Transcript of Explore video

Better Value Rail is a joint Department for Transport, Office of Rail and Road and Network Rail initiative to help those with an early idea for a rail infrastructure project.

The Better Value Rail toolkit helps people make better decisions earlier, identify the right transport solution, which may not necessarily be rail, saving time and money later on.

This video is aimed to help you work your way through the toolkit, explain the purpose of the tools, and how to use them.

The toolkit is separated into four different sections.

Firstly, strategy that looks at the overall objectives, explore that looks at the options for how to achieve those goals. Examine, that looks more closely at the issues involved in potential solutions, and overall a section on culture and capability around the underlying approach to project development.

In this video we will be looking at explore.

Explore is trying to help you understand what the right solution is to your problem and assumes you're considering a rail based project.

The section also helps you develop your idea to bring better value to stakeholders and to document this, to allow it to continue through the process.

The stage also helps to identify interdependencies, objectives and potential risks for all the parties involved. The overall aim is to expand on what might be needed to deliver a transport solution.

The website has a series of three videos that are meant to create an understanding of how the railway system works together and the complexities of an infrastructure change.

For people with experience in railways, some of the points here may be self-evident. But for many people, there will be useful information.

The videos helped to explain the areas you may need to consider when exploring an infrastructure change project as the railways is an interconnected system.

If you change one part, there is a knock-on effect. For example, signalling maintenance costs.

You should view these videos before the start of the Explore section to set the scene on the railway industry and its complexities.

The first tool is the early-stage specification tool, which presents a hierarchy of decisions to consider before changing infrastructure.

It helps you think about how the change you want could happen to realize the strategic objectives.

You should work through the questions in the order presented within the tool, whilst considering the problem you identified in the strategy section, as well as reflected on the cost and ease of the intervention.

An infrastructure intervention is often very costly and difficult to deliver.

For example, is there a way to deliver the strategic objectives without changing the infrastructure?

This may be a better option to consider as this will lower the complexity of the project and reduce the risks that come with the complexity.

You should explain and write out the justification which will promote the thinking and challenge that should continue through your project.

The tool may be relatively simple, but as with others it is the discussion and exploration of the issues that generates the value of this step and allows the development of the justification.

It's best to use the tool before developing any infrastructure change plans to make sure all options are being considered.

Next is the early-stage specification tool.

This tool takes the thinking about a rail project through the early stage of development and helps to build an indicative train service specification. While it's framed in language about mainline rail, the principles apply to other modes as well.

It shows the different aspects to the railway system that would need to come together to deliver the infrastructure project change you require.

This is not in as much detail as will be required further along in the process, and this reflects the early stage requirement of your project. There are challenges been built into this tool on the viability of the project. Looking at the rest of the network and other factors.

The tool is split up into four sections, but it is iterative and may take several turns as demonstrated on the flow chart presented here.

Stage one looks at the requirements and conditional outputs.

This party is about understanding the outputs of your rail project and their value. You need to make sure the outputs are tested against all the assumptions and risks.

Stage two. The indicative Train service specification (ITSS).

The ITSS is a useful tool to set out what kind of timetable infrastructure could support. It should not be seen as a requirement, but as an example of what is possible and a way to test different outcomes depending on what infrastructure is available.

It should also not be fixed as sometimes changing the proposed timetable might reduce the need for an infrastructure intervention. A key point is to consider whether reliability and performance are critical for the area you are considering as an ITSS typically does not include performance testing at this stage.

Stage three network analysis and modelling. This starts to look at the ITSS, modelled onto existing infrastructure to find pinch points that require interventions.

The reporting will detail assumptions, risks and opportunities, the range of options and capability delivered defined as train service outputs with a focus on non-infrastructure options before infrastructure options. It also looks at capability required of each intervention within a concept solution.

As information emerges throughout this process. You may need to go back to the regional hierarchy and reconsider whether rarely still the most appropriate solution to the potential cost.

You may need to revisit the multi modal assessment tool or implement the pause or proceed strategy.

You should use this tool at the early stage of a project to determine whether rail infrastructure is the best solution to the problem you've identified.

In this stage the work is becoming more complex.

And you will be likely to need the support of transport professionals in some of this analysis, and if it involves the mainline railway you should start to engage with Network Rail. By understanding what is required you can make sure you will have ready the information that these people will need to best advise you.

The next tool is the concept capture tool. This is intended to be a summary record of all the key aspects of the proposals.

Assumptions are made at this stage due to the high number of unknowns, so funders will be able to understand how this is related to the maturity of the stage in the process.

The aim of this tool is a way of recording all the information about the project in one place to allow transparency within the project.

The tool is a spreadsheet and different sections focus on different sections of your process, including engineering, safety and system integration.

You should fill in each section with a level of detail that is required at this stage of your project.

It's best to use this tool when it's been decided that rail infrastructure change is the best solution to the problem to start to build the picture of impacts, costs and benefits. You will need to revisit and update this document as available knowledge and information changes through the development of the proposals.

Again, at this point, we recommend using the pause or proceed plan before going on to the next stages of the toolkit.

It gives you an opportunity to review the project and realign it to the strategic objectives.

You should decide whether to carry on, wait for more information due to issues found in their explore stage, or consider if it’s even best to completely stop the project.

You should continue to involve stakeholders in these decisions using the plan built in the early stages and agreed together to allow a decision to be made together.

We’ve seen this tool before at the end of the strategy stage.

The tool presents different steps asking why and when you might stop or pause the project and what everybody is role in that may be. You should work through all these questions with your stakeholders and come to an agreement together on all the questions in the tool.

It's also useful to think about what would happen if you did nothing. To help consider the consequences of inaction.

It is best to do this review regularly throughout a project, especially when changes then develop may mean reviewing the strategic objectives. Asking these questions regularly should try teams to define and deliver better projects and help to manage the scope.

Make sure you engage with professionals throughout this process to get an understanding of the impact of your project. However, you need to keep this proportional to the early stage of project development. You don't need to go into a large amount of detail or spend a lot of money at this early stage.

The purpose is to get an overall understanding to share with stakeholders.

You should next move on to the examine section.

Any feedback you want to send the team would be welcome.

We're always looking to improve the site and the tools that are on it.

If you use the tools in the development of your project, we'd love to hear about that and potentially use them as case studies on our website. So please contact us.