MAGELLAN

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WHITE PAPER

Connected Britain: Rail Reform and Devolution

National scale, local control





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01 \ PREFACE

Rail reform and devolution are happening together, and the creation of Great British Railways (GBR) presents an opportunity for customers across Britain to benefit from a fully integrated, digital-first transport system, giving them an informed view of their end-to-end journey.

A stronger national railway will help regional authorities deliver transport that reflects local needs, but in order to deliver these benefits, a modern railway needs the technology that can support its operations and give regional transport authorities practical access to data, information, retailing and payments.

Through this white paper, Magellan makes the case for a GBR Technology Strategy that would define a national digital foundation which every region can connect to, with local freedom over how services are delivered and presented to customers.

A Technology Strategy should combine a ten-year direction with a rolling three-year delivery programme, reviewed annually. It should commit GBR to better customer outcomes while allowing the technologies used to achieve them to change. Customers should benefit from clearer information, simpler payments and more personal support while longer-term investment in infrastructure and rolling stock proceeds. Regional authorities should gain practical access to national digital capabilities that they can use to meet local needs. [1]

02 \ EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The UK is accelerating its programme of devolution. By 2028, every part of England will have a devolved strategic authority, with potential powers over the transport system.[2]

Stronger devolution of transport powers will achieve much more if the national rail system provides open access to its data and uses its digital systems to act as the unifying mode for the UK transport network. It is this vision that drives Magellan to refer to rail as the 'national spine' of the UK's transport network.

Magellan believes that these capabilities are best delivered through a Technology Strategy, set by GBR, which outlines the digital capabilities GBR will provide, thus allowing regional transport authorities to integrate with rail without costly bespoke systems and share relevant data with one another through agreed rules. This will provide customers across regions with a fairer and more consistent standard of service and reduce the risk that devolution creates new barriers between networks.

There are three key outcomes of a Technology Strategy that all contribute to a better customer experience:



Better door-to-door journeys: customers can plan and pay for journeys across participating networks through their chosen service, receive reliable onward travel information and find suitable alternatives when a disruption occurs.



A simpler route to devolution: regional authorities can connect existing systems to national rail capabilities, use shared services where appropriate and exchange relevant data without repeatedly building bespoke connections.



Better use of existing services and public money: operators and authorities can reduce duplicated digital investment, identify weak connections and use capacity more effectively. These improvements could reduce operating costs and support a more financially sustainable network. The Strategy should measure whether these savings occur and how they benefit customers.

GBR's Technology Strategy should establish a **right to connect**, set the standards for the digital delivery of local transport and give regions a role in setting the governance framework.

The Strategy should be judged by whether there is increased uptake of public transport, whether customers can make better, more seamless journeys, whether authorities can integrate services at a reasonable cost and whether transport operators can access and use information and capacity more effectively.

Better access to a higher quality of transport is an engine for economic growth in every postcode, improves social cohesion and gives people a wider choice of employment, education and training opportunities. People in West Yorkshire should benefit from this as much as people in Greater Manchester, and customers regularly travelling between regions should experience one seamless journey.[3]



03 \ DEVOLUTION NEEDS A CONNECTED RAILWAY

England's devolution settlement is changing.

The Devolution White Paper aims to extend strategic authority coverage across England and strengthen the role of local leaders so they can better leverage their understanding of the challenges and opportunities in their area.[4] It gives transport a central role in that settlement. But the transfer of responsibilities is phased, and authorities will not all have identical powers. Having strategic transport responsibilities does not automatically mean having control over local rail services.[5]

This distinction matters because local leaders who are given the powers to improve how people travel across their area will be faced with obstacles as soon as a customer needs to use the rail network to get from point A to point B. This could manifest in mismatched fares, a lack of information and no alternative routes provided when journeys go wrong.

The Railways Bill will create GBR as a national body responsible for bringing the railway together and ending decades of fragmentation. The opportunity is to make national coordination support regional independence and integration. Centre for Cities argues that rail reform also needs to address commuter rail's local role and its connections with other modes and networks serving the same urban labour markets. It identifies rail as a missing piece of integration in many large cities.[6]

The same challenge applies beyond major cities. Regions differ in the modes they operate, their technical capacity and the powers they hold. A national framework should make it easier for each authority to connect to rail rather than require each one to build its own technical and commercial arrangements.

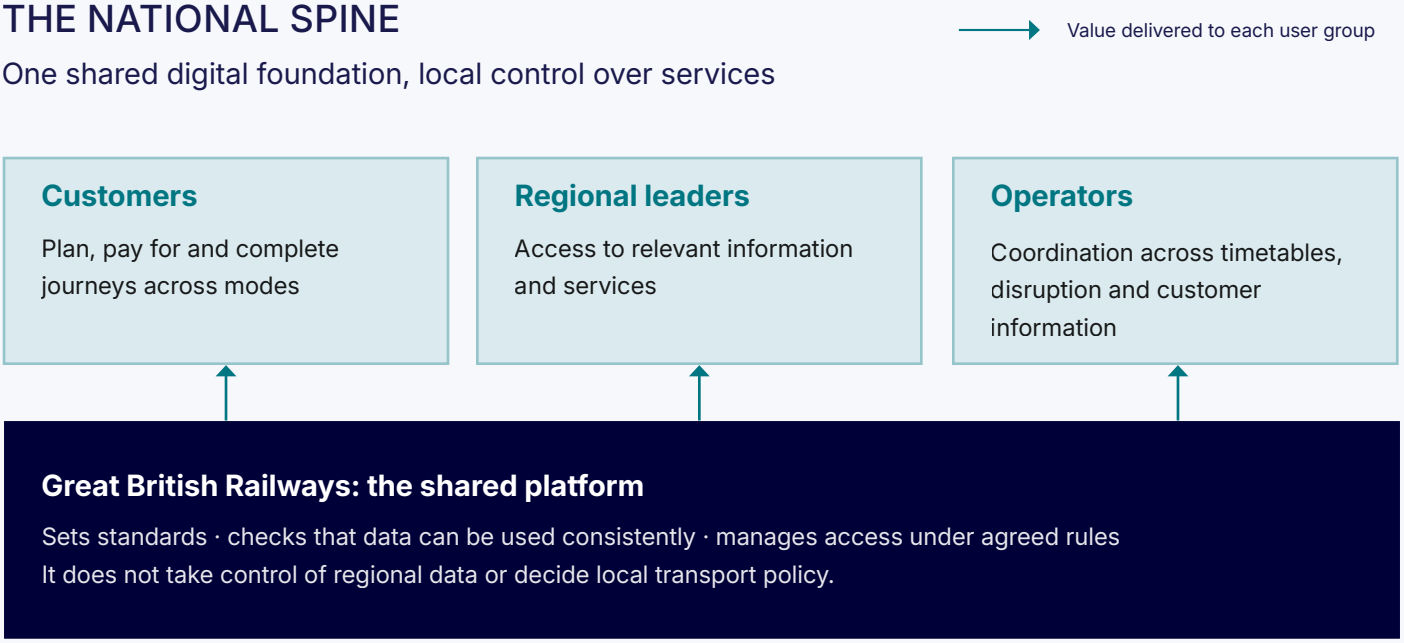
This is how a national railway can support *local control* without creating a separate system for every place.

\ THE NATIONAL SPINE

We use the term **‘national spine’** to describe rail’s digital role in connecting national and regional transport systems. GBR should make core rail capabilities available to regional authorities and enable them to exchange relevant information through common standards and shared services.

THE NATIONAL SPINE

One shared digital foundation, local control over services



Three elements must work together. Technical integration or orchestration allows systems to exchange reliable information. Commercial agreements determine how tickets, concessions, payments and revenue work across networks and between operators. Clear governance establishes who maintains the data, supports the customer and resolves problems. A technical connection alone cannot make a ticket valid on another operator’s service, or determine who pays when a journey goes wrong.

For customers, this will mean clearer choices and fewer gaps between different parts of a journey. **For authorities**, it will mean access to information and services that support local decisions. **For GBR and other operators**, it will support coordination of the shared digital foundations while allowing regions to retain control over their transport priorities, local products and customer channels.

The system should also present options fairly across modes. Rail’s national role should help customers to find the journey that meets their needs, whether their onward connection involves a bus, tram, micromobility or any other service. Digital integration can personalise this support and remove friction in a way that today’s and tomorrow’s customers increasingly expect.





04 \ INTEGRATION WILL DELIVER ECONOMIC GROWTH AND PRACTICAL **BENEFITS FOR CUSTOMERS**

Integration matters because access to jobs, education, training and services depends on the whole journey working.

A train may cover the longest distance, but a customer's ability to take the train can depend on whether their connecting bus arrives in time, whether the interchange is accessible, whether fares are clear and whether disruption information and advice on alternative routes cover the whole journey.

In 2025, Centre for Cities estimated that better integration of existing transport networks could bring 1.2m more people within a 30-minute public transport journey of the centres of six large English cities, potentially leading to £17bn more economic output from the resulting productivity gains. Centre for Cities' proposal includes improvements to bus frequency and journey times and better connections between modes.

Better connected transport is one of the most accessible levers decision-makers have to increase access to economic opportunity.[7]



BETTER INTEGRATION OF EXISTING TRANSPORT NETWORKS COULD BRING...

1.2m

more people within a 30-minute public transport journey of the centres of six large English cities

£17bn

of potential additional economic output from the resulting productivity gains

A 2026 Centre for Cities briefing makes the link to rail more directly. It argues that a third of estimated connectivity benefits from its earlier analysis would depend on greater devolved powers over rail, including the ability to integrate ticketing and synchronise timetables with other modes.[8]

These findings support a practical partnership between GBR and regional authorities. The Urban Transport Group's 2026 principles for a GBR that works for places call for national coordination and shared services alongside empowered local railway teams. They also seek detailed information on costs and revenues, near-real-time service performance data and access to evidence for evaluating local investment.[9]

Digital capabilities can make those partnerships more effective. Authorities need a consistent view of service performance, transparent revenue attribution and usable information about customer demand. Shared national services should make that evidence easier to obtain and use, while local teams retain responsibility for decisions about their networks.[10]

05 \ WHAT DOES ‘A RIGHT TO CONNECT’ MEAN?

A **right to connect** is a commitment from GBR to give regional authorities a way to discover what capabilities are available, how to access them and what technical and governance requirements apply.

At a minimum, the **right to connect** should cover:

01

Open, standardised service data

On timetabling, fares, disruption and capacity, made available through interfaces with clear rules.

02

Reciprocal data provisions

And controlled cross-region access for local authorities so customers can make seamless journeys between regions.

03

Journey planning and customer information

That presents rail as part of a wider regional network.

04

Ticketing and payment interfaces

Which give local authorities and their trusted delivery partners the ability to connect local products and payment options with rail.

05

Fares and settlement services

With clear processes for calculating, apportioning and reconciling revenue when a journey crosses networks or modes.

06

Governance and support

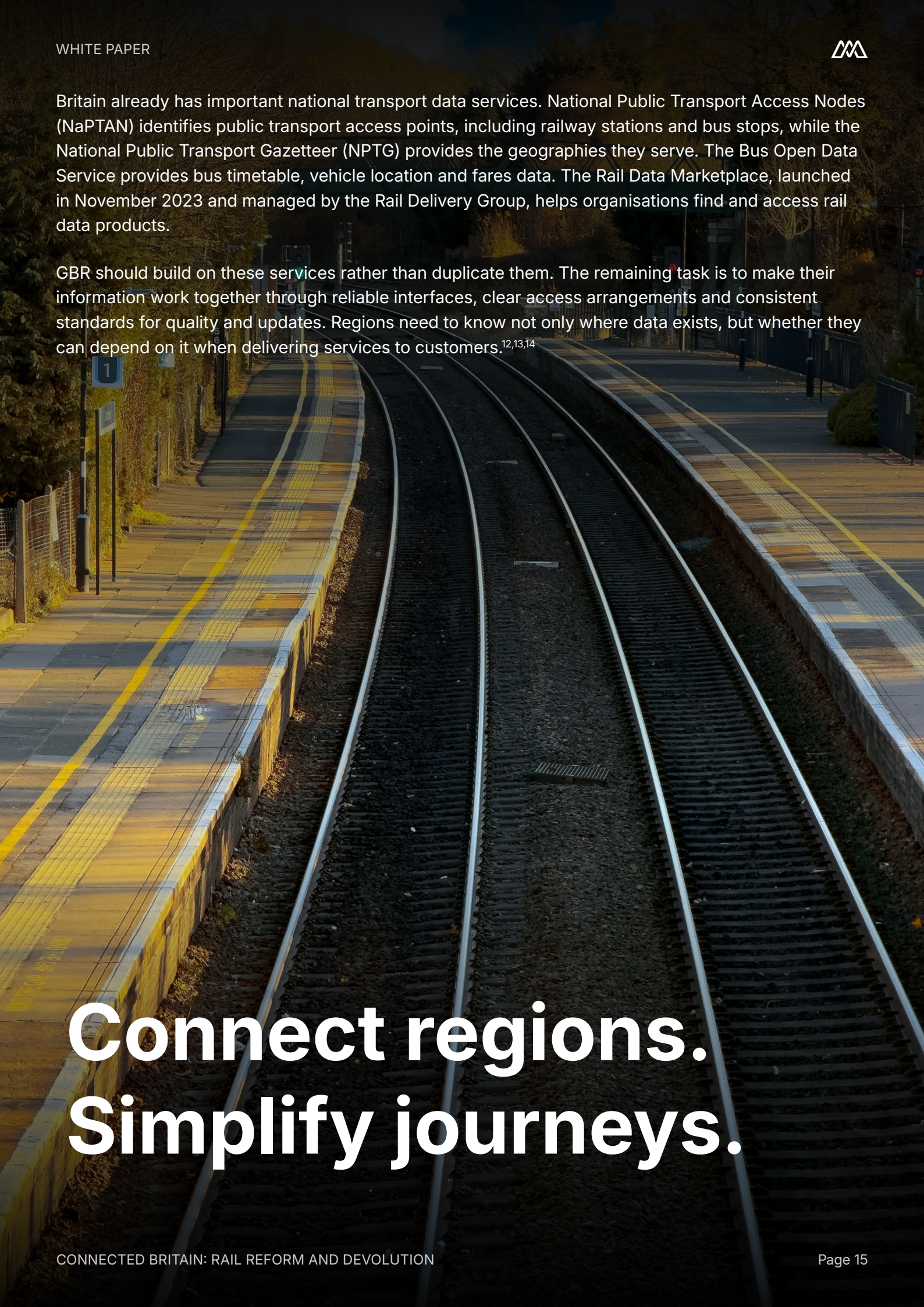
Including named contacts, service levels, security requirements and a route for authorities to raise issues and propose changes.

The DfT’s **Better Connected** (2026) Strategy sets a welcome direction of travel that includes simpler payments and information, integrated ticketing, open data and support for local leaders. Its account of rail retailing describes how national capabilities can operate alongside different retailers and local payment preferences. The Technology Strategy should turn these policy aims into a delivery plan with responsibilities, standards and milestones.[11]

The “open” in open data should be carefully defined. Non-personal transport data and service interfaces should be available on fair, transparent terms, without prohibitive access fees or bespoke negotiations that would prevent equitable access for regions. The **right to connect** is a right to use the relevant public digital infrastructure under clear conditions.

Britain already has important national transport data services. National Public Transport Access Nodes (NaPTAN) identifies public transport access points, including railway stations and bus stops, while the National Public Transport Gazetteer (NPTG) provides the geographies they serve. The Bus Open Data Service provides bus timetable, vehicle location and fares data. The Rail Data Marketplace, launched in November 2023 and managed by the Rail Delivery Group, helps organisations find and access rail data products.

GBR should build on these services rather than duplicate them. The remaining task is to make their information work together through reliable interfaces, clear access arrangements and consistent standards for quality and updates. Regions need to know not only where data exists, but whether they can depend on it when delivering services to customers.[12,13,14]



Connect regions. Simplify journeys.

\ FREE ACCESS AND FAIR COST

Magellan's position is that the core connection should not require each region to pay to recreate or separately procure national rail data capabilities.

That does not mean that every local product or service must be free to build or operate. Authorities may choose to develop their own customer channels, concessions and integrations. The Technology Strategy should distinguish the shared national capabilities GBR will provide from optional local services and set out any costs incurred transparently. The starting point of our proposed Technology Strategy should be that providing connections to core national rail data and interfaces is a standard part of GBR's public role.

This would help ensure that smaller or less well-resourced authorities can connect their services to rail without accepting a poorer customer experience because they cannot afford bespoke systems.



06 \ THE TECHNOLOGY STRATEGY - AN OPERATING MODEL

A Technology Strategy should describe how GBR and regional authorities will operate as parts of one integrated transport system while retaining their respective responsibilities.

The national service offer:

The core rail data, interfaces and shared capabilities GBR will provide, their terms of access and the service standards they will meet. This should also be available to freight and open-access passenger operators, with access governed by the purpose and sensitivity of the information involved.

Responsibilities:

How GBR will work with DfT, existing data service owners,regional authorities and operators. Each organisation should remain responsible for maintaining and correcting its source data.

Common standards:

Requirements for data exchange, accessibility, security and customer protection, including how participating organisations demonstrate that their systems meet them.

Regional and supplier participation:

How authorities shape priorities and how accredited providers can develop services using common capabilities.

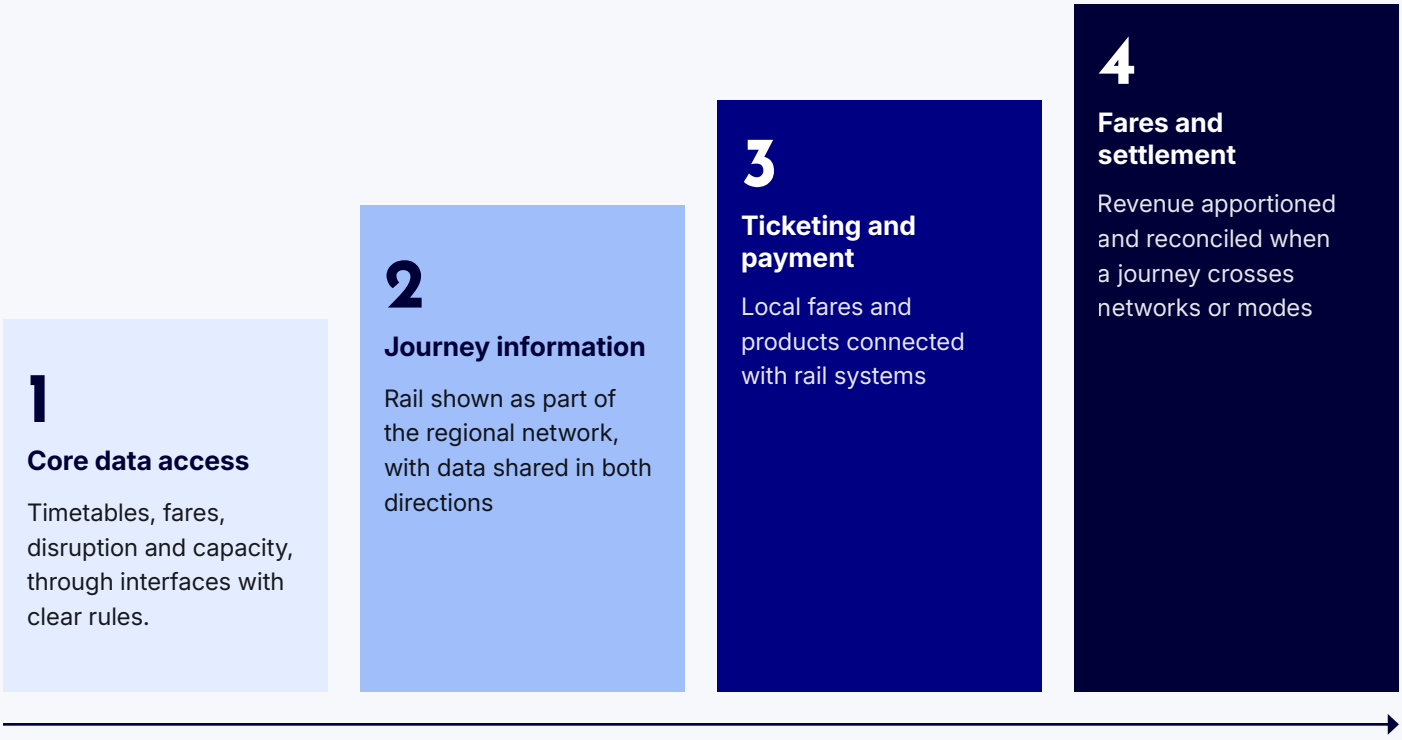
Delivery and accountability:

Milestones, performance measures and annual reporting on customer benefits, integration costs and service quality.

Authorities should have different routes to participation. Larger networks may principally need reliable connections between sophisticated existing systems. Smaller authorities may benefit more from shared, ready-to-use services and technical support. Neither should have to replace functioning regional systems simply to connect to rail.

A STAGED ROUTE TO CONNECTION

Each authority starts with basic data access and goes as far as it chooses



Increasing integration, at each authority's own pace

Every authority can access GBR's core data and digital services without taking on responsibility for commissioning or operating rail services.

Core national data and interfaces should be available to regional authorities without access charges. The Strategy should distinguish these from optional local products and additional services, with any associated costs set out transparently.

\ REGIONAL GOVERNANCE

Regional authorities should help shape the shared services, access rules and delivery priorities. GBR should provide national assurance while authorities retain control over local fares, concessions, travel priorities and customer channels. Competing providers should be able to build services on these common foundations.



07 \ THREE OUTCOMES FOR CUSTOMERS AND REGIONS

Outcome 1: Better door-to-door journeys

Customers should be able to see the information they need for the whole journey, including services beyond their home region. Someone travelling by bus, rail and local transport between Chester and North Wales should be able to understand the connections, fares and assistance available across the journey. A passenger travelling from Newcastle's Metro network to London by rail should receive relevant, targeted onward travel information through the service they choose.

These are different journeys, but the requirement is the same: organisations must be able to share information and explain which tickets and products apply. Where commercial agreements allow, shared payment and settlement capabilities should also make purchasing simpler.

Digital integration must support people who cannot or do not wish to use a smartphone. Customers should be able to access the underlying services through appropriate channels, including smartcards, bank cards, physical tickets, retail outlets and assisted services. People without bank accounts must also retain practical ways to travel. The objective is to improve systems behind the customer experience without making ownership of a digital device a condition of access.[15]

The 2026 Rail Replacement Location Data pilot shows how shared data can solve a practical customer problem. It records replacement bus pickup and dropoff points and links them to railway stations and existing NaPTAN stops. A journey planning service could use this information to direct a customer to the correct replacement bus location when their train journey changes.

GBR could build on this work by connecting location data with relevant service, disruption and accessibility information. The customer should receive useful instructions for completing their journey during disruption.

Outcome 2: A simpler route to devolution

Authorities should not need to build bespoke links to rail before they can connect local transport services. Common standards and shared digital services would give them a practical starting point and reduce duplicated technical work.

The sharing should work in both directions. Regional authorities should be able to provide relevant local data – such as bus services, connections, accessibility and disruption information – to GBR through agreed standards. GBR should then make the relevant data available to other participating authorities and transport partners. For example, West Yorkshire could share data with GBR, which could make it available to Greater Manchester where it supports journey planning or operational coordination. Greater Manchester should be able to share relevant data in return.

GBR's role would be to provide the common data service: setting standards, checking that data can be used consistently, and managing access under agreed rules. It would not take control of regional data or decide local transport policy. Authorities would retain responsibility for the quality of data they provide and for their own services.

Norway's Entur illustrates how national data services can support different customer channels. In January 2024, Norway's national auditor recognised Entur's contribution to collecting and sharing information, noting that Google Maps, regional operator Ruter and train operator Vy used its data.

The same audit found weaknesses in ticket availability, incentives and governance. Shared data had not, by itself, delivered a complete customer offer. Entur subsequently reported wider ticket availability by the end of 2024 and that some counties had retired their separate journey app in favour of Entur. The lesson is that common services can support reuse and regional choice, but successful integration also requires clear responsibilities and agreements between participating organisations.[17]

The Centre for Cities analysis shows why local powers matter to integration: its estimated connectivity gains rely in part on the ability to coordinate modes. Its rail briefing argues that local commissioning and greater local influence can better align commuter rail with local transport networks. That supports a case for enabling authorities to connect digitally, without requiring them all to take on the same responsibility for rail services.[18]

Shared data standards are critical to reducing fragmentation between regions. A customer travelling from Leeds to Manchester for work should not face avoidable gaps in journey information because the authorities use different systems. The local transport offer can differ but the basic ability to share relevant data should not.

Outcome 3: Better use of existing assets and public money

A shared national data service could reduce the need for authorities to build separate links to rail data and help operators and authorities make better use of services, capacity and customer information.

Recent developments show how common digital services can reduce duplication and simplify access. In March 2024, the Rail Delivery Group reported moving its smart ticketing back office from 16 individual operator back offices to a shared cloud platform. The change made it easier to configure services and connect additional operators. It demonstrates that national capabilities can serve multiple organisations without requiring each to maintain a separate system.[19]

The National Parking Platform offers a customer-facing example. In May 2025, DfT reported that the platform operated across ten local authorities and handled more than half a million transactions each month. Drivers could use their preferred approved app at participating locations, rather than download another app when travelling to a different area.

These examples support the case for shared foundations and different customer channels. GBR should apply that principle to rail-regional integration and measure the resulting benefits: lower connection costs, less duplicated work and easier journeys. Any effect on subsidy or fares should be demonstrated separately.[20]

Shared data can also support freight planning across ports, rail and roads. The Government has set a target for at least 40% growth in rail freight moved by 2040. Better digital connections could reduce integration efforts and help coordinate these movements alongside the capacity and commercial arrangements freight requires. Common standards could also support longer-term customer and freight connections internationally.[21]

WHAT TFL'S OPEN DATA WAS ESTIMATED TO DELIVER EACH YEAR

£70-90m

saved by passengers in journey time

£12-15m

in annual GVA for the data supply chain, with around 500 direct and 230 indirect jobs

up to £130m

in total annual benefits and savings across passengers, London and TfL

London-specific estimates from 2017. They illustrate possible value but do not prove that GBR data sharing would reduce subsidy.


tfl.gov.uk/dlr
DLR
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08 \ SMART TICKETING AND THE BACK OFFICE

Smart ticketing can make it easier to create a seamless multimodal journey which combines rail with buses, trams and other local services. Account-based systems can calculate fares after a journey, apply eligible caps and concessions and support settlement between operators. For customers, this can reduce the need to understand the separate systems. For authorities and operators, it can support local products without requiring them to build the whole rail ticketing and settlement capability.

That all depends on data moving between organisations under clear, agreed rules. A regional authority needs a way to share local fares and services with the relevant national systems. GBR needs to make rail fares, ticketing and settlement data available to regional partners. Where a journey crosses authority boundaries, the systems need agreed rules for sharing the information required to calculate the fare and settlement revenue.

Ticketing is therefore more than the card, app or machine a customer uses. It depends on fare rules, reliable transaction data, useful customer support, refunds and the allocation of revenue. The Technology Strategy should cover these shared back office functions as well as the customer experience.

Rail already has national capabilities for allocating ticketing revenue between operators. The LENNON upgrade programme shows how these can evolve. Cloud migration, facilitated by Magellan, will integrate a new ORCATS allocation calculator to use data more reflective of actual passenger journeys.[22]

This gives Magellan practical experience of the national systems that regional transport products would need to connect to. Extending that capability across modes would require agreement on ticket acceptance, local fare products, refunds and revenue allocation, alongside technical connections.

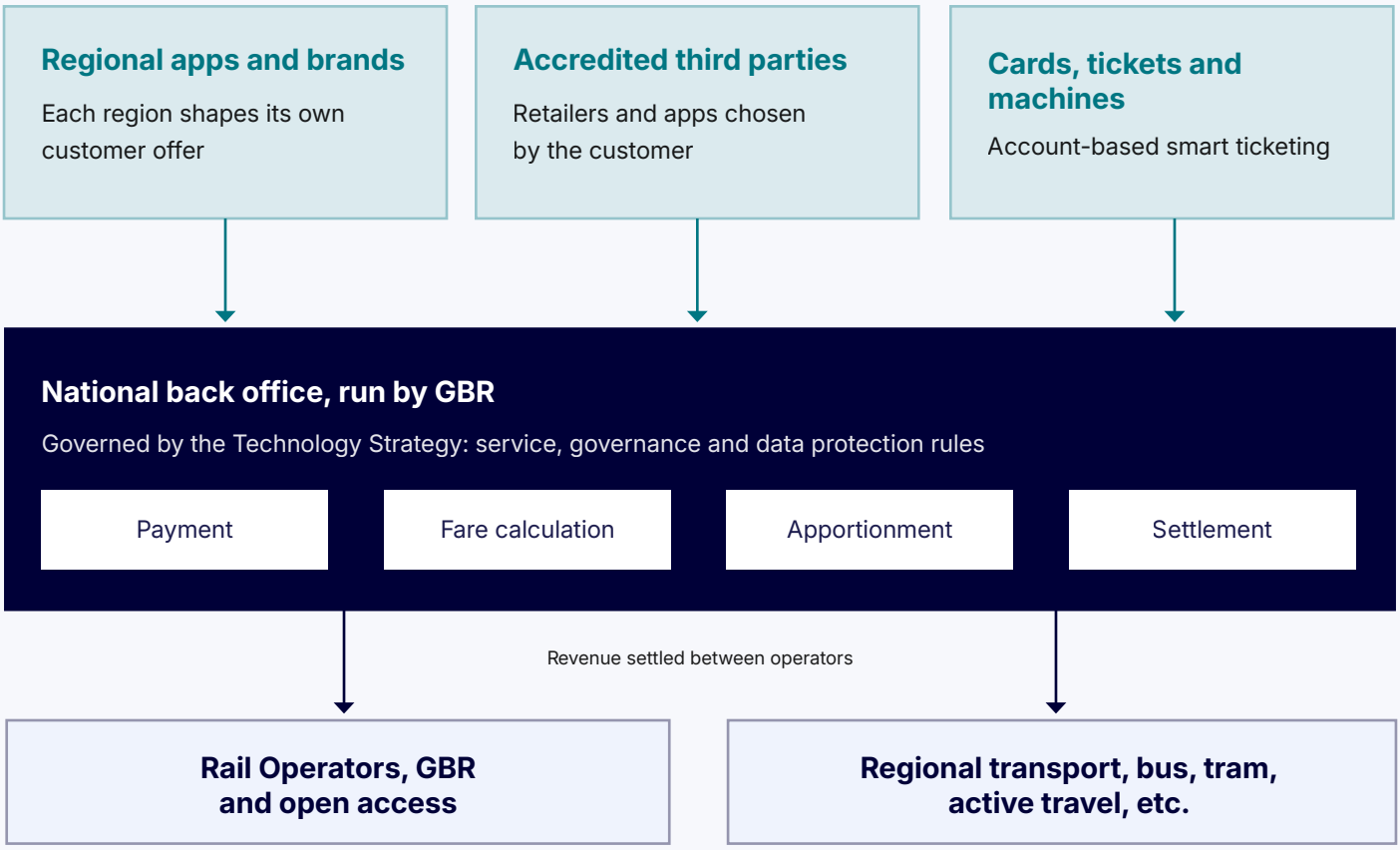
GBR should coordinate the shared framework while regional authorities retain control over local fare structures, concessions, multimodal products and mobility incentives within their agreed powers. For example, an authority could fund a discounted bus-and-rail product for apprentices, set its eligibility rules and offer mobility credits for onward travel. Shared ticketing, payment and settlement services would apply those choices and allocate revenue between participating operators.

For the customer, the local benefit should work through their chosen service, smartcard or assisted channel. For the authority, national capabilities should make its policy easier to deliver without transferring that policy to GBR. Authorities should also shape local accessibility priorities and assistance offers, within common legal requirements and national standards. Regional customer channels and competing providers should remain able to participate.

Magellan's work on France's Titre Unique offers a related lesson on how to design these sorts of systems: common national capabilities can support regional participation without requiring authorities to surrender their own transport offers or customer relationships.[23]

A NATIONAL BACK OFFICE

Shared functions behind many regional front ends





09 \ AI CAN COORDINATE A CONNECTED TRANSPORT EXPERIENCE

AI is already supporting practical rail tasks. Magellan's Rostering Co-Pilot, developed for a pilot with East Midlands Railway, combines generative AI and operational research to help identify crew shortages and match uncovered shifts with available staff. Magellan forecasts savings of up to 200 hours of control room planning each week. The purpose is to help resolve gaps more quickly; assessed pilot results should establish the savings and service benefits achieved.[24]

200 hours

Magellan forecasts savings of up to 200 hours of control room planning each week.

Customer facing applications are also in use. In July 2024 Northern reported that its AI-operated WhatsApp service had received 8,000 messages in its first year and freed up 1,277 staff hours for more complex enquiries. Customers could request live train information, disruption updates and details of onward taxi connections through a familiar channel.[25]

The next opportunity is to coordinate tasks across the systems behind a journey. **Agentic AI**, defined as systems that can select and use approved tools to carry out a sequence of tasks, has particularly exciting applications in transport. In rail, for example, an agent could work across journey planning, operational information, ticketing and assistance services, reducing the need for passengers and staff to navigate each separately.

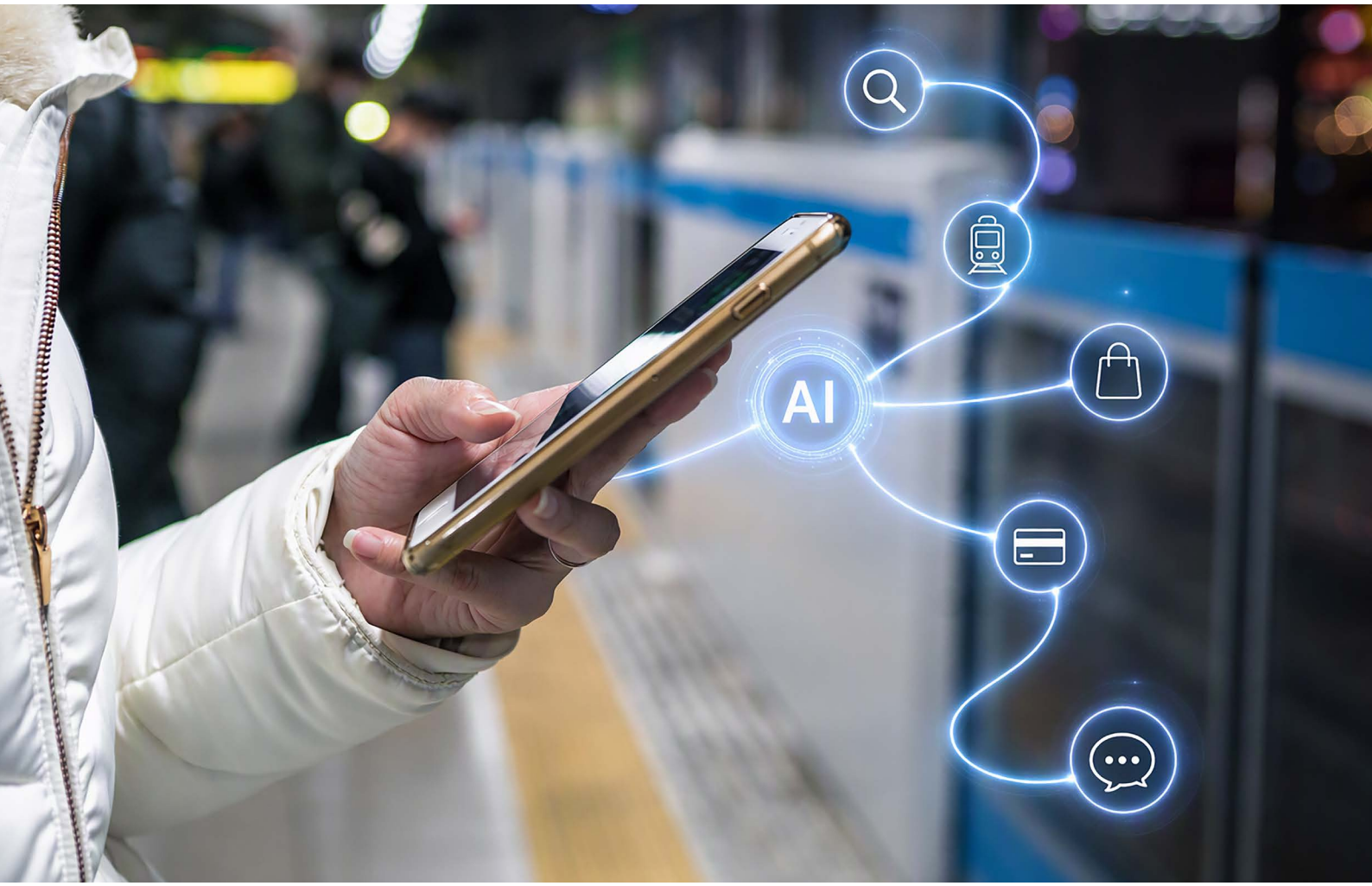
This approach could make existing systems easier to use together while targeted modernisation continues. The GBRX AI Action Plan sets a vision for shared data foundations and identifies a timetable checking agent at LNER that checks short-term changes before tickets are released for sale.[26] Entur has also published a prototype that connects AI agents to journey planning and location services. These examples show progress towards a proven end-to-end national service.

For a customer travelling between regions, a future AI-enabled experience could start with a simple request: arrive at Glasgow Central by 12:30, for no more than £30, using an accessible route. An AI agent would then consult all approved rail and regional services, compare journeys and offer options with explanations.

If disruption occurs, it could reassess the whole journey. Instead of presenting separate train, bus and tram updates, it could identify the effect on onward connections, check alternatives against accessibility and fare rules and explain the revised arrival time and cost. With the passenger's permission and the necessary commercial arrangements, AI agents could help change bookings or request assistance.

Staff would also have the same underlying capabilities available to them at stations, in contact centres and through assisted services. This would bridge the digital literacy gap and extend the benefits to customers who do not use an app and help staff provide consistent advice across organisational boundaries.

GBR's role should be to establish the trusted data, access rules and service standards that make this coordination possible. AI must work from authoritative information and defined permissions, with clear responsibility for decisions and a route to human support. The vision is one coordinated view of the customer's journey, delivered through connected national and regional systems.



10 \ DELIVERING THE TECHNOLOGY STRATEGY – BUILD IN STAGES AND MEASURE THE RESULTS

The Technology Strategy should turn the right to connect into a programme with clear steps and measures.

First publish the existing offer and the gaps.
GBR should identify the core data and services available, how they connect to existing national platforms, and what regions need that is not yet provided.

Second, assign responsibilities and agree access rules.
GBR, DfT, data service owners, authorities and operators should identify who maintains each source, how errors are corrected and what service standards apply. Sharing rules should define permitted uses, privacy safeguards and commercial conditions.

Third, pilot a connected cross-region service.
Partners should select a defined customer journey and use existing data sources to improve its planning, information and disruption support. The pilot should assess the whole customer experience, alongside data quality and integration cost.

Fourth, provide different routes to participation.
Larger authorities should be able to connect existing systems through approved interfaces. Smaller authorities should have access to shared services and support. Ticketing and settlement connections should follow clear commercial agreements.

Fifth, report on outcomes.
Annual reporting should cover:

- Connection time and cost for participating authorities.
- Accuracy and coverage of journey, accessibility and disruption information.
- Missed connections and the quality of disruption recovery.
- Customer satisfaction and the experience of people using assisted or non-digital channels.
- Additional journeys and repeat use, distinguishing growth from transfers between operators or modes.
- Reduced duplication, better use of services and any financial savings achieved.

The Technology Strategy should establish this right to connect and give regional authorities a role in shaping delivery. Success should mean easier journeys, more people choosing public transport, lower integration costs and better use of information and capacity. GBR should provide national capabilities that make local choices easier to deliver and journeys between regions easier to complete.



11 \ CONCLUSION: NATIONAL SCALE, LOCAL CONTROL

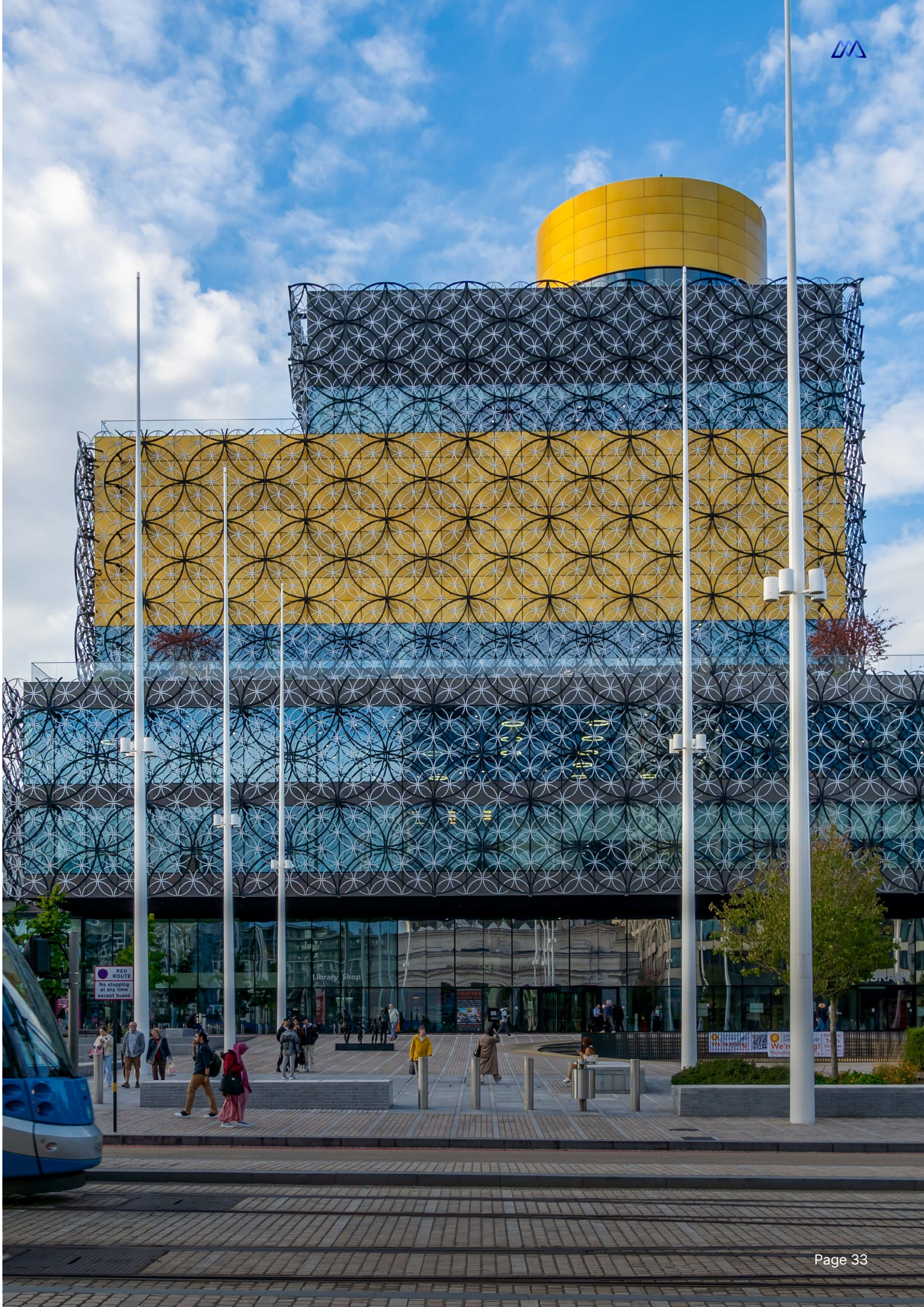
Devolution can give communities more influence over local transport. But regional authorities cannot connect their services to the national railway if they cannot access the data and digital services needed to do so – or if they cannot exchange relevant information with one another.

GBR must provide the shared standards and services that make this exchange possible. It should make rail data available to the regions, allow regions to contribute relevant local data, and support controlled sharing between participating authorities. Regional leaders should retain control over their services, data and priorities.

The Technology Strategy would establish this right to connect, explain how the shared data service will work and give regional authorities a role in shaping these arrangements.

The test is whether there is a net increase in the number of new journeys, whether customers can get better information, whether authorities can connect services at a reasonable cost, and whether operators can use information more effectively. That is how GBR can support local choices while improving access across regions.




RED ROUTE
No stopping at any time except buses
Library Shop

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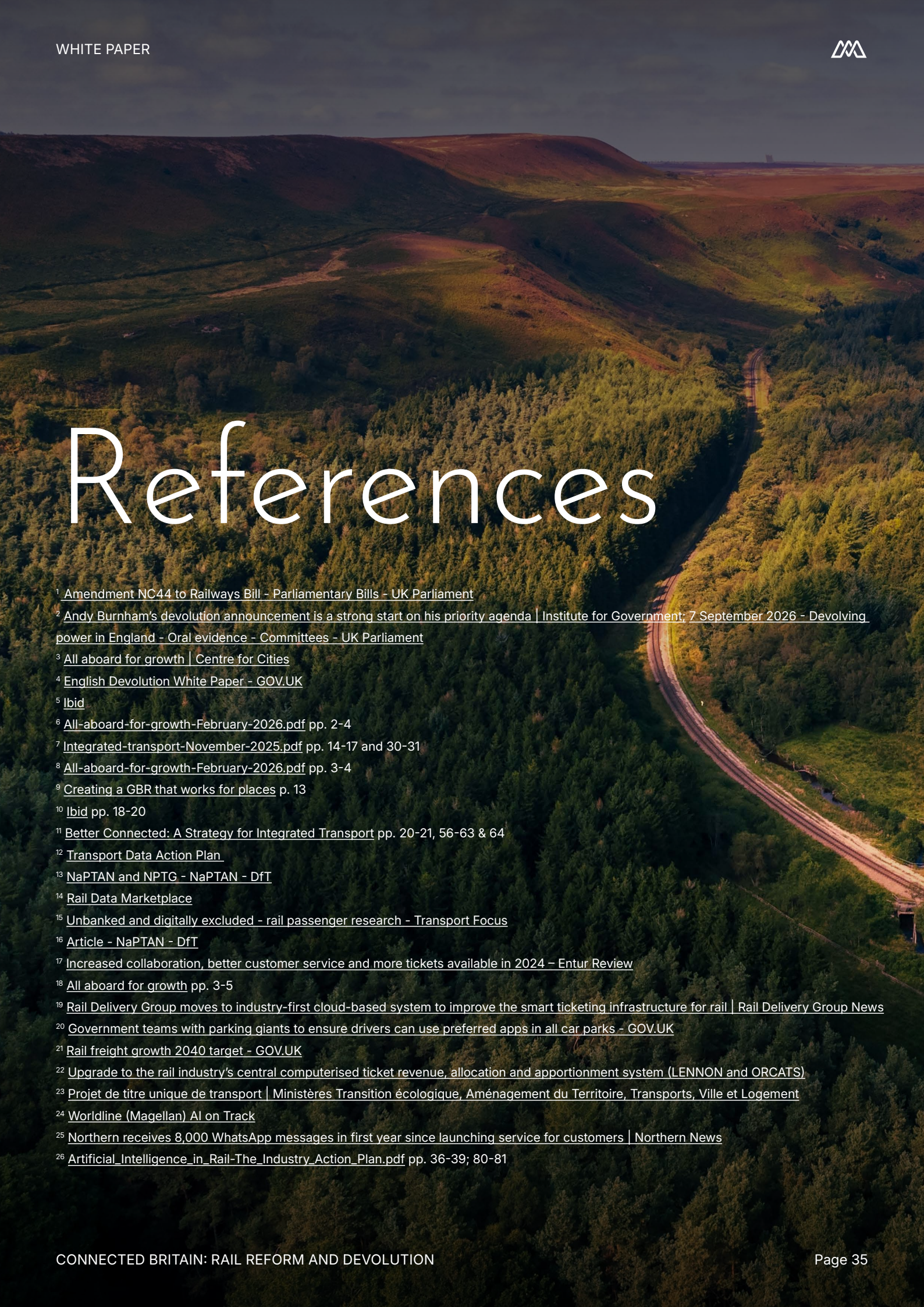
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About Magellan

Magellan supports businesses and public sector organisations by combining consultancy and technology to offer a bold approach, from strategy through to execution, bringing together business expertise, sector-specific knowledge and smart technological solutions.

Our mission: to ensure the long-term performance, resilience and security of your operations.

VISION IN ACTION

magellangroup.eu