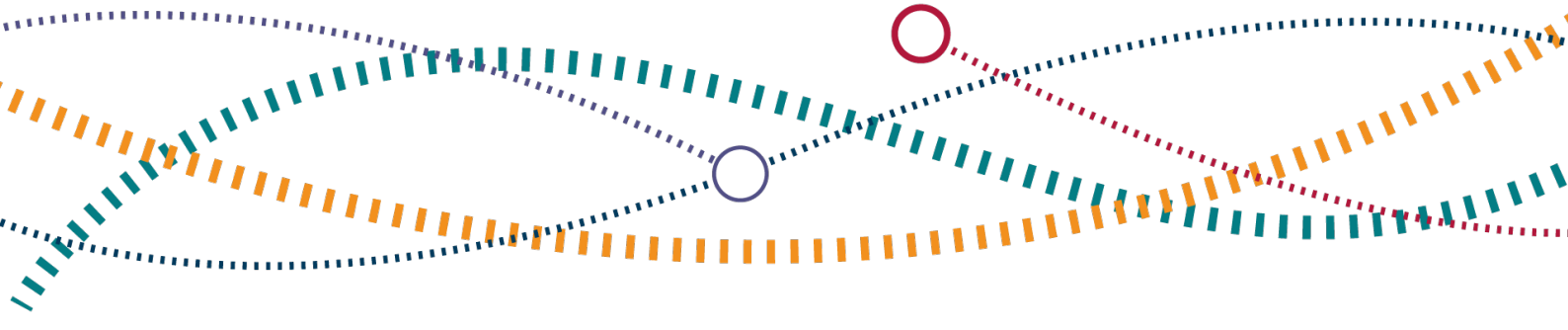
Timetable development process

2 May 2024



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Introduction

ORR is responsible for holding Network Rail to account against the conditions in its licence, which includes the requirement to produce the timetable: Network Rail's network licence | Office of Rail and Road (orr.gov.uk)

Meeting timetable production milestones allows robust timetables to be produced on time, providing certainty, and preventing significant changes to services in the 12 weeks prior to the timetable coming into operation.

This is important because it means passengers can access accurate timetable and ticket information well in advance of travel and have confidence that the information will not change. Similarly, passenger and freight operating companies can plan their services (for example, planning crew rosters and train movements).

ORR monitors industry compliance with timetable production timescales by gathering data from Network Rail and train operators on key milestones in the Network Code.

Our monitoring allows us to identify issues early in the timetable production process. Where milestones are not being met, we can engage with Network Rail, train operators and/or other stakeholders to understand the reasons and establish what is being done to get back on track.

ORR is committed to sharing information with industry and the public in an open, clear, and accessible way. To provide greater transparency about the timetable production process, we will share our analysis of timetable production data on the ORR website twice a year, following each main timetable change. Data tables and charts will be available from July 2024.

Network Rail and industry roles

Network Rail is responsible for creating timetables for passenger and freight services.

Each train and freight operating company makes requests to Network Rail for the timetable they would like to run. Network Rail coordinates all the different requests ('bids') to produce a single national rail timetable.

Most services in the timetable are updated twice a year, in May and December. However, Network Rail also needs to adjust the timetable on a weekly basis to account for things like engineering works or ad hoc events. This is called the rolling weekly timetable. Currently, ORR's timetable production reporting is focused on the two main timetable changes.

Network Rail must publish new timetables 12 weeks in advance of services running. Similarly, train operators have a commitment to inform passengers about services 12 weeks before they run.

Milestones for producing the timetable (the Network Code)

The process and milestones for producing the timetable are set out in Part D of the Network Code. The Network Code is a set of contractual rules incorporated into each track access agreement between Network Rail and train operators. It covers areas where parties must work together to the same standards and timescales.

The timetable development process starts 18 months before the timetable change (at Network Code Milestone D-73). Our reporting is focused on milestones from D-40, that is, around 9-10 months before the timetable change. Some of the key milestones are set out in the table below.

Table 1.1 Timetable production milestones from D-40

Time before timetable change	Network Code milestone	activity
9 to 10 months in advance	D-40	Train and freight operating companies formally submit ('bid') their new timetable. For the next three months, Network Rail works on developing the new national timetable from all these bids, checking for conflicts between different operators, and ensuring that trains can be run safely.
6 months in advance	D-26	Network Rail provides the rail industry with a national 'base' timetable, subject to the result of any appeals which must be made within 20 Working Days of its publication (that is, by D-22). The base timetable allows operators to start planning logistics, produce rotas and train staff
6 months in advance to the day of the timetable change	From D-26 onwards	Train and freight operators can request a variation to the base timetable. This is called

Time before timetable change	Network Code milestone	activity
		a Train Operator Variation request, or 'TOVR'. Network Rail will either accept, reject or modify the request.
3 months in advance	D-12	The new timetable is finalised and the railway industry formally publishes the timetable to passengers. Advance tickets go on sale.
Day of timetable change		The new timetable comes into operation

Train Operator Variation Requests (TOVRs)

Train and freight operators can request a variation to the base timetable after it is published at D-26. This is called a Train Operator Variation request, or ‘TOVR’. Network Rail will either accept, reject or modify the request.

Freight operators will often identify space in the timetable and use TOVRs to demonstrate their services can operate without undermining network performance, before applying for contractual rights.

TOVRs provide flexibility in the timetable production process by allowing additional or amended services from passenger and freight operators to be included in the timetable after the base timetable is published. This means capacity can be used effectively.

However, having a high number of TOVRs (passenger or freight) can create challenges in timetable production. TOVRs made within 12 weeks of the timetable entering operation can impact on the release of final timetables to train and freight operators and subsequently passengers.

Note on Network Code milestones

The timetable development process has not followed the Network Code milestones since the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Consequently, train and freight operating companies and passengers cannot be certain timetable information will be available 12 weeks in advance.

As part of the periodic review 2023 (PR23), we set Network Rail a requirement to return the timetable process to Network Code compliance by December 2024: PR23 final determination: settlement document for the System Operator (orr.gov.uk)

Other regulated networks

The Network Code referred to above is the Network Rail Network Code. This applies to parties with a right of access to Network Rail owned infrastructure. Other infrastructure managers have their own Network Codes which apply to parties who have a right of access to the infrastructure those infrastructure managers own and operate.

Table 1.2 Other infrastructure managers

Regulated network	Infrastructure manager	Where to find the Network Code
Core Valley Lines (CVL)	Seilwaith Amey Cymru / Amey Infrastructure Wales Limited	Core Valley Lines infrastructure manager | TfW
Crossrail Central Operating Section (CCOS)	Rail for London (Infrastructure) Limited	Crossrail Central Operating Section - Transport for London (tfl.gov.uk)https://tfl.gov.uk/corporate/publications-and-reports/crossrail-central-operating-section
Heathrow Spur (HAL)	Heathrow Airport Limited	Rail regulation | Heathrowhttps://www.heathrow.com/company/about-heathrow/rail-regulation
High Speed 1 (HS1)	HS1 Limited	Key Regulatory Documents – High Speed 1

These Network Codes closely align with the Network Rail Network Code, but with modifications to reflect the particular operating conditions on each network.

Timetabling functions for these regulated networks are provided by Network Rail.

Timetable production milestones for the CVL, CCOS and HAL networks match those set out in Part D of the Network Rail Network Code.

Milestones for the HS1 network differ. Timetable production for Eurostar, which only operates on the HS1 network, is therefore monitored against different milestones than for other operators.

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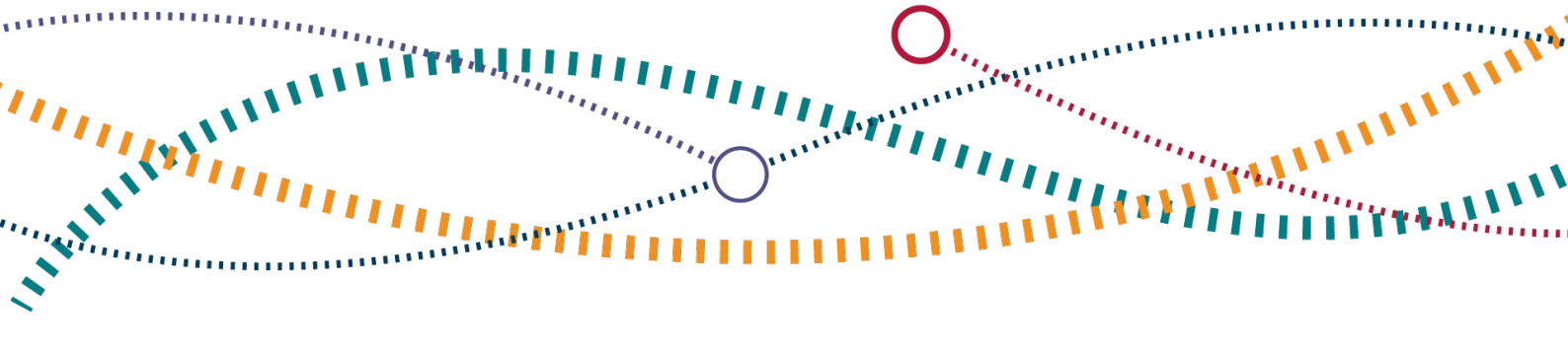
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