Annual rail consumer report 2023 to 2024

Accessible travel

We want to empower confident travel by all, including disabled passengers, whether their journeys are made independently or with assistance.

Approval and review of operators' Accessible Travel Policies

We approved new Accessible Travel Policies (ATPs) for three operators, including Eurostar, and assessed the annual review of ATPs by others.

We hold operators to account against the commitments they make in their ATPs, and require operators to review their ATPs annually. This year, all amendments to ATPs proposed through the annual review process were minor and reflected improvements made by operators.

London North Eastern Railway (LNER) separately sought our agreement to an alternative process for communicating between departure and destination stations when assistance is being provided, using the Passenger Assist staff app rather than a phone call. Following a successful trial period, we gave our approval.

Understanding the reliability of passenger lifts at stations



For the first time, we published data from Network Rail on lift performance.

Lifts enable access to the railway for disabled passengers and others. We have concerns about the number of faults that are occurring and an apparent decline in performance over time. We have launched a review of Network Rail's monitoring and management processes for lift maintenance and repairs, which will report later in 2024.

Network Rail will continue to report performance to us twice a year.

Improving the reliability of passenger assistance

We identified key areas of focus for the industry to drive improvement in the delivery of passenger assistance.

Informed by audits that we commissioned into how five operators were meeting regulatory requirements related to the delivery of assistance, we identified key areas for cross-industry focus, including:

- rollout of the Passenger Assist staff app
- communications between departure and destination stations, including at peak times (the handover protocol)
- delivery of assistance by onboard staff
- proactive maintenance of shared industry systems such as Passenger Assist and National Rail Enquiries
- risk management processes

We have set out next steps in all areas.

Better data to inform improvements in assistance provision

We are changing the data we collect from operators so that we are better able to hold them to account.

Operators report data to us every month on their provision of both booked and unbooked assistance, including failed assists. We had low confidence in the quality of that data and the insights it offered both to us and to operators themselves.

We have already implemented changes to improve reporting consistency. We also asked operators to comprehensively review the categories for reporting failed assists, which they delivered through RDG. RDG is now integrating the reporting into the Passenger Assist staff app.

We plan to update our guidance to require reporting of failed assists in line with the new categories from April 2025. Operators' staff will need to be using the Passenger Assist staff app to be able to report data accurately.

Accessible rail replacement vehicles

We work with the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency to monitor provision of accessible rail replacement vehicles, supporting them in their role enforcing the Public Service Vehicle Accessibility Regulations.

According to the data that we receive from operators, nearly all rail replacement vehicles either

met accessibility standards or have an exemption from the Secretary of State. For passengers, this means that 95% of rail replacement vehicles met accessibility standards.

This is a small rise from 94% in 2022 to 2023 and primarily reflects improved provision of rail replacement for unplanned disruption, where 95% of vehicles met accessibility standards this year compared to 90% last year.

Our research on the passenger experience of booked assistance

We have been surveying passengers on their experience of booked assistance on an ongoing basis since 2017, and publish findings annually.

This year, more than 9,000 passengers participated. Satisfaction is relatively high, with 87% of passengers satisfied with the overall service from booking through to travelling.

However, improvements that we saw in the reliability of assistance in 2022 to 2023 have not been maintained in 2023 to 2024.

The proportion of passengers reporting that they received all of the assistance they had booked has reverted to 76%, a fall from 81% in 2022 to 2023, and the same as 2021 to 2022. The same pattern is seen in the proportion who received none of the assistance that they booked, which has increased to 12% after dropping to 8% in 2022 to 2023. This is concerning.

Our published research report explores the data in more detail. The work that we have planned over the coming year is designed to drive up performance again.

Case study: securing compliance with requirements to provide disability awareness refresher training for passenger-facing staff every two years

We required recovery plans from three operators who failed to provide timely disability awareness refresher training for passenger-facing staff.

Well-trained staff are essential for an accessible railway. Most operators provided appropriate refresher training for their staff within the two-year timescale we require. Three of the operators

who were due to complete refresher training by end 2023 failed to meet the deadline: Southeastern, ScotRail and West Midlands Trains (WMT). We required a recovery plan from each.

Southeastern responded promptly and positively, both setting out for us a plan that saw them complete their training in April and a range of complementary activities designed to protect the passenger experience. They also extended their training to Directors, as well as passenger-facing staff.

ScotRail completed its training in June, in line with its plan.

WMT initially had a poor understanding of its progress and no clear plan for delivering the training. We engaged actively with WMT and accepted a plan that forecast completion by December 2024. This was on the basis that delivery was face-to-face which requires taking staff out of set rosters for training, and agreement that delivery would be accelerated where possible. At the end of June 2024, over 75% of eligible WMT staff had received training. We are monitoring progress closely.

Case study: ensuring that appropriate ramps are available for staff to deploy

We asked ScotRail for assurance that staff could deploy ramps.

In response to concerns we raised in 2021, ScotRail implemented changes to ramp provision that were designed to support better maintenance and safety. Ramps would be carried on trains and be available on the platform only at the 50 stations with the highest ramp usage.

We accepted this plan and ScotRail implemented the new approach in 2023. However, it emerged that station staff had been trained only to deploy platform ramps.

We were concerned that circumstances could arise where onboard staff were not available to deploy on train ramps, which would result in a failed assist.

To mitigate this risk, ScotRail plan to complete installation of ramps on the platforms at all staffed stations served by Driver Controlled Operation (DCO) services in July 2024.

Regulatory framework for accessible travel

All train and station operators must establish and comply with an Accessible Travel Policy (ATP) as

a condition of their licence, setting out their provision for disabled passengers.

Our published guidance defines the minimum requirements for operators' ATPs, covering areas such as:

- provision of assistance
- staff training
- passenger information

ORR also holds operators to account against accessibility standards for rolling stock and stations, which are set out in the Code of Practice on Design Standards for Accessible Railway Stations and the National Technical Specification Notices that are issued by Government under the Railway Interoperability Regulations.

Our priorities for April 2024 to March 2025

We will:

- develop a new approach to benchmarking operator performance on accessibility, supported by better quality data reporting from industry, so that we are able to hold operators to account more transparently and robustly
- assess compliance with the handover protocol (which sets out communication procedures between staff at departure and destination stations when assistance is being provided) at the busiest stations
- consult on amendments to our ATP Guidance that would require operators to take the views of passengers into account when proposing permanent changes to staffing at stations
- review operators' processes for operating help points
- disseminate good practice for operators to support greater reliability in assistance provision by onboard staff
- review industry progress in improving passenger information about station accessibility

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