

Martin Jones
Deputy Director, Access & International
Office of Rail and Road

7 September 2020

Dear Martin

Timetable development and Informed Traveller Timescales non- compliance

Thank you for your letter of 13 August 2020.

We have had some informal discussions about this topic at various rail industry meetings over the past few weeks and I appreciate your and ORR's broad understanding and support for the challenges of dealing with Informed Traveller in light of the COVID-19 crisis.

The volume of timetable change delivered by the timetable planning community in response to COVID-19 over the last six months has been unprecedented. We have worked together across the industry in challenging circumstances to plan three major timetable uplifts since the initial emergency timetable was introduced in March 2020; in May, in July, and today, 7 September. We will also be making a significant number of amendments to the December 2020 timetable in the next few weeks to reflect operators' resource levels and 'build back better' requirements. This all builds on the good levels of performance we have seen over the past few months and the strong desire across the industry to maintain high performance as increase the number of services being planned and operated.

The impact of these changes alongside higher than normal levels of weekly short term planning activity is such that we have needed to prioritise and reschedule the activity to be progressed by planning teams to reduce the risk of one or more of the timetables failing in the same manner as occurred in May 2018. To inform this work the Industry Timetable PMO led an exercise during July to understand the anticipated volume of change over the next few months in the context of the ability of the industry planning community to effectively deliver this level of change following the work required to deliver the September timetable change. This exercise considered the level of change expected for the December 2020 and May 2021 Working Timetables (WTT's), Informed Traveller, and weekly contingency timetables that are still being implemented. The output of the PMO's exercise demonstrated that it would not be possible to sustain the workload volume in the way it was originally planned, and therefore we have adopted a sequential approach known as the timetable change strategy.

The strategy been discussed and endorsed by the Industry Timetable PMO Steering Group (PMOSG), the Joint Executive Oversight Team (JEOT) and the Operational Planning Practitioner Group (OPPG) at the end of July 2020. The agreed strategy is based around amending the December 2020 timetable and changing some of the development dates for the May 2021 timetable. As a consequence of this, there is currently no effective long term base timetable necessary for the industry to deliver Informed Traveller at usual timescales (12 weeks in advance ("TW-12")).

We are now able to formalise our position regarding the plans we are establishing around timetable development and Informed Traveller recovery and address below each of the questions raised in your letter.

Informed Traveller “TW-12” Recovery Plan

We are now in a position to publish the Informed Traveller recovery plan. We have engaged with train operator Heads of Train Planning through the OPPG to establish the dates, principles and guidelines for recovery. This approach has also been endorsed through the Industry Timetable PMO Steering Group, and JEOT have been informed about the TW-12 recovery requirements. We consider the plan to be as robust as is reasonably practicable.

It has been necessary and appropriate to temporarily pause the Informed Traveller process whilst we go through the process to amend the December 2020 WTT for multiple operators. It will recommence from late September and will be in place until the December 2021 WTT comes into operation.

At a high level, in the early weeks of the recovery plan, bids will be submitted at TW-5 for the timetable to be published at TW-3. We have specific plans in place to enable passenger information for the Christmas period to be made available at TW-5. The recovery plan is based around processing five planning weeks in four working weeks and has been spaced so that bids and offers are not planned in weeks where there are only four working days. We expect to have recovered back to TW-12 publication in late September 2021 for the timetable that operates in December 2021.

The recovery plan has also taken account of high impact access requirements, such as the King’s Cross interventions, and following engagement with Regions we believe the plan to be deliverable around these access requirements.

The table in Appendix 1 shows the high-level dates for when the industry is targeting a recovery to TW-12 publication timescales.

Routine reporting on compliance, sharing it with the ORR and industry and publishing for transparency

We will maintain weekly compliance reporting against the recovery plan which will be shared with operator colleagues through the OPPG distribution list channels. We will also provide periodic reporting through the Industry Timetable PMO Steering Group showing progress against the plan to restore TW-12.

When we entered the previous Informed Traveller recovery plan in 2018, we scheduled periodic progress meetings with ORR to discuss progress, risks and issues. We suggest a similar approach this time as it was very constructive to have the opportunity for a discussion about progress rather than just supplying a report. Please let me know whether this is something that you would want.

How Network Rail and train operating companies intend to work together to communicate effectively with passengers

We recognise the importance of clear and accurate passenger information being made available throughout the period of the recovery plan. Whilst passenger numbers are still significantly lower than pre-COVID, it remains vital that the industry works together to communicate effectively with passengers throughout the recovery plan.

In order to provide assurance that we are doing everything reasonably practicable, we have begun discussions with RDG to understand how we can work together to provide consistent and accurate messaging to passengers using online booking systems, particularly as they were able to support this through delivery of the last Informed Traveller recovery plan. We will share further details about this when it becomes available.

Further to this, we are also looking into the possibility of using ticket booking systems in a different way where passengers can make a reservation on long-distance services before the timetable is published, on the understanding that they will receive a notification about any changes to the timing of the service when it is published. We are in the process of setting up a cross-industry working group to understand the viability of this with current ticket booking systems and processes. We will share further information about what this looks like when it becomes available.

What steps Network Rail will be taking to ensure that freight operators are able to plan their business with a reasonable degree of assurance

For the early weeks of the recovery plan, we know that we will be working to tight turnaround timescales and that this will have an impact on all operators. In order to mitigate against this, one of the recovery plan principles is to make minimal rejections throughout the recovery plan process, so that there is minimal time needed for freight operators to re-examine their offers. Therefore the plan aims to meet their requirements in the first instance.

It is our understanding that when we move back to TW-6 publication, freight operators should be back to their normal resourcing activity timescales and therefore have a good level of assurance about timetables that will be operating.

We will continue to work closely with freight operators throughout the process and remain committed to delivering for our freight customers and freight users.

Governance of decision making, and how risks associated with the reduced timescales are being assessed and managed

The Industry Timetable PMO Steering Group, JEOT and OPPG were all involved in the decision-making process for the timetable change strategy. We held various sessions with these forums, including some short notice extraordinary PMO Steering Group meetings, to discuss the requirements for the timetable changes from DfT and other funders, in the context of sustainable timetable planning activity. The PMO Steering Group and OPPG discussed the various options available to manage the competing options for the timetable change strategy. At this stage all forums are fully sighted and supportive of the timetable change strategy. I know that Chris Rowley and Chris Curtis have kept you informed on the strategy as it was being developed.

With regards to maintaining oversight of the progress against the timetable change strategy, we will report on this weekly. For the Informed Traveller recovery plan and risks that are associated with the reduced timescales, we will be holding weekly look-ahead meetings within System Operator timetable planning teams. These meetings will capture upcoming risks with operator bids and offer/publication activities and identify relevant mitigating actions. Further to this, progress, risks and decision making from the look-ahead meetings will be tracked through weekly visualisation sessions. This forum will provide an opportunity to escalate significant delivery risks if required.

Having regard to all relevant circumstances, as outlined in this letter, we believe we are applying efficient and effective processes to the greatest extent reasonably practicable. We trust that this clearly sets out our position but please do get in touch if you require any further information.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul McMahon". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'P'.

Paul McMahon
Managing Director, System Operator

Cc: Esther Sumner
Chris Rowley
Chris Curtis
Katherine McManus

Appendix 1: High Level Overview of the Informed Traveller Recovery Plan

Timetable Operates	Bid	Offer	Publication
December 20	TW-5/TW-6	TW-4/TW-5	TW-4/TW-5
Jan/Feb 21	TW-6/TW-7/ TW-8	TW-5/TW-6	TW-5/TW-6
Mar/Apr 21	TW-8/TW-9/ TW-10	TW-6/TW-7/ TW-8	TW-6
May/June 21	TW-10/TW-11	TW-8/TW-9	TW-6/TW-7
July/Aug 21	TW-11/TW-12 /TW-13	TW-9/TW-10/ TW-11	TW-7/TW-8/ TW-9
Sept/Oct 21	TW-13/TW-14 /TW-15	TW-11/TW-12/ TW-13	TW-9/TW-10/ TW-11
Nov/Dec 21	TW-15/TW-16	TW-13/TW-14	TW-11/TW-12