

# Network Rail says it is tackling ORR issues

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Network Rail has told Rail Business Daily it is working collaboratively to deliver improvements requested by the Office of Rail and Road (ORR).

Earlier today, ORR asked for a number of changes to maintain the levels of service delivered by Network Rail during the height of the pandemic as passengers return.

ORR says that performance by Network Rail is still better than before the pandemic, but that it has declined in the last six months as passenger numbers more than doubled and services increased.

The regulator says the Wales and Western region showed the largest deterioration from the end of 2020. Delays attributed to track failures and temporary speed restrictions due to track condition, it says, have contributed to this.

The rail regulator's mid-year report has looked at Network Rail's contribution to performance. ORR said while Network Rail had taken steps to learn from the high levels of performance seen during the pandemic, it still had more to do to build better performing timetables.

To keep the performance seen during the pandemic, ORR has asked that Network Rail:

- Deliver improvements to address the issues in its Wales and Western region;
- Continue to embed improved performance management capabilities, and work with the industry to develop a credible plan for the £40 million Performance Innovation Fund. This fund was established by ORR to support innovative ways to drive performance improvements and so far only £7.6m has been used;
- Work with industry to develop a clear plan for resolving timetabling and access rights on the East Coast Main Line;
- Demonstrate that it is engaging on, and influencing, service specifications and the timetable elsewhere on the network to ensure that decisions around performance and capacity are well-informed;
- Update its performance plans and targets to reflect revised service levels and usage across the network.

John Larkinson, Chief Executive, ORR said: “The pandemic continues to have an impact on all aspects of running the railway, including staff availability and passenger usage. And in that context, Network Rail and the wider industry are continuing to deliver their essential services well.

“As passenger numbers and freight continue to grow, a reliable and punctual train service performance will be a priority for all users.

“So, it is important that Network Rail delivers on its own commitments to maintain the network in good condition and also provides clear information on timetable choices. Network Rail must work with the wider industry to address performance and capacity challenges and do so transparently to ensure confidence and that funders are able to take well informed decisions.”

Network Rail said it was glad that ORR has noted the improvement of its services versus pre-pandemic performance, and said it was collaboratively tackling the issues that the ORR had raised.

A Network Rail spokesperson told Rail Business Daily: “We welcome the ORR’s recognition of improvements in train performance compared with before the pandemic. Working closely with partners across the industry, we are already addressing the issues raised so that we can continue to provide punctual services for passengers and freight as demand picks up.”

ORR also says it has now closed its 18-month investigation into Network Rail’s impact on poor performance in the North West and Central (NW&C) region.

Its investigation examined whether Network Rail had identified key factors impacting train performance in the region and had set time-bound plans to address them.

In its final assessment, ORR confirms that despite some disappointment at the pace of progress on delivering certain recommendations, it is now content that Network Rail has shown a genuine commitment to improve performance and has addressed all 25 of ORR’s recommendations.