Real-Time Payments Readiness Model: Where Does Your Bank Stand?

A DIAGNOSTIC GUIDE WITH BENCHMARKS AND ACTIONABLE NEXT STEPS FOR BANK EXECUTIVES

The shift to real-time payments represents one of the most significant infrastructure transformations in modern banking. Yet despite rapid global progress, the United States continues to lag significantly behind leading markets such as Brazil, India, Singapore, and the U.K.—countries where real-time payments have already become deeply embedded in both consumer and commercial ecosystems. What began as a faster payment innovation has quickly evolved into a foundational expectation across commercial banking ecosystems.

Businesses increasingly demand instant settlement, immediate confirmation, data-rich remittance, and seamless integration into enterprise workflows.

Global adoption is accelerating rapidly. Real-time payment transaction volumes are projected to exceed 575 billion transactions annually by 2028, up from 266 billion in 2023.[2] In the United States alone, the launch of the FedNow Service and continued expansion of The Clearing House RTP network have dramatically expanded access to instant payment rails.

For growth-minded banks, the question is no longer whether to enable real-time payments, but how quickly they can operationalize, scale, and monetize them.

This guide provides a structured Real-Time Payments Maturity Model to help executives assess readiness, benchmark against peers, and define a strategic roadmap toward real-time transformation.

According to the Federal Reserve, "faster payments are becoming a critical capability for financial institutions seeking to meet customer expectations and remain competitive.[1]"

A RECENT SURVEY BY JAVELIN STRATEGY & RESEARCH FOUND THAT **74% OF BUSINESSES CONSIDER FASTER PAYMENTS "IMPORTANT" OR "VERY IMPORTANT" TO THEIR OPERATIONS.**[3]

The Real-Time Payments Imperative:
A Market Forever Changed

Real-time payments have moved from innovation to expectation. Corporate treasurers, CFOs, and finance leaders increasingly rely on instant liquidity, immediate settlement visibility, and continuous cash positioning.

A recent survey by Javelin Strategy & Research found that 74% of businesses consider faster payments "important" or "very important" to their operations.[3]

Key forces accelerating adoption include:

B2B Modernization Pressures

Organizations are digitizing payables and receivables processes to improve working capital. Real-time disbursements, supplier onboarding, and automated reconciliation are becoming standard requirements.

Digital-First Competitors

Fintechs and embedded finance providers are redefining expectations. As McKinsey notes, "Corporate clients increasingly compare bank experiences not to other banks, but to digital platforms.[4]"

Expansion of Real-Time Rails

The U.S. market now operates multiple instant payment infrastructures, with interoperability and request-for-payment capabilities expanding use cases.

Treasury Modernization

Real-time reporting enables improved forecasting and liquidity optimization. According to AFP, 70% of treasurers cite real-time visibility as a top priority.[5]

Introducing the Real-Time Payments Readiness Model

Financial institutions progress through four maturity stages as they expand real-time capabilities:

STAGE	DESCRIPTION
Foundational	Infrastructure readiness; limited commercialization
Enablement	Connectivity live; early client access
Optimization	Automation and embedded workflows
Scale	Ecosystem-wide real-time monetization

Each stage is evaluated across five diagnostic areas:

1. **Technology & Infrastructure**
2. **Payment Operations**
3. **Fraud & Risk**
4. **Customer Experience**
5. **Product Strategy**

Diagnosing Readiness Across Core Areas

Technology & Infrastructure

Banks must be able to seamlessly connect to multiple real-time rails while maintaining reliability, scalability, and speed.

What to Evaluate:

- **Real-time rail connectivity (ex: ability to support RTP, FedNow-type networks, and emerging rails)**
- **API readiness for real-time initiation, status, and reconciliation**
- **Straight-through processing (STP) capabilities**
- **System flexibility (cloud, microservices, orchestration layers)**
- **ISO 20022-native processing**

Challenges to Watch For:

Be on the lookout for batch based systems that create friction, slow core modernization timelines that delay readiness, and siloed payment platforms that hinder end to end orchestration.

Next Steps for Advancement:

- **Increase automation across initiation and settlement**
- **Strengthen orchestration layers between the core and digital channels**
- **Modernize messaging infrastructure to support richer data flows**

Payment Operations

Real time payments require true 24/7/365 operations, with both automated workflows and human oversight working together to keep transactions moving at all hours.

What to Evaluate:

- **Ability to process payments continuously, including holidays**
- **Real-time alerts, confirmations, and exception management**
- **Reconciliation speed and accuracy**
- **Automated handling of high-volume exceptions**
- **Integration of reporting and messaging into digital channels**

Challenges to Watch for:

Watch for manual exception handling, siloed operations teams, and limited off hours coverage that would hinder the bank's ability to operate effectively in a 24/7 real time environment.

Next Steps:

- **Introduce real-time dashboards for operations teams**
- **Automate exception and return workflows**
- **Build real-time service-level commitments for commercial clients**

Fraud & Risk Management

Real-time payments demand real-time decisions. There is no buffer for review or manual intervention.

What to Evaluate:

- **Instant fraud scoring and behavioral analytics**
- **Machine-learning-driven anomaly detection**
- **User and account-level controls (entitlements, thresholds, approval workflows)**
- **Confirmation of payee or account validation**
- **Integration of fraud decisioning within digital channels**

Challenges to Watch for:

Be on the lookout for rule based systems that can't adapt, manual reviews that slow payment processing, and poor visibility into cross channel behavior that limits effective risk decisioning.

Next Steps:

- **Adopt behavioral analytics that learn from transaction patterns**
- **Strengthen corporate payment controls**
- **Deploy real-time alerts and intervention points**

Customer Experience & Digital Channels

Future winners will differentiate not just on speed, but on the intelligence and transparency woven into their commercial banking experiences.

What to Evaluate:

- **Real-time visibility into payment statuses and settlement**
- **User experiences tailored by role**
- **Integration with ERPs and accounting systems**
- **Rich payment data and reporting**
- **Embedded services such as real-time balances, liquidity insights, and automated workflows**

Challenges to watch for:

Be mindful of generic digital portals, a continued reliance on batch reports, and limited transparency into payment flows that together impede a bank's ability to deliver a modern, real time customer experience.

Next Steps:

- **Enhance dashboards with real-time information**
- **Offer API-based initiation and reporting**
- **Embed insights that help customers manage liquidity more effectively**
- **Increase customer awareness through targeted education, marketing, and in-platform guidance that shows clients how and when to use real-time payments.**
- **Develop onboarding journeys, tutorials, and role-based prompts that help customers adopt real-time capabilities confidently and consistently.**

Product Strategy & Commercialization

Rail connectivity is only the beginning. Banks must monetize and differentiate to drive revenue.

What to Evaluate:

- **Clear value proposition for each commercial segment**
- **Competitive pricing strategies**
- **Defined use cases (supplier payments, disbursements, collections, refunds, industry-specific needs)**
- **Roadmap for overlay services such as request-for-payment or automated reconciliation**
- **Partnerships with ecosystems, platforms, and marketplaces**

Challenges to watch for:

Avoid launching "rails" without determining clear value, ROI, and sales enablement plans.

Next Steps:

- **Build industry-specific offerings**
- **Introduce bundled packages with treasury and cash management**
- **Expand partnerships to create embedded banking opportunities**

The Four Maturity Stages in Detail

Stage 1: Foundational

Banks here are laying the groundwork but have minimal real-time readiness.

Characteristics:

- **Partial or no real-time rail connectivity**
- **Limited fraud control capabilities**
- **Manual operational processes**
- **Basic digital experiences**

Actions to Advance:

- **Prioritize connectivity to key real-time networks**
- **Begin modernizing digital channels to support real-time alerts and visibility**
- **Build initial real-time fraud framework**

Stage 2: Enablement

Connectivity is in place and select clients can transact.

Characteristics:

- **RTP available to limited commercial segments**
- **Basic real-time fraud and risk rules in place**
- **Essential reporting and notifications available**
- **Early API capabilities**

Actions to Advance:

- **Expand adoption through targeted industry use cases**
- **Strengthen fraud detection with behavioral analytics**
- **Improve digital workflows and transparency**
- **Build operational playbooks for real-time exceptions**

Stage 3: Optimization

Real-time becomes embedded and automated across systems.

Characteristics:

- **High STP rates and automated exceptions**
- **Real-time monitoring and analytics integrated throughout**
- **Digital channels fully support real-time initiation and status**
- **ERP/API capabilities widely used by customers**

Actions to Advance:

- **Introduce real-time liquidity and forecasting insights**
- **Expand overlay services such as request-for-payment**
- **Build specialized products for key industries**
- **Scale embedded banking experiences across partner ecosystems**

Stage 4: Scale

The bank becomes a real-time ecosystem leader.

Characteristics:

- **End-to-end real-time experiences across the commercial lifecycle**
- **Predictive insights guiding cash, liquidity, and payment decisions**
- **Broad ecosystem integrations with third-party platforms**
- **Real-time products as strategic revenue engines**
- **High customer adoption driven by proactive education, marketing, and embedded guidance**

Actions to Advance:

- **Introduce advanced, industry-specific service bundles**
- **Innovate with new business models around instant commerce**
- **Continuously expand analytics, automation, and decisioning capabilities**
- **Invest in customer awareness campaigns, training, and digital prompts that help clients understand the value of real-time payments and incorporate them into daily workflows**
- **Scale adoption through targeted marketing, partner enablement, and in-app usage nudges**

Banks should benchmark themselves against peers across each dimension to identify competitive gaps.

Benchmarks for High-Performing Banks

As real time payments mature, clear performance thresholds are emerging that distinguish leaders from the rest of the market. High performing banks don't just enable instant transactions, they operate with the speed, automation, intelligence, and transparency required to deliver them reliably at scale. The following benchmarks reflect the operational, technological, and customer experience standards that top institutions consistently achieve, and they offer a useful lens for assessing how well your organization is positioned to compete in an always on, data driven payments environment.[6]

- **95%+ STP on real-time payments**
- **Real-time fraud scoring <1 second**
- **API utilization across 35–60% of commercial clients**
- **Automated reconciliation rates above 90%**
- **Digital visibility for 100% of real-time payments**
- **Operational readiness for 24/7/365**
- **Liquidity insights updated in real time**

Banks should benchmark themselves against peers across each dimension to identify competitive gaps.

The Bottom Line

Real-time payments are more than a faster rail, they're the foundation for the next era of commercial banking. Institutions that successfully advance through the maturity stages will gain competitive differentiation, deepen client relationships, optimize capital deployment, and unlock new revenue streams.

By assessing your current state and building a strategic, multi-year roadmap, your bank can move from enabling real-time payments to leading in a real-time economy.

Building The Roadmap to Real-Time Readiness

0–6 Months: Immediate Wins

- **Enable real-time payments for targeted commercial segments**
- **Deploy enhanced risk and fraud controls**
- **Improve digital visibility into transactions and balances**

6–18 Months: Expansion & Automation

- **Automate exceptions and reconciliation**
- **Expand commercial use cases and embedded capabilities**
- **Strengthen API strategies**

18–36 Months: Strategic Transformation

- **Launch real-time liquidity and forecasting products**
- **Develop industry-specific service bundles**
- **Scale ecosystem partnerships and embedded banking models**

1. Federal Reserve Financial Services. (2023). FedNow Service adoption and market dynamics.
2. ACI Worldwide. (2024). Prime Time for Real-Time 2024 report.
3. Javelin Strategy & Research. (2023). Faster Payments Adoption in Commercial Banking.
4. McKinsey & Company. (2023). The future of corporate payments.
5. Association for Financial Professionals. (2024). AFP Payments Fraud and Control Survey Report.
6. (i) Near full automation and STP emphasized in corporate treasury and bank surveys and market outlooks (AFP Digital Payments and Capgemini World Payments Report 2025) ; (ii) sub second, behavioral fraud decisioning drawn from peer reviewed and practitioner literature on real time risk, alongside network/operator guidance on irrevocable push payments (Duvalla, 2025; Visa PERC) ; (iii) API/ERP adoption targets informed by open banking/API growth and business usage trends (Juniper Research; Citizens 2025 Payment Trends) ; (iv) automated reconciliation and end to end digital visibility expectations surfaced in AFP/treasury research and Faster Payments adoption studies (AFP Digital Payments; U.S. Faster Payments Council) ; and (v) 24/7/365 operational readiness and real time liquidity insights aligned with instant rail requirements and transaction banking outlooks (FedNow/RTP documentation & adoption data; McKinsey Global Payments Report 2025).

About Bottomline

Bottomline helps businesses transform the way they pay and get paid. A global leader in business payments and cash management, Bottomline's secure, comprehensive solutions modernize payments for businesses and financial institutions globally. With over 35 years of experience, moving more than $16 trillion in payments annually, Bottomline is committed to driving impactful results for customers by reimagining business payments and delivering solutions that add to the bottom line. Bottomline is a portfolio company of Thoma Bravo, one of the largest software private equity firms in the world, with more than $184 billion in assets under management.

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