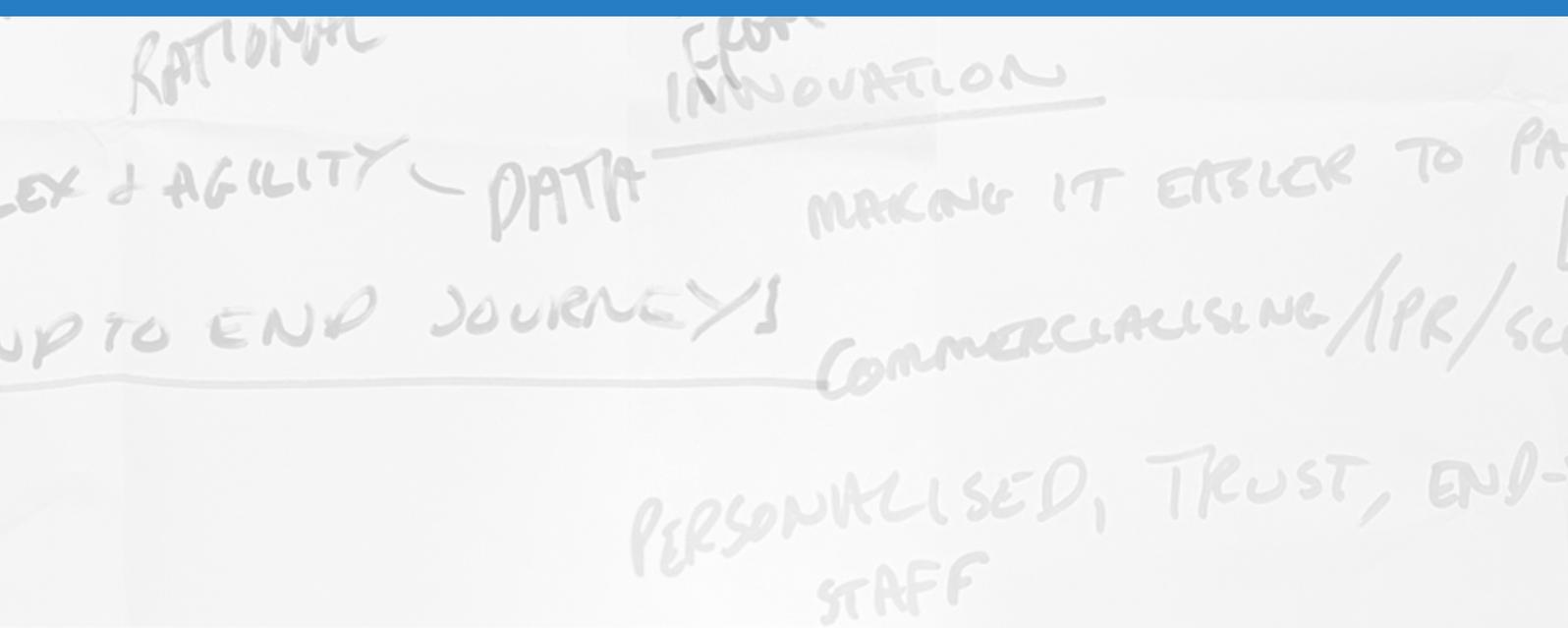*March 2020*

SUSTAINABILITY
How can we provide the same or better level of service while reducing adverse environmental impacts?
Late 2020

FREIGHT FOCUS The four workshops above are centred around passenger travel. We will also run one workshop focused exclusively on getting the freight perspective and learning about opportunities offered by the digital transformation of this sector.
Timing TBC

Workshop 1: Accessibility

At our workshop in November 2019 (pictured above), these key questions were discussed by people from various parts of the rail industry (and a few outside it). It was the first in a series of open discussions aimed at identifying and developing ways in which rail can be made a more accessible and attractive rail option in Britain.

We have collated the outputs of this discussion to share a collective vision for the accessible railway, and offer some suggestions as to how the rail industry can use data and information to help realise that vision.

The Challenges

TRAVEL MINDSET
Many people never travel by train. To them, the railway is an alien environment and not even considered as an option in their journey planning. Jumping in the car is seen as more convenient. Being door-to-door with no modal changes it involves less planning and is perceived to be cheaper, as well as guaranteeing a seat in a personalised environment (with room for luggage), and a Satnav informing their journey every step of the way.

How can an end-to-end journey with a rail element compete more effectively with the advantages of the car?
How can the rail industry raise awareness of the benefits of travelling by rail (total cost, environmental impact, ability to work while travelling, availability and cost of parking etc.)?

TRUST IN RAIL
People who rarely (or never) travel by train lack confidence that their train journey will go as planned, be enjoyable and be free from stress. This is shaped by various factors including the complexity of planning their end-to-end journey and their lack of familiarity with using the railway. Low expectations may be fuelled by news they have heard about dissatisfaction with railways, and compounded by a complex ticket buying process and fears of disruption to travel at weekends (when occasional travellers are most likely to make use of rail). Trust may also be undermined by bad experiences lodged in the memory. These bad experiences also undermine the confidence and trust of regular rail passengers.

How can we make an individual's end-to-end journey planning process build confidence in rail travel, rather than undermining it? What can we do to understand better why people don't travel by train when they could?

JOURNEY INFORMATION
is not always as good as it could be, both for end-to-end journey planning and during the journey. Travellers may have to consult multiple sources of information to create a complete picture of their whole journey. Unclear, incomplete or contradictory information creates uncertainty. People want to know whether they are likely to find a parking space at the train station (and whether there will be an electric vehicle charging point). They want better information for finding their way around stations, and about connections and modal changes that form part of their end-to-end journey. When their rail journey is disrupted, they don't want to have to work hard to find out what their options are and how it will affect their journey time.

How can the railway work with other transport modes and with innovators to create accurate, complete and personalised information for end-to-end journeys? How can this be made available not only to users of the internet and phone apps, but also those who are not 'digital natives'? How can we equip on-train and station staff with sufficient information to readily and adequately respond to passenger queries?

EASE OF USE

For commuters and other regular users of a particular train service, navigating the railway is not generally a major challenge. They have an unconscious mental model of the whole of their journey and how to navigate their way through it. They know how to purchase the right ticket, and the restrictions on its use. They know the station layout, the platform numbering, where the lifts, escalators, stairs, shops and other amenities are. They know how information is presented on the platform display screens and what it means for them. They know the formation of their train, and where to stand on the platform to get the best chance of finding a seat. By contrast, infrequent rail travellers do not have this wealth of information, and may not know how to fill the gaps in their knowledge. As a result, their journey becomes a series of trials and errors. This creates stress and takes the pleasure out of travel.

How can the people who design our stations, trains and the timetable, and who operate the railway, put themselves in the shoes of the infrequent traveller? How can this perspective be used to make the railway less prohibitive and much more user-friendly and easily navigable for everyone?

SERVICE QUALITY

Annoying failings in the delivery of the service can put regular passengers off using the railway. Before boarding, people may find their train has been cancelled or isn't going to call at their destination. And if there is a late change to their departing platform, there is nobody on the station to help guide them. Once onboard, they may find that their seat hasn't been reserved and that there are no vacant seats, and their journey could be sullied further by anything from a non-existent trolley service and patchy WiFi, to out-of-order (or unusable) toilets and garbled public address announcements, which only add to the confusion. It takes just one of these events for the experience to be regarded as unsatisfactory, which will stick in the mind long after the journey.

How can the rail industry get the passenger experience right every single day and reduce, radically, the occurrence of unsatisfactory elements? How can the industry focus more effort on pleasing its customers, rather than just regarding success as trains running on time?

ENHANCEMENTS AND INTEGRATION

For many people, rail is not a practical travel choice because to get to a station they need to travel by car, and once in the car they might as well complete the journey using it. Public transport is not sufficiently extensive in some parts of the UK to make a difference to people's travel options. But it is increasingly clear that the car cannot continue to be such a dominant transport mode, even taking into account the beneficial aspects of electric vehicles and autonomous driving. Land take, resource utilisation, environmental and health impacts are pressuring us to consider the alternatives. Rail cannot solve all transport needs, but it can be a greater part of the solution.

What options exist for extending the rail network and for introducing more stations on existing routes to serve more communities? Where are new bus services required to link communities with railway stations? Is there a place for loyalty schemes and more flexible purchasing options, to encourage people to use integrated public transport networks?

The Opportunities

Making better use of data and information

- **Provide railway planners and controllers with better information** about customer travel habits and experiences, to enable them to make more empathetic user-centric decisions
- Work in partnership with other transport organisations and stakeholders to create **a joined-up journey planning solution** suitable for the infrequent traveller which removes the need for multiple apps or sources of information. By harnessing journey data from users, we can further improve connectivity between modes with **end-to-end planning and ticketing systems** that put the passenger first
- Provide a **'Satnav' or 'Streetview' for the rail element of a journey**, to help people navigate around stations, find their seat easily, track the progress of their journey and connect with other transport modes
- **Review signage at stations** to focus on the needs of the infrequent traveller e.g. making sure onward transport information is available and prominently displayed at stations
- Develop and use information systems to **routinely collect data about defects** affecting the quality of service, and link these with those rail personnel best placed to remedy them. Make it easy for people to report problems. Monitor defect duration times to improve responsiveness
- Make **more data available for innovators** to use for journey applications and research.
- Routinely undertake **impact and options analysis of planned engineering work** (how many travellers are affected and how can this number be reduced?)

Realising the benefits of collaboration and integration

- **Reconsider the balance between weekend and weekday engineering work**, so that the infrequent traveller does not face the challenge of a disjointed rail service
- **Make it easier for SMEs and innovators to work with rail companies**; get involved in strategic thinking and action (not just solving specific problems); and make commercial returns from their contributions (IPR etc)
- **Simplify fares structures**; offer end-to-end journey purchasing (single "ticket" for whole journey, not just the rail element)
- **Change the industry mindset to look at the end-to-end journey**, to help deliver better connectivity (rail with rail and rail with other modes), physical accessibility, wayfinding through stations etc
- Work closely with other transport modes to **improve connectivity at stations**.
- Learn from other enterprises which **focus on delivering a personal experience** – including the major e-commerce outlets, which respond to customer behaviour with targeted marketing ("Customers who bought this also looked at/purchased…")