



John Larkinson  
Chief Executive  
Office of Rail and Road  
25 Cabot Square  
London  
E14 4QZ

Andrew Haines  
Chief Executive  
Network Rail Infrastructure Ltd  
Waterloo Station General Offices  
Walker Suite  
London  
SE1 8SW

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Dear John,

Thank you for your letter to Conrad Bailey at the Department for Transport (DfT) and me dated 5 April 2022, about the recasts of the timetables for the East Coast Main Line (ECML) and West Coast Main Line (WCML), planned for December 2022 and May 2023 respectively.

We appreciate the spirit in which your letter is written. As you note, it's essential that, as an industry, we get these changes right for our passengers and freight users who look to us to provide a robust and reliable timetable. As we recover from Covid we must continue to build confidence in our stakeholders that we can deliver these key objectives.

The ECML and WCML recasts are at different level of maturity. Recognising the painful lessons the rail industry learned in May 2018, it will be important that we collectively take timely and robust decisions to secure their success. As set out below, there remain a number of issues to be addressed before successful introduction, and their resolution (for the ECML in advance of D-40 timetable bid submission) will be a necessary and important for the recasts to go ahead.

Notwithstanding the ongoing industry reform effort, you will know that we continue to work within existing industry structure and rules. As you'd expect and require, we continue to take seriously our current formal Network Code and other contractual and regulatory roles and obligations. This gives us a relatively limited decision making-role in the introduction of a new timetable – the success of which will require decisions and implementation actions taken by several other industry participants including the ORR, the DfT and access rights holders.

As you note in your letter, we, funders, operators and others are working hard in an almost unprecedented spirit of collaboration to make the recasts a success. The remainder of this letter summaries some of the key next steps and dependencies to secure successful introduction.

## East Coast Main Line – May 2023 Timetable

As you outline, the ECML timetable recast is approaching a crucial decision point, and we too recognise there are further issues to be worked through before a decision to implement can be taken. We are currently working on an initial introduction of the Event Steering Group (ESG) timetable. As you have identified in Paragraph 8, for the introduction of a new timetable in May 2023 these include:

*Performance:* Modelling suggests that on-time performance of the proposed ESG timetable will be around 45 per cent (other factors being equal). This compares to our on-time current performance of around 71 per cent. This level of performance is below our scorecard target of 60 per cent for long distance train operators for this financial year.

Ultimately, the performance required from the ESG timetable is a matter for specifiers, but we do not expect that level of performance to be acceptable to them, and are working urgently with operators and the DfT to understand potential mitigations. Until and unless a satisfactory conclusion is reached, this remains a potential significant risk for the ESG timetable.

*Traction Power Supply:* Based on the outputs of our modelling, we expect that the mitigations we have put in place for traction power assets and train operators will provide sufficient supply for the additional demands of the timetable.

*Freight Paths:* We continue to focus planning resources to integrate outstanding freight paths into the May 2023 timetable structure. This must be completed by 12 August 2022, in advance of the Network Code Operators Priority bidding at D40. Until satisfactory freight paths (consistent with access rights) are identified, this also remains a potential significant risk for the ESG timetable.

*Required Infrastructure:* The full ESG timetable requires infrastructure changes to platform 11 at Newcastle station. Funding approval for this work is progressing through the ORR and the DfT's governance and will need to be in place by July 2022.

*Annual Business Plans:* We understand that the DfT (as part of its Annual Business Plan process) will need to approve any timetable bids (and their consequences for business plans) in advance of their bid by their contracted operators. We understand that this will be subject to an internal Government approvals process and therefore is on the critical path before D-40 bidding.

*Access rights holders and stakeholders:* At the April ECML Programme Board, there was industry support to continue to plan for the introduction of the ESG developed timetable in May 2023. The industry recognised that early decisions on whether to implement the timetable are necessary given the availability of critical timetable resources.

The DfT and contracted train operators will lead the subsequent engagement with industry stakeholders due to commence in May (after local elections) and conclude in advance of D-45 (on 8 July). We will provide extensive support for this activity, which is consistent with the original consultation process for the deferred May 2022 timetable last year.

We will coordinate freight and passenger access right applications through (and in compliance with) our Sale of Access Rights process and more broadly with the Network Code. Industry consultation processes will be started, where possible, so that the ORR can consider applications in advance of the Priority Date (D-40) for May 2023.

The success of these consultations as well as the formal capacity allocation decisions and the timeliness within which they are taken, will be critical success factors.

*ECML conclusion and PMO:* there remain a number of significant unresolved issues for the ECML recast. As is the normal industry process, the industry's timetable readiness Programme Management Office is currently reviewing ECML readiness and their recommendations will form a key part of any implementation decisions.

### **West Coast Main Line – December 2022 Timetable**

As you know, the WCML timetable is in a different position as the decision to proceed with the new timetable in December 2022 has already been taken by the DfT. However, we recognise that it is essential that the industry provides clarity and certainty about its plans, and we continue to take a leading role in that. We have been working closely with teams at the ORR on this and will maintain that dialogue as the launch date for the new timetable approaches. As you know, we intend to introduce the timetable structure agreed with the industry (even if we and the wider industry do not immediately populate all the paths it provides for), partly for the reasons set out below.

Turning to the specific issues that you have highlighted:

*Power supply:* We can confirm designs and delivery arrangements are in hand; however, investments at Bushey will not be in place for December 2022. The Bushey power supply scheme is progressing through the government's investment decision processes, with the expectation of final investment decision in May. If funding is approved in May, the target completion date will be Spring 2024. Clearly, we must make sure we have contingencies in place until then, so we're developing measures to protect resilience in the traction power supply which include interim service quantum limits for electric trains and reactive operational measures in real time.

*Access rights for First Trenitalia West Coast Rail Ltd and Grand Union Trains Ltd:* In compliance with our Network Code obligations, we are currently working to understand how any interim restriction on the total number of services that can be offered would be supported through the access right process. We have been working closely with your access and licencing team to take this work forward and will continue to keep them and the applicants updated on our progress.

*Completing the timetable production process:* Our timetable production plans have been discussed with operators through the normal Network Code process, and ESG and timetable change risk management processes. The Timetable Change Programme Management Office (PMO) has agreed with operators the revised milestone dates placing revised priority date (normally D40) at D34.

The PMO continues to scrutinise readiness, and the Region is working with them and operators through a readiness review process with meetings every fortnight. This identifies and manages risk to successful delivery of the new timetable in a collaborative way with Operators.

*Timetable slots:* Operators' bids are already being received and we expect to receive bids consistent with the timetable framework agreed that the ESG.

## Conclusions

Implementation of the proposed ECML and WCML timetables represent a significant challenge for our industry, but also a huge opportunity for us to collaborate and deliver for passengers. There remain a number of key issues that need to be resolved before the industry can be satisfied that the timetable can be successfully introduced. I hope that this letter demonstrates that we are collaborating across the rail industry to positively resolve those issues. If you have any further questions, please let me know.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew Haines". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Andrew Haines  
Chief Executive

Cc Conrad Bailey, Jake Kelly, Fiona White and Martin Jones