

Stephanie Toby
Director of Strategy, Policy and Reform



Tricia Williams
Managing Director
Northern Trains
By email only

5 December 2024

Dear Tricia,

Enabling disabled passengers to travel with confidence by delivering assistance reliably

On 19 September 2024 I wrote to you and requested an improvement plan to address concerns about the reliability of Northern Trains' passenger assistance delivery. Thank you for submitting your plan on 4 November 2024. We will now hold you to account for delivery of the plan and will monitor its effectiveness closely.

Your plan is based on an assessment of current performance informed by a range of insight from passengers and colleagues to identify the root causes of assistance failures. You have drawn together findings from complaints analysis, post travel passenger surveys, mystery shopping exercises, workshops with colleagues, and engagement with the Northern User Accessibility Group. You have identified five key themes that create the focus for the improvement plan. These are:

- Policy and processes: to ensure consistency across the network
- Human factors: to ensure colleagues have the capability to deliver the service
- Disruption: to empower colleagues to adapt and respond to challenges caused by disruption
- Technology: to support consistency in service delivery and enable insight into quality performance
- Information: to ensure easy access to the information needed by customers and colleagues

The plan sets out a programme of activity linked to the five improvement themes over a 12-month period. The actions are prioritised based on anticipated impact and are underpinned by a review of policies and procedures to ensure that colleagues are supported in making decisions that enable consistently good assistance delivery.

In the next three months Northern has committed to progress work to:

- I. review the staffing model for assistance at the ten stations that currently provide the highest volumes of assists, starting with Leeds station
- II. establish a new team who will be dedicated to remotely supporting passengers who require assistance, including during their journey, using phone and WhatsApp
- III. pilot additional colleague training on communication between boarding and alighting stations, at Leeds Station
- IV. trial a new process that enables passengers at unstaffed stations who have not pre-booked assistance to alert conductors to their presence
- V. work with colleagues and colleague representatives to progress rollout of the passenger assistance app for colleagues
- VI. ensure that all reports of failed assistance are recorded, investigated and the root cause identified.

Actions you have committed to progress as medium priority in the next three months include the introduction of passenger assist meeting points at the 40 stations that deliver the most passenger assistance, a priority seating and wheelchair space trial and a customer and colleague mobility scooter policy awareness campaign.

You provided a risk assessment for delivery of each of the actions in the plan and set out a range of appropriate mitigations. We recognise that delivering a plan containing so many new workstreams will be a challenge, and we note that many of the actions are dependent on the availability of resource. We expect the portfolio of risks and mitigations to be pro-actively managed throughout the delivery of the plan, and the delivery of the higher impact actions to be prioritised.

Next steps

We will arrange fortnightly progress calls to commence in December 2024.

We will carry out a full review of progress at the end of January 2025, and again at the end of April 2025.

Failure to secure the aims of the plan in the stated timeframes, may result in formal action being taken in line with our economic enforcement policy.



I am copying this letter to Gary Bogan, Director of the Rail North Partnership.

Yours sincerely

Stephanie Tobyn