

THE OFFICE OF RAIL AND ROAD
241st BOARD MEETING
Tuesday 19 May 2026, 09:00 – 14:00
At ORR, 25 Cabot Square, London, E14 4QZ

Non-executive members: Declan Collier (Chair), Xavier Brice, Ian Dobbs, Lindsey Fussell, Anne Heal, Ann Metherall, Daniel Ruiz.

Executive members: Feras Alshaker (Interim Chief Executive), Richard Hines (Director of Railway Safety).

In attendance: Fiona Bywaters (Board Secretary), Will Godfrey (Director of Economics, Finance and Markets), Russell Grossman (Director of Communications), Liz Herridge (Chief Operating Officer), Graham Richards (Director, Planning and Performance / TfL Analysis), Liz Thornhill (General Counsel), Stephanie Tobyn (Director, Strategy, Policy and Reform).

Other ORR staff who attended are shown in the minutes.

Item 1 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.
2. Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Madeleine Hallward and Catherine Waller.

Item 2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3. No new declarations of interest were raised.

Item 3 APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

4. The minutes of the meeting held on 28 April 2026 were approved.
5. A brief update was provided on actions arising and completed from previous meetings.

Item 4A INTRODUCTION: EXTERNAL GUEST

6. Graham Richards (GR) introduced the context, referring to the independent review of the Office of Rail and Road (ORR), led by Dr Richard Judge, under the Department for Business and Trade's (DBT's) Regulator Performance Independent Review Programme.

Item 4B EXTERNAL GUEST: DR RICHARD JUDGE

Stephen Robinson (Senior Policy Lead, Regulator Performance and Capability – DBT) joined the meeting for item 4b.

7. The Chair welcomed Dr Richard Judge (RJ), and invited him to speak to the independent review of ORR. RJ provided an overview of the context,

emerging findings and anticipated completion date (June 2026), as well as expressing his thanks to ORR colleagues for their contributions.

8. Reference was made to perceptions of ORR as a professional, diligent and competent regulator, with expertise across its remit. Emerging findings would therefore be framed around stepping back and looking at the 'bigger picture'. Consideration would also be given to the opportunities presented by rail reform, and the expanding advisory role of ORR, to provide valuable insight and thought leadership. RJ provided a broad overview of emerging findings relating to economics (and mainline rail), safety, and roads.
9. During the session, the Board discussed what is meant by a whole-systems approach; the future size and shape of ORR in an expanding advisory role; development of ORR's strategic skillset and toolkit; and stakeholder perceptions of ORR.

Item 4C REFLECTION: EXTERNAL GUEST

10. The Board briefly reflected on the guest's contributions and the anticipated review findings.

Item 5 CHIEF INSPECTOR'S MONTHLY REPORT

11. Richard Hines (RH) introduced the report, highlighting in particular:
 - Details of a Prohibition Notice served on the Channel Tunnel Group Limited (Eurotunnel) in relation to inadequate emergency rescue arrangements for work in confined spaces;
 - Confirmation that Network Rail had complied with the Improvement Notice served following a derailment incident at Audenshaw;
 - Work with the Rail Safety and Standards Board (RSSB) to continue the focus on welfare arrangements for railway workers with a further industry event planned in June (to which a Non-Executive Director was invited); and
 - The publication of guiding principles to support the development of Great British Railways' Health and Safety Management System.
12. It was requested that a safety update on the Channel Tunnel be provided to the Board, further to an upcoming discussion at the June Health and Safety Regulation Committee **[ACTION 05/01]**. The report should include a commentary of recent interventions for context and an update on previous stranded trains incidents.
13. Following questions from the Board, discussion focussed on:
 - ORR's contribution to a recent UK secondment for colleagues from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's Transport General Authority (TGA), and whether there was potential learning from the launch of a new international freight corridor in the region;
 - Potential learnings from the high-speed passenger train derailment in Spain, earlier in the year;

- Responsibility for enforcement at rail 'light maintenance' depots, and learning taken forward to the RSSB Depot Working Group (DWG), as well as through quarterly liaison with HSE; and
- Timescale service standards in relation to an exemption sought under Regulation 5 of the Railway Safety Regulations 1999.

Item 6B RAIL REFORM [ORAL UPDATE]

14. Stephanie Tobyn (ST) provided a brief update on rail reform, noting an upcoming prospectus of publications anticipated from the Department for Transport (DfT). Similarly, key enablers within ORR's responsibility had been shared as part of the Board strategy session the day prior. It was anticipated that an item on consultation of a retail code of practice would be presented to Board shortly.
15. Further reference was made to changes in senior staff at DfT, as well as the legislative process and anticipated areas of debate.
16. In response, the Board requested:
 - a. the list of key enablers of rail reform, and their status, be recirculated with clarification of timeline **[ACTION 05/02]**; and
 - b. potential areas of challenge to the Rail Reform Bill as it progresses through the legislative process, be shared **[ACTION 05/03]**.
17. It was noted that, in terms of parliamentary engagement, a roundtable event was planned in the Lords on 24 June 2026.
18. Further consideration was given to the perspective of freight stakeholders, with the Board proposing that a representative of the industry be invited to Board **[ACTION 05/04]**.

The Board adjourned for a short break.

Item 6 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

Redact this report from the published version as time-sensitive and covering confidential issues.

19. [...]

Item 7 NATIONAL HIGHWAYS' PERFORMANCE AND EFFICIENCY

21. GR introduced the report, providing a brief contextual update to National Highways' delivery plan and consideration as to whether it contained the requisite detail. Following questions from the Board, discussion focussed on:
 - Whether expectations around the delivery plan differed from those of the previous road period, with confirmation that they did not;
 - Whether the level of detail put forward by National Highways would provide sufficient assurance to the public; and

- The approach going forward to receiving sufficient information (for assurance on delivery) and whether ORR's position had been adequately conveyed.
22. It was explained that following recent meetings with National Highways, after dispatch of the papers, further detail was expected on the delivery plan. Reference was also made to Key Message 3 of the Annual Assessment, later on the agenda (at item 11).
23. The Board also considered the KPI overview at Annex B of the report, querying in particular network availability and pavement condition where the specific target had been achieved late in the final quarter. This was referred to as a consistent pattern year-on-year due to data input, though confidence in self-assurance would be reflected upon.
24. **The Board noted the contents of the performance update.**

**Item 8 COMMUNICATIONS BIENNIAL DASHBOARD & ANNUAL
STAKEHOLDER AND PARLIAMENTARY SURVEYS**

Lisa O'Brien (Head of Media Relations, Campaigns and Digital Comms), Jennifer Webber (Head of External Engagement) and Adele Potter (Head of Internal Communications and Engagement) joined the meeting for item 8.

25. Russell Grossman (RG) introduced the report, highlighting website metrics, a national trend of increased FOI requests, and rail reform as the dominant issue of the stakeholder survey.
26. Following questions from the Board, discussion focussed on:
- The difference in level of media coverage between October-December 2025 and January-March 2026;
 - The main findings of the stakeholder survey and whether there had been any change in the past two years;
 - The timing of the parliamentary survey (when the Rail Reform Bill was being debated) and whether this influenced responses;
 - Potential reasons behind decreased recognition of providing 'independent economic assurance', with the survey last having been conducted at a time of two high-profile periodic reviews;
 - Lessons learned from parliamentary engagement and how this would influence any future approaches;
 - Whether a 2-year cycle remained appropriate for a staff conference given the wider reform context or whether this was restricted for budgetary reasons;
 - The effectiveness of the ORR website, planned improvements and whether AI could present opportunities (such as presenting and interpreting ORR data);
 - Alternative means of digital engagement with key stakeholders, noting the effectiveness of social media and in particular, LinkedIn.

27. Finally, the Board queried if the word 'proactive' was included alongside 'reactive' in the stakeholder survey, and if not, suggested it be added.

Item 9 CLOSE OUT OF WALES AND WESTERN FINAL ORDER

Richard Coates (Deputy Director, Railway Planning and Performance), Steve Helfet (Deputy Director, Railway Operations) and Patrick Crowley (Senior Regulation Manager - North West & Central and Wales & Western regions) joined the meeting for item 9.

28. GR briefly introduced the report, with Richard Coates (RC) providing further context on the decision at hand and recommendation. Overall it was explained that significant improvements had been evidenced in terms of performance, delivery and culture.
29. Following questions from the Board, discussion focussed on:
- Substantial progress against the action plan, with 56 of 63 actions completed, and the remaining deemed significantly in progress;
 - Completion of headspan (overhead line support structures) renewals on the 0-12 miles to Paddington;
 - Assurance sought of the progress achieved, including quarterly in-depth reviews, reviews of delivery at 6-month intervals, and deep-dives on specific aspects of the action plan;
 - Cultural and behavioural changes, and how these had been embedded into delivered improvements;
 - How improvements would be sustained within a business-as-usual environment, based on governance, culture and performance;
 - Routine monitoring going forward, which would continue to look at culture change and ensure improvements are sustained in the long term; and
 - Consideration of the influence of train operators as well as Network Rail, noting the development of joint performance strategies, joint improvement plans, and operator engagement.
30. Practical illustrations were also provided to the Board and included: a focus on bringing track and train closer together, as well as local railways as an example of whole-system working.
31. **The Board agreed that Network Rail had implemented its train performance improvement plan for the Wales & Western region and had thereby complied with the Order issued on 10 July 2024.**

Item 10 NETWORK RAIL ANNUAL ASSESSMENT – KEY MESSAGES

Richard Coates (Deputy Director, Railway Planning and Performance) and Sneha Patel (Head of Operations & Network Regulation) joined the meeting for item 10.

32. RC introduced the report, referring to the key messages and the relevance of the quarterly performance report presented at the previous meeting.

33. Following questions from the Board, discussion focussed on:
- Key Message 1 - the drivers behind decreased cancellations, and a reflection on the importance to railway users; and
 - Key Messages 2 and 3 – effective framing of messages around efficiencies, in the context of asset health concerns and funding pressures (with the suggestion that an updated blog on the topic might prove useful at the time of publication), as well as clarity on the long-term consequences of asset condition decline.
34. Consideration was also given to the most appropriate order of key messages, as well as the audience and influence of the annual assessment.
35. **The Board noted the proposed narrative and key messages of the Annual Assessment of Network Rail 2025-26.**

The Board adjourned for lunch.

Item 11 NATIONAL HIGHWAYS ANNUAL ASSESSMENT – KEY MESSAGES

Rachel Gittens (Deputy Director, Strategic Road Network) and Iain Ritchie (Head of Highways Safety and Performance) joined the meeting for item 11.

36. GR introduced the report, briefly referring to discussions at item 7 of the agenda, as well as Highways Committee on 6 May (with feedback taken into account in the preparation of the board paper). These had focussed on adopting a more direct tone regarding levels of satisfaction in information being provided by National Highways (NH), and the preference to include a foreword to the annual assessment.
37. The key messages were considered in turn. Following questions from the Board, discussion focussed on:

Key Message 1 (Delivering the performance specification)

- Whether language that described that NH had ‘performed well for road users’ was most appropriately framed, noting that this referred to increased user satisfaction and reduced average delay – two key points for road users;
- Whether improvements in road user satisfaction and average delay were due to a low baseline the year before; and
- Reliance on NH providing self-assured data, noting that data monitoring statements are signed-off by the Chief Executive, and whether it was appropriate to incorporate such considerations in the annual assessment (or to convey by other means).

Key Message 2 (Delivering capital commitments and asset management performance)

- Wording around ‘facing challenges’ and whether this was sufficiently robust in the context of NH’s technology programme and underlying weaknesses;

- A sense of a lack of progress in terms of addressing operational technology issues; and
- Whether additional commentary could refer to: a lack of delivery in this area would likely cause a further erosion of public confidence.

Key Message 3 (Insufficient preparations for RIS3)

- Clarity around language of ‘pressing further’ and what this would mean in practice;
 - Future steps which may be considered within ORR’s regulatory toolkit and at what point in time; and
 - Views of other key stakeholders, including Treasury.
38. In the context of Key Message 3, the Board expected clear evidence of NH managing delivery outcomes.
39. **The Board noted the proposed narrative and key messages of the annual assessment of National Highways’ performance in 2025-26.**

Item 12 REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES

40. Lindsey Fussell (LF) reported on the first meeting of the Transformation Committee held on 28 April 2026. The Committee had discussed, among other matters:
- Preparation for the Board Strategy Day (18 May); and
 - The first draft of the internal transformation plan, noting a balance between organisational design and development, as well as timelines.
41. Anne Heal (AH) reported on the meeting of the Consumer Expert Panel held on 5 May 2026. The Panel had discussed, among other matters:
- Disability training issues at Northern Trains Limited;
 - The passenger watchdog (in the context of rail reform);
 - Redress for failed assistance – remembering the importance of process failure and an individual being let down, as well as financial and non-financial remedies; and
 - Consideration of how ORR might best communicate technical language in environmental documents to a public audience.
42. AH reported on the meeting of the Highways Committee held on 6 May 2026. The Committee had a single-item focus on the Annual Assessment (discussed at item 11 of the board agenda).
43. Reflections on the Board Strategy Day (18 May) would be conducted outside of the formal meeting.

Item 13 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

44. The Board noted the dates of the next meetings and items below the line, namely: the Board forward programme, committee minutes approved since

the last meeting and a paper on 'Risk Resilience' (presented to the Audit and Risk Committee meeting in April 2026).

45. The Chair referred to his recent and upcoming meetings.

Item 14 REFLECTION ON THE MEETING

46. Following the departure of the Executive in attendance, the Non-Executive Board Members then evaluated the effectiveness of the meeting. A brief update was also provided on the chief executive recruitment process.

Meeting end: 2.08pm
Approved: 23 June 2026