



Strategic report

The East Coast Upgrade

Check before you travel on the East Coast Main Line

Ongoing work until June 2021

We're busy upgrading the tracks, signalling equipment and platforms at King's Cross station. The work will enable quicker, more frequent and more reliable journeys across the route.

There will be changes to services at the station until June 2021, including some Fridays and weekends.

Your journey may be disrupted, so please check before you travel.

To sign-up for alerts, visit EastCoastUpgrade.co.uk

Let's travel safely



Wear a face covering



Please keep your distance

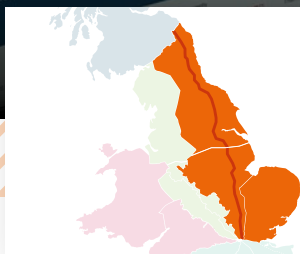


Carry hand sanitizer and wash your hands before and after travelling



Go online to book tickets and use contactless payments wherever possible

EASTERN



Rob McIntosh
managing director,
Eastern

15 July 2021

Eastern is Network Rail's largest region, covering approximately one third of the network serving everywhere from Southend-on-Sea to Berwick-on-Tweed. We operate three of the country's 10 busiest stations, serve the country's busiest container port, and have nine international airports on our patch.

Safety

Too many colleagues have not gone home safe every day this year and it's not improving, therefore the safety of our people must be central to everything we think and do. There have been no fatal incidents in Eastern, but there have been too many occasions when that has been narrowly avoided and some of our key statistics are heading in the wrong direction. In the last six months, our region has seen two derailments, an accident in which a colleague suffered life-changing injuries and an incident when one of our track workers had to jump out of the way of a moving train. Nearly 100 colleagues have been injured in the course of their work severely enough that they could not complete their next shift.

This comes at a time when our safety challenge has never been more pronounced, as we now have to protect our people and passengers from Covid-19, as well as maintaining railway safety.

We are reshaping our approach to safety as a result, with a renewed focus and drive from our senior leadership team. There is now a weekly meeting chaired by the regional managing director requiring personal ownership from each member of the executive team. This will then be cascaded throughout the organisation to drive a new performance on safety. This work will go alongside a significant focus on improving track worker safety. We've reduced unassisted lookout work – down from 25 per cent of maintenance operations to under seven per cent in a little over a year. We're committed to stopping the practice entirely by the end of July 2021.

Our response to Covid-19 has involved an unprecedented safeguarding drive, with an emphasis on both mental and physical wellbeing. We've remodelled workplaces to enable social distancing and introduced new cleaning and safety practices. New cleaning regimes were also introduced at stations, alongside passenger information to enable social distancing.

Train service delivery

Our train performance in recent years has not been good enough for passengers. Our new route structure will allow a greater focus on driving improvements, with the First 50 Miles programme in the East Midlands (which aims to tackle ongoing problems at the London end of the route) a good example.

Performance this year has been much better, coinciding with a huge reduction in demand. Timetables were reworked to accommodate reduced demand, facilitating a more deliverable service. On-time services increased from 66.9 per cent to 80.2 per cent. Equivalent statistics for freight increased from 92.4 per cent to 94.8 per cent. Our challenge will be to maintain performance as we welcome passengers back, working closely with train operators.

In addition to benefiting from adjusted timetables, freight performance was also aided by specific interventions, including removing outdated wheel timbers from tracks serving key routes to Felixstowe port.

We've been working over the last year to prepare for our interface with adjusted Crossrail services. In December 2020, Crossrail implemented an increased off-peak service of eight trains per hour (tph), up from six. In May 2021, the peak reduced slightly from 15 tph to 12 tph but, with the introduction of full-length units, capacity was increased. We continue to work with Crossrail towards the full introduction of services.

An area we need to improve is weather resilience. We suffered a number of poor performing days due to flooding and heavy snowfall, although this was mitigated by more track being given autumnal protection.

We had success last summer in reducing heatwave-related delays by better predicting extreme weather. This allowed us to introduce mitigations, which helped cut heat-related incidents from 117 in summer 2019 to 13 in 2020.

In 2020/21, we saw double the number of named storms compared to 2019/20, which is an indication of more frequent future severe weather events. Through our environment and sustainability strategy, we're committed to producing new drainage, earthworks management, and flood prevention schemes by 2024.

We're working to maintain performance in a post-Covid-19 industry as we welcome passengers back. Activities such as improving performance on Liverpool-Norwich services, supporting East Coast Trains ahead of their network debut, and the continued rollout of the new Greater Anglia fleet will support this. We're also working on major timetable changes in 2021 and 2022 to deliver the passenger benefits of the Midland Main Line (MML) and East Coast Main Line (ECML) upgrades.

Efficiency

Eastern region has committed to £1bn of efficiencies through Control Period 6 (CP6) by adopting new technology, new ways of working and optimised access strategies, among other initiatives. The region has exceeded the annual regulatory efficiency target by £28m, in delivering £182m of efficiencies. A key area of focus has been building confidence in our future efficiency plans with stakeholders, including our regulator, the Office for Rail and Road (ORR).

We've invested £2.3bn to operate, maintain, renew and enhance our network, which was £81m greater than originally budgeted. This was mainly driven by additional Covid-related investment in safeguarding passengers and staff, and changes to renewal and enhancement plans necessitated by the changed operating environment. Our focus for the year will be on improving productivity and seeking efficiency savings to play our part in the country's economic recovery.

Sustainable growth

Eastern has delivered successful projects across all four routes over the year. In Anglia, this has included: the identification of the preferred location for the planned new Cambridge South station; improvements at King's Lynn to enable longer trains with more seats for passengers; and new signalling at Clacton to reduce delays.

In the East Midlands, we've finished the biggest upgrade of the Midland Main Line (MML) since it opened in the

Victorian era, which will provide faster and more frequent services from London to Sheffield and Nottingham. On the North and East route, we've been working to improve Middlesbrough Station to enable better London connections; we've built a new platform at Leeds Station to improve services; and we've made good progress on the Trans-Pennine route upgrade.

Our biggest projects have been on the ECML. In response to changing Covid-19 travel restrictions, we were able to give up planned access for works on Christmas Eve. This was the right thing to do for passengers but required significant changes to engineering plans. A cross-industry effort enabled work to be delivered as planned with the railway returned to operators ahead of schedule.

A major improvement was also delivered at Werrington, north of Peterborough, where a 10,000-tonne concrete portal was manoeuvred into position under the ECML in a first for UK engineering. The innovative approach meant we were able to keep the line open for services and saved hundreds of hours of passenger disruption. The East Coast upgrade will deliver better journeys for millions of passengers on one of the country's most important lines.

A more local project also showed the impact Putting Passengers First can make in delivering improvements quickly. Horden Station, in Durham, was opened in June, just six months after breaking ground. Passengers in the area are now being served for the first time in 50 years.

Customers and communities

There has been a significant focus on our customers and communities work, incorporating our 'Four Ps': passengers, partners, public and people.

We used new techniques to reach lineside communities during the pandemic, with good examples of engagement through online forums on the East Midlands route and in the Trans-Pennine route upgrade work.

But lineside neighbour complaints rose significantly during all three lockdowns, leaving numbers far higher and well above internal targets. We failed to keep pace with rising complaints and response times became unacceptably high, peaking at nearly 60 days on average. We've worked to reduce that, with response times halving over the first quarter of 2021.

We're now introducing a new approach to improve complaints handling, with new ways of working over the course of the coming year. Our work to make our lineside neighbours feel like valued customers will drive this forward.

We recognise that good stakeholder engagement is vital. We conduct multiple surveys and reviews across different groups. This includes our listening programme, where one-to-one interviews are conducted by the Eastern executive team. We use the feedback from these activities to shape plans, communications and governance.

As part of our Putting Passenger First change programme, we established passenger experience teams in our four routes. The objective of these teams is to work in partnership with train operating companies to drive improvements.

We want to ensure that the Putting Passengers First programme isn't just about organisational change. We're working with our people to introduce cultural change to ensure that we truly put passengers first. We have several initiatives, including leadership events and team and personal development programmes.



People

In 2020, we introduced a people strategy to support us in attracting, developing and retaining the best people. Our employment engagement surveys show more than two thirds of colleagues were actively engaged and show a year-on-year increase from 64 per cent to 67 per cent.

We're determined to improve our diversity among under-represented communities. We've seen improving trends in the proportion of female employees (14.4 per cent) and those from black and minority ethnic (BAME) groups (6.9 per cent), particularly in employees aged under 30. Our leadership diversity is improving, with 25 per cent of



management posts filled by women. More work is needed and we will show improvements year-on-year.

In 2020/21, over 100 new apprentices joined the region. We also supported the Government's Kickstart programme, which will see us offer 60 paid placements to 16-24 year olds at risk of long-term unemployment.

With line management development identified as a key priority, a training programme has been introduced. This will ensure c1,000 managers have improved knowledge, skills and behaviours to be more effective line managers.

Having the right number of people, with the right skills when we need them is essential for us to deliver our strategic plans. That will be a key focus for the year ahead.

Eastern started 2020/21 with four items on the regulatory escalator. Three that the ORR included across multiple regions and functions, and an Eastern-specific item relating to ECML train performance. Eastern's delivery on commitments and engagement with the ORR has led to three of the four items being removed. We're working on ECML capacity allocation, the remaining item of concern, as part of the wider upgrade and planning for timetable changes next year.

Something we're proud of

The concrete structure we installed under the ECML at Werrington (pictured) was bigger than the Eiffel Tower, weighing more than 10,000 tonnes. The engineering technique to jack it into position had never been done in

the UK. The tunnel had been constructed at the side of the tracks, even as trains continued to use it.

To facilitate the project, we worked with train operating companies to install and fully test a temporary signalling system ahead of the nine-day works.

Using innovative engineering solutions meant we were able to maintain services despite such a major intervention. A more conventional approach would have been to close the ECML for a month, so we saved hundreds of hours of passenger disruption.

We also completed the electrification of the Midland Main Line electrification to Corby under budget and this entered passenger service in May 2021.

Something we want to improve

Safety has always been our priority. We must and will reverse concerning trends in our statistics and we will continue to drive out unassisted lookout work – eradicating it entirely by the end of July 2021.

Plans for the year ahead

Our focus will be playing our part in helping the country recover from Covid-19. We'll encourage passengers back to the railway as restrictions are lifted and make sure performance remains good as trains get busier. And we'll drive greater productivity and efficiency to play our part in the economic recovery.