

“THE RAIL SECTOR IN THE UK IS EXPERIENCING A RENAISSANCE” - AN INTERVIEW WITH TONY SIMS, DIRECTOR UK TRADE & INVESTMENT

The amount of people travelling by rail in the UK has increased exponentially in the last few years. How does the industry encounter this growth?

Indeed, we are seeing the longest sustained growth in history. Today’s network delivers 1.5 billion passenger journeys a year. This growth has outperformed key external drivers of demand, such as population or employment. Rail passenger growth in the UK is greater than in all other European countries. The UK rail industry accounts for expenditures of around £12 billion per year and provides more than 200,000 UK jobs, with around 40 percent of those in the supply chain. The rail sector in the UK is indeed experiencing a renaissance with big opportunities, such as the £38 billion of projects in the National Infrastructure Plan, Crossrail 2, HS2 & 3, electrification, the London Underground Investment and many more.

Can you tell us more about big opportunities, such as High Speed 2?

At a cost of £50 billion, High Speed Rail 2 (HS2) will provide the UK with its most important high speed, cross country rail link. The new HS2 project will provide a high speed rail connection between London, Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds, forming the ‘Y’ network. Following HS2 operations, capacity will be released on existing lines to allow them to continue services to intermediate towns and cities where trains already run at around 200 kph.

Are there further improvements for train operations?

According to a 2013 survey, rail passengers rated the UK’s railway network as one of the best major networks within the European Union. Train operations in the UK have improved significantly thanks to investment in infrastructure and asset management, also with privatisation. Train operators and suppliers have invested hundreds of millions in refurbishing depots, maintenance and service facilities to make sure trains are more reliable than ever.

What else does the future hold for the UK railway industry?

Light rail, tram and metro networks are set up to continue to grow strongly in the UK, with passenger journeys on the eight key networks increasing by 9 percent annually. The London Underground (LU) network alone makes around 1.2 billion journeys every year. This growth is set to continue well into the future, with train operators and Network Rail planning to accommodate an extra 400 million rail journeys on the mainline network by 2020.



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