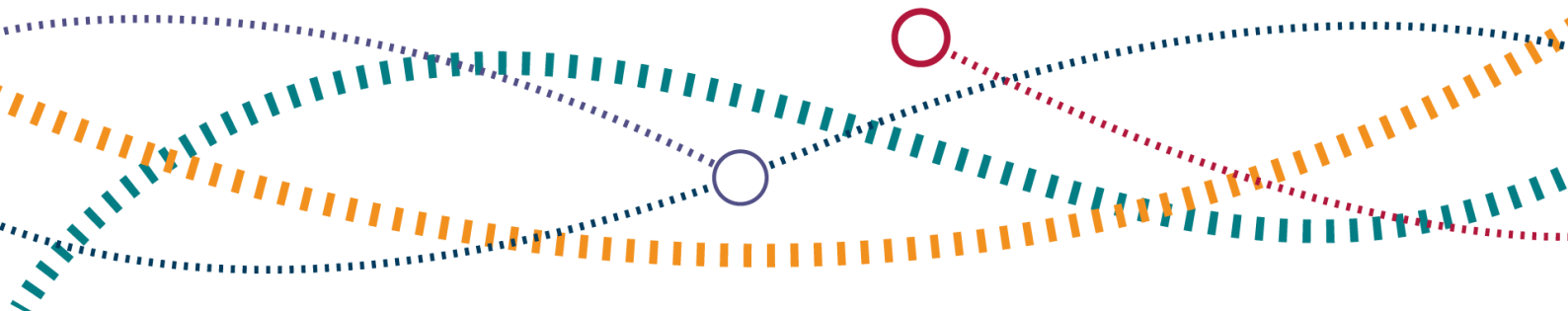# Annual assessment of Network Rail's stakeholder engagement, 2020-21

Network Rail Scotland - individual assessment

22 September 2021

Contents

Network Rail Scotland

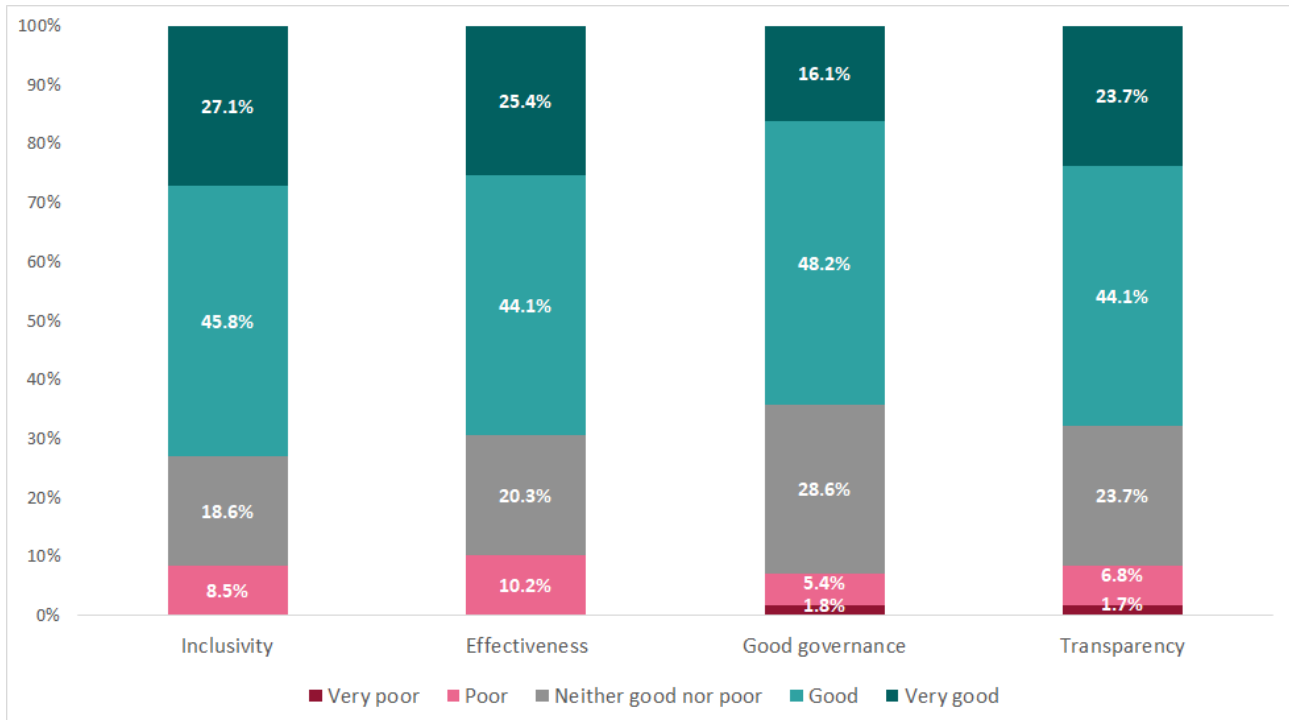## Introduction

1.1   This report presents our key findings and recommendations on the quality of Network Rail Scotland's stakeholder engagement during the second year of Control Period 6 (CP6), from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021. Alongside this report we have separately published our key findings and recommendations on the quality of Network Rail's stakeholder engagement as a whole during year 2 of CP6, as well as individual assessments for:

(a)   each of the remaining Network Rail regions;

(b)   the Freight and National Passenger Operators (FNPO) function;

(c)   the System Operator (SO); and,

(d)   Network Rail's engagement on its Enhancement Delivery Plan.

Summary

1.2   Network Rail Scotland's stakeholders were largely positive about the engagement that took place over the year: 84% rated engagement as good or very good, and 62% thought it had improved or somewhat improved. This is higher than the Network Rail average. In addition a significantly higher proportion of respondents felt that engagement had improved: 31% compared to 21% for Network Rail as a whole. A significantly lower number of respondents thought that engagement had stayed the same: 24% relative to 36% for Network Rail as a whole.

1.3   Across each of the four principles of good stakeholder engagement similar results were observed across the principles of inclusivity, effectiveness and transparency (Figure 1.1). The principle of good governance showed a comparatively higher level of respondents who viewed Network Rail Scotland's governance as neither good nor poor (29%).

Figure 1.1   Stakeholder views on Network Rail Scotland's engagement across the four principles, 2020-21

Survey question: "In your opinion how would you rate Network Rail Scotland's engagement with you on Network Rail's Network Licence obligations of inclusivity, effectiveness, good governance, and transparency?"

Source: ORR's stakeholder survey

1.4   Network Rail Scotland's own self–assessment highlighted an innovative approach developed during year 2 to engage with its stakeholders: Scotland's Railway website. This website was developed in response to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic to ensure regular engagement throughout 2020-21. It enabled the region to hold virtual forums such as the community drop–in sessions, arrange meetings with project teams and provided a platform for it to share information.

1.5   Our own experiences with the region's stakeholder engagement highlighted that it tried to reach out to, and work closely with many of its stakeholders, including cross-border operators. The Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and use of Microsoft's Teams communications platform had improved the agility of the region's engagement with a number of stakeholder groups – including, for example, with the supply chain and with local communities. The ability to hold virtual meetings meant that Network Rail Scotland could also continue to engage with members of the Scottish Parliament. We encourage the region to identify and retain approaches that have improved engagement throughout COVID-19.

1.6   The region has also made improvements on year 1, including its engagement with other key stakeholders such as the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland (MACS - a non-departmental public body). We support the region's areas for improvement (see below), including the focus on lineside neighbour engagement and embedding this as business-as-usual engagement going forward. Some of the feedback raised by stakeholders on engagement - especially that on occasion Network Rail Scotland seeks to validate its own priorities rather than that of stakeholders – is of concern. We will discuss this with the region.

1.7   Our own experiences highlighted three positive areas for the region:

(a)   Network Rail Scotland's engagement with passenger and freight train operators to identify performance improvements or opportunities through lockdown, for example to run more freight traffic, and also grow the freight sector, as demonstrated by completion of a six-week timber trial between Georgemas and Inverness in August 2020;

(b)   Close engagement with the supply chain during the COVID-19 ensuring that the region could continue to deliver; and,

(c)   The innovative approach developed by the region and described above: Scotland's Railways website.

1.8   The region has adopted a traffic light approach to share its learnings from year 2 and this demonstrates that it had a process in place for self-improvement. We note that this approach set out numerous examples of where the region had taken steps to improve its stakeholder engagement in year 2 (see Table 1.1 below for examples). It also highlighted that the region recognised that further work was needed, including:

(a)   Expanding how it engages with lineside neighbours and some local authorities across Scotland;

(b)   Expanding its Twitter account to engage non-passenger stakeholders;

(c)   Making improvements to the support it offers to active travel projects e.g. walking and cycling projects that interface with the railway with a more proactive approach to understand phasing and how the region can better feed these into its strategic planning and enhancements;

(d)   Ensuring consistency across the region in the delivery of work – especially in rural communities – including engaging in advance to take into consideration

the views of stakeholders who may be more disproportionately impacted by weekend engineering that temporarily close part of the railway network;

(e) Sharing success of improved governance structures across the region e.g. with freight operators;

(f) Reviewing ongoing worker behaviour complaints from lineside neighbours and improving the consistency of its lineside notification process, including planned works and clarity on points of contact for raising concerns or questions; and,

(g) Communicating the benefits of investment.

1.9 Our view is that these are broadly right and could be further supplemented by:

(a) Reviewing feedback received from stakeholders that their engagement seeks to validate its own priorities rather than that of stakeholders; and,

(b) Reviewing whether feedback is consistently given to stakeholders on how their feedback was used, and if not, why not.

Key findings and recommendations

Table 1.1   Summary of key conclusion(s) across each principle

Principle	Key conclusion(s)
Inclusiveness	**Our evidence suggested that Network Rail Scotland has a good understanding of who its stakeholders are, and that its engagement was tailored to meet the needs of its stakeholders.** • The region provided one page summary tables for each stakeholder. These showed that it engaged through a variety of different methods, for example social media, letters, workshops, and meetings. There was good evidence provided in terms of tailoring its approach to engagement. For example, the region has plans to develop an accessibility forum for both managed stations in Scotland to encourage more ongoing dialogue. Both Edinburgh Waverly and Glasgow Central stations will feature viewpoint devices which will allow passengers to provide instant feedback on specific aspects of the station. Station staff have also completed specialist visual and hearing impairment training. These are positive initiatives. • Network Rail Scotland also described the use of the Scotland's Railway website, which was an innovative approach to tailoring its engagement with stakeholders in response to COVID-19. During this, the region developed and maximised the use of the Scotland's Railway website, creating twelve dedicated online hubs to support the promotion of its projects and to facilitate direct contact between the railway in Scotland and its communities. The website created the ability to facilitate online public drop-in sessions. By attending these events online, members of the public were able to speak to members of a project team. We are not aware of any other region adopting an innovative approach like this to ensure engagement was inclusive. **Our evidence showed that improvements were made in year 2, including how it engaged with MACS on the needs of disabled persons in connection with rail travel.** • The evidence showed that Network Rail Scotland made improvements in year 2 on its engagement with MACS. Its

self – assessment described a regular programme of engagement with the MACS, which was put in place as a result of feedback received from it.

- Following feedback, the region has also extended its stakeholder distribution list to include more mobility and access organisations and its project communications ensured that these groups were routinely included in its regular engagement. The region is looking to proactively extend its engagement further, for example to suppliers. In its self – assessment the region described working with small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) to expand engagement, including widening it to cover the indirect supply chain supporting Network Rail Scotland.

- All of these positive initiatives and developments were supported through our survey findings, which highlighted that respondents' felt that the region's engagement was inclusive (73% stated that it was good or very good, which is higher than Network Rail as a whole).

The region is working to extend further its engagement with some local authorities and lineside neighbours/ local communities.

- The region recognised that improvements are required. It highlighted that some improvements could be made to the inclusivity of its engagement with some local authorities and lineside neighbours/local communities. The region gave examples of how it intends to do this in its self-assessment. For example, reviewing different ways of engaging with its lineside neighbours with one scheme including surveying rail communities to see if they would like to sign up for email pre-notifications about planned works. We recognise and support this as an area that needs to improve and would also encourage the region to review its stakeholders to ensure no gaps exist.

Key strengths

- The region extended its engagement in year 2 to cover more stakeholders, including MACS and SMEs.

- Lots of good examples of inclusive engagement and that efforts are being taken to ensure that the engagement is accessible to all. The Scotland's Railway website is an example of best practice and an innovative approach to engagement in the region.

Area for development

- A further review the inclusivity of its engagement to ensure that its plans and priorities present the true diversity of stakeholder opinion, in particular with lineside neighbours/ local communities and local authorities.

Effectiveness	**The evidence suggested that Network Rail Scotland had good relationships with its stakeholders, in particular with industry stakeholders, and that its engagement is timely.** • The region worked closely with stakeholders, and in response to COVID-19 adapted its approach, including developing innovative approaches to maintain stakeholder relationships (e.g. Scotland's Railway website, see section on inclusiveness of engagement). The region's self-assessment described making use of the lockdown to identify performance improvements to run more freight trains and grow freight traffic, for example a Freight Timber trial. • The operators and customer chapter of its self-assessment described various new collaboration forums e.g. the Rail Recovery Taskforce, which was set up in early 2020 to provide a platform where Network Rail, ScotRail and Transport Scotland could work together to communicate the changes needed to keep passengers safe and the railway running during COVID-19. The region received positive feedback on this forum. • The region highlighted strong engagement with its elected representatives and showcases that it understood their feedback and used it to inform its priorities. Its self-assessment described an annual survey undertaken, in partnership with ScotRail, with elected representatives. As a result of this survey the region identified a continuous improvement plan, using a traffic light system to inform its future communication and engagement plans. This highlighted timely engagement and we would encourage the

region to review whether this approach is consistently applied across each stakeholder group.

Network Rail Scotland engaged through a variety of forums but clearer links are required showing stakeholder concerns and action taken to address them.

- The region detailed, for each individual stakeholder, their concerns and issues and its planned mitigation, the actions taken and whether delivery is on track. Going forward it would be useful for the region to clearly set out for its stakeholders a clearer link between stakeholder concerns and the action taken to address them, and whether these had been successful or not.

Some stakeholders had concerns that on occasion the region engaged to seek agreement for its own priorities.

- Qualitative feedback received from our survey highlighted some concerns with Network Rail Scotland's engagement in particular that it engaged to seek commitment for its own priorities. A stakeholder voiced concerns that the region engaged to persuade or inform them of a course of action. Another stakeholder similarly voiced concerns on the information flow from the region – information was only given to them when they asked for it. They also stated that the region tended to decide what it wanted to do and then tell them.

- Network Rail Scotland also undertakes an annual stakeholder survey examining stakeholder attitudes and perceptions. In its most recent wave of results from early 2021, one stakeholder responded that at times the issues being discussed had already effectively been decided on by Transport Scotland and ScotRail/ Network Rail Scotland, and that the consultation process felt like a rubber-stamping exercise. :

- We raised this with the region. Specifically in response to feedback which suggests decisions are made without proper consultation, Network Rail Scotland said that decisions on scheme options are taken by Transport Scotland, and at times stakeholders can think that decisions have instead been taken by Network Rail. To improve transparency in this area, it is important

	that Network Rail Scotland makes clear its role and responsibilities on enhancement projects, and we will review it again in year 3

Key strengths

- The region has good relationships with its stakeholders and these are well developed within the industry. It has adapted its engagement well in response to COVID-19, ensuring that stakeholder relationships were maintained throughout.

- The region described a range of methods that the company takes to listen to its stakeholders and react to their feedback.

- Good evidence provided of timely engagement across stakeholder groups, mainly in relation to infrastructure projects.

Areas for development

- The region should review the effectiveness of its engagement following concerns raised by stakeholders that on occasion its engagement seeks to validate its own priorities rather than that of stakeholders.

- The region should ensure that stakeholders are clear on what its role and responsibilities are in decisions on enhancement projects. We will review it again in year 3.

Well – governed	**The evidence suggested that there is a consistent approach to its processes and governance arrangements.**
	- There is a consistent approach taken for each of its stakeholders, as evidenced by the summary tables in its self-assessment. These tables show, for each stakeholder, forums for engagement, year 2 actions to improve engagement (along with progress and owners for each action) and planned improvements on year 2 (along with owners for each action). We also set out in the section on effectiveness how these grids could be adapted going forward.
	- Our evidence showed that some of the region's teams have re-consulted forum attendees e.g. re-consulting on the terms of reference for the Freight Joint Board to ensure that processes and structures are well-governed. The region set out that it intends on sharing these successes across teams, which we support.

	• Our survey evidence also showed that while over half of Network Rail Scotland's respondents felt that its governance was good or very good (64%), this was still lower than the other four principles (Figure 1.1), indicating that further work is required. **We found some evidence that stakeholders are able to provide candid feedback on engagement activities.** • The region regularly assessed its engagement with elected representatives via its yearly stakeholder research report, which supports continual improvement in its engagement. This good practice approach should be expanded across the region.

Key strengths

• Good consistent approach to its governance processes and arrangements across the region.

• Its annual stakeholder survey provided a good example of stakeholders being able to candidly feedback on engagement activities, supporting continual improvement.

Areas for development

• Further work required to improve good governance across the region – our survey results showed that this principle scored less well compared to the other four principles of good stakeholder engagement.

• Expand on good practice demonstrated through the yearly stakeholder research with elected representatives across the region.

Transparency	**There was a good level of transparency with its stakeholders.** • Its self-assessment described work bank visibility for suppliers, which it is looking to improve further through all tiers of the supply chain. The Scotland's Railway website also provided a hub of information about both enhancements and major renewal works across Scotland, the aim of this is to provide direct contact between the railway network in Scotland and its communities. • The region did well to keep the freight industry updated on how it is delivering against targets and milestones and are in the process

of developing 'How to' guides to make engagement between the region and rail freight industry simpler.

There were some examples of the region feeding back to stakeholders, however concerns were raised over how systematically this was being done.

- It is self-assessment the region described introducing a new meeting framework for Caledonian Sleeper. Through this framework the region worked to enhance its Engineering Access Planning Forum, which ensured that Caledonian Sleeper's concerns and views were reflected in the analysis and in the solutions it developed. The region fed back to Caledonian Sleeper how its input has influenced the region's final decisions.

- Another example described in its self-assessment is the East Kilbride - Barrhead Electrification Programme. This case study described a major enhancement programme. It developed options and asked passengers, via an online survey, to note which option they preferred. Whilst this was a good case study highlighting that the region was open to changing its approach based on feedback received e.g. timely engagement, it would have been strengthened had the region showed how it acted upon the feedback it received, and how any final decisions about the approach were explained to those that took part in the survey.

- We would encourage the region to review whether feedback is consistently given to stakeholders on the outcome of their input. This is crucial to maintain stakeholder trust in the meaningfulness of their engagement with Network Rail Scotland.

- Our survey results showed that while 68% of respondents felt that its engagement was transparent, 9% of respondents felt that is was poor or very poor (and almost a quarter of respondents felt that is was neither good nor poor), indicating that further work is required on this principle.

Key strength
- The region has made improvements to its transparency over the year (e.g. work bank visibility, Scotland's Railway website).

Area for development

- Review whether the region consistently feeds back to stakeholders if and how their feedback was used, and if not, why not.