

Enterprise and Business Committee

Rugby World Cup 2015 - Network Rail Evidence

Network Rail was involved, on a route and national level, with planning and preparation for the Rugby World Cup from an early stage. In Wales, this included participating in a series of Travel Demand Management Meetings - led by Rugby World Cup organisers, England 2015 – and involving representatives of the Welsh Government, the Train Operating Companies (TOCs), Cardiff County Council, Traffic Wales and the emergency services.

Senior Network Rail operational staff also met with the TOCs on a monthly basis ahead of the tournament, and formed part of the Stadium Event Liaison Group along with the Welsh Government and other key stakeholders. Internally, weekly conference calls were held with other Network Rail routes, assurance documents were produced to feed into the planning process at a UK-wide level, and bespoke briefing packs were prepared for Network Rail's control, communications, signalling and maintenance teams.

Additional maintenance staff, signallers, and mobile operations managers were deployed for the duration of the tournament in Wales to cope with increased demand. Additionally, volunteers were recruited from within Network Rail to assist at stations on match days. These volunteers were fully integrated into the station teams led by Arriva Trains Wales, with support from staff and volunteers from Great Western Railway and the British Transport Police.

Network Rail's Wales Route Communications team also played a role, not just in terms of the planning and preparation, but also on match days when they were co-located with the England 2015 Travel Demand Management Team and communications staff from the TOCs and Cardiff County Council.

This match day link provided England 2015 with a direct line of communication to the Wales Rail Operating Centre (ROC) as well as to other Network Rail routes (giving a whole network view) - allowing any issues with the infrastructure to be identified quickly and for key messages to be communicated to the public via various channels, including social media and in-stadium announcements.

While we are always looking for ways to improve our service and the way in which we prepare for and operate during major events, aside from a few relatively minor incidents, Network Rail's infrastructure largely performed well throughout the tournament. Moreover, many of the well-publicised concerns around long queues and train capacity in the early matches were largely solved by the additional trains subsequently provided by the TOCs.

Despite the well-rehearsed crowd management process in place at Cardiff Central, the tournament did serve to expose the fundamental limitations of the station. It could be argued that the current operational infrastructure in and around Cardiff Central simply does not allow enough flexibility to run additional trains – particularly at events like the Rugby World Cup where at key times, the majority of passenger traffic is one way.

Network Rail's flagship Cardiff Area Signalling Renewal project will improve this situation: with a new platform constructed at Cardiff Central that's due to open to the public following the 2016 Christmas & New Year period and a major signalling upgrade that will allow trains to run in both directions from existing platforms. However, this upgrade will not alleviate all the issues at Cardiff Central, particularly in terms of the lack of space for passenger queues following major events.

Passenger numbers across the Wales route have doubled over the last decade and the draft Wales Route Study, published in March 2015, suggests that passenger demand will continue to grow strongly over the next 10 to 30 years. For example, the number of passengers using Cardiff Central could grow from 13 million per annum this year to 23 million per annum by 2023, and then up to 32 million by 2043.

Network Rail is therefore exploring options to deliver a major redevelopment of the station during the next five-year funding period, which starts in 2019. The draft Wales Route Study included proposals for a bigger and better Cardiff Central as one of the key choices for funders.

We have also been working closely with Cardiff Council so that we can achieve seamless integration with their plans for the Central Square site and the proposed new bus station. Additionally, the passenger queuing system should be factored into the wider redevelopment of the Central Square area that is currently underway.

Finally, it's important to reiterate the extent to which - industry wide - lessons were learned quickly and solutions implemented effectively following the first match at the Millennium Stadium, when some travelling fans undoubtedly faced long waits. Network Rail must accept our share of responsibility for that situation. But the fact that for subsequent matches, queues were shorter, passengers were moved more quickly and train capacity was better matched to demand is testament to the joint efforts of the rail industry and of everyone involved with travel demand management for the Rugby World Cup in Wales.