

TRANSPORT

Briefing

[Front page](#)[News & analysis](#)[Intelligence & resources](#)[Agenda & monitors](#)[Power 200](#)[Subscribe](#)[About](#)[News](#)[Analysis](#)

West Coast action package makes start on Gibb list

Posted 24/06/13

Chris Gibb: Network Rail says it has accepted all his recommendations in full

Network Rail has outlined plans to spend £40m on improvements to the West Coast Main Line to try and resolve the poor performance which has attracted repeated criticism from Virgin Rail Group.

The projects, many of which are already underway, range from overhead line improvements to new security fencing to reduce delays caused by trespass and vandalism.

A specialist team of engineers is said to have walked the entire West Coast route between London and Rugby and recommended a series of measures - over and above regular maintenance and inspection activity - to improve the reliability of the infrastructure.

To complement this work, Network Rail is changing the way it stores and analyses overhead line condition data which is captured by two specially adapted Pendolino trains. This change will enable the data to be analysed and essential maintenance work to be completed much more quickly.

Around £10m will be spent building more than 11 miles of new fencing along the railway between London and Rugby at key locations, reducing the risk of incursions from people or livestock onto the track.

Network Rail is also working with train operator London Midland and Samaritans to put in place suicide prevention measures at London Midland stations between Watford and Milton Keynes.

The performance of the 400 mile long West Coast Main Line has been a long-standing cause of friction between Network Rail and Virgin, which operates inter-city trains on the route. Network Rail admits that it is responsible for around 70% of delays to Virgin services with around 35% down to infrastructure faults and around 25% to external factors such as cable theft, fatalities, trespass, vandalism and extreme weather. The remaining 10% are caused by operational issues.

Last year Virgin Trains chief operating officer Chris Gibb was seconded to Network Rail for six months as the two organisations attempted to gain a better understanding of the causes of the performance problems. In December 2012 his report was published and contained 17 recommendations which called for a wide-ranging upgrade of the route (TB 8960).

However, Virgin management has become increasingly frustrated with the slow resolution of performance issues on the West Coast. Earlier this month Virgin Rail Group accused Network Rail of breach of contract for failing to improve track and other infrastructure (TB 9394).

This week Network Rail said it had accepted the recommendations of Chris Gibb's report in full. Network Rail's London North Western team, which is responsible for operating, maintaining and upgrading the West Coast Main Line, has been tasked with implementing those recommendations, meeting with train and freight operating partners regularly to keep them updated.



RELATED ARTICLES

Virgin to pursue Network Rail for line failings
West Coast revamp adds Euston-Glasgow semi-fasts
West Coast Wigan shutdown to accelerate works
Three part plan for West Coast Staffs upgrade
Reading and WCML wins give Invensys £55m lift
Australian-style alliance takes Norton Bridge
West Coast hiatus puts 500 supply jobs at risk
Rutnam outlines West Coast prompted DfT changes
West Coast upgrade required to fix WCRM omissions
Virgin frustrated as West Coast track troubles...

Among the recommendations in Gibb's report is that the entire West Coast route between Euston and Rugby should be fenced to a similar standard to High Speed 1; Network Rail's statement this week implies that it will work towards this goal. But it makes no mention of another of his recommendations which calls for the complete closure of the Euston to Bushey section of the West Coast AC lines to trains from 2200 on Saturdays to 0715 on Sundays and then from 0005 to 0500 on Monday mornings for five to 10 years in order to accelerate the pace of renewals.

Dyan Crowther, Network Rail route managing director, said: "We are not satisfied with the current performance of our infrastructure on the southern end of the West Coast Main Line which is one of Britain's most vital rail arteries. We have identified almost £40m worth of investment aimed at improving performance by targeting some of the most common causes of delay. Some of the measures will be delivered in a few short months while others are more long term."

Chris Gibb, chief operating officer at Virgin Trains, responded: "I am pleased that Network Rail has decided to progress all the recommendations and make a £40m investment to improve performance on the southern end of West Coast Main Line for our customers. Already we are starting to see that investment actually taking place but both Network Rail and the train operators need to keep the pressure on to ensure that lasting improvements in performance are achieved."

In addition to the £40m package the West Coast route will benefit from further improvements in the next 12 months. A major project covering 18 miles of railway near Wigan will see new junctions and track installed over nine days in July this year. In the longer term, similar infrastructure improvements in the Watford area will get underway in 2014.

[News index](#) [Front page](#)

[Front page](#) [News & analysis](#) [Intelligence & resources](#) [Agenda & monitors](#) [Power 200](#) [Subscribe](#) [About](#)

|| Transport Briefing is published by [Acumen Intelligence Ltd](#). Unless otherwise specified all content © Acumen Intelligence 2013.
We've been writing about transport infrastructure since 2002 - we also produce the [Crossrailnews](#) and [HS2 News](#) websites.
Contact Transport Briefing: email editor@transportbriefing.co.uk Follow us on Twitter [@transportb](#).