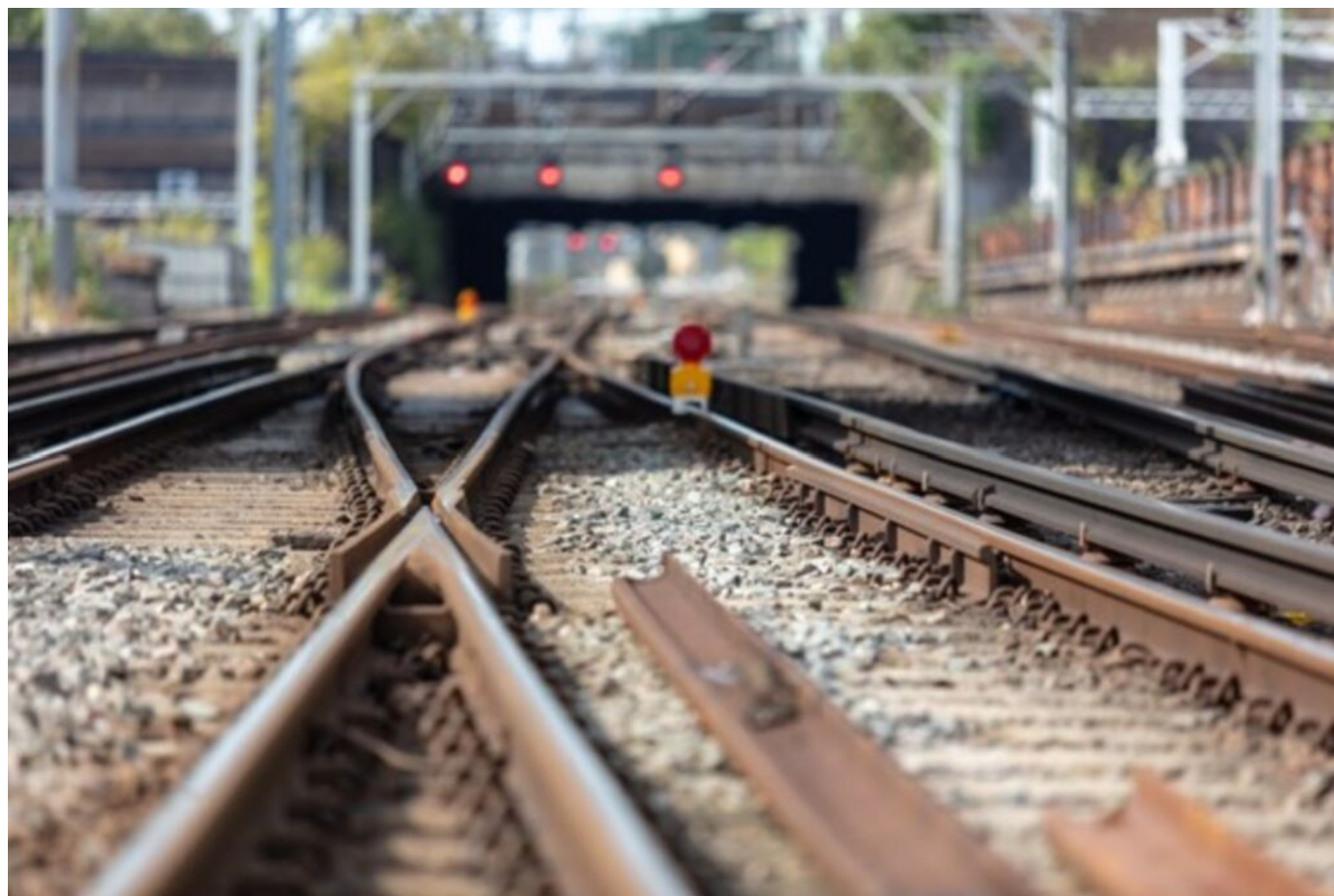


Rail regulator says train punctuality and cancellations remain challenging, but Network Rail starting to improve train performance

December 8, 2023



New statistics from the [Office of Rail and Road \(ORR\)](#) show Britain's railway is still not delivering consistently punctual and reliable journeys. However, the regulator's latest assessment of Network Rail's performance shows that the company is beginning to turn a corner.

In the latest quarter (1 July to 30 September 2023), 69.2% of passenger trains were on time, up 1.5 percentage points on the same quarter last year. Against a background of industrial action, the level of cancellations remains high, at 3.5% of passenger services, although slightly better (down 0.6 percentage points) compared with the same quarter last year.

Separate ORR analysis shows that in the last year Network Rail has begun to improve its overall contribution towards day-to-day running of passenger and freight services, with a key measure of delivery showing overall improvement between June and October 2023. This follows the company putting in place regional performance improvement plans, at the request of ORR.

In a letter to Network Rail, ORR's Chief Executive John Larkinson has welcomed the initial recovery but pointed out there is much more still to do to ensure consistent delivery of train services for passengers and freight across the country.

The company must continue to focus on performance of the infrastructure, learning from events including the recent high-profile incident at Plessey viaduct. While extreme weather remains a challenge for the network, the company must do what it can to safely reduce the effect on services.

Network Rail cannot deliver better journeys alone; train operators also have a role to play. For example, more than half of cancelled trains are train operator related. The regulator particularly wants to see Network Rail leading the whole industry in improving the processes that underpin punctuality and reliability, including making widespread use of innovative projects that the company and industry partners have developed with public funding to improve timetabling.

At a regional level, Network Rail's contribution to train cancellations and punctuality are varied. While improvement is showing through in most, ORR has concerns about performance in the Wales & Western region, where the regulator has recently started an investigation.

Feras Alshaker, Director, Planning and Performance, said: "As the independent regulator, the data we are publishing today bears out the reality that passengers in some areas are still experiencing trains not consistently arriving on time, and high levels of cancellations. However, we are beginning to see signs of improvement in Network Rail's contribution.

"While these improvements are promising, they aren't consistent, and as our analysis shows, the company can do much more to ensure that Britain's railway provides a reliable and punctual service for all its users.

"We recognise that ensuring trains run as planned and to time requires cross-industry collaboration. Network Rail can play an essential part in bringing the rail industry together to build on recent performance improvements and we will work with government to strengthen these relationships."

A Network Rail spokesperson said: "The positive actions we and the industry are taking to improve performance for our passengers and customers are having an impact. There is much more to do, especially in our western region, but we understand the underlying issues and have plans in place to address these.

"It's been a challenging time for the rail industry, and its passengers, with bouts of extreme weather, strikes and industrial unrest, and a fall-off in infrastructure reliability, which has taken its toll. But working together as an industry, and following through on our action plans, will deliver positive results.

"We are not complacent, we appreciate that there is much work to do to provide rail users with a better service they not only can rely on but deserve."

Photo credit: ORR