

John Larkinson
Chief Executive



Andrew Haines
Chief Executive
Network Rail Infrastructure Limited
By email

19 January 2023

Dear Andrew

Network Rail's contribution to train service performance

Thank you for your [letter](#) of 29 November 2022 which helpfully set out the steps that Network Rail is taking to drive improvements in train service performance. As you are aware, we are monitoring delivery of your improvement plans closely.

Since your letter performance has continued to decline. The percentage of trains arriving on time has fallen from 72.6% at the start of 2022-23 to 68.7%. The percentage of cancelled train services has increased from 3.4 to 3.9 since the start of the financial year (the on time and cancellation figures quoted are the moving annual average to the end of period 10, 7 January 2023). I recognise that operating conditions remain extremely challenging on the railway and factors including industrial action, extreme weather and trespass continue to impact train service performance.

There are two points I wanted to raise with you following your letter. I have waited until after the industrial action over the Christmas period to respond as I know you and your team have been busy planning for, and working through, that period.

Firstly, your letter states that an increase in passengers has led to a reduction in achievement of station dwell times, an increase in small delays and a reduction in system resilience. While this may be the case, I consider that it highlights the need to urgently progress improvements to the timetable – to deliver one which is resilient and performs well for passengers and freight under a range of typical operating conditions.

During the pandemic, the rail industry (including Network Rail) identified the opportunity to learn from the high levels of performance delivered under the exceptional operating conditions, lower passenger numbers and reduced services. Initial work was promising. For example, Network Rail's System Operator sought to identify and remove services from the timetable that had the greatest adverse impact on whole-network performance. It also identified stations where planned train dwell times were exceeded even during benign operating conditions and started to make changes to address this.



This work appears to have stalled, in part due to the extensive pressure on timetable planners who have been diverted onto work to accommodate frequent short-notice changes to timetables due to changing demand patterns, engineering work and industrial action. But the industry must not lose sight of its ambition to deliver a better timetable which supports better performance. Passengers rightly expect Network Rail and Train Operators to provide robust timetables that are resilient to the return of fare paying passengers to the network.

I have asked my team to step up engagement on timetable resilience with their counterparts at Network Rail and we will report on progress.

Secondly, your letter refers to current train performance being above the level seen on the network just before the pandemic. While I understand this may have been intended solely as a contextual comment, this comparator is not a useful benchmark.

Performance, as measured by the former headline measure of PPM (or Public Performance Measure), was 86.2% at the end of 2019-20. This was less than 1% better than performance following the May 2018 timetable issues. Collectively, we should not expect passengers, freight operators, taxpayers, and funders to accept this level of performance as an automatic benchmark.

I am placing a copy of this letter on our website.

Yours sincerely

John Larkinson
Chief Executive