



RailCorp

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Chief Executive Officer: PO Box K349, Haymarket NSW 1238
Level 6, 18 Lee Street, Chippendale NSW 2008
Tel: (02) 8202 3175 Fax: (02) 8202 2291
www.railcorp.info

Mr Paul McLeay
Chair, Public Accounts Committee
Legislative Assembly
Parliament of New South Wales
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000



Dear Mr McLeay

Inquiry into Signal Failures on the Metropolitan Network

Further to our letter of 4 February 2009 responding to your inquiry on aspects of how RailCorp is attempting to improve signal equipment performance and the effect that has on the train service delivered to the customer. I apologise for the delayed delivery of this response.

The Committee posed five additional questions. These are listed below, with RailCorp's response

1. What progress has been made in developing a detailed signal/operating specification for the network?

The many initiatives to improve the RailCorp network, including new turnbacks, additional stabling, double tracking of single lines, quadrupling of double tracks, new sections of line, etc., mean that a large number of individual signalling and train service control projects are undertaken to permit those initiatives to operate properly. To ensure that the initiatives are implemented in accordance with a long term framework, RailCorp is developing a strategic plan within which all future signalling and train service control upgrade work would be undertaken.

RailCorp's objective of reducing the present 29 separate signal boxes and control rooms on the RailCorp network into a small number of larger control centres is being included in the overall Signalling and Control Systems strategy.

A first draft version of a strategy document has just been released for review within RailCorp and then with the Ministry. To give your committee a flavour of the scope of the strategy, I attach a copy of the Executive Summary of the strategy document. All individual projects for increased capacity, service flexibility, improved safety and higher reliability will all be implemented in accordance with the over-arching strategy.

2. What is being done to ensure that RailCorp balances the resource demands of maintaining the existing network against planned network expansion and improvement

The expansion in customer demand over the last few years in Sydney and the need for capacity expansion to cope with it has put pressure on specialist resources within RailCorp. This is nowhere more evident than in the signalling and electrification areas. To help match demand to the available resource, RailCorp has set up a Technical Capability Division within

its Asset Management area. This group not only looks at the pipeline of routine and heavy maintenance activities but also at the flow of prospective projects. To smooth the workload, a possession planning group also plans out maintenance and project work across the network to minimise the impact on customers in particular geographical areas and to flatten as much as possible the demand for specialist resource.

The number of new projects planned over the next ten years in Sydney clearly indicates that the high demand for specialist signalling and electrical resource will remain. This could have an impact on the ability of RailCorp and others to deliver the projects designed to improve public transport in the Greater Sydney area. To increase capacity, a number of different initiatives are underway.

- a) The use of Alliance Contracting to undertake not only installation but also an increasing volume of design and project management work is bringing in skilled resources from the private sector. A major training programme is being developed to train these staff in the particular requirements of the railway systems. The work undertaken by the Alliance will relieve pressure on RailCorp's resources.
- b) Training curricula are being developed by the Technical Capability and Training Divisions to map a career path for junior members of staff to progressively take on more technical responsibility right through the grades.
- c) An increasing number of graduates, interns and apprentices are being taken on by RailCorp to provide the technicians and engineers that the future work programmes require. As of 30 April, there 334 apprentices in RailCorp and a further 100 are being sought for 2010.
- d) National and international recruitment campaigns continue to be held to augment the personnel available within Metropolitan Sydney. Some 45 engineers are being sought by RailCorp over the next six months. RailCorp's Alliance partners are also recruiting both nationally and internationally.

This shortage of specialist resource is not unique to New South Wales. It applies in Europe, USA, and Asia. Governments around the world are investing in transport infrastructure and this generates a scarcity of skilled people in railway specific disciplines. RailCorp will continue to have to work on a broad front to meet its requirement for specialist signalling staff. However, the different initiatives listed above will enable RailCorp to anticipate demand, allocate work in accordance with available resources both in-house and within the contractor market and to increase capacity as the people development work starts to bear fruit.

3. The outcomes of RailCorp's review of how its incident response framework impacts on signal incidents

RailCorp has reviewed how its incident response framework has impacted on the impact of signalling incidents. Conclusions reached indicate that the framework, and especially the implementation of Major Incident Management (MIM) arrangements, has had no negative impact on the management of signalling incidents. The MIM initiative has been successful in RailCorp in focusing the efforts of operational management. It is minimising the impact of both operational and engineering incidents.

The signalling engineering discipline has always organised itself to minimise the impact of signalling failures. The new RailCorp Incident Response Framework has had a positive

overall effect on minimising the impact of incidents and has not had any noticeable impact on signalling response or repair times. Signalling maintenance teams are working effectively within the new framework. The overall framework has had a very positive impact for the company.

4. The outcomes of RailCorp's review of its incident response strategy

A review of RailCorp's present response arrangements to signalling defects has been undertaken. Clearly, speed of response has to be matched against cost. Judgements have been made in the past as to where signalling response staff should best be located. The review suggests that some minor improvements can be made based on recent volumes of signal failures and this is being addressed. However, signalling defect patterns do change as train service volumes increase or decrease, as signalling equipment ages and as local environmental conditions change. The most appropriate location for signalling response staff has to be continuously kept under review.

The latest review has indicated that signalling response is properly adjusted for risk but that some minor changes would be beneficial in the following areas

- Canley Vale to Merrylands
- Harris Park to Blacktown
- Waverton to Chatswood
- Penshurst to Sutherland

Where appropriate, signalling depots or standby arrangements are being adjusted in these areas to better match the present requirement.

5. Whether RailCorp will publicly report on asset performance and its impact on on-time running on a regular basis

The level of statistical detail that RailCorp reports on the internet and in its Annual Report is comparable with what its peers in Australia and overseas report. Incidents under investigation for causing 10 or more train delays are reported on the internet. These incidents may arise due to asset performance and are therefore noted as such on the internet.

A greater level of detail on asset performance is reported to both Government (Minister & Ministry of Transport) and the Independent Transport Safety & Reliability Regulator, including benchmarks where available. The impact of signal failures on on-time running is included within these reports .

Yours sincerely



Rob Mason
Chief Executive Officer

Attachment: Signalling and Control Systems Strategy