

Where are our railways heading?

A much-favoured mantra of the Association of Train Operating Companies, leading rail industry figures, politicians and apparatchiks at the Department for Transport, is that Britain has the fastest growing railway in Europe.

Atoc started to trumpet the line several years ago when the number of annual passenger journeys passed the 1bn mark for the first time since just after the Second World War. As a piece of propaganda it has a very pleasing ring to it, although the notion that more and more passengers are choosing to use the railways because of a surge in quality is debatable.

Completing HS1 and the refurbished St Pancras on time and within budget is one thing, but when it comes to having a fast and efficient high-speed rail network, France, Germany and Spain are all light-years ahead of us.

Over the last couple of years, however, the inexorable rise in passengers has begun to look more like an uncomfortable threat than a welcome opportunity, particularly for an

industry that for decades had grown accustomed to managing decline.

A record 1.16bn passenger journeys were made last year and a total of 46.5bn passenger kilometres travelled – all on a network that has halved in size since its post-war zenith. With passenger numbers projected to rise by 30 per cent or more over the next decade, the railway is rapidly running out of space.

The Government's response is to belatedly give the go-ahead to long overdue enhancement schemes, such as the expansion of the cross-London Thameslink network and upgrades to Reading and Birmingham New Street stations. At the same time ministers have made it clear that the cost of funding the railway over the next 10 years will fall increasingly on the fare payer.

The shabby policy of letting passenger franchises with a built-in requirement for year-on-year fares hikes of up to three per cent above inflation

Rail PROFESSIONAL COMMENT

bears all the hallmarks of British Rail's discredited strategy of pricing passengers off the rails to ease congestion.

For all the promises contained in the Government's High Level Output Specification published last summer, a clear long-term vision for expanding Britain's railways to meet rising demand seems as far away as ever.

A new north-south high-speed line could bring real benefits to the Midlands, north-west and north-east England and Scotland.

Lobby groups, such as the admirable Greengauge 21, have set out to demonstrate how it could be built in manageable stages, starting with a route from London to the Midlands via Heathrow. So far the response from the DfT has been predictably lukewarm.

Tackling rail congestion will require energy and imagination, qualities that are in short supply at the DfT, as campaigners for the reinstatement of disused lines have recently discovered.

Re-opening lines closed in the 1960s and 70s would send a positive message that the Government is committed to promoting rail as an alternative to the car – and has a plan for beating congestion.

Certainly that's the view of Labour MP Graham Stringer who is fighting to prevent the disused Sheffield to Manchester Woodhead line from being used to run electricity cables through the Peak District, effectively ruling out any opportunity of it ever being reopened.

Stringer warns that allowing developers to dig up mothballed lines, such as Woodhead, undermines the ability of Britain's rail industry to cope with the projected steep rise in passengers.

Over at the DfT, where even now civil servants are preoccupied with trying to make the issue of HS2 disappear, re-opening lines is barely on the radar. An official says the department has no plans to reopen existing lines but 'would not rule out strong proposals'.

We'll take that as a no then, shall we?

Thameslink moves to St Pancras

First Capital Connect's Thameslink service has traded the bleak platforms of its Kings Cross Thameslink stop for a brand new stop at St Pancras, as part of the redevelopment of St Pancras International.

Passengers will notice improved facilities and even be able to connect directly with Eurostar for fast train journeys to Europe, thanks to Network Rail's new £70m domestic station within St Pancras.

St Pancras has been able to provide longer and wider platforms, served by lifts and escalators to improve accessibility.

The changes are part of the £5.5bn Thameslink upgrade, which will increase capacity and improve

conditions for passengers along the route, which links towns north of London to the south coast, via the capital.

Transport secretary Ruth Kelly, who opened the new facility, said: 'This new station will improve the daily journey to work for thousands of passengers, providing extra capacity and better transport links.'

She added: 'This is the latest installment in the package of improvements for rail passengers in the area, after the recent opening of the new high speed line to the Continent. And more will follow, as we are spending £1bn to improve the tube and mainline stations at King's Cross.'



Moir Lockhead, chief executive of FirstGroup, called the 9 December launch an 'exciting day'. 'We are thrilled that our customers are now able to travel to and from a fully accessible, state of the art facility.'

'I would like to thank our staff at King's Cross Thameslink for their hard work and commitment. The limitations of that station made it a challenging place to work, so thank you once again. St Pancras

International also offers easy links to our services from King's Cross mainline to Cambridge, Peterborough and King's Lynn as well as Eurostar services and benefits from a specially recruited dedicated customer service team. We look forward to welcoming our customers to this new station.'

Thameslink's new winter timetable sees many weekday services double in capacity, from four to eight carriages.

Bowker promises to make the trains run on time, as NEG launches East Coast franchise



National Express Group took over the prestigious East Coast franchise last month with a pledge to drag the long-distance train operator off the bottom of the performance league table, writes *Chris Randall*.

Just 80 per cent of trains run on time on the route, making it the worst performing train operating company in Britain.

But Richard Bowker, NEG chief executive, told a crowded press conference convened to mark the launch of the new franchise that improving performance was the company's

top priority. NEG is aiming to run nearly nine out of 10 trains on time by the end of the first year of the franchise.

Bowker said National Express had teamed up with Network Rail to produce a 100-day 'action plan' aimed at cutting delays caused by problems with the infrastructure, including damaged overhead lines and overrunning engineering works.

'Sorting out performance is critical,' stressed Bowker, who added that making sure trains were dispatched on time was another crucial element in

improving overall timekeeping. 'It comes down to the very basic stuff. If you are sloppy about two or three aspects of the process it can affect the whole timetable.'

David Franks, newly-appointed managing director of National Express East Coast, said he was confident that Network Rail was ready to play its part in helping to make the trains run on time.

'We have a very good relationship with Iain Coucher and the rest of the top team. The support we have received from them has been fantastic.'

In return for a seven-year East Coast franchise, NEG must pay the Government a record £1.4bn in premium payments.

The amount bid by the coach and train operator surprised rivals and industry analysts, particularly as GNER, the previous operator on the route, was forced to hand back the franchise in December 2006 when it was unable to meet instalments on a £1.3bn, 10-year deal.

Brushing aside fears that an economic slowdown or recession could quickly knock the franchise off course, Bowker said: 'We factored in a possible downturn in the economy, as I believe all the bidders did. We have Europe's fastest growing

Franchise highlights:

- Extending free wi-fi access to standard class from the start of the franchise;
- Hot meals served at seat in standard class;
- Boosting punctuality to 90.1 per cent by January 2010, rising to 91.3 per cent by the end of the franchise in 2015;
- Introduction of smartcard ticketing and mobile phone ticketing;
- An additional five Class 90 and Mark 3 sets to be introduced for the 2010 timetable; and
- From December 2010, five trains an hour to and from King's Cross; a new two-hourly Lincoln-London service; and an extra train to York every other hour throughout the day.

railway and the factors influencing that – such as road congestion – aren't going away. Rail has a great future.'

In contrast to GNER, which was committed to paying steeply increasing premium payments almost from the start of its contract, NEG's payments rise towards the end of its seven-year deal when extra capacity and a predicted surge in passenger numbers should boost revenues.

Unregulated fares are set to rise by 2.1 per cent above the rate of inflation over the course of the franchise to help meet the premium payments.

NEG says it expects passenger numbers to increase by 10m by 2015. From 2010 it will increase the number of weekday services from 136 to 161, providing an extra 14,000 seats a day. Journey times between Edinburgh and London will be cut to less than four hours and 20 minutes.

National Express's ideas about the future of the East Coast franchise in soundbites

Chief executive Richard Bowker on...

- The East Coast network: 'This is the best railway in the country. There is no reason why it can't be world class.'
- The pace of rebranding trains: 'It's about achieving the right balance between speed and impact.'
- Train catering: 'We want to serve more contemporary food in the restaurant, with the possible introduction of bistro style menus. At the moment passengers are waiting too long for their meals.'
- Maintaining tradition: 'We have no plans to scrap route names, such as The route of the Flying Scotsman. We wouldn't dare!'
- The staff inherited from GNER: 'There has been a tremendous buy-in from the GNER team. They have done an awesome job.'
- On the competition from open-access operators Hull Trains and Grand Central: 'Competition is a great thing. What do I think of Grand Central? They've got three trains; we've got 136.'

ROBOTIC INTERVENTION COULD PREVENT DISRUPTION DURING LINESIDE FIRES

Closures of railway lines due to the lineside fires involving acetylene (gas) cylinders could be a thing of the past, if current trials using remotely operated vehicles are successful.

There were five lineside fires involving gas cylinders in 2007, which caused major disruption to services, prior to the September start of the six-month trials.

Network Rail is working with Qinetiq to use robots to get close to the cylinders to identify whether they are stable enough for fire fighters to approach them. Currently a 200m exclusion zone is automatically imposed for up to 24-hours when there is a risk of acetylene cylinders exploding.

The concept behind the robots is similar to that behind remotely



controlled vehicles used by the Israeli army to disarm suicide bombers.

The fire brigade can now request Qinetiq's response team 24/7 if acetylene cylinders are thought to be involved in a fire.

The robots' cameras can identify whether gas cylinders are present and, using thermal imaging, can gauge whether the cylinders are sufficiently cool for the firefighters to safely approach them.

Derek Holmes, Network Rail's head of operations, said: 'We are very conscious of the fact that fires involving suspected or actual acetylene gas cylinders have caused misery to passengers. In situations such as this we have only closed lines when we have had no other choice and been advised to do so by the emergency services.'

'However, the deployment of the remotely operated vehicles will give us more options for faster resolution of incidents and hopefully lead to less disruption to train services.'

Acetylene has various industrial uses, but is primarily used for welding and cutting metal.

Qinetiq is a defence and security company that was formed from the Government agency Defra.



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Rail Office Contact:
Shane O'Halloran 079 6796 9727
shane.ohalloran@bcmrail.co.uk

New locos 'will reduce Freightliner's carbon footprint'

Freightliner Group has placed its largest ever order for new locomotives with a company which uses new technology to improve fuel economy, *writes Ed Gould.*

The diesel locomotives will have AC traction technology and dynamic braking which helps to generate fuel efficiency. The new fleet will help Freightliner to reduce its carbon footprint, the haulier claims.

The deal, for 30 new locomotives, is being finalised with General Electric (GE) with the new stock being manufactured at GE's facility in Erie, Pennsylvania.

Tim Shakerley, engineering director at Freightliner said:

'Packaging this technology into a locomotive compliant to the UK clearance gauge and axle weight is a tremendous challenge

but we are confident that GE can achieve this.'

The haulier says that the payload per train will be increased which, together with the fuel efficiency measures, will mean less carbon is emitted per tonne of freight moved.

A spokesman for Freightliner said the first chassis are expected to be completed in early 2009 with testing to follow in the USA.

'The first batch is due to be delivered in June 2009 and then hopefully into service in July.'

The new locomotives will be put into service alongside the existing fleet.

Freightliner says the cabs for the units will be fitted with air conditioning and the company will consult with groups of drivers when it comes to the final cab design.

IMPROVED SIGNALLING IS 'CHEAPEST WAY TO INCREASE CAPACITY'

Resignalling of the rail network could provide the most cost effective means of increasing transport capacity when compared to road travel, suggests a new report, writes *Ed Gould*.

The study found that building new motorways or rail lines are the best means of increasing transport capacity overall.

But, once the relative costs of new-build, widening, reinstatement or improving signalling are taken into account, then it is resignalling that provides the most cost benefits.

Traditional resignalling for long distance travel would provide 160 per cent more passenger capacity per pound compared with new motorway building, for instance.

European Rail Traffic Management System (ERTMS) signalling would beat new motorway building by 170 per cent under the same criteria, claims the



report which was commissioned by the Invensys Rail Group

The cost benefit index figures are calculated as capacity – passengers passing per hour – divided by the relative costs of each option per kilometre.

The cost benefits of upgrading signalling on commuter lines compared with road building or widening are even greater than those for long distance travel.

The index figure for every £1m spent on traditional resignalling on commuter lines is 3,678 compared with a lowly 430 for road widening or 741 for new roads.

However, the study admits that: 'As it is so cost effective, much of the UK commuter network has

four aspect traditional signalling and there is little room for improvement.'

ERTMS resignalling for commuter travel comes out at nearly two and a half times more cost beneficial compared to new-build roads.

Train lengthening, for commuter routes, is recommended too as 'it is an easy and high profile way of increasing capacity'.

Invensys Rail Group, which designs and manufactures rail control and automation systems, commissioned the research, which was carried out by Credo.

The report concludes: 'Signalling options, where possible, should be considered alongside train lengthening during the next Network Rail control period.'

First breaks into the FTSE100

FirstGroup, Britain's largest train operator, has broken into the FTSE100, confirming its status as one of Britain's most successful companies.

News of First's elevation to the exclusive club was confirmed last month. Moir Lockhead, the group's chief executive described it as 'a great achievement'. He added:

'I'd like to thank our staff for their hard work and commitment. Our strategy is to deliver shareholder value through sustainable profitable growth in our core markets.

'Our entry to the FTSE100 is recognition of the strength of our group, which has grown to become the market leader within the UK and North America in less than 20 years.'

The Aberdeen-based company started life as a council-owned bus operator and has gone on to become a multi-national transport business with annual revenues of £5bn, employing

135,000 staff worldwide. In Britain, First runs four train franchises – ScotRail, Great Western, Capital Connect and TransPennine Express – and has a majority stake in the open access operator Hull Trains. It also owns the rail freight business GB Railfreight.

The group's rail operation has been hit by problems on its Great Western franchise, where it signed up to £1.1bn in premium payments. Commuters and MPs have frequently complained about late and overcrowded trains.

Despite these difficulties, the move into the FTSE100 is seen as a personal triumph for Lockhead who left school at 15 to work as an apprentice mechanic at a bus depot in Darlington.

He went on to become chief engineer of Glasgow buses and underground, before moving to Aberdeen's council-owned bus company, which was being prepared for privatisation.

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NEWS IN BRIEF

**DRIVER MASONRY ATTACK
TEENS JAILED**

Two teenagers who badly injured an EWS driver when they threw masonry onto a freight train from a bridge have been jailed. Daniel Ratcliffe, 17, was jailed for seven and half years and Kevin Clee was sentenced for six years. Both men are from Kidderminster. The driver, Joseph Paxon, is now back at work after the attack a year ago, which left him with a broken jaw and 27 bone fractures in his head.

ONLINE LEAVES ON LINE

Sophisticated software which can predict leaf fall is giving Network Rail its best ever chance to anticipate leaf fall hotspots and take evasive action. Leaf Fall Risk modelling was developed by software company ADAS in conjunction with the Met Office. It has been available since 1995, but upgrades this year can now analyse smaller – quarter of a mile – sections of track and predict leaf fall up to five days in advance.

**SURVEY: FELLOW PASSENGERS
ARE MORE OF A PROBLEM
THAN LACK OF SEATS**

Digital signage and more reliable travel information would help to make the January fare hikes more bearable, say commuters. A third of passengers would like fellow passengers to wash more frequently, as BO is their biggest bugbear, while one in five get annoyed by other travellers' loud music.

Almost one in 10 (87 per cent) commuters are unhappy with the service they receive. But, perhaps surprisingly, only 11 per cent put getting a seat at the top of their wishlist. Most commuters are resigned to not getting a seat on the train – only 11 per cent put it at the top of their wish-list.

The research was carried out by IT networking specialist, Telindus.

**RAIL GAINING TIME ON AIR
FOR DOMESTIC TRAVEL**

Delays at airports are helping rail to beat air when it comes to domestic travel, according to research by Transform, the Scottish sustainable transport lobby group. Trains have already beaten planes on routes

between London and Manchester and Liverpool. On Anglo-Scottish routes, passengers who choose to go by rail can expect to arrive on time more often; get better value from the journey by working or relaxing; and don't take significantly longer between city centres than those who fly, the survey found.

**ECO MODE CUTS FTP'S DIESEL
CONSUMPTION**

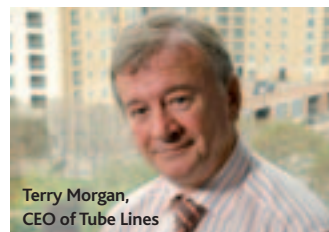
First TransPennine Express has cut fuel consumption by seven per cent on its Class 185 DMUs by running them in 'eco mode'. The energy saving initiative, developed by Siemens Transportation systems, has been introduced without incurring any delay minutes. Eco mode was developed through train control modifications, selective engine use and an analysis of driving techniques.

**EARLY DAY MOTION CALLS
FOR END TO FGW**

Stroud MP David Drew is calling for the Government to take the First Great Western franchise back into public ownership, following years of delays and more recent changes in rolling stock which, he claims, have led to less comfortable journeys for passengers. He has tabled an early day motion, which has been signed by 19 others. The union RMT has applauded the move.

**TUBE LINES REVEAL SECOND
QUARTER FIGURES**

PPP contractor Tube Lines has fallen short of its target for cleanliness of trains, stations and tunnels for the second quarter of the year. But the infrastructure company has come up to the measure on its other targets, including capital expenditure, which was £97m, compared to a forecast of £89.1m. Reliability and numbers of incidents causing delays had also improved in comparison to the same quarter last year.



Terry Morgan,
CEO of Tube Lines

LETTERS

**Upstaged by a
pushchair**

Today I travelled on the 14:31 from Manchester Piccadilly to Edinburgh. While the journey was as enjoyable as usual, there was one incident that caused frustration.

A female passenger was boasting to an apparently unrelated male passenger that she was travelling in First Class on a Standard Class ticket. The justification given was that she had with her a particularly bulky pushchair. Apparently the ticket inspector had allowed her carriage in first class accommodation.

As a disabled passenger, I appreciate the space, peace and quiet of first class, which is why I pay the premium.

My objection is that as a man

with a disability through no fault of my own, I must pay for a service apparently doled-out to a woman who is merely inconvenienced by a decision to bear a child. A decision that she has chosen to make.

In recent years we've seen pregnant women, or women with young children, given the same consideration as disabled people. But now to see this escalated to beyond that offered to disabled people, is a disgrace. Pregnancy is a choice. Disability isn't.

Peter McDougall
Edinburgh

**Small oversights
spoil Eurostar
experience**

So £5bn have been spent and now the train takes only 2 hours 20 minutes to get from London to Paris. But anyone making the

**Nipping a PPP urban
myth in the bud**

There is one point I would like to make re: a comment in Paul Coleman's interview with Terry Morgan, CEO of Tube Lines.

It was stated that Infracos would rather delay starting the tube service in the morning by 10 minutes to get a job finished than run through the rush hour with a speed restriction, but that the previous LUL management wouldn't and that was an example of the pre-PPP underground being afraid to take risks.

As an ex-LUL manager, I know this is simply not true. I had to make decisions of that kind on a number of occasions and (other factors being equal) would normally accept the initial delay rather than have an on-going speed restriction. Most of my colleagues would do the same.

This was simply a pragmatic decision, as running with a speed restriction can, in fact, accumulate an even greater delay. If the initial

delay was likely to be (say) 20 or 30 minutes, the decision might well change. After all, many people wish to use the first trains of the day and they deserve consideration, plus staff are trying to get to work on them. All that has to be put in the equation.

Like many decisions on a railway, there is a matrix of factors to consider, not just an 'either/or'.

I point this out for the record, as it is this kind of myth that can catch on and become folklore, painting the comparison between the pre- and post-PPP situation inaccurately.

It is also a slur on the management of the railway at that time – but, then, we are used to that!

In fact, post-PPP, many overruns of engineering work have run into hours.

Eric Stuart
France

journey needs to allow at least 45 minutes for all the goings-on beforehand.

This is due to the security arrangements which remain bad in London and even worse at Gare du Nord in Paris.

Passengers and luggage are screened for metal objects. Luggage goes on a conveyor belt through a tunnel with some kind of detector, which is unproblematic. At St Pancras, shallow plastic trays are provided for small objects like mobile phones, keys and cameras, and they go on the conveyor belt too.

But nobody has thought about providing tables or shelving where passengers can put their things in the trays before they are screened, and back in their pockets afterwards, so they stand at the end of the conveyors while they unload their bits and pieces, blocking other people's passage.

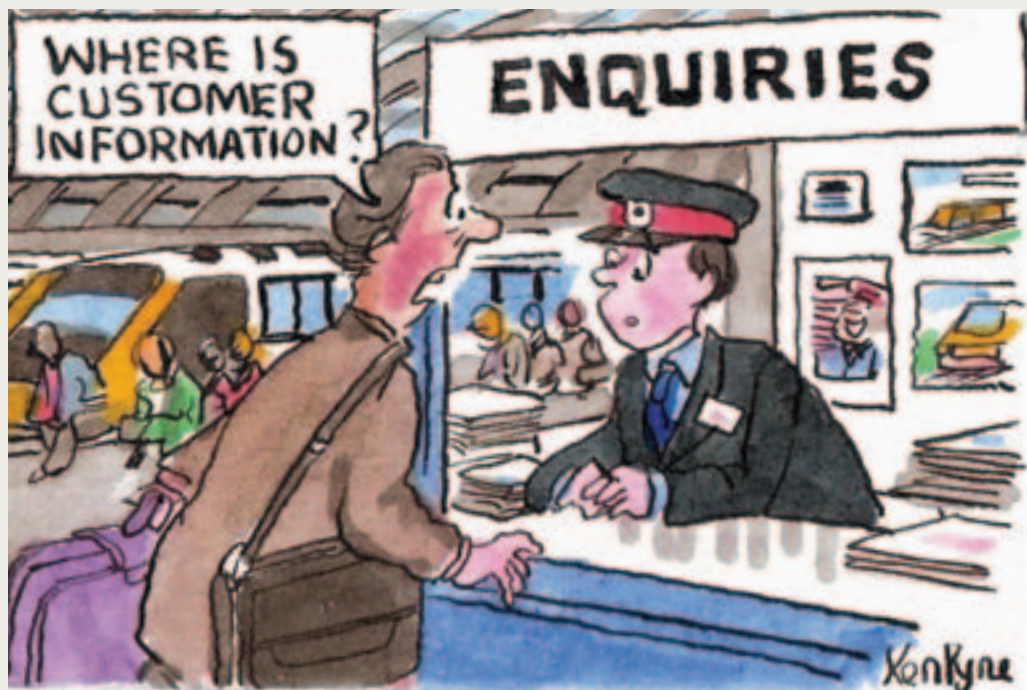
Passengers themselves then walk through a metal detector. If they have anything left in their pocket, it will sound the alarm. They will then be frisked as if they were criminals who had been caught committing a crime and arrested by the police.

This is degrading and embarrassing.

The situation at Gare du Nord is even worse. No boxes for small objects are provided (strange this, because they have them in the station left luggage office downstairs). So passengers have to take everything out of their pockets and show it to the French customs official.

But there is only a tiny space to put all the things on. On a journey last week, I had to go through the metal detector gate five times before I was clear. So there are my valuables, including camera and lenses, balanced precariously on a small area a metre above the concrete floor, while the official pokes around with it. Who pays for my Leica if it drops on the floor, I wonder?

I complained to one of the Eurostar crew on the train and was given a telephone number, which I rang next morning.



The person I spoke to said she knew exactly what I was talking about, having had the same problem.

There is a need for a sane approach to the security problem. The risk needs to be determined and appropriate measures put in place. If the aim is to prevent terrorism, the present arrangements are counter-productive, since they force passengers to gather whilst awaiting screening, thereby creating a target.

And any serious terrorists would take account of the security measures and adopt tactics which worked round them. The possibilities are so numerous that the security measures amount to little more than a charade to the inconvenience of passengers.

There are in any case other targets, presently unguarded, that would be of far more interest to a terrorist.

But assuming that there is a rationale behind the present screening system, then it should at least be organised so that it is less troublesome.

A stack of boxes should be provided just inside the screening area. The boxes should be big enough to contain people's outdoor clothing, in assorted colours so that they could be identified. Trolleys should be available so that people can take the box to the screening machine.

It is shocking that this situation has been allowed to arise, with, seemingly, nobody, including highly paid consultants and architects, giving a thought to the procedure to make it run as smoothly as possible. What kind of a company is this?

*Henry Law
Brighton*

Customer information should be better integrated

We applaud the article by Simon Rushtom (Lines of Communication) in the December edition and for bringing this important subject to the pages of *Rail Professional*.

Our research has found that the issue of customer perception during disruption is a major driver of their overall satisfaction with the service of any Toc. That said, our model for managing disruption differs from that presented in the article.

Fundamentally, we do not believe that customer information is a process in itself, but should become an integral part of existing (more operational) processes.

That way, handling of excellent customer information can be built upon established processes for train service management and there is less chance that there will be resistance to the new processes from so-called

'entrenched staff'. In our experience of working with the top performers in the NPS rating of 'How well the Toc dealt with delays', this performance is achieved through embedding, not bolting on, of information handling.

We have found that that the emphasis in PPM may not be congruent with customer satisfaction and that a more balanced measure of train performance/customer satisfaction is required.

For example, the current regime incentivises such things as running trains fast, skipping multiple stops or cancelling them just to restore the timetable – potentially inconveniencing hundreds of people. Whilst we agree such decisions often need to be made, they should be made intelligently.

This is why managing disruption is more than just providing better information, but is about putting the customer first in every operational action.

*Gerry Kirk
North Star Consultancy
London*

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