

March 2026

Progress update for Wagon Condition Programme

Please find below an update on the progress of the Wagon Condition Programme (WCP) since we last wrote to you in November. The programme is drawing to a close and remains on schedule to complete in July.

Maintenance Guidance Document published – a timetable for additional guidance is being formed to facilitate proportionate but targeted continuous improvement

In accordance with our past update, the Key Wagon Maintenance Principles (KWMP) document, is now live and available for use. As we noted in November, we would encourage your organisation to review its own current practices against the guidance. We know from the WCP commissioned risk assessment into the risks of wagon condition caused freight train derailments, that Entities in Charge of Maintenance (ECMs) are broadly delivering their objectives and the risks are modest. However, we also know there are opportunities for every ECM to adopt some elements of the guidance – every ECM has opportunities for improvement.

We had hoped at this time to be able to report that we have a prioritised and time-bound “work bank” for further guidance, where there are gaps in documented good practice on challenging areas. Encouragingly, the list of guidance “gaps” remains available and is already prioritised, but due to the challenging macro-environment that the freight industry is facing we have yet to agree a time-bound plan into the future to give us confidence around delivery timescales.

We expect to agree this plan in the next month.

Workstream 2 (Train preparation standard and Yards and Sidings ‘Centre of Excellence’ Toolkit) is drawing to a close

The work on the Train Preparation Maturity Model (TPMM) toolkit wraps up on the 18th March and we anticipate that RFOG will take ownership of the toolkit and future refinement. The tool has proven through its extensive trials to be a proportionate assessment and refinement tool to achieve safe and successful yard and siding operation for the preparation and departure of freight trains.

In conjunction with the TPMM, the train preparation standard (RIS-3781-TOM), incorporating the newly defined “Vehicle Condition Check” (VCC) that sets out the inspection requirements of a rail wagon, has been trialled successfully by all freight operators and in a variety of yards and sidings. This includes trials of trains working in engineering possessions for Network Rail. As a result, we have an efficient, workable train preparation standard that ECM’s can rely on in the formation of their maintenance plans for vehicles.

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The guidance builds on and remains in conformance with the outputs from WCP workstream V work in interpreting the law. The consultation will follow normal industry standards but the level of engagement and cooperation from your teams means we are confident that there will be no, or minimal, issues raised at consultation. Thanks again to your teams for their effort and support in getting us to this position. This and the TPMM completion brings the WSII workstreams to a close.

Once again, we extend our thanks for the engagement by freight operating companies and other interested parties in the freight community for delivering the work in Workstream 2. The toolkit has been tested and refined with every freight operator and is now going through final presentation and endorsement at the Rail Freight Operators Group (RFOG, a sub-committee of NFSG).

First phase of research drawing to a close

We were delighted with the high attendance, significant engagement and positive feedback from the freight research dissemination event held in Derby in December. We were able to present a picture of the work done so far as well as some detailed findings associated with how wheel flats form, the science behind a self-sustaining wheel flat and the investigation to date into how longitudinal compressive forces can build in Freight trains.

The static brake testing work that has been commissioned as part of T1350 work package 3 is going very well and we would like to extend our thanks for the significant commitment of time, assets and resources to allow us to complete the testing so far, with more planned. While the learning from the testing remains in its early phases, the initial results that have been gathered are already providing new insights into the behaviours of long trains, the use of overcharge and some of the factors that might be leading to sub-optimal brake performance of freight trains.

Formal reports and publishing will not complete until May 2026. However, during April, we expect to have sufficient insight into the various research packages to be able to consider and set the potential direction for the next phase of research. The Freight Braking and Adhesion Research Group (FBARG), chaired by Neil Ovenden and formed from colleagues from FOC's, ECM's, Network Rail and RSSB will be considering these findings and making recommendations for WCP board to consider. We have secured indicative support from the Network Rail FSIP portfolio for funding the next phase of research and we hope that this stage will be in defining practical steps and applications to reduce the propensity for wheel flats, brake drag and harmful braking forces in our freight trains.

Research to help define a lineside vs onboard technology strategy due to be considered in April

The Technology Working group (TWG) is acting as sponsor and client for a research project to determine a "whole industry" strategy for remote condition monitoring (RCM) equipment for rail vehicles, as well as developing a data protocol to allow effective sharing of safety critical information real time to drivers and signallers, while protecting sensitive Intellectual Property. Under the banner of research project T1386, it builds on the earlier work of TWG in identifying the desired system requirements for RCM, as well as embracing current state of the art developments in lineside and onboard technology developed by Network Rail, wagon owners and their industry partners and suppliers.

Work remains on track with the focus currently in developing the whole system business case covering what is the most cost effective way to deliver the wants and needs of industry in the RCM space, agnostic to whether it is lineside, onboard or a combination of both.

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Thank you

The WCP programme has received a lot of praise over its duration, but the key to its success has been the dedication and commitment of its stakeholders, a relentless commitment to support it with resources and expertise, and a meeting of minds to pursue our objectives, despite the pressing issues that face our industry. As we say at the end of each of these letters, your continued support is both highly valued and appreciated.

Further questions or requests for clarity can be directed to us using the e-mail addresses below or through Elinor Jackson at RSSB (elinor.jackson@rssb.co.uk) who is supporting the WCP project.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Golding'.

Dave Golding

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A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Tim Shakerley'.

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