

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



John Smith  
Head of Customer Contact Centre  
Northern Trains

15 December 2020

Dear John,

## **Complaints handling satisfaction**

In July, we published the results of our survey on passenger satisfaction with train operators' complaints handling. This showed low levels of passenger satisfaction with Northern's complaints handling arrangements. The purpose of this letter is to ask you to set out your plan to make improvements in this area.

### **Complaint handling survey**

As you are aware, ORR commissions this large-scale survey with passengers who have made a recent complaint to a train operator. The survey measures the passenger's satisfaction across a range of indicators related to the relevant operator's complaint handling process and subsequent outcome. We share the survey results with train operators quarterly to provide them with the opportunity to analyse their own performance and to identify areas driving dissatisfaction in order to make the necessary improvements.

The headline results for 2019/20 were published in our Annual Rail Consumer Report<sup>1</sup> and on our data portal<sup>2</sup>. This showed that of the 5,397 Northern complainants surveyed; only 20% were satisfied with the complaint handling process. A similar percentage (21%) were satisfied with the outcome of their

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.orr.gov.uk/sites/default/files/om/annual-rail-consumer-report-2020.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://dataportal.orr.gov.uk/media/1756/passenger-satisfaction-complaints-handling-factsheet-2019-20-q4.pdf>

complaint. Both scores are below the national weighted average for all operators<sup>3</sup>. These findings indicate that Northern's complaint handling arrangements are currently falling short of what we, and your passengers, expect.

### **Complaints handling**

Good complaint handling not only builds passenger trust, but also generates essential management information that operators can use to identify systemic or recurring problems to be corrected. In turn, that helps build a culture of continuous improvement geared to meeting the evolving needs and expectations of passengers.

**Therefore, I shall be grateful if you will set out how you have used the survey results to understand the drivers of dissatisfaction in your complaints handling process and the steps Northern has taken, or has planned, to make the necessary improvements.**

### **Next steps**

I look forward to receiving your reply by **Friday 15 January 2021**.

Please send your response to my colleague Denise Brown:  
[Denise.Brown@orr.gov.uk](mailto:Denise.Brown@orr.gov.uk)

This letter and your reply will be published on our website.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Marcus Clements', written in a cursive style.

**Marcus Clements**

---

<sup>3</sup> National weighted average for satisfaction: Outcome: 31.0%. Process: 30.0%. For further details see: <https://dataportal.orr.gov.uk/media/1756/passenger-satisfaction-complaints-handling-factsheet-2019-20-q4.pdf>