Guidance for Product Acceptance Sponsors

The role of the Product Acceptance Sponsor is to act as the Applicant. A Sponsor may seek out a Manufacturer who has a product which needs Acceptance or be contacted by a manufacturer who requests their assistance as a Sponsor. The 'Criticality' of a Product is determined by the Network Technical Head and this dictates the level of assurance required, including whether a trial is necessary and whether an SRP must be convened.

An overview of the whole Product Acceptance process can be found on the Network Rail Website, including a helpful video presentation: Product acceptance - Network Rail

The standard which governs this process can be found here: NR/L2/RSE/100/05 [Issue: 4] Product acceptance and change to Network Rail operational infrastructure

The Sponsor is responsible for submitting the initial product application, liaising with and requesting evidence from manufacturers against the generic and technical requirements and liaising with the Regions to arrange any required operational trials. Where a trial is necessary CSM-RA must be applied, details can be found in NR/L2/RSE/100/02 [Issue: 4] Application of the Common Safety Method for Risk Evaluation and Assessment.

Prior to submitting the application, the Sponsor should establish whether Product Acceptance is required; New and Modified Controlled Products must be assessed via the Product Acceptance Process, however some classes of products, such as Civil Engineering Infrastructure, are excluded. Guidance on whether the process applies to a Product can be found on Network Rail Product Acceptance Website in the following Guidance Note: Product Acceptance Guidance Note, How to Decide; further assistance and guidance is available from the Product Acceptance team at prodacc@networkrail.co.uk.

The Sponsor must also establish the business need for the product and determine the quantity and value of the product that NR are likely to purchase for their own Business Unit, and across the business where appropriate; for example, some equipment may be unique to a business unit such as an On-Track Machine for Route Services, or common to many such as a Sleeper across potentially all Regions. It is necessary to demonstrate that there is a business need for the product as part of the Acceptance process, giving consideration to safety, monetary and performance benefits.

Having established the need for Product Acceptance, the Sponsor should now apply using the Product Acceptance form, beginning here: Product Acceptance Application Form (oncreate.app)

This application will be assessed and registered by the Product Acceptance Specialist, other checks will follow and, if successful, the Applicant will receive a set of Generic Requirements which the product must initially satisfy. The Applicant should liaise with the Manufacturer to collate the evidence to demonstrate that the product satisfies these generic requirements.

The Lead Reviewer appointed for the product, a competent engineer with delegated authority from the relevant Network Technical Head, will set any necessary specific technical requirements for the product. The Sponsor must collate evidence from the manufacturer to demonstrate that the product also meets these specific requirements and provide this evidence to the Lead Reviewer who will undertake their assessment. Depending upon the product and the evidence provided, this process may iterate as the Lead Reviewer may request additional evidence or clarification from the Sponsor.

Once the technical requirements have been met, the Lead Reviewer will present their findings to the relevant Network Technical Head, who will review these and approve the product if they support the proposal, through a Product Acceptance Certificate.

The level of assurance and scrutiny required for a given product's acceptance is determined by the relevant Network Technical Head, or their delegate, using the Product Criticality Matrix found in the Product Acceptance Standard. Some higher criticality products may require a Trial on the infrastructure before Acceptance can be granted.

Where a Trial is required, the trial site should be a test track where possible and only be on the operational infrastructure where it is impossible to obtain the required evidence from an available test track.

Where a trial is required and must be on the operational infrastructure, a Trial Certificate, including a set of trial requirements, will be produced. The Sponsor must liaise with the Asset Manager for the proposed trial site to arrange the trial.

The Sponsor must collate the evidence gathered from the trial into a trial report to demonstrate that the trial undertaken met the identified trial requirements. This trial report will be reviewed against the requirements by the Lead Reviewer and, if successful, a full product acceptance certificate is produced, and reviewed and signed by the relevant Network Technical Head.

If a product does not successfully meet the trial requirements, then the Sponsor must arrange for its removal from the infrastructure.

Products of the highest criticality level may need independent safety assessment and an Assessment Body should be secured to undertake independent review of the safety work.

The highest criticality multi-disciplinary products are not reviewed by the Network Technical Head but are reviewed by a System Review Panel. System Review Panels contain the multi-disciplinary expertise to review these products and are governed by the following standard: NR/L2/RSE/100/07 [Issue: 3] System Review Panels

Further help and guidance is available from prodacc@networkrail.co.uk.