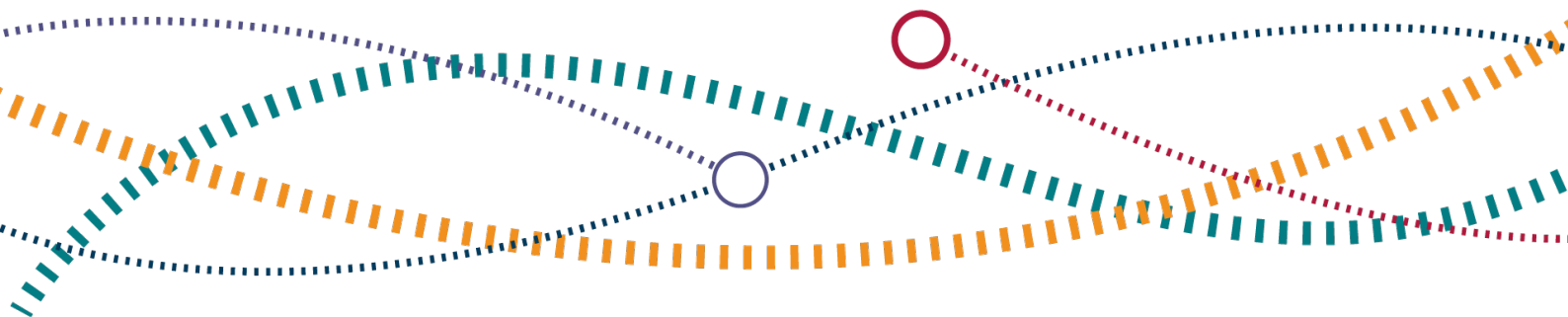




Passenger impact review – Hitachi class 800 trains

25 June 2021



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Executive summary

The disruption caused by the events on 8 May had an impact on passengers travelling or expecting to do so using the services of the train operators affected: Great Western Railway (GWR); London North Eastern Railway (LNER); TransPennine Express (TPE); and Hull Trains. In these circumstances, it is important that passengers are given the best information available about train services, and where they are advised not to travel or are unable to do so, they can access the correct information about their rights to a refund from the ticket retailer.

The extent of the disruption varied across the operators. All LNER routes were initially affected; 105 of its planned 148 trains were cancelled on 8 May (compared to 35 cancellations on 1 May). All of GWR's long distance services were affected (though its regional and local services not using Intercity Express Trains continued running as before); 145 of GWR's planned 1054 trains were cancelled on the first day of disruption (compared to 20 cancellations on 1 May). Only one of TPE's routes was affected, with 31 of its 276 planned trains cancelled on 8 May (compared to seven cancellations across its routes on 1 May).

To understand the passenger impact of the disruption, over the weekend of 8-9 May and 10-21 May (when we ceased our information checks), we initiated a review focussed on four particular areas. We considered what the train operators and third-party retailers did, and what lessons could be learned for future events. We have set out our findings, together with the issues we identified for industry consideration to reduce the impact on passengers should similar disruption occur in future, in each of these four areas below.

1. Consistency and clarity of travel information

8-9 May

The evolving nature of the incident meant that information for passengers was understandably not perfect at the start. The focus at such times was on getting the best information available to passengers; with some minor exceptions, train operators did so successfully. **Nonetheless, there are some issues we have identified which merit further consideration by the industry to reduce the impact on passengers should similar disruption occur in future.**

- ***Process for cross-check of websites*** – cross-checking by train operators of their website with others providing train information to ensure that the information is correct and consistent.

- **Route maps** – preparing alternative route maps for “standard” route disruption in advance so that they are ready for use when required.
- **Trigger for use of the red banner** – standardising the use of the National Rail Enquiries red banner website messaging so that it is clear what level of disruption should trigger the red message.
- **National Rail Enquiries bulletins** – making it clear in the disruption bulletin (information notice) when the journey planner has been updated and times shown can be relied upon, and removing general messaging (such as the need to reserve a seat) from the warning triangle tool when there is major disruption to avoid “triangle overload” in journey planners.

10-21 May

Throughout the period, the information given to passengers by train operators, with only minor exceptions, was largely prominent, clear and consistent. **Nevertheless, there are some issues we have identified which merit further consideration by the industry to reduce the impact on passengers should similar disruption occur in future.**

- **Consistent use of the red banner** – applying the red banner on the operator’s website when it is being used on National Rail Enquiries for the same issue.
- **Correcting the Automated Service Indicator** – correcting train operators websites using service indicators which automatically often show a good service (based on the revised service) even when there is disruption. This may need to be corrected manually to show that part of the network is closed.
- **Information about the availability of on-board services** – making it clear to passengers where the rolling stock type has been changed, especially when it has fewer facilities.

2. Ticket refunds – information and administration fees

We are unable to say to what extent passengers followed ticket refunds advice. We intend to send a request for information to the train operators and the third-party retailers to understand the volume of passengers claims made for a refund. **In the meantime, we have identified a number of areas where improvements in the information provided to passengers in future should be considered.**

- **Passengers who wish to claim a refund must have clear and consistent information to enable them to do so.** There were instances where information about the application of an administration fee for refunds - typically up to £10 - was either inconsistent or absent.
- **Keeping refund information about an incident on websites for longer.** Some retailers removed information about rights to a fee-free refund and claiming within 28 days for the incident shortly after the disruption was cleared. It would be helpful that such information remained in place for a longer period.
- **Reviewing industry rules to explicitly include ‘Do not travel’ advice.** The next industry review of the National Rail Conditions of Travel should give careful consideration to including the entitlement to a full fee-free refund when passengers follow advice not to travel so that this is clear and consistent for passengers.
- **Clarity in refund information on the National Rail Enquiries website.** Advice regarding refunds during the incident was only available via the information link for compensation for delays; it would be helpful if it was available via a dedicated link.
- **Using Twitter for refund information.** The communication of refund rights, such as signposting that they are available, could be employed more readily in tweets in future.
- **Disruption messaging on third-party retailer websites.** Third-party retailers should consider adding a disruption banner messaging to their home page and link to refund information during major disruption.

3. Advice to passengers on alternative travel arrangements including ticket acceptance

Whilst acceptance arrangements could have been better over the weekend of 8 May, train operators largely performed well. **Nonetheless, there are some issues we have identified which merit further consideration by the industry.**

- **Consistency of information about ticket acceptance** – it is important that consistent information is given across websites and social media, especially as changes are made.
- **Information about other operators’ services for ticket acceptance** – where ticket acceptance arrangements have been made, passengers should be told if

there is disruption on those operators' services or where the increased number of passengers using those services may impact on the ability to travel.

- ***Use of maps to highlight disruption and alternative routes*** - displaying maps as the disruption continued may have been helpful to passengers to plan and make their journeys.

4. Passengers who had booked assistance

The information we have collected provides us with comfort that as far as possible train operators proactively contacted passengers who had booked assistance to travel, to provide information about the disruption and offer alternative travel support.

Next steps

We have written to the Rail Delivery Group to highlight those areas of our findings where we consider improvements in information can be made and will discuss with them how these might be taken forward. We have also written to train operators and third-party retailers to set out our findings regarding the clarity and consistency of refund information and to reiterate our expectations in this area; we will come back to this issue in the coming year as part of our forward work plan.

Background

As part of our review of the issues surrounding the safety issues with the Hitachi class 800 trains, ORR has undertaken an exercise designed to understand the impact on passengers of the relevant train operators: Great Western Railway (GWR); London North Eastern Railway (LNER); TransPennine Express (TPE); and Hull Trains (although the impact on the latter was more limited), and what might be learned from this event. The terms of reference for our review covered:

- consistency and clarity of travel information, both over the weekend of 8 May as the safety issues became apparent but in the following week(s) including information provided by National Rail Enquiries;
- ticket refunds - information provided by train operators, National Rail Enquiries, and third-party retailers to passengers about their refund rights and the application of administration fees;
- advice to passengers on alternative travel arrangements including ticket acceptance on other operators; and
- the steps taken to contact passengers who had booked assistance to travel and the accessible alternative arrangements offered.

This report sets out our findings in each of these areas, together with any learning that could be applied to any future incidents.

We initially considered ScotRail in the scope of our review of passenger impact. However, it quickly became apparent that the impact on its services was minimal. We understand that of the circa 2,000 services operated, 19 ran with a reduced number of carriages and there were no cancellations as a result of this issue.

As we conducted our review, we discussed any immediate findings requiring attention with the industry, including on the initial weekend of disruption. We have also shared our preliminary findings with them prior to publication.

Similarly, we have been in dialogue with Transport Focus as we have conducted our work to minimise any duplication. We noted the exchange of correspondence between Transport Focus and the Rail Delivery Group. In its correspondence, Transport Focus asked the Rail Delivery Group to ensure that the industry focused on the clarity of information to passengers about train services, and refunds, as well as managing crowding and communications around social distancing. In further correspondence to the

Rail Delivery Group, Transport Focus highlighted some generic issues that complements our own review.

As a result, the Rail Delivery Group initiated a programme of daily checks. These were carried out by the National Rail Communications Centre following a review of the criteria with ORR and Transport Focus, a process that allowed us to ensure that the checks covered the same areas as our own.

Summary of findings and areas for future industry consideration

1. Consistency and clarity of travel information

In considering the extent to which the train operators and National Rail Enquiries provided clear and consistent information to passengers, we focussed our attention to the following questions:

- Is it clear on arrival on the website that something is happening?
- If you knew something was happening, could you find correct information?
- Would you be alerted that something different was happening when buying a ticket?
- Is the information consistent between the train operator and National Rail Enquiries?

In the following section, we set out our findings for weekend of 8 May, and from 10 May onwards.

1.1 Consistency and clarity of travel information weekend of 8 May

The evolving nature of the incident meant that information for passengers was not perfect at the start. We acknowledge the difficulty such situations can pose, and recognise this in paragraph 25 of our regulatory guidance on meeting passenger information requirements:

25. The licence obligations are not intended to undermine the primary objective of providing the best available service for passengers. Making justified changes to the train plan to meet passengers' needs should not be conditional on providing perfect advance information about these. However, we would expect licence holders to use reasonable endeavours to get such information out as widely as possible and as quickly as possible. We will take the circumstances into account during any assessment of compliance.

Operators initially used “a problem under investigation” as the reason for disruption and were less clear about the impact. For example, although many of the trains were cancelled in the morning of 8 May, it was not clear whether passengers could still travel that afternoon or whether operators had just not cancelled those trains yet. The messaging was later changed to “more trains than usual needing repairs at the same time” which was

more informative. Although a “do not travel” message was used widely, not all trains were cancelled which, whilst welcome, painted a confusing picture when journey planners did not differentiate between those cancelled, running or just not confirmed.

We set out below our findings for each operator and National Rail Enquiries.

GWR

GWR’s early morning pinned tweet of 8 May informed passengers of the disruption to its high-speed services and advised them not to travel. There was a lack of clarity at this stage regarding ticket acceptance arrangements, with GWR’s website and twitter responses to passengers suggesting that arrangements were only in place with Avanti West Coast and West Midlands Railway whilst the GWR journeycheck page indicated that Chiltern and CrossCountry were accepting tickets. The headline used for the disruption on its network updates page “Cancellations to services at London Paddington” may not have highlighted the geographical scope of the disruption.

Our review of the GWR website noted its small red triangle “travel update” warning with a prominent front page graphic about the disruption including the reasons for it. Two of the three pages on the revolving carousel of information highlighted that there were cancellations to GWR services although they did not give the “do not travel” message. The service information page provided detail of the affected routes together with advice not to travel, while noting that most of the local services across the wider GWR network were unaffected. There was no map to give more clarity on which routes were affected. Passengers attempting to buy tickets were presented with either yellow or red triangles against the individual service denoting disruption or cancellation respectively.

LNER

LNER’s twitter message posted early in the morning of 8 May indicated that services route-wide were subject to delays and cancellation. Passengers were asked not to travel and advised that tickets would be accepted up to 16 May (but that a new reservation must be made). Further tweets provided clear information on replacement coaches and ticket acceptance with other operators.

There was clear messaging on the website home page highlighting major disruption and why, together with advice to passengers not to travel. Information via the service updates link provided a list of train services that had been altered, and passengers looking to buy a ticket were unable to buy them for cancelled trains. However, information about replacement transport and ticket acceptance was not available on the website. This was because the “do not travel” message had not been linked to the relevant National Rail Enquiries disruption item. Where trains had been cancelled passengers were given a

standard message to travel on the next available LNER service (where a reservation would be required) rather than to use other operators.

TPE

TPE's early morning tweet of 8 May advised passengers of possible short notice cancellations and disruption on its Newcastle to Liverpool Lime Street route for the rest of the day. Further tweets provided information about the reasons for the disruption, ticket acceptance and rail replacement buses. A later tweet advised passengers not to travel on the Newcastle to York part of the route.

TPE had a clear and prominent banner on its home page warning of major disruption to services and advising passengers not to travel on its Newcastle to York route. This linked to an information page providing information about the cause of the disruption, a link to journey planners, and advice to passengers who had booked assistance.

Whilst the travel updates page highlighted the disruption and live departure information showed cancellations, at the time we checked this page the afternoon trains had no disruption messaging to indicate the possibility of delay or cancellation. Therefore, passengers buying a ticket would not be alerted to a potential problem with the service until arrival at the station.

Hull Trains

Hull Trains' early morning tweet of 8 May advised of possible cancellations across its whole network and disruption for the rest of the day, together with the reasons why. A tweet a short time later provided information about ticket acceptance arrangements.

The prominent front-page red banner provided advice against travel until further notice although live trains information on the home page did not reflect that services were cancelled. Appropriate messaging was in journey planners so that passengers buying tickets would know about the disruption.

Services were restored from the afternoon of 8 May with banner messages amended to say that services were running again. Given the disruption elsewhere on the East Coast mainline, it was sensible of Hull Trains to highlight its services were able to run normally in the afternoon; passengers having seen the earlier messaging may have otherwise assumed that they were not.

National Rail Enquiries

National Rail Enquiries had a clear and prominent red website banner on its home page advising passengers of major disruption on three routes. This highlighted major disruption to Hull Trains and GWR services and advised passengers not to travel on LNER. There

was no banner regarding TPE although TPE's website was displaying one. We checked with National Rail Enquiries and were informed that this was because only one of the TPE routes was affected. Detailed information about the disruption to all of the operators was available via the current disruptions link in the usual way.

We noted only minor differences between the information provided on the individual National Rail Enquiries pages for each train operator with that on the operators' own websites. However, for LNER the National Rail Enquiries page gave more information than was available on its website, including ticket acceptance, an LNER branded alternative route map and details of replacement transport. This is because the National Rail Enquiries incident is normally included on the LNER website but was not linked on this occasion.

In the National Rail Enquiries journey planner, a number of routes were marked with the yellow triangle showing that the service was disrupted. This was in addition to cancelled services where known. However, on the first day decisions were not made immediately for the afternoon services and these showed the green tick normal service indicator. It was not clear whether this was because they were checked and found to be running or whether the operators had yet to cancel them.

1.1.1 Issues for industry consideration

Clearly, this was a rapidly evolving situation over the weekend of 8 May with the extent of the disruption changing all the time. We recognise how difficult it can be to keep information up to date in such circumstances, especially at weekends when website updates may be more difficult. With some minor exceptions, train operators did so successfully. **Nevertheless, there are some issues we have identified which merit further consideration by the industry to reduce the impact on passengers should similar disruption occur in future.**

- **Process for cross-check of websites** – train operators should have a process of cross-checking their website with others that provide train information to ensure that the information is correct and consistent.
- **Route maps** - alternative route maps for “standard” route disruption, such as that used on National Rail Enquiries for LNER services, could be prepared in advance so that they are ready for use when required .
- **Trigger for use of the red banner** – standardising the use of the National Rail Enquiries red banner so that it is clear what level of disruption should trigger the red message.

- **National Rail Enquiries bulletins** – make it clear in the disruption bulletin when the journey planner has been updated and times shown can be relied upon. It is important that routes with disruption be shown as such; it may be appropriate to remove other more general messaging (for example the need to reserve a seat) when there is major disruption to avoid “triangle overload” in journey planners.

1.2 Consistency and clarity of travel information 10 – 21 May

After the initial messaging over the weekend, the situation stabilised as arrangements were put in place to deal with the longer-term situation. At the start of the period, the timetables were updated each day but later the journey planner was updated for a number of days ahead. In these circumstances, the priority is getting updated times into the industry’s central system Darwin, so that it can feed the other industry systems and ensure that journey planners are updated. Generally it should be possible to indicate the level of service being planned for the next day before the close of normal working hours.

However, in the rush to demonstrate “business as usual” there were some gaps in the information provided which could have been helpful to passengers. Whilst industry checks carried out by National Rail Communications Centre stopped after 17 May, we continued our monitoring as services returned to normality. We set out below our findings for each operator, which include any relevant references to National Rail Enquiries.

GWR

Our examination of the information on GWR’s website found that suitable prominence had been given to information about the disruption and this was largely both clear and consistent throughout the period checked. We noted only minor differences between the information provided by GWR and National Rail Enquiries.

GWR continued to extend its “do not travel” message on a daily basis but was also able to expand on the information provided for each route that was affected. Journey planners were initially updated daily, and it broke down the longer distance routes into a number of shuttle services. However, although we have seen useful internal maps showing the shuttle services that were operating, these were not seen in any of our checks on the information available to passengers.

By Sunday 16 May, an amended timetable was loaded into journey planners for travel through to Friday 21 May. With over 60 trains available for service by 17 May and the timetable stabilised, ticket acceptance with other operators was withdrawn. We noted that some services used different rolling stock (Class 387 services on some Bristol Parkway to Paddington journeys) which was not advertised specifically; facilities available to

passengers on these services were not those usually provided, for example seat reservations, and the difference could only be identified by the longer journey time (owing to a lower top speed).

LNER

Our review of LNER's website found that the information was largely prominent, clear and consistent from 10 May onwards until the service became more stable during w/c 17 May. During this time, we found isolated instances of out of date messaging such as train cancellation information from the previous day; these were quickly rectified when we made contact with LNER. We identified improvements made over time, such as the inclusion of bus accessibility information when trying to buy a ticket from 13 May. We also noted some discrepancies with the information regarding ticket acceptance, with more information available about these arrangements on National Rail Enquiries than on the LNER website.

From 17 May, the banners and warning messages were removed as a more stable service was introduced. There was no longer any information about this issue or changes to the timetable as a result. However, timetables are still only published a week ahead.

TPE

By 11 May, TPE's own website was no longer displaying any red banner other than a general message to remind passengers to follow government guidance in relation to restrictions. In contrast, the National Rail Enquiries website had been updated to include TPE on its red banner page. This discrepancy continued until 13 May when TPE was removed from the red banner on the National Rail Enquiries website. The National Rail Enquiries feed was updated to indicate that "normal service" had resumed.

The disruption page on TPE's website remained active until its removal on 14 May and our monitoring of TPE's website identified no further specific reference to this incident.

Hull Trains

There was clear and prominent messaging on Hull Trains website from 10 May to confirm that services had returned to normal.

1.2.1 Issues for industry consideration

We note that throughout the period that the information given, with only minor exceptions, was prominent, clear and consistent. **Nevertheless, there are some issues we have identified which merit further consideration by the industry to reduce the impact on passengers should similar disruption occur in future.**

- **Consistent use of the red banner** – in circumstances where the red banner is used on National Rail Enquiries, the operator’s website should also do so where it relates to the same issue.
- **Correcting the Automated Service Indicator** – correcting train operators websites using service indicators which automatically show that there is a good service - because it is based on the revised service scheduled to run - even when there is disruption such as the closure of a line (as was the case this time in respect of GWR and TPE). This may need to be corrected manually to show that part of the network is closed.
- **Information about the availability of on-board services** - making it clear to passengers where the rolling stock type has been changed, especially when it has fewer facilities.

2. Information about refund rights and the application of administration fees

The disruption caused by the events on 8 May onwards inevitably meant that a number of passengers were unable to use the tickets they had purchased for travel and as a result would be entitled to a refund. It is important that in these circumstances, passengers can access the information they need to understand their eligibility for a refund and are not faced with charges for doing so. The National Rail Conditions of Travel (NRCOT) set out the key contractual rights and terms relating to refunds. There are also obligations under consumer law to provide consumers with material information, for example about their rights.

We wrote to the four train operators on 11 May, and in similar terms to third-party retailers on 13 May, to remind them of their obligations under NRCOT. In particular:

- Passengers can get a full refund on all tickets (except season tickets) if the train they intended to use is cancelled, delayed or their reservation will not be honoured, and they decide not to travel or are unable to complete their journey;
- Refunds in these circumstances will not be subject to an administration fee; and
- Passengers should apply for a refund within 28 days of the intended date of travel, to the retailer from whom they bought their ticket.

We set out our expectation that this information (and any other relevant refund information) should be provided in a way that is clear, unambiguous and timely. On the company’s website, we would envisage that this information is included not only in general information

about ticket refunds but also referenced on any temporary webpages dedicated to the current disruption. It should also require a minimal number of clicks from the website homepage to access this information.

We would also expect the refund claims process to be simple and easy to navigate online, with a clear category for cancellations/disruption in the options when choosing a reason for the refund application. This can help ensure the passenger is not dissuaded from applying for a refund and can obtain it fee-free.

We also reminded them of their obligations under consumer law to provide consumers with material information, for example about their rights. This will help to ensure that they are not confused or misled about their existing contractual rights during disruption, a consequence of which could mean passengers not accessing the refunds to which they are entitled.

To understand whether the train operators, National Rail Enquiries, and third-party retailers were providing the required information to passengers about their refund rights and the application of administration fees, we reviewed the information about these matters on their respective websites on 10 May and where necessary shortly after, as well as on other media such as twitter.

We set out below our findings for each operator, National Rail Enquiries, Trainline, and three other main third-party retailers: TrainPal; raileasy; and Red Spotted Hanky.

GWR

We noted that GWR's pinned tweet informing passengers of the disruption also advised them not to travel and that full refunds will be available. Our review of the GWR website found a clear pathway from the home page banner advising of cancellations to services through to the refund claim form. Passengers were given clear advice not to travel as well as the option to use tickets on other services, prior to accessing the refunds page which provides information about their rights to a fee-free refund and the 28-day period for making a claim. However, the refund claim form stated that the £10 fee applies to all claims.

LNER

The travel alerts link in the 'Check before you travel' banner message on the LNER home page allowed passengers to click straight through to information on claiming a refund. It also provided relevant advice to passengers about the validity of tickets for travel as well as the need to apply for a fee-free refund within 28 days. We noted that twitter messages referred to the ability to use tickets on other services but not the right to obtain a refund.

TPE

We noted that whereas previously the red banner at the top of the TPE homepage would both alert prospective passengers to the fact that there was ongoing disruption and inform prospective passengers of their refund options, this information had been removed by 10 May 2021. While there was a dedicated page relating to this incident which provided details about the options for a refund, this page became inactive from 14 May onwards. At this point, passengers were required to follow the refunds tab from the home page (which states that it was last updated on 29 April 2021) to general refund information available on the TPE website. This includes information that where passengers cannot travel due to disruption they can get a full refund if they claim within 28 days.

Hull Trains

The website banner on the home page advising passengers that services had resumed included a link to information about claiming a refund for disruption to services on the morning of 8 May. This provided advice about claiming a refund within 28 days, and links to the refund claim form which states that the £10 fee applies to all claims.

National Rail Enquiries

As the primary resource of information for passengers, we reviewed the information available on the National Rail Enquiries website on two occasions, 10 and 12 May, to understand whether the information about refunds was current and consistent.

We were able to follow a clear path from the red banner highlighting major disruption on the home page for each of the train operators. However, there was no clear link from there to material on refunds; instead, this was accessed via the 'compensation' link which included information about fee-free refunds where a service is cancelled or delayed. Similar information was available via the Frequently Asked Questions link where it additionally stated that passengers had 28 days to claim.

Third-Party Retailer - Trainline

We reviewed the information available to passengers over the week commencing 10 May. Throughout the period, we noted that there was no banner messaging regarding the disruption. The path to information regarding refunds was via the 'Help' link accessible on the home page. On the refunds page, information about fee-free refunds was found under the 'refunds for delayed and cancelled trains'. The requirement to claim within 28 days was found under the 'which tickets can I refund' section and related only to flexible tickets.

Whilst there were some details about an incident and ongoing disruption on LNER and GWR via the help link, detailed information about refunds did not appear until on 14 May.

This included information about fee-free refunds but not the requirement to claim within 28 days.

Third-Party Retailers - TrainPal; raileasy; and Red Spotted Hanky

We reviewed the information available on three third-party retailer websites: TrainPal; raileasy; and Red Spotted Hanky, on three occasions between 11 and 14 May. Whilst none of the retailers provided information about the disruption, all provided a link from the home page via either a help or FAQ button to their refund information page. All stated that claims should be made within 28 days and that a £10 administration fee would be charged.

In terms of cancelled journeys: TrainPal confirmed that a claim for a full refund could be made but without reference to the 28 day limit or that it was fee-free; raileasy referred to providing a refund for an abandoned journey due to a cancelled train; whilst Red Spotted Hanky asked the passenger to obtain written confirmation from the train company of cancellation to be eligible for a refund.

2.1 Issues for industry consideration

We are unable to say to what extent passengers followed ticket refund advice. We intend to send a request for information to the four train operators and the third-party retailers to understand the volume of passengers claims made for a refund. **In the meantime, we have identified a number of areas where improvements in the information provided to passengers in future should be considered.**

- **Passengers who wish to claim a refund must have clear and consistent information to enable them to do so.** We noted instances where this was not the case, particularly with regard to the application of an administration fee for refunds. Information was either inconsistent or absent. Train operators and third-party retailers must ensure that passengers' rights to a refund, and the circumstances where a fee is not applicable and the time limit for making a claim, is explicit and consistent.
- **Keeping refund information about an incident on websites for longer.** We recognise that keeping all information up to date may be difficult in circumstances such as during this period of disruption. However, some retailers removed information about rights to a fee-free refund and claiming within 28 days for the incident shortly after the disruption was cleared. It would be helpful that such information remained in place for a longer period.

- **Reviewing industry rules to explicitly include ‘Do not travel’ advice.** The advice given to passengers by some operators was not to travel. Passengers who did not travel even if their booked train did run as normal, as they were following the ‘do not travel’ advice, should be entitled to a full fee-free refund from the retailer. Whilst such an entitlement is clear under consumer law, the next industry review of the NRCot should give careful consideration to including the entitlement to a full fee-free refund when passengers are advised not to travel so that this is clear and consistent for passengers.
- **Clarity in refund information on the National Rail Enquiries website.** We note that the advice regarding refunds on National Rail Enquiries website during the incident was only available via the information link for compensation for delays. It is important that the two subjects are not conflated and to reduce passenger confusion about their entitlements in the different circumstances we would expect National Rail Enquiries to consider providing specific links to refund information in future.
- **Using Twitter for refund information.** Train operators largely utilised twitter effectively to communicate key messages about the disruption. The communication of refund rights, such as signposting that they are available, could be employed more readily in tweets in future.
- **Disruption messaging on third-party retailer websites.** Passengers who purchased tickets from a third-party retailer may look to them for information about their journey. Where there is major disruption, the retailer should consider adding appropriate banner messaging to its home page, together with a link to refund information, to draw passengers’ attention to it.

3. Advice to passengers on alternative travel arrangements including ticket acceptance on other operators

We examined the information available on the individual operators websites and compared this to that which is available on National Rail Enquiries. As noted in section 1 above, in the initial stages there was a lack of clarity in ticket acceptance arrangements. We noted that LNER ticket acceptance arrangements were only available on twitter, and there were slight differences between TPE and National Rail Enquiries. However, when checking on 10 May we found uniformity between National Rail Enquiries and the operators. This included information about routes and operators with whom ticket acceptance arrangements had been made. GWR additionally noted that as routes will be busier,

reservations on these operators may be needed. A number of operators introduced limited rail replacement road transport. We noted that early in the week this was described as “buses” without accompanying information to say whether they were accessible, though some operators included information elsewhere which signposted to where advice on a rail replacement service, including accessibility information, could be found.

3.1 Issues for industry consideration

As noted above, this was a rapidly evolving situation and we recognise how difficult it can be to keep information up to date in such circumstances. Whilst acceptance arrangements could have been better over the weekend of 8 May, train operators largely performed well.

Nonetheless, there are some issues we have identified which merit further consideration by the industry to reduce the impact on passengers should similar disruption occur in future.

- **Consistency of information about ticket acceptance** – it is important that consistent information across websites and social media be given, especially as changes are made.
- **Information about other operators’ services for ticket acceptance** – where ticket acceptance arrangements have been made, passengers should be told if there is disruption on those operators’ services or where the increased number of passengers using those services may impact on the ability to travel. While acceptance may be across all routes on another operator, it should also not be assumed that the displaced passenger knows where alternative operator’s routes go.
- **Use of maps to highlight disruption and alternative routes** – whilst we did not expect maps to be used in the initial phase of the disruption, displaying maps as the issue continued may have been helpful to passengers to plan and make their journeys.

4. Passenger Assistance

Passenger Assist is a free service offered by rail companies providing passengers with disabilities or anyone else who may require help, with assistance to enable them to make their journey. It is important that passengers using this service be given accurate and timely information including when there is disruption. Where there is disruption, we expect passengers to be contacted to provide reassurance and alternative travel support should a booked train not be running.

We contacted GWR, LNER, and TPE to understand the steps they had taken to contact passengers who had booked assistance to travel and the accessible alternative arrangements offered. We set out the results for each operator below.

GWR

The company confirmed that it had been proactively contacting customers who had booked assistance to travel on the trains affected up until Sunday 16 May either by telephone or email depending on what contact details they had provided and when they were due to travel. When GWR contacted the customer it informed us that its recommendation to the passenger was that they should not travel unless they needed to, but where the journey was necessary GWR would provide either an alternative route advice or alternative transport including accessible coaches, dependant on the individual's need.

We became aware of reports that GWR might be planning to use alternative rolling stock on routes served by the class 800 trains. Therefore, we asked GWR to confirm whether these are accessible trains, and if not what arrangements it had in place to ensure that passengers requesting assistance for future travel are aware of any limitations. GWR confirmed that it continued to use fully compliant trains, albeit that some services were using different stock to usual.

LNER

LNER stated that it contacted all customers who had booked assistance to travel 8-10 May to advise them of its do not travel message and to discuss their travel plans including looking at what alternatives were available. From 11 May onwards (from when LNER was able to operate a near-full service), LNER confirmed that it continued to check assistance bookings against its cancellations and contacted any customer who had assistance booked on a train that would not operate to help them rearrange their journey. LNER stated that there was no change to the accessibility of its services although some services previously operated using Azumas were now using its older electric trains.

TPE

TPE confirmed that all passengers effected by the disruption who had booked assistance up to 16 May had been contacted and talked through a range of options to find the most suitable resolution for the customer. TPE's information page also provided advice to passengers who had booked assistance.

Noting that TPE's twitter feed stated that toilet facilities may not available on some of the rolling stock TPE was using, we asked the company to confirm that for passengers wishing to book assistance for future travel it was clear both on its website and when a passenger

called to request assistance, how accessible the rolling stock it is currently using is. TPE confirmed that it was able to inform customers over the phone if there were going to be toilet facilities out on the service they were intending to board.

We note that National Rail Enquiries provided further information on its TPE 'major disruption' page setting out the relevant stations and frequency of rail replacement bus services and advice for passengers who had booked assistance.

4.1 Summary

The information we have collected provides us with comfort that as far as possible train operators proactively contacted passengers who had booked assistance to travel to provide information about the disruption and offered alternative travel support.



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