

Marcus Clements
Head of Consumer Policy
Rail Markets and Economics
Office of Rail and Road

16 April 2019

Dear Marcus

Compliance with Condition 5 of your Station Licence and GB Statement of National Regulatory Provisions: Passenger

This letter provides a response to your letter dated 21 March 2019.

South Western Railway (SWR) is committed to improving disabled and older peoples' confidence in travelling on the railway and we understand that the reliability in the Assisted Travel service is paramount to this. Since the start of our franchise we have introduced a number of measures to improve the travel experience of disabled and older passengers including:

- Reducing our booking notice period to 12 hours and further reducing this to 4 hours' notice from our main stations;
- Introducing a Travel Assistance Card for our customers who may struggle with communication, allowing our staff to better help these customers.

- Appointing a dedicated Accessibility and Inclusion Manager who is responsible for the direction of our accessibility strategy and our Assisted Travel provision.

We also gather a large amount of data on Assisted Travel to ensure compliance with the requirements outlined in our DPPP.

We respond to each of the issues raised in your letter below.

ORR Research

We are naturally disappointed with the results of the Breaking Blue survey but do not believe that the results of the 116 passengers surveyed accurately reflect the experience of our passengers due to the small sample size and the apparent binary nature of the assessment of "successful" and "unsuccessful" assistance request.

Between Periods 1 and 8 of 2018-2019, SWR has captured data on 19,474 booked assistance requests. With the current technology available to us, this represents a sample of almost 40% of the 42,907 requests booked in this period, excluding London Waterloo, Clapham Junction and Guildford stations where SWR staff also provide the Assisted Travel provision.

Of the 19,474 requests in which we have collected statistics as described above, 3,958 booked assistance requests were recorded as "unsuccessful". The breakdown for "unsuccessful" assistance at SWR stations for Periods 1-8 was as follows:

Reason	Number captured	Percentage of captured (19,474)
No space on train	1	0.01%
No staff available	66	0.34%
Disruption	126	0.65%
Passenger did not arrive/arrived too late for service	3038	15.60%
Other	727	3.73%

The reasons for bookings being logged in the “Other” includes 557 occurrences of customers changing their travel plans at the last minute, which are noted as an “unsuccessful” assistance booking, despite the customer travelling earlier than booked and still receiving all of their requested assistance.

In spite of the above, I acknowledge that 170 of the reasons given for “Other” in the “Unsuccessful” assistance booking records were attributed to SWR being at fault for various reasons. With this in mind, and adding “No space on train”, “No staff available” and “Disruption” to the 170 “Other” records, SWR’s attributable reliability of the Assisted Travel Service is 9.2% of assistance marked as “unsuccessful.” I would, therefore, dispute ORR’s research that implied that 16% of customers received none of the assistance that they had booked, attributing it to SWR. The current system places constraints on our staff, especially in regard to providing live updates. If the circumstances change on the day, particularly in another part of the country, our staff would not be aware of any changes to assistance bookings except through manual processes, which during disruption and its ever-changing nature, can become difficult to enforce. Given the technology and systems available to all of us on the railway currently, it would be very difficult for our staff to know if a customer were travelling on their booked service or if they had changed services. We look forward to the introduction of the new Passenger Assistance system later this year. We are confident that it will greatly increase the reliability of the Assisted Travel service that all TOCs and Network Rail must provide.

Wareham Station

In regard to your specific questions in relation to Wareham Station. In these instances, an error was made by a member of staff when taking a booking for an individual customer. Had internal procedures been followed, notes would have been entered into the Passenger Assist log to inform nearby stations to make the necessary arrangements or a conversation would have been had with the customer involved to make the necessary alternative arrangements to ensure that the customer received all of the assistance that they required. We re-briefed staff on the procedure for booking assistance as soon as we were made aware of the passenger’s complaint.

Ongoing improvements

We are committed to enhancing the travelling experience of customers who require assistance when travelling with us and are currently working towards delivering the following improvements:

- From 17th April 2019, passengers will be able to request boarding and alighting assistance at short notice via the SWR App when using our services and stations.
- We will shortly be introducing an Assistance Dog Seat Reservation Card which will allow assistance dog owners to reserve the seat next to them for their dog, free of charge when travelling.
- We are creating a dedicated resource in our Video Contact Centre that will contact our guards via targeted text message rather than via email. We believe this will improve the timeliness and reliability of our Assisted Travel provision when guards need to help passengers to board or alight trains.
- We will continue to work closely with the Rail Delivery Group to support the introduction of the new Passenger Assistance system later this year which will allow passengers to request assistance both

- in advance and at short notice via an app which will have their own personalised profile. Our staff will be able to receive live updates on assistance requests, as well as being able to track these requests across customer touchpoints.

I trust that the above gives you a more accurate picture of the Assisted Travel provision on South Western Railway. Please do not hesitate to contact me if it would be useful to arrange a meeting to discuss the above in further detail.

Yours sincerely,



Alan Penlington
Customer Experience Director