



OFFICE OF RAIL REGULATION



Office of Rail Regulation investigation report: executive summary

**Disruption caused by
engineering overruns on 27
and 28 December 2014 at
King's Cross and Paddington
stations**

12 February 2015

Executive Summary

On 27 and 28 of December 2014, passengers travelling into or out of King's Cross and Paddington stations were severely disrupted as a result of overrunning engineering works. Passengers who travel between Christmas and new year include families with young children, the elderly and vulnerable often travelling with lots of luggage in an unfamiliar environment. Over the two days we estimate that more than 115,000 passengers were affected in some way by this disruption. There were impressive examples of good service from individual members of staff but the overall service passengers received was not acceptable. It led to widespread confusion, frustration, disruption, discomfort and anxiety. It was on the basis of this overall impact on passengers that we took the decision to investigate.

In carrying out our investigation, we set out to establish quickly the underlying causes which resulted in the poor passenger experience so that the industry can address any shortcomings in planning and delivering future engineering work. This is critically important because engineering work of this nature is essential to provide a safe and reliable railway and must continue to be undertaken. Network Rail (NR) is expecting to invest £25 billion¹ over the next 5 years and has a significant programme of work scheduled for the foreseeable future including this Easter and Christmas 2015.

In early January, NR published a review² openly identifying the issues which it considered caused the passenger disruption. It has responded quickly to our further requests for information. We have also met with Passenger Focus, London TravelWatch and all of the affected train operators. We have received a number of letters from passengers directly as well as detailed reports and information from the industry.

Over this Christmas period³, NR carried out engineering work on 300 separate projects across 2,000 worksites. It generally has a good record for handing back access to its network following work on time. This Christmas under 2 per cent of the planned possessions⁴ overran⁵. Nonetheless in the possessions taken on the lines into King's Cross and Paddington we have identified weaknesses in NR's planning, oversight and the incident response which followed, which failed to put the impact on passengers at the centre of decision making. This included:

- the planning of the King's Cross possession which did not take proper account of the impact of failing to handing back a working line on the 27 December, in advance

¹ Figure represents the renewals and enhancements totals (capital expenditure) sum from ORR periodic review 2013 final determination document (Table 3)

² See link to NR review report in Annex D

³ Christmas period classed as 19 December 2014 to 5 January 2015

⁴ A possession is when Network Rail restricts access to its network while it carries out engineering work.

⁵ Figures based on Network Rail T-4 review

of the lines being fully reopened on the 29 December, given work being undertaken elsewhere on the rail network;

- communication of the contingency plan developed for the King's Cross possession on the evening of the 26 December which was ineffective so that the plan for Finsbury Park station on the 27 December to segregate inbound and outbound passengers was not properly implemented. As a result the station became overcrowded and had to be closed for some time; and
- reporting the progress of the engineering works at Paddington which was inaccurate so that the operational contingency plan, which included diverting passengers to Waterloo to connect to services out of Reading, was not enacted until many passengers had already been severely delayed.

Had these issues been handled appropriately, much of the disruption which passengers experienced could have been avoided. We have identified the following recommendations so that in future passengers do not suffer the same experience.

Improved planning

Planning of possessions needs to be undertaken by NR with a complete understanding of the impact this could have on train passengers and (although not affected by the overruns at Paddington and King's Cross this Christmas) freight customers and the scale of work being undertaken across the railway network as a whole.

Specifically:

1. NR should ensure that for each possession there is an operational contingency plan which is fit for purpose and developed in conjunction with train operators and others (for example, Transport for London). The detail of the plan should be based on an explicit understanding of the impact on passengers (or freight customers if relevant) of any overrun, including within a possession. Even where there is a very low probability of an overrun if the impact on passengers is high, contingency arrangements will have been developed and tested where possible. The plan should consider provision for passenger welfare and management.
2. Within the planning process which NR follows, it should ensure that it identifies risks to delaying train services as well as handing the possession back on time. This is particularly relevant where it is intended that train services are planned to operate during staged works as at Paddington and before the possession is handed back in its entirety as was intended at King's Cross.
3. In planning a possession NR should ensure that the risk assessment process reflects the work being carried out elsewhere on the network. It should also ensure that the implications this has for it being able to respond to developments during the possession are taken account in determining the probability of a successful completion.

Oversight of possessions and communications

The risk of a possession being completed successfully changes throughout the course of the possession. In minimising the impact on passengers NR needs to understand in real time how the risk of a possession overrun has changed and effectively communicate this upwardly within NR and externally to train operators.

Specifically:

4. NR should review the processes it has in place for site reporting including consideration of the arrangements in place for management of contractors.
5. As part of its planning NR should make sure that there are clear go/no go decision points for the works and go/no go decision points for the implementation of the operational contingency plan and the interaction between the two is understood by all parties.
6. NR should ensure that the processes it puts in place for communicating up the chain of command and to affected parties will cover the go/no go decision points including with respect to the implementation of an operational contingency plan.

Incident response

Once it becomes clear that nothing further can be done to prevent the overrunning of engineering works and this will impact on the services available to passengers and freight customers, it is important that NR and train operating companies work effectively together to mitigate the impact. In the light of the experience this Christmas, NR should lead further work with the industry to improve their response to an overrun incident.

Specifically:

7. NR and train operators should review arrangements for cascading information during an overrun incident to take account of the likely working arrangements of staff at the time, including for example, that they are on call and that the prolonged nature of some possessions require a number of handovers between staff.
8. NR and train operators should consider testing elements, if not all, of an operational contingency plan at critical locations across the network to ensure a robust response in the event that it is required.
9. NR and train operators should review arrangements for managing the control of the overrun incident with a command structure covering all elements of the incident including communication, train planning and station management.

These recommendations address the breaches which we found through this investigation in NR's compliance with its Network Licence. NR accepts this and is content that the recommendations form part of the reasonable requirements which it is required to secure under the terms of Condition 1 of its Network Licence. As a result of its acceptance of our recommendations and the work it is already doing to remedy the failings it has identified, we do not consider it appropriate to take further enforcement action.

NR has confirmed that work is already being undertaken across all of these recommendations and that it is currently reviewing its contingency plans for possessions to be undertaken this Easter. We are in discussion with NR over its preparation for Easter. We expect NR to have implemented all of the recommendations, which will also require

work by the train operators, in advance of the Christmas 2015 engineering work. We will audit NR in the autumn to satisfy ourselves this is the case.

We will also work closely with the Department for Transport and the train operators as appropriate to ensure this work is properly joined up. In relation to train operator contingency planning, we would expect train operators to consider, for all affected stations, the arrangements for crowd control and passenger welfare in times of unexpected disruption including when access to the station facilities may not be available.

The six train operators - East Coast, Govia Thameslink Railway / Great Northern, Grand Central, First Hull Trains, First Great Western and Heathrow Express - whose services were affected by the overrunning engineering works acted in accordance with established processes for managing disruption. The train operators, who are dependent upon information from NR in order to plan and communicate with passengers, did not breach their licences.

Nonetheless passengers were rightly concerned by the quality and consistency of information which they received because the impact of an overrun can to some extent be mitigated by accurate and timely information. Better planning and prompter communication by NR would have improved the quality of information which was then passed on to passengers. We note that the industry also has plans in place to make improvements. The train operator plans including dates for delivery need to be published so that passengers can be confident that change will be delivered and we can monitor against them.

Throughout this investigation we have worked alongside our safety inspectors recognising that planning for engineering work and overrunning engineering work both have the potential to increase safety risk. Although fortunately no one was injured on these occasions, there are lessons for the industry to learn and take action on which are consistent with our recommendations. For example:

- In planning complex possessions it is critical to understand the human factor aspects of ensuring the workforce on the ground can carry out the work safely. If necessary, following a risk assessment, then the possession should be simplified if it poses unacceptable risks to the workforce or to the safe hand back of part or all of the work.
- When developing or changing a contingency plan it is critically important to carry out a suitable and sufficient risk assessment. It should be written down so that it can be communicated from shift to shift and that everyone involved is clear “why” the decisions have been made.

In carrying out this work we have also made a number of other observations which are set out in chapter 6; which in relation to the timing of engineering work and the availability of resources, we will feed into the Rail Delivery Group (RDG) led review⁶.

⁶ <http://www.raildeliverygroup.com/what-we-do/> Rail Delivery Group (RDG) planning and timing of engineering works review was commissioned by the Secretary of State of Transport. The review was commenced on 13 January 2015 and is to be completed by the end of March 2015.



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