Integrating robust timetabling in line plan optimization for railway systems

We propose a heuristic algorithm to build a railway line plan from scratch that minimizes passenger travel time and operator cost and for which a feasible and robust timetable exists. A line planning module and a timetabling module work iteratively and interactively. The line planning module creates an initial line plan. The timetabling module evaluates the line plan and identifies a critical line based on minimum buffer times between train pairs. The line planning module proposes a new line plan in which the time length of the critical line is modified in order to provide more flexibility in the schedule. This flexibility is used during timetabling to improve the robustness of the railway system. The algorithm is validated on the DSB S-tog network of Copenhagen, which is a high frequency railway system, where overtakings are not allowed. This network has a rather simple structure, but is constrained by limited shunt capacity. While the operator and passenger cost remain close to those of the initially and (for these costs) optimally built line plan, the timetable corresponding to the finally developed robust line plan significantly improves the minimum buffer time, and thus the robustness, in eight out of ten studied cases.