



Michelle Woolmore
NW&C Contract Manager
Network Rail Infrastructure Limited
By Email

Gareth Clancy
Head of Access and Licensing
Office of Rail and Road
By Email

08 July 2021

Dear Gareth,

Track Access Applications: West Coast Main Line (WCML)

I am writing to update you regarding the competing applications for track access on the West Coast Main Line (WCML). These are the First Trenitalia West Coast Rail Limited Section 17 application and Grand Union Trains Section 17 London to Stirling application.

Declaration of Congested Infrastructure

In early 2020, our analysis established that there was no available capacity without significantly impacting performance and causing a further reduction in timetable resilience due to the requirement for successive services to run on minimum headways. As a result, Network Rail declared the infrastructure on the West Coast Mainline South fast lines between Camden Junction and Ledburn Junction as Congested Infrastructure in May 2020.

In November 2020, we published the West Coast Main Line Congested Infrastructure report. This set out that an increase in the quantum of trains running on the fast lines between Camden Junction and Ledburn Jn could not be achieved in a way that would satisfy all the outstanding fast line proposals for access rights. It concluded that, in the short term, the withdrawal of the Grand Central London Euston to Blackpool service would potentially enable an alternative service to run. However, no analysis had been undertaken to determine whether any of the live access proposals for additional services would be suitable to run instead of the Grand Central service.

Progress since November 2020

In the long term the introduction of HS2 will alleviate capacity constraints on the West Coast Main Line; in the interim Network Rail established the WCML Industry Planning Group (IPG) which conducted a feasibility report to determine whether a timetable recast could deliver further capacity in the period prior to commencement of HS2 services.

The feasibility report was published on 12 February 2021 and it concluded that re-structuring the timetable provides opportunities for additional capacity, but to achieve this would impact other

calling patterns and connectivity. The report did not contain a sufficiently detailed performance assessment of the options identified to provide the assurance that these applications could be accommodated. In addition, the changes to other service patterns had not been agreed with funders and train service specifiers. Network Rail does not believe that in the round this provides enough assurance that these applications can be accommodated.

In addition, an assessment of the proposed timings of the Grand Union services north of Preston was undertaken against the May '20 timetable. This concluded that none of the paths were free from timetable conflicts, many flexes were applied to other services with 10 requiring flexes of over 20 minutes and the conflicts varied in severity. The early morning and late night services also conflicted with Engineering Access Statement Section 4 possession opportunities. The assessment was undertaken prior to the change in rolling stock suggested by GUT and therefore does not consider operation of these services by the class 93 locomotives Grand Union Trains now plans to operate. Network Rail will require class 93 performance data in order to undertake any further analysis.

Impact of ongoing timetabling uncertainty

Over the last 18 months, Covid-19 has significantly impacted the number of passengers travelling and it is expected that there may be a long term shift in travelling habits which are not yet understood. As an industry, this has meant that there is no robust timetable base to work from and there is uncertainty on how demand will return and what this will mean for the timetable and our ability to accommodate access applications.

The reduced timetables implemented during the pandemic and the reduction in passenger numbers in response to the Government's "do not travel" advice saw a step change in performance. The industry is determined to "Build, Back, Better" and maintain the high level of performance seen throughout the pandemic. This means our performance benchmarks previously used are no longer suitable, and the industry is working to ensure any return in service levels does not lead to a return to pre-Covid performance issues.

Our commitment to maintain performance and adapt to the changing market post-Covid has contributed to the large number of timetable changes which are currently being planned. All of these are currently in various stages of progress with many still developing. The changes below will impact the timetable and available capacity. These include, but are not limited to:

- Dec'22 - Manchester timetable Change
- Dec'22 -West Midlands timetable change
- TBC- HS2 enabling work with a potential further reduction in platforms at Euston Station.
- May'22 East Coast Mainline timetable restructure
- May 22 – full recast of the ScotRail timetable – Covid recovery market led timetable
- 2022 – Southampton Freight Train Lengthening Project delivery
- 2023- Wales and Borders ESG
- Dec 22 – WCML timetable restructure
- Dec 22 – Potential new freight services (including 1 train per day from Dalcross to Daventry in each direction)
- TBC – WCML North restructure.
- Carstairs enhanced renewal (planned disruption 2023)
- May 24 – Introduction of East West Rail services between Oxford and Milton Keynes
- Introduction and integration of HS2 onto the conventional rail network.
- Crewe Hub project
- Transpennine Route Upgrade.

Next steps

Our next steps are focused on the following three issues: capacity, performance, power supply and operational risk.

To assess the ability to accommodate competing live access applications, we are reliant on having accurate information from operators on rolling stock, operational data and indicative timings.

As the ORR is aware Grand Union Trains have only recently indicated a change in approach to the rolling stock they are seeking to procure and as a consequence we have only recently received details of the intended design characteristics of the rolling stock. This has been welcomed as an initial basis for analysis and we will continue to work with GUT to understand the rolling stock capability.

The IPG is currently developing a Concept Train Plan (CTP) for the December 2022 timetable which considers a number of the changes highlighted above and is expected to produce its report in October 2021. We have identified areas outside the scope of IPG’s work that will require assessment, such as Euxton Junction to Stirling, and we are finalising a plan to assess these by November 2021. We will use IPG’s report and our own assessments to inform our consideration of timetable capacity.

The IPG is also undertaking a performance assessment of the proposed CTP and there are additional areas that require assessment. We have identified the priority areas to review and have a plan in place to have assessed them by November 2021. We are still reviewing how the other areas of performance can be assessed, at the moment they are in the plan for completion by March 2022 however we are exploring how this work can be delivered by November 2021 to be able to provide an overall assessment of timetable capacity and performance in November.

We will hold a cross-regional risk identification and assurance meeting with each of the operators in July and August 2021 to understand any operational risks that need to be overcome, and identify and agree any mitigations required.

Since the applications were made, we have a better appreciation of the available power supply through modelling recently undertaken and a number of operational incidents. It has highlighted the locations where power supply is significantly constrained. We are currently working with power supply experts to evaluate what this means for these applications and agree any mitigations. We will share the outcomes with both operators and the ORR.

Our current plan for assessing the applications is as follows:

Activity	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb
WCML Restructure Eus to Liv and Euxton Jn/Carlisle	Remit and Database	TT Development					Report produced				
Performance assessment - PIF Analyser used to understand composition of TT, initial GRC/IPG timetable				Analysis							
Focused modelled area following PIF analyser output of GRC/IPG (Coventry Corridor)				Modelling			Modelling				
Performance assessment - Area focused modelling (Liverpool Lime Street - Weaver Jn)							Modelling				
Refresh analysis North of Euxton Jn following IPG and MRTF							Report Produced				
Performance assessment/modelling - North of Euxton Jn											
Performance assessment/modelling - Euxton					Modelling						
Performance assessment - Area focused modelling (Rugby - Crewe)					Modelling						
Performance assessment - Full Scope (Euxton - Euxton)							Modelling				
Risk assessment sessions held with each operator and Network Rail stakeholders for early risk identification.					Risk Identification						
Power Modelling - TBC											

We are committed to working with both operators to understand how the services might be introduced safely and resiliently however we are reliant on operators supplying information to inform the analysis in sufficient time to reach an evidence-based decision.

We will provide a robust update in November reporting on that work completed and the next steps in progressing the application.

We will keep you updated through our regular meetings, but please do not hesitate to contact me if there is any further information you require.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "M. R. Woolmore". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a blue horizontal line.

Michelle Woolmore
NW&C Contract Manager