Annual Assessment of Network Rail's stakeholder engagement April 2023 to March 2024

6. Southern

Summary of performance

Southern's self-assessment submission was of excellent quality, consistently scoring highly across all the four principles of stakeholder engagement. As such, we ranked the region as the strongest performer across the business units.

Southern has learnt from other business units, as well as sharing their own best practices, which we welcome and encourage the continuation of across all business units. The region has addressed the recommendations provided by ORR in last year's assessment and provided evidence to demonstrate continuous improvement.

Southern provided evidence of acting on stakeholder feedback throughout the submission, highlighting how feedback has changed decisions. For example, Southern re-wrote a strategic planning documentation (the Wessex Mainline Strategic Study) to include an analysis of journey time improvements to Waterloo, following feedback from Portsmouth and Southampton City Councils.

The reporting is reflective, informative and supported by evidence. There are multiple case studies which aim to illustrate the nature of the work and the different types of engagement which are being taken. There is strong evidence that Southern is continuing to innovate to improve

stakeholder engagement in all areas (e.g. 'out of hours on-call roster') and that it is proactively attempting to identify and apply best practice from elsewhere.

Consumer Expert Panel

Performance by principle of stakeholder engagement

Effective

Southern provided clear evidence of adjusting decisions based on stakeholder feedback, including the example of the Wessex Mainline Strategic Study outlined above. Engagement was also undertaken sufficiently far enough in advance to enable the outputs to be incorporated into decisions.

As the political landscape changed, Southern updated its stakeholder mapping accordingly, deploying a new tool to help create bespoke maps for each project.

Crucially, the region measured the impact of stakeholder engagement using both qualitative and quantitative feedback, such as newsletter readership figures and pulse survey results.

The region illustrates innovation through the development of new models for management and governance, such as the Southern Renewals Enterprise (SRE) and Southern Integrated Delivery (SID), the change in leadership, behaviours and skills that it brings, and developing it based on best practice in other sectors.

Consumer Expert Panel

Inclusive

Southern's detailed stakeholder mapping included a range of stakeholders including small to medium-sized enterprises, lineside neighbours and disabled passengers. The submission also provided evidence of tailoring communication and activities to meet the needs of different stakeholders.

Transparent

The region evidenced that stakeholders were given feedback on the engagement activities they took part in. This included explaining to stakeholders when their request could not be proceeded with, explaining why and finding an alternative solution instead

One of the positive things from Southern's submission is the work to embed a methodical and coherent approach to stakeholder engagement across all of Southern's activities, from the top to the bottom.

Consumer Expert Panel

Well-governed

Southern's self-assessment contained evidence that is best practice in terms of stakeholder governance. This is embedded within the region's principles of 'listen, learn, improve' and the focus on continuous improvement.

Good practice from self-assessment submission

The Motspur Park Access for All (transparent): A best practice example of stakeholders in Wessex being given the opportunity to feed into the strategic planning process in a timely manner. This included engaging with local communities to ensure their ideas and feedback are listened to and delivering upgrades accordingly. At Motspur Park this involved installing a footbridge to address youth trespassing.

Senior buy-in and governance (well governed): The chief of staff for the region reviews stakeholder engagement activities on a weekly basis. This is best practice of senior level commitment to stakeholder engagement.

Recommendations

Activity to continue or build on

Southern should continue the high-quality stakeholder engagement processes that it has in place. It could also consider how to help other regions to raise the overall level of engagement across

Network Rail, through continued sharing of learnings and successes.

Areas requiring improvement

Southern could consider how to further embed engagement with passengers and lineside neighbours around strategic and longer-term issues focused on the core aspects of planning and delivery, rather than just issues linked to service, complaints and planned work.

- ← Previous 5. Scotland
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