

Call for Papers

Imagining Railways from 1900 to the Present: Places, People, Infrastructures, Texts

The project ‘Twentieth-Century Railway Imaginations: Building the Mobility and Infrastructural Humanities’ (RAILIMAGE) invites scholars from all backgrounds to submit paper proposals for its 2027 conference. We also warmly encourage early-career researchers to apply.

The conference takes a diachronic view of railways focused on how people have experienced and imagined them, their spaces, and the experiences that railways generated in almost every global region during the long twentieth century. We welcome submissions from researchers in a multiplicity of disciplines, including literary and cultural studies, critical realist studies, human geography, political science, visual studies, mobility humanities, transport history, cultural history and more. A core contribution made by the project consists in recentring the long twentieth century in humanistic railway studies. This was an era when railways were the primary instrument of social change brought about by mobility. However, its transformative importance has often been overlooked in railway studies focused on the novelty of the mode in the nineteenth century and its potential to deliver sustainable long-distance transport in the twenty-first century.

The conference will feature three keynote speakers as well as an early-career keynote talk (to be announced).

Themes to be explored include, but are not limited to, the following:

- the railway and (literary and/or artistic) form
- the railway as infrastructure
- gender and sexual identity
- (post)colonial perspectives
- railway and war
- experiences of long-distance travel
- experiences of commuting
- the experience of railway work (labour, bureaucracy)
- spaces of the railway
- railway people
- railway heritage and memory politics
- railway and care
- railway future
- railways, landscape and the environment
- comparisons between literary and visual depictions of the railway

If you are interested, please send a proposal of max. 500 words to the organizers no later than **30 September 2026**. All abstracts should include a title as well as the names, affiliations and email addresses of all authors. Please also provide a short bio (max. 100 words) for each author.

Important Dates

30 September 2026	Deadline for submission of paper proposals
30 November 2026	Notification of paper acceptance
31 January 2027	Registration closes
1–3 April 2027	Conference

Practical Information

- The conference is an in-person event only.
- The conference language is English.
- Artists requiring specific infrastructure or equipment are encouraged to get in touch with us regarding their needs before submitting an application.
- More information is available on the conference website: blogs2.abo.fi/railimage

Contact Details

Please submit your paper proposal to railimage.abo@gmail.com

If you have any questions about the conference, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

- Jason Finch, Åbo Akademi University, Finland (jason.finch@abo.fi)
- Adam Borch, Åbo Akademi University, Finland
- Zeynep Correia, Åbo Akademi University, Finland
- Niral Joshi, Åbo Akademi University, Finland

About RAILIMAGE

The project “Twentieth-Century Railway Imaginations: Building the Mobility and Infrastructural Humanities” (RAILIMAGE) develops an urgently needed humanization of transport studies. It is active from August 2024 until July 2027. RAILIMAGE is writing the global qualitative and imaginative history of the long-distance railway journey and its spaces in the twentieth century, thus reaffirming the role of the railway in twenty-first-century imaginations of more sustainable mobility. The project advances an interdisciplinary approach to mobility and infrastructures, combining techniques and insights from the humanities, especially spatial literary studies, with critical realist philosophy, human geography and regional studies. The project team are working on case studies which illuminate regions such as the countries formerly part of the Ottoman Empire, colonial and postcolonial India, the UK, the USA and Scandinavia, as well as considering the experiences of long-distance train travellers originating in these regions.

RAILIMAGE is headed by **Professor Jason Finch** and based in the department of English Language and Literature at Åbo Akademi University, Finland. The project is funded by the **H. W. Donner Foundation** (administered by the Åbo Akademi University Foundation).