

Consultation on amending licences to give passengers the information they need to plan and make journeys

Summary of the responses to our consultation

There was overwhelming support from passenger representative organisations and third party information providers. These highlighted how confusing and frustrating the current situation is for passengers. They call for a much more integrated, consistent approach across the network, with train operators and station managers being responsible for the dissemination of information for all services calling at their stations. Many commented that the quality of information was essential, that it needed to be appropriate as well as accurate, and timely. Several noted that providing local intermodal information would also be useful. The role of Network Rail in managing disruption was also seen as a key factor in providing good information during disruption.

The franchising authorities were generally supportive. DfT in particular is keen to explore moving obligations out of franchises into licences as part of its wider franchise reform and in light of the recommendations from the McNulty review. Transport Scotland was also in favour, but thought it would want to retain some specific obligations in the franchise. Transport for London also generally supportive.

The passenger licence holders all rejected the proposals. They all stressed that they were fully committed to improving information to passengers and gave examples of the many initiatives they are implementing both individually and collectively. However, they all felt that licence obligations were not the best way to tackle this problem. They felt that the market already provides a big incentive to improve and, if any further changes were needed, then the franchising authorities could specify these during the bidding process. Many felt that a purposive licence condition did not give enough clarity on how we would measure success and enforce the obligations and they noted that this was a complex area where there was no “one size fits all” solution. They were also concerned that splitting responsibilities between Network Rail and operators would lead to a blame culture and that the possibility of enforcement action could lead to risk averse behaviour. Many noted that the Rail Delivery Group (RDG), set up following the McNulty review, was doing a lot of work on better collaboration in the industry and thought we should wait for this work to start delivering before trying to insert new conditions into the licences.

Network Rail is generally supportive but said in its response that it felt changes to the regulatory regime should be deferred until the industry, through RDG, has developed a clear plan that will deliver the necessary improvements.

We had a number of responses from third party information providers and others interested in wider use of data. These were all concerned about the availability of data for wider dissemination and have given a very useful insight into what passengers want and what can be provided across a wide range of media, which could all be beneficial to rail users. They felt that the information should be freely available through an Open Licence or that the proposed licence conditions should include an obligation to provide the data free. We are looking at this issue through a separate consultation, but we will discuss these proposals with the licence holders.

Next Steps

Following our consultation, the industry has asked for the opportunity to make further representations to us and we have agreed to allow a limited time for this before taking a decision on our next steps.