

# Passenger information



OFFICE OF RAIL REGULATION

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# Executive summary



1. For too long, railway passengers have suffered from poor information about services, particularly at times of disruption. Reliable and timely information is essential for planning travel, and when things go wrong, for assessing how best to complete journeys. We concluded that clearer accountability

was needed, together with a stronger focus on how the quality of information can be improved both now and over the longer term. To that end, we put new conditions into rail companies' licences making their responsibilities crystal clear.

***'The last six months have seen positive work by the rail industry to provide better information, but passengers now need to see consistent improvements.'***

2. These have now been in place for over six months. We have seen that Network Rail and train operators are taking their licence conditions seriously. They have brought in new technology, such as systems feeding more accurate information on platform screens, and are changing operational culture by making passenger information part of the competency assessment of frontline staff. We've also seen the owning groups of train companies ensuring good practice is shared across franchises.

3. Our initial assessment is positive and we have not found any cause to intervene. However, the spring wave of the National Passenger Survey did not show a significant improvement and there

continue to be examples of poor outcomes across the network. This highlights there remains a challenge for the industry to fulfil its obligations and keep improving.

4. Measuring whether the actions of Network Rail and train operators result in better information is not easy and the industry is still getting to grips with how to do this. But of course passengers themselves have a view, and it is vital that the industry understands what customers think. Some operators are collecting feedback directly from passengers affected by incidents, either online or through paper questionnaires. This will help them identify what passengers think and what further action they want to see to make things better.

5. As the weather worsens, the industry is better prepared to deal with weather-related incidents than before. We will see how the industry performs over the winter and continue to make sure all parties fulfil their obligations. We will regularly probe areas that we think are working less well and should be changed. We will also be following up how they take on board feedback from passengers.

6. In 2014 we will decide whether we want the industry to review whether more should be done. The industry already intend to update their plans every year to take into account developments in technology, changes to passenger needs and lessons learnt in the light of experience. The extent of these updates will inform how we take this forward in the longer term.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Richard Price". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

**Richard Price**  
**Chief Executive**

# 1. Train service information and customers' expectations: ORR's approach

1.1 It is in passengers' interests that sufficient accurate, timely information is available to enable them to make informed decisions about their journeys, including whether to buy a ticket to travel at all and not least during disruption. Passenger Focus' research into experiences during delays<sup>1</sup> shows that this matters for passengers. Industry processes for providing such information have not worked as well as they should, particularly when there are problems on the rail network. This is reflected, for example, in satisfaction statistics in the national passenger survey<sup>2</sup>, the Quarmby report on winter resilience<sup>3</sup>, a report by the Transport Select Committee<sup>4</sup> and passenger representatives' responses to our consultation<sup>5</sup>. This is not a new phenomenon and concerns go back to at least 2004 when work to improve passenger information started nationally.

1.2 Last year we decided passengers had suffered poor information for too long, the industry's progress had been too slow and something new needed to be done. Network Rail and operators had existing licences, enforced by us. In addition to our interests in safety, competition and consumer law we concluded that new licence conditions relating to passenger information should be introduced to ensure there is clear accountability in the short term and to incentivise continuous improvement in the longer term.

<sup>1</sup> [Passenger Focus research](#)

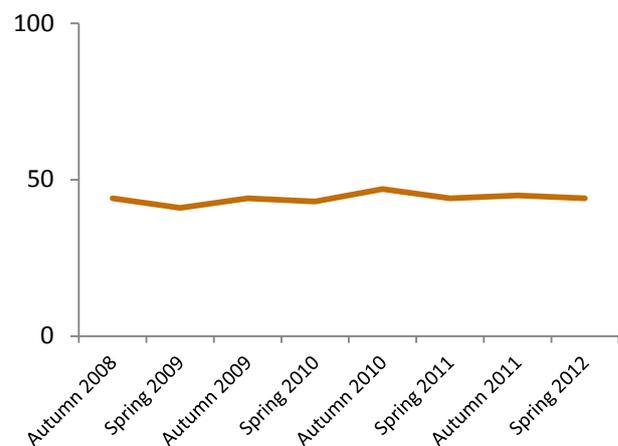
<sup>2</sup> [The national passenger survey](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Quarmby report](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Transport Select Committee report](#) and [Government response](#)

<sup>5</sup> [ORR consultation responses](#)

NPS - % satisfied with the usefulness of information during disruption



1.3 In reaching this view we were influenced by the industry's track record, which has been patchy. We commissioned a review in early 2011, using the independent consultants Arup<sup>6</sup>, which showed that parts of the industry had been slow to adapt to new working arrangements and there were instances where operators were not following their own procedures.

1.4 It was also apparent from many of the responses to our consultation that the existing accountability framework was not transparent to passengers. Differences in approach meant that passengers were unclear about what to expect on different parts of the network and were confused about where to direct complaints. This was particularly frustrating for passengers relying on the services of more than one operator to make their journeys and those who are not regular passengers.

1.5 We acknowledged that operators face commercial incentives to improve the quality of

<sup>6</sup> [Arup report](#)

information, as a key part of companies' customer service. Improvements should increase demand for train services and the revenue they generate.

***'More timely information so I didn't waste one hour walking in the snow to the station, wait another hour for a train [that didn't come] and then waste another hour walking home!'***

Passenger Focus report "Delays and Disruption" Dec 2010

However on some key parts of the network we felt that many passengers had no real alternative travel options, weakening these incentives. On parts of the network where passenger numbers are low this incentive is similarly diluted. And we were conscious that, although these incentives had existed for many years, the quality of information has continued to be a major source of passenger dissatisfaction.

1.6 In March 2012 all the licences were changed. They now require Network Rail to run effective timetable planning and to provide accurate and timely information to train operators. They also require operators to publish and follow codes of practice setting out how they will pass that information on to passengers. ATOC has published a code of practice, which we consider is good practice<sup>7</sup>. We insisted that the code should be published, and regard this as an important step towards greater transparency. As a result both we and rail users now have something against which we can compare operators and hold them to account. The code requires operators to let passengers know what disruption has occurred, what it means for them and what they should do to complete their journey. Each operator is required to produce a local delivery plan that sets out how they will follow the code of practice.

1.7 Alongside the new conditions we published a regulatory statement to be clear how we would enforce. In this we said that we expect licence

<sup>7</sup> [Code of practice on ATOC website](#)

holders to do what is necessary to comply with their current codes of practice. We would expect to intervene if it is clear that a licence holder is substantially failing to follow their codes. In the longer term we recognised the need for plans to be reviewed in the light of experience, developments in technology and changes in passenger needs. Any such review would take place after March 2014, giving rail businesses ample time to assess what their current plans will achieve for customers.

1.8 The conditions have now been in place for over 6 months and our role is to make sure Network Rail and the train operators fulfill their obligations. In this regard, we are publishing this report to set out our views on how the industry is performing so far and point out some good initiatives that should benefit passengers.

***'I received a text advising the train was cancelled which enabled me to make alternative arrangements, albeit a longer journey time.'***

Passenger Focus report "Delays and Disruption" Dec 2010

1.9 ORR is taking a number of related steps to make sure that passengers get the quality of service they expect. These include:

(a) promoting transparency, we want the rail industry to be more open and visible. This delivers accountability; it can create reputational incentives; and it can stimulate innovation and growth. With better knowledge consumers can access the products and services which are right for them. We have established a transparency programme to drive our ambitious vision for the industry. An early outcome of this work was in July when we published annual right time train information by sector to see how well services are performing.

(b) publishing complaints data, in March we published data which highlighted that, between 1 October 2011 and 31 December 2011, rail

passengers' complaints concentrated on train performance (38%), followed by complaints about the quality of facilities on-board the train, (16%), and fares (15%). This makes public the areas of most concern to passengers, and helps the industry to focus on where it can do most to drive improvements to passengers' experiences.

(c) understanding tickets and fares, in June we published research on ticket complexity, which led us to increase pressure on train operators to improve quality and usefulness of the information they provide to passengers to help them to buy the best-value ticket for their journey.

(d) focussing on punctuality, we continue to press Network Rail to improve the performance of the network in securing the punctuality and reliability of train service customers expect, particularly for the long distance and in London and south east England.

(e) as the health and safety authority for Britain's railways, we are responsible for ensuring railway companies protect passengers from any health and safety risks caused by crowded trains and infrastructure.

(f) enforcing the Competition Act 1998, which makes it illegal for companies to do certain things, for example, using their powerful position in the market to take advantage of consumers or fix prices and we may conduct an investigation if we have reasonable grounds to suspect the law has been broken. For example, our 2009 investigation into real time train information led to National Rail Enquiries agreeing to establish a voluntary code of practice which sets out the terms and conditions which apply to third parties who want access to the industry's Darwin data base.

(g) enforcing consumer law, including legislation that prohibits unfair and misleading commercial practices, to ensure that companies provide consumers with all the information relevant to their decision on what product to buy, for example, by intervening when the information provided on train

company or third party websites is misleading, to have the information amended or removed.

(h) making sure the industry provides accurate information suitably well in advance of known disruption, such as engineering works, so that passengers can plan accordingly, this is very pertinent at Christmas time.

1.10 These are not covered in detail in this report but more information can be found on our website.

## 2. What we've found so far

2.1 Our initial assessment is positive. We have found that NR and train operators are taking their licence conditions seriously and we have not found any cause to intervene.

2.2 However, we remain alert to the spring wave of the National Passenger Survey, which did not show any improvement in passenger perceptions and there continue to be examples of poor outcomes across the network, such as wrong information shown on platform screens and delays in letting people know when an incident is over, suggesting there is still disruption when the network is in fact operating normally.

### Network Rail

2.3 Network Rail is an important link in the chain at times of disruption with its staff being at the site of an incident and also its controllers being responsible for developing a plan to get back to normal service. Time estimates are key for managing an incident and letting passengers know the severity of the disruption.

2.4 Network Rail has retrained staff to heighten awareness that their actions can have significant ramifications on communications with passengers. It has also re-examined how it can better manage disruption. It has put in place a programme to embed lessons learnt from its own experiences and those of operators. It is on course to complete this work and make these improvements business as usual. Operators should continue to give Network Rail constructive feedback on how well it is doing through the incident reviews it undertakes. This is important if they are to know whether they are getting better at managing flows of information.

### Train operators

2.5 We have reviewed all the operators' local delivery plans and have not found anyone failing to follow their code of practice. In some cases certain aspects need to be further embedded in company processes, but there are plans to do this. It is clear that while each approaches the issues differently, there is a widespread commitment to improve the quality of information.

***'It is clear that while each approaches the issues differently, there is a widespread commitment to improve the quality of information'***

2.6 In our regulatory statement we said that we are not insisting operators make significant capital investment to improve their passenger information systems in the short term. However, we have found that in many cases operators have invested in new technology because it makes business sense.

2.7 Some operators are collecting feedback directly from passengers affected by an incident, either online or through paper questionnaires. This will help them understand whether they are improving from the perspective of their passengers and to identify what else could be done to improve.

# 3. What works? Some examples of improvements

3.1 A lot of good work is being done behind the scenes, supporting our conclusion that the rail industry is taking the new licence conditions seriously. Delivering on these will improve the passenger experience and we support the sharing of good practice.

## New ways of working

- Provision of more accurate information to frontline staff, e.g. by giving them smartphones to ensure they have at least the same level of information as many passengers.
- The deployment of staff in control centres, such as route information managers that focus on providing accurate information to passengers separately from those staff managing disruption.
- Introduction of 'rainbow boards' at stations and on websites illustrating a route specific overview of the level of service that is being provided, historically used on the tube and recently applied to the national rail network.
- Mobile versions of websites either through specific apps, e.g. Journeycheck mobile, or mobile websites to ensure that information is easier to access for travellers on platforms and trains that have smartphones.
- Deployment of customer action teams to stations that are normally unstaffed (or those where the disrupted operator does not have a significant staff presence) when disruption is occurring.
- Station posters, leaflets and ticket wallets guiding passengers to tools that can help them make best use of the information that

is available, using QR codes to allow smartphone users to access information more easily and on-train displays to remind passengers about sources of information.

- The North of London agreement, a joint operator agreement supported by pre-printed maps<sup>8</sup> for passengers, which show agreed alternative routes and ticket acceptance at times of disruption on key long distance routes between London and the north.
- Station-specific contingency plans including alternative routes and ticket acceptance arrangements.



## Staff training and competence

- Additional customer service training of station and on-train staff.
- Inclusion of passenger information provision in the competence assessment of frontline staff.

<sup>8</sup> [Pre printed maps on NRE website](#)



system and Arriva Trains Wales survey frontline staff at the same time.

## National Rail Enquiries

3.2 National Rail Enquiries provides a central service to all operators. It has recently introduced an update to its free smartphone app for passengers. A staff version is also available to give them additional technical detail on live incidents. It also provides Twitter alerts. The website includes disruption information in its journey planner and also makes this available to the online ticket retailers. This should help to stop people from inadvertently planning a journey on a train that has been cancelled. A feed of disruption information is provided to a number of individual operator websites to ensure consistency.

## Individual feedback to/from passengers and frontline staff

- Capturing feedback after specific incidents via surveys of both staff and passengers to ensure that actual experiences are reviewed and acted upon. This, combined with post event reviews of incidents involving serious customer service impacts (as well as those involving significant train delays) reporting at Director level, mean that necessary remedial actions are recorded and implemented.
- Engaging passengers via Twitter in real time which gives up to date information, establishes a relationship with the passenger and encourages feedback during the disruption. Passenger Focus research into social media noted that passengers expect Twitter to be available throughout the hours that trains are operating. Previously some operators only provided an office hours service but many have extended this to cover the commuting periods.



## Owner groups

3.3 In some cases the groups that own a number of train operators have brought together their staff from different operations to ensure that good practice is shared across the group.

3.4 Staff in FirstGroup now benefit from a First staff app which supplements the public information provided by National Rail Enquiries with more detailed information specific to their station or train. This ensures that staff have the most up to date information to pass to customers for both the mainline rail and underground networks.

Followers of Chiltern on Twitter are encouraged to complete an online questionnaire after a major disruptive event to let them know how they performed. A standard survey is used allowing Chiltern to compare scores against previous incidents. This also enables them to see which communication channels are most used. Other operators have introduced a similar



3.5 Arriva has a quarterly forum that allows examples of good practices to be shared across the group. Checking what a passenger sees is very important and the latest initiative from Arriva is to use staff from one operator to check what information passengers are getting from a sister company that is in the middle of an incident.

## New technology to feed platform screens

3.6 The Association of Train Operators (ATOC) is managing the rollout of new technology that feeds more accurate information on customer information screens (known as Darwin CIS). It has already been introduced on the West Coast Main Line where 17 individual station information systems were connected to real-time train running information. The same system went live on Chiltern Railways in September.

3.7 A connection to Darwin ensures that the information being provided on the station screens is the same as that on websites and applications. This work is being funded through the National Stations Improvement Programme Fund. The work will continue up to the end of the current funding period, which is in March 2014. The benefits of this work for passengers are obvious and we want it delivered as soon as possible. However, we recognise that a small amount of work may be needed to finish it off in the first year of the next funding period, which starts in April 2014. We have therefore allowed Network Rail to flex the funding cut-off date slightly to ensure that regulatory boundaries do not unnecessarily hinder this work.

## Network Rail

3.8 Network Rail has started to:

- identify best practice and share this across all of its control centres;
- run integrated incident management training with staff from train operators; and
- look at ways of assessing its performance in handling incidents, which at present is driven by feedback from operators.

3.9 Network Rail also manages some of the major stations and, in partnership with the relevant train operators, it is developing a bespoke information plan for each of them.



## 4. Looking ahead



4.1 As the weather worsens the industry is in a better position to deal with weather related incidents than before. In addition to new tools for frontline staff, next day contingency plans can be introduced more quickly and websites are capable of handling larger volumes of traffic. Operators should do what they can to help passengers make the most of information sources that already exist.

4.2 Over the next six months we will see how the industry performs over the winter period. We will keep the pressure up by probing areas of concern that we have. We will continue to review management reports as this will assure us that they continue to take passenger information seriously.

4.3 Beyond this we will review the annual updates that incorporate lessons learnt throughout the year. We will take this opportunity to work with operators to identify areas that are working less well and therefore should be changed. There is a risk that we get too caught up with process and lose sight of whether information is getting better for passengers. We will therefore continue to meet Passenger Focus regularly to understand

what they pick up from complaints and through their own research.

4.4 In March 2014 we will decide whether to require Network Rail and the train operators to do more than required by their existing codes of practice for the longer term. Unlike other areas of regulation, such as reliability, we have not set a target using a metric like the public performance measure<sup>9</sup>. We therefore require all parties to do their best within funding and contractual frameworks, address serious or systemic failures and continuously improve. Both Network Rail and all the train operators intend to update their plans annually to take into account developments in technology, changes to passenger needs and lessons learnt in the light of experience. The scope and extent of these updates will inform our decision.

4.5 In addition to this work we will be consulting shortly on a related matter of how National Rail Enquiries allow third parties, such as software developers, to gain access to the real time train information that it holds. Through expertise and innovation, we believe these third parties can develop other ways to provide passengers with timely and accurate information. We are, therefore, looking forward to hearing what operators and third parties think about this through our consultation.

4.6 Passengers can play an important part as well by providing constructive feedback to their operator and making use of the relationship offered through social media, such as Twitter, to alert operators to any problems they encounter. Passenger feedback helps to drive the way improvements are prioritised and delivered.

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<sup>9</sup> [Glossary definition of PPM](#)

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