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**10 December 2012
Kingsway Hall Hotel, London**

Anna Walker speech

I am delighted to welcome you all to today's event.

The aim of today's conference is simple – to encourage a debate around the benefits of increased transparency in the rail industry – for rail users, for taxpayers and rail businesses.

ORR believes that transparency really matters and can really make a difference. It gives people information which allows them to understand their choices and options better.

And as I am sure we will be hearing shortly from Norman Baker, transparency is central to the Government's drive to make public services more accountable and more responsive to their users and to stimulating businesses to improve their performance and to innovate.

In a sector like rail that receives several billion pounds of public investment every year, transparency is an absolute necessity.

It can provide a clear line of sight as to where the significant amount of public money being invested in the railway is going, what it is buying and at what cost.

It can facilitate comparisons between different parts of the sector and help to empower those who use rail services to make better informed choices.

By doing so it can help to build confidence and trust in the railways – and not only *in* the sector but *across* the sector.

This matters – because increased confidence and trust can in turn help to drive the different and better behaviours across the whole sector required to deliver better value for money and greater focus on customers.

And it matters because lack of trust breeds suspicion – that passengers are being 'ripped off' and taxpayers are not getting value for money, which in turn makes it difficult for the sector to convincingly demonstrate its commitment to delivering on efficiency and performance.

ORR firmly believes that transparency can be a powerful transformational lever and a crucial part of our drive to help make the rail industry more self-sustaining and less dependent on regulatory intervention.

That is why transparency is not only central to our Periodic Review of Network Rail but also informing our wider thinking on how best to incentivise whole-sector approaches to improved efficiency and performance.

Our vision for transparency is ambitious.

It demands more in terms of what we in ORR do to make our own processes more transparent, what we do in collaboration with the industry and in terms of what the industry itself does.

And we are already seeing delivery:

- *On information for passengers* – with the publication of complaints data, improved information during disruption and imminent publication (for the first time) of right time data
- *On comparative data* – with our on-going benchmarking of different Network Rail routes and recent analysis of train operator costs and revenues
- *On the use of public subsidy* – with our publication of data showing the extent of Government support for the railways over the past two decades
- *On encouraging greater collaboration across the sector* – for example on the publication of more disaggregated data for specific activities and regions

We of course recognise that there are risks and concerns around such issues as commercial sensitivities, data integrity and the costs of making data available.

And responses to our consultation have flagged concerns around the importance of providing a proper context for published data, of rail being compared unfavourably with other modes that are less transparent, and of GB rail being judged unfairly against European comparators.

These risks need addressing. We believe they can be and we strongly believe that the benefits of greater transparency strongly outweigh the risks, properly handled.

But there is a real debate to be had on these benefits and challenges and I hope we can use today to flush the issues out.

I am of course conscious that there is a growing body of good practice in the sector on which to build.

A good example of this is TfL's open data policy that embraces the benefits of making data freely available on behalf of passengers and recognises that third-party developers are much better at bringing new products to market. I understand, for instance, that when data on their new Bike Hire scheme was released iPhone apps were developed and available to the public within days.

Another recent example was the excellent commitment shown by franchised train operators working in collaboration with ORR to enable a detailed analysis of their costs to be published. This is a really important step in giving taxpayers and customers access to better information about what they are funding and paying for in relation to the services they are getting.

And it is also important that rail learns from the experiences of other sectors. As we have seen recently in the energy sector, simply giving consumers more information about a complex range of tariffs does not of itself make it easier for consumers to make informed decisions. This echoes findings in the financial services sector where consumers can feel swamped by information on complex financial products and we know passengers have similar concerns on ticket complexity on the railways.

What this tells us is that whilst giving consumers information is a good thing – it needs to be done in ways and at a level that they can engage with confidence.

So then, there is a lot to discuss.

I am delighted that we have such a diverse range of contributors here today who will I am sure bring a whole range of perspectives and insights to add to the debate.

I encourage all of you to listen to what they have to say, but also to share your thoughts during the course of what I hope will be an enjoyable, stimulating and challenging day!

It is now my pleasure to introduce Rail Minister Norman Baker MP.