

Rail regulator highlights need for strong engagement between Network Rail and its stakeholders

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The Office of Rail and Road (ORR) has released a report on the experiences on the quality of Network Rail's engagement. A total of 234 rail industry stakeholders helped shape the findings which show significant improvements in 2020-21, despite the challenging context of COVID-19, with a majority rating Network Rail's engagement as good or very good (73%).

However, over a quarter of those surveyed are not yet content and responded from a negative or neutral perspective. The regulator found significant variation in approaches to engagement and stakeholders' satisfaction across Network Rail's five regions and central business units.

Network Rail performed relatively well on the inclusivity and effectiveness of its engagement, with 68% of stakeholders rating these principles as good or very good. However it was rated less well on its transparency and governance arrangements, with scores of 61% and 57% respectively.

Inclusivity

- There have been improvements to widen the reach of engagement, particularly by Network Rail Scotland and the Eastern region.
- A more consistently inclusive approach is now needed right across the business.

Effectiveness

- Network Rail showed strong engagement with its stakeholders in response to the exceptional circumstances of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.
- This was often down to good work by individuals in the business rather than an embedded culture of stakeholder engagement.

Good governance

- There was significant variation in processes and governance arrangements across Network Rail.
- Consistency is now needed to ensure stakeholders have a clear point of contact.

Transparency

- Positive steps have been taken to improve the transparency of engagement, but it remains a key area of improvement for stakeholders.
- Business units need to provide stakeholders with feedback in a more systematic manner, in particular showing how their engagement influenced Network Rail's actions.

ORR also makes a number of overarching recommendations, including for Network Rail's senior leadership and its Board to encourage an organisation-wide culture of continuously improving stakeholder engagement and to drive forward the areas for development outlined in today's report.

Dan Brown, Director of Economics, Markets & Strategy said: "With the creation of Great British Railways, a strong customer-centric culture must be embedded across the railway and strong stakeholder engagement will become even more important.

"Network Rail is making improvements to the way it engages with rail industry stakeholders, but it now needs to build on this to address the 27% who are not yet content.

"Improving transparency and focussing engagement activity so it influences decision making and drives actual business improvement is crucial."

Responding to the report, Andrew Haines, Network Rail's Chief Executive said: "We are pleased that the majority of our stakeholders are happy with how we are engaging with them, and that they have noticed an improvement over recent years. This is a result of a conscious effort across our business to create a more customer-focused, service-driven organisation that is more responsive and easier to work with.

"As we welcome back more passengers to the railway following the COVID-19 pandemic, and as preparatory work for the creation of Great British Railways continues, it has never been more important for the industry to work together effectively to deliver a reliable train service for passengers and freight."

Annual assessment of Network Rail's stakeholder engagement 2020-21

Photo credit: Office of Rail and Road