

Office of Rail and Road half year report shows good train performance by Network Rail in COVID-19

December 8, 2020



In the third and final part of its mid-year report on Network Rail, the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) praises the company for making a positive contribution to keeping the railway open for business and running punctually, despite the challenges of the pandemic.

However, ORR notes the need for continued attention to improvements to train service performance in the North West.

In the first half of 2020-21, Network Rail and the industry delivered high levels of train performance that reversed a long-term downward trend over the last few years. The percentage of trains arriving on-time at stations was 75% in November 2020, compared to 65% before the pandemic.

ORR notes reduced service levels and passenger numbers have been a factor in improved punctuality, but it is evident that Network Rail has focused on strengthening its performance management capability, including taking steps to learn from the pandemic and deliver improvement plans.

Before COVID-19, passenger train performance was particularly poor in North West & Central region and an ORR investigation required a number of improvements. Given the pandemic, the regulator finds Network Rail has made reasonable progress against the majority of these improvements but that more still needs to be done.

Asset management still needs to improve and progress is required in working with train operators to facilitate the introduction of new trains. ORR will keep these areas under review.

John Larkinson, Chief Executive, ORR said: “In these exceptional times, Network Rail has played a vital role in keeping the railway open and running punctually, to ensure that passengers and freight are kept moving.

“While train performance is currently excellent compared to historic levels, Network Rail must continue its work with the industry on the fundamentals of good performance planning and management and learning from performance during the pandemic. This will help retain performance gains as passenger numbers increase.

“Following our earlier investigation into passenger train performance in North West and Central region, Network Rail has made reasonably good overall progress against the improvements we required, given the difficult operating conditions, but progress has been slower than expected on some aspects of asset management and train operations.”

Tim Shoveller, managing director for Network Rail’s North West & Central region, said: “While pleased we have progressed, we recognise we have more to do to give our passengers and freight customers the consistently reliable service they expect and deserve. This remains our focus.”

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