

Annual assessment of Network Rail 2025 to 2026

Capital investments

Delivery of the Access for All programme continued

The Access for All schemes, focusing on improving accessibility at railway stations nationwide, continue to be delivered in control period 7 (CP7). Since the start of the control period, 36 schemes have been completed. A further 14 schemes are in delivery and 13 are progressing through design and development, with the intention of completing all remaining CP6 schemes by the end of CP7.

We remain concerned about the lack of a delivery plan to keep stakeholders informed on the delivery of both CP6 and CP7 schemes, although we note that the Access for All webpage has been updated to include CP7 schemes.

We are also concerned about how scheme benefits are communicated to passengers. Despite Network Rail's press activity, a significant number of completed stations still state they have no lifts on the National Rail Enquiries station pages and map.

We share the concerns of Network Rail's Technical Authority regarding the application of 'safety by design' principles and instances where delivered schemes have deviated from Network Rail's own design standards and specifications. We raised these issues directly with the Access for All programme. These concerns indicate weaknesses in design assurance and compliance. Network Rail has initiated a programme of rectification, and we will monitor progress on this.

Transparency of enhancements delivery is improving in England & Wales, but an updated enhancements delivery plan for Scotland has not been published.

We continue to work with Network Rail in England & Wales and Scotland to improve transparency of enhancement activity. In Year 2, Network Rail maintained publication of its enhancements delivery plan (EDP) for England & Wales, providing greater clarity on key milestones.

However, in Scotland there has been no public update to the EDP since 2022. We continue to engage with Network Rail and industry partners to support the resumption of regular publication, recognising its importance for supply chain confidence and stakeholder visibility.

The 27 enhancements delivery milestones published in the England & Wales EDP (up to March 2026) are listed below.

Enhancement delivery milestones published in the England & Wales enhancements delivery plan (up to March 2026)

Completed on target
East West Rail Phase 2 – Connection Stage 1
Tactile Installation Programme
Midland Main Line Programme – South of Bedford OLE125

Completed but milestone revised

Wigan to Bolton Electrification

East Coast Digital Programme – Northern City Line

Liverpool Street Pedestrian Capacity Project

Barnt Green Lifts

Bradford Forster Square Capacity Improvements

On target for delivery in future years

Manchester Airport Remodelling (New Milestone)

TransPennine Route Upgrade E1 Church Fenton to York

TransPennine Route Upgrade W4 Ravensthorpe to Leeds

TransPennine Route Upgrade E234 Leeds to Church Fenton

TransPennine Route Upgrade W3 Huddersfield to Ravensthorpe

On target for delivery in future years

East Coast Digital Programme Tranche 4

Poplar Lines Electrification

Cardiff Central Station Modernisation (New Milestone)

MetroWest 1b: Portishead Line (New Milestone)

Delayed into future years

East Coast Main Line Power Supply Upgrade Phase 2

NW Train Lengthening Phase 3B

Cambridge South Infrastructure Enhancements

Bushey Power Supply Upgrade

Oxford Corridor Phase 2

Darlington Station Capacity

Subject to change control

Manchester and Northwest Transformation Programme – Configuration Stage 2
Infrastructure

Stratford Station Congestion Relief Scheme (Short Term)

East Coast Digital Programme Tranche 2 Welwyn to Hitchin Overlay (ETCS Operational
Migration)

East Coast Digital Programme Tranche 2 Welwyn to Hitchin Overlay (ETCS L2 No-signals)

Strategic renewals are progressing, but deferrals risk introducing inefficiencies and delivery challenges.

The West Coast North Modernisation Programme (WCNMP) successfully delivered approximately 80 single track kilometres of overhead line equipment in January 2026. Delivery was broadly in line with plan despite weather impacts. Development activity continues across the region, supported by a full line of route plan to inform future funding period planning and potential enhancement opportunities.

At Crewe, the Basford Hall and Independent Lines project was commissioned in 2025, and progress has been made in the development and access integration for the five work packages. However, several projects have been deferred to future funding periods, which we consider is likely to introduce inefficiencies and create significant delivery challenges.

In September 2025, we commissioned external consultants to assess how Network Rail and National Highways manage large renewal projects. The review identified opportunities to improve governance arrangements for repeatable renewals, better embed lessons learned, and strengthen

benchmarking and cost estimation in early project stages.

These findings will inform our ongoing monitoring and our advice to funders ahead of the next funding review. We will continue to engage with Network Rail to prioritise implementation of the recommendations in a proportionate way.

The digital signalling portfolio is unlikely to deliver all CP7 outputs, with slippage and supply chain uncertainty driving deferrals into future funding periods.

We continue to monitor Network Rail's delivery of its digital signalling portfolio, which includes infrastructure renewals, fleet fitment, enabling works, research development and innovation projects and CP6 legacy projects associated with the deployment of European Train Control Systems (ETCS).

Network Rail has maintained positive engagement on the portfolio during Year 2. It has continued to provide transparent updates by working with industry to understand challenges and establish revised programme baselines where appropriate. However, key initiatives such as the fleet fitment programme continue to slip.

Within the portfolio, the East Coast Digital Programme (ECDP) has continued to refine its delivery schedule, migration strategy and affordability assumptions, with outcomes expected to defer significant delivery volumes into the next funding period. As ECDP is jointly funded via the periodic review 2023 settlement and the Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline (RNEP), we will assess the implications for renewals outputs, funding and asset condition once plans are finalised. ECDP reporting would benefit from clearer governance, particularly in distinguishing enhancement and renewal reporting which would support greater transparency across the programme.

We appointed independent reporters to review Network Rail's change management capability across the portfolio. The review found Network Rail's framework had a good foundation, but identified that lengthy decision timelines, and a process of documenting rather than driving change, reduced its effectiveness. It recommended stronger links to risk management, improved

governance between projects and portfolio and more collaborative stakeholder engagement to prepare for rising future change volumes.

We have also appointed independent reporters to review deliverables and financial reporting, building on our Year 1 work. Initial Year 2 findings confirm a significant reduction in portfolio spend, including:

- West Coast North Modernisation Programme (WCNMP) re-profiling £295m of digital signalling spend in CP7 to digital enabling spend in CP7, with a proportion deferred into funding period 1 (FP1);
- fleet fitment slippage due to commercial and delivery challenges in freight;
- ECDP slippage due to delivery phasing challenges and the complexities of delivering an ETCS overlay integrated with a conventional signalling system, alongside maturity of the supply chain in the UK; and
- further reductions across other initiatives, e.g. the speed management programme.

Supply chain uncertainty across the portfolio is weakening confidence in industry commitment to digital signalling deployment and may erode the supply chain's capability to meet portfolio requirements. Potential misalignment between enabling programmes, fleet fitment and the signalling renewals workbank is driving further instability. This is an area that would benefit from greater cross-industry alignment in preparation for GBR taking on its role as directing mind.

These findings and our own monitoring, suggest the portfolio will not deliver all of the outputs set at the start of CP7, impacting future funding periods and leading to inefficiencies.

Network Rail is making progress on its capability to deliver capital programmes.

We continue to monitor Network Rail's implementation of recommendations from our 2024 capital investment capability framework assessment. We have observed positive progress across Network Rail centrally and the regions, particularly in coordinating new processes and approaches to renewals output and benefits management.

The shift to devolved capital delivery in CP7 represents a significant organisational change for Network Rail, building on its earlier regionalisation. In March 2026, we published our targeted assurance review of regional capital delivery operating models, which examined the differences

and commonalities across regions and how these models have evolved in the early stages of the control period. The review established a baseline for further assessment later in CP7.

We have also increased engagement with the supply chain through industry forums and representative bodies to better understand market perspectives on delivery, visibility and investment confidence. While we have observed improvements in the quality of pipeline information and coordination compared to the start of CP7, further progress is required to provide the certainty and transparency needed by suppliers. Our engagement has highlighted ongoing variability in communication and forward planning across the regions. We will continue to monitor Network Rail's engagement with, and provision of transparent information to, its supply chain to seek further improvements.

On power supply projects, engagement with National Grid varies across regions and schemes. The Rail Investment Centre of Excellence is leading work with National Grid to improve engagement, and we are monitoring this to understand how improvements are embedded.

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