



**The Institution of
Railway Operators**

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PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

Richard O'Brien says the rail industry finally understands the importance of good planning

The critical importance of having a good plan hasn't always been recognised in the rail industry. If we operate everything perfectly we will be as good as the plan allows. Yet we start each day with a plan that we know contains flaws and that is just not good enough. Other industries strive for 'zero defect' in all sorts of processes and have been doing so for 30 years or more. It is about time railways did the same.

Our planning processes need improving on a number of fronts. Rail struggles with the balance between strategic, medium-term and emergency planning. More important, we often fail to see these three aspects as an evolutionary process where people working on the medium-term plan give thought to how it might apply in emergency circumstances and pursuing a strategy.

In defence of the industry, the last few years have been particularly difficult and perhaps planning was not top of the agenda. However, as it recovers and starts to deliver improved performance, the emphasis will rightly shift to planning. Since becoming Network Rail's head of operations planning a year ago, I have sought to push this trend.

I see my role as one of collaborating with all the industry stakeholders and driving improvement.

DOING THE RIGHT THING

One element of this is to take a process – and most importantly the people involved in it – and concentrate on it fully. A good example is the Informed Traveller or T-12 process. We needed to work through a recovery plan to provide

information about journey times 12 weeks ahead of travel. This was completed on schedule in July 2005 and has become a first-class example of how the industry can work together to solve what seemed an intractable problem. As a result, rail has become a viable option for a market that had previously discounted us because of the inability to plan ahead.

Other examples where planning has improved are: the charter train business, where all trains are now planned four weeks before departure; and engineering haulage, which has a process in place that locks down all changes to engineering haulage trains four weeks before they operate.

The planning work (long-term planning for those familiar with the terminology) itself is now done in some considerable detail and uses proven project management techniques to ensure timetables are delivered on time.

A number of processes have been revised to deliver improvements to the freight businesses. This includes a project to move all short-term freight work (within four weeks of running) to Leeds. We agonised about the best way to divide the freight work up between our three planning centres. When we looked at the process and talked to those involved we found that the majority of the work and potential for error arose from splitting the work across planning centres and joining it back together again. We decided not to split the work at all and now it is all done from Leeds and is already delivering benefits in quality of train schedules.

Now that we have reached a point where a number of processes



O'Brien: 'Our planning processes need improving on a number of fronts.'

are working properly and we have a method for fixing any rogue processes, as an industry we can turn our minds to what we want the planning community to achieve.

Most notable is the Resilient Timetables Programme, where we have developed a systematic way of analysing actual running data which can be compared statistically to the plan. This highlights any points of deviation and is then presented to the operators in workshops where the reasons can be discussed and remedies agreed. Most important, the effective remedies can be measured continuously using the same method. We have commenced this work on the east coast main line, Manchester suburban and Scotland with some early successes implemented in the December 2005 timetable. A full schedule of these reviews is published in the Network Rail business plan.

Another interesting development is the speeding up of timetable production using a method called 'theory of

constraints'. This has the benefit of being able to produce high quality decisions quickly.

Last, but by no means least, we have people. We achieve all of the above through the professionalism of the workforce. We have started to improve the Network Rail training for train planning to make it an industry course. Ultimately, there is an opportunity to develop a joint industry accredited course with the Institute of Railway Operators and even the possibility of a National Vocational Qualification.

I am proud of the progress that we as an industry have made in recent months and really look forward, with the help of industry colleagues, to putting planning on the map.

Richard O'Brien is head of operations planning at Network Rail. A degree qualified civil engineer, he worked in the construction, airline and oil industries before moving to rail as Network Rail's area general manager for West Anglia.

DIARY OF EVENTS

SCOTTISH AND IRISH AREA

Track Renewals and the Operator

Amanda Henderson of Network Rail has a vision of how we need to be doing track renewals, if we are to create a fundamental building block for the new railway. So it was good that the Network Rail Track Renewal Programme was her topic for our annual joint meeting with our hospitable friends of the Permanent Way Institution.

As Amanda demonstrated, Network Rail has a huge task ahead to reduce the costs of renewals by a third; and she was adamant that it would only be achieved by working together. The prizes are great; recent evidence shows that, correctly approached, one third more work could be done for the same cost – and moreover it could be of a better-lasting quality, thus reducing major interventions. In harsh terms, though, the work has to be done for £893m less, over five years.

Amanda's starting point had been to remedy the lack of knowledge of costs, which had been allowed to arise. Variations of costs and benefits between similar jobs had emerged from this, but also a useful sort of hierarchy of cost-effective combinations of formation, ballasting and type of track. A 'magnificent seven' had been identified as giving real long-term value – and that was important, since the real objective was management of the total cost of track renewals, not just going for the expedient or the quick-and-dirty. Network Rail was establishing itself as a really informed buyer, and would work with contractors to

improve their bids by a better understanding of what the outputs (and inputs) should reasonably be; after all, unrealistic or ill-defined contracts helped nobody.

From the operator's viewpoint, the challenges were coming from the big new machines. At £25m for a relaying train, it was clear that it could not be confined to weekend work, but on the other hand, keeping it consistently at work could lead to phenomenal rates of track renewal. Possessions of 20-mile stretches were what they needed for these mammoths to really shine, and together we needed somehow to get to European standards whereby the categories of work were much fewer and were carried on in these lengthy production sites. They presented different and new problems, compared with just gearing up for a burst of weekend activity – problems such as feeding the brutes day after day with support materials, fuelling, and maintenance on site. It was clear that the rewards were great, though.

Amanda recognised that her concept of this track strategy as a fundamental building block would need other building blocks – operating ones, and these would have to be by way of strategies for train services, enhanced diversionary routes, more flexible signalling, stabling, and other facilities, and not least a different view of diversionary routes.

For information on all Scottish events and matters, please contact Scottish@railwayoperators.org or phone Jim Summers, acting chairman on 01324 625284

SOUTH EAST AREA

Monday 21 November 2005

London: 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 please email: Southeast@railwayoperators.org

NORTH EAST AREA

The programme for the meeting in November is still being finalised but is intended to be engineering planning processes. All North East Area meetings normally take place at 17:30 for 1800, at York.

For further news on the IRO in the North East contact us by email at Northeast@railwayoperators.org

SOUTH WEST AREA

For information on all South West events and matters, contact Lawrie Hall on 01453 822150 or email Southwest@railwayoperators.org

NORTH WEST AREA

Future meeting dates **Wednesdays 23 November, 25 January, 22 March and 24 May.**

To contact the North West area on any matter, please contact Clive Evans on 01270-629009 or email Northwest@railwayoperators.org

MIDLANDS AREA

The next event has been planned for **Monday 17 October 2005**, commencing 17:30 at Midland Mainline's academy in Derby. The

talk and presentation is entitled 'The Freight Multiple Unit'.

Other provisional dates for the diary: **Mondays 14 November, 23 January, 20 February, 20 March and 17 April.** Please note there will be no event in December.

To contact the Midlands Area on any subject, please call Julia Stanyard on 0121 345 5030 or email: Midlands@railwayoperators.org

PRACTICAL TRAIN PLANNING AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT COURSE

Our next course will run at the Southern Training Centre at Selhurst this autumn, on four days over three weekends (weekends have been chosen to ensure availability of expert tutors and for ease of releasing staff). You need to be available for all four days on this course in order to be accepted. This is part classroom-based and part work-based and is designed for those who are fairly new to the subject or those who wish to further their career development and expertise in this field.

Dates

Day 1 **Saturday 8 October 2005**
 Day 2 **Saturday 5 November 2005**
 Day 3 **Sunday 6 November 2005**
 Day 4 **Saturday 3 December 2005**
 For further details, please contact Mike Hill at education@railwayoperators.org or 01344 875328.

NEWS FOR IRO MEMBERS

The Institution is delighted to welcome First Transpennine Express as its latest corporate member. All employees of First Transpennine Express are now able to enrol into the Institution at affiliate or associate level (as appropriate to the individual) without any subscription payment being required.

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 – Network Rail, Eurostar UK Ltd, First ScotRail, First Great Western, First Great Western Link, Railnews, Iarnród Éireann (Irish Rail), EWS Railway, Northern Ireland Railways, Freightliner, Virgin Trains (West Coast), Virgin Cross-Country, Thameslink,

Southern, Corus Rail Consultancy, London Underground Ltd, Docklands Light Railway, Transport for London, Stagecoach Rail, South West Trains, Sheffield Supertram, Arriva Trains Wales, South Eastern Trains, Island Line, London Lines, Silverlink Trains, c2c Rail, WAGN Rail, Wessex Trains, Midland Mainline, First Transpennine Express.

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

IF YOU ARE NOT ENROLLED

Have you got experience of operating the railway? Would you like professional recognition, development and work-based academic qualifications? The Institution of Railway Operators exists to provide a professional structure and qualifications for people with knowledge and experience of operating the railway, at all levels.

An information pack is available for those interested in finding out more about the Institution and its education programme. Please contact Claire Wickes at the above address if you would like a pack.