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29 March 2007

Dear Abigail

National Rail Timetable

I write in response to your email of 26 March 2007 addressed to Jonathan Haskins requesting a formal letter from Network Rail setting out our reasons for withdrawing the book version of the National Rail Timetable (NRT) and replacing this with a web based publication.

The decision to cease printing hard copies of the National Rail Timetable was taken by the National Railway Timetable Board in 2006 and the May 2007 edition of the NRT will be the last version that is printed in hard copy format.

Demand for a printed version of the NRT has fallen dramatically in recent years. As a result we believe that it is no longer economically viable to continue to produce a hard copy of the NRT. In 1994 more than 134,000 copies of the printed NRT were sold. By 2006, falling demand meant that only 20,000 timetables were printed with approximately two-thirds of these being sold to the public. In future the NRT will be published electronically on Network Rail's website where it can be downloaded free of charge by anyone so wishing to.

Under licence condition 3 of our network licence, Network Rail is obliged, except in so far as the Secretary of State may otherwise consent, to publish or procure the publication of a national timetable of railway passenger services. Network Rail firmly believes that making a document available electronically on our internet site constitutes such 'publication'. Accordingly, we believe that publishing an electronic version of the timetable complies fully with the obligation imposed on Network Rail under our network licence.

In recent years and across all sectors of the UK economy there has been a significant move to publish information electronically both for cost and environmental reasons. We see no reason for the rail industry not to follow this trend and believe that it will have a negligible impact on rail passengers, with most passengers using small printed timetables, the internet or telephone enquiry bureaux service to access train times.

It should also be noted that the online NRT is in no way intended to compete with National Rail Enquiries' existing interactive online timetable. It is simply another resource offering train times. This simplification will also make any interim updates fully available without the need to publish supplementary versions. We believe this will aid the travelling public in its understanding of how to make best use of the UK rail network.

We will however review the format of the electronic publication to ensure that it is as accessible for users as is practically possible. With regard to our position on allowing a third party to print a book version of the NRT if they thought this was viable, we would be happy to give serious consideration to any such request.

Whilst we recognise that our decision to cease printing the NRT has not met with universal approval we do consider that the timing is now right to do this, particularly when considering that annual sales of the timetable have fallen to a point where it is uneconomical to continue to print hard copies of the timetable.

Yours sincerely

Richard O'Brien
Head of Operational Planning