

A Year in Rail and the Track Ahead



Safety

"A safe railway today is the foundation for a safer railway tomorrow."

Richard Hines,
HM chief inspector of railways

The collision at Talerddig last year, which claimed one life and injured many others, was a sobering reminder of what can happen when risk controls fail. Especially as the mainline railway undergoes a period of profound change through reform, it is a reminder that as an industry we cannot be complacent when it comes to safety.

A key area of focus this year has been Network Rail's assets. Substantial progress was made in addressing overdue assessments for structures and drainage assets, although this has been delivered in context of focussed regulatory attention.

Welfare provision has been a recurring concern, with rail staff often experiencing gaps in access to facilities such as toilets. We have seen improvement in some locations, but other areas require urgent attention. The evaluation of welfare provision will form a standard part of all of our inspections during 2025 to 2026.

Our health and safety permissions and approvals work this year included supporting the transition of train operating companies into public ownership. We continued work with DfT to explore options for streamlining the current statutory train driver licensing regime. A key early outcome has been to reduce the minimum licensed train driver age from 20 to 18 years.

We work closely with industry on regulatory issues but will take enforcement action where necessary. We served four Improvement Notices during the year and concluded three criminal prosecutions, including two relating to the deaths of trackworkers at Margam and Surbiton.

Performance

Passengers continued to return to the network in 2024-2025. Punctuality remained largely stable but cancellations reached record highs.

While most cancellations were attributed to TOCs, Network Rail missed its national targets for reliability and punctuality. The company has reduced its delay to train services.

Network Rail's Scotland region was alone in meeting its reliability and punctuality targets. Nationally, freight performance improved, narrowly missing targets.

Where we saw underperformance in the Wales & Western, and Eastern regions, Network Rail has responded constructively to our challenges. Network Rail received a high volume of access applications this year from operators, but its decision making was not timely and needs to speed up.

Passenger Journeys continued to rise in 2024-25

1,729m



Finances and efficiency

Network Rail delivered strong efficiency gains in 2024-2025, achieving £325 million in savings—£62 million above target.

However, the company has a significant funding gap of £488 million, which we have asked it to take action to resolve.

In addition, inflation and cost overruns pose challenges, and have seen Network Rail scale back its planned renewals in future years, potentially

impacting long-term performance and increasing future costs. While the organisation has embedded further savings, these have been offset by external pressures. Sustained financial discipline and strategic planning are essential to maintain value for money and deliver on CP7 commitments.

In 2024-2025

£62m
above target for
efficiency gains

Consumer and accessibility

This year we have made a number of interventions to improve the customer experience on the railway.

On ticketing, we secured increased transparency for passengers on fees, with the eight retailers we had concerns about all making significant changes to their online platforms.

Earlier this year, the Secretary of State for Transport asked ORR to review train operators' revenue protection practices. We found there is an urgent need to reform how rail fare enforcement works to make it fairer, more consistent and effective.

On passenger information, we have focussed on how operators respond when there is a disruption, welcoming improvements in information about rail replacement services, and bringing the industry together to consider the safety and welfare of passengers in stranded train incidents.

Our rail network should be accessible to all, and this year there has been a 17% increase in the number of bookings for passenger assistance. Our work this year included consultation on a new framework for benchmarking operators' performance in delivering assistance, agreeing an improvement plan with Northern Trains, reviewing the reliability of help points and asking station operators to review their approach to monitoring them, and reviewing the communications between staff at boarding and destination stations when providing assistance and asking operators to review their approaches to handover.

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