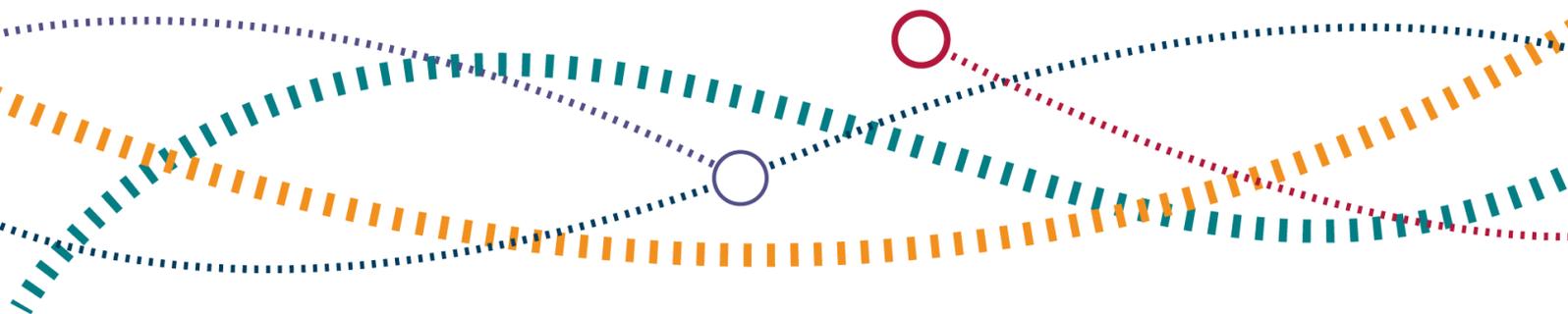# Rail industry compliance with timetable production milestones

Final December 2023 data and current June 2024 data for timetable changes

2 May 2024

Contents

Context for this release

Network Rail is responsible for creating timetables for passenger and freight services.

Each train and freight operating company makes requests to Network Rail for the timetable they would like to run. Network Rail coordinates all the different requests ('bids') to produce a single national rail timetable.

Most services in the timetable are updated twice a year, in May and December. However, Network Rail also needs to adjust the timetable on a weekly basis to account for things like engineering works or ad hoc events. This is called the rolling weekly timetable. Currently, ORR's reporting is focused on the two main timetable changes.

Network Rail must publish new timetables 12 weeks in advance of services running. Similarly, train operators have a commitment to inform passengers about services 12 weeks before they run.

For details on how the rail industry produces timetables, please see our report on the [timetable development process](#).

Train Operator Variation Requests (TOVRs)

Train and freight operators can request a variation to the base timetable after it is published at 26 weeks before the timetable starts (D-26). This is called a Train Operator Variation request, or 'TOVR'. Network Rail will either accept, reject or modify the request.

Freight operators will often identify space in the timetable and use TOVRs to demonstrate their services can operate without undermining network performance, before applying for contractual rights.

TOVRs provide flexibility in the timetable production process by allowing additional or amended services from passenger and freight operators to be included in the timetable after the base timetable is published. This means capacity can be used effectively.

However, having a high number of TOVRs (passenger or freight) can create instability. TOVRs made within 12 weeks of the timetable entering operation can impact on the release of final timetables to train and freight operators and subsequently passengers.

Note on Network Code milestones

The timetable development process has not followed the Network Code milestones since the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Consequently, train and freight operating companies and passengers cannot be certain timetable information will be available 12 weeks in advance.

As part of the periodic review 2023 (PR23), we set Network Rail a requirement to return the timetable process to Network Code compliance by December 2024: PR23 final determination: settlement document for the System Operator (orr.gov.uk)

December 2023 timetable change

The key findings below are based on the final data for the 10 December 2024 timetable change.

D-40 date – Timeliness of passenger and freight operator timetable bids to Network Rail

- The D-40 date specified by the Network Code was 3 March 2023. Network Rail asked operators to submit bids by 14 April 2023 (D-34).

- Of the 39 operators that submitted bids for the December 2023 timetable change:

  - Only one bid was submitted after 14 April 2023 (Direct Rail Services).

  - All other operators submitted their bids on or before 14 April 2023.

- One operator submitted its bid by the date specified in the Network Code (Caledonian Sleeper).

D-26 date – Timeliness of Network Rail providing operators with the timetable

- The D-26 date specified by the Network Code was 9 June 2023. For the December 2023 timetable, Network Rail was working towards a revised date of 30 June 2023 (D-23).

- Of the 39 operators that had submitted timetable bids:

  - 37 received their timetables on 30 June 2023.

  - CrossCountry received its timetable on 14 June 2023. This was earlier than the revised deadline for the December 2023 timetable change, but still 5 days later than the date specified by the Network Code.

  - Eurostar, which operates on the HS1 network, received its timetable on 7 July 2023. This was the date specified by the HS1 Network Code (D-22).

Train Operator Variation Requests (TOVRs)

- A total of 1189 TOVRs were made in the 26 weeks before the new December 2023 timetable came into operation.

- 81% of operators made at least one TOVR.

- 935 TOVRs (79% of the final total) had been received by 25 October 2023 (6.5 weeks before the timetable change).

- Most TOVRs (84%) were requested by freight operators, and most freight operator TOVRs were made in the final 12 weeks prior to the timetable going live. This is expected because of their business model of identifying and bidding for unused capacity in the base timetable.

- Of the passenger operators, TransPennine Express had the highest number of TOVRs at 26. Of these, 23 were requested in the final 12 weeks before the timetable change and 11 in the final 6.5 weeks.

- ScotRail had 24 TOVRs in total, slightly lower than TransPennine Express. However, all of ScotRail TOVRs were made in the final 12 weeks before the timetable started (but not later than the final 6.5 weeks).

June 2024 timetable change

For 2024 only, the usual May timetable change will instead take place in June, as industry continues to work towards compliance with Network Code milestones following the disruption caused by COVID-19.

The data below is current as of 5 April 2024. That is, 58 days before the timetable change.

D-40 date - Timeliness of passenger and freight operator timetable bids to Network Rail

- The D-40 date specified by the Network Code was 25 August 2023. For the June 2024 timetable change, Network Rail asked operators to submit bids by 20 October 2023 (D-32).

- 43 operators submitted bids for the June 2024 timetable change before 20 October 2023.

- Southeastern submitted a bid on 20 October but was required to rebid on 3 November 2023. We understand this was because of a change in requirement by its funder.

D-26 date – Timeliness of Network Rail providing operators with the timetable

- The D-26 date specified by the Network Code was 1 December 2023. For the June 2024 timetable, Network Rail was working towards a revised date of 29 December 2023 (D-22).

- All operators that submitted bids on time received their timetable on 29 December 2023.

- Southeastern rebid on 3 November 2024 and received its timetable on 26 January 2024.

Train Operator Variation Requests (TOVRs)

- As of 5 April 2024 (58 days before the June 2024 timetable change):

  – A total of 766 TOVRs had been received.

  – 193 TOVRs had been received from passenger operators.

  – ScotRail and TransPennine Express had made significantly more TOVRs that other passenger operators. Of the total, 28% came from ScotRail and 17% from TransPennine Express.

  – 559 TOVRs had been received from freight operators. 47% of these came from DB Cargo