

**Feras Alshaker**  
Director Planning and Performance



Jake Kelly  
Group Director, System Operator  
Network Rail Infrastructure Limited  
By email

7 March 2023

Dear Jake

**Simultaneous closure of both cross-border routes (WCML and ECML) on the weekend of 18/19 February 2023**

I am writing in relation to the simultaneous closure of both cross-border routes between Scotland and London on 18 and 19 February 2023, which resulted in disruption and inconvenience to passengers and freight operators.

As you are aware, Network Rail has an obligation under its [CP6 final determination-Scotland](#) settlement which requires it to use reasonable endeavours to plan to keep at least one cross-border route available at all times and ensure journey times on the available cross-border route are kept as short as possible. Network Rail is also required to ensure passengers, train and freight operators, funders and ORR are alerted to any variations as far in advance as is practicable.

On the weekend of 18 and 19 February 2023, Network Rail closed both the East and West Coast Mainlines to undertake engineering work around Preston and between St Neots and Peterborough. The relevant regions (Eastern and North West and Central) had planned this work independently of each other. Failure to co-ordinate this planning meant the two sets of work were scheduled at the same time, resulting in closure of these key routes. Network Rail failed to detect this situation until very shortly before the work took place. This late detection constrained the opportunity to implement alternative approaches (such as postponing some of the work). It also meant that opportunities to communicate with passengers or to strengthen replacement services were lost.

Your team, along with relevant colleagues from the affected regions, have already shared information from their initial review into this issue with ORR. I am grateful for their openness about what went wrong, and their commitment to learning from it.



ORR understands from these discussions that both the Eastern and North West and Central regions had good reasons for undertaking the required engineering works. However, Network Rail has identified errors that were made in the planning of engineering access which led to the un-coordinated full closure of both routes. This raises concerns around the robustness of Network Rail's processes and in particular, the failure, on this occasion, to identify and escalate problems in a sufficiently timely manner.

Network Rail, specifically the System Operator, has committed to take action to address any gaps in its current processes. Your team has shared initial details of some of the immediate proposed improvements to existing processes you intend to make.

In terms of next steps, to provide assurance that Network Rail is taking steps to address this issue, it should provide us with evidence that shows it has carefully considered and identified all gaps in its existing processes. It should also provide us with evidence of the action it will take to close those gaps. We will then assess the reasonableness of the steps that Network Rail is taking to make improvements to its processes.

A copy of this letter will be placed on our website and copied to Andrew Haines and the Eastern and North West and Central Regional Managing Directors at Network Rail, Bill Reeve, Transport Scotland and Dan Moore, Department of Transport.

Yours sincerely

**Feras Alshaker**