

Unlocking a new era of rail innovation



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A new direction of travel

In 2025 the government formally announced Great British Railways (GBR) as the new national rail operator. Each time the franchise of a private train operating company (TOC) comes to an end, their service will be transferred to the publicly owned GBR. By the end of 2027 that process should be complete, and GBR will be responsible for rail operations and infrastructure across the country.

The creation of GBR is a landmark moment in the UK's rail sector. At a time when trust in our railways is frequently battered, GBR holds out the promise of a brighter future. Collectively, we need to seize this opportunity to make our railways world-leading once again. This paper sets out UP3's vision for how that can happen – with the rail experience redesigned around passengers and powered by technology.

Hampered by fragmentation

Our rail system since privatisation in the 1990s has been structurally fragmented, with multiple operators running individual branches of the network. This created a disconnect between passengers and TOCs: while travellers experienced a single journey, the industry often behaved as if each leg belonged to a different universe. Ticketing, pricing and conditions were inconsistent and often opaque.

Fragmentation led to disjointed service and poor communication with passengers, especially during pivotal moments like train delays (which can end up damaging customers' confidence more than the disruption itself).

In addition, a multiplicity of TOCs meant duplicated systems, disconnected processes and varying standards, which only added to the hassle and price tag of rail. It's not unusual for a train journey between major cities to cost several times the amount of an airplane flight – undermining customer loyalty and trust.



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Creating a joined-up railway

Bringing services into a unified GBR sets the conditions for a transformation in how our railway runs. It allows us to create a future designed around people, not contracts or franchises, in which people feel like customers of “the railway” rather than individual operators.

A better passenger experience is possible through GBR because, for the first time in decades, we will have a “single view” of the customer across the entire network. That 360-degree perspective will enable continuity across journeys, stations and touchpoints. And with modern technology like AI, we can go so much further.

The starting point for innovation

The starting point of any successful tech innovation is to break down silos between datasets and to re-align incentives around the customer. GBR delivers both.

Excitingly, it allows us to build a single operational platform nationwide – bringing together different elements of the rail experience, from customer service to predictive maintenance – and use data to create innovation at scale in ways not possible before.

Modern digital platforms such as ServiceNow can act as powerful foundations for a more responsive and proactive sector, unlocking this new customer-centric era of British railways.

There are three dimensions to this:

- **Visibility.** With unified data all in one place, it will be easier to join the dots and improve the customer experience. GBR will have a single relationship with customers, giving it a better understanding of them than individual TOCs had, and enabling it to leverage existing interactions to tailor future offers, communications and services.
- **Scale.** Seamless access to large quantities of information is what allows organisations to innovate and drive efficiencies. That's especially true in today's AI era. Thanks to its unified view, GBR will be able to develop new capabilities, service improvements and workflow enhancements at speed.

- **Relevance.** When data is connected, new use cases emerge naturally. Past tech breakthroughs in the rail sector – such as fraud detection, one-click delay repay and rail disruption management – weren't planned upfront but became possible because relevant insights surfaced within ServiceNow where they could be acted on. This helps quickly embed a culture of continual service improvement.

A better service for all

Our railways are a major national asset that must be inclusive, accessible and beneficial to everyone. The creation of GBR allows us to put this principle back at the heart of the sector's operations.

So any tech-driven improvement from GBR must be delivered as “considered innovation” that leaves no one behind. Progress that excludes any part of the population – such as the elderly or less digitally confident – counts as failure.

Furthermore, GBR can contribute towards national objectives that go beyond narrow shareholder interests. There's no bigger national prize than improving British productivity and GDP. Given that millions of hours are spent on trains every year, tackling poor connectivity and unreliable services should be an urgent priority.

UP3's role

UP3 has seen the rail industry up-close through more than a decade of working across the sector. We've pioneered customer-centric innovation through ServiceNow to improve the passenger experience, speed up communication flows, and drive operational efficiencies. That experience has given us a deep understanding of the railway's challenges. Now the opportunity is here to apply these same lessons at nationwide scale and deliver greater impact.

GBR is an inflection point in the UK's railway story, creating the conditions the sector has been missing for so long. A more digitally enabled railway will deliver more reliable trains and higher quality services that benefit each of us as travellers, and the country as a whole. Let's unlock this potential together.

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