ORR Business Plan 2025 to 2026

Better Rail Customer Service

Accessibility of the rail network and services for all customers, and in particular customers with disabilities, remains a priority area for ORR this year.

We plan to establish a new framework for **benchmarking operators' provision of assistance** and to publish the first annual report in the autumn. This will help us judge how well train and station operators are meeting the obligation to provide assistance free of charge to anyone who needs it, irrespective of whether the help is booked in advance or requested at the station. By assessing performance in a more robust and transparent way we aim to both focus our efforts on the worst performing companies and disseminate good practice across the industry.

In parallel, we will drive improvements in the quality of industry data on assistance outcomes, requiring companies to report new data to us every month from April.

We will also publish a report on how staff at busy stations communicate with other stations about the needs of **passengers who have been assisted onto trains**. We will consider how to reduce the risk of a customer being left on a train at their destination, including the role that technology can play.

In 2024 we were asked by the Secretary of State for Transport to review train operators' and retailers' **revenue protection practices**, such as how they communicate ticket conditions and the use of penalty fares and prosecutions and we have also drawn on passengers' experiences. We want to support the right balance between punishing people who are trying to evade fares and recognising genuine mistakes. We will publish recommendations to government in May. We will also finalise the work initiated on the **Retail Information Code of Practice**, taking into account a number of our findings from the revenue protection review.

We will continue to hold companies to account for the quality of their **passenger information**, particularly during disruption; and for the quality and timeliness of their complaints handling and compensation processes.

We will continue to monitor the **Rail Ombudsman**'s effective delivery of, and improvements to, its service. This includes delivery of the ombudsman's accessibility road map, which sets out actions to ensure that the service is working well for disabled people, and others who might have specific accessibility needs. With Trainline recently joining the Ombudsman, we will continue to engage with other ticket retailers to encourage their participation and access to the service for their customers.

Access to the network and licensing of railway operators will remain a significant area of work this year. We will carry out our day-to-day role of reviewing and approving decisions taken between Network Rail and train operating companies about use of the network, including a continued focus on the competing applications for the May 2025 and December 2025 timetable changes. We will also continue to protect the public interest by ensuring that operators of rail assets are appropriately licensed.

We will continue to work with **First Group** as it prepares to implement new open access services between London and Wales, and London and Scotland. We will also continue to check that **Go-op** is making enough progress towards using the rights we gave it to operate regional open access services in the West Country. We will conclude our examination of depot capacity for new **international train services** and continue to work with applicants as they seek to develop their plans to introduce competition in the Channel Tunnel.

High-performing and resilient **timetables** are an essential part of providing a good service to passengers and freight customers. It is going to be particularly important that Network Rail continues to comply with established industry timescales in producing timetables, given the importance of successfully implementing the long-delayed new East Coast Mainline timetable in December 2025, and we will be holding them to account on this. We will continue to ensure transparency around the industry's delivery of timetabling and network access processes by publishing data on our website and ensuring that Network Rail and operators continue to make use of it.

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