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Paul Plummer
Director, Planning and Development
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Dear Paul

Gauging data strategy

Thank you for your letter and gauging strategy proposals that we received on 23 December 2009. Having carefully reviewed these we are satisfied that they represent a satisfactory way forward which should ensure that Network Rail can meet the needs of its customers, rail users and funders.

You have taken a thorough and wide ranging view of the issues raised in our letter of 13 August 2009, those identified by the reporter AMCL, and those raised by stakeholders. You acknowledge that Network Rail must maintain accurate records of all capability parameters, both for your own use and so that you can provide accurate and timely information to customers and stakeholders. You are also committed to maintaining this capability into the future (subject only to the agreed network change processes in Part G of the network code) so that customers can plan their businesses with a reasonable degree of assurance.

We note the milestones that you have committed to in the strategy and that you set out clearly in an email from John Boon to the stakeholder group on 17 February. We will continue to monitor progress through that group; it is important that it continues to meet on a regular basis to give full visibility of progress and so that any problems can be raised and dealt with effectively.

“Soft” customer service issues need as much attention as the technical and IT systems interfaces. In particular, it is important that you quickly provide a clear statement on expected turnaround times for typical information requests once your new processes are in place; you should then monitor service levels. To achieve these service levels you will need to ensure that your data is kept up to date. You have promised that no data in the NGD will be older than four and a half years by September 2011; you have agreed with stakeholders that more frequent surveys will be carried out on structures with less than normal clearances and you are considering whether the gauging cycle should be reduced to 2 years. Our position remains that the needs of stakeholders, and in particular the need to deliver the expected turnaround times, should ultimately determine the appropriate cycle.

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For the initiatives in your strategy to work, others need to be able to rely on published information held in the Sectional Appendices and the National Electronic Sectional Appendix (NESA). We note that this is available to a large number of organisations and that the 1 April 2009 baseline capability declaration, as required by the 2008 periodic review determination, sits alongside it. You have confirmed that you intend to include consist information in the Sectional Appendices alongside the 'W gauge' classification, which will give a clearer indication of the combinations cleared for each route.

Where you wish to change network capability you need to apply the network change process and the published data must then be updated promptly. We welcome your plans for revising the line standard (NR/L2/TRK/3201) to ensure that the data accuracy is not eroded over time and that any temporary alterations to capability, for whatever reason, are either rectified quickly or put through the short-term network change process.

You have continued to make progress resolving the discrepancies between published and actual capability found through the infrastructure capability programme. I will write to you separately on this after the consultation period for the network change proposals closes.

You now need to address any remaining areas where customers' needs for network capability information are not being properly satisfied. The most pressing of these is power supply capability. We wish to review your progress in this area and to understand how you intend to engage stakeholders; please suggest how you would like to take this forward.

I am copying this letter to Ron McAulay (Network Rail), Bill Reeve and Fiona Donald (Transport Scotland), Steve Montgomery and Mary Grant (First Group), David Wilson (Siemens), Tony Berkeley (RFG), Tim Gilbert (VS SIC), Tim Wellburn (DfT) and members of the Gauging Stakeholders Group and placing a copy on our website.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Lee". The script is cursive and fluid.A simple, slightly wavy horizontal line drawn in black ink, positioned below the signature.

Michael Lee