

Our Ref: PA/SA  
Your Ref:

21 August 2015

Paul McMahon  
Director, Freight  
Network Rail  
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London NW1 2DN  
By e-mail to:  
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Dear Paul,

## NETWORK RAIL ACCESS RIGHTS POLICY

I am writing in response to your letter dated 21 July 2015, which has been circulated to a number of my colleagues in the PTEs, who have expressed reservations in relation to Network Rail's (NR) current proposals. This letter summarises their shared concerns. Further to this letter, colleagues would be keen to discuss with NR specific instances where they feel that current proposals could have particularly negative effects and would like to propose a meeting on this topic.

### Background

As you know, **pteg** represents the six English Passenger Transport Executives (PTEs), and successor bodies such as Combined Authorities (CAs), which are the main strategic transport planning bodies outside London. All PTEs/CAs play an active role in the development of local and regional rail systems and they are committed to working to enhance the attractiveness of public transport as a whole. Their role in relation to rail is also set to increase as part of government moves towards greater devolution of rail powers. Rail North, the new client body responsible for the Northern and Trans-Pennine franchises due to be awarded later this year, has now been formally established as a partnership between DfT, PTEs and other Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) in the North of England. A similar proposition is being developed in the Midlands under the banner West Midlands Rail (WMR). Our members have therefore a keen interest in the outcome of Network Rail's review of its Access Rights Policy.

Our concerns relate, firstly, to the consultation process followed by Network Rail, and, secondly, to the content of Network Rail's current proposals.



### Concerns over process

As far as we understand, the changes being proposed by Network Rail appear to have been developed without reference to wider industry partners outside ORR, DfT and RDG. This ignores other organisations, such as PTEs, Transport for London and devolved administrations, with a key role in the development of the rail network, and who are likely to have strong views on the impact of such changes.

Although we maintain a good informal relationship with the RDG, I don't believe we have been invited to take part in this process prior to receiving your recent letter. It is therefore concerning that Network Rail has chosen to invite comments on the 21 July, with a deadline of 21 August. This is both an unusually short period of time in which to gather views and bad timing given that it is also a typical holiday period. We have therefore been unable to gather views from all relevant colleagues and may well need to come back to you with further comments.

### Concerns over content

Turning to the substance of the changes being put forward by NR, our comments relate to passenger services and the proposals summarised from page 8 onwards. Crucially, we consider the proposal normally only to grant access rights with regard to quantum of services, and not journey time or service interval, to be a backward step, which could negatively affect the attractiveness of both rail services and the wider public transport network. To be clear, we also disagree with the proposal that, where in exceptional circumstances any protection should be given beyond quantum rights, this would only cover either journey time or interval protection.

There is evidence to suggest that passengers place a value on simplicity, consistency and other service features which act to reduce the cognitive burden inherent to public transport use. It is important to remember that rail is in competition with other transport modes. For rail and public transport to be attractive and generate both higher economic and financial returns, the system should aim to present a coherent offer of integrated services which provide regular and reliable connections across the network. Regular interval timetables and consistent, reliable, journey times are two ways in which this can be achieved. For some journeys, such as those that rely on two or more services or different modes of transport, regularity, consistency and reliability can be of even more critical value. It is likely that a timetable designed without consideration for journey time or service interval protection would offer a much less attractive service to interchange passengers.

To give you a simple example, it could be that the easiest way to provide 2 trains per hour (tph) on a given line shared with other services, would be to flight both trains in close succession (for example, one at XX:02 and the other at XX:06). It is clear from rail industry evidence on the preferences of passengers that this option would have much lower value than one where the two trains were timed at even intervals (ie, XX:02 and XX:06).

The proposed changes could also impact on future timetable stability as it would be possible for substantial changes to be made to timetables at each timetable change date, without an obligation for industry consultation, whilst still complying with the specified quantum of trains.

We appreciate that greater flexibility with respect to journey times and service interval could potentially enable the infrastructure provider to fit more train services onto the

network at the lowest cost to itself. But what the NR proposal fails to acknowledge is that there are also potentially negative trade-offs for passengers, which need to be taken into account. This is likely to be the case in the city regions where capacity is at a premium, the network is shared by a wide variety of service types and where regular interval stopping services often form the backbone of commuter networks.

Moreover, lack of protection for journey times and service intervals could also lead to sub-optimal crew and rolling stock utilisation which could increase train operating costs. The timetable planning process should aim to maximise the wider economic value generated by the railways, and improve the overall cost-effectiveness of the system as a whole rather than concentrating narrowly on the costs perceived by the infrastructure manager.

In relation to the five bullet points in pages 8 and 9 of NR's document, we would therefore propose that:

- Quantum rights are considered together with service-interval and journey-time requirements;
- There should be an objective to ensure that the rail network provides a comprehensive and attractive service as a whole.
- More specifically, the timetabling process should, alongside other objectives, seek to achieve regular and even service intervals and maximise opportunities for connections between services.

We would of course be happy to discuss any of these issues in more detail.

Yours sincerely,



Pedro Abrantes  
**Senior Economist**