



Consumer Expert Panel

29 September 2023 – Microsoft Teams meeting

Name	Organisation
Anne Heal	Chair, Non-executive Director, ORR
Kate Denham	Consumer Expert Panel Member
Ralitsa Hiteva	Consumer Expert Panel Member
Claudio Pollack	Consumer Expert Panel Member
Marie Pye	Consumer Expert Panel Member
Andrew Williams-Fry	Consumer Expert Panel Member
Helen Parker	Consumer Expert Panel Member
Sarah Chambers	Consumer Expert Panel Member
Guy Dangerfield	Transport Focus (for Mike Hewitson)
Jacqui Russell	ORR
David Kimball	ORR
Pete Martin	National Highways (Item 2 only)
Paul Hill	National Highways (Item 2 only)
Richard McGreevy	ORR (Item 2 only)
Lawrence Bowman	Network Rail (Item 4 only)

Malcolm Pitt	Network Rail (Item 4 only)
Chris Rowley	Network Rail (Item 4 only)
Gareth Clancy	ORR (Item 4 only)
Stephanie Tobyn	ORR (Items 3 and 4 only)

Apologies

James Walker	Consumer Expert Panel Member
Mike Hewitson	Consumer Expert Panel Member & Transport Focus

Item	Speaker	Time
Welcome	Anne Heal	10.00
1. Update on work of Consumer Team	Jacqui Russell	10.05
2. National Highways – Access and Inclusion	Pete Martin (NH)	10.15
3. Retail fee transparency review	Jacqui Russell	11.00
4. Better Timetables for Passengers & Freight Users (BTPF) – impact of proposals on passenger information	Lawrence Bowman Malcolm Pitt (NR)	11.30
Closing remarks and AOB	Anne Heal	12.15

Notes

Welcome

1. **Anne Heal** welcomed the Panel. Apologies were received from James Walker.
2. Anne provided some brief background information on Item 4, for the benefit of the Panel: the ORR Board had asked Network Rail to seek feedback from the Panel on its approach to assessing the benefits for passengers of its proposed new approach to timetabling under the Better Timetabling for Passengers and Freight programme.

3. The Panel noted that Network Rail had been unable to provide a copy of the Equality Impact Assessment in the accessible format that had been requested.

Update on the work of the consumer team

- 2 **Jacqui Russell** then provided an update on ORR's role in the process of closing ticket offices, as consulted on by train companies over the summer. Transport Focus clarified the criteria under which they and London Travelwatch decide to object or not to each proposed closure, confirming that the impact of ticket office closures on business renting space at the station was not considered as part of the process.
- 3 Jacqui also noted that ORR is in the process of appointing an additional panel member to represent Scotland's interests, having failed to identify a suitable applicant as part of the process to recruit the four new members earlier in the year.

National Highways – Access and Inclusion

- 4 **Pete Martin** gave an overview of a presentation discussing the development of National Highways' (NH) customer strategy and its plans to ensure all user groups are fully considered, including disabled people. National Highways had taken the decision to embed access and inclusion within its overall customer strategy, rather than produce a separate accessibility strategy. **Paul Hill** then highlighted areas of good practice.
- 5 Overall, the Panel welcomed the approach taken by National Highways and encouraged it to be even more ambitious.
- 6 Responding to the Panel's queries and suggestions in the subsequent discussion NH:
 - i. confirmed its approach to providing information on toilet facilities, to visually impaired people, and to electric vehicle charging; and indicated that universal design was an important aspect underpinning its strategy;
 - ii. agreed to share its list of stakeholders for the Panel to review for any gaps;
 - iii. recognised the importance of providing information channels for people that do not use digital devices;
 - iv. indicated it would use the learning from its Equality Impact Assessments in its approach, and would be considering other protected characteristics in addition to disability (the Panel also suggested NH consider the intersectionality of protected characteristics); and

- v. acknowledged the need to do more work on providing information on connections with other modes of transport.

Retail Fee Transparency Review

- 7 **Jacqui Russell** introduced a paper providing an overview of ORR's recent review of the transparency of fees on train company and third-party retailer websites. She indicated ORR was now considering its next steps.
- 8 The Panel welcomed ORR's work in what it considered may be a challenging area, and offered the following comments:
 - vi. Using ORR's consumer law powers to ensure transparency would present both benefits and challenges;
 - vii. Consistency and comparability of information would be the key areas to consider so that consumers are able to identify where fees are being charged for products that add value and where they are being charged for those that do not;
 - viii. In any publication ORR should both celebrate good practice as well as highlight issues to address.
4. Jacqui thanked the Panel, clarified the scope of the work and how the market for rail tickets operates, and indicated that ORR was seeking legal advice before taking any further decisions.

Better Timetables for Passengers & Freight Users (BTPF) – impact of proposals on passenger information

- 9 Lawrence Bowman and Chris Rowley provided an overview of their presentation setting out Network Rail's roles and responsibilities as the system operator, and a background to its proposals for Better Timetables for Passenger & Freight Users (which led to a public consultation by ORR on changing the horizon for publishing confirmed timetables from 12 to 8 weeks before travel).
- 10 In response, the Panel:
 - i. expressed its disappointment that Network Rail had failed to set out in its initial presentation the benefit to passengers of making more frequent timetable changes that were made at shorter notice (which Network Rail indicated had been presented at an earlier stage of the the industry's internal decision-making process);

- ii. Sought to understand what passenger engagement Network Rail had undertaken;
 - iii. Queried Network Rail's evidence on passenger behaviour;
 - iv. Reminded Network Rail of the benefits to passengers of being able to view timetables 12 weeks in advance of travel (Transport Focus reiterated its position that the proposed changes were not of benefit to passengers);
 - v. Tested the underlying causes of current non-compliance with the timetable process;
 - vi. Indicated that disabled people would be particularly impacted by the proposed changes.
5. In summary, the Panel was of the view that Network Rail had not explored the issues fully in its presentation and needed to do more work to come to a solution that delivers benefits for passengers.

Closing Remarks and AOB

- 6. Anne Heal thanked the members for their contributions.
- 7. The next meeting would take place on 20th December 2023.



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