

Chris Burchell
Chair, Rail Delivery Group
BY EMAIL

3 September 2020

Dear Chris

Passenger Information Improvement Plan

Thank you for your letter of 26 June enclosing a copy of the industry's plan to improve customer information and for the ongoing engagement with your team as this has been developed. Your positive response to our research and letter is welcome. I also note the progress that you have made against the additional commitments made in your earlier letter of 8 January 2020.

Customer Information Measure

We are particularly pleased with your support on the Customer Information Measure (CIM), the development of which we identified in our research as an enabling tool to drive sustained improvement. It provides a structured framework to measure strengths and weakness across a range of elements considered integral to the consistent delivery of good passenger information. It aims to drive continuous improvement (as opposed to rigid compliance), a more integrated approach to decision making and, where necessary, reform in how passenger information is managed across both track and train.

It is important that the CIM is not a static model but can evolve to reflect best practice and bespoke business requirements. We expect the assessment process to be comprehensive and result in more meaningful planning, prioritisation and delivery of improvement across the industry. We are grateful for the involvement of Network Rail and for the work that CrossCountry and LNER are currently undertaking to trial and refine the CIM before we use it more widely in the coming months. If the emerging results indicate that there are additional areas that must be addressed at an industry level, the Passenger Information Improvement Plan must be sufficiently flexible to take these into account as decisions around priorities are undertaken.

Funding and governance

We recognise the steps taken by the Department for Transport¹ (DfT) to put in place emergency measures agreements (EMAs) with privately owned franchised train operators to mitigate the significant financial impacts resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. We also note that you have identified funding and resources as key challenges impacting on seven of the 13 work packages² identified in the plan. We understand that you have now written to DfT to provide further details on your plans to improve passenger information including the areas where you consider financial support is necessary from them to achieve this. We encourage you to seek their participation alongside ORR in the governance structure overseeing the project, and to engage other funders in due course.

While the initial plan is an important step forward, it is essential that there is a robust industry governance structure in place to ensure that delivery against the plan can be achieved. To that end we welcome the involvement of Steer in reviewing the current governance arrangements and in identifying and quantifying the benefits in a number of the key work packages. We look forward to seeing the findings and recommendations of this review once complete.

Monitoring

We note that since submission of the plan, progress can be seen from the 2-weekly programme reports received by ORR, with key milestones agreed or in the process of completion in a number of areas. It is important than momentum is gained and sustained in each work package and to that end we would find it useful to establish a series of deep dives in each area to enable us to monitor progress. This is particularly relevant where work is not subject to funding decisions and ‘quick wins’ are anticipated, e.g. improving National Rail Communications Centre (NRCC) processes to support better customer information. We will discuss this further with your team when we next meet.

Informed traveller (T12) timescales

Finally, it is important to note the impact of the pandemic on informed traveller timescales and the linkage to the industry’s improvement plan. In February 2018³ we wrote to train operators to set out some information principles that should be followed when the timetable is not confirmed. Since then helpful initiatives such as ticket availability calendars and ticket alerts have been widely adopted. However, new weekly checks carried out by the NRCC have highlighted that not all train operator ticket engines and journey planners are displaying the alert messages

¹ With parallel provisions established by Transport Scotland and Transport for Wales.

² Work packages 1 – 5, 11 and 12

³ <https://www.orr.gov.uk/sites/default/files/om/licence-condition-4-letter-to-toc-managing-directors-2018-02-23.pdf>



shown on National Rail Enquiries (NRE). Without commitment from all operators on this matter the value of improved NRCC processes - as intended in work package 9 - is undermined with the risk that passengers purchase tickets without access to complete or accurate journey information.

We believe it is unreasonable to expect passengers to have to search multiple websites to get the information that they need to plan their journey. To that end we will be writing to train operators shortly to remind them of our expectations during the period where informed traveller timescales are not being met. This is in addition to our work with the System Operator regarding revised timetable planning timescales for the December 2020 and May 2021 timetable changes.

Next steps

I welcome the ongoing engagement between our teams. We would like to ensure this continues. Our Consumer Expert Panel⁴ has also expressed an interest in this area and can provide a level of scrutiny and insight from their knowledge and experience in other sectors. I understand that your team has now agreed to attend the panel to provide greater insight into the plan, the expected outcomes for passengers and the anticipated timescale for delivery. We will confirm potential dates shortly.

We look forward to continuing to work collaboratively with Network Rail, operators, RDG and other stakeholders to ensure that the industry delivers the actions set out in the plan and drives continuous improvement through use of the CIM.

We will publish this response alongside your letter and plan on our website.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Larkinson'.

John Larkinson
Chief Executive

cc.

Andrew Haines, Deputy Chair of Rail Delivery Group Board & CEO Network Rail
Paul Plummer, Chief Executive of the Rail Delivery Group
TOC Managing Directors

⁴ <https://orr.gov.uk/about-orr/how-we-work/expert-advisors/consumer-expert-panel>