

Briefing: What the Railways Bill means for the role of ORR

1. On 5 November 2025, the UK Government laid the Railways Bill (the Bill) in Parliament. This briefing provides a summary of how the Bill and the establishment of Great British Railways (GBR) is expected to affect the role of ORR.
2. The briefing is based on the Bill (references throughout this briefing note are to the Railways Bill as brought from the House of Commons to the House of Lords (HL Bill 25), which is referred to as the 'Railways Bill') as well as ORR's understanding of UK Government policy from key public documents such as A Railway Fit for Britain's Future - Government Response. As the Bill progresses through Parliament, further changes may be made before it becomes law. All references to Bill clauses in this document refer to the latest available version of the Bill as brought from the House of Commons to the House of Lords and published on 11 June 2025.
3. For any enquiries related to the contents of this briefing, please contact strategyandreform@orr.gov.uk.

Executive summary

4. The Bill will have a significant impact on ORR's responsibilities, leading to a change in our overall role. ORR will be undertaking a major transformation to fulfil its new role – including as an independent, expert advisor to the Secretary of State – and to integrate with the wider reform programme. This new role includes:
 - A broader monitoring and reporting role covering all of GBR's activities informed by guidance from the Secretary of State, alongside a licence enforcement role that includes long-term asset stewardship, GBR's role in the management and operation of industry retail systems, as well as standards which the Passenger Watchdog will set and monitor

and ORR will enforce;

- A reduced enforcement role in other areas, with a greater role for the Secretary of State in holding GBR to account;
- A similar role to today for ORR in a new funding process with a wider scope centred on advising funders on GBR's integrated "track and train" business plan; and
- A reduced role for ORR in relation to access and use of the network, with GBR making access decisions and setting access charges for use of the network, and ORR performing a new appeals role.

5. There are also areas where ORR functions will not be impacted directly by the Bill, including health and safety regulation, production of rail statistics, competition and consumer law enforcement, and our existing roles in relation to roads, non-GBR infrastructure managers and the Channel Tunnel. We will also continue to work closely with all operators, infrastructure managers and stakeholders who will not be part of GBR.

6. This briefing summarises the effect of the Bill on ORR's role, structured in terms of:

- The Bill's impact on what ORR does and how it does it;
- Monitoring and enforcement;
- The new funding process: the Funding Period Review;
- Access and use of the network; and
- Next steps.

ORR will play a central ongoing role in ensuring that the reformed rail system works effectively. It will act as a critical friend to both the Department for Transport and GBR – trusted to speak candidly, operate independently, and add value through expertise.

A Railway Fit for Britain's Future: Government Response

- → Next The Bill's impact on what ORR does and how it does it