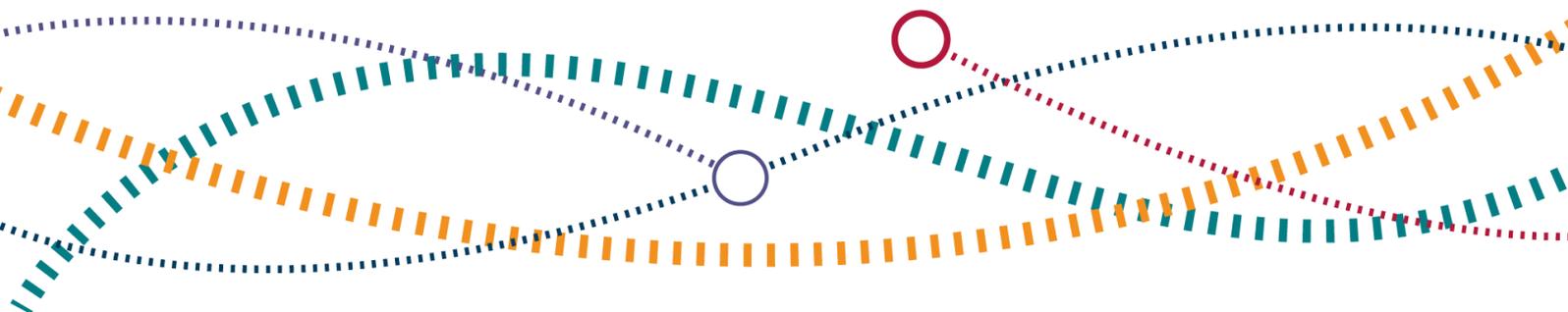# ORR review of Network Rail's delivery of passenger and freight performance in North West and Central region: Progress against ORR recommendations

Autumn 2021 assessment

23 November 2021

North West & Central review – 18 month assessment: Progress of outstanding recommendations from May 2021

Introduction

In May 2020 ORR published conclusions[1] from its investigation into Network Rail's impact on poor performance in the North West and Central (NW&C) region.

Since this time ORR has worked closely with the region to monitor what action it has been taking to address our findings. To date, ORR has published our assessments of Network Rail NW&C's progress with the recommendations at the six-month (December 2020)[2] and 12-month stage (May 2021)[3].

Our findings in May 2021 highlighted that the region had made good progress against the majority of the recommendations however it had not made sufficient progress on two operational and four asset management recommendations. As such, ORR extended its enhanced monitoring and assessment for a further six months, holding NW&C region to account for its obligations to complete these six actions satisfactorily.

This document sets out ORR's latest assessment of the regions progress for the period from May 2021 up to 13 October 2021.

Assessment

The RAG scores reflect the following:

	Green: NW&C has made, or is nearing, sufficient progress to date with the recommendation.
	Amber: NW&C has made some progress to date with the recommendation.
	Red: NW&C has not made the expected progress to date with the recommendation.
	Grey: Recommendation closed.

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[1] ORR review of Network Rail's delivery of train and freight performance in NW&C region, published 29 May 2020.

[2] ORR six month assessment of progress against the review of Network Rail's delivery of train and freight performance in NW&C region, published 8 December 2020.

[3] ORR 12 month assessment of progress against the review of Network Rail's delivery of train and freight performance in NW&C region, published 28 May 2021.

Train performance and Operations Management

ORR003 Network Rail should also review where such technology is practical to employ elsewhere on the network. Note: This recommendation relates to ARS technology in other locations across the region.			
ORR RAG score May 21		ORR RAG score Nov 21	**Closed in respect of NW&C investigation and subject to normal monitoring.**
Summary of assessment November 2021			
The region's operating strategy has been produced by consultants, and a draft version of this was presented to ORR in September 2021. The strategy works back from the region's target end state, incorporating elements of the national operating strategy. It contains short, medium and long-term commitments across infrastructure, people, process and technology, aiming to set priorities for the region's operations function as a whole. The technology element of the strategy acknowledges that current legacy train control systems are too inflexible for the current operating environment in respect of performance and capacity. ORR agrees that the proposed interventions are appropriate ways to optimise service recovery and overall performance. ORR has requested that the region continues to update us on the implementation of this strategy as part of business as normal activity.			

ORR008a Network Rail should continue to work closely with TOCs/FOCs to understand their aspirations regarding new fleet introductions, engaging at an early stage to develop joint contingency plans with operators to respond rapidly to 'on the day' failure incidents. (North West route)			
ORR RAG score May 21		ORR RAG score Nov 21	**Closed in respect of NW&C investigation and subject to normal monitoring.**
Summary of assessment November 2021			
Although progress has been slower than expected, North West route has begun to arrange forums for the discussion and mitigation of operational performance risk associated with the introduction of class 777s. The route has identified some high-level risks, such as staff training, power supply and rescue and recovery. The route now understands the benefits of Network Rail operations staff being involved in the process to introduce new fleets.			

The region was slow to assign responsibility to an experienced manager with local knowledge, who has now made plans for periodic joint forums to address the risks. ORR will continue to closely monitor progress up to entry into service of the fleet.

ORR008b (1&2) Network Rail should continue to work closely with TOCs/FOCs to understand their aspirations regarding new fleet introductions, engaging at an early stage to develop joint contingency plans with operators to respond rapidly to 'on the day' failure incidents. (Central route)			
ORR RAG score May 21		ORR RAG score Nov 21	**Closed in respect of NW&C investigation and subject to normal monitoring.**
Summary of assessment November 2021			
Central route operations managers have led several joint forums with WMT to discuss operational performance risks associated with class 196 and 730 introductions. ORR have been provided with lists of high-level risks identified, which are worked through during the joint forums, which demonstrates that the recommendation is being addressed. One issue of concern remains around stabling capacity for the new fleets, which the route continues to work through, and will be closely monitored by ORR.			

Asset Management

ORR017 Improve staff capability and competences to aid appropriate and timely asset interventions; (as defined in DRAM 10 Point Plan).			
ORR RAG score May 21		ORR RAG score Nov 21	**Closed in respect of NW&C investigation and subject to normal monitoring.**
Summary of assessment Nov 2021			
The Competence and Capability Strategy and Action Plans developed by the NW&C region demonstrates its commitment to improve staff capability and competences. There are separate actions plans for different asset disciplines – Track, Electrification & Power, Signalling & Telecoms. Each of them have a slightly different approach to tackle the issues that are key for each discipline. We agree that these plans are a step in the right direction to improve the staff capability and competences in each discipline. The time-bound plans provided as evidence satisfies our requirement to close the recommendation. However, in the latest progress update provided on the plan, ORR observed that for Track asset discipline, some milestones deadlines are approaching and some have been missed, with little or no progress since May 2021. ORR has asked the region to review the milestone dates and update the plan for the Track asset. ORR will follow-up on this requirement and general progress of the plans as part of routine monitoring.			

ORR018 Address the unfunded items within the WRCCA plan; (as defined in DRAM 10 Point Plan).			
ORR RAG score May 21	 	ORR RAG score Nov 21	**Closed in respect of NW&C investigation and subject to normal monitoring.**
Summary of assessment November 2021			

NW&C region has provided additional information on how it plans to deliver the items in Table-5 (titled as unfunded high priority actions) of the WRCCA plan (2019) which was subject to question.

The narrative provides clarity and suitable level of detail. As per the explanation, some of the activities are currently ongoing in this control period and there are plans in place to address the issues through a combination of; updated remits in existing renewals and enhancement schemes, routine maintenance activity, or identified for action in future control period work banks, dependent on the level of risk.

ORR accepts the reasoning for some of the issues which would require to go beyond the current control period to address. ORR assumed that the target date in the original plan was aligned with the end of the control period and hence was inadvertently misleading. However the detail the region has now provided of the work underway is more realistic.

The region has also informed that the WRCCA plan will be reissued, removing Table 5 and providing greater clarity on its plans. With regards to updating the WRCCA, it is the region's choice to make. However, if the region chooses to update the document, ORR would like to ensure certain elements are kept, for example target dates and predicted benefits. ORR has requested that the region ensures it keeps Network Rail's Technical Authority and ORR informed of changes made.

ORR019 Include a review of NW&C's inter-asset performance plans such as the management of vegetation. This is considered to be an external factor which affects the Electrification System and requires to be managed holistically to provide a reliable asset, vegetation being the most prevalent factor.			
ORR RAG score May 21	 	ORR RAG score Nov 21	**Closed in respect of NW&C investigation and subject to normal monitoring.**
Summary of assessment November 2021			

The region has provided the following evidence that we requested:
- a draft vegetation management plan; and
- a generic process addressing our concerns regarding co-ordination between Lineside and E&P disciplines. However, this process has been mapped based on the approach of only one MDU (Preston).

ORR expects that the region will deliver according to the newly developed vegetation management plan. ORR will continue to monitor the inter-asset performance for vegetation work around overhead line equipment (OLE) assets.

ORR considers the generic process provided as a positive step to co-ordinate vegetation management work between two disciplines. The other MDUs should review their existing approach and consider adopting similar best practice.
Based on the above, the recommendation can be closed.

ORR020 Acknowledge the importance of having accurate asset data upon which analysis can then be undertaken. In ORR's determination it was set out that Network Rail is expected to maintain its focus on the new Minimum Asset Data Requirements (MADR) that have been defined to establish a process for the Exchange of Asset Information (EAI).			
ORR RAG score May 21		ORR RAG score Nov 21	**Closed in respect of NW&C investigation and subject to normal monitoring.**
Summary of assessment November 2021			
The NW&C's Data Strategy and Data Improvement Plan assures that the region acknowledges the importance of having data that is accurate, fit for purpose and meets the business needs. This evidence satisfies our requirement to close this recommendation. The strategy and plan provided were draft versions, and ORR will follow-up to ensure the documents are signed-off and progressed.			