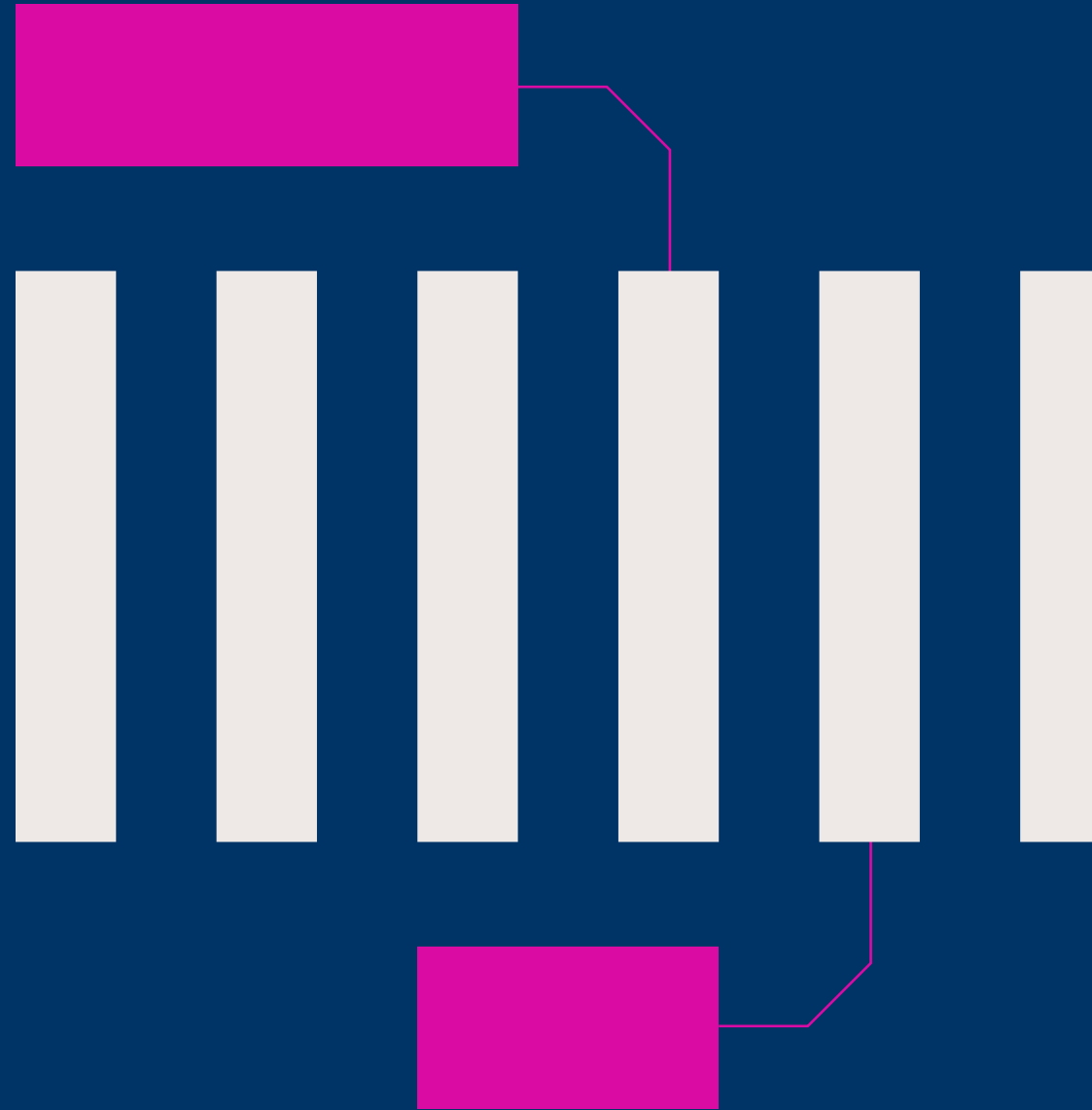# Network Operating Strategy Summary

INTRODUCTION

Background

The railway needs many key skill areas to run effectively. This includes civil, signalling, electrical and mechanical engineers, as well as railway operators. But operations often gets overlooked.

During the consultation for Net Ops 2, operations was revealed to be a discipline struggling to deal with the long-term impact of splitting infrastructure and train operations. Many participants also felt that operations was seen as only about day-to-day delivery and not involved in setting or influencing strategy.

The consultation revealed that staff and managers have had little experience outside of their own organisations and that more needs to be done to improve the knowledge of the role operations plays in the rail industry.

Vision

The Williams-Shapps review sets a clear objective to the industry for improving the skillsets of our people and the systems and technologies they use, with a strong emphasis on operations. This strategy is aligned with the objective of better enabling our railway operational teams to deliver train services for the benefit of our customers, and to grow and develop skillful and effective rail operating people.

Net Ops 2 sets out to develop themes and actions and to make sure the operational workforce is equipped for real-time operational delivery. It also aims to transform the operating functions of the railway to deliver better future outcomes.

Strategy

The Net Ops 2 10-year strategy brings views from across the industry into a clear set of prioritised improvement targets. These are as follows:

PEOPLE
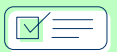
1. Whole system thinking
2. A joined-up railway for customers
3. Competence and future proofing
4. Fulfilling operations careers

CHANGE/TECHNOLOGY

5. Embracing and driving change
6. Operations-led change

PROCESS

7. Freight operational opportunities
8. Agile operations

The strategy outlines the common challenges to address and a set of suggested steps towards achieving improvement.

PEOPLE #1

(1) Whole system thinking

ℹ ISSUE

Operations is seen by many people as only being about on the day delivery and 'fire-fighting'. This limits our ability to think strategically and improve delivery for customers over the long term.

◎ GOAL

The operations strategy should be planned at an industry level to focus on delivery to customers.

👍 ACTIONS

The following steps can be taken to help us drive forward whole systems operational approaches:

– An industry-wide strategy should be established to manage key industrial relations issues

– Industry forums should improve how messages reach the industry as a whole

– Operations recruitment should be reviewed to improve the likelihood of attracting suitable candidates

– An industry operations strategy taskforce should be created, with representation from across the industry

(2) A joined-up railway for customers

ℹ ISSUE

Our operating community lacks knowledge and experience of the whole railway and doesn't incorporate 'system thinking' in the way it runs trains services for customers.
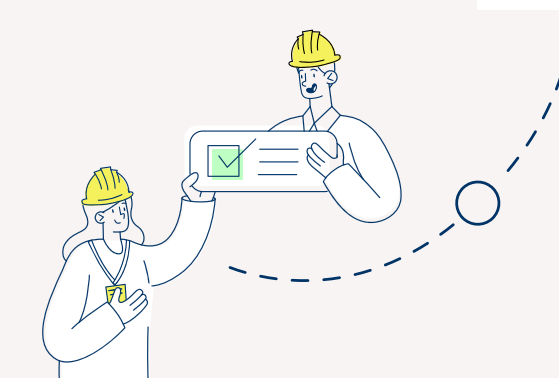
◎ GOAL

There should be opportunities available for everyone in the workplace to experience the full breadth of railway operations.

👍 ACTIONS

The following steps can be taken to help us promote cross-industry learning opportunities:

– Working collaboratively to overcome barriers to secondments/job swaps

– Baselining of operating knowledge should take place across the Operations community

PEOPLE #2

(3) Competence and future proofing

ℹ️ ISSUE

Operations lacks a structured and consistent approach to 'away from desk' training, and cross-industry development of key roles such as apprentices and graduates.

🎯 GOAL

The operations function will develop and deliver competency in a way that sees the system as a whole, regardless of industry structure.

👍 ACTIONS

The following steps can be taken to deploy innovative ways to sustain operational competence:

– Simulation-based training should be invested in

– Graduate and apprenticeship schemes should be available cross industry

– An industry graduate training scheme should be developed

– The industry should work collaboratively to overcome barriers to secondments/ job swaps

– The 'Connected Leaders' programme should be adapted and expanded to include leaders throughout the industry

(4) Fulfilling operations careers

ℹ️ ISSUE

Rail operations have a lack of professional recognition and career pathways for its people. Many roles, particularly involving leadership, are therefore less attractive to potential new entrants.

🎯 GOAL

We'll have clearly identified pathways for operations people, with structured and supported succession planning in place to identify and nurture effective operations leaders of the future.

👍 ACTIONS

The following steps can be taken to help operational leaders invest in their people:

– Succession plans should be in place for key roles in operations

– Development plans should be agreed with those in operational roles as part of their onboarding and progression into new roles

– Operations people should be given time away from their day job to support their development

– Operations leaders should be recruited with future talent in mind and the capability to rapidly acquire operational domain knowledge

– Senior leaders should actively encourage opportunities for 'stepping up'

**CHANGE/
TECHNOLOGY**

(5) Embracing and driving change

i ISSUE

People in operations feel unprepared for changes on how the railway is run. Layering of change and lack of resources to manage implementation of things like new technology leave people unable to do their best and can often drive resistance.

◎ GOAL

The railway should be prepared and resourced to successfully embrace the changes required of it. Our people should be supported with resources sufficient to engage in and lead the design, development and implementation of change.

👍 ACTIONS

The following steps can be taken to help operations embrace and drive changes to the railway:

– All future industry projects should enhance and expand the involvement of operations in project design and development

– TOCs and FOCs should ensure they have sufficient operational specialist resource for project development and research

– Current industry leaders should fully engage with recent and current developments to ensure operational innovations capable of wider application are exploited fully

– The industry should form 'centres of excellence' and legacy sharing platforms to maximise the benefit of experience and knowledge

(6) Operations-led change

i ISSUE

Technology changes and innovation are impacting upon, rather than enabling innovation in operational concepts. But many outdated legacy systems issues remain unaddressed.

◎ GOAL

Whether in technological change or operating model innovation, rail operators should lead the thinking and guide it to address customer needs, in balance with (rather than driven by) technical capabilities.

👍 ACTIONS

The following steps can be taken to give operators the responsibility, confidence and competence to lead and drive the planning and implementation of technological and operating model changes:

– Continue to implement the actions in Net Ops 1 to improve the role of operations in the Network Rail project development processes

– Provide the resource and expertise to lead for operations in the development of innovative and appropriate new technology solutions

– Facilitate knowledge sharing on digital technologies

– Develop operational data architecture and manipulation as a skill set with an appropriate certification to support it

PROCESS ⚙

(7) Freight operational opportunities

ℹ TARGET ISSUE

The industry needs to embrace opportunities to improve freight operations, which is growing due to sustainability initiatives, and ensure it is a core skill area for the industry.

◎ TARGET STATE

Freight operational innovation and change will drive economic, social and environmental benefits at the heart of the railway.

👍 STEPS TO NEXT TARGET

The following steps can be taken to help accelerate responsiveness to freight operational needs:

– Ensure each Network Rail route/region has appropriate resources for rail freight

– A process of learning and education including placements and secondments

– Ensure future freight considerations are properly included in projects

(8) Agile operations

ℹ ISSUE

Segregation of operations across different areas of the organisation, and concentration on specific aspects of real time operational delivery, has led to a poor ability to act quickly on organisation-wide issues.

◎ GOAL

We need new agile operating methods to deliver better services to customers.

👍 ACTIONS

The following steps can be taken to develop new and innovative ways of operating the railway well:

– Undertake a review of decision making across operational boundaries and develop a gap analysis

– Develop a plan based on the gap analysis to deliver improved decision making across organisational boundaries

THE WAY AHEAD
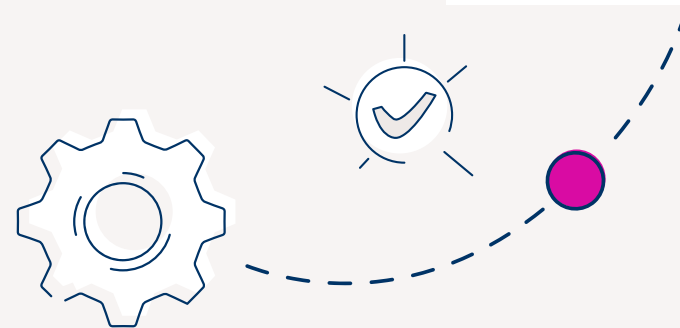
Driving future operating strategy

The effects of the Covid pandemic have had a big impact on society and the economy. The need to deliver a joined-up approach to operations has never been greater and this can only be achieved if we accept and rise to the need for change.
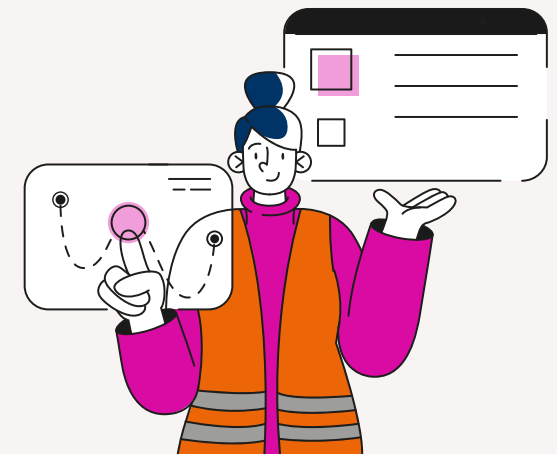
The rail industry's response to these impacts has demonstrated hidden resilience and a willingness to meet difficult challenges. We now have a better understanding of the relationship between capacity, operational practices and delays which mean we can take more informed decisions in the future.

The Williams-Shapps review has set further triggers for change. Operations needs to play a full part in responding to these and is central to delivering a more joined-up approach to how we run the railway for the benefit of passengers and freight users.

Operations knowledge and experience is central to this and in creating a workforce and leadership teams who operate the network. Acting quickly is essential to sustain and drive forward the value that rail offers to the economy and society, whilst restoring confidence and improved customer delivery.

This strategy will be owned by the Better Operations Programme Board on behalf of the industry. But it will require the ongoing commitment of Network Rail, TOCs, FOCs, IRO and most importantly the managers, planners and frontline staff that work so tirelessly to deliver the network our customers and stakeholders demand.

During 2021, the industry will develop an agreed action plan and make vital first steps to implement the changes required to the current operating concept. Our focus is on restoring customer confidence in a resilient, sustainable and healthy rail system. These plans will evolve over time, but the key will be to focus on delivering the high-level strategic aims as set out in this strategy.

For more information, please email:
NetOps@networkrail.co.uk