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Photo: Network Rail.

Network Rail plans to 'form alliances' with train operators

23 Jan 2012 □ by [A. Samuel](#) □ in [Featured Rail News](#), [Rail News](#), [Train Operating Companies](#) □ [5 Comments](#)

Network Rail has plans to form alliances with at least half a dozen train operators as it 'looks to work more closely with operators and deliver passenger benefits more quickly'.

Streamlined decision making and the delivery of a more passenger focused operation at lower cost are at the core of the move.

Alliance framework agreements have so far been made, or about to be made with:

- Abellio Greater Anglia
- c2c
- ScotRail
- Northern
- Southeastern.

Discussions 'continue with all other operators' on how Network Rail can work more closely together and these may lead to further alliance agreements.

Network Rail is also discussing the opportunity for further alliancing as part of refranchising.

A potentially different kind of alliance, called a 'deep' alliance, is being developed involving the Wessex route (one of Network Rail's devolved operational regions) and South West Trains.

This may see the establishment of a single, senior joint management team formed to look after both train and track on the Wessex route operating out of Waterloo – a much more integrated way of working.

This potential alliance is being discussed with government, the Office of Rail Regulation, employees and other operators.

David Higgins, chief executive, Network Rail, said:

"Working more closely with the train operators, with decision making devolved to the front-line and better aligned incentives, will, I believe, bring substantial benefits.

"The alliances will deliver a better service for passengers and freight users and at lower overall cost to the taxpayer."

Key principles of the alliances have been agreed, but discussions continue to identify and develop tangible changes that can be made to deliver a better service. Final proposals may also be subject to approval by governments and regulators.

These alliances form part of the substantial changes underway within the rail industry as Network Rail pushes decision making and accountability from its headquarters to its 10 geographic operating regions and encourages much closer collaboration with train operators to speed up improvements for passengers and freight users alike.

It is 'fundamental that both parties in any alliance retain their existing accountabilities and Network Rail will remain focused on delivering its obligations to all parties, protecting the interest of all customers whilst maintaining the seamless operation of the whole network'.

The alliances will be 'discrete individual agreements with each operator' but all the agreements have some common features including:

- Network Rail and the operator will remain separate entities
- Employees will continue to have the same employer (with their current terms and conditions)
- Each company continues to be ultimately accountable for their own areas of responsibility
- The interests of other passenger rail companies and freight operators are protected.

The agreements in place commit the companies to working together and to work up specified projects where there is an opportunity for more integrated working and an opportunity to improve the service to passengers or reduce cost.

The alliances may look at how stations can be better managed to provide a better service to passengers, how engineering work can be better planned or how improvements to train punctuality can be delivered.

David Higgins concluded: "Demand for our railway continues to grow and we need to work smarter with our rail industry partners if we are to continue with the improvements we have made to services over the last decade.

"Maintaining high levels of performance on an ever congested network, while investing billions of pounds and cutting costs, is a major challenge for all of us, a challenge that alliances will help to tackle."

Ruud Haket, managing director of the soon to operate Greater Anglia franchise said:

"We welcome the closer working relationships with Network Rail. Greater Anglia has committed to improving customer service and transparency in operational performance.

"A key part of service delivery will be the provision of operational information for staff and customers to help them make decisions during times of disruption."

Tim Shoveller, managing director of South West Trains, said:

"We operate one of the busiest commuter rail networks in Europe and we have a real opportunity to build on the close partnership working we already have in place with Network Rail.

"Our joint proposals for a 'deep alliance' have the potential to deliver a better service for our passengers, ensure faster and more customer-focused decisions, give better value for money to taxpayers and create a more efficient railway for the long-term."

Charles Horton, managing director Southeastern said:

"We have always had a close working relationship with Network Rail and have developed innovative projects together in the past, such as installing anti-ice tanks on passenger trains and setting up an integrated control room.

"This new alliance is the next logical step and will serve to formalise our existing close relationship. It will help us continue to improve the railways performance for passengers and help drive efficiencies across Southeastern and Network Rail."

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