

**Jacqui Russell**  
Head of Consumer Policy



TOC MDs  
by email only

30 January 2023

Dear TOC MD,

## **Notifications when trains are cancelled or timetables changed**

I am writing to set out our expectations around the provision of proactive notifications to passengers when trains are cancelled, or timetables are changed. I am also asking for further information regarding the implementation of associated business rules and promotion of live alert services to passengers.

Passengers want to be able to plan their journeys in advance. Where a journey is impacted by cancellations or timetable changes, passengers reasonably expect train operators to be proactive in keeping them informed. This is particularly relevant at the moment, while passengers are facing high levels of changes to train times owing to weather, engineering works, train crew shortages and industrial action.

### **Notification service for tickets purchased in advance**

The Smarter Information, Smarter Journeys programme is a cross-industry programme established in response to research and a subsequent [challenge from ORR](#) for the industry to develop a strategy for improving passenger information. The timetable comparator system is a key deliverable of the programme and we recognise the good cross-industry working that has enabled its development. It allows proactive notifications to be sent to ticket retailers (whether train operators, independent retailers or travel management companies) when booked trains are changed or cancelled up to two days before travel. Retailers are then able to contact and advise their customers.

The first messages from the timetable comparator system were sent to passengers in May 2022 by retailer Raileasy. This paved the way for a national rollout of personal journey notifications. Many operators and other retailers have started to use it to provide better information to their passengers. We expect all operators to implement the system by the end of March 2023.

Implementation of the notifications is the first step. We also want passengers to be clear of their rights when a booked journey is changed. This will require the implementation of the associated business rules and we also expect you to have clear plans for taking these forward without undue delay.



## Customer information pledges

The passenger information licence condition requires operators to enable passengers to plan and make their journey with a reasonable degree of assurance. Under this licence condition, we have accepted the [Customer Information Pledges](#) as your regulated code of practice.

The pledges must be reviewed annually and we are pleased to note that the first review is underway. When the pledges were [established in April 2022](#), we accepted that the pledge to “notify passengers if train times change after tickets have been purchased” should be a future commitment as the functionality was not yet available to operators. Following delivery of the timetable comparator tool we now expect to see that pledge become a regulatory commitment from April 2023.

The pledges already commit operators to encourage passengers to sign up for notification and alert services. Live alerts provide benefits to passengers that go beyond those offered by the timetable comparator system, particularly where there is disruption on the day. We expect you to be actively identifying opportunities to develop and offer alert services and to promote those services to passengers.

## Next steps

Notifications and alerts help ensure that accurate, timely information is available to passengers. This helps to build a good relationship with passengers, improve trust and support passengers in choosing to travel by rail in the future. To demonstrate commitment and progress in this area please confirm:

1. When you implemented or plan to implement the notification service for tickets purchased in advance, including providing an example of a notification sent;
2. The process that a customer would have to follow to receive a notification.
3. When you plan to implement the business rules associated with the notification service for tickets purchased in advance, and
4. Which live alert services you offer to customers, how you promote live alerts that can notify passengers of disruption on the day and whether it is possible for the alert to be linked to the ticket purchase so that a customer doesn't have to register separately

We have sent this letter to all mainline operators and the industry Customer Information Group. You should reply (to [consumer@orr.gov.uk](mailto:consumer@orr.gov.uk)) by **Friday 17 February 2023**.

Yours sincerely

**Jacqui Russell**