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

8. Wales & Western

Summary of performance

Wales & Western provided a strong submission which took on board ORR's feedback from last year, clearly outlining how this has been acted upon.

Wales and Western have reflected on ORR's feedback last year and clearly made changes as a result, which is good to see.

Consumer Expert Panel

Wales & Western provided good examples of how they are building and maintaining positive working relationships, to inform and educate stakeholders, such as passengers, lineside neighbours and those living in rural communities. Wales & Western also clearly evidenced engagement with a wide variety of stakeholders, including minority groups and local stakeholders, in a proportionate way.

We welcome the introduction of the independent challenge panel, and other commitments such as passenger drop-in sessions and Q&As which highlight how stakeholder's feedback and views are being listened to. We expect our recommendations from the Wales & Western investigation and the role of stakeholder engagement within that to be taken forward. This includes the expectation

that Network Rail adopts a renewed focus on passenger communication, to ensure passengers understand what is driving poor performance and when they can expect improved reliability and punctuality.

Performance by principle of stakeholder engagement

Effective

Wales & Western provided a wide range of methodologies for stakeholder engagement in its self-assessment, from helpline cards for lineside neighbours to stakeholder breakfasts. It is positive to see the variety of methods for reaching stakeholders, where engagement is tailored to the specific stakeholder, to ensure it is appropriate.

Wales & Western highlighted a range of meaningful stakeholder engagement opportunities, where stakeholders had the opportunity to provide feedback before decisions were made. The stakeholder challenge panel is a strong example of where stakeholder feedback has informed business thinking.

Inclusive

Wales & Western provided excellent stakeholder mapping, which highlighted that the region has a good understanding of all stakeholders, with a broad breadth of engagement across a wide variety of stakeholders.

Within the submission there was also evidence of where Wales & Western has taken on board feedback from stakeholders. For example the region acted on feedback from stakeholder polling, which showed stakeholders' preference for simultaneous rather than bilateral engagement.

The region has also focused heavily on accessibility of engagement, such as increasing engagement options for the digitally excluded.

Transparent

Wales & Western provided some evidence of targets linked to engagement as part of the submission, such as targets for the number of complaints and tracking against these. We would

recommend this approach of setting and monitoring targets is expanded to more areas of its stakeholder engagement.

The region also showed awareness of areas where improvement is needed, and lessons could be learnt. This focus on lessons learnt shows a mature approach to stakeholder engagement and a commitment to demonstrate continuous improvement.

Well-governed

Wales & Western used a variety of different polls to understand stakeholder perceptions and attitudes. We welcome a variety of stakeholder engagement methodologies. For example, the use of independent experts which helped to ensure that feedback was gained impartially. Using independent assurance to monitor the quality of engagement enables impartial, honest and frank feedback that can be translated into actionable outputs for the business unit. We encourage all business units to adopt this approach.

Good practice from self-assessment submission

Access for All in Abergavenny (inclusivity): Wales & Western has focused on ensuring engagement is appropriate for those who face digital exclusion. In Abergavenny, project and communications team members have undertaken door knocking as part of the Access for All scheme.
CP7 stakeholder challenge panel (well governed): Wales & Western put in place an independent stakeholder challenge panel for CP7, to scrutinise the development of its delivery plan, adopting best practice from other industries.

Recommendations

Activity to continue or build on

Wales & Western should continue to build trust with stakeholders. For example, It was positive to see the region build relationships with lineside neighbours and build trust via joint business planning forums with operators.

We recommend that the region continues its focus on inclusion, ensuring that different groups of stakeholders have communication tailored to their needs.

Areas requiring improvement

The region could do more to ensure that targets are consistently applied, and engagement is measured across all stakeholder activities.

While it was positive to see that Wales & Western followed up on feedback from stakeholders, it must ensure that this is done consistently, to enable stakeholders to be informed on how their feedback has been implemented.

It is positive that Wales & Western has identified areas for improvement in its stakeholder engagement. Wales & Western should consider how to address these going forwards.

In addition to the recommendations highlighted above, we also expect the region to take forward the recommendations highlighted in our recent train performance investigation:

(a) Network Rail has described a wide range of engagement touchpoints with its stakeholders. It is clear Wales & Western takes stakeholder engagement seriously with significant time commitment dedicated to it. As part of our recommendation to Network Rail to take a lead in seeking to drive greater cross-industry performance improvements, it should also reflect on its stakeholder engagement touchpoints to make sure that they are structured to most effectively govern performance improvement (NR5).

(b) Stakeholders have highlighted incident learning as a significant area for Network Rail to improve on. In addressing our incident learning recommendation (NR10), Network Rail should make sure that it takes a joined-up approach to incident learning with train and freight operating companies, to achieve appropriate participation in each other's incident learning reviews and transparency in tracking delivery of improvement actions.

(c) Lastly, we would urge Network Rail to adopt a renewed focus on passenger communication to make sure that passengers understand what is driving poor performance, what the region is doing to remedy this and when passengers can expect improved reliability and punctuality. Network Rail should continue to work with train operating companies to achieve timeliness and transparency of communications to passengers during delay incidents.

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