

John Larkinson
Chief Executive



Andrew Haines
Chief Executive
Network Rail
By email

Conrad Bailey
Director General, Rail Strategy and Services
Department for Transport
By email

5 April 2022

Dear Andrew and Conrad,

West Coast Main Line (WCML) and East Coast Main Line (ECML) major timetable recasts in 2022/23

1. I thought it would be useful to set out our understanding of the necessary decisions or issues to resolve for the major timetable projects on the WCML and ECML. Both projects are at crucial decision-making points, for December 2022 and May 2023 respectively. The successful delivery of these complex timetables will provide funders, operators (including freight) and passengers certainty over service provision and available capacity going forward.

West Coast Main Line timetable December 2022

2. In 2019, ORR asked Network Rail to consider if there was sufficient capacity on the WCML to accommodate the aspirations¹ from several operators. In early 2020, Network Rail reported the capacity was insufficient without significantly impacting performance and causing a reduction in timetable resilience. Subsequently, it declared WCML South as Congested Infrastructure².
3. This meant two interdependent Event Steering Groups (ESGs), the WCML South and the Manchester Recovery Taskforce (MRTF) (the latter including the Castlefield Corridor) were in progress on the WCML. Both programmes are scheduled to deliver new timetables for implementation on the December 2022 timetable change date. Our understanding is that DfT has agreed the MRTF and WCML South timetables should now go into “production”, to progress towards implementation. However, the following decisions and actions which impact on the robustness of the December 2022 timetable in the future are still necessary:
 - (a) A final investment decision by Government to implement a power supply solution is needed imminently, for Network Rail to make it operational by 2024.

¹ [Access to the West Coast Main Line \(WCML\) - 11 October 2019 \(orr.gov.uk\)](https://www.orr.gov.uk)

² [ORR Letter for WCML South FL Congested Infrastructure \(networkrail.co.uk\)](https://www.networkrail.co.uk)

- (b) By mid-May, Network Rail to provide sufficient evidence to industry and ORR on whether the applications by First Trenitalia West Coast Rail Ltd and Grand Union Trains Ltd for additional services can be accommodated, so that an access rights decision can be made.
 - (c) Network Rail to imminently set out its plan for completing the timetable production process to ensure industry understands and can follow the timescales.
 - (d) Operators to apply for timetable slots in line with their access rights and the new timetable design in the next month (and funders to ensure this is the case).
4. Successful implementation of the timetable will also require ongoing work to mitigate train service performance (for new rolling stock and power supply) as well as complex adjustments to take account of platforming work at Euston. The platforming work is currently scheduled for completion in 2025.
 5. As industry is now less than 40 weeks from the timetable change, it is increasingly urgent that funder and operator decisions are made to ensure sufficient time for industry planning. Delays will not only make Network Rail's work more challenging but reduce the time available to ensure efficient resource planning and transparency for all operators.

ECML timetable May 2023

6. The ECML has faced access rights and timetabling issues for several years. The ECML timetable was due to be recast in May 2022. The recast aimed to accommodate additional services, replace contingent rights with more firm rights and in doing so provide more certainty for passenger and freight train operators.
7. In August 2021, DfT and Network Rail chose to delay the May 2022 implementation of an Event Steering Group (ESG) timetable to at least May 2023 because of the list of unresolved issues and associated risks. At this time, we wrote to Network Rail and DfT recommending that funders and industry learned lessons from the 2021 experience.
8. We understand that the ESG option still has risks, including acceptability of the modelled performance; power supply (mitigated by reduced fleet power draw or operation in diesel mode); inclusion of freight access requests; additional platform capacity at Newcastle (subject to DfT approval); plus, the outcome of DfT Business Plans agreed with contracted operators.
9. After the August 2021 decision to delay implementation, DfT commissioned further work on an option labelled 'Guiding Mind'. Network Rail has progressed this option with input from industry via steering and oversight groups, although work also continued concurrently on the ESG option.
10. The Guiding Mind option is not at the same level of maturity as the ESG option, in terms of planning and performance analysis. Industry considers the Guiding Mind

option could only be implemented in May 2024 or later. This means for May 2023, the following decisions and actions are needed:

- (a) In the next month, DfT should decide whether it expects Network Rail to implement a roll-over timetable or the ESG developed timetable. It will also decide on the addition of extra platform capacity at Newcastle. These decisions will be informed by the recommendations from the April ECML Programme Board (where industry and DfT are represented) and the Industry Timetable PMO within Network Rail.
- (b) Network Rail to conduct any required stakeholder engagement on the proposed timetable.
- (c) Network Rail to resolve access rights requests in line with the proposed timetable. It also needs to communicate its plan for the timetable production by July, to give industry sufficient time to comply with timescales.
- (d) Operators need to apply for timetable slots in line with access rights, the proposed timetable and the required timescales (and all funders should support this).

11. Taking timely decisions on the WCML and ECML will demonstrate lessons have been learnt by funders and industry from the ECML in 2021. It will provide a greater opportunity to mitigate outstanding risks while complying with legal obligations. It also offers industry (including Network Rail) a chance of resolving any access rights changes needed, through the Network Rail Sale of Access Rights process. Finally, it supports industry in returning to compliance with an agreed contractual process, which was an expectation we set out in our letter on Timetabling and Network Code Change requirements³, February 2022.

12. This letter will be published on the ORR website.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Larkinson', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

John Larkinson

³ [Timetabling and Network Code Change requirements, 22 February 2022](#)