

Network Rail Infrastructure Ltd
Waterloo General Office
London
SE1 8SW

09 December 2024

Emyl Lewicki
Track Access Manager
Office of Rail and Road
25 Cabot Square

Via email

Dear Emyl,

Network Rail Representations for the proposed Track Access Contract between Network Rail Infrastructure Limited (Network Rail) and Grand Central Railway Company Limited (trading as Grand Central)

As invited in your letter dated 11 November 2024, Network Rail is making its representations in respect of an application under Section 17 of the Railways Act 1993 for a Track Access Contract (TAC) between Network Rail and Grand Central.

Network Rail welcomes the opportunity to continue the running of Grand Central's existing services on the network. This response will provide Office of Rail and Road (ORR) with Network Rail's position on why we cannot currently support this application by Grand Central. ORR are to note that the application was issued to the industry by Network Rail on 02 September 2024 with a response deadline of 02 October 2024.

ORR are to be made aware that upfront informal discussions took place with Grand Central prior to 02 September 2024 and this has enabled any concerns to be addressed at an early stage. Discussions are ongoing and both parties are meeting regularly to close out the remaining concerns.

Workstream 1: Capacity modelling and Performance assessment

The existing access rights are proposed to continue using a new build of at least Bi-Mode trains with consideration being given to include an element of battery operation. Network Rail notes the introduction of the new build trains is due to commence in January 2028 and full fleet replacement is anticipated to be complete by December 2028. Network Rail and Grand Central have had discussions on capacity and performance. On 13 November 2024 Grand Central confirmed that the new build trains will be able to at least match Class 180 timings across their existing routes as well as anticipating some improvement in sectional running times (SRT's) specifically when operating in

electric on the East Coast Mainline (ECML) compared to a Class 180 (their current rolling stock). Network Rail and Grand Central will work together to agree SRT's as part of the standard industry process to introduce the new build trains.

Network Rail would also like Grand Central to confirm where the new build trains will be maintained/serviced and whether it will be via their existing depot arrangements. This is to enable Network Rail to work with Grand Central to plan the necessary empty coaching stock moves that are crucial to operation.

Workstream 2: Route clearance for new build Bi-Mode trains

Network Rail and Grand Central will work together as part of the standard industry process to prove compatibility. The remit will be agreed with Network Rail and undertaken by Grand Central as per Rail Safety and Standards Board (RSSB) guidance on the RSSB website (see RIS-8270-RST).

Network Rail note that the Vehicle Change procedure will not be required as the intention is for the new build trains to be included as part of this Section 17 application. On 13 November 2024 Grand Central confirmed that the new build trains will be a maximum of 5-car in length and will reflect a similar envelope to existing Bi-Mode fleets already existing on the ECML. Network Rail would like the train length to be confirmed as there is an expectation of trains platform sharing at London King's cross and so we would need to understand that the difference is not so great as to cause an issue.

Workstream 3: Power modelling

Network Rail note that the new build trains intend to draw electric traction when on the ECML. There are known constraints with power on the ECML. Grand Central and Network Rail met in August / September 2024 to draw up a remit to consider the impact of running their existing services in electric on the ECML. Network Rail is in the process of power modelling the requirements for Grand Central. Network Rail and Grand Central met on 21 November 2024 where Network Rail provided its initial outputs on the power modelling. These are expected to be finalised in January 2025. The outputs of the power modelling will determine where Grand Central can utilise electric running (and expected faster performance) and whether Network Rail requires a footnote added to Grand Central's rights in Schedule 5 so that all or part of their service(s) can only run with diesel traction.

Workstream 4: Sale of Access Rights

The access rights proposed by Grand Central are to be a continuation of their existing access rights in their existing TAC. On that basis, and with the presumption of continuity principle applied, Network Rail supports the continuation subject to the remaining concerns outlined in this letter. Network Rail notes that the Schedule 5 Table 2.1 and Table 4.1 footnotes in their existing TAC are not included in the proposed TAC within this Section 17 Application. Network Rail wish for these footnotes to be added to reflect the continuation of the existing arrangements until such point the ECML local access rights policy falls away.

Network Rail also notes that there are a couple of typographical errors in the proposed TAC:

- In Table 2.1 for Bradford Interchange to London King's Cross rights on weekdays. Grand Central currently have 4 firm rights each way on a weekday but the proposed TAC states 5 firm rights each way on a weekday. Grand Central are aware of this typo and will update the proposed TAC accordingly

- In the front end of the TAC within paragraph 3.8.2 the proposed wording states: “The Train Operator shall obtain from ORR written confirmation that the Train Operator has entered into a contract as set out in Clause 8.1 above.” Instead this should state: “The Train Operator shall obtain from ORR written confirmation that the Train Operator has entered into a contract as set out in Clause 3.8.1 above.”

Network Rail notes that Grand Central are looking for directions from ORR by 31 December 2024 and understands that this is due to the need to secure the build of the new trains. When the outputs of the power modelling workstream are completed, and if the remaining concerns are resolved, Network Rail will be able to support the continuation of Grand Central’s existing access rights and this proposed TAC.

Workstream 5: Operational readiness and European train control system (ETCS) fitment

Network Rail notes that Grand Central is intending to obtain access rights prior to procuring the build of the new rolling stock. Once the rolling stock is known there will be further workstreams, as listed above in this letter, to enable the introduction of the new rolling stock and continuation of Grand Central’s services. Grand Central has confirmed that the new build trains will come with ETCS fitted. Network Rail looks forward to working with Grand Central as the East Coast Digital Programme expects to have “signals away” between Peterborough and King’s Cross on the ECML by December 2027 and as Grand Central transition between Class 180s (ETCS fitted) and their new build trains during 2028.

In summary, Network Rail considers this response to have addressed the points put forward by Grand Central in their application made under Section 17 of the Railways Act 1993. Network Rail will continue to collaborate with Grand Central and will provide a more informed view in January 2025.

Yours sincerely,

Mark Garner
Customer Manager, Eastern Region
Network Rail