

Martin Jones
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Dear Paul

Informed Traveller publication timescales

Thank you for sharing the paper you took to JEOT on 5 November and for the helpful discussion with Chris Curtis following that meeting.

Based on this, we understand that the System Operator is proposing to continue in the immediate term with the current operating process of supporting localised train service changes, but that this is likely to result in timetable publication at T1 for the Christmas week due to a number of operators making significant changes to their services.

For 2021, you are now proposing to use the updated December 2020 timetable as a base and switch to a quarterly cycle with localised adjustments made in March, June, September and December. Under this proposal, Informed Traveller Timetables will be published at T4, although you are considering ways to open up bookings for some long-distance services earlier.

Your note to JEOT recognises that this proposal diverges from the Network Code. When we wrote to you in August¹, we recognised why the industry had decided to move temporarily away from the Network Code prescribed timescales. From our

¹ ORR 13 August 2020 letter to Network Rail on timetable development and informed traveller non-compliance, available here: <https://www.orr.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2020-10/timetable-development-and-informed-traveller-timescales-non-compliance-letter-to-network-rail-2020-08-13.pdf>

correspondence in August and September², we understood that you were making best endeavours in respect of your passenger information and network management obligations under your network licence. We also considered the recovery plan that you had put in place for returning to T12 publication.

Given that the situation has changed and the recovery plan abandoned, we are keen to understand what steps you are now taking to ensure compliance with your licence and contractual obligations, particularly in respect of passenger information and providing a reasonable degree of assurance to freight operators.

We understand that Network Rail and the industry are responding to a high level of uncertainty due to the pandemic, and the need to respond to changing passenger demand, available resource levels and to train operator efficiency proposals. However, the current proposals appear to represent a significant, potentially permanent departure from the approach to timetable development that the industry has successfully pursued following May 2018. As such, it is vital that we have clarity about how risks to timetable development, provision of passenger information and the needs of freight operators are to be mitigated. I would therefore like to reiterate these issues, and invite you to respond to me to confirm how you will be addressing them.

Systemic risks

As you are aware, one of the key themes of Stephen Glaister's inquiry into the May 2018 timetable disruption was the vital importance of the timetable and its development process aligning with other critical decision processes across the industry – particularly where major network changes are being implemented.

In particular, the inquiry made specific recommendations (accepted by the industry) concerning the importance of alignment with the schedule set out in Part D of the Network Code as a key component for mitigating the transmission of risk between programmes³.

Over recent months, industry has needed to depart from some of these requirements in order to be responsive to the exceptional demands placed on Network Rail and operators by the coronavirus pandemic. We have recognised the necessity of this more flexible approach in the short-term, subject to the necessary risk mitigations and recovery plans being in place. It is now not clear to us if, how and when you intend to recover towards the regulated timescales for timetable development and how you intend to manage the risks of not doing so for an increasingly prolonged

² NR 7 September letter to ORR on timetable development and informed traveller non-compliance, available here: <https://www.orr.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2020-10/timetable-development-and-informed-traveller-timescales-non-compliance-letter-to-network-rail-2020-09-07.pdf>

³ See paragraph 63 of <https://www.orr.gov.uk/sites/default/files/om/inquiry-into-may-2018-timetable-disruption-december-2018-report-grayscale.pdf>

period. In this context, it is important that you outline how you now intend to manage the systemic risks arising from condensed planning horizons and ensure continued alignment between the new lead-in process for timetable changes and:

- Other dependent industry processes, especially where major network changes are being planned;
- Programme assurance, including the timetable assurance activities of the PMO;
- The activities of industry readiness Boards

Passenger Information

We have recently written to ticket retailers, including train operators, to remind them of the need to keep passengers informed about the timetabling challenges that they face⁴. In the context of this proposal we would like further information and assurance that:

- Journey planners are clear that times already published (currently showing to early February 2021) are likely to be reviewed again;
- A clear industry communications plan will be put in place to ensure that there is consistent messaging for those that need to travel as well as those who will be entitled to a refund or need to rearrange their journey – especially for, but not restricted to, the Christmas period;
- Further detail on the System Operator Informed Traveller work with train operators to allow ticket sales ahead of the timetable being confirmed is shared with ORR on an ongoing basis and is coordinated with the industry “smarter information, smarter journeys” programme; and
- The timetable that is published at T-4 is the final timetable and will not be subjected to further late notice changes (except for urgent safety related works) caused by Network Rail routes making short notice changes.

Freight operators

Several freight operators have informally voiced concerns to us about the impact of delays in the publication of the Informed Traveller Timetable. In particular we have heard that late publication:

- Limits the ability of operators to plan their businesses effectively and efficiently, particularly in respect of crew rostering and train diagramming;
- Limits their ability to respond to customer needs;

⁴ <https://www.orr.gov.uk/search-news/train-companies-must-do-more-to-keep-passengers-informed-about-timetables>

- Limits the opportunity of Network Rail and operators to work to address any issues within the offered timetable, and that this means that trains could be subject to cancellation or to further late change; and
- Puts additional pressure onto timetable planners within both freight operators and Network Rail, potentially reducing the quality of outputs.

Freight operators are a minority user on your network, but their output is of national economic significance. This was recognised by both DfT and Network Rail in spring this year when Network Rail developed and delivered a contingency timetable prioritised the needs of key workers and freight. I note that your JEOT paper referenced the need to have ongoing discussions with the freight operators, and I would be interested in the outcome of those discussions.

I would be grateful for your response by Friday 20 November, and would highlight the ongoing need to ensure that the needs of passengers and freight are given sufficient accommodation in any further decision making on timetable processes. It would also be useful if we could also arrange a discussion of these issues in more detail.

We will publish this letter, along with your response, on our website.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Martin Jones'.

Martin Jones