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Jake Kelly
Chair, Network Performance Board
By Email

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ORR Review of Joint Performance Strategies

I am writing to you in your role as Chair of the Network Performance Board.

Passenger and freight train performance is vitally important to the economic function of the railway and wider economy. We know that journey punctuality and reliability always feature highly in passenger and freight end user priorities.

I know that the rail industry collectively recognises that punctuality and reliability could be much better. Performance is an output of the whole railway system, working together, and the Network Performance Board is leading a concerted effort between Network Rail and train operators to improve services following a challenging period.

To support the industry's efforts, we have undertaken a review of the completeness and quality of the joint performance strategies agreed between Network Rail and most passenger train operators for 2023-24.

These strategies are updated each year, in line with the requirements of the Network Code.

They are also an important part of the Performance Improvement Management System (PIMS), which Network Rail initially developed in 2018-19 in response to our challenge to improve the management of performance and which has since been adopted by the rail industry.

Our methodology

ORR has assessed this year's joint performance strategies against the established good practice guide, which is included within PIMS.

The good practice guide in turn builds on findings and recommendations from internal and external reviews of previous iterations of the strategies, made over the past five years.

We designed a question set to directly assess consistency with this guide, as well as considering a small number of other elements of good practice (such as plans to

engage front line colleagues on performance). We then completed a desk-based assessment of each strategy against these criteria.

Findings and recommendations

Overall, the standard of the strategies was notably improved from the last time ORR reviewed them (informally, in 2021). There is a good level of consistency with the good practice guide across most of the strategies.

At the detailed level, our findings are there to help operators and Network Rail routes to identify where good practice exists that they might usefully borrow – thus strengthening the overall network approach and improving system outcomes.

Sharing good practice in this way is at the heart of PIMS.

ORR has therefore shared the detailed report with Network Rail and operators' performance professionals; we expect they will use it for that purpose. However, we are mindful of letting perfection be the enemy of the good; we do not currently intend to review the strategies in this way again until next year.

Our work highlighted some themes that we believe merit further consideration and development, to strengthen rail performance improvement.

As such we have identified the following eight recommendations, which we have addressed variously to Network Rail and the Network Performance Board (plus its sub-groups):

Recommendation 1: The process for the production and finalisation of joint performance strategies should be reviewed by Network Rail and operators, to ensure there is a common commitment to achieving timely sign-off.

Recommendation 2: Network Rail should review on a case-by-case basis whether to engage open access and freight operators to produce joint performance strategies. As part of this it should identify if either a standalone strategy or a collective strategy with one lead route (for example East Coast route with Grand Central, Hull Trains and Lumo or FNPO with freight operators) might be appropriate.

Recommendation 3: Network Rail Routes/operators with a “no” or “partly” assessment in areas of generally positive coverage should consider how to source good practice and cover these areas in the next iteration of their joint performance strategy.

Recommendation 4: Network Performance Board (via the PIMS Governance Board) should consider how to ensure good practice on benefits management is shared, to strengthen this area ahead of the 2024-25 strategies.

Recommendation 5: Network Performance Board (via the PIMS Governance Board) should consider how to improve consistent application of the 'hopper of projects' approach described in the good practice guide, to strengthen this area ahead of the 2024-25 strategies.

Recommendation 6: Network Performance Board to consider how to focus development of consistent leading indicators that can be used across the network.

Recommendation 7: Network Performance Board (via the PIMS Governance Board) should consider how best to promote more consistent adoption of RM3P and the PIMS Capability Framework (including TEPIDOIL) within joint performance strategies.

Recommendation 8: A further peer review of joint performance strategies should be undertaken by PIMS practitioners, to draw examples of good practice and consider whether the Good Practice Guide should be updated for the 2024-25 strategies.

Next Steps

I trust that you will take these recommendations in the spirit in which they are offered, to help the industry strengthen its approach to performance planning – which in turn will help punctuality and reliability for passengers and freight to improve.

Of course, having a thorough strategy document is only the start. These strategies must be implemented within Network Rail Routes and operators successfully.

As such I was pleased to have been part of the Network Performance Board's recent discussion that required the PIMS Governance Board to design follow-on work, that will build on ORR's review and check that the strategies are being implemented.

I would welcome your feedback on how these recommendations will be taken forwards in due course and am happy to discuss how ORR can support further.

A copy of this letter has been sent to Conrad Bailey at the Department of Transport and Bill Reeve at Transport Scotland.



Yours sincerely

Feras Alshaker

Cc: Conrad Bailey (Department for Transport)
Bill Reeve (Transport Scotland)