

# ORR tackles TOC failings in timetable information

THE Office of Rail and Road (ORR) has written to the managing directors of UK train operating companies seeking "urgent improvements" in how passengers are kept informed of timetable changes.

It follows the announcement in February that Network Rail would be unable to finalise timetables until six weeks in advance of the timetable changes, rather than the normal 12 weeks.

Passenger watchdog Transport Focus (TF) is also weighing in on the issue, holding a public meeting on May 15 attended by senior representatives of Network Rail and the Rail Delivery Group. TF is seeking explanations over what steps are being taken to warn passengers when timetable changes and engineering works will affect their journeys. The rail line was invited to attend, but declined to do so.

The meeting also probed the slow recovery to the normal 12-week timetable notice period around Christmas 2017, and sought a long-term solution to stop this reoccurring.

Although the ORR says it has been talking to operators and that



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it has seen some improvements, it adds that train-specific warning messages - where trains are not yet confirmed to run or late changes are not yet in the journey planner - are not always included on all operators' websites. These details are contained on the National Rail Enquiries website.

The regulator wants each train company to set out the actions they are taking to resolve the issues, and when improvements will be made. It will review these actions to assess their fitness for purpose and monitor progress, keeping the need for further action under review.

ORR Deputy Director for Consumers Stephanie Tobyn said: "ORR's monitoring has shown that train companies are not always giving passengers good enough information to help them plan their journey. This is not acceptable, and that is why we have written to all train companies requiring them to set out how they will put this right."

In the letter from Director of Railway Markets & Economics John Larkinson, the ORR referred to Condition 4 of the Passenger Licence and GB Statement of National Regulatory Provisions: Passenger (Information to Passengers) and the Consumer Protection (from Unfair Trading) Regulations 2008.

As well as concerns about timetable information, the ORR says it is concerned that train operators may not be contacting passengers to alert them to new journey times or refund options, that attention is not being drawn to train times that are still wrong less than a week before travel, and that some operators selling advance tickets do not make it clear when these are available to buy.

It adds that weekday daytime works affecting peak-time commuters are not easily distinguished from those taking place overnight or at weekends, and that while websites and mobile websites mostly display a banner message when services are disrupted, many mobile applications do not.

TF Chief Executive Anthony

Smith said: "The rail industry must do more to warn passengers about inaccurate timetables on all websites, including National Rail Enquiries, Trainline and others. We're calling on the rail industry to act now to stop websites selling tickets for trains that they know won't run."

The ORR said it expected replies by May 21, and that it would publish its future report and train operators' responses on its website.

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Tobyn: "Train companies are not always giving passengers good enough information."

## Government review into NR vegetation management

Rail Minister Jo Johnson has launched a review into Network Rail's tree-cutting and vegetation management.

Johnson made the announcement on May 11. NR has been asked to suspend all felling during the current bird nesting season, except where the need is safety-critical.

Government said the review will consider how NR can "best ensure the safety of our railways, while also protecting wildlife and preserving trees". It will also build on areas of existing best practice in vegetation management within the organisation, said the Department for Transport.

The review has been launched in consultation with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and the Tree Council.

"How we manage our trees and vegetation - and protect the wildlife that

lives in and around them - is an important issue," said Johnson (pictured).

"It is right that Network Rail is able to remove trees that could be dangerous, or have an impact on the reliability of services. In the last year, vegetation management and related incidents have cost the railway £100 million."

He said he understood that cutting back trees can "alarm people who enjoy these environments - and can especially raise concerns over the effects

on birds during the nesting season. That is why the review has been commissioned," he explained.

NR is the fourth largest landowner in the country. In the past year there have been 1,500 incidents involving trees

and bad weather that led to widespread travel disruption,

according to Government.

A Network Rail spokesman told RAIL the company was constantly balancing the needs of the environment and its lineside neighbours with the needs and safety of 4.6 million people who use the railway each day.

"Last year we recorded over 400 incidents of trains colliding with fallen trees and another 1,000 where they caused delays to services, costing the industry over £100m," he said.

"As a result, we have well-thought-out standards and policies in place that have been developed over many years, with the help of experts, that we believe strike the right balance and maintain a safe and bio-diverse lineside."

"Most of the time when putting those standards and policies into action we get it right, but sometimes we don't. To help us improve we have formed close partnerships with the Tree Council, the Woodland Trust and other experts in the field."



## DfT seeks views on new Heathrow Airport rail links

The Department for Transport is to explore what it calls the "market appetite" for developing proposals to link Heathrow Airport from the south and the west by rail.

DfT issued two Prior Information Notices (PINs) on May 8. The aim of both PINs is to explore how interested the wider market beyond Network Rail is for developing both links - including sharing the risk of the development process and exploring how "non-railway benefits" could provide funding for the projects. They also seek to understand what expectations external parties may have of the process.

The most developed of the two concepts is the Western Rail Link to Heathrow (WRLH) project, which comprises a new railway between Langley and Heathrow Airport Terminal 5.

This project has been divided into two packages. Package A is an approximately 3.1-mile line, including a new twin-bore and separate cut-and-cover tunnel to link to the existing railway at Terminal 5. The DfT is considering private sector involvement in

financing, delivery and maintenance in this project.

Package B involves works to connect the new tunnel of Package A to the Great Western Main Line at a new Langley Junction, including grade separation to connect the tunnel to the main line via a 'rail intersection bridge'.

This package would likely be funded and delivered by Network Rail, due to the complexities of connecting it to the operational railway at Langley. Construction of the Western link could start in Control Period 6 (2019-24) and be complete by 2027.

Specific areas in which the DfT is expressing interest are financing, construction, maintenance, protection and mitigation works for third-party infrastructure, and provision of tunnel boring machines plus materials and equipment supply.

Publication of the contract notice is expected in early July. DfT says the expected construction costs of this project are estimated to be between £7bn and £9bn.

The proposed Southern link would serve London Waterloo and

Surrey/Hampshire from Heathrow, although the PIN acknowledges that this is at a "conceptual stage" and that strategic aims, output specification, routes and infrastructure are not yet defined.

An event on the Southern Access to Heathrow project will be held on May 24, at One Great George Street, London. Publication of the contract notice is provisionally expected in September.

Responding to the PINs, Heathrow Southern Rail Link Director Graham Cross said: "This is a further important development in the process of constructing a privately financed rail link to Heathrow from the south, made significantly on the same day as the launch of the new sub-national body Transport for the South East."

"We look forward to working with the DfT, Network Rail and other stakeholders to complete this next stage in the development of a project urgently needed to tackle congestion and improve air quality in the vicinity of Heathrow."

The company is seeking funding and permission to build its route, which would run from Heathrow

Airport to Chertsey, with another option being to run to Virginia Water. A connection to the rail network at Staines is also proposed.

Meanwhile, NR is holding its final round of public consultation on plans to connect Heathrow Airport with the Great Western Main Line west of the airport. The consultation will run until June 22.

The Department for Transport has provided funds to develop a detailed proposal for the project, which if built could cut journey times from Reading to the airport to 26 minutes, and from Slough to seven minutes.

The proposed link would leave the GWML between Langley and Iwer and incorporate a short stretch of open railway before entering a 3.1-mile tunnel. The tunnel is expected to require five access buildings along the route, with two providing ventilation.

Following the consultation, NR will publish its final plans before submitting a Development Consent Order in 2019 to build the new railway. The final decision will be made by the Secretary of State for Transport.

## Class 50 stars at Swanage gala

With Corfe Castle in the background, preserved 50049 Defiance crosses Corfe Common on May 11 with the 1000 Norden-Swanage, during the Swanage Railway diesel gala. The '50' was one of nine visitors attending the annual gala, and hauled trains onto the line from Wareham across the three-day event. See page 32-33 for a report and more pictures. MARK PIKE.



## Rolling stock leasing companies to lead on train life, says Minister

It is the role of the train leasing companies to take a view on the expected life of trains and offer them at competitive rates to the market, said Rail Minister Jo Johnson on May 8. This would then ensure they are kept in service for their expected life.

Johnson was responding to a Commons Written Question from Shadow Transport Secretary Andy McDonald, who had asked about the level of future vehicle leasing charges. McDonald claimed there was a projected shortening of average vehicle life.

In recent years, trains have been

ordered for franchises that will lead to the replacement of fleets built as recently as 2006 (Class 185), 2009 (Class 350/2), 2011 (Class 379) and 2017 (Class 707).

It is also a matter for the rolling stock leasing companies to determine the use or storage of more than 4,000 vehicles coming off-lease in the next three years.

Johnson made the statement in a Commons Written Reply to McDonald on May 3.

Trains such as the Class 707s were ordered at the behest of Government, but currently have no future home.

## New brand identity for Freightliner

Freightliner has launched a new brand identity.

Following American parent company Genesee & Wyoming's acquisition of Pentaver Transport last year, the business' commercial teams now serve customers across three core platforms of rail, road and terminals.

With that in mind, G&W UK/Europe Region CEO Gary Long said it made sense to "align the Freightliner brand with that of G&W, providing consistency across the three platforms".

The new logo is consistent with that of Pentaver and more than 120 G&W railway businesses in North America, Australia and Europe. It is now in use in the UK.

A rebranding of intermodal and

bulk rail freight terminals and Freightliner Road Services trucks will begin shortly, while a phased rebranding approach is being taken to locomotives and wagons.

Freightliner is also investing heavily in information technology to further drive service performance and efficiency, according to Long.



a Genesee & Wyoming Company