

DFTO takes next steps towards Great British Railways

20.3.2026 - | Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs

Laura Shoaf and Tony Poulter join the Department for Transport Operator (DFTO) board, helping to set up Great British Railways (GBR).

- Shadow GBR moves to a new phase in March 2026 as Laura Shoaf joins the DFTO board, creating a solid foundation for the next stage of rail reform
- DFTO board also welcomes Tony Poulter, former GBR Transition Team Non-Executive Director
- developments bring experts together to continue to pave the way for the creation of GBR in 2027

A new era for railway leadership begins as Laura Shoaf and Tony Poulter are appointed as non-executive directors to the Department for Transport Operator (DFTO) board, helping to set up Great British Railways (GBR).

The appointments mark the official transition towards GBR from Shadow Great British Railways (SGBR), chaired by Laura Shoaf.

Under Laura's leadership, Alex Hynes, Chief Executive, DFTO, Richard Goodman, Director General for Rail Reform and Strategy in the Department for Transport and Jeremy Westlake, Chief Executive, Network Rail have worked together to establish improved ways of working and create the blueprint for how GBR will work in the future - a framework which is already being followed with integrated leadership in place to bring together track and train in the South East and East Anglia.

It has helped to deliver change, reduce waste and put the interests of passengers at the heart of decision making. This work leaves a powerful foundation rail leaders will build on to deliver the government's ambitious rail reforms going forward.

In her new role on the DFTO board, Laura will continue her critical role in ensuring passengers' and staff's voices are heard in the way the railway is run, now and in the future.

Tony Poulter will also join the DFTO Board, bringing significant passenger and commercial experience. As a member of the Department for Transport (DFT) Board, he has provided specialist support and strategic advice on Rail Reform. He was previously a partner at PwC.

Rail Minister, Lord Peter Hendy, said:

The leaders working at SGBR have set the standard for the future of British railways. Under their direction, teams are now working together to end years of fragmentation and inefficiency and develop creative and innovative ways of improving the rail network.

Both Laura and Tony will bring expert knowledge and experience to the DFTO board as we get ready for GBR. I look forward to working with them to deliver the reliable, affordable and modern railway passengers deserve.

Passengers are already benefiting from SGBR's work across the railway network. For example, if there's a disruption, tickets are accepted by all other publicly owned operators, so people can still reach their destinations without spending an extra penny. They also piloted innovative digital ticketing trials in Yorkshire and the East Midlands and made it easier for passengers travelling on Northern or LNER services to find journey information in one place through a single app. This work, alongside removing waste and reducing operational costs, is directly contributing to the future design and function of GBR.

Prior to SGBR, Laura was the Chief Executive of the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) and the Managing Director of Transport for West Midlands. She was also the first female chair of the Urban Transport Group and 1 of the 2 figures appointed as the UK's first 'transport champions for tackling violence against women and girls'.

Sir Andrew Haines, chair of DFTO, said:

Laura and Tony have very significant experience over a wide range of complementary sectors and will play a vital role in supporting DFTO's mission to deliver for customers and help build Great British Railways.

I look forward to working with them both as we continue the transfer programme, implement rail reform and improve performance across the network - work that will benefit passengers and represent better value for taxpayers.

More than 8,500 services are now running daily through publicly owned train operators under DFTO, helping over 660 million passengers get where they need to go each year. The DFTO board is tasked with ensuring the smooth transition to public ownership, operators are delivering value for money and a consistently better experience for passengers.

There are now 8 train operators in public ownership: LNER, Northern, Southeastern, TransPennine Express, South Western Railway, c2c, Greater Anglia and WM Trains. The next operator to move into public ownership is Govia Thameslink Railway on 31 May 2026.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/dfto-takes-next-steps-towards-great-british-railways>