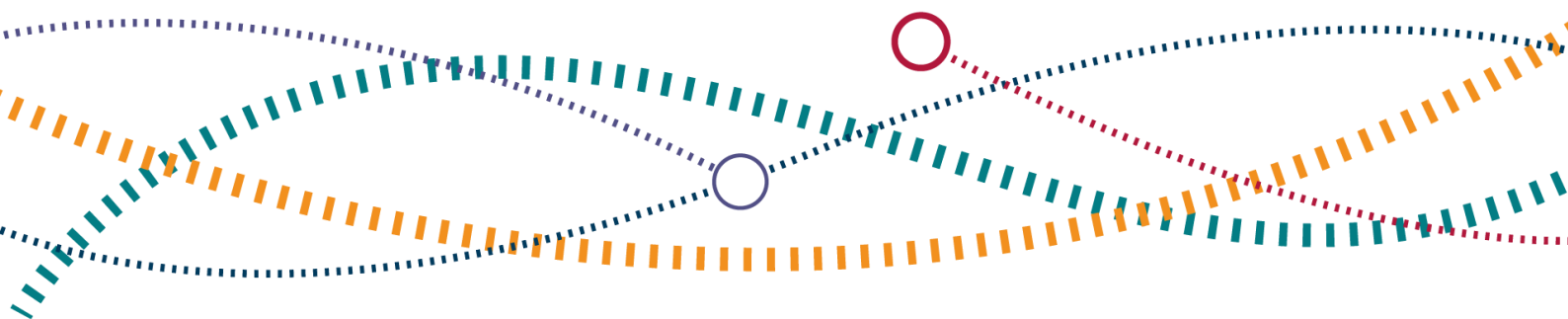




Access rights planning and use factsheet

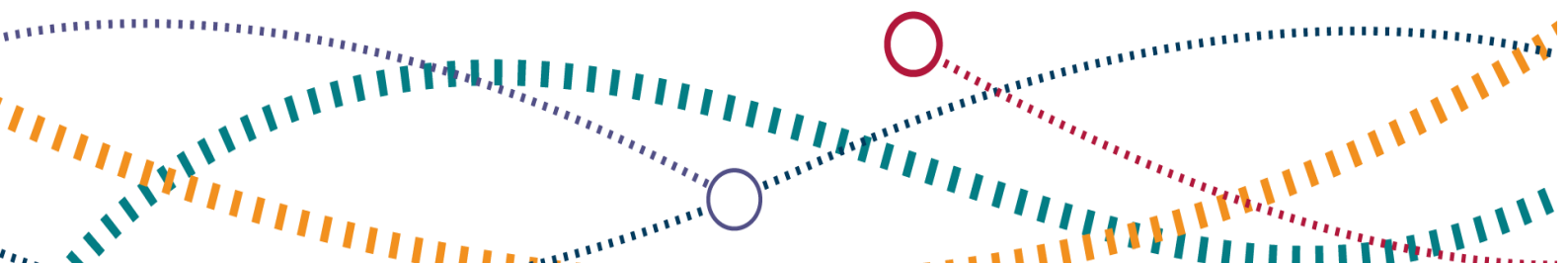
18 May 2025 timetable change

18 July 2025



1. Key Messages

- Passenger train operators made 28 applications for additional or different capacity use (track access) for the timetable change date on 18 May 2025 which enabled them to deliver improved or continued services. ORR assessed and approved these applications ahead of the timetable change to provide certainty to operators, passengers and freight customers.
- As with December 2024, many these applications for May 2025 were submitted close to the timetable change. 25 applications were submitted after the industry deadline for publishing the timetable and when advance ticket booking opens ('D12' – 12 weeks before the timetable change). This introduces a potential risk for operators (and passengers) of timetabled services not having the right to use the network. In part, this was because Network Rail was not able to offer long term access to all operators who had applied for it as part of the [competing applications process](#) in May 2024. Instead, it continued its [interim approach](#) of supporting short term access for May 2025 in the 9 interacting locations included in [this letter](#).
- As of 13 July 2025, passenger operators planned to use 90 per cent of the total contracted rights (capacity) allocated in the period since the 18 May timetable change, and during the same period these operators actually ran train services which used 86 per cent of the total capacity allocated in terms of rights.
- There is a large amount of variability on an operator and service group level in terms of services planned and ran. For example, a number of operators were impacted on the West Coast Mainline due to overhead line failures. Other operators were impacted by planned or short notice engineering access as well as decisions by operators and funders on when services run impact the use of rights.
- Some operators are consistently low in terms of services planned and ran and we expect these operators to work with Network Rail to ensure their contracts accurately reflect the rights required.
- In some instances, operators did not explain differences between the rights held and the services planned or ran. It is important for industry to understand its rights in the timetable better to ensure capacity is used most effectively.
- The [timetable monitoring production](#) data published by ORR is a useful comparison for looking at when operators had access rights in place against when Network Rail offered the timetable to industry at D26 (26 weeks before the timetable change). This will be updated shortly to reflect the May 2025 timetable change.



2. Context

Overview

The regulatory access dashboard provides management information on access rights planning and use. It includes:

- track access applications made by freight and passenger operators of rail services in Great Britain;
- the submission and approval timescales for passenger track applications against the timetable production milestones of the Network Code; and
- information on the use of access rights by passenger operators.

ORR approves (or directs) the granting of access rights and monitors the timing of Network Rail and train operators' applications. Comparing when an application is made against the Network Code timescales is important because:

- passengers can have greater confidence that timetabled services will run because they are supported by a contract;
- an operator has a contractual priority giving greater certainty its related services will run as planned in the timetable;
- the greater certainty supports better operational planning for trains and crew.

Network Rail is responsible for producing the timetables for passenger and freight services to run. The main timetable changes are made twice a year, in May (however in 2024 this took place in June) and December. New timetables must be published 12 weeks in advance; this milestone is referred to as D12.

Train operators must have contractual access rights to use the network to run their trains. They apply for these access rights to secure capacity and priority for inclusion in the timetable. The [Network Code](#) sets out the process and contractual timescales for producing the main timetable changes. These timescales underpin the [Network Rail licence](#) requirement to produce a timetable “not less than 12 weeks” before services run, and also enable train operators to meet [their commitment](#) to make tickets available for sale 12 weeks in advance of travel.

ORR is required to publish the information contained in access contracts on the [public register](#). This factsheet presentation of that data provides a holistic overview of the

contracted capacity across the network and how it is used in the timetable by passenger operators.

Access rights dashboard

Data tables and an interactive dashboard associated with this factsheet are published on the [ORR website](#). Key definitions are contained within a glossary on that same webpage.

Currently, the data focuses primarily on passenger train service data. The access rights and timetable data contained in the dashboard is provided by train operators and Network Rail. The time of submission to ORR and approval is ORR management information data.

All the access rights in this dashboard were approved by ORR for the 18 May 2025 timetable change. It is valid to compare access rights from the 18 May 2025 timetable change to timetable data up to the 14 December 2025 timetable change. However, the rights data is most accurate at the beginning of the timetable period because rights applications will be submitted and approved after 18 May, thereby updating rights held before the December timetable change.

Competing applications process

There is an ongoing process to determine long term access in specific locations as part of the [competing applications process](#). This included unsupported applications from operators for rights from May 2025.

Network Rail began providing evidence and analysis on these competing applications from the end of March. It was not possible for ORR to determine the majority of these applications before the timetable change. Therefore, these have been excluded from the figures in the dashboard. We acknowledge the outstanding unsupported applications led to delays in some supported applications being submitted under [Network Rail's short-term, interim approach](#).

ORR has now directed a number of these applications and these decisions are published on [our website](#).

Recent changes to train operators

The Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Act 2024 received Royal Assent in November 2024, allowing passenger train operators with contracts with the Department for Transport (DfT) to be brought into public ownership.

On 25 May 2025, [South Western Railway](#) became the first operator to transfer back into public control when its contract with DfT expired. DfT plans to return all passenger services operating under DfT contracts to public ownership by the end of 2027 and this will be done when each contract expires, as set out in their [press release](#). C2c and Greater

Anglia are the next train operators planned to be nationalised, in July and October 2025 respectively.

In addition to the above, the operator of the Elizabeth Line also changed on 25 May 2025, with GTS Rail Operations now operating these services. ORR approved and directed the novation of the contract from the former operator, MTR Corporation (Crossrail) Limited, to GTS.

Further information on individual operators, including route maps, can be found via the [Rail Delivery Group](#) website.

Further information

The access rights data dashboard will be updated in early 2026 for the timetable beginning in December 2025.

For more information on dashboard terminology please view the [glossary](#).

For further information on the content of this factsheet or the regulatory access dashboard, please contact the Head of Passenger Track Access: track.access@orr.gov.uk.

3. Passenger applications for track access (capacity) from May 2025

Applications received

When Network Rail and operators finalise contracts, it indicates the level of industry preparedness and provides transparency of capacity use. This supports industry and passenger certainty over the length of the contracts.

Passenger train operators made 24 supported applications for additional or different capacity use (track access) ahead of the timetable change that took place on 18 May 2025 and which required ORR's specific approval. An additional 4 applications were submitted for ORR's general approval. [Data table 3](#) contains details on each application submitted for the May 2025 timetable change.

There were 18 supported applications for May 2025 which were submitted under Network Rail's [interim approach](#), for short-term, contingent rights for one timetable period only. This is because they include rights which were part of the unsupported applications submitted to ORR on or before 20 May 2024 as part of the [competing track access applications process](#). As these unsupported applications are being managed through a separate process which requires ORR's direction (rather than approval), only the supported applications are included in this factsheet and the dashboard.

Comparison to previous timetable changes

*Table 1: ORR specific approval supported applications for December 2023 through to the May 2025 timetable by Network Code milestone**

Timetable period	After D12		Before D12		Before D26		Before D40		Total
December 2023	13	54%	8	33%	2	8%	1	4%	24
June 2024	10	37%	17	63%	0	0%	0	0%	27
December 2024	26	65%	10	25%	2	5%	2	5%	40
May 2025	21	88%	0	0%	3	12%	0	0%	24

*Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number

The number of supported applications for the May 2025 timetable change was more in line with previous timetable changes than the December 2024 change, where ORR received almost double the number of supported applications compared to the December 2023 change. Specifically, ORR received 3 less applications for May 2025 than for June 2024.

In December 2023 there were 27 applications, of which 54% were submitted within 12 weeks of the timetable change. Although the June 2024 timetable change represented an improvement in the number of applications submitted after the 12-week milestone (37%) compared with the prior timetable change, December 2024 showed a decline as industry submitted 65% of applications within 12 weeks of the timetable change. May 2025 continued this decline, with 88% of applications submitted less than 12 weeks before the timetable change.

It is important that operators and Network Rail work to improve timeliness of applications future timetable changes in order to provide industry and passengers greater certainty of services.

Application timescales for May 2025

ORR ensured all the submitted supported applications requiring its specific approval were complete before the timetable started. However, 21 (88%) of the applications requiring ORR specific approval were submitted informally to ORR after the timetable publication deadline for passengers on 23 February 2025 (12 weeks in advance of 18 May).

Submitting applications for ORR to approve less than 12 weeks before the timetable starts, and services run, means that those services are at risk of not having contractual rights in place. This could negatively impact on operator train or crew planning and negatively impact on passengers who have bought tickets in advance, reducing confidence in the timetable.

For supported applications for the May 2025 timetable change, no part of Network Rail submitted all its applications requiring specific approval before the 12-week milestone (D12).

- Eastern region submitted 3 applications for this timetable change. All of these were submitted after D12. Applications for both Greater Anglia and LNER were submitted within 8 weeks of the timetable change, with Greater Anglia's application submitted just over 4 weeks ahead of the change.
- Similar to the December 2024 timetable change, Scotland's Railway submitted its application (for ScotRail) after D12. It also submitted a general approval for ScotRail within four weeks of the timetable change.
- Southern region submitted 6 applications for May 2025, with all of these submitted to ORR after D12. This represents a worsening from December 2024, where around 50% of its applications were submitted before D12. Despite being submitted after D12, the majority of the region's applications, including two each for Govia Thameslink Railway and Southeastern, were still submitted more than 8 weeks ahead of the timetable

change. An application for Southeastern using ORR's general approval was submitted only four working days ahead of the timetable change.

- Wales & Western region submitted 4 applications for May 2025, and all of these were submitted after D12. The first two of these were submitted for Great Western Railway in March, with both Transport for Wales Rail and the Elizabeth Line's applications being submitted within 8 weeks of the timetable change.
- North West & Central region submitted all but one of their 7 of their applications after D12. Both of their applications requiring general approval from ORR were submitted within seven working days before the timetable change, representing applications from Avanti West Coast and Chiltern.

The [regulatory access dashboard](#) provides detail on submitted applications by Network Rail region and operators for users to analyse themselves.

Our monitoring has identified an increase in applications updating contracts to ensure rights are in place for services already running or for the removal of unused rights. Also, some applications corrected errors in contracts. Accurate management of contracts is important for the infrastructure manager and operators because it ensures transparency and accurate information on network use. This information can provide an insight into the amount of capacity used, or equally, potential capacity available for new services. It also underpins contractual arrangements on performance incentives to ensure that Network Rail and operators are financially accountable where performance dips.

4. Use of passenger access rights

Overview

Comparing the approved (and published) access rights by ORR with the planned timetable and the services which actually operated allows ORR, Network Rail, funders, industry and passengers to understand the use of the railway network.

We have compared the contracted access rights for each passenger operator by service group (how an operator groups different train services to related destinations) to the published timetable. This data, for planned timetables and services which actually operated, provide metrics on contractual compliance as well as the use of allocated capacity on the network. These metrics and usage data can be analysed through the online [regulatory access dashboard](#).

At publication of this factsheet, our dashboard contains data for this timetable change from 18 May up to and including 13 July 2025.

- During this period, operators planned to use 90% of the access rights held in their contracts for the timetable which operates until December 2024. This can be compared to 87% planned use over a similar period after the December 2024 timetable change.
- During the same period, 86% of the access rights held by operators resulted in services in operation for passengers.

The dashboard reflects the rights that were in place as of 18 May 2025. If contracts have been updated since then, these edits will not be reflected within the dashboard. The data used for services planned and ran is based on Network Rail data from the timetable agreed at 22:00 the night before services run, therefore this includes Short Term Planning services.

The use of access rights in the timetable can be reduced by various factors including whether Network Rail could accommodate the rights in the timetable; engineering works by Network Rail, industrial action; funder decisions on service provision; and train operator service decisions. These factors mean it is most useful to compare operators in similar geographical areas and/or time periods which are not affected by industrial action/engineering work to understand these factors.

It is important to remember that access rights grant the right to a slot in the timetable, not a specific time slot. Also, some operators may hold contingent rights which receive lower

priority when Network Rail produces the timetable and are therefore more likely to not be accommodated where there are conflicts.

The contracted access rights in place from the May 2025 timetable change onwards are appropriate for comparison against the planned 2024/5 working timetable (the period from 18 May 2025 until 13 December 2025). Timetable data for this factsheet is available up to 13 July 2025.

Accuracy adjustments

Most access rights are represented in the timetable by one train service. The following operators have train services which correspond to more than one access right: CrossCountry, Caledonian Sleeper, Scotrail, LNER and TfW. For these services we have adjusted the number of rights held to accurately reflect their use in the planned timetable and the services which operated. For example, one CrossCountry service has 7 access rights, so for an accurate reflection of rights usage we mapped this service to one access right. The other adjustments are contained in Annex A below.

The accuracy adjustments mean it should be only the level of contingent rights, engineering access, industrial action or non-use of rights which impact on the rights usage reported. The ORR approved access rights held by each operator are available to download via the data tables on our [dashboard webpage](#).

Operator and Network Rail engagement with the production of this factsheet has identified where greater transparency will be achieved by industry regular monitoring and updating rights tables. When the factsheet and data are updated in early 2026 following the December 2025 timetable change, we will identify where Network Rail and operators need to provide further clarity then.

Rights usage

As in the December 2024 timetable, there was no correlation between operators with a smaller number of rights and them having higher planned rights usage (see figure 3.1). Similarly, many operators who had the highest planned rights usage in the December 2024 timetable were the same as those with the highest planned rights usage in this May 2025 timetable. For example, Chiltern, Greater Anglia and c2c. We might expect factors which influence the use of access to have a disproportionate impact on operators with a smaller number of rights.

West Midlands Trains, Hull Trains and Transport for Wales were the three operators with the lowest planned and actual usage of rights in the May 2025 timetable data. They were also in similar positions in the December 2024 data. Where operators are consistently

running significantly fewer services than the rights that they hold, we would expect Network Rail to work with them to ensure this is reflected in contracts.

The majority of operators increased the percentage of rights they planned to use in the May 2025 timetable change, which is in contrast to December 2024 (but in line with June 2024). 14 operators planned to increase the percentage of rights used and a further two saw no change in the percentage of planned rights usage since the December 2024 timetable. The remaining 6 reduced the percentage of rights they planned to use.

Whilst the data at an overall operator level shows no operator ran more services than they had rights for (although the data on Chiltern shows it planned to use 101% of its rights), this is not the case when you look at the data on a service group level. This shows the importance of industry understanding how it uses the rights in the timetable. To encourage operator transparency and improvement in information across the industry, we selected a two-week period (25 May to 7 June) to analyse. The two sections below provide more detail on this.

Operators with more than 110% of planned or ran services against rights

Between 25 May and 7 June some service groups for the following operators show that they either planned to run or ran more than 110 percent of services for which they hold the rights:

- Avanti West Coast
- Caledonian Sleeper
- Chiltern
- East Midlands Railway
- Great Western Railway
- Northern
- Southeastern
- TransPennine
- West Midlands Trains

In some instances, such as with Southeastern, TransPennine and Caledonian Sleeper these anomalies relate to disruption (for instance due to problems with, or damage to, overhead wires), engineering work and bus services being used where blockades were in

place on the route. This can result in one train being recorded as two services because it is operated in two parts, despite it only having one right.

Some other anomalies relate to the way the rights are represented in the contracts when compared with how they are categorised in train service codes, for instance in the case of Great Western Railway (who were prompted to do a check after we raised these anomalies) and Northern. Avanti and West Midlands Trains referenced the way that short term planning services are represented in the data as the reason for their anomalies. These types of anomalies may not necessarily mean they actually ran more services than they held rights for.

At this time, not all operators have explained the reason for anomalies in the Network Rail data when comparing it to their own (which does not always contain these same anomalies), for example Chiltern and East Midlands Railway. We expect Network Rail and these operators to ensure the differences can be explained and are supported through contracts in advance of each timetable change.

Operators with less than 60% of planned or ran services against rights

Between 25 May and 7 June, some service groups for the following operators also show that they either planned to run or ran less than 60 percent of services for which they hold the rights:

- Arriva Rail London
- Avanti West Coast
- Caledonian Sleeper
- CrossCountry
- East Midlands Railway
- Greater Anglia
- Govia Thameslink Railway
- Great Western Railway
- LNER
- Northern
- Southeastern

- South Western Railway
- Transport for Wales
- TransPennine
- West Midlands Trains

We sought clarity from these operators on the reasons for low rights usage in some service groups. For many, this was due to engineering works, restrictions of use, infrastructure failure or fatalities, for example the closure of the WCML after a tree fell on the overhead lines. This was the case for Avanti West Coast, Greater Anglia, Govia Thameslink Railway, Great Western Railway, South Western Railway, Southeastern and TransPennine. Caledonian Sleeper services were also affected by this, along with some early terminations due to loco and coaching stock failures.

Other instances of low rights usage were linked to current Sunday driver position leading to a number of trains particularly on the Cardiff-Nottingham route being pulled at short notice (CrossCountry), amended start and end stations (LNER) and conductor availability leading to a reduced, amended service on Sundays in the North West (Northern). Transport for Wales cited the way services are represented in the rights tables as the reason for anomalies against the planned and ran data.

Figure 1: Planned services as a percentage of rights used, 18 May to 13 July 2025



Figure 2: Services ran as a percentage of rights used, 18 May to 13 July.



Uses for the data

The same reasons as listed above, will impact the percentage of services ran. However, this data set is also useful to compare against the planned use of rights to assess factors which materialised after the planned timetable was established.

Together, the two data comparisons should support operators in identifying the impact of different factors on capacity use. It should also provide a starting point for discussion between infrastructure manager and operator on unused access or better use of capacity. Where an operator does not intend to use access rights in the future it could be a potential opportunity for other operators to use capacity differently. It is important that operators ensure that all their current operations have the correct contractual framework in place to provide transparency to realise these opportunities.

Annex A: Data sources and methodology

Data sources

Data sources include applications submitted by train operators and Network Rail to ORR; performance data supplied solely by Network Rail and data collated by ORR.

As part of track access applications Network Rail and operators submit documentation that ORR Access Executives process through the lifecycle of a case. This forms our casework data.

We have collated data from Schedule 5 of the Track Access Contract between an operator and Network Rail. This schedule sets out the firm and contingent access rights agreed between the parties. We have collated this onto a workbook and displayed the day and service group to determine how many trains have access rights on the network.

We receive data from Network Rail on how many services were planned to run in the timetable and how many services did run. We have compared the service group data to our Schedule 5 access rights data. We work with stakeholders across industry to quality assure this data.

Methodology

Most track access rights held in contracts across industry correspond to one train service, known as a head code in the timetable. This underpins the methodology we have used to create our planned use and actual use reporting within our regulatory information tool. There are a small number of operators where this is not the case and there are multiple access rights all tied to a single head code. In some cases, these head codes have an access right for different portions of the journey. Currently we are unable to compare multiple rights on head codes to actual train running data.

In order to present a more accurate reflection of how these operators are exercising their contracted access rights we have accounted for this in the data that feeds our model. We have done this by subtracting the excess rights and matching the rights figure to the head code figure. The Elizabeth Line (Crossrail) has multiple rights both Peak and Off-Peak. To reflect the service and usage, these have been combined.

The data refers to the working timetable period of 18 May 2025 to 13 December 2025 timetable period (inclusive).

Table 2: Adjustments made to base rights data, by service group, where required for comparison against planned and ran data

Operator	Service Group	Base			Adjusted			Revised Total
		Weekday	Saturday	Sunday	Weekday	Saturday	Sunday	
Cross Country	EH01	341	333	253	128	115	95	338
Caledonian Sleeper	ES01	10	2	9	7	2	6	15
Scotrail	HA01	324	320	127	315	310	126	751
Scotrail	HA02	292	298	149	291	297	148	736
Scotrail	HA03	71	68	20	70	67	20	157
Scotrail	HA04	114	112	47	107	105	47	259
Scotrail	HA06	414	397	216	412	395	216	1023
Scotrail	HA07	191	191	78	190	190	76	456
LNER	HB02	92	82	66	81	68	53	202

Annex B: Related information

Data tables

[Table 1: Number of track access rights, by operator and flow in each service code, for weekdays and weekends Great Britain, biannual data, May 2025](#)

[Table 2: Total number of track access rights in each service code, by operator, Great Britain, biannual data, May 2025](#)

[Table 3: Passenger track access applications, Great Britain, May 2025 timetable](#)

Other related documents

[Dashboard glossary](#)

[Network Code - Network Rail](#)

[ORR track access guidance](#)

[ORR guidance on access to regulated networks](#)



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