

THE UK RAIL REPORT 2018



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2. ECONOMIC BACK-DROP



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Rail is a service industry which reaches every corner of the UK and therefore, opinion is always likely to be divided as to how financial investment is most effectively apportioned. The midway point in CP5 has now passed, and some of the most significant construction projects are still ongoing – in some cases their eventual outcome is still in doubt.

Construction, according to the Office for National Statistics, is in recession after the largest output fall in five years. At the same time, the public is more concerned about investment in the railways than the supply of new housing, according to a new poll.

The Transport Secretary, Chris Grayling, confirmed that £48 billion will be spent on the rail network during Control Period 6 (2019 to 2024). This amount includes a grant of £34.7 billion from the Government, as it continues its record-setting funding which saw more than £25 billion put into Control Period 5. This is the biggest since the Victorian era.

This funding has been vital for large-scale projects like HS2 and Crossrail, as well as a number of other projects throughout the country.

Darren Caplan, Chief Executive of the Railway Industry Association, said: “It is positive news that today, on Budget Day, we can applaud the Treasury’s decision to allow Network Rail to allocate an additional £200 million to spend on renewals in CP5.”

Electrification

Two of the biggest and best-publicised electrification programmes in Britain – the Great Western Electrification Programme (GWEP) and the Edinburgh to Glasgow Improvement Programme (EGIP) are now both overdue and over budget. However, October 2017 saw an InterCity Express train carrying passengers for the first time along an electrified section of the route.

Network Rail has received criticism for being too optimistic about the productivity of new technology as well as failing to foresee issues relating to electrical clearance regulations.

A number of commitments were made to UK rail in the November budget, including the replacement of the Tyne & Wear Metro fleet with ‘modern and energy-efficient trains’, continued work with Transport for London (TfL) on developing ‘fair and affordable’ plans for Crossrail 2 and investment to ensure the High Speed 2 rail project can accommodate future rail improvements. Network Rail also announced that the £130m upgrade of the Gospel Oak to Barking line on the London Overground that was due to be finished in June 2017 won’t be finished until January 2018. Along the 14-mile route, a number of the structures carrying the overhead lines were incorrectly designed and couldn’t be installed at the planned locations. Further delays were caused by late delivery of materials and structures.





£4.2 BILLION NET GOVERNMENT SUPPORT TO THE RAIL INDUSTRY IN THE UK IN 2016-17

Crossrail 2

Crossrail 2, the cross-London line, which would run North-South from Hertfordshire through to the Surrey commuter belt, was originally scheduled to be fully operational by 2033 but may not now open until the mid-2040s. It has yet to receive the go-ahead from the government and its latest setback was the result of a major disagreement between the mayor's office at City Hall and Transport for London (TfL).

Net government support to the rail industry in the UK totalled £4.2 billion in 2016-17 (excluding Network Rail loans). This is 12.6% lower than 2015/16, which is mainly due to the end of Crossrail funding. However, HS2 funding increased to £839 million in 2016-17. Direct rail support, PTE grants and central government grants totalled £3.3 billion in 2016-17. In real terms, this was the same as 2015-16.

HS2 £21.2 billion (£8.7bn contingency)

Earlier in 2017, the Public Accounts committee cast doubts on HS2's original deadline of December 2032/33, calling it 'overly ambitious'. The scheme's chairman, Sir David Higgins, said building work on the northern section should be accelerated to reach as far as Crewe by 2027, instead of aiming for Birmingham by 2026.

In a report for the government, called HS2 Plus, he said the second phase of HS2 could then be completed by 2030 instead of 2033. In December 2017 a report detailed that some of the UK's biggest contractors have formed joint ventures to bid for deals to deliver London's two planned HS2 stations, worth a combined total of £3bn.

Rolling stock £7.5 billion (£1.7bn contingency)

A favourable combination of development and investment in projects throughout the country, coupled with growing demand for rail services from the travelling public, means that the market for the manufacture of train vehicles continues to be buoyant (see Section 9).

Great North Rail Project

The Great North Rail Project is a £1 billion investment which, by 2022, will see 2,000 more services every week and 40,000 extra passengers daily across the north of England. This includes 300km of electrified lines and 500 new carriages.

Linking Manchester's three principal mainline stations for the first time, the Ordsall Chord has been billed as eventually facilitating 700 extra daily journeys across the north of England. There was fierce opposition early on, in particular from Mark Whitby due to fears over damage to the historic line into Liverpool Road station being severed. Since this was overturned in the High Court, the project has been reported to be a "really good example" of how when they're given the support, time and money, they can "really deliver these pieces of infrastructure" – Transport for the North (TfN) boss David Brown (in an interview with *Rail Technology Magazine*).