



ORR Accessible Travel Stakeholder Forum

30th October 2023

Microsoft Teams Meeting

Attendees

Name	Organisation
1 Matt Westlake	Office of Rail and Road (ORR, Chair)
2 Claire Clark	Office of Rail and Road (ORR)
3 Sarah Robinson	Office of Rail and Road (ORR) – item 6 only
4 Jacqui Russell	Office of Rail and Road (ORR)
5 Will Sanderson	Office of Rail and Road (ORR)
6 Stephen Brookes	Disability Rights UK – item 3 onwards
7 Dave Partington	Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC)
8 Simon Watkins	Mobility Access Committee for Scotland (MACS)
9 Emma Vogelmann	Transport for All

Apologies were noted from David Mapp (DPTAC) and Erik Matthies (RNIB).

Agenda

Item no.	Time	Topic
1	10:30-10:35	Welcome, introductions and actions
2	10:35-11:00	LNER handover protocol proposal

Item no.	Time	Topic
3	11:00-11:20	2022-23 Passenger Assist survey
4	11:20-11:30	Refreshment break
5	11:30-11:50	Lifts performance
6	11:50-12:00	Roundtable update and AOB

Meeting summary

The Chair began by welcoming the Forum members and provided an overview of the agenda. The Chair shared the sad news that Clare Gray had recently passed away. On behalf of the Shaw Trust, Clare has made numerous valuable contributions to the Forum and the Chair had contacted the trust to share condolences on behalf of ORR and other forum members.

LNER handover protocol exemption

The Chair introduced the first item, detailing LNER’s proposal to use an alternative process in place of the existing phone call-based handover protocol. It was explained that the potential for this is enabled by ORR’s ATP Guidance, which states that “This guidance [on the handover protocol] does not apply where ORR has agreed that an alternative process or technology, with equivalent functionality and effectiveness, may be used by the Operator.”

LNER’s problem statement, which led to their proposal, was presented. This was that they were increasingly facing challenges around demand and resource – the handover protocol can require numerous phone call attempts with the recipient often busy dispatching or dealing with customers. It was explained that the result of this was often staff having to make a choice between complying with the handover protocol or providing the assistance. The Chair also noted that LNER are one of the operators who deliver the most assistance, and that they are consistently one of the better performers in our annual survey of booked assistance.

The Chair presented LNER’s proposal, which was to use the Passenger Assist (PA) staff app – an industry-developed tool that allows users to share and access the same information that would be communicated via the handover protocol. Over the last year significant progress had been made across industry in deploying the app and training staff and for LNER it is now embedded, and well-used, at all their stations as well as

Kings Cross and Edinburgh where LNER deliver assistance. The Chair explained that LNER had presented two options for how the PA staff app could be used in place of the handover protocol – Option A would see only the app used for booked journeys between LNER-managed stations and the existing process (handover protocol and app) for all other journeys; and Option B would see the app also used for booked journeys between LNER-managed stations and any other ‘app-compliant’ stations (stations with very high PA staff app usage) subject to agreement of operator and local teams, and the existing process for all other journeys.

The Chair explained ORR’s assessment process. This took into account that there may be other requests relating to the increased usage of the PA staff app from operators in the future, with assessment principles and assurance processes designed so that they may apply elsewhere, without presuming that LNER’s proposal would be suitable for all contexts. ORR’s assessment included engagement with LNER through visits to Kings Cross, Grantham and Newark stations, engagement with other operators and RDG, and taking into consideration the emerging results of an ongoing audit into passenger assistance and the handover protocol of five operators which included LNER. The Chair then invited comment from the Panel, including on any potential risks or benefits that ORR should consider.

The Forum expressed a range of views on the proposals. This included support, noting the need for the industry to keep looking forward, especially with technological developments such as the PA staff app and phone calls arguably not being the most effective way of communicating when there are these other options. However, the Panel also raised some potential concerns about reliance on the app, and the impact this may have on passengers’ confidence – referring to the reassurance that many passengers felt when phone calls were made. Noting the potential for further requests in the future, the Panel acknowledged the opportunity presented to use the proposed changes as a pilot project, consistent with provisional ORR thinking. It was proposed that consideration be given to how this might be evaluated and it was suggested this may provide reassurance to passengers. The panel also voiced support for the thorough assurance process that ORR had conducted.

2022-23 Passenger Assist survey

The ORR accessibility senior executive presented the second item, covering ORR’s work around the 2022-2023 *Experiences of Passenger Assist* survey. They summarised some of the headline findings, which included year-on-year improved outcomes and continued high satisfaction, but the need for further improvement was also emphasised. The presenter explained how many variables were assessed and found to have no

material impact, while some were considered to have more influence on outcomes for passengers.

The item lead outlined some of the variables that were identified as risk factors, including station staffing type (unstaffed stations higher risk), assistance delivery type (assistance delivered by onboard staff), passenger disability type (non-visible disabilities) and some specific operators.

Noting the variation in performance by different operators, the item lead opened up a discussion about which operators should be engaged with, taking into account that the ORR team needs to use its time and resource in the most efficient and effective way to achieve the greatest impact. The Panel urged caution around using passenger assistance numbers as a guide for the value of engagement or focus, in the context of specific staffing models or operators. This is because this data risks not reflecting those who are displaced to other stations or operators, or those that choose not to travel at all due to their perception of reliability. There was support for cross-industry work to achieve improvement collaboratively. Recognising previous success in achieving improvement through targeted improvement with operators, it was suggested by the Panel that poorer performers continued to be targeted regardless of the number of assists delivered. Focus on operators with more unstaffed stations and greater delivery of assistance by onboard staff was also suggested.

ACTION: ORR to circulate a link to the [2022-2023 Experience of Passenger Assist Survey Report](#).

Lift performance

The Chair returned to present the final item on ORR's emerging work around lift performance, which aims to improve our understanding of the issue going forward. For enhancing accessibility there are two key factors here: lifts being in working order, and accurate and timely information being provided about lifts that are not working.

The Chair reported to the Forum that ORR has secured a commitment for Network Rail to provide us with appropriate metrics and a proportionate reporting framework for the next Control Period. ORR's proposal includes six-monthly reporting and publication of a range of measures by region and category of lift. These measures are proposed to include total number of lifts, number / average duration of faults that put a passenger lift out of use, number of passenger lifts where there was more than one fault within a six-month period, and number/duration of entrapments.

Comment was invited from the Panel on whether these measures were meaningful for quantifying impact on passengers, or if there were other factors that might be considered. The Panel generally agreed with what had been proposed, but felt it could be beneficial to obtain information around the causes of faults. Another suggestion was from consideration to be given to Network Rail's maintenance regime and resource.

Roundtable update

Closing the session, the Chair provided members with the opportunity to update the rest of the Forum:

- Transport for All raised that they will be publishing a report into accessibility of public transport on 6th December 2023 – they agreed to circulate a link to the report when available.
- Disability Rights UK shared concerns around inconsistency between information provided on ticket vending machines and fees charged; and raised the need for improved communication between operators for the benefit of passengers.
- MACS reported that ScotRail have committed to all rolling stock (apart from intercity) to be level-boarding; that Network Rail Scotland will be publishing an accessibility strategy in the next month; and ScotRail have committed to replacing all ramps in line with ORR requirements.

ACTION: Transport for All to share the December report with ORR when published in December, and ORR to share with Forum members.

AOB

The ORR ombudsman senior manager joined the session with queries for the Panel, ahead of ORR taking on sponsorship of the ombudsman in November 2023.

The first query was around commissioning an organisation to test access and usability of the ombudsman service for passengers, including those with disabilities, to see if members had any recommendations or suggestions. Members offered their services and also recommended speaking to the Great British Railways Transition Team who had previously commissioned similar work.

The second query was in relation to contact channels for the ombudsman, including textphone. This channel has not been used at the ombudsman at all across the previous five years, so there is a question about whether or not this should be retained alongside other channels such as SMS and WhatsApp in the future. The Panel emphasised it was positive to have a range of communication channels, including

beyond initial contact. It was also suggested that the Royal National Institute for Deaf People were approached for their input.

The Forum provided more general feedback relating to the ombudsman as well, including that it needed to be made clearer to passengers at what point the ombudsman should be involved.

No further business needed addressing and the meeting closed at 12:00. The next meeting will be held in April/May 2024.

END