

# What makes for good, safe punctuality?

By Clive Evans, **Operations Focus Team Leader for Network Rail's performance enhancement programme**. He is a Member of the Institution of Railway Operators and secretary to the North West Area Council.

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*"...punctuality must be improved substantially by addressing basic operating disciplines."* Charles Horton Managing Director South Central. The challenge for operators in the next round of franchising. *Rail Professional*, November 2003.

In his article last month, Charles highlighted three simple areas wherein railway operators must demonstrate to all our stakeholders that we can get our house in order: capacity, punctuality and cost. The word 'punctuality' should resound with all operators across the industry; it is our basic task to run trains safely, to time. So often in recent years have we talked vaguely of performance, and even more negatively of delay and lateness, that the casual observer could be excused for thinking we delight in measuring failure and attributing blame. Saying that contractual regimes push us in that direction is no more than an excuse; as railway operators we stand or fall by the punctuality of the service we offer passengers and freight forwarders. We should focus our attention on success – running punctual trains. But what are the key components and core requirements we need to consistently achieve good punctuality?

First, we need a **robust timetable**, with realistic sectional running times and junction, station and engineering allowances. Complementary diagrams distil the complex plan into simplified and useable documents for the individual. These require detailed planning and co-ordination, for all the pieces of the jigsaw to fit together. A robust plan, together with effective contingency

arrangements, forms the bedrock of good punctuality.

**Reliable equipment, infrastructure and rolling stock** are heavily dependent upon adequate maintenance regimes. As railway operators, we need to recognise the need to provide access through possessions and diagram allowances for exams.

**Efficient safe procedures** have developed over the years, through the Rule Book and associated documents, but must be constantly updated to embrace ever-changing

we are open and honest with one another.

Finally, and most crucially, all this requires well-trained, competent and experienced **people**, ready and willing to take responsibility for their part in a vast virtual team. The team includes planners, train and infrastructure maintenance teams, yard and station operators, train crew, signallers, controllers, response teams, performance analysts and many more. These are all railway operators, and the Institution of Railway Operators exists to support

that is to follow Charles Horton's lead by sharpening the "basic operational disciplines".

Discipline is an emotive word. I prefer to think in terms of self-discipline. Many railway operators work essentially alone and unsupervised. Yes, we work with others as part of a virtual team, but at the point of delivery, much of the time, our actions cannot be saved, checked and approved. It is the very nature of operations that our actions have direct and, often, immediate effects on safety and punctuality. That is what makes operations interesting, challenging and satisfying when done well. We can all sharpen our own self-discipline through attention to detail, by checking the rules of the plan when timing trains, by checking the diagram, WTT and late notices, by being where we should be in good time, by communicating promptly with colleagues in other companies, listening to and respecting one another's needs and experience, by pulling off to give the driver the distance, by getting the doors shut and locked, and so on. If we all do these things, we can all make a real contribution to punctuality.

About 18,000 trains run on the network each day. Each day 10 to 20 per cent run late. If we can save a minute on each train each day we will make a noticeable improvement in punctuality. This can be achieved if we can re-learn the basic operational self-discipline that successful railways seem to take for granted but, in truth, have to work constantly to maintain. This attention-to-detail, through self-discipline as part of a larger team, is the mark of the professional railway operator. We must all demonstrate it, not just now and again, but all the time. In this way, railway operators throughout the industry can make a real, tangible and immediate contribution to punctuality, demonstrating to all our stakeholders that rail can, and will, get its house in order.

## 'Railway operators must demonstrate to all our stakeholders that we can get our house in order'

circumstances. Modern practices and techniques provide the opportunity to introduce decision support tools to help the railway operator and reduce the risk of human error.

**Timely and focused communication** is essential to bring the plan, equipment and processes to life and deliver punctual trains. At every stage, individuals are constantly communicating with one another to run trains to time. Do we really acknowledge the important part it plays, or do we take it for granted?

**Monitoring and measurement** of all aspects of our activities is essential to identify strengths and weaknesses. Feedback loops and key performance indicators need to be seen as opportunities for learning and improvement rather than threats and challenges. Genuine continuous improvement in punctuality can only be achieved if

and facilitate their professional development.

You may say that there's nothing really new in our task of running trains safely to time. So what are we missing? Take delay-per-incident as an example. Published sources show that this has deteriorated over recent years by as much as 70 per cent. Incidents of many types across the industry are taking longer to resolve and result in more delay, worse punctuality, than four or five years ago. A great deal of cross-industry effort is going towards analysing and reversing this trend. Key issues like response times, congestion and professional driving are being addressed. What is clear is that there is no quick and easy fix; in truth, the range of issues covers all the components of consistent good punctuality described above. But one thing can offer some early improvement if we have the collective determination to do so;

## PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FOR RAILWAY OPERATORS

- Have you got experience of operating the railway?
- Do you want professional recognition, development and qualifications?
- The Institution of Railway Operators has been established to provide a professional structure and qualifications for people with knowledge and experience of operating the railway, at all levels.
- A new information pack is now available for anyone interested in finding out more about the Institution and its education programme. Please e-mail, write, phone or fax to Claire Wickes at the above address if you would like a pack for yourself or colleagues.

### MEMBERS' NEWS

#### Corporate Membership

The following employers operate a Corporate Membership scheme, by paying a one-off annual fee which covers all their employees' Affiliate or Associate membership subscriptions. (Those with full Membership will continue to pay their subscription personally, irrespective of whether they can subsequently claim it back from their employer through expenses).

Network Rail, London Underground Ltd, Wales and Borders, Freightliner, Virgin Trains, First North Western, First Great Eastern, First Great Western, Go-Ahead Group, Transport for London, Docklands Light Railway, Thames Trains, South Central, Thameslink, Stagecoach Rail, London Lines, GB Railways, Sheffield Supertram, WAGN, Anglia Railways, Island Line, Silverlink Trains, Hull Trains, South West Trains, c2c, GB Railfreight, EWS Railway, Northern Ireland Railways, South Eastern Trains, Iarnród Éireann, Corus Rail Consultancy, ScotRail, Central Trains.

### DIARY OF EVENTS

#### MIDLANDS AREA

Dates of next meetings:

- MONDAY 22 MARCH 2004
- MONDAY 26 APRIL 2004

For information on all Midlands Area events, please contact Julia

Stanyard on 0121 345 3099 or e-mail us at Midlands@railwayoperators.org

#### SOUTH EAST AREA

TUESDAY 30 MARCH 2004 - Tim O'Toole, Managing Director, London Underground.

MONDAY 24 MAY 2004 - Ray Price, Operations Director, Arriva Trains.

All meetings take place at the Union Jack Club, Sandell Street, Waterloo. Doors open at 18.00 and the talks commence at 18.30. To contact the South East area on any subject please email: Southeast@railwayoperators.org

#### NORTH EAST AREA

TUESDAY 2 MARCH, 1730 for 1800. Scott Handley of Wensleydale Railway on the operational aspects of the launch of the railway and operational progress to service expansion. 'The Studio', Platform 9, York Station. Buffet provided. Non-members welcome.

TUESDAY 4 MAY. Visit to Neville Hill depot. Meet at 1745 in front of WH Smith on Leeds station concourse for minibus to/from depot. Stout footwear required - other PPE will be provided on site. As places are limited, it is essential you e-mail [mike.hogg@ews-railway.co.uk](mailto:mike.hogg@ews-railway.co.uk) if you wish to attend. Places will be confirmed by e-mail. Return to Leeds by minibus by 2030.

The North East Area of the IRO continues into its fourth year of bi-monthly lectures and visits. Around 20 to 25 people attend lectures at our normal venue of the Studio at York Station - kindly facilitated by GNER. Members are encouraged to bring guests. We e-mail/post out an A4 forthcoming meeting notice and members are asked to display this at their workplace. As is now traditional, the summer sees two site visits, the first of which is advertised above. As space on these is normally limited, special (e-mail based) booking arrangements will always apply. The area is looking for one or two members to join the NE Council, which meets bi-monthly at York to plan events, review the budget and undertake new member grading. We are especially keen to see sharp-end staff join the council. If you are interested in joining us for this fairly small time commitment, please contact Mike Hogg on 01302 766300 or 07801 905262.

North East Area meetings normally take place at 1730 for 1800, at York, and full details will be published in advance each month in this column. For more news on the North East area, e-mail: Northeast@railwayoperators.org

#### SCOTTISH AREA

For information on all Scottish events and matters, please contact Scottish@railwayoperators.org or phone Douglas Kerr on 0141 335 5430.

#### SOUTH WEST AREA

The South West area now holds an open committee meeting, followed by a social evening in Bristol on the second Tuesday of the month - the next one is on 9 MARCH 2004. The meetings start at 1600 in the Network Rail offices at Temple Point, Redcliffe Way, Bristol. The social is from 1700 in the 'Shakespeare', Victoria Street (close to Redcliffe Way).

An all-day Saturday event has been arranged for 24 APRIL, to visit Mendip Rail, and Merehead Quarry operations near Cranmore, meeting at Westbury for road transport. Lunch will be at a suitable location in the Merehead area. Please put this one in your diaries - full details will follow.

For all events, contact Lawrie Hall, internal 07 79307, mobile 07771 827797 or e-mail us at Southwest@railwayoperators.org

#### NORTH WEST AREA

WEDNESDAY 24 MARCH. North West Annual General Meeting with talk by Tom Birch on the Institution's education programme. WEDNESDAY 26 MAY - 1800 for 1830 Visit to Longsight Depot.

Future meeting dates:

- WEDNESDAY 15 SEPTEMBER
  - WEDNESDAY 17 NOVEMBER
- Venues to be advised.

**Maurice Perkins, chairman of the North West Area Council, writes:**

The January meeting of the North West branch of the IRO was jointly held with colleagues from the Greater Manchester Area branch of the ILT, at the offices of Network Rail, Manchester. It was hosted by Neil Worthington, an IRO member and chair of the GMA ILT, with thanks to Network Rail for once again providing the accommodation. Our guest

speaker was Malcolm Brown, the Commercial Director from Midland Mainline, who provided a very enthusiastic presentation of Midland Mainline's RIO Project for the SRA. The project was a short notice request to supply an alternative inter city service to support Virgin and the Manchester customer base during the upgrade works on the West Coast Mainline project. Malcolm provided us with a candid account of the trials and tribulations of the project, describing how well all the staff within Midland Mainline had pulled together during the build-up and delivery of the service. Lessons are being learned, in the process, that can only benefit new and prospective inter-city travellers going through, to and from the East Midlands area, Manchester and London. Malcolm is obviously very proud of Midland Mainline's endeavours, and it showed through in a well-structured and very informative presentation. He dealt admirably with some intense and quite detailed questions.

We reminded members present of the forthcoming Annual Members' Lunch being held this year in the National Railway Museum in York, giving us northerners the option of a day trip, as opposed to an overnight stay in London. We will have a North West table, and look forward to meeting colleagues from around the country.

The North West branch has held a number of very informative and interesting visits and presentations since our inception but can only make further progress if we can attract committed individuals. The numbers of the branch continue to grow and our council will be planning further visits and presentations in order to widen the knowledge and understanding of members.

However, we do need some new blood as some people are taking the opportunity to develop their careers and move on out of the area. If you think that you have something to offer or want to make a difference, then please contact Clive Evans (details below).

For details please contact: Clive Evans on 01270-629009 or e-mail: Northwest@railwayoperators.org