Michael Lee
Director, Railway Planning and Performance
Telephone 020 7282 2139
Fax 020 7282 2042
E-mail michael.lee@orr.gsi.gov.uk

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Robin Gisby
Director, Operations and Customer Services
Network Rail Infrastructure Limited
Kings Place
90 York Way
London   N1 9AG

Dear Robin

West Coast main line timetable performance modelling: lessons learned

MVA has now concluded the study that we jointly commissioned, to review how computer modelling of train service performance had been used during development of the WCML route upgrade and high frequency timetable, and how the results compared with performance in practice.

The main purpose of the study was to help improve the planning of such major projects in future. This has been a valuable exercise and when our teams met with MVA recently to discuss the findings I think we agreed about the most important issues to have come out of MVA's report:

1. While your modelling approach does provide important information to help improve the design of infrastructure and timetables, it is not capable of producing reliable projections of overall operational performance on a complex network following major redesign and/or major service change. This will be vital for changes such as Thameslink (key output 2) and Crossrail.

2. Some project teams are unaware of this limitation. Poor communication between infrastructure projects and performance modellers means that the implications of the modelling are not always properly understood, and so may not feed back properly into project design.

3. The specification for performance modelling on the west coast was not always well integrated with the project development or objectives. Modelling should be planned as an integral part of the overall project to ensure that it is supporting the critical decisions. It also needs to be carried out at the right time; some modelling for west coast was too late to influence key decisions on the upgrade and the timetable. Methodologies need to be able to handle uncertainties in detailed assumptions to avoid delaying modelling beyond the point where it is useful.

We now need to know how Network Rail proposes to address these issues. I am sending copies of this letter to Paul Plummer and Simon Kirby, given their roles in major projects; perhaps we can have a word about how you would like to handle this with us going forward.

I am also putting a copy of this letter on our website together with the MVA report.

Yours sincerely

Michael Lee