



ORR investigation into Network Rail's New Year engineering overruns

February 2008



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Passenger Focus welcomes the decision by ORR to investigate the New Year overrunning engineering works. Passengers were badly let down by Network Rail's handling of its Christmas and New Year engineering programme, not least the extraordinarily late notice to train operators that routes would not reopen as planned, and we are pleased to contribute to the investigation.

Passenger Focus (and its predecessor body, RPC) has conducted several pieces of research that set out passenger attitudes towards planned service disruption:

- Passenger requirements during train service disruption while the Colchester to Clacton/Walton-on-Naze railway is resignalled. Passenger Focus in association with Network Rail and 'one'. June 2007.
- Light at the end of the tunnel? The impact of Chiltern Railways' handling of the contingency arrangements following the tunnel collapse at Gerrards Cross on 30 June 2005. Passenger Focus and London Travelwatch.
- Passengers' attitudes towards engineering works. RPC in association with Network Rail, ATOC and RSSB. August 2003.

From these we have been able to identify five core messages that set out what passengers want and expect from the industry when it comes to planned engineering work.



What do passengers want?

The key messages from a passenger perspective are:

- **Justification** (*explain why it has to be done*)
Passengers' acceptance of disruption increases if they understand the reason for the work and the benefits it will ultimately bring.
- **Information** (*tell me where and when it is going to take place*)
Passengers want to make informed choices about their travel plans. If notified in advance some can plan around the disruption. Information about alternative arrangements, length of disruption and increased journey time should be available when tickets are booked. Efforts should be made to inform passengers if situations change after tickets have been booked. Improved compliance with T-12 has gone a long way to resolving this issue, however the final section of this document raises concerns about current T-12 compliance on the West Coast Main Line.
- **Competence** (*do it as quickly and as painlessly as possible*)
Passengers' acceptance of disruption increases if they believe the works are being planned efficiently and in a way that would reduce the overall timescale of the disruption. Implicit in this is that the railway is re-opened on time and as promised. One size does not fit all – geography and market segment affect passengers' flexibility, availability of alternative routes or modes and therefore their attitudes towards how disruption can be minimised. Understanding the needs and constraints of passengers on particular routes needs to be done on a case by case basis. The example of work carried out prior to the Clacton re-signalling project shows the benefits of consulting passengers on proposed arrangements.
- **Alternatives** (*make sure the alternative arrangements work*)
Passengers have a hierarchy of alternative modes of transport. Their choice depends on a number of factors, but includes the extended journey time by rail, number of changes required, proximity to airports for longer journeys, congestion on alternative road routes and availability of parking at destination.

In general, passengers rate replacement buses as inconvenient and would rather spend up to an hour extra on the train than the time proposed for a bus replacement journey. This means greater consideration of single-line working and diversionary routes.

Where buses replace trains the arrangements must be fit-for-purpose:

- Buses of a suitable standard and capable of carrying luggage and, ideally, bicycles.
- Provision made for passengers in wheelchairs.
- Enough staff to redirect and assist passengers, especially those who are carrying heavy luggage or whose mobility is restricted.
- Bus drivers who are aware of the route to be followed.
- Sufficient buses to transport the volume of passengers wishing to travel.



- Compensation (*be fair to passengers*)

It is one of the features of the existing system that Network Rail will compensate TOCs for lost revenue as a result of engineering work, planned or unplanned, but that passengers typically have no entitlement – even where the industry has clearly mismanaged the work. For instance, ORR fined Network Rail £2.4m for project planning and management failings following the overrun of signalling work in the Portsmouth area at Christmas 2006, but passengers received no automatic right to compensation.

Where the industry has been clearly at fault there is a strong case for passengers to have an improved right of redress.



How passengers fared during the Rugby and Liverpool Street overruns

Information

On the positive side, the industry was effective in using the national broadcast media to alert passengers to the problems, aided by the fact that two significant Network Rail overruns were newsworthy in themselves. However, the overruns again highlighted deficiencies in how the industry provides information to passengers at times of short-notice disruption. There were examples of good practice: the 'one' and Virgin Trains website home pages displayed prominent messages early on 2 January, the first working day of 2008. Nevertheless, we are aware of the following:

Tuesday 18 December 2007

This was the day it was announced that the West Coast Main Line at Rugby would not reopen on 31 December as planned. Despite the issue of a press release by Network Rail at 1430, neither the Virgin Trains nor London Midland websites had any mention for the remainder of the day that work at Rugby would not be complete by 31 December.

Wednesday 2 January 2008

Network Rail website

- Despite the revised re-opening date for the West Coast Main Line (1 January) having been missed at 0746 on 2 January the Network Rail website was completely silent on the subject, still referring to "why can't I travel on 31 December".

'one' railway website

- On 2 January in the critical morning peak period the 'one' website advised passengers not to travel to London if the trip was not important, but gave no information about what services were running if your journey was essential. This was later addressed, but after it would have been of use for commuters returning to work. Use of the c2c route, FCC services from Cambridge, Norwich-Ely-Kings Cross as an option from Norfolk were not mentioned.
- The journey check pages of the 'one' website (driven by Nexus Alpha) gave the message "Train services between London Liverpool Street and Stratford are being disrupted due to overrunning engineering works. Engineers are working as fast as possible to restore services to normal. Short notice alterations, cancellations and delays can be expected". This information, to which passengers could navigate without first viewing the general announcement on the website homepage, hardly conveyed the seriousness of the situation that day.
- The information available from Live Departure Boards was often inaccurate because, it appears, service alterations were not being sent through using the appropriate Tyrell template messages. As a consequence, many 'one' trains were showing on Live Departure Boards as continuing to run to/from Liverpool Street and undermining passenger (and railway staff) confidence in those parts of the system that were giving accurate information.



London Midland website

- Throughout 2 January the London Midland website had no information on its homepage about service alterations between Northampton and Birmingham. Even on the engineering works page the site continued to advise passengers “2 January: services return to the normal weekday timetable”. This was not addressed until one of our non-executive directors emailed the London Midland Head of Communications.

Virgin Trains website

- The Virgin Trains website advised passengers not to travel on 2 January. However for those obliged to travel, use of the Marylebone, St. Pancras and Kings Cross routes was not mentioned.
- Despite being ‘Day 2’ of the overrun, on 2 January the Virgin Trains website was still offering passengers enquiring about travel from London to Manchester through trains as per the normal timetable.
- The information available from Live Departure Boards was often inaccurate during the overrun because, it appears, service alterations were not being sent through using the appropriate Tyrell template messages. Trains that were cancelled were left on the system simply showing “no report” and undermining passenger (and railway staff) confidence in those parts of the system that were giving accurate information.
- On at least one occasion two trains on the West Coast Main Line were running north and south of the block with the same headcode, causing the Live Departure Boards system to show rogue information.

National Rail Enquiries

- While we did not conduct comprehensive checks, it appeared that NRE call centres were advising passengers of the problems when dealing with telephone enquiries.
- Journey planner enquiries on the NRE website were giving passengers through trains from London to Manchester, London to Norwich etc. despite the fact they could not run. The savvy may have noticed the small exclamation mark giving access to information alerting them to a problem, but this was:
 - easy to miss.
 - inferior to being advised in the first place that there was a problem and given proper alternative times (in the case of London to Manchester, either via the West Coast Main Line using the Northampton to Coventry coach or via an alternative rail route).
 - the ‘alert’ details were not expressed in a passenger-friendly way. It said “Virgin Trains services from London Euston will terminate/start at Northampton. Services from the North will terminate/start at either Coventry or Birmingham International. A replacement coach service will operate between Northampton and Coventry/Birmingham in both directions”. Until such time that the journey planning/timetable enquiry system can be made ‘real time’, these alerts must be less generalised and better tailored to the needs of the passenger making that particular enquiry. It could have read “This train cannot run throughout from London Euston because of overrunning engineering works at Rugby. Catch a train from London Euston to Northampton where a coach will take you to either Coventry or Birmingham International from where you will catch another train to complete your journey. The journey overall is expected to take 1½ hours longer than normal”.



Ticket retailing websites

Websites offering ticket sales were continuing to allow passengers to buy tickets online and reserve seats on trains that could not run, a symptom of the incorrect data within journey planning/timetable enquiry systems. Note: the 'alert' exclamation mark on the NRE website may be easy to miss, but the ticket retailing websites contain no facility to alert passengers to unplanned problems that might affect the journey for which they are about to buy a ticket.

Information at stations

The principal information problem at stations appears to have been that Customer Information Systems (CIS), i.e. screens, displayed information about what *should* have been happening, rather than what was happening. This resulted in unnecessary confusion and irritation amongst passengers: station staff had to explain that trains showing as being for London Euston would not go there. It is patently absurd that many station information systems are effectively useless whenever there is a significant departure from the normal timetable.

Summary regarding information

- The timeliness with which information appeared on some industry websites, particularly homepages, was unacceptably slow
- The inability of online journey planning/timetable enquiry tools to present amended information, or even to suppress inaccurate information, must be addressed. Similarly, the industry must stop selling tickets and issuing seat reservations on trains that it is known will not run. In the short term, the way enquiry/ticket sales websites alert passengers to known inaccuracies in the data they are presenting must be improved.
- The inability of station CIS to display accurate information about departures at times of disruption must be addressed.
- The inability to keep Live Departure Boards up to date when passengers really need them more than ever is not acceptable.

Compensation and refunds to passengers

General

While there were examples of good practice, we believe the industry can do better in the way it communicates the following:

- the alternatives available to passengers if their intended route is not available and being clear about acceptance of tickets on the alternative routes.
- the fact that refunds apply if passengers decide to abandon their journey in the event of unplanned service disruption
- the arrangements for compensation in the event of delays or there being no effective service provided.



Virgin Trains

On 2 January the Virgin Trains website homepage advised passengers not to travel and that tickets for 31 December, 1 and 2 January would be valid for travel on 3 or 4 January. It was not clear that passengers who chose to abandon their trip were entitled to a full refund. It was insufficiently clear on which routes tickets would be valid, including Virgin-specific tickets, and confusion was reported on the ground at some stations. Good practice was that Virgin Trains allowed Saver tickets to be used in the peak up until 8 January when things were back to normal.

'one'

On 2 January, while advising passengers not to travel to London the 'one' website was silent about when tickets for the 2nd could be used and that passengers who abandoned their journey would receive a full refund. The arrangements for season ticket holders, in particular the fact that if you heeded the 'not to travel' advice you would be refunded, emerged only later. However, the eventual package amounted to good practice in that for the days when no effective service was provided, Season Ticket holders will receive a full cash refund, in some cases exceeding what would have been due under "delay repay".

London Midland

On 2 January, even if a passenger managed to navigate through to where information about the Rugby overrun was displayed, there was no ticket validity information shown.



How passengers fared during the Shields Junction overrun

Sunday 6 January 2008

This was the day it was announced, albeit not until c. 2100, that replacement buses would be in operation on the Paisley Canal line on Monday 7 January due to ongoing testing of newly-installed signalling equipment on the route.

Monday 7 January 2008

In the event, however, it was not just the Paisley Canal line that was affected. No morning services from Ayrshire, Inverclyde and Paisley Gilmour Street were able to operate through to Glasgow, with Ayrshire and Inverclyde services terminating at Paisley Gilmour Street where replacement buses to Glasgow Central were provided. There was no advance information, with passengers unaware of the problems until told either at the station or onboard trains. There were dangerous levels of crowding at Paisley Gilmour Street station: it being impossible to source sufficient buses at such short notice to clear the sheer volume of passengers alighting from terminating trains. On top of the crowding, this resulted in major delays for passengers travelling into Glasgow.

Evening services were reduced to four services per hour between Glasgow Central and Ayr, Largs and Ardrossan. All other services, including services to Gourock and Wemyss Bay included replacement bus services between Glasgow Central and Paisley Gilmour Street. Passengers travelling from Glasgow Central were inconvenienced and increasingly frustrated as Network Rail were unable to answer passenger queries as to when services would return to normal. Several answers were given ranging from a) don't know b) a few days c) a week d) might be OK tomorrow.

Given the short notice nature of service cancellation/disruption, information by First ScotRail (FSR) via website/telephone and at stations was simply advising passengers of ongoing severe disruption to services and to check before travelling.

Tuesday 8 January and Wednesday 9 January

Reduced services were in operation between Ayrshire, Inverclyde and Paisley Gilmour Street to Glasgow Central with a large number of replacement buses arranged between Paisley and Glasgow. Passengers were advised to contact FSR Customer Relations, National Rail Enquiries (NRE) and station help points for further information regarding the amended timetable.

Wednesday 9 January

Network Rail were still unable to say when the engineering overrun would end and when passenger services would return to normal, leaving passengers seeking information on a day-to-day basis.



Thursday 10 January

Passengers were advised that services would be suspended between Glasgow Central and Paisley on Saturday 12 January to allow Network Rail to complete the engineering works, which would in turn allow a resumption of the full timetable on Monday 14 January.



Passenger benefit to be funded by Network Rail

We assume that ORR will conclude that Network Rail breached its Licence in relation to the Rugby, Liverpool Street and Shield Junction overruns. However, it will not benefit passengers – the people inconvenienced – if the company is simply fined over these breaches. This section therefore discusses what Network Rail could be asked to deliver that would deliver long-term benefit to passengers and the industry.

Enhanced passenger information

We recommend that ORR requires Network Rail to fund substantial enhancements to the delivery of passenger information, with a particular focus on delivery of timely, relevant, accurate and consistent information at times of unplanned disruption. The National Passenger Survey scores for “How well train company deals with delays”, of which information will form a key part, are low: just 35% of passengers satisfied and 29% positively dissatisfied. Part of the improvement should benefit all passengers, everywhere; and part of the improvement should benefit passengers using those parts of the network directly affected by the New Year overruns. Clearly, these improvements must be additional to what Network Rail is obliged to do anyway under its Licence and there must be a binding, early, date for delivery.

At a network-wide level, we suggest that Network Rail be required to ensure that changes made to the base timetable using the industry’s Very Short Term Planning (VSTP) process will in future reflect immediately in all downstream systems. For avoidance of doubt, these are:

- Station CIS
- Station public address, where this is automated
- Timetable enquiries and associated ticket sales made at station ticket offices/travel centres
- Timetable enquiries and associated ticket sales made on on-line
- Timetable enquiries and associated ticket sales made on the telephone
- Real time running information, including on-line Live Departure Boards, TrainTracker, TrainTracker text etc.

Achieving this would eliminate most of the underlying problems which passengers (and TOC staff) grapple with every time there is unplanned disruption.

For Virgin Trains passengers:

We suggest that, at Virgin Trains-managed stations Network Rail be required to:

- Provide CIS that has greater flexibility to display general disruption information and other passenger notices
- Provide greater automation of CIS through links to signalbox train describers and TRUST
- Provide an automatic announcement facility at each station
- Provide CIS with the ability to properly convey information to passengers about trains that divide or join *en route*.
- At Coventry, Birmingham International and Wolverhampton, provide ‘Next train to London’ and ‘Next train to Birmingham’ indicators
- At Stockport, provide ‘Next train to London’ and ‘Next train to Manchester’ indicators.



For 'one' railway passengers:

We suggest that, at 'one'-managed stations Network Rail be required to:

- Provide CIS that has greater flexibility to display general disruption information and other passenger notices
- Replace all cathode ray tube-design CIS screens with modern LED-design screens
- Upgrade public address systems, and install them where not currently present, to provide automatic announcing facilities at all stations.
- Install CIS screens at all stations where none currently exists, with the exception of a small number of very low footfall locations.
- Install passenger helppoints at all locations where none currently exists.
- Provide summary of departures indicators at Cambridge, Colchester, Shenfield, Bishop's Stortford and Harlow Town that allow fast and slow trains to be effectively differentiated.
- Provide CIS with the ability to properly convey information to passengers about trains that divide or join *en route*.
- At Colchester, Shenfield, Stratford and Bishop's Stortford, provide 'Next train to London' indicators.
- At all stations Colchester-Maryland, Southend Victoria-Billericay and Stansted Airport-Bethnal Green including the West Anglia branches and Southbury loop, provide real time running information about London Underground, London Overground and DLR.

It should be noted that some elements of the above will be covered, or will be covered in part, by Network Rail renewals due in Control Period 4. Network Rail should be required to bring forward this work for completion in Control Period 3.

For London Midland passengers:

We suggest that, at London Midland-managed stations Network Rail be required to:

- Provide CIS that has greater flexibility to display general disruption information and other passenger notices
- Upgrade CIS at London Midland-managed stations between London Euston and Northampton
- Provide audio passenger information and upgrade visual displays at Long Buckby station, where passengers were obliged to use replacement buses throughout the Rugby blockade.

For First ScotRail passengers:

We suggest that Network Rail be required to contribute to the ongoing Station Improvement Plan in Scotland, with particular emphasis on the following:

- Improved long line public address systems
- Upgraded and additional CIS
- Autodial telephone Help Points
- Finger-style signage
- REACT, the audible wayfinding system



Other passenger benefits

In view of the severity of the difficulties passengers experienced as a result of the New Year overruns we recommend that Network Rail also be required to fund other passenger benefits. We make the following suggestions:

For Virgin Trains passengers:

- Network Rail to undertake improvements to toilets, waiting areas, subways and other customer facilities at various Virgin Trains-managed stations, details to be discussed with Virgin Trains.
- Network Rail to provide, operate and maintain at its cost until the end of Control Period 4 a new lounge for disabled passengers at London Euston, with full accessibility and for use by all disabled passengers, Standard and First Class ticket holders and regardless of the train operator with which they are about to travel.
- Network Rail to procure and maintain at its cost until the end of Control Period 4 mobile phone transmitters in WCML tunnels to allow passengers to maintain telephone conversations when using the four major mobile networks and using wi-fi facilities on Virgin and London Midland trains. The tunnels concerned are at Primrose Hill, Kensal Green, Watford, Northchurch, Linslade, Kilsby, Beechwood, New Street North, New Street South, Shugborough, Harecastle, Hibel Road, Prestbury and Edge Hill to Liverpool Lime Street.

For 'one' railway passengers:

- Network Rail to install and upgrade equipment to allow the public realm at 'one' stations to be managed in real time to improve customer service and enhance passenger safety and security. To include:
 - Replacement or installation of CCTV at 53 'one'-managed stations, details to be agreed with 'one' railway.
 - Upgrade of lighting systems at 53 'one'-managed stations, details to be agreed with 'one' railway.
 - Provision and maintenance of a centralised CCTV monitoring centre, with Network Rail covering the operational costs until the end of Control Period 4.

For London Midland passengers:

- At Long Buckby, Network Rail to install modular station structures and provide DDA-compliant full accessibility to both platforms.
- Network Rail to provide additional car parking capacity at various London Midland stations, augmenting schemes being promoted by London Midland.
- Network Rail to provide DDA-complaint full accessibility to Platform 3 at Leighton Buzzard station and provide a new ticket office.
- Network Rail to provide DDA-compliant full accessibility to the island platform at Tring station.
- At Euston, Network Rail to remodel gateline to reduce passenger congestion
- At Euston, Network Rail to make improvements to the taxi rank



For First ScotRail passengers:

- On behalf of First ScotRail passengers we suggest that Network Rail be required to contribute to the ongoing Station Improvement Plan in Scotland, with particular emphasis on upgraded and additional CCTV systems.



Informed Traveller, T-12

Finally, we wish to draw ORR's attention to the apparent failure to achieve T-12 in respect of West Coast Main Line services at Easter 2008. Up until Tuesday 29 January 2008, on-line journey planning/timetable enquiry websites showed Virgin Trains' services running over Easter as per the normal timetable, when the line will be closed at Rugby. We are told that this was because Network Rail was late amending the base timetable to reflect the engineering works that will be taking place, allegedly because of a backlog of work caused by the New Year overrun at Rugby. As of Wednesday 30 January, Virgin services are showing correctly as operating to Birmingham International only in the southbound direction, but London Midland trains are still within systems as operating to the normal timetable. This meant that on 30 January passengers could still buy tickets from Glasgow to Euston for Good Friday with a change of trains at Crewe into a service that it has been known for months will not operate. We encourage ORR to investigate the causes of these failures to meet T-12 requirements and to establish whether this is specific to the West Coast Main Line or if failures are occurring elsewhere. It is unacceptable that passengers are able to buy tickets for, and reserve seats on, trains over Easter that the rail industry knows it cannot operate.

Passenger Focus
February 2008



Single Journey from Glasgow Central (GLC) to London ([View Details](#) for specific Stations)

Outward: **Friday 21 March, 2008**

Option 4

Journey Details

- [Text me this journey](#)

Leg 1 of 2

Depart: 07:10 Glasgow Central (GLC)

Arrive: 10:32 Crewe (CRE)

Travel By: Train

Retail Service ID: VT658000

Train Company: Virgin Trains service from Glasgow Central to Birmingham International

Seating Class: First Class available.

Catering Code: Restaurant for First Class passengers.

Cycle Policy: Train has a cycle policy.

Duration: 3:22

Leg 2 of 2

Depart: 11:00 Crewe (CRE)

Arrive: 13:18 London Euston (EUS)

Travel By: Train

Retail Service ID: LM241800

Train Company:

- London Midland service from Crewe to London Euston

Seating Class: First Class available.

Catering Code: Trolley service.

Cycle Policy: Train has a cycle policy.

Duration: 2:18

Total Journey Duration: 6:08