

## ORR's Crowding Position Statement

As the health and safety authority for Great Britain's railways, ORR has a responsibility for ensuring railway companies protect passengers from any health and safety risks, so far as is reasonably practicable. Train and station operators protect passengers by identifying, reducing and alleviating risks, including crowding risks. Our railway inspectors oversee this and can respond to any shortfalls according to our risk-based priorities and, if necessary, use their enforcement powers to require improvements.

ORR also oversees a number of other obligations train companies have to their customers. Some of these responsibilities are part of their licences and some are applicable from general consumer law. In relation to crowding, we are particularly interested in how train companies provide information to customers during times of disruption and how the railway is made accessible for all passengers.

Where the risks from crowding are being well managed, and operators are meeting their consumer obligations, ORR does not have powers to require further action.

We continue to talk to operators about their plans to mitigate crowding, and we use and promote the latest research to better understand any crowding health and safety risks and effects on passengers.

The number of passengers using the railways has been rising in recent years. Many train services run with large numbers of standing passengers, often preceded by crowding at stations, including on the platforms or at the platform-train interface ('PTI'). Crowding can occur on regular journeys, particularly at peak times. When something disrupts the normal operation of the network, such as engineering works, cancelled services or special events, this can make crowding worse.

Crowding reflects the GB railway's flexible 'turn up and go' model. In theory, different models could eliminate crowding, but these are unlikely to be without consequences. For example, crowding on trains could be eliminated under an airline-style, booked-seat only model. But that would be at the expense of excluding many passengers from train services, particularly at peak times. There is ongoing investment to increase the carrying capacity of trains, but the investment necessary to eradicate all crowding would be considerable.

In 2019, we expanded our position statement on crowding to cover crowding at stations, including at the platform. We also now cover the effects on passenger wellbeing from crowding; which in this context means how crowding can affect moods, feelings and emotions during a journey. These are important additions in order to cover the whole of the passenger experience, and encourage a more holistic approach to managing the effects of crowding.

## **The Office of Rail and Road's position on crowding**

1. There is little direct evidence of an increase to passenger health and safety risks from crowding. Trains are designed to operate safely, even when many passengers are standing. However there are indications that;
  - crowding can increase the risk of slips, trips and falls, particularly at stations and when getting on and off trains (the PTI);
  - crowding means some passengers are more at risk of fainting, particularly on crowded trains in hot weather;
  - evidence on the health and safety risks would be further improved if the reports completed by operators after a passenger incident always considered, and recorded, whether crowding had been a factor.
2. ORR takes passenger concerns about crowding seriously. There is now clear evidence that feelings of stress, anxiety and vulnerability are high in crowding scenarios. This can make passengers feel unsafe and can negatively affect their wellbeing;
3. Hazards and the negative wellbeing effects associated with crowding varies between passengers. For instance, feelings of stress, anxiety and vulnerability may be felt with greater intensity, or frequency, by some passengers with visible or non-visible disabilities, older people or those travelling with young children. There is no 'one size fits all' experience;
4. There can be a complex, dynamic relationship between passenger wellbeing and safety in some crowding scenarios. For instance, a passenger feeling anxious from being in a crowd might behave in a way that makes an otherwise unrelated safety risk worse, perhaps by moving past the platform yellow line in order to be nearer the doors of a shortly to arrive train. These negative effects on wellbeing can sometimes lead to entirely new risks, such

as a passenger deciding to self-evacuate from a stranded train's crowded - but otherwise safe – carriage on to the unsafe track. This interrelationship between health, safety and wellbeing is part of the reason ORR now takes a holistic view of crowding across our safety and consumer protection functions.

## **What improvements can be made?**

Crowding is a feature of many rail journeys. The currently high volumes of passenger journeys should not disguise the discomfort felt by many on crowded services and the effects of negative passenger experiences on the wider satisfaction and confidence in the GB rail network.

Although the safety risks from crowding are generally well-managed, improvements can still be made to address the remaining areas of risk. In addition, the industry is encouraged to further acknowledge and take action wherever practicable to reduce the negative effects from crowding on passenger wellbeing.

Whilst all crowding on trains and at stations cannot realistically be eliminated, new research in 2019 suggests actions by ORR, train and station operators and passengers themselves can improve the ways crowding is planned for and managed. The Rail Safety and Standards Board (RSSB) is expected to produce new good practice guidance for the industry in early 2020 which draws on this new research, which ORR is awaiting and will consider.

## **What do we expect from train and station operators?**

Train and station operators should continue to comply with their health and safety responsibilities to protect passengers from risks on crowded trains and at stations, so far as is reasonably practicable. ORR will pay close attention to how the railway industry plans to further reduce the health and safety risks of slips, trips and falls and fainting connected to crowding. We will examine the control measures train companies and station operators have to mitigate these risk in particular. We will also focus on the effectiveness of operator plans to prepare for, and safely manage, known events such as sporting fixtures that can cause or exacerbate crowding. Emergency situations require competent and trained staff to manage any crowding risks that might arise, and we expect the industry to diligently apply the available good practice guidance.

We also encourage train and station operators to apply recognised good practice in planning for, and managing, a wide range of crowding scenarios. This includes new RSSB guidance expected in early 2020. Operators' plans should clearly set out how crowding hazards can be identified, and wherever possible reduced, and crowding's negative effects on passengers alleviated. When there is a passenger safety-related incident, operators should ensure they consider whether crowding either caused or contributed to it, and record that accurately. All operators should monitor and continuously improve their planning, procedures and processes in the light of their learning about its effectiveness. Planning should relate to the 'real world', reflecting each operator's stations or services at different times and under both 'normal' and 'abnormal' situations. Train and station operators should ensure timely and helpful information is shared with passengers about crowding conditions.

Train and station operators should set out and comply with an Accessible Travel Policy (ATPs) as approved by ORR. This is part of their licence requirements and covers a wider range of legal and good practice elements to ensure every rail company's policies, practises and procedures facilitate the use of the railway by disabled people and people of reduced mobility (DPRM). Crowding at stations and on trains can have a greater impact on passengers with both visible and non-visible disabilities. We expect operators to consider the impact of crowding in their ATP strategies and how this is applied. For example, this could include how information about access to (as opposed to just provision of) accessible toilets on crowded services can be communicated. In accordance with our ATP requirements for operators, part of the training their staff will receive from 2021 (at the latest) will include hearing from disabled people about their experiences of using the railway.

## **What can passengers do themselves?**

Passengers can also take steps to reduce risks and the negative effects on their own and fellow passengers' wellbeing by practising good travel etiquette. This includes the now long-established need to keep luggage away from aisles and off seats and prepare for crowding in advance, especially by carrying water during journeys in the summer months. Some train operators are using technology to provide up to date information about their busiest services and carriages, which can be helpful for passengers.

Passengers should remain alert in crowds and supportive of more vulnerable fellow passengers. In particular, passengers should remember to stand behind

the yellow line markings at the platform edge, an essential safety feature in stations irrespective of any perceived advantage gained for embarking onto a busy train.

All passengers must take responsibility to prevent any feelings of stress from being in a crowded situation spilling over into confrontations with, or abuse towards, frontline railway staff or other travelers.

ORR supports passengers making full use of the channels available to them to raise concerns about crowding, directly with operators in the first instance.



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