

Background

Following the timetabling panel of 9 August 2023, Network Rail proposed to review actual performance data over the winter 23/24 to assess the 14.5tph two track timetable. It was agreed to create a baseline for 4 track operations from which 2 track performance could be compared. Assumptions and parameters to measure performance were discussed at length with operators through regular 4 weekly calls.

After a review of the summer demand data and forthcoming two track in weeks 37, 41 and 43 Network Rail proposed (in letter dated 8 Sep 23) a limited trial of an additional afternoon/evening peak path during a main line block and this path was allocated to GWR. The aim of the trial was to inform capacity allocation for future main line possessions for autumn 24 (expect to be from week 28 onwards). Trial dates were set as weeks 37, 43, 45 and 47.

Operators were also asked to provide further passenger demand data for 10 weekends during December 2023 – February 2024 to allow Network Rail to evaluate Sunday passenger demand against previous forecasts, using a larger data set and from a different time of year to that collected in summer 2023 as part of a continued review of effective capacity allocation.

Analysis

Network Rail shared its assessment of performance during Sunday two track timetable over autumn /winter 2023-4 with operators on Friday 26th April. The timetable has faced a degree of variability associated with differing service levels, industrial action, significant incidents and poor weather. As a result it has been difficult to truly assess the impact of Sunday two track timetable in isolation. However, in general the two track data collected and shared with operators has shown performance drops below Regulatory targets (previous and current) for both Main Line and Relief Line blocks, when compared to the average four track Sunday in summer/autumn 2023. There is little resilience in the two track train plan to cope (or recover) from any operational and external incidents.

Due to external circumstances the 15.5tph trial has been limited in application and given the performance drop shown in the wider data, there is a risk that additional paths have the potential to further impede the delivery of a high performing Sunday timetable.

Passenger demand data analysis is still ongoing (outputs to be shared with operators w/c 20 May 24) but initial review of what has been provided shows that demand is broadly in line with the previous forecast.

Way forward

Given that the Western Route is on the ORR regulator for poor performance one option would be to further reduce the paths available to improve timetable performance, but this would impact operators' ability to move passengers.

Recent discussions have focused on implementing timetable and operational mitigations to help reduce inconsistency and improve performance on two track days. Operational and timetable workshop/workstreams have been set up to identify and implement improvements and further assessment will then take place.

Treno performance modelling to compare 14.5 and 15.5 tph is due out shortly. Early data outputs suggest that 15.5 tph shows a decline in punctuality in the Ealing area and through the two track section. When analysis is complete the final report will be shared with all operators.

After consideration of the performance data review, initial passenger demand data review and early insights into the performance modelling Network Rail have decided that maximum capacity for scheduled passenger services remains at 14.5tph. This allows capacity for 1 path every two hours for other services such as engineering trains and charter services.

This applies to HS2 works between weeks 25 and 32. Network Rail will review week 35 onwards once the review of demand data and performance modelling is completed.