

**Feras Alshaker**  
Director, Planning and Performance



Jake Kelly  
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Network Rail

By email only

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Dear Jake

## **Your recovery plan for punctuality and reliability on Network Rail's Eastern region**

Firstly, I would like to thank you and your team for their engagement with us and the work they have put in reviewing and refreshing your regional improvement plan. This took place in a relatively compressed timescale, following my letter to you of 9 October 2024 that set out ORR's concerns about punctuality and reliability trends in your region.

### **Our overall assessment**

ORR has reviewed your revised plan and the process you have used to develop it. Overall, the plan is based on analysis and evidence, which we welcome. It identifies key performance issues, and the initiatives presented are aligned with that analysis. However, as set out in further detail below, there are some discrete areas where we require further evidence over the coming weeks. We will then focus our monitoring on the delivery of the plan and the realisation of expected benefits.

We recognise the pressing need to now focus on delivering better punctuality and reliability for passengers and freight, and welcome your team's assurance that they are pressing ahead with the work identified in the plan.

We note that, implemented in full, you expect it to recover performance to the regulatory trajectory in Year 2 (i.e. by March 2026) but that there are risks to achieving this. We recognise that your understanding of some of these risks is currently more mature than for others.

There remain areas where we do not have enough evidence to satisfy us that good practice will be followed, to give the best chance of a successful outcome for passengers and freight.

Therefore, by Friday 11 April 2025, we require you to provide evidence that the areas identified under “Further assurance required” are being addressed.

### Highlights of the plan

The plan has cohesive high-level analysis that identifies the key performance issues. This includes the geographic challenges of the west end of the North London/Mildmay Line and the first 50 miles from London on the Midland Mainline, as well as the consistent issue of external delay across the region and localised problems with “non-track” assets.

The plans and initiatives you have presented are aligned with this analysis. For example, the Camden Stabilisation plan is focused on tackling the challenges at the west end of the North London/ Mildmay Line. There are also numerous initiatives targeting external delay across the region’s four routes. Both the North & East and East Midlands routes have specific schemes to tackle non-track asset failures.

Each route has a simple “complexity/benefit” infographic highlighting the different improvement schemes, and their relative impact on performance. This is a useful tool which should help you prioritise efforts in the coming months.

### Further assurance required

The following paragraphs summarise the key themes where we require further information and assurance over the next twelve weeks. We ask you to describe:

1. **Governance and holding to account for delivery:** how the Region will be assuring itself, its customers and ORR that progress is being made. We also need to see evidence that all schemes have objectives that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timebound (“SMART”), allowing progress to be measured through indicators that are described in the plan but need to be routinely tracked.
2. **Prioritisation of resources:** how improvements are being prioritised for time and resource, and where the funding is being drawn from (noting ORR’s previous concerns that funding should not be diverted away from core renewals).
3. **Sharing good practice:** how Eastern will learn from innovation and incidents originating both inside and outside the Region. This appears a national challenge for Network Rail, having also been highlighted in our investigation into train service performance in the Wales & Western region.
4. **Consistency of approach:** how the Region will promote consistency between its routes in response to common problems. For example, there is no obvious single approach (or consistent prioritisation) to gaining efficient access for reactive work on the line, which you highlight as a notable cause of performance loss. The “Keeping Trains Safely Moving” national initiative on

operational decision making is referenced by each route, but this appears an isolated example. The lack of consistency makes operation of train services across route and regional boundaries more difficult, something that train operators have also highlighted to us.

5. **Customer engagement:** how Network Rail will step up engagement with its passenger and freight customers on the Region, engendering their support and buy-in to the plan and its implementation.

We will separately provide you with a technical assessment against the principles that we said we would consider, when I wrote to you on 9 October 2024 (and about which ORR subsequently shared additional guidance). This also provides some additional detail describing assurance that we require.

### **Next steps**

We expect to receive the evidence described above from Network Rail, by Friday 11 April 2025. To minimise unnecessary distraction, we are content that this may be provided within our existing enhanced engagement plan. We look to your team to focus agendas appropriately.

ORR will review the evidence, then closely monitor Eastern's delivery of the plan and any changes in passenger and freight service performance that follow.

This monitoring will include selected visits (that we will arrange in advance with Network Rail) to understand the practical implementation of improvements, as well as further engagement with passenger and freight operators.

If you have any questions about our further requirements, please do not hesitate to contact me. A copy of this letter will be published on our website in due course.

Yours sincerely

**Feras Alshaker**