Annual Assessment of Network Rail's stakeholder engagement April 2023 to March 2024

5. Scotland

Summary of performance

Network Rail Scotland has been able to demonstrate a clear year-on-year improvement in its stakeholder engagement activity, including taking appropriate action to respond to all of the recommendations from last year's report.

We were pleased to see that there has been an effort to learn from the best practice identified in other regions (e.g. Southern) and to adopt these within its own processes. Network Rail Scotland was able to demonstrate a more coordinated approach to engagement, a more ambitious approach to reporting and an understanding on how to tailor engagement effectively for different stakeholder groups. It excelled in crisis management communications, which should serve as best practice for other business units.

While this is positive progress, there are still a number of areas that the region can build on. It could have used more quantitative data or metrics to measure the effectiveness of its stakeholder engagement activities to showcase progress more robustly.

There is evidence that Network Rail Scotland have learned from Southern and have a more ambitious approach to reporting and conducting its stakeholder engagement this year. Although things are moving in the right direction, there is still more to do.

In addition, the narratives for some of its engagement across stakeholder groups, such as its funders and regulatory bodies were considerably better evidenced than others. We encourage Network Rail Scotland to ensure that its approaches to engagement with these stakeholders is adopted across all stakeholder groups.

Effective

Network Rail Scotland was able to illustrate an improvement in its overall effectiveness of stakeholder engagement. The region demonstrated that engagement was broadly timely and had been conducted through a range of methods. According to one survey, 9 in 10 stakeholders find the communications they receive from Network Rail Scotland useful (87%) and reflect positively on engagement opportunities with the organisation.

Network Rail Scotland became the first part of Britain's rail network to publish a joint climate plan with an operator. The collaboration has created an effective approach to addressing the impacts of the changing climate across all of Scotland's Railway – and brings an opportunity for climate collaboration across the wider infrastructure sector. However, it would have benefited from more evidence detailing how different stakeholder views have been considered across certain activities in the plan.

Inclusive

Network Rail Scotland were able to better demonstrate its engagement with a range of different stakeholders compared to last year. This included detailed engagement with operators outside of ScotRail, and attempts to apply the same culture and activities across these different engagements. An example of this is the production of a Charter and Heritage strategy, aiming to provide the conditions to grow the number of charter services operating in Scotland.

Examples were provided of innovative approaches adopted to improve inclusiveness, such as the trial of a new method for engaging with local communities in the development of station masterplans and the launch of a new customer service academy. Overall, inclusivity was relatively well addressed, however it would benefit from further evidence and explanation of methodologies used and the scale of engagement consistently across all stakeholder groups. We had expected the region to demonstrate the effectiveness of its engagement model with the freight community in more detail, given we know Network Rail Scotland are performing well in this area and other

regions are adopting a similar approach.

Transparent

Network Rail Scotland has significantly improved its stakeholder mapping process, in collaboration with the Southern region. This is now more detailed as a result of additional mapping to identify the correct stakeholder mapping contacts. There have been good instances of innovative approaches to understand their stakeholders. This included identifying 10 passenger profiles for Scotland's Railway, in order for Network Rail Scotland and ScotRail to share data and intelligence to better understand how passengers use the railway.

It was able to highlight a number of examples of using multiple channels to provide sufficient information to stakeholders, particularly in the context of storm management, with clear and transparent communications during the 11 named storms this year. However, in most cases evidence of what the organisation has changed and how as a result of feedback is lacking or could be better demonstrated.

Well-governed

Network Rail Scotland have made a concerted effort to reflect on and improve the management structures and feedback channels between different parts of the region this year. Ahead of the year 5 exercise, we requested that the region provide us with more information on its governance arrangements.

Network Rail Scotland responded to our request in a timely manner, setting out these arrangements and its future plans in this area. While there are improvements that have already been made, including instituting a new stakeholder engagement meeting, it is also encouraging to see more ambitious plans being prepared for the future.

Some of the evidence provided for year 5 fell short of explaining how and why the engagement which took place was meaningful, and what indicators or criteria were used to judge its effectiveness.

Network Rail Scotland could do more to make clear the methodologies used for collecting feedback and illustrate what is being done to embed good practices and standards or benchmarks of stakeholder engagement across the region into its business-as-usual activity.

Consumer Expert Panel

Good practice from self-assessment submission

Customer Service Academy (inclusive): is a bespoke development programme run with ScotRail. The aim is to develop its people and provide them with the essential skills required to put service at the heart of everything they do. The programme is accredited by City and Guilds.

Storm Babet crisis communications (transparent, effective): Having crisis communications experts working across the region has helped to land key messages on potential disruption and have become an invaluable source of information for communities across Scotland, helping other industries and communities to make informed decisions that kept people safe. Network Rail Scotland won the Digital Railway Team award at the Railstaff Awards 2023.

Recommendations

Activity to continue or build on

Network Rail Scotland should consider how to further embed stakeholder feedback into its day-to-day business decisions.

It should embed quantitative data into its processes to effectively monitor and illustrate the scale and success of its stakeholder engagement activity.

We welcome the plans proposed for the development of a stakeholder engagement strategy document and encourage Network Rail Scotland to progress with this.

Areas requiring improvement

Network Rail Scotland needs to ensure that there is appropriate focus on its engagement with freight customers, and the governance and coordination aspects of this approach are transparent.