

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



Craig Alexander
Travel Integration & Accessibility Manager
Northern Trains

18 February 2021

Dear Craig,

Compliance with Condition 5 (Accessible Travel Policy) of your Station Licence and GB Statement of National Regulatory Provisions: Passenger

Thank you for your response to our letter dated 21 August 2020 in respect of Northern Trains' (Northern's) licence and its performance in relation to the requirements of the Accessible Travel Policy (ATP) guidance.

You have cited a number of possible reasons why passenger satisfaction for expected assistance received was low, which was discussed at the recent ATP Quarterly meeting held with my team. We are disappointed to see that this includes the suggestion that customer expectation of the extent of assistance available at stations may differ from the provision available at many locations. As you are aware, it is important that disabled people and other passengers with reduced mobility both expect and receive the assistance they have booked in advance. Passengers must not be booked onto assisted journeys that are inaccessible to them or where assistance is not available. Furthermore, unmet expectations can have a significant impact on passenger confidence and willingness to travel in the future.

In your response, you set out a number of measures that were planned to be put into place over 2020-21 to improve the reliability of your assistance provision. These include: a detailed review of the touchpoints of a customer's journey; a programme of research to evaluate and monitor the delivery and the effectiveness of your assistance provision; and the implementation of regional station workshops to identify station based improvements.

We welcome these measures and will continue to ask for updates on progress in our forthcoming ongoing ATP quarterly meetings.



Please note that this letter and your previous correspondence will be published on our website.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marcus Clements". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Marcus Clements



Craig Alexander
Travel Integration and Accessibility Manager
craig.alexander@northernrailway.co.uk

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

10 September 2020

Dear Marcus

Compliance with Condition 5 (Accessible Travel Policy) of your Station Licence and GB Statement of National Regulatory Provisions: Passenger

Thank you for your recent letter regarding Northern's compliance in relation to Condition 5 (Accessible Travel Policy) of our Station Licence. I was disappointed to read of the findings from the report, and in a similar way to those reported to Martin Howard in April 2019, the survey results are not generally reflective of the feedback we typically receive from our customers. However, I welcome the research conducted as an opportunity to identify where we can improve the service we provide.

The '*Experiences of Passenger Assist*' research report published in July 2020, offered a mixed picture on the experience of respondents when travelling from a station managed by Northern; 87% were satisfied or very satisfied by the helpfulness of station staff, a rise of seven percentage points from 2019. However, respondent satisfaction for expected station assistance received was lower, and this is an obvious area of concern.

There are several potential explanations for this result. Northern operates a broad geographical network of 479 stations across the North of England and the infrastructure and facilities at these stations varies considerably across the network. Approximately 25% of our stations are staffed, while some have staff presence for part of the day and the remainder have no station-based staff. Customer expectation of the extent of assistance available at stations, may differ from the provision available at many locations.

Similarly, the information available and provided to customers when planning a journey with assistance is an important consideration for travelling with confidence, an area we have placed considerable focus on.

While there are number of factors which may influence the survey results, I would like to share three initiatives we have launched in 2020 which we believe will improve the reliability of Northern's booked assistance provision:

- 1) Review of assisted journeys:** a detailed review of each 'touchpoint' of a customer journey, from planning travel to booking assistance through to completing the journey at the destination station is underway. We recognise that each touchpoint contributes to reliable assistance which customers can be confident in using and provides a high-quality customer experience. An improved online Passenger Assistance booking form is the first output of this initiative, which will be released in Q3 2020.

northernrailway.co.uk

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- 2) **Assisted Journey research:** a research programme is under development which will provide granular insight into assisted journeys across the Northern network, to identify areas of success and opportunities for improvement. In doing so we aim to be able to monitor and evaluate our delivery of assistance, and the effectiveness of interventions. We anticipate a pilot will go live in Q1 2021, subject to COVID-19 circumstances.
- 3) **Regional Station Workshops:** a pilot initiative is underway to focus on how assistance is delivered at a group of stations in our North East Region, where workshops bring colleagues from across our conductor and station teams to identify where improvements can be made at specific stations, reflecting the operational environment. The implementation of the Assistance Provision Communications Protocol that will support this initiative. We expect to roll this workshop approach out across the business in Q1 2021.

I hope that I have been able to convey our commitment to fulfilling our obligations and by providing reliable assistance our services are accessible to all and customers can travel with confidence safe in the knowledge that support is available at each stage of their journey, when needed.

We have more projects within our two-year plan that I would be happy to share with you as we continue to transform travel in the North.

Yours sincerely



Craig Alexander
Travel Integration and Accessibility Manager

Marcus Clements
Head of Consumer Policy
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Craig Alexander
Travel Integration & Accessibility Manager
Northern Trains

21 August 2020

Dear Craig,

Compliance with Condition 5 (Accessible Travel Policy) of your Station Licence and GB Statement of National Regulatory Provisions: Passenger

I refer to Condition 5 of Northern Trains' (Northern's) licence and its performance in relation to its obligations under the Accessible Travel Policy (ATP) guidance.

Following receipt of your response to our letter of 3 July 2020 from David Kimball, we will continue to discuss Northern's draft ATP with the aim of issuing a formal approval letter in due course. In the meantime, in its 2017 Disabled People's Protection Policy Northern has committed to providing assistance when booked in advance through Passenger Assist, at any station during the hours that trains are scheduled to serve that station. Our data shows that Northern received 46,692 requests for booked assistance in 2019/20.

As you will be aware, the Office of Rail and Road conducts ongoing research into the experience of booked assistance users who rely on the service to make their journeys. Our latest survey results for 2019/20 (rail periods 1-13) show that at the stations managed by Northern only 62% of passengers surveyed¹ received all aspects of the assistance they had booked in advance. We note that one in five (20%) of those Northern passengers surveyed did not receive any aspect of the assistance they had booked.

These findings indicate that the reliability of Northern's booked assistance provision is currently falling short of what we, and your passengers, expect. It is especially

¹ Based on a sample of 191 Northern passengers surveyed by Breaking Blue.

disappointing that the steps you outlined in your response² to us when we wrote to you on the same issue last year have failed to deliver the improvements you anticipated, and highlight that further action is required. It is important that passengers receive the service they have booked. Failure to do so can have an adverse impact on passengers' confidence and willingness to travel in future.

Next steps

I shall be grateful if you will explain the reasons for the shortfall in performance together with the steps you intend to take to improve the reliability of the booked assistance provided to passengers.

I look forward to receiving your reply by **Friday 11 September 2020**.

Please send your response to: Denise.Brown@orr.gov.uk

This letter and your reply will be published on our website.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Marcus Clements', written in a cursive style.

Marcus Clements

² Northern 12 April 2019 response to ORR letter regarding the reliability of assistance provision: https://orr.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/41357/arn-response-dppp-compliance-letter.pdf