Rail access rights planning and use, 15 December 2024 timetable change

This publication provides management information on access rights planning and use. It provides a holistic view of passenger track access rights and can display how these are being used across the network including:

- track access applications made by freight and passenger operators of rail services in Great Britain
- the submission and approval timescales for passenger track applications against the timetable production milestones of the Network Code
- information on the use of access rights by passenger operators

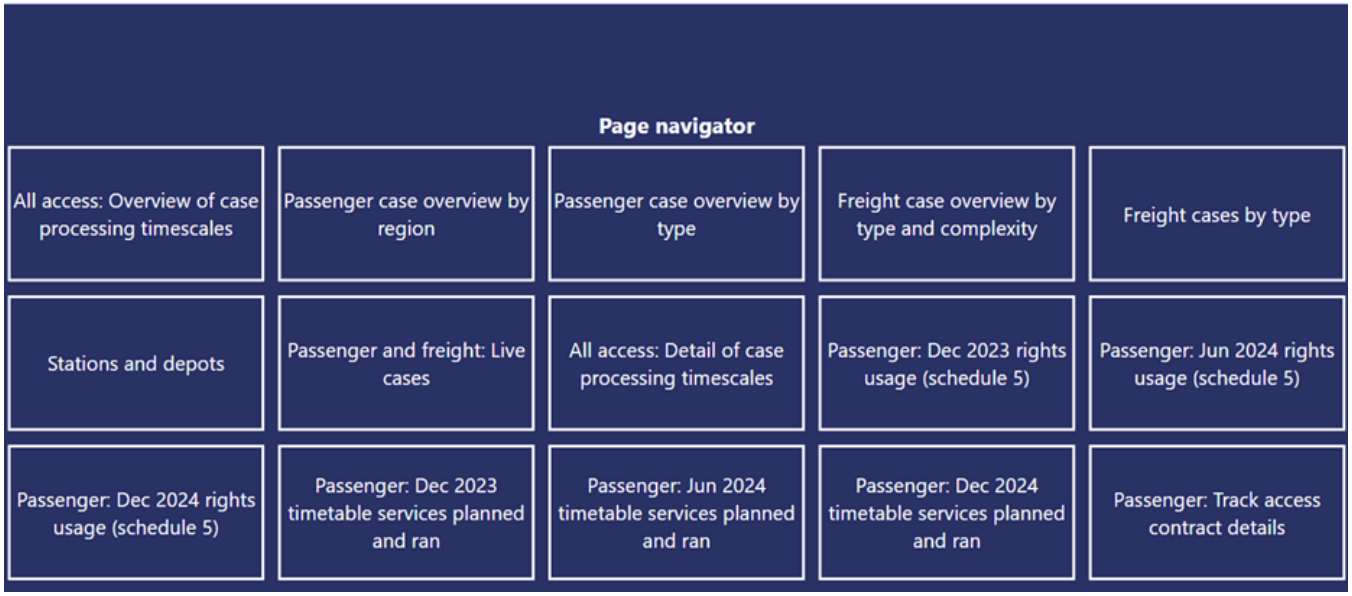
The latest data includes applications up to the Principal Timetable Change which began operation on 15 December 2024. Download the factsheet for more details.

The factsheet is accompanied by a Power BI dashboard and data tables available below.

View the glossary for more information on dashboard terminology.

View the dashboard, hosted on Power BI:

Access regulatory information



Key Messages

- December 2024 saw a large number of late applications which were created by administrative processes. Some of these supported improved services for passengers, whilst others were to continue existing services. ORR ensured that all supported applications submitted ahead of the timetable change were approved in time.
- December 2024 represented a significantly higher number of access applications when compared with the previous four timetable changes. Passenger train operators made 40 applications for additional or different capacity use (track access) for the timetable change date on 15 December 2024 which required ORR's specific approval and 7 applications which required ORR's general approval.
- 32 of these applications were submitted after the industry deadline for publishing the timetable and when advance ticket booking opens ('D12' – 12 weeks before the timetable change). This introduces a potential risk for operators (and passengers) of timetabled services not having the right to use the network. This represented a worsening of timeliness when compared with the May 2024 timetable change, where 10 out of 27 similar applications were approved after the industry timetable was published. In part, this was because Network Rail was not ready to offer long term access to all operators who had applied for it as part of the competing applications process in May 2024.
- The timetable monitoring production data published by ORR is a useful comparison for

looking at when operators had access rights in place against when Network Rail offered the timetable to industry at D26 (26 weeks before the timetable change). This shows that a high number of operators did not have long or short-term access rights in place by D26.

- As of 15 December 2024, passenger operators planned to use 87 per cent of the total contracted rights (capacity) allocated.
- Up to 25 March 2025 passenger operators actually ran train services which used 83 per cent of the total capacity allocated in terms of rights.
- Use of rights for most operators is impacted by planned engineering access. However, industrial action and short notice engineering work as well as decisions by operators and funders on when services run impact the use of rights.
- In some instances, operators were not able to explain differences between the rights held and the services planned or ran. It is important for industry to understand its rights in the timetable better to ensure capacity is used most effectively.

Regulatory access dashboard factsheet December 2024
Published 10 April 2025
PDF 513.82 KB
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Data tables

Table 1: Number of track access rights, by operator and flow in each service code, for week day and weekends Great Britain, biannual data, December 2024
Published 10 April 2025
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Table 2: Total Number of track access rights in each service code, by operator, Great Britain, biannual data, December 2024
Published 10 April 2025
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Table 3: Passenger track access applications, Great Britain, December 2024 timetable
Published 10 April 2025

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About ORR's role

ORR approves (or directs) the granting of access rights and monitors the timing of Network Rail and train operators' applications. Comparing when an application is made against the Network Code timescales is important because:

- passengers can have greater confidence that timetabled services will run because they are supported by a contract
- an operator has a contractual priority giving greater certainty its related services will run as planned in the timetable
- the greater certainty supports better operational planning for trains and crew

- → Next Glossary

Glossary

- **A and L function:** refers to functions within ORR Access and Licensing Team. These are passenger track access, freight access and stations and depot access
- **Access regulatory information:** the report name for the information we publish relating to passenger, freight and station and depot access on regulated networks
- **AVG days:** the average duration of the application process, meaning the average overall time, in days, from start to finish for all applications
- **Awaiting formal submission:** an application that is in the pipeline but not yet formally submitted to ORR
- **Complexity RAG:** A red, amber or green status applied to cases based on their complexity when processed by ORR. Green means any issues were minor and quickly addressed. Amber means concerns were raised but were resolved without further complication, and without significantly extending the case duration. Red means sustained problems which led to further complications, and/ or significant delays to the case process
- **Consultation:** the industry consultation carried out by Network Rail on behalf of the

application

- **Facility name:** the station, depot etc. that the contract refers to.
- **FNPO:** Freight and National Passenger Operator. This is an area of Network Rail that looks after nationwide operators
- **Formal submission invited:** ORR has completed its review and instructed applicants to submit the finalised legal documents
- **Formal submission received:** the applicants have submitted the finalised legal documents for ORR to approve
- **General approval:** permits Network Rail and a train operator to make amendments to their track access agreement, subject to certain conditions, without our specific approval
- **IM:** infrastructure manage
- **Influencing factors:** considerations ORR undertakes during application review
- **Informal submission received:** ORR has received an application from an infrastructure manager and a beneficiary to amend their contract
- **Live cases:** the current access applications being reviewed by ORR.
- **NC milestone:** relates to timetable production dates published in Network Rail's Network Code.
- **Non Network Rail Infrastructure:** areas of railway infrastructure that are not managed by Network Rail
- **Operator**: train operator
- **RFT:** right first time, referring to track access applications which are submitted with all evidence and information required for ORR to make a decision presented correctly.
- **PCD:** principal change date; referring to one of two annual updates to the UK rail timetable. This is the timetable change date which typically falls in December.
- **Region/route:** geographical area of Network Rail
- **SCD:** subsidiary or summer timetable change date, referring to one of two annual updates to the UK rail timetable. This is the timetable change date which typically falls in May.
- **Section:** section of the Railways Act 1993 which is part of the framework within which ORR operates as set by legislation
- **Segment:** the market segment of passenger train operators, whether they are open access operators or on public service contracts
- **SoAR:** Network Rail's Sale of Access Rights panel
- **Specific approval:** a regulated access contract reviewed and approved by ORR
- **TAC:** track access contract
- **Total access rights:** the overall number of track access rights held by passenger train

operators

- **Total services planned:** the number of services with access rights that train operators plan to run on the network
- **Total services ran:** the number of services with access rights that train operators actually ran on the network
- **Under review:** means ORR is undertaking its review of the application in line with its statutory duties

- ← Previous Rail access rights planning and use, 15 December 2024 timetable change

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