

## Responses to 'Improving Assisted Travel by rail' letter – June 2018

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John Larkinson  
Director  
Directorate of Railway Markets and Economics  
Email: DPPP@orr.gsi.gov.uk

16<sup>th</sup> May 2018

Dear Mr Larkinson,

**Re: Improving assisted travel by train**

Thank you for the opportunity to advise on the work delivered, and planned to be delivered, with the intention of improving assisted travel on our network following on from the recent consultation. Our Managing Director, Tom Joyner, has asked that I reply on his behalf as he is currently away from the office conducting a colleague tour across the network.

Arriva Trains Wales is committed to improving our assisted travel provision for our customers. Improvements in several areas have been realised this year that support this aspiration, with many more in the pipeline to be delivered soon.

We believe that the creation of the Assisted Travel advisory Group will assist greatly in ensuring the industry has a clear understanding of requirements and aspirations in this area and we would welcome the opportunity to be involved from an early stage.

In terms of the steps already taken to improve in the three areas identified; raising passenger awareness, the reliability of Assisted Travel provision, and staff training please see details listed.

1. Raising passenger awareness

- a. A new 'Making Rail Accessible' booklet has been created for customer use. This is essentially a customer friendly version of our DPPP that has been updated with new and updated information in 2018. It details staffing availability, whether there is wheelchair access, booking office facilities, waiting rooms and shelters and where the nearest accessible station is, for each of the 247 stations on our network. This will put the customer in the know about what to expect when they arrive at the station.

- b. A full review of the information about our stations on NRE website has been concluded with numerous updates made to the information that was showing. This was a considerable challenge as some of the information was years out of date, but we are now able to ensure that this information is updated to the website as station facilities change. This in turn will inform customers if their local station is accessible and direct them to the nearest accessible station if not, amongst other things.
- c. An audio guide of the above 'Making Rail Accessible' guide has been completed in English & Welsh for customers with impaired vision.
- d. We are working with groups who provide support for disabled people to raise awareness of our Assisted Travel Awareness Scheme. We visit local groups where we explain what assistance is available at stations and on trains, how to buy a ticket and book assistance, what facilities are available at stations and on trains and the benefits of a Disabled Persons' Railcard. As part of each visit, a familiarisation trip can be arranged for each group so that they can experience a journey and enjoy a day out by train.
- e. Our Orange Wallet scheme has been one of the most successful initiatives that has been available in Wales for several years. We continue to promote the benefits of this scheme for the people that can use it as it is widely known in Wales and gives holders further support when travelling by public transport.
- f. We offer the Assistance Dogs Travel Scheme in partnership with Assistance Dogs (UK). The principle aim of the scheme is to raise awareness of the needs of Assistance Dog owners among our employees and customers when travelling by train. Increasingly, Assistance Dog owners are enjoying the benefits and freedom of travel. Their dogs undergo intensive training in preparing them to use public transport.

## 2. The reliability of Assisted Travel provision

- a. Hi-vis assisted travel vests have been provided as a trial at Cardiff Central in response to customer feedback. We have often heard from customers who could not locate the person supposed to be assisting and have been able to help customers to easily identify them by providing a different colour hi-vis vest. Once the trial has concluded the expectation is that this will be rolled out at major stations on the network.
- b. At the start of 2018, none of the stations we managed had an Assistance meeting point for customers. We have since introduced these on a trial basis at our four busiest stations; Cardiff Central, Newport, Swansea and Chester with the aim of meeting more customers and delivering the expected support.

## 3. Staff training

- a. All new entrants to the Conductor function receive training on how to deliver safe passenger assistance and a disability awareness session. Stations training in this area is currently delivered on an ad-hoc basis although on writing, a rollout plan for a Stations Foundation Course is being developed, within which will be these training modules.
- b. Their competency in this area is then measured by their line manager to ensure it meets the required standards. If not, their manager provides the required support necessary for improvements to be made.

In terms of what further steps we will be taking, please see below:

1. Raising passenger awareness
  - a. We do not have further plans to raise awareness over and above what has already been actioned this year. With the franchise due to end of 13<sup>th</sup> October, we await the new Operator's plans in this area.
2. The reliability of Assisted Travel provision
  - a. The system we use as a support for all staff is called Genius Mobile. It has come to light that many users no longer sign in and use this system and rely on the e-mail updates sent from Northgate each day. Due to the limitations of using a static file we have commissioned a new guide for colleagues to use daily. This guide comprises of a video guide on how to use the app and why it's important and is backed up by a booklet that can be referred to for ongoing support and guidance. The expectation is that the more our colleagues use the system, the better they can support our customers that need assistance.
3. Staff Training
  - a. A new disability awareness training course has been written and delivered as a pilot session. We are currently planning on how to deliver this new session to all customer facing colleagues across the business. Following on from this training being delivered, the competency standards will be updated and assessed.
  - b. Similar to the overview customer journey map, a new Passenger Assistance journey map is being designed. This assistance map will support training delivery and highlight typical pain points that customers experience so all colleagues are aware of how the customer may feel in differing situations.

Other items that have been considered as part of the Accessibility and Inclusion project group that I am running at ATW include; refreshing the disability stickers on all trains so that the signage is clear and updating the Orange Wallet to widen its reach.

Yours sincerely,



Barry Lloyd  
Head of Customer Experience

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Letter by Email.

7<sup>th</sup> June 2018

Dear John,

**Re: Improving Assisted Travel by Rail.**

Thank you for your email of 30<sup>th</sup> April 2018 regarding the **Improving Assisted Travel by Rail** consultation.

Within this letter we have set out what steps we have taken to make improvements to Assisted Travel in the three key areas since the publication of your research, and what further steps we will be taking to make improvements to Assisted Travel in the three key areas over the next six months.

Offering unbooked assistance through the provision of Turn Up and Go has been a key part of our Assisted Travel provision since its launch in our London stations in 2015. Customers are able to arrive at any of our stations without prebooking and we will provide assistance as soon as reasonably possible on the next available service onto which our staff can safely board them. When a customer wants to travel on a specific service however we encourage them to book in advance as staff may have to finish other duties before being able to provide the required assistance.

Our recently completed and planned steps towards improving Assisted Travel Services are:

**Raising passenger awareness**

- Direct feedback is sought from accessibility group members on the potential impacts of changes to our services. This includes when we alter our stations, or introduce new initiatives and technologies. Disability Groups that we maintain two way communications with include c2c Passenger Panel and Options for Independent Living (OIL). These are forums for people who have hidden and visible disabilities and require assistance when travelling.
- Attendance of a c2c representative at industry Disability forums is maintained; this ensures that we are updated on local and industry-wide issues and changes. Outputs

from these forums are shared with the relevant c2c departments in order to make sure the required changes are implemented.

- We continue to offer services that are specialised for particular customer groups. For example, large print timetables are available to customers upon request. These customers often contact us directly, allowing us to ensure that the most appropriate service is offered to the individual customer.
- The size and capacity of the wheelchairs we accommodate on the train is displayed at key stations as a full size floor vinyl. This information and guidance is included within our website.
- We are actively removing railway jargon from information we distribute to customers. Throughout the company we are aiming to communicate in a way that our customers find informative, clear and easy to understand.
- We engage with the wider community and Essex County Council Travel Trainers to hold Try a Train days. On these days, groups from local disability schools are invited upon a special charter train service in order to experience (many for the first time) train travel. The day includes how to purchase a ticket, how to board and disembark a train, understanding train routes, and getting to know what facilities are available to assist customers through their journey.
- Our stations and on board help points have undergone a recent technology upgrade. These help points allow customers to gain direct up to date information regarding the train service.
- We continue to keep our website up to date with the latest assisted travel information. Customers are able to find details of how to book assisted travel, as well as information on additional schemes we run such as our Priority Seat Badge initiative.
- Information on our policies and procedures is widespread. As well as on the c2c website, c2c-online.co.uk, our Passenger's Charter is updated annually with the latest procedures. New schemes are outlined in our Commuter News and Annual Customer Report publications.

**Reliability of Assisted Travel provision:**

- Improvements have been made to our website in order to make it clearer for our customers to find the information they need to plan a journey. We've also improved our information related to live disruption updates.
- Our mobile application now drives customers to live travel information pages, allowing customers to use one source of information for travel disruption; this has been improved with people with disabilities taken into consideration.

- A review of our assisted travel guidance for each station has been conducted and updates will be made accordingly when changes to stations are implemented. Required changes have also been fed into the National Rail Enquiries *Stations Made Easy* pages to ensure that this information is up to date.
- The current Passenger Assistance booking system, provided by Northgate, will cease to exist in the near future. We are working closely with the Rail Delivery Group (RDG) in relation to a new Passenger Assistance booking system. We are hoping to become one of a number of train operating companies to trial the new system. This new booking process will mean customers can book their assisted travel directly with the stations concerned and interact with the station staff directly.

**Staff Training:**

- The current training course for staff is being redesigned in order to ensure that staff understand the needs of and can provide the appropriate type of assistance to each of our passengers with a disability. The course is being shared with a number of our disabled travellers to confirm that the information is accurate and that the training will allow staff to fully meet their needs.
- During 2017, we launched our Service Guidelines, giving staff a series of hints and tips on how to provide great customer service to disabled customers. These guidelines will be re-launched in the next few months to ensure our staff continue to make a difference when interacting with customers.

We are a railway company which has the customer at the heart of our business. We continue to make improvements where possible to achieve making travel for all easier.

Yours sincerely

Julian Drury

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Alan Riley  
Customer Service Director

21<sup>st</sup> May 2018

Email: [DPPP@orr.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:DPPP@orr.gsi.gov.uk)

Dear Mr Larkinson,

## RE: IMPROVING ASSISTED TRAVEL BY RAIL

We strongly agree with the ORR's vision for the confident use of the railway by all passengers and look forwards to your updated guidance on the Disabled Persons Protection Policy.

This is an area Chiltern Railways continue to work with industry partners and our customers with the objective of ensuring we deliver the best customer service for all passengers. In this letter we set out our approach to delivering service for passengers that require assistance and go on to explain what more we intend to do for these people.

### 1. Raising Passenger Awareness

A link to details of our commitment to passengers who require assistance is provided from the landing-page of the recently updated Chiltern Railways website (see extract from our website below). This also contains a link to the Chiltern Railways Disabled Persons Protection policy and our support for the Guide Dog Travel Charter.

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Assisted travel

[chilternrailways.co.uk](http://chilternrailways.co.uk)

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Registered office: 1 Admiral Way, Doxford International Business Park, Sunderland, England SR3 3XP.  
Company Registration No. 3007939. VAT Registration No. GB 667 3877 77.

## 2. Staff Training

We continue to carry out training for all frontline customer service staff in delivering a safe experience for passengers and this includes specific manual handling training in the use of ramps. It also includes review of our buggy process to ensure that staff are confident, comfortable and safe in using the required equipment.

All new starters, regardless of their position in the organisation, attend a disability awareness training course which includes going to the platforms and understanding how to make an accessible journey for passengers using our stations, as well understanding from a passenger point of view the issues that they could face. The training takes place over a half-day and is comprehensive, covering a range different types of assistance required by disabled passengers. The training is delivered by an external organisation who is well known as a supplier throughout the rail industry.

All staff training is measured regularly by line managers to ensure each staff member has the support needed and improvements in place if required. Refresher training for customer service assistance staff is carried out regularly.

## 3. Equipment

One key aspect in delivering a network fit for all is to ensure all the relevant equipment is available at all our stations. There is an enhanced register to check this critical equipment, including as ramps and buggies to ensure they are in the correct area (regardless of what type of train calls at that station) and are available and safe to use. Where station equipment is defective we make this clear on our website and brief our staff so that they have an up to the minute picture that they can share with passengers.

## 4. Listening to our customers

Chiltern Railways customer satisfaction is a key measure in our Strategy and there are initiatives underneath this to ensure that we are the operator of choice for all passengers. Part of ensuring that we achieve this is simply listening to our customers. That includes reviewing each booked passenger assist, this is completed by our station management team to ensure that we always provide a seamless service, and where things can be improved it is actioned and logged immediately.

## 5. Ticket Vending Machines (TVMs)

A project to replace our Ticket Vending Machines is underway across our stations. The new TVMs are designed so they are much more accessible than the previous version, this includes being designed to be accessible for people that use a wheelchair.

## 6. Improvements at Marylebone Station

Recently, we have introduced a dual boarding system at Marylebone station to increase the time that passengers have to board their trains during peak hours. The implementation of zoned public address reduces the amount of verbal clutter at the station making it easier for all our customers to locate and travel to their train.

## 7. On train toilets

Almost all our now fleet has toilets that can be used by wheelchair users following the recent modification of the toilet on the class 165 trains.

**[chilternrailways.co.uk](http://chilternrailways.co.uk)**

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Steps we plan to take in the near future:

1. Further staff training

Chiltern Railways are looking to introduce staff training specifically aimed on how to confidently deliver customer service to all types of passengers who require different levels of assisted travel. One of the ways to achieve this is by giving our staff the confidence to identify with the passenger what their specific needs may be across their journey. This is to empower both the staff and passengers to use our network with confidence.

2. Access at stations

There is a review into our gatelines at our stations and ensuring that we have the correct number of wide aisle gates and increase them at stations where it has been identified there to be a need.

Part of ensuring safe access is also a review of our platforms to identify how we can make station platforms safer to use especially in peak times where it can be crowded and difficult to navigate through.

3. Additional signage

There is a review of all trains and platforms to identify any additional or enhanced signage that can be placed to help passengers easily access our services. An example is reviewing how to have signage clearly placed on platform to identify to passengers where the disabled toilet(s) will be on a train. There is also a review underway of our current signage and looking at what can be replaced with larger/clearer signage to heighten visibility.

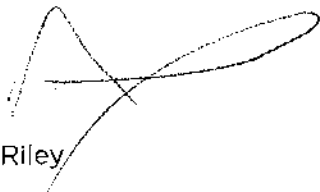
4. Station improvements

Throughout 2018 and 2019 we are transforming our stations through a multi-million pound investment programme. All these improvement works will meet the Design Standards for Accessible Railway Stations published by the Department for Transport.

Chiltern Railways is working to implement accessibility initiatives that its parent company has initiated. In addition we will continue to do work with our staff, passengers and industry colleagues to ensure that we deliver the best railway for all our passengers.

If you do require any further information, please do contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Alan Riley

Customer Service Director  
Chiltern Railways

**[chilternrailways.co.uk](http://chilternrailways.co.uk)**

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John Larkinson  
Director, Directorate of Railway Markets and Economics  
Office of Rail and Road

By Email

18 May 2018


Dear John

### **Improving Assisted Travel by Rail**

Following the publication of the ORR research into passengers' awareness and experience of Assisted Travel, and the subsequent consultation, we welcome the opportunity to respond to the areas highlighted and ultimately to drive forward improvements for the benefit of our customer.

Since the publication of your research, and despite the challenges we faced with Industrial Action and the worst winter storms on record, we still continued to strive for excellence. We have made many improvements to increase awareness and smooth delivery of Passenger Assistance, but more specifically;

- Created a cross-functional working group, led by our Safety, Security and Environment Director, focusing on Accessibility and Inclusion. By mapping the customer journey (from the decision to travel through to reaching their destination and beyond), we identified all of the touch points and discussed areas where improvements or amendments could be introduced in order to improve the customer experience and making it easier for all customers to make their journey as confidently as possible. By utilising the research available to us (including that conducted by ORR), and our own customer feedback we have produced an action plan to address many of the areas we identified and are making progress on their implementation.
- Introduced a cross-TOC Arriva UK Trains working group, which purely focuses on accessibility and inclusion. The ORR research and feedback from our customers and disability groups forms a large part of pushing forward our strategic vision.
- This is in addition to the internal cross-functional working group which has been formed to 'Improve the Customer Experience' (ICE forum). Members of the Exec, including myself, and 'heads-of' are key members of this meeting, with Accessibility being a key focus of discussion. Some of the improvements generated by this forum are still in progress but are outlined below in our plans for the next six months.
- In recent weeks, CrossCountry has become part of the established network of 'north' TOCs to increase awareness and confidence with the disabled users who participate in this forum (alongside Northern, Hull Trains and First TransPennine) and to break down the barriers to travelling by rail. We utilise these full-day workshops to communicate what we, and the industry, are doing to improve services and facilities and to obtain valuable feedback and suggestions to improve things even further.

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- Following the introduction of the wallet-size cards providing information on Delay Repay and our contact details, we have taken the opportunity to improve this further by adding the Passenger Assistance information to this too. These cards are utilised by our on-train teams and station colleagues to promote the scheme and its benefits, as well as communicate the different ways in which customers can get in touch to make their arrangements in advance.
- In 2017, we undertook a full review and refresh of our Disability, Equality and Inclusion training, of which Passenger Assistance and the support required by those with hidden disabilities forms a key element of this. The additional module focuses on the soft-skills and customer service element of the delivery, used to complement the practical delivery training already in place, and provides our frontline teams with the knowledge and experience required in order to deliver a first-class customer experience. Following the successful rollout to all new recruits who will be based on-train, we have also started to revisit those already in post who received the original training as part of their induction.
- A review of our internal processes has resulted in us actively visiting customers who may have experienced difficulties when travelling by train in person. By including members of the Customer Relations team, it has enabled us to obtain valuable feedback and build strong relationships with our customers, increasing user-confidence in our services and ultimately improved the quality of the experience they can expect to receive from us.
- Improved our website layout and introduced a one-click link from our home-page. We have also reviewed content to make the Passenger Assistance pages more prominent, clearer and easier to understand. The introduction of an online form has also been very successful, making it quicker and more efficient for our customers to request the support they need when travelling with us.

As an operator who does not directly operate any stations, we recognise that the key to ensuring our customers receive a high-quality and consistent experience is by creating strong working relationships with our SFO's. Through the passenger panel and working group feedback received, we know that our customers just want their journey to go smoothly and with as little inconvenience as possible and so we ensure that accessibility is a key agenda item on our review meetings as standard, driving forward improvements collaboratively.

Whilst we have made many improvements, we believe there is still more we want to do and have plans in place to progress this. Some of the things which we will be working on over the next six months include;

- Working with colleagues across Arriva UK Trains to create a 'mental health awareness' training module which will be delivered to all new and existing employees (providing a consistent approach to delivery across much of our network)
- Expand the delivery of our Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity training to all grade groups across the business
- Provide train layout plans within our DPPP's to show what accessible features are available on each of our unit types
- Explore the ability with our Fleet supplier to create an additional visual aid (something on the floor for example) in the wheelchair space to depict it is space for a wheelchair user and not luggage etc.
- Investigate the potential to implement something which allows a customer to make contact with a member of on-train staff when travelling for non-emergency things support such as to request catering or help to navigate way to toilet etc. (particularly for those travelling with an assistance dog or reduced mobility).



- Introduce support cards which can be carried by customers to discreetly notify staff of any additional support or assistance they may need in order to undertake a journey with confidence
- Better utilise our social media platforms to increase awareness and engagement with disability charities and social networks where appropriate
- Explore the potential for 'try-a-train' sessions with local disability groups, in order to increase awareness and confidence when considering rail for a customer's journey

Ensuring representation at key events and forums, we are keen to help shape the future for our customers. As an example, our Head of Customer Relations is part of the RSSB working group which is committed to 'Developing Guidance for GB Rail', making journeys accessible to all, as well as being an active member of the cross-TOC industry working groups, demonstrating our commitment to improving the quality of service received by passengers right across Great Britain.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to reassure you once again that as a customer-centric organisation, we care passionately this subject and welcome the opportunity to share the work we have been doing around Accessibility and Inclusion.

Yours sincerely

Andy Cooper  
Managing Director

John Larkinson  
Director, Railway Markets and Economics  
Office of Rail & Road

By Email: [DPPP@orr.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:DPPP@orr.gsi.gov.uk)

15<sup>th</sup> May 2018

Dear John

## Improving Assisted Travel by Rail

Thank you for your email dated 30<sup>th</sup> April highlighting the summary of responses to your recent consultation on Improving Assisted Travel. We support the need to make improvements on the service we provide to our disabled customers, from awareness (both customers and staff) to delivery.

### Raising Passenger Awareness

In response to your request, we have made the following improvements in the last 6 months:

1. Continued use of the Passenger Assistance APP by our front-line staff.
2. We have created an E Learning package for disability awareness for all staff.
3. The 'Assisted travel' number is included on our station and on-train posters.
4. Disability training is included in Train Managers and Station staff courses.
5. We continue to work with ROSCOs on a PRM programme for our 15X fleets and are actively engaging with the Department for Transport to support the next East Midlands Franchise to ensure a plan is in place for the High Speed Train (HST) fleet.

In the next 6 months we will make improvements in the following key areas:

1. Take the Train Day. Working with local disability groups, we provide complimentary travel on our trains to experience rail travel.
2. Marketing campaign (including social media) to highlight the 'booking' service we provide.
3. Use of post travel-surveys to raise awareness.
4. We have included specific information within our special times/replacement bus stops, during the forthcoming periods of planned engineering work.

## The reliability of Assisted Travel Provision

1. We are reviewing the way our front-line teams use Genius, as an additional means of obtaining information regarding booked assistance.
2. East Midlands Trains will be trialling the use of universal ramps at our stations.
3. We will be reviewing our Scooter Policy.

## Staff training

1. A new 'Vulnerable People' Policy has been written, to assist our staff when dealing with such passengers. The policy includes a section on how to assist disabled passengers including those with 'hidden disabilities'.
2. A training course is being created (working with Mind) specifically for dealing with dementia.

I do hope that this explains the work East Midlands Trains are undertaking and we look forward to receiving the new DPPP guidance later in the year.

Yours sincerely

**Jake Kelly**  
Managing Director



John Larkinson  
Director, Railway Markets & Economics  
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18<sup>th</sup> May 2018


Dear John,

### **Improving Assisted Travel by Rail**

Following the ORR consultation and research on passengers' awareness and experience of Assisted Travel published in November 2017, we welcome the opportunity to provide a further update on our ongoing work in this area.

In terms of the steps already taken to improve in the three areas identified; raising passenger awareness, the reliability of Assisted Travel provision, and staff training, please find details listed below.

- Improved wheelchair space signage and refurbished universal toilets to increase the reliability of our on-board facilities, as part of our £9m refurbishment programme of Grand Central's fleet, with the first train entering service in March 2018.
- Introduced a cross-TOC Arriva UK Trains working group, which solely focuses on accessibility and inclusion. The ORR research and feedback from our customers and disability groups forms a large part of pushing forward our strategic vision to transform our Assisted Travel offer.
- Established an Accessibility and Inclusion steering group for Grand Central, which brings together colleagues from across the business to review customer feedback and identify how we can improve the consistency of Assisted Travel service delivery.
- Local groups participating in our 'Try the Train' initiative, where local disability & inclusion groups travel by train and provide feedback, which is shared with our steering group.

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As an open-access operator, we recognise that collaboration with industry partners, particularly Station Facility Owners (SFO's), is vital to ensure customers receive a consistent standard of assistance for their whole journey.

The continuation and development of partnerships, cross functional TOC working groups and our cross-TOC Arriva UK Trains group allows us to drive forward improvements collaboratively, and continues to provide benefits to our customers.

Whilst we have implemented a number of improvements to our Assisted Travel provision, and we are committed to delivering further enhancements over the next six months. Some of the areas we will be working on include:

- Rolling out a new disability awareness and equality staff training module, which will be undertaken by all customer-facing colleagues, as part of our commitment to a continuous customer service training programme.
- Working with the cross-TOC Arriva UK Trains group to create a 'mental health awareness' training package that will be delivered to all new and existing customer-facing colleagues, to provide a consistency approach to delivery across our areas.
- Collaborating with our cross-TOC Arriva UK Trains colleagues to produce passenger information videos, to increase awareness and remove barriers for interconnecting travel with other TOC's, especially connections at larger stations.
- Join the Joint Inclusivity Forum (JIF) within the North, to work with other operators including Hull Trains, Northern and TransPennine Express to improve service delivery of Assisted Travel across our respective networks.
- Continue to engage with local charities and support groups as part of our 'Try the train' programme, to further increase awareness and confidence when a customer chooses rail for a journey.
- Better use our social media channels to increase awareness and engagement with our customers and disability organisations. We will explore how social media can be used to assist customers requesting assistance both in advance and on the day of travel.

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Grand Central is committed to improving accessibility for customers, as we believe that all passengers should be able to travel with us at ease and with confidence. We fully support the work of the ORR in this important area.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Craig Alexander'.

Craig Alexander  
Customer Policy Manager



 Grand Central Railway Company Limited,  
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Ref: GR986 \ GWR \ ORR \ 060118JG

1<sup>st</sup> June 2018

Mr. Stephanie Tobyn  
Deputy Director Consumers  
Office of Rail and Road  
One Kemble Street  
London  
WC2B 4AN

**Great Western Railway**

Milford House  
1 Milford Street  
Swindon, SN1 1HL

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T 01793 499400

Dear Stephanie,

**Re: Results of ORR Mystery Shopping Survey**

Thank you for your letter dated the 8<sup>th</sup> May 2018 regarding the ORR's Delay Compensation mystery shopping results for Great Western Railway.

Whilst it is always pleasing to see progress made in this area, we acknowledge that it has only been a marginal increase and, as you note, it is disappointing that we remain below the industry average overall.

Looking at the results it is clear however that we score strongly, and above the industry average, in some key areas "accurate information provided regarding the minimum delay length" and "correctly advised on how to make a claim" but have seen a decrease for correctly advising passengers they could receive compensation in cash.

This is disappointing as we have been providing cash for compensation claims for close to two years now so it is a well-established aspect of our compensation scheme and I am keen we address this as soon as possible.

While there are positive aspects for individual metrics our overall compliance score of 22% is below the industry average and saw a smaller increase than the industry average also.

We know from experience that passengers can find our three-pronged legacy compensation scheme confusing and we continue to lobby the Department for Transport to agree the move over to the simpler Delay Repay scheme. We know that it is important our customer facing staff provide accurate information when this is requested and your survey provides us with helpful information on the areas where we clearly need to act in order to see an improvement. We are as a result of your survey reviewing, once again, our current training material and we hope that this will go some way to improving the situation.



Providing a better service in this area is also important for our preparation for Delay Repay as we know Season Ticket holders, currently compensated differently to the holders of daily and weekly tickets, will move over to the industry wide scheme that requires them to claim for individual delays experienced.

It is essential we ensure that change is supported by knowledgeable and helpful staff providing accurate advice and making the required improvement in this area now will help to provide a better service when this does happen.

I also note that many of your mystery shoppers did not see any signs of posters and/or leaflets regarding compensation, despite the fact that the information does exist around our network, and this too is a concern. It was pleasing however to see many were able to speak to a GWR member of staff with a minimal wait to do so.

Some of the data included in our results is however unclear. For example, a Weston super Mare journey to London is an ex-FGW journey so an hour is the delay threshold for claiming compensation. A Weston super Mare journey to Bridgwater is an ex-Wessex journey so has a 30-minute threshold. It isn't clear which journey was used for our sample, or if the researcher, or respondent was even aware of this distinction.

As noted earlier, we know this is an area our passengers find confusing, and we agree, and I am keen to understand if this provided any variance in our results. We would welcome any further feedback you may be able to offer on this particular point.

To ensure we deliver the required improvements we have just kicked off a re-briefing of all our Passenger's Charter entitlements for compensation in the event of a delay, or cancellation to all GWR Guards and Train Managers.

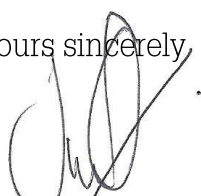
This re-briefing has already commenced and not only refreshes the rules of our existing compensation scheme but also provides guidance on directing customers to our online compensation claim form in the event of a delay as well as advice on guidance on when to make compensation announcements.

We have asked our Service Quality team to review the placement of leaflets and posters at all of our stations to ensure they are prominent and easy for passengers to locate and we will continue to actively monitor this. I have also asked our publications team to review the placement of our existing range of posters and information at stations and on-board trains.

We are also the first TOC to trial and to implement automated announcements at our unstaffed stations to advise passengers how to claim compensation when the relevant delay threshold has been exceeded. This commenced at the start of March this year and we hope that it will have a positive impact on customers awareness of when and how to claim compensation.

Finally, for Annexe B I am pleased to confirm, as of May 2018 there has been no change to our position on the five-good practice standard noted and we are compliant for each measure.

Yours sincerely,



**Joe Graham**

Business Assurance Director



John Larkinson  
Director  
Directorate of Railway Markets and Economics

Email: [DPPP@orr.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:DPPP@orr.gsi.gov.uk)

8 June 2018

Dear John

### **Improving Assisted Travel by Rail**

I'm pleased to provide a response to your consultation summary published on Improving Assisted Travel by Rail and update you on the two areas on which you sought feedback in your letter, i.e. steps we have taken to improve assisted travel and further steps we will be taking in the next few months, plus some other feedback I hope you will find useful. Let me also re-state our commitment to improving our standards and service in the area of Assisted Travel.

### **Actions taken to improve Assisted Travel**

#### Raising Passenger Awareness

We also recognise that knowledge of 'assisted travel' amongst the disabled community can be improved so we have been taking steps to address that issue across our network.

As part of our franchise commitments we have established a 'Stakeholder Equality Board' which represents the interests of various disability groups and helps us ensure that business decisions are made with reference to our legal and franchise obligations and to promote accessibility issues both internally and externally. The group meets once a quarter and several work streams have been established including new trains, communications, toilets, built environment and training. These work streams are led by members of the group and chaired by Greater Anglia's Accessibility Manager, who was also appointed in accordance with our franchise commitment.

We currently promote assisted travel through our DPPP guidance, website and word of mouth at stations and ticket offices. In addition, we have recently trialled the publication of two additional sources. One is a DL leaflet with information about how to book assistance (enclosed) which has been displayed at all ticket offices. We are also working on producing a wallet-sized card with the same information to distribute to anyone expressing a desire to book assistance.

Both of these have been well received and an additional print run is being organised with a wider distribution to include, in addition, libraries, doctors' surgeries and the Local Authority Blue Badge schemes (if permitted). We are planning to extend the current 'assistance card' to include an 'I need help' type

element which would allow someone with hidden disabilities 'ask' for support in whichever area they need i.e. boarding, patience with listening etc.

Going forward, we are also planning a marketing campaign to support this through social media and will promote it widely through our Twitter and Facebook accounts and issue press releases to local media with the aim of gaining some local media coverage for assisted travel.

### Reliability of Assisted Travel

Through our Accessibility Manager, we have been reiterating the importance of Assisted Travel provisions and re-briefing our front-line teams.

In addition, we have begun the roll-out of another initiative which helps with Assisted Travel – the upgrade of ticket vending machines, which are now being rolled out to the vast majority of our stations, with a direct help line to our contact centre, which now also has extended opening hours – so it offers round-the-clock 24/7 cover.

We're also pleased to confirm that we already offer compensation to a customer using our services if we do not provide the assistance they have booked (an issue raised in Q.11 of your consultation – "Would a commitment from rail operators to refund the cost of the journey if booked assistance was not provided as requested be of benefit to both operators in demonstrating their commitment to providing a reliable service and give passengers a form of remedy when failures occur?").

We are passionate about offering the best customer service possible and recognise that if we do fail with assistance that we need to make amends immediately to ensure we don't undermine the confidence of the vulnerable passenger. Although we have found that compensation is not the main driving force for contact about lack of assistance, our experience has shown that passengers welcome this in recognition that we have understood their journey was an unsatisfactory one. However, we would suggest that from a customer point of view, it would be helpful if an industry wide approach was taken so a vulnerable passenger had the confidence that they were fully supported wherever they were travelling.

### Employee Training

With regards to staff training, we are currently delivering a half day workshop on accessibility awareness for our employees as per our committed obligation. In addition, we are developing the training to include workshops from various organisations such as Guide Dogs, Dementia Awareness and Autism awareness (through the Sycamore Trust) to focus on specific disabilities, particularly the hidden disabilities which are often missed or misunderstood.

We are looking at the possibility of delivering accredited training to 'ambassadors' within each area of the business for them to promote disability awareness within their teams and also engage with their local

communities. We already trialled this approach at a couple of locations and now have active participants in Cambridge and Norwich who meet regularly with various community groups to help them gain confidence to travel independently, to familiarise them with their local station and to be their point of contact. We believe this localised approach is vital in supporting independent travel for disabled people.

### **Actions planned to further improve Assisted Travel**

#### Raising Passenger Awareness

We will continue to raise awareness through our marketing and PR activity. We are also planning to extend the scope of the current 'assistance card' to include an 'I need help' type element which would allow someone with hidden disabilities 'ask' for support in whichever area they need i.e. boarding, patience with listening, etc.. Our Stakeholder Equality Group will continue to shape our priorities and actions in raising awareness. We will also highlight the continuing involvement of Assisted Travel representatives in the specification, launch and operation of our new train fleets which are now being built and start to enter service next year.

#### Reliability of Assisted Travel

We will continue with our approach of additional briefings for managers and front-line teams to maintain the rightful, high-profile importance of this key aspect of our service provision.

#### Staff training

We will continue to deliver effective staff training across the business and confirm the realistic scope of for the extension of the local "ambassador" approach.

We will also explore the use of additional multi-channel options by utilising our new internal social media platform, Fuse, to share resources and best practice amongst colleagues, all of which should help raise standards and awareness internally.

### **Additional feedback**

From a customer perspective, we believe it is important that the industry is guided towards some uniformity in assisted travel, so that someone travelling between any stations, short or long distances, north to south or east to west, will have the confidence that the assistance will be consistent across all the TOCs they encounter on their journey. The majority of the components of assisted travel should be consistent and of a core, minimum standard wherever you travel through whatever combination of stations or trains, building on the core train attributes that come into force from January 2020.

It is important, therefore that this is a consideration during franchise renewal processes to ensure that the current system, whereby each TOC has a different set of obligations around assisted travel, is not allowed to continue to complicate a passenger journey.

An industry-wide approach would also contribute a great deal to improving and simplifying customer communications which can, in some cases, be complicated, inconsistent or unsatisfactory for a passenger travelling on more than one TOC's trains as part of their journey.

The proposed RDG app supporting assisted travel will, we believe, revolutionise the experience for passengers needing additional help with their journeys. Early indications point towards a positive step-change in how a passenger communicates with a train operator and individual members of staff and how a member of staff can offer more personal and consistent service to the passenger. We wholeheartedly support the introduction of this nationwide approach and think it will offer a significant boost to the customer service offered to customers needing travel support.

The current user experience can be variable, and it is this inconsistency which undermines the confidence of someone travelling with additional needs. We are looking at how we may incorporate both mystery shops and customer feedback research into our customer experience model and feed that into further improving both customer service and colleague training.

We support the revision of the DPPP and the accompanying guidance and would ask that train operators are consulted during the development of any revisions. It is important that during the process due diligence is given to any franchise commitments or limitations that will affect the ability to deliver any increased commitments that are currently un-resourced.

I hope this feedback on the points you requested, and some wider issues, is helpful.

Yours sincerely

Martin Moran  
Commercial Director

## Improving Assisted Travel – GTR update to ORR (May 2018)

At GTR we are committed to working with our passengers (through our Access Advisory Panel) and stakeholders to continuously focus on maximising passenger’s confidence to use our network.

This report outlines progress that we have made further to our submission to the ORR consultation earlier this year.

### Working with Passengers – Our Access Advisory Panel

The GTR Access Advisory Panels (AAP) was established in September 2016. The panel consists of 11 passenger representatives (and three staff members). Each panel (Thameslink/Great Northern and Southern/Gatwick Express) is chaired by the appropriate Passenger Service Director.

Panel members are provided with a travel pass to enable feedback of their journey providing on going feedback. Members are asked to provide direct praise and feedback whilst they are travelling on the routes to our front line teams.

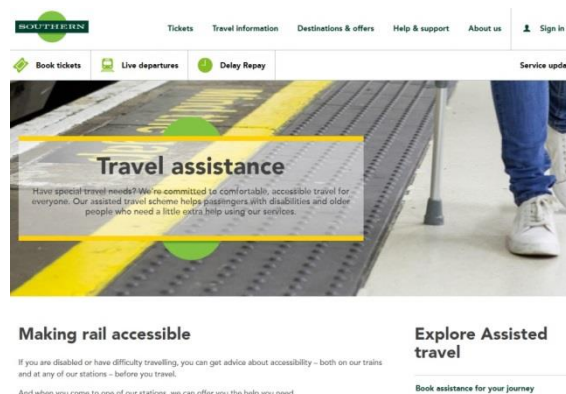
We ask members to submit their reports in advance of the meetings, and the reports are promptly shared with the appropriate manager for appropriate action. Key trends are discussed as a standard agenda item at each meeting.

Key topics raised through these reports since the last update include;

- On Board announcements on Driver Only Operated services
- Communication between staff (on board and stations) to provide confidence that passengers will be met at their destination
- Blue badge space availability in car parks - see Blue badge parking below
- Assisted travel - awareness of on line bookings – see Assisted Travel Review below.
- Experience with newly introduced boarding ‘humps’ at Thameslink ‘core’ stations

Panel members have supported us in re launching web sites for each of our brands, all of which were launched during autumn 2017. Specific input has included fact checking, improving the prominence of pre booking information and ideas to ease navigation.

*Assisted Travel web page*



## Assisted Travel Review

We are currently carrying out a review of our 'Assisted Travel' service and both access panels have been consulted regarding our proposals to ensure that bookings are consistently managed throughout the brands.

In late 2017 we completed a review of the Southern station booking process and removed blockers and delays to stations receiving the bookings.

We have since introduced a dedicated 'Assisted Travel Support' team in our contact centre that are separate from the 'Customer Relations' team – designed to give a more personal customer experience. The team of specialists deal with all aspects of assisted travel support from enquiries, bookings, amendments through to praise and complaints.

We have reviewed and streamlined all processes for handling booking within the 'Assisted Travel' team to ensure consistent high quality and reduce the risk of errors

Other improvements include launching an assisted travel post journey feedback survey that is sent to every customer who books – this initiative was a direct result from feedback from our customers and AAP that they found the traditional phone call surveys inconvenient. The eSurvey allows the customer to provide all forms of feedback on both their booking and journey so we can improve the service we offer and share best practise.

Our focus looking to the next 6 months is around delivering enhancements to our online booking form to make booking online rather than over the phone even easier. The changes and further enhancements will be consulted with our AAP.

## Blue badge parking

Further to AAP feedback regarding using the Blue Badge bays at their location stations due to mis - use i.e. passengers without blue badges obstructing bays, we are trialing at Hitchin, Royston and Redhill a new way to enable passengers to easily report mis - use of these bays. See below signage that has recently been installed at the trial car parks.

*Trial Blue badge poster*



Indigo manage this car park working in partnership with:

### Review and re launch of Accessible Materials

With the support of our AAP we have reviewed materials provided to passengers to provide greater confidence to use our network. To date, outputs have included our GTR ‘Communication Guide’ & with hidden disabilities in mind our ‘Travel Support Card’ - both of which have now been launched across our staffed stations following consultation via AAP members and groups representing passengers with learning needs.



Communication Guide and Travel Support Card

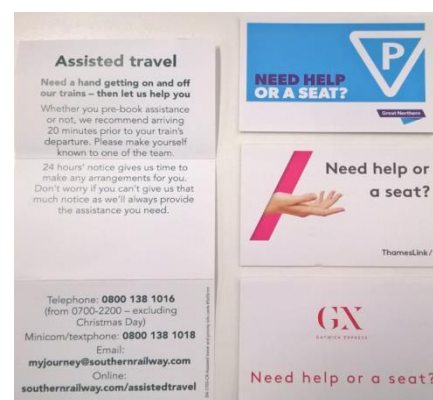
To encourage use of these new materials, panel members have also supported a press release, with quotes such as below provided;

Gill Henley GN AAP, representing people with ‘hidden disabilities’ such as hearing and speech difficulties “I think these two tools will bring reassurance to those who may not have the confidence to ask for help. Unlike a badge these are more discreet and therefore will enable someone who needs help to approach a member of staff in the same way as you or I. For anyone with speech and language issues these will give them a voice. For those who lack confidence, perhaps because of mental health conditions, these will enable them to travel with confidence knowing they will be listened to and assisted.”



Yusuf Osman, Thameslink panel, said “This is an innovative approach to providing assistance. Simply fill in the help you need, show it to a member of staff and help will be provided.”

Fiona Bower, Southern panel, uses a wheelchair and an assistance dog. Fiona said: “You might think that I wouldn’t need these aids personally, but there have been many times when I was so tired on the way home that I needed such supportive material to ensure I got home safely. They give people confidence and peace of mind, and reduce anxiety when words don’t come out well.”



*GTR journey support - Priority Seat scheme, Baby on board badges and customer toolkit cards*

We are aware through research carried out via 7000 members of our passenger panel that knowledge of the new support materials as well as more established offerings including our Priority Seating and Baby on board badges is relatively low. We are currently working on a wider communication plan to promote these materials across our network, mindful that we need to reach people who may be unaware of travel support as they don't currently travel through our stations.



## Try a Train – Encouraging confidence to use our network

Our 'Try a Train Events' provide an ideal opportunity for those who lack confidence travelling by train to visit our stations and to experience a train journey. These events are aimed at those who have any form of disability or access needs who wish to build their confidence when travelling. The trips are also available to those who may encounter other barriers to travelling e.g. senior citizens, non-English speakers.

We tailor the agenda to the group's specific needs and area of interest. We typically hold at least 10 of these events each year across our network for various socially disadvantaged and disabled customers – we have completed during 2018/19 to date (since April 2018).

*County Care Try a Train trip to St Pancras  
11.01.18*



We obtain feedback from every group to check the goal of increasing confidence to travel has been met and feedback from participants of recent events has included; “The group got to really test what they know and they had fun using the new literature” (Communication Guides and Travel support Cards) - County Care trip from Redhill to London (11.01.18),

“We all had fun, it was a good day out. I felt our voices were heard on a number of issues” – Possability People trip from Brighton to Chichester on 18.01.18

Feedback from students from Bedford College from a number of trips during the year including “was hoping to achieve confidence travelling to London and fear of crowds – returned confident to travel by train again and staff member was patient, supportive and friendly”.

### **Journey support ahead of our new timetable**

Following a suggestion by a member of the AAP, we invited 11,000 passengers from our Great Northern route with access needs to join a tour of St Pancras station ahead of services switching from King's Cross to St Pancras from May 2018.

Over two days, approximately 100 passengers joined the 12 bookable tours.



*St Pancras familiarisation tour 11.04.18*

Feedback included “A big thank you from me - this was a first I had seen by any TOC and / or public transport provider. Very clear discussion, tips and helpful insight to the layout and surroundings.

“I found it most helpful and was impressed with the balance of staff to customers so that everyone had an opportunity to ask questions and engage with you all”

“I gained a clear picture of the ease of movement around the station”

“Customers/passengers who may be less physically able, non - English speaking, or just generally in unknown/confusing surroundings, have been considered, and various facilities provided. However personnel who are readily available and friendly are just as important. I found this very refreshing amongst the busyness of the station. On a practical level I was particularly impressed with the raised area for disembarkation or reception on specific areas of the platform. Thank you for your time and courtesy”.

## Staff Training

GTR have continuously improved accessibility awareness training for our front line teams. All staff receive accessibility awareness training as part of their company induction.



GTR *Learning on the Go* module

All front line staff also completes an innovative accessibility awareness elearning ('Learning on the Go') course that explores key access needs. All new front line staff also attend a full day accessibility awareness course.

This training is supported by other job specific mainstream training that reinforces the skills required to deliver accessible services across our routes.

**Antony Merlyn**  
 Accessibility Manager  
 May 2018



**Heathrow  
Express**  
The smarter way

Daniel Edwards,  
Commercial Customer Service Manager,  
Heathrow Express,  
Compass Centre,  
Nelson Road,  
Hounslow,  
Middlesex,  
TW6 2GW.

24<sup>th</sup> May 2018

**RE: Improving Assisted Travel by Rail**

Dear John,

Many thanks for your letter of the 30<sup>th</sup> April 2018 to Fraser Brown, the MD of Heathrow Express. I apologise for the delay in my response to you. Fraser has asked me, as the business lead for customer assistance and accessibility to outline our response to the findings of your Improving Assisted Travel consultation. The outputs from the consultation are particularly interesting and provide a useful insight as to where the industry can improve.

Heathrow Express offers a 'turn up and go' accessible service between Heathrow and Paddington, which allows customers who need assistance to arrive at the station and assistance is made available. We are fortunate that our stations and trains are fully accessible and we have the wider Heathrow Airport and Great Western Railway assisted travel teams to deliver customer assistance where necessary. Despite this, we agree that there is more we can do to be an industry leader regarding assisted travel, and to this avail we have already:

- Completed a re-draft our Disabled Persons Protection Policy, which is currently subject to the ORR review process;
- Incorporated accessible features into the design of our new website and app which will be launched in Summer 2018;
- Trained our staff to recognise and support customers who wear the 'Sunflower Lanyard' so that those with a hidden disability can be identified for extra assistance if necessary;
- Making printed literature available in a range of formats, including audio file and Braille.

As we continue to develop our plans around providing a more accessible service in 2018 and beyond, we will look to develop and deliver:

- Enhanced training and awareness for all front-line customer service teams, including Social Media, on supporting customers travelling with us. We will particularly focus on supporting those customers with hidden disabilities, and will link in with wider Heathrow schemes such as Blue Assist.

- Begin discussions with the Rail Delivery Group to consider the benefit of Heathrow Express taking part in the national Passenger Assist system, as we extend our ticket retailing provision to include the National Rail network;
- Create specific content for customers with disabilities on our website, to support them with their journey through Heathrow;
- Continue to build closer working relationships with the wider Heathrow disability partners (such as Dementia Friends) and identify a specific charity partner that Heathrow Express will work with to continue to raise awareness.

At an industry level, we welcome the changes to the guidance for writing the Disabled Persons Protection Policy, and believe that this, along with the formation of the Assisted Travel Advisory Group will go a long way in improving rail travel for those with disabilities.

We, as an operator, will engage with the Rail Delivery Group to understand more how the industry can be a force for change in this important area, and look forward to sharing our experiences, as well as hearing about those from our peers. Most importantly, understanding the challenges faced by people with disabilities, first hand, and understanding what we can do to improve, will be of the utmost importance. I also remain in close contact with Stephen Brookes MBE, Rail Champion for the Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work, and look forward to Stephen offering his advice, support and guidance to us as an operator.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to respond to your consultation. Should any points in this letter require clarification please let me know. I look forward to working with you in the coming months and years to improve accessibility on our railway network.

Yours Sincerely,



**Daniel Edwards**  
**Commercial Customer Service Manager**  
**Heathrow Express Operating Company**



29<sup>th</sup> May 2018

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HU1 3UT

John Larkinson  
Director, Railway Markets and Economic  
Office of Rail and Road  
One Kemble Street  
London  
WC2B 4AN

Dear John

**Re: Improving Assisted Travel by rail**

Thank you for your e-mail dated 30<sup>th</sup> April. My apologies for the confusion about to whom to send the e-mail to and subsequent delay in my response following Will Dunnett's recent departure from the organisation.

I welcome the recent consultation into Assisted Travel and how this can be improved by the industry. Providing high quality, simple, reliable and welcoming assistance is of the upmost importance to Hull Trains as we seek to increase patronage and ensure rail travel is accessible for all of our customers.

I am also pleased to learn of your action to update the Disabled People's Protection Policy (DPPP) Guidance and engagement with the wider industry and stakeholders. My team are more than happy to review and feedback comments on the consultation document that you intend to provide in September.

I note your request for the provision of information concerning recent and future actions following on from the consultation and the three key areas identified, therefore please find my response detailed below:

**Raising Passenger Awareness**

*Actions Taken*

- We have continued to work alongside TransPennine Express and Northern with disabled stakeholders and their representatives at regular meetings of the Joint Inclusivity Forum (JIF). During the JIF we have explored a number of areas relating to Assisted Travel, promoting the service to stakeholders and examining some of their frustrations, as well as how we can address their concerns.
- Our Business Development Manager has also attended a West Yorkshire RNIB discussion with a group of local stakeholders to promote Assisted Travel and understand how the service can be improved.
- Our on-board teams have been briefed to inform customers who are travelling with us, where appropriate, about the Assisted Travel service where they might be unaware of it.

*Actions Planned*

- At each JIF, a topic is selected by the group for discussion. We will therefore put forward to discuss how it is possible to ensure that more disabled stakeholders and potential customers are made aware of this service at a future JIF.
- Our trains have electronic on board information screens which have the ability to relay short pieces of information to customers visually. We are therefore looking at what options there are to promote the Assisted Travel service through this medium.
- We have a customer magazine which is issued twice a year and is available on board and at some of the stations at which we call. We will be putting an article about Assisted Travel in the next edition to highlight the services available and how customers can take advantage of these.

- In Winter 2018 we will launch a new website with improved accessibility including a revamped Assisted Travel section.

### **The reliability of Assisted Travel provision**

#### *Action Taken*

- We have now ensured that each of our On Board Managers (OBM) has the Passenger Assist app installed on their smartphones. The app ensures that each OBM can view a list of assistance bookings for their train, allowing them to prepare for the journey ahead and ensure their team is in the right place to deliver help required.

#### *Actions Planned*

- We plan to provide all On Board Hosts with the same Passenger Assist app as the OBMs to ensure that they are also equally prepared and can assist customers who have booked assistance.
- During our quarterly Station Liaison meetings we cover the topic of accessibility and ensure that any issues related to reliability of provision of Assisted Travel are reviewed and related actions taken.

### **Staff Training**

#### *Action Taken*

- Our on-board teams continue to attend disability awareness training (provided for us by our sister TOC TransPennine Express) so that they are aware of not just how to carry our assistances, but also given the ability to empathise with disabled customers.

#### *Actions Planned*

- We will be reviewing disabled training, looking to the wider industry to understand what examples of best practice are available and how our teams can be made aware of any emerging thinking.
- We will ensure that all new OBMs and OBHs attend the existing disability awareness training.

Should you have any queries about the above, myself, or a member of my team would be happy to discuss these.

Yours sincerely



Louise Cheeseman  
Acting Managing Director  
Hull Trains



25 May 2018

John Larkinson  
Director  
Directorate of Railway Markets and Economics  
The Office of Rail and Road

Email: [DPPP@orr.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:DPPP@orr.gsi.gov.uk)

### **By Email**

**Mark Wild**  
Managing Director

London Underground  
11<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Palestra  
197 Blackfriars Road  
London SE1 8NJ

[www.tfl.gov.uk/tube](http://www.tfl.gov.uk/tube)

Dear John,

### **Improving Assisted Travel by Rail**

Thank you for your letter dated 30 April 2018 summarising responses to your recent consultation on Improving Assisted Travel and how you intend to take forward the issues identified.

The responses to your consultation have reinforced the need for improvements to Assisted Travel in the following key areas:

- Raising passenger awareness
- The reliability of Assisted Travel provision
- Staff training

Consequently, you have asked us to set out:

- Steps we have taken to make improvements to Assisted Travel in the three key areas since publication of your research
- Further steps we will take to make improvements to Assisted Travel over the next six months

Our responses to these questions are presented in the following pages.



Improving the accessibility of the London Underground is a priority for Transport for London (TfL). We will continue to focus on the issues highlighted by your consultation over the coming months and years to ensure that everyone can travel with ease on the Tube.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Wild." The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Mark Wild

**What steps you have taken to make improvements to Assisted Travel in the three key areas since publication of our research?**

**What further steps will you be taking to make improvements to Assisted Travel in the three key areas over the next six months?**

Over the last six months London Underground (LU) has been working with the ORR and Rail Delivery Group (RDG) to update and launch a Disabled People's Protection Policy (DPPP). LU is the Stations Facility Operator at 30 stations at which other Train Operating Companies (TOC) call and therefore LU has additional obligations for those services. Once launched, our DPPP will include Assisted Travel for elderly and disabled customers when booked.

LU has recently drafted both an internal and external policy document (as per DPPP guidance), designed briefing packs for the operational areas/teams, continued to work with the relevant TOCs and RDG to integrate a technical solution, and started formal consultation.

Currently, all assistance is dealt with using a Turn Up and Go (TUAG) service at all stations.

In the next six months, LU will be concluding consultation on its proposed DPPP with LU's recognised Trade Unions. LU's DPPP proposal has been agreed in principal with the ORR. Once the document has been internally ratified, there will be an opportunity for this document to be shared with The Plain English Campaign to ensure to language used is fully accessible.

Once consultation is complete, LU will brief all staff working in locations where the DPPP is applicable (circa 1,500) and join the Assisted Travel booking scheme (currently known as Passenger Assist) recommended by the RDG. Once both these steps are complete, LU will communicate to its customers and update relevant TOCs. LU representatives will continue to update the nominated ORR representatives on the progress of this work stream at its regular meetings every three months.

As well as LU's work on the DPPP, it has made other improvements to Assisted Travel in the three key areas, as detailed below:

- Raising passenger awareness

LU promotes its TUAG service through leaflets, press stories, online, social media, stakeholders and at accessibility events. One example is our 'Accessible Travel in

London' leaflet. Following the publication of the ORR report, Transport for London (TfL) expanded the distribution of the 'Accessible Travel in London' leaflet (already available in LU, London Overground and TfL Rail stations) to Dial-a-Ride and other stakeholders. LU will be promoting the TUAG service at a live event planned for November 2018.

TfL launched an Accessibility Insight Package in December 2017 that includes a recruited panel of disability customers to review its services and provide insight for improving the customer experience.

Our Accessible Communications Policy states that TfL will consider all requests for alternative formats for information where reasonable, and, as an example, we have provided braille translations on request in the past for our Getting Around London booklet.

There is a review of TfL's Accessible Communications Policy currently underway and in the next six months TfL will be undertaking a review of the 'Transport accessibility' section of the website to ensure the content and usability is optimised for customers.

- Reliability of Assisted Travel Provision

Since the publication of the ORR research in November 2017, LU has developed a new TUAG App. The app was produced following significant analysis of LU's existing TUAG process. The app will be made available to all station staff to provide assistance using their handheld devices. At the origin station, a member of staff will input information about the customer requiring assistance. As the TUAG journey commences, this information will then be shared with the destination (and interchange if applicable) stations. These stations will also be provided with the customers' estimated time of arrival. At destination and interchange stations, staff will be able to track TUAG journey arrival times and locations (i.e. platforms) using the app's dashboard. The improved visibility of TUAG journeys will enable station managers to deploy their staff more effectively to provide assistance. The app will be rolled out to staff from mid-July. The information will also be available to service control room staff, enabling them to take into account passengers with mobility issues if they need to make changes to the destination of trains.

Over the next six months, once the App has been rolled out, LU will be able to start collecting data on TUAG journeys, including origins, destinations, interchanges, completion rates and reasons for failed journeys. This information will be used to track performance across the network and identify opportunities for continuous improvement.

- Staff training

LU recognises the need for station staff to receive the appropriate training. All new starters receive comprehensive accessibility training prior to working on the network during their induction. In this, they are introduced to the social model of disability, the existing legislation enacted to protect people with disabilities, and are familiarised with accessible journey planning. New starters are trained to communicate with customers with different disabilities, including hidden disabilities. During their induction, staff are introduced to LU's policies and procedures, including TUAG and LU's taxi policy for unplanned lift closures; and trained on the equipment which has been provided to assist people with disabilities, such as manual boarding ramps and wheelchairs. E-zone courses are available to all staff and cover the topics discussed above. These can be accessed by staff at any time to reinforce or refresh their learning.

More recently, LU has provided Disability Equality Training (DET) to over 230 of its senior managers. This training provides LU's managers with an insight into experiencing LU from a disabled customers' perspective, increases their understanding of the key barriers and of what actions they can take to improve the service LU provides to disabled customers. The training involved a two hour trip on the network accompanying a disabled person, before a four-hour classroom based session focusing on the Social Model of Disability. The classroom sessions were delivered by a disabled trained. Over the next six months, LU will be procuring additional DET sessions for managerial staff. During this time, it will also be scoping out ways in which the training can be rolled out to front-line operational staff.

In addition to this, to improve Assisted Travel, all staff will be briefed on using the new TUAG App prior to it being launched in July 2018.

While assisted travel is a vitally important service, we also recognise that many customers with a condition affecting their mobility want to travel independently. To make this easier, LU has audited all assessable wayfinding and signage on the LU network and will be making improvement where needed over the coming year.

Your ref:  
Our ref:

Tel: 0151 955 2191  
Fax: 0151 702 3074

Mr John Larkinson  
Director Railway Markets & Economics  
Office of Rail and Road  
One Kemble Street  
London  
WC2B 4AN

30<sup>th</sup> May 2018

## By Email

Dear John,

### Improving Assisted Travel by Rail

Thank you for your letter dated 30th April regarding the recent consultation on improving assisted travel. Please accept my apologies for the delay in responding to you, it appears your initial contact was not received by my office.

Merseyrail has a proud history of supporting our customers who need assistance to travel and we were delighted to take part in the consultation. I understand members of your team also spent some additional time with our Head of Customer Experience, Greg Suligowski, as part of their work and gave feedback that they found it extremely useful, which was particularly pleasing to hear.

As a small, metropolitan TOC we do benefit from having near full staffing of our ticket offices from the start to end of service each day. This means that there is usually someone on hand to support our customers who need extra assistance when they choose to travel. This is reflected in the relatively high volumes of 'turn up and travel' assists that our station team support on a daily basis. Whilst of course we do offer a pre-booking service through our customer relations team, speaking to our passengers we know that many simply prefer to turn up and travel when they need to and I am pleased we are able to support them in this way.

Reading the output from the consultation it was particularly pleasing for me to see a number of our efforts in these areas highlighted, in particular our engagement with the disabled community within the City Region around last year's Wirral Loop Line Track Renewal programme which was so successful.



Whilst we are rightly proud of the work we do in this area, we are absolutely committed to continuous improvement in all that we do. In your letter, I note you request information on improvements being brought forward since the consultation and those planned for the next 6 months. In fact, Merseyrail, as part of our customer experience strategy has been working on a number of key projects in this area for the last 6-12 months. These are:-

- An overhaul of our accessible travel page on Merseyrail.org. This will not only bring accessibility information for all stations with one click on our home page but will, for the first time, provide an interactive map with indicative step heights from the platform to the train for all of our stations. We hope that this will help support older people and those travelling with young children to plan their journey more effectively. We aim to have this live over the summer.
- Since January 2018, our social media shared services team now deal with the majority of real time assisted travel bookings, whilst this still largely takes place via phone, we plan in the medium term to advertise the ability for customers to be able to book via social media. We hope to trial this later in the year.
- A review of how we manually record passenger assistance. Whilst we have a long tested and very effective system in use on our network, we recognise the need to keep pace with modern technology. We are fully engaged in the RDG led replacement of the Passenger Assist system including the development of an App and hope we are in a position to implement the final tool. We are mindful, however, that our current system works well and we await the final roll out details before making this decision with the best interests of our passengers in mind.

I hope this response gives you the information you need and the assurance that Merseyrail is continuing to drive improvements in terms of assisted travel provision.

As ever, we would welcome any suggestions or best practice that you could share.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you need any further assistance.

Yours sincerely,



**Andy Heath**  
**Managing Director**



John Larkinson  
Director  
Directorate of Railway Markets and Economics  
The Office of Rail and Road

15 May 2018

Dear ORR

## IMPROVING ASSISTED TRAVEL BY RAIL

Thank you for your letter of 30 April 2018 in which you published a summary of responses to your recent consultation on Improving Assisted Travel, together with how you intend to take forward the issues identified.

The responses to your consultation have reinforced the need for improvements to Assisted Travel, across the U.K Rail Industry, in the following key areas:

1. Raising passenger awareness
2. The reliability of assisted travel provision
3. Staff training

Following your consultation you have asked UK Train Operating Companies to set out:

- What key steps we have taken to make improvements to Assisted Travel in the three key areas since the publication of your research; and
- What further steps we will be taking to make improvements to Assisted Travel over the next six months

### Background for MTR Crossrail

MTR Crossrail is the operator of TfL Rail and of future Elizabeth line services.

Our vision is to set a new transport standard for the UK, moving people and connecting communities better than anyone else. Our mission is to:

- ✓ Enhance our customers' experience, ensuring a safe, reliable and high quality journey
- ✓ Actively engage with communities to move London forward
- ✓ Foster a company culture whereby we inspire, empower and develop our people
- ✓ Build our business through innovation and continuous improvement

Delivering continuous improvement in Assisted Travel provision (and helping to make TfL Rail and future Elizabeth line services accessible-for-all) forms a key part of our vision and mission to deliver a new transport standard for the UK. All of our stations are staffed from first to last train which means that turn-up-and-go is available during all service hours.

When the Elizabeth line project is complete the railway will be fully accessible. As part of this, we will ensure that we continuously raise the awareness of Assisted Travel and





turn-up-and-go facilities at our stations, we will ensure that the provision of assisted travel is consistently reliable, and we will ensure that our staff training supports our accessibility obligations and aspirations to set a new transport standard for the UK.

### **In what areas have we taken steps to improve Assisted Travel since the publication of the research?**

In our journey towards opening the Elizabeth line in December 2018 we have taken a number of steps to improve Assisted Travel in the three key areas identified. These steps are listed below:

#### **Raising Passenger Awareness of Assisted Travel Services:**

In the last six months – and as we move closer to opening the Elizabeth line - we have taken the following steps to raise passenger awareness of Assisted Travel:

- ✓ Our Customer & Community Engagement Plan sets out specific objectives for improving passenger awareness of Assisted Travel services. Many of which are listed further in this letter
- ✓ We have delivered six ‘here to help’ sessions at our key stations: where our Senior Managers and our Customer & Community Ambassadors raise awareness across all aspects of using the TfL Rail (and future Elizabeth line service) including the facilities available for Assisted Travel
- ✓ Our Customer & Community Ambassadors have delivered seven ‘Making Rail Accessible’ trips’. The trips are carried out with local accessibility groups and with customers who have been identified as needing additional help and assistance when using the railway. The events are designed to raise awareness of how to use Assisted Travel on TfL Rail and future Elizabeth line services.
- ✓ We have recruited two new Customer & Community Ambassadors both of whom have personal objectives for improving passenger awareness of Assisted Travel
- ✓ We have recruited a new Travel Ambassador. Our Travel Ambassadors are volunteers from within the local community. One of their primary objectives is to work across our customer and community base to raise awareness of Assisted Travel facilities
- ✓ We have promoted the work of our Customer & Community Ambassadors on social media, including our ‘here-to-help’ sessions and community events to improve Assisted Travel
- ✓ We have carried out engagement events to promote Assisted Travel in the local libraries that serve the communities in which we operate
- ✓ Together with Transport for London, we have delivered ‘Access Days’, where we work with local disability groups to improve Assisted Travel at key stations. An Access Day was carried out at Stratford station on Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> October 2017. There were a number of attendees from different transport sectors including MTR Crossrail’s Ambassador team; the Docklands Light Railway Community Team, local Community Nurses, the TfL Accessibility Team and representatives from TfL’s internal staff committee.
- ✓ Members of our Senior Management Team and our Customer & Community Ambassadors have attended regular meetings with the Making Rail Accessible Group. We have also attended the Chelmsford OIL (Options for Independent Living) Group. These events have all taken place with the intention of improving the awareness of Assisted Travel services on TfL Rail and future Elizabeth line services.



- ✓ Our Customer & Community Ambassadors have undertaken regular checks of the availability of the Disabled Persons Protection Policy (DPPP) at all of our stations to ensure that this important literature is always available for our customers
- ✓ Our new Class 345 trains have improved accessibility through the provision of dedicated wheelchair spaces and additional doors on each carriage to improve access and egress. The improved accessibility of our new trains has been included in TfL press releases and emails to our customer mailing list. We have also produced on-train 'car-cards' to promote the improved accessibility of the new trains

In the next six months we will take the following steps to raise passenger awareness of Assisted Travel:

- ✓ We will develop and roll out a communications campaign for promoting Assisted Travel services across Long Line Public Address Announcements (LLPA), Customer Information Screens and Social Media
- ✓ We will recruit two additional full time employed Customer & Community Ambassadors to promote Assisted Travel services across the Central Operating Section of the Elizabeth line, and the communities that it will serve
- ✓ We will review and enhance the accessibility page on the MTR Crossrail website
- ✓ We will develop a local engagement plan for the Central Operating Section of the Elizabeth line, identifying and engaging with local disability groups, community libraries and other community hubs
- ✓ We will expand our 'here to help' sessions to the western section of TfL Rail (Paddington to Heathrow) where services will begin operating on May 20 May - and then to the Central Operating Section from January 2019.

### **The Reliability of Assisted Travel Services**

TfL Rail has some of the lowest complaint rates in the UK rail industry, with approximately two complaints received for every one hundred thousand customer journeys. In the last six months, we have received four complaints relating to Assisted Travel.

During this time we have taken the following steps to improve the reliability of Assisted Travel:

- ✓ We have put in place an Accessibility Steering Group which is held monthly and is chaired by our Customer & Community Engagement Manager. The meeting is attended by our Head of Stations, Head of Customer Experience, Head of Control and members of the Station Management team. The purpose of the group is to drive forward improvements in Assisted Travel provision, to track trends in the quality of service provided to customers who use Assisted Travel, and to take remedial or corrective action where necessary
- ✓ When lifts or help points are unavailable (for example due to a fault) we place a member of staff at the lift to provide advice and assistance on using an alternative route (either to the platform or to another railway station)
- ✓ All of our customer facing colleagues receive accessibility training on induction and this is refreshed annually
- ✓ We have worked with our taxi supplier to improve response times of taxi bookings for customers who require an accessible taxi to complete their TfL Rail journey.



In the next six months we will take the following steps to improve the reliability of Assisted Travel:

- ✓ We will carry out a further review of our 'turn-up-and-go' process in readiness for the opening of Elizabeth line service from December 2018
- ✓ We will work collaboratively with Transport for London's Accessibility Lead and we will develop joint initiatives to improve the reliability of Assisted Travel on TfL Rail and future Elizabeth line services
- ✓ We will work collaboratively with the Rail Delivery Group and Transport for London to investigate the use of new and innovative technology to improve the reliability of Assisted Travel
- ✓ We will work collaboratively with local disability user groups and local community hubs to gain insight into how we can improve the reliability of Assisted Travel. For example through understanding customer gain and pain points for Assisted Travel when using the railway
- ✓ We will continue to use the Accessibility Steering Group to track the performance of Assisted Travel (including missed assists) and to ensure that we are taking appropriate remedial action to prevent any recurrence

## Staff Training

In the last six months we have delivered the following staff training to improve Assisted Travel:

- ✓ All of our customer facing colleagues and operational managers have received new accessibility training following the launch of the Class 345 trains
- ✓ All new customer facing colleagues have received accessibility training. The training covers all aspects of aspects of Assisted Travel – including processes, procedures and customer care. The training ensures that we treat customers who need additional assistance respectfully and with a personal, professional and helpful approach
- ✓ All customer facing colleagues attend a half day Quarterly Briefing Cycle. Within the most recent briefing cycle we have included a specific module on Assisted Travel, including a refresher on processes and procedures, how to identify customers who may need additional assistance, hidden disabilities and customer care.

In the next six months we will deliver the following improvements in staff training to improve Assisted Travel:

- ✓ We will roll out a new e-learning application which will include a specific section on Assisted travel to further improve staff knowledge and helpfulness when supporting with Assisted Travel
- ✓ We will put in place a personal objective across all customer facing colleagues Personal Development Plans covering Assisted Travel responsibilities
- ✓ Our Managing Director carries out a monthly 'coffee and conversation' session with all MTR Crossrail HQ colleagues. We will use one of these sessions to promote Accessible Travel and with attendance from guests from our local disability user groups to promote real life stories of the importance of delivering an excellent customer experience for customers using Assisted Travel services.



The Elizabeth line will transform travel in London when it opens in 2018. MTR Crossrail takes its responsibilities for providing an excellent Assisted Travel experience extremely seriously and, in collaboration with Transport for London, we will continue to work hard to improve Assisted Travel in the months ahead.

Yours faithfully



**John Geary**

Head of Customer Experience, MTR Crossrail





John Larkinson  
Director  
Directorate of Railway Markets and Economics  
Office of Rail and Road

Our ref: TJH/jp/ljh/orr\_assistedtravel  
Your ref:

via email to: [dppp@orr.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:dppp@orr.gsi.gov.uk)



17 May 2018

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Dear John

**Re: Improving assisted travel by rail**

Thank you for our letter of 30 April 2018 concerning the Assisted Travel scheme.

There are approximately 48,000 independent journeys by wheelchair users on the Tyne & Wear Metro every year, where assistance from staff is not required. This reflects the highly accessible nature of the system.

The majority of the system was designed and constructed in the late 1970s and with wheelchair accessibility as a key part of the design. All new stations were designed with step-free access to the platform, and between the platform and train. Where existing stations were incorporated into the system, upgrades took place to improve their accessibility. In this context, the accessibility of the system is different to a great deal of the national rail infrastructure.

Recent station refurbishments have included accessibility improvements such as dual handrails, tactile platform surfaces, improved seating and installation of further lifts. The Tyne & Wear Metro also voluntarily applies its existing DPPP to the 48 stations which fall outside regulatory scrutiny. This includes providing pre-booked assistance at four working hours notice, and appropriate alternative transport for passengers where required.

As you will be aware, Tyne & Wear Metro does not participate in Assisted Travel but has its own scheme to provide assistance to passengers.

Given how accessible the system is compared with a great deal of the national rail infrastructure, I would like to provide you with an update on how Tyne & Wear Metro continues to improve accessibility for all passengers. Over the last year we have delivered improvements including:

Nexus House St James' Boulevard Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 4AX  
T: 0191 2020747 F: 0191 203 3180 [nexus.org.uk](http://nexus.org.uk)

- Launch of “I need a seat” and “Baby on board” badges and publicity campaigns, to encourage passengers to give up seats for those who may need them more.
- Additional customer services training for all customer facing staff, which included a range of topics to enhance knowledge and skills for assisting passengers with disabilities. These topics included hidden disabilities, appropriate language/interaction, inclusion and mental health. This training has contributed to passenger rating of staff helpfulness increasing from 73% to 88% and staff knowledge increasing from 68% to 87%, in our six-monthly Customer Satisfaction Survey.
- Publication of information on the platform-train height-gap distances at each station, to help wheelchair users make an informed decision whether they require assistance.
- Improving our assisted travel arrangements by:
  - Reducing the notice period for booking from 6 hours to 4 hours - improving on a level which is already significantly better than the 24 hours required under Passenger Assist – and increasing our booking times from 07:00 – 19:00 to 06:30 – 00:00.
  - Contacting staff who are booked to provide assistance to confirm assistance was provided.
  - Logging assistance provided through “turn up and go” arrangements.
- Updating our Metro Access Guide, which provides more detailed accessibility information on our stations than required under DPPP guidance.
- Continuing our liaison with forums and user groups representing those with disabilities. As the Tyne & Wear Metro system covers a compact geographic area, we are able to effectively engage with these groups to improve the accessibility of the system.
- Improving the platform-train height-gap distances at stations as part of planned track renewals work.

Over the next year, in addition to continuing our current activities, we plan to include accessibility improvements in a further seven station refurbishment schemes.

I trust that this provides an insight into the actions being taken to further improve the accessibility of the Tyne & Wear Metro system.

Yours sincerely



**Tobyn Hughes**  
**Managing Director**



John Larkinson  
Director  
Directorate of Railway Markets and Economics  
Email: DPPP@orr.gsi.gov.uk

By Email

21<sup>st</sup> May 2018

Dear John,

### **Improving Assisted Travel by Rail**

Following the ORR research and consultation into passengers' awareness and experience of Assisted Travel, we welcome the opportunity to respond and update on the areas highlighted within the report that demonstrate the continuous improvement and development that's been happening here at Northern.

Since the publication of your research, and despite the challenges we face with continued Industrial Action, delayed network infrastructure upgrades and the worst winter weather on record, we continue driving forward with improvements to our Passenger Assist provision to raise awareness and familiarisation of the service.

Specifically to date;

- We have established a cross functional customer working group chaired by Northern, CrossCountry, First Transpennine Express and Hull Trains to engage exclusively on Accessibility and Inclusive travel. The group's aims and objectives attempt to remove barriers associated with accessible travel, inviting participants to address areas that are important to them whilst gaining valuable suggestions and feedback on how to improve things further.
- We play an equal part on our cross-TOC Arriva UK Trains working group that focuses solely on Accessible and Inclusive travel. The ORR research alongside involvement from our customers and disability groups, forms the basis in which we push forward with our strategic vision and continued strive for excellence.
- We continue to develop a close and pragmatic relationship with the Government's Rail Sector Lead for Disabled People - Stephen Brookes MBE – where regular meetings provide emphasis to local and national rail accessibility issues. Additionally, we explore areas of additional support customers may require, to include Disability Hate Crime prevention and supporting a safe travel environment free from discrimination.
- We worked successfully with Blackpool Transport to provide a fully accessible and inclusive replacement bus schedule during the closure of the Preston to Blackpool route. As a popular destination with significant demand for assistance, we recognised the need for a fully accessible transport provision as a key factor within our procurement process. During the blockade, Northern and Blackpool Transport managed to operate a 100% accessible bus replacement service, enabling our customers to have confidence and assurance that the service was consistency inclusive to all.



- Development and evolution of our website and app is continuous, delivering increased levels of accessibility and inclusion for our customers. Improving our website layout, accuracy in accessibility information (making it clearer, more prominent and easier to understand) and the functionality to bulk book passenger assistance requests via a dedicated web form and email address, makes it more efficient and seamless for customers to request the right level of assistance they need.

We also recognise the significant benefit that disability familiarisation training can have on customer experience and colleague confidence, where a link between the two has driven an uplift in customer satisfaction. We invest heavily in our training programmes where colleagues tell us they value the scope of disability familiarisation, the hints and tools provided to help customers, and learning from first hand, face to face passenger journeys so they can deliver an experience specific to the customer's needs. To date;

- A total of 896 front line colleagues have received comprehensive familiarisation training from a pan range of both visible and hidden disabilities. 71 colleagues have successfully completed a 4 day British Sign Language Level 1 (BSL1) course enabling them to provide an additional means in which we can communicate with our customers.
- Senior Managers meet regularly with disabled rail users to travel on-board our trains and stations to experience a journey from our customer's perspective. Accompanied with the use of simulation aides (such as simulation spectacles and wheelchairs) we gain invaluable first-hand experience of the challenges and difficulties that comes with travelling with a disability. This is fed back into our continuous improvement network at a local and group level where we explore solutions to identified problems.
- Our disability specific training programs are created and delivered by our partners Enhance the UK and Dementia Forward, supported by people from a pan range of disabilities, who assist in the delivery of course content. New entrant colleagues attend a 1 day intensive course whilst existing colleagues complete this during their annual 'off line' 5 day CPD standard. All training is refreshed, updated and redelivered every 12 months.

As a licensee operating over 460 stations and nearly 375 trains, we recognise that the key to a consistent high quality service comes from multi agency working relationships that allow improvements to be driven collaboratively. Whilst we have already made developments to our passenger assist provision, our drive for continuous improvement makes us want to do more over the next 6 months. The areas we will work on include:

- Working with the cross-TOC Arriva UK Trains group to create a 'mental health awareness' training package that will be delivered to all new and existing colleagues.
- Expand disability awareness training to all colleague grades within Northern
- Improve on-board priority seating signage to include priority seats, toilets and wheelchair spaces.
- Introduce a priority seat card that our customers can use to request a seat on-board the train.
- Increase usage of mobility scooters and their carriage across trial routes within the Northern operated network.
- Deliver a series of information videos demonstrating the step by step process of requesting passenger assistance, to increase awareness and familiarisation of this before travelling with us.
- Expand on this further, by integrating our cross-TOC Arriva Trains UK partners in our passenger information videos, to remove barriers associated with interconnecting travel, especially on long distance routes with connections at our larger stations.
- Invite Grand Central Railway to become a partner of the Joint Inclusivity Forum (JIF) within the North.

- Engage with local charities and support groups to form a 'Try the train' program to increase awareness when considering rail for a journey, and confidence when travelling.
- Better use our social media channels to increase awareness and engagement with our customers and disability organisations. We will explore how social media can be used to assist customers requesting assistance both in advance and on the day of travel.
- Forming with a strategic partnership with Disability Rights UK to develop our disability familiarisation programmes and training framework (for both front line staff and Managers) whilst seeking official accreditation of existing training programmes, and ongoing assessment of service and standards delivery.

In addition to the work already completed, we will continue to engage with individuals, charitable organisations and cross-TOC operators to ensure qualitative improvement continues, valuing the benefits that come from multi-agency working to deliver a fully accessible and inclusive railway.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Williamson', is written over a light grey rectangular background.

Peter Williamson  
Travel Accessibility and Integration Manager  
Northern Railway

John Larkinson  
Director  
Directorate of Railway Markets and Economics  
Office of Rail and Road

15 May 2018

By Email

Dear Mr Larkinson,

## **IMPROVING ASSISTED TRAVEL BY RAIL**

Thank you for your letter to Alex Hynes of 30 April 2018.

ScotRail is committed to helping make Scotland more accessible for all and we want everyone who travels with us to have a secure, comfortable and enjoyable journey. It is particularly important that those customers who require additional assistance during their journey have confidence in using our services. During the year ending 31 March 2018 ScotRail provided support for 326,000 booked assistance requests across our 358 stations in Scotland.

The findings of your recent consultation exercise very much mirror those from ScotRail's own Mystery Shopping for Assisted Travel that we carry out annually. We are committed to making sure that customers who need assistance can make full use of Scotland's rail network. That means providing access to an effortless journey, making our trains and stations as accessible as possible and providing additional support and assistance when our customers require it.

Regarding steps we have already taken in the three key areas for improvement, I would comments as follows:

### **Raising Passenger Awareness**

During the current works to upgrade Glasgow Queen Street Station, ScotRail has introduced a new Assisted Travel Point (see photo attached) including 3 new staff to service this facility. An associated assisted travel poster campaign was also introduced at the key stations that serve Glasgow Queen Street (see attached PDF).

ScotRail Passenger Assistance information has now also been included on Disability Equality Scotland communications hub to reach a wider audience. The link: <http://accessibletravel.scot/>

We continue to host a regular Stakeholder Equality Group at which we review key passenger requirements. Membership of the Stakeholder Equality Group has recently been extended to include representation from young disabled people and hidden disability groups.

### **The reliability of Assisted Travel provision**

We conduct an ongoing review of all customer feedback and complaints to identify key themes that impact upon reliability and service quality.

This includes specific interventions with staff who provide assistance at stations and on train, in line with the customer feedback, to identify



where our processes can be strengthened.

ScotRail's Access & Inclusion Manager has established a comprehensive engagement network with key national disability stakeholders and user-groups, in addition to undertaking specific customer engagement to discuss the key issues affecting the reliability of our Assisted Travel service.

As a result of the above, a number of specific staff information briefs have been developed regarding Assisted Travel.

### **Staff training**

Our new staff induction and training programme includes a full-day training on passenger assistance and accessibility. Over the last six months a review of current training material and our delivery methodology has been initiated.

In addition to activity supporting these three key areas, ScotRail has also reduced our Booked Assist Notification period to three hours and carried out a comprehensive accessibility audit of all ScotRail managed stations.

Over the next six months further steps to make improvements to Assisted Travel in the three key areas will include:

### **Raising Passenger Awareness**

ScotRail is seeking to develop a more creative and customer friendly DPPP. This will focus upon providing customer information in formats more aligned with the changing technological landscape such as on-line videos, voice-guidance, and an improved interactive website. A communications strategy is being developed to promote the launch of this enhancement to the DPPP.

### **The reliability of Assisted Travel provision**

A key focus of our approach to understanding the reliability of ScotRail's Assisted Travel processes and new procedures will be the greater involvement of direct customer input and feedback. This will include an initial workshop in May 2018 with customers' representing a number of our user groups and senior customer-experience managers to identify process and reliability challenges and identify opportunities for improvement. This workshop will also provide customer videos which will be used to advise future staff training.

### **Staff training**

New training is being developed, which includes providing a greater awareness of hidden disabilities. We will also be developing short videos from a range of stakeholders regarding assisted travel. We will be raising staff awareness of ScotRail's DPPP.

Please contact me should you require any further information.

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Marshall-Roberts  
Access and Inclusion Manager



# PASSENGER ASSISTANCE AT QUEEN STREET STATION



As part of our commitment to customers requiring assisted travel during the redevelopment at Glasgow Queen Street station, we've introduced a new passenger assist process.



1. There will be a Passenger Assist stand on the main concourse and customers who require un-booked (turn-up and go) assistance should report here.
2. Customers who use our Assisted Travel service and pre-book, now have the option to be dropped-off in front of the Millennium Hotel on George Square, where they will be met by one of our team to ensure they are supported for onward travel.

Similarly if a customer arrives in Queen Street, they will be escorted to the pick-up point by one of the team.

## You can book assistance:



**By visiting any staffed station**  
on our network



**Free Assisted Travel Helpline:**  
0800 912 2901 Monday to Sunday  
from 07:00 to 22:00 (except Christmas Day)



**Online:** Assisted Travel booking format  
[www.scotrail.co.uk/form/assisted-travel](http://www.scotrail.co.uk/form/assisted-travel)  
(three hours or more before you travel)



**Assisted Travel Textphone:**  
18001 0800 912 2 901  
(for people who are hard of hearing)



John Larkinson  
Director  
Directorate of Markets and Economics  
Office of Rail and Road  
One Kemble Street  
London  
WC2B 4AN

22/05/2018

Dear John,

**RE: Improving Assisted Travel by Rail**

Thank you for your letter dated 30<sup>th</sup> April 2018, in which you set out ORR's intended way forward post consultation.

As you are aware, Serco Caledonian Sleeper Ltd. is unusual amongst UK franchised train operating companies, being both a reservations-only service as well as offering a distinct focus on our guests, including operating with the highest staff-to-customer ratio in UK Rail, and consistently achieving the highest praise percentage per 100,000 journeys by your own measurements.

We acknowledge that even in such a guest-focused environment, there is always room for improvement. However, perhaps our improvements are focused in different areas to those that apply to a more conventional train operating company. Below I have set out our actions under each of the three key areas you have raised:

(1) Raising Passenger Awareness


As a reservations-only service, we have a unique opportunity to ensure that our guests are fully aware of the facilities available to them, including the Passenger Assist system. Within our standard operating procedure, we ask guests at the point of booking whether we are able to offer them any assistance, and this is replicated in our online booking process. This is then arranged by our Guest Service Centre team on the guest's behalf at the point of booking. Additionally, when guests book online, we frequently receive telephone calls to arrange assistance and again follow the same procedure.

We operate a culture of continuous improvement within our Guest Service Centre, and have a rolling training programme that all our ambassadors participate in in order to ensure high standards of guest care are constantly evolved to better meet guest needs.

(2) Reliability of Assisted Travel Provision

As Serco Caledonian Sleeper Ltd. does not operate any of the 48 stations which we serve, we are entirely dependant on the Station Facility Owners to deliver assistance to our guests. As this therefore lies outwith our direct control, we have taken care and time to forge strong relationships with those providers to ensure that our services' unique care for our guests is supported by our delivery partners.

Registered Office: 1 Union St, Inverness, Scotland IV1 1PR | Tel: 0330 060 0500  
Email: enquiry@sleeper.scot | Registered No. SC477821 | VAT No. 190 1594 08

Operated by 

Serco Commercial

During 2017 and 2018, we have substantially completed a programme of installations of Caledonian Sleeper Information Points at the stations we serve, supported by enhanced lounge facilities at selected locations in Scotland that will serve as key guest hubs on opening later this year. This ensures that even though a member of Caledonian Sleeper staff may not be present, a video link to our Guest Service Centre as well as any information required by guests is available to resolve any issues our guests may have.

As we are a reservations only service, provision of assistance at all stations is known to us before the event – our on board teams therefore know whom to expect and extend a personal welcome to our guests. Given our service model, you will appreciate that “no-shows” are not something we encounter very frequently. We have enhanced this with the addition of a dedicated duty manager at London Euston to support our onboard teams.

(3) Staff Training

To support the above points, we carry out extensive training of our staff to ensure that we are continuously delivering high standards. All our staff complete a comprehensive induction programme which includes a module on accessibility, designed by our Accessibility Consultant Nick Goss on behalf of The Shaw Trust. This programme aims to provide all staff with a baseline level of competence and confidence in providing assistance to any and all guests. Additionally, we deliver annual refresher training to all staff involved in service delivery to ensure their knowledge remains current and any legislative changes are taken account of. Thirdly, in advance of introduction of our new train fleet later in 2018, we are revisiting our existing training package and re-training all staff to ensure that their capabilities are further enhanced in line with the anticipated rise in expectations by our guests. The intention of this programme is to ensure all of our guests enjoy an exceptional experience in every aspect of their journey with Caledonian Sleeper.

Given our service is notably different from that of other UK rail operators, we welcome the planned consultation on revisions to the guidance on DPPP's, and will fully participate in the process. However, I must point out at this stage that we have some concerns about changes made to the guidance that could adversely impact or unintentionally prejudice our operational practices

I trust that the above information will prove useful, and welcome further discussion on this very important issue.

Yours Sincerely,



Ryan Flaherty

Managing Director, Caledonian Sleeper



John Larkinson  
Director Railway Markets and Economics  
Directorate of Railway Markets and Economics  
One Kemble Street  
London  
WC2B 4AN

21 May 2018

Dear John,

Thank you for your letter, dated 30 April 2018 regarding Improving Assisted Travel. South Western Railway (SWR) is happy to provide you a response to the following two questions, related to the three areas raised in your letter (raising passenger awareness, the reliability of assisted travel provision and staff training):

1. What steps you have taken to make improvements to Assisted Travel in the three key areas since publication of our research?
2. What further steps you will be taking to make improvements to Assisted Travel in the three key areas over the next 6 months?

SWR has recently appointed a dedicated Accessibility and Inclusion Manager who has been working with station and on-board teams to understand the current assistance provision. This dedicated manager has set up an Accessibility Forum, in partnership with Disability Rights UK, which met for the first time on 17 May 2018, and in part, the purpose of this forum will be to discuss the Assisted Travel provision of SWR and how improvements can be made. SWR has committed to run accessibility forums each year, for the duration of the franchise.

As per our Disabled Persons Protection Policy (DPPP) obligations, we have recently begun reporting on the successes or failures of booked and unbooked assistance. I understand that this is the first time that this data has been collected on our network. From the data gathered, we are getting a much clearer picture of where we need to focus our resources. Station Managers have been empowered to put measures in place to improve assistance provision with their teams. Where SWR has received any complaints from customers regarding the Assisted Travel provision, the company has fully investigated these and identified actions in order to prevent recurrences.

In accordance with our franchise agreement, we have been working with 'Blue Assist' to ensure all of our frontline teams are aware and understand the need to provide assistance to customers with hidden disabilities.

Over the next six months we will be implementing the following:

- Reducing the Assisted Travel booking horizon from 24 hours to 12 hours for journeys undertaken across our network between 06.00 & 22.00 hours from 1 June 2018, with notice for travel between the following stations being reduced to 4 hours:

Basingstoke  
Bournemouth  
Earlsfield  
Feltham  
Kingston  
New Malden  
Norbiton  
Portsmouth and Southsea  
Portsmouth Harbour  
Putney  
Queenstown Road  
Raynes Park  
Richmond  
Salisbury  
Southampton Central  
Staines  
Surbiton  
Twickenham  
Vauxhall  
Wandsworth Town  
Wimbledon  
Winchester  
Woking

- Our Assisted Travel line will be operational 24 hours a day from 1 June 2018.
- We will be trialling a new assisted travel system in partnership with Rail Delivery Group, which will allow customers to use their Smartphone to request assistance.
- With regard to staff training, our Accessibility and Inclusion Manager will be working with colleagues in the stations and on-board teams to look at our current processes and provisions to best understand where improvements could be made. The trialling of the new 'Assisted Travel' system will provide insight into this work going forward.

No promotion of Assisted Travel has happened in the recent past, however, for the future, SWR is happy to promote this, given the right conditions in the business after procedures have been reviewed with station and on-board managers. SWR also notes the consultation summary of responses where a national campaign, coordinated by the Rail Delivery Group, could be launched and this is something which SWR would be keen to support.

Yours sincerely,



Andy ~~Mellers~~  
Managing Director

**John Larkinson**

**Director**

Directorate of Railway Markets and  
Economics

Email: [DPPP@orr.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:DPPP@orr.gsi.gov.uk)

14 May 2018

Dear John,

## **IMPROVING ASSISTED TRAVEL BY RAIL**

Thank you for your letter and copy of the summary of responses to your consultation.

We had welcomed the reports launched in November 2017 and were glad we were able to provide feedback on them. We felt that our observations were insightful and would have helped you understand the challenges we face.

We have read with interest your consultation summary and found that there are many areas on which we agree although we are not clear on the role of the Assisted Travel Advisory Group especially when it comes to the re writing of the Code of practice for producing DPPP's.

We welcome the decision to update this code and to include representatives from the 3<sup>rd</sup> sector especially to help with doing this however it 'appears' that there is no intention in having direct TOC representation on this group. The only named industry representative mentioned is RDG, which obviously we would support but RDG on their own would not be an effective voice for the industry. As a minimum there should be representatives from Commuter, Intercity, Cross country and regional railway companies as well as the TOCs representing Wales and Scotland. This will ensure that the different businesses with their unique challenges all have a voice.

We also believe it will be mutually beneficial for this group to continue to include direct TOC and Network Rail representation.

With reference to your request for feedback on what action we have taken in direct response to your research.

We have in fact always been proactive in our approach to providing a service to our disabled passengers and so much of the research that was undertaken helped to reinforce the actions that we have taken already. So it is hard to pick out things we have done in direct response to this research but instead below I will set out what it is we have put in place or are continuing to put in place for our disabled passengers over the last two to three years and will be doing up to the end of this franchise.

We are one of the few TOCs that employs a full time Accessibility and Inclusion manager who is responsible for our Disabled Peoples Protection Policy and continues to seek to make improvements not only for our network but by working closely with colleagues

throughout the industry and at the Rail Delivery Group, to influence change across the country. An example of this is the re-evaluation of the proposed replacement for the Passenger Assist system named RARS which had fallen behind its schedule for delivery and instead sourcing and introducing a new more innovative and responsive company and product which should meet the original proposed replacement dates.

Specifically for Southeastern the following has been either introduced or are on going:

We carry out Mystery shopping with disabled people every month and feedback is shared with managers and staff

We have produced a card for staff to hand to passengers who need assistance, giving them details of the assisted travel phone numbers.

We have introduced messages onto our CIS screens to inform passengers when the on board toilet isn't working

We have introduced signage onto our accessible toilets supporting a campaign from Colitus and Crohns UK pointing out that not all disabilities are obvious.

We have produced specialist maps that show the accessibility and staffing of our stations

We are the only TOC that ensures our Conductors and OBM's get notifications of the assisted travel bookings they have through a manual process overnight in our control centre.

We refund the cost of tickets if the booked assistance doesn't get delivered

We have introduced a priority seat card and badge

<https://www.southeasternrailway.co.uk/travel-information/on-board/priority-seating>

We have introduced a 'Can you Help Me' card and a communication card (picture card showing common symbols at stations) <https://www.southeasternrailway.co.uk/travel-information/more-travel-help/travel-support-card>

We have just introduced a Wheelchair and scooter guide for passengers.

<https://www.southeasternrailway.co.uk/travel-information/more-travel-help/assisted-travel>

We have just introduced a Vulnerable passenger guide for staff with practical information to help disabled people and other vulnerable people.

We call back people who have booked assistance every month and record over 90% satisfaction

Over 75% of passengers who need assistance don't book but turn up and go and this is now being recorded as part of the on going ORR survey.

We are working with a visually impaired person who gives hands on guiding technique training to frontline staff on trains and at stations.

We have confirmed and extended our 'Ambassador' role at main London terminals – these are staff dedicated to the role of customer service (that is they have no other role like platform duties or gate line) who are able to go above and beyond solving passenger's problems at stations whether train related or otherwise. This means they are able when necessary to spend additional time with vulnerable and disabled passengers and go the

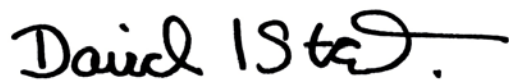
extra mile to ensure they can complete their journey. They are currently in place at St Pancras, Cannon St, London Bridge and Charing Cross stations.

We spend £350k every year on physical improvements at stations including this year getting the two platform lifts replaced at Faversham station and two more accessible toilets installed (Oxford and Shortlands)

We will continue to identify and make improvements in how we deliver the service to our disabled passengers and we welcome further research that the ORR will make, including the now monthly survey of booked assistance passengers that the ORR have committed to.

If you would like any further detail on these improvements please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Statham". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke extending from the end of the name.

**David Statham**  
Managing Director



John Larkinson  
Director  
Directorate of Railway Markets and Economics  
Email: [DPPP@orr.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:DPPP@orr.gsi.gov.uk)

By Email

21<sup>st</sup> May 2018

Dear John

### **Improving Assisted Travel by Rail**

We wish to begin by thanking the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) for the opportunity to respond to the consultation, and hope that our contribution was of use whilst determining the next steps to improve assisted travel.

It is pleasing to hear that the Disabled People's Protection Policy (DPPP) Guidance is to be updated, supported by the newly created Assisted Travel Advisory Group, and would encourage representation from train operating companies as part of this group to ensure that any changes whilst being in the interest of the customer, are also achievable with recognition of some of the infrastructure challenges which our industry faces.

Since the publication of the ORR's research, TransPennine Express has continued to innovate to improve the assisted travel service for our customers particularly around the priority areas of raising passenger awareness, the reliability of Assisted Travel provision, and staff training.

Specifically, to date:

- We have introduced new, shorter booking horizons for requesting assistance for those customers travelling with TransPennine Express between two of our 19 managed stations. This has been achieved through making a change from the use of emailed assistance booking lists to the Passenger Assistance Staff App, which allows for updates to be processed throughout the day. This app also provides an opportunity for greater reporting on the status of assistance requests. We would hope that through the demonstration of this change, other operators consider whether they can make a similar change to provide a greater number of journey opportunities with reduced notice being required for the booking of assistance.
- We continue to engage with disabled customers through our Joint Inclusivity Forum, working collaboratively with Northern, Hull Trains, and most recently CrossCountry.

TransPennine Express Limited  
Registered in England Number 09111801  
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London, W2 6LG

The remit of the group is to discuss and devise means of overcoming barriers to inclusive travel. We are exploring opportunities to expand the membership of this group to gain the views of customers with a greater number of hidden disabilities having gained representation for customers with ADHD.

- To ensure that the wheelchair user spaces on board our trains remain available for customers who require them, we have made changes to our cycle policy with the aim of ensuring that bikes are carried in the allocated space on board the train, reducing confrontation and anxiety for customers about the availability of the wheelchair user space, and to improve their experience whilst on board our trains.
- Revisions have been made to our Scooter Policy, allowing TransPennine Express to evaluate customers' specific journeys rather than adopting a blanket approach to safety assessments when issuing Scooter Cards for our services. This has seen an increased number of customers being issued with Scooter Cards, enabling them to travel using our services where they may have previously not have been able to.

In the coming months, TransPennine Express will reach a pivotal moment as we begin to introduce the first of our 220 brand-new state-of-the-art carriages, providing greater capacity and a revolutionary experience for our customers. Disabled customers travelling on these trains will benefit from PRM-TSI compliant carriages featuring Wi-Fi, at seat sockets, digital displays, electronic seat reservations and real-time loading. TransPennine Express will be exploiting the opportunities offered by these new trains to develop new solutions to assist disabled customers. Additionally, in the coming six months and beyond throughout our Franchise term:

- All new staff joining the TransPennine Express team undertake Disability Awareness Training ensuring that 100% of our customer facing workforce are equipped to recognise and help customers who may need assistance whilst travelling. All of our existing customer facing staff have already been trained.
- Throughout 2018 and 2019 we will continue to deliver our programme of Minor Works to make changes to our stations to improve their accessibility, and remove any physical or operational barriers. We are also considering where innovation or adoption of technologies from outside the rail industry may be applicable to improving access.
- We are working with our sister train operating companies (Hull Trains, Great Western Railway and South Western Railway) to devise shared policies to improve consistency, considering the development of baseline policies which can then be tailored to each specific operator's geography and operating model. This work will focus on the key areas identified in your consultation response as a priority and will reflect improvements in policies which could include the DPPP, scooter policy, BlueAssist etc.

We will also continue to be represented at Rail Delivery Group with the aim of adopting best practice from across the industry, and work collaboratively to improve travel for disabled customers across all train operators' services. We will also maximise opportunities within the industry, and those which are presented by key stakeholders and charities with whom we engage to make improvements to our services and operations for the benefit of disabled

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customers, placing challenge where we feel changes need to be made which are outside of our control for the benefit of our customers.

Should you wish to discuss the developments being made by TransPennine Express, or our plans to improve the access of our services and the experience for disabled customers when travelling with us, please do not hesitate to contact me and we would be happy to facilitate a meeting.

Kind regards



Leo Goodwin

Managing Director

TransPennine Express

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John Larkinson  
Directorate of Railway Markets and Economics  
Office of Rail and Road  
One Kemble Street  
WC2B 4AN

**8 June 2018**

Dear John

## **IMPROVING ASSISTED TRAVEL BY RAIL**

Thank you for your letter of 30 April with which you included your report on the outcome of your recent consultation into assisted travel. We were happy to assist with RDGs response to the consultation, and also take part in a separate consultation meeting with you.

We remain fully committed to giving our disabled customers the best possible experience when travelling with us. Last year we dealt with nearly 120,000 assistance requests at the stations we manage, for which we generally achieve high levels of satisfaction, and which we note is borne out in your research findings.

The three key areas summarised in your letter are recognised as sensible issues to focus attention on.

As a company we regard the training of our staff as a fundamentally important activity to the success of our business, which is why we have invested heavily in our Talent Academy in Crewe, where we take full advantage of its modern facilities. Disability training is a core area of our induction program for all staff joining the business, and we routinely include a disability element into a variety of other courses where appropriate.

The issue of raising awareness and the reliability of the service we can offer are actually interlinked in our view. Raising passenger awareness is something we are keen to do. However, we have always taken the view that targeting the promotion of this service at those customers who rely most heavily on the service in order to travel at all makes sense in order that the available staff resources are concentrated in the most effective way and result in the service being as reliable as possible.

Your letter also asked us for steps we have taken recently to make improvements to Assisted Travel in the three key areas, and what we are planning in the near future.

In terms of what we have been doing, we continue to engage closely with accessibility groups as well as individual customers in order that we can improve our understanding of their needs. In some cases we have also arranged for people with disabilities to talk directly to our trainers and front line staff.

We have also developed a Resolution app which is available to our front line teams and which contains advice on solving problems for assisted problems and also all contact numbers for stations. This is particularly helpful in dealing with disabled travellers requesting assistance on an ad hoc basis when travelling, which we know is how many disabled people want to be able to travel.

In terms of future plans, we are currently developing schemes to improve accessibility as part of our current franchise agreement including a Changing Places facility at Birmingham International, in addition to one we already have in place at Crewe station.

We are also already engaged in ORR-led workstreams to look at ways of improving reliability of pre-arranged assistance across the industry, along with other train company representatives, Network Rail and the Rail Delivery Group. We will be happy to continue to support this work.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Whitehouse', written over a horizontal line.

Mark Whitehouse  
Managing Director  
Virgin Trains





East Coast Main Line Company Limited  
East Coast House, 25 Skeldergate  
York YO1 6DH

[virgintraineastcoast.com](http://virgintraineastcoast.com)

John Larkinson  
Directorate of Railway Markets & Economics  
Office of Rail & Road  
One Kemble Street  
London  
WC2B 4AN

17 May 2018

Dear John,

I am writing on behalf of David Horne in response to your letter of 30 April 2018 concerning improvements made to Assisted Travel by Virgin Trains East Coast (VTEC).

As you will be aware from the presentation I gave at the launch event for this consultation back in November, the research you had commissioned identified that VTEC were industry leaders in this area. This does not however mean that VTEC has been resting on our laurels and work has continued, and is planned, to improve our performance even further.

When the research was published we made use of Yammer, the social media tool we favour to communicate openly with our people, to publicise the findings of the research and clearly identify the action areas for both VTEC and the wider industry. Through this increased awareness, our people were then in a better position to understand and consider how they could positively impact the journey experience for customers.

Since November we also created a new role of Access & Inclusion Manager to focus entirely on delivering an inclusive end to end service. The three priority areas identified through the ORR's research were captured within the job description for this new role; to raise customer awareness of P-Assist, to improve the reliability (and quality) of the assistance service and to help develop improved training for our frontline teams.

On this training point; with the introduction of our new Azuma fleet from late 2018, we are currently redeveloping our full suite of operational and customer experience training which all new and existing frontline employees will go through. A key part of this training will be an overhaul of our current access and inclusion training as it is no longer appropriate for such training to be standalone; it is integral to our whole customer experience offer.

While not specifically about the research priorities, since November 2017 we have completed a number of enhancements at the 11 stations we manage including; creating a new system for wheelchair users to request accessible taxis at York

without the need for human intervention, the creation of weather-proof waiting facilities on both lower level platforms at Retford, the installation of additional accessible toilet facilities at Leeds and Doncaster and the refurbishment of existing accessible toilets at Doncaster and Darlington.

I do hope the above gives you sufficient reassurance that VTEC strives for continuous improvement. While leading the way in our industry, as identified in your research, we have not remained static and will continue to improve the journey experience for our customers.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'MS', with a large, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Matt Short  
Head of Government Partnership Working

21 May 2018

John Larkinson  
Director Railway Markets & Economics  
Office of Rail and Road  
One Kemble Street  
London  
WC2B 4AN

Dear John,

## **Improving Assisted Travel By Rail**

Thank you for your letter dated 30 April 2018. I'm pleased to be able to respond to your letter and explain the steps we have made since we started operating the franchise in December 2017, as well as the plans we have to make even more improvements.

In line with your request, I've responded outlining our plans both delivered and future, for each of the three key areas.

### **1. Steps we have taken since publication of the research**

Following the publication of the ORR's research last year, there has been a change in franchise ownership. West Midlands Trains commenced operation of the West Midlands Railway and London Northwestern Railway brands on 10 December 2018. Unless otherwise stated, this response identifies actions and initiatives from this date only and applies to both brands.

#### **1.1. Raising Passenger Awareness**

We produced Assisted Travel contact cards which provide the contact details for our Assisted Travel team. These are for staff to distribute at their discretion, particularly in cases where customers were not previously aware of the service.

In April 2018, six months ahead of our committed obligation, we launched our Stakeholder Equality Group, comprising people from all groups and backgrounds who experience inclusion barriers (not just self-identifying disabled people). The lack of awareness of assisted travel services among older people was notable and in line with your research findings. However, we are pleased to have the opportunity to work with influential older members of the group to identify ways of raising awareness.

One such way will be our new Passenger Assist Plus service (explained at 2.1 below). The planning and consultation workshops for this initiative have provided us with a focussed panel for raising awareness of Assisted Travel. All attendees were given Assisted Travel contact cards.

Travel Support Cards are available to download from our websites for customers to fill in and use, as a discreet way to communicate their needs to our colleagues and secure personalised and appropriate assistance.

In line with our bid commitments, we introduced Priority Seat cards as a means for customers to show others that they have a real need for a seat. This particularly has customers with hidden impairments in mind.



## 1.2. Reliability of Assisted Travel provision

On my request, our Accessibility and Inclusion Specialist performed a gap analysis of the assisted travel process, from booking through to the risks associated with unplanned disruption. This report is currently being analysed by senior colleagues in all areas of the business to identify opportunities to improve customer experience and service reliability.

In March, we launched a trial of a new passenger assistance app with the support of our technology partner, Transreport. Staff at 13 stations are using the staff app to communicate with colleagues in order to provide assistance to our cohort of volunteer passengers. We have been carefully analysing feedback and data, as well as addressing issues as they arise. Rail Delivery Group (RDG) has been closely observing our trial. We are proud to be pioneering the use of this technology out on our services.

We have also produced new step-free maps which will be published with our revised DPPP. These maps have introduced a new 'at a glance' category of station accessibility as we felt that 'step free' or 'non-step free' was overly simplistic. The new category indicates step-free stations at which some customers may experience barriers such as longer ramps, level crossings, alternative accessible entrances etc.

We understand that restricted use of facilities at our stations may affect a disabled or older person's decision to travel. That is why, in addition to lifts, we have introduced an alert on the station pages of NRE when our station toilets are out of order. Our Stakeholder Equality Group did not think it would be helpful to put this information on Twitter but we will keep this under review.

From the first day of our franchise, we commissioned our Assisted Travel team to perform feedback surveys using a 10% sample of customers who booked assistance each period. As part of the monitoring process, we have redesigned the survey to secure more valuable data for us to act upon.

## 1.3. Staff Training

All new colleagues receive a designated module on disability awareness (produced by RDG) as part of their induction.

Our Accessibility and Inclusion Specialist has drafted a comprehensive Guide to Customer Assistance. This is designed from a customer experience viewpoint and provides practical tips for staff as well as clarify our policy on many Assisted Travel issues. The guide also provides quotes from customers which help bring our policies to life and make them easier to understand.

## 2. Steps we will be taking in the next six months

### 2.1. Raising Passenger Awareness

Once finalised and approved, we will be publishing a revised version of our DPPP. We have provisionally secured support from various third parties in the community, including Tourist Information Centres to display copies of the new leaflets.

We are in the process of ordering the Assisted Travel contact cards in Braille.

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On 31 May 2018, we will be introducing the trial of Passenger Assist Plus. This is a free travel information and journey planning service for people over 65 in the West Midlands across rail, bus and taxi. The service will be called 'Ask Annie'. One of the objectives is to introduce older people to new modes of transport, which may include rail. The service will arrange assisted travel for anyone who needs it and will be delivered by the team that provide our assisted travel booking service. This initiative has huge potential to introduce older people to assisted travel in rail.

We have recently given our support to Transport for West Midlands' 'Baby on Board' badges. However, on our request, TfWM are now exploring 'Please offer me a seat' badges for older and disabled people. We feel this may be a more accessible, inclusive and 'joined up' approach than cards and/or separate schemes across multiple operators.

## 2.2. Reliability of Assisted Travel provision

We are using the data from our Transreport app trial to provide evidence to help us to evaluate the technology and decide on the best solution before a full launch. Quantitative and qualitative data has been positive enough for us to start planning Phase 2 of the trial. We have been working closely with the team at London Euston (Network Rail) who wish to join us in that phase of testing. It is logistically ambitious, but we are committed to the objectives of this projects – namely establishing whether this technology will enable us to deliver more reliable and efficient Assisted Travel and increase levels of customer confidence.

We will be tasking our Stakeholder Equality Group to review our survey data collected from Assisted Travel customers and outline how and where we need to improve.

## 2.3. Staff Training

We are just nearing the end of our restructuring exercise. I will now be inviting our Accessibility and Inclusion Specialist to identify a series of recommendations for role-specific disability equality training as outlined in our DPPP. This will include customer-facing staff who provide Assisted Travel support.

In the meantime, we will be initiating a consultation process with customers, stakeholders and colleagues on our draft 'Guide to Assisting Customers'.

I hope this information reassures you of West Midlands Trains' commitment to improving Assisted Travel and the experience of our disabled and older customers. If you have any questions, we would be happy to share more detail on our plans.

Yours sincerely,



**Andrew Camp**  
Commercial Director