

Transport Committee

Oral evidence: Rail timetable changes, HC 1163

Monday 18 June 2018

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 18 June 2018.

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Members present: Lilian Greenwood (Chair); Jack Brereton; Steve Double; Huw Merriman; Grahame Morris; Luke Pollard; Iain Stewart; Graham Stringer; Daniel Zeichner.

Questions 1 - 206

Witnesses

I: Charles Horton, Chief Executive Officer, GTR; Nick Brown, Chief Operating Officer, GTR; David Brown, Managing Director, Arriva Rail North Ltd; and Rob Warnes, Performance and Planning Managing Director, Arriva Rail North Ltd.

II: Jo Kaye, Managing Director, System Operator, Network Rail; John Halsall, Route Managing Director, South East, Network Rail; and Martin Frobisher, Route Managing Director, London North Western, Network Rail.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Charles Horton, Nick Brown, David Brown and Rob Warnes.

Q1 Chair: We have quite an audience today. Before we begin, I am sure we have all seen the news that three young men were killed on the railway at Loughborough Junction this morning. We do not yet know the details, but I am sure our thoughts go out to their families and friends, and of course to the railway staff and the staff of British Transport police who have been affected by the incident.

Welcome, and thank you for coming along today. For the record of our proceedings, please introduce yourselves by giving your name and the organisation you represent.

Nick Brown: I am Nick Brown. I am the chief operating officer of GTR.

Charles Horton: I am Charles Horton, the chief executive officer for Govia Thameslink Railway.

David Brown: I am David Brown, MD at Northern Rail.

Rob Warnes: I am Rob Warnes, performance and planning director at Northern.

Luke Pollard: I declare an interest. Prior to being elected I did some work with Go-Ahead and GTR.

Q2 Chair: Thank you. Before I get into the questioning, I want to give voice to some of the issues that passengers have experienced in recent times. A lot of them have contacted me on social media, so I am going to share a few of their comments.

One GTR user said: "Week five of this timetable in chaos, and it's as bad as day one." Louise, another passenger, says: "It's horrendous. Trains are dangerously rammed. Standing rigid for the whole journey, which is often way longer than it should be. Unable to move your arms. Trains are cancelled with no notice, and we pay thousands of pounds a year for this diabolical service."

Rose says: "The current debacle was the final straw that pushed me into quitting my job in London two weeks ago." Rosalind says: "Lost income from not being able to get to work. My professional reputation is being tarnished. Suffering severe anxiety. I can't sleep because I'm so stressed about how I will get to work." Dan says: "I now have to leave too early and get home too late to see my young daughters at all during the week." Dan makes the point that his delay repay compensation simply does not make up for the impact on his life.

That has been the experience of too many passengers on the networks that you represent. We know that the reasons for that have been put down to lack of train drivers, overrunning infrastructure works, and rolling stock not being available as expected. All of those have contributed to the timetabling chaos that is having a real impact on the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

lives of real people. Charles and Nick, in relation to GTR, is there a single contributing factor on your part of the network about why the introduction of the May timetable has been such a spectacular disaster?

Charles Horton: There is no single cause of what happened. This has been a systemic failing of the industry's timetabling system, which has had the devastating consequences on our customers that you outlined. We are very, very sorry for that. All of us here today feel deeply sorry that customers have had that awful experience.

In terms of why this has happened, certainly in the case of GTR, the biggest challenge we have faced is that, normally, when there is a major timetable change we would expect the timetable to be finalised at least 12 weeks in advance of it starting. On this occasion, we were finalising the timetable three weeks before it started. All the detailed, complicated resource-planning tasks that we would normally spread over at least a 12-week period we had to complete in a three-week period. That caused us multiple problems in terms of the deployment of our drivers to that new timetable, with, ultimately, a gap between the drivers we had available to us and the skills they held and the work that we were requiring them to do, with the resulting cancellations and delays that are ongoing.

Q3 **Chair:** Can you remind me when you became aware that Network Rail was not able to meet the T minus 12 timeframe for providing the new timetables?

Charles Horton: We have been working with Network Rail since we put in our timetable bid last August. We have been working alongside Network Rail to get the timetable established, but the process became extremely protracted and was complicated by a number of changes that happened during the timetable development process. One of those changes was that a decision was taken to phase in the timetable. That was made at the end of October 2017.

Q4 **Chair:** Whose decision was that?

Charles Horton: That was a decision made by Ministers following a process of development in the industry to look at options for changing the timetable structure. It was a decision ultimately taken by Ministers, in which the industry had been involved. The effect of that phasing change was not clearly understood in terms of its impact on Network Rail's processes. The result was that that, combined with some challenges in getting the timetable established, meant we were into April before we had the timetable finalised.

Q5 **Chair:** Would it have helped if that decision by Ministers had been made earlier, and could it have been made earlier?

Charles Horton: I do not know whether the decision could have been made earlier. What I can say is that in any timetable process the earlier



HOUSE OF COMMONS

you make a decision on specification, the better it is in terms of your ability to establish the timetable effectively.

That changed specification was not the only issue we were facing. As I said previously, the slow pace of getting the timetable finalised also meant that we were challenged.

Q6 Chair: Do you hold Network Rail timetabling staff responsible for the slow pace of getting things agreed, or were you yourselves putting in revisions to what you were bidding for in the new timetable?

Charles Horton: That goes to the heart of the inquiry that the ORR have put in place. As an industry, we really need to step back and look at what has gone on, and look at the systemic issues that caused it to happen.

Clearly, there are multiple causes when something like this happens. I do not think it is right to start pointing fingers at people. What I want to do is to make sure that somebody looks at this in a cool and objective way and says, "What could have been done and when? What sequence of events led to this situation?" Then we will get to a proper answer in terms of what could have been different and how it could have been changed.

Q7 Chair: You said that you could not be clear about whether the decision around phasing could have been made earlier than October 2017, although I think the recommendation around phasing was made some months earlier. If the decision could not have been made earlier, could the timetable introduction have been postponed?

Charles Horton: Because our timetable interworks with five other operators and three Network Rail routes, any decision to delay the timetable would have had a significant impact on other operators as well as GTR. You would have to find an appropriate point in the timetable development process to make the decision that you no longer wished to proceed.

At the stage where we were in October, none of us believed that the phasing decision would cause, along with other things that went wrong, the level of problem or challenge that we subsequently experienced.

Q8 Chair: At what point did you realise that the timetable was not going to be delivered?

Charles Horton: At every step through the process we were seeking to find work-arounds and ways of dealing with a delay to the timetable. We had to make some assumptions, for example, about the deployment of our drivers to new depots. That was one of the things that was necessary to make the timetable happen.

We also did some work on draft work schedules for drivers. Even though the timetable was delayed, we were trying to do our best to find ways to get around the problems we were facing. It was only in the final stages of finalisation of the timetable, and our need to resource that timetable, that



HOUSE OF COMMONS

we started to become aware of the scale of the problems. In that final few weeks, we encountered multiple issues. The final major problem that caused the major disruption we have was when we applied the drivers' work schedules to their work rosters and found the mismatch in skills.

Q9 Chair: Do you think you were honest with yourselves about your capability to find work-arounds for that problem?

Charles Horton: I think we were being honest with ourselves. We were also trying to approach it in a positive, collegiate and collaborative way as an industry. We were not seeking to do anything other than deliver the right outcome for passengers. The changes we were seeking to put in place were very important. The boost in capacity that the changes were planned to deliver, the improved journey opportunities and the better connectivity of services were very important objectives that we wanted to achieve.

I am terribly sad and terribly sorry that it has ended as it has. Our job now is to try to take the situation we are in at the moment and get it back on track as quickly as we possibly can.

Q10 Chair: In terms of your realisation that it was proving very difficult, and ultimately proved impossible, to deliver the timetable changes, tell me about the relationship, the contact and the communication you were having with the Department for Transport.

Charles Horton: We were keeping the Department for Transport apprised of the challenges that we were facing. We were also describing to them the mitigating actions that we were seeking to take in the lead-up to the introduction of the timetable. There were regular calls and contact with the Department.

Maybe Mr Brown could say a word or two about what he was doing at that stage as well. Nick was having a very close relationship with the Department as well.

Nick Brown: We were briefing officials in the Department, as Charles said. We were also working on the work-arounds, as we described. We had two phases of last-minute problems.

The first one was around the work schedules for drivers. Once we receive the timetable, we have two tasks. The first is to develop what we call diagrams, which are work schedules for the trains and for the people who drive them around the network. The issue only became apparent at the point when we started to do that with the drivers' work schedules. We normally go through a series of iterations to optimise and balance those work schedules. That normally takes place in the last 12 weeks of the timetable. We were not afforded that; it went from three months down to three weeks. Then there is the final phase, which we call the roster phase, applying work schedules to a roster in a depot. That happened on the Thursday night before the timetable changed on the Sunday.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

That was the second phase where we realised that there was a skills mismatch between the assumptions that we had made for the location of the train drivers through the whole project, and which had been in place for over a year, and the actuality of where the work had fallen.

- Q11 **Chair:** Had it really changed that much, so that at the last minute you did not know what staff had been trained, where they were or that they were not capable of operating?

Nick Brown: We know where they are and where they work, but the balance of how the work schedules fit to the work roster is what caused the challenge. We notified that immediately to the Department.

- Q12 **Chair:** When you said earlier, Mr Horton, that three weeks out you realised that it was not going to be possible to deliver, did you communicate that to the Department?

Charles Horton: No; what I said was that because of the way in which the work schedules were coming together—the diagrams as we call them—we started to see an increased risk at that stage, but we did not see the scale of the problems that were subsequently experienced.

- Q13 **Chair:** Did you communicate how serious a risk that was?

Charles Horton: We said that we saw an increased risk of cancellations in the immediate aftermath of the timetable being introduced. That was what we said we were seeing. We also said that we were taking action to try to mitigate that as much as possible by making some changes to the way we were organising part of the operational plan for the timetable. It was something called piloting; we were getting drivers to go with other drivers through part of the centre of London. We made changes to plans whereby we brought in some other staff to do that task and released some drivers back to do driving duties to help us get out of that difficulty.

That was typical of what we were doing throughout the whole process. We were looking for solutions to problems and trying to find a way to deliver what we thought and believed was a very important change.

- Q14 **Chair:** Mr Brown, you will have an idea of what I am going to ask you. I suspect the issues are slightly different on Northern. What were the factors that contributed to the problems that your passengers have experienced?

David Brown: The first thing is that a timetable change that was supposed to be a significant upgrade for people in the north of England clearly was not delivered in a way that gave that additional connectivity. We have apologised to our customers many times. I do so again today. We are truly sorry that the timetable and the service that was provided in the first two weeks of the timetable clearly affected people travelling not just to and from work but for major life events as well. I am personally truly sorry for that. We have been working really hard to put in place an interim timetable.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

The root causes of our problems are slightly different from those of Charles and Nick. We were on track to deliver our timetable in May this year. We started the process in July and August last year. It is a process that normally takes 40 weeks, about 10 months. We were on track. We had more than enough train drivers to provide the service that we were looking to operate in May this year. We have more train drivers than the company has ever had, and far more than we need to operate the timetable.

The big issue for us was that the timetable was predicated on certain pieces of infrastructure being delivered, such as the electrification in the north-west of England, particularly the axis between Preston and Manchester and out to Blackpool. Our timetable plan was based on that corridor being operated by electric trains. The scheme had already been delayed. It was originally planned for December 2016 and then December 2017. It was delayed further, and was then planned for May this year. The decision was taken on 5 January this year that the scheme could not be delivered at the time we needed for our plans in May this year and would, therefore, be delayed beyond the May introduction of the timetable.

That meant that Rob's team and people in Northern and in Network Rail had to plan the whole timetable in a period of 16 weeks rather than 40 weeks. We had to look at options for completely rewriting a timetable for the north of England, which is 10% to 11% of the total national rail network, in four months—16 weeks compared with 40 weeks.

We made a request that the timetable already in place should be rolled forward into May. That request was declined. We were, effectively, the only train operator that was requested to start again and completely rewrite—

Q15 Chair: Sorry, can you say that again? At what point did you ask for the introduction of the timetable to be delayed?

David Brown: At the end of January there was a conversation about options.

Q16 Chair: With whom?

David Brown: It was an industry conversation with other train operating companies and with Network Rail as the system operator. A range of options were generated. Clearly, our preferred option was that our timetable and the national timetable were effectively rolled forward, so that what was in place then would be seen again in May. A significant number of other players did not want that to happen, and that option was not the preferred or chosen option.

Q17 Chair: Was that information communicated to the Department?

David Brown: The two events—the delay in the infrastructure and the electrification—were a decision taken at a north of England programme



HOUSE OF COMMONS

board. The core members are the Department for Transport and Network Rail. That then led to the subsequent conversation about the timetable and what structure the national timetable would take from May.

Our client is Rail North partnership, a joint venture between the Department for Transport and Transport for the North. They were aware that we were being asked to rewrite our timetable. The system operator has to look at the whole national timetable and take a decision based on all the train operators and the total timetable.

Our preferred option was declined at that point in time. That meant we had to rewrite the timetable for May this year. Again, very similar to my colleagues on the right, the timescale to rewrite the timetable was massively truncated. I am not aware that it has ever been done before.

Q18 Chair: Were there further discussions? In January, you asked for the timetable process to be extended, and that was refused. As you tried to implement the timetable as planned, I am guessing that it became clearer that you were not going to be able to succeed. Did you ask again?

David Brown: No. At that point, the decision was taken that the option chosen was that Northern would effectively withdraw our piece of the national jigsaw, change the shape of it and then try to reinsert it into the process. We had 16 weeks to do that.

The other thing to stress is that part of the decision on the electrification meant that additional engineering work was required on the corridor. The same team that tried to rewrite the timetable then had to plan for successive engineering blocks during the period between February and September. The base plan was being rewritten, and the short-term plans were also being rewritten.

We were rewriting the plan at that point. The second element was that at that point in time we had more than enough train drivers, and we had a training programme that would have hit and enabled us to deliver the May timetable.

A further infrastructure scheme was delayed. We were notified in the middle of March that the electrification scheme between Blackpool and Preston would be three weeks late, and therefore would not be delivered until later in April. That might seem quite a small issue, but it effectively means that all the drivers who operate on that line can request retraining as if it is a new piece of line. For us, that meant that 450ish drivers could all require, and needed, brand-new training. That was never in the training plan. That new training requirement was a direct consequence of the delayed electrification.

Finally, as we were rewriting the timetable in short order, very similar to colleagues, it scrunched down and screwed down the time we had available. That then led to a new training requirement, because we are not running electric trains on part of the network. We are looking at



HOUSE OF COMMONS

running diesel trains on different routes. That stimulated a further driver training requirement. We were trying to plan the base and deliver a new driver training requirement for Blackpool, as well as identifying the gaps between what people were trained to do and what they were then required to do.

We only started to see that emerging, literally, in the days before the May timetable went live on 20 May. In the first week of the new timetable, as a team, we immediately started to identify a plan that we could put in place to arrest the poor performance. On 29 May, after just over a week of the new timetable, we shared with our client an interim timetable, which reduced on a structured basis the number of trains we were providing for an eight-week period, and allowed us to give stability and a bit of certainty for customers. That went live on 4 June.

Q19 Chair: Can I stop you there? I want to understand a bit more about communication during the period after you had realised there were major problems because of the delay of electrification and the further infrastructure delay that impacted on you.

Schedule 9.4 of the Northern franchise agreement sets out what happens when there is an infrastructure-related change. It talks about there being a process of "regular and effective reporting by the Franchisee" to the Department. It talks about "discussion and engagement leading to appropriate decision making...and the taking of appropriate risk mitigation actions on a timely basis." It talks about that happening throughout the period, so the Department knew that there were already issues. They had rejected your request back in January. What discussions or engagement, as per the franchise agreement, were happening in the period between January and 20 May?

David Brown: From the point that the infrastructure assumption was changed, there was ongoing dialogue with our client, Rail North partnership, on behalf of the DFT and Transport for the North. They understood that the assumption had now changed and triggered that part of the franchise agreement, as you say. They were fully aware of that.

They were fully aware of the fact that we were the only ones asked to rewrite the timetable. All the train operators, including those in the north, were allowed to stay with their existing timetable. They were fully aware of the decision that had been taken by the system operator and the industry.

The issue at that point was that we were trying to rewrite the timetable and understand where there would be a mismatch of skills and resources. We were working very hard to do that and deliver the timetable. Clearly there was ongoing dialogue. At that point, the whole scale of what was likely to happen in May was not apparent. We were busy writing the timetable from scratch.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Once we became aware of the slippage in the Blackpool issue, the client was aware that it would trigger ongoing training requirements not just for Blackpool but for those 450 drivers. We have had regular dialogue with the Rail North partnership at officer level, but it was only just before the timetable went live on 20 May that the full ramifications and the culmination of all those events became apparent.

Q20 **Chair:** What date was that?

David Brown: We communicated with stakeholders on 17 or 18 May. We were aware that in the timetable we had re-planned there were some structural weaknesses. We were not able to offer the timetable we wanted to offer because of the short notice on which it had had to be rewritten. Bear in mind that we were trying to put our piece of the jigsaw back into a national jigsaw, when everyone else's pieces were still in place.

Q21 **Chair:** Literally, until the last two or three days before the timetable was introduced, you did not see it coming. What understanding would the Department have had at that point? You were working hard to try to mitigate the risks, and then, only a few days before, you say, "Actually, this is going to lead to thousands of cancellations."

David Brown: They were clearly aware of the additional training requirement we had for Blackpool. You can see the deterioration and the increase in cancellations during April up to the May timetable. At that point, we were trying to run the train service, and to train drivers we did not expect to have to train.

The culmination of that was that we were piecing together the rosters and the diagrams only days and evenings before—literally—to such an extent that for the first two weeks of the timetable we were in a situation of emergency rostering. We were trying on a daily basis to match drivers, conductors and train units. The full impact only became apparent when the timetable went live.

Q22 **Iain Stewart:** I want to get some clarification. Going back to January, when you realised that there were overruns and it was going to be very challenging for you to enact the new timetable, you say that your request to roll forward the existing timetable was denied by a partnership of other operators and your client. Is that right?

David Brown: In the industry, there is a set of ongoing discussions with the train operators and Network Rail. We formally wrote to the system operator, which is Network Rail, to suggest that one option that could be considered would be to roll over the whole timetable. That option was declined; it was not the chosen option.

Q23 **Iain Stewart:** When that was declined did you, at any time, pick up the phone to the Department and say, "Look, this is serious and you need to look at it afresh. There needs to be ministerial involvement"? Did you do that at any time?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

David Brown: We had an ongoing dialogue with the Rail North partnership. They were fully aware of both the infrastructure slippage and the fact that we would now have to do a 40-week task in 16 weeks. They were fully aware of that decision. I assume that the system operator will advise Ministers if there is considered to be a risk to the national timetable.

Q24 **Iain Stewart:** I am trying to get to the bottom of how much you pressed, as the operator, and went straight to the top of the Department to say, "Look, we need more time and we need the existing timetable rolled forward."

David Brown: I accept that it may be a criticism that we did not shout louder and earlier in the process. At that point, the task was to rewrite the timetable. There is a balance in crying wolf and saying there is a big problem and being able to quantify exactly what it looks like. Because the timetable process is sequential, you only realise that right at the last minute.

Normally we, like all train operators, would have all of the technical documents 12 weeks in advance, so that we could understand where the risks were. Clearly if you are only starting that 16 weeks out, you do not have that opportunity. Did we shout really loudly at that point? All the officers in the Rail North partnership were fully aware of the challenges that we faced, but our task was to get on and rewrite the timetable, because at that point it was not clear what the full consequences would be; plus the impact of the additional training from Blackpool did not become apparent until April.

Q25 **Grahame Morris:** I am sure you are aware that, under the terms of reference of the Committee, we want to know when it was realised there was a serious problem with the proposed timetable changes, who was told and when, and why those changes went ahead.

The problems are rather different for the two operators. Mr Brown, you told us that you were running 10% or 11% of the network, and that in January you identified the potential problems with the system operator, Network Rail, and other operators. Was it suggested then that phasing might be an option—to withdraw that 10% or 11% and phase it? Would a determining factor in deciding whether to phase be any revenue implications of doing that?

David Brown: I will hand over to Rob because he is involved in the options that were developed, and then I will answer the question about revenue.

Rob Warnes: I do not think phasing was a real option because the timetable structure in the north was changing, with TransPennine moving to their new six paths an hour across the Pennines. Northern services, like most local services, are what we call "last on the graph". Our services are put on the timetable plan last. Long distance goes on first, and



HOUSE OF COMMONS

TransPennine moving to its new structure meant that we had to rewrite our entire structure across the north.

As electric trains were not able to operate on the Bolton corridor, we had to pull back on to the Bolton corridor all the diesels that were planned to go off and do other things. We very carefully had to try to knit back the basic service that we were operating in December around the new TransPennine structure and around some of the other long-distance operators that were changing as a result of GTR services down south. That meant there really was not a phase; it was all or nothing. That is why we suggested that perhaps we should take the original December and roll it to May. Once we were not in that position, we had to fit as best we could around all the other operators so that we could actually produce a train plan for the north from May and have a timetable to operate.

David Brown: On the revenue point, that is not a conversation in which I was directly involved. There are clearly commercial considerations if TransPennine is asked to change its timetable and we are asked to change our timetable. I do not know what the decision-making process was for that. Under our franchise, there is an infrastructure assumption that is now different, and we will have to have a conversation with the Department about that.

Q26 **Grahame Morris:** I am interested in whether or not revenue considerations were a factor in the decision-making process. You might have conversations about them with various operators and Network Rail, but were they the determining factor or a contributing factor in the decision to go ahead?

David Brown: It was not a direct issue for us. We wanted to deliver the timetable in May. It was clear that we would not be able to do that, and therefore for us, for customers and for operational reasons, rolling over the existing timetable would have been the best option. The commercial considerations were not a key part of that decision making. Whether they were a part of the decision making by the system operator or the Department, you would need to ask them.

Q27 **Chair:** Can we be clear about who stopped your plan to roll over the timetable? Was it Transport for the North? Was it DfT? Was it other operators? Was it Network Rail? Or was it in some way a consensus decision?

David Brown: If I can be really clear, there was a discussion among the train operating companies and Network Rail. We asked for that option to be considered.

Q28 **Chair:** Where does that discussion happen? Is there a body that brings them together?

David Brown: There is a body, which I cannot recall; it is effectively a working group. I guess the main decision is the one taken by the system operator, because they are looking across the whole timetable. I have to



HOUSE OF COMMONS

say though that the vast majority of train operating companies did not want to roll over their timetable, because of operational and commercial imperatives.

Q29 **Chair:** Are you saying that your client, Rail North, and the DFT were not part of that decision making, or were they part of it?

David Brown: I cannot tell you absolutely whether they were part of it, but they were clearly aware of the decision that was taken.

Q30 **Graham Stringer:** You are saying that you are not aware who took the critical decision. David, that does not sound credible.

David Brown: I am clear when the decision was taken. The decision was taken after a set of options were put. That was the decision by the system operator, together with support from the train operating companies. The question was whether I was aware if the DFT and Rail North partnership were involved in that decision making. I am not aware whether they were or not, but they were aware of the final decision.

Q31 **Graham Stringer:** That was the question I was asking. Charles Horton said he did not like finger pointing, but in one sense, we want to know who was responsible. You are saying that you do not know who was responsible for not allowing you to adjust the timetable.

David Brown: I am saying that the option we put forward was not accepted by the system operator, Network Rail, or supported by other train operating companies.

Q32 **Graham Stringer:** So it was Network Rail.

David Brown: They are the system operator.

Q33 **Graham Stringer:** Yes. On their own they said no.

David Brown: No. There was a conversation with all the train operating companies. They took options and agreed the preferred option. I assume it is the system operator that makes the final decision, as the responsible body for the national timetable.

Q34 **Graham Stringer:** I have tried to listen carefully but I do not quite understand. I understand that you did not have the timetable you wanted. You did not have the rolling stock that you were expecting to have. You did not have the infrastructure in part of the system that you were expecting. You were trying to put the jigsaw together and knit the pieces together as best you could.

I know you to be a professional and competent man. You must have known that if you did not have the right rolling stock there was the potential for the kind of catastrophe that has happened. Did you pick up the phone to the Department, to the Secretary of State's office, and say, "This is going to go badly"?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

David Brown: To be absolutely clear, in January we had more than enough drivers and conductors to operate the timetable that we were planning to operate in May. We had more than enough rolling stock to operate at that point in time, but, as Rob said, once a decision is taken not to electrify, you cannot use electric trains. You have to move diesel trains from elsewhere in the north to replicate that. At that point, the rolling stock resources and the timetable changed. There was adequate rolling stock to provide that timetable. Rob's team made huge efforts to bring in rolling stock from elsewhere, so we had adequate rolling stock at that point in time. That has become stretched because we are not using electric trains where we are supposed to be using them. We are having to use diesel trains from elsewhere in the north.

Q35 **Graham Stringer:** I understand that there is a problem because the infrastructure was not as you expected, the train sets were not as you expected and therefore the drivers—even though you had plenty in January—were not necessarily trained. The question I am asking is, given those huge problems, did you not shout and say to the Secretary of State or the Department, "We have been denied the timetable change that we think would be helpful and now other things have gone wrong, so this is going to be a very major problem"?

David Brown: At that point, we were not aware of the full consequences. We were busy rewriting the timetable. As I said earlier, two things happened. We then had a significant additional driver training burden because of the delayed electrification to Blackpool; 450 drivers—

Q36 **Graham Stringer:** I accept that. I am just saying that these are such big problems. You said you only had 16 weeks to write the timetable. I accept that as a fact. But the problems were bigger than whether you could write the timetable. I am surprised that a man of your professional background and experience did not say, "This is not going to fit together." It is not just writing a new timetable and getting Network Rail and the other operators to fix it. It is a huge problem.

David Brown: It is, and because the timetable process was so truncated and it is sequential, until you write the base plan you do not become aware of the full consequences of the mismatch between skills and location until the very last minute. That is a similarity between ours and Charles's story, in that the timescales mean that you do not become aware until the very last minute of the actual size of the problem. That is why we tried to work very hard and put in place a change to that timetable.

Q37 **Graham Stringer:** You are saying that the last minute was 18 May.

David Brown: It was literally right up until the last minute, because we were still producing the outputs of the timetabling process.

Q38 **Graham Stringer:** How much has cancelling all these trains cost you?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

David Brown: I do not know the exact financial value but we clearly do not benefit in any way financially from cancelling trains, either on the day or on a planned basis. We have put in place an interim timetable that reduces the number of trains we are running by about 6% or 165 trains. They are classed as cancellations. That is not saving us money in any way. It is aimed at giving customers certainty of the service we can offer.

Q39 **Graham Stringer:** You surprise me with your answer. Are you saying that you do not know how much it costs to cancel each train?

David Brown: I do, but I do not have the detail to hand. I am happy to send it afterwards.

Q40 **Graham Stringer:** You will send us the figure for the total cost of the cancellation.

David Brown: I am happy to provide that.

Q41 **Graham Stringer:** I think you are trying to answer a question I had not asked about whether or not there is a perverse incentive for cancelling trains rather than running them late. That has been suggested.

David Brown: No. There is no financial incentive for us to cancel trains. Clearly, our customers do not want us cancelling trains. We definitely do not want to be cancelling trains for them. We definitely do not want to be cancelling them as we were in the first two weeks, in short order. We have reduced the number of trains we are operating, so that we can provide more certainty to customers.

Q42 **Graham Stringer:** I am sure you will send us a paper, but can you give us a rough, ballpark figure for how much the train cancellations have cost?

David Brown: I would rather do that specifically than quote a number that might be inaccurate.

Q43 **Graham Stringer:** I am genuinely surprised that you cannot tell the Committee now. I guess it will be a big figure.

David Brown: Like I say, I would rather send you that and be accurate so that the Committee has it to hand in a proper way.

Q44 **Graham Stringer:** Is the crash that happened on Friday at Piccadilly station anything to do with the chaos around the cancellations and the systems?

David Brown: No. Last week, we saw a significant reduction in cancellations since we put the interim timetable in place. Last week was a driver error. It is still being investigated. The two trains involved are in their depot being repaired.

Q45 **Graham Stringer:** You say you did not realise until right at the end about the deliverability of the timetable. Were the people who were actually drawing up the timetable and into the nitty-gritty of it telling you



HOUSE OF COMMONS

anything about the deliverability of that timetable before 18 May?

Rob Warnes: At the beginning of May, when some of the plans were beginning to take shape, we identified some of the mismatches, where drivers would not have the knowledge to go on a certain route or take a certain train. The planning teams that work for me reallocated work. We were moving work from one depot to another so that we could match that work. We were therefore redirecting some of the training. It was an iterative process to try to constantly move, but, as David said, Blackpool overrunning tipped the training profile over the edge. That was the straw for us. We had a plan and we could do the training, but, when Blackpool went wrong, it imposed a load more training on us at the last moment.

Q46 **Graham Stringer:** Was there sufficient communication between the people doing that work? Is it the sort of issue that, if you had gone into a pub with the people drawing up the timetable, they would have said, "Oh, we are in for a right problem"? Did the people drawing up the schedules and the railway timetables know four or five weeks beforehand? Were their communications with top management good enough?

Rob Warnes: Not four or five weeks beforehand, because we had not actually produced what we call the train crew diagrams at that point.

David Brown: There is excellent communication between those train planners and our own staff and our regional directors, and a very good working relationship with Network Rail's planners at Milton Keynes. They are a key part of that process. The timescales within which we had to deliver the timetable as well as plan the engineering work were unprecedentedly small. We would normally be in discussion on the detail 12 weeks before the timetable, but we were literally only starting to write that timetable 16 weeks before.

Q47 **Graham Stringer:** Is there anything else you would have done differently?

David Brown: On reflection, we would have flagged our concerns earlier, but at that point I could not quantify how serious the issue would be. Again, on reflection, we would have shouted earlier in the process when those key decisions were taken in January and February. At that point—it is a balance—we could not be clear what the full consequences would be.

Q48 **Huw Merriman:** I am still struggling to try to identify roles and responsibilities. For any change management project of this scale, one would expect to see a project manager and a sponsor who is looking to make sure the whole thing is done, with all the organisations that are required and a timetable. The project manager will sign off at each stage, meaning that, if there is an issue, it is caught early enough and communicated across the whole sphere. In that context, who was the project manager of the timetable change?

Charles Horton: It is difficult to describe railway timetabling in classic project management terms. If I may just explain who does what in the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

industry as a starter, and then describe how the particular arrangements worked with our timetable change, would that be helpful?

Huw Merriman: I am conscious of time.

Charles Horton: I will be brief.

Huw Merriman: Forgive me if I interrupt.

Charles Horton: In very short order, the DfT specify the services they wish us to operate. Train operators propose services to Network Rail under a bid process, and Network Rail compiles the timetable, and mitigates and deals with conflicting demands between operators.

In relation to GTR, our train planning and timetabling team were working on the timetable bid based on the specification the Department had given us. We bid in August 2017 in accordance with the bid timescales. As I explained before, we had an issue when there was a change to the specification later on, which meant that we had to go back and rework that. We also had a slow process of timetable compilation and completion.

In terms of how we were managing and structuring this, internally we had our own project management arrangements. We had a programme manager in charge. We had people tracking the programme. We were also working closely with colleagues in other train operating companies and with Network Rail. This was an industry change. As I explained already, we were interacting with five other train operators and three Network Rail routes, so there was an industry assurance process over the top of it.

An industry readiness board was looking at the readiness of the industry to make this major change. An assurance panel was looking at the detail of the arrangements in our company, and in other companies, to make the changes happen. We were overseen through that process as well, but the ultimate responsibility to do our part of the timetable development was with us. Network Rail was there to pull the timetable together and to make sure that it was delivered.

Q49 **Huw Merriman:** Was the industry readiness board the project manager in that sense? When each organisation has its own project management team it suggests that this is a darned big project, yet there is no overall project management structure, where one party, who is not necessarily doing the delivery, is normally able to take a step back and get each of you to sign off by a set time, and blow the whistle when it realises that somebody has not. That is rudimentary change management, is it not?

Charles Horton: That would imply that the industry readiness board had a very executive role. They did not. Their role was to oversee and look at what was going on. Railway timetabling is hugely interdependent. All industry partners have a part to play in the development of the timetable. If you ask who had the ultimate accountability for producing the



timetable, it was clearly Network Rail, but it could not do that without other parties playing their part in making sure that the timetable was delivered.

- Q50 **Huw Merriman:** I acknowledge that, and I hope we all agree. It seems so obvious, with so many interdependencies between organisations, that if one organisation gets it wrong and the other organisation does not know, they are relying on delivery that they cannot actually do because somebody else has not done something. Taking a step back, it requires one big project manager to do just that. I am amazed that there was not a timetable or a project manager who went round and got sign-offs and reported to the Department and various others. I am staggered that that did not exist. Hindsight is a wonderful thing. Let me put it another way: do you think there will be a role in that manner when the next set of timetable changes are due? How can we be assured that the same thing is not going to happen all over again?

Charles Horton: The big lesson for me from this particular problem is that we should never again embark on a major timetable change when the planning horizons have become compressed to such a level. We have proved, and unfortunately have ample evidence, that trying to squeeze major timetable change into a few weeks is fraught with risk and difficulty. Frankly, it is not something that I would ever wish to see embarked upon again because it is just too difficult.

Nick Brown: When those processes were running in parallel, they should have been running in series.

Charles Horton: To qualify what I said, I made that comment with hindsight. I did not think that at the time. We were seeking to get the job done and to get it sorted. It was only in the final run-in on the timetable that we started to see the risks ratcheting up and layering on top of each other to create the very bad consequence we have now seen.

Huw Merriman: I appreciate your openness in saying that.

- Q51 **Chair:** It strikes me that the body that sits above all this must surely be the DFT. They are your client; they are in charge of Network Rail. Surely they should have oversight of this process.

Charles Horton: Certainly they have a role in the process. They are the specifier. They specify what the timetable should be. They have an oversight role over us and the contract we have with them. There is a commercial contract between ourselves and the DFT. They also clearly have a relationship with Network Rail, so they have a role in the process.

Network Rail are the producers of the timetable. They are there to create the timetable, based on the inputs from train operators, and potentially to mediate conflicts between train operators to get a good result. That is pretty much as it is, and we all play a role.

- Q52 **Chair:** We will have some questions for them in due course. Do you think



HOUSE OF COMMONS

that the DFT underestimated the complexity? You have already said there were five franchise train operators and three Network Rail routes. Did they just not understand what they were asking? It was 25% of the rail passenger journeys on the network.

Charles Horton: It would not be fair to say that they were underestimating. None of us saw the particular combination of issues coming together and producing this very bad outcome. In fact, in the last few weeks before the timetable was finalised, we had a number of things that went the wrong way, which have caused the problem we have now.

For example, normally when we are producing a timetable and getting that timetable implemented, we produce diagrams—drivers' work schedules. We iterate those two, three or maybe even four times. We were dealing with a situation where we had to take the first draft. The number of diagrams that we had was significantly greater than we had anticipated.

Secondly, when we took the first draft diagrams we had to consult on them at breakneck speed. We got good co-operation from the trade unions, but inevitably there has to be compromise in that situation. Thirdly, when we got the final timetable and saw the assumptions we had made about where we would put our drivers, because we needed to redeploy drivers, we could have done a better job if we had known in advance where those drivers needed to be.

Q53 **Chair:** All the things you are telling me are, "This was the worst-case scenario," and, "That was the worst-case scenario." Would it be right to say that you underestimated the risks?

Charles Horton: It is true to say that, looking at all of those things together, I did not anticipate that all of them would go wrong. We were working really hard to try to mitigate and deal with those risks. We had some success. The problem was the final issue, which was the mismatch in skills because of applying the work schedules to the drivers' rosters. That tipped it over the edge.

Q54 **Chair:** Were the meetings that you had with the Department one to one, or were they all via the industry readiness board?

Nick Brown: We had meetings through the industry readiness board with the Department, and we have normal franchise management meetings with the Department.

Q55 **Chair:** How regular are the normal franchise management meetings?

Nick Brown: We have monthly franchise management meetings and quarterly meetings. The industry readiness board meets every month and has done since January last year. On top of that, working on behalf of the industry readiness board, the industry assurance panel reports to the readiness board.

Q56 **Jack Brereton:** I want to ask about the finances. A number of the issues



HOUSE OF COMMONS

relate to infrastructure overruns, which are the responsibility of Network Rail. Are you set to be financially compensated by Network Rail for things that are outside your control?

David Brown: The way our franchise agreement works is that the timetable we prepare is based on a set of assumptions as to what infrastructure will be available. The timetable that we intended to deliver in December last year was delayed until May, and it has now been further delayed. That is a franchise change mechanism, so it is a request from the client—the Department for Transport—via the Rail North partnership to say to us, “What is the consequential financial impact of that change to the infrastructure?” We do that back to the client, through the Rail North partnership.

Q57 **Jack Brereton:** Yes or no?

David Brown: It will be funded by the Rail North partnership, not Network Rail.

Q58 **Jack Brereton:** You are not going to receive any compensation for the fact that there have been significant overruns on Network Rail’s project management of these issues.

David Brown: Our claim is through the Rail North partnership as the client.

Rob Warnes: There are two things. If the infrastructure is not delivered on time to enable a timetable, it is through a change mechanism. If it is engineering work, such as Blackpool when it overran by three weeks, Network Rail would compensate us for the three weeks of additional bus operations that we had to put in place.

Q59 **Jack Brereton:** You are going to receive some compensation for those overruns.

Rob Warnes: Yes.

Q60 **Daniel Zeichner:** To go back to GTR, I represent Cambridge, and many people in the east of England have had really bad experiences over the last few weeks. I want to go back to the franchise set-up. Peter Hendy suggested some years ago that it was undeliverable in the first place. Was it an unrealistic thing to try to do?

Charles Horton: No, I do not think it was. What we are dealing with is clearly a very serious systemic failure of the industry’s timetabling process, which has had very bad consequences on customers. Is it the wrong plan? No, it is not the wrong plan. Ultimately, the result for customers will be very good. We will see new journey opportunities opening up. We will see increase in capacity. We will see improvement in the quality of services. Certainly there will be more capacity, better trains, newer trains and more modern trains.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

The problem we have been dealing with is that the execution of the timetable has not gone well, and the consequence for customers has been awful.

Q61 **Daniel Zeichner:** But isn't it the case that almost always in major projects things go wrong? You cannot necessarily predict which things will go wrong. Is sufficient contingency built into the plans to allow for the unexpected?

Charles Horton: Efforts were made to try to de-risk. The decision to phase in the timetable was made for the right motive, which was to try to de-risk things. Unfortunately, the execution of that created a further problem that we needed to get around.

Similarly, during the initial phases of the timetable, we were looking to de-risk as well, and we had some plans in place to do that. The issue is that all of those plans and all of those efforts to try to de-risk the implementation were overwhelmed by the particular problem that we faced in the week before the timetable was introduced. We have been working since then to try to recover the position and get things back on a much more stable basis.

Q62 **Daniel Zeichner:** You are in a slightly unusual position. The Public Accounts Committee discussed the remedial plans you are working to. Does the latest remedial plan protect you from breaking the terms of your franchise agreement?

Charles Horton: We are still in a contractual regime. The DFT can enforce a franchise agreement on us. We are absolutely exposed to the DFT using its enforcement powers on us.

Q63 **Daniel Zeichner:** Going back to the previous question, how much is that going to cost you, potentially?

Charles Horton: It does not work like that in relation to GTR. GTR is in a situation where we do not receive any of the passenger revenue or any of the moneys from Network Rail in terms of its delays. We receive a fixed fee for running services.

Q64 **Daniel Zeichner:** Does this mean that you escape scot-free from this?

Charles Horton: No, of course not. We are exposed to the contractual regime. We are also bearing additional costs in dealing with significant disruption on our network.

Q65 **Daniel Zeichner:** It will be down to the DFT to decide the penalty that you pay.

Charles Horton: As it always is under any contract. It is for the DFT to make a judgment about whether we have met our obligations. In making that judgment, they will take a view on what they want to do if they feel that we have not. We believe we have, but it is for the DFT to determine.

Q66 **Daniel Zeichner:** You said that, looking back, you feel that the lesson



HOUSE OF COMMONS

from this is that you should not have compressed it into a shorter time. Given that it is a much bigger timetable change than anything that has been attempted before, surely every single alarm bell in your head should have been ringing at that point, knowing that it could not work once you had seen it was compressed into that time.

Charles Horton: As I said, it was only in the last week before the timetable change, when we saw the significant issue with the mismatch in the skills and the drivers' work schedules, that we realised there was a much more significant problem than we had anticipated. We had seen and overcome a number of problems in the lead-up to the timetable implementation by taking action to try to address those issues. It was really a case of something at the very last minute finally tipping things over the edge. We had been successful in mitigating problems until then.

Q67 **Daniel Zeichner:** At that point, did you pick up the phone to the Secretary of State and tell him that?

Charles Horton: We were in dialogue with his officials at that stage; I think Mr Brown was speaking to his officials at that stage. We explained to them exactly the situation we were facing.

Q68 **Daniel Zeichner:** Can I press you? Do you have the Secretary of State's number on your phone?

Charles Horton: No, I do not have the Secretary of State's number.

Q69 **Daniel Zeichner:** Why not?

Charles Horton: I do not happen to have the Secretary of State's number on my phone, but I have access to his officials.

Q70 **Daniel Zeichner:** Does he have yours?

Charles Horton: He does not have my number, to the best of my knowledge. I don't know.

Q71 **Daniel Zeichner:** He should, shouldn't he?

Charles Horton: I have access to the Secretary of State's senior officials. If I need to get a message to the Secretary of State, or, if I need to say something to his senior officials so that they can get a message to him, we have the access we need to pass messages on and to speak to the relevant people in franchise management teams.

Q72 **Daniel Zeichner:** Have you spoken to him about this debacle?

Charles Horton: I have spoken to the Secretary of State about this. He has spoken to others about it as well.

Q73 **Daniel Zeichner:** Did he suggest you stand down?

Charles Horton: No. This was a decision I made myself. This was my decision. I took a judgment based on the facts. Looking at all the circumstances and looking at the fact that the industry had had a



HOUSE OF COMMONS

systemic failing of its planning system, I said to myself, "I am an industry leader and I feel that in the circumstances, it is right that I step down."

Q74 **Daniel Zeichner:** You have taken responsibility, but shouldn't the Secretary of State take responsibility, too?

Charles Horton: It is not for me to tell other people, either within or without the industry, what they should do in circumstances like this. I made a personal decision based on my assessment of the situation and my feelings about that situation.

Q75 **Chair:** You were talking about not realising the impact, particularly around the rosters and the training issues, until the last minute. One of the questions asked of David and Rob was whether anyone internally or externally was speaking out and saying, "Hang on, this isn't going to work." Were you not hearing that? Was nobody in GTR saying, "This is going to be a major problem"—none of the trade unions, none of the staff or none of the individual drivers?

Charles Horton: We were clearly aware of an emerging risk. As I explained, there were a number of risks we were seeking to mitigate. We were in active dialogue within and outside the company about the issue. We were speaking to colleagues in Network Rail, as well as to colleagues in the Department, about the issues. What we were seeking to do, as it was our belief that it was the reasonable and responsible thing to do, was to find ways of mitigating a problem. We were very close to the implementation of a timetable. If we had said a week before, at the last minute, "Right, let's stop doing this," the consequences would have been even worse, across multiple franchise operators.

Q76 **Chair:** Was anybody saying to you, "This is not working. This is going to be a disaster"?

Charles Horton: It was only in that final week, on the Thursday before the timetable came in, that we realised the problem was more serious than we expected.

Q77 **Chair:** Before that final week you are saying that nobody—none of your staff or the trade unions—was saying to you, "This is going to be a problem."

Charles Horton: There was an active dialogue within the company, realising and looking at problems we had identified. There was also an active dialogue within the company to find solutions to those problems. We took many steps to try to tackle those issues in the final period before the timetable was introduced.

Nick Brown: It is worth mentioning, Chair, that the training programme for train drivers was never intended to be fully complete prior to 20 May. It was always going to run through 20 May, and that tied in with the phasing programme that the DfT authorised. As a consequence, not



HOUSE OF COMMONS

every driver was going to be trained on every last piece of route. We had to make a set of assumptions, as Mr Horton described.

I met some train drivers in passing, because I was out and about on the network. I was able to explain to them how that part of the plan was going to work. The work allocation for a depot would not require every driver to have that knowledge. We made and presented to the industry readiness board the assumptions, over a series of months, as to how we were going to train sufficient drivers to carry that through. Exactly as Mr Horton said, it worked and the contingency we had in place at the time of the timetable change meant that we had enough train drivers. It was the mismatch of skills and locations in the quantities that we needed, driven off the inability to optimise the drivers' schedules once we had received the timetable, that caught us in the last couple of days.

Q78 Grahame Morris: I will be brief because we are overrunning. On the training issues and the skill mix, I appreciate that David Brown said that as far as Northern Rail was concerned there were sufficient drivers, but there were issues about the skill mix. The problems are slightly different for GTR. In terms of anticipating requirements, particularly for GTR where the same issues were not involved—Blackpool and so on—and with the benefit of hindsight, what would you have done to try to resolve the problem, and to ensure that it does not happen again when the next timetable change comes in December?

Charles Horton: The answer is that by taking sufficient time in the planning phase, between the timetable being established and its being implemented, we could have found a way around a lot of the problems. We simply ran out of time to do what we would normally do when we face a major timetable change, which is to look for options to optimise things. We would have deployed the drivers in different locations, because when we saw the final timetable we realised that some of our assumptions were not quite right. We would have had more time to optimise the drivers' diagrams. We would probably have done that two, three or four times. The consultation with employees would have been undertaken at a much more sensible pace than we had to do it, and we would have had more time to tackle the sorts of issues that we faced around changing our plans for piloting drivers and mitigating the skills gaps where we put them in place.

That is why the period before the timetable introduction—the 12 weeks—is absolutely essential. If you can establish a timetable before 12 weeks out, which is all the better, you can do even more to deal with those sorts of risks.

Q79 Grahame Morris: I understand the nature of the network and the train operating companies. Our concern on this side of the Committee is about fragmentation and the problems that creates. Were there opportunities to work with other train operating companies to try to improve opportunities for training, maybe on electrified stretches of line that were not in your operational area? With hindsight, are there any lessons to be learned?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Charles Horton: One of the strengths of what has clearly resulted in a bad outcome for customers has been that there has been good co-operation across the industry, both overseeing the arrangements for the timetable change and having active dialogue between train operators and with Network Rail to make sure that we look for opportunities to do the sort of thing you said. Other companies have stepped up and helped us deal with the situation we are now facing to try to do a bit better for customers. The co-operation has been strong. It is simply about the fact that we are squeezing an activity that we would normally do over a much longer period of time into such a compressed period.

Q80 **Grahame Morris:** How much longer do you think you will have to rely on instructors and drivers from other companies to operate the services? How much longer will it be before you have sufficient trained drivers with the right skill mix to operate the services?

Nick Brown: We want to keep the piloting programme in place for a good few months yet, as an insurance as much as anything else. The programme has been in place for some time and we want to keep it going until all our drivers are trained through the core part of the network, which is key to the whole operation. There are other elements of learning as well. As I mentioned to the Chair just now, the programme for the whole introduction continues, with the train drivers being trained in other elements over the coming months.

Q81 **Jack Brereton:** I want to dig a bit deeper into the issue of training new drivers. We need to know a bit more. David Brown, you mentioned the fact that there is almost an anomaly in that drivers have a right to request new training, although there might not have been significant changes to the route. Why is that?

David Brown: The thing that triggered the additional training burden for us was that the infrastructure was closed for more than six months because of the delay in delivery. It is just a statement of straightforward fact. It was three weeks longer than it should have been, and it meant that the line was closed for six months. That triggers, quite rightly, the fact that drivers have to have training as if it is a new route. Even though it is only a small extension to a construction programme, it has significant consequences for the number of drivers. That was never in our plan, so part of introducing 450 drivers to this new route, effectively, was triggered by that six-month period.

Q82 **Jack Brereton:** How substantial would that training be if you were going to start on an entirely new route compared with training on a partial change of route? There must be some difference in the length of time?

David Brown: If it had been delivered within the six months, the training requirement would be far slimmer. That is within the programme. As soon as you go over the six-month period, drivers are entitled to a significant increase in the amount of training—at least five round trips on the route. Bear in mind that our drivers operating in Blackpool come from



HOUSE OF COMMONS

right across the business, so there are people from Liverpool, from Buxton, from Manchester and from Leeds and so on, because ours is such a complex and interwoven network. That training burden was not in the plan. It was only triggered because the infrastructure was delivered later than programmed.

Q83 Jack Brereton: These are set down in the rulebook for drivers. How long is it since it has been reviewed and updated?

David Brown: It is in the terms and conditions negotiated by the trade union for drivers. It varies across the country in different places. We are constantly looking to modernise those terms and conditions. We have a very good working relationship with drivers, but clearly when there is a new piece of infrastructure we want drivers to be fully trained.

Q84 Jack Brereton: How long is it since there have been improvements and full reviews of that rulebook?

David Brown: It is an ongoing process. It is not easy to sit down and just revise it.

Q85 Jack Brereton: So there have been none.

David Brown: Yes. There are ongoing discussions. We have just agreed an arrangement with ASLEF that, working forward, we will look at putting in place a new modernisation programme for them. Part of that will be looking at the overall terms and conditions for all the drivers across Northern.

Q86 Jack Brereton: Charles and Nick, do you want to add anything about the rulebook and whether it needs to be fully reviewed and updated?

Nick Brown: To give you an example, if I may, the closure of London Bridge to through trains for GTR meant that from January this year, when it was reopened, our drivers needed to be route-learned on the section between there and East Croydon, which has substantial amounts of new and very complicated infrastructure. There are very different patterns. Our first objective is to do that safely and in consultation with trade union members.

As to changes to the rulebook, it is inevitably a huge logistical task to make sure that you get your train drivers across routes sufficiently frequently, especially where long distances are concerned. In the Thameslink network, the distances are longer, inevitably. We need to ensure that they retain that knowledge over what we call a roster cycle, their normal pattern of work.

Q87 Chair: Is that route knowledge important to safety?

Charles Horton: Crucial.

Nick Brown: Yes.

Q88 Chair: It is not unreasonable that it appears in the rulebook; you believe



HOUSE OF COMMONS

it is necessary for safety.

Charles Horton: We do a detailed risk assessment for every route that our drivers drive over to make sure that the specific risks and hazards associated with that route are understood. We then train our drivers and make sure that they are aware of those risks. It is very easy to get into the mindset that it is something like a car, with colour light signals and things like that. You might think it is like that. It isn't.

You need to know which signal you are required to obey. You need to know absolutely what speed you should be operating at on different parts of the journey. You need to know what particular hazards and risks there may be on that part of the network. All that knowledge needs to be in your head, and you need to be able to use it without thinking, in an unconscious, competent way. It is not a trivial matter. It is absolutely fundamental to the safety of the railway.

Nick Brown: Day and night, and in all weathers.

Q89 **Chair:** People watching might have got the impression that these things were inflexible and unreasonable. I wanted to know from an industry perspective whether you believe that to be the case.

David Brown: No. As Charles said, it is absolutely essential for the safe operation of the railway.

Q90 **Iain Stewart:** We have covered most of the questions I was going to ask. I have a couple of supplementaries on one of the potential contributory factors for Northern. You were expecting a number of trains to be transferred from Scotland to bolster the new service pattern. Those have been delayed because the electric trains in Scotland had to be modified, and some of the HSTs were not delivered from the works in time. To what extent has the late arrival of those trains contributed to the problem?

Rob Warnes: In fact, it has not affected us. If anything, the work we have been doing with ScotRail has been very beneficial. We are to receive quite a lot of those trains later in the year. Scotland were able to give us some trains a bit earlier, and that has helped us. We were able to train our drivers in the Leeds area and are now operating four of those trains on the Leeds to Harrogate to York line very successfully. They have been very helpful to us, and we have been helpful to them in making sure the programme fits with some of the challenges they have with electrification.

Q91 **Iain Stewart:** Nigel Harris in an editorial in *Rail* magazine pinpointed that as perhaps one of the contributory factors to short formations of existing services. Is that not correct?

Rob Warnes: Not in the Northern network, no.

Q92 **Iain Stewart:** I have a final question. You have had a number of industrial disputes in recent months. Has that been a contributory factor?



David Brown: No. The RMT union is in dispute with Northern about our plans in the franchise for driver-controlled operation, but that has not affected this issue in particular.

Q93 **Iain Stewart:** It has not been about overtime bans or anything like that; it has been a case of drivers not being able to drive trains.

David Brown: No, separately we had a rest-day working agreement in place until December last year, which was extended to February. At that point, ASLEF decided not to extend the agreement further, but reinstated it on 7 June.

Q94 **Iain Stewart:** Predating that, didn't it contribute to the issue?

David Brown: They decided not to extend the rest-day working agreement in the middle of February this year. We wrote to them asking them to extend it, but they declined. That in itself adds a little bit of pressure to our training programme, but is not the root cause of it. The root cause is the additional training burden from the rewriting of the timetable and the Blackpool electrification.

Q95 **Steve Double:** I would like to look at the role of the industry readiness board. What was the IRB told in the run-up to the May timetable change?

Nick Brown: As I mentioned earlier, the industry readiness board has been sitting since January last year and has reviewed all the plans through the industry assurance panel. As I mentioned earlier, our proposals have been laid out for the assurance panel and reviewed and reported on at the industry readiness board.

My colleagues and I reported to the industry readiness board at the 4 May meeting, but not just at that meeting, where the challenge was around the quantum of work schedules, or diagrams, as you have heard, that came up as a consequence of the compressed timetable publication and then our work on it. We updated the board on that, and we identified what the risk was.

Q96 **Steve Double:** What did you tell them? Did you tell them that you had significant concerns about the impact?

Nick Brown: We said at the meeting at the beginning of May that there was a risk of cancellations as a consequence of the work we had not been able to do on the optimisation of the diagrams, and in consequence there would be a risk for a period of time—a few weeks—until that was mitigated. Also, as a consequence of the timetable process and what had come out of it, the gradient of improvement of the training programme that we had, which continued through 20 May and beyond, would be lowered slightly; and until we picked that up we would still need to put mitigation in place. Finally, we identified what mitigation we had put in place and what the risk was around that.

Q97 **Steve Double:** I am sorry to probe further. You said you had identified risks of cancellation. How high a risk and how many cancellations were



HOUSE OF COMMONS

you predicting at that point?

Nick Brown: The industry assurance report that went into that industry readiness board flagged it as red as a consequence of the diagram scrutiny process.

Q98 **Steve Double:** What was the scale of the cancellations?

Nick Brown: It was hard to determine at that point exactly how many it would be, because we were still putting the mitigations together, but it ran into several 10s and up to 100.

Q99 **Chair:** Can you tell me what red means in that context?

Nick Brown: High risk.

Q100 **Chair:** That was what I assumed. I just wanted to check. That was at the meeting on 4 May.

Nick Brown: Yes.

Q101 **Steve Double:** Do you believe that the IRB had opportunities to change the course of events?

Nick Brown: As we said before, this was a highly complicated timetable change, with many parties involved. There was almost a group-think: "Actually, what change could you have brought about at any point in time?" As a consequence, the mitigations we were able to identify at that point were the ones we placed our faith in. They were not the only mitigations. There were plenty that we and others were making as part of the programme. As we have said, it was the coming together of all those unforeseen things.

Q102 **Steve Double:** I appreciate that hindsight is a wonderful thing, but do you believe the IRB could have done any more at that point to call for a delay or postponement of the changes?

Nick Brown: If it had, the implications would have been worse because of the interworking across three Network Rail routes and the five other operators that were dovetailing with us. One of the complications of the timetabling process, which is a multi-party thing governed by the system operator, as I mentioned before, is that things that perhaps should have happened in parallel were actually happening in series. That is why the time ran out. Holding the mirror up, it was the fact that time was slipping away from us.

Although we were working very hard to mitigate the situation, at the time we made the call to brief the industry readiness board, we were not aware of the problem that came three days before the timetable change. It was exactly the same as in Northern, where the rosters are drawn up and the work is applied to them. At that moment, we realised that the skills mismatch with the location, and the skills and competence of the drivers to know those routes, was the late presenting thing. We did not know that at the last readiness board we had.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q103 **Chair:** You flagged that up to the industry readiness board as red. What is the point of the industry readiness board if they get a red flag but do not do anything?

Nick Brown: The readiness board was looking to us to help mitigate that. As it was flagged up from the assurance panel, it is one that you would probably have to ask other members of the readiness board about. They were obviously looking to us. It was not the only red flag that was there. There were others. We had lived with them for many months and mitigated them to varying degrees.

Q104 **Luke Pollard:** Does the IRB publish its minutes?

Nick Brown: I would need to check, but I think it does.

Q105 **Luke Pollard:** Would you be comfortable sharing minutes, especially of the meeting of 4 May, with the Committee?

Nick Brown: I would have to defer to the chairman of the industry readiness board on that.

Q106 **Luke Pollard:** But there is nothing that you would think could not be shared with the Committee investigating this. There are no skeletons in the closet in those minutes.

Nick Brown: Not as far as I am concerned, no.

Q107 **Luke Pollard:** It would be helpful to be able to see them, to see what is going on.

I want to ask about the new timetable change. Do you think the system is fit for purpose when it has two major changes of timetables in May and December, as we currently have at the moment?

Nick Brown: That is a very big question for one part of it. As we have described, our view is that the ORR must do its review into why this set of circumstances has come across two of the largest franchises in the country, and why a set of circumstances arriving at this point in time has given our passengers such a dreadful experience.

It is clear that collectively the industry processes have failed, and have failed passengers. We welcome the review if it helps identify a way forward through the industry processes and how they may need to be changed to deal with change on this scale. This is a culmination of huge investment in the rail network, in particular in the south-east to deliver the Thameslink project, and what we have done behind that. In terms of being found wanting as far as what we finally deliver to the passengers is concerned, we question whether the processes are as fit for purpose as they could be.

Q108 **Luke Pollard:** The Gibb report suggested that the timetable changes be phased in over eight different changes, which was eventually reduced to four different changes. In the changes we are expecting in December, what proportion, compared with the ones in May, will you be planning in



HOUSE OF COMMONS

December?

Nick Brown: Most of the eight phases happened before 20 May. The first phase of what was the rephased part was 20 May, and that was endorsed by the Department for Transport in autumn 2017. The changes step up, with an extra two trains per hour sequentially. The plan is for December, for May, and then for the following December.

Our experience thus far has been that we want to tread very carefully and very cautiously as to what the next step up would be. It would be unwise after this experience to promise to do something at this stage that actually took on even greater risk and possibly exported risk to other parts of the national rail network.

Q109 **Luke Pollard:** You were speaking about how many weeks you need for preparation of timetables. There are not that many weeks to prepare, based on the numbers you gave, before the December timetable. Are you confident that the December timetable change will go smoothly?

Nick Brown: The issue around the timetable change comes back to the phasing as well a little bit. As Mr Horton described before, we bid our proposed timetable to Network Rail through the system operator, in accordance with the industry processes, in August last year. The proposal that came back from Network Rail in November needed further work. The phasing of the timetable had then been endorsed by the Department. That was one of two elements that actually led to the increase in workload as to why the timetable development was protracted over a period of time.

Q110 **Luke Pollard:** That seems a lot of words to use instead of saying, "Yes, I think it is going to go smoothly in December," "No, I don't think it is going to go smoothly," or "I don't know."

Nick Brown: It is giving you the background to understand that we have to get the timetable straight now.

Q111 **Luke Pollard:** Which of those three options do you think you are in? You do not know whether it is going to go smoothly, you think it will or you have concerns.

Nick Brown: We want to get this timetable as right as we possibly can, with the ingredients that go into it, as we have described, and then take a view for December. The planning process under the industry rules is under way for December as we speak.

Q112 **Luke Pollard:** Have the DFT asked you to do anything differently with the next timetable change?

Nick Brown: Not at the moment.

Q113 **Luke Pollard:** With the state of chaos that was caused in this one, you have had no instructions, given the management contract you have with the DFT, to do anything different for the next stage.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Nick Brown: I expect the Department to be in discussion with us soon as to how we front up to the December timetable and subsequent stages, but I think their focus, as is ours, is definitely on getting this timetable right, as it is for our colleagues in the north.

Q114 **Chair:** I have two final questions. I will ask you to write to us about others. Just now you said there were several red flags, but it still went ahead. Do you think that was wise?

Nick Brown: Red flags come and go from the assurance panel in the industry readiness board. They have come and gone over the 18 months.

Charles Horton: May I explain? Normal business in the assurance panel is that it highlights a risk. We have a discussion about the risk and how it can be mitigated. Once the mitigating action is taken, you would expect the risk to come down in terms of its level of severity. That is the normal process, and in my view the assurance panel is doing its job then. If it highlights a risk—

Q115 **Chair:** But it did not do its job, and that is what we are trying to understand.

Charles Horton: We are explaining that that was a particular risk that emerged very late in the day, and the time to take mitigating action was much compressed. That was the issue we faced, but there was an active process within the industry and within our company to look for risks, to identify the risks and to take mitigating action. That is responsible and sensible project management in those terms.

Q116 **Chair:** But in the end ineffective. David, I want to ask a question about Northern. You said earlier that you had all the rolling stock you need at the moment. Can you explain to me why we still have the Lakes line running with buses?

David Brown: Within a week of the timetable, we pulled together a plan that reduced the number of trains we were operating for an eight-week period through to the end of July. That meant that we planned on the basis that we could tell people that those trains were not running rather than having short-notice cancellations. That has added and brought a lot of stability to the network. It has given customers a lot more certainty about what we are doing. Part of that was temporarily to withdraw the train service on the Lakes line. That is partly because we need to get the drivers from Barrow and Blackpool trained on that network. That was one of our outstanding training requirements.

Secondly, the level of service we were providing there was not fit for purpose for customers. The decision that we took was to provide a high-quality coach and bus service to give people certainty. It was something we put in place, and we have now agreed with the Department for Transport and Transport for the North that we will reintroduce train services on that branch line on 2 July. That is when we will be confident



HOUSE OF COMMONS

of providing a higher quality of train service, and it will be reintroduced on 2 July.

Q117 **Chair:** I don't know whether passengers will feel that the certainty that there are no trains is an adequate answer.

Time has defeated us. I am going to ask you a number of questions and I want you to write to me with the answers, if you don't mind. These are particularly important to passengers, but also to the Committee.

First, I want to know what steps you are taking to put things right, and when you expect those steps to take effect, so that when people come to the station, the train you have said is operating will operate. I particularly want to understand why the emergency or interim timetables are not being adequately delivered. Why is there still a level of cancellations? I appreciate that those things will not be exactly the same on the two different networks we are talking about.

Secondly, I want you to explain why communication with customers has been so poor. We have seen comments about the quality of information on websites. Staff at stations are not adequately briefed or able to answer people's questions. There are some pretty appalling responses on social media, and people have been blocked from social media for asking perfectly legitimate questions.

We would like to know what you are doing to compensate passengers and when that compensation will be paid. Finally, although I know we have touched on this, how do you think people can possibly feel confident that December's timetable change will be implemented effectively, given that it is even bigger than the one that has just taken place in May?

I look forward to your responses. We may call witnesses back at a later date. That concludes our questions to the first panel today. Thank you.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Jo Kaye, John Halsall and Martin Frobisher.

Q118 **Chair:** Welcome, and thank you for coming along. For the record of our proceedings would you please introduce yourselves?

Martin Frobisher: My name is Martin Frobisher and I am managing director for the London north-western route for Network Rail.

Jo Kaye: My name is Jo Kaye. I am the managing director of the system operator part of Network Rail.

John Halsall: I am John Halsall. I am the route managing director for the south-east route for Network Rail.

Q119 **Chair:** This is primarily a question for you, Jo. Network Rail describes the timetabling process as "a very complex process that seeks to balance the ambitions of all train operators." Are timetable changes made predominantly for the commercial benefit of train operators and freight



HOUSE OF COMMONS

operators?

Jo Kaye: Timetables are changed for a number of reasons, predominantly to provide more or different journey opportunities for passengers. They may be faster journey times, they may be connections that did not exist previously between cities or they may be to increase the frequency of services. There are a number of things that might drive a train operating company to suggest to us that they want to make a change to their services.

Q120 **Chair:** Do you think that changing the timetable every six months produces sufficient demonstrable benefits to passengers across the network? Are passengers seeing an improvement to their services?

Jo Kaye: Clearly if those changes go well—obviously I would be the first to say that this one has not gone well, a fact for which I am deeply sorry—they can provide significant benefits. The fact that the timetable changes twice a year has emerged from custom and practice in the industry, right from when railways were first invented. If the process is followed properly, it effectively gives a stable amount of time both for the timetable to be constructed and for operators to get ready for the change in the way you have just heard witnesses talk about.

Q121 **Chair:** Describing it as “not gone well” is something of an understatement. You have just heard the evidence we have taken. Given the problems identified, shouldn’t Network Rail have told the train operators that the timetable was going to be rolled over, perhaps for six or eight weeks? Could that have been done? If it could not have been done, why not? If it could, why didn’t you do it?

Jo Kaye: Maybe I can give a bit of context to the background to the May 2018 timetable change, which I think will help answer your question, although it may take me a moment or two. The May timetable change was the biggest that has been attempted on the network in recent history. It was four times the average that we have done in previous changes, and was the culmination of a huge amount of investment in both the north of England and the south-east.

The first version of the timetable was completed on time in November last year, but three things then happened that made the timetable we had just completed invalid. The first was that we discovered that the electrification of the Bolton line would not be completed on time, so that element of the timetable needed to be rewritten. The timetable that we had completed simply could not work without that infrastructure in place.

Secondly, in the south of England, as you heard, the Thameslink phasing decision was taken. Given that that decision was to downgrade the level of risk expected in the timetable, again we felt we had to attempt a rewrite to manage better the risk that people foresaw. Thirdly, from a national perspective, although it is not the key focus of this Committee today, the non-availability of some rolling stock in Scotland meant that the timetable we had written for Scotland was not going to work either.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

The culmination of those three things forced us to rewrite huge elements of the national timetable, and that rewrite is the thing that took us longer than we had hoped. It obviously severely compressed the amount of time that operators had for readiness for May 2018, on which you have just taken evidence from them.

Q122 Chair: I am not sure I got an answer to my question. Could you have rolled it over for six or eight weeks? Could you have given yourself the extra time you just said you required?

Jo Kaye: If we had rolled the timetable over, we would have had to roll over the whole national timetable. There are a number of operators operating on the network today. The national timetable is a culmination of all those things pieced together, and they all work together. For example, Northern works across parts of the network that are also heavily used by other train operators. There was not the simple option of just continuing with one plan for one operator, because we had already made changes for other train operators who use the same infrastructure. That is why we had to rewrite the timetable rather than just roll it over. To roll over the national timetable would have lost the benefits of the May timetable change for other parts of the network.

Q123 Chair: But would it have been better to maintain the existing timetable for a longer period to allow that rewrite to happen? I understand that it would have delayed benefits for some people, but you are setting that against causing massive disruption for something like 35% of the network.

Jo Kaye: Absolutely. You have taken evidence from our colleagues that we all believed that the mitigations we were putting in place and the rewrite we were doing would produce a better outcome for passengers. That clearly turned out not to be the case, but the intent of the rewrite of the timetable was to manage those risks better and to deal with the consequences of the non-availability of rolling stock and infrastructure to produce a better outcome for customers. We believed—albeit with hindsight that was clearly incorrect—that those things could be managed in the time available and still deliver the timetable change.

Q124 Chair: Did you consider delaying the implementation of the timetable?

Jo Kaye: As Northern stated, they asked us to consider rolling over their timetable. The difficulty was that we could not just simply maintain one operator with one plan when other train operators were moving to a different plan. When a timetable is so interlinked in that way, that simply is not possible. That is why we went for the rewrite option.

Q125 Graham Stringer: Surely it would have been possible, given the level of chaos that has ensued on what we are told is 11% of the network, to delay the whole system. A lot of passengers would have been better off.

Jo Kaye: It was an option that was considered, but it was discounted because we believed that the mitigations we were putting in place, and



HOUSE OF COMMONS

the rewrite that was attempted, would be delivered in time to enable the timetable change to go ahead, with all the benefits for others, in a controlled way.

Q126 Graham Stringer: Do you regret that decision?

Jo Kaye: Clearly that is one of the things I look back on and ask myself whether or not we could have foreseen the consequences of proceeding with a timetable rewrite in quite the way they manifested themselves. Yes, I would probably look at that decision again differently. That is absolutely why we are looking very hard again at the plans for December and asking operators to re-examine their ambitions for the December timetable change, so that, if changes are necessary to what people want to do in December, we can handle those now and give them the maximum possible amount of time to prepare for December.

Q127 Daniel Zeichner: You say “we” made that decision. Was the Department for Transport part of the decision-making process?

Jo Kaye: The decisions surrounding timetabling belong to the whole industry. There is a network code that covers those things, and it covers all the industry parties. The individual decisions on the deferral of the Bolton electrification and on the phasing of the Thameslink timetable implementation had a level of DFT involvement in the way that was described by previous witnesses.

Q128 Daniel Zeichner: But was that overall big decision—a really big decision about the trade-off of potential benefits against potential risks—made by the board that brings all those people together? Was it made by you? Who finally made that decision?

Jo Kaye: We have previously described that at a national level there is no single organisation or guiding mind that would make that decision. Those things were done appropriately, and had DFT involvement in the specific circumstances. Ultimately, the decision to proceed with the rewrite was something that the system operator proposed, after discussions with the industry, and that was accepted.

Daniel Zeichner: I am not sure that I understand that answer.

Q129 Chair: Accepted by whom?

Jo Kaye: By the industry. The code that runs the timetabling process is owned and managed by the industry.

Q130 Chair: Who was party to the discussions where you decided, “Okay, these are the risks of going ahead. This is what we are planning to do. This is the mitigation and we think we can do it”? Who signs that off? Who is in the room when that decision is made?

Jo Kaye: Many industry members are in the room. In the case of the Bolton electrification deferral, for example, there is a programme board. It has Network Rail representatives; all the train operators are involved in it, as well as some of the client organisations you have heard from, and



HOUSE OF COMMONS

the Department for Transport. It is very much an industry decision-making process.

- Q131 **Iain Stewart:** When you were considering and rejecting the call to roll over the timetable, did you or anyone else say, "Hang on, we need to escalate this right up to the top of the DFT"? Did anyone make that call?

Jo Kaye: I do not think we can evidence that that was the case. As we have described, the industry is very much in the mindset of identifying and mitigating risks. We all believed right up until the very last minute, as previous witnesses said, that the actions we had taken and the mitigations we had put in place would address those risks. That clearly turned out not to be the case.

- Q132 **Iain Stewart:** We heard from Northern that it was aware in January that there was a significant problem. Did no one say, "Hang on, this is going outwith the usual risk element"?

Jo Kaye: Everyone in the industry was clear that the decisions we had to take to rewrite the timetable were outside the normal industry processes. That was very clear in all the discussions we had, but I go back to the fact that, if the infrastructure was not going to be available, it would have been foolish to continue with a plan that simply would not work.

Similarly, the decision to phase Thameslink was about reducing the risk of the implementation of that timetable. Had we not proceeded with a timetable rewrite, we would have been attempting to make an even bigger change in May. In the case of Scotland, you have to have the trains to enable that to work. Those decisions and the risk mitigations were believed to be the right and proper ones at the time, in the circumstances we faced.

- Q133 **Chair:** Does the network code specify the whole timetabling process?

Jo Kaye: It does, yes.

- Q134 **Chair:** Do you think it is too inflexible? Should it be changed? Was it changed in any way ahead of that major timetable change?

Jo Kaye: The network code has had some minor changes over the years, but in essence it has existed in its current form for a number of years. This and other circumstances have led me to believe that it is time for a rewrite of the code. It has strengths in some ways, in that it sets out adequate amounts of time for planning if things are followed properly, but it clearly has weaknesses when, for reasons perhaps beyond your immediate control, you are not able to stick to those timescales.

We would certainly be very supportive of looking again at the network code. I would expect that to be a feature of the ORR review of the overall process. I expect that they would be very interested in what elements of it could, and should, be reviewed. We would support the review and would be willing to participate fully.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q135 **Chair:** Yes or no: were any changes made to the network code ahead of May?

Jo Kaye: No significant ones, no.

Q136 **Chair:** Do you anticipate any changes being made to the network code ahead of December?

Jo Kaye: No.

Q137 **Chair:** I want to check some of the timelines and compare them with what we heard earlier. On the Bolton electrification, were you saying that you became aware of that in November rather than in January, as Northern said earlier?

Jo Kaye: No. Martin will comment in more detail, but the decision to delay Bolton was taken in January.

Martin Frobisher: I would like to start by saying sorry for the difficulties that we have caused to passengers. I live in the north, and friends and family have seen the effects that this has caused. I am particularly sorry for the impact we have caused for Mr Stringer, his constituents and others.

The context is the great north rail project. We are doing a vast and complicated upgrade of the network, and the north really needs the great north rail project. It is absolutely essential to improve the infrastructure for the north. We had some difficulties with the project, particularly on the Bolton line. We had some very difficult ground conditions. We started sinking pile foundations and they filled with running sand. We took a closure of the line and there was a water main burst at Moses Gate, so we had to focus on fixing the bridge abutment rather than doing the work. That put the project behind.

By the time we got to 5 January, we faced a choice, either to close the line for five weeks to proceed with the project and get it built, which would have involved busing in 10,000 people per day from places such as Bolton, or to do the May timetable on a different basis, in compressed timescales. We sat down with all the industry parties—the Department for Transport, Rail North and the train operators—and took the decision that the right thing was to do the May timetable in compressed timescales. We believed that was better than closing the line for five weeks.

Q138 **Chair:** Do you think that was the right decision?

Martin Frobisher: Yes.

Q139 **Chair:** Did you think it was the right decision at the time?

Martin Frobisher: Bussing 10,000 people per day from Bolton for five weeks was clearly unacceptable. We believed at the time that we could re-plan this for the May timetable. That was the basis on which the whole industry reached consensus. At the time, with the facts and the information available, I genuinely believed that to be the correct decision.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q140 **Chair:** That decision was made at the beginning of January. I do not dispute that there were difficulties and that you encountered ground conditions that you had not anticipated, but should you have realised that the electrification work was going to be delayed before you got to January?

Martin Frobisher: We experienced problems with the foundations through the summer and autumn of 2017. We found technical solutions to those problems, but at a programme board meeting on 4 December we believed a two-week closure of the line would allow us to recover the programme. By the beginning of January, it was clear that that was a five-week closure. Progress through the autumn and over the Christmas bank holiday period was difficult, and that led us to a decision on 5 January that I believe was correct.

Q141 **Chair:** It sounds to me as if you had underestimated the risk. You could have anticipated earlier in the process that the Bolton electrification was not going to happen over the Christmas period and that you were not going to catch up. Is that right?

Martin Frobisher: We genuinely believed that it was possible to recover the programme with a short line closure through to December, but by January it was absolutely clear that it would have required a five-week line closure and really difficult circumstances for many people who commute from places such as Bolton. That was the basis on which we made our decision.

Q142 **Chair:** John, when was the Thameslink phasing decision made, and could it have been made earlier?

John Halsall: Conversations around phasing started in June. That is when it was first minuted in the IRB. It was probably being talked about informally before then, but June was the first formal moment when it was minuted. Fairly intense dialogue took place at various industry readiness boards, and, I think, between GTR and the Department, until the decision in November.

Q143 **Chair:** That is a long time to make a decision about phasing. Why was that?

John Halsall: That is best answered by the Department and GTR, to be honest.

Q144 **Chair:** Would it have been helpful if they had made that decision faster? The answer to that is obvious.

John Halsall: Yes. From a south-eastern perspective, there was a series of issues that delayed the timetabling process. It started with the decision around the phasing. That slowed down the process of GTR submitting the timetable proposal to Network Rail. That then meant that Network Rail responded slower, and, as I think Charles and Nick said earlier, that compressed the timescale so that they struggled to produce the driver diagrams. Any one of those could have been tightened up.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

The only point I would make is that all through that process the industry readiness board was discussing the risks associated with those decisions at those points in time and still felt that we could deliver the May timetable.

Q145 Chair: Jo, you talked about the industry culture of mitigating risks and solving problems. It is not a bad thing to mitigate risks and work out how to solve problems, but is it possible that that culture stops you seeing the big picture?

Jo Kaye: That is something we all need to reflect on in the light of this. As I said, we are very good at identifying and mitigating individual risks. Stepping back and taking a look at those risks in the round, in a different way, would probably have been helpful in this context. That is all within an organisation and an industry acutely aware of capacity crunch and the need for more services. Everyone was absolutely in a spirit of hugely positive forward momentum to make those changes happen for the benefit of passengers in the round. Perhaps something about the culture of being so keen to deliver blinded us in some ways to some of the risk.

Q146 Chair: You said that the rewrite took longer than you had hoped. I am aware that Network Rail were asked to make efficiency savings in relation to their timetabling operations in CP5, despite there being such huge timetabling requirements. Do you think that the resourcing of your timetabling operations had any impact on your ability to respond in the timescale you had?

Jo Kaye: I do not think that was a material factor. It is right that in the original control period five settlement there was an expectation of significant efficiencies in the team towards the last two years of the control period, where we are now. We realised those when we were assessing the workload for the last couple of years, and we reversed the changes.

Clearly recruitment and retention is still a challenge for us, and we work very hard on that, but I do not believe it was a material factor. We have a large team of hugely professional and very dedicated individuals, who have had to deal with an awful lot of the consequences of some of the things we have discussed here. They have done a really good job in difficult circumstances.

Q147 Chair: Do they feel unfairly blamed for the chaos?

Jo Kaye: They deal with the consequences of things that go on elsewhere in the industry. In both Network Rail and the train operators, planning resource is precious. They are a huge bunch of great people and they have done a really good job, and will continue to do a good job in the difficult circumstances that face us now.

Q148 Graham Stringer: I want to be clear about this. In answer to a previous question about whether, when things started going wrong, the Secretary of State was told what was happening, I think you said that the industry



HOUSE OF COMMONS

was told but not necessarily the Secretary of State. Network Rail is a publicly owned company. I am surprised, if that was the answer, that you did not tell the person who stands in for the owner. Have I understood that properly?

Jo Kaye: What you have heard from myself and my colleagues, and from previous witnesses, is that the industry did not have clarity of sight of the risk, so they were not really in a position to tell others. In individual cases of particular projects or circumstances, the DFT was involved, but the situation we found ourselves in was not clear to us until extremely late, as you heard from colleagues previously.

Q149 **Graham Stringer:** I was not trying to ask the same question as I asked the previous witnesses. I was just trying to understand the answer you gave about the Bolton issue and whether you told the Secretary of State at that particular time about the problem.

Jo Kaye: Martin can answer in terms of the DFT's involvement.

Martin Frobisher: We have a regular programme board with the Department for Transport officers. They were present at the meeting on 5 January when we took clear decisions about the Bolton project. I genuinely believe that to be the right decision. There was consensus across the industry; it was not just the Department for Transport and Network Rail. It was a difficult decision, but I genuinely believed it to be the right decision at the time.

Q150 **Graham Stringer:** Was there a fault in the survey work that meant you found ground conditions that you were not expecting?

Martin Frobisher: I do not think there was a fault in the survey work. It is very patchy. There were 1,660 foundations to sink, which is a huge number along a 25-mile section, so it was a hugely complex project. As we sank many of those foundations, we found running sand and difficult ground conditions. It was a difficult project. We found technical solutions, but that led to the delays I have described.

Q151 **Graham Stringer:** How many people are involved in the timetabling process in Network Rail? This may be a question that you cannot answer, but it is an interesting question: how would that compare with how many people were involved under the British Rail system?

Jo Kaye: I certainly cannot answer your last question, I am afraid. I have never made that comparison. My team consists of around 450 people at Milton Keynes on timetabling in all its forms.

Q152 **Jack Brereton:** We have heard about the problems we experienced along the way with this timetabling. It was going to be quite an unusually complex timetable change from the start. At what point did you actually know that it was going to be a timetable change of such complexity?

Jo Kaye: The process begins when operators submit their plans to us. For the May timetable change, they submitted their plans to us in the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

previous August, so we were aware in August 2017 of the magnitude of the task for May 2018. We spent the next four months developing the timetable and piecing together the plans to create the overall national timetable. We completed that on time in November. That is one of the factors that gave us confidence that it could be delivered. We had actually achieved the first milestone, which was to deliver a first draft of the timetable on time.

Q153 Jack Brereton: Do you think there are sufficient processes in place for when things go wrong, like this? Are there mitigation measures to reduce the potential risks?

Jo Kaye: We have talked about looking for individual mitigations to individual problems. In light of this, and going back to the Chair's previous question about the network code, we should consider as an industry the maximum amount of change we try to make at any one timetable change. That is currently not built into the code. The code is silent on the amount of change you should ever attempt. Certainly something I would be looking for in a review of the network code would be a limit set by the industry for itself, to make sure that we do not look to achieve something extremely ambitious at any timetable change in the future.

Q154 Jack Brereton: As we have heard, Northern was asked to do a complete rewrite in a much shorter period than would usually be acceptable. Do you think that was right?

Jo Kaye: The circumstances were such that there were few options. The infrastructure that supported its original plan, which it had already written and submitted to us, simply was not going to be available, for the reasons Martin described. We could not proceed with a timetable that simply was not going to work, so some element of a rewrite had to be achieved. In this case, as you heard, the Northern timetable was rewritten. Because of its interaction with other operators, it was not possible to roll forward the timetable that was already there.

Q155 Jack Brereton: In asking those operators to rewrite the timetable in a much shorter time than would usually be acceptable, couldn't those issues have been foreseen—that there would be problems in asking them to do something that would normally not be seen as possible?

Jo Kaye: We knew it would be a huge challenge. I think you heard that from others. I think you also heard from others, and I concur, that we believed that we could do it. While it was being done to acknowledge the compressed timetable—

Q156 Jack Brereton: Do you think that belief was wrong?

Jo Kaye: In hindsight, absolutely, but our options were very limited. Some element of a rewrite had to be done to take account of the fact that the infrastructure was not going to be available. It was not an option just



HOUSE OF COMMONS

to continue with the previous timetable in isolation, because of the interaction with other operators.

Martin Frobisher: For the north, during the period January to May, we had a regular series of timetable readiness meetings with the train operators. That is a normal industry process. There is an approved code of practice for that. What was happening was that the timetable and crew diagrams were being re-planned while we held those meetings. Our industry-approved code of practice is very much designed around normal timetable planning cycles, and I do not think those meetings were as effective, because re-planning was taking place during that time.

Q157 **Jack Brereton:** Are you saying it does not really accommodate emergency situations when things change?

Martin Frobisher: Our industry-approved code of practice is designed for normal planning timescales. What happened was compressed. Everybody knew that the timescales were compressed, and that meant that our readiness checks were less effective than they should have been.

Q158 **Chair:** Are the industry readiness meetings you have described just between the train operators and Network Rail?

Martin Frobisher: The industry readiness meetings are between Network Rail and the train operators. In this case, it was Northern, TransPennine Express and two Network Rail routes. Separately, with oversight throughout the industry, we have a programme board across the north which is a DFT forum.

Q159 **Chair:** Was the programme board also aware of the issues?

Martin Frobisher: The programme board was aware of the compressed timescales, but, as previous witnesses have said, the real issues with crewing and the difficulties with the May timetable emerged only at the very end of the process.

Q160 **Chair:** Jo, you suggested in answer to Jack that there should be potential for changing the code and wondered whether there should be a cap on the level of changes in any one timetable period. Wouldn't it be difficult to do that when there are franchise specifications that determine the level of service an operator is required to provide? Is there potential for a mismatch? If the franchise specification says that you must provide this sort of timetable, it would not necessarily fit with the cap you described.

Jo Kaye: In the longer term, it would necessitate franchise specifications to take that matter into account. The Department and other franchise specifiers would need to think about how the benefits they wanted to see in a new timetable would fit within any potential cap. It would have a longer-term effect. In the next couple of timetable changes, we need to take a good hard look at what is planned, to avoid a repeat of what we have seen.

Q161 **Chair:** Was Network Rail consulted about the franchise specifications and



HOUSE OF COMMONS

their impact on the May 2018 timetable?

Jo Kaye: We have been involved to various degrees. Some of the franchises are more recent. As I may have mentioned to the Committee before, our role as a system operator has been enhanced so that we have a greater role in specification. Equally, some of the franchises were let some years ago, prior to our being involved in the same way as we are today. There is a real mix in the level at which we were consulted on the specifications when they were set.

Q162 **Chair:** In relation to the ones we are talking about, did you warn DFT that the franchise specifications might create timetabling difficulties?

Jo Kaye: Previous Committees have heard our views on the original Thameslink specification. That is one of the reasons why we were clearly so supportive of the attempts to phase that implementation in the way that was ultimately decided, albeit later than was ideal.

Martin Frobisher: What we are really trying to do is to deliver the great north rail project. That is about bringing 2,000 extra services every week to the north, and it requires infrastructure and timetable change. Ultimately, it is about delivering a better service for people in the north, and we need it.

Chair: I do not think anyone will argue with the ambition; it is the delivery.

Q163 **Daniel Zeichner:** There seems to me to be a slight contradiction. Jo, you have been saying that in retrospect it was over-ambitious, yet also that it had to be done. I am not clear how you balance that. Looking forward to the future, would you say that trying to make four times the number of changes you do in a normal timetable change is just too much? Where would you pitch it? What would actually be achievable?

Jo Kaye: I have not formed a clear view on the level at which a cap should be set. That is a discussion that needs to be thought through long and hard, rather than just alighting on a number in short order. I would not say that we were over-ambitious, but we were very ambitious, and rightly ambitious, because we were ambitious for the people we wanted to deliver benefits for. With hindsight, you might describe it as over-ambitious, but at the time we were rightly committed to making those changes in the way we wanted.

Q164 **Daniel Zeichner:** There was a discussion going on about whether to do phasing or not, and how it should be done. Why was that got wrong? In retrospect, it looks like it was got wrong and it was over-ambitious.

Jo Kaye: The original plan was the full, complete introduction of the Thameslink timetable, the 24 trains an hour. The intention of the phased approach was to reduce that level of ambition so that we stepped it up a little more gradually. From a timetabling perspective, that may sound relatively straightforward; you are running less trains so it should not be difficult, but the way in which a railway timetable is constructed, both in



HOUSE OF COMMONS

terms of how the resources are allocated and its interaction with lots of other operators, meant it was not just a simple deletion of some of GTR's trains.

The interactions with other services and the five other operators who were affected—significantly, freight operators as well—meant that what might look like a simple set of deletions on the face of it, turned out to be a much more complex process in which a set of changes were made and then further amendments were required to make that successful. That is why rewriting the timetable took longer than we might have hoped.

It is of note that the rewriting of the timetable took about as long as it takes us to write a full timetable in the first place. When you consider the level of change we had to make, on the face of it that may not be entirely unreasonable.

Q165 Daniel Zeichner: I will put the same question to John that I put earlier about Peter Hendy's prediction three years ago that it was over-ambitious. What do you think now, looking back?

John Halsall: What is interesting is that we are understandably focused on the word "timetable," but we have not talked at all about the wider issues. In terms of the industry readiness board, in an agenda of eight or nine items, there was one item called "Timetable." There were items about stations, fleet, drivers, infrastructure, training and how to operate and maintain the system differently. All those different moving parts feed in to allow the thing called the timetable to work.

Not only did we have a massive timetable change in terms of the mathematics of timetables, but a massive number of significant moving parts had to be synchronised with the mathematics of timetable change. It was a combination of all those elements that caught us out in this terrible way—not just the word "timetable," which understandably we have focused on. That is the culmination.

To answer your question, in hindsight we were patently too ambitious. We were super-ambitious when we were thinking of going for the two-phase. We were still too ambitious with the four-phase. It was the right decision to change it, but what we collectively failed to do as an industry was to recognise the point, probably in November, that it was too ambitious and that there were risks associated with delivering it. Hindsight is a wonderful thing, but that is the truth of it. I echo what colleagues have said in sincere apology. I know this is devastating for people's lives.

Q166 Chair: It is not simply a failure to identify and manage risks. Isn't it a failure of governance?

John Halsall: The industry readiness board failed to deliver its primary goal, which was a successful roll-out of the May timetable. There is no question about that. I have reflected an awful lot, as you would expect, about where things have gone wrong and where we failed as a collective



HOUSE OF COMMONS

of 20 hugely experienced railway people—where we missed it. The truth of it is that there was a tiny moment that I can see, round about November, when the final decision was arrived at with respect to the change from the two to the four-phase. That was later than we hoped, but it was the one moment in time when as an industry we could have put our foot on the ball and said, “No, stop,” and raised a flag at a moment when it would not have caused complete national mayhem.

Why did we not, at that point, put our foot on the ball? The answer is that at that point every member of the board and their respective teams believed they could deliver it. It plays to the culture that Charles, Nick and Dave talked about, but also earlier on. When we set up the industry readiness board, it was obviously to make this programme succeed. There were many challenges associated with it. If the board had adopted the approach, every time a red risk materialised, of saying, “This isn’t going to happen,” we would not have progressed at all. That “can do and get on with it” approach, which was so helpful up to a point, was actually the problem when we got to the split second when we could have put our foot on the ball: everybody said, “No, we can do this, and we must push on.”

Once we got past November, as previous witnesses have articulated, it was a matter of, “Is there a work-around? Can we work through this? Can we come up with a mitigation?” We felt every time that we could, until we finally got to the compressed point in terms of driver skills.

Q167 Chair: How would you change the industry readiness board, or the process, so that there is somebody who does not have that kind of attitude, somebody who is going to say, “Hang on, you’re just being over-optimistic”? Because you were over-optimistic, you underestimated the risks, which led to a catastrophic decision.

John Halsall: We have already talked about the proposition of a single accountable controlling mind or body, something outside the industry readiness board. As Charles pointed out, it did not have executive powers; its power came from the component executives who sat on it. The lack of a single accountable body, person or party definitely made a difference.

Q168 Huw Merriman: One thing about the rail industry is that it is very collegiate, so we often hear, “It was a collective failure.” The difficulty for us as a Committee is in trying to work out which bits are responsible and how change can ever happen. It is very difficult to penetrate that. That being said, Mr Halsall, am I right in saying that GTR, for example, should not have made any changes in the timetabling as soon as the 12-week period was about to run, to allow a lockdown for the changes to be made? If that is the case, did they make any changes from the 12 weeks counting down towards timetable day?

Jo Kaye: Under normal circumstances, yes, we would strongly discourage operators from making changes after the timetable has been



HOUSE OF COMMONS

published, and certainly within the 12-week window. As we have already said, we were working to timescales that took us beyond that in these circumstances, which meant that operators were continuing to make changes much closer to the timetable change day.

Q169 Huw Merriman: I understand that with Northern there were some overruns with regard to the asset, but with GTR that was not the case. Network Rail had delivered what it was required to deliver.

Jo Kaye: Yes, on instruction.

Q170 Huw Merriman: On that basis, why, when the timetabling issues came up on the Sunday and it was apparent that things were not working, did Network Rail get the public criticism that it was chiefly their responsibility, when from what I have just described with regard to GTR it would seem to be their responsibility? Did you take one for the team?

John Halsall: I am not sure whether that was aimed at the northern situation or the southern situation. It was mixed up a little bit as it was reported. I completely understand how beneficial it would be for all parties in the event that we could say that there was one person or body solely responsible for the situation.

The first problem arose with the late change from the two to the four-phase timetable. Was that the right decision at the time? Yes, it felt like the right decision at the time. Did we believe that collectively? We have talked about the make-up of the industry readiness board. It had four or maybe five different operators, the Department, the Office of Rail Regulation, the system operator and two notable railway people who were independently chairing it, with representatives from the infrastructure. Twenty people all looked at this and said, "We can do it," so we collectively made the decision.

We then got into a position where GTR worked their socks off to get the timetable submitted as soon as possible, but it took a bit longer. We then got into a position whereby the timetable had to be reviewed by the system operator, which took a bit longer. Finally, we compressed the timetable. At any point in that time, the industry readiness board could have collectively raised the red flag; indeed, individuals within it could have raised the red flag. As much as I appreciate the Committee's need to identify a single responsible party, there was a collective industry failure.

Q171 Huw Merriman: That was my point. In the early days, it seemed to be suggested that there was one individual party, and it was Network Rail. That was what seemed to be put out. What you are talking about is more of an industry failure.

Jo Kaye: We and other witnesses have given you a feel for the fact that this is a complex situation, and a number of items came together. Some of the early reporting probably reflected the fact that people did not fully understand the number of issues at play.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q172 **Huw Merriman:** Do you think it was unfair, on the basis that, as you have described it, there was a failing of the industry as a whole, for Network Rail, very quickly it would seem, to have been identified as chiefly responsible?

Jo Kaye: We have been really clear that we acknowledge that we absolutely played a role in this. We are very sorry for the consequences of that, so it is right that we were identified as part of the issue.

Q173 **Huw Merriman:** In a way, this demonstrates the challenge for us. You are acknowledging that you are partly responsible, which is very admirable, but my point is that from the outside, seemingly, you were blamed for being chiefly responsible, which I do not think you acknowledge is fair, but you are not actually saying that. It is very difficult for us, or for me, to have confidence that things can be put right when allocating responsibility is incredibly difficult to penetrate.

John Halsall: First of all, Stephen Glaister's review will put a spotlight on this discussion, but from a south-east route perspective I would probably say the same thing. Network Rail and the route were part of the collective problem. On the accuracy of Network Rail being painted as perhaps the sole responsible party, things have moved on from when that statement was originally made. As Jo said, we accept the fact that we have responsibility, but it is not the sole responsibility.

Q174 **Huw Merriman:** This is my very last question. We have talked already about having a responsible project manager, so I shall not repeat that. Is there a likelihood that for the December changes, assuming that they go ahead by December—I would be interested in whether you have had discussions as to whether that can occur on schedule—there will be a different project management model, so that there is one accountable body that has sign-offs provided to it by certain times? If not, that body would flag to the sponsor that it was not going to plan.

Jo Kaye: As you say, the process has already started for December, as is required under the industry code. We have written to all train operators and asked them to reconsider their plans for December, in the light of what has happened and, if they wish to make changes, to let us know.

Within Network Rail, we have established a team looking at cross-industry readiness, not just for the particular operators affected by this but across the whole piece. Our incoming CEO will make some recommendations to the Secretary of State in light of the work that we have done. Those are ongoing conversations, but Andrew Haines will be speaking to the Secretary of State in the coming days with his views on readiness for December, in the light of what has been discussed here.

Q175 **Luke Pollard:** Some of the questions I was going to ask have been asked already by colleagues. Can you confirm that what we heard from the GTR colleagues was correct—that problems were flagged up in the 4 May IRB meeting?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

John Halsall: We have talked about a number of different issues in terms of drivers. Two aspects were flagged at the 4 May IRB. As Nick rightly said, the first was associated with driver diagrams, and that was a red risk. My recollection is that driver availability was an amber risk. Both of those were discussed at the 4 May industry readiness board.

Q176 **Luke Pollard:** The industry readiness board had Network Rail, the TOCs and DFT officials present at that time.

John Halsall: Correct.

Q177 **Luke Pollard:** On 4 June, when the Secretary of State told the House of Commons that he was reassured in the weeks leading up to 20 May that the timetable was broadly deliverable across the network, his officials at the time would have been aware of the red and amber risks flagged by GTR at the 4 May meeting.

John Halsall: That is correct, but it goes back to what is a red or an amber risk. The red risk associated with diagrams—the schedules Charles and Nick referred to—is different from the driver training risk, which was amber, as I recall. That amber risk meant that it was in place but mitigated, and Nick said that. From my perspective—again, I think GTR said this collectively—they were not flagging at the May industry readiness board the disaster that has occurred. They were not flagging that at all; they were flagging a potential risk that they were mitigating. It is a different situation.

Q178 **Luke Pollard:** Who is responsible from a DFT point of view, or a Network Rail point of view, for testing what they are being told is true? If there are red and amber risks on a risk register, is the working assumption of the IRB, “Oh right, that’s okay, that’s been mitigated,” or is there someone whose role is to challenge that and say, “Tell me how you’re going to do that”?

John Halsall: Exactly that. The industry readiness board carried out some peer review of the proposals, but in addition there was something called the industry assurance board, which would go off and do deep dives into the key workstreams that were necessary to deliver a go-live in May. One of the things they reviewed was, inevitably, driver availability.

Q179 **Luke Pollard:** Jo told us earlier that it was the largest timetable change, with four times the amount of normal changes. If I was a DFT official or Minister and I knew that this was the largest timetable change that we were having, I would probably ask for proof that every single red risk was being mitigated and drilled down into, with greater involvement. Was there more involvement with DFT officials or Ministers than would happen with a normal timetable change—the quarter figure that may happen normally?

John Halsall: I do not know what would normally happen. I do not think it would have the same level of scrutiny that took place for this change. The industry readiness board, chaired by Chris Gibb, is quite special in



the sense of the number of individuals on it, and the independent assurance panel is also unusual. To put that in context, that group of individuals probably, over the course of a year and a half, did 30 deep dives into different components, reported back and were challenged on their reports.

I would not want the Committee to be under the impression that it was anything other than a fairly challenging and pointed meeting, for both the industry readiness board and the industry assurance board. They did the deep dives, and the industry readiness board reported to the Thameslink programme board, which was chaired by the Department for Transport. Excuse my coughing.

Q180 Luke Pollard: We will get you some more water. While you are recovering, perhaps I can ask Jo the same question that I asked GTR colleagues. In the IRB minutes for those meetings, is the secretariat Network Rail, and, from a Network Rail point of view, would you have any problems with those minutes, especially of the key meetings in the lead-up to the timetable change, being published, so that the Committee could review what actually took place from a written record?

Jo Kaye: I shall ask John to comment on who the secretariat is, assuming he can.

John Halsall: I think I can.

Jo Kaye: Certainly, from a Network Rail perspective, I do not believe that there is anything in there that we would be unhappy to share with the Committee. I think that would be fine.

Martin Frobisher: The same applies to all the documentation for the north.

Luke Pollard: Great.

Chair: It seems to me absolutely essential that we see the notes of the industry readiness board and have an awareness of what flags, red or amber, were in front of that board at various points, particularly at the start of May.

Q181 Jack Brereton: I note that it was not flagged at that time that this was going to be an issue in the cataclysm that happened subsequently, but I am keen to understand whether the industry readiness board feels empowered that, if it was flagged, it would be able to take decisions to halt the process and take whatever actions are necessary. If not, who is empowered to do that?

John Halsall: From a personal perspective, as somebody who sat on that board pretty much every time, I do not think there was any question about how empowered we felt. Although I have made reference to the fact that the chair did not have executive powers, all the members of the board had executive powers. The failure was not that the board did not



HOUSE OF COMMONS

feel empowered, but that we did not recognise the risks we have already alluded to.

Martin Frobisher: The same is true for the north. We had timetabled readiness meetings and a north of England programme board, with lots of opportunity to escalate and flag things up, but, with the processes taking place late and being compressed, the problems were not identified until the very end.

Q182 **Iain Stewart:** I apologise if I have picked this up incorrectly. At the 4 May meeting, because of the risk flags, the industry assurance board was asked to look in depth at those risks. Is that correct?

John Halsall: No, it is not correct. The industry assurance board had a regular rotation of deep dives, including driver training and driver availability. In February this year, there was a final deep dive into the eight principal workstreams associated with go-live, which included driver availability. That was one of the areas that was presented at the subsequent board.

Q183 **Iain Stewart:** They didn't do any work after the 4 May meeting.

John Halsall: They had an ongoing check programme, but the deep dive was carried out in February.

Q184 **Iain Stewart:** What I am trying to establish is whether they did anything after 4 May, prior to the introduction of the timetable, and, if so, what did they report and to whom.

John Halsall: No, they didn't do anything further.

Q185 **Grahame Morris:** I have two questions, although I know time is short. We heard anecdotally from the Chair some comments that had been sent to the Committee about the operation of the emergency timetable. Is that timetable working, in your opinion, and, if it is not working, how can we justify having an emergency timetable? It certainly does not seem to be working on parts of the network in the northern region.

Martin Frobisher: The emergency timetable in the north has reduced the number of services by 6%, which I think is 165 trains per day. It has made a substantial difference to reliability. When this problem first occurred, when the new timetable was introduced on 20 May, the industry performance measure was recording 60% per day in terms of Northern services. In recent days, it has been increased to 86% or 88%, so, as a result of the actions that we and Northern have taken, we have seen an improvement in the service.

There is more to do; we are having daily phone conferences with Northern and following up the actions on those. There are lots of extra actions taking place at Manchester Piccadilly and lots of extra people on the station, with some changes to platforms 13 and 14, all of it coming out of the close co-operation we have with Northern on a daily basis. We



HOUSE OF COMMONS

have more to do, but we have made improvements, and I believe they have helped.

Q186 **Grahame Morris:** When will the original timetable changes that were planned to come in May come into effect?

Martin Frobisher: The end of July. There is an eight-week period of the emergency timetable, after which the full timetable will be reintroduced.

Q187 **Grahame Morris:** Can I ask a general question about who suffers? We have heard from passengers about the problems they have experienced, financially and in terms of inconvenience and stress. I am sure that you were here for the earlier witnesses and heard about the problems that the train operating companies are having. In terms of collective responsibility, will there be any consequential effect on bonuses for managers and senior staff at Network Rail? We heard in the press that Mark Carne and Jeremy Westlake would not receive any. Are there other suggestions that there will be a consequence if blame is apportioned?

Jo Kaye: All of us at Network Rail are subject to performance-related pay. The matter of bonuses for last year is under consideration with the Department. Given that it is performance-related pay and the performance has been as bad as you have experienced, I would be astonished if it was even a discussion for us.

Q188 **Chair:** We wanted to ask John the same question about emergency timetables. Have they started to stabilise performance on GTR's network? From the tweets I am seeing, it certainly looks as though they have not.

John Halsall: The timetable is led by GTR, but I will share my understanding with the Committee. At the moment, there is no emergency timetable in place from the GTR perspective. Our focus in the past few weeks has been on just trying to stabilise performance, reducing the number of unplanned cancellations by trying to fill in the service gaps that we knew existed. Concurrently with that, the team within GTR is working on an interim timetable, with an expectation that it will be complete in July and then implemented. From then, we would expect to see a step change in improvement. As we sit here today, there is no interim timetable in place.

Q189 **Chair:** There is no interim timetable in place now, but you say that there will be one.

John Halsall: Correct, from the middle of July.

Q190 **Chair:** When will the full May timetable be implemented?

John Halsall: That depends. Once the interim timetable has been put in place, it will support GTR in accelerating some of the driver training. That will free up drivers, and from there we can move on to the original glide path, the original timetable.

Q191 **Chair:** When do you expect that to be? When will we get to what should



HOUSE OF COMMONS

have been introduced at the beginning of May?

John Halsall: That really ought to come from GTR, but I think it is the end of August. That would need to be confirmed.

Q192 **Daniel Zeichner:** The communication is still appalling. I will read just one message I have had from a commuter in Hitchin: "Got to the station at 7.55"—this morning. "The big board says nothing to London till 8.47. Platform board says there's an 8.34. Platform staff say that it's probably an 8.20 that's not on the board, then a slow 8.04 turned up, taking everyone by surprise." That is disastrous, and it is still happening now. How can people run their lives like that?

John Halsall: I fully recognise that it is an unacceptable situation, and I sincerely apologise for it. It is not where we want to be.

Q193 **Chair:** What is the current level of cancellations on the GTR network? Do you know, as Network Rail, what the current level of cancellations is, based on what it is expecting to run?

John Halsall: GTR runs about 3,600 services a day. It obviously varies day to day, but it is something in the order of 500—something like that, maybe a little more.

Q194 **Chair:** Have we got current performance figures for delays as well?

John Halsall: The absolute performance numbers appear okay. Network Rail and GTR together review the numbers; we are a team on that. We review cancellations as the priority, then service completeness and then train performance. In the event that you prior notice a cancellation, it does not affect train performance in the way we measure it. Our focus is absolutely on cancellations rather than train performance. The absolute PPM numbers—the train performance numbers—do not reflect the level of pain that passengers are suffering.

Q195 **Chair:** If they decide the day before to cancel a train, it is not reflected in the PPM figures. Is that right?

John Halsall: Correct. Cancellation is the area we are focusing on fixing.

Q196 **Chair:** Where would we find statistics that show when a train runs but is a short formation, so a lot of passengers find that they cannot get on? How can we find that information?

John Halsall: GTR would have that information. We can get that to you.

Q197 **Chair:** I have some final questions about looking ahead to the December timetable change, which we have touched on. What confidence can we have, Jo, that the December 2018 timetable is on track? I know you have published a first draft, but how confident should we be?

Jo Kaye: As I have already indicated, we have asked the industry—all train operators—to review the level of ambition they originally planned for December. We are in the middle of that process at the moment. We have



HOUSE OF COMMONS

established a team to look at cross-industry readiness, and our incoming chief executive has taken some views from that and from his own discussions with the train operators. It is very much a live conversation in the industry at the moment. In the coming days and weeks, the level of confidence in December will become much clearer.

Q198 **Chair:** Do you think there is time to learn for December the lessons from what went wrong in May?

Jo Kaye: There is a short period of time, absolutely. Equally, we would not want to take a huge amount of time to learn the lessons for this particular timetable change, otherwise we could have the effect of compressing the timescales again, in the way we have heard was so devastating this time around. We need to make some decisions quite quickly.

Q199 **Chair:** From the timescales I have heard for the ORR's investigation or inquiry, it does not seem to me that it is going to report until the end of the year. Is that your understanding?

Jo Kaye: My understanding is that they will produce an interim report in September, on the fact-finding around the issues with the May timetable, and the contribution of the various parties. Their terms of reference say that their recommendations for future timetable changes will come later, towards the end of this calendar year. In that context, I would expect them to talk about timetable changes further in the future.

Q200 **Chair:** Presumably an interim report in September, which will be quite limited, will not particularly help you in relation to the December timetable. It is going to come too late, isn't it?

Jo Kaye: It is difficult to judge what the inquiry will find and how it will set out its views, but certainly we need to make some decisions quickly in the industry about what we are going to set out to achieve in December to make that more successful.

Q201 **Chair:** Have any red risks already been identified for the December timetable changes?

Jo Kaye: Some of the things that we are looking at internally, inside Network Rail, are around the infrastructure to support those changes. There are some risks that we are currently managing, and they are part of the current discussion about our readiness for December.

Q202 **Chair:** Have you considered rolling over the December timetable changes?

Jo Kaye: Again, we have asked that question of the industry, whether they want to roll forward the current arrangements. It requires the vast majority, if not all, of the operators to agree, and it is very much one of the features of the conversation we are having now.

Q203 **Chair:** Explain to me again who makes that decision. If you go out to the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

operators and they all say that it is fine, who takes the decision? Who has ultimate sign-off? Is it about how many operators say yes and how many say no? Do you have to reach consensus in the room? What is the process?

Jo Kaye: One feature of the network code is that, if you are going to step outside the process we have laid out, you need a consensus decision, which will be hard to come by. Clearly, we want to get those responses from all the operators before taking a view as to what steps might be necessary in the case that there is a clear majority.

Q204 **Iain Stewart:** Does any one operator have the power of veto?

Jo Kaye: It is not a distinct power of veto, but the network code was written some time ago, as we discussed earlier, and does not really take account of the possible circumstances we find ourselves in now. We are treading some uncharted process territory.

Q205 **Chair:** Given what you have said, do you think there should be a voice for passengers in all this, given that they are the ones who have actually suffered in the last weeks and months?

Jo Kaye: Yes, I would say that is absolutely right. Certainly, we expect the conversations we have with our train operators to reflect the voice of their passengers, much in the way you have described. GTR and Northern have both had some very clear feedback from their passengers on the current situation, and I would expect that to form part of their judgment about what they want to go ahead with in December.

Chair: I am not sure how passengers would feel about being represented by private train operators. Do colleagues have any further questions?

Q206 **Luke Pollard:** Do you think it is appropriate for the Secretary of State to sign off the next December timetable changes, given the sheer level of public inconvenience and the disruption that has taken place? As the Secretary of State is, effectively, the person who owns Network Rail and is the person at the top of the tree and whom we can hold accountable, do you think that the sign-off processes, complex as they are within Network Rail and the groups you have, require ministerial sign-off, to reassure members of the public that all the right questions have been asked? It sounds as if the system to date has not been asking the right questions. Should there be ministerial level accountability to do that?

Jo Kaye: The Secretary of State has already said in statements that he has made that he is seeking assurance from the industry about its readiness level. That is very much a feature of the conversation that Andrew Haines will have with him over the coming days.

Chair: Thank you for giving evidence today. That concludes our session.