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NETWORK CUTOVER READINESS CHECKLIST

What to check before you change a live network or system. Most cutovers that go wrong were missing something simple: a rollback trigger nobody agreed, a site key nobody had, a test that left no evidence. This checklist covers the six areas we review before every cutover.

WHY A CHECKLIST STILL MATTERS

Experienced teams don't fail on the hard parts. They fail on the small things everyone assumed someone else had done. A short, shared checklist turns those assumptions into named owners and written answers, a day before the change instead of at 2 am.

Use it in your readiness meeting, a day or two before the window. Anything you can't tick is either fixed, accepted as a risk by the person who owns the go / no-go call, or a reason to move the date.

THE CHECKLIST

1. PLAN AND METHOD OF PROCEDURE

- [ ] Every step has an owner, a planned start time and an expected duration.
- [ ] Dependencies and hold points are marked, with the person who releases each hold point.
- [ ] The change window fits the plan, with time kept back for a rollback.
- [ ] The pre-change state is captured: configurations backed up, baseline readings recorded.
- [ ] Vendor and third-party steps are confirmed in writing, with names and phone numbers.

2. TESTING

- [ ] Pre-checks are written down and run the day before, and again on the day.
- [ ] Each test has a pass criterion, not just "check it works".
- [ ] Every test leaves evidence: a reading, a screenshot, a log or a signed record.
- [ ] Customer-facing services are tested end to end, not just the links in between.
- [ ] Someone who did not make the change confirms the acceptance tests.

3. ROLLBACK

- [ ] Clear trigger points: which result, or which time on the clock, means you roll back.
- [ ] Rollback steps are written out in full, not "reverse the steps above".
- [ ] Time to restore is estimated, and it fits inside the change window.
- [ ] The rollback has been rehearsed or tested where that is practical.
- [ ] The person who calls the rollback is named, and so is their backup.

4. COMMUNICATIONS

- [ ] Customers and users know what will happen, when, and what they will notice.
- [ ] Operations, the NOC and on-call teams have the plan and the contact list.
- [ ] One bridge or chat channel is set up for the night, run by one person.
- [ ] Update times are agreed: for example every 30 minutes and at each hold point.
- [ ] Messages are drafted in advance for success, for a rollback and for an overrun.

5. SIGN-OFFS AND AUTHORITY

- [ ] The change is approved through your change process (CAB or equivalent).
- [ ] The go / no-go decision owner is named, and the criteria are written down.
- [ ] Contract and client requirements are checked: notice periods, approvals and outage limits.
- [ ] Everyone knows who can stop the work on safety grounds, and that they will be backed.

6. PEOPLE AND LOGISTICS

- [ ] Site access, keys, inductions and permits are arranged for every site involved.
- [ ] Spares, tools, test gear, cables and charged laptops are checked and on site.
- [ ] There is a shift plan with breaks, so nobody runs the critical steps exhausted.
- [ ] Risk assessments or SWMS are in place for the on-site work.
- [ ] The contact list, with mobile numbers, is checked the day before.

FIVE RED FLAGS WE SEE MOST OFTEN

- **"Rollback: reverse the above."** If it isn't written step by step, it hasn't been thought through.
- **No time to restore.** Without it you cannot know whether the window is big enough to fail safely.
- **Nobody owns the go / no-go call.** On the night, the decision drifts to whoever is loudest or most tired.
- **Tests with no evidence.** "Looked fine" is not an acceptance record, and it will not help the next shift.
- **The same people on shift for 14 hours or more.** The riskiest steps often come last, when people are most tired.

RUNNING THE GO / NO-GO CALL

1. **Status of every pre-check,** read out against the plan, not from memory.
2. **Open risks and issues,** each with an owner and a yes or no: do we proceed with it?
3. **Rollback confirmed:** triggers, steps, time to restore and who calls it.
4. **People and sites ready:** access, spares, shifts and contacts.
5. **The decision,** made by the named owner and recorded with the time.

AFTER THE CUTOVER

- **Keep watch.** Agree a hypercare period with extra monitoring and a named contact.
- **Close it properly.** Record the evidence, update the as-built records, and close the change.
- **Learn from it.** A short lessons-learned session while it's fresh, written down for the next one.

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