Network Rail's Investment Programme

The Hendy Report Consultation

Transport Focus welcomes the opportunity to comment on the above consultation.

We provided input into the original Hendy review and the accompanying Bowe and Shaw reviews of Network Rail so we will not repeat in detail our comments on the cause of the current predicament.

However, we do consider it essential that lessons are leant when it comes to the planning of major enhancement projects.  Our research into passengers’ priorities for improvement shows that passengers want a more punctual, reliable, frequent service on which they can get a seat[[1]](#footnote-1). With much of the original High Level Output Specification (HLOS) programme being directed at performance and capacity it was clearly something that was welcomed by passengers and which began to build expectations. We also know that performance is the bedrock on which train companies can build up levels of trust and begin to improve relationships with passengers[[2]](#footnote-2). So the HLOS commitments were not just about physical improvements to the railway but were also important in changing passengers’ attitudes to, and relationships with, train companies and their perspectives about the industry as a whole.

Since then the uncertainty surrounding the enhancement programme has inevitably dented some of the goodwill that had been built up. The Hendy Review is a welcome attempt to draw a line under the past and to present a new plan for the future. As well as providing a new engineering and financial baseline this plan should also form the basis of a new package of information to passengers – the aim being to help rebuild trust and confidence.

We believe there are two main elements to this:

* Clarity on new delivery dates and what this means for passenger services.

It is extremely hard for passengers to assess the impact of the revised plan. There is no sense of how long schemes have been extended or, in cases where some investment has been shifted to CP6, of when it will be completed.  The only way to build up any sense of the overall impact would be to do a line-by-line analysis of the current and previous versions of the plan.

Passengers want some sense of when their particular scheme will be complete and when they will begin to see the benefits. Wherever possible infrastructure delivery needs to be phased so as to enable the earliest possible introduction of passenger benefits. However, we acknowledge that work is still underway and that this can make it difficult to provide a definitive date – for instance where enhancements are also dependent on franchise negotiations or rolling stock purchases/cascades. When firm information is not available it will be important to say so and to give passengers some sense of when it may be available.

* Assurances.

Passengers want assurance that the new dates are robust and will not be changed again. This, of course, begs the question of whether the underlying planning/engineering assumptions that created the problem in the first place have been addressed through the Bowe and Shaw reviews.

The Great Western main-line electrification scheme is a good case in point for both issues. Passengers welcomed the original electrification and modernisation plans – when combined with new rolling stock it was a visible and tangible attempt to significantly improve services. This undoubtedly helped to take some of the sting out of the engineering work and the subsequent disruption required to deliver the improvements.  Since then passengers have seen repeated statements that either cast doubt on the investment or which seemed to keep deferring delivery dates. Even when looking at the revised details in the new delivery plan it is still not totally clear when passengers can expect to see everything being delivered. Again, we acknowledge that decisions on franchising are ongoing and that until these are resolved it will be difficult to say precisely when the benefits will be delivered. However, passengers still need some sense of reassurance that the work will continue and sufficient detail against which they can begin to hold the ‘railway’ to account.

To this end we would advocate broadening out the ‘Customer Promise’ idea adopted within rail franchises. On a route, or even a project-by-project basis, this would set out a clear, easily understandable statement of what has been promised and by when. When accompanied with regular updates on progress it will help build a bit more accountability and transparency into the enhancement progress. This is also consistent with the conclusions of the Bowe review looking at how the end-user can be better involved in the delivery of major projects and the Shaw review concept of local stakeholder panels

Some of this uncertainty also extends into the ring-fenced funds set out in the HLOS. For instance, it is clear from the revised plan that less will be spent on Access for All projects in CP5; [the CP5 fund value has been revised from £135m -including £32m rollover - to £87.1m in 12/13 prices, with the remainder of the original CP5 fund value now planned for CP6]. What we do not know, however, is how this translates into the number of schemes affected and which stations will be deferred. We understand that a list is being prepared but there is, at present, very little in the public domain. Again, there is a need for ongoing clarity and transparency.

If passenger confidence is to be restored and improved then the delivery plan must build in enhanced levels of transparency and accountability.

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1. [Rail passengers’ priorities for improvements](http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/publications/rail-passengers-priorities-for-improvements-october-2014). Transport Focus. October 2014 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [Passengers’ relationship with the rail industry](http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/publications/passengers-relationship-with-the-rail-industry). Transport Focus. August 2014 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)