

Review into Planning and Timing of Engineering Works on the GB Rail Network: RDG Response

9th June 2015

In January 2015, the Secretary of State for Transport commissioned a report into the planning and timing of engineering works (see Appendix 1 for the terms of reference). The review was led by Anton Valk and sponsored by Network Rail, while falling under the responsibility of the RDG for their approval as to the report's recommendations and publication.

We are grateful to Anton Valk and his team (Christopher Garnett OBE, Richard Morris, Graham Smith MBE and Graham Spiby) for their report and for completing it in a short period of time. We are now publishing his final report together with our response to it.

The core question at the heart of the review was whether it would be better for major rail engineering works to be carried out at times other than Christmas and Easter. The key conclusions from the review are that

- there is an argument for doing such work at other times of the year, but that while this might be possible on parts of the network, the scope for doing so on routes within 50 miles of London is extremely limited;
- Christmas, Easter and bank holidays should be used to focus more on engineering work for which major network possessions are needed (with work not requiring such possessions to be moved to other times), in order to reduce unnecessary pressure on industry resources and in turn the risk of possession overruns.

We broadly support the key conclusions of the review, which we believe confirm our view that the key to success lies in more extensive implementation of existing initiatives or approaches well-known to the industry, driven primarily by stronger high-level commitment from Network Rail and operators.

We agree, or agree in principle, with all of the review's 31 recommendations, which we see as falling under the following five themes:

- **Timing of access to the network for engineering works (recommendations 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11).** The process and toolkit for optimising the timing of engineering access already exists in the form for the Industry Access Programme (IAP), but it needs to be "industrialised" and applied far more widely than is currently the case;
- **Efficient use of access (recommendations 13, 14, 15, 16, 17).** Much greater focus is needed on improving the efficiency with which possessions of the network for engineering work are used, supported by development of a possession productivity measure. Network Rail should actively pursue options for accelerating use of technology in taking and protecting possessions;
- **Better planning (recommendations 1, 3, 12, 23, 29, 31).** Improved planning and minimising last minute changes will mean that engineering work, at any time of the year, is done more effectively and will use resources more efficiently. The early involvement of operators and contractors in planning is essential;
- **Cross-industry engagement (recommendations 8, 10, 11, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 27, 30).** Network Rail and the operators need to rise to this challenge. The involvement and support of both the Department of Transport and Office of Rail and Road will be critical to success;

- **Cross-industry knowledge and skills (recommendations 7, 8, 18, 19, 25, 26, 27, 28).** In improving the competence of staff involved in engineering work, areas to address include: levels of understanding about different parts of the industry or the duties and responsibilities of others; and levels of understanding of operating practices and procedures, and how services may operate in degraded conditions.

Understandably, given the short period in which the report has been prepared, there has been limited opportunity for the review team to develop the analysis or generate the relevant data and empirical evidence to support some of the recommendations. In the case of fourteen of them, we believe further research and analysis is needed to understand the root causes of the issues raised and therefore to establish the best specific way of following up the recommendation.

For each of the five themes above, we have identified those existing industry activities which are relevant but need strengthening, together with potential new initiatives to complement those activities, which together would seek to achieve the recommendations made in the report. In the case of potential new initiatives, further work needs to be done to establish business cases for action before proceeding with them.

We now intend to move forward on the review's recommendations, starting with the following next steps:

1. In order to drive Network Rail to adopt the joint industry working initiatives developed by the APSCM, Phil Hufton, Network Rail's Managing Director of Network Operations, will assume chairmanship of the APSCM;
2. We will develop a delivery plan for the work to strengthen existing industry initiatives and consider potential new initiatives, to be completed by end of July 2015;
3. As a key part of developing the above delivery plan, we will focus on what can be achieved through existing and potential new initiatives to improve the prospects for successful delivery of engineering works during the Christmas 2015 and Easter 2016 possessions.

Appendix 1: Review Terms of Reference

1. Purpose of Review

To make recommendations on the best times of year to undertake major works on the rail network having regard to the trade-offs between reliable and predictable operation of train services and efficient execution of necessary engineering work.

2. Commissioning and stakeholders

The report has been commissioned by the Secretary of State for Transport. The review will be sponsored by Network Rail but will fall under the responsibility of the RDG for their approval as to the recommendations and for publication.

Key stakeholders to this Review are: the DfT, Transport Scotland, Transport for London, RDG and the ORR.

Key consultees will include Passenger Focus and London Travelwatch.

3. Scope of the Review

(i) to consider the lessons learned from experience of Christmas 2014 and earlier major programmes of engineering work and their possessions, including those outside holiday periods.

(ii) to review experience and best practice in other countries.

(iii) to consider factors affecting the impact of engineering work on train service operations at different times of year.

(iv) to consider how major work can best be managed so as to limit impact on passenger and freight operations, whenever work is carried out, including risk analysis and contingency planning.

(v) to consider incentives provided by the existing compensation schemes in relation to access and efficient engineering work.

(vi) and to make recommendations.

4. Timing.

The review will commence on the 13th January 2015 and be completed by the end of March 2015.

5. Resources

- i. Sufficient expert resources will be made available to the team by Network Rail and the RDG working group on access.
- ii. A resource will be made available to make notes of the interviews and to draft the report.

6. Budget

The budget for the review will be made available by Network Rail