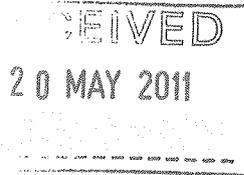


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17 May 2011

Dear Sir or Madam

Consultation on revised contractual regime at stations – proposed changes to the Stations Access Conditions and Independent Station Access Conditions

Thank you for giving Passenger Focus the opportunity to comment on ORR proposals to reform parts of the contractual regime at stations, which will see changes to the National Stations Access Conditions and the Independent Station Access Conditions for both England, Wales and Scotland.

We agree with the need for reform and were a little disappointed that the proposals did not address concerns surrounding the split of responsibilities for maintenance, repair and renewal – something that has long been flagged up as an issue throughout the industry. We note, however, that alternative proposals are being made through franchise proposals and it may be that these address those concerns once we have had an opportunity to review/discuss them in more detail.

In the consultation foreword, reference is made to the pending 'Rail Value for Money review' and the need for contractual arrangements to be capable of supporting and encouraging better efficiency. We agree with the need for efficiency savings but are keen that value for money for passengers is taken into consideration alongside that of the taxpayer. Streamlining the process for station access will help but it is crucial that the process does not lose sight of the ultimate end-user - the passenger.

Where appropriate, care therefore needs to be taken to ensure that the views of passengers are taken into account when investment is to be made at a station, even if that investment is coming from a third party outside of the industry. Importantly, if proposals concerning the public side of the railway fail to demonstrate that the most appropriate benefits can be delivered, to the benefit of passengers, there needs to be an opportunity to question why that proposal should be allowed to proceed without further justification. There is already a great wealth of research to draw upon in order to identify where money is best spent at stations across the board that would help proposers of schemes ensure they would maximise passenger benefit from their investment.



Passenger Focus is not best placed to provide a response to the detailed questions relating to the separation of financial compensation (and the provision of alternative accommodation) from the list of valid objections to a scheme going ahead. However, we would quite naturally agree that schemes should be delivered to the benefit of passengers as swiftly as possible, and that works should be completed with a minimum of disruption to the passenger. This means that where station facilities are unavailable for a significant period of time, as a result of the works, e.g. waiting rooms or ticket machines, that reasonable alternatives should be offered. We note that reference to 'alternative accommodation' in the consultation document primarily refers to the Train Operating Companies; but we see no reason why this could not also be extended to passengers where practicable.

In section 6.11 there is reference to the direct involvement of third party developers in proposing station changes in their own right. Provided those third parties are given appropriate guidance on how their input could deliver the greatest benefit to passengers this would be a welcome development. However, caution needs to be exercised so that the thresholds proposed, both for Specific and Strategic Contributors, do not deter investment in smaller scale projects. On reading section 6.11 there is a suggestion that Specific Contributors are only likely to have a short term interest in stations. This is, in our view, would depend a great deal on the reasons for their initial involvement and whether any of the future changes would impact the investment they had made. We would hope that any third party looking to play a role in enhancing a station, to the benefit of its users, would not be discouraged from having a sustained input.

Passenger Focus endorses the proposal that any station changes will need to be registered with the ORR and that such changes cease to be effective if not implemented within a set period of time after registration.

I trust that the above comments will be helpful; should you have any queries, please feel free to get in touch.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dan Taylor', is written over a horizontal line.

Dan Taylor
Policy and Research Adviser