Passenger information when rail replacement services are in use

Follow up report



Executive summary

Planning and making a journey when planned rail replacement services are in use should be as easy for passengers as when travelling by train. We have reviewed industry progress in improving the information available to passengers when they are planning and making journeys that involve rail replacement services for a part of the journey.

Last year, we challenged industry to improve passenger experience, identifying areas where it

needed to improve passenger information for rail replacement services. This year we ran a second round of fieldwork to assess progress. We made 17 journeys on planned rail replacement services across England and Wales during summer 2024. We acknowledge our fieldwork covered a small sample of operators and did not cover Scotland. We supplemented our fieldwork with an information request to 23 train operators to gather more detail on their processes. We consider these sources of information sufficient to indicate where there are potential concerns with passenger experience that warrant further investigation.

On the basis of our fieldwork sample and information request, it would appear industry has made good progress in a number of areas. Information when planning your journey in advance is generally accurate and of good quality, while operator staff and agents providing information on the day were informative and friendly, and added to the reassurance of passengers. We also saw improvement in the information provided at the stations where passengers change to rail replacement vehicles (interchange stations), and the majority of services now appear in station customer information screens (CIS). We are encouraged by the collective efforts from industry via the Smarter Information Smarter Journeys (SISJ) programme, which has worked this year to develop real time tracking of rail replacement vehicles and the production of new videos outlining maps of planned disruption.

We are however disappointed to see little improvement in the information provided on the rail replacement journey itself. Too often, the final destination and intermediate stops for rail replacement vehicles were not displayed or announced. More also needs to be done to explain at origin stations that a portion of the journey can, and will, be made via rail replacement. We found instances where the information appeared to suggest that the journey would end where the rail journey ends.

We have set out a number of further actions that we expect industry to implement in order to build on progress. The key recommendations for industry and operators are that they should:

- continue to improve the quality of information provided online about engineering works
- provide information about the accessibility of rail replacement vehicles set out in their Accessible Travel Policy on their assisted travel webpages, rail replacement FAQs and webpages for specific engineering works
- continue to improve the availability of online maps in advance of travel
- ensure passengers understand how they can complete a journey that includes a rail replacement service on the day of travel

- review their approach to ensuring that destinations are consistently displayed on rail replacement vehicles and intermediate stops are announced throughout the journey

A full list of the actions we expect industry to take under each recommendation can be found under next steps. We will write to individual operators asking them to demonstrate that their approach is fit for purpose in response to some of our findings.

We will hold a workshop with industry in early 2025 to discuss the cross-cutting issues identified in this report and will continue to monitor activity, escalating issues or considering more formal action if we do not see the expected improvements.

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