



OFFICE OF RAIL AND ROAD

# **'MEASURING UP' ANNUAL RAIL CONSUMER REPORT**

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**CASE STUDIES JULY 2017**

## Information during disruption at Charing Cross station

The Code of Practice encourages companies to make use of 'disruption mode' when there is serious disruption. This means that the information screens only show trains that are known to be running and removes all the cancelled trains, so it is easier for passengers to identify those trains that are running.

In March 2017, a security alert at London Bridge disrupted services in the evening peak. There were reports that during the disruption information screens at Charing Cross station were blank for a period of time.

Because of the number of people affected by the disruption we undertook a review of the information provided during the incident. Network Rail had tried to implement 'disruption mode' but did so incorrectly, which meant that instead of showing trains running all of the information screens were blank and trains that did depart weren't advertised. Procedures have now been changed to ensure that correct information is given during disruption in future.

## Making stations accessible

When train companies and Network Rail carry out work at stations they need to have regard to the Department for Transport Code of Practice on *Design Standards for Accessible Railway Stations* (the Code). This makes sure that when work at stations is carried out recognition of accessibility needs is incorporated. The Code applies at the point at which a company installs, renews or replaces infrastructure or facilities. In addition to complying with the Code, we also expect companies to consult with key organisations such as local access groups, in particular when planning and undertaking works at stations.

We received a complaint from a local access group that Abellio Greater Anglia had not complied with the Code at Shenfield station and had not listened when they tried to engage with the company to resolve the problem. This included issues with Blue Badge parking spaces and signage. We visited Shenfield station to see the situation in practice.

We then worked with the train company to resolve the situation at this station, and identify works across its station estate which may engage the Code and make sure that in future these are carried out in compliance. We are pleased that AGA and latterly the new holder of the franchise Abellio East Anglia (AEA) agreed to address a number of the issues at Shenfield including by way of a pilot exercise that is designed to see whether relocation of the Blue Badge Parking spaces will attract more passengers. This pilot is, we understand, currently underway and a number of other issues including signage have also been addressed.

We are still working with AEA towards achieving compliance at other stations.

This year we will be reminding all station and train companies of their obligations under the Code, in particular to refresh understanding of the low threshold at which the Code is triggered and the process for seeking a derogation or dispensation where this is appropriate. In addition we will consider our own approach to ensure that companies are held to account for their responsibilities in this area.

## Notice periods for booking assistance

It is important that all train companies and Network Rail meet the standards set out in the guidance, and that passengers receive consistent messages about how much notice they need to give to book assistance.

We were concerned that although all policy documents complied with the guidance and stated that people booking assistance would not be asked to give more than 24 hours' notice, in practice some companies were asking for more via certain booking channels (such as on e-booking forms) and in information provided on websites.

In February 2017, we wrote to five train companies (Arriva Trains Wales, East Midlands Trains, London Midland, ScotRail and Virgin Trains East Coast) setting out our concerns and asking them to make changes. Following our engagement, all five companies quickly amended the relevant information to make clear that passengers do not need to give more than 24 hours' notice.

We also asked RDG to update the assistance page on the National Rail Enquiries website. This now makes clear that passengers can book assistance at short notice and do not need to give more than 24 hours' notice.

We will continue to keep this area under review.

## Complaints backlog

Companies have a regulatory obligation to respond to 95% of complaints within 20 working days. Through our compliance monitoring we identified that Arriva Trains Wales (ATW) had failed to meet its complaints handling obligations and that the trend in performance was downward. A backlog of responses to complaints and contacts of over 9,400 had also built up.

We had been in contact with ATW to understand the situation and decided to visit ATW to conduct an end-to-end review of its complaint handling process. This thorough review, and ATW's positive approach to this engagement, enabled the areas where ATW's current arrangements for handling complaints could be improved to be identified, such as arrangements for dealing with the backlog in complaints which had developed.

Progress against ATW's resulting improvement plans has been monitored through weekly reporting and ATW has swiftly now returned to compliance with its complaints performance obligations. This took effect from the start of the 2017-18 reporting year and so is not reflected in the reporting data in this report.

## Contact centre move

In November 2016, FirstGroup companies Great Western Railway (GWR) and TransPennine Express (TPE) proactively complied with the requirement to inform us where regulatory obligations are unlikely to be met.

The failure to deal with 95% of complaints within 20 working days arose as a result of FirstGroup companies moving their contact centre, which created a backlog in complaints. At its peak, the outstanding caseload of contacts and complaints was more than 53,000 cases.

Following dialogue with ORR, both TPE and GWR provided a detailed action plan and recovery milestones. We subsequently met with them to test their ambition to put matters right for consumers.

Through weekly monitoring reports and engagement with Transport Focus we were able to gauge progress and identify further areas where consumers were not getting the required service, such as the quality of responses and information about delays. This collaborative approach proved successful with both train companies returning to full compliance with their obligations by the start of the 2017-18 reporting year.

## Planned engineering works

In October 2016 we formally raised concerns with Merseyrail that it had not been meeting the timescales for responding to complaints for an extended period of time. Merseyrail took actions to implement a new Customer Relationship management system, appointed a new team leader and better matched resources to projected demand, assigned extra staff to complaints handling, and made sure oversight of the team's performance became more visible to the Executive Leadership team to ensure challenge. This meant it was able to return to meeting the relevant timescales for responding to complaints.

In addition, between January and June 2017 Merseyrail undertook a significant programme of engineering works as part of the Wirral Loop Line Track Renewal. Merseyrail took proactive steps to inform ORR of its plans to let consumers know about the upcoming works. It also explained how it planned to deal with any associated uplift in complaints. Steps taken included forming a new team to support the provision of real time customer information during the work. Merseyrail also worked with other companies to understand the impact of similar programmes of work on their networks. Although Merseyrail has experienced some increase in complaints since the start of the track works it has met the relevant timescales for responding to complaints since December 2016 (rail period 9, 2016-17).