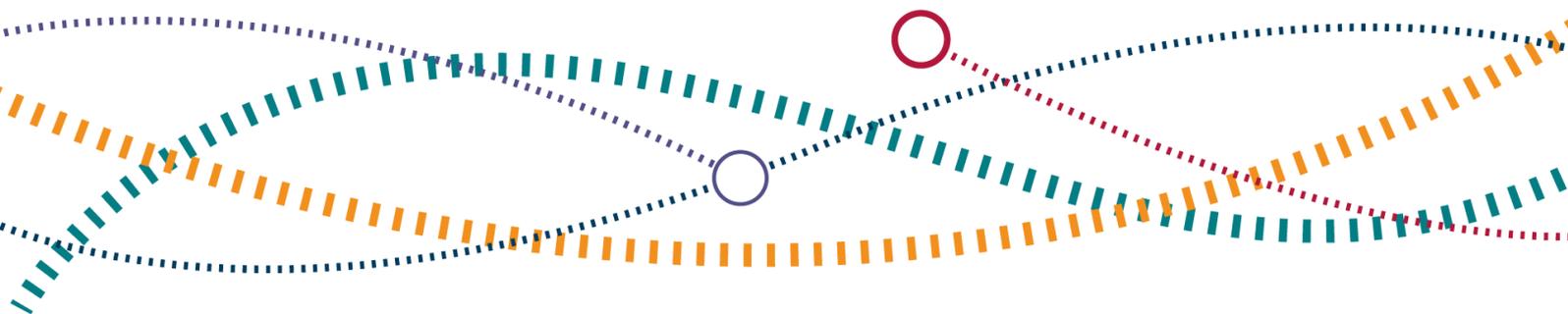




Annual assessment of Network Rail's stakeholder engagement 2020-21

Eastern region – individual assessment

22 September 2021



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Eastern region

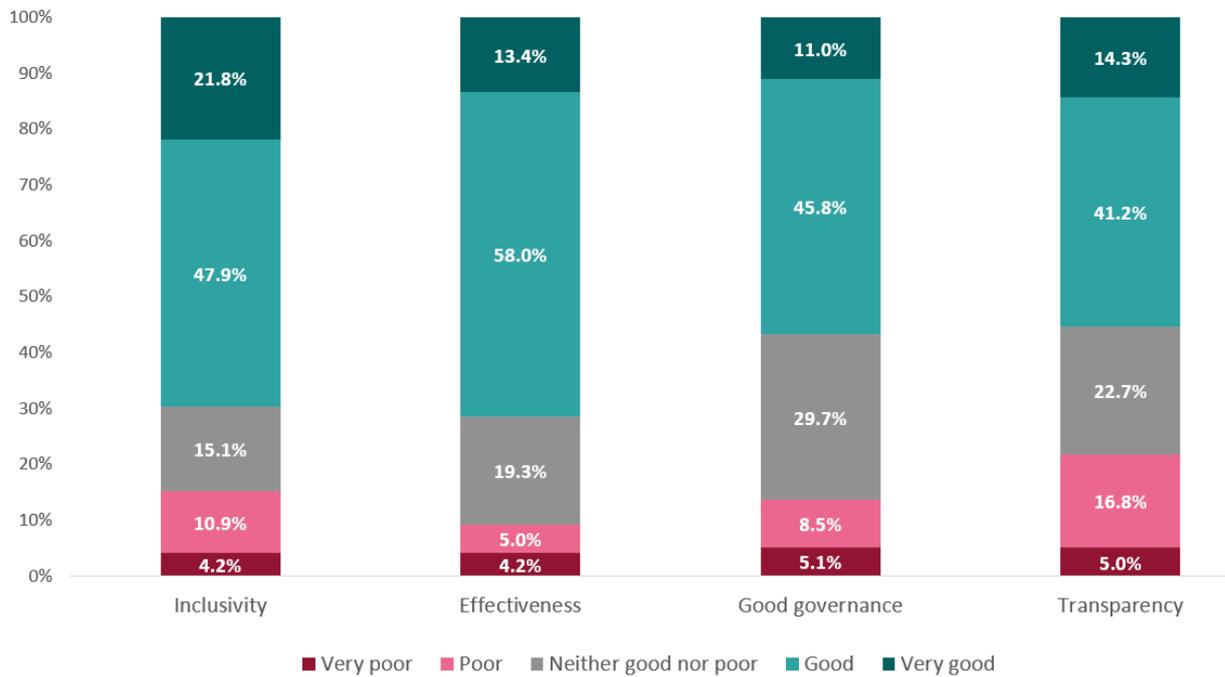
Introduction

1. This report presents our key findings and recommendations on the quality of Network Rail's Eastern region stakeholder engagement during the second year of Control Period 6 (CP6), from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021. Alongside this report we have separately published our key findings and recommendations on the quality of Network Rail's stakeholder engagement as a whole during year 2 of CP6, as well as individual assessments for:
 - a) each of the remaining Network Rail regions;
 - b) the Freight and National Passenger Operators (FNPO) function;
 - c) the System Operator (SO); and,
 - d) Network Rail's engagement on its Enhancement Delivery Plan.

Summary

2. Network Rail's Eastern region stakeholders responded very positively about the engagement that took place during the year. 75% of survey respondents rated the region's engagement as good or very good, and 58% thought that engagement had improved. This is broadly in line with Network Rail as a whole.
3. Stakeholders also positively rated the region's engagement during the year across the four principles of good stakeholder engagement (Figure 1.1). Network Rail's Eastern region's results compare well with the other business units, except on transparency.

Figure 1. Stakeholder views on Network Rail's Eastern region's engagement across the four principles, 2020-21



Survey question: "In your opinion how would you rate Network Rail's Eastern region's engagement with you on Network Rail's Network Licence obligations of inclusivity, effectiveness, good governance, and transparency?"

Source: ORR's stakeholder survey

4. The region's own self-assessment shows that it has implemented a range of activities to engage with stakeholders in a tailored and proportionate way. We also noted the design or implementation of several improvement plans to respond to stakeholder feedback, in particular with suppliers, lineside neighbours, and community rail partnerships. However, the region's self-assessment provided limited evidence in a number of important areas, including on:
 - a) How it ensures coordination and consistency in stakeholder engagement across its routes, or what the challenges are and how it plans to tackle them;
 - b) How it ensures that upcoming engagement activities are visible to stakeholders, and that any relevant information or data is shared in advance of engaging; and,
 - c) How it ensures that all stakeholders are routinely given feedback on what changed or did not change (and why) as a result of its engagement.

5. Our own experience of the region's engagement highlights that devolution to its routes has allowed it to develop a localised approach to stakeholder engagement and we have seen excellent cross-region/route working. However, devolution has also made the distribution of responsibilities and accountabilities between the region and the routes more complex, and limited opportunities for strong regional governance and the sharing of best practice. In addition, we have seen robust engagement with stakeholders and initiatives to find joint solutions. We were particularly impressed by the East Midland route's approach to the electrification of the London to Corby railway line and how it dealt with issues, by working closely with train operators to resolve train operations issues such as driver training and contingency planning.
6. The region did recognise a number of areas for improvement in its own self-assessment, including to:
 - a) Develop its engagement with Community Rail Partnerships to get closer to passengers and understand better the importance that rail services have on communities and local businesses;
 - b) Improve its engagement and service with lineside neighbours, in particular by reducing complaint response time; and,
 - c) Improve its staff training and development around stakeholder engagement to better equip its employees with the skills necessary to positively manage its relationships.
7. Our view is that these are broadly right, but need to be supplemented by:
 - a) Improving the transparency of upcoming stakeholder engagement activities, by identifying and sharing relevant information and data with stakeholders prior to engaging with them; and,
 - b) Reviewing whether feedback is consistently given to all stakeholders on how their views were taken into account or if not, explaining why not.

Key conclusions across each principle

Table 1. Summary of key conclusion(s) across the four principles

Principle	Key conclusion(s)
Inclusiveness	<p>The Eastern region engaged with a wide range of stakeholders in a proportionate manner.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement is particularly strong with passenger train operators and suppliers. However, we noted in our survey that, whilst most passenger train operators responded positively on their inclusivity within the Eastern region’s engagement, a couple of train operators expressed concerns around the possibility that the region had prioritised its relationship with major operators on its network. We also noted increased engagement with freight operators, to respond to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and involve them more systematically in key projects and the strategy for the region e.g. the TransPennine Route Upgrade project and electrification strategy. Additionally, the region has implemented a strategy to improve its engagement with local stakeholders, in particular community rail partnerships and lineside neighbours. Our survey and interviews have indicated that these stakeholders responded positively to Eastern’s efforts. <p>The Eastern region segmented its engagement strategy with some stakeholders to ensure it met the needs of each group.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For example, it divided suppliers into three different groups and adapted its engagement approach accordingly. Our survey indicates that suppliers responded very positively to this initiative and several regarded it as good practice to share more widely. This is very positive and we encourage Network Rail’s regions to assess more systematically the merits of differentiating engagement approaches within stakeholder groups.

Going forward, the region should focus on developing the accessibility of its engagement activities.

- The region has demonstrated some consideration of the accessibility of its engagement activities with the wider public. For example, the Anglia route combined traditional methods of engagement with digital means to consult on a major enhancement work (new Cambridge South Station project) and considered the accessibility of the engagement activities to people with hearing or vision impairment.
- The region should review whether further steps should be taken to ensure the accessibility of its engagement with all stakeholders (for example with rail industry members, not just the wider public), in a systematic and proportionate manner.

Key strengths

- The region engaged with a wide range of stakeholders.
- The region ensured that its engagement approach is tailored to stakeholder needs and capabilities, for example by segmenting stakeholder groups.

Areas for development

- The region took the initiative to segment its engagement approach within stakeholder groups and should assess the merits of doing this more widely.
- The region should review the accessibility of its engagement to all stakeholders.

Effectiveness

Stakeholders responded very positively to the effectiveness of the Eastern region’s engagement and we noted the development of robust working relationships with key stakeholders.

- As with Network Rail’s other regions, our own evidence showed that collaboration is stronger with train operators. Operators are regularly involved on strategic level issues; issues are resolved jointly where appropriate (e.g. performance on Liverpool-Norwich railway line); and, we noted a smooth process to agree on scorecard measures and targets. We particularly noted the creation of a partnership style of relationship between the North and East route and a passenger train operator; where they sought to act as one team and have devised a common

plan to deliver outcomes for passengers and taxpayers. However, as noted above, our survey suggested that the quality of the relationships between the region and its passenger train operators can vary from one operator to another.

- Regarding suppliers, the Eastern region has effectively increased its engagement to support suppliers through the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, for example with more regular engagement and relief processes. This is in line with the approach taken in Network Rail's other regions. Suppliers responded positively to these efforts in our survey, although one of them stated that their relationship with the region remained too contractual and that they would appreciate a more collaborative style of relationship.

Finally, the evidence highlighted that the region's stakeholder views have effectively influenced processes and decisions.

- One example is the Cambridge South Station project for which the region's Anglia route led a public consultation before decisions were made. Key changes were agreed following stakeholder feedback and the outcomes of the consultation were reported publicly.
- Another important example concerns lineside neighbours. The region's engagement has historically been poor with lineside neighbours and Network Rail as a whole has often failed to respond to a rising number of queries and complaints in an effective manner. The region has recognised this and presented an improvement plan, in which it proactively listened to lineside neighbours' complaints to understand their issues and concerns, reviewing its processes accordingly, with input from experts outside of the rail industry. While these efforts are positive, we note that the region's performance to respond to lineside neighbours' complaints continues to remain below its own standards, as set out in the individual route scorecards, as well as Network Rail's Network Licence requirements on timely stakeholder engagement. The region should therefore pursue

its efforts with lineside neighbours and ensure that effective improvements are secured.

Key strengths

- The region has developed robust collaborative relationships with operators on its network, although this can be perceived as inconsistent across all train operators.
- Effective engagement with suppliers through the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic which was well recognised both by our internal intelligence and survey.
- Strong evidence of responding to stakeholder feedback, including with the design of improvement plans where necessary.

Area for development

- The region should review the implementation of its different improvement plans and evaluate the results achieved and identify further improvements to make, in particular with lineside neighbours and Community Rail Partnerships.

Well – governed

The region implemented solid governance frameworks with its key stakeholder groups or for major projects which demonstrated good practice (e.g. organising meetings in advance and providing visibility to stakeholders on upcoming activities, sharing agendas and slide packs in advance, sharing meeting minutes and recording actions). In our survey, several stakeholders reported that they appreciated having more visibility on stakeholder engagement activities and many respondents cited the implementation of the Supplier Account Management meetings as good practice to share more widely.

Furthermore, the Eastern region implemented governance processes to support continuous improvement in stakeholder engagement.

- For example, it designed a maturity assessment to evaluate and monitor its stakeholder engagement against a range of criteria, and for each major stakeholder or stakeholder group. This is very good practice, which demonstrates a focus on improvement. We recommend developing this maturity assessment further and aligning it with the four principles of good stakeholder engagement as defined in Network Rail's Network Licence.

More generally, devolving stakeholder engagement to the routes has come with opportunities and challenges in terms of stakeholder engagement.

- On the one hand, the region's routes have developed a more local approach to stakeholder engagement. In our survey, many respondents noted that devolution has positively impacted upon the region's engagement.

“The transition to regions and routes has led to a general refresh and improvement in engagement.” (An Eastern region stakeholder).

- On the other hand, devolution has blurred responsibilities between the region and its routes, making it more difficult to ensure consistency in engagement across its routes, and between its routes and its regional strategy and priorities. It has also introduced multiple interfaces and contact points for stakeholders, putting a strain on its resources. In its self-assessment, the region acknowledged this and its North and East route reported that it has developed cross-route and cross-region working to rationalise engagement with passenger train operators. The region needs to investigate the opportunities to develop cross-working initiatives more widely (as appropriate).

Key strengths

- The region implemented governance frameworks to manage its relationships and engagement with stakeholder groups in a structured way.
- The region developed and implemented a maturity assessment to review and monitor the development of its stakeholder engagement approach.
- There were positive examples of cross-region and cross-routes workings to streamline engagement.

Areas for development

- We view positively the region's maturity assessment and we recommend aligning it with the four principles of good stakeholder engagement, as defined in Network Rail's Network Licence.
- Clarify responsibilities between routes and the region to stakeholders, as appropriate.
- Continue to develop cross-route or cross-region working, as appropriate.

Transparency

While there is some evidence that the region took steps to improve the transparency of its engagement, it performed less well on this principle.

- We have collected examples of the region's sharing of information with its stakeholders, for example through newsletters, project briefings, social media or a website. We have also found some evidence of the region sharing relevant information or data with stakeholders to support specific engagement activities, for example with suppliers or train operators to agree scorecard measures and targets.
- In our survey, some stakeholders noted that the provision of information from Network Rail had improved but it can be difficult to navigate the amount of available information and identify the most useful parts of it. In general, in our survey, stakeholders responded less positively on the transparency of the region's engagement, compared to the other principles. This indicates that the region should review the transparency of its engagement, and in particular the volume and targeting of its communications.

Furthermore, we collected some examples of the region feeding back to its stakeholders on the outcomes of its engagement activities that they took part in, although it remains unclear how systematic this is.

- For example, for the Cambridge South Station Project, the announcement of the preferred option will include the results of the consultation activities and how the consultation has helped to develop the project proposals and what key changes were made as a result. The region also mentioned the existence of a

“you said, we did” programme which aims to inform train operators of how it responded to their feedback.

- However, it remains very unclear how systematic these initiatives are, and if they are implemented with all stakeholder groups. Network Rail’s Eastern region should therefore review whether it has processes in place to consistently inform all of its stakeholders of how their engagement influenced plans, or not. The ability to provide feedback to stakeholders is crucial to preserve trust between Network Rail and its stakeholders and maintain a constructive ground for further engagement.

Key strength

- The region provided some evidence of communicating regularly with stakeholders to share relevant information.

Areas for development

- Review how the region can improve the transparency of upcoming stakeholder engagement activities, in particular the volume and targeting of its communications.
- Take further steps to ensure feedback is routinely provided to all stakeholders on how their input influenced plans and decisions, or if not, why not.



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