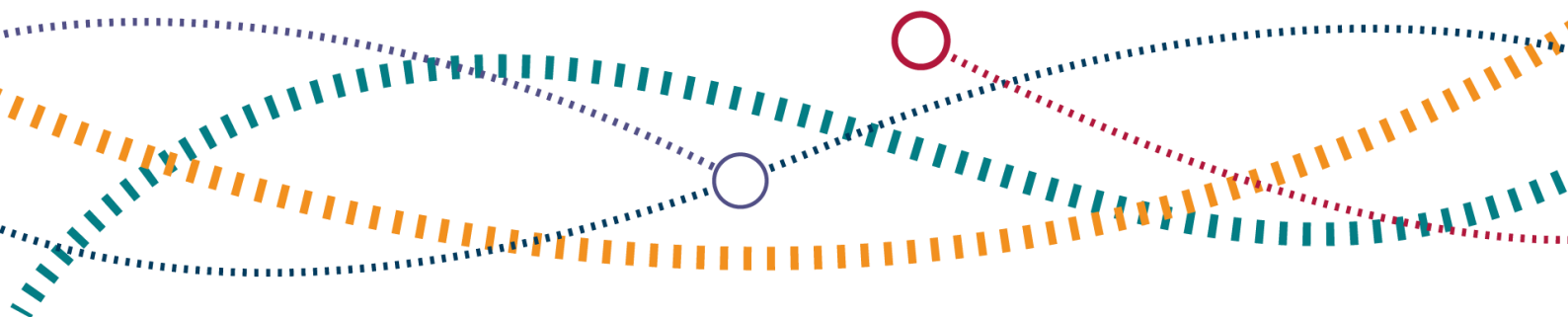




Rail industry compliance with timetable production milestones

**Final May 2026 timetable change data. Current
December 2026 timetable change data.**

30 September 2026



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Context for this release

ORR monitors industry compliance with timetable production timescales by gathering data from Network Rail and train operators on milestones in the [Network Code](#). to receive higher priority in the production of the timetable. Operators can “bid” in expectation of receiving new or amended contractual rights. This is explained in more detail in the [Regulatory Access Dashboard Factsheet](#).

This report highlights key findings from our analysis of final data from the May 2026 timetable change. It also takes a first look at data for the December 2026 timetable change.

Analysis of data from the preceding timetables is available on [our website](#).

Network Rail and industry roles

Network Rail is responsible for creating timetables for passenger and freight services. Train operators (passenger and freight) make requests to Network Rail for ‘space’ in the timetable. For details on how the rail industry produces timetables, please see our report on the [timetable development process](#).

Access Rights

ORR produces [reports on Rail access](#) rights through the Rail Access Rights Factsheet and accompanying Access Rights Dashboard. These are helpful companion documents when looking at when operators had access rights in place against when Network Rail published the draft timetable at D-26 (26 weeks before the change).

The updated Regulatory Access Dashboard Factsheet (to be published in Autumn 2026) will show that as with recent previous timetable changes, a high number of operators submitted applications for additional or different capacity use within 12 weeks of the December 2025 timetable change (at D-12).

For May 2026, 20 applications for access rights were submitted after D-12, introducing the potential risk for operators with timetabled services not having the rights to use the network, and passengers not having access to these services.

D-12 is an important milestone as the Network Code required Network Rail to publish the new timetable at ‘not less than 12 weeks before’ the timetable change. Industry are also

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ties to D-12 in order to meet [their commitment](#) to make tickets available for purchase to customers 12 weeks in advance of travel.

Industry had not finalised all of its desired capacity with Network Rail before tickets went on sale, which created avoidable risks for completing the timetable. Despite this, Network Rail and operators submitted the required evidence to ORR in time for it to make the necessary decisions so that the timetable could be legally implemented for passengers and freight.

May 2026 timetable change

The data below is current as of 30 September 2026.

D-40 date – Timeliness of passenger and freight operator timetable bids to Network Rail

- The D-40 date specified by the Network Code was 8 August 2025.
- All operators bar one submitted bids for the May 2026 timetable change on or before 8 August 2025.
- Direct Rail Services submitted their bid two days past the D-40 deadline, on the 10 August 2025.
- Nine operators submitted their bid before the D-40 deadline of 8 August 2025.

D-26 date – Timeliness of Network Rail providing operators with the timetable

- Network Rail issued all operators with their draft timetables on 14 November 2025, which is line with the D-26 as required by the Network Code.
- The May 2026 timetable shows a significantly lower number of revised access proposals submitted between D-40 and D-26 when compared with both May and December 2025, with a total of 66 revised access proposals. The revised access proposals came from 11 different operators, including public service passenger operators, freight operators, London Underground and a charter operator.
- There were no revised access proposals from open access passenger operators.
- The number of revised access proposals submitted to Network Rail by D-26 has shown a declining trend across the last three timetable productions, with a substantial decrease for the May 2026 change.
 - May 2025: 436 revised access proposals

- December 2025: 292 revised access proposals
- May 2026: 66 revised access proposals
- Although we don't have data preceding the May 2025 timetable, we note a continued downwards trend in revised access proposals.
- While revisions between the original bid and the draft timetable are a normal and expected part of the timetable development process, the continued downward trend may indicate improved quality and robustness in initial bids submitted by operators.
- The distribution of revised access proposals has shifted significantly. While freight operators accounted for around 90% of revisions for both the May 2025 and December 2025 timetables, this fell to 48% for May 2026.
- The decrease has been driven by freight operators who generated 394 and 265 revised access proposals for the May 2025 and December 2025 timetable changes respectively. For the May 2026 timetable, they generated 32 revised access proposals.

D-22 date – Appeals intention

- Five operators notified Network Rail of their intention to appeal aspects of the draft May 2026 timetable by the 12 December deadline (D-22). This is a decrease from the number of operators who appealed both the May and December 2025 timetables.**
- All five operators subsequently appealed to the ADC*.

*This is based on data from the [ADC website](#) which lists its determinations.

Cases related to the May 2026 timetable can be found under the following references:

- TTP2761
- TTP2762
- TTP2763
- TTP2764
- TTP2765

Timetable appeals are referred to the independent [Access Dispute Committee](#) (ADC) in the first instance to resolve issues on behalf of industry. Once an ADC Hearing Chair has

made their determination, parties may choose to appeal against that determination to ORR. For more information on timetable appeals (disputes) the ADC has produced a [snapshot of current disputes](#).

Train Operator Variation Requests (TOVRs)

Train and freight operators can request a variation to the base timetable after it is published at 26 weeks before the timetable starts (D-26). This is called a Train Operator Variation request, or 'TOVR'. Network Rail will either accept, reject or modify the request.

Freight operators will often identify space in the timetable and use TOVRs to obtain timetable slots for up to 12 months. This can be helpful for operators to be able to provide services at a short notice, cater to customers who only require services for a short-term period, as well as to demonstrate that their services can operate without undermining network performance, before applying for firm contractual rights.

TOVRs are an important part of the timetable production process and can allow capacity to be used effectively. TOVRs provide flexibility in the timetable production process by allowing additional or amended services from passenger and freight operators to be included in the timetable after the base timetable is published.

However, having a high number of TOVRs (regardless of operator type) can create instability. TOVRs made within 12 weeks of the timetable entering operation can impact on the release of final timetables to train and freight operators and subsequently passengers.

We are currently collecting data on the total number of TOVRs made by operators, along with how many individual services are affected by those TOVRs. A higher number of TOVRs might suggest more work would be required to finalise the draft timetable. However, as it does not take into account the complexity of each TOVR or the number of services affected, the data is limited in what it can tell us about the impact of TOVRs on timetable production and information to passengers. We plan to develop our analysis further in future.

- The volume of TOVRs submitted by Freight operators has decreased sharply from 1,675 in June 2024. The volume of TOVRs decreased to 337 in May 2025, before increasing to 777 in December 2025. However, as of May 2026, this number has since decreased to 443, signalling a sharp decrease. Currently, the volume of Freight TOVRs remains 74% lower than in June 2024.

- As a proportion of the total number of TOVRs submitted to Network Rail, Freight operators share of the total follows a similar pattern:
 - 87% (June 2024)
 - 81% (December 2024)
 - 48% (May 2025)
 - 70% (December 2025)
 - 66% (May 2026)
- We (and industry) expect freight operators to have a high number of TOVRs because of their business model, which relies on identifying and bidding for unused capacity in the base timetable. Nonetheless, TOVRs can introduce complexity in finalising the timetable, particularly if submitted close to the Timetable commencement date.
- Freight operator submitted TOVRs continue to account for the majority across four of the five timetable changes, but the downward trajectory from 2024 to 2025 suggests that there is a decline in TOVR use by Freight operators.

Timeliness of freight operator submissions

- For May 2026 (of 443) 266 submissions were made with **less** than 12 weeks to the timetable change, accounting for 60%. This is roughly the same in terms of absolutes, but much higher as a percentage of freight operator TOVRs received with less than 12 weeks to the timetable change for December 2025 (of 777) 261, accounting for 34%.
- These numbers show that early submissions of TOVRs have decreased as the amount of TOVR's submitted by freight operators with more than 12 weeks to the timetable change has also decreased as a proportion as well as a value, from 516 (66%) in December 2025 to 177 (40%) in May 2026.
- ORR monitors the certainty provided by Network Rail to operators through access rights and under the timetable processes defined by the Network Code. This may reflect ongoing work by Network Rail and the Freight Operators to address long-running TOVRs in the timetable. Of the recent applications supported by Network Rail,

and submitted to ORR, 100% of rights had been running for at least one timetable period as a TOVR.

Public service operators

- Passenger operator TOVR submissions decreased in share of all operator submissions in May 2026 and showed an overall decrease in volume. May recorded 216 TOVRs, representing 32% of all TOVR submissions, compared with the December 2025 timetable change, which saw 336 TOVRs and accounted for 30% of total submissions.
- Passenger operator submissions rose from 233 in June 2024 to a peak of 350 in May 2025, before falling slightly to 336 in December 2025 and further still to 216 in May 2026. This indicates initial gradual growth over the period, followed by a decline in the most recent changes.
- The proportion of passenger TOVR applications fluctuated considerably over the period, increasing from 12% in June 2024 to a peak of 50% in May 2025 before falling back to 30% in December 2025 and then rising slightly to 32% in May 2026.
 - 12% (June 2024)
 - 17% (December 2024)
 - 50% (May 2025)
 - 30% (December 2025)
 - 32% (May 2026)

Timeliness of passenger operator submissions

- Passenger operator timeliness improved between December 2025 and May 2026. Overall volumes fell, and both the number and proportion of TOVRs submitted within 12 weeks of the timetable change decreased (from 241 / 72% in December to 86 / 40% in May), indicating less reliance on late requests.

- Of the passenger operators, Scotrail and East Midlands Railways had some of the highest number of TOVRs for the May 2026 timetable change at 40 and 27 respectively. Notably, 44% of East Midlands Railways TOVR submissions were submitted less than eight weeks before the timetable change.
- ScotRail has consistently had some of the highest numbers of TOVRs as a proportion of passenger operator TOVRs across the last passenger timetable changes. However, the proportion of TOVRs from Scotrail has trended downwards across the last 5 timetable changes, from a high of 29.2% down to 15.2% in December 2025, before increasingly slightly to 19% in May 2026.

Open Access and Other operators

- There were 10 TOVR requests from open access operators or other operators for May 2026.

TOVR Impacts

- As of May 2026, the ORR has begun gathering data relating to the number of services affected by TOVR applications.
- The total sum of individual services affected by TOVRs (regardless of operator) for the May 2026 timetable was 12,428.
- One key finding from this data indicates that the number of TOVR applications does not necessarily correlate with the number of services affected by those TOVR applications.
- In the May 2026 timetable, South Western Railway applied for 8 TOVRs in total. These TOVRs affected 3,710 services in the timetable, which is the highest volume of individual services for any operator who submitted a TOVR for this timetable change.
- Conversely, GB Railfreight applied for the highest volume of TOVRs, at 181 for the May 2026 timetable. However, these only TOVRs impacted only 435 services in the timetable.

- Currently, there is not enough data to determine whether there are any changes over time to the complexity of TOVRs.

December 2026 timetable change

The data referenced below is current as of 30 September 2026.

D-40 date – Timeliness of passenger and freight operator timetable bids to Network Rail

- The D-40 date specified by the Network Code was 6 March 2026.
- All operators submitted bids for the May 2026 timetable change on or before 6 March 2026.
- Thirteen operators submitted their bid before the D-40 deadline of 6 March 2026.

D-26 date – Revised access proposals

- Network Rail issued all operators with their draft timetables on 12 June 2026, which is line with the D-26 as required by the Network Code.
- The December 2026 timetable shows a significantly lower number of revised access proposals submitted between D-40 and D-26 when compared with both December 2025 and May 2026, with a total of 48 revised access proposals. The revised access proposals came from 11 different operators, including public service passenger operators and freight operators.
- There was one revised access proposal from an open access passenger operator. This was submitted by Hull Trains.
- The number of revised access proposals submitted to Network Rail by D-26 has shown a declining trend across the last four timetable productions, with a substantial decrease for the May 2026 change, and a smaller decrease for the December 2026 timetable.
 - May 2025: 436 revised access proposals
 - December 2025: 292 revised access proposals
 - May 2026: 66 revised access proposals

- December 2026: 48 revised access proposals
- While revisions between the original bid and the draft timetable are a normal and expected part of the timetable development process, the continued downward trend may indicate improved quality and robustness in initial bids submitted by operators.
- The distribution of revised access proposals has continued to shift. While freight operators accounted for around 90% of revisions for both the May 2025 and December 2025 timetables, this fell to 48.5% for May 2026 and continued to fall to 27.1% in December 2026.

D-22 date – Appeals intention

- Four operators notified Network Rail of their intention to appeal aspects of the draft December 2026 timetable by the 10 July deadline (D-22). This is a decrease from the number of operators who appealed both the December 2025 and May 2026 timetables.
- The four operators who notified Network Rail of their intention to appeal were CrossCountry, GB Railfreight, Grand Central, and TfW Rail. However, Grand Central's appeal arrived after the deadline and thus was considered invalid, meaning that it did not proceed.

*This is based on data from the [ADC website](#) which lists its determinations.

Cases related to the December 2026 timetable can be found under the following references:

- TTP2854

- TTP2853

- TTP2852

Next publication date

Final data for the December 2026 timetable change will be published [on the ORR website](#) in February 2027, along with an initial view of data for the May 2027 timetable change.

Updated data tables and charts will also be available.



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