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ORR

Jacqui Russell
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By email

8th August 2023

Dear Matt and Jacqui

LNER proposal to replace Handover Protocol with alternative process

I am writing to you in relation to the Handover Protocol for Passenger Assist, how it is implemented and managed at LNER and where we believe changes are needed.

For some background, I wanted to set out the current position for LNER on Passenger Assist (PA). In the rail year 2022/2023, our staff delivered assistance 178,014 times across our 13 stations – this number is calculated by adding our booked PA requests (155,068), turn-up-and-go (TUAG) requests (46,856) and then taking away our 'no show' numbers – the customer that booked assistance but then did not travel – (23,910). This number is one of the highest in the industry – compared to Great Western Railway, who delivered around 183,000 in the same timeframe, and has 196 stations compared to our 13. It is worth pointing out, for clarity, that these numbers may differ somewhat from the numbers ORR report on due to the fact London Kings Cross and Edinburgh Waverley are managed by Network Rail, but we provide assistance.

We are at a point where 0.76% of all LNER customers now request Passenger Assist. As a result of these high numbers, Passenger Assist has been and continues to be a huge part of our service offering and something we pride ourselves on delivering to a high standard. Our customers enjoy our service, and our reliability is incredibly high. For example, in our customer satisfaction survey undertaken in Q4 of 22/23 customers telling us they used Passenger Assist gave us an overall satisfaction score of 68.6% compared to a general score of 61.6% - showing customers who use our Passenger Assist service generally have a better experience when travelling with us.

We saw a total of 258 complaints lead to compensation for failed assistance last financial year – meaning that only around 0.19% of Passenger Assist journeys were not delivered successfully. This is although demand for Passenger Assist has grown massively for us in recent years – seeing a 46% increase in the number of people assisted in 22/23 compared to 21/22 and an 86% increase from a pre-Covid year of 19/20 to 22/23

Challenges with Handover Protocol for LNER

Under the Accessible Travel Policy (ATP) guidance issued by ORR, LNER has agreed to follow the Handover Protocol as part of our ATP. As you will be aware, we did raise serious concerns at that time – before the significant uplift we have seen in PA – about our ability to comply with the Handover Protocol. We proposed an alternative which ORR rejected. As our numbers have continued to increase, it has become more and more challenging to try to maintain compliance with Handover Protocol without our need to comply negatively impacting our ability to deliver assistance.

The Handover Protocol requires a phone call to be made in relation to every assist that goes through a station – booked and TUAG – and relay at least 4 pieces of information to the other end. Phone calls are managed by Information Controllers at our larger stations (Edinburgh, Newcastle, York, Doncaster, Peterborough and London Kings Cross) and by a member of the station team (or Team Leader) at our smaller stations (Grantham, Newark Northgate, Retford, Wakefield Westgate, Darlington, Durham, and Berwick-Upon-Tweed).

When making these phone calls it can often take numerous attempts to get through – this can be because the person responsible for the phone calls is on another call, dispatching, dealing with a customer or various other factors. This means it can sometimes take quite a while to get through to a station.

To demonstrate the impact, we have included the data below. This shows the amount of time LNER colleagues would spend on the phone based on the average phone call length. We have worked on the basis that a call takes, on average, 2 to 3 minutes from the time of starting to make the call to getting through and having relayed the required information. We have done this for the whole route and also for a sample of our busier stations.

Data on the assumption that all calls take 2 minutes:

Station	Daily average		Busiest day of the year for each		Period average		Year total 22/23	
	Assist	Hours	Assists	Hours	Assists	Hours	Assists	Hours
Edinburgh	90	3	280	9.3	2,513	83.8	32,670	1089
Newcastle	55	1.8	165	5.5	1,548	51.6	20,126	670.9
York	65	2.1	177	5.9	1,839	61.3	23,906	796.9
Peterborough	58	1.9	262	8.7	1,638	54.6	21,290	709.6
London Kings Cross	102	3.4	382	12.7	2,857	95.2	37,137	1237.9
Total of all 13 stations	**484**	**16.1**	**1,613**	**53.8**	**13,693**	**456.4**	**178,014**	**5933.8**

Data on the assumption that all calls take 3 minutes:

Station	Daily average		Busiest day of the year for each		Period average		Year total 22/23	
	Assist	Hours	Assists	Hours	Assists	Hours	Assists	Hours
Edinburgh	90	4.5	280	14	2,513	125.7	32,670	1633.5
Newcastle	55	2.8	165	8.3	1,548	77.4	20,126	1006.3
York	65	3.3	177	8.9	1,839	92	23,906	1195.3
Peterborough	58	2.9	262	13.1	1,638	81.9	21,290	1064.5
London Kings Cross	102	5.1	382	19.1	2,857	142.9	37,137	1856.9
Total of all 13 stations	**484**	**24.2**	**1,613**	**80.7**	**13,693**	**684.7**	**178,014**	**8900.7**

Given that many calls take longer than 2-3 minutes, we think the above assumptions would be reasonable for this. This means that per year, ignoring the fact our numbers are rapidly growing year-on-year, we would spend 370 days of a 363-day year (no trains 24/25th Dec) just making phone calls about Passenger Assist – and would require a minimum of 4.8 FTE people doing this non-stop beyond our actual Passenger Assist team.

Additionally, the way Handover Protocol works at major stations means that information is not going between people responsible for assistance delivery but between Information Controllers. This means that information communicated by phone has to be relayed in 3 parts – the person delivering assistance at station A to Information Controller (IC) at station A, IC at station A calling IC at station B, IC at station B to the person delivering assistance at station B. The Passenger Assist Staff App allows information to be better communicated directly between the people delivering the assistance and only rely on the information controllers for other critical information not present in the app.

This has put us in a position where we often must choose between complying with the Handover Protocol and failing on assistance delivery as Information Controllers at stations such as Peterborough may be required to go and help customers on the platform, particularly during disruption. One of the reasons we had proposed to the ORR only making phone calls where something has changed was to ensure that complying did not put customer journeys at risk. Still, the fact that this was rejected has now put us in a place where our ability to comply with the Handover

Protocol in this current state is near impossible without failing our customers – which the Handover Protocol is supposed to stop, not cause.

Another issue with the current Handover Protocol is auditability. If Kings Cross, for example, are making and receiving 352 phone calls on the busiest day of the year, and one assist to York fails. Still, on that day, the number of customers going to York could be, for example, 100 customers; it is impossible to know which calls made to York were about which assist, which makes investigations incredibly difficult.

The Passenger Assist Staff App – Our progress on rolling this out

Between April and June 2023, LNER has been rolling out the Passenger Assist Staff App developed by Transreport (PA staff app) to all our managed stations. We did this in phases – rolling out to 2-4 stations per week until all 13 stations were live. We did on-site training and provided the teams with familiarisation time (using a test environment) before using the app. We are now in a position where all 13 stations that LNER provides assistance at are using the PA staff app.

Additionally, most of the train operators we interface with are already using the PA staff app. Scotrail, TransPennine Express, LUMO, Hull Trains, Grand Central and Cross Country have already fully rolled out the app across their business, while GTR, Greater Anglia and East Midlands Railway are currently rolling it out across their businesses with many stations already live. Northern are slowly introducing the app but have already successfully trialled it in Leeds – the main Northern station we interface with.

We are confident that our rollout has been completed successfully and has been handed over to our stations management team as part of the BAU process of managing assistance. At present, our teams are using this while continuing to make phone calls as mandated by the Handover Protocol.

Current usage and performance of the PA Staff app

We have seen great take-up already from our people of the PA staff app with consistently high usage scores. The usage scores below show how many bookings were 'actioned' – which means that everything that needed to be done in the app was done at that station. We have a few areas where we are seeing patterns in which bookings are not actioned – particularly people forgetting to mark a booking as completed after helping someone off a train as previously they did not have to do anything after assisting a customer at the arrival station.

Weekly summary	% app usage								
Station	WC 5/6	WC 12/6	WC 19/6	WC 26/6	WC 3/7	WC 10/7	WC 17/7	WC 24/7	
Edinburgh	93%	92%	94%	95%	97%	97%	94%	96%	96%
Berwick-upon-Tweed	100%	98%	99%	97%	99%	100%	99%	100%	100%
Newcastle	93%	91%	93%	95%	96%	94%	95%	95%	94%
Durham	100%	98%	99%	96%	99%	98%	97%	97%	96%
Darlington	96%	99.6%	100.0%	98.0%	98.9%	98.0%	95.2%	97.6%	97.7%
York	88%	88%	86%	91%	90%	86%	89%	93%	96%
Wakefield Westgate	99%	97%	100%	100%	99%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Doncaster	95%	94%	95%	98%	99%	96%	95%	96%	97%
Retford	89%	80%	100%	95%	97%	94%	100%	100%	100%
Newark Northgate	99%	97%	100%	100%	100%	99%	100%	100%	100%
Grantham	99%	99%	99%	98%	99%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Peterborough	99.9%	99.8%	99.4%	99.8%	100.0%	97.0%	99.6%	99.0%	99.6%
London Kings Cross	95%	93%	94%	93%	93%	94%	94%	94%	96%
Total	**94.8%**	**93.6%**	**94.2%**	**95.4%**	**95.9%**	**94.7%**	**94.9%**	**96.0%**	**96.8%**
WoW % Change	7.8%	-1.2%	0.6%	1.3%	0.5%	-1%	0%	1%	1%

The PA staff app is not a finished product and we continue to work with RDG on what we think are important changes still required to make it an even more robust system – this includes enhancements to the dashboard to manage assistance, the ability to 'undo' and edit bookings (particularly during disruption), more streamlined interface for staff who deliver many assists a day, and other features we think would be beneficial to our teams. We hope that RDG will be able to integrate many of these into the roadmap as we go forward.

Our proposal for Handover Protocol

On considering the challenges laid out above, and our current position with the PA staff app, we are seeking ORR approval for a proposal on an alternative to the Handover Protocol (in line with section A1.2.e of the ATP guidance stating that we may use an alternative "where ORR have agreed an alternative process or technology, with equivalent functionality and effectiveness").

All LNER stations are staffed first-to-last train which means that we can always guarantee messages can be picked up. The Passenger Assist system is checked on a frequent basis. At major stations bookings are allocated in advance to a member of staff to assist that customer, and at smaller stations they are done on an ad-hoc basis by the person dispatching the train at the time. If anyone enters an additional TUAG booking into the app, or a same day booking is made by the contact centre, an email is triggered to a monitored inbox at that station, acting as an alert. Simultaneously, the new booking will appear in the 'Unassigned' section of the PA staff app. This inbox at each station is monitored from the same phone or same location as the landline phone where phone calls are made, so it is no less likely to be received than a phone call but does not require the person to be free to answer at the second the booking is made as they can pick it up after dealing with their current call.

The biggest risk to this process in its current form would be the sheer volume of phone calls the person is receiving which prevents them from frequently reading the emails received. In our alternative proposal this reduced phone call volume would give the person managing assistance at each station the additional capacity to spend the time they need dealing with the correspondence received.

Our proposal is to have two different processes depending on the journey. For the purposes of clarification, we will refer to "app compliant" stations in this proposal. These are stations that are fully using the PA staff app, confidently demonstrating effective use, and are also staffed at all times that trains are operating. The following flowcharts set out this process we would like to use between app compliant stations for booked and TUAG journeys.
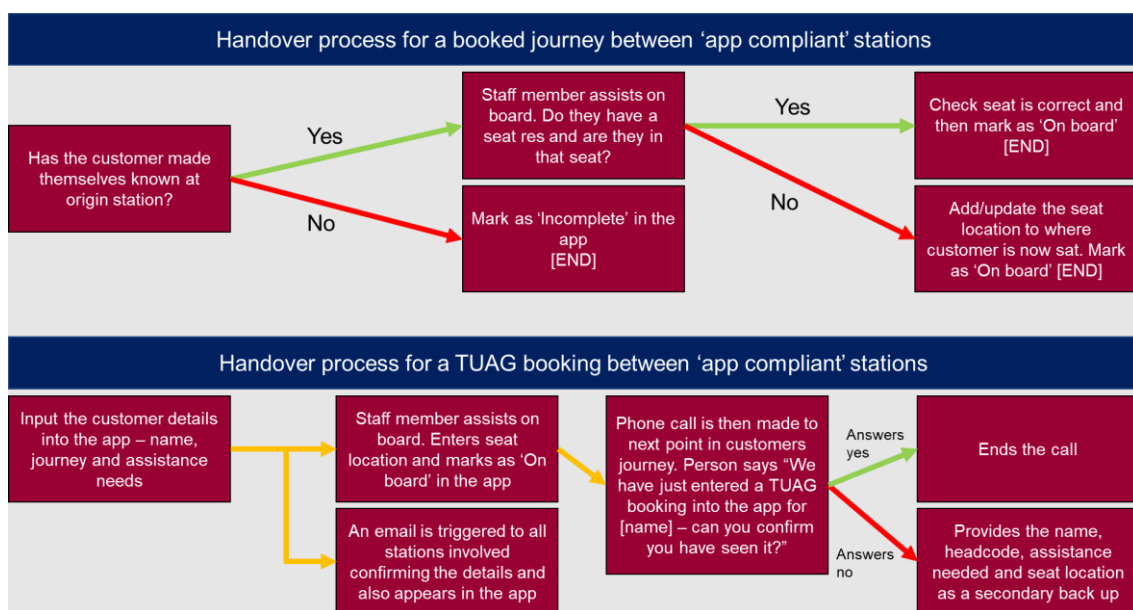
Where a journey is between either two non-app-compliant stations, or one app-compliant and one non-app-compliant station, we would revert to the existing Handover Protocol. All LNER managed stations would be deemed app compliant.

What this would result in is phone calls only being made when bookings are not entirely between app compliant stations, and when passing information about additional TUAG bookings between app compliant stations. This would assure us that messages were being received whilst also significantly reducing the risk of excessive phone calls impacting reliability.

A further benefit to this approach is that it is much easier to audit. Every interaction in the app is tracked via an audit trail which means, for the purposes of investigations, we can quickly identify the parties involved and understand the cause. This also significantly speeds up the time we can reply to customers who have complained about failed assistance. It also gives us better access to reliable information which we can use to proactively contact a customer where possible if we identify something went wrong in their journey.

Our proposal initially works between all LNER-managed stations. However, we have options which we are proposing as set out below as to how this could work beyond LNER:

- Option A: We introduce this above process just between LNER-managed stations and continue to use the existing process for all non-LNER stations
- Option B: We introduce the above process just between LNER-managed stations initially with a review period with ORR to show this works and, if proven successful, look to work with other TOCs, such as East Midlands Railway, on any further stations we could include as app compliant, subject to ORR agreement.
- Option C: We introduce the above process between LNER-managed stations and include any station managed by another TOC that meets the definition of app compliant, following agreement with the local teams and TOC management.

We know that RDG is doing work to improve the 'electronic Handover Protocol' in 2024, and we look forward to these improvements, which will hopefully remove even more phone calls, however we think the proposed process is robust enough to go live now, and we hope to widen the number of TOCs involved in this as time goes on.

Summary

We ask that ORR consider the information we have provided, the challenges we are facing, and the opportunity to improve the reliability of an already strong service by reducing the burden on our people, giving them more time to focus on customer care and reduce the risk of failed assistance. We hope that you will agree to one of the proposed options above – we would particularly hope for option B or C – and we are open to any dialogue that would be beneficial with you to help move this forward.

As we are already live with the PA staff app and this is an ongoing challenge, we are keen to make these changes as urgently as possible so understanding the due diligence required for any changes like this, we would encourage some dialogue with you at the earliest opportunity so that we can make this happen soon and prepare for the surge in assistance over Summer and at Christmas.

We look forward to hearing from you.
Yours Sincerely,

Charlie Woodhead
Accessibility and Integrated Travel Manager
LNER

Alan Riley
Head of Stations
LNER