



**Management, maintenance and modernisation
of the rail network**

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Thank you very much for having me here to speak today.

So to start, let me just give you a quick run through of a few of the amazing things that are happening in Britain's railways today and also a quick look at what we are going to be doing in the very near future.

We all know about some of the astonishing changes that are occurring in the stations that we've been building over the last few years, and I think you'll have seen what an amazing transformative effect these new stations are having.

King's Cross is such a fantastic example of this. It was a 70 acre complete regeneration. Who remembers what King's Cross area was like 10 years ago compared to what it's like today?

The same thing is happening around Birmingham New Street where we built the fantastic new station; Reading is utterly transformed, and of course we've now got the amazing London Bridge that I'm so immensely proud of, that we opened on the 2nd of January this year, on the day we said we would open it 7 years previously.

This was an amazing engineering achievement. I think one of the greatest engineering achievements in our country, because there is huge difficulty rebuilding a station of this scale with 55 million people using it every year. It is certainly something that nobody should underestimate and is in fact an incredible achievement.

But London Bridge is no longer *just* a station; we have built 70 retail properties in the station and it will become one of the thriving social meeting places in London, completely transforming the area.

And it's not just stations – new pieces of railway can make a huge difference too. Railways like the Ordsall Chord in Manchester; it doesn't look like all that much, but it totally changes the way the railway flows around the north of England, connecting places as far afield as Newcastle directly to Manchester airport.

And then of course we've got the Great Western electrification, these trains are now running, they are starting to arrive week by week and delivering a completely transformed service. By the end of this year there will be a train every 15 minutes from Bristol to London, delivering faster journeys than they do today. But it's not just about speed, it's not just about capacity, and it's not just about passengers, it's also about environment. These trains are super clean, they are electric hybrid, and they are replacing, honestly, some of the dirtiest trains around.



And I can tell you why that is the best plan, it's not my plan, it's not a plan dreamt up by people sitting in the centre, this is a devolved business plan. We have 8 route businesses and one national business unit, these businesses own their plans with passion, they know precisely what they are going to do and how they are going to do it, it's a plan built from the ground up with a proper understanding of the assets

that we have to maintain and renew over the next 5 years, and it's going to deliver some significant benefits.

We are going to continue to strive to improve safety. Safety and performance go hand in hand in any great business, it's my number one business mantra, ask anybody who knows me. We are going to continue that journey of improving safety.

We are going to reduce the number of train delays by 15% across the network as a whole by working more collaboratively with train operating companies, and by further improving the underlying reliability of our assets.

We are going to continue to become more cost efficient. The costs of Network Rail make up 50% of the costs of running the railway, if we can drive our costs down, then we create more choices for Government about where to invest money for to change ticketing price strategies.

And of course we want to continue to invest and grow the railway.

While CP5 was very much about big projects - there will be big projects in CP6 as well, not least of which TransPennine route upgrade will be one - CP6 will also really usher in the digital railway.

Now I'm not going to say too much about it today, but just let me give you this one fact. In the next 15 years Network Rail has to renew 63% of the signalling system of this country, it's life expired in the next 15 years. To me it's a real simple choice, do we spend £20 billion renewing traffic lights with more traffic lights, or do we make the big and brave and bold decision to invest that money in a modern digital train control system that will transform the performance, reliability and capacity of our network? So CP6 is absolutely about those first brave steps on the digital railway journey, because we want a railway that is fit for the future in this country.

This is a conference that talks about environment, so what are we doing and contributing from our side on the environment?

Well I've already talked about the cleaner trains, but in Network Rail we are committing to reduce our energy consumption by 18% in the next 5 years, and part of that is just basic stuff, getting rid of all these halogen lights and replacing them with LEDs in every station, every building we've got, just monitoring our energy consumption in real time and managing it in smarter and better ways. 25% less greenhouse gases and carbon, also buying cleaner energy in the first place.

We have more land in Network Rail than the whole of the Isle of Wight, it's a huge amount of land, and a lot of that land is right in the middle of urban centres, so by really thinking about biodiversity and how we can contribute biodiversity by managing that land in smarter and better ways we can really make a difference to the communities that we live in. And of course we want to reduce the waste that we send to landfill to as near as possible to zero, and we have to continue our journey on weather resilience.



The collapse of the railway at Dawlish following storms was literally my first week on the job. But, you know, we've got to face this sort of thing today. This photo was taken yesterday. It's been a tough day or two, and I want to thank Lillian Greenwood, because I think her showing her appreciation for the 30,000 people I have out there today trying to keep this railway running is really appreciated. I shall make sure they know

about it, because it's a tough job, it's a really tough job and in the middle of the night, when it's snowing or pouring with rain and you are out there trying to keep the railway running, they do an astonishing job and I'm really proud of them.

What we do also matters for the society that depends upon us. Network Rail puts a lot of energy and effort into trying to protect vulnerable people who choose, sadly sometimes, to take their lives on Britain's railways. In the last few years we've achieved a 14% reduction in the number of people who take their lives on our railways, and by the way we have about 250 suicides a year, so it's a very significant reduction against a rising trend in society as a whole.

We want to be better neighbours. 20 million people live within 500 yards of a railway, so if we come up in the middle of the night and start digging up the railway, chopping down the trees and they don't know we are about to do it, they get pretty irritated and rightly so, so we put a huge amount of effort today into making sure that we engage with communities, understand their needs and try to reflect their wishes wherever we can and we've seen a dramatic reduction in the number of complaints. And I'm pleased to say that I've seen a dramatic reduction in my postbag as well of letters of complaint from MPs, I used to get 1,000 letters a year from MPs, it's down by more than 20% in the last few years because we are actually being better neighbours, working better with communities.

And if you want to work with communities then you have to think about what communities want.

Two years ago when there was a debate about free water fountains at stations, people said "oh you can't do that, we are going stop selling water, we won't make as much money". It's nonsense! Of course we should have free water at our managed stations to enable people to refill their bottles and not buy more plastic. And of course you should have free toilets at managed stations. I think it's wrong that people turn up a station, they are feeling really uncomfortable and we say to them, yes we know you're uncomfortable, give us 50p and we will help relieve your pain. No, that's not the sort of company that we are. So free toilets at all of our managed stations, many now and all during CP6.

At all great companies, you see great people and great teams. And we are putting a huge amount of effort into building really a fantastic organisation that's not just devolved and empowered, but has great people in it.

And I'm really encouraged by some of the progress we've made. A 34% increase in the number of women we have in Network Rail in the last four years, and I can tell you I've got some amazing data which some of you will have seen in other speeches that I've made that show that diverse teams perform better, they are more engaged, they are safer and they are higher performing. You need about 20% women in order to get to that tipping point, but once you get to 20% women you see a significant increase in the performance of those teams.

And my own team, 40% of my team is women, so we are doing everything that we can to make sure we promote the best people for the job and to encourage the best people to apply for those jobs and to broaden the spectrum of people that we look at to come and work in the rail industry. For too long the rail industry had a stereotypical mind-set of what it took to be a railwayman, and it's not a railwayman, we want railway people from all backgrounds and we are making great progress in that.

So I will leave you with this thought, I think the railway is at an amazing tipping point. I think the passengers are going to really see a huge change in the railways in the next few years as these huge projects come to fruition, but I think the challenge for us is going to be to continue to win the hearts and minds of passengers, to continue to win their trust and to continue to win the trust of politicians to continue the journey to invest even more in modernising and transforming our railway.

Because the railway provides the economic arteries of our country, and if we invest wisely in better railways, we invest wisely in a better Britain.

Thank you very much.

**Note: this a transcript, so language reflects the speech as delivered.*