



Marcus Clements
Head of Consumer Policy
Directorate of Economics, Markets & Strategy
Office of Rail and Road

13 January 2021

Dear Marcus,

Complaints Handling Satisfaction

I write in response to your letter dated 17 December 2020.

Having identified several key areas of customer concern, I am pleased to summarise conclusions drawn and actions taken as a result, as well as what we will continue to do to improve customer satisfaction in these areas.

Response times

Disruption on our network is the primary driver for an increase in customer contacts that can affect our usual response times. Significant and prolonged disruption in the periods leading up to Period 10, including a Code Black for flooding as well as multiple fatalities and OLE damage, contributed to this. Prior to that, Period 5 had a total of 12 incident days (where CaSL exceeds 10%), many due to extreme weather (excessive heat, wind and/or flooding).

As customers are able to claim refunds, Delay Repay and/or declassifications up to 28 days after the affected journey, (sometimes longer than that for other complaint types), at least one following period will always have an increase in case volumes and, therefore, response times.

We continue to monitor disruption closely and adjust our resources wherever possible to ensure customers receive a high-quality response in a timely manner. Our newly centralised call centre allows resource to be more easily adjusted based on customer demand, with the aim of providing a seamless customer experience whether they contact us during disruption or not. First Time Resolution is a continued priority of ours to ensure

satisfactory resolutions are not delayed during case processing. We have also made use of the unique circumstances the pandemic has brought about to deliver even more timely responses, avoid complacency and be in the best possible position for when passenger numbers start to return to normal.

First Class service over Christmas and New Year

A number of complaints relate to our First Class service not meeting our customers' expectations over the Christmas period. This is something we work to improve year-on-year, as we know how important our food and beverage offer onboard is to our First Class customers. We strive to meet or exceed their expectations and not, fall short.

In terms of communicating our offering over Christmas and New Year, we have improved the information we share on our website and published this further in advance wherever possible, allowing customers to book ahead and make a well-informed decision about their class of ticket. We share this information proactively via our CRM emails to those on our mailing list, but also via our website and FAQs. Reactively, we are able to give customers more detail and answer any of their questions via our multiple contact channels.

Regarding the First Class service itself, this summer we have trialled a more consistent food offering across weekdays and weekends as we stepped up our catering offer once safe to do so. We will use customer feedback in relation to this, alongside results from our autumn trial of intermediate class 'Standard Premium', to continue developing propositions which will meet and exceed our customers' expectations.

Lack of Seat Picker on website

When the new website for Avanti West Coast was being developed for the franchise start date, the Seat Picker was not an option within the booking engine. We quickly became aware of its popularity based on customer feedback and complaints. We acknowledge that, despite being a new company with a brand-new website, the lack of Seat Picker may have felt like a lesser offering to past Virgin Trains customers.

We reacted quickly to customer feedback, creating a dedicated inbox for customers to request their preferred reservations while a new Seat Picker was in development. This contact method alone meant we could provide new or amended reservations to over 15,000 customers. We also continued to provide this service via live chat and our call centre.

Back by popular demand, we now have a Seat Picker live on our desktop site, which has been well received. It will soon also be available on mobile web and our app.

Delay Repay complaints

The move to a new system and new team for Delay Repay with the new franchise did have some teething troubles, as well as regular customers having to become familiar with an unfamiliar system. This feedback was monitored closely, both in terms of the volume of negative comments or complaints, as well as specific suggestions for where we could improve.

This allowed us to make many improvements to the functionality of the Delay Repay form and the overall process since the franchise began, with more developments to improve the customer experience in the pipeline. As well as using any negative feedback from Avanti West Coast customers, we took past experience of positive comments from past Virgin Trains customers in order to bring best practice, old favourites, and big customer wins through into the new team and system.

As well as the many improvements we have made since Period 10, customers getting used to the then-new Delay Repay website and claim form should also contribute to an increase in positive feedback, although we will continue to push for an improved customer experience in this area.

I would like to reiterate that at Avanti West Coast we take customer feedback very seriously and will continue to keep customers at the heart of what we do to further develop our service.

Yours sincerely,

Prea Duhra

Prea Duhra

Franchise Manager