Annual assessment of Network Rail 2024 to 2025

Train service performance

Key message 1

Although Network Rail missed the targets set for combined infrastructure and train operator cancellations and punctuality, the company reduced its delay to train services. Where regional performance was poor, Network Rail responded to ORR's challenge by developing credible improvement plans. ORR took enforcement action to secure better performance improvement plans in the Wales & Western region and train performance has since improved.

Passengers value reliable and punctual train services. We look at the percentage of passenger services that are cancelled and the percentage that are delayed – which are the product of both Network Rail and train operator delivery. In Year 1, 4.1% of passenger services were cancelled, missing the 3.4% target set. This is the highest level of cancellations seen since 2014 when recording started.

84% of passenger services arrived at stations within three minutes of their scheduled time. 66.4% of passenger services arrived at stations within one minute of their scheduled time, slightly below the target of 67.3%.

Time to 3, On Time and Passenger Cancellations versus targets, Great Britain, April 2024 to March 2025

Measure	2024-25	Target
Time to 3	84.3%	No target set
On Time	66.4%	67.3%
Cancellations	4.1%	3.4%

Source: ORR analysis of Network Rail data

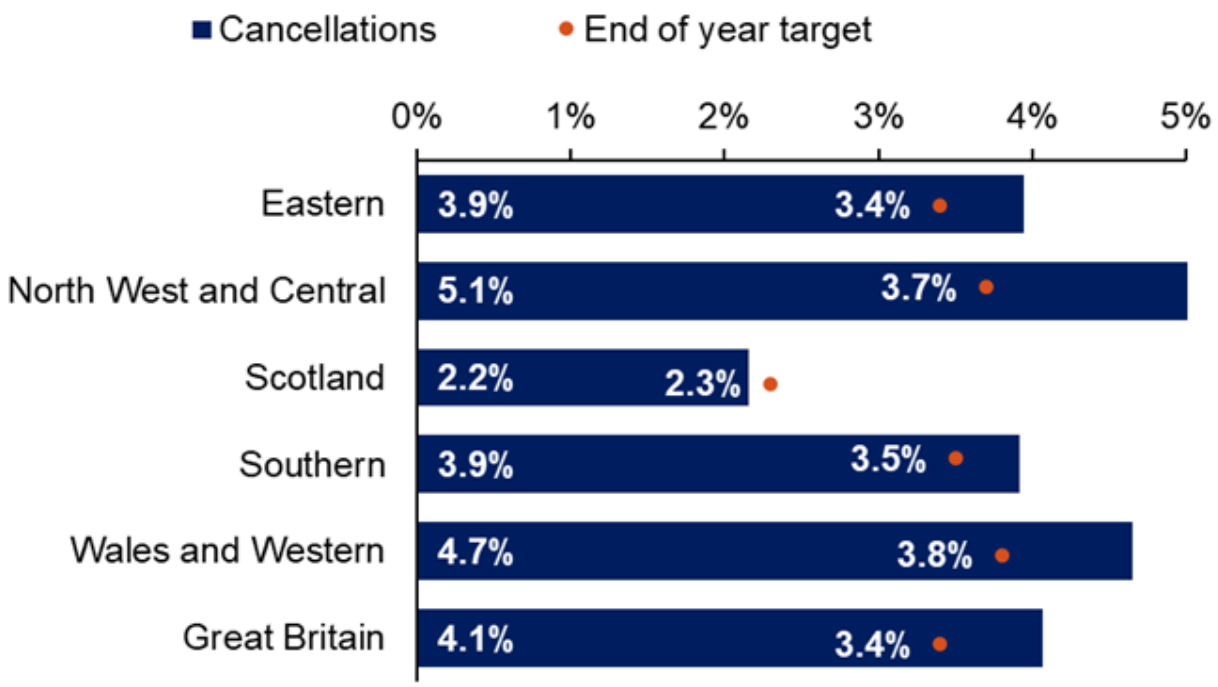
Note: Data presented is for Network Rail managed infrastructure only

In reviewing Network Rail's performance, we have assessed its contribution to these whole-industry measures.

Network Rail's contribution to minimising cancellations

Passengers experienced cancellations at the highest rate since the measure was introduced in 2014, with only the Scotland region meeting the target set. Cancellations can be attributed to either train operators or Network Rail. While the main variance to targets was caused by train operators, Network Rail still has an important role to play in improving service reliability.

Cancellations versus targets, by Network Rail Region, April 2024 to March 2025



Source: ORR analysis of Network Rail data

Note: Data presented is for Network Rail managed infrastructure only

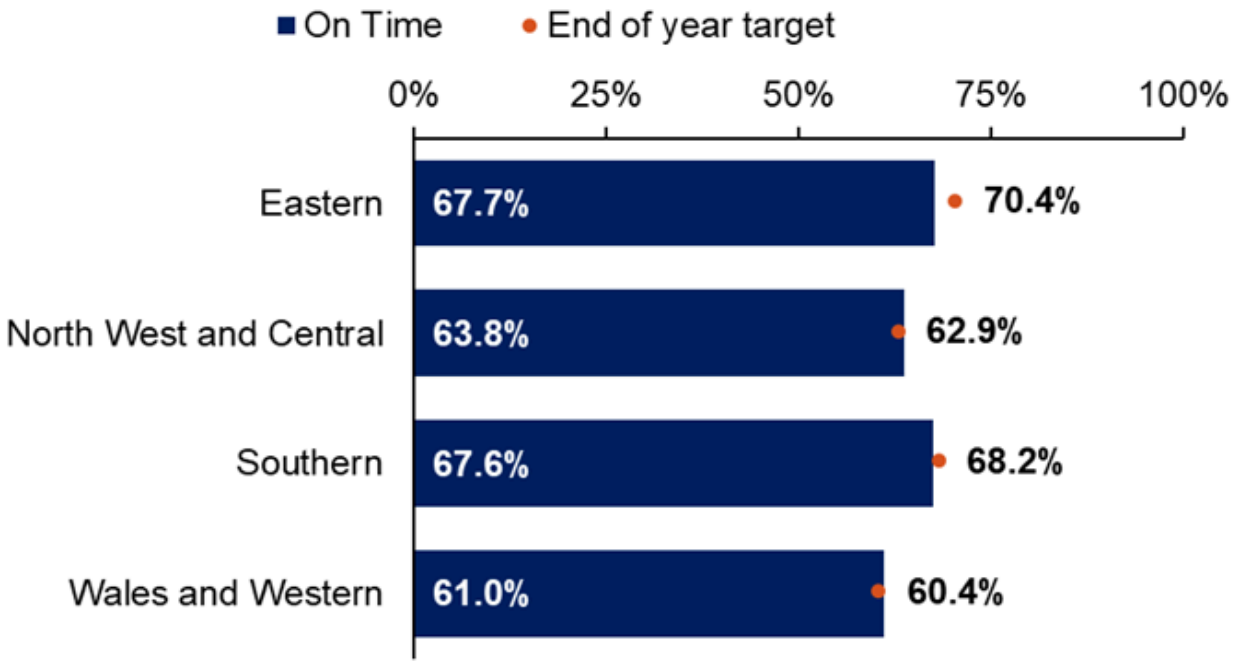
During the year, there were more cancellations attributed to train operators 2.3% than to Network Rail 1.8%, with primary causes including train operator staffing and fleet reliability. However, Network Rail cancellations were still a significant factor. We therefore required Network Rail's regions to demonstrate they have plans in place to improve their own performance in minimising cancellations. For Eastern and Wales & Western this formed part of their broader train performance improvement plans, discussed below.

We engaged two further regions, Southern and North West & Central, to review the measures they were taking to improve reliability. In North West & Central region, cancellations were particularly high. While this was mainly driven by train operator traincrew availability (such as in Northern), the region has developed its own reliability improvement plan for the 'First 60 Miles' from Euston. This focuses on causes of excess Network Rail asset-related delays and cancellations. Outcomes in the latter part of Year 1 suggest that this plan is beginning to have a positive effect. Southern has developed a plan focused on the following priorities: tackling sub-threshold delay, reactionary delay, points and train detection failures, trespass and antisocial behaviour, and cancellations. We are content that both regions understand the main causes of passenger cancellations and are taking appropriate action where their own cancellations are not at expected levels.

Network Rail's contribution to delivering punctual train services was mixed

Network Rail's performance in delivering punctual services varied across its regions, with Wales & Western and North West & Central regions meeting the targets set for running trains on time, but Eastern and Southern missing theirs.

On Time versus targets, by Network Rail Region, England and Wales, April 2024 to March 2025



Source: ORR analysis of Network Rail data

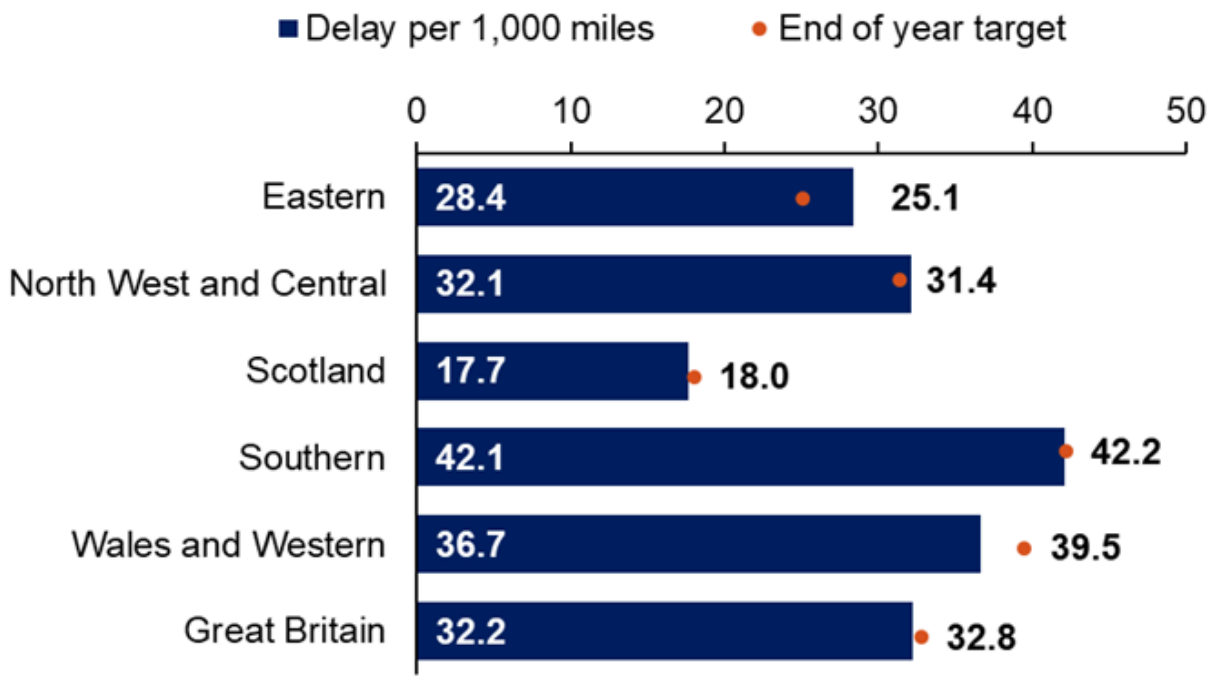
Over the year, on time performance improved by 0.4 percentage points in North West & Central and by 2.4 percentage points in Wales & Western. In contrast, on time performance worsened by 1.6 percentage points in Eastern and by 1.2 percentage points in Southern.

In Scotland, performance, as measured by the Scotland Train Performance Measure (STPM), which combines cancellations and punctuality. In the Delivery Plan for CP7, Network Rail Scotland set out a trajectory of how the alliance with ScotRail ('the Alliance') would deliver the target of 92.5% STPM by year 4 of CP7. In Year 1, performance was below the target agreed by the Alliance of 90.7% for the year, at 89.7%. However, Network Rail caused less delay than forecast – and less than in the previous year. A key reason for this was a 45% reduction in the delay caused by severe weather. Severe weather is a constant risk in Scotland, so the good Network Rail delivery in Year 1 may not be replicated in future years if there is more severe weather, but nevertheless, reducing delay

year-on-year is a significant achievement.

Across the whole network, train delays attributed to Network Rail (as measured by delay per 1000 miles of train travel) finished the year better than its own target (32.2 against a target of 32.8 minutes). There was variation across the regions. Eastern significantly missed its target while Wales & Western significantly outperformed its target.

Delay per 1,000 miles (NR attributable only) versus targets, by Network Rail Region, April 2024 to March 2025



Source: ORR analysis of Network Rail data

Note: Data presented is for Network Rail managed infrastructure only

Key underlying movements from the previous year included an increase in external delay (for example, from trespass) and a reduction in delay due to severe weather.

ORR took enforcement action to secure better performance improvement plans in the Wales & Western region. As a result, train performance in Wales & Western improved

In response to declining train service performance across Wales & Western, ORR carried out a

formal investigation in late 2023 and early 2024. In July 2024 we issued an enforcement order requiring Network Rail to produce and implement an improvement plan. The region responded positively, developing a robust, evidenced and comprehensive plan which we accepted. We are content that the region has made good progress in implementing the plan to date. Train performance improved in the second half of the year and the region met its Year 1 targets for passenger train punctuality. We will continue to monitor delivery of the plan.

The plan includes a substantial investment in assets in the London Paddington to Reading corridor. Year 1 did not have the same level of very high impact asset failure incidents that was seen the year before. There was a particularly notable improvement delivered in understanding and resolving issues with axle counters. The region also worked well with its train operator partners – for example collaborating closely with MTR Elizabeth Line (now GTS) to introduce a permanent presence in the Swindon control. Other impactful interventions included developing a new protocol for operating trains along the seawall at Dawlish in Devon, improving delay and reliability.

ORR required Network Rail to enhance its performance improvement plan in its Eastern region and we will be closely monitoring its delivery

During the year, whole industry train performance deteriorated in Network Rail's Eastern region. Network Rail delay per 1000 miles improved slightly, with an increase in delays associated with externals compared to the previous year, offset by a reduction in delays associated with severe weather (which fell by 27%). In October 2024, we wrote to Network Rail requesting that it review and refresh its performance improvement plan. It acknowledged the request and upgraded its regional plan. After reviewing the revised improvement plan, we confirmed in May 2025 that we were content that the key areas were addressed and that we considered the plan to be credible. We are closely monitoring the plan's delivery in Year 2.

Network Rail's activity to improve train operations

Network Rail has increased its focus on resilient train operations (including timetables) during the year and is playing an active role in promoting and delivering longer-term improvements. However, this is not a 'quick fix', and persistence will be needed to achieve better network-wide outcomes.

Keeping Trains Safely Moving is a whole-system initiative, led by Network Rail and supported by the Network Performance Board (which is an independently chaired committee of senior industry representatives, tasked with driving performance improvement at a network-level). The Keeping Trains Safely Moving programme aims to support operations staff taking informed decisions,

which reduce how many times trains need to be stopped in response to performance incidents (in turn leading to a different set of operational risks). It aims to reduce associated delay whilst maintaining safety.

Network Rail is also progressing Integrated Train Service Recovery, a programme of work to improve processes to recover train services more effectively and help reduce delay from incidents.

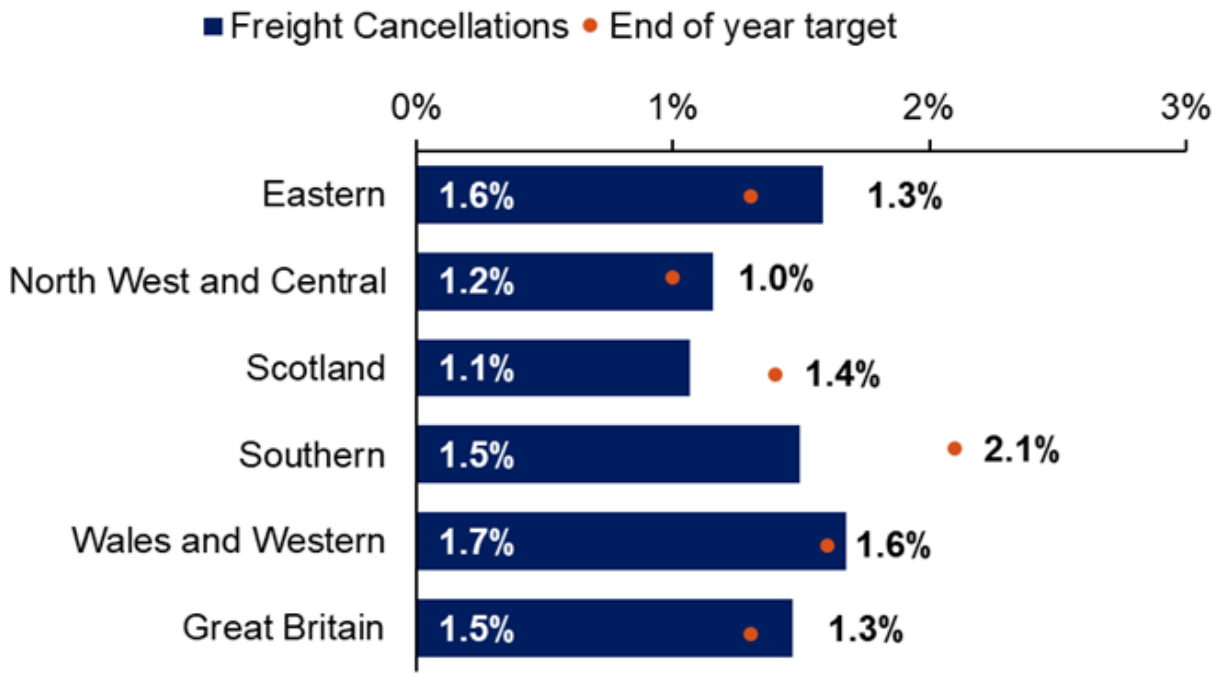
The Western route ran the Control Operations Leadership Academy, a programme of training to improve the capability of its control staff. This initiative is an example of good practice that could be replicated in other routes and regions.

In its Scotland, Anglia, Wales and Western routes, Network Rail progressed its rollout of a traffic management system, Luminate. This supports better operational decision-making during service disruption. Network Rail supported this with work to improve how this is utilised and embedded within working practices.

Freight performance improved and Network Rail only narrowly missed the national target set for freight cancellations

The level of freight cancellations improved over the year, with fewer cancellations than the previous year in all regions except North West & Central, where freight cancellations were stable. Network-wide freight cancellations narrowly missed the target set, but there was variation by region, with outturn better than target in Scotland and Southern.

Freight Cancellations versus targets, by Network Rail region, April 2024 to March 2025



Source: ORR analysis of Network Rail data

The largest category of Network Rail attributed freight cancellations was severe weather, autumn and structures – accounting for 36% of cancellations. Eastern region had the highest number of cancellations, making up 44% of the national total, but also has the highest freight train kilometres at 41%. As reported above, Eastern region has produced a train performance improvement plan and we are closely monitoring its delivery.

- ← Previous Annual assessment of Network Rail 2024 to 2025
- → Next Asset management