Comments on the ORR Consultation Document – Periodic Review 2008: Network Rail Outputs

This comment is offered by David Stewart-David, an Independent Public Member of Network Rail

1. In general the proposals in the document are sensible, although it is surprising that in section 3 there are no proposals for the measurement of customer satisfaction. I suggest that the dictum "that which is not measured is not managed" particularly applies when some key performance areas are explicitly measured – and rewarded – whilst other are not. This approach can create a perverse incentive to pay undue attention to some aspects of performance to the neglect of others.

2. In particular the NR emphasis on cutting the cost of maintenance and renewals has created an incentive to close the railway, especially at week-ends, rather than operate with single line working. Such closures, combined with the fragmentation of train operation inherent in the British system of TOC franchises leads to a degree of temporary "bustitution" which is a deterrent both to rail travel as a mode, and (for some groups) any kind of travel on Saturdays and Sundays.

3. As matters stand there are no publicised figures showing such performance indicators as:

   Hours of over-run of week-end possessions;

   Hours, (perhaps days), of overrun of major renewal blockades, such as those in Portsmouth and South Manchester

   Number of services on which those with baby buggies, bicycles and wheelchairs are unable to travel because of the fact of bustitution and the nature of the transport provided.

4. Directors of Network Rail have argued that a greater use of "red zone" track maintenance" would lead to more track gang casualties. This is not denied; but what are not measured are the road casualties which result from rail passengers being forced to go by road. A particular example is that of groups going to week-end events where a self drive minibus may be used instead of the train, especially as possessions are often associated with the non-availability of discount price rail tickets.

5. I therefore suggest that ORR should require: statistical data on the number and duration of week-end possessions; similar data on longer blockades and also figures showing over-runs of both possessions and blockades.

6. Further it is suggested that ORR put to the remuneration committee of NR that a bonus payment criterion is introduced which reflects both days of week-end closures and days of overrun; I would not tie bonus payments to the number of renewal blockades, as this would be a deterrent to renewal progress

7. I would also suggest that the document needs to address the issue of speed and general competence of NR to incidents of disruption such as OHLE wires down, points failures and so on.

8. Underspend on aspects of replacement and renewal is often presented as an achievement, which sometimes is the case. In other cases it is a failure to spend money which has been allocated because resources have not been obtained, so cash flow is improved at the expense of good housekeeping; This is not an achievement; ORR should give attention to this aspect of performance presentation

Finally I would note that from despatch of this ORR document to delivery to my home by Royal Mail took more than 4 weeks; a result of postal strikes; Consultation documents might sensibly have been despatched by e mail to most recipients

David Stewart-David