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Dear Feras

### **Independent Reporter work on network capability**

Thank you for your letter dated 24 July 2023. We recognise our network licence obligation to provide reliable and accurate network capability information to operators and accept that we can do this better.

There are many reasons why a single, consistent and up-to-date version of the capability of the network, correctly referenced to geospatial location, is a valuable tool. This is most important for operators and our own teams planning trains. Activities ranging from planning possessions to designing new infrastructure currently rely on several different systems (and sometimes different methods of measurement) to undertake their activities. Improving this area presents an opportunity to drive efficiencies across several activity areas, also to reduce operational risk through a lower chance of errors.

The Independent Reporter work has highlighted areas for improvement, and we welcome the input provided by their review. We are working through their recommendations and are broadly comfortable with these. We will be responding more fully to the recommendations in the next eight weeks.

This letter sets out our initial plan for improvement. As you have stated, this is a complex area, and our plan is likely to evolve as we engage with our route and train operator colleagues on the detail.

As stated in your letter, and raised by the Independent Reporter, sponsorship of network capability is a key issue which needs to be resolved quickly. It is proposed that the Group Director, System Operator (SO) formally holds accountability in Network Rail for the management and coordination of Network Capability information. This would not change the accountability of the regions to maintain accurate data for their geography and manage changes to it. The SO role would be to own, facilitate and assure the business processes and tools associated with network capability data, and to publish the information (through the NESAs) to industry users. The accountability would be held by the Group Director and delivered by the Network Operations team working in collaboration with the Capacity Planning team (who publish the NESAs).

Our initial high-level improvement plan for network capability, for delivery before the end of March 2024, includes the following steps:

1. Agree ownership and lead (sponsorship) within the SO to take this work forward, including identification of team(s) to progress the action plan.
2. Take paper to Executive Leadership Team (ELT) to gain appropriate senior level oversight and buy in for the approach.

3. Confirm understanding of each regional (or route business) process, accountabilities, and how they align/differ, to build into the NESAs process more effectively.
4. Identify scale of and opportunities for funding – since this work is unfunded (at network level) it will need to be covered through process efficiencies or another source.
5. Identify ‘quick wins’ to deliver benefits in the short term, ahead of longer-term improvements (in some cases quick wins may be progressed alongside longer term solutions – for example short term digitisation of existing drawings, ahead of project to capture asset data directly).
6. Develop solution for NESAs as the master source of operational line speed and permanent speed restrictions including direction of working, plus notes on signalling, GSM-R radios and the local implementation of operational rules and railway procedures.
7. Develop process for operators to report inconsistencies in the NESAs data (could be implemented ahead of solution above). This should include service levels (for response) and KPIs.
8. Review TSR process and identify opportunities for improvement, including any interface with NESAs.
9. Develop baseline of network capability for CP7 – using data workstreams and/or individual route pilots (including freight loads) to learn and apply more widely.

Working with the regions and industry colleagues we will develop the detail and progress this plan as a priority and, where we can, adopt a two-track approach to deliver incremental improvements quickly where possible ahead of longer-term bigger scale changes. We will work through the detail, track our delivery and provide updates through the regular SO Director Level Meetings and relevant industry forums.

I confirm that future correspondence on this matter should initially be addressed to Rupert Walker, Programme and Business Management Director in the SO, and we will confirm the working level lead in due course.

Yours sincerely

**Paul McMahon**  
**Director, Planning & Regulation**

cc  
Jake Kelly – Group Director, System Operator  
Rupert Walker – Programme and Business Management Director, System Operator