

Stephanie Tobyn
Deputy Director, Consumers
Directorate of Railway Markets & Economics

5 September 2018

Patrick Verwer
CEO
Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR)

Dear Mr Verwer,

Govia Thameslink Railway

Compliance with condition 4 of the passenger licence and GB Statement of National Regulatory Provisions: Passenger

I have set out below a number of concerns relating to the provision of information to passengers using GTR services.

1) Inadequate notice when planning travel at weekends

The timetable change on 20 May 2018 caused significant disruption and is the subject of a separate ORR Inquiry¹ which is considering the impact on passengers. However, since then, the rest of the industry has returned to more normal timescales for its timetable updates. In the weekly report, provided to the industry by the National Rail Communications Centre, the GTR brands have become significant outliers in terms of information provision, particularly at weekends.

The report shows that in addition to failing to supply data more than 4 weeks ahead, the data that has been supplied contains more errors than that from the rest of the industry.

In February 2018 we wrote² to all train operators to set out principles that should apply to the provision of information while informed traveller timescales are not being met. In a

¹ <http://orr.gov.uk/rail/consumers/inquiry-into-may-2018-network-disruption>

² http://orr.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0020/27047/licence-condition-4-letter-to-toc-managing-directors-2018-02-23.pdf

letter to ORR³, Transport Focus notes that “at weekends the timetable is not showing correctly in passenger facing systems until very late”. The late timetables affect passengers who find that they are unable to plan weekend travel until just a few days in advance.

In August 2018 the Brighton Mainline project⁴ started station drop-in events handing out leaflets with details of line closures affecting that route which is used by Southern, Thameslink and Gatwick Express services. While information about closures every weekend in October 2018 was clearly known about in time to get the leaflets printed on 2 August 2018, the journey planners are still showing trains running between Three Bridges and Brighton, albeit with yellow triangle warning information (on those train operator and third party retailer ticket engines that show them). The first of the closures takes place on Saturday 8 September 2018, yet journey planners are not yet updated for Thameslink services.

It is clear that this may cause passengers to be unable to plan their journeys or in some cases to pay more expensive fares as advance tickets have not been made available. The ability to be able to plan or make a journey with a reasonable degree of assurance is a requirement of Condition 4 of the Licence and GB Statement of National Regulatory Provisions: Passenger.

Late notice updates to GTR weekend timetables are now out of step with the rest of the industry. In recognition that Network Rail has a part to play in this process please provide us with details of the joint GTR/NR recovery plan that will allow all GTR services to be advertised in line with current industry timescales.

2) Managing information for Thameslink & Great Northern at London stations

The timetable change on 20 May 2018 introduced new through London journeys which linked a number of previously standalone services. While this has offered new journey opportunities for passengers, it has resulted in significant change for those at London Kings Cross. Instead of all services departing from that station, some are now through London Thameslink services, which depart from St Pancras station instead. In addition, even where trains operate from the station, their reclassification as Thameslink means that

³ <https://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research-publications/publications/timetable-crisis-watchdog-sets-long-term-issues-regulator-tackle/>

⁴ <https://brightonmainline.co.uk/>

they do not appear on the “Great Northern” board. We note that Kings Cross is a Network Rail managed station.

Passengers enquiring about journeys on this route via National Rail Enquiries will see a message in their journey results to remind them that additional services operate from other stations. However, once at Kings Cross or St Pancras there is nothing to remind passengers. This is particularly important when services are disrupted and the next train may depart from the other station.

Please provide us with details of how you plan to increase awareness of Thameslink services at Kings Cross – both those departing from Kings Cross itself and those to Great Northern destinations departing from St Pancras.

3) Passenger information on Class 700 trains

The introduction of a completely new fleet of trains onto Thameslink services gave the opportunity to improve passenger information across the whole of the route. While the screens on the trains allow the display of messaging such as toilet availability and train loading we have noted issues of trains running with no information at all. Apart from the requirement to tell passengers of the next station this can be an issue because of stations with short platforms where the doors in some carriages will not open.

We have observed that these faults are being regularly reported to you and acknowledged on Twitter. However, the number of occasions where trains are running with blank screens or “please listen to announcements” appears to be on the increase. Also we note that the P5 Quest scores published on your website⁵ show a drop in compliance for Thameslink on train information.

We would expect that a modern train can provide data for the availability of information screens and that the driver would be aware of the need to make additional announcements because the automatic system is not working.

Please provide us with details of the reporting procedure for information screen faults and instructions for drivers to make announcements in these cases. In addition please provide details of what action has been taken following reports of screen failures either by passengers or your staff.

Please also describe what checks you make to ensure that the information system is working correctly at the start and during a journey. If you have updated your

⁵ <https://www.thameslinkrailway.com/about-us/how-were-performing/train-and-station-audits>



Quest audit handbook since November 2016 please provide a copy of the latest version.

I look forward to receiving your response to these issues by **Monday 17 September 2018**. Subject to the information provided in your response we would like to agree a time to meet to discuss these issues further. We will follow this up by e-mail.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Stephanie Tobyn'.

Stephanie Tobyn