

MDA No.: 1347

Title: Williams-Shapps: The Committee's response to the Plan for Rail

1. Executive Summary

1.1 At the Transport Committee meeting on 12 October 2022 the Committee resolved that:

6.5 (b) That authority be delegated to the Chair, in consultation with the Deputy Chairman and party Group Lead Members, to agree any output arising from the meeting.

1.2 Following consultation with party Group Lead Members, the Chair agreed the Committee's report *Williams-Shapps: The Committee's response to the Plan for Rail* as attached at **Appendix 1**.

2. Decision

2.1 **That the Chair, in consultation with the Deputy Chairman and party Group Lead Members, agree the report *Williams-Shapps: The Committee's response to the Plan for Rail* as attached at Appendix 1.**

Assembly Member

I confirm that I do not have any disclosable pecuniary interests in the proposed decision and take the decision in compliance with the Code of Conduct for elected Members of the Authority.

The above request has my approval.

Signature:



Printed Name: Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM

Date: 25 February 2022

3. Decision by an Assembly Member under Delegated Authority

Background and proposed next steps:

- 3.1 The terms of reference for this investigation were agreed by the Chair, in consultation with the Deputy Chairman and party Lead Group Members on 3 September 2021 under the standing authority granted to Chairs of Committees and Sub-Committees. Officers confirm that the report and its recommendations fall within these terms of reference.
- 3.2 The exercise of delegated authority approving the report will be formally noted at the Transport Committee's next appropriate meeting.

Confirmation that appropriate delegated authority exists for this decision:

Signature (Committee Services): Paul Goodchild

Printed Name: Paul Goodchild

Date: 14 February 2022

Telephone Number: 07842 600832

Financial Implications: NOT REQUIRED

Note: Finance comments and signature are required only where there are financial implications arising or the potential for financial implications.

Signature (Finance): Not Required

Printed Name:

Date:

Telephone Number:

Legal Implications:

The Chair of the Transport Committee has the power to make the decision set out in this report.

Signature (Legal):



Printed Name: Emma Strain, Monitoring Officer pp Rebecca Arnold, Assistant Director, Committee & Member Services

Date: 14 February 2022

Telephone Number: 020 7983 4421

Supporting Detail / List of Consultees:

- Keith Prince AM (Deputy Chairman)
- Elly Baker AM
- Sian Berry AM

4. Public Access to Information

- 4.1 Information in this form (Part 1) is subject to the FoIA, or the EIR and will be made available on the GLA Website, usually within one working day of approval.
- 4.2 If immediate publication risks compromising the implementation of the decision (for example, to complete a procurement process), it can be deferred until a specific date. Deferral periods should be kept to the shortest length strictly necessary.
- 4.3 **Note:** this form (Part 1) will either be published within one working day after it has been approved or on the defer date.

Part 1 - Deferral:

Is the publication of Part 1 of this approval to be deferred? NO

If yes, until what date:

Part 2 – Sensitive Information:

Only the facts or advice that would be exempt from disclosure under FoIA or EIR should be included in the separate Part 2 form, together with the legal rationale for non-publication.

Is there a part 2 form? NO

Lead Officer / Author

Signature: Gino Brand


Printed Name: Gino Brand

Job Title: Senior Policy Adviser

Date: 11 February 2022

Telephone Number: 07511 213765

Countersigned by Executive Director:

Signature: 

Printed Name: Helen Ewen, Executive Director of Assembly Secretariat

Date: 15 February 2022

Telephone Number: 07729 108986

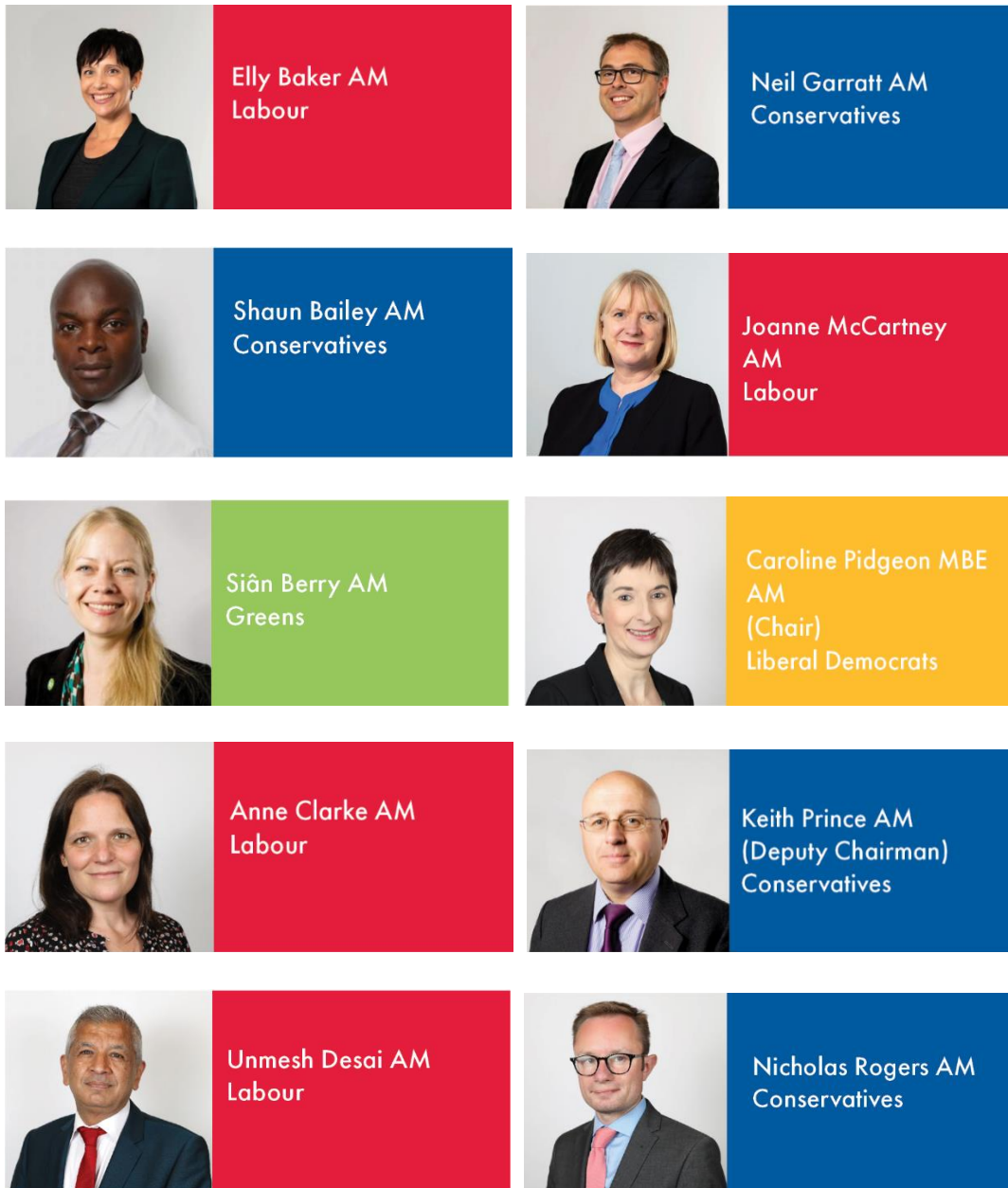


**Williams-Shapps: The Committee's
response to the Plan for Rail**

Transport Committee

LONDON ASSEMBLY

Transport Committee



The Transport Committee holds the Mayor and Transport for London to account for their work delivering the capital's transport network. The Committee examines all aspects of the transport network and presses for improvements on behalf of Londoners.

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Foreword



Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM
Chair of the Transport Committee

Britain's railways have long needed serious reform. The current system has let down passengers time and time again with poor service, poor communications and a lack of consistency across the network. The government has now put forward its blueprint for the future of rail after several years of research and review. It is no surprise to anyone on the Transport Committee that London Overground, and its model for providing quality of service, figures prominently in the plans for the future of the railways.

The Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail is an important starting point for the future of the UK's railways. There are big opportunities for the industry to improve reliability of services, simplify ticketing and improve accessibility so that the railways can be used by more people than ever before. But those opportunities have to be realised.

There has been, and remains, the potential for a huge amount of change to Britain's railways. The COVID-19 pandemic had a catastrophic impact on ridership levels for public transport including rail, with a big question mark still hanging over the longer-term impact on passenger behaviours. The publication of the Plan for Rail was itself delayed by the pandemic, as the team sought to consider what was happening on the railways as the country was plunged into lockdown after lockdown. There remains an awful lot of work to do to fully understand what will happen in the longer term, with the potential for more remote and hybrid working to become the norm. What that means for railways is a crucial point on which the success of any new system will depend.

The Plan for Rail has some sensible recommendations; and the Transport Committee is encouraged that the model used by Transport for London (TfL) for London Overground has been considered, and is being used as the basis of the model for what will become Great British Railways.

London Overground has been extremely successful in providing better connections across London and increasing ridership numbers. The Transport Committee has a long-standing

interest in the relationship between London's rail services and the rest of the UK's network. Based on its previous work on the topic, it also holds a long-standing belief that rail services should be devolved to London. In light of the recommendations in the Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail, the Committee also believes that the running of London Overground should stay within TfL's remit and be protected.

The railways do need change, but we also do not want to see successful services such as London Overground suffer as a result. There is an opportunity to build on the success of London's rail to serve all Londoners better, with more reliable and accessible services and to improve the capital's transport network.

Executive summary

The Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail is the Government's blueprint for how it intends to reform the UK's rail industry. The Plan claims it is proposing biggest change to the railways in 25 years, with the aim of bringing the network under a single national leadership of a new public body, Great British Railways. As part of these plans Network Rail, the current infrastructure owner, will be absorbed into this new organisation, along with other functions from the Rail Delivery Group and Department for Transport (DfT).

The Government's plans for the rebranded and nationally integrated Great British Railways, as set out in the Williams-Shapps White Paper, introduce new approaches to service provision, including ticketing and fares for National Rail (excluding TfL). These are significant proposed changes to the way the rail industry currently operates, with a potentially huge impact across the rail industry for operators, workers, and passengers.

The Transport Committee held an investigation into the Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail and the impact it will have on Londoners last year, across two Committee meetings. In September it heard from Keith Williams, Chair of the Williams-Shapps Review, as well as representatives from Network Rail; London TravelWatch; Southern Railway and Gatwick Express; and the Rail Delivery Group.

In October the Committee heard from a number of passenger groups with an interest in London's transport system and the recommendations of the Plan for Rail. Passenger groups and wider citizen interest groups in London – and those representing commuters and others travelling into London on public transport – continue to be engaged in these live issues, as well as ongoing public transport-related topics including service provision, accessibility, cost, and various other aspects of the passenger experience.

The evidence received by the Committee has led to the following recommendations, for the DfT to consider as part of the Rail Transformation Programme, as it works towards achieving the aims of the Plan for Rail. The recommendations cover the devolution of rail services to London, and the need for London Overground to remain under the control of TfL in the new structure for the railway. The recommendations also cover the need for passenger and freight services to be developed in tandem to maximise services on both sides of the rail industry. The Committee has also made recommendations related to passenger needs, including understanding the long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic; and understanding more about the root causes of the lack of passenger trust, and the need for robust consultation with passengers and railway staff ahead of any changes to the railway industry.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

The Committee reiterates its long-standing recommendation that suburban rail services in London should be devolved to TfL as part of the move to Great British Railways. This is to provide a truly integrated, reliable and affordable rail network for Londoners.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that, as part of the move to Great British Railways, existing devolved responsibilities, including London Overground, should remain devolved. TfL should retain control over the specification for the rail concessions in London.

Recommendation 3

The Committee is concerned about the anticipated savings in reorganising the railways; and recommends that any savings must not lead to cuts to rail services, in terms of frequency and quality, as well as cuts that may lead to safety concerns.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that both the passenger and freight sides of the rail industry are brought together, to coordinate activity that will better use paths on the railway to maximise both passenger and freight services at the appropriate times of day.

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that DfT places greater emphasis on passenger needs as part of the Rail Transformation Programme. This includes monitoring the long-term impacts of COVID-19 on passenger levels and travel needs; ensuring that TfL and other rail services are integrated as fully as possible; and considering station staffing for passenger safety.

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that the Rail Transformation Programme examines further evidence on the root causes of a lack of trust from passengers with the current rail system, particularly with regards to ticketing and fares. DfT should ensure that TfL, the Mayor of London, the London Assembly and London TravelWatch are included in discussions about any changes to the fares and ticketing system, ensuring transparency for passengers in any future structure.

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that the Rail Transformation Programme examines further evidence on the root causes of a lack of trust from passengers with the current rail system, particularly with regards to ticketing and fares. DfT should ensure that TfL, the Mayor of London, the London Assembly and London TravelWatch are included in discussions about any changes to the fares and ticketing system, ensuring transparency for passengers in any future structure.

Recommendation 8

The Committee recommends that through the Rail Transformation Programme, DfT must ensure that it carries out thorough and robust consultation with passengers, railway staff and other relevant stakeholders ahead of the implementation of changes outlined in the Plan for Rail, so that those who use and work on the railway, can shape its future.

Chapter one – The Future of Rail overview

The Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail

Background

On 20 May 2021, the Government launched “Great British Railways: Williams-Shapps plan for rail”. The White Paper sets out the Government’s plan for a revolution on the railways in Great Britain.¹ The report was written by Keith Williams, the independent Chair of the Rail Review, and the Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP, the Secretary of State for Transport.

The Williams-Shapps Rail Review was established in September 2018 to look at the structure of the whole rail industry, and the way passenger and freight rail services are delivered. The review was led by independent chair, Keith Williams, and supported by a panel of experts with expertise in rail, freight, business and passenger interests.

The Government states that it believes the plan shows how it will make railways the backbone of a cleaner, more environmentally friendly and more modern public transport system across the country. The aim is to replace franchising with a new focus on reliability, performance and efficiency, accelerating innovation and integrating the railways. This should deliver an efficient and financially sustainable railway that meets the needs of passengers.

Changes to the rail industry

Investigation

The Committee held two meetings in September and October 2021 to better understand the concepts set out in the Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail and what this would mean for London’s rail services. The first of these meetings was with guests from the rail industry, including Keith Williams, the co-author of the Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail.² This provided the Committee with a further explanation of the intentions of the Plan. The Committee heard information on the role of TfL; how the changes to the system will be financed; freight services; and how the rail industry is intended to look in the future for passengers and freight.

In October the Committee also heard from passenger groups with an interest in London’s transport system and the recommendations of the Plan for Rail. The groups included local

¹ DfT, [Great British Railways: Williams-Shapps plan for rail](#), 20 May 2021

² London Assembly Transport Committee, [Transcript of Item 6 – Williams-Shapps Review](#), 13 September 2021

passenger groups such as the Clapham Transport Users Group, the North and West London Light Railway and the Crofton Park Transport Users' Group as well other interest groups including Transport for All, Railfuture and London Vision. London TravelWatch also attended and gave examples of findings from its research.

The next steps for delivering against the Plan for Rail include the government is setting up a Rail Transformation Programme within the DfT and the rail industry to establish a common understanding of the vision, set out the phases of delivery and work collectively with the sector to design and implement this major project. Alongside this, the government intends to establish an advisory group chaired by Keith Williams to support the Secretary of State in ensuring that these proposals are implemented across the sector.

The plans in the report are understandably high-level at this stage, and further detail would be expected in the next phases of work to realise the Plan for Rail. However, the plans do highlight some opportunities within the new system that could be of benefit to rail passengers in general and to Londoners, including improving integration between TfL and other rail services. There may also be opportunities to improve reliability of services; to increase the use of freight on the railways; and to save money across the railway system as a whole. However, some of these areas would also benefit from further work to understand what is achievable. The Committee has identified some overarching themes emerging through its investigation on the plan, and how it should be developed for London and London's passengers.

Role of TfL

One of the biggest implications of the report for London is that it did not recommend that all rail services and infrastructure in the capital should be devolved to London. The devolution of rail services has been recommended by the London Assembly on a number of occasions. The Transport Committee's 2015 report, 'Devolving Rail Services to London', recommended that the Mayor and TfL develop a detailed business case for the devolution of the South Eastern rail franchise.³ The subsequent business case from the Mayor to DfT stated that, by taking advantage of TfL's track record of making rail services better, there is an opportunity to provide a truly integrated, reliable and affordable rail network.⁴ It also stated that rail devolution would lead to economic benefits within communities.

In September 2019, the Transport Committee reiterated its call for greater devolution of rail franchises stating:

*"This Assembly reiterates its long standing support for the devolution of train franchises and for more suburban rail services to be run on the successful model of London Overground."*⁵

³ London Assembly Transport Committee, [Devolving Rail Services to London](#), October 2015

⁴ GLA, [The Mayor's plans for rail devolution](#)

⁵ London Assembly, [London needs greater rail devolution](#), 5 September 2019

The Plan for Rail states that Great British Railways will bring together the whole system, and perform a role for rail services similar to the one TfL has in London.⁶ It will own the railways across Great Britain and run them as an integrated system to common goals. The new organisation will work closely with partners across the sector, including freight operators and suppliers, to help deliver a customer-focused rail system. Existing devolved administrations and authorities across Great Britain will continue to exercise their current powers and to be democratically accountable for them. The Plan for Rail and evidence from Keith Williams has suggested that the industry appears to be enthusiastic towards the idea of change; however, this will need to be monitored once more detail is provided on the plans and how they will work in practice.

Keith Williams gave evidence to the Committee on the subject of the working relationship between Great British Railways, cities and regions.⁷ He explained that one thing to come out of the review was that the regions felt they had a lot to offer, but frequently could not get their voice heard. Therefore, certain parts of the review mandate much closer cooperation between the central body and cities and regions.

On a different set of questions, about the integration of the suburban rail with the TfL network, there was some explanation about the challenge of getting this right:⁸

“It is a question of then how far out do you go where you then lose the long distance over the shorter route. That is always going to be a challenge. One of the challenges that the outer boroughs were raising with me is, if you create something where everything is controlled from London, I might lose my service further out. That is one of the challenges that I faced. The answer to that really is in the greater voice rather than having the direct control.”

**Keith Williams, Chair
Williams-Shapps Review**

On the basis of this evidence, the Committee has some concerns about the interaction between Great British Railways and TfL, and what control TfL will retain in the new structure including over the specification of its concessions. The Committee does not want to see a loss to rail devolution. The Committee therefore reiterates its recommendation that suburban rail services should be devolved to London as part of the move to Great British Railways.

⁶ DfT, [Great British Railways: Williams-Shapps plan for rail](#), 20 May 2021

⁷ London Assembly Transport Committee, [Transcript of Item 6 – Williams-Shapps Review](#), 13 September 2021

⁸ London Assembly Transport Committee, [Transcript of Item 6 – Williams-Shapps Review](#), 13 September 2021

Recommendation 1

The Committee reiterates its long-standing recommendation that suburban rail services in London should be devolved to TfL as part of the move to Great British Railways. This is to provide a truly integrated, reliable and affordable rail network for Londoners.⁹

London Overground

The London Overground network was established after the Silverlink franchise was devolved to TfL in 2007.¹⁰ At this time, TfL became the commissioning authority for the service rather than the Department for Transport, although the Overground remains an integrated part of the National Rail network. While working under the TfL brand, Arriva Rail London runs the train franchise and is responsible for all operations of the line until at least 2023.

London Overground's launch introduced Oyster to all 55 stations; replaced the entire train fleet with 62 modern trains; refurbished every station; and made other improvements. The Overground network has been extended several times since 2007, including the new Shepherd's Bush station in 2008 and Imperial Wharf in 2009, to support areas that had previously suffered from poor public transport provision.

In 2010 London Overground opened a new line in east London between Dalston Junction and West Croydon, with branches to New Cross and Crystal Palace. The route was extended to Highbury and Islington in 2011, and to Clapham Junction in 2012, completing a loop around London. In 2015 the government devolved suburban services on the Greater Anglia franchise to TfL.

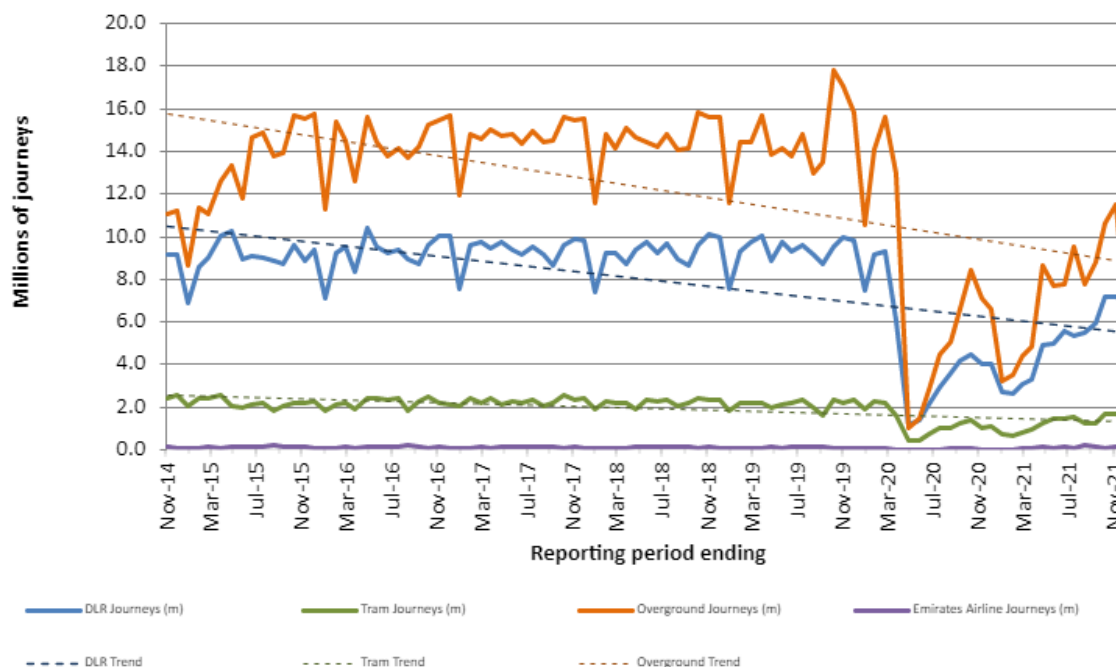
The London Overground network now covers 112 stations across six routes. TfL states that in 2016-17 more than 189 million journeys were made on London Overground.¹¹ Figure 1 shows the ridership levels for London Overground and other transport types between November 2014 and November 2021.

⁹ The GLA Conservatives do not support this recommendation. Further information is at Appendix A.

¹⁰ London Assembly Transport Committee, [Devolution of Rail Services to London](#), October 2015

¹¹ TfL, [London Overground](#)

Figure 1: Number of journeys for public transport by type between 2014 and 2021¹²



The London Overground model has been used as a basis for how rail in the UK will work in the future, particularly in its approach to getting rid of franchising. The Committee heard evidence from Keith Williams at its Transport Committee meeting in September 2021. On the Williams-Shapps Review, which began in 2018, he stated:¹³

“It looked at the replacement for franchising and the London Overground model, if you look at that, is a basic model for running rail into the future. If you look at London Overground, the operator there is essentially challenged with running an efficient operation rather than taking the revenue risk itself. I did not want to prescribe a one-size-fits-all policy, but that would be the base model. The reason for that was, if you are going to get passenger satisfaction back to the level it needs to be, you need an efficient operation.”

**Keith Williams, Chair
Williams-Shapps Review**

¹² TfL London Datastore, [Public Transport Journeys by type of journey](#)

¹³ London Assembly Transport Committee, [Transcript of Item 6 – Williams-Shapps Review](#), 13 September 2021

The Committee agrees with the conclusion of London Overground being an efficient operation; and believes that the success of London Overground shows how well it is being run by TfL, including the approach to franchising and gaining a significant increase in passengers over the time it has been in operation. Therefore, having proven its efficiency in running the London Overground network, TfL should retain control of it.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that, as part of the move to Great British Railways, existing devolved responsibilities, including London Overground, should remain devolved. TfL should retain control over the specification for the rail concessions in London.¹⁴

Finances

One of the government's aims of the Plan is for a saving of £1.5 billion a year off the current cost of the rail industry (e.g. £18.5 billion instead of £20 billion). The Plan states that as a single organisation, Great British Railways should be able to benchmark internally, monitor costs transparently, and roll out best practice more widely and quickly.¹⁵ Taking a whole-system approach to planning and delivery should enable further cost reductions, while also reducing disruption to services, in turn generating more cost savings. The Government believes this will be further strengthened by pushing cost and revenue control down to regional and local levels to bring a clear financial focus across the whole organisation. The Plan states that savings from reform will take several years to realise, but industry experts suggest that after an initial five-year implementation period, substantial annual cost savings could be achieved.

The evidence available in the Plan is limited and from the evidence heard in the Committee meetings, it is unclear at this stage where these savings would come from. At the 13 September Transport Committee meeting, when asked if the changes to the industry can be made within the £20 billion envelope of the current cost of the rail industry, with some refocusing on the platform for ticketing, Network Rail's representative confirmed he believed that was the case and was what they were targeting, however did not provide evidence of where the savings would come from:¹⁶

¹⁴ The GLA Conservatives do not support this recommendation. Further information is at Appendix A.

¹⁵ DfT, [Great British Railways: Williams-Shapps plan for rail](#), 20 May 2021

¹⁶ London Assembly Transport Committee, [Transcript of Item 6 – Williams-Shapps Review](#), 13 September 2021

“Absolutely. Also, the recognition that reform in its total sense, we are targeting a net £1.5 billion per annum off that £20 billion number as the dividend for bringing the industry together, both driving revenue and reducing costs.”

**Anit Chandarana, Chief of Staff
Network Rail**

Whilst understanding that some efficiencies may come out of this reorganisation of the railway, the Committee is concerned that the anticipated savings are unclear and this could mean cuts to services in terms of the frequency and quality, as well as raising safety issues, impacting both passengers and staff. Given that the scope of cuts has not been clarified, it could extend to any part of the railway, including operations and maintenance. This lack of clarity poses a problem for the Committee in terms of hampering scrutiny. It also means the public isn't able to question what the Williams-Shapps plan means in practice and what Network Rail and the rail industry is considering to make these savings.

Recommendation 3

The Committee is concerned about the anticipated savings in reorganising the railways; and recommends that any savings must not lead to cuts to rail services, in terms of frequency and quality, as well as cuts that may lead to safety concerns.

Freight

The Plan highlights the potential to learn from freight services as part of its transformation of the railways. Freight use of the railways has recovered quickly after an initial shock in 2020 and seems likely to take a bigger share of traffic and revenues in the future.¹⁷ The rail freight market has been transformed over the past quarter-century, from largely moving coal and steel to now moving construction materials, containers and food supplies between ports and businesses across the country.

Freight trains reduce road congestion, connect markets over long distances and are much less carbon-intensive than road freight. They have played a crucial role in keeping food and medical supplies moving during the pandemic and the Plan states that the freight sector will be key to building back better as it looks to support economic recovery across the country.

¹⁷ DfT, [Great British Railways: Williams-Shapps plan for rail](#), 20 May 2021

The Plan identifies potential areas for improvement within freight, including a new, customer-focused approach, modern track access rights and new safeguards. Alongside this there is a balance to strike between passenger and freight services.

The Committee believes there is still some work to be done on freight to make it attractive for businesses, particularly around long-term contracts, and the ability to plan ahead. Alongside this there is also some further work needed on the electrification of trains and the potential positive environmental impact. For freight and long-distance journeys there is no viable alternative to electrification that will be able to provide the required power. The Committee also believes there is always a tension between increasing freight and passenger services. We would want to see both sides of the industry coming together and coordinating activity to better use paths on the railway to maximise both passenger and freight services at the appropriate times of day.

Passenger service contracts

For the past 25 years, most passenger services on the railways have been run by franchised operators. This model saw private companies compete for the right to operate services for typically around seven years, and to manage stations and set fares in an area to a specification set out by DfT or devolved authorities, to whom they paid a fee or received a subsidy. Most operators bore the financial risks of changes in revenue and operating costs.

In the London Overground model, TfL has opted to keep its contracts relatively short, normally at about seven years, as it feels the changing landscape of London works better with shorter terms. Under London Overground's incentive model, the operator can earn bonuses on performance measures such as customer satisfaction, punctuality and staffing levels, but can also be penalised when such performance falls short.

The Plan for Rail aims to get rid of franchising and outlines that Great British Railways will not operate most trains directly but will contract with private companies to operate them on its behalf under Passenger Service Contracts. Great British Railways will specify service levels and on most of the network will set fares and take the revenue risk. The Plan states that this will get trains running on time and deliver more of the competitive private sector involvement that the railways need.

The Committee understands that the aim is to increase the quality of service, with London Overground a good example of where this type of arrangement has worked. The Plan for Rail works on the premise that passenger service contracts could open up the market to more companies and increase competition, however this may not necessarily succeed, and it is necessary to learn from what has happened in the past. The Committee therefore recommends that DfT collects further examples of best practice to ensure that this process works as well as possible.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that both the passenger and freight sides of the rail industry are brought together, to coordinate activity that will better use paths on the railway to maximise both passenger and freight services at the appropriate times of day.

Chapter two – Passenger experience

Passenger experience

Investigation

The Transport Committee's investigation heard from a number of passenger groups to help gather Londoners' and passengers' perspectives on rail in London and the Williams-Shapps review. This included understanding the issues experienced by passenger groups representing different areas of London to understand the differences in travel experiences in some areas, but also where there is consistency of the problems experienced by passengers.

The meetings covered subject areas including the future of rail; ticketing and fares; Crossrail; accessibility; and the use of technology on the railways. Local passenger groups such as the Clapham Transport Users Group were able to provide evidence of problems in local areas, and the Committee had the opportunity to explore and compare that evidence. Alongside the evidence from passenger groups, London TravelWatch presented evidence from their research that supported the views and problems explained by the passenger groups.

Alongside the evidence the Committee received on the wider changes to the rail industry, there was also significant evidence about where the Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail needs to consider the passenger experience as part of the next stage of work.

In terms of the passenger experience, the Plan for Rail states that it can be stressful, inconvenient and unsatisfactory at various points throughout a journey.¹⁸ Other conclusions included:

- passengers find pricing confusing, and fewer than half of journeys offer value for money
- at stations, some passengers find it difficult to get around and/or that there is a lack of comfortable waiting spaces
- two-thirds of disabled passengers report at least one problem when travelling by rail
- service punctuality and reliability is the number one priority for improvement amongst passengers
- one in three trains were late in 2019–20
- experience on board trains is inconsistent, from toilets and disabled access to WiFi and sockets

¹⁸ DfT, [Great British Railways: Williams-Shapps plan for rail](#), 20 May 2021

- communication to passengers before, during and after journeys is often unclear and can cause anxiety.

The Committee has identified three main areas where it recommends DfT focuses the next stage of its work, in order to ensure the Plan for Rail achieves its goals to improve the passenger experience.

Areas of focus

Customer needs

The Committee believes that customer needs are not fully addressed in the Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail. One of the areas which may need further work is how the railways are taking account of people's changing travel needs post-COVID-19.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented a significant challenge to the railways. Almost overnight, passenger numbers fell to levels last seen in the 1850s, reaching just 4 per cent of previous demand in April 2020.¹⁹ Demand estimates, published in May 2021, averaged around 65 per cent below pre-pandemic levels. Therefore, there will need to be further work to understand what the longer-lasting impact will be on passenger levels, particularly in London.

At the 12 October 2021 Transport Committee meeting, the Committee heard evidence from several passenger groups, including on the effects of the pandemic:²⁰

“Historically the railway has focused around having to deliver – particularly in London and the South East – a large number of passengers from their home to their workplace, morning and evening, Monday to Friday. Now they are in a totally different position. So much more of their travel is optional, whether that is home commuting. If a train is not there, it is not reliable, the windows are broken, all the examples that have been made, that discourages travel. There has to be this fundamental shift in attitude and mental attitude and culture from everybody to move towards working hard to get that marginal passenger on to the train, whether it is getting them to commute three times a week rather than twice, or to commute at all.”

Neil Middleton
Railfuture

¹⁹ DfT, [Transport use during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic](#)

²⁰ London Assembly Transport Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Londoner's Perspectives on Rail in London and the Williams-Shapps Rail Review Proposals](#), 12 October 2021

Therefore, it is vital that as well as understanding that travel habits may have changed, travelling on the railways must remain an attractive prospect. This includes the services available; the standard and quality of the trains; the affordability of the fares; and the possible improvement to the integration of TfL and other rail services.

Another example of customer need came from passenger groups who called for station staffing to be extended to all London suburban rail stations for passenger safety. The Plan states that improving customer service at stations large and small across the network is vital to modernising the passenger experience, and better integrating rail travel with wider transport services. However, it is important that passenger needs are properly considered and integrated.

The Committee heard from London TravelWatch that engagement with passengers was not adequately covered in the Plan for Rail. London TravelWatch expressed concern and felt that there was a lack of understanding from train companies about the nature of passengers' changing travel patterns, and about how to gain a better understanding.²¹

“For example, at the moment it is a good test: how are the railways taking account of people’s changing travel needs post COVID-19? That is the real first test. A couple of weeks ago we saw South Western Railway (SWR) embarking on a consultation for timetable changes that are going to be happening in nearly 18 months’ time, which seems ridiculous when we do not even know how people are going to be travelling in 18 weeks’ time.”

**Emma Gibson, Chief Executive
London TravelWatch**

There needs to be a better understanding of not only the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on rail travel, but also of what passengers want in other areas including the integration of TfL and other rail services; station staffing for passenger safety; reliability and punctuality; fares; and accessibility.

Understanding what customers need from the railways in the future is crucial to Great British Railways being a success. Therefore, the Rail Transformation Programme will need to ensure that passenger needs are adequately considered and analysed as part of any changes to the way the railways work.

²¹ London Assembly Transport Committee, [Transcript of Item 6 – Williams-Shapps Review](#), 13 September 2021

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that DfT places greater emphasis on passenger needs as part of the Rail Transformation Programme. This includes monitoring the long-term impacts of COVID-19 on passenger levels and travel needs; ensuring that TfL and other rail services are integrated as fully as possible; and considering station staffing for passenger safety.

Ticketing and fares

As part of the Plan for Rail, plans to extend contactless payment methods across the UK could potentially include using personal debit/credit cards as well as an Oyster card-type system, echoing what is already in place in London.

The Plan has stated that it is important to simplify ticketing and make it more transparent in order to build customer trust, which will in turn build ridership. It states there is currently a real problem with lack of trust within the industry, as passengers do not believe they are getting the cheapest fares, and that could also be an opportunity for improvement. Keith Williams stated that customer trust had peaked in 2014, with satisfaction on rail reaching 86 per cent; but added that it had been in decline from 2014 onwards. There is a fear, however, that simplification of prices may mean higher prices. The Committee is interested in the root causes of this lack of trust from passengers.

Keith Williams gave evidence to the Committee about the need for transparency with regards to ticketing as a way of building trust. He gave the example that in the airline industry, people accept that they might pay a different fare on the basis that they booked later, but it is transparent.²² Keith Williams also stated that he was advised by many not to look at ticketing as that is where the revenue comes from and it could lead to losses. The approach of the Plan for Rail is that simplified ticketing will lead to an increase in customer trust, which will in turn lead to an increase in revenue.

At the same time, there is always a risk of there being winners and losers with a change to the current system, an idea highlighted by Duncan Henry from the Rail Delivery Group:²³

²² London Assembly Transport Committee, [Transcript of Item 6 – Williams-Shapps Review](#), 13 September 2021

²³ London Assembly Transport Committee, [Transcript of Item 6 – Williams-Shapps Review](#), 13 September 2021

“There is a significant challenge to that though, which is that by simplifying the fare structure you end up with winners and losers. Of course, the losers are always more vocal than the winners. That is true of whether that is a customer or a train operator or Government. We just need to recognise how hard it will be to really deal with the anomalies and inconsistencies in the fares system.”

**Duncan Henry, Retail Strategy Director
Rail Delivery Group**

At present, the price of a return ticket is often almost the same as a single ticket. Therefore, reducing the cost of one could impact the price of the other. Duncan Henry also stated that when they carried out a study on easier fares a few years ago, about 30 per cent of prospective customers told them they would not travel on trains because they could not be sure of getting the best fare. This presents an opportunity to the industry, but it also presents an element of risk. The Committee is concerned that the risks associated with simplifying fares need to be fully investigated and discussed with relevant stakeholder groups.

At the 12 October Transport Committee meeting, the Committee heard from a number of groups on the merits of different approaches to ticketing.²⁴ London TravelWatch also expressed concerns over fares and ticketing and the need to ensure that simplification of tickets doesn't mean a rise in prices across the board.

“As far as paper tickets are concerned on the railways, one of the things that we are concerned about moving forward with GBR is that, with the simplification of tickets, passengers who take advantage of the very restricted but cheaper tickets, such as advanced-purchase tickets, that is lost and then they are priced off the railway. We know that the technology with Oyster is very out of date now. Contactless payment has the ability to be used more broadly across the country but then not everybody has that sort of card. Therefore, other alternatives should be available.”

**Susan James
London TravelWatch**

²⁴ London Assembly Transport Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Londoner's Perspectives on Rail in London and the Williams-Shapps Rail Review Proposals](#), 12 October 2021

One of the key elements of the Plan for Rail is for some of the proposed changes in the Plan to take place as soon as possible, especially around ticketing.²⁵ This includes contactless journeys and the continued roll-out of digital ticketing; introduction of flexible season tickets and delivering Pay As You Go travel. While there are benefits to these plans, the Committee believes that DfT should consider the needs of all passengers when taking these elements forward.

Passenger groups made a number of points about the merits of frictionless payments in their evidence to the Committee. This included confusion for people entering and leaving London, with some areas requiring paper tickets and some Oyster – there was support for ensuring more journeys could take place without the need for a paper ticket. Passenger groups also expressed concerns about the potential move to cashless stations, as well as the potential phasing out of Oyster cards which is seen as a trusted brand.

“...because a lot of the people in my area cross the border there is all sorts of confusion about paper tickets and Oyster, but I do not see any way of resolving that other than explaining it to people. Oyster, in my opinion, is very good. One of the advantages for people like me is that I can add my senior rail card to it. Paper tickets are still needed for lots of cross boundaries.”

Charles King
East Surrey Transport Committee

The Committee has some concerns about how far TfL will retain control over pricing and the implications for customers if fares change considerably. This also raises the question of whether fare rises will stop or reduce the return to public transport. The Committee also notes that there may be consequences if fares don't rise such as savings being made elsewhere across the network either through cutting services, or a reduction in the quality or maintenance of those services. Therefore, the Committee believes it is important that TfL, the Mayor of London, the Assembly and London TravelWatch are part of the conversation about a new simplified fares system; and that any new structure has transparency for passengers about how those fares are set. This is essential to ensure passenger trust in the system, which currently appears to be opaque to passengers.

²⁵ DfT, [Great British Railways: Williams-Shapps plan for rail](#), 20 May 2021

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that the Rail Transformation Programme examines further evidence on the root causes of a lack of trust from passengers with the current rail system, particularly with regards to ticketing and fares. DfT should ensure that TfL, the Mayor of London, the London Assembly and London TravelWatch are included in discussions about any changes to the fares and ticketing system, ensuring transparency for passengers in any future structure.

Accessibility

As part of the Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail, a new national accessibility strategy will provide the first robust, joined-up, system-wide approach to accessibility, including getting to, from and around stations, and on and off trains. The strategy will aim to introduce new, consistent standards to enable passengers to know the level of service to expect wherever and whenever they travel. This will be underpinned by improvements in training and information for staff, leading to a more inclusive culture that puts passenger needs first.

The Committee agrees that a renewed focus on accessibility in the Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail is welcome. However, it is unclear at this stage if it is going to be integrated into all the railways' functions or whether it is going to be something done by a separate unit. The Committee understands that Great British Railways will be given a statutory duty to improve accessibility but further clarity on how this will be achieved is needed. The Committee also received evidence from London TravelWatch which suggested that it needed to be "baked into the legislation" that accessibility will be joined up and considered by everyone in the future.²⁶

In terms of comparison, over half of London Overground stations now have step-free access from street to platform. A further five stations are proposed to be made step-free by 2024 as part of the Department for Transport's Access for All scheme.

Crossrail has shown how accessibility improvements can have real benefits for passengers and offer an example of what could be achieved in terms of accessibility, if it is properly prioritised, with the reform of the railways. Transport for All gave evidence to the Committee's 12 October 2021 meeting, which was extremely positive about the improvements to accessibility it has delivered:²⁷

²⁶ London Assembly Transport Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Londoner's Perspectives on Rail in London and the Williams-Shapps Rail Review Proposals](#), 12 October 2021

²⁷ London Assembly Transport Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Londoner's Perspectives on Rail in London and the Williams-Shapps Rail Review Proposals](#), 12 October 2021

“We have seen just phenomenal improvements to the Tube network in terms of accessibility as a direct result of the Crossrail works. I went to Ealing Broadway the other day and got on the Central line for the first time in my life, which was an experience. That really, really cannot be understated at all.”

Katie Pennick
Transport for All

Crossrail therefore acts as an example of what can be done; and the transformation of the railways to Great British Railways needs to ensure it capitalises on the opportunities to improve accessibility for all passengers. However, improvements to accessibility in London shouldn't be reliant on a large capital project and its knock-on impact. Instead, there is a need for improvement across the rail network, which should help to make using the railways a more appealing and achievable option for all.

The evidence received by the Committee found that consistency across the network is one of the most desired elements of accessibility on the railways. This includes consistency of training for staff, as well as consistency of facilities. Alongside this, there are measures that can make a big difference to railway users and could be integrated across the network as part of changes to the railways. These include passenger assist (pre-booked assistance at a station); level boarding (where the platform is flush with the train); tactile surfaces (to assist visually impaired passengers); and options such as boarding ramps and turn-up-and-go services that are reliant on staff being available at stations. Passenger groups felt that staffing was necessary at all suburban stations in order to improve health and safety for all.

The Committee heard that the current fragmentation of how railways are run is a big reason for a lack of consistency across the rail network.

“In terms of accessibility, fragmentation is the same sort of story. It is entirely dependent upon the particular train operating company (TOC) that runs the service that you are using that gives you the particular service that you will experience. Each TOC sets its own accessible travel policy and the variations of this between TOCs is so huge. You could be going from one part of the country to another part of country and the service that you will receive in terms of assistance, boarding the train and getting off the train will differ from station to station.”

Katie Pennick
Transport for All

There is therefore a need for improvements across the rail network, in a way that allows passengers to turn up and use the railway without any problems. Alongside this, passenger groups want to see more of a focus on level boarding as an important safety measure. Understanding the needs of local communities should be an important part of the process for the next phase of work, and there is an opportunity for communities to be involved in station improvements. DfT therefore should ensure that local communities are properly included in consultation processes.

Passenger groups also gave evidence that enhanced technology could be beneficial for improving accessibility outcomes. Transport for All gave evidence to the Committee that TfL has a complex strategic plan for step-free improvements that takes into account passenger data, demand, particular traffic flows, transport hubs, and looking at the network contextually. However, passenger groups also expressed concern that advances in technology need to be accessible for all, and not leave gaps in the system. Understanding how this will work would be much more effective if all partners (Network Rail, TOCs, etc) put their resources together and offered some consistency. The Committee is keen to understand further the possibilities for this knowledge-sharing.

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that DfT ensures accessibility is at the heart of the Rail Transformation Programme's work and any associated legislation and looks to maximise enhanced technology with different partners to improve accessibility across the network. The new GBR should ensure consistent, high-level accessibility across all of its services.

Consultation

Robust and meaningful consultation with passenger and staff groups ahead of the implementation of the Plan for Rail is essential. The Committee is aware of the consultation process for the Plan itself, but believes it is extremely important to ensure that passengers and staff are fully engaged every step of the way, helping to shape the new railway structure and systems. The TfL central model may be one of the best ways to take this forward.

At the 12 October 2021 Committee meeting, passenger groups emphasised the importance of stakeholder engagement and consultation with commuters before implementing any changes. It was also highlighted that this process hadn't been very good previously with Network Rail and train operating companies, and that there was room for improvement in how this was approached with Great British Railways.²⁸

²⁸ London Assembly Transport Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Londoner's Perspectives on Rail in London and the Williams-Shapps Rail Review Proposals](#), 12 October 2021

“There is no proper engagement. When they slashed a third of our key services, there was no proper consultation. That was a point that was rightly accepted. We then went through a very lengthy process with Thameslink and Network Rail where they reconsulted, they carried out a survey ... We had all these meetings and we were told that the problem would be solved. Guess what? It was never solved.”

Emily Ketchin
Harpenden Thameslink Commuters Group

The Committee also heard from the Associated Society of Locomotive Steam Enginemen and Firemen (ASLEF) Trade Union that the changes to the railways, its structure, its funding and its services need to be done in partnership with the workforce as much as possible.

The Committee heard from ASLEF that the current fragmentation of the railways creates certain issues for staff and passengers, in part due to the short-termism created by the franchise system, where rail operators have not wanted to invest long-term if they may lose a contract in seven years' time. The Committee therefore recommends that any changes to the railways need to ensure consultation with the public, staff and other relevant stakeholders at an appropriate time so that their views can be taken into account.

Recommendation 8

The Committee recommends that through the Rail Transformation Programme, DfT must ensure that it carries out thorough and robust consultation with passengers, railway staff and other relevant stakeholders ahead of the implementation of changes outlined in the Plan for Rail, so that those who use and work on the railway, can shape its future.

Appendix A

Minority Report from the GLA Conservatives

The GLA Conservatives have long believed that rail devolution would be beneficial for London. Whilst rail devolution is sometimes described as nationalisation, it is more true to say it is a form of localism, which would mean TfL gaining control of London's rail network, setting the contracts and then selecting a private operator or operators to actually run the trains.

However over the last six years we have been scathing about many of the decisions made by the current Mayor with regard to TfL. We have frequently warned the Mayor that decisions such as freezing TfL fares were significant mistakes and that, furthermore, those mistakes were making it less likely that the Government would trust TfL with the devolution of mainline rail. The Mayor has exacerbated these concerns by making clear that, were devolution to happen, he would extend his fares freeze to mainline rail fares.

Given this, given the dire financial state of TfL and given that the introduction of Great British Railways is a significant change to the structure of mainline rail in Britain, the GLA Conservatives do not believe that now is the time to devolve mainline rail in London. Therefore we cannot agree to 'Recommendation 1'.

In fact, we would argue that it makes more sense to allow Great British Railways to bed in and to assess the state of TfL before giving any further consideration to rail devolution. As this report notes, it is positive that "the model used by TfL for London Overground has been considered and is being used as the basis for the model for what will become Great British Railways." However, it may be that this removes some of the advantages of rail devolution, whilst avoiding the disadvantages – such as the lack of democratic accountability for those from outside London. This being the case, we cannot agree to 'Recommendation 2'.

Other formats and languages

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Chinese

如您需要这份文件的简介的翻译本，
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Vietnamese

Nếu ông (bà) muốn nội dung văn bản này được dịch sang tiếng Việt, xin vui lòng liên hệ với chúng tôi bằng điện thoại, thư hoặc thư điện tử theo địa chỉ ở trên.

Greek

Εάν επιθυμείτε περίληψη αυτού του κειμένου στην γλώσσα σας, παρακαλώ καλέστε τον αριθμό ή επικοινωνήστε μαζί μας στην ανωτέρω ταχυδρομική ή την ηλεκτρονική διεύθυνση.

Turkish

Bu belgenin kendi dilinize çevrilmiş bir özetini okumak isterseniz, lütfen yukarıdaki telefon numarasını arayın, veya posta ya da e-posta adresi aracılığıyla bizimle temasa geçin.

Punjabi

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਸ ਦਸਤਾਵੇਜ਼ ਦਾ ਸੰਖੇਪ ਆਪਣੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਲੈਣਾ ਚਾਹੋ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਇਸ ਨੰਬਰ 'ਤੇ ਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ ਜਾਂ ਉਪਰ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਡਾਕ ਜਾਂ ਈਮੇਲ ਪਤੇ 'ਤੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ।

Hindi

यदि आपको इस दस्तावेज का सारांश अपनी भाषा में चाहिए तो उपर दिये हुए नंबर पर फोन करें या उपर दिये गये डाक पते या ई मेल पते पर हम से संपर्क करें।

Bengali

আপনি যদি এই দলিলের একটা সারাংশ নিজের ভাষায় পেতে চান, তাহলে দয়া করে ফো করবেন অথবা উল্লিখিত ডাক ঠিকানায় বা ই-মেইল ঠিকানায় আমাদের সাথে যোগাযোগ করবেন।

Urdu

اگر آپ کو اس دستاویز کا خلاصہ اپنی زبان میں درکار ہو تو، براہ کرم نمبر پر فون کریں یا مذکورہ بالا ڈاک کے پتے یا ای میل پتے پر ہم سے رابطہ کریں۔

Arabic

الوصول على ملخص لهذا المستند بلغةك،
فجراء الاتصال برقم الهاتف أو الاتصال على
العنوان البريدي العادي أو عنوان البريدي
الالكتروني أعلاه.

Gujarati

જો તમારે આ દસ્તાવેજનો સાર તમારી ભાષામાં જોઈતો હોય તો ઉપર આપેલ નંબર પર ફોન કરો અથવા ઉપર આપેલ ટપાલ અથવા ઈ-મેઈલ સરનામા પર અમારો સંપર્ક કરો.

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