Feras Alshaker
Chief Executive

Jeremy Westlake
Chief Executive
Network Rail

By email

1 June 2026

Dear Jeremy

Network Rail's implementation of its Wales & Western region train performance improvement plan

As you are aware, the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) issued a final order in July 2024 in response to Network Rail's contribution to poor train service performance in its Wales & Western region, requiring the development and implementation of a performance improvement plan. I am writing to confirm ORR's determination that Network Rail has now fully complied with the requirements of that final order.

Context

In late 2023, following sustained decline in train performance in the Wales & Western region, we opened an investigation into its compliance with Network Rail's Network Licence obligations. We subsequently issued a final order in two parts, the first requiring Network Rail to produce a train performance improvement plan and the second requiring it to implement the plan. Following Network Rail's submission of its plan in August 2024, we assessed that it had complied with the first part of the order.

Since then, we have conducted enhanced monitoring of the region's implementation and delivery of the plan, including regular reviews of progress, engagement with the region's stakeholders, site visits to gain assurance and reviewing the benefits being delivered.

Our review of compliance with the final order

On 20 April 2026, at our request, Network Rail submitted its Performance Improvement Plan Report, setting out why it is satisfied that the plan has been fully implemented. It has committed to publish the report on its website.

As captured in this report and verified through our enhanced monitoring, the region has implemented its plan through a broad range of activities to address the underlying causes of poor performance and improve its performance management capability.

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A major area of focus has been the Thames Valley and Network Rail has carried out a high volume of asset interventions concentrating on track, overhead line equipment, axle counters and points. Network Rail has supplemented these interventions with the introduction of welfare officers to prevent trespass at key Thames Valley stations. Further along the Great Western Mainline it has improved flood resilience at Chipping Sodbury. In the Wales route it has undertaken preparations for freight growth at Port Talbot to anticipate changes in freight flows. Across the region Network Rail has strengthened its operational leadership capability, enhanced train control functions, established dedicated timetable planning taskforces and review processes, and improved both incident learning and the management of stranded trains.

The region has also changed its approach to delivering train performance. It has strengthened its governance processes to maintain focus and build resilience, while investing in staff training and capability development. Its operating model has been reshaped to devolve greater control to its routes, giving them more of the levers needed to improve train performance. The region has also enhanced integration with train operators, from executive leadership to local railway teams. Through site visits and engagement with Network Rail staff, we have observed a shift in performance culture. This culture change will be key to Wales & Western sustaining the successful delivery of its plan and driving further improvements in train performance reliability.

The region has presented clear evidence of the benefits delivered by its plan. These benefits have supported a continued improvement in train performance over the period following the plan's inception. Since August 2024, passenger cancellations have reduced from 4.9% to 3.8% at the end of 2025-26 and the percentage of trains arriving within three minutes of their scheduled time has improved from 77.6% to 79.4%. The region has also achieved the train punctuality and reliability targets we set it for 2025-26. While this progress is noticeable, the region recognises there is opportunity to further improve train performance across the network and has strengthened its governance and capability to meet this challenge.

In assessing Wales & Western's delivery of its performance improvement plan, we engaged with stakeholders and considered their views. They highlighted the progress made in asset reliability, improved operational decision-making and better weather preparedness, all underpinned by a stronger performance focused culture and leadership. Stakeholders emphasised that a successful transition from a dedicated performance improvement programme to the routine management of the network will be critical to sustaining and building on performance gains.

Stakeholders also identified specific areas of focus, including improving communications with passengers during delays, ensuring freight infrastructure remains in good condition on the Western route, and strengthening the notification and handling of maintenance access. We expect Wales & Western to keep the needs and experience of passengers and freight users at the heart of its ongoing approach to managing train performance.

Next steps

We will continue to monitor delivery of the plan's longer term performance improvement activities through our regular engagement with the region. These activities are already underway and contributing to improved train performance. They include completion of an overhead line headspan renewals project between Paddington and Airport Junction, further points conversions, additional phases of work to improve weather resilience and the final stage of an operating model change programme designed to empower local teams to better deliver train performance.

We are grateful for Wales & Western's constructive engagement with us throughout our enhanced monitoring of the implementation of the plan, including arranging site visits and additional meetings to scrutinise the activities that have been delivered. Through this, we have seen first-hand the commitment of Network Rail's people across the region to the continued improvement of train performance.

Meeting the requirements of our final order represents a significant milestone in the region's efforts to improve train performance. We look forward to continuing our engagement with the region as it builds on this progress to deliver a high performing and reliable network for both passengers and freight users.

A copy of this letter will be published on our website.

Yours sincerely

Feras Alshaker
Chief Executive