Minutes

transportfocus

Special Board meeting	
Date:	**15 May 2018**
Location	**Fleetbank House, 2-6 Salisbury Square, London**

Attended

Board members:

Theo de Pencier	TdP	Board member, Chair
Philip Mendelsohn	PM	Board member for Scotland
William Powell	WP	Board member for Wales
Arthur Leathley	AL	Board member for London
Marian Lauder MBE	ML	Board Adviser

Executive in attendance:

Anthony Smith	AS	Chief executive
Ian Wright	IW	Head of insight
Mike Hewitson	MH	Head of policy
Guy Dangerfield	GD	Head of strategy
Jon Carter	JC	Head of business services
Michelle Calvert	MCa	Management assistant to the CEO and Chair
Sara Nelson	SN	Head of communications
Nina Howe	NH	Senior stakeholder manager

Apologies:

Jeff Halliwell	JH	Chair
Isabel Liu	IL	Board member

Guests:

Paul McMahon	PMcM	Managing Director Freight & National Passenger Operators, Network Rail
Crispin Humm	CH	Head of Customer Journey, Rail Delivery Group

Members of the public:

Fran Edwards, Rail Delivery Group
Marcus Clements, Office of Rail and Road
Simon Feast, Department for Transport

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Part A: Preliminary

1.0 Chairman's opening remarks; apologies

TdP welcomed everyone to the meeting. AS and MH were not initially present but would be joining later. The representative of Trainline was also not attending. Transport Focus had requested a statement from them instead, but they had declined to provide one.

Jeff Halliwell had been unable to attend and so TdP would be the Chair.

TdP explained the purpose of the special board meeting, which was to explore the issues affecting passengers as a result of the rail industry's current inability to publish timetables correctly 12 weeks in advance, known as 'Informed Traveller' or T-12. He recalled this was the process designed to ensure that amendments to the base timetable were made 12 weeks in advance and had been a regulatory requirement for Network Rail since the late 1990s.

The aim of the meeting was to understand better the progress made to restoring T-12 and to explore what Network Rail and the Rail Delivery Group (RDG) should do in the interim to minimise the impact on passengers.

Part B: Business Planning

2.0 Paul McMahon, Managing Director Freight & National Passenger Operators, Network Rail

PMcM explained that the issue was one on which National Rail and RDG collaborated closely. The issue of T-12 was a serious one in Network Rail and affected all parts of the company. It affected capacity, infrastructure projects, rolling stock and, above all, delivery of the operational railway.

When the T-12 recovery plan and the suspension of the Informed Traveller process had been announced back in February, National Rail invoked it's 'corporate crisis' measures. PMcM himself had been asked to lead the process. Network Rail had worked with companies across the industry to resolve the issue and support them and the passenger. CH emphasised that the process was much wider than Network Rail and RDG. He and GD had been working closely to understand the root causes of the issue.

PMcM recalled that in November 2017, the May 2018 base timetables had been provided to train operators.

PMcM emphasised that the May 2018 timetable included the biggest change ever; 46% of the schedules in the timetable had needed to be altered. Furthermore, a key part of the North-West electrification programme would not, as had originally been planned, be complete in May 2018. This could not be managed locally as the deferment of the new

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Bolton timetable meant that the new electric trains could not run and other assumed rolling stock changes in the area could not take place. There were also issues with the late introduction of the class '385' trains in Scotland. There were also ongoing issues with Govia Thameslink Railway's (GTR) May timetable in relation to the phasing in of Thameslink. Network Rail had therefore not had a stable base timetable for May at the end of January, as would normally have been the case. There had also not been consensus about the best solution until Network Rail had taken the decision to suspend T-12. PMcM added that the situation was unprecedented.

PMcM explained that there were well-established processes for writing the national timetable which started far in advance of the actual date the timetable applied; by way of illustration, the process had already begun for the May 2019 timetable. The important work commences in August when operators are required to provide their bid for the timetable at T-40. At T-26, Network Rail would present the draft timetable to the operators.

When National Rail had decided to suspend T-12 and initiate the recovery plan, this had included a number of principles as discussed with the industry. The T-12 system had been replaced with a system whereby the operators would bid their engineering timetables to Network Rail eight weeks out, and Network Rail would finalise them six weeks out, with some exceptions. Network Rail had been maintaining this process with generally no material deterioration in quality. They continued to work closely with operators through the steering group and regular calls and meetings.

Network Rail in collaboration with partners in the industry was endeavouring to publish timetables earlier than six weeks in advance for particularly important weeks. The aim was to recover the T-12 process in October and publish for Christmas and New Year 2018 at T-12. Other critical weeks included the August bank holiday and the closure of Euston station in August.

Within the recovery plan there is a staged process; Network Rail is progressively, over the summer, transitioning back to the T-12 system. This could not be completed more quickly and, indeed, that plan has no contingency and assumes no new timetable challenges emerge.

As part of their work with train operators, National Rail had tried to identify the services operators could open up for advanced reservations ahead of T-6 – the ones engineering work is most unlikely to affect.

PMcM presented the RAG ratings for the rail operators. Great Western was not included as they were in a unique situation.

Most operators were meeting their bidding deadlines according to the recovery plan and Network Rail was publishing the timetables six weeks in advance. There were specific challenges with GTR because the base timetable is only just agreed, so they are currently

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not meeting T-6 deadlines. Great Western Railway (GWR) was also not publishing at T-6. There was a large volume of work that needed to be completed for the Great Western electrification works, meaning large volumes of late change to the access plan.

CH stated that GTR were facing difficulty in recovering in line with the rest of the industry. They had focussed many resources on informing the public, but GTR would remain in their current state for some time. TdP asked if he as a Thameslink user should have confidence in the upcoming timetables. CH stated that TdP should have confidence in GTR's clarity in what they knew would run and what they could not confirm.

AS observed that GTR significantly affected other areas and asked what the cumulative effect would be of the issues they faced. CH said there was a degree of knock-on effect to other train operating companies (TOCs). The other TOCs were also consistent about what they could or could not confirm.

PMcM stated that the decision to publish the timetables six weeks in advance had been taken in recognition of the difficulty that might pose to GTR. In some cases, GTR's timetable had to be added to timetables that had already been published.

PMcM explained that the risks to the plan included late notice possessions. For GWR in particular, this included a huge volume of work. There was now greater focus on planning engineering works to minimise late notice work. Network Rail was also trying to maximise the resources in the industry. It was, for example, bringing people back into the company who had retired and transferring others. Employees were working overtime and working at weekends.

In terms of ensuring the situation was not repeated, PMcM stated that, firstly, there was a need to make sure the delivery of schemes was reliable, including the introduction of new stock, maintaining the timetable and linking it with the rest of the industry. Strict adherence to the timetable development timeline was required, as was industry cooperation. PMcM stated that a benefit of having to go through the recovery plan was the degree of cooperation with the rest of the industry that had arisen. PMcM stated that there were approximately 450 people in the Network Rail capacity planning team. They had published their plans for the next control period and would increase their resources, which would yield benefits later on.

PM asked how the recovery would synchronise, particularly in relation to GTR. PMcM stated that they were expecting to see improvements during the summer. He did not currently anticipate issues with having the recovery plan completed for December. GD understood that the issues GTR were facing were in relation to finalising the summer timetable, which had to happen before engineering work alterations could be made. PMcM confirmed the concern was in relation to the base timetable. CH stated that there was currently no indication that the recovery plan was at risk. PMcM stated that it had been believed that a recovery plan that was not consistent nationally would be too chaotic to be productive, and so they had decided to implement a national plan. As this plan was now being generally

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adhered to, National Rail was more confident in accelerating it where possible, although PMcM emphasised that this was only tentative.

WP asked how Network Rail aimed to restore discipline, particularly to the infrastructure projects division. He observed that it was important that Network Rail made it possible for train operating companies to bid accurately at T-18. PMcM observed that when Sir Peter Hendy had become Network Rail's chairman, there had been the review of the capital programme, followed by significant work to review enhancements, organisation and delivery culminating in the publication of the Enhancements Improvement Programme. This included improving the costing of the capability processes. National Rail had lessened the level of granularity on costing compared to that review and had improved the clienting and sponsoring organisation in Network Rail. There was also a governance process in place involving DfT for the English and Welsh schemes. A pipeline process for Control Period Six (CP6) had been instituted for agreeing, developing and delivering any capital enhancements scheme. National Rail therefore considered they now understood the issues of capital delivery and were coping with them appropriately.

AL observed that it seemed as though passengers suffered twice, from the delays and then having incomplete information as a result of those delays. He asked if anything could be done to prioritise those operators who were forced to make a late bid. He observed that GWR particularly seemed to have this difficulty. PMcM stated that National Rail had brought in extra train planners.

CH recalled that the question of prioritisation had been raised at the steering board. There was now more focus on how the industry could identify the pinch points and mitigate any negative impact.

ML understood that the process to highlight where trains are not showing correctly in journey planners is manual and labour-intensive, and reliant on the industry's weekly engineering circulars being accurate. She therefore suggested that Network Rail should develop a way to identify whether a particular train was not going to run. CH said he would cover this in his presentation.

GD asked if there were likely to be continual late notice possessions affecting GWR until the electrification programme was complete. He further asked how Network Rail could provide reassurance that the next big upgrade would not have similar problems in achieving T-12 timescales. PMcM observed that the electrification of GWR was a particularly big project. The late notice possessions would continue. In relation to prevention of disruption from future projects, he observed that changes, including the Enhancements Improvement Programme, were being made in the company.

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3.0 Crispin Humm, Head of Customer Journey, Rail Delivery Group

CH introduced himself as the Head of Customer Strategy at RDG. He explained that his role was to ensure a consistent and exceptional experience for the entire, door-to-door journey of rail customers, as well as working on the longer-term vision of the railway service. The RDG were about to publish their business plan that would explain the vision. Informing customers was fundamental to this. There were three pillars to the division: retail, customer information, and support and redress. Technology played a fundamental role to keeping customers informed, but it also involved staff in the contact centres, at the station and on the train lending their assistance. GD and he were working closely to identify the areas that needed the most work.

Due to the nature of information flows, some temporary measures had had to be employed, although they were inefficient. These included the National Rail Communication Centre who conducted a train-by-train, line-by-line check on all the services planned and engineering that is scheduled.

In terms of informing customers, across the RDG's website, there were clear banners explaining the issue and the reason for it. He emphasised the importance of being clear, open and honest with customers. The third-party retailers all wanted to display a consistent message. Challenged about whether RDG should compel third party retailers to improve information, CH stated that he did not wish the response to be punitive, and favoured a more customer-led approach; he wanted to achieve results by explaining what customers wanted and deserved. However, some directive approaches were being considered.

The banners explained that services could not be guaranteed up until T-6 and the RDG's advice was to book as normal, and passengers would be refunded if their booked train was cancelled; the RDG did not want customers to be out of pocket as a result.

When a customer booked and they did not know a train was definitely running because the industry could not confirm it, those trains would be 'bulletined'. In conjunction with positive dialogue for Transport Focus, the RDG were making changes to the NRE website that would introduce another field to increase clarity about incorrect schedules. RDG actively encouraged all journey planners to use its disruption bulletin and were considering measures to improve adoption.

However, these were manual measures and RDG and its partners were exploring options to facilitate the flow of information. This includes exploring whether the solution would be to extract the data from the source Network Rail system, although he emphasised that he did not want to make a prediction. RDG would be asking what information passengers wanted and how they wanted it to be presented, to ensure the process was customer-led. He was not yet certain about the timing of the introduction of these measures.

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TdP observed that some indication of timescale would be useful. CH stated that he could return and inform the board members when he had this information but would consider it disingenuous if he were to make an estimation.

CH explained that RDG had had to introduce some extraordinary manual interventions. The long-term plan was emerging and CH could update Transport Focus on it. However, current advice remained that customers should check, book as normal and the industry would refund tickets for cancelled trains. The principles were still for RDG to be open, honest and clear where they were not certain.

ML observed that CH had said the process to improve information flow would be customer-led. She stated that Transport Focus had conducted a mystery shopper exercise, and as a result suggested that, firstly, the train planner icon for a train not running as scheduled be changed from amber to red and, secondly, an unambiguous message be provided when a customer hovered over the icon. CH said RDG would be introducing new symbols to enable better differentiation. Furthermore, the wording of messages was under continuous review. He encouraged Transport Focus to continue to provide customer feedback.

GD observed that the third-party retailers had been given several years to make required changes, and so RDG needed to carefully consider whether the right to sell rail tickets entailed a duty to take reasonable steps to caution customers about inaccurate information, and whether stronger measures from RDG were required as a result. CH stated that a mature relationship would be based on partnership and customer outcome. If the mature approach was not being achieved, other measures were not ruled out. He stated that the relationship was now more of a partnership. CH emphasised that the customer experience had to be excellent, and the current situation was lacking in this regard. RDG was doing everything it could to keep customers informed.

PM stated that there seemed to be an inconsistency between vending systems and journey planners. CH agreed on the importance of having this consistency. He added that, unfortunately, RDG was currently reliant on manual interventions. The challenge was to identify ways to move to an automated system.

WP observed that customers with access issues suffered particularly from the lack of information and the unpredictability of it. He asked what assurance could be given to these customers. CH stated that RDG was conscious of the difficulties faced by some customers. The solution was a comprehensive approach. This would be addressed through the Accessibility Group, which included representatives of various disability action groups. He emphasised that there was clarity in the aim of all customers having the confidence to book and have knowledge where exact confirmation could not be granted. Improvements were being made to Passenger Assist, which was also due to be replaced in the longer-term.

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GD asked about ways to inform customers whose tickets had been cancelled. CH stated that the approach to the whole Informed Traveller process was to include third-party retailers fully. The aims of RDG and the third-party retailers did converge, and this ensured a degree of efficiency.

AS asked how the railways would cope with the additional strain on the weekend of 19/20 May due to the Royal Wedding. Secondly, he asked about the scale of the problem. Thirdly, he asked why the process was still so manual. CH stated RDG would be soon publishing the business plan. The current focus was delivery on customers' needs. Customers thought in terms of the door-to-door journey and wanted to be able to travel without knowing about fares regulation, wanted to be kept informed and redress in case of errors. The current legacy systems did not facilitate this. A number of measures were in place to ensure that delivery of customers' wishes. Fares reform was underway. Smart ticketing was being considered and how customers planned their journeys was being reviewed. In terms of the manual nature, PMcM added that he understood that over the previous decade there had been more focus on maintenance and efficiency of the asset base, and customers' needs was likely not recognised as a crisis at that point; it had not been the highest priority.

PMcM expected that the timetable for the May weekend would function correctly. Great effort had been made across the sector to ensure the smooth running of the trains and all tests had been conducted successfully. In terms of the scale of the difficulties, CH observed that while T-12 was very important for a small number of customers, minimising disruption was important.

AL asked about the scale of the solution, particularly in relation to the costs of the solutions. CH agreed that the solution would be industry-wide just as the problem was. He was not yet aware of the quantity of the cost but emphasised that it was important to identify this. The approach, as it was in other areas, was to find a solution as a partnership.

TdP recalled discussing the joint responsibility of notifying inaccuracies, and the use of source data. He asked whether the System Operator would have, by Control Period 6, have an IT systems that could identify trains in conflict with engineering work that was known to be taking place. PMcM said he did not know, although there was a range of tools globally to assist with schedule planning. Network Rail was in conversation with suppliers to identify those most suitable to Great Britain.

CH said the Rail Technical Strategy and Capability Plan was put together on behalf of the industry by RSSB, which included rail packages designed to improve the railway, in terms of disruption management and data use, in Control Period 6. He understood there was Department for Transport funds allocated for the project.

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4.0 Any Other Business

TdP wished CH and PMcM luck for the May weekend and thanked the attendees. He encouraged the improvements to be speedy as well as precise.

There being no other business, the meeting ended at 12.43.

Signed as a true and accurate record of the meeting:

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Theo de Pencier
Acting Chair, Board member, Transport Focus

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Date

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