



# ORR Accessible Travel Stakeholder Forum

23 March 2021, Held virtually.

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## Attendees

Name	Organisation
David Kimball	Office of Rail and Road (ORR)
Claire Clark	Office of Rail and Road (ORR)
David Mapp	Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC)
Thomas Burke	Leonard Cheshire
Michael Tornow	Mobility Access Committee for Scotland (MACS)
Stephen Brookes	Rail Sector Champion
Zoe Courtney	Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB)
Tom Marsland	Scope
Kirsty Hoyle	Transport for All

Apologies were noted from Clare Gray (Shaw Trust) and Kirstie Kalonji (Alzheimer's Society).

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## Meeting summary

David welcomed the Forum members and provided an overview of the agenda. He signposted the updated [Accessible Travel Policy \(ATP\) Guidance](#) published in September 2020 which includes revised guidance on rail replacement and new technical guidance for the Handover Protocol.

## **ORR accessibility work plan: forthcoming monitoring work and areas of focus for 2021**

David updated the group on the recent monitoring work undertaken by the ORR consumer team since the last meeting in September 2020. This includes the introduction of regular core data monitoring of operators' provision of redress where assistance has failed, the review of all operators' staff disability awareness and equality training, and the review of all operators' provision of assisted travel information on their websites and how compliant the sites are with web industry standards. He went on to signpost the two recent reports published by ORR which summarise the work on staff training and the websites' review and which are covered in more detail later on in the [meeting](#).

As part of the monitoring work, David gave an overview of the extensive audit of station accessibility information currently underway. The audit is looking at specific requirements contained in the ATP Guidance which relate to the availability and consistency of information on operators' websites and on the National Rail Enquiries site. He confirmed a sample of actual visits to stations to verify the information are also being delivered.

Transport for All were keen to understand whether the audit tested the usability of services to which David confirmed it did not. The group emphasised that user led experience is critical to understand how effective the provision of information is, and whether all passengers can access the necessary information to complete their journey. In response, David explained that the ATP Guidance requirements had been developed in consultation with disabled people and disabled people's organisations.

David confirmed that ORR does have plans to deliver a series of mystery shopping exercises based on the requirements of the ATP and would welcome input from members on how to deliver this work. He went on to explain that as part of the website review work, ORR sought assurance from operators on how they are delivering their own testing of their website facilities. He confirmed that ORR will consider how user testing might form part of the monitoring work following the December 2021 deadline for all websites to be compliant with the web industry standards.

Forthcoming monitoring work for 2021 includes the introduction of the 6 hour notice period for booked assistance from 1 April, and the continuation of the annual Passenger Assist user satisfaction survey. The survey will also include specific questions on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic and the provision of assistance. David added that the consumer team will continue to monitor operators' performance on staff training and website accessibility, noting that majority of frontline staff should have received their training by 31 July 2021, and that all operators are committed to ensuring their websites are compliant with web industry standards by December 2021.

## Roundtable discussion on rail travel issues for disabled and older passengers

The group turned their attention to discussion points on the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic and disabled people travelling by rail. The group agreed that the introduction of new measures to manage safety also introduced new barriers for disabled people and the ability to make their own decisions on how to travel had been reduced. For example, some passengers are not able to move to a safe space easily on a train if the space around them becomes busy with other passengers, and the availability of audio and visual information on safety at stations is inconsistent, meaning that passengers with hearing or vision impairments may not receive crucial information about their journey. The Rail Sector Champion expressed concern about the varying instructions on services across different operators, explaining that there is confusion about whether a passenger needs to reserve a seat or wheelchair space, and whether Turn up and Go is still available. They stressed the need for services to be compatible across the board. Leonard Cheshire added that disabled people will expect the journey to be more complicated and this will deter them even more from travelling by rail.

DPTAC emphasised the need to provide all passengers with the confidence to return to travel by rail. They highlighted that in the forthcoming months, industry should take advantage of all the positive work being delivered on accessibility and use it as an opportunity to provide assurance to disabled and older passengers. This includes the reduced notice period for booking assistance, the roll out of the new passenger assist app and the completion of frontline staffs' disability and equality training.

The Rail Sector Champion explained the need for disabled people to be included in decision making, particularly the post recovery plans. MACs added that the rail industry need to capture positive case studies for accessibility and make these widely available. DPTAC agreed, expressing there is a need for research to be delivered which looks into the best ways of reaching disabled people and understanding current perceptions of rail travel and their main concerns, which could help inform future campaigns. In saying this DPTAC recognised that a communications strategy needs to happen sooner rather than later and it should be two fold – one aimed at encouraging former regular rail users back, and the other aimed at encouraging new passengers once safety measures and improvements are firmly established.

Finally, the group looked at the existing ATP requirements and advised which areas they thought ORR should be focusing their attention on. RNIB explained that information is key and enables people to be more independent. The group discussed the need to consider assistance provision at all types of stations – particularly those which are unstaffed. Transport for All advised on a nuanced approach, adding that focusing on a specific area and understanding lived experiences from an end to end journey will engage people more. David indicated ORR would give all these points careful consideration and return to the group with specific actions for discussion. .

# **Accessible Travel Policy Guidance: an update on latest monitoring reports into staff training and operators' websites**

## **Staff training**

David summarised the approach undertaken to review all operators' training materials. This included operators' completion of an information request, ORR's analysis of returns and materials and several meetings held with each operator to understand their progress towards meeting the 31 July 2021 deadline. David explained a formal letter had been issued in December to each operator, setting out their progress, and confirming an extension for five operators who had provided sufficient justification. David set out the next steps for monitoring each operators' training progress, including the quarterly meetings recently introduced with each operator to facilitate an ongoing dialogue with accessibility leads and monitor compliance with the full range of ATP commitments.

## **Websites**

Claire Clark took the group through the work undertaken in 2020 on the review of operators' websites. She explained two separate reviews were conducted to analyse compliance with the ATP website requirements. These requirements include providing a source of relevant information on assisted travel on operators' websites, and working towards achieving the Website Content Accessibility Guidelines. Claire summarised the outcome of the review, highlighting that key areas such as information on temporary reductions in accessibility and clear information on how to claim redress for booked assistance failure is now available via one source of information. She explained several operators had used this exercise as an opportunity to ramp up the work they had already planned ahead of making sure their websites were fully compliant by the end of the year.

## **ORR Improvement Notice for Liphook station**

The group were joined by ORR's Senior Engineer for Rail Vehicles Giles Turner. Giles took the group through ORR's first improvement notice on accessibility which was issued to South Western Railway (SWR) in November 2020. He explained what led ORR to identify a failure to provide a boarding device at Liphook station and why this was a breach of the Rail Vehicle Accessibility standards that apply to the trains calling at the station. As a result ORR were able to use their safety enforcement powers as defined by the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 to serve the improvement notice.

Giles went on to explain the mitigating actions taken by SWR to address the non-compliance, which involved moving bicycle storage hoops to make space available for deployment of a ramp.

## **AOB**

David touched on the findings from the recent Rail Accident Investigation Branch (RAIB) into the incident at Eden Park station. He confirmed that ORR has agreed to follow RAIB's recommendation that ORR make the provision of tactile information at stations a requirement of the ATP Guidance as part of its next iteration.

He confirmed ORR will follow up with DPTAC in response to a query raised on the delivery of infrastructure works at stations and their compliance with accessibility standards and also MACs in relation to a query on the passenger assist survey.

David thanked the Forum members for their participation and contribution to the discussion points. He confirmed ORR will work with the group on the key areas raised, including plans to deliver the mystery shopping work and the ATP areas to focus on as part of the ongoing monitoring work.

**END**