



Department  
for Transport

# **Equalities Impact Assessment**

## **Railways Bill**

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# Leadership for Britain's Railway

This is an initial assessment of the proposed Designation, Duties, Functions and Accountability of Great British Railways (GBR), as in the Railways Bill. This section covers the following topics:

- Designation of GBR
- Functions and Duties
- Long Term Rail Strategy
- Directions and Guidance
- Licensing Regime
- Role of ORR and ORR's Duties
- Designation of Passenger Services
- Rolling Stock

## **Section 1 - Relevance to the PSED**

Yes – further assessment is needed.

## **Section 2 – Summary**

### *Designation of GBR*

GBR will be established as a new 'directing mind' in charge of our railway, responsible for infrastructure and passenger services. This will overhaul the existing fragmented model to create a system with fewer interfaces, clear lines of accountability, and greater direction.

The Secretary of State will be given the power to designate a body as Great British Railways through secondary legislation. Following Royal Assent, it is intended that a body

within the Network Rail group (the organisation that currently manages train tracks, some stations and other infrastructure) will be designated as GBR.

The PSED is considered to have very low relevance in this context because this provision simply relates to providing Secretary of State the power to designate a body as GBR. The PSED currently applies to Network Rail and DfT Operator, and it will apply to GBR once designated in the future. Nevertheless, any equalities impact of designation will be considered as part of the secondary legislation that is required to designate GBR.

### *GBR's Statutory Functions*

GBR's statutory functions, as set out on the face of the Bill, and as listed below, capture the roles and responsibilities of GBR as the directing mind for the railways in Great Britain, with ownership of track and train. GBR's statutory functions cover:

- Managing the use of its network;
- Infrastructure management (including operation, maintenance, renewals and enhancements);
- Operation of passenger services and the setting of fares and the selling of tickets for these services;
- Providing common systems to facilitate the operation of railway services, including those not provided by GBR; and
- The carrying out of research and development, and the publishing of advice and standards on matters relating to railways and railway services.

The PSED is considered to have very low relevance in this context, with no further assessment required, as GBR's statutory functions are primarily a statement of purpose and do not set out any requirements relating to GBR's performance in the delivery of these functions. The establishment of GBR's statutory functions does not inform how the PSED will apply to GBR as the PSED applies to everything GBR does and this is a separate obligation under the Equality Act 2010. Further, the PSED will also apply to any body authorised to exercise GBR's statutory functions on behalf of the organisation.

### *General Duties*

The Railways Bill will also establish a set of general duties that will, where appropriate, apply to GBR, the ORR, the Secretary of State for Transport and Scottish and Welsh Ministers when exercising their relevant statutory functions related to the railway and railway services. These sector bodies must consider:

- Promoting the interests of passengers, including the needs of those who are disabled.
- Promoting the use of rail freight.

- Promoting high standards of railway service performance.
- Enabling railway service providers to plan and invest.
- The public interest, including social and economic benefit alongside environmental impacts.
- The costs of the railway and the efficient use of public funds;

GBR and the ORR only must also consider:

- The Secretary of State's Secretary of State Long Term Rail Strategy;
- the Scottish Ministers' Rail Strategy; and
- the Welsh Ministers' Transport Strategy;

GBR must consider:

- The Secretary of State's freight growth target; and,
- The local transport plans of each mayoral combined authority and each mayoral combined county authority, alongside the Mayor of London's transport strategy.

The ORR, the Secretary of State, Scottish and Welsh Ministers must also consider:

- Rail safety (please note the Railways Bill will not change the existing safety regime which will apply to GBR)

In addition, the PSED will apply to GBR and the other sector bodies across their activities as public bodies.

The Railways Bill does not provide for a hierarchy between the general duties or the PSED. As legal requirements, no duty can be ignored or sidelined. Instead, it will be the responsibility of each sector body to ensure that their decision-making demonstrates consideration of competing requirements, where these exist, and seeks to strike a rational balance in making trade-offs.

We note that the shared general duties on the interests of passengers, including those who are disabled, are consistent with the requirements of the PSED as the sector bodies will need to consider the interests of those with protected characteristics when discharging these duties. This means that for the first time passenger services on our railways will be bound by an accessibility duty. This is a significant improvement to the current framework where there is no accessibility duty in legislation for any train operating company or for Network Rail.

Therefore, as these general duties will apply in addition to the PSED when the sector bodies exercise their statutory functions related to the railway and railway services, they will independently support some of the requirements of the PSED. The application of these duties will not inform how the PSED is applied by the sector bodies, therefore, the PSED is considered to have a low relevance in this context, with no further assessment required.

### *Long Term Rail Strategy (LTRS)*

The Secretary of State will set a long-term strategy, clearly articulating the Government's vision and desired outcomes for the railway on behalf of its users and taxpayers. This will give GBR a clear set of strategic objectives while ensuring it has autonomy over the planning and operational decisions that determine how these are achieved. GBR will support the Secretary of State in producing the strategy be required to have regard to it when carrying out its functions.

Both the 2022 call for evidence and Railways Bill consultation demonstrated the desire for a long-term strategy from stakeholders. While it is the Government's policy to require the production of a long-term rail strategy the provisions within the Bill do not specify the content that must be included in the strategy. The work to develop the strategy will be undertaken separately to the Bill and will be subject to its own public sector equality assessment.

At this time, given it is only the principle of the LTRS, rather than the detail of the LTRS content, that is being allowed for, the PSED is considered to have a low relevance in this context, with no further assessment required. It should be noted that a full EQIA will be done as part of the development of the actual LTRS and ahead of publication.

### *Directions and Guidance*

The Secretary of State will have the power to issue binding directions and non-binding guidance to GBR on the exercise of its statutory functions. Scottish Ministers can issue directions and guidance to GBR on the exercise of its statutory functions in Scotland so far as they relate to Scottish railway activities. Directions are a responsive tool for necessary course correction and will be used when this is proportionate and where there is strong justification, for example in instances of serious operational failure or national emergencies. The Secretary of State and Scottish Ministers will be required by statute to publish directions and guidance issued to GBR.

GBR will be held to account first and foremost by the Secretary of State through its Chair and Board. The Secretary of State will appoint the Chair and have a clear role in the appointment of Board members as well as continuing to seek the views of Scottish Ministers, as funders of rail infrastructure in Scotland and engaging with Welsh Ministers on these.

Guidance is considered to be of low relevance to the PSED. When issuing guidance, the Secretary of State will be subject to the PSED. GBR will have a duty to regard any issued guidance, however, this will not impede GBR's ability to meet its obligations under the PSED which, as legal requirements, will apply alongside the general duties in the Bill.

Directions have the potential to be more relevant because they could require GBR to take specific actions. In principle, a responsive direction could shape operational decisions which in turn could impact passengers with protected characteristics. However, in practice, any direction issued by the Secretary of State or Scottish Ministers will itself be subject to the PSED, as will GBR when implementing it. As such, the legal safeguard reduces the likelihood of material equalities impacts, meaning this area is assessed as low relevance overall, with no further evidence required at this stage.

We expect that equalities considerations will form part of the advice provided to the Secretary of State when specific guidance and directions are developed.

### *Licensing Regime*

GBR will be subject to a substantively streamlined and simplified licence, reflecting its unique position as the network's operator of both infrastructure and passenger services. While this licence will be enforced independently by the ORR, unlike today it will be drafted, issued and where necessary amended by the Secretary of State, ensuring it is fully consistent with the strategic direction set by the government.

Subject to further policy work and consultation with industry, we are proposing GBR's licence will include conditions under the following themes:

- **Industry obligations** – which are the various processes, schemes and rail industry obligations GBR needs to adhere to such as making sure it has insurance to cover any harm caused to third parties, and following fair processes for handling claims and sharing responsibility if things go wrong.
- **Minimum consumer standards** – which are various minimum standards (to be developed and set by the Passenger Watchdog) operators must adhere to ensure a consistent passenger experience across the system on accessible travel policies, complaint handling, information for passengers, and delay compensation.
- **Information requirements** – which are conditions that concern the provision of information including financial information to the ORR, which can be enforced by the ORR itself.

We are proposing that a series of conditions in the existing Network Rail licence will not be included in the GBR licence. There will be a further assessment of equalities impacts when the licence conditions are developed.

To ensure that a refreshed licensing system supports GBR in delivering its goals, the duties that govern the ORR have also been reviewed to ensure that they are aligned with the new sector model, as well as allowing the ORR to align with wider government priorities like promoting growth.

The PSED is considered to have limited direct relevance in this context, as the licensing changes are structural and primarily affect the governance of GBR's licence and that the Secretary of State will be issuing it, without immediate or differential impact on service users or employees. However, the PSED will be relevant during the licence consultation as the contents of the GBR licence will need to have shown due consideration of the PSED. GBR, as a public body, will remain bound by the PSED in how it exercises its functions. Additionally, both the ORR and the Secretary of State are also subject to the PSED and must apply it when issuing and enforcing licences, ensuring that equality considerations are embedded throughout the licensing process.

### *Passenger Services designation*

Primary legislation will include the power for the Secretary of State to designate the services for which GBR will be responsible (an adaptation of Railways Act 1993's current

section 23). It enables the switching on of relevant GBR powers in relation to those services (e.g. delivery of passenger services and fares provisions). Historically designation has been very succinct, and this may remain the case – the new designation is subject to further policy development.

We have considered the relevance of the PSED to this policy and concluded that it is very low and, therefore, no further assessment is required, because passenger services designation does not provide route, nor timetable-level detail, which could affect individuals. In any case, the Secretary of State will need comply with the PSED when designating the services.

### *Rolling Stock*

GBR will take over operation of train services including rolling stock leasing and maintenance arrangements from the fourteen franchised train operators under contract to the Department for Transport. The initial transfer of rolling stock responsibilities to GBR does not impact the service provided and therefore the PSED is considered to have very low relevance in this context and has not been considered further.

The PSED only becomes relevant after the transfer, when GBR will be able to make changes to the services provided, the rolling stock used to provide passenger services or the passenger environment on board that rolling stock and we expect GBR to undertake appropriate PSED assessment at that point.

There may be opportunities at this stage to deliver further improvements for disabled passengers. The Government has publicly committed that the forthcoming Rolling Stock and Infrastructure Strategy will make reference to accessibility considerations. This signals an intention for future rolling stock decisions to take greater account of the needs of disabled passengers, complementing the reforms set out in the Bill.

### *Cross-cutting*

The package of legislative reforms within the Railways Bill is expected to have impacts on the experience of passengers who utilise the railways. This cross-cutting section throughout the return assesses the demographics of passengers who travel by rail, and the potential equalities implications.

## **Section 3 - Evidence Summary**

### *Cross-Cutting*

Passenger demographics: This section outlines evidence on the demographics of rail users against the wider Great British population, to demonstrate how changes to rail may generally impact certain groups who use rail more than others.

### *Great Britain Population Demographics*

This section provides evidence on the distribution of protected characteristics within the Great British population. These are provided as a comparator against which the demographics of rail passengers are compared. The wider population of Great Britain has been used within this assessment to provide a consistent comparison with the affected

groups against the wider population. This allows for the identification of protected characteristics that are over or under-represented within the affected groups and are, therefore, likely to face greater or lesser impacts as a result of the Bill. As explored below, we have found that for some of the protected characteristics there is a difference between the national level and rail user demographics, which could mean that some groups will be disproportionately affected by changes to rail.

The charts and statistics below present the distribution of protected characteristics across the wider population of Great Britain. This is primarily based on data from the ONS 2021 Census covering England and Wales only, as it is the most comprehensive and reliable source of population-level data on protected characteristics. This assessment also draws on more recent ONS datasets where there are more regularly updated statistics, including the Annual Population Survey and Family Resources Survey. While this does not capture the entirety of Great Britain, and there may be differences in protected characteristics between England and Wales and the rest of the Great British population, we expect the data for England and Wales to be broadly representative of the distribution of protected characteristics across Great Britain as a whole, with England and Wales accounting for approximately 92% of the Great British population. It is therefore not considered problematic that the data does not specifically cover Scotland.

## Age

Figure 1 below illustrates the age distribution of the population, using data from the ONS mid-2024 population estimates for England and Wales. Approximately a quarter of the population is between 0-20 years old, around 50% is between 21-59, and 25% over 60.

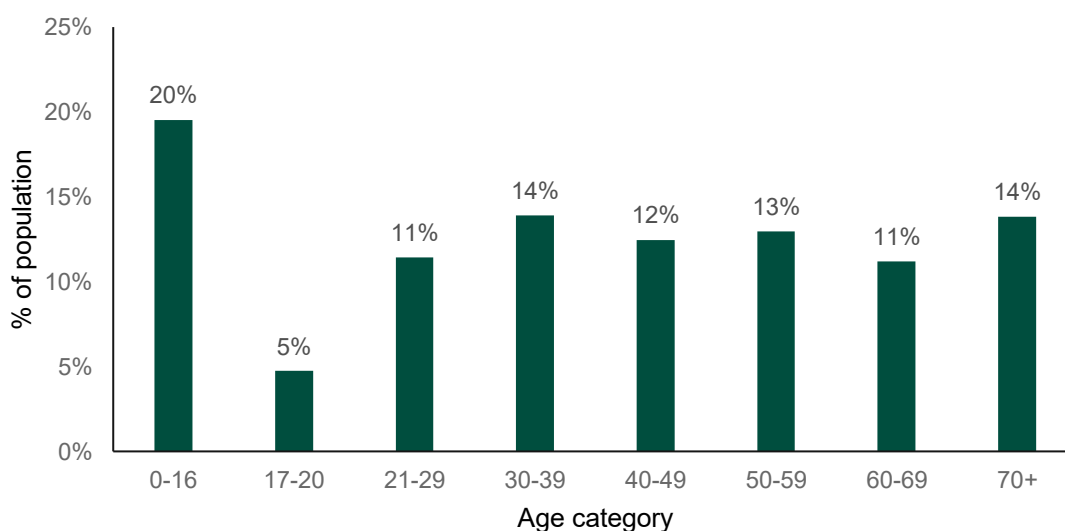


Figure 1:

Population age distribution 1

## Disability

People with a disability are a minority within Great Britain. Data from the Census for England and Wales in 2021 indicates that 18% of the population have a disability.<sup>2</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> ONS (2025). Mid-2024 population estimates: England and Wales: [Analysis of population estimates tool for UK - Office for National Statistics](#)

<sup>2</sup> ONS (2023). Census 2021: [Disability, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics](#)

latest Family Resources Survey (FRS), which is the government’s principal source for monitoring disability in line with the Equality Act 2010 definition estimates indicate that around one quarter of the UK population reports a disability in 2023/24, reflecting increases over time associated with demographic change and improved reporting<sup>3</sup>

**Ethnicity**

Figure 2 below illustrates the ethnicity distribution of the population, using data from the Census for England and Wales in 2021. 82% of the population is white, and 18% are from ethnic minorities. These figures are also similar to the more recent Annual Population Survey (APS) findings for 2024-25, although are not directly comparable given the use of different ethnicity categories.

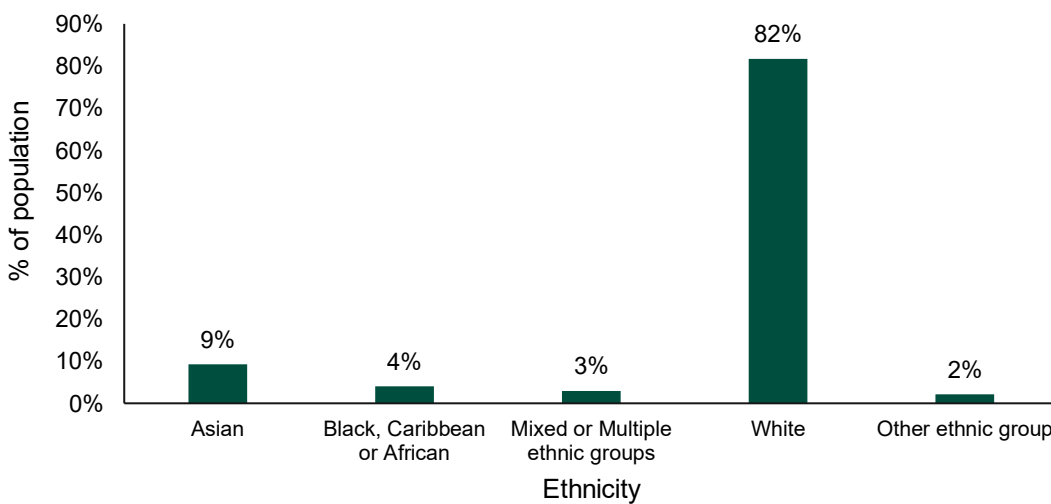


Figure 2:

*Population ethnic distribution<sup>4</sup>*

**Gender reassignment**

The majority of Great Britain’s population identify with the same gender registered at birth. Census data for England and Wales in 2021 indicates that approximately 0.5% of the population do not identify with the same gender registered at birth.<sup>5</sup>

**Pregnancy and maternity**

According to NHS England, there were 542,235 deliveries in NHS hospitals in England in 2024-25, representing a 0.5% decrease from 2023-24.<sup>6</sup>

**Marital status**

<sup>3</sup> Department for Work and Pensions (2026). [Family Resources Survey: financial year 2023 to 2024 - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/family-resources-survey-financial-year-2023-to-2024)

<sup>4</sup> ONS (2022). Census 2021: [Ethnic group, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/ethnicityandnationality/census2021/ethnicgroupenglandandwales)

<sup>5</sup> ONS (2023). Census 2021: [Gender identity, England, and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/ethnicityandnationality/census2021/genderidentityenglandandwales). 6% of the respondents did not answer this question so this figure could be higher/lower if there was a 100% response rate.

<sup>6</sup> NHS England (2025). NHS maternity statistics, England, 2024-25. [NHS Maternity Statistics, 2024-25 - NHS England Digital](https://www.nhs.uk/england-digital/nhs-maternity-statistics-2024-25)

Figure 3 below illustrates the marital status of the population, using data from the Census for England and Wales in 2021. This indicates that 38% of the adult population<sup>7</sup> has never been married or registered in a civil partnership, 47% is married or in a civil partnership (including separated), 9% has divorced or had a civil partnership dissolved, while 6% is widowed or surviving a civil partnership partner.

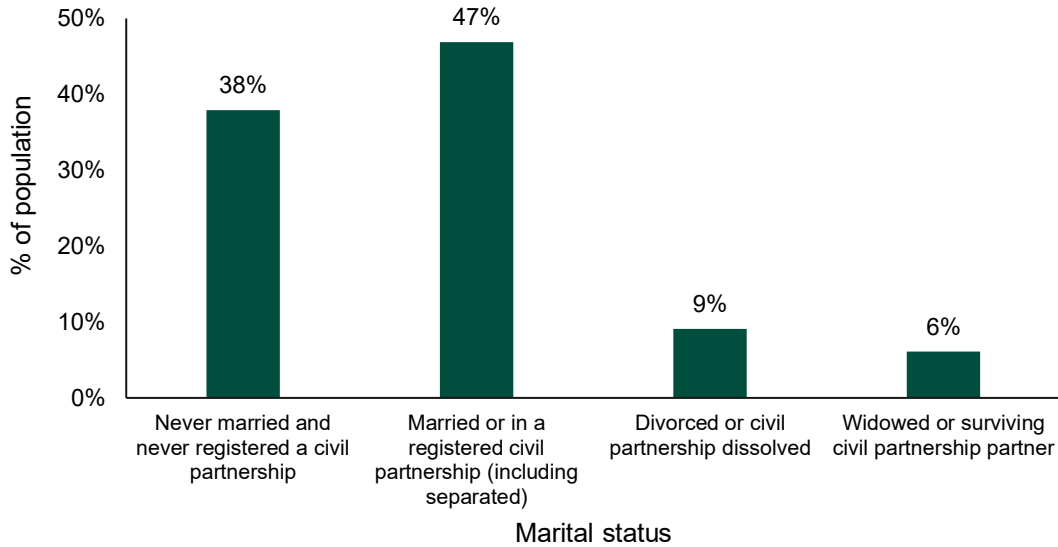


Figure 3: Marital status of the Great Britain’s population<sup>8</sup>

**Religion**

Figure 4 below illustrates that the largest religion in England and Wales in 2021 is Christianity, with approximately 46% of the population reporting themselves as Christian. Islam was the second most followed religion at approximately 7% and around 37% follow no religion.

<sup>7</sup> Adult population is defined as residents aged 16 and over.

<sup>8</sup> ONS (2023). Census 2021: [Marriage and civil partnership status in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/marriageanddivorce/censusesandsurveys/census2021/marriageandcivilpartnershipstatusinenglandandwales)

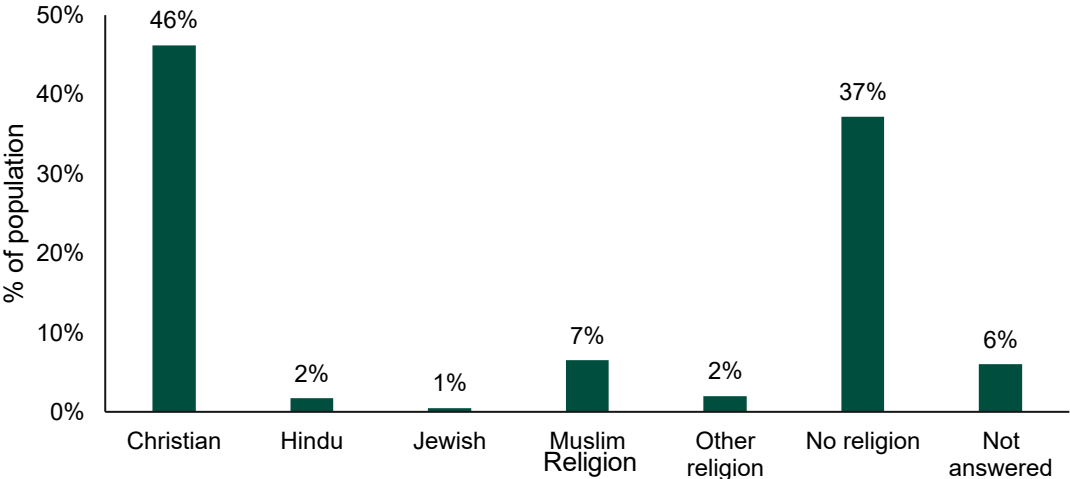


Figure 4:

Religion distribution of Great Britain population<sup>9</sup>

**Sex**

The breakdown of Great Britain’s population is fairly evenly split between male and female. Population estimates for England and Wales in mid-2024 indicate that 51% are female and 49% are male.<sup>10</sup>

**Sexual orientation**

Figure 5 below summarises responses from the ONS 2021 census on sexual orientation for England and Wales. 89.4% of respondents identified as straight or heterosexual, 3.2% identified as an LGB+ orientation (including gay, lesbian, bisexual, and other sexual orientations), and 7.5% did not answer the question.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> ONS (2022). Census 2021: [Religion, England, and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk). Note that the UK population figures do not add up to 100% due to rounding.

<sup>10</sup> ONS (2025). Mid-2024 population estimates: England and Wales: [Analysis of population estimates tool for UK - Office for National Statistics](https://ons.gov.uk)

<sup>11</sup> ONS (2023). Census 2021: [Sexual orientation, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk)

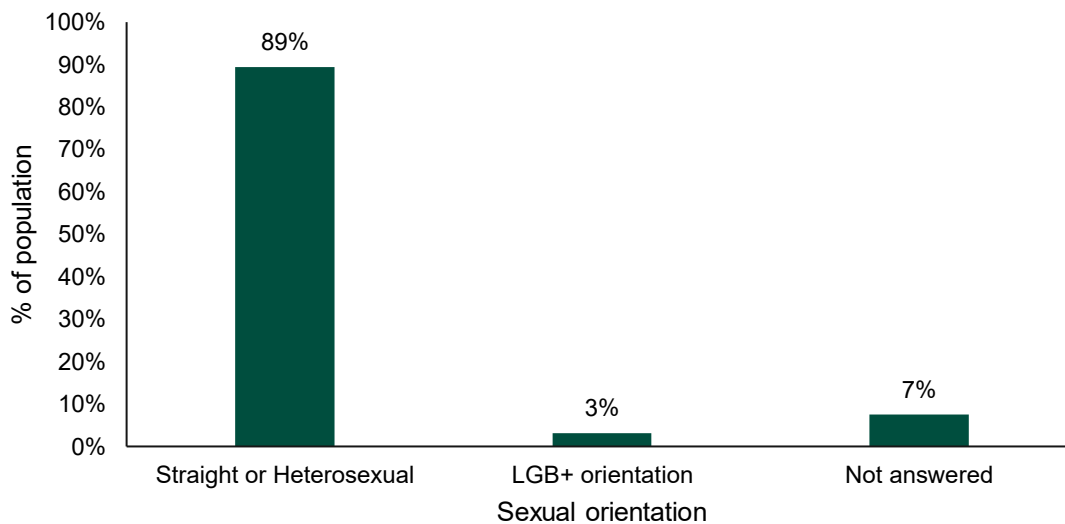


Figure 5:

*Sexual orientation distribution of Great Britain's population<sup>12</sup>*

**Rail Passenger Demographics**

This section provides evidence on the demographics of rail passengers. This explores the protected characteristics of those who use the rail network. This will be used to inform the assessment of the impact of the policy provisions in the Railways Bill on these groups in the following section. In general, we expect rail passengers to experience a benefit from the provisions in the Railways Bill, although it is possible that some negative impacts may also be experienced. These impacts are explored further in the Impact Assessment supporting the Railways Bill. The demographics of rail passengers below show that some groups will face disproportionately large impacts because they use rail more than other groups

Some data sources refer to 'surface rail', which typically includes all heavy rail, however the exact definition of this term varies according to the source. In this document, evidence on surface rail usage is taken mainly from the Department's National Travel Survey. The National Travel Survey notes and definitions indicate that within their results surface rail corresponds to National Rail. The data from the National Travel Survey covers England only and therefore presents a limitation of not being fully representative of Great Britain. However, due to data limitations, this serves as a reasonable proxy for rail user demographics across Great Britain, with England accounting for the majority (approximately 87%) of Great Britain's population. Therefore, while regional variations may exist, they are not expected to significantly alter the overall findings of this assessment. Additionally, the National Travel Survey is recognised as a high-quality dataset for transport usage and is therefore considered the most appropriate to use in this context.

**Age**

The National Travel Survey shows that, in England in 2024, passengers in the 21-29 age group, on average, made the most surface rail trips with 39 trips per person per year, with those in the 30-39 age category making 32 trips per person per year. The groups taking the fewest trips per year were those under 16 (8 trips per year), those aged 60-69 (15 trips per year), and those aged over 70 (6 trips per year). The average for all ages was 21 trips

<sup>12</sup> Figures do not exactly total to 100% due to rounding

per year.<sup>13</sup> When comparing these figures to the national age distribution, it is evident that younger age groups utilise the railways disproportionately more than older age groups.

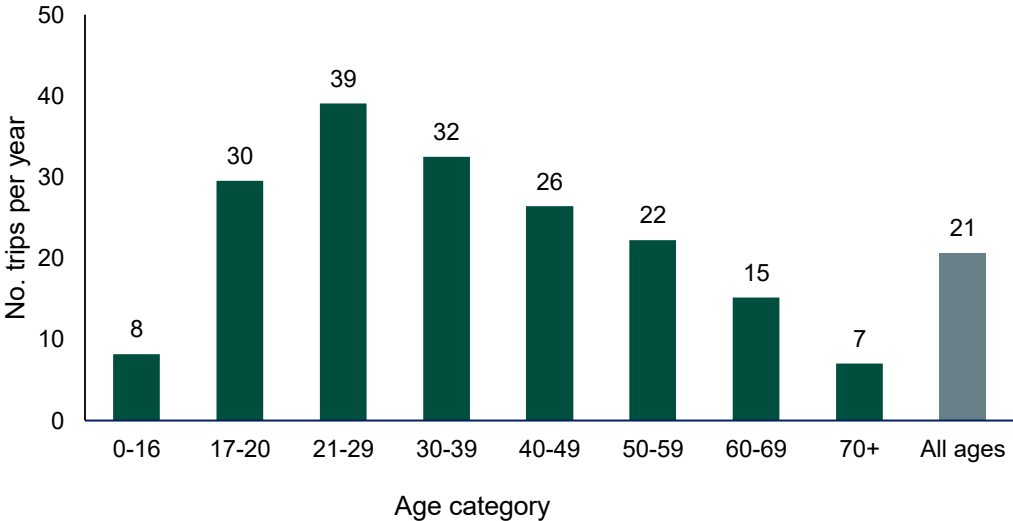


Figure 6:

*Surface Rail usage by age category (Average number of trips per year)*

The survey also shows for the same region and period (England, 2024) that passengers aged between 21 and 29 travelled on average 1222 miles per person per year, the highest of any age category.

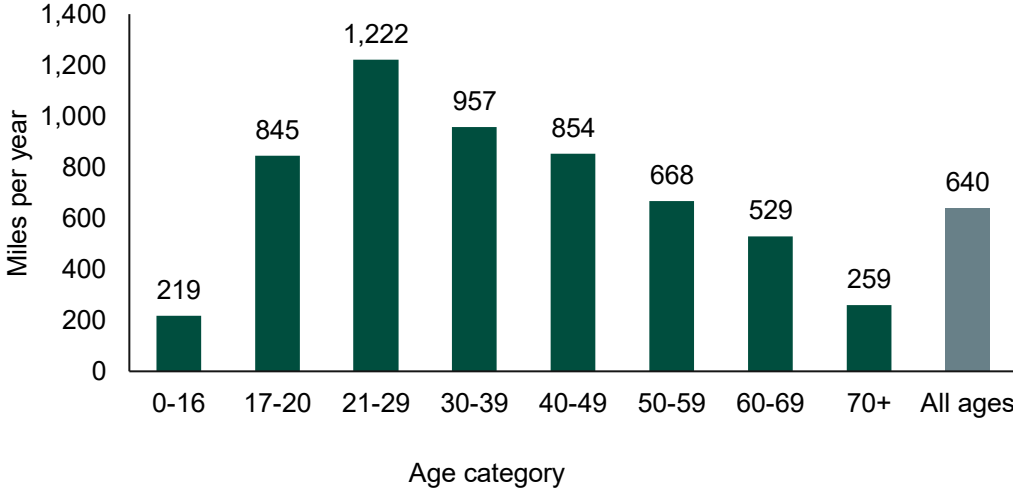


Figure 7:

*Surface Rail usage by age category (Average mileage per year)*

When average mileage per year is divided by the number of trips, those aged 70+ travelled the furthest on average at 37 miles per trip taken. This is illustrated in the figure below.

<sup>13</sup> National Travel Survey (2025) - Trips, stages, distance and time spent travelling, Mode by age and gender (NTS0601). ([Mode of travel - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-travel-survey-2025))

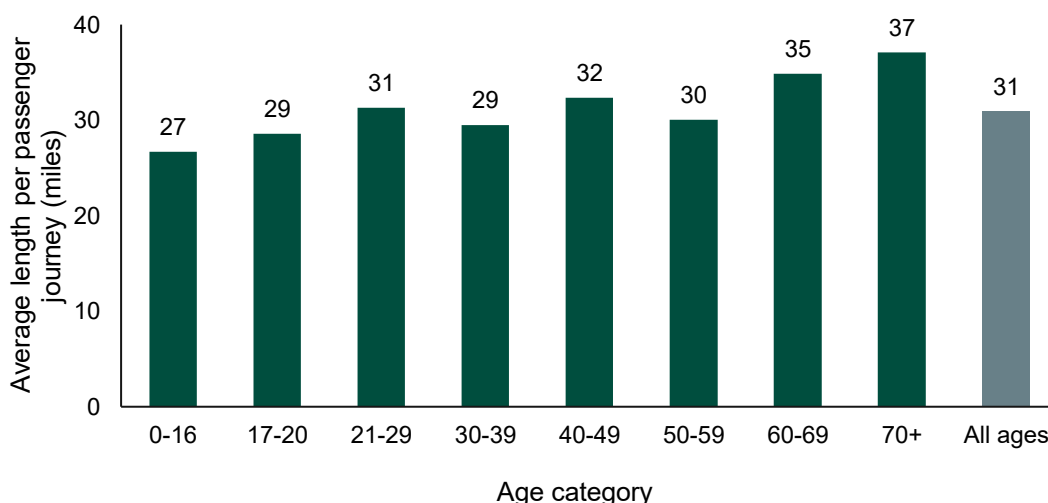


Figure 8:

Surface Rail usage by age category (Average length of rail journey)

### Disability

In this section we look at statistics on trips made by passengers with a disability, as well as those who have mobility difficulties (as access to the transport systems for those with mobility difficulties is generally more challenging). On average, in 2024, those with any disability<sup>14</sup> made 11 trips per person in England by surface rail, while those with a mobility difficulty<sup>15</sup> made 6 trips per person in England by surface rail. This compares to 28 trips per person completed for those without a disability and 26 surface rail trips per person completed for those with no mobility difficulty.<sup>16</sup> When comparing total trips over a year for those with a mobility difficulty (600) compared to those without (987), the former has a lower likelihood of using rail compared to other modes of transport. This corresponded with a lower total distance travelled on rail for those with a mobility difficulty over the same period, with 209 miles travelled compared with 799 for those without.

### Ethnicity

According to an August 2023 publication on travel from the Government ethnicity facts and figures service, data collected from the 2019 National Travel Survey shows that, in England between 2015-2019, passengers of black ethnicity made the most surface rail trips with 37 trips per person per year. In contrast, passengers of white ethnicity made the fewest number of surface rail trips per year, with 20 trips per person per year. The average number of trips per year for all ethnicities was 21.<sup>17</sup> When comparing these figures to the national ethnic distribution, it is evident that ethnic minorities utilise the railways disproportionately more than passengers of white ethnicity.

<sup>14</sup> Defined as a disability or illness expected to last more than 12 months.

<sup>15</sup> The NTS definition of having a mobility difficulty is based on those adults who responded to say they have difficulties travelling on foot, by bus, or both.

<sup>16</sup> National Travel Survey (2025). Travel by mobility status and main mode (NTS0709) ([Accessibility - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-travel-survey-2025-travel-by-mobility-status-and-main-mode)); National Travel Survey (2025). Average number of trips by disability status and main mode (NTS0711) ([Accessibility - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-travel-survey-2025-average-number-of-trips-by-disability-status-and-main-mode)).

<sup>17</sup> Data from the National Travel Survey (2019) presented as part of Ethnicity Facts and Figures relating to travel - <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/culture-and-community/transport/travel/latest>

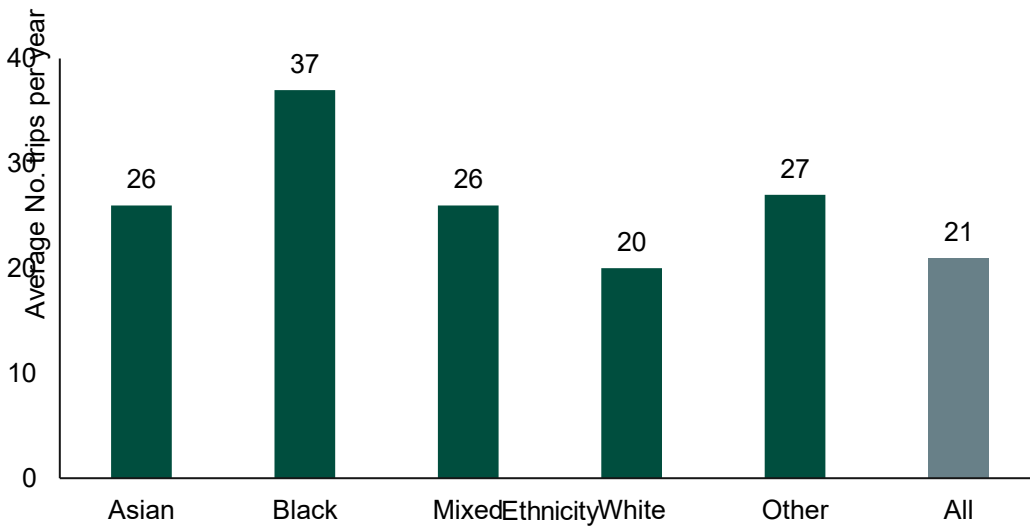


Figure 9:

*Surface Rail usage by ethnicity.*

The same data source indicates that of all trips made by black people, 5% of those are made by surface rail – the highest proportion of the ethnic groups assessed.

Updated figures from the 2024 National Travel Survey, which only explores ethnic minorities as a whole, shows that the average number of surface rail trips per year for passengers of ethnic minorities in England was 24, higher than for passengers of white ethnicity, who averaged 20 trips per year. In comparison, the average number of trips for any mode was 746 for ethnic minorities, and 967 for passengers of white ethnicity, indicating that passengers of ethnic minorities have a higher likelihood of travelling by surface rail than passengers of white ethnicity.<sup>18</sup>

**Sex**

The National Travel Survey shows that, in England, in 2024, men on average made around 23 surface rail trips per person per year compared with around 18 trips per person per year for women. This corresponded with a higher average distance travelled per year on rail for men, with 725 miles travelled compared with 557 miles for women. The average distance travelled per rail trip by both sexes was the same in 2024 at 31 miles per trip.<sup>19</sup>

**Region**

The 2024 National Travel Survey found there to be geographical inequalities in rail usage in England. The average number of rail trips per person was highest in London (53), followed by East of England (27) and South East England (26). The lowest number of trips

<sup>18</sup> National Travel Survey (2025). Average number of trips and distance travelled by mode, ethnic group, region and rural-urban classification of residence (NTS9917) ([Mode of travel - GOV.UK](#)).

<sup>19</sup> National Travel Survey (2025) - Trips, stages, distance and time spent travelling, Mode by age and gender (NTS0601) ([Mode of travel - GOV.UK](#))

per person was for East Midlands (6), North East England (7), South West England (8) and West Midlands (8).<sup>20</sup>

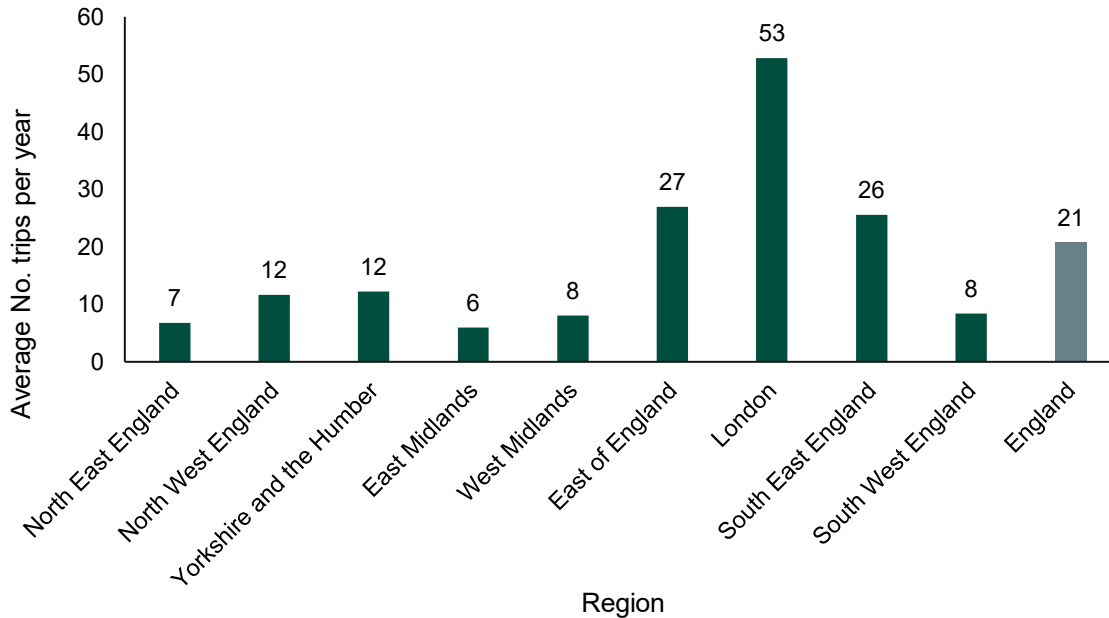


Figure 10: Average number of surface rail trips per person by region.

The survey also illustrates a relationship between urbanity and rail usage.<sup>21</sup> The average number of surface rail trips per person was greatest in urban areas nearer to a major town or city (23), followed by urban areas further from a major town or city (17), with people in larger and smaller rural areas having 14 or less average rail trips per year. The average number of trips for all areas was 21.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> National Travel Survey (2025). Average number of trips by main mode, region and rural-urban classification of residence (NTS9903) ([Mode of travel - GOV.UK](#)).

<sup>21</sup> Rural-urban classification of residence is based on the ten-category [rural urban classification](#).

<sup>22</sup> National Travel Survey (2025). Average number of trips by main mode, region and rural-urban classification of residence (NTS9903) ([Mode of travel - GOV.UK](#)).

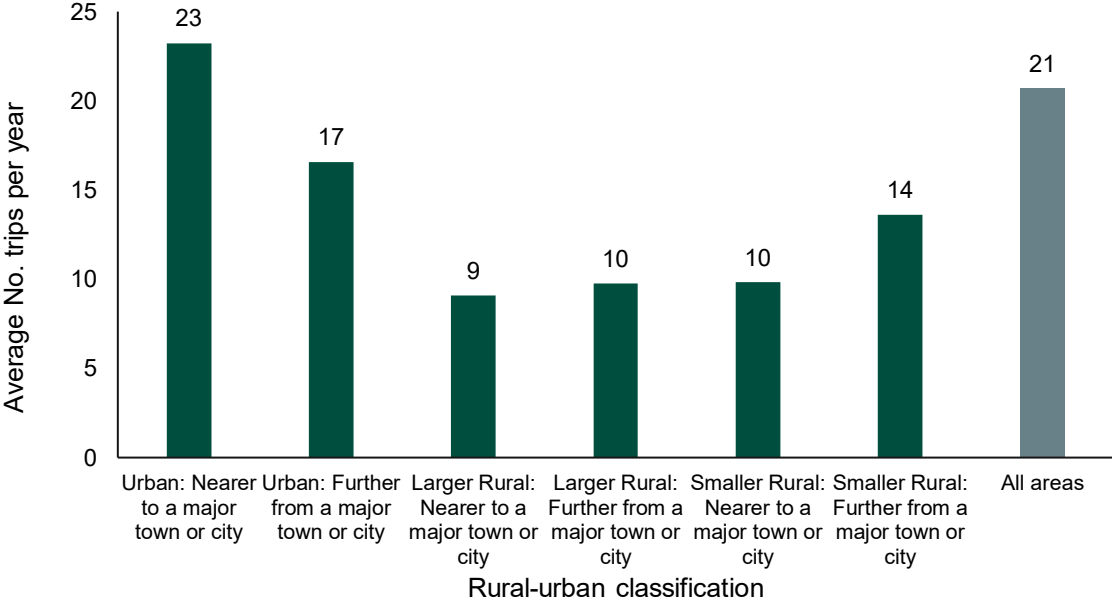


Figure 11: Average number of surface rail trips per person by rural-urban classification

**Income**

The National Travel Survey shows that, in England, in 2024, the highest income quintile averaged the greatest number of surface rail trips per person (41) and the greatest average distance travelled by surface rail (1149 miles). Conversely, the lowest quintile averaged the least number of trips (11) and the lowest average distance (313 miles).<sup>23</sup>

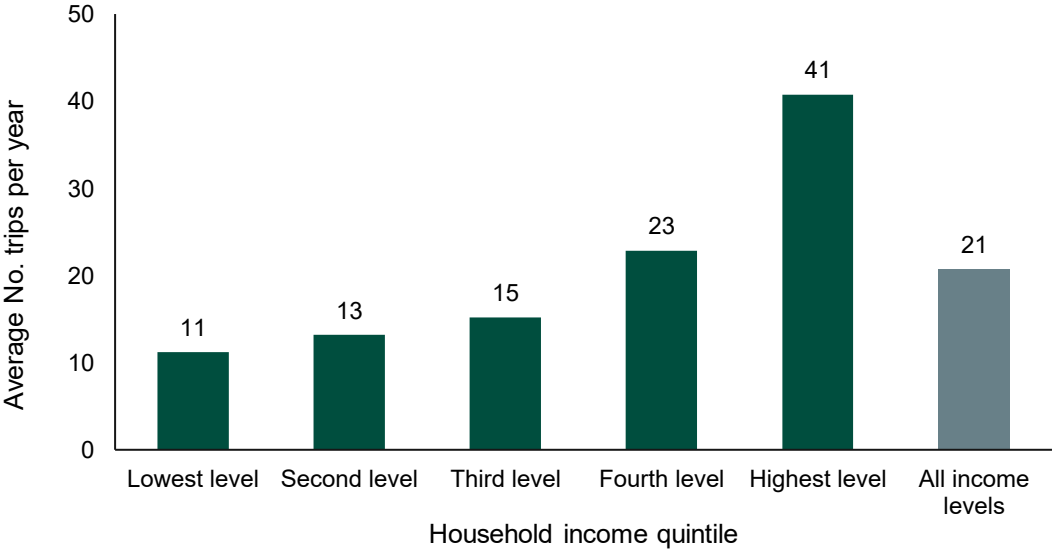


Figure 12:

Average number of surface rail trips per person by household income quintile

<sup>23</sup> National Travel Survey (2025). Average number of trips and miles by household income quintile and mode (NTS0705) ([Mode of travel - GOV.UK](#)).

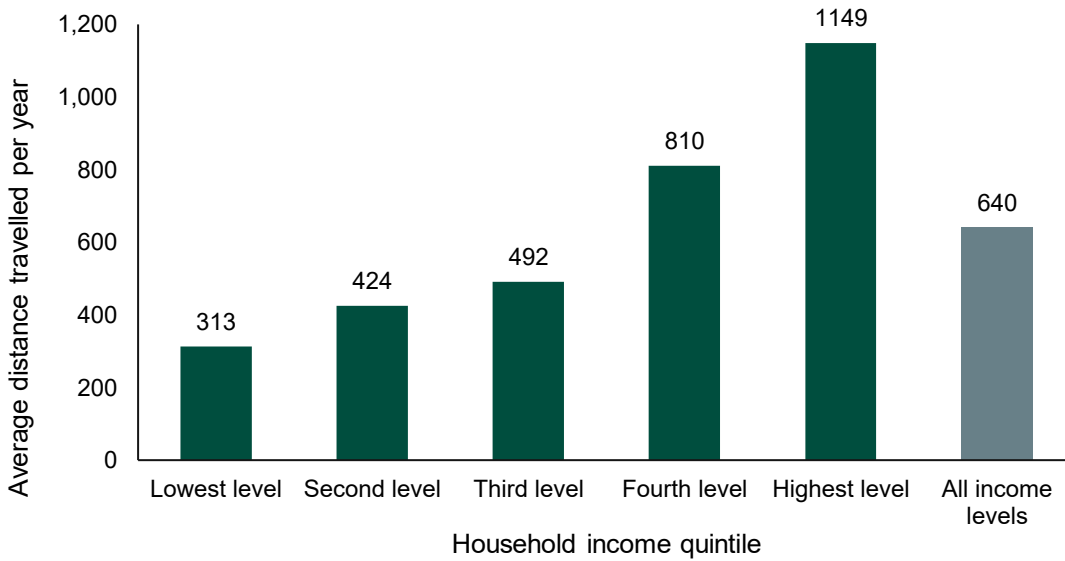


Figure 13:

*Average distance travelled on surface rail per person by household income quintile*

**Other**

There is no data available on the usage of rail for the demographics regarding the protected characteristics of gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief, and marriage and civil partnership. However, as these groups specifically are not expected to be directly impacted by the Bill, it is not proportionate to conduct further research to investigate these areas.

**Section 4 – Assessment**

*Cross-cutting*

The impact on rail passengers from the Bill is expected to be generally positive.

The provisions aim to improve the efficiency and performance of the railways, simplify the fares and ticketing landscape, and consolidate customer support functions, leading to improved passenger experience. Improving reliability and consistency of the railways can increase usage including for disabled passengers due to increased confidence in the service. GBR will be set up to be passenger centric with the ability to focus on passenger satisfaction. There is also a possibility of negative impacts, such as if GBR makes poor management decisions although there are provisions in the Bill designed to hold GBR to account for its decision making.

The Bill is expected to have greater impact on people who use rail more frequently. The evidence summarised in the cross-cutting section in Section 3 indicates that passenger usage varies by certain protected characteristics. For example, younger age groups tend to travel more frequently on rail than older age groups and are therefore likely to be impacted more. Nevertheless, older people are still expected to benefit from increased rail connectivity and performance, supporting greater access to jobs, healthcare and other services, and potentially leading to reduced isolation.

The evidence also indicates that people with disabilities and mobility issues tend to use passenger rail services less frequently than those without. Nevertheless, passengers with disabilities and mobility issues are still expected to benefit from these reforms through

increased focus on improving accessibility, such as through the creation of the Passenger Watchdog, stations improvements or more accessible information sharing. The Passenger Watchdog will also act as an advocate for passengers, including those with disabilities. Further discussion on accessibility benefits can be found in the Equalities Impact Assessments: A New Voice for Passengers, and Devolution.

Ethnic minorities are shown to be more likely to travel by rail than people of white ethnicity, whilst men tend to travel slightly more by surface rail than women.

Whilst not protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, Section 3 also summarises evidence regarding the usage of rail by region and income. It illustrates that the usage of rail differs geographically, with the frequency of trips greater in urban areas such as London, suggesting that passengers in these areas would be impacted more from the Bill. The evidence also suggests that rail is used more frequently by households with higher income, indicating a potential for higher-income groups to experience greater impacts as a result.

Nonetheless, the overall intention of the Bill is to deliver improvements across the rail network that enhance service quality, accessibility, and customer experience for all passengers, regardless of their background or circumstances. By strengthening accountability, simplifying consumer redress, and enforcing minimum passenger and accessibility standards through GBR's licence, the reforms are intended to improve confidence in the railway and deliver a more reliable and passenger-centred system. While the impacts may vary between groups based on existing patterns of rail use, these patterns pre-date the Bill and cannot be attributed to it; instead, the reforms are expected to support wider take-up over time, including among those who currently use rail less frequently.

## **Section 5 - Decision and Conclusions**

### *Cross-cutting*

The reforms are intended to proceed as planned. GBR will support improvements to efficiency and reliability of the railways, and help provide a consistent experience for passengers, including greater support for disabled passengers. This may facilitate increased usage for all passengers, including disabled passengers. Whilst certain groups may be impacted more than others by reforms and changes to rail, the overall intention of the Bill is to deliver improvements across the rail network that enhance service quality, accessibility, and customer experience for all passengers, regardless of their background or circumstances. These expected variations of impacts are a result of passenger usage which pre-dates the introduction of the Bill and therefore cannot be attributed to the Bill.

## **Section 6 - Monitoring and Review Summary**

### *Cross-cutting*

We will continue to monitor the usage of rail through existing datasets, and an evaluation strategy for the Rail Sector Transformation programme within the Department for Transport will help identify the impacts to those with protected characteristics and support

the decision-making of GBR. Further details on monitoring and evaluation can be found in the Railways Bill Impact Assessment linked [here](#)<sup>24</sup>.

## **Section 7 - Sign Off**

I am satisfied that the above assessment demonstrates that full and appropriate regards has been paid to the PSED.

### SCS sign off

Name: Elisabeth Cuthbertson

Role: Director – Rail Reform Directorate

Grade: SCS 2

Date: 4 Nov 2025

Signature: Elisabeth Cuthbertson

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<sup>24</sup> <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/59-01/0325/FinalRailwaysBillImpactAssessment.pdf>

# A New Voice for Passengers

This is an initial assessment of the proposed establishment of a new Passenger Watchdog (also known as the Passengers' Council (PC)), as laid out in the Railways Bill. It covers the proposed functions of the Watchdog as follows:

- Watchdog and advisory function
- Standard setting function

## Section 1 - Relevance to the PSED

Yes – further assessment is needed as the establishment of a Watchdog will have an impact on passengers with protected characteristics.

## Section 2 – Summary

The current landscape of passenger rights, standards, and redress is complex and difficult to navigate. Passengers dealing with lack of access to services, persistent delays and cancellations among other issues during their journeys are faced with a lack of clear routes to raise concerns or reliable mechanisms to bring about change.

This was reiterated by the Transport Select Committee (TSC) in their report, *Access Denied: rights versus reality in disabled people's access to transport*, which presented evidence from disabled people showing that there is still a very substantial gap between the rights and obligations that exist in theory, and the daily experience of people who rely on pavements, buses, taxis, trains and planes to get to work, to access services or for leisure.

Existing consumer protection roles for rail are split across several organisations creating fragmentation. Therefore, the government will transform Transport Focus into a more powerful Passenger Watchdog, transferring under it most existing rail consumer functions to ensure there is an effective passenger focused body to support GBR and other operators in delivering an excellent passenger experience, including more accessible services, and to address the fragmentation of the current rail consumer landscape. While GBR will own its relationship with passengers and be responsible for delivering excellent passenger services from the outset, the new Passenger Watchdog will:

- Advise and support GBR to help shape its passenger offer.
- Monitor passenger experience across rail services in Great Britain.
- Shine a light on and investigate any issues that passengers face, ultimately raising persistent issues that impact passenger experience more formally with GBR, other operators, the government and the ORR; and
- Play a role in holding GBR and other operators to account for how well they are delivering for all passengers.

Rather than create a new body, the government has decided to strengthen Transport Focus as it already has the necessary passenger focused culture, and this provides the quickest way to make improvements for passengers. We will do this through the issuance of further statutory powers to Transport Focus, namely:

The ability to issue statutory advice to the Secretary of State, GBR and other delivery bodies (with specific roles to advise on strategies, business plans, and obligations on decision makers to take account of the Watchdog's advice).

The setting and monitoring of minimum consumer standards (including accessibility standards), to be referred to in GBR's licence and that of other operators. Transport Focus will take over this role from the ORR and will initially monitor existing standards set by the ORR such as operators' Accessible Travel Policies.

A requirement to provide an alternative dispute resolution service (through sponsorship of the Rail Ombudsman). Transport Focus will take over this role from the ORR.

A specific role in driving up accessibility standards underpinned by an accessibility duty, by monitoring how services are delivered to disabled passengers and advocating improvements where issues arise.

### **Section 3 - Evidence Summary**

The following evidence has been considered as part of this assessment:

[Consultation: A railway fit for Britain's future](#)

[TSC Report: Access denied: rights versus reality in disabled people's access to transport](#)

[Government Response - Disabled people's access to transport report](#)

ORR report: [Disabled passengers' experiences of complaints handling by train operators - April 2024](#)

[Core complaints data | Office of Rail and Road](#)

[Equalities Act 2010 and guidance](#)

The core evidence to inform decisions on the establishment of the Passenger Watchdog came from the Department's public consultation, A railway fit for Britain's future, which closed on 15th April 2025.

We also took account of the evidence presented in the Transport Select Committee's (TSC) report, Access denied: rights versus reality in disabled people's access to transport, which followed the TSC's inquiry, carried out between 2023 and 2024. The Department's response was published in June 2025.

Evidence presented by ORR in their Core Complaints Data reports and in their Disabled passengers' experiences of complaints handling by train operators from April 2024 has also been considered.

We have also held several stakeholder meetings with the ORR, the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC), Transport Focus, London TravelWatch, the Rail Ombudsman and devolved authorities. These discussions have helped us to consider how best to develop the functions of the Passenger Watchdog and how all these organisations can work together to support improvement of the passenger experience.

The ORR are currently responsible for monitoring how train and station operators handle customer complaints including their compliance with codes of practice on complaints handling. They publish complaints data on a quarterly basis, at both national level and by train operator. The latest release for the period October 2024 to March 2025 was published in June 2025.<sup>25</sup>

There were 322,409 passenger complaints closed by train operators in the latest year (1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025), a decrease of 8% from the previous year, which is a rate of 19 complaints per 100,000 journeys. There were 163,688 passenger complaints closed by train operators in the latest six months (1 October 2024 to 31 March 2025), a decrease of 7% from the same six months in the previous year.

In the latest year, 97.1% of passenger complaints were closed within 20 working days. In the latest six months, 96.2% of complaints were closed within 20 working days.

Punctuality or reliability was the most common cause of passenger complaints to train operators in the latest year (1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025), accounting for 19.3% of all complaints.

Overall, 83.8% of passenger complaints were made by email or webform in the latest year.

In 2024, ORR published a report<sup>26</sup> focussing on disabled rail passengers' experiences of operators' complaints processes. There were three key findings:

Most disabled people are aware of operators' general complaints processes. However, lack of awareness about the ability to seek redress where booked assistance fails is preventing many disabled people from raising issues and claims.

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<sup>25</sup> Office of Rail and Road (2025). [Passenger rail service complaints | ORR Data Portal](#)

<sup>26</sup> Office of Rail and Road (2024). [Disabled passengers' experiences of complaints handling by train operators - April 2024](#)

Operators' complaints processes are broadly accessible to most disabled passengers but not all.

Disabled passengers would be more likely to complain if they felt it was a worthwhile use of their time and energy and that it would lead to change.

Around 17 million people in the UK are disabled, representing almost one in four of the population.<sup>27</sup> This includes physical and sensory conditions such as mobility difficulties, hearing or sight loss, non-visible disabilities such as autism, dementia and anxiety, learning disabilities, and physical and mental health conditions. Some 29 per cent of disabled adults live in households without access to a car, compared with 16 per cent of non-disabled adults. People with specific access needs tend to travel less, find travel more stressful and feel less confident in travelling. In 2023, disabled adults in England made 25 per cent fewer trips across all modes than non-disabled adults. This gap widens further among over-60s.<sup>28</sup> Decreased confidence when making complex, multi-modal journeys is evident and is particularly pronounced for people with cognitive differences and mental health conditions.

When the TSC opened its inquiry, it launched a survey to enable members of the public to tell them directly about their experiences of travelling as, or with, a disabled person on modes of transport other than private cars. The survey asked people how often they experienced access challenges or barriers that make it difficult to travel. Just under 90 per cent of respondents said that this happened either often, most of the time, or always. Around 60% of the respondents said they had often faced difficulties when travelling by rail.<sup>29</sup>

From the evidence considered, it is clear that passengers are unsatisfied with current rail services and find it difficult to get redress and lack awareness of how to do so, with disabled passengers in particular feeling the impacts. The reforms will therefore address this by bringing most consumer functions together in a strengthened passenger body which is better equipped to help GBR deliver excellent services for passengers.

The Passenger Watchdog will be given more power and ability to investigate and raise issues and priorities for passengers, in order to support GBR and other operators in delivering an excellent passenger experience, including more accessible services. The Watchdog will also consider if complaints processes could be improved, including by considering accessible routes to understand passenger rights and raise issues.

The Railways Bill places a clear passenger and accessibility duty on the face of primary legislation. Clause 18 requires GBR, the ORR and Ministers to promote the interests of passengers, including in particular the needs of disabled persons. This duty will sit alongside the Public Sector Equality Duty. This is reinforced by a specific statutory accessibility duty on the Passenger Watchdog and by minimum consumer standards in GBR's licence, which will be developed and monitored by the Watchdog and enforced by

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<sup>27</sup> Department for Work and Pensions (2025). [Family Resources Survey: financial year 2023 to 2024 - GOV.UK](#)

<sup>28</sup> Department for Transport (2025). [Disability, accessibility and blue badge statistics, England, 2023 to 2024 - GOV.UK](#)

<sup>29</sup> Transport Committee (2025). [Access denied: rights versus reality in disabled people's access to transport](#)

the Office of Rail and Road, ensuring accessibility is embedded across governance and enforcement.

In February 2025, the Government published the consultation A railway fit for Britain's future, which sought views on new policies to be included in the forthcoming Railways Bill.

We consulted on primary legislative changes to bring about the government's vision for the railways, seeking views on 20 questions, with 3 focused on the roles of the Passenger Watchdog. There was broad general support for the proposed primary legislative changes set out in the consultation, including for the establishment of a powerful new Passenger Watchdog to be an independent champion for passenger interests.

One set of the campaign responses asked for passengers to be given a real voice in GBR, providing passengers with a real say over what happens on the railway. The Passenger Watchdog will be able to ensure passengers' interests are factored into every key decision the organisation makes. This body will champion passengers' interests and monitor that GBR and other operators are meeting minimum standards. The body will also have a specific role on accessibility to ensure that there is a critical focus on GBR and other operators' delivery for disabled passengers.

There was considerable support for the proposed functions of the Passenger Watchdog. Most responses supported the creation of a strong, independent Watchdog to advocate for passengers and have a clear focus on improving passenger experience. Several responses highlighted the need for the Watchdog to focus on accessibility for disabled passengers and other vulnerable groups.

The majority of responses were supportive of the Passenger Watchdog having a statutory advisor and regulatory role and so the government has decided to give the Watchdog the ability to set standards. Most responses also agreed with either transferring the sponsorship of The Rail Ombudsman or its powers to the new Watchdog. We believe transferring the sponsorship will achieve a solution where passengers find it easy to contact the Watchdog as a passenger-facing service with any issues they face, with the reassurance that disputes will be resolved by an independent and accredited ombudsman.

Many respondents called for the Watchdog to have enforcement powers in addition to regulatory powers. However, the ORR will remain the sector's safety regulator and will retain powers to monitor and enforce GBR's licence, including conditions on passenger experience. Giving enforcement powers to two separate bodies would pose a risk of duplication and inconsistent enforcement, which creates a risk of additional fragmentation and is not in line with the government's ambition to create a more agile state. Therefore, we believe one sector enforcer will be more effective, provide clarity and confidence to operators and clear lines of accountability. The ORR as the current regulator has the relevant experience and access to information required to be an effective and fair enforcer. The Watchdog and ORR will work closely together, with the Watchdog keeping the ORR informed of compliance and improvement issues it finds through monitoring operator performance.

## **Section 4 – Assessment**

The Passenger Watchdog will be established from Transport Focus to act primarily as an advocacy body. It will also ensure the provision of a dispute resolution service for rail

passengers who are unsatisfied with how GBR and other rail operators deal with complaints. It will have a specific role on accessibility in identifying themes and recurring issues raised by disabled passengers in complaints and disputes and advocating for improvement. It will also be able to hold GBR and other operators to account for delivering its agreed passenger outcomes (i.e. stated in strategies, plans and customer charters etc.) and for meeting minimum consumer standards covering areas of passenger rights.

### *Watchdog and Advisory Functions*

The Watchdog will cover all rail passenger and station services within its remit and play an important role in holding GBR and other operators to account for how effectively they are delivering for all passengers. It will do this by monitoring passenger experience, investigating emerging issues and overseeing alternative dispute resolution to identify repeated issues and common themes in issues raised by passengers. It will be able to conduct research into passenger experience and investigate issues using strengthened information gathering powers. It will ensure issues and passenger priorities identified are raised through advice to the Secretary of State, GBR and any other relevant operators and rail bodies, and encourage action to address them. We expect the Watchdog to hold GBR and other rail operators to account publicly, so there is transparency on how performance is being measured and actions taken to improve it where necessary.

Currently many passengers, particularly disabled people, find it difficult to raise issues when things do not go well, and find lines of accountability ambiguous. The need to strengthen monitoring and enforcement of existing standards and make it clear where and how to lodge complaints are key areas where improvement has been called for. The importance of addressing these areas was also highlighted in the TSC Report. A core part of the Watchdog function will be an explicit duty on accessibility. The Watchdog will specifically monitor how services are delivered to disabled people (for example, by gathering information through surveys and complaints data) and raise persistent issues with operators to seek improvements, with the ability to raise them up to the ORR and the Secretary of State where it does not consider operators are responding adequately.

GBR is expected to succeed in delivering for the passenger and will have every incentive to do so. If it does not, the Watchdog will have tough investigation powers and will be able to demand data and information from GBR and other operators to expose issues where passengers feel they are being let down. This could help highlight – for example – a pattern of defective ticket machines, persistent issues at particular locations or routes, failures to provide information during disruption, or common issues faced by passengers on complex fares and tickets or passenger assist.

The Watchdog will not replace any current accessibility bodies or statutory advisors such as DPTAC, and we expect the representation currently on Transport Focus' board to continue and be diverse and representative of all passengers including those with protected characteristics. The Watchdog will have a role to consider the needs of disabled passengers and is expected to engage with relevant organisations when conducting this duty. This new specific duty will ensure disabled passengers have a strong advocate in the railways that can drive improvements on their behalf.

GBR and the Government will be expected to consider the Watchdog's advice when making decisions, writing policies, and setting strategies which affect passengers. In some

cases, there will be a legal obligation to consult the Watchdog, including on the long-term strategy for the railway, and priorities for funding settlements.

It will ensure the provision of an independent service to help passengers pursue unresolved complaints when they are unsatisfied with GBR or another operator's response. For example, if a wheelchair user is left alone on a platform despite having booked assistance and gets no resolution after making a complaint, they will be able to escalate via the alternative dispute resolution service provided by the Watchdog.

The Watchdog will:

- Specifically monitor how services are delivered to disabled people (for example, by gathering information through surveys and complaints data) and raise persistent issues with operators to seek improvements.
- Consider the diverse needs of passengers and is expected to engage with relevant organisations thus ensuring disabled passengers have a strong advocate in the railways that can drive improvements on their behalf.
- Advise the Secretary of State on passenger priorities including on policies and strategies which affect passengers – notably the LTRS and priorities for funding periods. It will advise GBR on its policies and strategies which affect passengers including business plans, strategies for managing upgrades and service disruption, and passenger charters and policies.
- Be able to amend or develop guidance and codes of practice against consumer licence conditions in the areas of accessible travel policies, passenger information, complaints and delay compensation, ensuring the Watchdog can both drive improvements in services and has a powerful but proportionate voice in the industry.
- Oversee operator compliance but refer enforcement cases to the ORR.

London TravelWatch will remain the Watchdog for the London area but its investigatory and information-sharing powers and duties for rail will be expanded to align with the new powers for the Passenger Watchdog to ensure London passengers have the same level of consumer protection and advocacy as those in the rest of the Great Britain.

### *Standard Setting Function*

The Watchdog will have the ability to set and monitor passenger experience standards in key areas of passenger rights which are conferred on operators through consumer licence conditions. For the Watchdog to have a meaningful ability to drive up standards for all passengers, we consider it is important it has input when minimum consumer standards are developed, while also balancing ambition with operational and financial realities. Therefore, we believe the best approach is to transfer the development and monitoring of consumer related standards from the ORR to the Watchdog.

Although it will be able to develop consumer standards in whatever consumer areas it sees fit; this will mean it can amend or develop guidance and codes of practice in the areas of accessible travel policies, passenger information, complaints and delay compensation, ensuring it is equipped to drive forward improvements for all passengers.

All operators, including GBR, will be required to meet these minimum standards and the Watchdog can escalate issues to the ORR for enforcement action where necessary and it considers operators are not complying with minimum standards despite reasonable attempts to encourage compliance.

The Watchdog will set standards relevant to matters that affect the passenger experience. This is a function the ORR currently has, so it will transfer to the Watchdog with some changes to the process. The Watchdog will:

- Consult on amendments to existing standards or when proposing new standards related to passenger experience.
- Get consent from Secretary of State as the funder and ORR as enforcement body before any amended or new standards are agreed and become binding on operators via references in licence conditions.
- Monitor compliance and take action short of enforcement to encourage operators to make improvements where needed (e.g. by requesting improvement plans).
- Refer issues to ORR for enforcement action where necessary, with ORR obligated to follow up with the Passenger Watchdog about any enforcement action that it took.

The PSED requires us to pay due regard to 3 “aims” or “needs” in relation to the 9 protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. Our consideration of these is set out below.

#### 1. Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010

We do not consider that the decision to establish a Passenger Watchdog has any unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation or any other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act.

Consideration has been given to the impacts of establishing the Watchdog and whether it will or will not be likely to lead to direct or indirect discrimination or disadvantage, based on the protected characteristics as specified in the Equality Act. We have had no concerns drawn to our attention or suggestions that proceeding with the establishment of the Watchdog will adversely impact upon people based on the following 8 protected characteristics: age; sex; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sexual orientation; and marriage and civil partnerships.

However, given that the Watchdog will have a focus on passenger issues more generally, as well as the capability to identify repeated issues and common themes in issues raised by all passengers (including themes raised by passengers with protected characteristics)—its establishment should be a positive for all of the above 8 protected characteristics. This can be explored further in the implementation and monitoring phases of establishing the Watchdog and it will be for the Watchdog to shine a light on issues it sees and champion improvements. Given the findings of the TSC report detailed above, further consideration for passengers with a disability is set out below.

### **Disability**

Consideration has been given to the impacts of establishing the Watchdog and whether it will or will not be likely to lead to direct or indirect discrimination or disadvantage, based on the protected characteristic of disability as specified in the Equality Act.

Overall, we consider that the Watchdog will be positive for passengers with protected characteristics, particularly disabled passengers, due to the functions proposed. We are creating a body more able to oversee issues raised by passengers and ensure these are addressed. Alongside this, having a single operator for most services should make it easier to address any systematic issues that arise.

*Direct discrimination:* It is possible that the Watchdog functions will be more likely to be applicable to disabled individuals. Therefore, there is the potential for a positive disproportionate impact on those who share this protected characteristic as opposed to those who do not. We believe that the Watchdog would support passengers with this protected characteristic and offer a practical, proportionate, safe and deliverable benefit.

*Indirect discrimination:* It is important to note that not all passengers with this protected characteristic will require or want to use the Watchdog. However, having the Watchdog ensures that all passengers will have equal opportunity to utilise the Watchdog if they believe it necessary. The Watchdog will also have tough investigative powers and will be able to demand data and information from GBR, monitor how GBR and other rail operators meet passenger rights and standards and report these publicly and transparently. This will enable problems to be exposed as they arise on the network. It will be a strong advocate for better passenger experience by having a role in holding GBR to account.

2. Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it; and

3. Foster good relations between people who share a relevant characteristic and those who do not share it.

The Watchdog is intended to ensure that all passengers will find it easier to raise issues when things do not go well and that there are clear about lines of accountability.

## **Rail Demographics**

Overall, these provisions are expected to make it easier for passengers to raise issues and find clear lines of accountability, providing benefits to all passengers of rail regardless of background or circumstances. This is expected to lead to more frequent benefits for groups who utilise the railways more often. These expected variations in frequency of benefit are a result of passenger usage which pre-dates the introduction of the Railways Bill and therefore cannot be attributed to the Bill. This is explored further within the 'Leadership for Britain's Railways' Section.

## **Section 5 - Decision and Conclusions**

Following the above considerations, we will proceed with establishing the Passenger Watchdog as planned and we are taking all reasonable steps to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations.

From all the evidence set out above and the positive response across all groups to the Watchdog proposals set out in the consultation, it seems clear that the Watchdog will be beneficial to passengers including those with protected characteristics. As explained above, we consider that the Watchdog will be positive for all passengers, and especially disabled passengers. We are creating a body better able to oversee issues raised by passengers and get these addressed. Alongside this, having a single operator for most services (GBR) should make it easier to address any systematic issues that arise.

## **Section 6 - Monitoring and Review Summary**

We will review this assessment prior to the establishment of the Watchdog and on an annual basis following that. The review will consider if the impacts have changed and consider what mitigations, if any, are warranted.

## **Section 7 - Sign Off**

I am satisfied that the above assessment demonstrates that full and appropriate regards has been paid to the PSED.

### SCS sign off

Name: Elisabeth Cuthbertson

Role: Director – Rail Reform Directorate

Grade: SCS 2

Date: 4 Nov 2025

Signature: Elisabeth Cuthbertson

# Making the Best Use of the Rail Network

This is an initial assessment of the proposed Access Framework. It covers the following topics:

- Access and Charging
- Disapplying the Access and Management Regulations (AMRs) for GBR
- Role of ORR
- Secretary of State Power to Amend Contracts
- Competition (duty to secure capacity)

## **Section 1 - Relevance to the PSED**

No further standalone assessment is needed.

## **Section 2 – Summary**

### *Access and Charging*

A new legislative framework will be created to enable GBR to become the decision maker for decisions on access and charging that are currently the responsibility of the ORR. The Government's view is that the current legislative framework is highly complex and has conflicting and misaligned duties between key organisations who have interests and roles within the access framework. The problems that this causes – inefficient use of expensive national infrastructure; major delays to new timetables; overly congested infrastructure and poorer services for passengers and freight operators – is what the Government is trying to solve with this policy proposal.

Establishing a new capacity allocation and access charging framework that is fit for purpose, rooted in legislation, and on which GBR is the key decision-maker, is fundamental to delivering the Government's objectives for a simpler and more efficient railway. GBR, as the 'Directing Mind', will be able to take better strategic decisions that can improve services for passengers and freight customers.

GBR will be responsible for making the best use of the network. It will take access and charging decisions in accordance with its general duties and established public law principles will ensure that GBR will, as a public body, act transparently and without discrimination when making access decisions on its network. GBR will have a clear remit set in statute, empowering it to focus on delivering national benefits, including promoting rail freight.

In addition to these obligations, the Secretary of State can issue specific directions and guidance on the Government's priorities for use of the railway.

GBR will set policy and standard contracts transparently and in consultation. It will be required to consult (and have regard to consultee responses) on how it fulfils its duties in relation to access to and use of the network. This will be set out in GBR's access and use policy (AUP) and – where relevant – in standard contract terms and conditions.

A new charging framework established in legislation will enable GBR to set the charges for use of its network, based on the charging principles we have today, including more flexibility to offer discounts to support delivery of strategic priorities for the network and charge mark-ups where an efficient operator can afford it. GBR will consult the sector regarding the setting and recalibration of access charges, which will be linked to the funding settlement to provide stability. Non-GBR operators will pay access charges that are set fairly and reflect the cost of them using the GBR network. However, GBR, in its capacity as an operator, will not pay access charges, as GBR will be exposed directly to the cost implications of running its own services; and legal obligations to make payments within GBR would act as a barrier to simplification and integration. Finally, the Bill ensures that access and charging decisions are appealable to the ORR.

GBR will be required to ensure it has the available capacity to run its own passenger services where it has already assessed that they would constitute best use of the network, and where the Secretary of State intends to fund those services through the funding and business planning process. This requirement will not change the proposition on access and capacity allocation that was set out in the consultation. GBR will need to work with devolved authorities, freight and open access operators to consider their aspirations for the services they want to run, and where these represent 'best use' of the network, they can expect to be awarded capacity commitments.

We have considered the relevance of the PSED to this policy and concluded that it is very low as the provisions are primarily structural and do not themselves determine service outcomes. However, where these provisions enable improvements to rail services, there may be equality impacts because different groups use the railway at different rates. In line with the approach taken elsewhere in this EQIA, any such impacts are assessed on a cross-cutting basis in the 'Leadership for Britain's Railway' section. On this basis, no further standalone assessment is required here.

### *Disapplying the AMRs for GBR*

To enable GBR to be the directing mind for the network we will amend the AMRs to remove GBR from the scope of these and any connected Regulations. While GBR will not be within the scope of the AMRs, all other infrastructure managers such as TfL, HS1 and Core Valley Lines will continue to be within scope.

We have considered the relevance of the PSED to this policy and concluded that it is very low and, therefore, no further assessment is required because the legislation will only affect rail operators, infrastructure managers and the ORR but does not apply to individuals. Moreover, the policy does not present barriers to participation nor disadvantage any protected groups. Therefore, we do not expect any impacts on particular individuals or groups of people with protected characteristics.

### *Role of the ORR*

Under the new framework, the ORR will act as a robust and independent appeals body for access decisions made by GBR on the GBR-managed network. The ORR's appeals function will provide a clear, credible, and accessible route for any directly affected railway undertaking or operator to challenge decisions that they believe are unfair.

The ORR will evaluate whether GBR has acted rationally, fairly, in line with its legal duties, and complied with its established statutory duties, published processes, policies and its AUP.

When determining an appeal, the ORR must apply the same principles as would be applied by the High Court on an application for judicial review. If an appeal is successful, the ORR will have the power to remit the decision back to GBR with a direction to change the decision where appropriate, with clear and binding directions regarding how the decision must be put right and GBR cannot ignore these directions. For those appeals subject to quashing and substitution as well as remitting, where the ORR identifies an error of law in GBR's decision-making and, without the error, there would have been only one decision which Great British Railways could have reached it can in addition immediately replace GBR's decision with its own.

We have considered the relevance of the PSED to this policy and concluded that it is very low and, therefore, no further assessment is required because the legislation will only affect rail operators, infrastructure managers and the ORR but does not apply to individuals. Moreover, the policy does not present barriers to participation nor disadvantage any protected groups. Therefore, we do not expect any impacts on particular individuals or groups of people with protected characteristics.

### Provision for a time limited power for the Secretary of State to amend contracts and the Network Code

The Railways Bill will disapply the ORR's powers under S17-22C of the Railways Act 1993 and its corresponding Section 4 duties. As a result, the ORR will no longer be able to approve changes to existing access contracts and will have no legal basis to amend an existing contract without an operator's consent. This would mean that, routine and periodic updates to access charges which are an essential requirement both now and in the future could not happen and existing contracts would become unworkable with no legal way of updating them.

Ahead of GBR stand-up Network Rail will work with the ORR and engage and consult with operators to identify inoperable clauses and propose replacement wording to amend contracts.

While we anticipate the vast majority of access contracts will be amended via this process, there are risks to the effective running of the new framework if changes are not made:

- Some provisions in the contracts will need to be adjusted to reflect the introduction of capacity commitments that apply to GBR and other operators alike, and usage planning as a key stage in determining future network use.
- Without contract changes, the disapplication of the ORR's powers under S17-22C of the Railways Act 1993 will result in an uncertain legal basis for GBR to levy access charges to those operators with existing rights.
- GBR could be bound to outdated provisions which no longer offer appropriate protections to both private operators and GBR services.

The clause will provide the Secretary of State with a power to amend contracts including the Network Code which is incorporated into them. The power is intended to be used only to ensure that transition to the new model is effective, and that existing operators will not be left with unworkable arrangements or contracts. The power to amend contracts will not be exercised lightly and would only be used to ensure necessary changes to contracts, such as to reflect the changing role of the ORR and creation of GBR. We are committed to honouring the ORR's Periodic Review 2023 final determination, including conditions on charging and incentives (up to Control Period 8 when GBR's new charging framework will be applied).

We have considered the relevance of the PSED to this policy and concluded that it is very low and, therefore, no further assessment is required because the legislation will only affect rail operators, infrastructure managers and the ORR but does not apply to individuals. Moreover, the policy does not present barriers to participation and will not disadvantage any protected groups. Therefore, we do not expect any impacts on particular individuals or groups of people with protected characteristics.

### **Section 3 - Evidence Summary**

N/A

### **Section 4 – Assessment**

N/A

### **Section 5 - Decision and Conclusions**

N/A

### **Section 6 - Monitoring and Review Summary**

N/A

### **Section 7 - Sign Off**

I am satisfied that the above assessment demonstrates that full and appropriate regards has been paid to the PSED

SCS sign off

Name: Elisabeth Cuthbertson

Role: Director – Rail Reform Directorate

Grade: SCS 2

Date: 4 Nov 2025

Signature: Elisabeth Cuthbertson

# Financial Framework

This is an initial assessment of the proposed Financial Framework of GBR. It covers the following topics:

- Funding GBR – The Funding Period Review
- GBR Funding/Change Management

## **Section 1 - Relevance to the PSED**

1.No further standalone assessment needed.

## **Section 2 – Summary**

A proposed new funding process, to be established in legislation, will facilitate integrated decisions and enable Great British Railways (GBR) to deliver its agreed business plans and the strategies of railway funders. This new funding process would replace the periodic review and initially determine funding for the operation, maintenance and renewal of infrastructure.

While the financial framework provisions are primarily concerned with funding structures and governance, an improved and more stable funding settlement has the potential to feed through to improvements in rail services for passengers. To the extent that these improvements materialise, any resulting equality impacts — arising because different groups use rail at different rates — are assessed on a cross-cutting basis in the 'Leadership for Britain's Railway' section of this EQIA; no further standalone assessment is therefore required here.

### *Funding GBR - The Funding Period Review*

Core settlements will last 5 years, and the ORR will retain a role in assessing business plans and settlement viability.

The proposed legislation would preserve flexibility to allow for the scope of activity funded by the settlement to change over time potentially allowing both infrastructure operations, maintenance and renewal funding and passenger services funding to be set together,

where this may allow greater benefits to be delivered. Both sets of activities will be covered by the Business Plan regardless.

The development of GBR's business plan will be core to the Funding Period Review. This development will be informed by several inputs from across GBR's funders, monitors and regulator. Each of these inputs and GBR's business plan should be considering equalities impacts.

- The Statement of Objectives – This document is provided by GBR's Funders and sets out their high-level objectives for GBR over the 5-year funded period. The Statement of Objectives will need to be subject to an equalities assessment during creation.
- The Statement of Funds Available – This document sets out how much funding the government expects to be able to commit for GBR to be able to deliver their public interest railway activities. This document should also be subject to an equalities assessment when being finalised.
- Informal advice given by the Passenger Watchdog and the ORR – GBR will be required to consult the Passenger Watchdog and the ORR during development of the business plan. As public bodies, both the Passenger Watchdog and the ORR should be acting in accordance with equality principles while performing this role.
- Formal advice provided by the ORR to GBR's Funders on GBR's business plan – This advice produced by the ORR will outline whether or not GBR's plans represent good value for money and appropriately deliver on the Statement of Objectives. Similar to the informal advice, the ORR will need to be acting in accordance with equalities principles while formulating this advice.

The Secretary of State would sign off the business plan at the end of the process, approving it for delivery and agreeing to provide the stated funds. Like today, Scottish Ministers will be 'Funders' of the new process like the Secretary of State following the same steps to reach a funding settlement for Scotland. The PSED would apply to decision making at each stage of this process.

### *GBR Funding/Change Management*

Currently, there are mechanisms in access contracts to ensure that the grant awarded by the Secretary of State for the operation, maintenance, and renewal (OMR) of railway infrastructure is "safeguarded" and cannot be changed too easily or frequently, as that could disrupt services, drive poor value for money and in extremis create safety concerns. In the future, government also intends that the grant awarded to GBR for OMR through the Funding Period Review lasts the full 5-year Funding Period.

We're proposing provisions which will require Funders to be transparent over material reductions in funding awarded to GBR at the end of the Funding Period Review. Alongside this transparency requirement, ORR will be notified when a proposed material reduction to this funding occurs allowing the opportunity for further scrutiny. This will allow for a system which can inform the decision-making of ministers and allow for effective public accountability. This in turn will mitigate against hasty and uninformed decisions on long-term funding, incentivising a stable settlement.

### *Subsidy Control*

Paragraph 15 of Schedule 2 of the Bill codifies existing EU case law and subsidy control principles which state that financial assistance given for the primary purpose of maintaining and operating the main UK rail network (i.e. funding to enable GBR to exercise its clause 3(1)(a) infrastructure function) is not a subsidy for the purposes of the Subsidy Control Act 2022.

### *Conclusion*

Overall, given that these legislative proposals primarily handle the determination and mechanics of the award of funding, Equalities Impact Assessments will be better conducted during these future processes, when the downstream impacts of funding decisions are being considered.

### **Section 3 - Evidence Summary**

N/A

### **Section 4 – Assessment**

N/A

### **Section 5 - Decision and Conclusions**

N/A

### **Section 6 - Monitoring and Review Summary**

N/A

### **Section 7 - Sign Off**

I am satisfied that the above assessment demonstrates that full and appropriate regards has been paid to the PSED

#### SCS sign off

Name: Lucy Ryan

Role: Director – Rail Reform Directorate

Grade: SCS 2

Date: 4 Nov 2025

Signature: Lucy Ryan



# Devolution

This is an initial assessment of the proposals around Devolution. This covers the topics below:

- Statutory role for Devolved Leaders
- Devolved Governments
- Mayoral Partnerships

## Section 1 - Relevance to the PSED

Yes – further assessment is needed. The PSED is relevant to the proposals in the Railways Bill concerning devolution.

While the new Passenger Watchdog (also known as the Passengers' Council (PC)) will undertake its own equalities assessment, this EQIA notes its role in supporting inclusive passenger outcomes through its advisory and standards-setting functions.

## Section 2 – Summary

The Railways Bill proposes to create a statutory role for devolved governments and Mayoral Strategic Authorities (MSAs)<sup>30</sup> in governing, managing, planning and developing the rail network. This will bring the benefits of railway integration across Great Britain and will bring decision-making as close as possible to local communities. As a nationally integrated network, the railway's governance must balance local, commuter, regional, national, international and high-speed services, as well as the role of freight.

The statutory role will ensure devolved leaders will be appropriately consulted on GBR's activity (including on GBR's access and use policy and on other GBR decisions where they have a significant impact to the economy or interests of persons using services in the devolved jurisdiction) and that GBR has due regard to devolved transport strategies. A

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<sup>30</sup> MSA means a category of Strategic Authority to be established in the English Devolution Bill. There will be two sub-categories of Mayoral Strategic Authority: Established MSAs and Standard MSAs. Mayoral Strategic Authorities which meet specified eligibility criteria may be designated as Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities

duty to share information will apply to GBR and MSAs. The Passenger Watchdog will operate alongside this framework, providing independent advice and oversight on passenger experience.

Existing devolved accountabilities to the Scottish and Welsh governments will continue and the intention is that the Bill should enable a range of options for future integration of track and train so that the benefits of GBR can be felt across Great Britain.

The Railways Bill will establish shared general duties that will apply to the Secretary of State and Welsh and Scottish Ministers when exercising their functions relating to railways and railway services. The Secretary of State and Welsh and Scottish Ministers have a duty to prepare and publish a Memorandum of Understanding to set out how they will work together to exercising their respective functions. When exercising their functions under the Railways Bill, they will need to consider PSED requirements in the interests of users, including those with protected characteristics. The Passenger Watchdog's monitoring of passenger experience, particularly for disabled passengers, will complement these duties and provide additional insight into accessibility.

In England, along with retaining existing devolved accountabilities in London and the Liverpool City Region, GBR will be empowered to agree partnerships with mayors to enable degrees of local influence and control. These will be bespoke agreements and will range across a spectrum as outlined in the 'Mayoral Partnerships Framework' diagram published in the Railways Bill consultation. Each partnership entered will depend on the MSA's ambition and capability.

The detail of partnerships specifically are not covered in the Bill but statutory roles for devolved leaders will underpin this framework, establishing the baseline for engagement with MSAs. The Bill will provide GBR with the power to enter into arrangements with MSAs under which they fund GBR as part of partnership arrangements. This will enable mayors to directly commission GBR by funding them to run services. Existing mechanisms to devolve services through an exemption from designation by the Secretary of State and the Scottish and Welsh Ministers will remain in place. Outside of legislation, the Secretary of State will publish guidance on how Established MSAs, if necessary to achieve their objectives, can apply for relevant orders to provide and secure rail passenger services and enhancements to the networks and related infrastructure. The Passenger Watchdog's remit will include advising on passenger experience and standards for devolved operators, which may intersect with devolved arrangements where passenger outcomes are concerned.

While the devolution provisions in the Railways Bill are primarily structural and governance-focused, they have the potential to deliver improvements in passenger experience where devolved authorities exercise greater influence over rail services. To the extent that such improvements arise — for example through enhanced accessibility, safety, service integration or local responsiveness — these may have equality impacts because different groups use the railway in different ways and at different rates. These impacts are not unique to devolution and are therefore assessed on a cross-cutting basis in the 'Leadership for Britain's Railway' section of this EQIA, which considers how improvements to rail services may affect passengers with protected characteristics. The conclusions reached in that section apply equally where service improvements are delivered through devolved or partnership-based arrangements.

### Section 3 - Evidence Summary

The following evidence has been considered as part of this assessment:

The Equalities Act 2010

#### Consultation: A railway fit for Britain's future

Accessibility data on stations.

How existing local transport strategies and ambitions support the partnerships approach.

Stakeholder engagement and feedback (ongoing).

Historical Comparable Proposals (ongoing).

Key equality-related themes from the consultation:

- The consultation revealed considerable support for proposals to enhance the role of devolved leaders in rail governance, with 64% agreeing to the statutory role for MSAs and devolved governments.

Key equality-related themes included:

- Safety and accessibility improvements: The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Women in Transport highlighted that initiatives in Greater Manchester and West Midlands around women's safety had led to tangible improvements. These initiatives were seen by the APPG as critical to enabling access to jobs and education, especially for women and girls.
- Local influence: MSAs and devolved governments expressed a desire for clearer statutory roles to influence GBR decisions, particularly around accessibility and multimodal integration.
- Concerns about fragmentation and consistency in accessibility standards: Some stakeholders, including train operating companies and freight operators, raised concerns that devolution could lead to complexity, potentially impacting consistency in accessibility standards.

#### *Accessibility Data on Stations – Evidence*

#### **Contextual Relevance of Accessibility Data**

While not directly linked to provisions in the Railways Bill, the following data is included to illustrate the baseline accessibility challenges that devolved authorities could support to address. It provides evidence of current performance issues that disproportionately affect disabled passengers. These challenges highlight the potential for targeted, locally informed interventions through Mayoral Partnerships which will enable local influence.

According to data from the ORR<sup>31</sup>:

- As of 31 March 2025, 1,351 passenger lifts are installed across 515 Network Rail-owned stations in Great Britain.
- During rail periods 8 to 13 (13 October 2024 to 31 March 2025):
  - There were 4,334 lift faults, a 9% increase compared to the same period the previous year.
  - There were on average of 3.2 faults per lift, up from 3.1 in the same period the previous year.
  - There were 314 lift entrapments, a 14% increase year-on-year.
  - Average repair time for lift faults rose by 15% to 27 hours, compared to the same period the previous year.
  - Average response time to entrapments increased from 50 to 53 minutes compared to the same period the previous year.

This time period (rail periods 8 to 13: 13 October 2024 to 31 March 2025) was selected to align with the most recent operational reporting cycle from the Office of Rail and Road (ORR). It reflects a period of heightened passenger activity and infrastructure usage, offering timely insights into performance trends. While a full year of data provides broader context, this snapshot enables focused analysis of seasonal pressures and emerging issues relevant to accessibility.

Implications for Greater Local Influence: This data highlights several areas where performance could be improved, particularly in relation to lift faults, entrapments, and response times. These challenges disproportionately affect disabled passengers and those with mobility difficulties. While not directly linked to provisions in the Railways Bill, this evidence illustrates the types of operational issues that greater local influence—through Mayoral Partnerships—could help address. These challenges present clear opportunities for targeted, locally informed interventions that support multimodal connectivity. The proposed framework for Mayoral Partnerships and the statutory role for devolved leaders offer can support such improvements, which is explored further in Section 4.

### **Alignment with Local Transport Strategies and Historical Precedents**

The Mayoral Partnerships proposal is designed to empower MSAs to work collaboratively with GBR to deliver transport outcomes that reflect local needs.

Evidence from existing local transport strategies across MSAs strongly supports this approach. For example, Greater Manchester's Bee Network and West Midlands' Local Transport Plan both embed equality and accessibility as core principles.<sup>32</sup> These strategies

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<sup>31</sup> Office of Rail and Road (2025). [Passenger lifts at stations | ORR Data Portal](#)

<sup>32</sup> Greater Manchester Bee Network Delivery Report (2024), p.1-2. <https://democracy.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/documents/s34344/BNC%2020241024%20Delivering%20the%20Bee%20Network.pdf>

aim to reduce barriers to transport for disabled people, older adults, and economically disadvantaged groups.

In Greater Manchester, the Bee Network has introduced a range of accessibility features as part of its franchised bus rollout. New buses now include two wheelchair spaces, audio-visual next stop announcements, hearing induction loops, and priority seating signage. These features were developed in consultation with representative groups, including disability advocacy organisations.<sup>33</sup> Fare affordability for disabled passengers in Greater Manchester rose from 46% in 2022 to 69% in 2024. Overall public transport affordability, with 77% of residents in 2024 agreeing they can afford to travel as much as they like, up from 56% in 2022.<sup>34</sup>

In the West Midlands, inclusive infrastructure has been supported through real-time travel tools, community-led design of walking and cycling routes, and the development of “15-minute neighbourhoods”<sup>6</sup> to reduce travel barriers.<sup>35</sup>

Both regions have also demonstrated strong community engagement in shaping transport strategies. In Greater Manchester, public consultation has influenced the design of transport hubs, resulting in features such as tactile signage and colour-contrasting wayfinding lines for visually impaired passengers.<sup>36</sup> In the West Midlands, the Local Transport Plan includes Area Strategies developed to reflect local views, issues, and opportunities across Birmingham, Solihull, Coventry, and the Black Country.<sup>37</sup>

There is emerging evidence from previous and ongoing devolution initiatives in transport—particularly in Greater Manchester, West Midlands, and London—that localised control can lead to improved equality outcomes. For instance, Greater Manchester and the West Midlands have implemented targeted campaigns to enhance women’s safety on public transport, demonstrating the potential of locally led interventions to address specific community needs and promote inclusive mobility.

- Greater Manchester:
  - The #IsThisOK? campaign reached over 4 million people on social media, raising awareness and challenging male behaviours linked to harassment and violence.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> [Accessible public transport | Bee Network | Powered by TfGM](#). See main content page.

<sup>34</sup> Transport for Greater Manchester Inclusion and Equality Strategy 2022–2026, p.2-4.  
<https://tfgm.com/corporate/equality-and-diversity>.

<sup>35</sup> West Midlands Local Transport Plan Presentation (2023), p.3-5.  
[https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/26845/presentation\\_by\\_david\\_harris\\_-\\_reimagining\\_transport\\_in\\_the\\_west\\_midlands.pdf](https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/26845/presentation_by_david_harris_-_reimagining_transport_in_the_west_midlands.pdf).

<sup>36</sup> [Consultations and Engagement – Bee Network](#), p.7.

<sup>37</sup> West Midlands Local Transport Plan Area Strategies Update (2024), p.2-3.  
<https://governance.wmca.org.uk/documents/s13906/Local%20Transport%20Plan%20Area%20Strategies%20Update.pdf>

<sup>38</sup> Great Manchester Combined Authority (2024). Annual report – Gender-Based Violence Strategy, p.1-2.  
[gender-based-violence-annual-report-2024.pdf](https://www.gmcabirmingham.co.uk/annual-report-2024/gender-based-violence-annual-report-2024.pdf)

- The Women’s Night-Time Safety Charter encourages businesses to adopt safety pledges, improve public space design, and train staff to support victims.<sup>39</sup>
- The Safer Streets programme led to a 25% average monthly reduction in female victim offences on the Oldham Metrolink and a 600% increase in incident reporting, suggesting increased trust in safety mechanisms.<sup>40</sup>
- The Women & Girls Reference Group ensures lived experience informs local safety policy.<sup>41</sup>
- West Midlands:
  - Safer Streets funding has supported enhanced lighting, CCTV, and community engagement in areas with high levels of harassment.
- Wales:
  - Transport for Wales (TfW) has integrated multimodal services. Integrated multimodal services help accessibility by enabling seamless journeys across different transport modes—such as rail, bus, cycling, and walking—without unnecessary barriers or interruptions. For disabled passengers and other users with accessibility needs, this means consistent step-free access, coordinated timetables, and accessible infrastructure across the entire journey. For older adults and those with mobility challenges, multimodal integration reduces the need for long transfers or complex route planning.
  - TfW’s remit includes delivering sustainable, affordable, and inclusive transport aligned with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act. The Act mandates consideration of equality, health, and community cohesion in public services.<sup>42</sup>
- Scotland:
  - The Department for Transport and Transport Scotland publish a joint Code of Practice setting out Design Standards for Accessible Railway Stations which details the requirements for providing accessible rail services. This Code aims to ensure that any infrastructure work at stations makes railway travel easier for disabled passengers and applies to services provided by operators in Great Britain in relation to trains and stations.<sup>43</sup>
  - Accessibility improvements have been identified and delivered as part of larger projects in Scotland. All new build stations such as Kintore, Reston, East Linton, Leven and Cameron Bridge Station have been built to modern railway

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<sup>39</sup> Women’s Night-Time Safety Charter: <https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/what-we-do/economy/foundational-economy-innovation-fund/keeping-staff-safe-after-hours-the-new-app-that-supports-the-night-time-economy>. See main content page

<sup>40</sup> GMCA (2022). Safer Streets programme: [Safer Streets programme recognised for innovative approach to helping women and girls - Greater Manchester Combined Authority](#)

<sup>41</sup> Greater Manchester Combined Authority. [Women and Girls’ Equality Panel - Greater Manchester Combined Authority](#).

<sup>42</sup> Welsh Government (2025). [Wellbeing of Future Generation \(Wales\) Act 2015: the essentials](#).

<sup>43</sup> Department for Transport (2020). [Design Standards for Accessible Railway Stations](#).

standards and are accessible and this will be the same for any planned future stations.

Gaps in the Evidence Base: While this EQIA draws on a range of qualitative and quantitative sources, several gaps remain:

- Limited longitudinal data on the impact of devolved transport initiatives on protected groups, particularly in relation to rail services.
- Inconsistent accessibility metrics across different regions and modes, making comparative analysis difficult.
- Lack of granular data on passenger experience disaggregated by protected characteristics (e.g. disability, gender, ethnicity).
- Uncertainty around future partnership arrangements, which limits the ability to assess specific equality impacts at this stage.
- Limited evaluation frameworks to measure the long-term equality outcomes of multimodal integration and localised control.

Mitigating Actions to fill in gaps in evidence base. To address these gaps, the following actions will be taken:

- The Department for Transport will continue to engage with Devolved Governments to ensure alignment with relevant strategies and monitor outcomes in the interest of rail users, including on accessibility, in relation to policies in devolved areas.
- It is the Department's policy intention to work collaboratively to support information sharing between GBR and devolved operators, in order to address concerns and improve outcomes.
- Engagement will continue with Local Transport Authorities, including MSAs, to ensure awareness of their transport strategies and priorities and their effectiveness.
- Accessibility and connectivity outcomes will be monitored.
- Comparative analysis of accessibility standards across different modes within multimodal networks will be explored where a partnership is to be introduced.
- A targeted engagement plan will be developed for protected groups likely to be impacted by each partnership agreement before it has been finalised. This will enable direct input from members of the public with protected characteristics.
- Future assessments will be conducted at more appropriate stages of implementation, including after partnership arrangements are in place with GBR and MSAs and GBR and the Welsh and Scottish Governments respectively.

## Section 4 – Assessment

The EQIA draws on strong evidence from existing devolved transport initiatives to demonstrate how the Railways Bill strengthens local accountability in rail governance. Rather than promoting further devolution as a default, the policy provides mechanisms for locally informed decision-making and oversight, allowing authorities to shape rail services in line with community needs. Evidence from Greater Manchester, the West Midlands, Wales and Scotland show that when local bodies have influence over transport planning, they can deliver tangible improvements in safety, accessibility, and inclusion. These successes illustrate how enhanced local accountability—supported by statutory roles and partnership frameworks—can help realise similar outcomes in rail, without requiring full devolution of powers.

Why devolution has the potential to advance equal opportunity: As noted above, the below examples suggest that giving devolved authorities greater influence over rail services—whether through formal partnerships or statutory roles—has the potential to advance equal opportunity and foster good relations. This is especially when aligned with local and national transport strategies and equality objectives.

Accessibility data on stations: This evidence supports a case for devolved authorities to play a more active role in addressing accessibility challenges. The following policy levers could be enabled through devolution and partnership working:

Empowering MSAs to Fund Enhancements: Devolved bodies may wish to fund targeted investment in lift maintenance and upgrades, especially at high-usage or underserved stations. This would allow for more responsive and locally informed infrastructure improvements.

Faster response and repair protocols: Local coordination of maintenance services could enable quicker turnaround times for lift faults and entrapments, reducing disruption for passengers who rely on step-free access.

Enhanced monitoring and accountability: Devolved bodies are better placed to respond to passenger feedback and accessibility failures. Statutory duties to share information between MSAs and GBR could improve transparency and facilitate more proactive interventions.

Integration with local transport strategies: MSAs and devolved governments could ensure station accessibility is embedded within broader transport planning, enabling multimodal improvements such as seamless bus-rail interchanges and continuity of step-free access across networks.

### *Alignment with Local Transport Strategies and Historical Precedents*

By enabling MSAs to influence rail services, the partnership model ensures that GBR decisions are informed by locally defined equality goals, helping to meet the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). Local transport strategies such as Greater Manchester's Bee Network and the West Midlands' Local Transport Plan embed equality and accessibility as core principles, aiming to reduce barriers for disabled people, older adults, and economically disadvantaged groups.

These strategies have already delivered measurable improvements. These outcomes illustrate how devolved influence over transport can lead to tangible equality gains, reinforcing the case for extending this influence to rail.

Under the partnership model, GBR will be better positioned to reflect local equality priorities through mechanisms such as information-sharing provisions in partnership agreements, supported by the duty to share information under the Railways Bill legislation. This would allow GBR to incorporate local data, lived experience, and strategic objectives into service planning and delivery, strengthening the alignment between national operations and local equality ambitions.

### *Proven Impact of Local Control*

Initiatives like women’s safety campaigns in Greater Manchester and West Midlands have shown that local leadership can deliver targeted interventions that national bodies may overlook.

These successes demonstrate that devolved influence over rail can lead to tangible improvements in safety, accessibility, and inclusion, particularly when informed by community engagement and lived experience.

### *Integrated Multimodal Planning*

MSAs are already responsible for bus, cycling, and walking strategies. The partnership model allows rail to be integrated into these plans, creating seamless, accessible journeys—especially important for disabled passengers and those in underserved areas.

Evidence from Greater Manchester and the West Midlands shows that multimodal coordination can improve affordability, independence, and access to essential services, as demonstrated by the Bee Network’s affordability gains and the West Midlands’ investment in inclusive infrastructure.

### *Responsiveness and Accountability*

Local transport strategies are developed through community engagement, making MSAs more responsive to the needs of protected groups. For example, Transport for Greater Manchester has incorporated public consultation into the design of transport hubs, resulting in features such as tactile signage and colour-contrasting wayfinding lines for visually impaired passengers at Wigan Bus Station, and cultural design elements at Hyde Bus Station that reflect local heritage.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, the West Midlands Local Transport Plan includes Area Strategies developed to reflect local views, issues, and opportunities across Birmingham, Solihull, Coventry, and the Black Country.<sup>45</sup>

These outcomes demonstrate that locally led transport strategies can deliver tangible benefits, reinforcing the value of collaborative partnerships between GBR and MSAs

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<sup>44</sup> Transport for Greater Manchester: [Consultations and engagement | Bee Network | Powered by TfGM](#)

<sup>45</sup> West Midlands Combined Authority (2024). [West Midlands Local Transport Plan – Area Strategies and Implementation Plan development update.](#)

Partnerships with GBR provide a mechanism for accountable delivery, ensuring that rail services reflect local priorities and feedback.

The demonstrated success of locally led initiatives reinforces the importance of maintaining local input and oversight in future partnership arrangements, particularly to ensure that improvements are sustained and equitably distributed. These examples demonstrate that devolved influence over rail can lead to tangible improvements in safety, accessibility, and inclusion. By empowering Mayoral Strategic Authorities (MSAs) to shape transport environments based on local needs and lived experience, devolution offers a mechanism for:

- Designing safer stations and public transport spaces.
- Coordinating cross-sector responses to harassment and exclusion.
- Embedding gender-informed planning into transport policy.
- Enhancing trust in safety mechanisms and increasing reporting of incidents.

The APPG has also highlighted that when women feel safer using public transport, it can lead to increased confidence and improved access to employment and education—demonstrating that inclusive transport environments can deliver wider socio-economic benefit.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, high passenger satisfaction levels on devolved services such as London Overground and Merseyrail may—though not definitively—reflect the benefits of locally responsive management.<sup>47</sup>

While devolution alone is unlikely to be the sole driver of improvement, these models indicate that local oversight can contribute to enhanced reliability, accessibility, and user experience, particularly for disabled and older passengers. The success of Transport for Wales in integrating multimodal services under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act further demonstrates how devolved authorities can embed equality, health, and community cohesion into transport delivery frameworks. However, while outcomes are promising, robust evaluation frameworks are still needed to quantify their long-term impact on equality, access, and inclusion. These findings reinforce the value of local leadership in identifying and addressing specific risks that may be overlooked by national bodies and highlight the importance of ongoing monitoring and evaluation to ensure that improvements are sustained and equitably distributed.

### **Devolved Governments specific assessment**

The overall intention of the policy of railways integration in Great Britain is to deliver the benefits of integration across England, Scotland and Wales. Our approach aims to support the PSED, improving service quality, including accessibility, and enhancing the customer experience for all passengers, regardless of their circumstances. The specific ways in which Scottish and Welsh rail passenger services will be delivered is not yet settled. The Passenger Watchdog will support this ambition by providing a consistent mechanism for

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<sup>46</sup> APPG for Women in Transport, *Parliamentary Roundtable on Women's Safety in Transport*, as referenced in their public response to the Railways Bill consultation. <https://www.womenintransport.com/blog/putting-womens-safety-at-the-heart-of-rail-reform>

<sup>47</sup> London Overground received the third-highest passenger satisfaction score (91 out of 100) in Transport Focus' [June 2025 Rail User Survey](#)

monitoring passenger experience across nations, helping to identify and address disparities in passenger experience and accessibility

The provisions in the Bill below are reflected in this assessment because of how they potentially impact equality duties:

- Delegation of Functions
- Strategic Alignment Duties
- Service Designation and Discount Fare Schemes
- Consultation Duties on Service Changes
- Co-operation Duty

The Passenger Watchdog’s statutory advisory role will help ensure these provisions are implemented in ways that uphold equality standards and reflect passenger needs.

*Eliminating discrimination, harassment, victimisation*

GBR and Scottish and Welsh Ministers (i.e. those who will have duties to secure rail passenger services) will be subject to the Public Sector Equality Duty, which applies across Great Britain. The integration of railway services may indirectly affect people with protected characteristics. This is further explored in the ‘Leadership of Britain’s Railways’ EQIA. GBR will work closely with devolved operators to ensure a consistent passenger experience in England, Scotland, and Wales.

GBR will be empowered to drive improvements in equality, such as enhancing accessibility and removing barriers for passengers throughout the network. While the functions of GBR are not covered in detail within this devolution EQIA, it is important to note that GBR will have statutory responsibilities to operate, maintain, renew, and improve the railway network, and to secure the provision of rolling stock.

Decisions in these areas—such as investing in accessible rolling stock or installing lifts at stations—could have direct impacts on passengers, including those with protected characteristics.

The provision allowing Scottish and Welsh Ministers to delegate rail functions to GBR, a GBR subsidiary, or a jointly owned company will be carefully managed to ensure that equality obligations are not only not diluted, but are enhanced. Delegated arrangements ensure the statutory responsibility for any devolved function remains with the devolved Minister (who is subject to general duties and PSED). When carrying out a delegated function, GBR will also be required to act consistent with its duties and statutory obligations (many of which provide safeguards for equalities obligations). This means, we expect delegation arrangements to reflect the common responsibility for equalities obligations such as including safeguarding and anti-discrimination standards to maintain consistent protections for people with the 8 protected characteristics: age; sex; gender

reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sexual orientation; and marriage and civil partnerships.

### *Advancing equal opportunity*

A framework between GBR and devolved operators will define the collaborative approach to achieving successful outcomes for passengers, including those with protected characteristics. This framework will require GBR to consider transport strategies set out by both UK and devolved governments.

Accessibility and safety matters are largely reserved to the Secretary of State, ensuring consistency of standards across nations. Devolved governments may also promote accessibility and safety through regional campaigns, provided these align with national regulations.

The duty on GBR and the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) to have regard to the Secretary of State's rail transport strategy, the Welsh Transport Strategy, and to the Scottish Ministers' strategy under section 5 of the 2005 Railways Act ensures that equality objectives embedded in these strategies are considered in service planning and delivery.

The powers for Scottish and Welsh Ministers to designate and secure the provisions of rail passenger services, and to implement discount fare schemes, offer opportunities to improve access for underserved groups, including disabled passengers, older people, and low-income communities.

The power to exempt services from designation must be exercised with care to avoid excluding services relied upon by protected groups.

The Passenger Watchdog's data-gathering and research functions will help identify specific pain points and encourage improvements.

### *Fostering good relations*

The policy is expected to positively impact relations across England, Scotland, and Wales. The UK and devolved governments are working together to agree on principles and arrangements that will ensure the benefits of rail reform, including economic growth, are realised across Great Britain. This coordinated approach may be perceived positively by passengers, taxpayers, and the general public.

Ongoing engagement between the Department for Transport and the Scottish and Welsh Governments will establish mechanisms for corporate collaboration and further assessments will be conducted as the policy matures.

The duty on GBR to consult devolved governments before making significant changes to services in which they have an interest, and the reciprocal duty on Scottish and Welsh Ministers to consult GBR and relevant MSAs before making changes to cross-border services, promotes transparency and mutual respect. These provisions help ensure that service changes are coordinated and considerate of community needs, fostering trust and reducing potential conflict.

Joint ownership models and delegated arrangements offer opportunities for collaboration and shared responsibility but must be designed inclusively to build public confidence and ensure diverse voices are reflected in decision-making.

### **Mayoral Partnerships specific assessment**

The Mayoral Partnerships policy aims to support the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) by fostering inclusive collaboration between GBR and MSAs, with a focus on improving transport outcomes for all passengers, including those with protected characteristics.

The provisions in the Bill below are reflected in this assessment because of how they potentially impact equality duties:

- Delegation of Functions to GBR or Joint Entities
- Requirement for GBR to Have Regard to Local Transport Strategies
- English Rail Devolution Applications Guidance
- Creation of Joint Governance Models
- Eliminating discrimination, harassment, victimisation:

The policy is designed to ensure that GBR will have due regard to Local Transport Strategies, which helps ensure compliance with the Equality Act 2010 by promoting inclusive transport planning.

While specific impacts are currently difficult to quantify due to the broad scope and early stage of implementation, future analysis will be undertaken as powers are enacted and partnerships formalised. This will include ensuring equality provisions are embedded in partnerships.

#### *Advancing equal opportunity*

The policy has the potential to advance equal opportunity by improving accessibility for disabled passengers, enhancing connectivity for older people and those in underserved areas, and supporting economic inclusion through better access to employment, education, healthcare, and other essential services.

Multimodal improvements may also increase independence for disabled passengers and pregnant women, although inconsistent accessibility across modes remains a challenge.

While there is a risk that devolved arrangements could lead to variation in passenger experience, this is mitigated through nationally set duties, minimum consumer and accessibility standards and system-wide oversight by GBR, the Passenger Watchdog and the Office of Rail and Road. This approach is intended to advance equality of opportunity by enabling locally targeted improvements for passengers with protected characteristics, while maintaining consistent baseline standards that foster good relations and reduce the risk of fragmentation across regions.

where functions are exercised by GBR, mechanisms should be in place to ensure local insight continues to inform service design and delivery. This includes maintaining channels for community engagement, data-driven planning, and responsiveness to the needs of protected groups.

### *Fostering good relations*

By encouraging collaboration between GBR and local authorities, the policy supports stronger relationships between transport providers and communities. This can help reduce isolation for older people and improve public trust.

During the transition to a single national operator brand, care will be taken to minimise confusion, particularly for those who may have protected characteristics, through consolidated communications and campaigns.

Centralised delivery risks weaken trust between communities and transport providers. Partnership arrangements offer opportunities for collaboration and shared responsibility but must be transparent and inclusive.

## **Section 5 - Decision and Conclusions**

We intend to proceed with our proposals around devolution and we consider that this work area is likely to meet PSED requirements. We are taking reasonable steps to ensure that the equality principles are met, ensuring mitigating actions where needed.

## **Section 6 - Monitoring and Review Summary**

### *Devolved Governments*

We will undertake ongoing reviews of this assessment as powers in the Bill are used to underpin objectives in the mechanisms that will be agreed with the Scottish and Welsh Governments to ensure that any future impacts are assessed and mitigated as required:

- Future EIAs will be conducted as required for the bespoke arrangements for both devolved governments.
- The policy will continue to be further developed, working closely with partners and the wider rail industry ahead of the establishment of GBR.

### *Mayoral partnerships*

There will be an ongoing review as powers in the Bill are used which underpin/enable objectives in each partnership agreement:

- Future EIAs will be conducted as specific partnership arrangements are developed and specific duties are deployed.
- Feedback loops with stakeholders including local authorities to ensure inclusive outcomes.

- The consistency of accessibility standards on multimodal networks where a partnership impacts accessibility in rail will be monitored and reviewed.
- The targeted engagement plan for those impacted by any changes from the partnerships work will be monitored and reviewed.

#### Section 7 - Sign Off

I am satisfied that the above assessment demonstrates that full and appropriate regards has been paid to the PSED

#### SCS sign off

Name: Lucy Ryan

Role: Director – Rail Reform Directorate

Grade: SCS 2

Date: 4 Nov 2025

Signature: Lucy Ryan

# Fares, Ticketing and Retail

This is an initial assessment of the proposals around Fares, Ticketing and Retail. This covers the topics below:

- Fares Setting (including discount schemes)
- Ticket Retailing

## **Section 1 - Relevance to the PSED**

Yes – further assessment is needed.

## **Section 2 – Summary**

### *Fares Setting, parameters and guardrails and discount fare schemes*

Great British Railways (GBR) will take over from relevant train operators as the organisation responsible for setting fares on the services it operates and collecting revenue. Alongside GBR, open access and devolved operators will remain responsible for setting fares for services they operate, and we will consult the devolved governments on safeguarding their existing legislative powers to determine overall fare levels for their services.

Legislative changes will enable and empower GBR to deliver industry-wide modernisation and reform of the complex and fragmented fares landscape inherited from privatisation, where even minor changes meant securing agreement across multiple train operators with their own commercial interests. This will enable GBR to simplify the ticketing system and make it easy for passengers to find the right fare. While the intent of this legislation is to enable GBR to deliver these benefits, the Secretary of State will also retain specific oversight over the affordability of the railway.

As provided for in the legislation, the Secretary of State will set out parameters and guardrails that will govern GBR's fares setting activity, at regular intervals when agreeing its funding settlement, while empowering it to deliver on fare setting. This will likely include the limits by which fares can change over the course of the settlement period and the level of discretion that GBR has in the overall level of fares.

This gives the Secretary of State significant levers to influence and manage the overall level of fares to balance the interests of passengers and taxpayers.

Legislation will also ensure that discount schemes for young, senior and disabled persons continue to enjoy statutory protection.

The Secretary of State is required to have due regard to the public-sector equality duty under section 149(1) of the Equality Act 2010 in exercising their functions – this duty will apply to the power to set out parameters and guardrails that will govern GBR’s fares setting activity. Additionally, both this function and the duty requiring GBR to offer certain discount schemes affect the prices passengers pay to access the railway, and evidence suggests that this could more significantly impact those with the protected characteristics of age, sex, disability and ethnicity.

The function for GBR to set fares is an operational function that would be expected of any rail passenger services operator and is entirely separate from any future fares policy they choose to pursue (e.g. regardless of the level at which GBR sets fares, or whether GBR chooses to increase or decrease fares, they nonetheless need to set fares). The policy decision to assign this function to GBR therefore does not give rise to any considerations under the PSED. However, when exercising this function GBR will need to have regard to the PSED when setting fare policy and strategy and making decisions about fare levels.

### *Ticket Retailing*

Today, the 14 Train Operating Companies (TOCs) either contracted to run services by DfT or already within DfT Operator sell tickets in person (through ticket offices, ticket vending machines and handheld mobile devices on trains), online and via call centres.

In future, GBR will provide ticketing services directly to customers and this will be enabled through legislation. This will be via the methods currently used by TOCs. This will replace the 14 DfT TOCs’ retail activities, but not independent retailers’ or those of devolved / regional transport authorities. Notably, GBR’s website and app will replace those currently operated by the 14 TOCs.

All retailers will continue to be able to improve the passenger experience, drive innovation and further encourage competition in future.

The provisions of the Bill relating to retail will allow GBR to retail tickets and establish the framework for GBR’s overseeing wider online retail industry management functions such as the contractual licensing of independent retailers, including provisions for independent scrutiny and complaint resolution.

There is the potential for rail retail services to discriminate against and / or fail to advance equality of opportunity for, people with protected characteristics. For example, people with reduced mobility – which links to disability and age – need a high-quality online service, while people without internet access or a smartphone (with links to age, disability and, indirectly, ethnicity) need a robust option for purchase in person.

More generally, to ensure equitable service provisions, the Bill will allow for GBR to continue to retail at stations, and governance levers created by the Bill will allow for the

Secretary of State to ensure GBR meets accessible design standards for both its physical retail and online platforms.

### Section 3 - Evidence Summary

#### *Fares Setting, parameters and guardrails and discount fare schemes*

Distribution of individual total wealth by characteristic in Great Britain<sup>48</sup>:

- On average, total individual wealth increases with age and peaks at 60-64 years, before falling in older age groups as people use their wealth to support life during retirement.
- When holding other factors constant, average total individual wealth was found to be statistically significantly lower for women (with a negative £101,000 compared with men), people with a longstanding illness or disability (negative £65,000 compared to those without), people who are bisexual<sup>49</sup> (negative £65,000 compared to heterosexual people), and people from several ethnic minority groups.<sup>50</sup>

Rail net-subsidy levels<sup>51</sup>:

- The level of net subsidy has reduced since its all-time high of over £12bn in FYE March 2021 but remains high at £4.1bn in FYE March 2024.

According to data from the ORR, there were 384,444 Disabled Persons Railcards in circulation in Great Britain in FYE March 2025, a 30% increase on the previous year.<sup>52</sup>

On average in 2024 in England, persons with mobility difficulties made 6 rail trips per year compared with 26 rail trips per year for those without mobility difficulties.<sup>53</sup>

Certain demographics utilise rail more frequently than others, such as younger age groups and ethnic minorities. The demographics of rail passengers is further explored in the EQIA – Leadership for Britain’s Railways.

#### *Ticket Retailing*

According to the DfT’s Rail passenger ticket purchasing behaviour and preferences study.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> ONS (2022). [Distribution of individual total wealth by characteristic in Great Britain - Office for National Statistics](#). Data from April 2018 to March 2020.

<sup>49</sup> Wealth was also found to be lower for gay people than heterosexuals, but this was not statistically significant.

<sup>50</sup> Statistically significantly lower for individuals from Pakistani, Indian, Other Asian, White and Black

<sup>51</sup> Department for Transport (2025). [Rail factsheet: 2024 - GOV.UK](#)

<sup>52</sup> ORR (2025). [Table 4310 - Disabled persons railcards \(DPRC\) in circulation and issued | ORR Data Portal](#)

<sup>53</sup> National Travel Survey (2025). NTS0709: Travel by mobility status and main mode.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/nts03-modal-comparisons>

<sup>54</sup> Department for Transport (2024). Ticket purchasing behaviour and preferences among rail passengers. [Rail passenger ticket purchasing behaviour and preferences - GOV.UK](#). Study consisted of a sample size of 8,132 in England.

- 77% of respondents preferred to use a website or app to purchase train tickets
- 48% of people aged 66+ preferred to buy via ticket offices, compared to 12% for under 26
- 20% of those aged 16-17 did not have a bank, building society, post office, or credit union account
- 99% of respondents had internet access. 4% of those do not make payments online.

According to the ONS, 92% of all adults were recent internet users, compared to 81% of disabled adults. Internet usage for different ethnic groups varied between 87.8% (Bangladeshi) to 99.2% (Mixed/multiple ethnic background).<sup>55</sup>

According to Age UK, in 2021-22:<sup>56</sup>

- 29% of people aged 75 & over in the UK, around 1.7m, did not use the internet.
- 9% of people aged 65 to 74, around 0.6m, did not use the internet.
- 18% of people aged 65 & over, around 2.3m, did not use the internet.

## Section 4 – Assessment

### *Fares Setting, parameters and guardrails and discount fare schemes*

#### *Parameters and guardrails*

Today, the Department for Transport regulates certain rail fares and protects passengers by setting the maximum amount that regulated fares can increase year on year. Under fares regulation, TOCs set the price of regulated rail fares within the framework set by the Secretary of State and agreed with HM Treasury, which places a limit on the maximum amount that regulated fares are permitted to rise in any single year.

When GBR takes over from TOCs as the fares setter, our policy intent via these provisions is that the Secretary of State will retain a role in determining the overall level of fares but that this will be delivered not via a regulated fares cap, but instead through a new system of parameters and guardrails. This system will continue to provide an upper limit of how much fares can increase in a given period but will also more transparently consider how GBR's fares setting impacts on the interests of taxpayers, given that the railway will be publicly owned.

We also envisage that these levers will be used to better align fare setting with the delivery of the government's wider objectives for fares reform.

It is necessary to consider some upper limits on potential fares increases as these impact all rail passengers, including those with protected characteristics. Naturally, people with

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<sup>55</sup> ONS (2021). [Internet users - Office for National Statistics](#)

<sup>56</sup> Age UK (2024). Facts and figures about digital inclusion and older people. [internet-use-statistics-june-2024.pdf](#)

lower incomes may be more negatively impacted by fares increases than those with higher incomes – therefore, increases may have particular impacts on people with the protected characteristics of age, disability, sex, ethnicity/race, and/or sexual orientation.

The evidence in Section 3, paragraph 15 shows that young people and senior people could be more negatively impacted by fares increases than older working age adults, due to the distribution of total individual wealth across age-groups. Likewise, the evidence also shows that average total individual wealth is materially lower for women, people with longstanding illness and disability, people who are bisexual or gay and people from several ethnic minority groups.

By retaining a role for the Secretary of State to set these upper limits on how much fares can change over a given settlement period, these legislative provisions will ensure that mechanisms remain in place to ensure that passengers, including those with protected characteristics, have assurance comparable to that under existing provisions in the Railways Act 1993 regarding the overall affordability of fares and how much these can change over time. Additionally, this ensures that the Secretary of State, as the ultimate decision-maker and funder for the publicly owned railway on behalf of the government, is accountable to all passengers on matters of affordability.

However, alongside affordability for passengers, it is important, given the move to public ownership, for there to also be an explicit acknowledgement of the interests of taxpayers in terms of the level of taxpayer subsidy required to ensure sufficient funding for rail passenger services, supporting infrastructure and operational safety. It is fair that passengers, as the primary beneficiaries of this subsidy, contribute to these costs via rail fares and help to balance the impact on taxpayers and the public purse. Without these contributions, rail passenger service provision or safety could be at risk of deteriorating, with associated disproportionate impacts on all rail users.

The Secretary of State will therefore need to be mindful in exercising this function to consider both the overall affordability of rail fares and the impact that GBR's fares policy and associated fares guardrails and parameters may have on passengers, while also considering the broader impact that fare levels will have on overall rail subsidy. In doing so, they will need to consider the impact of this policy specifically on those with relevant protected characteristics and consider opportunities via setting guardrails and parameters to advance equality of opportunity.

Overall, the ultimate impact of the system on equalities depends on the specific policy set by the Secretary of State and GBR via these provisions. However, the inclusion of these provisions in legislation delivers a comparable level of assurance on the overall affordability of fares for passengers as seen today, and ensures that decision-making in this space will be transparent – so that GBR and the government can be held to account in how they choose to balance passenger and taxpayer contributions to rail costs in a given settlement period, including how this impacts on equalities. Similarly, GBR will need to consider the PSED when setting its fares policy in line with the parameters and guardrails set by the Secretary of State.

### *Railcards*

Section 28 of the Railways Act 1993 currently sets out the requirement for train operators to participate in certain approved discount fare schemes targeting young, senior and

disabled people. These are currently delivered by the rail industry as railcards – specifically the 16-25, Senior and Disabled Persons Railcards – and managed by the Rail Delivery Group (RDG).

The rationale behind requiring operators to offer these discount schemes by law is that these groups are historically more likely to experience price as a barrier to accessing rail travel and associated benefits, such as employment. Additionally, these groups are also captured under the protected characteristics of age and disability.

Devolved operators are also required to offer these discount schemes as the Railways Act 1993 applies in England, Scotland and Wales. Open access operators also participate in these schemes via their membership of RDG.

It is therefore the Government's intention for the requirement to offer discount schemes targeting these groups to be maintained in the Bill provisions, as discount fare schemes remain an important means for improving equality of opportunity by reducing the impact of price on their ability to travel by rail. Setting this out in primary legislation provides the strongest possible reassurance to these passengers that the schemes will continue to be offered under GBR. Devolved governments and operators will also continue to be required to offer discount schemes for these groups but will have discretion over whether they choose to participate in the national level schemes managed by GBR or create their own schemes for their designated services.

We will also ensure in our drafting that we continue to maintain the flexibility of the existing drafting in the Railways Act 1993 in terms of how the discount fares schemes are ultimately implemented. While these are currently offered by industry as railcards, it is possible that in future GBR might want to explore alternative ways to offer the discounts to passengers as technology improves and advances over time. This will allow the implementation of the discount schemes to continue to best serve passenger needs, including those with protected characteristics e.g. those with specific accessibility needs.

It is our assessment that maintaining this requirement will have a neutral-positive impact for the protected characteristics of age and disability – as these provisions ensure the continued protection of these discount schemes in legislation and that their implementation can evolve over time in line with passenger needs.

### *Ticket Retailing*

The evidence section above shows the potential that retail policy has for differential impact if online and in-person services do not meet passengers' diverse needs. The provisions of the Bill would not, in themselves, have a direct impact on people with protected characteristics, as their functions are a) to replace 14 different TOC retail functions with one consolidated alternative and b) to set up a mechanism for independent scrutiny and appeal.

There is, however, potential for a differential impact on people with protected characteristics during implementation, and the Government will need to be mindful of equalities considerations to ensure that the transition from TOCs to GBR retail does not inadvertently result in discrimination.

Some retail products have online and physical retail functions. For example, a parent can order a ticket online for a child to pick up in person. When implementing reform, we will need to consider how best to maintain and fulfil these passengers' needs.

We will need to carry out equalities impact assessments at the appropriate stages of implementation. For example, the Full Business Case for online retail should set out whether the move from 14 different TOC websites and apps to the GBR solution will reduce online accessibility features or reduce availability of services such as Passenger Assist, and justify any negative impacts, as well as considering opportunities to advance equality of opportunity.

## **Section 5 - Decision and Conclusions**

Fares setting and railcards – proceed as planned with the proposed legislation.

Retail – proceed as planned with the proposed legislation but further consider the Public Sector Equalities Duty at design stage. This is because the provisions of the Bill will not directly impact people with protected characteristics, but the manner of their implementation has the potential to do so.

## **Section 6 - Monitoring and Review Summary**

Fares setting and discount schemes – GBR's management of its fare revenue in line with the guardrails and parameters set by the Secretary of State, and offering of the requisite discount fare schemes, will be an ongoing business-as-usual activity within the Department's broader monitoring of GBR's financial performance and performance against its wider strategic objectives.

Additionally, the Secretary of State will be required to conduct equality impact assessments for its specific fares policy that they pursue when setting the guardrails and parameters for a given financial settlement period. Likewise, when exploring changes to the price or terms and conditions of discount fare schemes, they would also need to conduct equality impact assessments. GBR itself will also need to have regard to the PSED when setting its own fare strategy and policies (in line with the parameters and guardrails) and when making fare setting decisions.

Retail – conduct equalities impacts assessment as part of the business case process for planned reforms.

## **Section 7 - Sign Off**

I am satisfied that the above assessment demonstrates that full and appropriate regards has been paid to the PSED

### SCS sign off

Name: Lucy Ryan

Role: Director – Rail Reform Directorate

Grade: SCS 2

Date: 4 Nov 2025

Signature: Lucy Ryan

## Remaining Policy Areas

This is an initial assessment of the following policies.

- Luxembourg Rail Protocol
- Train Driver Licensing
- Funding ORR
- Consequential Amendments Power

### **Section 1 - Relevance to the PSED**

No further standalone assessment is needed

### **Section 2 – Summary**

#### *Luxembourg Rail Protocol*

Powers are needed to enable the Government to make the necessary secondary legislation to implement the Luxembourg Rail Protocol to the 2001 Cape Town Convention on International Interests in Mobile Equipment and ratify it under the Constitutional Reform and Governance (CRAG) Act 2010.

The Protocol aims to reduce the level of risk involved in, and subsequently to reduce the costs associated with, financing rolling stock. The Protocol will do this by establishing an international legal framework for the creation and registration of international interests in rolling stock, as well as legal remedies for default and insolvency.

We have considered the relevance of the PSED to this policy and concluded that it is very low and, therefore, no further assessment is required because the protocol provides the same level of risk and cost reduction for anyone involved in financing rolling stock. It does not discriminate against any of the protected characteristics.

*Train Driver Licensing*

The Railways Bill includes a power to allow the Secretary of State to update, amend and revoke provisions specifically in the Train Driving Licences and Certificates Regulations 2010 (TDLCR) and related assimilated law in Great Britain via future secondary legislation.

The power would only be available to the Secretary of State, and whilst it will fill a 'powers gap' created by the repeal of section 2(2) of the European Communities Act 1972, it will be limited to making regulations in respect of the requirements for train driving licences and certificates.

We have considered the relevance of the PSED to this policy and concluded that it is very low because the powers are not being used to implement any policy changes at this time and, therefore, no further assessment is required.

We are, however, aware that future proposals for use of these powers could have direct or indirect impacts on people with protected characteristics. We have been in discussion with trade unions, industry bodies and other affected stakeholders to develop and test potential reforms that could have a positive impact and help improve diversity among the train driving profession. Any proposal will be subject to a separate equality impact assessment and informed by a body of quantitative and qualitative evidence based on extensive stakeholder engagement.

*Funding ORR*

We are replacing the current Network Rail licence fee with a new statutory power for the ORR to levy a fee on GBR to cover the ORR's costs related to its non-safety activities. This approach will help to guarantee the ORR's independence of funding in order to maintain stakeholder trust and confidence.

Currently the ORR's non-safety functions include funding through licence fees. As Secretary of State will issue GBR's licence rather than the ORR, this measure will replace the income the ORR currently receive from the NR licence fee with a levy and will only apply to GBR. There are no other impacts on other parts of rail.

We have considered the relevance of the PSED to this policy and concluded that it is very low and, therefore, no further assessment is required because the measure is purely technical in nature to the funding mechanism for the ORR's non-safety functions. It does not alter the scope of the ORR's responsibilities, create new regulatory powers, or change the way in which services are delivered to passengers or staff.

*Consequential Amendments Power*

A power to make consequential amendments is a provision often included in legislation to allow changes or modifications to other legislation after Royal Assent. Rather than requiring a primary legislative vehicle for each modification, the consequential amendments power allows for the necessary changes to be made quickly and efficiently via a statutory instrument.

The powers conferred by this clause would be limited by the fact that amendments made under this power would have to be genuinely consequential on provisions in the Bill.

Furthermore, any amendments to primary legislation would be subject to the affirmative procedure.

We have considered the relevance of the PSED to this policy and concluded that it is very low and, therefore, no further assessment is required because any consequential amendments will only be an exercise in tidying up the statute book, which will have no impact on individuals or those with protected characteristics. If relevant, considerations of equality impacts will be conducted further down the line, when consequential amendments are made. However, this can only be done after Royal Assent.

### **Section 3 - Evidence Summary**

N/A

### **Section 4 - Assessment**

N/A

### **Section 5 - Decision and Conclusions**

N/A

### **Section 6 - Monitoring and Review Summary**

N/A

### **Section 7 - Sign Off**

I am satisfied that the above assessment demonstrates that full and appropriate regards has been paid to the PSED

#### SCS sign off

Name: Lucy Ryan

Role: Director – Rail Reform Directorate

Grade: SCS 2

Date: 4 Nov 2025

Signature: Lucy Ryan

