



It's all in the planning

GB Railfreight is a major player in the movement of infrastructure trains. Paul Taylor describes the process that the company goes through to make sure everything runs smoothly

Operating infrastructure trains for Network Rail is a daily challenge, needing disciplines far in excess of normal everyday freight flows. However, there are common elements in running a freight flow or an infrastructure train.

The rule book (in most parts) – the group standards for loading and total operations process system reporting – are the same, but there are additional elements that are unique for Network Rail's requirements.

Unlike most regular freight flows, we do not have the comfort of a regular timetabled service for infrastructure services. Each train is individual for the location and date that it is required for.

The daily requirements have heavy 'peaks and troughs' varying from a one-off maintenance train on a mid-week night, through to a 10-train weekend renewal worksite and, at the extreme, a several-week blockade of a particular route.

This variance is led by the needs of the operating railway. Parts of the network need maintenance or renewal far more frequently than a passenger branch line.

Having identified the need to renew a piece of track, a plethora of processes are followed with the regular train operators to identify when and for how long a piece of line can be closed for renewal.

The first consideration will be the importance of customer flows –

a stretch of track to a holiday destination is more likely to be closed mid-winter than affect services on a summer Saturday!

Well in advance, Network Rail will decide their 'workbank' and agree with operators and contractors when and where work will take place.

Meetings will take place to agree outline train plans, with train routing and theoretical numbers of wagons required. This will serve several purposes, mainly that the outline plan will actually be feasible; for example, if a route near to a yard is blocked, it may not be possible to feed trains to another site – and so alternatives need to be considered.

It is at roughly six months down the line (T-31 weeks) that GBRf and other hauliers will be fully brought into the process and start to take the initial plan into a complete operation.

Every four weeks, a 'T-31 haulage meeting' is held for each Network Rail Territory. Representatives from Network Rail National Delivery Service (NDS), renewal contractors, maintenance teams, Network Rail operations planning and the hauliers attend, and will take individual trains and discuss them in detail.

The initial plans are checked thoroughly, making sure that yards have the capacity for the number of trains required. Routes are checked for pathing capacity,

and hauliers make sure they have sufficient resources to pull and crew the trains on order.

A check on the number of wagons required is also made and some swapping of different types takes place to try to keep within the number available, to ensure there is enough wagon capacity for the materials to be moved.

Where local distribution centre (LDC) capacity is exceeded, the hauliers and NDS will agree an 'outstabling' strategy, or moving readily prepared trains out from an LDC during the week to more

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local sidings in advance of the weekend, to ease the bottleneck effect on a yard.

From the T-31 meeting, suggested changes are formalised and other possession planning takes place. This culminates with the train orders becoming 'firm' at T-22.

Technically, the train orders are confirmed and fixed at this stage, but priorities, budgets and unforeseen problems will occur, meaning that there will be changes to jobs post T-22.

The final checks come at T-4, when a weekly telephone conference is held with all

interested parties, to go through the current position of each train order and 'lock it down' so a fixed plan can go through the final stages of preparation.

It is recognised that emergency issues will arise and, so, any changes post T-4 have to go for high-level approval as a control procedure against unnecessary changes and to input discipline into the T-4 lock down.

That is the planning theory – the challenge is to then make it happen, especially regarding diagramming and rostering train crew.

Take the East Anglia area. Almost all trains run to/from the LDC at Whitmoor, which GBRf operates on behalf of Network Rail. The routes are spread quite widely over the area, so sufficient time must be allowed to travel from the yard to the actual site of work. The coverage of routes also varies.

Given that each GBRf train driver must be conversant with the route, making sure that crews have sufficient training to cover each weekend's work is a full-time job in itself.

So, how does GBRf manage these 'peaks and troughs'? Well, having 31 weeks notice is a good starting point! Every four to six weeks, an internal planning meeting is held, where the contract manager, planners and operations managers look through the work to come and review any likely problem areas.

An area that sees little or no freight use will be highlighted, and the local operations manager tasked with checking how many crews need to learn or refresh the route. A check that sufficient

locos will be available is also made and checks where locos can be sensibly 'recycled'. For example, a train can be run on Friday night and return in time to be used again on Saturday night.

During the run-through, operations managers are expected to report back on progress, concentrating on previously highlighted issues. Changes to the previous plan are also pointed out to check that the current route-learning plans are relevant.

Copies of train plans are available for train crews to peruse. Where possible, crews are encouraged to look ahead and agree to swap leave and rest days between quiet and busy periods. That is not always possible, but GBRf crews do appreciate the nature of our business and some give-and-take always works well with staff relations.

Final timings are received three weeks before operation, these then are transformed into individual crew diagrams and then rosters. Towards the end of the week, the rosters are published and operations managers are tasked with checking the arrangements and tying up the loose ends.

The final part of the pre-planning is a weekly phone conference. At 11am each Friday, a weekly internal conference call is held, where operations managers feed in any issues that may arise and contingencies are agreed from this.

A check on the actual loco plan, train formations and specific crewing requirements are made. From this conference, Network Rail is given a brief status report to confirm all is in place for the weekend.

Finally come the days of operation. The GBRf management ethos is to be 'hands-on' and visible. Every weekend, a mix of contract managers and ops managers will choose the busiest worksites and pay a visit. This puts people on the ground to deal with any problems.

Some of the senior managers are also qualified drivers and will sometimes be used to supplement the usual train crew at busy times. Generally, a manager will also be at the Peterborough loco shed to aid loco preparation and ensure prompt departure of locos from the shed to collect their trains.

If a problem is found with a loco, there is someone there to make a quick decision to resolve the problem.

This is just a taste of the complexities of operating infrastructure trains. GBRf takes pride in providing a good level of service and enjoys good relations with Network Rail and its track renewal contractors. This is built on a professional attitude to planning and operations and being flexible when problems arise.

Paul Taylor is GBRf's contracts manager, infrastructure services.

DIARY OF EVENTS

CHRISTMAS PARTY

The IROSE & YP is hosting a Christmas party for all IRO members on the evening

Thursday 7 December in central London from 18:00. Please email Chris Loder at loderc@arrivatrain.co.uk if you would like to come along, or check the website for further updates.

SCOTTISH AND IRISH AREA

The new chairman of the area is Jim Gillies, a highly experienced operator now working with Network Rail. He is assisted by the current secretary, Chris Owen, and is putting together a new and wide-ranging committee, which particularly needs more representation from train operators in Scotland.

Jim is contactable at jim.gillies@networkrail.co.uk or at Network Rail, Buchanan House, 58 Port Dundas Road, Glasgow G4 0HG. Chris Owen is at Caowen7@aol.com

MIDLANDS AREA

Monday 27 November: The next Midlands Area event will be a trip on Midland Metro trams, which has been arranged along with a visit to the maintenance depot and operational centre at Wednesbury.

An optional extra will be to visit the wash plant, during which high-visibility vests will be required. If you would like to attend the event please contact Julia Stanyard on 0121 345 5030 or email: Julia.stanyard@networkrail.co.uk

NORTH EAST AREA

North East Area meetings normally take place at 17:30 for 18:00, at York. For further news on the IRO in the north east, email: northeast@railwayoperators.org

NORTH WEST AREA

To contact the North West Area

on any matter, please contact Clive Evans on 01270 629009 or email: northwest@railwayoperators.org

SOUTH WEST AREA

For information on all South West events and other matters, contact Lawrie Hall on 01453 822150 or 078 91 231738, or email: southwest@railwayoperators.org

SOUTH EAST AREA

Monday 20 November: All South East Area 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, email: southeast@railwayoperators.org

YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

Monday 20 November: At this meeting, Iain Coucher, deputy chief executive, of Network Rail will talk to us about 'taking Network Rail forward' at the Union Jack Club, 16:00 for 16:30. This will be followed by a Track for Operators Masterclass at 18:30 with IROSE. Go to: www.iroyoungprofessionals.org.uk/events to register for this event.

Our next visit will be in February (TBA), but don't forget that the Christmas party will be the next event, on **7 December** in central London, from 18:00.

INFORMAL NETWORKING

Following the success of the first two informal networking occasions, the next will be at the Iron Duke, Victoria on **Thursday 2 November**. Please do feel free to drop in and meet members from 17:30 onwards.

We'd welcome any feedback, comments or enquiries on the Young Professionals, so please feel free to get in touch with us at info@iroyoungprofessionals.org.uk or check our website at www.iroyoungprofessionals.org.uk

MEMBERS' NEWS

The following employers operate a corporate membership scheme, by paying a one-off annual fee that covers all their employees' affiliate or associate membership subscriptions:

Network Rail • Eurostar UK Ltd • First ScotRail • First Great Western • One • Railnews • Iarnród Éireann (Irish Rail) • EWS Railway • Northern Ireland Railways • Central Trains • Virgin West Coast • Virgin Cross Country • First Transpennine Express • Southern • Corus Rail Consultancy • London Underground Ltd • Docklands Light Railway • Transport for London • Stagecoach Rail • South West Trains • Sheffield Supertram • Arriva Trains Wales • Southeastern Railway • Island Line • London Lines • Silverlink Trains • c2c Rail • Gatwick Express • RWA Rail • Midland Mainline.

Those with full membership will continue to pay their subscription personally, irrespective of whether they can subsequently claim it back. Please note that, as the IRO's subscriptions are tax-deductible, a receipt will be issued for all payments – whether by cheque, standing order or internet payment.

If your company would like to explore the benefits of corporate membership of the institution, please contact us. We welcome applications from all industry companies, suppliers and associations – please contact Chris Daughton on 01444 248931 or admin@railwayoperators.org