

Launch of Project SPEED challenges rail industry to cut time and costs of rail upgrades

- Rail Minister officially unveils the rail Project SPEED approach, focused on halving the time and significantly reducing costs of delivering rail infrastructure projects
- innovative ways of working and simplification of processes to be rolled out across all rail upgrades
- new approach builds on the Prime Minister's new taskforce, [announced last June](#), to complete public investment projects more rapidly and at lower cost

The government has challenged the rail industry today (26 February 2021) to pioneer new ways of working that will halve the time and reduce the cost of delivering critical infrastructure projects, as the country builds back better out of coronavirus (COVID-19), with the launch of the next stage of rail Project SPEED.

In a keynote speech at the Project SPEED conference today, hosted by the Rail Industry Association, Rail Minister Chis Heaton-Harris invited the 1,800-strong virtual audience to get on board with the new approach to become faster, smarter and more efficient in the way that projects are delivered.

Rail Project SPEED (Swift, Pragmatic and Efficient Enhancement Delivery) was jointly developed by the Department for Transport (DfT) and [Network Rail](#) last summer. [Infrastructure projects](#) at different stages of development have been reviewed to identify how government funding could go further and work could be carried out faster.

This approach identified 10 key themes to lower costs and speed up the delivery of infrastructure schemes, such as rapidly increasing the use of innovative construction methods and removing complexity from planning processes.

These new and innovative ways of working will be rolled out across all rail upgrades, with the intention of:

- ensuring passengers experience better journeys more quickly
- giving greater value to taxpayers
- transforming the pace and way in which our railways are improved

A project already benefitting from Project SPEED principles is the [scheme to reopen the Northumberland line between Ashington and Newcastle-upon-Tyne](#), which closed to passengers in 1964 as part of the Beeching cuts.

Northumberland County Council, DfT, Network Rail and AECOM have collectively worked to identify opportunities to bring this into service as quickly as

possible. This could take months off the schedule and deliver efficiencies that save millions from the programme.

Rail Minister Chris Heaton-Harris said:

The whole country has relied on the transport industry over the past year to keep the country moving, supplies delivered and key workers to their jobs saving lives. We are now depending on transport to kickstart our economic recovery.

Rail Project SPEED, forged alongside Network Rail, is a call to arms to cut unnecessary red tape, be bold and purposeful, and empower the railway to be radical in its thinking to halve the time and reduce the cost of delivering infrastructure projects.

By maximising the benefits of every pound that we're channelling into rail, we will make the case for continued investment. Our intention is to create a more resilient, resourceful and robust railway, equipped for the challenges ahead and delivering better for its passengers, as we build back better from COVID-19.

Andrew Haines, Network Rail's chief executive, said:

There has never been a more important time to make the case for rail. The pandemic has spurred us to make real progress in removing barriers that have long hindered industry transformation.

But, of course, there is still much more to do, and we will do that faster and more effectively when we work together across the industry.

At today's conference, the Rail Minister has called on the supply chain to come up with creative ideas where they can help reduce the cost of delivering infrastructure projects, with the best ideas set to be recognised in future industry awards.

The launch of rail Project SPEED builds on the new [Acceleration Unit](#), announced by Transport Secretary Grant Shapps in August 2020, to complete public investment projects more strategically and efficiently.

The DfT's new unit brings together transport experts, ministers, businesses, local government and other specialists to inspire fresh ideas, getting to grips with opportunities to improve infrastructure delivery, and help transport share best practice and learn from other industries.