



**Heathrow  
Express**  
The smarter way

Heathrow Express Operating Company Limited  
The Compass Centre, Nelson Road  
Hounslow, Middlesex  
TW6 2GW

**Marcus Clements**

Head of Consumer Policy  
Directorate of Economics, Markets & Strategy  
Office of Rail and Road

15 January 2021

Dear Marcus,

**Re: Complaints handling satisfaction**

I am writing in response to your letter dated 15 December 2020 in relation to our complaints handling satisfaction and how we intend to address the concerns raised in the results of the 2019/20 complaint handling survey that the ORR commissioned.

**Heathrow Express Complaints in rail period 2019/20**

We take our complaints extremely seriously and I wanted to set out the steps we have taken to address the complaints we received during the last rail period 01 April 2019 through to 31 March 2020. During this period the number of complaints we received was less than 0.02% of the total journeys our passengers took on our service. Of the complaints we received, the vast majority (73% of our total complaints) were split into these categories:

- I. 27% attributed to; Punctuality/reliability (i.e. the train arriving/departing on time)
- II. 25% attributed to; Ticket buying facilities
- III. 21% attributed to; Provision of information on website or mobile apps

We have taken considerable steps to address the complaints in these categories, including:

**I. Punctuality/reliability (i.e. the train arriving/departing on time)**

Our punctuality during rail period 2019/20 was 89%. The percentage of our trains that ran their entire journey, calling at all scheduled stations and arriving at the terminating station within 5 minutes, was 94%. We knew that a newer fleet of trains would improve this performance further and so in December 2020 we replaced our fleet of class 332 trains with a newer fleet of class 387's. In addition to enhanced facilities onboard our trains, our passengers will benefit from the increased reliability and punctuality that a new fleet brings.

## **II. Ticket buying facilities**

In the autumn of 2019, we introduced a dedicated team to monitor and manage the performance of our ticket buying facilities across our estate at Heathrow and Paddington. The proactive and reactive work that this team undertook meant that our customers can expect our ticket vending machines (TVM's) to be available 99% of the time, which was up 15% from previous months. Given the significant drop in journeys throughout the COVID-19 crisis this team has been placed on Furlough, however despite the devastating effect COVID-19 has had on our business when we invite our frontline team back from furlough we will continue to keep this team in place to continue to provide clean, accessible and available TVM's for our customers for the foreseeable future.

## **III. Provision of information on website or mobile apps**

In the autumn of 2019, we launched our new website and mobile app. This launch allowed us to provide a superior upgrade on our existing digital platforms and address specific customer feedback and concerns. Whilst we launched these platforms over a year ago, we still have a programme of continuous improvement and have a significant upgrade planned in 2021 to improve the user experience further.

## **Heathrow Express Complaints handling in rail period 2019/20**

Whilst we are proud to have met our service level agreement to provide a full response to 100% of complaints within 20 working days during every rail period of 2019/20, we acknowledge that there isn't a correlation between the speed of the response and the satisfaction of the complaint handling or complaint outcome. There is more for us to do to bring our Net satisfaction of 15% to at least the national Net satisfaction average of 30%.

The below steps are being taken to address the results of the 2019/20 complaint handling survey and increase the satisfaction levels for our customers.

### **I. Frontline and Management team trained to handle "first-line" support**

Our customer relations (contact centre) team handle an array of customer cases, many of these cases can be categorised as "first-line" support which are often very simple to fix for customers; however, they can be inconvenient for our customers to raise as it requires them to contact our customer relations team directly through phone, email or by post.

In 2021 our frontline staff and managers will be trained to provide "first-line" support to our customers "in the moment". If customers speak to one of our staff or managers onboard our trains or at our sales locations at Heathrow or Paddington we will be able to assess very quickly if we can resolve the issue or query for them immediately without the need for escalation to our remote working customer relations team. This enhanced change of approach will not only allow us to provide a more convenient service recovery "in the moment" it will importantly reduce the number of "first-line" cases coming through to our customer relations team, giving this team more time to handle complaints and more complex cases. We anticipate that this will improve the satisfaction our customers have on the way their complaints are being handled.

## **II. Customer Relation re-training and team assessments**

In 2021 we will be providing additional training on our complaints handling procedure, which will include a practical session on the feedback received in the passenger survey. In addition an enhanced assessment programme for our customer relations team means that each of our staff members will be assessed at least once per month on the required competency within our complaints handling procedures. Formal performance management and training will be part of this programme to ensure our staff are delivering against the expected level of service. The trending results will be reviewed at the monthly performance meeting (below).

## **III. Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and Exec level monitoring and control of complaints and complaints handling**

In 2021 a monthly review meeting will be held to review complaints and complaints handling, this will include:

- Total complaints (all media) trends and analysis; volume and categories
- SLA review; Complaints received Vs complaints responded to
- Review of verbatim comments and RAW data
- Complaints root cause analysis process to establish actions and workstreams
- Measurement and control; review if complaints countermeasure is working

The above will form part of the company's executive performance card along with monthly review of the complaints handling performance dashboard.

## **IV. Joining the Rail Ombudsman**

We are still committed to joining the rail ombudsman and will continue to work with the ORR and the RDG to become a member of this service that our passengers can benefit from.

## **V. Considerations for outsourcing our customer relations team**

Before the COVID-19 crisis we were considering the prospect the outsourcing of our customer relations team. Given the significant impact this crisis has had on our business and with uncertainty about future demand we are reviewing the options once again with a decision in Q2 of 2021.

We look forward to implementing and reviewing these initiatives against the satisfaction results of the next survey.

In the interim please let me know if you require any further information and we look forward to receiving the ORR guidance notes for complaints handling and the new delay compensation code of practice referenced in the Annual Rail Consumer Report 2020.

Yours faithfully,

Heena Vora  
**Customer Relations Manager**  
**Heathrow Express**

