ORR's health and safety crowding position statement

Introduction

As the health and safety authority for Great Britain's railways, ORR has a responsibility for ensuring railway companies protect passengers from health and safety risks, so far as is reasonably practicable.

Train and station operators protect passengers by identifying, reducing and alleviating risks, including any health and safety risks arising from crowding. Our railway inspectors can respond to any shortfalls according to our risk-based priorities and, if necessary, use their enforcement powers to require improvements.

Aside from health and safety, ORR also monitors other obligations that train companies have to their customers. This includes how train companies provide information to customers during times of disruption and how the railway is made accessible for all passengers. Our website has more information about protecting rail passengers.

Crowding reflects a flexible 'turn up and go' model for train travel. In theory, different models could eliminate crowding, but these are unlikely to be without consequences. For example, crowding on trains could be eliminated under an airline-style, booked-seat only model. But that would be at the expense of excluding many passengers from train services, particularly at peak times. The investment necessary to eradicate all crowding would be considerable.

The number of passengers using the railways can mean that many train services run with large numbers of standing passengers. That can often be preceded by crowding at stations, including on the platforms or at the platform-train interface ('PTI'). Crowding can occur on any journey, but particularly at peak times. When something disrupts the normal operation of the network, such as engineering works, cancelled services or special events, this can make crowding worse.

Our health and safety position on crowding

1. There isn't clear evidence for increased health and safety risks to passengers from crowding. Trains are designed to operate safely, even when many passengers are standing. Where any health and safety risks from crowding are being well-managed ORR does not have powers to require further action.
2. However:
    - some passengers report slips, trips and falls, particularly at crowded stations or when getting on and off crowded trains (at the PTI)
    - crowding means some passengers are more at risk of fainting, particularly on crowded trains in hot weather
    - future evidence on the health and safety risks would be improved if the reports completed by operators after a passenger incident always considered, and recorded, whether crowding was a factor
3. There is clear evidence that feelings of stress, anxiety and vulnerability are high in crowding scenarios. This can make passengers feel unsafe and can negatively affect their wellbeing.
4. The negative wellbeing effects associated with crowding varies between passengers and their personal thresholds for experiencing discomfort may vary. Psychological feelings of stress, anxiety, vulnerability or discomfort may be felt with greater intensity, or frequency, by some groups of passengers – for example, those with visible or non-visible disabilities, pregnant passengers, older people or those travelling with young children. There is no 'one size fits all' experience.
5. There can be a complex, dynamic relationship between passenger wellbeing and safety in some crowding scenarios. For instance, a passenger feeling anxious from being in a crowd might behave in a way that makes an otherwise unrelated safety risk worse, perhaps by moving past the platform yellow line markings to be nearer the doors of a shortly-to-arrive train. Similarly, these negative effects on wellbeing may lead to entirely new risks, for example anxious passengers on a stranded and crowded train self-evacuating from a safe carriage on to the unsafe track.
6. We monitor operators' plans to both prevent and manage crowding, and we use and promote the latest research to better understand any crowding health and safety risks and effects on passengers.

More information on ORR's role in relation to station and train crowding can be found on our

website.