

Rail Delivery Group

Submission

House of Commons Transport Committee

Rail timetable changes inquiry

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Executive summary

- A. The May 2018 timetable change was the most significant in recent memory: part of a plan to deliver an additional 6,400 services a week by 2021.
- B. The problems with its introduction resulted from a number of major issues that emerged after the completion of the normal timetable change process, including delays in service specification and the delivery of critical infrastructure and rolling stock.
- C. These issues required repeated and substantive revisions to the timetable, which had a knock-on effect on the time available for more detailed planning for its implementation. Some of these effects only became apparent at a very late stage.
- D. Interim timetables subsequently introduced by affected operators have mitigated some of the impact, and additional compensation – funded by the rail industry – has been made available to passengers.
- E. The industry is and will be taking a number of measures in the short-, medium- and long-term intended to prevent a situation such as this ever happening again. This includes Network Rail establishing a new comprehensive Timetable Assurance Programme Management Office (PMO) approach to monitor the delivery of all the separate projects necessary to ensure the successful delivery of the planned timetable change. This PMO approach has led to the industry adopting a ‘hybrid’ approach to the next timetable change in December 2018, with some operators introducing new services as planned and others rolling over their May 2018 timetable.

Introduction

1. The Rail Delivery Group (RDG) brings together passenger train operators, freight train operators, as well as Network Rail; and together with the rail supply chain, the rail industry – a partnership of the public and private sectors – is working with a plan ‘In Partnership for Britain’s Prosperity’¹ to change and improve for everyone in Britain, now and in the future. The RDG provides services to enable its members to succeed in transforming and delivering a successful railway to the benefit of customers, the taxpayer and the UK’s economy. In addition, the RDG provides support and gives a voice to passenger and freight operators, as well as delivering important national ticketing, information and reservation services for passengers and staff.
2. Rail is fundamental to the country’s prosperity. After enormous growth, Britain’s railway is increasingly important in connecting workers to jobs, businesses to markets, and people to their families and friends. The combination of public and private investment going into the railway is set to boost the UK’s economy by almost £85bn, benefiting every region of Britain.²

¹ *In Partnership for Britain’s Prosperity*, RDG (October 2017): <http://www.britainrunsonrail.co.uk/files/docs/one-plan.pdf>

² Ibid

3. The RDG welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Committee's inquiry on behalf of our members. Individual members may provide their own submissions, and Network Rail, Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) and Northern Rail (Northern) have all given detailed oral evidence to the Committee. This submission outlines what went wrong in May; the steps taken subsequently to mitigate the impact on customers; and the actions being taken to ensure there is no recurrence.

Overview

4. Rail customers quite rightly want a service they can rely on and in some parts of the country, due to the May timetable changes, that has not been the case. We are very sorry for the disruption experienced by our passengers.
5. The industry has committed to learn the lessons from what went wrong with introducing the new timetable to ensure future changes do not cause such disruption. Rail timetables are normally confirmed 12 weeks ahead of time, but this was not the case for the May timetable change. Indeed, GTR's timescale was compressed down to three weeks.
6. The introduction of interim timetable changes for GTR and Northern have given customers more certainty about their journeys. The aim of these changes was to offer a more stable timetable and reduce the number of late notice cancellations. Further services will be restored to the timetable when this is possible; for example, as driver training is completed.
7. In the long-term, these timetable changes will see customers in many parts of the country benefit from more and faster services as well as new trains, better connecting communities and boosting the economy. We thank customers for continuing to bear with us over what we know has been a very difficult time.
8. We are supporting the Office of Rail and Road's inquiry, chaired by Stephen Glaister, into the root causes of what went wrong and how to prevent a recurrence. This inquiry is due to produce an interim report in September and a final report with recommendations in December. The industry is not waiting for the outcome of this inquiry, but has already taken steps to address the problems, which are outlined later in this submission.

Key issues

May 2018 timetable changes

9. The planned May 2018 timetable change was the largest in living memory and depended on the successful delivery of a very wide range of infrastructure, rolling stock and staff projects. This was part of delivering the rail industry's plan to add 6,400 extra services a week and 7,000 new carriages by 2021, using new and upgraded track across the country to give customers a better service, better connect communities and secure £85bn of additional economic benefit.
10. However, while nationwide more than eight out of 10 services arrived as planned, following the introduction of the new timetable in May, customers in some parts of the country experienced unacceptable levels of disruption.

What went wrong with the May timetable?

11. The retiming of over 100,000 trains has been a huge logistical challenge. Additionally, GTR needed to increase daily train services from 3,200 to 3,600. In order to make space on the network for the additional services, the timing of all GTR and most Northern services had to be changed, with all of these new journeys needing to be individually approved by Network Rail to ensure the rail network would continue to run safely and smoothly.
12. The problems stemmed from a number of major issues affecting the timetable that emerged after the completion of the normal timetable change process in mid-November 2017. There were changes to service specifications and delays to the completion of critical infrastructure projects and rolling stock delivery on which the planned timetable changes were dependent, including:
 - The phased introduction of Thameslink services: in November 2017, the decision was made to accept the recommendation from the Thameslink Readiness Board that the increase in services should be phased in, requiring reworking of the GTR timetable bid;
 - Electrification of the Bolton corridor: it was announced in early January 2018 that the project would not be completed in time for the May timetable. This generated the need for a wholesale rewrite of the timetable in the North West as major changes to service patterns were predicated on the use of electric trains over new through routes;
 - In March 2018, delays in the delivery of the Class 385 fleet for ScotRail required substantial rewriting of the timetable in Scotland; and
 - Blackpool electrification: it was announced on 15 March 2018 (just over nine weeks before the start of the new timetable) that this project would be delivered late. As explained in detail during Northern's evidence to the Committee on 18 June, the delay to this project was critical due to its impact on driver training requirements affecting Northern's ability to operate the re-planned services.
13. As a result, further substantive re-working of large parts of the timetable was required after the normal timetable change process had been completed. This had a knock-on effect on the time available for

completing the planning of train diagrams, crew rostering and other logistics. The final timetable was therefore completed only a few weeks before the change on 20 May, leaving operators with very little time to finalise their operational plans to deliver the timetable. GTR, for instance, was left with three weeks, instead of the 12 weeks to complete the diagram and rostering work. In addition, as has been explained in evidence by the affected operators, some gaps in readiness only became apparent at the last minute. The late completion of the new timetable moreover affected the Informed Traveller process for the planning of temporary timetable changes, with the usual T-12 publication being temporarily pushed back to T-6.

Action taken to mitigate the impact

14. We never want passengers to suffer delays or disruption and when things do go wrong we want to put it right. An additional industry compensation scheme was originally offered for those season ticket holders on routes most affected by issues relating to the introduction of the May timetable. The schemes are funded by the rail industry with the amount of compensation to be paid calculated according to the level of disruption since the start of the new May timetable.³ On 28 August, GTR announced that it would be extending the additional industry compensation scheme for those Great Northern and Thameslink passengers most affected by disruption but who do or did not hold season tickets.
15. Overall, Train Operating Companies (TOCs) are making claiming compensation simpler and clearer. More people are receiving cash compensation as train companies continue to pay out more and make it easier to claim, with a fivefold increase in the last five years. The rail industry is also working to introduce smarter ticketing and ways to pay to travel which will better enable more TOCs to compensate customers automatically in future.
16. The RDG has appointed Dispute Resolution Ombudsman to establish the first ombudsman for the rail industry to rule on customer complaints. The independent body, which already provides an ombudsman service for other industries, will have the power to hold train companies to account. As part of the industry's long-term plan to change and improve, rail companies committed to creating a rail ombudsman to further build confidence in services.⁴ The accessible and free to use rail ombudsman service will launch in November 2018 and will cover rail journeys throughout Britain.
17. Customers that are unhappy with the outcomes of their complaints to rail companies will be able to refer them to be formally ruled on by experts in consumer rights, giving customers greater confidence of a fair hearing. Decisions by the ombudsman will be binding and rail companies will have to take action if failings are identified. The appointment follows a competitive procurement process.

Preventing a recurrence

18. It is imperative the industry learns lessons from what went wrong in May and implements changes to ensure it does not happen again. We have already started to tackle this.

³ <https://www.raildeliverygroup.com/media-centre/press-releases/2018/469774228-2018-07-18.html>

⁴ Ibid

19. We have established a Network Rail-led Timetable Assurance Readiness Programme Management Office (PMO). This is overseen by a cross-industry Steering Group with TOC Owing Groups and freight operators represented. This group:
- Has assessed industry readiness for the December 2018 timetable change and made recommendations to the Secretary of State for Transport, who agreed to proceed with the proposed 'hybrid option' with some operators making changes as originally planned, while others rolled forward their May 2018 timetable;
 - Continues to monitor risks to the successful delivery of the December 2018 change; and
 - Is conducting a similar review of the May 2019 timetable and will make recommendations for the changes to be made based on an assessment of the risks to delivery, the planning capacity to accommodate changes, as well as the prioritisation of proposed changes.
20. Having tackled the immediate challenges around the December 2018 and May 2019 timetable changes, the Industry Timetable Assurance PMO will now move on to assess what the future 'business as usual' processes for assessing industry readiness should be, and where the accountabilities should rest. Key aspects of the developing processes are:
- Increasing collective awareness of key milestones and dependencies;
 - restoring discipline with established processes, particularly for timetable production; and
 - Ensuring openness and honesty from all parties in identifying and monitoring the risks.
21. Other longer-term areas of activity that are key to reducing the risk of a recurrence include:
- An industry review of the processes that lead to the final timetable, including the upstream specification of franchises and evaluation of bids, as well as the iterative timetable production; and
 - Investment in timetable systems and people: Network Rail's System Operator business plan for Control Period 6 (CP6) includes continuing staff recruitment and retention programmes to ensure the sufficiency and capability of planning resources, as well as provision for systems investment to increase the automation of the timetabling process in order to make it more agile and efficient, and to reduce the dependency on manual intervention.

December 2018 timetable changes

22. The December 2018 timetable change will be of a similar scale to the smaller changes of recent years. Customers in many parts of the country will still see changes to their timetables this winter, while elsewhere a more cautious approach will be taken with some planned improvements being introduced more gradually.
23. This 'hybrid' approach – recommended by Network Rail and TOCs and supported by DfT – has been adopted following the difficulties encountered with the May timetable changes. The rail industry has reviewed its plans for December 2018 and is acting now to make sure that changes can be introduced

smoothly, and that passengers can plan their journeys with confidence. The Government has accepted the rail industry's recommended approach.

24. The majority of operators will introduce a new December timetable. Others will continue with their May timetable, which will still require additional work to be done. Where this is the case, minor adjustments and small locally-based changes that have limited wider impact may be made if possible.

RESPONSE ENDS