

Northern is currently experiencing the best autumn operations since the franchise began and this can be put down to two reasons. Firstly, we have witnessed unprecedented levels of collaboration with Network Rail, particularly on de-vegetation work and the provision of greater resources on the ground to deal with trouble spots in real time. There is better provision of information and liaison both at a Control and local levels and we feel they have responded to our concerns this year much more than in previous years. NWR maintenance teams have even carried out work on our behalf at key Northern managed stations using their skilled off track teams and new equipment to assist with de-vegetation. Secondly, autumn conditions have been particularly benign especially in Lancashire & Cumbria.

At the end of period 8, traditionally the worst period for train running performance, Northern surpassed the period PPM targets by a significant margin. Lancashire & Cumbria recorded a provisional PPM of 85.6% some 8% above last year's figure. All L&C routes mirrored this upward trend with the Clitheroe to Manchester Victoria route recording a PPM of +86%; this represents a 5% improvement on last year. Whilst it is pleasing to see these improvements, I acknowledge that we need to work together to improve the level of consistency with daily PPM fluctuating between 70% and 100%. The good news is that our partnership with Network Rail is ensuring we maintain a keen focus on all performance related incidents with local management teams investigating the root causes of delays ensuring that any lessons learnt are adopted into ongoing joint mitigation measures.

Northern was let as a steady state franchise, which means that little or no growth was forecasted however, together with our industry partners we have been successful in attracting 38% more passengers since the franchise started in 2004. We have worked hard to strengthen key services and for this last period we have been tracking at around the 81% mark with the exception of the 07:40 Clitheroe – Manchester Victoria that has been tracking at 63%. The main reason for this has been the reliability of the class 153 units. Northern is currently going through a transitional period that says farewell to 3 x class 180s and 4 x class 156s as part of the HLOS cascade and we welcome a much needed boost of 17 x class 150s arriving from London Midland and 7 x class 142s returning home to the business from First Great Western, 2 of which are already in service along with a number of 150s.

Despite the overall increase in infrastructure reliability I thought that you'd be interested to read that there have been a number of incidents on this route that have severely disrupted operations of late and I would like to share those with you. The 05:55 Hunterstall to Fiddlers Ferry freight service has failed 3 times over the last 2 periods, resulting in heavy delay and cancellation of services along this corridor. Network Rail and Freight Liner Heavy Haul are now looking at a number of measures to improve reliability of this service such as replacing the 66/5 with 66/6 or 70 loco with greater horse power, monitoring this service with a view to diverting via West Coast Main and also notifying the Local Operations Manager and Autumn Team to be in the area prior to the trains arrival and treat the railhead appropriately to prevent any adhesion issues.

As I write this note it is very disappointing to report that as recently as yesterday (Tuesday 22nd November) we suffered with a cable defect on track circuit 799. We have suffered a number of infrastructure failures between Darwen and Blackburn Station, most significantly affecting track circuit 799. NWR have carried out a number of actions to address these issues including the replacement of the transceiver within Sough Tunnel, renewal of cabling and relays at Blackburn as well as enhanced maintenance on points within the Blackburn area and we hope (expect?) to see an improvement soon.

I hope that you've found this update useful and it goes some way to explaining the constraints we face as a business and the solutions we are working on with our partners to make improvements along the route.

Finally, you may not have heard that I have appointed Craig Harrop into the role of Client and Stakeholder Manager for Lancashire and Cumbria. Craig has over 20 years of railway experience across stations, planning and operations and more recently he was the Operations Delivery Manager for Lancashire and Cumbria. I'm sure that you will join me in wishing Craig every success in his new role and unite in thanking Iain Aldred who has done such a great job in covering the area until we found a permanent replacement for Kathryn O'Brien.