

Our Ref: KM/KOB

Mr Marcus Clements
Head of Consumer Policy
Directorate of Economics, Markets and Strategy
Office of Rail and Road
25 Cabot Square,
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E14 4QZ

13th January 2021

Dear Marcus,

RE: Complaints handling satisfaction

I am writing to you with regards to your letter of 14 December 2020 about concerns of low levels of customer satisfaction with TransPennine Express's complaints handling arrangements. We sincerely understand the importance of quality complaints handling and the way in which this can improve overall customer experience, therefore the results of the ORR's 2019/2020 survey were of great concern to us.

To better understand the results of the survey, we have closely examined the affected timeframe in an effort to recognise the reasons for which satisfaction around complaints handling appears to be so low at 16%, as identified in your letter. What we have found is that, regrettably, our train service performance for a large proportion of this time period was very poor; this is primarily down to the delayed delivery of our new Nova fleets, which in turn delayed our driver training programme and resulted in a high level of our services being delayed or cancelled. This was a particularly difficult time for our passengers, and as a result our level of contact increased exponentially; the consequence of this significant rise in contact was a considerable caseload, and this in turn affected our response rate, whereby customers were unfortunately waiting longer than usual for a response.

Due to the above, it is therefore unsurprising that complaints handling satisfaction was so low – for customers that were already unhappy with the service provided, a slower response rate is likely to have exacerbated the issue further. It is also possible that the survey commissioned by the ORR was used as an outlet for which customers could vent their frustration towards our poor performance. Regardless of reason, it is extremely disappointing that satisfaction for TransPennine Express's complaints handling was so low in 2019/2020, and we are keen to ensure that levels of satisfaction do not drop to this level again.

Changes made since 2019/2020

I am happy to disclose that we have made many changes to our contact centre since year 2019/2020 to improve customer experience and satisfaction. In September 2020, we transitioned call centres and implemented a new Customer Relations Management (CRM) system; this new CRM system is a vast improvement on our previous system and allows us to identify complaints and any trends that may be emerging much more efficiently. In addition, new and improved webforms can now be located on our website – these webforms are much more intuitive and enable queries and complaints to be directed towards the relevant department in the first instance. We have also introduced post-journey surveys, which we are sending to customers that have purchased tickets for our services through our website – any negative feedback received through these surveys is being followed up to better understand how we can improve customer experience onboard and at our stations.

Whilst this transition and the relationship with our new call centre is still fairly fresh, I can confirm that our CSAT scores are much better in comparison to our scores from 2019/2020 (although these figures are admittedly very low, due the fact that our passenger numbers over the past year have drastically decreased as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic). I am also pleased to say that our current caseload is very small and is being worked through in an efficient and timely manner. We are hopeful that these new changes will enable us to continue to provide excellent customer service to our customers, and we will of course be constantly on the lookout for ways in which we can build on passenger trust.

Thank you for bringing this matter to our attention, and I hope that I have been able to address your concerns. I can assure you that we continually strive to improve all areas of customer experience, with complaints handling at the forefront of our minds especially during this period of uncertainty and travel restrictions.

Yours sincerely



Kathryn O'Brien
Customer Experience Director
TransPennine Express



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