

## Network Rail brings in Virgin chief as troubleshooter

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*Gibb: Virgin chief operating officer will report to Network Rail's Robin Gisby for rest of 2012*

Virgin Trains chief operating officer Chris Gibb is to be seconded to Network Rail in an attempt to address repeated infrastructure problems on the West Coast Main Line which are dragging down train performance.

Gibb has agreed to work alongside the Network Rail West Coast team for the rest of this year and will report to Robin Gisby, Network Rail's managing director of network operations, for the duration of his secondment. He will work closely with Jo Kaye, route managing director of the London North Western route.

The appointment follows a statement issued by Virgin earlier this month which described infrastructure performance on the West Coast Main Line as

"unacceptable" and "having a major impact on Virgin Trains' customers and those of other operators who have seen punctuality fall well below expected levels". "We are concerned with the lack of focus on immediate improvement as we and our customers must see short term progress, especially as the Olympics and Paralympics will be a showcase for the industry," it added.

Virgin said it was meeting with senior Network Rail executives to discuss the matter, talks which have culminated in Network Rail allowing Gibb to join the infrastructure team. He will retain many of his current duties and responsibilities at Virgin but will now use his 31 years of railway experience to advise Network Rail how infrastructure failures, particularly at the southern end of the West Coast Main Line, can be avoided.

Virgin Trains chief executive Tony Collins said: "Chris is one of the best operators in the industry and his experience will prove invaluable to Network Rail in delivering the improvements to performance our customers rightly demand. We have a strong working relationship with the team at Network Rail and this short term secondment seemed the natural thing to do."

Latest railway punctuality figures, published on 8 June, showed Virgin had a PPM of 82.9%, down from 89.6% the previous year and the lowest of all franchised train operators. Network Rail said punctuality on the West Coast route had been affected by infrastructure problems over the month including overhead line issues at Bushey and in Cumbria, track problems south of Rugby, a number of temporary speed restrictions as well as cable theft and a fatality.

A £9bn modernisation of the West Coast route was officially completed in December 2008 but despite the investment punctuality has lagged behind other inter-city routes and there have been repeated infrastructure failures (TB 6013).



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